A Word Game Becomes a Game
Game: Filling in the Blanks

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LINE BY LINE, DESIGN BY DESIGN
There is a low-tech party game where players write a story line by line. The first person writes a sentence starting the narrative, and hands the paper to another, who writes a second sentence, then folds down the paper over the first sentence. When the third person receives the paper, they can only see the second sentence of the story, and continues the narrative based solely on that limited information. The big reveal, at the end of the party game, is the reading aloud of the collaboratively written—and intentionally or unintentionally absurd, delightful, and hysterical—story.

Utilizing DiGRA’s 2014 Mad Libs theme, this Filling in the Blanks format opens myriad possibilities for adapting old word games, creating new stories, and building an unusual, peculiar, and fabulous artifact. In this case, a Little Big Planet 2 (LBP; Media Molecule, 2011) level will be collaboratively designed by attendees with limited information, built on the spot by the author, and disseminated to the LBP network at the end of the session.

LITTLE BIG PLANET 2
LBP is a PlayStation 3 (PS3) game that provides both levels to play and tools to design one’s own levels. All of the levels—those designed by LBP and those published by players—are available online through the PlayStation Network, and players can also play together remotely. Each of the players has an avatar that can interact with the game (a sackperson, see Figure 1). Players can use sackpeople to communicate with other players, or use more standard methods such as text and voice.
Figure 1: The LBP avatar, known as a sackperson.

The LBP building tools are well designed with some specific constraints that make building a game simpler, and are distinctly playful. Tools provided include a gravity tweaker to modify the in-game gravity, complex logic gates and digital microchips, teleporters, non-player-characters with various behavior programming, build-your-own-soundtrack tools, and various power-ups (like jetpacks) and weapons (such as the Cakeinator, which shoots jelly-filled frosted cakes, water cannons, and paint guns).

AUTHOR BACKGROUND
The author is a dissertator at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW) in Curriculum and Instruction, with a joint masters from UW in Mathematics and Mathematics Education. She is the co-chair of the Games+Learning+Society Conference (GLS; www.glsconference.org), and has been involved with game design and research her entire academic career. She has worked on two “shipped” educational games, including Quest Atlantis (Indiana University, 2008) and Me & E (Oklahoma K20 Center, 2012).

The author has built multiple Little Big Planet 1 and 2 levels, prototyped her dissertation game in LBP, conducted two LBP Well Played sessions (Williams 2010, 2011a), and published a journal article involving LBP (Williams, 2011b). She is currently completing her learning trajectory game design on fractions and linear functions for her dissertation, prior to building the final LBP game and conducting her research.

JUSTIFICATION FOR EVENT
This event provides the opportunity to share the experience and process of designing live in a rapid-build context, infused with humor and playfulness. Furthermore, as a collaborative design event, this will serve as a community builder—one that is playful through and through, and a nice break from the more academically oriented DiGRA sessions. Lastly, this event will conclude with a public artifact that we, as a DiGRA community, built and published together in a digital location that players both familiar and unfamiliar with DiGRA can play.

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION
This event session will be a 90-minute rapid design and live-build event. Attendees will opt in or out of being an active designer participant, with ten such participants and the remainder remaining in the room as a live audience. The ten participants will be randomly ordered, and asked to stand outside the room. They will enter one at a time, watch a short segment of the previous gameplay, and make a quick design decision about the next chunk of gameplay. The author will build it immediately, the participant will join the live audience, and the next participant will enter. All ten players will repeat this process, with approximately five minutes per participant. The entire level will be played in its entirety as the concluding event activity, and immediately published on the LBP network. (Given that this is a new event idea, and standing outside a closed door for 45 minutes may not be fun for the last participant, some alternative possibilities: a) the author will bring two friends to be the last ones in line; b) the waiting participants will allowed in the audience but provided with earplugs so they can see the building, but not hear the narrative; or c) active participants will write down their game design decision, while future participants sit parallel to the television, unable to see the game design in action, but able to hear the audience and the author. Feedback on these, or other proposals, is much appreciated.)
In order to test this activity in advance, the author met with colleagues and asked for story ideas. She built a starting point based off a stub idea she designed to be specifically open-ended for the participants (“It was a beautiful sunny day, just right for an adventure!”), and was directed by a colleague as follows, “And then he meets a dragon.” This was followed by, “The dragon ate an elephant, and it’s trapped inside – help the elephant!” followed by “then he meets 12 turtles running around.” To illustrate the aesthetic style of LBP, and what such rapid construction builds look like, the starting point is illustrated in Figure 2, and the “dragon” is pictured in Figure 3.

Figure 2: The author’s stub: “It was a beautiful sunny day, just right for an adventure!”
REQUIRED RESOURCES
This event requires that DiGRA provide a television or projector and internet access, provided one half hour prior to the session beginning. The author will provide a PS3, a copy of LBP, and a simple level stub (such as Figure 2).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
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BIBLIOGRAPHY