

# A Hugo Award for "Best Game or Interactive Experience"

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Please note that this document refers to an earlier version of this proposal and cuts off at 2019 data. Please check [the Games Hugo campaign website](#) for updates.

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## Abstract

Right now, there is no Hugo Award category for games. We're working to change that.

Games, whether digital or analog, are a thriving site of speculative fiction work today and are major innovators in the genre. Whether it's video games or tabletop RPGs, board games or interactive prose, amusement park installations or VR experiences, if it's interactive it's doing something totally unique, something that deserves to be recognized alongside other speculative fiction work.

Games have always been part of WSFS culture. [WSFS members play games, write about games, and make games](#). We have entered the age of Steam, YouTube, and Twitch; mobile games and the indie explosion. Hundreds of WSFS members create and play analog games, telling stories by touch and by chance, by word and by wit. The tools to breathe life into the branching paths of an interactive novel have never been more accessible and sophisticated.

We need an award that recognizes the proliferation of all types of games and interactive media, of all types of creators and players in the WSFS community. It is time for an inclusive games Hugo Award.

Thirteen years ago, in 2006, there was [a trial attempt at a "Best Interactive Video Game" category](#), and there have been calls for games categories since then, even as the gaming scene has evolved greatly. This proposal differs from past attempts: It's not just for video games and it addresses the issue of modifications — such as DLC and expansions — using the concept of

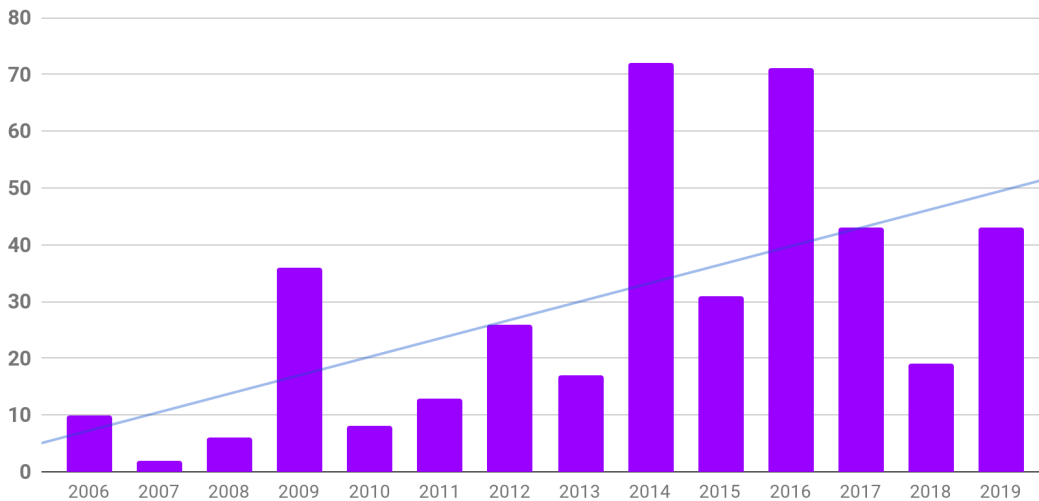
"substantially modified" already present in the Best Related Work category. The proposed definition names games specifically while leaving room for other qualifying media, preserving both translatability and breadth.

Games do serious speculative fiction work in ways that set them apart from works in the Best Dramatic Presentation and Best Related Work categories. While games are currently eligible there, [they simply do not fit](#). Aside from competing with big budget films and TV series, games would also have to be sorted by runtime, which is not a reasonable metric for most interactive media. More importantly, putting games in any of these categories ignores the unique nature of interactive storytelling that blends narrative and play. Games are uniquely suited to [push the limits of interactive worldbuilding](#), [expand the ways we can tell stories](#), and [interrogate the nature of narrative and play](#). There is SFF work only games can do.

It doesn't matter if it's audiovisual, analog, immersive, or prose. If it's interactive, it's made differently, it's crafted differently, it's consumed differently. We approach the work in a different way; we shape it even as it shapes our experience. This unifying element of all interactive experiences deserves to be recognized.

Interest in games has grown substantially since the 2006 attempt, as demonstrated by writing by WSFS members and [games programming at Worldcons](#). There have been multiple calls for a games category, and [many prominent WSFS members write about or create games](#). Between 2006 and 2019 there have been **396 game-related program items at Worldcons**, and the percentage of games-related programming has **tripled** while the absolute number of game-related program items has **increased fourfold**. Games programming has accounted for 6-9% of all programming at some of these Worldcons, up from less than 1% at the 2006 Worldcon where the Best Interactive Video Game category was trialed.

## Absolute Number of Game-Related Program Items



Games as a medium have also changed and matured in both content and accessibility. There are dozens of worthy games to nominate each year. Rather than being dominated by expensive AAA titles, the medium is saturated with shorter indie and mobile games that cost the same as a hardback novel or even ebook novella, and mobile distribution platforms such as Steam have made gaming more accessible than ever. Interactive fiction ranges from inexpensive to free, and analog games are often either communally owned or accessible on platforms like Tabletopia and Tabletop Simulator, sometimes for free. For those who can't or don't want to play the games, "guided tour" videos like Let's Plays or "movie versions" of games abound on YouTube and Twitch. Becoming an informed voter does not have to cost a lot or take a long time.

Moreover, there's a fair degree of consensus every year on what the "best games" of the year are. Nominations will cluster to a sufficient degree to make a strong longlist. Each year, [across the five most major video game awards](#), roughly two dozen games get at least five nominations in various categories across the awards. These top **two dozen games**, out of over 100 titles that got at least one nomination, **consistently take home 60% of the honours** every year. In the analog gaming world, for the prime RPG award, less than **ten games** out of roughly 50 nominees **take home roughly 35% of possible honours**.

The game community demonstrates consistent consensus on what quality games are, and there are more than enough of these each year to populate a longlist multiple times over. The charts below show the "Game of the Year" finalists and winners for 2018 and 2019 across the four general video game awards<sup>1</sup> that have this category.<sup>2</sup> Each year demonstrates not only both

<sup>1</sup> These are the BAFTA, D.I.C.E, The Game Awards, and Game Developers Choice Awards.

<sup>2</sup> Games that were also nominated for Nebula Awards are marked with [\*].

broad consensus without losing differentiation, but also that indie titles (marked with [IND]) comprise roughly half of the top games each year.

#### 2018 Game of the Year Finalists and Winners

Legend: Nomination Win

|                                       | BAFTA | D.I.C.E. | TGA | GDCA | TOTAL |
|---------------------------------------|-------|----------|-----|------|-------|
| <i>Assassin's Creed Odyssey</i>       |       |          |     |      | 2     |
| <i>ASTRO BOT Rescue Mission</i> [IND] |       |          |     |      | 1     |
| <i>Celeste</i> [IND]                  |       |          |     |      | 3     |
| <i>God of War</i> [*]                 | Win   | Win      | Win | Win  | 4     |
| <i>Into the Breach</i> [IND]          |       |          |     |      | 1     |
| <i>Marvel's Spider-Man</i>            |       |          |     |      | 3     |
| <i>Monster Hunter: World</i>          |       |          |     |      | 1     |
| <i>Return of the Obra Dinn</i> [IND]  |       |          |     |      | 3     |

#### 2019 Game of the Year Finalists and Winners

Legend: Nomination Win

|                                               | BAFTA | D.I.C.E. | TGA | GDCA | TOTAL |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------|----------|-----|------|-------|
| <i>Control</i> [IND]                          |       |          |     |      | 4     |
| <i>Death Stranding</i>                        |       |          |     |      | 3     |
| <i>Disco Elysium</i> [IND] [*]                |       |          |     |      | 2     |
| <i>Luigi's Mansion 3</i>                      |       |          |     |      | 1     |
| <i>Outer Wilds</i> [IND] [*]                  | Win   |          |     |      | 3     |
| <i>Resident Evil 2</i>                        |       |          |     |      | 1     |
| <i>Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice</i>              |       |          | Win |      | 3     |
| <i>Super Smash Bros. Ultimate</i>             |       |          |     |      | 1     |
| <i>The Outer Worlds</i> [*]                   |       |          |     |      | 1     |
| <i>Untitled Goose Game</i> [IND] <sup>3</sup> |       | Win      |     | Win  | 3     |

And even within this broad consensus, there will be a much greater chance for analog and interactive prose games to shine -- rather than being too broad, the category uses the common element of interactivity to recognize great SFF work.

<sup>3</sup> Not a speculative title. This game is included to demonstrate the clustering behavior and account for the other two wins.

Finally, the substantial modifications clause lifts a burden off the Hugo administrators. Modifications are part of gaming craft and culture, whether digital or analog, and can be experienced directly as part of the work. A truly inclusive game award must acknowledge the speculative fiction and fannish work being done here. With this clause, Hugo administrators don't have to legislate common cases like large expansions and top-to-bottom remakes. Less substantial modifications are simply less likely to be nominated: gamers can tell the difference.

WSFS members play games, write about games, make games, and are inspired by games. We have always been here. We have always gamed.

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# Introduction

Speculative interactive fiction, analog and video games, and other interactive experiences are not adequately served by the current Hugo category structure and deserve recognition in a Hugo category of their own. While some such works are currently permitted in the Best Dramatic Presentation categories or Best Related Work, the interactive nature of such works makes them distinct enough in terms of craft, structure, presentation, and consumption that they deserve to be recognized in a separate category.

Such a category should be inclusive enough to encompass the breadth of important speculative fiction work being done in interactive media. While video games are expected to be the primary entrants, other forms of interactive media should be explicitly welcome. This is in keeping with the interests of World Science Fiction Society (WSFS) members, as will be shown below.

In this proposal, I intend to give proof of interest by WSFS members in games and interactive media; demonstrate the viability of the category by presenting a collection of Hugo-worthy works past and present; and put forward a proposed definition of the category based on the preceding evidence, diving into the details of amending the WSFS Constitution and dealing with edge cases.

## Purpose of this Document and the Award Category Process

The World Science Fiction Society (WSFS) is the overarching organization of Worldcons and the Hugo Awards. Worldcons are the yearly WSFS conventions at which Hugo Awards are given. Rule changes, including new Hugo categories, must be approved by direct democracy at the Business Meeting held at every Worldcon.

Worldcon Business Meetings are for all WSFS members. All Worldcon members of the current year's Worldcon are WSFS members, including most attendees, and all Hugo voters, nominators, and Worldcon supporting members. You can read more about WSFS membership in [this FAQ question](#) on the Hugo Awards website, and more information is available in the rest of the FAQ. Any WSFS member attending that year's Worldcon is welcome to speak at the Business Meeting and vote on issues raised there.

To create a new category, a proposal must be passed by two consecutive Worldcons. Thus, after one Worldcon's Business Meeting has passed the category, it then must be ratified at the next Worldcon. New categories are rarely passed in their first year of being raised, and in recent years a lot of Hugo category work is passed to committees for examination, and the committee's recommendations, if any, are heard at the next Business Meeting. One effective way to

convince WSFS members that a category is viable is to have seen a Worldcon run it as a trial category first. Every Worldcon is allowed to run a single trial or other category of its choosing.

The purpose of this document is to begin the category creation process by laying out the issue in full and engendering discussion and feedback. A 2-3 page distillation of this document was presented at the 2019 Worldcon Business Meeting in Dublin. At that Business Meeting, the WSFS members present voted to add a subcommittee to the Hugo Study Committee specifically to consider this category. This document is continuing to be updated with new data and considerations as they emerge from this process.

More information on creating new categories can be found [on the Hugo Awards website](#) and in [this post](#).

## Proposed Definition and Preliminary Concerns

In proposing a new category, it is necessary to address some concerns, both general and specific to games. Primary among these is a definition that excludes works in the proposed category from being eligible anywhere else while honouring the work in the proposed category. However, other considerations, such as current category fit and accessibility of nomination, also come into play. The overarching concerns of demonstrating interest from the electorate, showing that enough quality work is put out every year, and examining real-world and thorny cases are covered in the [Proof of Interest](#), [Robustness of the Category](#), and [Category Definition](#) sections, respectively.

I will also demonstrate that games meet three other criteria as potential Hugo Award-worthy media. The first is that out of a field of a tremendous number of titles, a loose consensus will form on a small number of exceptional titles per year, generally roughly three times the length of a Hugo longlist. The second is that roughly half to two-thirds of any such list in a given year will be comprised of shorter, affordable games. Finally, there is consensus in gaming circles and the game industry that substantial modifications of games are also deserving of accolades, not just standalone games.

To underline this quality of award-worthy games, I am marking all games mentioned in this report that can be reasonably regarded as not AAA titles or their equivalent in the field<sup>4</sup> with [\[IND\]](#). Titles that in some way meet the definition of "substantial modification" presented in "[Category Definition and Substantial Modification](#)" are marked with [\[MOD\]](#).

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<sup>4</sup> Based on factors including price and being developed independently of major studios.

## Proposed Category Definition

Games and other interactive media are unique in a number of ways that the current category structure does not accommodate. Most notably, the unique and uniting element of games as a medium and as an art form -- the hallmark of truly exceptional games, the Hugo-worthy ones -- is the marriage of fiction and play into the cohesive whole of an interactive experience. The thrust of my proposal is that a lot of worthy speculative fiction work -- narrative, characters, worldbuilding -- is being done in a medium that is also uniquely suited to engage with the very nature of narrative or play, like *Braid*<sup>[IND]</sup>, *BioShock*, and *The Stanley Parable*<sup>[IND]</sup> do. This is further addressed in the section [Unique Craft, Storytelling, and Consumption in Games](#).

Games are a uniquely modification-heavy medium where additions to or modifications of a game, whether professional/official or fan-made, can be experienced directly as part of the work rather than as an ancillary. This is an essential part of game creation, consumption, and culture, and is covered in detail in the [General Cases and Considerations](#) section.

Moreover, as will be demonstrated in the [Proof of Interest](#) section, WSFS members' interest in games runs the gamut, including video games across all platforms; tabletop, card, board, and other analog games; AR and VR experiences; LARP games; and interactive fiction in all media, including purely-prose. A games category in the Hugo Awards should reflect this diversity of interest, expression, and passion.

With these considerations in mind, I present the following proposed definition in the form of amendments to the [WSFS Constitution](#):<sup>5</sup>

3.2.5: An interactive work is any work (such as a game, interactive narrative, demonstration, or installation) in any medium where player, user, or reader choice, interaction, or participation significantly impacts the narrative, play, meaning, or experience of the work.

**3.2.67:** The categories of Best Novel, Novella, Novelette, Short Story, and Series shall be open to non-interactive works in which text is the primary form of communication, regardless of the publication medium, including but not limited to physical print, audiobook, and ebook.

**3.3.7: Best Graphic Story or Comic.** Any non-interactive science fiction or fantasy story told in graphic form appearing for the first time in the previous calendar year.

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<sup>5</sup> Additions are marked in underlined green and deletions in ~~crossed-out red~~. Please note that the WSFS standard is for additions and insertions to be in underlined blue, but as that can be confused with links in the context of the present document, I am using green.

**3.3.8: Best Dramatic Presentation, Long Form.** Any non-interactive theatrical feature or other production, with a complete running time of more than 90 minutes, in any medium of dramatized science fiction, fantasy or related subjects that has been publicly presented for the first time in its present dramatic form during the previous calendar year.

**3.3.9: Best Dramatic Presentation, Short Form.** Any non-interactive television program or other production, with a complete running time of 90 minutes or less, in any medium of dramatized science fiction, fantasy or related subjects that has been publicly presented for the first time in its present dramatic form during the previous calendar year.

**3.3.10: Best Game or Interactive Experience.** Any interactive work or substantial modification of a work first released to the public in the previous calendar year in the fields of science fiction, fantasy, or related subjects.

This proposed category will be abbreviated to BGIE in this document. This definition aims to:

- Specifically use the word "games" to ensure clarity and translatability, but also provide a broader cue ("interactive experience") to avoid the issues previously present in the Best Graphic Story<sup>6</sup> category title on the one hand and the Best Dramatic Presentation category titles on the other. These categories struggle to balance naming specific types of media vs. describing a broader range of media in a way that is accessible to international audiences.
- Include the full breadth of interactive works based around a key defining feature of interactivity, which will separate them from all other Hugo-eligible works and take care of the mutual exclusivity concern for work-based categories.
- Appropriately reflect all potentially Hugo-worthy material within this category by including substantial modifications of existing works, taking advantage of a concept articulated similarly in the Best Related Work category. The element of modification is a key feature of game works and games fandom, and it is my strong belief that any Hugo category for interactive media should incorporate this modification element. Further discussion of this aspect takes up the majority of the [Category Definition](#) section near the end of this report.

This definition will be further motivated and elaborated on throughout this proposal, but for now will be taken as our working definition for the rest of this section.

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<sup>6</sup> Now "Best Graphic Story or Comic" as of the Dublin 2019 Business Meeting

## Poor Fit for Games in Other Categories

New categories are often prompted by voters attempting to nominate works in categories that don't quite fit. However, this is not a usable metric when most people don't know games can be nominated at all. Looking at the amount of interest Hugo voters display in games and gaming compared to the composition of the longlists in the available categories, Hugo voters don't seem to realize that they can nominate games, and in the absence of longlist data I use a variety of other metrics in my [Proof of Interest](#) section. However, per the WSFS Constitution, games and other interactive experiences are currently conceivably eligible in three existing categories:

- **3.3.6: Best Related Work.** Any work related to the field of science fiction, fantasy, or fandom, appearing for the first time during the previous calendar year or which has been substantially modified during the previous calendar year, and which is either non-fiction or, if fictional, is noteworthy primarily for aspects other than the fictional text, and which is not eligible in any other category.
- **3.3.8: Best Dramatic Presentation, Long Form.** Any theatrical feature or other production, with a complete running time of more than 90 minutes, in any medium of dramatized science fiction, fantasy or related subjects that has been publicly presented for the first time in its present dramatic form during the previous calendar year.
- **3.3.9: Best Dramatic Presentation, Short Form.** Any television program or other production, with a complete running time of 90 minutes or less, in any medium of dramatized science fiction, fantasy or related subjects that has been publicly presented for the first time in its present dramatic form during the previous calendar year.

Each of these categories is a bad fit for games in terms of creating voter confusion and not respecting the work in the medium.

The Best Dramatic Presentation (BDP) categories ignore the essential interactive nature of games and other interactive experiences, in that the player/user is in control of the experience and the dramatic elements must be designed with interactivity in mind. Games require active participation throughout, and many games allow the player to shape the narrative, world, and characters even as they are experiencing them. This ability to manipulate the narrative and follow branching paths is born of a unique art form that deserves recognition.

A more technical issue with the BDP categories is that they are defined by runtimes, which are inimical to games. A demonstration of this can be seen in the 2016 longlist data. This was a year dominated by [puppy voting](#), but the nominated games are pretty normal selections and serve as good example cases on a technical level. Five games were nominated in 2016, with two being disqualified on runtime grounds:

| Rank                                                           | Noms | Title                                                              | Percent Noms |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| <b>Best Dramatic Presentation (Long Form) (2,904 ballots)</b>  |      |                                                                    |              |
| 7                                                              | 394  | <i>The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt</i>                                    | 13.57%       |
| 8                                                              | 340  | <i>Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain</i>                        | 11.71%       |
| 10                                                             | 329  | <i>Until Dawn</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>                                 | 11.33%       |
| <b>Best Dramatic Presentation (Short Form) (2,219 ballots)</b> |      |                                                                    |              |
| 4                                                              | 318  | <i>Tales from the Borderlands, "The Vault of the Traveller"(*)</i> | 14.33%       |
| 5                                                              | 312  | <i>Life is Strange, Episode 1</i> <sup>[IND]</sup> (*)             | 14.06%       |

(\*) Disqualified from BDP:SF for being too long

Though this particular data in and of itself doesn't show good-faith interest by WSFS members, it still demonstrates the definitional issue with the runtime-based BDP categories vis-a-vis interactive experiences. As far as gamers are concerned, both of the disqualified 2016 games are very short, and it's reasonable that gamers would have put them in a short BDP category, absent any guidance for determining runtime for games. Interactive experiences are by nature inimical to runtime requirements, in that the player sets the pace, and can take as much time as they like to explore the world, contemplate their narrative choices, or enjoy the mechanics.<sup>7</sup> Indie games, which tend to be shorter, are particularly prone to this type of disqualification (*Life Is Strange* being an example), and this unfairly disadvantages independent developers. A rough feeling of "this game is long and this game is short" is demonstrably not enough to determine appropriate categories for video games. For other types of games and interactive experiences, this metric cannot be said to apply at all.

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<sup>7</sup> Runtimes can be estimated for various play styles, but these are only estimates, unlike the fairly nailed-down runtimes of other works in the BDP categories. The website [How Long to Beat](#) catalogues averages of how long various play styles take for numerous games, but even these are only ranges, and completionist runs -- a way to experience all the possible interactive content and, as far as voting goes, fully appreciate the game -- often take much more time than a playthrough with a "get to the end" mentality. Both are legitimate ways to interact with a game, and one runtime cannot be said to be more "true" than the other. On the far end of the spectrum from completionist runs are things like speedruns, which endeavour to beat a game as quickly as possible irrespective of its narrative content, focusing only on leveraging interactive aspects/mechanics to achieve the end goal by whatever means. A completionist run of *Dragon Age: Origins* (this series being very popular with WSFS members) takes about 88 hours, and a "main story only" run about 40 hours, while the current world record (as of July 2020) for a speedrun of the same game is just shy of 40 minutes ([source](#)). Runtime is simply not a viable way to look at games.

Setting aside the runtime requirement, the dramatic/narrative content of games versus their interactive component should be considered. If the narrative content of a game is set aside, or if a game does not have a large narrative component (such as the popular party game *Werewolf*, which often gets play sessions at Worldcons) then theoretically they can be nominated in Best Related Work (BRW). However, this ignores the nature of interactive fiction as a medium.

Works nominated in Best Related Work must be either non-fictional or "noteworthy primarily for aspects other than the fictional text." In this vein, it might be possible to nominate games that are primarily noteworthy for innovative gameplay, but in such cases their fictional/narrative content cannot be considered. This fundamentally misunderstands and misrepresents the nature of games and other interactive media. It is the blending of narrative, presentation, and play that makes games unique. Trying to separate these elements disregards the fundamental nature of the work and disrespects the speculative work being accomplished in games today. This is further covered in the [Robustness of the Category](#) section.

All of the above category issues, in both the BDP and BRW categories, unfairly disadvantage indie games in particular. Indie games are a thriving site of speculative fiction work, and they gain recognition precisely for being good interactive fiction -- beautiful, meaningful, and fun all together. This is why games like *Return of the Obra Dinn*<sup>[IND]<sup>8</sup></sup>, *Celeste*<sup>[IND]</sup>, and *GRIS*<sup>[IND]</sup> made such [excellent showings at awards for 2018](#) and *Outer Wilds*<sup>[IND]</sup>, *Disco Elysium*<sup>[IND]</sup>, and *Sayonara Wild Hearts*<sup>[IND]</sup> did in 2019, and why gaming award categories like "Games Beyond Entertainment"<sup>9</sup> and "Meaningful Play"<sup>10</sup> exist. *GRIS*<sup>[IND]</sup>, for example, is a drippingly gorgeous platformer about the nature of grief, which marries silent storytelling via environment, gesture, and colour with gameplay that actually lets you experience the endless fall and gradual rise of mourning via slowly building powers. This sort of storytelling is unique to games, because the player participates in the experience in a way that is not possible for any other medium, and can shape the world and experience even as they live it.

It does not make sense to try to put games in 2-3 ill-fitting categories when there is an obvious unique and uniting factor that makes grounds for a category of their own, plus the interest from the electorate to match. The speculative work in games deserves to be recognized in and of itself. It's important storytelling done in a way that can be accomplished in no other medium.

## Accessibility of Nominations

A concern with any new category is whether it is reasonably accessible for nominees in terms of cost of the materials/works, time investment in evaluating works, and wide availability of a sufficient number of works to fill out a longlist. The biggest AAA games and a number of the more complex board games are notoriously expensive, and there is a proliferation of gaming

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<sup>8</sup> I link to a Tor.com article in my [Proof of Interest](#) section titled "[Return of the Obra Dinn Proves Game Writing Deserves SFF Award Recognition](#)."

<sup>9</sup> A category in the BAFTA Game Awards.

<sup>10</sup> A category in the International Mobile Gaming Awards.

platforms that are also substantial investments. I will address the issue of cost here, and the issue of building longlists in the [Potential Games Longlists and Shortlists](#) section.

First, I am fully convinced there are enough existing WSFS gamers, already in possession of the equipment and games, that they would easily create a strong longlist and shortlist in a category devoted to this medium. I provide evidence of this in the [Writing and Work by WSFS Members](#) and [Games Programming at Worldcons](#) sections, both under [Proof of Interest](#).

In terms of analog gaming, their cost is often spread over multiple people as generally only one playable set is needed to serve a number of gamers. In addition, while board games can be expensive, some analog board games can also be played online via Tabletopia and Tabletop Simulator, sometimes for free.

Whether or not someone is already a gamer, the increased presence of indie games in the SFF landscape means that the cost to nominate can be kept close to the cost to nominate in other categories. By far the most accessible type of game, indies make a solid annual showing in [existing video game awards](#), making up about half the shortlists and winners. Indie games typically cost \$5-\$25 and can be completed in 3-15 hours, comparable to the time and money investment of 1-2 prose novels. *Return of the Obra Dinn*<sup>[IND]</sup> and *Celeste*<sup>[IND]</sup>, two of the most lauded titles of 2018, are \$19.99 each on Steam, and *Outer Wilds*<sup>[IND]</sup>, one of the most widely recognized titles of 2019, is \$24.99. This is typical of roughly half of any given year's major contenders. A huge amount of gaming is being done on run-of-the-mill PCs and does not require specialized equipment, and lots of indie games get cross-platform releases besides. A lot of quality games are also released on phones (many such games are listed in my [Appendix C](#); please see the platform ticky boxes). Rather than ballots being skewed to expensive AAA titles, the accessibility and high creative quality of indie games are likely to skew Hugo ballots to the indie end of the range. Even with a mix of half AAA and half indie titles, typical of major gaming awards, one can play enough games to make a full nomination ballot for not much more than the price of seeing a full ballot's worth of BDP:LF features in theatres or on stage, or the cost of reading enough works to nominate in Best Series.

Once the nominations are in and a list of finalists is available, games cannot be distributed in the voter packet, same as most BDP finalists.<sup>11</sup> However, non-gamers have plenty of ways to get a feel for the finalists without paying a high price, or any price at all. There is a thriving community of gaming videos on YouTube and Twitch.tv that can help non-gamers experience all the relevant content in a game. One example is "Let's Play"s, videos of skilled players giving "guided tours" of games, showing off both narrative and gameplay content. These come in both casual and completionist styles. For those not interested in the gameplay aspects and who just want the narrative content, many games have "movie versions" on YouTube that capture the story of the game and leave everything else out. This is an admittedly limited way of

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<sup>11</sup> Though ideas for voter packet items could include promo codes or coordinating with game creators on a special Hugo-related sale.

experiencing games, but just as with other categories, not everyone can experience everything on the ballot fully or in the intended way. For example, not everyone can watch full seasons or runs of shows in order to get all the context for finalists that are TV episodes. In the end, for those not interested in the experience of the gameplay, or those unable to play the games for other reasons, accessing the relevant narrative and artistic content is only a matter of voter education, no different from other categories.

## Previous Video Game Category Attempt

Before proceeding, the previous attempt at a games category must be addressed. In 2006, there was a trial attempt at a "Best Interactive Video Game" category. The statistics for the category were as follows:

| VOTERS: 58 | ITEMS: 52                                      | VOTES: 98 |
|------------|------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Votes      | Title                                          |           |
| 13         | <i>World of Warcraft</i>                       |           |
| 7          | <i>Lego Star Wars</i>                          |           |
| 6          | <i>We ♥ Katamari</i>                           |           |
| 5          | <i>City of Villains</i> <sup>[MOD]</sup>       |           |
| 4          | <i>Dungeons and Dragons Online</i>             |           |
| 4          | <i>Eve Online</i>                              |           |
| 4          | <i>Shadow of the Colossus</i> <sup>[IND]</sup> |           |
| 3          | <i>Destroy All Humans</i>                      |           |
| 3          | <i>Half-Life 2</i>                             |           |
| 2          | <i>Myst V: End of Ages</i>                     |           |
| 2          | <i>F.E.A.R. First Encounter Assault Recon</i>  |           |
| 2          | <i>Indigo Prophecy</i>                         |           |
| 2          | <i>Resident Evil 4</i>                         |           |
| 2          | <i>Darkwatch</i>                               |           |
| 2          | <i>Dungeon Siege II</i>                        |           |

There are almost as many items as voters, and only twice as many votes as there were items or voters, indicating a wide spread of nominations with little consensus. Indeed, the top entrant, *World of Warcraft*, only received 13 nominations, with a 3-way tie for 5th place at 4 votes each for *Dungeons and Dragons Online*, *Eve Online*, and *Shadow of the Colossus*<sup>[IND]</sup>. The category was dropped from final consideration due to low participation.

While this was an admittedly unsuccessful attempt, gaming and the WSFS membership have changed a lot in the 14 years since then. Fourteen years is enough for an entire generation of

young gaming SF fans to come of age and become mature WSFS members. Gaming has grown explosively and become much more normalized and accessible. Games programming at Worldcons has increased in quantity and sophistication by an order of magnitude (compare 2007 to recent years in [Games Programming at Worldcons](#)). Fourteen years is enough for multiple generations of gaming consoles and other technologies to enter and leave the market. Steam, where now so much quality game content is accessible in terms of both platform and cost, was in its infancy in 2006. YouTube had barely been founded, while now Let's Plays and game movies thrive there. Twitch was a long way from existing. Indie games have become a thriving site of SFF work in the intervening years, facilitated in no small part by the existence of Steam and mobile platforms. In the gaming world, fourteen years is a long, long time, and this reality has to be acknowledged.

This category also narrowly specified video games, while my proposed definition is open to all types of games and interactive experiences. WSFS members play a broad range of games, and giving them the freedom to nominate analog games, interactive fiction, and other interactive experiences greatly increases the chances of a robust longlist.

Rather than seeing this trial category as discouraging, I instead see it as further evidence that WSFS members have long been interested in a Hugo category for games. Games as a medium have continued to mature, and the WSFS membership has evolved. In fact, a games Hugo can help the WSFS membership evolve further, demonstrating a commitment to staying in touch with modern speculative fiction culture.

# Proof of Interest

As previously stated, a lot of people don't realize games are eligible for Hugo Awards, and what games do get nominated are in competition with the primary entrants in the Best Dramatic Presentation categories -- films and tv series -- so there is very little longlist data to support a games category. However, many WSFS members are interested in games, as can be observed by their writing and by the presence of game panel tracks at recent cons, as well as explicit interest in awards for speculative fiction games. The 2016 longlist data has previously been addressed in my introduction, and for this section I will be looking at other methods of gauging WSFS member interest.

## Games Programming at Worldcons

Recent Worldcons have had robust game-related activities and programming. I was able to find data on all the Worldcons since Worldcon 64 (the year of the 2006 attempt).<sup>12</sup> Between these 14 cons, there have been **396 documented gaming-related panels**, presentations, demonstrations, sessions, or other program items, increasing roughly **fourfold** over the intervening years (Fig. 1). These have been staffed by **483 different panelists**, moderators, hosts, GMs, presenters, and performers, and presumably these program items were attended by an order of magnitude more people. These would all, by definition, be WSFS members interested in games. In the intervening years, the percentage of Worldcon programming that is game-related has **tripled** (Fig. 2).<sup>13</sup> Game creators have also been guests of honor multiple times, most notably in 2014 and 2019.

WSFS members' interest in games has only grown with time, and gaming panels have proliferated and taken on more nuance and areas of interest. Aside from scheduled gaming sessions and demonstrations, Worldcon games programming often engages with the craft of interactive storytelling; the business side of making games; and a host of connections between games and fandom, society, and politics. WSFS members clearly think games and the craft of making them deserve attention, analysis, and passion.

Below is the summarized Worldcon data. [Appendix A](#) goes into detail on each Worldcon's games programming, in terms of both program items and other gaming activities. [Appendix C](#) contains the full dataset of all game-related program items at each of these Worldcons, including panel descriptions and panelists. These are split into multiple sheets (summary and

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<sup>12</sup> Please note that scheduled gaming at Worldcon 76 was coordinated via paper signup sheets in the games area, so I could not find records of the scheduled gaming sessions. This may also have influenced Worldcon 75. For all other cons, scheduled gaming is included alongside all other game-related program items in my calculations.

<sup>13</sup> Again keeping in mind the issue with the Worldcon 76 and possibly Worldcon 75 data that may have made those numbers artificially smaller.

raw data sheets each for Worldcons 64-72, Worldcons 73-76, and Worldcon 77) due to there being too many panelists to fit in a single sheet.

### Absolute Number of Game-Related Program Items

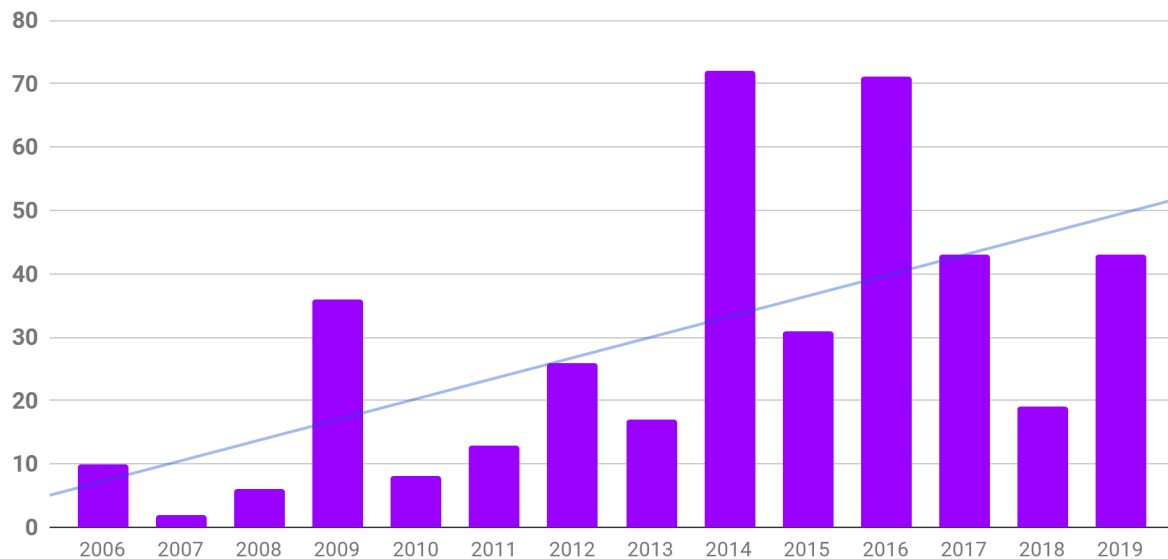


Figure 1: Absolute number of game-related program items at Worldcons 2006-2019

### Percentage of Worldcon Programming Game-Related

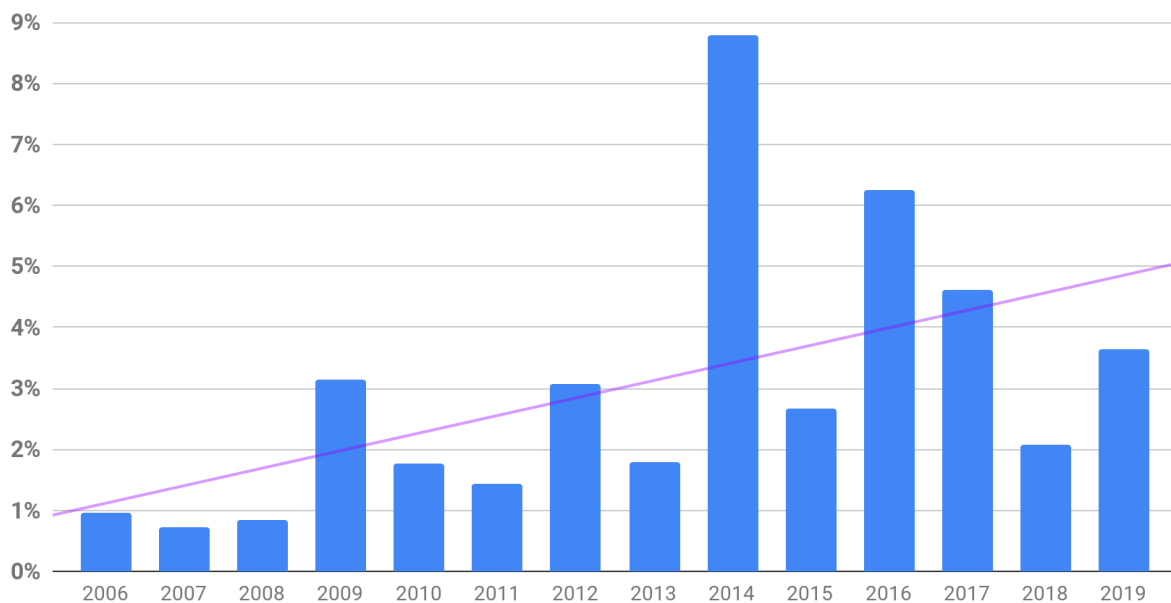


Figure 2: Percentage of Worldcon program items that are game-related 2006-2019

| Year                   | Game-Related Program Items | Panelists/Hosts on Game-Related Items | Total Program Items | Percentage of Program Items Game-Related |
|------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------------|
| 2006                   | 10                         | 21                                    | 1046                | 1%                                       |
| 2007                   | 2                          | 4                                     | 280                 | 1%                                       |
| 2008                   | 6                          | 11                                    | 714                 | 1%                                       |
| 2009                   | 36                         | 21                                    | 1143                | 3%                                       |
| 2010                   | 8                          | 17                                    | 452                 | 2%                                       |
| 2011                   | 13                         | 22                                    | 911                 | 1%                                       |
| 2012                   | 26                         | 14                                    | 845                 | 3%                                       |
| 2013                   | 17                         | 15                                    | 945                 | 2%                                       |
| 2014                   | 72                         | 93                                    | 819                 | 9%                                       |
| 2015                   | 31                         | 58                                    | 1157                | 3%                                       |
| 2016                   | 71                         | 69                                    | 1137                | 6%                                       |
| 2017                   | 43                         | 37                                    | 930                 | 5%                                       |
| 2018                   | 19                         | 39                                    | 917                 | 2%                                       |
| 2019                   | 43                         | 131                                   | 1185                | 4%                                       |
| <b>Grand Total/AVG</b> | <b>396</b>                 | <b>483</b>                            | <b>11435</b>        | <b>3%</b>                                |

## Writing and Work by WSFS Members

As is clear from the Worldcon programming data, many WSFS members are gamers, including Hugo winners, finalists, longlist candidates, and other members. Aside from playing the games, many WSFS members engage critically with game storytelling, structure, and content, demonstrating interest in game quality and in recognizing outstanding games.

Three-time Best Novel winner N. K. Jemisin is famously a fan of *Dragon Age*, and has written about the series and other games many times:

- [Identity should always be part of the gameplay](#)
- [Your groundbreaking is not my groundbreaking](#)
- [DA: Inquisition Story Review](#)
- [Gaming as connection: Thank you, stranger](#)
- [A world in which race matters](#)

Multiple Hugo finalist and winner Mur Lafferty has stated that her Best Novel Finalist *Six Wakes* was inspired by the video game *FTL: Faster Than Light*<sup>[IND]</sup> (Subset Games, 2012):

- [The Big Idea: Mur Lafferty](#)
- [Interview with MUR LAFFERTY](#)

Multiple-time Best Fan Writer Hugo Finalist and 2019 winner Foz Meadows writes about games and gaming culture, and includes games in posts on writing and craft:

- [Final Fantasy FXV: Thoughts](#)
- [Dragon Age: Meta. Thoughts & Feelings](#)
- [Sexism In Gaming: A Response To Gabrielle Toledano](#)
- [Sprawling Worlds](#)

Multiple-time Hugo finalist Yoon Ha Lee has co-created a game called [Heretical Geese](#) based on his *Machineries of Empire* series.

Most of the editors of the multiple-time Hugo-winning fanzine *Lady Business* (myself included) are avid gamers and write about a variety of games:

- [This Game Deserves a Hugo: Outer Wilds](#)
- ["She's Tearing us to Pieces!" Tomb Raider \(2013\)](#)
- [Dragon Age: Inquisition -- Glimmering Gems in a Morass of Disappointment](#)
- [Exploration, Assumptions, and Cats: Beyond Eyes from Tiger & Squid](#)
- ["I'm going to break its heart" - Transistor Review](#)
- [Costume Quest: Saving the town's candy \(and maybe your twin\)](#)
- [Red, Green, Blue \(Mass Effect\)](#)
- [The Fantasy of Orderly Grief: GRIS and The Haunting of Hill House](#)

Multiple Hugo-winning File 770, run by Mike Glycer, regularly reports on the BAFTA Game Awards (also covered in this report in [Video Game Awards](#)) as a point of interest for speculative fiction fans:

- [2017 British Academy Games Awards Nominees](#)
- [2017 British Academy Games Awards](#)
- [2018 British Academy Games Awards Nominees](#)
- [2018 British Academy Games Awards](#)
- [2019 British Academy Games Awards Nominees](#)
- [2019 BAFTA Games Awards Winners](#)
- [2020 British Academy Games Awards Nominees](#)
- [2020 British Academy Games Awards Winners](#)

Multiple-time Fanzine finalist *nerds of a feather, flock together* has an entire [category for video game reviews](#) with 66 titles covered, with many more titles reviewed but not linked in the category. In addition to that reviews category, *nerds of a feather, flock together* also [includes games in regular features like "We Rank 'Em"](#) and [addresses wider trends in gaming such as microtransactions](#). Hugo winner *A Dribble of Ink* also has a [games category](#). Aidan Moher of *A Dribble of Ink* recently released [an article on how Japanese RPGs have influenced modern](#)

[fantasy authors](#) such as Sott Lynch, Troy L. Wiggings, Peng Sheperd, and Tamsyn Muir. Paul Weimer tied his review of *Civilization 6* to *Skiffy and Fanty*'s status as a Hugo finalist in [a tweet](#).

Multiple Hugo winner and finalist John Scalzi blogs about games and gaming culture with his daughter, including using gaming as a metaphorical example in one of his most famous posts:

- [Straight White Male: The Lowest Difficulty Setting There Is](#)
- [Beat Saber: AKA the Coolest Game Ever](#)
- [My Wacky Video Game Mouse/Keyboard Control Scheme](#)
- [Yes, I've Heard About the New South Park Game's Difficulty Settings](#)
- [GamerGate Adds to Its Vast Warehouse of Stupid](#)

As presented earlier and elaborated on in [Appendix A](#), recent Worldcons have featured a wealth of gaming programming, including **483** distinct panelists, speakers, and hosts for gaming-related panels, presentations, and events based on the data I was able to obtain.<sup>14</sup> This does not count the actual attendees of the panels/events, which number many more. All of these are by definition WSFS members interested in games and gaming. Sasquan in particular had a number of game industry professionals in attendance, and numerous cons had a wide array of both fannish and professional panelists active in the gaming community, including:

- Steve Jackson, a renowned game creator, was a Guest of Honour at Worldcon 77 and was on a number of panels.
- Aaron Reed spoke at two panels and has [a website](#) dedicated to game reviews, gaming, and the craft of interactive fiction.
- Jason Hill also spoke on two panels and is the COO of [Choice Of Games](#).
- Rebecca Slitt is an editor and partner at Choice Of Games, has written interactive novels, and contributed to many tabletop games.
- Pam Victorio spoke at 3 panels and describes herself as "a literary agent [...] now lending her vast publishing experience to interactive gaming. She's also an avid Magic the Gathering player and would love to play a game with you anytime. She plays the Burn deck."
- Veronica Belmont was the host of Playstation's first digital magazine, *Qore*, and is the co-founder of the largest *World of Warcraft* guild in North America.
- Kate Dollarhyde [posted about her award eligibility](#), including her work on multiple games.
- Terilee Edwards-Hewitt is an author of a number of LARPs and served on two panels.
- Vanessa McLaren-Way writes SF fiction and poetry, invents robots, and plays *Ingress* and *Pokémon GO*. She hosted meetups for these games at San Jose in 2018.
- [Donna Prior](#) is the Organized Play Manager at [Catan Studio](#), and is one of the founders and is the Executive Director of [OrcaCon](#), the Inclusive Tabletop Games Convention.
- Author [Annie Bellet](#) describes herself as a gamer and participates in gaming panels at Worldcon and other cons.

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<sup>14</sup> A full list of panels and panelists is available in [Appendix C](#).

Finally, WSFS members have expressed explicit interest in game awards and a game category for the Hugos.

In addition to the BAFTA coverage at *File 770*, there are a number of other demonstrations of interest from the WSFS community in game awards for speculative fiction work. This includes previous proposals for Hugo category reform that includes interactive fiction categories, such as a [these two nerds of a feather, flock together](#) posts and a mention in the [2018 Hugo Study Committee Report](#) (search "Video Games"). There was also a trial games category for the 2006 Hugos, covered previously. More recently, Tor.com also had a post titled [Return of the Obra Dinn Proves Game Writing Deserves SFF Award Recognition](#). The calls for a game category are only increasing.

## Speculative Fiction Game Awards

While there is no inclusive, medium-neutral speculative fiction award for games -- the Hugo Awards could be the first! -- there are some more narrowly focused awards. Most notably in terms of cross-section with WSFS members, the Nebula Awards have a "Best Game Writing" Category, inaugurated in 2018 and now in its second year. The category definition reads:

*An interactive or playable story-driven work which conveys narrative, character, or story background.*

*Works in the game writing category shall have no word count requirements.*

The works nominated for 2019 were:

- Winner: *The Outer Worlds* by Leonard Boyarsky, Kate Dollarhyde, Paul Kirsch, Chris L'Etoile, Daniel McPhee, Carrie Patel, Nitai Poddar, Marc Soskin, and Megan Starks
- *Outer Wilds*<sup>[IND]</sup> by Kelsey Beachum, published by Mobius Digital
- *The Magician's Workshop*<sup>[IND]</sup> by Kate Heartfield
- *Disco Elysium*<sup>[IND]</sup> by Robert Kurvitz
- *Fate Accessibility Toolkit*<sup>[IND]</sup> by Elsa Sjunneson-Henry, Jess Banks, Laurel Bell, C.D. "Casey" Casas, Lillian Cohen-Moore, Brian Engard, Philippe-Antoine Ménard, Clark Valentine, Mysty Vander, and Zeph Wibby

It's worth noting that over half this list comprises games that were recognized throughout other awards in 2019 (see [Other Game and Interactive Fiction Awards](#)).

The works nominated for 2018 were:

- Winner: *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* by Charlie Brooker, published by House of Tomorrow and Netflix
- *The Road to Canterbury*<sup>[IND]</sup> by Kate Heartfield, published by Choice of Games
- *God of War* by Matt Sophos, Richard Zangrande Gaubert, Cory Barlog, Orion Walker, and Adam Dolin, published by Santa Monica Studio/Sony/Interactive Entertainment
- *Rent-A-Vice*<sup>[IND]</sup> by Natalia Theodoridou, published by Choice of Games
- *The Martian Job*<sup>[IND]</sup> by M. Darusha Wehm, published by Choice of Games

This clearly demonstrates interest in awarding games in Hugo-adjacent circles, and the viability of games and game writing in a storytelling award intellectual economy.

The fan-based ENnie Awards (previously known as the Gen Con EN World RPG Awards) are a tabletop RPG award hosted at Gen Con, and center almost exclusively on speculative fiction titles and creators. With 22 categories<sup>15</sup> recognizing gold and silver winners in each in addition to the finalists, the ENnies demonstrate three important qualities in a speculative fiction game award. The first is the breadth of achievements in a single area of speculative fiction game creation. The second is that even with the tremendous number of nominees, honours will cluster on a small number of exceptional titles -- the sort of games that could go on a Hugo longlist. Finally, a number of qualifying titles and even several categories, such as Best Supplement, are awarded on grounds of being modifications of games rather than standalone game in and of themselves.

Analyzing the categories that seemed most in line with Hugo voter interests<sup>16</sup> produces a small list of multiple-category nominees and winners.

This list for 2019 included:

- *Mothership: Player's Survival Guide* (Tuesday Knight Games)
  - **1 Gold:** Best Game
  - **2 Finalist:** Product of the Year, Best Production Values
- *Forbidden Lands – Retro Open-World Survival Fantasy RPG* (Free League Publishing)
  - **2 Silver:** Product of the Year, Best Rules
  - **2 Finalist:** Best Production Values, Best Setting
- *Dinosaur Princess* (Ardens Ludere)
  - **1 Silver:** Best Family Product

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<sup>15</sup> As of the 2019 awards ([archived copy of 2019 awards list](#)). 2018 had 23 categories ([archived copy of the 2018 awards list](#)).

<sup>16</sup> The categories used were: Best Game, Product of the Year, Adventure, Electronic Book, Family Product, Free Game/Product (these were separate categories for 2018), Organized Play, Production Values, Rules, Setting, and Writing.

- **2 Finalist:** Product of the Year, Best Ebook
- *Ironsworn* (Shawn Tomkin)
  - **1 Gold:** Best Free Product
  - **1 Finalist:** Best Ebook
- *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay Core Rulebook* (Cubicle Seven Entertainment Ltd.)
  - **1 Gold:** Best Writing
  - **1 Finalist:** Best Rules
- *Dialect: A Game About Language and How it Dies* (Thorny Games)
  - **1 Silver:** Best Game
  - **1 Finalist:** Product of the Year
- *Dream Askew/Dream Apart* (Buried Without Ceremony Games)
  - **3 Finalist:** Best Game, Product of the Year, Best Setting
- *Liminal* (Wordplay Games)
  - **3 Finalist:** Best Game, Product of the Year, Best Writing
- *Silent Titans* (Swordfish Islands)
  - **3 Finalist:** Product of the Year, Best Production Values, Best Writing

These 9 games, out of a total 46 titles across the 12 selected categories, account for 38.5% of the total possible honours, demonstrating that even in a wide field such as this, there is a reasonable expectation of finding a small number of best-loved games.

A similar list for 2018 includes:

- *Delta Green: The RPG* (Arc Dream Publishing)
  - **3 Gold:** Best Organized Play, Best Production Values, Best Rules
  - **2 Silver:** Product of the Year, Best Game
- *Harlem Unbound* (Darker Hue Studios)
  - **2 Gold:** Best Setting, Best Writing
  - **2 Finalist:** Product of the Year, Best Rules
- *Zweihänder Grim & Perilous RPG* (Grim & Perilous Studios)
  - **2 Gold:** Best Game, Product of the Year
- *Star Trek Adventures: Collectors Edition Core Rulebook* (Modiphius Entertainment)
  - **3 Silver:** Best Organized Play, Best Production Values, Best Rules

- **1 Finalist:** Product of the Year
- *Delta Green: A Night at the Opera* (Arc Dream Publishing)
  - **1 Gold:** Best Electronic Book
  - **1 Silver:** Best Adventure
- *Frostbitten and Mutilated* (Lamentations of the Flame Princess)
  - **2 Silver:** Best Setting, Best Writing
  - **1 Finalist:** Product of the Year
- *The Dark of Hot Springs Island* (Swordfish Islands)
  - **1 Gold:** Best Adventure
  - **1 Finalist:** Product of the Year

These 7 games, out of a total of 53 titles across the 13 selected categories, account for 30.5% of the total possible honours.

The ENnies also have another category worth noting, Best RPG-Related Product, which functions somewhat like the Hugos' Best Related Work. The honorees for 2019 were:

- **Gold:** Dark Adventure Radio Theatre: Masks of Nyarlathotep, The H. P. Lovecraft Historical Society Inc.
- **Silver:** Miskatonic University: The Restricted Collection, Chaosium Inc.
- **Finalists:**
  - Bluebeard's Bride: Book of Lore, Magpie Games
  - Deven Rue Map Weights Set, Campaign Coins

The honorees for 2018 were:

- **Gold:** [Khan of Khans](#), Chaosium Inc.
- **Silver:** [Dresden Files Cooperative Card Game](#), Evil Hat Productions
- **Finalists:**
  - [Storm Hollow](#), Game Salute / Escapade Games
  - [Friendly Local Game Store](#), Gameplaywright
  - [#feminism](#), Pelgrane Press

The Origins Award is a juried award by the Academy of Adventure Gaming Arts & Design:

*Each year the Academy presents the Origins Awards at the Origins Game Fair in June. The purpose of the Origins Awards is to reward excellence in game design.*

*The nominee's products in each category, as determined by the Academy Jury, are announced after the GAMA Trade Show in March. The nominees are voted on by all*

*members of the Academy. The Academy vote determines the winner of the Origins Award. The nominee's products are also voted on by attendees of the Origins Game Fair for a chance to win the Fan Favorite award in each category.*

The category structure is amorphous, with the awards given out in any year being dependent on the field of qualifying titles. The 2018 Origins categories and winners were:<sup>17</sup>

**Best Board Game, Fan Favorite, and Game of the Year:**

*Root* (Leder Games)

**Best Card Game, Fan Favorite:**

*The Mind* (Pandasaurus Games)

**Best Family Game:**

*The Tea Dragon Society Card Game* (Renegade Game Studios)

**Fan Favorite Family Game:**

*Echidna Shuffle* (Wattsalpoag Games)

**Best Collectible Game and Fan Favorite:**

*Keyforge: Call of the Archons* (Fantasy Flight Games)

**Best Role-Playing Game and Fan Favorite:**

*Vampire: The Masquerade 5th edition* (Modiphius Entertainment)

**Best Role-Playing Game Supplement and Fan Favorite:**

*Dungeons & Dragons: Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* (Wizards of the Coast)

**Best Miniatures Game:**

*Necromunda* (Games Workshop)

**Best Miniatures Game and Fan Favorite:**

*Star Wars: Legion* (Fantasy Flight Games)

**Best Game Accessory:**

*Dungeons & Dragons: Black Dragon Trophy Plaque* (WizKids):

**Fan Favorite Game Accessory:**

*Dungeons & Dragons: Monster Cards* (Gale Force Nine)

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<sup>17</sup> [Archived copy](#).

Once again it is notable that a number of winners are modifications or supplements rather than totally independent, stand-alone titles.

The field of speculative fiction game awards honours a breadth of achievements, but there is no inclusive single speculative fiction game award. It's time for the Hugos to join the ranks and become the first.

## Robustness of the Category

A number of WSFS members clearly care about games and think they deserve analysis, discussion, and recognition. However, it is necessary to show specifically that games deserve a category of their own and would, moreover, populate that category robustly every year. Every year, game creators produce more than enough quality content to populate a Hugo longlist. This section will discuss the unique craft in video games, cover a number of other game awards, and follow this with potential Hugo longlists for the last several years.

## Unique Craft, Storytelling, and Consumption in Games

Games are an utterly unique medium in what sorts of storytelling they can accomplish and how audiences interact with the material. Speculative fiction is particularly suited to pushing the limits of a medium, and gaming as a medium is uniquely suited to pushing the boundaries of speculative fiction. Three distinguishing hallmarks of games are the way they can expand the ways we tell stories, push the limits of interactive worldbuilding, and interrogate the natures of narrative and play themselves. Each of these incorporates play and interactivity into the work of storytelling in such a way that they cannot be divorced from each other. This sort of work cannot be adequately covered by a Best Dramatic Presentation category, and consideration in the Best Related Work would necessarily and wrongly divorce the works from their speculative fictional elements.

## New Ways to Tell and Consume Stories

While video games in particular may have audio and video elements, like the movies and TV shows that primarily populate the BDP categories, the integration of interactivity into the storytelling disrupts the sorts of structures available to movies and TV and creates entirely new and different paradigms for telling stories. In many games, there is no guarantee that the player will encounter story or worldbuilding elements in any particular order, unlike the presentation of a movie or TV show, and the story must then be written taking this into account. This interactivity also means that the player must participate in building and discovering the story, a method of consuming media that is again unique to games. Games also give players the opportunity to *live* the stories in a way that non-interactive media cannot, and the element of player choice introduces the ability to affect that narrative's order and events. This means that games must be crafted with interactivity in mind, with a particular and more flexible approach to storytelling. Even nonlinear books, movies, and TV cannot claim this, as their content, while presented in a nonstandard order, is still simply presented -- the audience cannot affect it or change the experience of it.

Just about any piece of interactive fiction or game with multiple endings/worldstates can demonstrate the unique nature of interactive storytelling, but many titles interweave this element with the speculative nature of the work. The prose interactive fiction game *Birdland*<sup>[IND]</sup><sup>18</sup> blends the nature of narrative choice into dreamlike magical realism, synergizing the two elements together to convey a story that couldn't be told with the same sense and nuance in any other medium. This game [exposes its mechanics to the player](#), letting them see how the mechanics of their choices play out and maintaining an awareness of medium unique to the nature of gaming. While *Birdland* is prose-based, *GRIS*<sup>[IND]</sup><sup>19</sup> has no prose at all but still [uses interactive storytelling to convey a story of grief and recovering from loss](#). In this puzzle platformer, the player experiences the stages of grief through art, music, and the movement of the player character through space, starting with mostly horizontal motion for the early stage of denial, a downward plummet for the depression stage, and an upward ascent for the stage of acceptance. This general sense of motion is punctuated by the player's constant smaller ups and downs, false starts, and mistakes, using the medium of a game to convey the emotionally uneven landscape of grief in a way that can't be done in any other medium and cannot be divorced from either its substance or its delivery.

Some games require the player to assemble the narrative for themselves, discovering the story in anachronic order and solving its mystery by interacting with the world and its specific mechanics. *Return of the Obra Dinn*<sup>[IND]</sup>, which received great critical acclaim for 2018,<sup>20</sup> has the player use a magical timepiece to [see back in time to the deaths of every person aboard](#) the titular vessel. The order in which the player encounters the dead bodies is not set, so the order the story is assembled in, and what clues the player puts together, must be flexible enough to accommodate the nature of play. Similarly, *Heaven's Vault*<sup>[IND]</sup> is a game about [deciphering an ancient language and rediscovering a lost culture](#), which allows the player to make mistakes and assemble translations in any order. This sort of flexible presentation and allowance of error and luck for the player in discovering the story is particular to games, and many games blend these unique story mechanics with the speculative elements such that considering either element independently loses a significant portion of what makes the work unique and meaningful. Moreover, the necessary participation of the player in assembling the story and discovering the world allows not only for a mode of storytelling that is unique to games, but also a play experience that is unique to each player.

## Interactive Worldbuilding

All speculative fiction involves some degree of worldbuilding, if only to establish the speculative elements. However, games present a unique opportunity to expand what sort of worldbuilding is

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<sup>18</sup> 2015 title with 6 XYZZY nominations and a win for Best Game; see [Interactive Fiction Awards](#) in Appendix B.

<sup>19</sup> 2018 title with 7 nominations across 5 major awards, and 1 win.

<sup>20</sup> 17 nominations and 3 wins across 5 major awards; see the tables in [Video Game Awards](#).

possible, as players are able to actively explore worlds, affect the fictional world around them, and worldbuild collaboratively as part of play.

*Microscope* is a stunning example of the sort of speculative work that only games can do. In this game, worldbuilding *is* the gameplay: 2-4 players cooperate in a pen-and-paper RPG to build a timeline of a world, working in anachronic order and "zooming in and out" on epochs and events, always interrogating the basic assumptions behind speculative worldbuilding and again and again getting at the question of "why?" Here is how *Microscope* describes itself:<sup>21</sup>

### **What is Microscope?**

*Humanity spreads to the stars and forges a galactic civilization...*

*Fledgling nations arise from the ruins of the empire...*

*An ancient line of dragon-kings dies out as magic fades from the realm...*

These are all examples of *Microscope* games. Want to explore an epic history of your own creation, hundreds or thousands of years long, all in an afternoon? That's *Microscope*.

You won't play the game in chronological order. You can defy the limits of time and space, jumping backward or forward to explore the parts of the history that interest you. Want to leap a thousand years into the future and see how an institution shaped society? Want to jump back to the childhood of the king you just saw assassinated and find out what made him such a hated ruler? That's normal in *Microscope*.

You have vast power to create... and to destroy. Build beautiful, tranquil jewels of civilization and then consume them with nuclear fire. Zoom out to watch the majestic tide of history wash across empires, then zoom in and explore the lives of the people who endured it.

Mock chronological order.

Defy time and space.

Build worlds and destroy them.

A role-playing game for two to four players. No GM. No prep.

The settings created in games of *Microscope* tend towards the wildly creative, and many game masters use games of *Microscope* to develop settings for the more traditional RPGs they intend

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<sup>21</sup> From [the Microscope website](#), captured June 10, 2019.

to have those players play in later. A game like *Microscope* provides [a totally unique framework for speculative worldbuilding](#), and the essence of the game lives in its interactive elements.

*Dwarf Fortress*<sup>[IND]<sup>22</sup></sup> also plays with worldbuilding in nontraditional ways, using procedurally generated worlds to synergize with its complex emergent gameplay to tell grand narrative arcs -- if the player can discover them. This element of discovery is one of the game's defining features, as play involves experimenting with the game's incredibly deep and granular mechanics to discover what can be achieved. This type of worldbuilding-through-play is common to many games of a type called roguelikes, such as *Sunless Sea*, but is also a common element of more general exploration-based games such as *Myst*.

More traditional types of interactive worldbuilding are available in many games. Information about the world is not simply presented to the player, but must be found by experiencing the world itself, and is often interacted with or affected by the player's choices, changing the world through the player's actions. The *Dragon Age* series of games features massive amounts of worldbuilding, but much of it must be discovered by interacting with non-playable characters (NPCs), examining or interacting with the surroundings, or making narrative choices that affect the story and reveal information about the world. As a series, *Dragon Age* builds on players' past choices about the world to let each player create a worldstate unique to their play experience, changing which factions are in power and why, what happens to significant historical figures, and the direction entire nations and religions take. Aside from these more momentous world-shaping choices, the setting responds to player choice in smaller ways. Thedas -- The *Dragon Age* Setting -- is a well-developed world with many sociological, historical, linguistic, mythological, and fantastical nuances, but they must be discovered through interaction. In addition to the visual elements of the world, *Dragon Age: Inquisition*<sup>23</sup> has over a million words of dialogue and worldbuilding flavour text to discover. In addition to the information gleaned from talking to other characters in the game, the player can explore the world to learn even more. Collecting herbs and minerals unlocks stories about their use, pages from herbals, or accounts of legendary armour forged from that metal. Going out of your way to examine murals, statues, and cave paintings teaches you about the gods and folklore of the world. Defeating powerful optional enemies lets the player learn how so much power can be accumulated in this world. Each of these interactions conveys information about the fantasy world of Thedas such that the speculative elements are woven throughout the play.

Games allow for a depth and mode of worldbuilding not available in any other medium, involving the player not only in experiencing the world, but also in shaping it.

## Interrogating Narrative and Play

This section contains spoilers for all the named titles.

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<sup>22</sup> Featured in 2012 in the Museum of Modern Art's collection on video games and video game history.

<sup>23</sup> The third game in the series, released in 2014 and winner of numerous Game of the Year accolades.

While works in any medium can incorporate medium-awareness and interrogate the nature of the medium they are made in, games have several avenues here not available to non-interactive media. The incorporation of player choice allows games to question the structure and nature of interactivity as a creative medium and of the roles of luck and free will in both the fictional world of games and in the real world of the player.

Games are rich sites for narrative play; nonlinear narratives abound and games that play with the nature of gameplay come out every year. *Pandemic Legacy* is a highly lauded<sup>24</sup> 2015 board game that requires the players to [make permanent alterations to the game itself](#) as part of play, actively questioning the players' attachment to the game artifacts and to the idea of what constitutes fair play. The cooperative nature of the game and its extreme difficulty invite each play group to negotiate what they think is a reasonable way to play the game, making this extradiegetic element part of the play, as well as questioning players' reluctance to deface the game. The game's self-awareness regarding not just the dire narrative of the game but also its difficulty and how players approach it constitutes a unique interrogation of what play is, what is fun or enjoyable play, and how much control players have. Many video games also surface and directly interrogate the means of interaction, introducing medium-aware interface elements such as in *Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem* or *Metal Gear Solid*.

Many games interrogate the nature of choice and what it means to command a character. *The Stanley Parable*<sup>[IND]</sup><sup>25</sup> responds intelligently to [how and whether the player follows the narrator's version](#) of what the player character, Stanley, does. The game explores the limits of linear game narratives through disobedience of the rules of narrative and gameplay. The theme of disobedience is explicitly sustained in *Bioshock*, which was part one of the wave of games in the later 2000s that sparked the debate over [whether video games are art](#). In this game, the trope of the helpful voiceover character is subverted when the player discovers that the voice over the radio has been using a hypnotic phrase to compel the player character to act in the entire game to that point. The rest of the game is dedicated to the player character throwing off this hypnotic conditioning even as the player themselves is aware of still controlling the character on the screen. This kind of engagement with the idea of control cannot be performed in any other medium, and games like *Bioshock* interweave that work seamlessly with their speculative elements. The recent game *Baba Is You*<sup>26</sup> engages even more deeply with the nature of gameplay by making changing the rules and logic of the game the central mechanic of the gameplay.

Also part of the [wave of late 2000s medium-defining games was \*Braid\*](#), a puzzle platformer based around time manipulation mechanics. *Braid* kicked off the indie game revolution, sowing

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<sup>24</sup> A list of awards and honour can be seen on [the game's page at Board Game Geek](#).

<sup>25</sup> Originally a modification of *Half-Life 2* released in 2011, with a high-definition standalone remake released in 2013. Both releases would qualify as modifications under the proposed category structure; see [Category Definition and Substantial Modifications](#).

<sup>26</sup> 2019 title nominated for the 2018 Independent Games Festival Seumas McNally Grand Prize and winner of "Best Student Game" and "Excellence in Design"

the seeds for the rich field of indie games that exists today. Like *Bioshock*, *Braid*<sup>[IND]</sup> eschews the separation of gameplay mechanics and story, and, like *GRIS*<sup>[IND]</sup>, it uses the player character's movement through space to tell its story and explore its themes. This game employs separation of fabula (events of the story) and sujet (presentation of events in the narrative) to explore themes of causality and responsibility and the player's expectation of a linear and orderly narrative. In the final level, chronologically the first in the narrative, the game uses a reversed flow of time to expose and subvert the player's expectations of the narrative, having the player play through the level in reversed time then seeing how the story changes when the flow of time is set forward again.

This sort of interrogation of play and narrative cannot be accomplished in non-interactive media, and makes games a rich and unique site for speculative work.

## Other Game and Interactive Fiction Awards

There is considerable interest in awards for speculative fiction games and interactive media across fannish circles, the gaming industry, and non-gaming industry prestigious associations.

In the following section, I will present a number of international and region-specific gaming awards, showing that speculative fiction titles tend to dominate even in general gaming awards. This section presents a summary, and full game award data is available in [Appendix B](#).

**Please note:** Throughout this section, only speculative fiction honorees are shown/counted. Non-speculative honorees are not shown.

### Video Game Awards

There are a number of prominent video game awards, and I focus on five in this section: the BAFTA game awards, the D.I.C.E awards, The Game Awards (TGA), the Game Developer's Choice Awards (GDCA), and the Golden Joystick Awards (GJA). Each of these game awards is prestigious and popularly recognized, and, despite these being general gaming awards, speculative fiction titles have dominated in these awards for the length of their existence.

The BAFTA Awards were [mentioned previously](#) in the Proof of Interest section as an award that WSFS members had taken particular interest in. Games have formed a part of the BAFTA Awards since 1998. The BAFTA Awards should be noted for their rules permitting a game to requalify upon sufficient alteration (see [Appendix B](#) for details).

The D.I.C.E. Awards are an industry award arranged by the Academy of Interactive Arts & Sciences. The AIAS also has a [Hall of Fame](#) honouring individual developers for revolutionary and innovative achievements.

The Game Awards, existing since 2014, garnered over 26 million viewers in the most recent year. This award is notable for its blend of juried (90%) and popular public (10%) voting system, and for allowing games to requalify if the jury "feels their inclusion is merited due to new contents, improvements or service updates." There is also a special category, "Best Ongoing Game," for "titles that have continued to provide value to customers." Another notable rule is that early access<sup>27</sup> games are eligible for the award. Full details are available in [Appendix B](#).

The Game Developer's Choice Awards are presented at the annual Game Developers Conference. Of note in the rules is the statement that "upgrades, expansions and mission packs are not eligible," again demonstrating that this is an issue of interest in game awards.

The Golden Joystick Awards are the longest still-running video game award ceremony, the second oldest to have existed, and the biggest video game award show by number of votes cast (over 9 million votes were cast for 2014). These awards have added a "Still Playing" award starting in 2017 for games that continue to have a strong following and put out new content/modifications.

Each of these awards has a robust category structure with 4-6 nominees per category, and speculative fiction titles were nominated in every category for 2018. A summary of 2018 results for these awards is below:

|                                                   | <b>BAFTA</b>    | <b>D.I.C.E</b>  | <b>TGA</b>      | <b>GDCA</b>     | <b>GJA</b>      |
|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| <b>Unique SFF Nominees</b>                        | 37              | 47              | 60              | 19              | 79              |
| <b>Categories with SFF Nominees</b>               | 17/17<br>(100%) | 21/21<br>(100%) | 21/21<br>(100%) | 11/11<br>(100%) | 14/14<br>(100%) |
| <b>Categories with SFF Winners</b>                | 8/17<br>(47%)   | 19/21<br>(90%)  | 15/21<br>(71%)  | 7/11<br>(63%)   | 12/14<br>(86%)  |
| <b>SFF Games Nominated in Multiple Categories</b> | 20              | 11              | 17              | 7               | 37              |

This clearly demonstrates the dominance of speculative fiction titles across the major game awards. A closer look at the multiple-category nominees (last row) also shows that there's a reasonable degree of consensus on what "the best games" of the year are. The below table shows only SFF titles that received at least 2 nominations in each of at least 2 different awards, so each of the below games has been recognized as superior across different awards and areas of merit.

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<sup>27</sup> See [Draft Versions: Alpha/Beta Releases and Early Access](#)

|                                                           | BAFTA<br>(18 Cats) |   | D.I.C.E.<br>(23 Cats) |   | TGA<br>(25 Cats) |   | GDCA<br>(11 Cats) |   | GJA<br>(14 Cats) |   | TOTAL |      |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|---|-----------------------|---|------------------|---|-------------------|---|------------------|---|-------|------|
|                                                           | N                  | W | N                     | W | N                | W | N                 | W | N                | W | Noms  | Wins |
| <i>Death Stranding</i>                                    | 11                 | 1 | 8                     | 2 | 10               | 3 | 7                 |   |                  |   | 36    | 6    |
| <i>Control</i>                                            | 11                 |   | 8                     | 4 | 8                | 1 | 5                 | 3 | 3                | 1 | 35    | 9    |
| <i>Outer Wilds</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>                       | 5                  | 3 | 4                     |   | 3                |   | 5                 |   | 5                | 1 | 22    | 4    |
| <i>Disco Elysium</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>                     | 7                  | 3 | 6                     |   | 4                | 4 | 4                 | 2 |                  |   | 21    | 9    |
| <i>Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice</i>                          | 4                  |   | 2                     |   | 5                | 2 | 3                 |   | 1                |   | 15    | 2    |
| <i>Sayonara Wild Hearts</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>              | 2                  | 1 | 3                     | 1 | 3                |   | 3                 |   | 2                |   | 13    | 2    |
| <i>Apex Legends</i>                                       | 2                  | 1 | 1                     |   | 4                | 1 | 1                 |   | 1                | 1 | 9     | 3    |
| <i>Resident Evil 2</i>                                    |                    |   | 3                     |   | 4                |   |                   |   | 1                | 2 | 8     | 2    |
| <i>Baba Is You</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>                       | 2                  |   | 1                     |   | 1                |   | 2                 | 2 | 1                |   | 7     | 2    |
| <i>Luigi's Mansion 3</i>                                  | 4                  | 1 | 2                     | 1 | 1                | 1 |                   |   |                  |   | 7     | 3    |
| <i>Super Smash Bros. Ultimate</i>                         |                    |   |                       |   | 4                | 1 |                   |   | 3                | 1 | 7     | 2    |
| <i>The Outer Worlds</i>                                   |                    |   | 2                     | 1 | 4                |   | 1                 |   |                  |   | 7     | 1    |
| <i>Concrete Genie</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>                    | 2                  |   | 2                     |   | 1                |   |                   |   | 1                |   | 6     |      |
| <i>Final Fantasy XIV: Shadowbringers</i> <sup>[MOD]</sup> |                    |   | 1                     |   | 3                |   |                   |   | 2                |   | 6     |      |
| <i>Knights and Bikes</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>                 | 4                  |   |                       |   |                  |   | 1                 |   | 1                |   | 6     |      |
| <i>Life is Strange 2</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>                 | 5                  | 1 |                       |   | 1                |   |                   |   |                  | 1 | 6     | 2    |
| <i>Mortal Kombat 11</i>                                   |                    |   | 3                     | 1 | 1                |   |                   |   | 2                |   | 6     | 1    |
| <i>Devil May Cry 5</i>                                    |                    |   | 2                     |   | 2                | 1 |                   |   | 1                | 1 | 5     | 2    |
| <i>Fire Emblem: Three Houses</i>                          |                    |   | 1                     |   | 2                | 2 |                   |   | 2                |   | 5     | 2    |
| <i>Fortnite</i>                                           |                    |   |                       |   | 3                |   |                   |   | 2                | 1 | 5     | 1    |
| <i>Gears 5</i>                                            |                    |   | 1                     |   | 3                | 1 |                   |   | 1                | 1 | 5     | 2    |
| <i>Sky: Children of Light</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>            |                    |   | 1                     |   | 1                |   | 2                 | 1 | 1                |   | 5     | 1    |
| <i>Slay the Spire</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>                    |                    |   | 2                     |   | 1                |   |                   |   | 2                |   | 5     |      |

|                                                 | BAFTA<br>(17 Cats) |   | D.I.C.E.<br>(21 Cats) |   | TGA<br>(21 Cats) |   | GDCA<br>(11 Cats) |   | GJA<br>(14 Cats) |   | TOTAL |      |
|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------|---|-----------------------|---|------------------|---|-------------------|---|------------------|---|-------|------|
|                                                 | N                  | W | N                     | W | N                | W | N                 | W | N                | W | Noms  | Wins |
| <i>God of War</i>                               | 10                 | 5 | 12                    | 9 | 8                | 3 | 6                 | 1 | 5                | 5 | 41    | 23   |
| <i>Marvel's Spider-Man</i>                      | 3                  |   | 10                    | 1 | 7                |   | 6                 |   | 3                |   | 29    | 1    |
| <i>Return of the Obra Dinn</i> <sup>[IND]</sup> | 6                  | 2 | 5                     |   | 2                |   | 4                 | 1 |                  |   | 17    | 3    |
| <i>Celeste</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>                 | 5                  |   | 2                     | 2 | 4                | 2 | 3                 | 1 |                  |   | 14    | 5    |
| <i>Detroit: Become Human</i>                    | 2                  |   | 4                     |   | 3                |   |                   |   | 2                |   | 11    |      |
| <i>Into the Breach</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>         | 2                  |   | 4                     | 1 | 2                |   |                   |   | 2                |   | 10    | 1    |
| <i>Moss</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>                    | 2                  |   |                       |   | 2                |   | 2                 |   | 3                |   | 9     |      |
| <i>GRIS</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>                    | 3                  |   | 2                     |   |                  |   | 2                 | 1 |                  |   | 7     | 1    |
| <i>ASTRO BOT: Rescue Mission</i>                | 3                  |   | 4                     |   |                  |   |                   |   |                  |   | 7     |      |
| <i>Assassin's Creed Odyssey</i>                 | 2                  |   |                       |   | 4                |   |                   |   |                  |   | 6     |      |
| <i>Monster Hunter: World</i>                    |                    |   |                       |   | 3                |   |                   |   | 3                | 1 | 6     | 1    |
| <i>Octopath Traveler</i>                        |                    |   |                       |   | 3                |   |                   |   | 3                | 2 | 6     | 2    |
| <i>Fortnite</i>                                 | 2                  |   |                       |   | 3                | 2 |                   |   |                  |   | 5     | 2    |
| <i>Sea of Thieves</i>                           | 2                  |   |                       |   |                  |   |                   |   | 3                |   | 5     |      |
| <i>Tetris Effect</i>                            | 2                  |   |                       |   |                  |   | 3                 |   |                  |   | 5     |      |
| <i>Nintendo Labo</i>                            | 3                  | 2 |                       |   |                  |   |                   |   | 2                |   | 5     | 2    |
| <i>Destiny 2: Forsaken</i>                      |                    |   | 2                     |   | 3                |   |                   |   |                  |   | 5     |      |
| <i>Mario Tennis Aces</i>                        |                    |   |                       |   | 2                |   |                   |   | 3                |   | 5     |      |
| <i>Dead Cells</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>              |                    |   |                       |   | 2                |   |                   |   | 2                | 1 | 4     | 1    |

Two things must be noted here. First is that multiple-category SFF nominees across different awards still comprise more titles than a Hugo longlist, and the additional 30 nominees included in [Appendix C](#) would make for triple a longlist overall. This all for general awards that do not even specialize in SFF work.

Second is that this entire list, and the top tier of nominees and winners especially, is not dominated by AAA titles but instead has a solid number of indie titles. Of the top 10 titles in this list, going by total number of nominations, over half are independent: *Return of the Obra Dinn*, *Celeste*, *Into the Breach*, *Moss*, *Dead Cells*, and *GRIS*.

The categories themselves also bear examination, as they lend some insight into the range of artistry in games and the grounds on which games could qualify for an overall "best game" award. Notable categories include:

#### **BAFTA**

- Artistic Achievement
- Game Design
- Game Innovation
- Games Beyond Entertainment

Speculative fiction titles won in 3 of these 4 categories in 2018.

#### **D.I.C.E**

- Outstanding Achievement for an Independent Game
- Outstanding Achievement in Art Direction
- Outstanding Achievement in Character
- Outstanding Achievement in Game Design
- Outstanding Achievement in Story
- Outstanding Achievement in Game Direction

Speculative titles won in all of these categories in 2018.

#### **The Game Awards**

- Best Game Direction
- Best Ongoing Game
- Best Narrative

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<sup>28</sup> This table shows only games with multiple nominations in multiple awards. The further 30 games got multiple nominations (2 or more) in one award. Games that got multiple nominations in one award but single nominations across multiple other awards are not shown.

- Best Art Direction
- Games for Impact

Speculative titles won in 4 of these 6 categories in 2018.

#### Game Developer's Choice Awards

- Best Design
- Best Narrative
- Best Technology
- Best Visual Art
- Innovation Award

Speculative titles won in 3 of these 5 categories in 2018.

#### Golden Joystick Awards

- Best Storytelling
- Best Visual Design
- Best Indie Game
- Still Playing Award

Speculative titles won in 3 of these 4 categories in 2018.

Full lists of categories and speculative fiction honorees are available in [Appendix B](#).

Each of these awards (except for Golden Joystick) does have an overall "Best Game" or equivalent category.<sup>29</sup> The finalists for each award's Best Game category also show a broad consensus, but enough differentiation to make each award's shortlist unique and the entire process interesting.

These are the finalists and winners for 2019:

| Legend: Nomination Win                | BAFTA | D.I.C.E. | TGA | GDCA | TOTAL |
|---------------------------------------|-------|----------|-----|------|-------|
| <i>Control</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>       |       |          |     |      | 4     |
| <i>Death Stranding</i>                |       |          |     |      | 3     |
| <i>Disco Elysium</i> <sup>[IND]</sup> |       |          |     |      | 2     |
| <i>Luigi's Mansion 3</i>              |       |          |     |      | 1     |
| <i>Outer Wilds</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>   | Win   |          |     |      | 3     |
| <i>Resident Evil 2</i>                |       |          |     |      | 1     |

<sup>29</sup> The Golden Joystick Awards have "Game of the Year" categories broken down by platform. In 2018 the platforms were mobile, PC, PlayStation, Xbox, and Nintendo.

|                                               |  |     |     |     |   |
|-----------------------------------------------|--|-----|-----|-----|---|
| <i>Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice</i>              |  |     | Win |     | 3 |
| <i>Super Smash Bros. Ultimate</i>             |  |     |     |     | 1 |
| <i>The Outer Worlds</i>                       |  |     |     |     | 1 |
| <i>Untitled Goose Game</i> <sup>[IND]30</sup> |  | Win |     | Win | 3 |

These are the finalists and winners for 2018:

|                                                  |              |                 |            |             |              |
|--------------------------------------------------|--------------|-----------------|------------|-------------|--------------|
| Legend: Nomination Win                           | <b>BAFTA</b> | <b>D.I.C.E.</b> | <b>TGA</b> | <b>GDCA</b> | <b>TOTAL</b> |
| <i>Assassin's Creed Odyssey</i>                  |              |                 |            |             | 2            |
| <i>ASTRO BOT Rescue Mission</i> <sup>[IND]</sup> |              |                 |            |             | 1            |
| <i>Celeste</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>                  |              |                 |            |             | 3            |
| <i>God of War</i>                                | Win          | Win             | Win        | Win         | 4            |
| <i>Into the Breach</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>          |              |                 |            |             | 1            |
| <i>Marvel's Spider-Man</i>                       |              |                 |            |             | 3            |
| <i>Monster Hunter: World</i>                     |              |                 |            |             | 1            |
| <i>Return of the Obra Dinn</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>  |              |                 |            |             | 3            |

This trend of broad consensus, some degree of differentiation, and an appreciable showing from indie titles continues in the historical "Best Game" winners, where speculative fiction titles have won almost every year of each of these awards

|      | <b>BAFTA</b>                                        | <b>D.I.C.E.</b>                                | <b>TGA</b> <sup>31</sup>                       | <b>GDCA</b>                                    |
|------|-----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| 2019 | <i>Outer Wilds</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>                 | [ non-SFF winner ]                             | <i>Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice</i>               | [ non-SFF winner ]                             |
| 2018 | <i>God of War</i>                                   | <i>God of War</i>                              | <i>God of War</i>                              | <i>God of War</i>                              |
| 2017 | <i>What Remains of Edith Finch</i> <sup>[IND]</sup> | <i>The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild</i> | <i>The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild</i> | <i>The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild</i> |
| 2016 | [ non-SFF winner ]                                  | <i>Overwatch</i>                               | <i>Overwatch</i>                               | <i>Overwatch</i>                               |

<sup>30</sup> Not a speculative title. This game is included to demonstrate the clustering behavior and account for the other two wins.

<sup>31</sup> Award years begin in 2014, when The Game Awards were founded.

|      |                       |                                    |                                 |                                       |
|------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 2015 | <i>Fallout 4</i>      | <i>Fallout 4</i>                   | <i>The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt</i> | <i>The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt</i>       |
| 2014 | <i>Destiny</i>        | <i>Dragon Age: Inquisition</i>     | <i>Dragon Age: Inquisition</i>  | <i>Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor</i> |
| 2013 | <i>The Last of Us</i> | <i>The Last of Us</i>              |                                 | <i>The Last of Us</i>                 |
| 2012 | <i>Dishonored</i>     | <i>Journey</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>    |                                 | <i>Journey</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>       |
| 2011 | <i>Portal 2</i>       | <i>The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim</i> |                                 | <i>The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim</i>    |
| 2010 | <i>Mass Effect 2</i>  | <i>Mass Effect 2</i>               |                                 | [ non-SFF winner ]                    |

A common concern with a potential games category is the dominance of AAA titles. As covered in the [Accessibility of Nominations](#) section, indie games provide a thriving and financially accessible source of speculative fiction work in games. The games industry is rather unique in how frequently and thoroughly independent creators are recognized, in contrast to prose publishing, movies, or TV series. The closest analogue in Hugo categories is Best Graphic Story, where independent publications often get recognition.

A number of the nominees in the above general awards are independent titles that received wide acclaim in indie game circles; their ability to break through and compete alongside AAA titles speaks to the unique nature of games and to the potential for indie games to claim a Hugo prize.

The Independent Games Festival (IGF) has been running since 1999 and rewards independent gamemakers in a number of categories. The Seumas McNally Grand Prize, the main award given at the festival, has had SFF winners almost every year going back to 2010:<sup>32</sup>

2019: *Return of the Obra Dinn*

2018: *Night in the Woods*

2017: *Quadrilateral Cowboy*

2015: *Outer Wilds*

2014: *Papers, Please*

2013: *Cart Life*

2012: *Fez*

2011: *Minecraft*

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<sup>32</sup> Award years are for the previous year's work.

The 2018 finalists and honorable mentions for the IGF are instructive in that they continue to show both a general consensus on quality games -- a consensus that breaks through into the general market -- and the dominance of speculative fiction titles.

- **Winner:**
  - *Return of the Obra Dinn*
- **Finalists:**
  - *Minit*
  - *Opus Magnum*
  - *Noita*
  - *Hypnospace Outlaw*
  - *Do Not Feed the Monkeys*
- **Honorable Mentions:**
  - *Beat Saber*
  - *Iconoclasts*
  - *Mirror Drop*
  - *Moss*
  - *Subnautica*
  - *Wandersong*
  - *Virtual Virtual Reality*
  - *Unavowed*

About a third of these titles broke through into the general awards scene, as demonstrated above and in [Appendix C](#).

There are a number of other video game awards covering a wide range of achievements in video game creation, and speculative fiction games make a solid showing in all of them.

The International Mobile Game Awards have both global and regional versions, including specific awards for Southeast Asia, Middle East and North Africa (MENA), and China. A notable feature of these awards is their extensive category definitions, which include detailed descriptions and examples. The "Best Meaningful Play" category focuses on games with educational or social impact: "political awareness and calls for action, art games, games for toddlers, 'games for good'. This category is for all this." The "Excellence in Innovation" and "Excellence in Storytelling" categories reward original explorations of the interactive fiction medium -- all specifically for mobile games, with plenty of entrants for each category every year.

In addition to the mobile-specific IMGA regional awards, there are also other regional video game awards, such as the Deutscher Computerspielpreis award, which focuses on German games. Winners such as *Portal Knights* (2017) and *Crysis 2* (2012) demonstrate that well-known and critically acclaimed titles come from markets besides the enormous North American and Japanese powerhouses. Other region-specific game awards include the [Swedish Game Awards](#) and [The Slovak Game of the Year Award](#). Speculative fiction games have also

been honoured in non-industry awards, such as the Annie Award for Outstanding Achievement for Character Animation in a Video Game.

## Analog Game Awards

Speculative games also see solid turnout at analog game awards.

The Golden Geek Awards are a popular award administered by BoardGameGeek.com, and speculative fiction titles have historically won about half the honours in any given year. A notable feature of this award is that it explicitly recognizes expansions,<sup>33</sup> which are a common feature of both digital and analog games. A summary of speculative fiction winners for the last three years is below, acknowledging a variety of popular titles and demonstrating how *Scythe* has remained relevant in its expansions:

- **2018**
  - *KeyForge: Call of the Archons*
  - *Scythe: The Rise of Fenris*
- **2017**
  - *Gloomhaven (2 wins)*
  - *Scythe: The Wind Gambit*
  - *Werewords*
  - *My Little Scythe*
- **2016**
  - *Scythe (4 wins)*
  - *Star Wars: Rebellion*
  - *7 Wonders Duel: Pantheon*
  - *Arkham Horror: The Card Game*
  - *Star Trek: The Dice Game*

The As d'Or (Golden Ace) award is a juried board game award given at the International Cannes Games Festival since 1989. Recent speculative winners include:

- **As d'Or Jeu de l'Année (Grand Public)**
  - 2016: *Mysterium* / Oleg Sidorenko & Oleksandr Nevskiy / Libellud
  - 2013: *Legends of Andor* / Michael Menzel / Kosmos / Iello
  - 2009: *Dixit* / Jean-Louis Roubira / Libellud
- **As d'Or Grand Prix (Expert)**
  - 2018: *Terraforming Mars* / Jacob Fryxelius / FryxGames
  - 2017: *Scythe* / Jamey Stegmaier / Stonemaier Games
  - 2015: *Five Tribes: The Djinn of Naqala* / Bruno Cathala / Days of Wonder

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<sup>33</sup> See "[Expansions](#)."

- 2012: *Olympos* / Philippe Keyaerts / Ystari Games
- 2010: *Small World* / Philippe Keyaerts / Days of Wonder

American Mensa has awarded the Mensa Select award every year since 1990 to five games per year that are "original, challenging and well designed." Recent speculative honorees include<sup>34</sup>:

- Ex Libris (2018)
- Glastonbury (2017)
- Clank! (2017)
- Harry Potter: Hogwarts Battle (2017)
- Dragonwood (2015)
- Euphoria: Build a Better Dystopia (2014)
- Gravwell: Escape from the 9th Dimension (2014)
- Forbidden Desert (2013)
- Ghooost! (2013)
- Forbidden Island (2010)

There are also region-specific analog game awards, the most notable perhaps being the Spiel des Jahres (Game of the Year) award in Germany, which has been recognized as a primary driver of the excellence and innovation in the Eurogames scene (recognized in panel programming content at Worldcon 75 in Helsinki). Even though this award focuses specifically on simpler family-style, less competitive games, and has only recently added a "connoisseur-enthusiast" category, a number of titles honored by this award have reached international acclaim, including *Terraforming Mars* (2017) and *Dixit* (2010). Both of these games continue to be relevant through expansions and additions.

## Interactive Fiction Awards

The XYZZY Awards are an award for interactive fiction administered by XYZZYnews. These awards acknowledge a variety of accomplishments in interactive fiction. The 2018 results are not yet available, but speculative fiction makes a good showing in the available recent years (listing any speculative fiction winners and all speculative fiction finalists for Best Game):

Aside from Best Game, categories recognize achievements such as writing, story, setting, overall and individual puzzles, playable and nonplayable characters, and medium-aware categories such as Best Implementation, Best Use of Innovation, Best Technological Development, and Best Use of Multimedia.

Notable recent winners and honorees include:

- **2018**
  - *Bogeyman*, Elizabeth Smyth (4 wins, including Best Game)

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<sup>34</sup> By award year.

- *Animalia*, Ian Michael Waddell (2 wins and a Best Game nomination)
- *Bandersnatch*, Charlie Brooker, David Slade (Best Use of Multimedia)
- *Alias "The Magpie"*, J. J. Guest (1 win and 7 nominations, including Best Game)
- **2017**
  - *The Wizard Sniffer*, Buster Hudson (5 wins, including Best Game)
  - *Eat Me*, Chandler Groover (2 wins and a Best Game nomination)
  - *Harmonia*, Liza Daly (2 wins)
- **2016**
  - *Superluminal Vagrant Twin* by C.E.J. Pacian (2 wins, including Best Game)
  - *Cactus Blue Motel* by Astrid Dalmady (2 wins and a Best Game nomination)
  - *Foo Foo* by Buster Hudson (1 win and a Best Game nomination)
  - *Open Sorcery* by Abigail Corfman (1 win and a Best Game nomination)
  - *The Mary Jane of Tomorrow* by Emily Short (2 wins)
  - *The Ice-Bound Concordance* by Aaron A. Reed and Jacob Garbe (2 wins)
- **2015**
  - *Birdland* by Brendan Patrick Hennessy (6 wins, including Best Game)
  - *Brain Guzzlers from Beyond!* by Steph Cherrywell (1 win and a Best Game nomination)
  - *Midnight. Swordfight.* by Chandler Groover (1 win and a Best Game nomination)
- **2014**
  - *80 Days* by inkle and Meg Jayanth (3 wins, including Best Game)
  - *Haedean Lands* by Andrew Plotkin (4 wins and a Best Game nomination)
  - *With Those We Love Alive* by Porpentine and Brenda Neotonomie (2 wins and a Best Game nomination)

The clustering of honours for titles like *Haedean Lands*, *The Wizard Sniffer*, and *Birdland* demonstrates a broad consensus on high quality games, and titles like *Bandersnatch*, *80 Days* and *Anchorhead* (multiple winner for its original 1998 version, with a recent rerelease) have also garnered wider acclaim in speculative fiction and gaming fan circles.

The Interactive Fiction Competition is a little different in that it is an actual (juried) competition rather than a traditional juried or popular award. However, speculative titles continue to do well:

- **2018:** *Alias "The Magpie"* by J. J. Guest
- **2017:** *The Wizard Sniffer* by Buster Hudson
- **2015:** *Brain Guzzlers from Beyond!* by Steph Cherrywell
- **2014:** *Hunger Daemon* by Sean M. Shore
- **2013:** *Coloratura* by Lynnea Glasser
- **2012:** *Andromeda Apocalypse* by Marco Innocenti
- **2010:** *Aotearoa* by Matt Wigdahl

A lot of important speculative fiction work is being done in the arenas of games and interactive fiction. In addition to speculative fiction titles' general dominance of various awards, this can be seen in game awards with categories like "Game for Impact," "Game Beyond Game," or "Meaningful Play." In addition, the ability of indie games like *Celeste*, *Beat Saber*, *GRIS*, and *Return of the Obra Dinn* to climb the award ranks demonstrates that a prospective games Hugo Award will not necessarily be dominated by the same AAA studios. A variety of developers and publishers produce quality games every year, as will be demonstrated in the next section. Finally, the multiple honours given to analog games like *Terraforming Mars*, *Scythe*, and *Gloomhaven*; and the wide acclaim of interactive fiction like *Birdland* and breakout titles like *Anchorhead* and *80 Days*, show the viability of interactive fiction titles in this intellectual marketplace. They, too, deserve a home in a Hugo Award category.

## Potential Games Longlists and Shortlists

The field of speculative fiction games and interactive experiences is incredibly rich and can easily furnish a sufficient number and breadth of Hugo-worthy works every year. In addition, the range of creators and publishers is large, so there is room for a diverse slate of nominees.

Speculative content tends to dominate in gaming and interactive fiction awards, as demonstrated above, and this leads naturally to being able to build lists of Hugo-worthy games in any given year relatively trivially. A Hugo longlist only needs 15 works, and a field of roughly 25, but looking solely at the multiple-time nominees from the various awards in the preceding section easily adds to more than 15 titles, coming in at something more like triple a longlist. Combining the awards data with my research among various gaming populations, a 2018 Hugo games longlist could have drawn from titles such as:<sup>35</sup>

| Title                                      | Developer/Creator   | Publisher |
|--------------------------------------------|---------------------|-----------|
| <b>Interactive Fiction</b>                 |                     |           |
| <i>Alias "The Magpie"</i> <sup>[IND]</sup> | J. J. Guest         |           |
| <i>Animalia</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>           | Ian Michael Waddell |           |

<sup>35</sup> Games reasonably regarded as not AAA titles or their equivalent in the field have been marked with <sup>[IND]</sup>. Titles that in some way meet the definition of modifications presented in "[Category Definition and Substantial Modification](#)" are marked with <sup>[MOD]</sup>.

|                                   |                              |                            |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <i>Black Mirror: Bandersnatch</i> | Charlie Brooker, David Slade | House of Tomorrow, Netflix |
| <i>Bogeyman</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>  | Elizabeth Smyth              |                            |

### Interactive Experiences

|               |              |          |
|---------------|--------------|----------|
| Nintendo Labo | Nintendo EPD | Nintendo |
|---------------|--------------|----------|

### Analog Games

|                                                             |                                                                                                |                                    |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <i>Arkham Horror (Third Edition)</i> <sup>[MOD]</sup>       | Richard Launius, Nikki Valens, Kevin Wilson                                                    | Fantasy Flight Games               |
| <i>The Dark of Hot Springs Island</i>                       | Jacob Hurst, Evan Peterson, Donnie Garcia                                                      | Swordfish Islands                  |
| <i>Delta Green: A Night at the Opera</i> <sup>[MOD]</sup>   | Dennis Detwiler, Shane Ivey, Greg Stolze                                                       | Arc Dream Publishing               |
| <i>Delta Green: The RPG</i>                                 | Dennis Detwiler, Adam Scott Glancy, Christopher Gunning, Kenneth Hite, Shane Ivey, Greg Stolze | Arc Dream Publishing               |
| <i>Frostbitten and Mutilated</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>           | Zak Smith                                                                                      | Lamentations of the Flame Princess |
| <i>Harlem Unbound</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>                      | Chris Spivey, Ruth Tillman, Bob Geis, Sarah Hood, Neall Raemonn Price                          | Darker Hue Studios                 |
| <i>Keyforge: Call of the Archons</i>                        | Richard Garfield                                                                               | Fantasy Flight Games               |
| <i>Root</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>                                | Cole Wehrle, Kyle Ferrin                                                                       | Leder Games                        |
| <i>Terraforming Mars: Prelude</i> <sup>[MOD]</sup>          | Jacob Fryxelius                                                                                | FryxGames                          |
| <i>Vampire: The Masquerade 5th edition</i> <sup>[MOD]</sup> | Kenneth Hite                                                                                   | Modiphius Entertainment            |

|                                                            |               |                         |
|------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|-------------------------|
| <i>Zweihänder Grim &amp; Perilous RPG</i> <sup>[IND]</sup> | Daniel D. Fox | Grim & Perilous Studios |
|------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|-------------------------|

## Video Games

|                                                                    |                       |                                       |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <i>Anchorhead</i> <sup>[MOD]</sup>                                 | Michael Gentry        | Michael Gentry                        |
| <i>Assassin's Creed Odyssey</i>                                    | Ubisoft               | Ubisoft                               |
| <i>ASTRO BOT Rescue Mission</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>                   | SIE Japan Studio      | Sony Interactive Entertainment Europe |
| <i>Call of Cthulhu</i>                                             | Cyanide Studio        | Focus Home Interactive                |
| <i>Celeste</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>                                    | Matt Makes Games Inc. | Matt Makes Games Inc.                 |
| <i>Cultist Simulator</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>                          | Weather Factory       | Weather Factory                       |
| <i>Darkest Dungeon: The Color of Madness</i> <sup>[IND][MOD]</sup> | Red Hook Studios      | Red Hook Studios                      |
| <i>Dead Cells</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>                                 | Motion Twin           | Motion Twin                           |
| <i>Destiny 2: Forsaken</i>                                         | Bungie Software       | Activision                            |
| <i>Detroit: Become Human</i>                                       | Quantic Dream         | SCEA, Sony Interactive Entertainment  |
| <i>Donut County</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>                               | Ben Esposito          | Annapurna Interactive                 |
| <i>Dragon Quest XI: Echoes of an Elusive Age</i>                   | Square Enix           | Square Enix                           |
| <i>Frostpunk</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>                                  | 11 bit studios        | 11 bit studios, Merge Games           |
| <i>God of War</i>                                                  | SCE Santa Monica      | Sony Interactive Entertainment        |
| <i>GRIS</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>                                       | Nomada Studio         | Devolver Digital                      |
| <i>Hollow Knight - Gods &amp; Nightmares</i> <sup>[IND][MOD]</sup> | Team Cherry           | Team Cherry                           |

|                                                 |                                   |                                       |
|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <i>Iconoclasts</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>             | Joakim Sandberg, Konjak           | Bifrost Entertainment                 |
| <i>Into the Breach</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>         | Subset Games                      | Subset Games                          |
| <i>Life is Strange 2</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>       | Dontnod Entertainment             | Square Enix                           |
| <i>Marvel's Spider-Man</i>                      | Insomniac Games                   | Sony Interactive Entertainment Europe |
| <i>The Messenger</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>           | Sabotage                          | Devolver Digital                      |
| <i>Minit</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>                   | Devolver Digital                  | Devolver Digital                      |
| <i>Monster Hunter: World</i>                    | Capcom                            | Capcom                                |
| <i>Moss</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>                    | Polyarc                           | Sony Interactive Entertainment        |
| <i>Ni no Kuni II: Revenant Kingdom</i>          | Level 5                           | Level 5, Bandai Namco Games           |
| <i>Octopath Traveler</i>                        | Square Enix, Acquire              | Square Enix, Nintendo                 |
| <i>Reigns: Game of Thrones</i> <sup>[IND]</sup> | Nerial                            | Devolver Digital                      |
| <i>Return of the Obra Dinn</i> <sup>[IND]</sup> | Lucas Pope                        | 3909                                  |
| <i>Shadow of the Colossus</i> <sup>[MOD]</sup>  | Bluepoint Games, SCE Japan Studio | Sony Interactive Entertainment        |
| <i>Shadow of the Tomb Raider</i>                | Eidos Montreal                    | Square Enix                           |
| <i>Subnautica</i> <sup>[IND]</sup>              | Unknown Worlds Entertainment      | Unknown Worlds Entertainment          |

This represents almost as many developers/creators as there are titles, and a broad range of publishers, showing that a games category is not likely to be dominated by a small set of creators or publishers every year. Note also that a number of expansions, editions, or other modifications are included.

An even wider range of commonly-agreed to be quality<sup>36</sup> speculative 2018 titles is available in [Appendix C](#), which provides information on developers, publishers, and ratings across a number

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<sup>36</sup> Fallout 76 is included as a counterexample to show that being a AAA title from a beloved franchise does not automatically lead to acclaim.

of venues such as Metacritic, Steam, and BoardGameGeek, as well as which platforms the games have been released on (also showing that the above list encompasses a broad range of platforms).

Games and other interactive media have a strong history of producing standout work every year going back decades, and there is no reason to think this trend will in any way diminish. To the contrary, games are rapidly maturing as a medium, with many titles that play with the structure of interactive narrative, push the limits of interactive worldbuilding, expand the breadth of means and types of interaction, and interrogate the very idea of gameplay itself.

To demonstrate the long-term and ongoing viability of the category, I am providing potential longlists going back 5 years below. Further lists of games that may have appeared on Hugo ballots going back to 1997 are provided in [Appendix D](#). These include video games, analog games, and other types of interactive experiences. Longlists for the last several years could have included:<sup>37</sup>

- **2017**
  - *Assassin's Creed Origins*
  - *Cuphead*<sup>[IND]</sup>
  - *Destiny 2*
  - *Gloomhaven*<sup>[IND]</sup>
  - *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice*<sup>[IND]</sup>
  - *Hollow Knight*<sup>[IND]</sup>
  - *Horizon Zero Dawn*
  - *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild*
  - *Monument Valley 2*<sup>[IND]</sup>
  - *NieR: Automata*
  - *Night in the Woods*<sup>[IND]</sup>
  - *Persona 5*
  - *PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds*<sup>[IND]</sup>
  - *Prey*
  - *Resident Evil 7: Biohazard*
  - *Super Mario Odyssey*
  - *What Remains of Edith Finch*<sup>[IND]</sup>
  - *The Wizard Sniffer*<sup>[IND]</sup>
- **2016**
  - *Abzû*<sup>[IND]</sup>
  - *Arkham Horror: The Card Game*<sup>[MOD]</sup>
  - *Cactus Blue Motel*<sup>[IND]</sup>
  - *Dark Souls III*

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<sup>37</sup> Information on developers, publishers, platforms, release dates, etc. is available in [Appendix C](#).

- *Darkest Dungeon*<sup>[IND]</sup>
- *The House in Fata Morgana*
- *Hyper Light Drifter*<sup>[IND]</sup>
- *INSIDE*<sup>[IND]</sup>
- *The Last Guardian*<sup>[MOD]</sup>
- *Orwell*<sup>[IND]</sup>
- *Overwatch*
- *Oxenfree*<sup>[IND]</sup>
- *Pokémon Go*
- *Scythe*<sup>[IND]</sup>
- *Stardew Valley*<sup>[IND]</sup>
- *Superluminal Vagrant Twin*<sup>[IND]</sup>
- *Terraforming Mars*
- *Titanfall 2*
- *XCOM 2*
- **2015**
  - *Assassin's Creed Syndicate*
  - *Batman: Arkham Knight*
  - *Birdland*<sup>[IND]</sup>
  - *Bloodborne*
  - *Broken Age: Act 2*<sup>[IND][MOD]</sup>
  - *Cibele*<sup>[IND]</sup>
  - *Crypt of the Necrodancer*<sup>[IND]</sup>
  - *Everybody's Gone to the Rapture*<sup>[IND]</sup>
  - *Fallout 4*
  - *Hadean Lands*<sup>[IND]</sup>
  - *Life is Strange*<sup>[IND]</sup>
  - *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain*
  - *Mysterium*<sup>[IND]</sup>
  - *Ori and the Blind Forest*<sup>[IND]</sup>
  - *Pandemic Legacy: Season 1*<sup>[MOD]</sup>
  - *Rise of the Tomb Raider*
  - *Super Mario Maker*
  - *Undertale*<sup>[IND]</sup>
  - *Universe Sandbox<sup>2</sup>*
  - *Until Dawn*
  - *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*
- **2014**
  - *80 Days*<sup>[IND]</sup>
  - *Alien: Isolation*
  - *Assassin's Creed Unity*

- *Bayonetta 2*
- *Borderlands: The Pre-Sequel!*
- *Broken Age: Act 1*<sup>[IND]</sup>
- *Child of Light*<sup>[IND]</sup>
- *Dark Souls II*
- *Destiny*
- *Dragon Age: Inquisition*
- *Dungeons & Dragons (5th edition)*<sup>[MOD]</sup>
- *Five Nights at Freddy's*<sup>[IND]</sup>
- *The Last of Us: Left Behind*<sup>[MOD]</sup>
- *Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor*
- *Monument Valley*<sup>[IND]</sup>
- *Never Alone*<sup>[IND]</sup>
- *Papers, Please*<sup>[IND]</sup>
- *Shovel Knight*<sup>[IND]</sup>
- *Steins;Gate*<sup>[IND]</sup>
- *Sunless Sea*<sup>[IND]</sup>
- *Sunset Overdrive*
- *Tales from the Borderlands*
- *Titanfall*
- *Transistor*<sup>[IND]</sup>
- *The Vanishing of Ethan Carter*<sup>[IND]</sup>
- **2013**
  - *Antichamber*<sup>[IND]</sup>
  - *Beyond: Two Souls*
  - *Bioshock Infinite*
  - *Brothers: A Tale of Two Sons*<sup>[IND]</sup>
  - *Dead Space 3*
  - *DmC: Devil May Cry*<sup>[MOD]</sup>
  - *Don't Starve*<sup>[IND]</sup>
  - *Dota 2*
  - *Final Fantasy XIV: A Realm Reborn*<sup>[MOD]</sup>
  - *Fire Emblem: Awakening*
  - *The Last of Us*
  - *The Legend of Zelda: A Link Between Worlds*
  - *Lumino City*<sup>[IND]</sup>
  - *Mass Effect 3*
  - *Pokémon X and Y*
  - *Rayman Legends*
  - *Saints Row IV*
  - *The Stanley Parable*<sup>[IND][MOD]</sup>

- *Tearaway*
- *Tomb Raider* <sup>[MOD]</sup>

Lists like this demonstrate that games have long been ready for Hugo recognition. Spanning the gamut of genres, developers, and publishers, games as a medium have been producing innovative quality content for decades. As a mature and rapidly evolving medium, they deserve recognition as a locus of speculative fiction work in their own right.

# Category Definition and Substantial Modifications

The preceding sections demonstrate areas of interest in gaming circles in general and within the WSFS community in particular. WSFS members are interested in a broad range of games and other interactive experiences, and creators continue to furnish quality titles across all possible implementations of interactive fiction and interactive experiences. A Hugo category for this should encompass the breadth of WSFS interests and industry output. For this section, we return to the proposed definition and examine its particulars as they apply to real-world situations.

Many titles in the preceding sections were not standalone games but modifications to existing games. Games are a unique medium in that, besides having sequels and side-entries as many other mediums do, they also often get modifications that rely on the framework provided by preceding or parent entries. These encompass expansions, editions, remakes, fan mods, and many other types of content that may or may not be able to be experienced independently of its parent work. For example, downloadable content (DLC) generally requires the player to possess the parent game; the new content cannot be experienced at all outside of the parent game. Board games often have expansions that depend on the materials provided in the parent game and cannot be played independently. On the other hand, games of all types often have "editions" that reuse engines, assets, frameworks, or other essential materials from the original entry but provide new content in the form of narrative, rules, economies, characters, art, or even overhauls of the previously named essential items. These editions are often regarded as their own sufficiently independent works, such as different editions of *Dungeons & Dragons*, or Final Mix versions of *Kingdom Hearts* that tweak the gameplay and narrative to be more in line with later entries.

With these considerations in mind, we revisit the proposed definition:

**3.3.X: Best Game or Interactive Experience.** Any work or substantial modification of a work (such as a game, or interactive narrative, demonstration, or installation) first released to the public in the previous calendar year in the fields of science fiction, fantasy, or related subjects in any medium where player/user choice, interaction, or participation significantly impacts the narrative, pacing, play, or experience of the work.

To fully motivate this category definition, we must examine the nature of games culture and fandom. It is important to keep in mind that any category that is sufficiently broad to capture the types of interactive experiences WSFS members care about will inevitably run into a variety of difficulties akin to those present in the BDP and Graphic Story categories, as well as the additional complication of "substantial modifications" similar to the Best Related Work category. These complications are best understood through examining cases.

The presence of a "substantial modifications" clause helps reduce the load on Hugo administrators by making controversial nominations and disqualifications less likely. This clause adds much-needed nuance to a category where, by the nature of the medium, trying to force black-and-white distinctions will cause grief in all directions. Expansions, covered below, are a simple example: most are not standalone games and cannot be experienced outside the context of their parent works. This is a common occurrence in games that doesn't have a neat parallel in other media. Without the substantial modification clause, this very likely type of nomination would be a huge headache. But the substantial modification clause makes such cases entirely straightforward. Lesser modifications are simply less likely to be nominated, and thus less likely to get enough votes to even need to be legislated, shifting the burden of case-by-case analysis off common occurrences like expansions. The sort of low-modification rerelease structures common to AAA games means that such releases will not be numerous in any given year (vastly outnumbered by new releases, mostly indie and some AAA), and thus will not form a large burden on Hugo admins in terms of either quantity or complexity of ruling. The "substantial modification" clause is explicitly structured to include worthy work while shifting the burden off Hugo admins.

In the below sections I outline a variety of general considerations and specific cases. This category definition needs to hold up against not only the simple common case -- a single game released in a single year with no modifications -- but also against the full breadth of the thriving game/interactive fiction intellectual economy. I assume the former, straightforward cases do not need to be explored, and instead engage below with the more interesting cases presented in the medium, demonstrating how the above definition would interact with recent Hugo-worthy titles.

## General Cases and Considerations

Games as a medium are unique in their release and modification structure and what role fans play in all such considerations. Below, I outline a number of common terms and issues when considering games in a yearly award context.

### Editions and Versions

Both video and analog games often come in editions or versions that may or may not also bundle in other content related to the original release. The defining feature of an edition is that it is in itself, or includes in its bundle, a standalone work that can be experienced fully without any outside supporting framework. By this metric, several other game-related items not normally labelled "editions" also fall into this category, including ports, re-releases, remasters, remakes, translations, and localizations. These will be covered below.

In analog gaming contexts, editions are often iterative in a way digital games are not, as in *Dungeons and Dragons* or *Arkham Horror*, which both come in numbered editions that take the essential gameplay elements of the original and refine or restructure them. However, many

analog games have editions that are not explicitly labeled as such, such as *Pandemic Legacy*, which is a fully-playable version of *Pandemic* that adds different gameplay elements (and also has seasons; see more on game seasons below). Per the proposed definition, such editions would each be eligible in their own right.

In digital gaming contexts, editions are often NOT iterative in the same sense. "Game of the Year" editions are common, bundling the original game (including all patches and bugfixes) alongside any previously-released downloadable content and sometimes expansions. Many such editions include updates to graphics quality via assets (art, textures, etc.), rendering/physics engines, or both. *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* serves as an example of this sort of edition and bundling structure (please see below for [a full section on Skyrim](#) under Individual Cases). *Kingdom Hearts* games often get "Final Mix" or "ReMIX" versions that include graphical updates, gameplay tweaks, and a small amount of new story content to better link the games together.

Such editions are often presented as "perfect" or "intended" versions of a game, encompassing the entire creative vision for the game. This could be similar to a "director's cut" for movies, but, in this analogy, could include reshoots, script changes, additional scenes, and post-production upgrades. Whether such editions are eligible under the proposed definition depends on interpretation of the "substantial modification" clause on a case by case basis, but many broad rules apply. A "Game of the Year" bundle edition that contains the original previously released game with only minor changes and previously released side content would likely not qualify, as each part of the bundle had already qualified previously. This would be akin to several novels or novellas being rereleased as an omnibus, perhaps with minor editorial changes and a foreword or other interstitial materials. However, releases like a *Kingdom Hearts* "Final Mix" version may contain changes to story and gameplay, often as an artifact of being remade for a different platform, that are significant enough to trigger the "substantial modification" clause.

In that vein, games are also often released on platforms other than their original platforms significantly after their original release dates, and these releases may include graphics/engine changes and control scheme changes. Most important for Hugo eligibility purposes are the cases where these releases fall in different calendar years from the original. Sometimes these are simple re-releases or straightforward ports or emulations,<sup>38</sup> with no significant new content or gameplay changes beyond what is necessary to make the game run on the new hardware or operating system. These days, however, remasters and remakes are common, taking older games and recreating them from scratch, with entirely new graphics, new gameplay elements,

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<sup>38</sup> Emulation is generally seen as separate from a port. A native port rewrites the game to run on different hardware or a different operating system. An emulation, meanwhile, does not rewrite the game and instead uses a virtual copy of its original platform to run the game. For example, DOSBox is an emulator that simulates the DOS environment from the early days of computer games, and games such as *Doom* or *Dune 2* can be played on it. A more modern example is the Wii Virtual Console, where Nintendo released many older titles from the SNES. An emulated version of a game would not count as a substantial modification, but a new emulator could count in its own right, similar to how Nintendo Labo provides a unique interactive experience.

and script changes. *Final Fantasy IV* is a good example of a remake, going from the SNES to the Nintendo DS:<sup>39</sup>



In addition to an entirely different graphical approach made possible by the more modern platform, the game also received script adjustments, new story content, and gameplay changes to the combat. As the combat is the primary gameplay mechanic, altering how players engage with it is a relatively large change to the game. Taken together with the massive asset changes and script/story additions, this sort of remake would certainly trigger the "substantial modification" clause and be eligible in its own right.

Another context for digital game editions is translations and localizations.<sup>40</sup> A significant percentage of games are released first in non English language markets, though not always in a language other than English. Such games can follow the normal three-time Hugo eligibility timeline of being released first in a non-English language/market, then in English in a non-USA market, then finally in the United States. The differentiation of English-language markets for games has greatly decreased but is a historical fact and may become so again. Here, it is important to note the significant role the fan community can play in localizing games that will never get official English-language releases. Some such [fan-made localizations](#) are only scripts that can be read alongside the non-English game, while other fan-made localizations are unofficial and generally unauthorized releases of the game with the new English-language script programmed in and fully playable. Such examples include the fan translations of [Ace Attorney Investigations 2](#) and [Mother 3](#), which were both released in the form of patches to the emulated versions of the games. Whether such translations should be categorized as Best Related Work or as English-language releases in their own right is akin to the fansubbing debate in the BDP categories, with the game-specific twist that such translations/localization are incorporated directly into the game and can be experienced as part of it.

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<sup>39</sup> [Screencap source](#)

<sup>40</sup> Analog games also have translations and localizations, such as many of the German board games discussed in [Appendix B](#).

It is worth noting one context in which "editions" of digital games are iterative: software version numbers. Digital games often have version numbers along the lines of v1.03.02 that denote groups of patches, bugfixes, and updates that, generally speaking, do not change the gameplay experience beyond addressing faults and errors in the original release. However, in highly iterative games such as many massively multiplayer online titles, version numbers may denote significant tweaks to the gameplay experience. *World of Warcraft* uses an incremental update model and [numbered patches](#) to both correct errors and incorporate new world/narrative content, gameplay changes, and playable classes. Whether a major patch or update counts as a "substantial modification" is a case-by-case issue, but fans/players are generally good judges of this and are not likely to nominate a patch, update, or numbered software version unless there has been a truly significant change. In addition, release structures like this are generally advertised as or expected to be incremental, culminating in a patch with the final areas/bosses of the campaign or other addition. In this sense they can be regarded similarly to serial fiction, and eligible in their year of completion.

## Draft Versions: Alpha/Beta Releases and Early Access

Games are unusual as a medium in that fully playable "drafts" in the form of alpha, beta, playtest, or early access versions are often available before the official release. Kickstarted RPGs often have early playable versions, and digital games often release early versions for public playtesting. These versions are generally fully interactive but may not have complete or final versions of the script or assets, or may be missing gameplay elements intended for the official release. However, many of these draft versions are pretty much complete and are only awaiting a sufficient volume of player testing. The aim of these early versions is to solicit player input or to test features on real players, with the goal of improving the final product<sup>41</sup>. A game may change very much or very little between its early draft release(s) and its official supposedly-final release (though that may in turn have patches, updates, or bugfixes; see above).

Play testing is a normal part of the game development cycle<sup>42</sup> and may take place privately or publicly. Larger developers are more likely to have private or closed betas, with either in-house play testers or a limited number of publicly solicited beta testers. However, smaller or indie developers often don't have the resources for private or sponsored play testing, and use public-access alpha, beta, and early access releases to improve their product before full market release. These are versions of the game released to the general public but which are understood to not be completely finished.

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<sup>41</sup> There are often secondary marketing goals of building up excitement for the product, but these are not relevant to the discussion of version eligibility.

<sup>42</sup> Analog games also go through play testing, but beta versions of analog games are not generally publicly available, and are thus not eligible.

A private beta would not be eligible for a Hugo as it would not be easily available to the general public, but public draft versions present a conundrum in terms of Hugo eligibility in two ways:

- 1) A work may be eligible more than once under the "substantial modification" clause if its draft versions differ significantly from the final release or from each other.
- 2) Many games never get official or final releases out of the beta stage, and are in a state of perpetual beta or release limbo, so it is difficult to pin down an official release date.

Often it is not possible to tell in the calendar year of a draft release whether the game will actually officially release on its advertised date. In addition, indie productions are far more likely to have public drafts than larger developers. In the interest of not disqualifying worthy works and unfairly disadvantaging independent developers, it may be a good idea to allow draft versions of a game to qualify, and let the "substantial modification" clause take care of whether subsequent releases, even official final product releases, should re-qualify. Under the structure of the proposed definition, fans can decide whether a draft version of the game deserves to be nominated.

## Expansions

Expansions are common for digital and analog games, and are defined both by having significant new content and by their dependency on their parent game. As a rule, expansions are not playable without the framework provided by their parent game, unlike the editions/versions discussed above. Expansions to board games often provide new game pieces, map/board additions, and rule sets, but require the original board, ruleset, and ancillary equipment in order to be playable. Card game expansions do not generally contain a sufficient number or variety of cards to create a meaningful game without the base set of cards, instead focusing on adding new card types and new mechanics. Expansions for digital games generally require a full installation of the original game to be present on the platform, as the expansions require the engine, code, and assets of the original in order to be playable. Digital game expansions almost always include new narrative and world elements (new maps or unlocking previously closed off areas), but often also include new gameplay elements such as new abilities or new types of enemies/puzzles that require different strategies or entirely new control schemes.

Per the proposed definition, almost all video game expansions and many analog game expansions will straightforwardly qualify as a "substantial modification" of its parent game and will qualify in the year of their release. Under a more conservative definition based on standalone works, such expansions would not qualify. However, under the proposed broad definition, it should be noted that many expansions are released in the same calendar year as their parent games, and thus present a similar issue as is already present with BDP and Graphic Story categories in terms of nominating a parent work or a section of a whole. Voters

are more likely to nominate an expansion separately from its parent game the further apart the release dates and the larger the expansion is, while a parent game and an expansion released close together are more likely to be regarded as "part of the same thing" and to be nominated under the umbrella of the parent game. Example cases are considered below under [Dragon Age, Horizon Zero Dawn, and Expansions](#).

Some expansions come as separate physical copies, or are large enough to comprise entire new games, such as many *World of Warcraft* expansions, but are still not standalone in that the player must already have -- or the expansion itself includes -- the original game. In this sense expansions can blur the edge into editions, but for the purposes of Hugo eligibility such large expansions/editions will qualify and likely be nominated by their expansion name rather than under the umbrella of the parent game, such as *World of Warcraft: Legion*.

## Fan-Made Content

Another unusual feature of games is that fanworks can often be experienced as part of the actual framework of the original or parent work. Fanfics<sup>43</sup> are not embedded inside their parent works, and other forms of related work are generally either standalone works or meant to be experienced alongside or as an ancillary to their parent works. However, fan-created content for games is generally meant to be embedded directly into the parent work and form a part of the play experience in realtime, and can affect the parent work in a way that fanfics and other fannish works cannot.

Fans create all types of game content that can be embedded directly into the game via patch or other type of download/modification. Such content can include:

- Assets such as new artwork, skins, textures, or models that may either add to or entirely replace existing assets
- Additional worldbuilding content such as new maps or new races/classes
- Narrative additions such as story arcs or missions, or new characters and interactions
- Bug fixes and other popularly demanded tweaks such as unlocking gender-locked romance options
- Restoring deleted content or completing incomplete sections of the game
- Entire self-contained playable versions of lost, abandoned, or region-locked official releases

Generally all such fan-made game content is referred to as "mods."

Some fan mods reach such levels of popularity and prestige that they become regarded as an essential part of experiencing the parent game. *The Sims 4* has popular fan mods such as "MC Command Center" and "WickedWhims," considered essential by many players. *Minecraft* has many popular mods that add new gameplay elements or alter the essential nature of the game,

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<sup>43</sup> Game canons also have fanfics, of course, but these are a non-embeddable form of fan content. Some fanfics are eventually made into playable mods.

basically turning it into other games that run on the *Minecraft* engine (see [the \*Minecraft\* section](#) under "Individual and Example Cases"). *Knights of the Old Republic 2: The Sith Lords* has a massive content restoration mod that adds back in story content, an entire planet, and an expanded ending that were cut from the original game due to a rushed production schedule. Sometimes fan mods subtract content rather than adding it; two popular mods to *Dragon Age: Origins* allow players to skip two particularly unpopular areas of the game while retaining all the loot and character benefits.

Some mods approach or are the equivalent of entire games in themselves. *Crusader Kings 2* has a total overhaul mod that turns the game into a playable version of *Game of Thrones*. *XCOM* and *XCOM 2* have the "Long War" and the "Long War 2" respectively, which are mods that massively add to the base games and make them much longer and more difficult. *The Binding of Isaac: Rebirth* has an official piece of downloadable content, *Afterbirth*, but also a user-made expansion called "Anti-birth," which is even bigger than the officially released DLC. There was also a massive project to restore a lost *Resident Evil* sequel, now dubbed [Resident Evil 1.5](#).

Entire games have been built around sharing fan-made levels, missions, or other content, such as *Super Mario Maker* and *LittleBigPlanet*. Such games function almost like "game creation systems," but come with prepackaged assets, physics, and other materials. Gameplay in these games includes both the act of building game content for others to play, and playing the game content oneself, with communities of players, creators, and hybrid users. Specific level designs on these platforms can gain enormous notoriety within the community and are often built around themes that might interest speculative fiction fans; it is not inconceivable that fan-made content like this could gain enough traction to be nominated.

Another popular type of fan-made content is randomizers, which entirely rewrite and rebalance a game by changing maps and item locations based on intelligently developed equations to make gameplay more challenging and unpredictable. Randomizers are their own pieces of software written to modify specific games, often for the purposes of challenges and exhibitions, providing a way to highlight player skill, ingenuity, and game knowledge within the context of a specific game.

Analog games also have fan-made content. Fans add cards to card-based games, publish fan versions of rules, or create modifications of figurine-based games. Some such fan modifications are heavily interactive, such as "homebrew" rulesets or character classes for tabletop RPGs.

All such fan-made content varies in how it would be treated under the proposed definition. The key component that would determine if content was a substantial modification of the proposed definition is the interactive nature of the work in question. Therefore, simple asset changes would qualify under Best Related Work, while playable narrative additions or major gameplay changes would qualify as "substantial modifications" under similar logic as expansions.

## Downloadable Content (DLC)

For digital games, all of the above game modifications generally come in the form of downloadable content. While full game editions and fan-made content are technically "downloadable content" in that they are not physical copies, and "DLC" can be used as a catch-all term, these days it usually refers to officially released *additions* to games. Expansions are a popular form of DLC, but smaller additions are incredibly frequent, comprising anything from new skins/costumes to additional maps, characters, and missions that are not large enough to be referred to as full expansions.

For purposes of Hugo eligibility, the issue is exactly the same as for fan-made content, just put more broadly. Fans can tell when DLC that is not substantive or very engaging and are less likely to reward such content, and it would be nearly impossible to legislate a more technical definition. This is another reason that the proposed Hugo category is so broad: game content is so diverse that it is largely impossible to legislate a definition that does not also improperly exclude significant new work which would, given the existence of this category, be ineligible in any other.

## "Best Dramatic Presentation" vs "Best Game or Interactive Experience"

To date, games have been technically eligible in the BDP categories, despite their interactive nature and not having the set run times that define belonging to one or the other category. For the new category to function, it must clearly differentiate from and form a mutually exclusive set with the BDP categories it is being split from. The key factor in the definition is the interactive nature of the works in the new category.

*Critical Role* is a fantastic case to examine. There is the show itself, which is broadcast on a regular basis as unscripted recordings of gaming sessions, and there is also the specific "homebrew" version of *Dungeons & Dragons 5th Edition* used to create the show. Matt Mercer, the Game Master, created not just a specific setting, worldstate, and NPCs, but also custom classes that significantly affect the framework previously provided by D&D5e. This modification is codified and publicly available as *Critical Role: Tal'Dorei Campaign Setting*, which qualifies it as a Hugo-eligible work of some type. It is interactive in nature, providing a framework for users to enact unique narratives in and play out their own *Critical Role* games. The show is a clear candidate for BDP:Long, but the gaming framework used in creating the show is a candidate for the proposed BGIE category.

Machinima serves as another example. Machinima is a genre of dramatic content created by using or modifying an existing video game's engine and assets to act out scripted or unscripted non-interactive narrative content. This is popular for shorts and music videos. The output of this process would fall under BDP. However, the games themselves and/or the modifications made to them to produce the content would qualify under BGIE.

Kinetic novels are a different BDP vs BGIE case. Played like visual novels but without the branching paths, kinetic novels allow the player to control the pace of the narrative while presenting the story with prose, visuals, and music or other audio. The would be a borderline case, but as active participation from the player is required at every point to advance the story, these would qualify for the BGIE category.

## Individual and Example Cases

Having covered some general considerations when it comes to a games category, we can move on to more specific cases that demonstrate the unique nature of the medium.

This section is dedicated to walking through significant examples of Hugo-worthy works and exploring how the proposed definition would have applied to them in their theoretical year(s) of eligibility. The aim of this section is not to answer every possible question and iron out every possible wrinkle, but merely to acknowledge and explore issues this category would encounter in real life.

### Dungeons and Dragons

*Dungeons and Dragons* is a massively popular tabletop roleplaying game that would be sure to make the shortlist in any award year it would qualify for. The games do not provide or require specific equipment or assets<sup>44</sup> and instead depend on rule sets. There have been five major editions to date, with smaller significant editions as well. A [publication history/timeline can be referenced on the wikipedia page](#), and shows that each edition consists of multiple publications. An "edition" comprises several published volumes and ancillary materials. Per the definition, any volume that substantially modifies the options and gameplay available to players would qualify on its own as a "substantial modification," and in this light the usual three volumes per edition would each qualify, though some ancillary materials or additional materials like figurines would not. However, "an edition" of *Dungeons and Dragons* would also qualify as a whole, as the entirety forms a complete interactive experience, and is what voters would be most likely to nominate.

It's worth noting that there are many "homebrew" versions of D&D and other roleplaying systems. If any such were published and available to the public, they would also qualify as "substantial modifications" of the D&D framework, such as the *Critical Role* campaign setting. This is simply a specific case of the general prevalence of fan-made game content.

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<sup>44</sup> Some licensed equipment is produced and sold, and some generic equipment such as dice is always required, but these do not form a consistent "package" with the rules that form the core of the game.

## Sleep No More

*Sleep No More* is an interactive adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* spread out over numerous rooms in a building where attendees are free to explore the entirety of the building as the piece is performed. Attendees' choices in actors to follow, rooms to explore, and threads to prioritize affect their experience of the narrative, and it is impossible to experience the entire narrative in a single session. *Sleep No More* fits tidily in the category definition and is primarily noted here as a significant non-game entry. It is worth noting that *Sleep No More* could also have "editions" if it were to change locations, incorporate different physical layouts, or make other changes which would significantly modify the way attendees navigate the experience. This is akin to changing the entire map for a video game, or perhaps similar to the changes made by a randomizer, altering the "player" experience based on changing how "gameplay elements" are laid out and accessed.

## LARPs

Live-Action Roleplaying games, or LARPs, constitute a thriving site of speculative fiction storytelling and play. However, like the particular roleplaying campaigns represented in works like *Critical Role* or *The Adventure Zone*, individual LARP sessions or campaigns would not be eligible in a BGIE category. The eligible work is the setting and ruleset of any given LARP, including as it evolves during play, assuming it is in some way published or publicly available for voters to experience (similar to a movie having a sufficiently wide release). Post-facto, the story and events of any given LARP would be eligible in non-interactive fiction categories, depending on their presentation.

## Dragon Age, Horizon Zero Dawn, and Expansions

*Dragon Age: Origins* is a fantasy role-playing game developed by Bioware and published by Electronic Arts (EA), and is the first entry in the *Dragon Age* series. This series is extremely popular among WSFS members, and dealing with its entries should be accounted for in a games Hugo definition. In this case, the original game released to much acclaim in late 2009 (exact dates vary by platform). An expansion, titled *Dragon Age: Awakening*, was released in March of 2010, using the same engine and world but adding an entire new narrative, new playable characters (with attendant stories and assets), and new gameplay elements such as playable classes and specializations. In this case the category definition can be straightforwardly applied: *Dragon Age: Origins* would have qualified for 2009, and *Dragon Age: Awakening* for 2010. However, there conceivably could have been some confusion in terms of 2010 nominators listing *Dragon Age: Origins* as their pick rather than *Dragon Age: Awakening*. In this case the Hugo administrators would have had to reapportion all DA:O votes to DA:A, as that is the qualifying work.

*Horizon Zero Dawn* is an action-adventure video game developed by the Dutch company Guerilla Games and published by Sony in 2017. The game itself would straightforwardly qualify for a Hugo per the proposed definition (and was nominated for the BDP:Long category by a number of WSFS members). However, it also had a DLC expansion released in the same year called *Horizon Zero Dawn: The Frozen Wilds*. This expansion used the existing engine and assets and had to be accessed by actually traversing the preexisting in-game map and guiding the character to the new area. Beyond that, however, it incorporated an entire narrative, set of written characters, and side-stories; new assets in terms of art, character models, and monster models; and new gameplay mechanics. Per the definition, *The Frozen Wilds* would also qualify on its own terms as a "substantial modification," and, had it been released in a different calendar year from its parent game, this would be pretty straightforward as with *Dragon Age: Awakening* above. However, since the parent game and its expansion were released in the same year, there is potential for a split vote. There is no neat analogue in other categories here, though the Best Graphic Story quandary comes closest. The predicted behaviour is that WSFS members, understanding that both entries were released in the same year and that *The Frozen Wilds* is intrinsically dependent on its parent game, would nominate *Horizon Zero Dawn* as an entire work, encompassing its same-year expansion. However, it should be noted that expansions released in their own calendar years could still be nominated on both their own individual merits and on the merits of their parent game.

## Minecraft and Mods

*Minecraft* is a sandbox video game created by Swedish developer Markus Persson, with distinctive block-based 3D graphics and a notable open-ended gameplay style. Indeed, the open-ended nature of the game has inspired many fans to create mods that significantly alter the base game, and *Minecraft* has a particularly rich modding community because of this. As the second-best-selling video game of all time (behind only *Tetris*) and with its active modding scene, *Minecraft* should be accounted for in a BGIE Hugo category.

One popular mod is "[Minecraft Comes Alive](#)," which retools the gameplay to be similar to an RPG with relationship mechanics, a sharp diversion from the game's base crafting- and survival-based play. Another modification which is more similar to the base game is "[NuclearCraft](#)," which adds more modern "crafting," including the ability to develop nuclear power and be damaged by its effects. "[Galacticraft](#)" allows players to build spaceships to go to the moon, space stations, or other planets and explore each setting dungeon-style. A hugely popular variation on *Minecraft*, "Minecraft Hunger Games," does what it says on the tin: turns the game into a *Minecraft* version of *The Hunger Games*. All such mods would qualify as substantial modifications.

Mods like these are a vibrant part of the gaming community and intellectual economy, and cannot be ignored by a games Hugo. Many other game awards are only able to acknowledge

official commercially released products. But as a fan award that acknowledges the work and worth of fans within the speculative fiction community, a games Hugo would have a broader capacity to acknowledge and engage with the work fans put into games.

## Pokémon

Pokémon is a longstanding Japanese franchise with (to date) 20 games in the main series (and many more side entries) spanning release years from 1996 to the present day. Each individual game would clearly qualify under the proposed definition. However, the games traditionally come out in pairs (e.g. *Pokémon Red* and *Pokémon Blue*, or *Pokémon Sun* and *Pokémon Moon*), and the two games are often regarded as a single entry in the canon (e.g. *Pokémon Red and Blue* or *Pokémon Sun and Moon*) due to sharing the same engine, story, protagonists, antagonists, and -- key to the series -- the same set of capturable monsters shared across the games and generally requiring both games to complete, arguably forming a single interactive experience in two parts. Thus, voters could conceivably nominate one out of a pair of games, or, more likely given how players interact with the Pokémon games, the pair of games together.

Pokémon players also group games in terms of generations, which depend on the available monsters. Generations importantly introduce not just new monsters but new *types* of monsters, which is a gameplay addition that significantly rebalances the core mechanics of the game (acquiring monsters for breeding and combat). However, I feel we can disregard this as a nomination criteria, as Pokémon players would be highly unlikely to nominate a generation of entries for an award. We can instead focus on single games or paired games.

Pokémon games may present a problem akin to that seen with Best Graphic Story, in that there could be a question of vote distribution between entries in an overarching series, where entries for a single game could or could not be counted as votes for the overarching series. *Pokémon* as a game series should not, I think, in itself qualify for a Hugo, at least not of this type -- that would be something like a Best Series Hugo, but encompassing games rather than novels. Per the definition as given, Pokémon games would qualify both individually and in pairs, but voters are much more likely to nominate a paired set rather than individual games.

Another notable trait of the Pokémon series are the updated re-releases of older entries. These add not just new assets (all art and animations) and new monsters (though the releases have to date been split between sticking mainly to the original's generation or incorporating everything up to the current generation), but also new mechanics and retrofitting new pokémon classes onto old pokémon (with associated combat and breeding rebalancing) to stay in line with the expanding interaction sets of the newer entries. These updated re-releases, plausibly categorized as remakes, would likely qualify as "substantial modifications" per the definition and thus qualify for nomination in their release years.

## Dixit and Expanded Play Sets

*Dixit* is an artwork-based card game where players tell stories about the artwork cards. In a sense, the card artwork and how it interacts with the rest of the deck and the players *is* the gameplay.<sup>45</sup> *Dixit* was originally released in 2008 in limited markets, with wide release in 2010, but has had a number of expansions and editions since then. For example, the *Dixit: Odyssey* title comes in two versions. The 2011 version is a full edition, including 84 new cards as well as a game board, pieces, and other materials necessary to play the game. The 2013 version of *Odyssey* contains only the new cards and is meant to be incorporated into any of the other standalone versions of the game. Editions of *Dixit* would straightforwardly qualify per the category definition, being full standalone games with their own card sets. Expansions, however, depend on the "substantial modification" clause. *Dixit* expansions do not introduce new mechanics, and straddle a strange line between introducing new assets versus introducing new characters.

While the parallels may not be immediately obvious, the question of *Dixit* expansions is very similar to many DLC questions, especially the case of additional characters in combat-based games. This is similar to adding new pokémon to a game. The framework is the combat, which is the gameplay, and new characters alter the balance, and may introduce some entirely new mechanics. In *Dixit*, the new card sets function much like new fighters in combat games, in that they do not significantly impact the framework of the game but do affect issues of balance and the details of gameplay. That said, new combat characters in video games tend to be introduced in small numbers, between 1 and 3 at a time, while *Dixit* expansions tend to come with about 80 new cards each. In such cases, the sheer volume of new content may overwhelm its basic nature, especially as a set of 80 *Dixit* cards is rich enough to make a completely different game experience and would likely be significant enough to qualify as a substantial modification.

*Magic: The Gathering* has a similar relationship with expansions, but MTG depends on a variety of card types or classes, while *Dixit* has only the artwork cards. MTG is structured more like *Dungeons and Dragons*, with something akin to editions that come in multiple published parts.

For purposes of our award, the 2011 version of *Dixit: Odyssey* would be eligible, while the 2013 would not, the content being previously published in 2011. Expanded play sets like this add substantially to the game experience, and are largely unique to analog games.

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<sup>45</sup> Official play does also include a game board and tokens.

## The Walking Dead and Episodic Games

The video game series *The Walking Dead* is an episodic adventure game series developed and published by Telltale Games, based on the comic book series of the same name.<sup>46</sup> *The Walking Dead* game was released as episodes in seasons, and structured explicitly to resemble a TV series, but still be played as an interactive adventure game. The release schedule for the episodes, seasons, and side-stories is as follows:

| Season/Series            | Episode                      | Release Date |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|--------------|
| Season 1                 | 1: A New Day                 | 2012-04-24   |
|                          | 2: Starved for Help          | 2012-06-27   |
|                          | 3: Long Road Ahead           | 2012-08-28   |
|                          | 4: Around Every Corner       | 2012-10-09   |
|                          | 5: No Time Left              | 2012-11-20   |
| -                        | DLC: 400 Days                | 2013-07-02   |
| Season 2                 | 1: All That Remains          | 2013-12-07   |
|                          | 2: A House Divided           | 2013-03-04   |
|                          | 3: In Harm's Way             | 2013-05-13   |
|                          | 4: Amid the Ruins            | 2013-07-22   |
|                          | 5: No Going Back             | 2013-08-26   |
| Michonne                 | 1: In Too Deep               | 2016-02-23   |
|                          | 2: Give No Shelter           | 2016-03-29   |
|                          | 3: What We Deserve           | 2016-04-26   |
| Season 3: A New Frontier | 1: Ties That Bind - Part One | 2016-12-20   |
|                          | 2: Ties That Bind - Part Two | 2016-12-20   |
|                          | 3: Above the Law             | 2017-03-28   |
|                          | 4: Thicker Than Water        | 2017-04-25   |

<sup>46</sup> The TV show is also inspired by the same comic series, but the TV series diverges from the comics and game.

|                            |                        |            |
|----------------------------|------------------------|------------|
|                            | 5: From the Gallows    | 2017-05-30 |
| Season 4: The Final Season | 1: Done Running        | 2018-08-14 |
|                            | 2: Suffer the Children | 2018-09-25 |
|                            | 3: Broken Toys         | 2019-01-15 |
|                            | 4: Take Us Back        | 2019-03-26 |

This video game series demonstrably runs into many of the same issues that non-interactive TV series do, where seasons spanning across multiple calendar years raise questions of whether to nominate a season or individual episodes. In this case, we must consider how *The Walking Dead* was experienced by players as it was released, which is how it would have been voted on for Hugo nomination purposes. Each season is predictably well-structured, with 5 episodes that each take about 2-4 hours to play through.<sup>47</sup> The number of seasons was not initially known. There are also the extra-seasonal entries of the *Michonne* sidestory and the *400 Days* DLC. Per the proposed definition, every episode and DLC would qualify, as each would be a substantial modification to the parent work. In practice, I anticipate WSFS member nominations would split across individual episodes and the entire season, same as they do in the BDP categories, though my inclination, in terms of my own experience with the gaming community, is that people would be more inclined to nominate the relatively well-bounded and predictably released seasons.

Here it must be mentioned again that an episode of *Life is Strange* was disqualified from BPD:S based on length. In addition to this game being divided into episodes, it also has a separate sequel title, *Life is Strange 2*. Similar release structures can blur into expansions rather than episodes, such as with the *Hollow Knight* series, and trying to legislate this line is not productive. In general, episodic games are not uncommon, and should be accounted for in some way, but this is an issue faced by the BDP categories as well, and is not unique to games.

## The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim and Editions

*The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* is the fifth installment in the long-running popular role playing franchise *The Elder Scrolls*, which dates back to 1994. Each main *Elder Scrolls* release came out to much acclaim, and any could have been a Hugo contender in its release year had the category existed. *Skyrim* is a particularly popular entry and infamously has a huge number of editions, ports, and re-releases. The game had an original release in Western markets in 2011, as well as three DLC whose release dates vary by platform and region but broadly fall within 2012. Since then, *Skyrim* has been re-released and ported multiple times in multiple markets.

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<sup>47</sup> Again, even games that are very short by gamer standards do not fall under the correspondingly short BDP category.

While the *Skyrim* release schedule can be confusing in its entirety, a condensed version could be presented as follows:

| Release Date            | Title                              | Notes                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2011-11-11              | <i>Skyrim</i>                      | Original Western market release on PS3, XBOX 360, and Windows                                                                                                                                                               |
| 2011-12-08              | <i>Skyrim</i>                      | Japanese market release                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 2012<br>(various dates) | <i>Skyrim: Dawnguard</i>           | DLC with its own narrative. Varying release dates by platform and region.                                                                                                                                                   |
| 2012<br>(various dates) | <i>Skyrim: Hearthfire</i>          | DLC with its own narrative as well as gameplay changes. Varying release dates by platform and region.                                                                                                                       |
| 2012<br>(various dates) | <i>Skyrim: Dragonborn</i>          | DLC with its own narrative, new area, and gameplay changes. Varying release dates by platform and region.                                                                                                                   |
| 2013-06-04              | <i>Skyrim – Legendary Edition</i>  | Release on all original platforms that includes patches and bug fixes (that players may or may not have downloaded for the original) as well as all three DLC expansions.                                                   |
| 2016-10-28              | <i>Skyrim – Special Edition</i>    | Release on PS4, XBOX One, and Windows incorporating all previous changes and DLC as well as improved graphics.                                                                                                              |
| 2017-11-17              | <i>Skyrim for Switch</i>           | Release on the Nintendo Switch incorporating all the content and some of the graphics updates of <i>Special Edition</i> and some additional assets, as well as incorporating Switch-specific gameplay and control elements. |
| 2017-11-17              | <i>Skyrim for VR</i>               | A virtual reality version of the game, retaining core mechanics, world, and story but with entirely new immersive experience and control changes.                                                                           |
| 2018-06-10              | <i>Skyrim Very Special Edition</i> | An Alexa version based on spoken voice commands, necessarily quite different from the base game but retaining core mechanics, world, and story.                                                                             |

In terms of the proposed definition and the Hugo Awards' relationship to calendar years, the original release would have neatly qualified in 2011 and each DLC on its own in 2012, with the usual issues of DLC vs. parent games as mentioned in other sections. The *Legendary* and *Special* editions would not qualify, as they basically repackage previous modifications into a single release, while a lot of users would have downloaded all of those at the time of original release, and the *Special Edition* is largely just a port to new platforms without new content. A minor argument could be made that the Switch versions adds a different motion-based control scheme, but in the end would not qualify.

The VR, edition, on the other hand, drastically alters the experience by making it immersive, changing the nature of interacting with the game. Likewise, *Skyrim Very Special Edition* straightforwardly qualifies as an entirely new take on the game, as a piece of audio interactive fiction.

*Skyrim* also has a rich fan mod community, ranging from asset-based mods like one that [turns all dragons into Thomas the Tank Engine](#), which would not be eligible, to mods that significantly affect core mechanics, which would.

## Kingdom Hearts The Story So Far, Bundles, and Non-Interactive Content

*Kingdom Hearts* is a wildly popular action RPG series developed and published by Square Enix based on blending the worlds of *Final Fantasy* and various Disney properties with roughly a dozen releases (depending on how you count) spread across a huge variety of platforms and release dates (also varying by region), with various remakes and remasters for many entries. In preparation for the release of *Kingdom Hearts III*<sup>48</sup> (2019), Square Enix released *Kingdom Hearts The Story So Far* (late 2018) on the PS4 to serve as a kind of definitive edition of the *Kingdom Hearts* universe all in one place.

*KHTSSF* is a major release in its own right, but contains no new content. It is a single-package bundle of two previous releases, which were themselves bundles: *Kingdom Hearts HD 1.5 + 2.5 ReMIX* (itself a two-part bundle of bundles originally broken into base bundles numbered 1.5 and 2.5) and *Kingdom Hearts 2.8 Final Chapter Prologue*.<sup>49</sup> Each of these bundles contains both playable remasters/remakes of previous games, and non-playable movie versions of previous games. The contents of *KHTSSF*, broken into its bundles/sub-bundles, are listed below.<sup>50</sup> The notes for each entry include major changes, and the bundle notes cover overall changes like HD upgrades.

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<sup>48</sup> Actually the 11th game in the series.

<sup>49</sup> I know, just. This is how it is.

<sup>50</sup> Some changes and intermediate editions omitted for simplicity. [Full details are available on the Kingdom Hearts wiki](#).

| Bundle                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Updated Release                                                                                                                                                                                    | Original Release                                                                                         |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Kingdom Hearts HD 1.5 ReMIX</i><br>[2013, PS3] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All titles remastered in HD</li> <li>- <i>Kingdom Hearts 358/2 Days</i> converted into non-playable 3-hour cinematic.</li> </ul>                                                           | <i>Kingdom Hearts Final Mix</i><br>[2002 (Japan only) - PS2] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- New story content</li> <li>- Gameplay tweaks</li> </ul>                                      | <i>Kingdom Hearts</i><br>[2002, PS2]                                                                     |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <i>Kingdom Hearts Re:Chain of Memories</i><br>[2007, PS2] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Complete graphical overhaul from 2D to 3D</li> <li>- New cinematics and voice acting</li> </ul> | <i>Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories</i><br>[2004, Gameboy Advance]                                      |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | -- no intermediate version --                                                                                                                                                                      | <i>Kingdom Hearts 358/2 Days</i><br>[2009, Nintendo DS]                                                  |
| <i>Kingdom Hearts HD 2.5 ReMIX</i><br>[2017, PS4] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All titles remastered in HD</li> <li>- Japanese-language cutscenes dubbed into English</li> <li>- <i>Kingdom Hearts Re:coded</i> converted into non-playable 3+ hour cinematic.</li> </ul> | <i>Kingdom Hearts II Final Mix</i><br>[2007 (Japan only) - PS2] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- New story content</li> <li>- Notable gameplay changes</li> </ul>                          | <i>Kingdom Hearts II</i><br>[2005/6, PS2]                                                                |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <i>Kingdom Hearts Birth By Sleep Final Mix</i><br>[2011 (Japan only) - PSP] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- New story content</li> <li>- Gameplay tweaks</li> </ul>                       | <i>Kingdom Hearts Birth By Sleep</i><br>[2010, PSP]                                                      |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | -- no intermediate version --                                                                                                                                                                      | <i>Kingdom Hearts Re:coded</i><br>[2010/11, DS]                                                          |
| <i>Kingdom Hearts 2.8 Final Chapter Prologue</i><br>[2017, PS4]                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <i>Kingdom Hearts Dream Drop Distance HD</i><br><b>[Only released in 2.8 bundle]</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Complete remake</li> </ul>                                           | <i>Kingdom Hearts 3D: Dream Drop Distance</i><br>[2012, 3DS]                                             |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | -- no intermediate version --                                                                                                                                                                      | <i>Kingdom Hearts 0.2 Birth by Sleep -A fragmentary passage-</i><br><b>[Only released in 2.8 bundle]</b> |

|  |                               |                                                                                                         |
|--|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | -- no intermediate version -- | <i>Kingdom Hearts χ Back Cover</i><br><b>[Only released in 2.8 bundle]</b><br><b>Non-playable movie</b> |
|--|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Given this release structure and the contents of each separate bundle, each of these three bundles would have qualified in its release year, as would each of the updated versions inside the bundles in *their* release years. The 1.5 and 2.5 bundles would have qualified because of bringing previously Japan-market-only content into English-language markets. The 2.8 bundle would have qualified because of the *Dream Drop Distance* complete remake and the *A fragmentary passage* game. However, *Kingdom Hearts The Story So Far* simply collects all three of these bundles in one place and on one platform without "substantial modifications." Thus, despite it being a title of great significance to *Kingdom Hearts* players, it would not qualify for a BGIE Hugo. This is analogous to an omnibus release of previously published novels. Despite the complicated structure of the *Kingdom Hearts* canon, the proposed category definition actually applies to it pretty straightforwardly.

Another notable quality here is the non-interactive content. Some of this is natively non-interactive, such as *Kingdom Hearts χ Back Cover*, which debuted as a movie. Other pieces of non-interactive content are "movie versions"<sup>51</sup> of preexisting games such as the cinematic conversions of *Kingdom Hearts 358/2 Days* and *Kingdom Hearts Re:coded*. These days it is very common for games to also spawn ancillary or even essential non-interactive content. *Final Fantasy XV* is another example of this, and [its complex universe structure can be seen on the Final Fantasy wiki](#). No matter how essential in terms of narrative content such entries are, if they are not interactive, they do not qualify for the proposed BGIE Hugo.

## Twitch Plays Pokémon

In 2014, an anonymous Australian programmer launched an interactive social experiment that allowed users of the popular game streaming site Twitch to "crowdsource" playing *Pokémon Red*. This work, called *Twitch Plays Pokémon*, used a bot to take typed-out commands from Twitch chat, such as "up," "B," or "select," and converted them into button inputs for an emulated version of *Pokémon Red*. Because of the conflicting crowdsourced nature of the commands, progression through the game was not always straightforward; however, the very nature of the experiment inspired many users to collaborate and find ways to work with the bot's programming to successfully complete the game.

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<sup>51</sup> These are incidentally not much different from the sorts of "movie versions" put up for free on Youtube that, as previously noted in [Accessibility of Nominations](#), can be used to familiarize voters with the nominees if they can't or don't want to play the games.

*Twitch Plays Pokémon* holds the *Guinness World Record* for having "the most participants on a single-player online video game," with 1,165,140 users contributing commands to finish the game. *TPP* received a Game Award in December 2014 for "Best Fan Creation." This interactive experience was a major touchstone in the Twitch gamer community, and many more crowdsourced game experiments have emerged since then. The site [Crowd Control](#) facilitates crowdsourced gaming such as this.

Once again returning to how a work would have been experienced in the year of its eligibility, *TPP* was definitely and definitively interactive, but could be approached in two ways: as "Best Game or Interactive Experience", acknowledging the work of the anonymous programmer, or as "Best Related Work," to acknowledge its amorphous and crowdsourced nature. Either way, the work runs into issue of credit. However, it should be noted that issues of credit are not uncommon in the gaming world if fan-created content is allowed to qualify, as many creators go by handles or are anonymous. *TPP* is merely a particularly large-scale example. Under the broad BGIE category, the program that enabled *Twitch Plays Pokémon* would have qualified as an interactive experience.

## Theme Park Attractions and Other Immersive Experiences

There are two attractions coming soon to various Disney parks: [Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge](#) and [Beauty and the Beast](#).

Attractions like these often allow the attendee to freely move about and experience the environment at their choice and will. In this sense, such attractions are not far removed from VR-based experiences that are based simply upon experiencing a particular location, without the ability to affect the environment, or performance-based experiences such as *Sleep No More*. These attractions/installations are distinguishable from the more common type of ride which simply involve the attendee sitting in a vehicle and being moved through an immersive environment, making such rides not much different from 3D movies. These sorts of attractions could very conceivably catch the interest of WSFS members and get significant numbers of nominations. This sort of cutting-edge immersive work seems worth rewarding, but does not neatly fit the proposed definition, in that player choice does not greatly impact the experience of some attractions.

While there is an aspect of immersion that would make these rides feel like they should belong in a BGIE category, a straightforward reading of the proposed definition would involve splitting such attractions or installations into BDP or BGIE depending on whether or not the attendee is free to move about or interact with the environment in ways that affect the experience.

# Conclusion

Games and other interactive media are doing massive amounts of speculative work, and deserve to be recognized in their own category due to the uniqueness of their craft, structure, and consumption. WSFS members are deeply engaged with games and the gaming world, and have been for decades, and it does a disservice to the WSFS membership to ignore this crucial part of the community.

An award for games and other interactive experiences presents a number of challenges. Some of these, like issues of seasons and expansions, are shared with the Best Dramatic Presentation and Best Graphic Story categories. Other issues are unique to the gaming ecosystem and have to do with fanworks, more official modifications, and the staggered release structure games can be subject to. Some of these issues are shared by the Best Related Work category as well, particularly the idea of being "substantially modified" between eligibility years, but others are unique to games. Most can be addressed by a thorough understanding of the proposed category definition that will allow appropriate case by case determinations. While the clustering of so many issues is unusual, gamers have a good sense for what should and should not be nominated, and as a fan award, the WFSS community has and should continue to trust in the good judgement of its members in making merit-based nominations

While there are challenges, they should not dissuade us from rewarding interactive speculative fiction. Ignoring the contribution of games and other interactive media to the field of speculative fiction is not a neutral position. It is an act of disengagement with and repudiation of where speculative fiction work is happening today. So much worldbuilding, narrative work, and interrogation of medium are currently happening in games right now, and it is a fantastic medium for exploring speculative themes. And creators, both professional and fannish, have consistently stepped up to the plate to create amazing interactive works that add to our understanding of the genre. It is time to recognize the great contributions of these creators to our community. It is time for a Hugo Award for games.

# Acknowledgements

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# Appendix A: Worldcon Games Programming and Panels

Recent Worldcons have had robust game-related activities and programming, growing vastly in the past fourteen years. I was able to find formal games programming from all fourteen Worldcons since the 2006 attempt, and scheduled games programming from every con except Worldcon 76 and possibly Worldcon 75. The most recent Worldcons have relied on the Grenadine event scheduling app for their programming, and as a consequence scheduled gaming sessions seem to have been migrating from being formalized in print/PDF versions of the con's program to less formal in-person signups and scheduling. The general trend of games programming at Worldcons has been sharply upward, and the number of panels/presentations at Worldcon 75 and 76 is commensurate with that trend, but both seemed lean on scheduled gaming sessions and demonstrations. Aside from this note, I present the data here as I found it.

The raw data and pivot table interpretations are available in [Appendix C](#). Google Sheets only allows 256 columns per sheet, so a single pivot table was not sufficient to display the 300+ panelists, presenters, hosts, GMs, and other named program item staff. There are therefore three raw data sheets (two split across Worldcons and one combined) and three corresponding aggregate pivot table sheets.

To obtain this data, I looked through the websites and PDF or online programs of each Worldcon, either as is currently present on the site or as archived by the WayBack Machine. Archived copies of each program are provided in footnotes where available. As noted in the [Acknowledgements](#), elks collected the Grenadine-based Worldcon 75 and 76 programs, with further checking on Worldcon 76 done via its available PDF program and corrections. I looked for two things:

- **General statements made on websites or in print/PDF programs about games programming.** These give an overall picture of each con's approach to games. Most cons had a general statements on games and games programming. Many cons also mentioned games in the context of kids' and teens' programming. For the purposes of this appendix, I am including only substantive general statements on games at the con that signify a significant engagement with games as a topic of general interest to WSFS members.
- **Game-related program items.** Anything game-related that the Worldcon deemed worth formalizing in the program was included. This was not always included in the body of the main program; some cons separated the scheduled games programming into its own section, similar to readings, signings, kaffeeeklatsches, and film screenings. Throughout this data-gathering endeavour I maintained the approach of "it it's specifically listed in the

program it counts." Please refer to the note above on where this breaks down for the most recent cons. Game shows were not included.

I welcome corrections of and supplements to this data.

Throughout this section, it is evident that gaming has always had a presence at WorldCons. While the percentage of programming devoted to gaming starts out low, it grows quickly and demonstrated a growing engagement with both analog and digital games, the craft behind making them, and the nuances of analyzing and playing them.

Throughout this section, I've grouped games programming in categories of my own making for ease of reading and scannability. Full lists of program items are available in [Appendix C](#), and I will only be showing selections here.

## Worldcon 64 (2006) Anaheim, California (L.A.con IV)<sup>52</sup>

Worldcon 64 was the year of the trial "Best Interactive Video Game" attempt, with **10 game-related program items** (0.96% of the total) staffed by 21 people. While the trial category specified video games and there was not a large percentage of gaming program items, this Worldcon this Worldcon was very enthusiastic about analog gaming, and had special gaming-only badges for those who only wanted to attend the con to game. and had a weblog<sup>53</sup> for gaming at the con.

### **Gaming at Worldcon!**

Yes, there will be gaming at Worldcon!

Worldcon gaming will take place at the Hilton, in the Pacific Ballroom.

### **Badges!**

You do NOT need a full Worldcon membership to participate in the gaming only section of the event. [...]hose who only want to game do not need to pay full price. You can buy a Gaming Only membership.

[...]

### **What type of Gaming?**

Board Games, Role-playing Games, RPGA, Miniatures, Live Action Role-playing, and more are currently being scheduled. As we get closer to the convention the scheduling details will be provided here. So check this space for more details!

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<sup>52</sup> Source: [WorldCon 64 site on WayBack Machine](#)

<sup>53</sup> [Archived copy](#) on the WayBack Machine

**Come on... can't you give me SOME idea of what's going on?**

Okay. In the LARP arena we intend to have a Vampire based LARP as well as a Combat Oriented LARP.

For Board Games several game companies such as Steve Jackson Games will be running many events.

Warhammer Miniatures as well as Upper Deck Entertainment will be out, running several old and new games for your gaming pleasure!

**Game Masters!**

We need Game Masters, people to run games, who have a passion for games, or just like blowing up hapless PCs in their dungeons. If you want to run some games and events please contact me directly at gaming.

Those who run 8 hours of gaming gets badge that allows you access to the gaming events at Worldcon. Those who run 24 hours of gaming are eligible for a full Worldcon membership and access to the entire convention.

[...]

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There will definitely be plenty of Gaming at L.A.con IV. Perhaps more (and more different kinds) than there's ever been at a Worldcon before. Things are still in the planning stages and we're hoping for something special to come through that will make it all possible.

We've got big plans. We just don't know yet if we can carry them out. So keep your fingers crossed and watch this space (and the Progress Reports) for news on our plans for tournaments, possible prize competitions, premieres, LARPs, etc.

There was also a weblog<sup>54</sup> for gaming at the con, though it did not receive updates after the introductory set. However, it's worth noting that this Worldcon felt gaming was important and a draw for the con, even for people who did not intend to attend the rest of the convention programming.

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<sup>54</sup> [Archived copy](#) on the WayBack Machine

## Worldcon 65 (2007): Yokohama, Japan (Nippon 2007)<sup>55</sup>

Worldcon 65 had limited but present games programming, with **2 program items** staffed by **4 people**, comprising **0.71%** of the total programming:

- Golden Guidelines for Good Game Design
- Want to Play a Game? Teaching Other People to Play

## Worldcon 66 (2008): Denver, Colorado (Denvention 3)<sup>56</sup>

Worldcon 66 had **6 program items** with **12 panelists**, comprising **0.84% of the programming**. The con held gaming sessions and events as follows:

*Denvention 3 will run RPGs, card games, board games, and LARPs in the Tower Exhibit Area at the Sheraton from Wednesday evening through Sunday afternoon. [...] Gaming is open during the following times, free gaming available during the times listed as well as scheduled events.*

Additional gaming programming included:

- Golden Guidelines for Good Game Design
- Tie-in novels for TV and gaming
- Wizards of the Coast Presentation
- Writing the Rules Right: Teaching Other People to Play Your Game

## Worldcon 67 (2009): Montréal, Québec (Anticipation)<sup>57</sup>

Worldcon 67 saw a sharp rise in game-related program items, with **36 items** and **21 panelists**, representing **3.15% of total programming**. This explosive growth was mostly in the form of numerous scheduled gaming sessions, but there were also panels on computer game design and development and writing in gaming. As well as gaming programming focused on children and teens. Gaming panels/events included:

- **Game Events and Learning New Games**
  - Card & Board Gaming

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<sup>55</sup> Source: [Worldcon 65 website on WayBack Machine](#)

<sup>56</sup> Source: [Denvention Quick Reference Guide](#)

<sup>57</sup> Source: [Anticipation Convention Guide](#)

- Tabletop Games
- Intro to RPG
- **Game Creation and Craft**
  - Making Computer Games
  - Writing in Gaming – Open Discussion
  - Computer Game Design and Development
- **Other Gaming Programming**
  - Role of Concept Art
  - RPGs and the Writing of Tie-In and Fan Fiction
  - Techno-Nostalgia
  - Time Traveller™ & Skins

## Worldcon 68 (2010): Melbourne, Victoria (Aussiecon Four)<sup>58</sup>

Worldcon 68 saw a decline in absolute number of game program items compared to the preceding con (**8 items** and **17 panelists**), but the percentage of total programming that was related to games was still higher than the cons before that, at **1.77%**.

The games program was described as follows:

There will be a number of tournaments and games running throughout the weekend. Additional games will be available for your use. The gaming room will be operating extended hours. Further information will be available from the information desk and the gaming room.

Select program items included:

- Game on! Games and YA spec fic
- Play the story: Videogames and narrative technique
- Sandbox vs theme park: The design of MMOs
- Videogames as art

## Worldcon 69 (2011): Reno, Nevada (Renovation)<sup>59</sup>

Worldcon 69 had 13 gaming items with 22 panelists, comprising 1.43% of the programming and the highest panelist count of the cons since 2006. This con described its gaming extensively on the [Program - Gaming page](#). Highlights include:

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<sup>58</sup> Source: [Aussiecon 4 Pocket Program Book](#)

<sup>59</sup> Source: [Worldcon 69 site on WayBack Machine](#)

Renovation will offer a wide spectrum of games, from board games to card games to role playing games to Live Action Roleplaying (LARP). Whether you want to game for hours on end or just drop by for a quick game, we'll have something for you. Want to play *Dominion*? We've got that. *Race for the Galaxy* or *Settlers of Catan*? Got those. *Scrabble*? Sure? *Munchkin*? Yep. You get the idea. We will have hundreds of games available, courtesy of [OSFCI](#) and [GameStorm](#), and a dedicated staff to check games out and even teach you how to play. You can see a current list [here](#).

**Roleplaying - Darnell Coleman - Doctor Who**

**Summit Arcane: A LARP set in the world of Jim Butcher's [Dresden Files](#)**

**Roleplaying - Darnell Coleman - Pathfinder D&D**

**Roleplaying - Adam Meyers - Pathfinder D&D;**

**Dominion Tournament**

There was also programming on the business of game design, the craft of game design, and the role of art and artists in games.

## WorldCon 70 (2012): Chicago, Illinois (Chicon 7)<sup>60</sup>

Worldcon 70 had 26 program items with 14 panelists/hosts, comprising 3.08% of the program. There was a section devoted to gaming in the category index, from which a large number of the program items are drawn, and a section devoted to describing the Artemis Bridge Simulator. Programming included:

- LARPing: Make-Belive for Adults
- The Future of Gaming
- WOrlD Building from Games to Stories

## Worldcon 71 (2013): San Antonio, Texas (LoneStarCon 3)<sup>61</sup>

Worldcon 71 had 17 program items with 16 panelists/performers, comprising 1.80% of the program. Worldcon 71 had gaming activities throughout the con as well as a set of gaming music panels/performances; screenings of multiple short films with the subject of gaming or set in game worlds; and other gaming panels and gaming activities throughout the con:

*Gaming will be taking place in the exhibit hall during the daytime, with both scheduled games and a library for our members to pick something up on the fly. Gaming moves at*

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<sup>60</sup> Source: [Chicon 7 Pocket Program](#)

<sup>61</sup> Source: [LoneStarCon Program Guide](#)

*night to the Riverwalk River Terrace Room. The shift to the evening location is at 9:00 p.m. Thursday and Friday. On Saturday and Sunday, gaming moves there at 8:30 pm.*

- **Game-related music panels and performances**
  - Filk Concert: Dr. Dr. Mary Crowell<sup>62</sup>
  - Concert: Scott Snyder
  - Theme Filk: Gaming
- **Game-related film screenings included:**
  - *The Escape* (USA, PG-13)
  - *Red Sand: A Mass Effect Fan Film* (USA, PG-13)
  - *Chill* (USA, PG-17)
  - *Family Business* (USA, PG)
- **Other game programming**
  - Introduction to RPGs
  - Creating Art For Card Games
  - The Sundering — Splitting D&D Down the Middle

## Worldcon 72 (2014): London, UK (Loncon 3)<sup>63</sup>

Worldcon 72 had tracks for both Gaming and Videogames, and had a whopping **72 game-related program items**, with **93 panelists**, comprising **8.69%** of total con programming. The games programming is described as:

### **Gaming**

The Games Tent is located at the back of the Fan Village, next to the Library. We have a large games library being supplied by Eclectic Games, and you can also bring your own games to play during the con, with a check-in system so that they can be identified as yours.

Whiteboards will show what gamesklatsches and events are happening each day. We also have lots of demo teams running playtesting, board and card games, roleplaying games, and a few surprises throughout the convention. As well as tables for you to play games on, we have comfy seating for people who want to streetpass or play handheld games together.

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<sup>62</sup> *sic*

<sup>63</sup> Source: [Loncon 3 Pocket Programme Guide](#)

Talk to the Games Tent volunteers if you want to run your own gamesklatsche during the convention and we will try to allocate you a slot.

Please be respectful of everyone in the tent and their games. Treat anything you borrow as if were your own.

### **Game Times**

The Games Tent is open from 10am every day until late at night, other than on Thursday and Saturday evenings, when we will be running LARP events (set up 7:30pm, start 8pm). While the tent is being used for LARPs, you will still be able to play board and card games outside in the Fan Village.

On Friday, a session of Azad will run from 7pm.

This might make things a little crowded, but the tent will also still be open for other games.

We have several sets of Werewolf, and have set aside Sunday night especially for this game. Again, the tent will also be open all evening for general play

The games panels included a broad range of topics and "gamesklatsches," as well as an entire 4-panel set devoted to discussing and recreating the fictiona; game Azad from Iain M.Banks' The Player of Games.

## **Worldcon 73 (2015): Spokane, Washington (Sasquan)**

Worldcon 73 had a robust gaming program, featuring a number of industry professionals such as Ken Burnside and Brian Campbell. The con had 31 program items with 58 panelists, at 2.68% of total programming. The gaming program was described as:<sup>64</sup>

*Gaming Program will have panels on computer and video games, board games, and roleplaying. Game designers, authors, artists, and fans will discuss not just how good games are made but how games can inform and inspire other aspects of fannish creativity. Panels we are preparing include Writing For Video Games, The Best Video Games Ever!, and The Game Designer's Toolbox, among others.*

Sasquan also had multiple ongoing gaming activities throughout the time of the con. In addition, there was a track called SpoCon Presents, featuring a partnership with Black Shield

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<sup>64</sup> Source: [Sasquan Program Guide](#)

Productions that took in-depth dives into specific areas of the game master craft. Select panels include:

- SpoCon Presents: Black Shield Gaming—Knight Court (Dresden Files)
- SpoCon Presents: Role-Playing Games with Black Shield Productions
- SpoCon Presents: Ambushes and Counterambushes for Storytellers and Gamemasters
- SpoCon Presents: Man Tracking for Storytellers and Gamemasters
- SpoCon Presents: Developing A Realistic, Viable Economy for your World
- SpoCon Presents: Modern Weapon Misconceptions for Gamemasters and Storytellers
- SpoCon Presents: Magic the Gathering Tournament with Brandon Sanderson
- SpoCon Presents: Sub-Genre Games
- SpoCon Presents: Black Shield GMs: Have Dice, Will Travel

Other game-related programming included:

- **Game Artists and Designers**
  - The Art of Jef Sturgeon
  - The Art of Jef Fennel
  - Space Opera Seminar
- **Game Creation**
  - The Game Designer's Toolbox
  - Role Playing Games as an Author's Tool
  - How to Produce a Video Game
  - Writing For Video Games
  - The Limits Of Crowdfunding
  - Worldbuilding And Sandbox Games
  - Game Mastering 101
- **Favorite Games**
  - Family-Friendly Board Games
  - Honoring Great Games
  - The Best Video Games Ever!
- **Other Game Programming**
  - Gaming for Therapy, Gaming for Education
  - Female Characters in Video Games
  - The Future of Video Games
  - Sequel, Add-On, or DLC
  - *Of Dice and Men*—PG-17

## Worldcon 74 (2016): Kansas City, Missouri (MidAmeriCon II)

Games programming climbed sharply again for Worldcon 74, with **71 items (6.25%)** and **69 panelists**. This con dedicated [a full page to featuring gaming programming](#)<sup>65</sup>. The page read:

*Gaming is a big part of Fandom and will be well-represented at MidAmeriCon II.*

- *We have 5000 square feet of gaming space we will be using for all day gaming in the Exhibit Hall starting Wednesday afternoon and continuing through all open hours in the KCCC.*
- *There will also be 24-hour gaming in the Marriott!*
- *We are excited to be working with the Gamer's Haven Game Library, who will be providing tabletop games.*
- *We'll also be featuring a multitude of RPG sessions and holding demos and tournaments of various games throughout the duration of the convention so there will always be something exciting going on in the games area.*
- *Be sure to check out the Warhorn to see currently scheduled games!*
- *Did someone say Ingress Event (we're working on it)?*
- *As well as our standard gaming library, we will have an Artemis Bridge simulator, and teams of people on hand to demonstrate and help you find something exciting to absorb you.*

*If you are interested in helping out, please contact us at [gaming@midamericon2.org](mailto:gaming@midamericon2.org) for more information.*

*The gaming area will have a series of playtests available for sign up on the day. Several of these sessions will feature designers and developers showing off their new games, and we'll also have sessions on the Firefly and Mistborn RPGs. Slots will be allocated on a first come, first served basis.*

*To complement our gaming area in the Exhibit Hall, the gaming program will cover games of all types. From boardgame recommendations to scriptwriting in videogames to live action roleplay (Larps), our focus this year is on "Gaming for Everybody." Do you want to build a gameworld, find out about crowdfunding, or just run a great role-playing game (RPG) session? How do you play games with kids or introduce new players to boardgames? The gaming program will dig deep into these ideas, provide some suggestions, and enjoy all things ludic. We've got some fantastic panelists from all aspects of gaming, as well as fans who are passionate about their play.*

The panels covered a broad range of topics, including:

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<sup>65</sup> [Archived copy on the Wayback Machine](#)

- “Ellie’s Last Line”. Scriptwriting and Narrative for Videogames
- “Go for the Eyes, Boo!” Character Design in Videogames
- “W for Worldbuilding” in “V for Videogames”
- Crowdfunding Your Way to Success in Gaming
- Designing Great Boardgames
- Eradicating the Pandemic: Realism in Boardgames
- The Art of Games
- Writing Games in Fiction

## Worldcon 75 (2017): Helsinki, Finland<sup>66</sup>

Worldcon 75 had 43 program items and 37 panelists, with 4.62% of programming devoted to gaming-related items. As stated previously this con may have done its scheduled programming off the Grenadine app I used to collect the data, accounting for the lower number of program items.

Worldcon 75 had a set of panels and activities specifically to serve the active Eurogames scene and fandom, as well as a dozen other gaming panels and activities:

- **Eurogames and Other Board Games**
  - [Eurogames We Love and Hate](#)
  - [Current Trends and Ways Forwards in Board Games](#)
  - [Well-known Board Games](#)
- **Game Writing and Craft**
  - [Writing for Video Games](#)
  - [Long-form Storytelling in Scifi Videogames](#)
  - [Conversion between Books, Movies and Games](#)
- **Game Genres and Structures**
  - [Adventure Games](#)
  - [Horror in Roleplaying Games](#)
  - [Different Types of LARP](#)
- **Demonstrations and Meetups**
  - [Demoscene — Digital Graffiti](#)
  - [Encounter on Endor - The Treehuggers](#)
  - [Pathfinder Adventure Card Game](#)
  - [EVE Fan Meet](#)

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<sup>66</sup> I could not find a non-Grenadine version of the Worldcon 75 program, but the contents of the Games track are available in [Appendix C](#).

## Worldcon 76 (2018): San Jose, California

Worldcon 76 definitely ran into the issue of scheduled games programming moving off the Grenadine app and onto paper, which I do not have access to. Because of this, the numbers are lower, at 19 program items and 39 panelists, or 2.07% of the available games programming.

Worldcon 76 had gaming activities as described below.<sup>67</sup>

*Primary gaming includes open gaming, game demos, learn-to-play sessions, and games run by staff, vendors, and volunteers. These will include table top board, card, dice, miniatures, and role-playing games, as well as a game library. A schedule will be posted in the gaming area as well as sign-up sheets for all scheduled games. We will also have a secondary area for evening/after-hour/adult-themed games in the San Carlos room at the Marriott that will be open all night starting at 8:00 PM. This will also be open gaming but will have a sign-up sheet for tables and a schedule for any planned games. Please come and join us in your off time.*

The Games track (as a label on the programming items) also included over a dozen panels and events related to gaming:

- **Gaming and Fandom**
  - [Addressing Videogames and Sexism](#)
  - [How Gaming is Important to Fandom](#)
  - [Playing for a Better World: Social Activism in Games](#)
  - [We Have Always Played Games: Women at the Gaming Table](#)
- **Meetups and Experiences**
  - [Artemis Bridge Simulation](#)
  - [Ingress: Mission Mosaic Walkabout](#)
  - [Pokémon Go Walkabout](#)
- **Gaming Platforms and Structure**
  - [Making Choices Matter: Player Agency in Digital Games](#)
  - [Small Stories for Big Audiences: Subplots in Contemporary Gaming](#)
  - [Unearthing Hidden Analog Indie Games](#)
  - [What's the Story with AR Games?](#)
- **Writing Games and Interactive Fiction**
  - [The Craft of Interactive Fiction](#)
  - [Transitioning to Digital Game Writing: Why Your Next Story Should be a Game](#)

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<sup>67</sup> Source: [Worldcon 76 Program Guide](#)

- [Pokémon meet - Team Valor!](#)

## Worldcon 77 (2019): Dublin, Ireland

Worldcon 77 featured not only a games programming track, but a Gaming Guest of Honor: Steve Jackson. The Worldcon 77 website notes in their profile of him that Steve Jackson has won 12 Origins Awards, which is an award examined in this report. Steve Jackson participated in the usual Guest of Honour activities such as interviews, and also participated in gaming sessions and other program content. Overall, this con had 43 game-related program items, comprising 3.6% of total programming. This includes 131 panelists, a count that is higher because of an orchestra and a band that performed gaming music, with each musician listed as a program participant.

Worldcon 77 featured an entire page in their program book about their Gaming Hall and the activities therein, again featuring Steve Jackson:

### **Gaming Hall**

*Gaming will take place in the CCD Level 2 Wicklow Hall 2, opening at 10:00 each day. The Gaming Hall caters for both diehard tabletop gamers and those of you who would like to try something new. No experience is necessary: all you need is an open mind and a willingness to have fun!*

### **Board Games**

*The Gaming Hall features a large selection of board games for attendees to borrow, and our volunteers are happy to help teach those games. If you have never played modern board games before, ask one of the gaming staff members in the hall who will teach you a game and get you playing as quickly as possible. Existing tabletop gamers are encouraged to bring along their own games to the convention and to find players to join them!*

*Each day, the Gaming Guest of Honour, Steve Jackson (of Steve Jackson Games, creator of GURPS, Munchkin and so much more!) will be visiting the Gaming Hall to play games with the attendees. If you'd like a chance to play with Steve Jackson, come to the Gaming Hall for one or more of the "Gaming with Steve Jackson" sessions (one each day) listed in this publication and also on the Grenadine mobile app.*

### **Gaming Workshops and Talks**

*In addition to a multitude of gaming-related panels, the Gaming Programme will feature the following introductory workshops and talks:*

- *Introduction to Dungeons & Dragons (Thursday 13:00 and Saturday 11:00 in CCD Level 2 Wicklow Meeting Room 3)*
- *How to Introduce Kids to Roleplaying (Saturday 14:00 in CCD Level 2 Wicklow Meeting Room 3)*
- *Making the transition from Player to Gamesmaster (Friday 10:00 in CCD Level 2 Wicklow Meeting Room 1)*

*Consult this guide and the Grenadine mobile app for more details.*

### **Role Playing Games**

*The Gaming Hall will offer a range of tabletop role-playing experiences from Dungeons & Dragons 5th Edition to Call of Cthulhu, Vampire, Cyberpunk, the Laundry Files, and many more that you might not have heard of but all of which are sure to entertain.*

*If you've made a character for Dungeons & Dragons at the workshop, you'll be able to play in games with them over the convention. Don't worry if you don't have a character ready or dice to hand, all our games will have pre-generated characters and everything else needed so you can just turn up and play!*

*Gaming slots are available at the following times in the Gaming Hall:*

- *Thursday: 14:00 – 17:00 and 19:00 – 22:00*
- *Friday, Saturday and Sunday: 11:00 – 14:00, 15:00 – 18:00, and 20:00 – 23:00*
- *Monday: 11:00 – 14:00*

*Each slot will have a choice of games from our volunteer Game Masters, with places available on a first-come, first-served basis.*

### **Gaming Hall and Children**

*Children under 15 years old must be accompanied by a parent/guardian at all times. While a child is playing a game, their parent/guardian must remain in the Gaming Hall. Additionally, some RPGs might have an age limit, which will be strictly enforced.*

In addition to the sessions mentioned here and numerous other gaming sessions, Worldcon 77 also had

Beyond Dungeons and Dragons

Blurred media

Evoking theme through boardgame mechanics

Game writing and the story

Games for science

How to introduce kids to role-playing  
How to self-publish your roleplaying game  
Inclusive game design  
LitRPG, GameLit and isekai  
Modern alternatives to classic boardgames  
Narrative and storytelling for games  
Representation of marginalised people in games  
So you want to be an indie game developer?  
Stories from other media turned into games  
Tabletop games as educational tools  
Tabletop RPG as inspiration for creative writing  
The 'evil' of gaming  
The history of tabletop gaming  
The impact of Kickstarter on the gaming industry  
The popularity of livestreaming games  
Video game nostalgia: remakes and remasters  
VR and AR: the future of gaming or a fad?

#### Game-Related Performances

A Critical Miss, presented by Tantalus Ireland  
Concert: Another Castle  
Concert: Irish Video Game Orchestra  
Ditch Diggers podcast: live recording

## Appendix B: Gaming Awards Data

I summarized a variety of gaming awards data in the body of the proposal. In this appendix, I provide a full look at speculative fiction titles in game awards.

There is considerable interest in awards for speculative fiction games and interactive media across fannish circles, the gaming industry, and non-gaming industry prestigious associations. In the following section, I will present a number of international and region-specific gaming awards and show that speculative fiction content tends to dominate across awards and award categories. For awards with a robust category structure, I will present 2018 categories and any speculative fiction honorees, with a goal of furthering the argument for current robustness of a proposed games Hugo category.

## General Awards

There are a number of prestigious general gaming awards awarded by a variety of bodies, both juried and popular.

## Video Game Awards

The video game awards scene is thriving, with both industry-specific and general media bodies taking note of video games as an important locus of creative work.

### BAFTA Game Awards

The British Academy of Film and Television Arts ([BAFTA](#)) has recognized achievements in [games and interactive media](#) in some form since 1998, and recognizes games as a "third arm" of the academy's awards. A recent BAFTA Games Rulebook<sup>68</sup> outlines eligibility for the award:

- *Any game is eligible as long as it has been, or will be, released in the UK between 1 January – 31 December 2014.*
- *No game that has previously been entered can be re-entered (this includes Late Releases from 2012 entered into categories presented at the Awards in 2014). However, games which have been entered for the Children's Awards in 2014 can also be entered in to these Awards.*
- *If a game was originally released prior to the eligibility period, but has received a significant update or alteration between 1 January and 31 December 2014, it may be entered if it can be demonstrated that there are significant new levels of content and innovation. Entrants wishing to enter on this basis should consult with Kelly Smith (see Contact List) prior to entry.*

It is noteworthy that games can become eligible again upon sufficient alteration. This point will be returned to in the proposed category definition below.

The BAFTA Game Awards recognize [a variety of categories](#), with many speculative fiction titles making the cut. Such entries for 2018 included:

- **Best Game**
  - Winner: *God of War* – Santa Monica Studio / Sony Interactive Entertainment Europe

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<sup>68</sup> [British Academy Games Awards Rules and Guidelines 2015](#) (archived copy)

- *Assassin's Creed Odyssey* – Ubisoft Quebec / Ubisoft
- *ASTRO BOT Rescue Mission* – SIE Japan Studio / Sony Interactive Entertainment Europe
- *Celeste* - Matt Makes Games Inc. / Matt Makes Games Inc.
- *Return of the Obra Dinn* – Lucas Pope / 3909
- **Artistic Achievement**
  - Winner: *Return of the Obra Dinn* – Lucas Pope / 3909
  - *Detroit: Become Human* – Quantic Dream / Sony Interactive Entertainment Europe
  - *Gris* – Nomada Studio / Devolver Digital
  - *God of War* - Santa Monica Studio / Sony Interactive Entertainment Europe
  - *Marvel's Spider-Man* – Insomniac Games / Sony Interactive Entertainment Europe
- **Audio Achievement**
  - Winner: *God of War* – Santa Monica Studio / Sony Interactive Entertainment Europe
  - *Detroit: Become Human* – Quantic Dream / Sony Interactive Entertainment Europe
  - *Marvel's Spider-Man* – Insomniac Games / Sony Interactive Entertainment Europe
  - *Tetris Effect* – Monstars Inc. and Resonair / Enhance, Inc.
- **British Game**
  - *The Room: Old Sins* – Fireproof Games
  - *Overcooked 2* – Ghost Town Games & Team 17 / Team 17
- **Debut Game**
  - Winner: *Yoku's Island Express* – Villa Gorilla / Team 17
  - *Beat Saber* – Beat Games
  - *Cultist Simulator* – Weather Factory / Humble Bundle
  - *Donut County* – Ben Esposito / Annapurna Interactive
  - *Gris* – Nomada Studio / Devolver Digital
- **EE Mobile Game**
  - Winner: *Old School RuneScape* (Jagex)
  - *Brawl Stars* (Supercell)
  - *Clash Royale* (Supercell)
  - *Fortnite* (Epic Games)
  - *Pokémon Go* (The Pokémon Company/Niantic/Nintendo)
- **Evolving Game**
  - Winner: *Fortnite* – Epic Games
  - *Destiny 2: Forsaken* – Bungie / Activision
  - *Elite Dangerous: Beyond* - Frontier
  - *Overwatch* – Blizzard Entertainment
  - *Sea of Thieves* - Rare / Microsoft Studios
- **Family**

- Winner: Nintendo Labo – Nintendo EPD / Nintendo
- *Lego Disney Pixar's The Incredibles* – TT Games / WB Games
- *Overcooked 2* – Ghost Town Games & Team 17 / Team 17
- *Pokémon: Let's Go, Pikachu! and Let's Go, Eevee!* – Game Freak / The Pokémon Company and Nintendo
- *Super Mario Party* – NDCube / Nintendo
- *Yoku's Island Express* – Villa Gorilla / Team 17
- **Game Design**
  - Winner: *Return of the Obra Dinn* – Lucas Pope / 3909
  - *ASTRO BOT Rescue Mission* – SIE Japan Studio / Sony Interactive Entertainment Europe
  - *Celeste* – Matt Makes Games Inc.
  - *God of War* – Santa Monica Studio / Sony Interactive Entertainment Europe
  - *Into the Breach* – Subset Games
  - *Minit* – JW, Kitty, Jukio, and Dom / Devolver Digital
- **Game Innovation**
  - Winner: Nintendo Labo – Nintendo EPD / Nintendo
  - *ASTRO BOT Rescue Mission* – SIE Japan Studio / Sony Interactive Entertainment Europe
  - *Celeste* – Matt Makes Games Inc.
  - *Cultist Simulator* – Weather Factory / Humble Bundle
  - *Moss* – Polyarc
  - *Return of the Obra Dinn* – Lucas Pope / 3909
- **Mobile Game**
  - *Alto's Odyssey* – Team Alto / Snowman
  - *Brawl Stars* – Supercell
  - *Donut County* – Ben Esposito / Annapurna Interactive
  - *Reigns: Game of Thrones* – Neiral / Devolver Digital
  - *The Room: Old Sins* – Fireproof Games
- **Multiplayer**
  - *Overcooked 2* – Ghost Town Games & Team 17 / Team 17
  - *Sea of Thieves* – Rare / Microsoft Studios
  - *Super Mario Party* – NDCube / Nintendo
  - *Super Smash Bros. Ultimate* – Nintendo, Bandai Namco Studios and Sora Ltd / Nintendo
- **Music**
  - Winner: *God of War* – Santa Monica Studio / Sony Interactive Entertainment Europe
  - *Celeste* – Matt Makes Games Inc.
  - *Gris* – Nomada Studio / Devolver Digital
  - *Tetris Effect* – Monstars Inc. and Resonair / Enhance, Inc.
- **Narrative**

- Winner: *God of War* – Santa Monica Studio / Sony Interactive Entertainment Europe
- *Frostpunk* – 11 Bit Studios
- *Marvel's Spider-Man* – Insomniac Games / Sony Interactive Entertainment Europe
- *Return of the Obra Dinn* – Lucas Pope / 3909
- **Original Property**
  - Winner: *Into the Breach* – Subset Games
  - *Dead Cells* – Motion Twin
  - *Moss* – Polyarc
  - *Return of the Obra Dinn* – Lucas Pope / 3909
  - *Subnautica* – Unknown Worlds Entertainment
- **Performer**
  - Winner: Jeremy Davies – *God of War* as The Stranger
  - Christopher Judge – *God of War* as Kratos
  - Danielle Bisutti – *God of War* as Freya
  - Melissanthi Mahut – *Assassin's Creed Odyssey* as Kassandra of Sparta
  - Sunny Suljic – *God of War* as Atreus
- **Game Beyond Entertainment**
  - *Celeste* – Matt Makes Games Inc.
  - *Life is Strange 2* – Dontnod Entertainment / Square Enix
  - Nintendo Labo – Nintendo EPD / Nintendo

This comprises 37 unique speculative fiction titles across 16 work categories and 1 performance category. Speculative fiction games won in 7 categories, with an additional win for a performer in a speculative fiction game. Speculative fiction games with multiple nominations included:

- **10 Nominations:** *God of War* (5 wins)
- **6 Nominations:** *Return of the Obra Dinn* (2 wins)
- **5 Nominations:** *Celeste*
- **3 Nominations:**
  - *ASTRO BOT: Rescue Mission*
  - *GRIS*
  - *Marvel's Spider-Man*
  - Nintendo Labo (2 wins)
  - *Overcooked 2*
- **2 Nominations**
  - *Assassin's Creed Odyssey*
  - *Cultist Simulator*
  - *Detroit: Become Human*
  - *Donut County*
  - *Fortnite*
  - *Into the Breach*

- *Moss*
- *The Room: Old Sins*
- *Sea of Thieves*
- *Super Mario Party*
- *Tetris Effect*
- *Yoku's Island Express*

Speculative games have also topped the Best Game category almost every year. Recent winners include:

- 2018: *God of War*
- 2017: *What Remains of Edith Finch*
- 2015: *Fallout 4*
- 2014: *Destiny*
- 2013: *The Last of Us*
- 2012: *Dishonored*
- 2011: *Portal 2*
- 2010: *Mass Effect 2*

Exclusive game-centered awards and gaming industry awards also provide evidence for a wealth of interest in high-quality speculative fiction games.

### D.I.C.E Awards

Speculative games have topped the D.I.C.E Awards, an industry award arranged by the Academy of Interactive Arts & Sciences, for all the years since 2010. Game of the Year winners in this time were:

- 2018: *God of War*
- 2017: *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild*
- 2016: *Overwatch*
- 2015: *Fallout 4*
- 2014: *Dragon Age: Inquisition*
- 2013: *The Last of Us*
- 2012: *Journey*
- 2011: *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*
- 2010: *Mass Effect 2*

Like the list of recent BAFTA winners, this list includes both AAA titles from a variety of developers and indie productions, and it's worth noting that some years there is a consensus and others there is not, though each game is popularly regarded as excellent and could conceivably have been a Hugo winner.

The D.I.C.E. Awards describe themselves thus:

*Since 1996, the D.I.C.E. Awards have recognized games, individuals and development teams that have contributed to the advancement of the multi-billion dollar worldwide entertainment software industry. The D.I.C.E. Awards are the most credible, respected and recognized awards for the interactive entertainment community with voting cast by members of the Academy's 33,000+ membership base.*

Speculative fiction D.I.C.E. honorees in the 2018 categories were:

- **Game of the Year**
  - Winner: God of War
  - Into the Breach
  - Marvel's Spider-Man
  - Return of the Obra Dinn
- **Outstanding Achievement for an Independent Game**
  - Winner: Celeste
  - Into the Breach
  - Minit
  - Return of the Obra Dinn
- **Portable Game of the Year**
  - Dandara
  - Donut County
  - Dragalia Lost
  - Oddmar
- **Action Game of the Year**
  - Winner: Celeste
  - Destiny 2: Forsaken
  - Shadow of the Tomb Raider
- **Adventure Game of the Year**
  - Winner: God of War
  - Detroit: Become Human
  - Marvel's Spider Man
  - Return of the Obra Dinn
- **Family Game of the Year**
  - Winner: Unravel Two
  - ASTRO BOT Rescue Mission
  - Kirby Star Allies
  - LEGO DC Super-Villains
  - Starlink: Battle for Atlas
- **Fighting Game of the Year**
  - Winner: Super Smash Bros. Ultimate

- BlazBlue: Cross Tag Battle
- Dragon Ball FighterZ
- SoulCalibur VI
- **Immersive Reality Game of the Year**
  - Winner: Beat Saber
  - ASTRO BOT Rescue Mission
  - Moss
  - Sprint Vector
  - Transference
- **Immersive Reality Technical Achievement**
  - Winner: Tónandi
  - ASTRO BOT Rescue Mission
  - Beat Saber
  - Dr. Grordbort's Invaders
  - Torn
- **Online Game of the Year**
  - Winner: Fortnite
  - Destiny 2: Forsaken
  - Laser League
  - Sea of Thieves
- **Outstanding Achievement in Animation**
  - Winner: Marvel's Spider-Man
  - God of War
  - GRIS
  - Moss
- **Outstanding Achievement in Art Direction**
  - Winner: God of War
  - Detroit: Become Human
  - GRIS
  - Marvel's Spider-Man
- **Outstanding Achievement in Character**
  - Winner: God of War - Kratos
  - Assassin's Creed Odyssey - Kassandra
  - God of War - Atreus
  - Marvel's Spider-Man - Peter Parker/Spider-Man
- **Outstanding Achievement in Game Design**
  - Winner: God of War
  - Into the Breach
  - Marvel's Spider-Man
  - Return of the Obra Dinn
  - Subnautica
- **Outstanding Achievement in Original Music Composition**
  - Winner: God of War

- Detroit: Become Human
- Forgotten Anne
- Marvel's Spider-Man
- Tetris Effect
- **Outstanding Achievement in Sound Design**
  - Winner: God of War
  - Detroit: Become Human
  - Marvel's Spider-Man
  - Moss
- **Outstanding Achievement in Story**
  - Winner: God of War
  - Assassin's Creed Odyssey
  - Marvel's Spider-Man
  - Return of the Obra Dinn
- **Outstanding Technical Achievement**
  - ASTRO BOT Rescue Mission
  - God of War
  - Marvel's Spider-Man
- **Role-Playing Game of the Year**
  - Winner: Monster Hunter: World
  - Assassin's Creed Odyssey
  - Dragon Quest XI: Echoes of an Elusive Age
  - Ni no Kuni II: Revenant Kingdom
  - Pillars of Eternity II: Deadfire
- **Strategy/Simulation Game of the Year**
  - Winner: Into the Breach
  - Frostpunk
  - RimWorld
- **Outstanding Achievement in Game Direction**
  - Winner: God of War
  - Marvel's Spider-Man
  - Return of the Obra Dinn

This comprises 47 games across 21 categories. Speculative games won in 18 categories, with an additional win in a character category. Multiple nominees were:

- **12 Nominations:** *God of War* (9 wins)
- **10 Nominations:** *Marvel's Spider-Man* (1 win)
- **5 Nominations:** *Return of the Obra Dinn*
- **4 Nominations:**
  - *ASTRO BOT Rescue Mission*
  - *Detroit: Become Human*
  - *Into the Breach* (1 win)

- **3 Nominations:**
  - *Assassin's Creed Odyssey*
  - *Moss*
- **2 Nominations:**
  - *Celeste* (2 wins)
  - *Destiny 2: Forsaken*
  - *GRIS*

The AIAS also has a [Hall of Fame](#) honouring individual developers for revolutionary and innovative achievements.

## The Game Awards

The Game Awards is an annual awards ceremony that in its most recent year garnered over 26 million viewers. A selection from [the FAQ and rules](#)<sup>69</sup> illuminates key features of the award process and eligibility:

### ***Who selects the nominees for The Game Awards?***

*Nominees for The Game Awards are chosen by an international jury of 69 global media and influencer outlets, selected for their history of critical evaluation of video games. The full list of outlets is available here.*

*Each outlet completes a confidential, unranked ballot based on the collective and diverse opinion of its entire editorial staff, listing out its top five choices in each category. These ballots are tabulated, and the five games that appear on the most ballots are put forth as nominees. In the event of a tie, six (or more) nominees will be announced in a category.*

### ***Who selects the winners?***

*The winners are determined by a blended vote between the voting jury (90%) and public fan votes (10%). Fans can vote for their favorite games on TheGameAwards.com and The Game Awards Discord server in all categories, and also via Twitter DM, Facebook Messenger, as well as using voice on Alexa and Google Assistant in select categories. Fan voting closes on Wednesday, December 5 at Midnight PT.*

### ***What is the cutoff date for games to be eligible this year?***

*Games eligible for The Game Awards this year must be available for public consumption on or before November 16, 2018. Titles that are released after this date will be eligible for The Game Awards ceremony in 2018. (Similarly, games that were released in December 2017 are eligible for this year's awards).*

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<sup>69</sup> Retrieved 2019-04-17 [[archived copy](#)]

***How are “games as a service” titles being handled in the voting?***

*The Game Awards recognizes that many games are ongoing services that evolve over time with new content, features and improvements. Games released in previous years are eligible in all award categories if the jury feels their inclusion is merited due to new content, improvements or services updates. In addition, a new category, “Best Ongoing Game,” specifically recognizes titles that have continued to provide value to customers.*

***Are early access games eligible for The Game Awards?***

*Yes, any game available for public consumption by the deadline is eligible for potential nomination. It’s up to the jury to decide if a title warrants nomination for creative and/or technical excellence in any given year.*

Speculative fiction games have won Game of the Year every year of the award's existence (since 2014):

- 2018: *God of War*
- 2017: *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild*
- 2016: *Overwatch*
- 2015: *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*
- 2014: *Dragon Age: Inquisition*

This award also has a number of other categories. Speculative fiction honorees across categories in 2018 included:

- **Game of the Year**
  - Winner: *God of War* – SIE Santa Monica Studio/Sony Interactive Entertainment
  - *Assassin's Creed Odyssey* – Ubisoft Quebec/Ubisoft
  - *Celeste* – Matt Makes Games
  - *Marvel's Spider-Man* – Insomniac Games/Sony Interactive Entertainment
  - *Monster Hunter: World* – Capcom
- **Best Game Direction**
  - Winner: *God of War* – SIE Santa Monica Studio/Sony Interactive Entertainment
  - *Detroit: Become Human* – Quantic Dream/Sony Interactive Entertainment
  - *Marvel's Spider-Man* – Insomniac Games/Sony Interactive Entertainment
- **Best Ongoing Game**
  - Winner: *Fortnite* – Epic Games
  - *Destiny 2: Forsaken* – Bungie/Activision
  - *No Man's Sky* – Hello Games
  - *Overwatch* – Blizzard Entertainment
- **Best Narrative**
  - *Detroit: Become Human* – Quantic Dream/Sony Interactive Entertainment
  - *God of War* – SIE Santa Monica Studio/Sony Interactive Entertainment
  - *Life Is Strange 2* – Dontnod Entertainment/Square Enix

- *Marvel's Spider-Man* – Insomniac Games/Sony Interactive Entertainment
- **Best Art Direction**
  - Winner: *Return of the Obra Dinn* – 3909 LLC
  - *Assassin's Creed Odyssey* – Ubisoft Quebec
  - *God of War* – SIE Santa Monica Studio/Sony Interactive Entertainment
  - *Octopath Traveler* – Square Enix/Acquire/Nintendo
- **Best Score/Music**
  - *Celeste* – Lena Raine
  - *God of War* – Bear McCreary
  - *Marvel's Spider-Man* – John Paesano
  - *Ni no Kuni II: Revenant Kingdom* – Joe Hisaishi
  - *Octopath Traveler* – Yasunori Nishiki
- **Best Audio Design**
  - *God of War* – SIE Santa Monica Studio/Sony Interactive Entertainment
  - *Marvel's Spider-Man* – Insomniac Games/Sony Interactive Entertainment
- **Best Performance**
  - Bryan Dechart as Connor – in *Detroit: Become Human*
  - Christopher Judge as Kratos – in *God of War*
  - Melissanthi Mahut as Cassandra – in *Assassin's Creed Odyssey*
  - Yuri Lowenthal as Spider-Man – in *Marvel's Spider-Man*
- **Games for Impact**
  - Winner: *Celeste* – Matt Makes Games
  - *Life Is Strange 2* – Dontnod Entertainment/Square Enix
  - *The Missing: J.J. Macfield and the Island of Memories* – White Owls/Arc System Works
- **Best Independent Game**
  - Winner: *Celeste* – Matt Makes Games
  - *Dead Cells* – Motion Twin
  - *Into the Breach* – Subset Games
  - *Return of the Obra Dinn* – 3909 LLC
  - *The Messenger* – Sabotage/Devolver Digital
- **Best Mobile Game**
  - *Donut County* – Ben Esposito/Annapurna Interactive
  - *Fortnite* – Epic Games
  - *PUBG Mobile* – Lightspeed & Quantum/Tencent Games
  - *Reigns: Game of Thrones* – Nerial/Devolver Digital
- **Best VR/AR Game**
  - Winner: *ASTRO BOT Rescue Mission* – SIE Japan Studio/Sony Interactive Entertainment
  - *Beat Saber* – Beat Games
  - *Moss* – Polyarc Games
  - *Tetris Effect* – Resonair/Enhance, Inc.
- **Best Action Game**

- Winner: *Dead Cells* – Motion Twin
- *Destiny 2: Forsaken* – Bungie/Activision
- *Mega Man 11* – Capcom
- **Best Action/Adventure Game**
  - Winner: *God of War* – SIE Santa Monica Studio/Sony Interactive Entertainment
  - *Assassin's Creed Odyssey* – Ubisoft Quebec/Ubisoft
  - *Marvel's Spider-Man* – Insomniac Games/Sony Interactive Entertainment
  - *Shadow of the Tomb Raider* – Eidos Montréal/Square Enix
- **Best Role Playing Game**
  - Winner: *Monster Hunter: World* – Capcom
  - *Dragon Quest XI* – Square Enix
  - *Ni no Kuni II: Revenant Kingdom* – Level-5/Bandai Namco Entertainment
  - *Octopath Traveler* – Square Enix/Acquire/Nintendo
  - *Pillars of Eternity II: Deadfire* – Obsidian Entertainment
- **Best Fighting Game**
  - Winner: *Dragon Ball FighterZ* – Arc System Works/Bandai Namco Entertainment
  - *BlazBlue: Cross Tag Battle* – Arc System Works
  - *Soulcalibur VI* – Bandai Namco Entertainment
  - *Street Fighter V: Arcade Edition* – Capcom
- **Best Family Game**
  - Winner: *Overcooked 2* – Ghost Town Games/Team17
  - *Mario Tennis Aces* – Camelot Software Planning/Nintendo
  - *Nintendo Labo* – Nintendo
  - *Starlink: Battle for Atlas* – Ubisoft Toronto/Ubisoft
  - *Super Mario Party* – NDcube/Nintendo
- **Best Strategy Game**
  - Winner: *Into the Breach* – Subset Games
  - *The Banner Saga 3* – Stoic Studio/Versus Evil
  - *BattleTech* – Harebrained Schemes/Paradox Interactive
  - *Frostpunk* – 11 bit studios
  - *Valkyria Chronicles 4* – Sega
- **Best Sports/Racing Game**
  - *Mario Tennis Aces* – Camelot Software Planning/Nintendo
- **Best Multiplayer Game**
  - Winner: *Fortnite* – Epic Games
  - *Destiny 2: Forsaken* – Bungie/Activision
  - *Monster Hunter: World* – Capcom
  - *Sea of Thieves* – Rare/Microsoft Studios
- **Best Student Game**
  - *Dash Quasar* – UC Santa Cruz
  - *JERA* – DigiPen Bilbao, Spain
  - *LIFF* – ISART Digital
  - *RE: Charge* – MIT

- **Best Debut Indie Game**

- Winner: *The Messenger* – Sabotage/Devolver Digital
- *Donut County* – Ben Esposito/Annapurna Interactive
- *Moss* – Polyarc Games
- *Yoku's Island Express* – Villa Gorilla

This list comprises 60 works across 20 work categories and 1 performance category. Speculative games won in 15 categories, with multiple nominees numbering thus:

- **8 Nominations:** *God of War* (3 wins)
- **7 Nominations:** *Marvel's Spider-Man*
- **4 Nominations:**
  - *Celeste* (2 wins)
  - *Assassin's Creed Odyssey*
- **3 Nominations:**
  - *Destiny 2*
  - *Detroit: Become Human*
  - *Fortnite* (2 wins)
  - *Monster Hunter: World*
  - *Octopath Traveler*
- **2 Nominations:**
  - *Dead Cells*
  - *Into the Breach*
  - *Life Is Strange 2*
  - *Mario Tennis Aces*
  - *The Messenger*
  - *Moss*
  - *Ni no Kuni II: Revenant Kingdom*
  - *Return of the Obra Dinn*

## The Game Developers Choice Awards

The Game Developers Choice Awards have been presented annually at the Game Developers Conference since 2001, with the ceremony held just after the Independent Games Festival ceremony. In addition to the usual category structure with nominees/finalists, the GDC Awards also have a single-entry Audience Award, a Best Debut Award for a studio, and two awards for individuals: the Lifetime Achievement Award and the Pioneer Award. The eligibility rules for regular awards state:

*Any video game which was released, and made publicly available to consumers, during the year 2018, irrespective of platform or delivery medium, is eligible for nomination. Upgrades, expansions and mission packs are not eligible.*

In addition to the implication of alpha/beta releases being eligible, this wording continues to demonstrate the relevance of modifications when considering gaming awards.

Speculative titles have won the GDCA Game of the Year Award every year since 2011 (a non-SF title won in 2010):

- 2018: *God of War*
- 2017: *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild*
- 2016: *Overwatch*
- 2015: *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*
- 2014: *Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor*
- 2013: *The Last of Us*
- 2012: *Journey*
- 2011: *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*

The 2018 nominees and winners were:

- **Audience Award Winner**
  - *Beat Saber* (Beat Games)
- **Game of the Year**
  - Winner: *God of War* (Sony Santa Monica / Sony Interactive Entertainment)
  - *Return of the Obra Dinn* (Lucas Pope / 3909)
  - *Marvel's Spider-Man* (Insomniac Games / Sony Interactive Entertainment)
  - *Celeste* (Matt Makes Games)
- **Best Audio**
  - Winner: *Celeste* (Matt Makes Games)
  - *God of War* (Sony Santa Monica / Sony Interactive Entertainment)
  - *Marvel's Spider-Man* (Insomniac Games / Sony Interactive Entertainment)
  - *Tetris Effect* (Monstars and Resonair / Enhance)
- **Best Debut**
  - Polyarc (*Moss*)
  - Nomada Studio (*Gris*)
  - Villa Gorilla (*Yoku's Island Express*)
  - Sabotage (*The Messenger*)
- **Best Design**
  - Winner: *Into the Breach* (Subset Games)
  - *Marvel's Spider-Man* (Insomniac Games / Sony Interactive Entertainment)
  - *Celeste* (Matt Makes Games)
  - *God of War* (Sony Santa Monica / Sony Interactive Entertainment)
- **Best Mobile Game**
  - *Alto's Odyssey* (Snowman)
  - *Reigns: Game of Thrones* (Nerial / Devolver Digital)

- *Holedown* (Grapefrukt Games)
- *Donut County* (Ben Esposito / Annapurna Interactive)
- **Innovation Award**
  - Winner: Nintendo Labo (Nintendo EPD / Nintendo)
  - *Tetris Effect* (Monstars and Resonair / Enhance)
  - *Return of the Obra Dinn* (Lucas Pope / 3909)
- **Best Narrative**
  - Winner: *Return of the Obra Dinn* (Lucas Pope / 3909)
  - *God of War* (Sony Santa Monica / Sony Interactive Entertainment)
  - *Marvel's Spider-Man* (Insomniac Games / Sony Interactive Entertainment)
- **Best Technology**
  - *Marvel's Spider-Man* (Insomniac Games / Sony Interactive Entertainment)
  - *Assassin's Creed Odyssey* (Ubisoft Quebec / Ubisoft)
  - *God of War* (Sony Santa Monica / Sony Interactive Entertainment)
- **Best Visual Art**
  - Winner: *Gris* (Nomada Studio / Devolver Digital)
  - *Marvel's Spider-Man* (Insomniac Games / Sony Interactive Entertainment)
  - *God of War* (Sony Santa Monica / Sony Interactive Entertainment)
  - *Return of the Obra Dinn* (Lucas Pope / 3909)
- **Best VR/AR Game**
  - Winner: *Beat Saber* (Beat Games)
  - *Budget Cuts* (Neat Corporation)
  - *Tetris Effect* (Monstars and Resonair / Enhance)
  - *Moss* (Polyarc)
  - *Astro Bot Rescue Mission* (SIE Japan Studio / Sony Interactive Entertainment)

Multiple-time nominees for 2018 included:

- **6 Nominations:**
  - *God of War* (1 win)
  - *Marvel's Spider-Man*
- **4 Nominations:** *Return of the Obra Dinn* (1 win)
- **3 Nominations:**
  - *Celeste*
  - *Tetris Effect*
- **2 Nominations:**
  - *Beat Saber* (2 wins)
  - *GRIS* (1 win)
  - *Moss*

## The Golden Joystick Awards

The Golden Joystick Awards have been running since 1983, making it the longest still-running video game award ceremony. It is also the biggest video game award show in terms of number

of votes cast, with over 9 million votes cast in 2014. These awards have added a "Still Playing" award starting in 2017 for games that continue to have a strong following and put out new content/modifications.

The Golden Joystick Awards do not have a single "Game of the Year"-style award, and have instead split this award up by platform since 2015. In that time, 17 of the 20 winners have been speculative titles:

|      | Handheld/Mobile                             | PC                                   | PlayStation              | Xbox                            | Nintendo                                         |
|------|---------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| 2018 | <i>PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds Mobile</i> | <i>Subnautica</i>                    | <i>God of War</i>        | [non-SFF winner]                | <i>Octopath Traveler</i>                         |
| 2017 | <i>Pokémon Sun and Moon</i>                 | <i>PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds</i> | <i>Horizon Zero Dawn</i> | <i>Cuphead</i>                  | <i>The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild</i>   |
| 2016 | <i>Pokémon Go</i>                           | <i>Overwatch</i>                     | [non-SFF winner]         | <i>Rise of the Tomb Raider</i>  | <i>The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess HD</i> |
| 2015 | <i>Fallout Shelter</i>                      | [non-SFF winner]                     | <i>Bloodborne</i>        | <i>Ori and the Blind Forest</i> | <i>Splatoon</i>                                  |

The 2018 winners and finalists were:

- **Best Storytelling**
  - Winner: *God of War*
  - *Forgotton Anne*
  - *Gorogoa*
  - *Marvel's Spider-Man*
  - *Octopath Traveller*
  - *Pillars of Eternity II: Deadfire*
  - *Reigns: Her Majesty*
  - *The Banner Saga 3*
  - *Unavowed*
- **Best Visual Design**
  - Winner: *God of War*
  - *Chuchel*
  - *Dead Cells*
  - *Dragon Ball FighterZ*
  - *FAR: Lone Sails*
  - *Frostpunk*
  - *Gorogoa*
  - *Monster Hunter: World*

- *Subnautica*
- *We Happy Few*
- **Best Audio Design**
  - Winner: *God of War*
  - *Jurassic World Evolution*
  - *Just Shapes & Beats*
  - *Life Is Strange 2*
  - *Monster Hunter: World*
  - *Sea of Thieves*
  - *Shadow of the Tomb Raider*
  - *Subnautica*
- **Best Indie Game**
  - Winner: *Dead Cells*
  - *Celeste*
  - *Gorogoa*
  - *Into the Breach*
  - *Laser League*
  - *Minit*
  - *Opus Magnum*
  - *Owlboy*
  - *Steamworld Dig 2*
- **Best Competitive Game**
  - Winner: *Fortnite Battle Royale*
  - *Arena of Valor*
  - *Dragon Ball FighterZ*
  - *Laser League*
  - *Mario Tennis Aces*
  - *Paladins*
- **Best Co-operative Game**
  - Winner: *Monster Hunter: World*
  - *Firewall Zero Hour*
  - *No Man's Sky Next*
  - *Overcooked 2*
  - *Sea of Thieves*
  - *State of Decay 2*
  - *Unravel Two*
  - *Warhammer: Vermintide 2*
- **Still Playing Award**
  - *Destiny 2*
  - *Final Fantasy 14*
  - *Hearthstone*
  - *Overwatch*
  - *PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds*

- *Pokémon Go*
- *Warframe*
- *World of Warcraft*
- **E-Sports Game of the Year**
  - Winner: *Overwatch*
  - *Dota 2*
  - *Dragon Ball FighterZ*
  - *League of Legends*
  - *Rocket League*
  - *Street Fighter V*
- **Best Mobile Game**
  - Winner: *PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds*
  - *Animal Crossing: Pocket Camp*
  - *Donut County*
  - *Fortnite Battle Royale*
  - *GNOG*
  - *Million Onion Hotel*
  - *Pokémon Quest*
  - *Reigns: Her Majesty*
- **Best Nintendo Game**
  - Winner: *Octopath Traveler*
  - *Captain Toad: Treasure Tracker*
  - *De Blob 2*
  - *Detective Pikachu*
  - *Donkey Kong Country: Tropical Freeze*
  - *Hollow Knight*
  - *Mario Tennis Aces*
  - *Nintendo Labo*
  - *WarioWare Gold*
- **Best PlayStation Game**
  - Winner: *God of War*
  - *Detroit: Become Human*
  - *Firewall: Zero Hour*
  - *Marvel's Spider-Man*
  - *Moss*
  - *Ni no Kuni II: Revenant Kingdom*
  - *Shadow of the Colossus*
  - *The Persistence*
- **Best PC Game**
  - Winner: *Subnautica*
  - *Battletech*
  - *Frostpunk*
  - *Into the Breach*

- *Kingdom Come: Deliverance*
- *Opus Magnum*
- *Pillars of Eternity II: Deadfire*
- *Surviving Mars*
- *Two Point Hospital*
- *Warhammer: Vermintide 2*
- **Best Xbox Game**
  - *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice*
  - *Nier: Automata*
  - *No Man's Sky Next*
  - *PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds*
  - *Sea of Thieves*
  - *State of Decay 2*
  - *Warhammer: Vermintide 2*
- **Best VR Game**
  - Winner: *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim VR*
  - *Firewall Zero Hour*
  - *Flotilla 2*
  - *GNOG*
  - *Moss*
  - *Sprint Vector*
  - *The Persistence*
  - *Transference*
  - *Wipeout Omega Collection*

Due to the large number of categories and finalists in each category, the list of multiple-category nominees for 2018 is quite extensive and includes:

- **5 Nominations:** *God of War* (5 wins)
- **4 Nominations:** *Firewall Zero Hour*
- **3 Nominations:**
  - *Gorogoa*
  - *Mario Tennis Aces*
  - *Marvel's Spider-Man*
  - *Monster Hunter: World* (1 win)
  - *Moss*
  - *Octopath Traveler* (2 wins)
  - *Overwatch* (2 wins)
  - *PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds* (1 win)
  - *Sea of Thieves*
  - *Subnautica* (1 win)
  - *The Persistence*
  - *Warhammer: Vermintide 2*

- **2 Nominations:**

- *Captain Toad: Treasure Tracker*
- *De Blob 2*
- *Dead Cells* (1 win)
- *Detective Pikachu*
- *Detroit: Become Human*
- *Donkey Kong Country: Tropical Freeze*
- *Fortnite Battle Royale* (1 win)
- *Frostpunk*
- *GNOG*
- *Hollow Knight*
- *Into the Breach*
- *Laser League*
- *Ni no Kuni II: Revenant Kingdom*
- *Nintendo Labo*
- *No Man's Sky Next*
- *Opus Magnum*
- *Pillars of Eternity II: Deadfire*
- *Reigns: Her Majesty*
- *Shadow of the Colossus*
- *State of Decay 2*
- *WarioWare Gold*

## The International Mobile Gaming Awards

The International Mobile Gaming Awards specifically honour mobile games, with a focus on innovation and use of the unique platform. The IMG Awards have particularly notable category descriptions, providing motivations as well as examples. Selected categories and descriptions:<sup>70</sup>

### **GRAND PRIX**

For 12 years, the IMGA has been looking for the game that is the most visionary. The game that is showing us a glimpse of future games, the game that is fun, original, and will probably be copied in the years to come. The most important point here is that there has to be an important innovation in the game, a different approach. The innovation can be in the format of the game ([Her Story](#)), the style and art ([Monument Valley](#) and [Badland](#)) or gameplay ([The Walking Dead](#)).

### **BEST MEANINGFUL PLAY**

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<sup>70</sup> [Archived copy](#) of IMGA "Award Categories" page

Games should be fun to play. That is the main purpose of a game. But there can be another purpose, such as learning. We used to call these games serious games or educational games, but today these terms are no longer covering the wide variety of games with a secondary purpose: political awareness and calls for action, art games, games for toddlers, 'games for good'. This category is for all this.

Example: [This War of Mine](#), a game sharing a war experience and raising money for a charity. [Paper Please](#), showing the life of an immigrant at border control. [Artistico](#), the game for art lovers.

### EXCELLENCE IN INNOVATION

This category awards games who try something original, which we haven't seen before. In the early days, we awarded the first experiments with Location Based Games and the first attempts to make AR games. Today we are looking at anything innovative, such as a new way to learn how to dance: [Bounden](#) a completely new way to play a game, such as [Her Story](#) who also won the Grand Prix.

### EXCELLENCE IN STORYTELLING

Interactive storytelling is becoming mainstream in mobile games, with more and more TV series coming to mobile platforms, such as the Walking Dead. There are also Point-and-click adventure games and games who are almost like interactive documentaries. All games who are exploring the areas where games, TV, and Cinema meet, belong in this category. [Republique](#) and [80 Days](#) are both wonderful interactive experiences, with a lot of puzzle elements. [The Walking Dead](#) is clearly much closer to a movie or TV experience, whereby the player connects different sequences of the story together by making choices.

Speculative titles won in a number of categories in 2018:

- Jury's Honorable Mention: *Flipping Filip*
- Excellent in Visual Art and Design: *CHUCHEL*
- Excellence in Innovation: *Gladiabots*
- Best Multiplayer Game: *Brawl Stars*
- Best Quickplay Game: *Oddmar*
- Excellence in Audio: *ELOH*
- Excellence in Gameplay: *Bring You Home*
- Best Upcoming Game: *Agatha Knife*

There are also region-specific versions of the IMG Awards, covered in the region-specific section below.

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Awards such as the ones described in this section demonstrate the excellent performance of speculative fiction games in every conceivable category of video game achievement. Speculative fiction game work is recognized in a number of other sectors, such as animation and education.

- Annie Award for Outstanding Achievement for Character Animation in a Video Game<sup>71</sup>
  - God of War / Santa Monica Studio / Nominees: Erica Pinto, Mehdi Yssef, Bruno Velazquez
  - GRIS / Nomada Studio / Nominees: Adrian Miguel, Adrian Garcia, Adrian Miguel
  - Marvel's Spider-Man / Insomniac Games / Nominees: Bobby Coddington
  - Moss / Polyarc / Nominees: Richard Lico
  - Shadow of The Tomb Raider / Square Enix / Nominees: David Hubert, Jacob Gardner, Giovanni Spinelli, Marco Foglia, Jean-Philippe Chaurette

## Analog Game Awards

Speculative games also see solid turnout at analog game awards.

### ENnie Awards

The fan-based ENnie Awards (previously known as the Gen Con EN World RPG Awards) are a tabletop RPG award hosted at Gen Con. These awards recognize a variety of categories for roleplaying games and contributions to roleplaying games, and are almost exclusively centered on speculative fiction titles and creators. The award website [describes the award](#)<sup>72</sup> thus:

*The Gen Con RPG Awards (the “ENNies”) are an annual fan-based celebration of excellence in tabletop roleplaying gaming. The ENnies give game designers, writers and artists the recognition they deserve. It is a peoples’ choice award, and the final winners are voted upon online by the gaming public.*

*[...] As the awards have grown, the ENnies have expanded from an Internet-based awards selection to an annual award ceremony at Gen Con. The ENnies have also*

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<sup>71</sup> Further award history before its restructuring:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annie\\_Award\\_for\\_Best\\_Animated\\_Video\\_Game](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annie_Award_for_Best_Animated_Video_Game)

<sup>72</sup> [Archived copy](#)

*branched out from their roots as an award ceremony focused upon d20 system publishers and products to celebrate the achievements of all tabletop RPGs and the publishers and products that support them.*

*With award categories recognizing the components that make a game great to the types of products fans have come to love, categories for fan-based websites and much more, the ENnies are the best way for fans to acknowledge outstanding effort from and to say “thank you” to the creators, publishers, designers and artists who make this hobby great.*

The full 2018 list of categories and honorees is too long to reproduce here, but the [full list can be seen on the ENnie website](#)<sup>73</sup>, and I present a selected list of categories and gold/silver winners (and all Best Game honorees) here:

- **Best Game**
  - Gold Winner: *Mothership: Player’s Survival Guide* (Tuesday Knight Games) Author: Sean McCoy
  - Silver Winner: *Dialect: A Game about Language and How it Dies* (Thorny Games) Authors: Kathryn Hymes and Hakan Seyalioglu
  - *Companions’ Tale* (Sweet Potato Press) Author: Laura Simpson
  - *Dream Askew/Dream Apart* (Buried Without Ceremony Games) Authors: Avery Alder and Benjamin Rosenbaum
  - *Liminal* (Wordplay Games) Author: Paul Mitchener
- **Best Adventure**
  - Gold Winner: *Masks of Nyarlathotep* (Chaosium Inc.)
  - Silver Winner: *Mothership: Dead Planet* (Tuesday Knight Games)
- **Best Aid/Accessory – Digital**
  - Gold Winner: *World Anvil Grandmaster Tier Worldbuilding & Campaign Management Platform*
  - Silver Winner: *DUNGEONFOG—Online Map Maker & Authoring Tool*
- **Best Aid/Accessory – Non-Digital**
  - Gold Winner: *Masks of Nyarlathotep Gamer Prop Set* (H.P. Lovecraft Historical Society)
  - Silver Winner: *Dwarven Forge’s Dungeon of Doom Modular Terrain* (Dwarven Forge)
- **Best Art, Cover**
  - Gold Winner: *Call of Cthulhu – Terror Australis 2E* (Chaosium Inc.)
  - Silver Winner: *KULT: Divinity Lost, 4th Edition* (Helmcast AB)
- **Best Art, Interior**
  - Gold Winner: *RuneQuest: Roleplaying in Glorantha Slipcase* (Chaosium Inc.)
  - Silver Winner: *Symbaroum Monster Codex* (Free League Publishing)
- **Best Cartography**

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<sup>73</sup> [Archived copy](#)

- Gold Winner: *Forbidden Lands* (Free League Publishing)
- Silver Winner: *A New Map of Hot Springs Island* (Swordfish Islands)
- **Best Electronic Book**
  - Gold Winner: *Sly Flourish's Return of the Lazy Dungeon Master* (Last Word Audio)
  - Silver Winner: *Fear's Sharp Little Needles* (Stygian Fox Publishing)
- **Best Family Game / Product**
  - Gold Winner: *Kids on Bikes* (Renegade Game Studios/Hunters Entertainment)
  - Silver Winner: *Dinosaur Princesses* (Ardens Ludere)
- **Best Free Game / Product**
  - Gold Winner: *Ironsworn* (Shawn Tomkin)
  - Silver Winner: *The Ultraviolet Grasslands* (Hydra Cooperative)
- **Best Monster/Adversary**
  - Gold Winner: *Sandy Petersen's Cthulhu Mythos for 5E* (Petersen Games)
  - Silver Winner: *Creature Codex for 5th Edition* (Kobold Press)
- **Best Organized Play**
  - Gold Winner: *Cypher Play Numenera Season 18-2: Building Amber* (Monte Cook Games)
  - Silver Winner: *Minsc and Boo's Guide to Stuff and Things* (Greg Marks)
- **Best Production Values**
  - Gold Winner: *Forbidden Lands* (Free League Publishing)
  - Silver Winner: *Invisible Sun Black Box* (Monte Cook Games)
- **Best RPG Related Product**
  - Gold Winner: *Dark Adventure Radio Theatre: Masks of Nyarlathotep* (H.P. Lovecraft Historical Society)
  - Silver Winner: *Miskatonic University: Restricted Collection* (Chaosium Inc.)
- **Best Rules**
  - Gold Winner: *Call of Cthulhu Starter Set* (Chaosium Inc.)
  - Silver Winner: *Forbidden Lands* (Free League Publishing)
- **Best Setting**
  - Gold Winner: *The Fall of DELTA GREEN* (Pelgrane Press)
  - Silver Winner: *Call of Cthulhu – Terror Australis 2e* (Chaosium Inc.)
- **Best Supplement**
  - Gold Winner: *The Glorantha Sourcebook* (Chaosium Inc.)
  - Silver Winner: *The 7th Ed. Guide to Cthulhu Invictus* (Golden Goblin Press)
- **Best Writing**
  - Gold Winner: *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay Core Rulebook* (Cubicle Seven)
  - Silver Winner: *KULT: Divinity Lost, 4th Edition* (Helmcast AB)
- **Product of the Year**
  - Gold Winner: *Masks of Nyarlathotep Gamer Prop Set* (H.P. Lovecraft Historical Society)
  - Silver Winner: *Forbidden Lands* (Free League Publishing)

- **Best Game**
  - Gold Winner: *Zweihänder Grim & Perilous RPG*, Grim & Perilous Studios  
Author: Daniel D. Fox
  - Silver Winner: *Delta Green: The RPG*, Arc Dream Publishing Authors: Dennis Detwiler, Adam Scott Glancy, Christopher Gunning, Kenneth Hite, Shane Ivey, Greg Stolze
  - *Blades in the Dark*, Evil Hat Productions Author: John Harper
  - *Red Markets: A Game of Economic Horror*, Hebanon Games Authors: Caleb Stokes, Laura Briskin-Limehouse, Ross Payton
  - *Vurt: The Tabletop Roleplaying Game*, Ravendesk Games Authors: Alexander Lepera, Lee Pruitt
- **Best Adventure**
  - Gold Winner: *The Dark of Hot Springs Island*, Swordfish Islands Authors: Jacob Hurst, Evan Peterson, Donnie Garcia
  - Silver Winner: *Delta Green: A Night at the Opera*, Arc Dream Publishing  
Authors: Dennis Detwiler, Shane Ivey, Greg Stolze
- **Best Aid/Accessory**
  - Gold Winner: *Hex Kit*, Cone of Negative Energy
  - Silver Winner: *Conan GM Screen*, Modiphius Entertainment
- **Best Art, Cover**
  - Gold Winner: *Harlem Unbound*, Darker Hue Studios Artist: Brennen Reece
  - Silver Winner: *Critical Role: Tal'Dorei Campaign Setting*, Green Ronin Publishing  
Artist: Aaron Riley
- **Best Art, Interior**
  - Gold Winner: *City of Mist*, Son of Oak Game Studio Artist: Marcin Soboń, Mariusz Sculz, Ario Murti, Carlos Gomes Cabral, Monsters Pit
  - Silver Winner: *Starfinder Core Rulebook*, Paizo Inc. Artists: Alexandur Alexandrov, David Alvarez, Rogier van de Beek, Leonardo Borazio, Tomasz Chistowski, Taylor Fischer, David Franco Campos, Sebastien Hue, Guido Kuip, Robert Lazzaretti, Mikaël Léger, Víctor Manuel Leza Moreno, Setiawan Lie, Damien Mammoliti, David Melvin, Mark Molnar, Mirco Paganessi, Jose Parodi, Miroslav Petrov, Hugh Pindur, Roberto Pitturru, Pixoloid Studios (Aleksandr Dochkin, Nothof Ferenc, Gaspar Gombos, David Metzger, and Mark Molnar), Maichol Quinto, Pavel Rtishev, Connor Sheehan, Firat Solhan, Remko Troost, Leon Tukker, Ben Wootten, Joshua Wright
- **Best Cartography**
  - Gold Winner: *The Middelands – An OSR Setting & Bestiary*, MonkeyBlood Design & Publishing Cartographer: Glynn Seal
  - Silver Winner: *Starfinder Pact Worlds*, Paizo Inc. Cartographer: Damien Mammoliti

- **Best Electronic Book**
  - Gold Winner: *Delta Green: A Night at the Opera*, Arc Dream Publishing
  - Silver Winner: *Scenario from Ontario*, Dungeons and Donuts
- **Best Family Product**
  - Gold Winner: *Khan of Khans*, Chaosium Inc.
  - Silver Winner: *Heavy Metal Thunder Mouse*, Shoreless Skies Publishing
- **Best Free Game**
  - Gold Winner: *High Plains Samurai: Legends*, Broken Ruler Games
  - Silver Winner: *Saga of the Goblin Horde*, Zadmar Games
- **Best Free Product**
  - Gold Winner: *Runequest: Quickstart Rules and Adventure*, Chaosium Inc.
  - Silver Winner: *Tabletop Audio – Original Ambiences and Interactive Sounds*, Tabletop Audio
- **Best Miniature Product**
  - Gold Winner: *Star Trek Adventures Miniatures: The Next Generation*, Modiphius Entertainment
  - Silver Winner: *Double-Sided Dry-Erase Tiles*, Gaming Paper
- **Best Monster/Adversary**
  - Gold Winner: *Frostbitten and Mutilated*, Lamentations of the Flame Princess  
Author: Zak Smith
  - Silver Winner: *Down Darker Trails*, Chaosium Inc. Authors: Kevin Ross, Mike Mason, Scott David Aniolowski, David Cole, Todd Woods
- **Best Organized Play**
  - Gold Winner: *Lost Tales of Myth Drannor*, D&D Adventurers League, Greg Marks, Robert Adducci, Bill Benham, Travis Woodall, Claire Hoffman, Alan Patrick
  - Silver Winner: *End of the Line*, Michael Maenza
- **Best Production Values**
  - Gold Winner: *Delta Green: The RPG*, Arc Dream Publishing
  - Silver Winner: *Star Trek Adventures: Collectors Edition Core Rulebook*, Modiphius Entertainment
- **Best RPG Related Product**
  - Gold Winner: *Khan of Khans*, Chaosium Inc.
  - Silver Winner: *Dresden Files Cooperative Card Game*, Evil Hat Productions
- **Best Rules**
  - Gold Winner: *Delta Green: The RPG*, Arc Dream Publishing Authors: Dennis Detwiler, Adam Scott Glancy, Christopher Gunning, Kenneth Hite, Shane Ivey, Greg Stolze
  - Silver Winner: *Star Trek Adventures: Core Rulebook*, Modiphius Entertainment  
Authors: Dave Chapman, Jim Johnson, Patrick Goodman, Ross Isaacs, Bill Maxwell, Jonathan Breese, Nathan Dowdell, John Snead, Oz Mills, Aaron Pollyea, Rob Wieland, Ade Smith, Anthony Jennings, Dan Taylor, Dayton Ward,

Michael Brophy, Giles Pritchard, Maggie Carroll, Steven Creech, Shawn Merwin, Sam Webb, Jacob Ross

- **Best Setting**
  - Gold Winner: *Harlem Unbound*, Darker Hue Studios Authors: Chris Spivey, Ruth Tillman, Bob Geis, Sarah Hood, Neall Raemonn Price
  - Silver Winner: *Frostbitten and Mutilated*, Lamentations of the Flame Princess Author: Zak Smith
- **Best Supplement**
  - Gold Winner: *Reign of Terror*, Chaosium Inc. Authors: Mark Morrison, Penelope Love, James Coquillat, Darren Watson
  - Silver Winner: *Shadowrun Dark Terrors*, Catalyst Game Labs Authors: Brooke Chang, Kevin Czarnecki, Jason M. Hardy, Alexander Kadar, Adam Large, O.C. Presley, Scott Schletz, Dylan Stengel, R.J. Thomas, Amy Veeres
- **Best Writing**
  - Gold Winner: *Harlem Unbound*, Darker Hue Studios Author: Chris Spivey, Ruth Tillman, Bob Geis, Sarah Hood, Neall Raemonn Price
  - Silver Winner: *Frostbitten and Mutilated*, Lamentations of the Flame Princess Author: Zak Smith
- **Product of the Year**
  - Gold Winner: *Zweihänder Grim & Perilous RPG*, Grim & Perilous Studios
  - Silver Winner: *Delta Green: The RPG*, Arc Dream Publishing

This award lineup demonstrates the wide range of qualities aside from the writing that go into making a game award-worthy, and also demonstrates a loose consensus around "the best" games of the year with winners across multiple categories, such as *Delta Green: The RPG* and *Harlem Unbound*.

## Golden Geek Awards<sup>74</sup>

The Golden Geek Awards are a popular award administered by BoardGameGeek.com, and speculative fiction titles have historically won about half the honours in any given year.

- **2018**
  - Best 2-Player Board Game  
*KeyForge: Call of the Archons*
  - Best Board Game Artwork & Presentation  
*Root*
  - Best Board Game Expansion  
*Scythe: The Rise of Fenris*
- **2017**
  - Best Board Game Expansion

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<sup>74</sup> [Source](#)

- Scythe: The Wind Gambit*
  - Best Party Game  
*Werewords*
  - Best Print & Play Board Game  
*My Little Scythe*
  - Best Solo Board Game  
*Gloomhaven*
  - Best Strategy Board Game  
*Gloomhaven*
- **2016**
  - Best 2-Player Board Game  
*Star Wars: Rebellion*
  - Best Board Game Artwork & Presentation  
*Scythe*
  - Best Board Game Expansion  
*7 Wonders Duel: Pantheon*
  - Best Card Game  
*Arkham Horror: The Card Game*
  - Best Print & Play Board Game  
*Star Trek: The Dice Game*
  - Best Solo Board Game  
*Scythe*
  - Best Strategy Board Game  
*Scythe*
- **2015**
  - Board Game Artwork/Presentation  
*Mysterium*
  - Best Innovative Board Game  
*Pandemic Legacy: Season 1*
  - Best Print & Play Board Game  
*Dune: The Dice Game*
  - Best Solo Board Game  
*Tiny Epic Galaxies*
- **2014**
  - Best 2-Player Board Game  
*Star Realms*
  - Best Board Game Artwork & Presentation  
*Abyss*
- **2013**
  - Best 2-Player Board Game  
*Star Wars: X-Wing Miniatures Game*
  - Best Abstract Board Game  
*Tash-Kalar: Arena of Legends*

- Best Board Game Artwork/Presentation  
*Mice and Mystics*
- Best Board Game Expansion  
*Lords of Waterdeep: Scoundrels of Skullport*
- Best Children's Board Game  
*Forbidden Desert*
- Best Print & Play Board Game  
*Tiny Epic Kingdoms* (one of two honorees)
- Best Strategy Board Game  
*Terra Mystica*
- **2012**
  - Best Board Game Expansion  
*Alien Frontiers: Factions*
  - Best Card Game  
*Android: Netrunner*
  - Best Family Board Game  
*King of Tokyo*
  - Best Innovative Board Game  
*Risk Legacy*
  - Best Party Game  
*King of Tokyo*
  - Best Thematic Board Game  
*Mage Knight Board Game*
- **2011**
  - Best Board Game Expansion  
*Twilight Imperium (Third Edition): Shards of the Throne*
  - Best Party Board Game  
*Dixit: Odyssey*
  - Best Print & Play Board Game  
*The Thing*
- **2010**
  - Best Board Game Artwork/Presentation  
*War of the Ring Collector's Edition*
  - Best Children's Board Game  
*Forbidden Island*
  - Best Innovative Board Game  
*Catacombs*
  - Best Print & Play Board Game  
*Zombie in my Pocket*

## Other Analog Awards

The As d'Or (Golden Ace) award is a juried board game award given at the International Cannes Games Festival since 1989. Recent speculative winners include:

- **As d'Or Jeu de l'Année** (Grand Public)
  - 2016: *Mysterium* / Oleg Sidorenko & Oleksandr Nevskiy / Libellud
  - 2013: *Legends of Andor* / Michael Menzel / Kosmos / Iello
  - 2009: *Dixit* / Jean-Louis Roubira / Libellud
- **As d'Or Grand Prix** (Expert)
  - 2018: *Terraforming Mars* / Jacob Fryxelius / FryxGames
  - 2017: *Scythe* / Jamey Stegmaier / Stonemaier Games
  - 2016: *Pandemic Legacy* Matt / Leacock & Rob Daviau / Z-Man Games / Filosofia
  - 2015: *Five Tribes: The Djinn of Naqala* / Bruno Cathala / Days of Wonder
  - 2012: *Olympos* / Philippe Keyaerts / Ystari Games
  - 2010: *Small World* / Philippe Keyaerts / Days of Wonder

American Mensa has awarded the Mensa Select award every year since 1990 to five games that are "original, challenging and well designed." Recent speculative honorees include<sup>75</sup>:

- Ex Libris (2018)
- Glastonbury (2017)
- Clank! (2017)
- Harry Potter: Hogwarts Battle (2017)
- Dragonwood (2015)
- Euphoria: Build a Better Dystopia (2014)
- Gravwell: Escape from the 9th Dimension (2014)
- Forbidden Desert (2013)
- Ghooost! (2013)
- Forbidden Island (2010)

## Interactive Fiction Awards

The XYZZY Awards are an award for interactive fiction administered by XYZZYnews. These awards acknowledge a variety of accomplishments in interactive fiction. The 2018 results are not yet available, but speculative fiction makes a good showing in the available recent years (listing any speculative fiction winners and all speculative fiction finalists for Best Game):

- **2017**

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<sup>75</sup> By award year.

- **Best Game**
  - Winner: *The Wizard Sniffer*, Buster Hudson
  - *Eat Me* (Chandler Groover)
  - *Known Unknowns* (Brendan Patrick Hennessy)
  - *The Owl Consults* (Thomas Mack)
- **Best Writing**: *Eat Me*, Chandler Groover
- **Best Story**: *The Wizard Sniffer*, Buster Hudson
- **Best Puzzles**: *The Wand*, Arthur DiBianca
- **Best NPCs**: *The Wizard Sniffer*, Buster Hudson
- **Best Individual Puzzle**: getting past the dragon in *The Wizard Sniffer*, Buster Hudson
- **Best Individual NPC**: Squire Tuck in *The Wizard Sniffer*, Buster Hudson
- **Best Implementation**: *Eat Me*, Chandler Groover
- **Best Use of Innovation**: *Harmonia*, Liza Daly
- **Best Use of Multimedia**: *Harmonia*, Liza Daly
- **2016**
  - **Best Game**
    - Winner: *Superluminal Vagrant Twin* by C.E.J. Pacian
    - *Cactus Blue Motel* by Astrid Dalmady
    - *Foo Foo* by Buster Hudson
    - *Open Sorcery* by Abigail Corfman
  - **Best Story**: *Foo Foo* by Buster Hudson
  - **Best Setting**: *Cactus Blue Motel* by Astrid Dalmady
  - **Best Puzzles**: 16 Ways to Kill a Vampire at McDonalds by Abigail Corfman
  - **Best NPCs**: *Cactus Blue Motel* by Astrid Dalmady
  - **Best Individual Puzzle**: Customizing the robot in *The Mary Jane of Tomorrow* by Emily Short
  - **Best Individual NPC**: The robot (variously-named) in *The Mary Jane of Tomorrow* by Emily Short
  - **Best Individual PC**: BEL/S in *Open Sorcery* by Abigail Corfma
  - **Best Implementation**: *Superluminal Vagrant Twin* by C.E.J. Pacian
  - **Best Use of Innovation**: *The Ice-Bound Concordance* by Aaron A. Reed and Jacob Garbe
  - **Best Use of Multimedia**: *The Ice-Bound Concordance* by Aaron A. Reed and Jacob Garbe
- **2015**
  - **Best Game**
    - Winner: *Birdland* by Brendan Patrick Hennessy
    - *Brain Guzzlers from Beyond!* by Steph Cherrywell
    - *Midnight. Swordfight.* by Chandler Groover
    - *SPY INTRIGUE* by furkle
  - **Best Writing**: *Birdland* by Brendan Patrick Hennessy
  - **Best Story**: *Birdland* by Brendan Patrick Hennessy

- **Best Setting:** Sunless Sea by Failbetter Games
- **Best Puzzles:** Sub Rosa by Joey Jones and Melvin Rangasamy
- **Best NPCs:** Birdland by Brendan Patrick Hennessy
- **Best Individual Puzzle:** Understanding how the RPS cannon works in Brain Guzzlers from Beyond! by Steph Cherrywell
- **Best Individual NPC:** Bell Park in Birdland by Brendan Patrick Hennessy
- **Best Individual PC:** Bridget in Birdland by Brendan Patrick Hennessy
- **Best Implementation:** Midnight. Swordfight. by Chandler Groover
- **Best Use of Innovation:** Laid Off from the Synesthesia Factory by Katherine Morayati
- **2014**
  - **Best Game:**
    - Winner: 80 Days by inkle and Meg Jayanth
    - Choice of Robots by Kevin Gold
    - Hadean Lands by Andrew Plotkin
    - Hunger Daemon by Sean M. Shore
    - With Those We Love Alive by Porpentine and Brenda Neotenomie
  - **Best Writing:** With Those We Love Alive by Porpentine and Brenda Neotenomie
  - **Best Story:** 80 Days by inkle and Meg Jayanth
  - **Best Setting:** Hadean Lands by Andrew Plotkin
  - **Best Puzzles:** Hadean Lands by Andrew Plotkin
  - **Best NPCs:** Creatures Such As We by Lynnea Glasser
  - **Best Individual Puzzle:** The sequence of time-travel in Fifteen Minutes by Ade McT
  - **Best Individual NPC:** The Empress in With Those We Love Alive by Porpentine and Brenda Neotenomie
  - **Best Individual PC:** The PC in the uncle who works for nintendo by michael lutz
  - **Best Implementation:** Hadean Lands by Andrew Plotkin
  - **Best Use of Innovation:** Hadean Lands by Andrew Plotkin
  - **Best Use of Multimedia:** 80 Days by inkle and Meg Jayanth

The clustering of honours for titles like *Haedean Lands* and *Birdland* demonstrates a broad consensus on high quality games, and titles like *80 Days* and *Anchorhead* (multiple winner for its original 1998 version, with a recent rerelease) have also garnered wider acclaim in speculative fiction and gaming fan circles.

The Interactive Fiction Competition is a little different in that it is an actual (juried) competition rather than a traditional juried or popular award. However, speculative titles continue to do well:

- **2017:** The Wizard Sniffer by Buster Hudson
- **2015:** Brain Guzzlers from Beyond! by Steph Cherrywell
- **2014:** Hunger Daemon by Sean M. Shore
- **2013:** Coloratura by Lynnea Glasser

- **2012:** *Andromeda Apocalypse* by Marco Innocenti
- **2010:** *Aotearoa* by Matt Wigdahl

## Region-Specific Game Awards

Germany has a particularly robust game development and awards scene outside of North America and Japan.

The Deutscher Computerspielpreis award has been awarded since 2009. Speculative fiction winners of Best German Game include:

- *Portal Knights* (2017 Winner)
- *Anno 2205* (2016 Winner)
- *Lords of the Fallen* (2015 Winner)
- *The Inner World* (2014 Winner)
- *Chaos on Deponia* (2013 Winner)
- *Crysis 2* (2012 Winner)
- *A New Beginning* (2011 Winner)
- *Drakensang: The Dark Eye* (2009 Winner)

A number of these games, such as *Portal Knights* and *Crysis 2*, have won international acclaim and recognition.

The Spiel des Jahres (Game of the Year) award is a German award recognizing excellence in game design in board and card games coming out of Germany, and has been running since 1978. This award focuses on family-style and children's games, with a more recent "Connoisseur-Enthusiast Game of the Year" award formalized in 2011. Recent speculative fiction honorees across all categories include:<sup>76</sup>

- *Funkelschatz* (2018 Winner)
- *Emojito* (2018 Nominee)
- *Shaky Manor* (2018 Nominee)
- *Kingdomino* (2017 Winner)
- *Magic Maze* (2017 Nominee)
- *Terraforming Mars* (2017 Nominee)
- *The Mysterious Forest* (2017 Nominee)
- *T.I.M.E Stories* (2016 Nominee)
- *Leo* (2016 Nominee)
- *Broom Service* (2015 Winner)

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<sup>76</sup> English-market titles used where available

- *Elysium* (2015 Nominee)
- *Push a Monster* (2015 Nominee)
- *Ghost Fightin' Treasure Hunters* (2014 Nominee)
- *Brandon the Brave* (2013 Nominee)
- *Legends of Andor* (2013 Winner)
- *Mucca Pazza* (2013 Nominee)
- *Schnappt Hubi!* (2012 Winner)
- *Spinnengift und Krötenschleim* (2012 Nominee)
- *Die kleinen Drachenritter* (2012 Nominee)
- *Asara* (2011 Nominee)
- *Forbidden Island* (2011 Nominee)
- *Dixit* (2010 Winner)

The prestige and popularity of this award speaks to the active Eurogames scene, represented in panel form at Worldcon 75 in Helsinki. A number of these games, such as *Terraforming Mars* and *Dixit*, have gained international acclaim and prestige, and *Dixit* continues to get additions and expansions to this day, demonstrating the viability of even a relatively niche game genre (family-style board and card games) in an international award market.

The International Mobile Game Awards also have region-specific versions for Southeast Asia (SEA), Middle East North Africa (MENA), and China. These regional awards are newer, but still demonstrate the dominance of speculative fiction titles across all markets.

In the 2018 IMGA SEA awards, speculative fiction titles won in every category:

- People's Choice Award  
*Dragon Project*
- Jury's Honorable Mention  
*Tales of Abbie*
- Excellence in Innovation  
*Qinoto*
- Excellence in Visual Art and Design  
*Behind the Screen*
- Best Multiplayer Game  
*Billion Lords*
- Best Quickplay Game  
*Holy Ship*
- Excellence in Gameplay  
*Hamsterdam*
- Excellence in Storytelling  
*Opus: Rocket of Whispers*
- Excellence in Audio  
*Valz*

- Best Technical Achievement  
*Hamsterdam*
- Best Upcoming Game  
*Gospel of Satan*

Speculative titles also won in almost every category in 2017 and 2016, which is as far back as the award goes.

The IMGA MENA awards are also in their third year, and while this award has had fewer nominees and categories overall, it is for the region that produced *Flipping Filip*, which won several honours in the general IMGA awards. Taken together with the China awards, the IMGA award demonstrates that quality speculative fiction work comes from a variety of regions.

Other region-specific game awards include the [Swedish Game Awards](#), [The Slovak Game of the Year Award](#),

## Appendix C: Game and Panel Data

Appendix C is in the form of a spreadsheet and is thus a separate document. It can be accessed here: [Hugo for Best Game of Interactive Experience: Appendix C](#). Please note that, in the games data sections, this spreadsheet includes an "AVG" column, which is computed as an average of scores from the various sites and databases used. This is a purely subjective measure without any real meaning, simply a tool for me to be able to easily sort through this data.

## Appendix D: Further Games Longlists/Shortlists

In accordance with the data gathered for [Appendix B](#) and [Appendix C](#), as well as my own research within the gaming community, I can present a number of potential games longlists/shortlists going back several decades. These are merely intended to show that sufficient numbers of games for valid Hugo ballots have been released every year for a long time, and that this is an ongoing and growing trend with games and interactive experiences. As before, these lists include video games, analog games, interactive fiction, and other types of interactive experiences.

- **2012**

- *Assassin's Creed III*
- *Borderlands 2*
- *Bravely Default*
- *Dear Esther*
- *Diablo III*
- *Dishonored*
- *Guild Wars 2*
- *Journey*
- *Lego Batman 2: DC Super Heroes*
- *Mark of the Ninja*
- *The Room*
- *The Unfinished Swan*
- *The Walking Dead*
- *XCOM: Enemy Unknown*
- *Xenoblade Chronicles*

- **2011**

- *Assassin's Creed: Revelations*
- *Bastion*
- *Batman: Arkham City*
- *Child of Eden*
- *Dark Souls*
- *Dead Space 2*
- *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*
- *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*
- *Insanely Twisted Shadow Planet*
- *The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword*
- *LittleBigPlanet 2*
- *Minecraft*
- *Portal 2*
- *Rayman: Origins*

- *Saints Row: The Third*
- *Sentinels of the Multiverse*
- *Sleep No More*
- *Super Mario 3D Land*
- **2010**
  - *Alan Wake*
  - *Amnesia: The Dark Descent*
  - *Angry Birds*
  - *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood*
  - *Civilization V*
  - *Dragon Quest IX*
  - *Fallout: New Vegas*
  - *God of War III*
  - *Kirby's Epic Yarn*
  - *Limbo*
  - *Mass Effect 2*
  - *Nine Hours, Nine Persons, Nine Doors*
  - *StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty*
  - *Super Mario Galaxy 2*
  - *Super Meat Boy*
- **2009**
  - *Assassin's Creed 2*
  - *Batman: Arkham Asylum*
  - *Bayonetta*
  - *Borderlands*
  - *Braid*
  - *Dragon Age: Origins*
  - *flower*
  - *Left 4 Dead 2*
  - *LittleBigPlanet*
  - *Plants vs. Zombies*
  - *Scribblenauts*
- **2008**
  - *Dead Space*
  - *Dixit*
  - *Dungeons & Dragons (4th edition)*
  - *Fable II*
  - *Fallout 3*
  - *Left 4 Dead*
  - *Prince of Persia*
  - *Mirror's Edge*
  - *Persona 4*
  - *Spore*

- **2007**
  - *Assassin's Creed*
  - *BioShock*
  - *Crackdown*
  - *Crysis*
  - *Final Fantasy Tactics: The War of the Lions*
  - *God of War II*
  - *The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass*
  - *Mass Effect*
  - *Odin Sphere*
  - *Ōkami*
  - *Persona 3*
  - *Portal*
  - *Super Mario Galaxy*
- **2006**
  - *Dungeons and Dragons Online: Stormreach*
  - *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*
  - *Final Fantasy XII*
  - *Kingdom Hearts II*
  - *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess*
  - *Lego Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy*
  - *Tales of the Abyss*
  - *Tomb Raider: Legend*
- **2005<sup>77</sup>**
  - *Civilization IV*
  - *Dungeons and Dragons Online* (\*)
  - *EVE Online* (\*)
  - *God of War*
  - *Indigo Prophecy/Fahrenheit* (\*)
  - *LEGO Star Wars* (\*)
  - *Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney*
  - *Psychonauts*
  - *Resident Evil 4* (\*)
  - *Shadow of the Colossus* (\*)
- **2004**
  - *Fable*
  - *Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles*
  - *Half-Life 2* (\*)
  - *Halo 2*

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<sup>77</sup> This year had an actual trial games category for the Hugos (meaning the 2006 Hugos), and thus I am providing a longer list here. Items with a (\*) indicate titles actually nominated in that year, though there was not enough participation to keep the category. *World of Warcraft*, *We ♥ Katamari*, and *Half-Life 2* also got nominations, but are listed in 2004.

- *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater*