Towards Reactive Failure-Recovery Gameplaying:
The Fall and Rise of the Grail Hero

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ABSTRACT

We propose to examine here a heroic narrative pattern, in which the protagonist begins as a simpleton, learns about the world and about himself along successive stages, *falls down* nevertheless in a crucial instant, but is then led to *rise again* and move towards a high position that nobody else was worthy to attain. A major feature of the pattern is that the hero's recovery is attributed to later preparation in aspects until then overlooked. The pattern is inspired on a 12th century romance of chivalry entitled *Le Conte du Graal (Perceval)*, by the French poet Chrétien de Troyes, which originated the grail literary tradition. We shall also consider a few variants to the basic pattern, all taken from medieval stories concerning the grail. The paper examines in detail the main components of the pattern, presents it as a network structure, and analyses its relations with recent games that have storylines that come close to match the pattern. The proposed pattern is of much interest towards the interactive composition of stories with an encouraging outcome, as well as an authoring asset for the construction of successful game narratives.

Keywords: narrative pattern, medieval literature, grail, computational narratology.

1 INTRODUCTION

The order of the calendar throughout the Latin year, its causes, and the starry signs that set beneath the earth and rise again, of these I'll sing ... Here shalt thou read afresh of holy rites unearthed from annals old, and learn how every day has earned its own peculiar mark.

Ovid, *Fasti*

Flegetanis the heathen knew well how to impart to us each star's departure and return – how long each revolves before it stands back at each station. By the stars' circuit's journey all human nature is determined.

Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*

The role of storytelling in games has long been the subject of lively debates [41]. Although some authors believe that story and games are in direct opposition [7], most agree that successful narrative in games is possible, and a few argue for the importance of story creation as part of gameplay [40]. However, a different sort of narrative is required: it must be nonlinear and play-centric, that is, it must revolve around the player's experience [29]. The player is no longer a mere consumer of the narrative, but both a consumer and a (co-) producer of the plot. The game designer

typically selects a genre. In game-playing, interactive storytelling emerges, but care must be taken to ensure that the basic rules of the genre, as well as the corresponding tropes and narrative structures, are understood by the coauthors of the story [40].

Accordingly, this paper, as part of a research project mainly focused on the topic of Computational Narratology [6], starts with a literary study in an attempt to establish a useful orientation for what may be termed *reactive failure-recovery gameplaying*.

With this aim in mind, we propose to examine a heroic narrative pattern, in which the protagonist begins as a simpleton, learns about himself along successive stages, *falls down* nevertheless in a crucial instant, but is then led to *rise again* and move towards a high position that nobody else could attain. The pattern is inspired on a 12th century romance of chivalry entitled *Le Conte du Graal (Perceval)*, by the French poet Chrétien de Troyes [17], whereby the Grail literary tradition was inaugurated. We shall also consider a few variants to the basic pattern, all taken from texts of the 12th and 13th centuries (cf. [25]), arguably the most creative period of Arthurian literature; to compose his widely popular *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Thomas Malory drew extensively from some of these books [18].

Fairly generic hero patterns have been proposed, since a long time, by scholarly researchers such as Joseph Campbell [4] and Lord Raglan [32]. A distinguishing feature of the more specific pattern described in this paper is its stress on the hero's recovery after acquiring the knowledge whose lack was the cause of the initial failure.

As illustrated in the two passages in epigraph, ancient and medieval writers were wont to associate human destiny with the movement of the 'starry signs'. As far as these constitute a cyclic phenomenon, it should not matter whether one talks of *rise and fall* or of *fall and rise*. Both sequences lend themselves to significant metaphors. The former suggests the fatal birth-death succession that plagues mankind and portends the decline of once victorious powers [11][35]. But the other sequence – which is the one that figures in the above passages, and determines the title of this paper – is even more inspiring, denoting death-resurrection, sin-forgiveness, appropriate in a 'Bildungsroman'' (novel of formation) and compatible with the withdrawal-and-return thesis of Arnold Toynbee, the reputed philosopher of history [39].

In Chrétien's poem, the mother of Perceval keeps him confined in a rural habitat and forbids her servants to ever mention the word 'knight' in his presence, because her husband and all their other sons had perished in consequence of combats. But one day he meets a group in splendid armour, believes that they are angels but then learns that they call themselves 'knights', and immediately leaves his mother (who dies when he departs) in order to seek King Arthur to whom the naïf boy bluntly demands [17]: "Make me a knight, sir king, for I wish to be on my way".

Perceval kills his first adversary whose red armour he clumsily puts on, learns about the skills and ethics of chivalry from a

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worthy gentleman, and then, having been properly dubbed a knight, proceeds to successfully succour a lovely damsel. But then comes the crucial ordeal, for which he was not ready, despite all that he had learned so far. He watches a ritual scene in the castle of the rich Fisher King, in the course of which a *grail* and a *bleeding spear* are brought to a secluded room, and fails to ask why the spear bled and who was served from the grail – questions that simply by being asked would have allowed the maimed sovereign to regain the use of his limbs and reassume the rule of his lands. At King Arthur's court, where he has become a knight of the Round Table, he is summoned by an ugly, disfigured damsel to seek the grail. After years of fruitless '*errance*' (wandering), Perceval meets a pious hermit and learns yet another lesson, this time a spiritual guidance. Supposedly he has now reached the stage whereat, fully conscious of the shortcomings that had caused his fall, he should be able to rise up and achieve his high mission. However, we shall never be sure about how Chrétien intended to treat this possible second attempt, since he died, interrupting the romance almost in mid-sentence.

Four so-called *Perceval Continuations* [3] were appended to Chrétien's text, purporting to extend the narrative to a final state in which the meaning (in Old French, 'senefiance') of the ritual scene is clarified, and the hero's efforts are rewarded with a happy outcome. A separate trilogy attributed to Robert de Boron [33], whose third part is traditionally called the *Didot Perceval*, had a decisive influence on the *Perceval Continuations*, as well as on several other variants, especially the *Quest of the Holy Grail* [26], which constitutes the fourth part of the *Vulgate cycle* [19], associating the grail and the spear with relics of Christ's passion. A significantly different *Quest of the Holy Grail*, pertaining to the *Post-Vulgate cycle*, was translated in Portugal under the title *Demanda do Santo Graal*; this beautiful text survives in one manuscript of the 15th century kept in the Austrian National Library, in Vienna, which was edited in Brazil by the Jesuit priest Augusto Magne and adapted and published by Heitor Megale from the Universidade de São Paulo [27]. A medieval Portuguese translation of another part of the *Post-Vulgate cycle*, the *Livro de José de Arimatéia*, was the object of a doctoral thesis, supervised by Professor Megale [38].

An entirely different reading was proposed in the *Parzival* of the German poet Wolfram von Eschenbach [43], loosely adapted much later (in 1882) by Richard Wagner's opera *Parsifal*.[1] The name 'Parzival' is just an altered spelling of 'Perceval', the same applying to the protagonists of the anonymous prose romance *Perlesvaus* [2] and of the Welsh *Peredur*, which is part of the also anonymous *Mabinogion* collection [15]. On the contrary, the two remaining variants to be considered in this paper feature radically different heroes, namely Galaad (spelled 'Galahad' in English translations), the protagonist of the French *Quest of the Holy Grail*, and Gawein (in English 'Gawain') in the German *The Crown* of Heinrich von dem Türlin [12].

The pattern is not restricted to medieval texts. By *generalizing* its episodes, the pattern can be *specialized* to match similarly structured stories of other genres and media forms, such as video games. Looking at game industry, we can observe a growing interest on new ways of creating and telling stories [36], which is supported by the recent success of games with complex storylines, such as *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (CD Projekt RED, 2015), *Heavy Rain* (Quantic Dream, 2010), and *Dragon Age: Inquisition* (BioWare, 2014). The pattern examined here may provide directions to expand the boundaries of traditional game narratives towards new forms of interactive storytelling with emphasis on

falling and rising again. In addition, the existence of many modern game narratives that come close to match the pattern, suggests its applicability as an authoring asset for the construction of successful game narratives.

The paper examines in some detail the components of the pattern, describing the variants encountered in influential medieval texts and modern game narratives. Sections 2 and 3 deal, respectively, with the hero and with the character enigmatically called the Fisher King. Section 4 tries to visualize the many facets of the grail, and section 5 discusses what may signify the quest for this holy object. Section 6 takes a global view of the entire pattern, presenting it as a network structure, whose forking paths correspond to alternatives offered by the variant retellings of Chrétien's original story. Section 7 discusses the relation of the proposed pattern with game narratives and reviews some storylines that come close to match the pattern. Section 8 offers concluding remarks.

2 THE HERO'S PROGRESS

The grail hero must not only descend from a noble family, but also be a relative (e.g. cousin or nephew) of the grail king. His nobility is further enhanced, by being admitted to King Arthur's Round Table. Furthermore, he invariably ends up being proclaimed as the worthiest knight in the entire world, able to win all others in combat.

Most grail heroes, modelled after Perceval, start as simpletons (in the sense of someone foolish, naïf, who does not have good sense or judgment), and helpless paternal orphans raised in isolation by their mother. As a consequence, they must develop through successive stages, as already anticipated in the Introduction:

(1) He learns that enemies existed who would not treat him kindly like his mother, who had accustomed him to identify himself simply as "fair son". He kills his first adversary, the Red Knight, and after donning his armour he now *is* the Red Knight.

(2) But he is not yet a true knight. From a worthy gentleman, he learns about chivalry, about the courteous way to address other people, how to ride and bear arms in combat and to grant mercy to a surrendering opponent. The gentleman then proceeds to effectively make him a knight.

(3) Meeting Blancheflor, a damsel in distress, he frees her dominion from the troop that was besieging her castle, and they fall in love with each other. Later he will dream about her feminine charms while contemplating a few drops of blood, shed by a wounded bird on a field covered with snow.

(4) He takes leave of Blancheflor, and departs to see his mother. Coming close to a river, he finds a man fishing, who offers him lodging in his castle, which happens to be the grail castle. Sitting down beside his maimed host, he receives a sword as a gift, and watches a bleeding spear and a grail being carried into a secluded chamber. He then fails to ask about the meaning of this procession.

(5) At King Arthur's court, he is admitted as a member of the Round Table.

(6) Summoned by the "ugly damsel", he seeks the grail in vain for many years.

(7) From a hermit, his uncle, he receives the religious guidance that he still lacked, after removing his armour and confessing his sins.

These stages can be understood as describing the hero's preparation (or *initiation* [4]) to be extended and adapted towards a more comprehensive pattern in section 6.

The hermit introduces himself as both a brother of Perceval's mother and of the man who was served from the grail. Therefore, being a cousin of the Fisher King, Perceval should be a likely candidate to succeed his invalid relative as guardian of the grail.

The hero of the *Quest of the Holy Grail*, Galahad, has similar family ties, but differs from Perceval in a vital aspect: being predestined, the chosen one to accomplish the quest, he does not have to go through these stages. Above all he fulfils since the beginning the chastity requirements of celestial chivalry (as opposed to the worldly chivalry of Lancelot and Gawain), preached to those who would fight in the Crusades, by pope Urban II and by St Bernard of Clairvaux [34].

Yet, the circumstances of his birth would seem incompatible with the notion of chastity: Lancelot, his father, was misled to lie with King Pelles's daughter, assuming by the effect of a potion that she was his beloved Guinevere. Maybe an event in the Bible was taken as a justifying precedent. Like Lancelot, Jacob was deceived by Laban to lie with Leah in his bed, believing she was Rachel. Later, as a consequence of frictions between Jacob and Laban, the former escaped with his already numerous family and was pursued by the latter, with his armed men. But when they met at the mount of Gilead, Laban decided not to fight against his son in law. They piled up stones around a large cornerstone, intending to raise a monument to celebrate their peace – and both the mount and the monument were called 'Galaad' in St. Jerome's Vulgata[2]: "Dixitque Laban: Tumulus iste erit testis inter me et te hodie, et idcirco appellatum est nomen ejus Galaad, id est, Tumulus testis [And Laban said: This heap is a witness between me and thee this day. Therefore was the name of it called Galaad, that is heap of witness]".

As will be stressed in section 5, besides the main grail hero there might be other knights who, to a limited extent, would have some success in the quest for the holy objects. In the *Quest of the Holy Grail*, Lancelot is shown at first as invincible, the best among the best, but loses this position to Galahad, his son. Gawain is said to be a great knight, a model of courtly love, but also a sinner, responsible for the death of several knights of the Round Table participating in the quest. This degraded view of Gawain is in sharp contrast to how he is treated in all five romances of Chrétien, where Arthur's nephew (Gawain) is consistently presented as a foil to each protagonist, the model to be followed by any candidate to the Round Table. In Chrétien's *Perceval*, it is suggested (though not confirmed in the unfinished romance) that he might share successfully one half of the quest with the protagonist: he was charged [17] "to go in search of the lance whose point bleeds constantly". And in the German romance whose laudatory title – *The Crown* – refers to him, he ends up featured as the grail hero.

3 THE FISHER KING

The grail king, in Chrétien's *Perceval* and elsewhere, is called the Fisher King. Having been hit "by a javelin through both thighs" [17], his incurable wound was a continuing torture. Among other disabilities, he could not mount a horse. To enjoy himself, he was wont to spend time fishing.

In the *Didot Perceval*, the grail king, whose name is Bron, is a brother in law of Joseph of Arimathea[3]. The reason why he is called the Fisher King is that, one day, he was ordered by the grail to catch a fish to be served in a banquet. Independently of such attempts to explain the appellation, it may be appropriate to recall that St Peter, the first pope, a king of kings, had been a fisherman.

Also, as has been often pointed out in literary studies (cf. [9]), the Old French word 'pescheor' (fisher) is quite close to 'pecheor' (sinner). In *Parziwal*, as a matter of fact, the king was wounded as punishment for the sin of disobeying a grail directive. Indeed, the issue of who was responsible for the king's disability varies greatly in the texts. While in *Perceval* the king was simply a victim of some enemy's action, in the *Perceval Continuations* he wounded himself, in desperation, after a certain Partinal had killed his brother.

The hero himself was in some cases guilty for the king's sufferings. In *Didot Perceval* the king started to 'languish' since the moment when the hero unduly dared to sit on the 'perilous seat' of the Round Table, and in *Perlesvaus* when he failed to ask the expected questions at the grail castle.

Conversely, how could the king be healed? The most common way is, of course: when the hero, on a second visit to the grail castle, asks the questions, as happens, for instance, in *Parzival*, wherein a single very meaningful question takes the place of the enquiries about the grail and the spear [43]: "Uncle, what troubles you?" It is a question that reveals, instead of curiosity about the mysterious objects, a feeling of *compassion* towards the king.[4] In the *Perceval Continuations*, however, this is not enough: Perceval must avenge the king by killing Partinal.

In *Parzival* the king does not regain his position after being healed – he is immediately replaced by the hero. In other texts, such as the *Perceval Continuations*, he reigns again for a short time, and only after his death Perceval becomes the new guardian of the grail.

Another declared benefit of asking the questions is to cause the 'waste land' to flower again. As if confirming the primitive belief that the health of the king and the fertility of the land are magically related [10], as soon as Gawain in the first of the *Perceval Continuations* asks the questions, the land grows green again.

4 SUCH A HOLY THING

It is a well-known fact that Chrétien's enigmatic object was not introduced as *the* Grail, but simply as *a* grail [17]: "A maiden accompanying the two young men was carrying a grail ('un graal') with her two hands", while a squire held a white lance "from whose tip issued a drop of blood". Figure 1 depicts the two objects.

[2] http://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/vul/gen031.htm

[3] According to an ancient tradition, Christianity was introduced in Britain (England) by Joseph of Arimathea, who would also have brought the Holy Grail to the abbey of Glastonbury [20]. Both this tradition and the prominent role of Joseph in Arthurian literature may derive from the similarity of his name in Latin, 'Joseph ab Arimathia', with the original Aramaic name of Flavius Josephus, which was 'Joseph bar Matthias'. An effect of this anachronistic conflation can be observed in the text available at http://d.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/text/history-of-that-holy-disciple-joseph-of-arimathea. See also the "Additional Information" appended to the text.

[4] Recall the leitmov of the 'innocent fool' who learns by compassion, in Wagner's *Parsifal*: "Durch mitleid wissend, der reine Tor".

Figure 1: The grail procession. Image extracted from manuscript (circa 1330) of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, the Second Continuation attributed to Wauchier de Denain (circa 1205-1210).

The Old French word 'graal' was not coined by Chrétien. It is a well-attested common noun, meaning a large platter; its first literary appearance was in the Old French *Roman d'Alexandre*, in the *Alexandre décasyllabique* version (1160s or early 1170s), which covers a limited period of the Macedonian king's legendary career (356 BC – 323 BC). The passage expresses the host's wish to honour his guest, by inviting him to share the meal from the same platter – so, in this very likely source, Chrétien would find the notions of conviviality and communion[1]:

'Sire, dist il, Deus te porgart de mal.
Ot tei manchai erser a ton graal'
['My lord', he said, 'God protect you from evil.
With you I ate last night, from your dish'].

In a later passage of Chrétien's text [17], a hermit reveals something about the contents and use of the Grail. He who is served from the Grail, in a secluded room in the grail castle, is the father of the Fisher King. He had been living in confinement there for twelve years, and what was 'served' to him in the Grail was a single wafer. Since the hermit does not elucidate whether the wafer was consecrated, one suspects that the receptacle itself, not its contents, had the power to sustain the man's life: 'Tant sainte chose est li graals' ['such holy thing is the grail'].

Continuators of Chrétien [3] would associate the Grail with objects related to the Passion of Christ. In that, they were following the tradition initiated by the poem that first incorporated Joseph of Arimathea to the Arthurian lore, *Le Roman de l'Estoire dou Graal* [33]. Ascribed to Robert de Boron, the poem inaugurates the interpretation that most authors would adopt from then on: the Grail was a vase ('veissel') used by Christ for sacramental purposes, wherein Joseph would collect his blood while taking him down from the cross. But, in this context, the word vase could refer either to a platter or to a chalice, since both holy recipients were used in the Last Supper – an ambiguity that would inevitably affect how the grail would manifest itself in each text.

As to the lance, it would be the spear with which the Roman centurion Longinus pierced the flank of Christ. Figure 2 is a typical crucifixion scene, in a 12th century manuscript, showing a woman (representing the Church) in the act of collecting Christ's blood, and Longinus with his spear in the background.
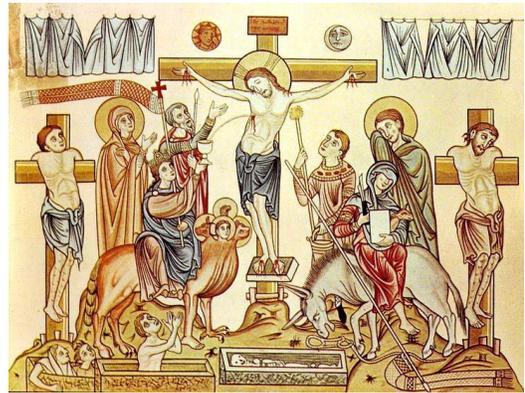

Figure 2: Christ's blood being collected and the lance of Longinus. Image extracted from manuscript *Hortus Deliciarum* of the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*, compiled by Herrad of Landsberg.

A radically different view of the grail was introduced by Wolfram von Eschenbach, whose *Parrzival*, [43] written by the beginning of the 13th century in Middle High German, showed the grail as a marvellous stone, "the perfection of Paradise, both root and branch". It is also known by another name, *lapsit exillis*, an ungrammatical Latin phrase that until today puzzles the critics. It is tended exclusively by a maiden called Repanse de Schoye, a paragon of chastity, since the grail is "of such heavy weight that false humanity can never carry it from its place". Inscriptions appear from time to time over the stone to summon very special knights ('templeis') to its service at Munsalvaesche. They must observe a strict rule of chastity: "Whoever undertakes to serve the grail must renounce the love of women. The king alone is to have, lawfully, a pure spouse – and those others whom God has sent into lordless lands to be lords." But even the grail king is not free to choose, since if he "desires love other than that which the inscription grants him [, he] must suffer for it, and enter sigh-laden heart's sorrow." Disobeying this injunction, the grail king Anfortas was incurably wounded by a poisonous spear, being "pierced through his genitals".

An analogy can be driven between Wolfram's stone grail and the meteoric stone that was worshiped as the embodiment of the Phrygian goddess Cybele [23], brought in a time of crisis to Rome, where she was received as the Magna Matter. She was served by eunuch priests, who were compelled thereby, recalling the grail knights, to renounce the love of women. A long fascinating passage about Cybele and her cult in Rome is contained in *Fasti* [28], which may have been among the "Latin books" consulted by the controversial Kyot, who Wolfram claimed to be the main source of his *Parzival*. As if anticipating Wolfram's remark that the grail was too heavy except to a chaste woman, it tells how Claudia Quinta drew without effort the rope attached to the bark transporting the Cybele stone, which had sunk in the muddy shallows, after the strongest men had tried in vain – thus having her chastity attested by the verdict of the goddess. The *Fasti* also tells the story of Attis, the first acolyte of Cybele, who promised his love to the goddess and then broke faith; punished with madness, he "retrenched the burden of his groin, and of a sudden was bereft of every sign of manhood", poignantly recalling the case of Anfortas.

The more traditional view of the grail as a vessel and Wolfram's stone representation are combined in a platter, (wrongly) reputed to be carved from emerald, captured by the crusaders from a pagan temple in Caesarea [42][9]. With the name of *Sacro Catino*, the platter was taken to the San Lorenzo cathedral in Genoa, in whose museum it still is (see the photograph in Figure 3). Archbishop Jacopo da Varagine, in his *Chronica Civitatis Ianuensis* (Chronicle of the City of Genoa) [14], affirmed that "the English in their books call that vessel the Sangraal".
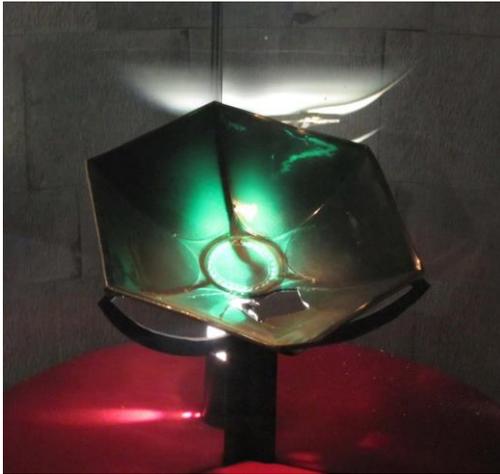

Figure 3: The Sacro Catino (Cattedrale di San Lorenzo, Italy). Image reproduced under "fair use" policy and the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International.

Among the alleged sources of Arthurian texts one must cite, besides Latin classics such as Ovid and Virgil, the fascinating folk tales of Wales, especially those collected in the anonymous *Mabinogion* [15]. One of these tales is *Peredur* (a name that has been assimilated to 'Perceval'), whose plot follows so closely Chrétien's story of the grail that critics have conjectured [17] that either one book was the source of the other or they both originated from one lost prototype. However, ironically, what in *Peredur* would correspond to the grail is a severed head in a platter, which would constitute a gruesome and most unlikely view of the holy object.

And yet a severed head could, in some circumstances, be a holy relic. In this connection, a historic event, rather than a literary source, should be cited [9], concerning Chrétien's patron, Count Philip of Alsace. Philip had a predilection for the city of Aire (today Aire-sur-la-Lys, in northern France). In a desire to ennoble a newly constructed church in Aire (*c.* 1166), Philip performed a rash feat. He violently snatched from their guardians a miraculous relic: the severed head of St Jacques, belonging to the St Vaast abbey in the city of Arras. Pope Alexander III decreed severe counter-measures, but Hughes, abbot of St Amand, acting as an arbiter, negotiated a compromise: the head was split into two parts, the largest returning to Arras and the smallest staying in Aire to grace the new church where, since then, miracles have been reported. The relic is no longer preserved, but mural paintings in the church provide a pictorial account of the events. Figure 4 reproduces the frame where Count Philip is shown grabbing the platter with the head of St Jacques.
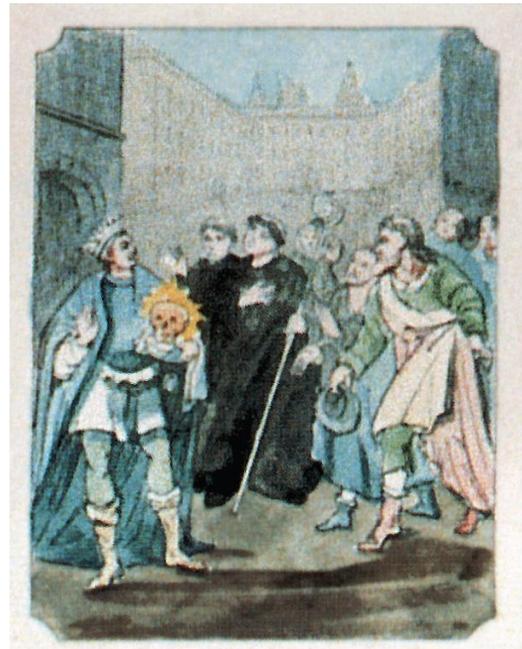

Figure 4: Count Philip stealing the relic: frame in the Story of the St. Jacques relic – mural paintings in the Collégiale St. Pierre at Aire-sur-la-Lys.

As a holy object, the grail is in general kept in a remote castle or temple, under the guardianship of a king. In *Parzival* it exerts a ruling capacity, with the power of electing its servers and sending them away in chivalric missions around the world; one of these was Parzival's own son, Loherangrin (the Lohengrin of Wagner's opera). Its beneficial presence has the virtue of keeping a person alive and sound. In texts like the *Quest of the Holy Grail* [26], it even acts as a classic cornucopia or Celtic cauldron of abundance, furnishing at the banquet table whatever food or drink each guest most desires. In contrast, Gawein discovers in *The Crown* [12] that the king and most other persons in the grail castle were dead people, solely animated by drinking blood from a reliquary (another shape of the grail).

But, in all variants, the grail is above all an irresistible attraction to every worthy knight, a driving energy that motivates all of them to engage in an adventurous *quest*, whose significance is the subject of the next section.

5   WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO 'ACHIEVE' THE QUEST?

The grail quest being understood as a mission, it is only natural to wonder what does it mean to 'achieve' it (cf. the Introduction of [18]).

Taking literally what, in Chrétien's romance, a cousin of Perceval tells him after his disastrous visit to the grail castle, the decisive act would be to ask the questions, by whose virtue he [17] "would have brought great succour to the good king who is maimed: he would have totally regained the use of his limbs and ruled his lands, and much good would have come of it!".

As mentioned before, in the *Perceval Continuations* the hero should also avenge the king – and would eventually become his successor. In *Perlesvaus*, he had also to recapture the land from an evil brother of the deceased grail king, and transfer it to his mother (still alive in that text). Even in the unfinished story of Chrétien, one might anticipate – from the fact that the king gives

him a sword – that the hero, after posing the questions, would be required to accomplish some military feat.

Of course an implicit goal of the quest (also in the benefit of the readers…) was always to find out some answer to the questions. Curiously, asking the questions is consistently indicated as more vital than obtaining the answers, which are variously supplied by the king himself or by a pious hermit.

In the *Quest of the Holy Grail*, wherein all the 150 knights of the Round Table swear to pursue the quest immediately after Gawain solemnly commits himself, the goal is to see more clearly the holy object, of which they just had a quick vision at Arthur's court. And since they depart together, one would assume that they regarded the quest as a collective endeavour, but soon, surprisingly, they take separate paths. Only Galahad, the predestined one, fully succeeds, being allowed to look into the grail so as to begin to *contemplate*, while still living, the heavenly things – and, when he perishes in ecstasy, the grail and the spear are taken from this world. His companions, Perceval and Bors, succeed partially, and Lancelot has a modicum of success, while most of the others fail entirely. Noting that 'achever' in French not only means 'to achieve', but also 'to finish', a side effect of the success of Galahad is to terminate the adventures of the land, the strange occurrences with allegoric meaning that kept happening due to the presence of the grail. Also finished is the Arthurian world, as if left unprotected by the disappearance of the grail after Galahad's death – indeed the *Quest of the Holy Grail* is followed by *The Death of Arthur*, fifth and last romance of the *Vulgate cycle* [19].

To the majority of the knights, imbued with the objectives of worldly knighthood and courtly love, quite apart from the crusading ideals, the quest was a chivalric adventure like any other, an opportunity to show their 'value'. In the *Perceval Continuations*, when Perceval or Gawain try to elicit the fateful answers from the grail king, the latter imposes a pre-condition: the knight should mend a certain broken sword by simply adjusting the two pieces together! And, if the repair is not perfect, he is told that he has not yet accomplished enough heroic feats to prove that he is the worthiest one alive.

In a deeper sense, the hero's progress itself, along the stages described in section 2, may be regarded as the main achievement implicitly involved in the quest. It can be compared with Jung's *individuation process* [13][16], letting the decisive stages correspond to the assimilation of certain *archetypes*. Thus, when Perceval becomes the red knight, by putting on the armour of his first dead adversary (item (1)), he is incorporating his _shadow_; by defining and thereby limiting his identity, his ego, to the role of knight (items (2) and (5)) he is assuming a _persona_ mask; the image of Blancheflor becomes an internal image, his _anima_ – the feminine side of his male personality – to the point that he 'sees' her in the snow-covered field (item (3)); to assimilate the teaching of the hermit, the _wise old man_ (item (7)), he typically has to first remove the armour that had turned into a rigid mask. The final stage, absent from Chrétien's interrupted narrative, would be the encounter of the grail, to signal that no longer his ego, but rather a fully balanced _self_ ('selbst', in German), is now the center of his personality – so the grail would symbolize the self, and its achievement would mark the completion of the individuation process.

As a complement, starting from Lacan's notions [8], the grail would correspond to *objet (petit) a*, signifying empathy with the other as object of desire, and achieving the grail would be tantamount to being open to true compassion.

6 STORYTELLING CROSSROADS

A recurring motif, to be employed as a metaphor, is possibly the best way to initiate the global analysis of the proposed grail-based heroic pattern. The motif occurs, to give one example, in the *Perceval Continuations* [3]: "He (Perceval) came then to a *crossroads*[5] where the road split into three". Depending on the chosen path, different adventures would unfold.

Indeed, the basic pattern, *generated by abstraction* from a linear succession of items taken from the unfinished Chrétien's *Perceval*, and extended until reaching an outcome by resorting to the *Perceval Continuations*, becomes a *branching* network structure if one or more variants are brought into the picture.

By 'generated by abstraction' we mean that, in the pattern, the items are *generalizations* of the episodes occurring in the grail stories, so that, in turn, the pattern can be specialized to match similarly structured stories. Further generalization may be in order to accommodate other genres, so as not to remain restricted to the Arthurian universe.

Here is a possible rendering of the (extended) basic pattern, which prospective authors may consider as a help to compose new stories:

(1) Preparation 1
(2) Failed mediation
(3) Apotheosis 1
(4) Mediation
(5) *Errance*
(6) Preparation 2
(7) Quest
(8) Apotheosis 2

In the pattern, the term 'apotheosis' was drawn from [4], in which Campbell identifies the elevation of the hero, and 'mediation' was taken from [31], in which Propp identifies the moment when the hero is made aware of the act of villainy or lack.

Two very special items must be inserted at some point. Choosing where to interpolate them is a tricky decision to be left to the author's discretion. They are reminiscent of detective stories [37], wherein two narratives are involved, namely the story of the crime and the story of the investigation, where the until then occult events are disclosed:

(a) Unknown crisis
(b) Revelation

The 'abstract' story induced by the pattern can be roughly interpreted as follows:

The hero learns some skills (1), but they are not enough to even understand the crisis (a) which he is being urged to face (2). And yet he is allowed to join a community, of which he becomes a highly reputed member (3). He is summoned again – and blamed for his complacent attitude of mindlessly enjoying his present status – to pursue the mission that he had failed to comprehend (4). Still lacking an indispensable skill, he wanders in vain for a time (5). Meeting an old sage, he receives the missing instruction (6). Only now it can be said that the quest effectively begins, with ample chance of success (7). The quest is finally achieved, and the hero is rewarded somehow (8).

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[5] The italics are the authors' emphasis.

The special item (a), the crisis, can occur as a 0th event, i.e. before the hero was born, and must of course precede item (2). On the other hand, the special item (b), gathering information about the crisis, should occur at some place *after* item (2), and in fact may never occur at all, frustrating the expectations of the readers. In the grail variants reviewed here, it partly coincides with (6) – when the hero encounters the hermit –, and partly with (7) or (8) – letting the grail king eventually reply to the hero's questions.

In Propp's schemes [31], mediation (his function IX) necessarily consists of a character with the role of *dispatcher* telling the hero – explicitly, in clear words – that a villainy was committed (function VIII) and summoning him to succour the *victim*. The striking innovation of item (2) of the pattern is that the roles of victim and dispatcher are conflated in a single character, the king in the grail stories, and the mediation takes the form of a dramatic scene (the grail procession) that should arouse the hero's curiosity. The failure of this implicit mediation negates its usual complement, namely the hero's counteraction (function X).

To guide the process of enriching the pattern with alternative crossing paths, thus converting the original linear sequence into a network structure (Figure 5), one may borrow from one or more of the variants referenced in this paper. For instance, looking at the *Quest of the Holy Grail*, a Galahad predestined type of hero might be included as an alternative to the Perceval type (considered here as the default), in which case a branch could be added to allow items (5) and (6) to be skipped. As another example, if Wolfram's *Parzival* is in the list of chosen variants, a branch might lead to an (additional) item – (9) Wedding –, at some position before item (8), where the hero would marry his beloved, whom Wolfram renamed Condwiramurs – an event that is treated ambiguously in the *Perceval Continuations*, where the hero, at the triumphal end of the quest, does not bring Blancheflor to inhabit in the grail castle as his queen.
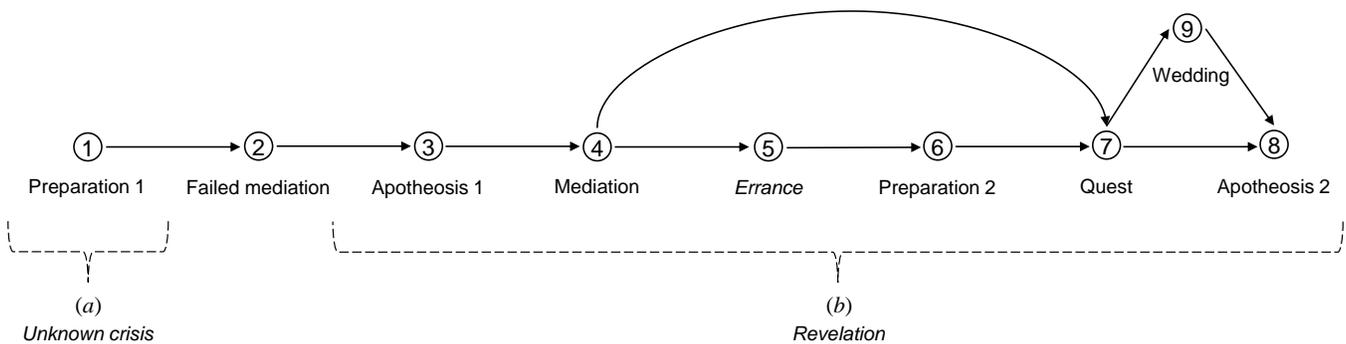

Figure 5: Branching network, displaying the basic pattern affected by two variants

A different pattern representation is needed to display, for instance, the *characters*' emotional state along the time axis, when reacting to reversals of fortune. Or else, still along the time axis, the *action*'s falling or rising level of tension. For cases like these, *story arcs* [24] should provide a convenient graphic representation, an additional line of investigation that we plan to pursue in the continuation of our project.

7 THE FALL AND RISE OF GAME HEROES

The pattern can be found not only in medieval texts but also in modern game narratives. Such narratives may not refer to the grail itself but have storylines that come close to match the pattern. As described in Section 5, the grail may be anything that represents an irresistible attraction to a hero, a goal of supreme importance that motivates him/her to engage in an adventurous quest. Such driving force may be related with the need for saving the world, avenging the death of a loved one, finding the cure for a disease, or becoming the strongest warrior. The process of searching for a grail represents the motif that drives the storyline of many games. It allows the hero (controlled by the human player) to engage through a series of challenges in order to acquire experience, grow, and become capable of achieving his objective (*a* grail).

A distinguishing feature of our pattern, with respect to previous very well-known proposals [4][32], is the emphasis on the hero's recovery (rise) after acquiring the knowledge whose lack was the cause of the initial failure (fall). In the grail stories, this failure (item (2)) was restricted to 'failed mediation' – but now, to generalize the grail pattern to other genres, we shall extend that to any kind of 'initial failure' resulting from incomplete preparation.

Analysing the narrative of recent games, we identified some games with storylines that come close to match the pattern, which will be discussed in the next sub-sections.

Besides covering all or nearly all items of the pattern, especially those related to the fall-and-rise feature, these narratives deal with a crisis similar to the 'waste land' of the grail stories, namely affecting the 'peace of the kingdom' (sub-section 7.1), the impending 'White Frost' (sub-section 7.2), and the 'Breach' (sub-section 7.3). Moreover some 'holy thing', reminiscent of the grail, the spear and the sword given by the grail king, may be instrumental towards the resolution of the crisis, such as the 'Triforce' and the 'Master Sword' (sub-section 7.1); or else descending from an ancient dynasty, like that of the grail kings, may be required – as happens with Ciri's belonging to the 'Elder Blood' lineage (sub-section 7.2); or gathering a powerful fraternity, like the Round Table, may be decisive – which is illustrated by the 'Inquisition' (sub-section 7.3).

Surely traditional patterns, such as Campbells's monomyth [4], should always be considered when studying heroic narratives in general. And yet, nonetheless, the application of specific patterns, such as ours, seems well justified in order to stress the occurrence of certain especially significant items. Besides, comparative studies across different genres may be favoured by drawing analogies like those pointed out in the above paragraph.

7.1 The Legend of Zelda

In most games of *The Legend of Zelda* series, the crisis, item (*a*), occurs at the beginning of the story and, usually, concerns an evil force trying to dominate or destroy the kingdom of Hyrule. The hero, Link, is destined to thwart the great evil and restore

peace to Hyrule. In *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past* (Nintendo, 1991), Agahnim, the fake chief advisor of the king of Hyrule, imprisoned princess Zelda and started to perform magical experiments in an attempt to break the seal of the Sacred Realm in order to steal the mystical Triforce. Telepathically contacted by Princess Zelda, Link is charged with the mission to get the legendary Master Sword – the only weapon powerful enough to defeat Agahnim. However, he is advised that only descendants of the Knights of Hyrule are able to wield the sword (as the grail hero). To prove himself worthy of wielding the sacred blade, Link starts his quest to acquire three Pendants of Virtue and withdraw the Master Sword from its pedestal (a reminiscence of Arthur's Excalibur), which represents the hero's initial preparation in the pattern (i.e. item (1)). After successfully withdrawing the Master Sword (item (3)), Link invades the Hyrule Castle and proceeds to confront Agahnim. However, without being strong enough to defeat Agahnim (item (2)), Link is sent to the Dark World. After the initial failure, Link wanders through the Dark World (items (4) and (5)) before being assigned with the mission to rescue the imprisoned Seven Maidens from dungeons around the world (item (6)), which would allow him to access the tower where Agahnim was hiding (item (7)). With the power of the Seven Maidens, Link breaks the seal on the tower and defeats Agahnim, only to discover the real enemy: the evil king Ganon, of whom Agahnim was the disguised alter ego (item (b)). After a long battle, Link defeats Ganon using a Silver Arrow, which he had found in his quest through the Dark World. After defeating the great evil, Link recovers the Triforce, and by making a wish, restores the peace to the kingdom of Hyrule (item (8)).

In *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo, 1998), which occurs before *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past*, Link starts as a young boy that always had been ostracized by other children and had constant nightmares of a girl fleeing from an evil man clad in black. One day, after proving his courage to the Great Deku Tree, Link receives the Spiritual Stone of the Forest and is sent to Hyrule Castle to talk with princess Zelda. When Link encounters the young princess, she tells him about her prophetic dreams and explains the evil intentions of the Ganondorf, who is trying to steal the mystical Triforce. Then, Zelda sends Link on on a quest to find the other two Spiritual Stones in order to prevent Ganondorf from obtaining the Triforce (the hero's preparation; i.e.: item (1)). After collecting the Spiritual Stones, Link returns to Hyrule Castle, where he witnesses Ganondorf's attack. Princess Zelda escapes and is chased by Ganondorf, who not considering a young boy a credible threat, hits Link with a powerful magic spell and chases after Zelda (item (2)). After the initial failure, Link finds the Ocarina of Time and proceeds to the Temple of Time, where he finds the mythical Master Sword. But, then, the sword seals him within the Sacred Realm for seven years (item (4) and item (5)), judging him too young to be the legendary Hero of Time, the only one worthy of wielding the Master Sword (item (3)). After seven years, Link awakes and discovers that Hyrule Kingdom has become a haunted land. Then, he is assigned with the mission to find and awaken six Sages (item (6)), who would be able to help him to defeat the great evil. After awaking the Sages, they break the barrier around Ganondorf's fortress, allowing Link to confront Ganondorf (item (7)). Link, now as the legendary Hero of Time, defeats Ganondorf. The peace is restored to Hyrule and Link is returned to his own time with the knowledge of what would happen (item (8)).

Another game of *The Legend of Zelda* series that matches the pattern is *The Legend of Zelda: A Link Between Worlds* (Nintendo, 2013), which follows a storyline similar to *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past*. At this time, Hyrule is threatened by a strange sorcerer called Yuga, who can transform people into wall paintings. Yuga puts a barrier around the Hyrule Castle and Link is assigned with the mission to acquire the Pendants of Virtue to withdraw the Master Sword from its pedestal in order to break the barrier and save Zelda (item (1)). After successfully getting the Master Sword (item (3)), Link confronts Yuga. Link is defeated (item (2)); Yuga turns Zelda into a painting and flees through a crack on the wall. After failing, Link follows Yuga to a dimension called Lorule (items (4) and (5)), where he has to save seven Sages in order to protect Hyrule and Lorule from Yuga's threat (item (6)). After saving the Sages, Link receives the Triforce of Courage and proceeds to confront Yuga (item (7)). After a long battle, Yuga is defeated and the peace is restored to Hyrule and Lorule (item (8)).

7.2   The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt

In the recent game *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (CD Projekt RED, 2015), the role of hero is played by Geralt of Rivia, who starts the game searching for his love, the sorceress Yennefer of Vengerberg. However, it is Yennefer who ultimately finds Geralt and informs him that Emhyr var Emreis, the emperor of Nilfgaard, has convoked Geralt for an audience in Vizima. Emhyr reveals to Geralt the crisis, item (a) of the pattern, which concerns the disappearance of Ciri – the emperor's biological daughter and Geralt's adoptive ward. Ciri is a child of the Elder Blood, which gives her the power to manipulate space and time. She is escaping from the Wild Hunt, a group of spectres led by the Eredin (the King of the Wild Hunt), which is determined to capture Ciri and use her abilities for their own malicious purposes. Geralt begins his mission to find Ciri, which leads him through several adventurous quests that provide Geralt with crucial clues of Ciri's whereabouts. After passing through these ordeals (the hero's preparation – item (1)), Geralt finds out that Ciri was hidden in the abandoned Isle of Mists and resolves to rescue and return her to Kaer Morhen (his witcher school), but realizes that doing this would attract the Wild Hunt. After assembling a small group of companions at Kaer Morhen in preparation for the coming battle, he travels to the Isle of Mists and finds Ciri, who teleports them back to Kaer Morhen. Minutes later, the Wild Hunt attacks. During the battle, Vesemir (Geralt's father figure), is killed by Imlerith – a Wild Hunt general (item (2)). Ciri, distraught by Vesemir's death, releases an uncontrollable power, causing Eredin and the Wild Hunt to retreat. After failing in defeating the Wild Hunt and loosing Vesemir, Geralt and his friends engage on several new quests in a search for ways of destroying the Wild Hunt (item (4) and item (5)). During this journey, they revenge Vesemir's death by killing Imlerith, become allies with the Nilfgaardian fleet, and discover the Sunstone – an ancient elven artefact capable of trapping the Wild Hunt (item (6)). After using the Sunstone to draw the Wild Hunt, Geralt and his allies attempt to defeat them (item (7)). After a long battle, Geralt finally defeats Eredin. However, the White Frost begins to descend and Ciri insists that only her Elder Blood could stop the White Frost before it consumes all life in the world. Ciri goes through a portal and confronts the White Frost, ending the threat (item (8)).

7.3   Dragon Age: Inquisition

Another recent game that follows the proposed heroic pattern is *Dragon Age: Inquisition* (BioWare, 2014), which tells the story of Herald of Andraste (later to be known as the Inquisitor), who is on journey to close the Breach and settle the civil war between mages and Templars. The Breach represents the major crisis (item (a) of the pattern) and consists of a mysterious hole in the sky created by

an explosion, which broke the magical boundary between the physical world and the Fade (the world of spirits). Herald, the only survivor of the blast, emerged with a mark on his hand, but no memory of what happened. Together with former Templar Cullen and Ambassador Josephine, Herald establishes the Inquisition, an organization to end the war, close the Breach, and defeat the one who created it. After establishing his operational base, Herald engages in a quest to recruit companions (the hero's preparation – item (1)). After gaining the assistance of either the mages or the Templars, Herald succeeds in closing the Breach. However, during the victory celebration, his operational base is attacked by a massive force led by Corypheus, an ancient magister, who was responsible for opening the Breach. Aided by a dragon, Corypheus forces Herald and the Inquisition group to flee (the hero's failure – item (2)). Herald regroups the survivors and leads them to the abandoned fortress of Skyhold, which becomes their new base. At this moment, the Inquisition begins to refer to Herald as the Inquisitor – the leader of the Inquisition (item (3)). Assisted by other members of the Inquisition, the Inquisitor engages in several quests to stop Corypheus' malevolent plans (item (4) and item (5)). During this journey, the Inquisitor regains his memories (lost during the explosion that created the Breach), brings to an end the ongoing civil war, and discovers that Corypheus's dragon is the key to stopping him (item (6)). After witnessing Corypheus reopening the Breach, the Inquisitor engages Corypheus's dragon in battle and defeats him, rendering Corypheus vulnerable. In a final confrontation (item (7)), the Inquisitor defeats Corypheus, throws the dark magister into the Fade, and reseals the Breach permanently (item (8)).

8 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Today the word 'grail' stands in common parlance as a reference to any goal regarded to be of supreme importance, and deserving the utmost effort to be achieved, such as finding the cure for some disease. Once again we are justified, like Chrétien, to use the word as a common noun: '*a* grail', instead of '*the* Holy Grail'.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, it is sometimes employed as a narrative device, devoid of any real sense, corresponding to what Hitchcock used to call a "MacGuffin". As Slavoj Zizek explains[6]: "We all know what the Hitchcockian "MacGuffin" means: the empty pretext which just serves to set in motion the story, but has no value in itself".

More significant, however, may be the approach that shifts our attention from the grail, as a precious object to be gained – a prize, a trophy, a cup to commemorate a victory –, to the process of searching for it, whereby a person grows internally. The grail can be pictured as a humble vessel, not precious at all, and can remain out of the reach of the seeker, and yet the quest will nonetheless be entirely justified as long as what was called *illumination*, in an American movie of the Indiana Jones franchise[7], is achieved.

Our study about the relations of the proposed pattern with game narratives revealed a variety of different narratives that come very close to match the pattern, which suggests the applicability of the pattern as an important authoring asset for the construction of successful game narratives. We believe that the proposed pattern, combined with further research efforts in the line of computational narratology, may contribute to the design of automated methods for supporting interactive plot composition with emphasis on falling and rising again, and may expand the boundaries of traditional game narratives towards new forms of interactive storytelling.

Another application that caught our attention is related to educational games. If the basic pattern is combined with systems programmed to detect what skills are lacking to accomplish an objective, it would also help towards the design of educational games with the ability to train differently skilled users on what each of them needs for success in a renewed attempt. Such systems, in fact, exist from an early date, a remarkable example being the projects involving *computer-assisted instruction* [5][30]. The pattern may provide such systems with new insights on how to engage players while maintaining their serious purposes.

As further research, we intend to analyse the relations of the pattern with movie narratives, which also have storylines that come close to match the pattern. Among the candidates are the recent 'alternate reality' *Star Trek* movies,[8] where Starfleet is the space-bound version of the Round Table, with cadets and officers in the place of squires and knights, and in which the paternal orphan James T. Kirk is the hero, and Captain Christopher Pike plays the maimed king to be relieved by the young Kirk in the command of a space ship. Several details seem to match, a particularly suggestive one being Kirk's failure to obey the 'prime directory', which Captain Pike attributes to Kirk being 'not ready', but later affirms that nobody else deserved so much 'a second chance'.

Another objective of future research is programming interactive tools for different applications of the pattern. We plan to investigate the integration of the proposed heroic narrative pattern with our recent work on folktale variant-formation phenomena [21][22], in an attempt to implement automated computational tools for generating new heroic narrative variants.

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