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Abstract

This article proposes a widened view of fictional games by considering the game guidebook *Vermis I – Lost Dungeons and Forbidden Woods* (2023) by Plastiboo. Through a kaleidoscope of theoretical concepts hailing from playfulness, aesthetics, design, narratology, and literary reception, the authors engage with the issues of literary play and imaginary games. This conclusion is drawn: *Vermis* exemplifies a fictional game existing both parallel to a secondary world and within its own secondary world created by a factual book. Its format invites a literary play activity showcasing the playful power inherent in fictional games.

Keywords

Fictional games; *Vermis*; Plastiboo; aesthetics; play; reading; guidebook

A corpse kneels beside a well.

*Mesmerized by the reflection of
its living flesh: it wonders what
could have been done and could
have been.*

*And for as long as the moon
shines, the feeble illusion
will prevail.*

Plastiboo, *Vermis I – Lost Dungeons and Forbidden Woods* (2023)

Thus begins the book *Vermis I – Lost Dungeons and Forbidden Woods* (2023) by the artist Plastiboo and the Italian publishing house Hollow Press. It is an unpaginated, pocket-sized book, no more than A5, and its size and cover art pay homage

to the cherished aesthetics presently adored by fans of retro video games and aficionados of independent tabletop Role Playing Games (RPG). On the cover, a dark pixelated knight, poised in a presumed dungeon, prepares to engage some undead skeletons in close combat (see Image 1). The image is framed to resemble the cover of a rare video game from the golden era of pixels, complete with a patina of scratches and marks to create an illusion of age and mystery. Below the image, a text declares it as an “Official Guide”. However, it does not specify what it is a guide to. The back of the book gives no further explanation of the above statement, just a pixelated image of a forest and a discarded sword. Above this image is one line of text asking, “Which flesh is your flesh?”. A relevant question—but nothing that clarifies the book’s guideship. The book is clearly a guide to a work of fiction, but what sort of fiction is it a guide to?

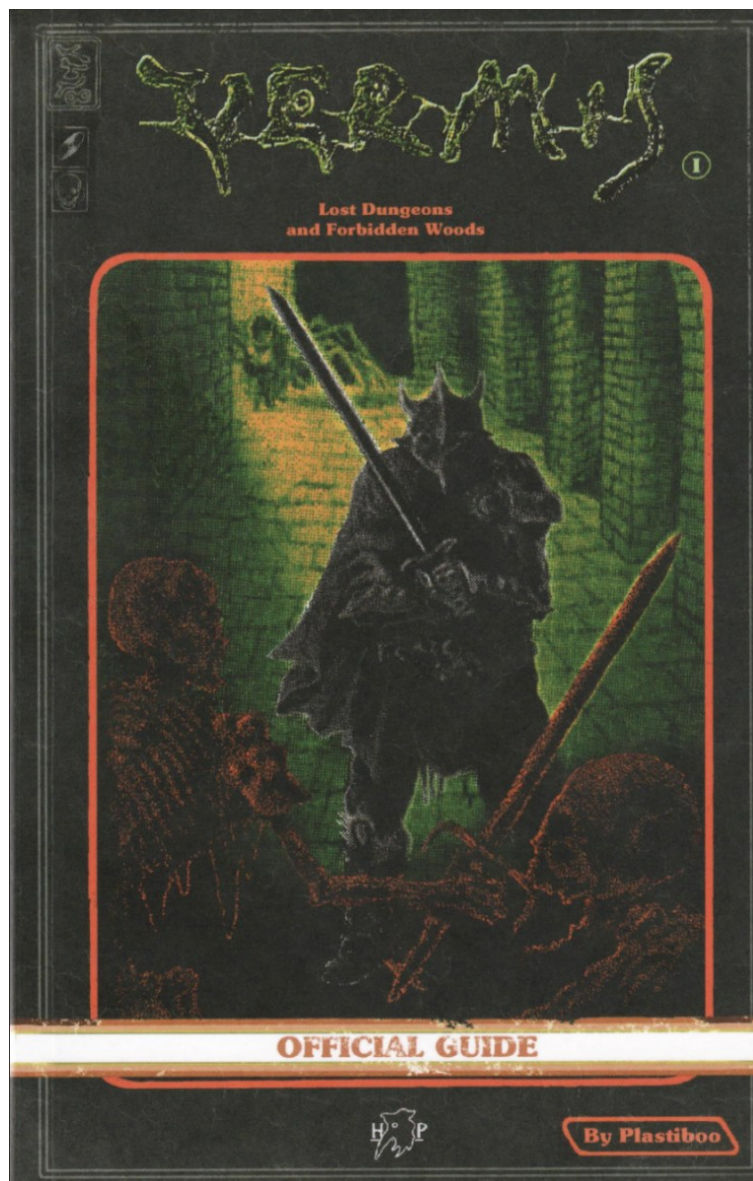


Image 1. Front cover of *Vermis I – Lost Dungeons and Forbidden Woods* (Plastiboo, 2023).
© Michele Nitri & Plastiboo.

As a book, *Vermis* is described as a guide to a game that does not exist (Fiorilli, 2023); hence, it appears to be a fictional game, that is, a product of pure imagination. According to Gualeni & Fassone (2023), fictional games are “playful activities and ludic artifacts conceptualized as part of fictional worlds”, meant to “trigger the imagination of the appreciator of a work of fiction and cannot actually be – or at least were not originally meant to be – played” (p. 2). Furthermore, in recognised definitions of fictional games, a fictional game is part of a fictional world (Gualeni, 2021; Gualeni & Fassone, 2023; Seiwald, 2019). The only medium containing *Vermis* is a guidebook; therefore, the game is not yet part of a fictional world. Instead, *Vermis* uses the idea of a fictional game to create a fictional world around it; hence, it would not fit the existing frame of fictional games. Nevertheless, *Vermis* contains traits pointing towards a fictional game; for example, the characters and creatures in the book are presented with numerical attributes similar to RPGs (see Image 2). Moreover, fans have begun exploring whether *Vermis* can be developed into a (real) game (Duehring, in development).

Can *Vermis* be a bridge to another perspective of fictional games, much like its namesake, the median lobe vermis of the cerebellum, which connects the two lateral hemispheres of the brain (‘Cerebellum’, 2024)? Against this background, we posit the research question: How can *Vermis* be understood as a *fictional* game? We seek to explore the definition of ‘fictional games’ by revisiting and broadening the concept through the case of *Vermis*.

Vermis: A short description

Returning to the guidebook, a quick flip-through reveals a plethora of descriptions of playable characters, environments, encounters, creatures, status effects, and items (of which some come with stats indicating their abilities and weaknesses). All in the same style of dark fantasy art hinting back to pixel games like *Moonstone: A Hard Days Knight* (Anderson, 1991), but also newer vector-based 3D games in the style of *Dark Souls* (FromSoftware, 2011) and *Elden Ring* (FromSoftware, 2022), or analogue tabletop roleplaying games like *Mörk Borg* (Nilsson & Nohr, 2020). Despite the art style, this is not just a collection of concept art. Rather, the publication follows a narrative path, depicting the protagonist’s illustrated journey from one encounter to the next, accompanied by sombre, poetic reflections. The linear narrative direction, with its lack of choices, also excludes another alternative, the choose-your-own-adventure novel, even though it certainly recalls the *Lone Wolf* gamebooks (Dever, Dever, & Lazzari, 1984–current) with their gloomy aesthetics and framing of language or solo-journaling games popular today, for example, *Thousand Year Old Vampire* (Hutchings, 2020). Hence, the book *Vermis I – Lost Dungeons and Forbidden Woods* speaks to the generations of players who grew up during the 1990s to the early 2010s with its art, language, and references.

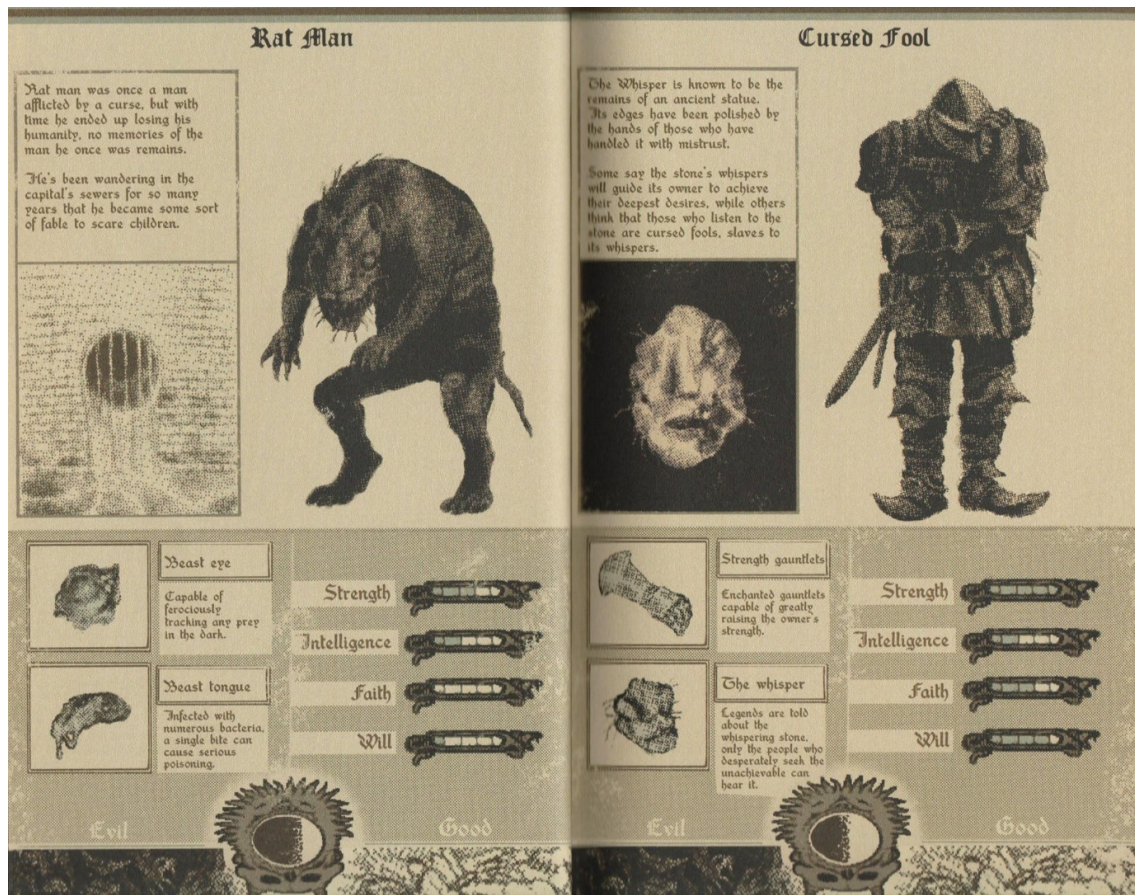


Image 2. A selection of character choices with different allocations of attributes in *Vermis I – Lost Dungeons and Forbidden Woods* (Plastiboo, 2023). © Michele Nitri & Plastiboo.

Many stumble upon this book when shuffling through online communities dedicated to tabletop old-school roleplaying games. For example, large YouTube channels like *Questing Beast* reviewed the book in 2023 when it was first published. Its publisher, Hollow Press (an independent Italian publishing house specialising in alternative and experimental comics), officially presents *Vermis* as a guidebook to a Dungeon Crawler video game that does not exist. The pseudonymous artist Plastiboo, the main creator, has, with the help of the editor Michele Nitri and graphical designer Marco Cirillo Pedri, used the traditional game guidebook format as an artistic and worldbuilding method. The reason for using the game guide as a medium for *Vermis* eludes the reader, as not much is found on the artist Plastiboo and their intention beyond statements such as “I like drawing on my computer” (Plastiboo, n.d.) and their being inspired by old Dungeon Crawler games.

For those unfamiliar with the format of game strategy guides, this was a phenomenon predating the Internet, when the key to solving a tricky video game was left to word-of-mouth, game magazines, or official guidebooks. These guides also became a way to interact with games for those unable to play them, either because they had not yet been released or for the lack of material means. *Vermis'* method of presenting itself as a guidebook to a videogame also distinguishes it from publications which

could be considered pure worldbuilding, i.e., presenting just a fictional world—similarly to books like *Arthur Spiderwick's Field Guide to the Fantastical World Around You* by Holly Black and Tony DiTerlizzi (2005). Still, *Vermis* both follows and differs from traditional game guides in its narrative method of fluctuating objectivity or vacillation between command and description. For example, in the official strategy guide for *Riven: The Sequel to Myst* (Prima Games, 1997), most of the book is written as a journal from the first-person point of a narrator who explores the world of *Riven*. In contrast, the game guide for *Arcanum: Of Steamworks & Magick Obscure* (Prima Games, 2004) lacks a narrator and addresses the player directly with descriptions and commands. However, the choice of wording and fluctuating objectivity may also be a consequence of a translation from Italian to English or an artistic choice alluding to the often stodgy translations of Japanese guides to English, such as *The Shadowgate Hint Book* (Kemco/Seika, 1989).

Understanding fictional games: A kaleidoscopic analytical approach

In this article, we engage with the understanding of games and play by applying a pallet of various concepts from playfulness, aesthetics, design, narratology, and literary reception, to discern how *Vermis* can be understood as a fictional game.

Our analytical approach uses the kaleidoscope as a metaphor, similar to how Kanter (1986) applies it to explain creative thinking as a process wherein a rearrangement of ideas leads to the formation of new ideas as novel and flexible patterns emerge. Hence, to guide the readers through our analytical kaleidoscopic exploration of how *Vermis* can be understood as a fictional game, we combine theory and analysis in one section. For clarity, we provide a definition of the terms used in the analysis (see Table 1).

Field of origin	Concept	Meaning
Playfulness	<i>Play</i>	A free but rule-bound activity characterised by playfulness, i.e., an engagement surpassing external consequence, realness, or convention (Huizinga, 1949/2016; Masek & Stenros, 2021), categorisable into different forms, such as competitive <i>agon</i> or imaginative <i>mimicry</i> (Caillois, 1958/2001).
	<i>Lusory attitude</i>	The attitude required by a player entering into the play of a game, wherein the player accepts the arbitrary rules of the game in order to sustain gameplay (Suits, 1978/2005).
Aesthetics	<i>Aesthetic striving play</i>	A form of play in which a player experiments with their temporary agency in relation to the game played; the player engages with a game on their own aesthetic terms in which stakes do not matter and where the playful activity constitutes its own reason for being (Nguyen, 2020).

Design	<i>Diegetic prototype</i>	An object which exists in a fictional world, created by dialogue, plot, character interactions, and narrative structure (Kirby, 2010).
Narratology	<i>Narrator</i>	The voice dictating the narrative—as an omniscient storyteller absent from the story told but with unlimited knowledge of the story world, or an unreliable narrator who filters their narration through their own subjective perspective (cf. Genette, 1980).
Literary reception	<i>Mind's eye</i>	The notion that a literary work is not a material artefact, but rather, a unique story which comes to exist in the individual head of each reader (Jauß, 1974).

Table 1. Definition of the concepts used in the analysis.

Playfulness: What is at play in Vermis?

In revisiting the concept of play for this study, we return to the foundational game scholar Johan Huizinga's interwar period writings, given the ubiquitous nature of play and games in culture—as per *Homo ludens*. According to Huizinga's (1949/2016, p. 7) nearly centennial statement, “all play is a voluntary activity. Play to order is no longer play: it could at best be a forcible imitation of it”. Since there is no order in *Vermis*, and since the reader (upon signing the reader's contract by engaging with the guidebook) enters a ludic session where the lack of gameplay offers a limitless set of possibilities wherein only one's imagination sets the boundaries, reading *Vermis* as a guidebook might be conceived as a literary form of play, wherein the reader engages in a game of worldbuilding by the help of the guidebook. As Ortoleva (2012, p. 14) notes, “play is discovery and invention at the same time”, and the guidebook to *Vermis* invites a simultaneous exploratory reading and an act of mental worldbuilding. Echoing Huizinga's further definitions of the characteristics of play and taking his definition at face value, that is, that play is free, unreal, and limited and secluded (1949/2016, pp. 8–9), *Vermis* ticks all the boxes.

Play is free—and so is *Vermis*. As De Kesel (2024, p. 3) explains in his revisiting of the Huizingian concept of the magic circle, play “defies, disturbs, and transgresses the rational”, and playing is not a teleological endeavour—that is, it lacks a purpose. Moreover, play “raises man above the blind, deterministic logic of nature and society” (De Kesel, 2024, p. 3). *Vermis* embraces these notions, in its defying of the typical genre conventions of a guidebook, in its transgression of a rational reading experience, and its unspoken in-world teleology. The reader of *Vermis* is left completely unaware of their mission, as their chosen flesh “will be temporary”, their “decision only has the weight [they] choose to give it”, and the only deterministic logic which limits the gameplay is the imagination of the individual reader. Thus, *Vermis* demands that the reader adopts a lusory attitude (cf. Suits, 1978/2005) wherein everything is free and arbitrary. Initially, the reader of the guidebook believes that the choosing of flesh will constitute a choice which will dictate the rest of the reading

experience (much like the Choose Your Own Adventure genre of gamebooks), but the reader soon realises that the lusory attitude required in fact stipulates that the reader will only be confronted with pseudo-choices throughout their reading.

Play is unreal—and so is *Vermis*. In Caillois's (2001/1958) four forms of play, the *fictional game* of *Vermis* would take on the nature of *agon* (in the sense that characters would be created with different stats, and by defeating monsters, the characters would grow in power—and the players would be engaged in competition). The *actual game* of *Vermis* (the guidebook), on the other hand, exhibits the nature of *mimicry*, in the sense that the play-element at work is that of make-believe: the reader of the guidebook is engaged in imagining the ludic scenarios made possible by reading the book and possibly simulating the choices of a tabletop role-player. Moreover, in alignment with the definition of 'playfulness' suggested by Masek and Stenros (2021) as something which prioritises engagement over external consequence, realness, or convention, *Vermis* does indeed invite the reader to engage with the most unconventional, the most unreal, and the most internal—namely, one's own imagination, which, as Ortoleva (2012, p. 15) reminds us, is "a close relative of play".

Play is limited and secluded—and so is *Vermis*. Boluk & LeMieux (2017, p. 8) claim that videogames do not have rules (only game mechanics), as rules are "voluntary constraints and social contracts" between the players. Similarly, the printed guidebook to the fictional game of *Vermis* presents the reader with an ontological gap which the reader is invited to fill in. *Vermis*, thus, functions like "*equipment* for making metagames" (Boluk & LeMieux, 2017, p. 9), in that it invites the reader to play that they are playing a game. The factual guidebook to the fictional game thus becomes a reading game about a roleplaying game. Moreover, in line with Boluk and LeMieux's (2017, p. 29) notion of indie games, *Vermis*—as a metagame—represents and references the style and gameplay of other games, thus becoming a game about games, or a reading toy functioning as a portal to the imaginary world in which the fictional world of *Vermis* exists. This notion aligns with Huizinga's (1949/2016) seclusion criterion, as the fictional game of *Vermis* only exists in the minds of the readers, which ought to be understood as seclusion par excellence—comparable to the mind game *The Game*, where the whole objective of the game is to refrain from thinking about the game in question. Huizinga even concludes that in acknowledging play, one acknowledges mind, "for whatever else play is, it is not matter" (1949/2016, p. 3). Thus, play—in essence—only truly exists in the mind, as play, even in the animal world, "bursts the bounds of the physically existent" (Huizinga, 1949/2016, p. 3).

Aesthetics: What constitutes the reader of *Vermis*?

Games can be considered to possess their own aesthetic genres (cf. Mosselaer, 2018; Sommerseth, 2009). As Nguyen (2020, p. 115) notes: "To have aesthetic experiences, it has been suggested, we must be disinterested in practical outcomes, or we must be contemplative, or we must maintain a particular unfocused quality of

attention". Moreover, aesthetic experiences are only readily available to the *spectators* and the *designers* of games—as these do not require “any form of instrumental goal-oriented thinking on the part of the audience” (2020, p. 117); the *players*, on the other hand, are “in tension with the disinterest requirement for aesthetic experience” (2020, p. 117). The solution, proposed by Nguyen, is an ‘aesthetic striving play’ constitutive of a ‘disinterested interestedness’ or an ‘impractical practicality’ where players only play for the sake of the aesthetic experience. There, the players set up their temporary agency and submerge themselves in a game where the stakes do not matter—but, rather, where the activity constitutes its own *raison d’être*.

In a sense, what Nguyen (2020) suggests is a subversion of play, in the sense that the aesthetic striving player plays the game on their own aesthetic terms. Applying this idea to a reading of *Vermis* yields the following notion: as the guidebook does not provide any clear goals of the nonexistent game, nor indeed any clear goals of how to engage with the guidebook to the nonexistent game, and since the reader is oblivious of the means to any goal, the only reasonable goal—and only reasonable means to said goal—would be aesthetic striving play, wherein the means constitute the goal, and vice versa. Thus, the reader must interact with the guidebook in such a way that they are playing a reading game if the guidebook is to make any sense—as the book, given its narratological and ludological gaps (its unreadability and unplayability) would not make sense to be read in any straightforward fashion. In a sense, *Vermis* invites (or even summons) an aesthetic striving player on being read.

Diegetic prototypes: What is the game of Vermis?

Another perspective we apply to the book is the concept of diegetic prototypes. According to Kirby (2010, p. 41), a diegetic prototype is a design existing in the fictional world created through “dialogue, plot rationalizations, character interactions, and narrative structure”. However, most diegetic prototypes in Kirby’s definition refer to (future) technologies that only exist in a fictional world, for example, within science fiction movies. At the core of the idea are the two activities of prototyping and storytelling, something *Vermis* succeeds with, as it is 1) a factual book from the primary world that retells the story from 2) a secondary world which in turn is an artifact of another secondary world: one where *Vermis* is 3) a playable game (cf. Tolkien, 1947, p. 18, on the concept of primary and secondary worlds; see Figure 1).

Sicart (2014) reminds us that games are formal manifestations of play, existing as portable tools to inspire us to play—through play, we are not separated from reality but rather made a part of it. Though the guidebook is an analogue object, it plays with a secondary world where the game *Vermis* existed, and based on the reception, it begs for its existence to be manifested in this primary world, almost like a grimoire conjuring a demon. *Vermis* has inspired an unofficial soundtrack and lo-fi mixes featuring the artwork from the book as a backdrop. Meanwhile, many dedicated fans have attempted to decipher the lore behind the first book or jokingly commented

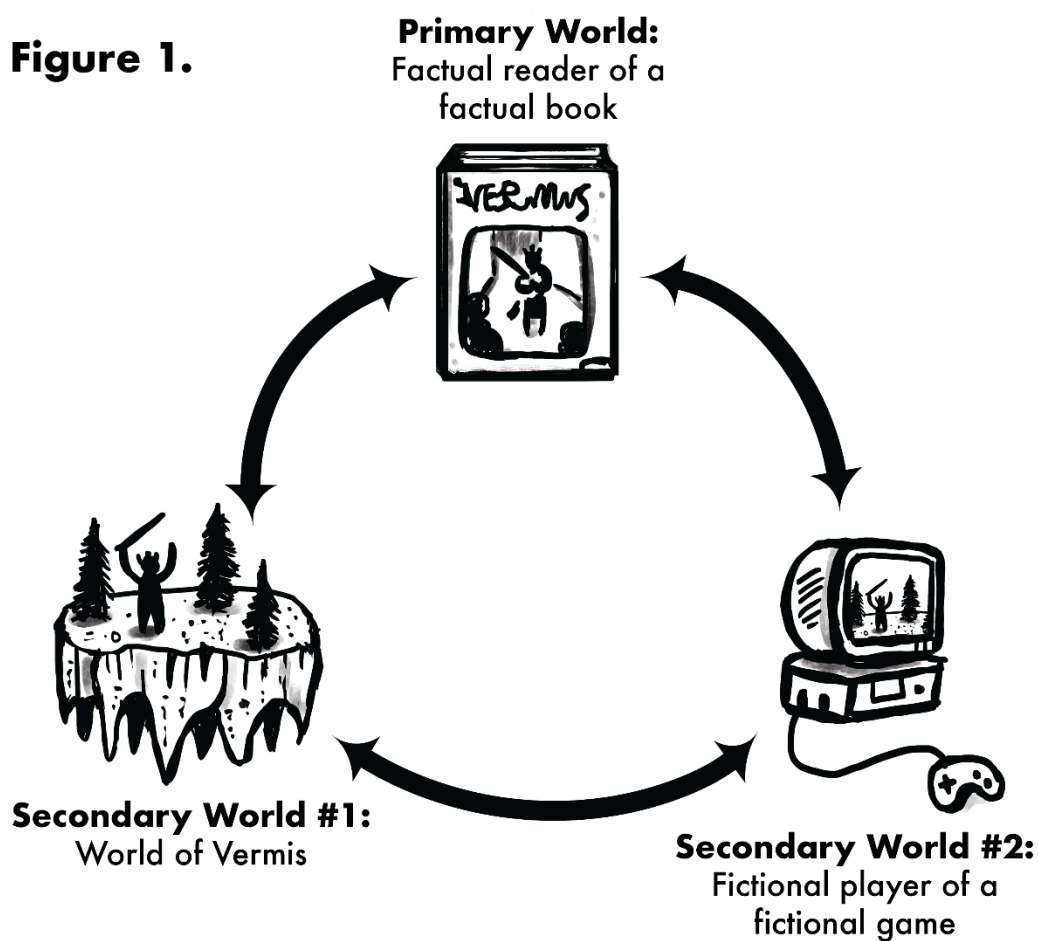


Figure 1. The relationship between the book of *Vermis* (existing in our world), the world of *Vermis* (existing in the book), and the fictional game of *Vermis* (existing in the reader's mind).

on social media about playing the game *Vermis* “back in the day”, with their independent fandom playfully engaging with *Vermis*'s non-existence. Committed fans have even taken it upon themselves to create fan-based games inspired by the book. The fanbase's dedication to making the diegesis of the game *Vermis* into reality turns the book into what Kirby (2010) defines as a “performative artifact” (p. 43), an object that demonstrates a possible future scenario through its existence. It would not be surprising if an official *Vermis* game would one day reach “actuality” (cf. Gualeni & Fassone, 2023, p. 13), though it was never intended to happen. It would be mysteriously shrouded in a narrative of being a game from the earlier days of digital entertainment, lost for a time but now resurrected.

Bateman (2011), engaging in Walton's (1990) definition of official and unofficial games, claims that “we can say that if one plays along with the spirit of an artwork, story and so forth, one is playing an authorized or normal game (as opposed to an *unofficial game*, which may be perfectly licit, but is not what is usually expected or intended)” (p. 139). The spirit of *Vermis* *officially* invites the factual reader to be both

a player and a protagonist, each in their secondary worlds. However, as the game does not exist in the primary world, the variety of conceptualisations of the game of *Vermis* will naturally constitute a plethora of *unofficial* games.

Narratological analysis: Who is the narrator in Vermis?

The guidebook presents different selves of the narrator, which complicates the relationship with the reader (cf. Genette, 1980). In the chapter 'A House Without Windows', the address mimics the style of a guidebook: "After some time walking, hidden in the forest you will find what appears to be the perfect place to rest" (Plastiboo, 2023). This is a fairly objective instruction as a how-to manual to beat the game. On the following page, however, it says: "You soon notice how the exterior doesn't show any windows ... You don't perceive any sounds of lights coming from the inside" (Plastiboo, 2023). This way of deciding for the readers what they do and do not notice more resembles gamemaster-jargon than objective instructions to the player on how to progress. In the chapter 'The Goblin's last breath', the tone of the narrator becomes clearly objective, and the narrator states what one can and cannot do: "You can't take his armor or his axes with you because they are extremely heavy" (Plastiboo, 2023).

The guidebook even ad-libs objective facts (displaying the narrator's lack of omniscience), which becomes clear in the description of the Ring of the Singing Fire: "The effect only lasts about five minutes" (Plastiboo, 2023). In the chapter 'The Alluring Shine', it says: "You look at the chest wondering what wonders could be hidden within it". This call refers to two different worlds: partly a description of what happens in the game, partly a description of the reader who there and then reads the sentence (oblivious to what happens in the fictional game). *Vermis* is thus always experienced in two different layers at the same time: in the moment of reading and in the imagination where the game is played (see Figure 1).

The chapter 'Goblin Knight' employs a suggestive and gradually clarifying style:

A threatening presence stands in the middle of the room; their odd looking armor presents the main traits of a goblin, but it doesn't match his imposing stature, he carries a pair of wavy war axes. As soon as he notices your presence he starts walking towards you. (Plastiboo, 2023)

We thus move from a "threatening presence" to a genderless "their" to a gendered "his". The narrator's omniscience returns in the chapter 'The Princess's Chamber', where the narrator states what a corpse is dreaming about: "The princess remembers better times ... she thinks of the goblins and her father" (Plastiboo, 2023). Verily, since the guidebook does not present a clear narrator, the reader ends up in a state of ontological uncertainty, resulting in a playful reading where nothing is granted.

Literary reception: What is the work of fiction of Vermis?

In the definition of a literary work put forth by Jauß (1974, p. 14), an essential and material approach to the text should be forgone, as the literary work does not constitute an actual object providing the same meaning in each of its readers—as though it were a physical artefact or a “monument”, as Jauß calls it. Rather, a literary work is to be understood as something which takes shape in the idiosyncratic imagination of each individual during the act of reading. Echoing the notions in Barthes’ (1967/1997) text ‘Death of the Author’, in which the meaning of a work of fiction is dependent on the impressions of the individual readers rather than the inconceivable intents of the author, the claim can once again be made that fictions, much like meaning, exist outside of the written narrative and inside the minds of the readers.

As Fiorilli (2023) notes in his review, *Vermis* “builds the speculative world of its own existence”, and the book is “less a narrative than a narrative of a narrative: a guide to a more complete story that exists nowhere else but, in the player/reader’s own head”. However, despite the attempt at creating a world in which the game exists, *Vermis* does not provide enough information for the game to be fully playable—thus, the game remains a fragmented mystery, which becomes evident when comparing the game to more rigorously detailed RPG books. This setup hints that the reader possesses an agency in their reading activity. In *Vermis*, however, the agency of the reader is strictly reduced to choosing one’s flesh and engaging with acts that either end the journey or keep the journey going. *Vermis* might thus be regarded as an incremental game, from the idea that the guidebook lacks enough information regarding gameplay to present the reader with a comprehensive reading experience. Ironically, the only one of the five attributes ever explicitly tried in the guidebook is *will*. In the chapter ‘The Silent Keeper – Two Coins’, the reader is instructed to measure their level of will correctly and place a pair of coins in the correct hands, otherwise, they will be inflicted with a curse (see Image 3).

In the chapter ‘The Deepening’, the following is stated: “You may enter into this lengthy hallway without really knowing since the position on the map is provisional, the hallway is constantly moving and changing locations”. This works in both ways: the hallway in-game is supposedly constantly moving, and the same is true of the imaginary setting hazily existing in the reader’s head. This irreplicability of the game is seen in how *Vermis* plays with the idea of the reader leaving the narrative upon finishing the guidebook (or completing the game). In the final chapter, “A Room with a Well”, the following is stated: “A feeble illusion shatters in silence. The void swaddles you gently, welcoming you back; a life has been lived and the Dream is no longer” (Plastiboo, 2023). As the illusion falters, the reader is brought back to the surface and the portal to the game is shut—never to be accessed again. This irreplicability is also suggested by the final phrase of the guidebook, “Which flesh is your

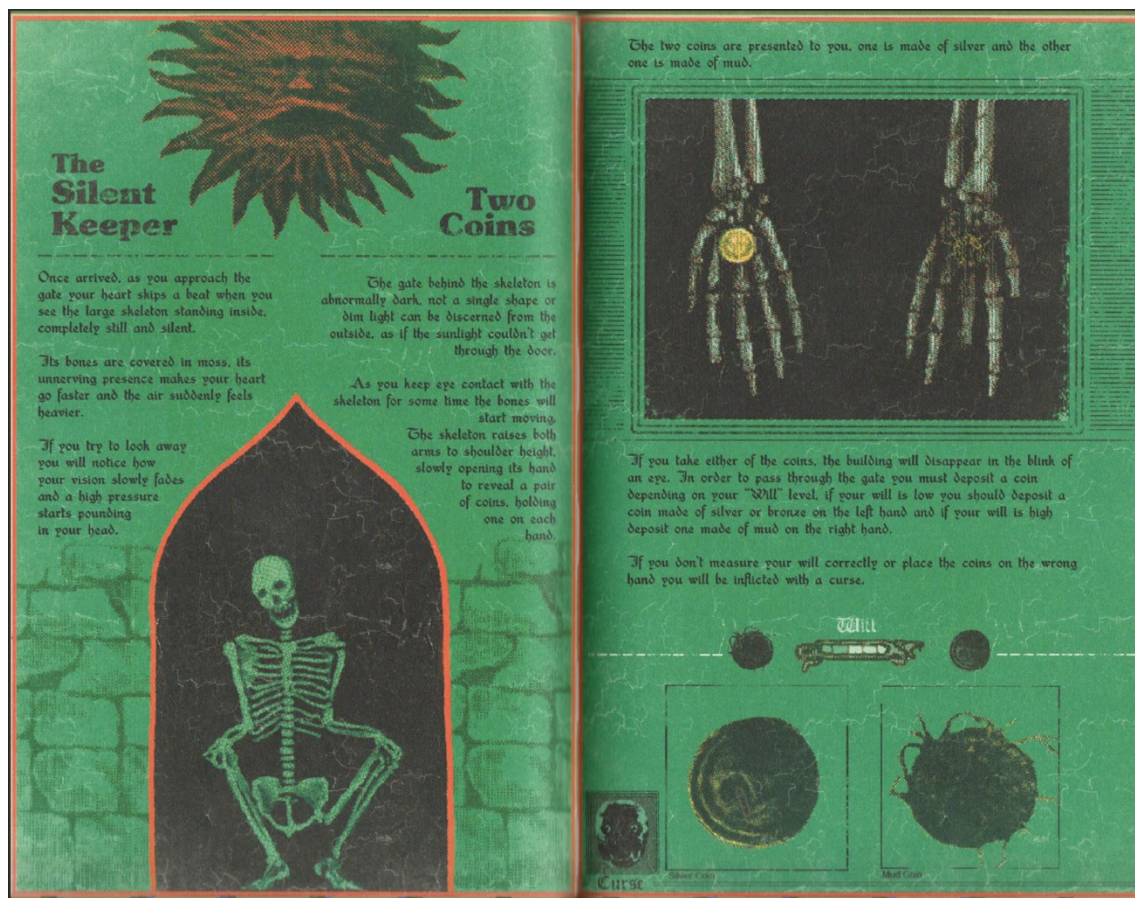


Image 3. The attribute “Will” is tested in the chapter ‘The Silent Keeper – Two Coins’ in *Vermis I – Lost Dungeons and Forbidden Woods* (Plastiboo, 2023). © Michele Nitri & Plastiboo.

flesh?”, which prompts the reader to engage with the ludic guidebook a second time—hence, every reading experience is inherently unique.

Vermis, thus, is presented to the reader as a game in which the buttons push themselves. There is no real player. Instead, *Vermis* is a self-playing game in its current format—a linear narrative photo-developed in the individual minds of each reader.

Bateman (2011, p. 50) notes that uncertainty is central to stories, and this is “common to all well-regarded stories” (p. 50). Moreover, in following Malaby (2009), Bateman stipulates that “games can be understood as processes that utilize uncertainty in particular ways to create compelling and engaging experiences, while play is best understood as a willingness to improvise in the face of uncertainty” (2011, p. 53). Applied to *Vermis*, this yields the following conclusion: the fictional game of *Vermis* would likely make use of uncertain processes to engage the players (much like any roleplaying game), whereas the factual guidebook of *Vermis* compels the reader to willingly improvise a hypothetical scenario wherein the reader would in fact be a player.

Conclusion

Broadening the concept of fictional games by blending fictional games and imaginary play, we argue that *Vermis* invites the reader to reconsider play from a meta-perspective, wherein the reader is inhabiting multiple secondary worlds during the same reading.

Using the concepts diegetic prototypes and performative artefacts, we have illustrated how the guidebook *Vermis* plays with a secondary world where the actual game *Vermis* exists. In comparison to other fictional games, created as part of a secondary world, *Vermis*, the fictional game itself, exists on a meta-level first, and demands the creation of a secondary world which can harbour it. Thus, a fictional game does not necessarily need to be part of an (existing) secondary world—it can be the object that creates and enforces a secondary world.

Narratologically, the guidebook does not present a clear narrator—putting the reader in a state of ontological uncertainty. The reader, thus, is played by the guidebook, where the toying with the reader leads to an increasingly playful reading; the playfulness, thus, is aggregated. Moreover, *Vermis* creates its own player. The guidebook, having functioned as a blueprint for the game, contains the cogs necessary to make the narrative machine work in the head of the reader but framed in such a way that the reader becomes a player in their own idiosyncratic imagination. At its most rudimentary stage, then, *Vermis* functions like a meta-game: a game in which the reader, in their illusion, plays that they are in another illusion (Figure 1); they pretend that they are pretending (cf. Boluk & LeMieux, 2017).

In this article, we have discussed if *Vermis* can be understood as a fictional game. Indeed, *Vermis* lacks some of the traits associated with fictional games, since it does not exist in a fictional narrative. However, *Vermis* still brings to the table significant traits of 'fictional games', since it functions like a reading toy which inspires the reader to imagine a world where the fictional and hitherto unplayable game of *Vermis* is a factual and playable game. This suggests that the present definition of 'fiction' in fictional games is disrupted, and within such disruption lies a potentiality to widen the concept. Much like its namesake, the median lobe vermis—connecting the two hemispheres of the cerebellum—the guidebook *Vermis* functions like a bridge to a fictional reality wherein the game presented in the guidebook exists. Thus, *Vermis* shows the power inherent in fictional game guidebooks to conjure up imaginary games which demand their unique form of lusory attitude in order to be enjoyed.

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