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### Ridiculous Fishing

The iOS game *Ridiculous Fishing* simulates a conglomeration of fictional representations of fishing which tells a generic story, but through immersive gameplay mechanics the story becomes an emotional experience that uses only our culture as a basis.

Janet Murray describes the "cyberdrama," or the use of story in the fictional game world (Murray 4). The cyberdrama suggests that player action can make the story more meaningful. Ken Perlin, however, believes the problem with such games lies in the lack of real interactivity (Perlin 16). Games are not programmed with a wide array of responses for NPCs and environments such that a player could realistically simulate action. Perlin notes that this prevents games from being a "psychological narrative" (17). Espen Aarseth notes that simulation in games allows players to achieve great understanding of how the parts of the story work together by working with them by hand (Aarseth 52).

*Ridiculous Fishing* puts the player in control of a fisherman named Billy. The player is not given the opportunity to choose a name, so she understands an expectation of roleplaying to a certain extent. This does not prevent the player from feeling immersion in the game. Due to the various frictions acting within the game the player can feel the great weight of the lure as it rips all the fish out of the water as they hang, weightless for a moment. The player tenses her muscles as each gunshot fires, clearing the skies of fish and netting big money for Billy.

The name Billy, a guidebook of fish called the Fishopedia, and a "social network" feed of updates called "Bydr" where Billy or @RodAndGunMan converses with the birds accompanying

him on the lonesome sea is all the information the player is given to construct a narrative. Not enough for a novel, but in a game a player can act. Act in both the sense of performing actions as well as the dramatic, roleplaying sense. *Ridiculous Fishing* relies on the player's ability to assume the role of a fisherman using clues from the game as well as information from fictional accounts of fishing in our culture.

Why is the fisherman out at sea? Presumably for money, but through fictional representations of fishermen in media the player suspects there is more than just financial gain on the open waters for the fisherman. Something drives Billy to reach further into the ocean depths on each journey. This idea is compounded by the inclusion of the Fishopedia which depicts shadowy unknown fish, never before caught. The Fishopedia simulates the depictions in media of fishermen sitting in an old coastal bar, telling stories about amazing encounters with great fish on the stormy seas. Like Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, the lure of adventure and the chance to face one's demons drives the player to spend all of her money for a longer fishing reel on Billy's behalf.

All alone on the briny plain, Billy communicates through "Byrdr," a mock social network which connects to the various birds nearby. When the fisherman begins to talk to the creatures of the ocean and imagines them talking back, is it sea madness? Or is Billy projecting his self doubt onto the birds, hoping to find the will to carry on? The player ponders these questions that are common to fishing stories like Melville's *Moby Dick*; questioning the righteousness of the quest and the sanity of its captain.

Geared up and desperate for answers, the player plunges deep into the arctic floes. After many agonizing failures, the player finds herself at the bottom. The prize is a block of ice, which appears to encase a man's body. The Ice Man looks to be a fisherman too. The player knows this is what she and Billy have been searching for. The harrowing trip back up to the surface is fraught with danger. Infinite Jellyfish and Carrier Fish could jeopardize the capture of the Ice Man. Fish which usually

provide the Fisherman's living are now distractions from the biggest catch of all. When the line reaches the surface and the Ice Man is thrust into the air; the shot of Billy's gun explodes the ice block and the man inside into nothingness. "Look to the Sky," the game reads and the credits roll. Once the credits are completed, there is a notification of a new message on Byrdr from a new user named @OG\_RodAndGun "William" with the status, "@RodAndGunMan Hey son. I believe in ya. Release yourself from yer grief. I live on in the sky seas."



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The player's eyes well up with tears as she softly clicks the "Retweet" button on Byrdr. She knows that she has participated in something spectacular. A simulation of fiction brought to life by tense gameplay mechanics and mere suggestions of plot, hinting at a greater story. It is a simulation, which allows the player to work with all aspects of the game to achieve greater understanding; but it is not a simulation of something real. It is a simulation of a fictionalized representation of fishing. The art of roleplay using story cues in *Ridiculous Fishing* results in a richer narrative because it is only created with the player's cooperation.

## Works Cited

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