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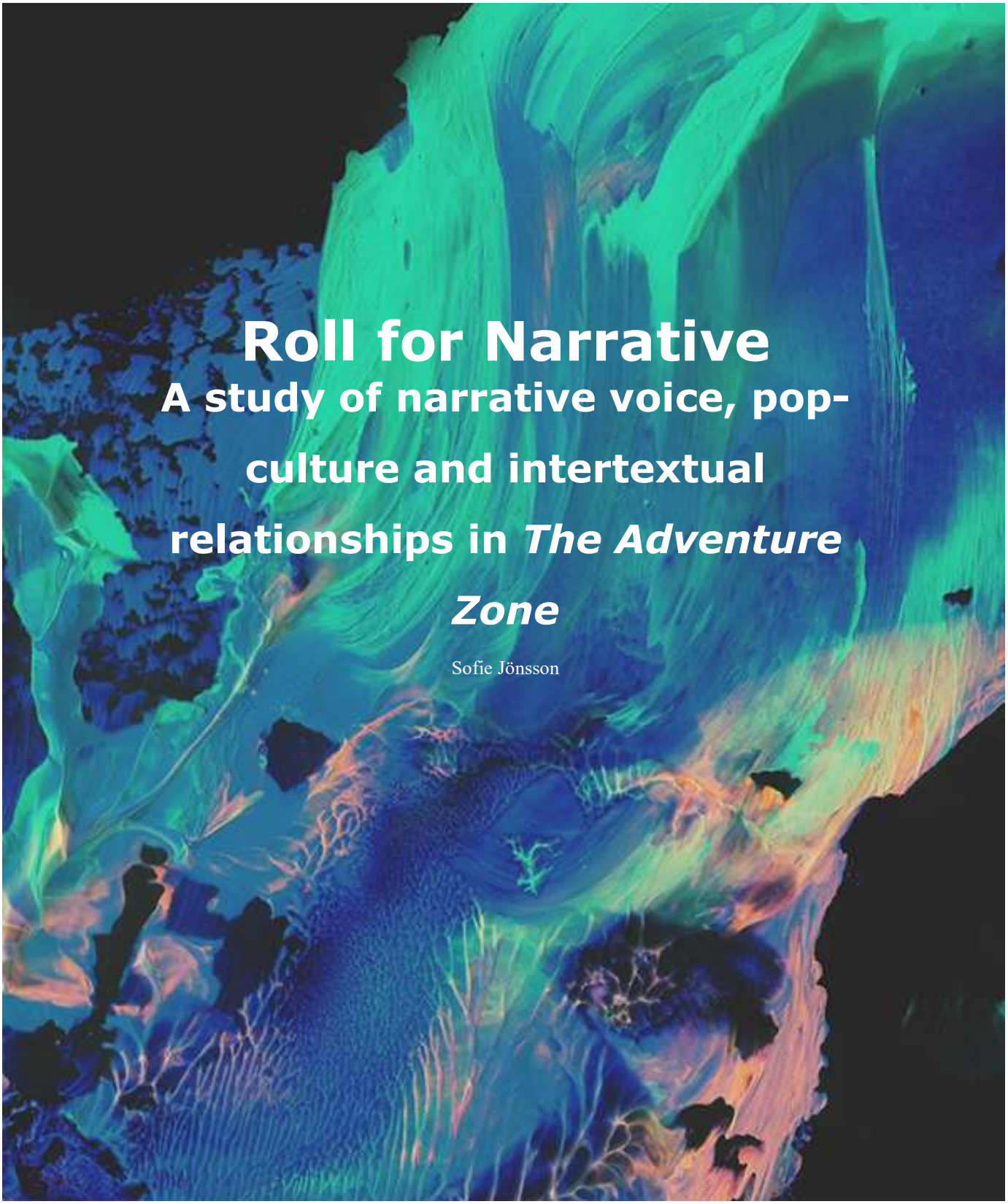

# Roll for Narrative

## A study of narrative voice, pop-culture and intertextual relationships in *The Adventure Zone*

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**Abstract**

*The Adventure Zone* graphic novel as a story incorporates many different kinds of humor and storytelling techniques to develop its narrative. While the original podcast has been the primary focus of multiple previous scholarly studies, this has left the graphic novel adaptation quite underexamined in comparison. The aim of this study is to analyze how parody, metafiction and intertextuality operate within the graphic novel to challenge and reinterpret the established rules of storytelling through *Dungeons and Dragons*. In addition, the study investigates Griffin McElroy's dual role as both narrator and *Dungeon Master*, and how these roles shape the reader's experience of the narrative. The findings suggest that Griffin operates using a hybrid position throughout much of the story, where he appears simultaneously as a character within the narrative, a pseudo-narrator who guides the audience by explaining events, detailing what characters are doing and feeling, while also describing dialogues in real time.

**Keywords**: The Adventure Zone, Dungeons and Dragons, D&D, Intertextuality, Fanfiction Studies, Metafiction, Parody, Narrative.

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## 1. Introduction

> "I need you to make a perception ch-" (5)

This is the first line of dialogue spoken by the character Griffin McElroy in the graphic novel adaptations of the narrative podcast *The Adventure Zone*. It quickly and efficiently sets the tone for what kind of experience the reader is about to have, as it is relaxed and humorous, while also being meta in tone as well as content. Griffin is immediately interrupted by the other characters yelling as they rush into battle, and the story quickly progresses without caring about or acknowledging this further. He is Griffin, the other characters can talk to him even though he exists outside the panels of the story, and he is their DM.

Nevertheless, what is a DM? A reader who is not familiar with this term might experience some confusion for a moment, if one were to pick this graphic novel up without any prior knowledge of the source material. The graphic novel itself mostly assumes that the reader already knows what a DM is and what they do. In the tabletop roleplaying game *Dungeons and Dragons*, the DM, short for *Dungeon Master*, is a form of leader who steers the game and upholds the game rules. *Dungeons and Dragons*, commonly abbreviated as *D&D*, is a game where the ultimate goal "(...) is to tell a story" (*D&D Beyond*), and the *DM* "manages the narrative of the story" (*D&D Beyond*).

At first glance, *The Adventure Zone* may look like a conventional graphic novel, but the unique take on storytelling where characters break out of the frames, ignoring the established rules of comic structure, sets it apart from other more conventional graphic novels. In the introduction to the first volume of the graphic novel version of *The Adventure Zone*, the best-selling fantasy author Patrick Rothfuss presents his love for the original podcast while also commending the work that has gone into adapting it into a graphic novel format, presenting this thought, "What you hold in your hands is a unique experiment. A brave, even remarkable thing. This comic is an attempt to translate pure audio improvisational storytelling into a visual medium. I've done some work in comics, and I can't think of a harder transition for a story to make" (1). It is difficult to refute this statement, as all adaptations from one medium to another will eventually face their share of problems to solve during the adaptation process. However, the transition between mediums can certainly be easier or more difficult depending on how fundamentally different the various mediums used are. In the case of *The Adventure Zone*, the actual adaptation has been praised by both

Rothfuss and other fans alike, earning it a #1 spot on the *New York Times* Bestseller list and a multitude of positive reviews from readers.

Its origin as an improvised *D&D* podcast naturally adds a layer of metafictional depth through fourth-wall breaking and pop-culture references that make it a truly unique reading experience. Due to the fact that all of the character's actions are originally improvised by the creators in the podcast, the presentation of the choices and the decisions made by the characters can be interpreted as inconsistent at times. How do the player's choices and decisions affect the storytelling itself? Furthermore, could it be argued that the inclusion of real-life actors and references to other fantasy stories make *The Adventure Zone* a form of fanfiction?

In contrast, the rules of *D&D* greatly affect the story in more structured ways. How does the graphic novel reflect the *D&D* mechanics, and how is the narrative affected by these mechanics? Furthermore, the story is fundamentally changed in its new graphic novel form. The question here becomes; is Griffin still the narrator in the graphic novel version?

This structure invites questions about how the story is constructed and how story elements like Griffin McElroy can be construed by the reader. This analysis will focus mainly on the narrative construction and characterizations of the first volume of the graphic novel adaptations, *The Adventure Zone: Here There Be Gerblins (2018)*. The purpose of this study is to analyze how the character of Griffin in particular functions in the story structure and how the use of pop-culture references works together with the turn-based rules of the *D&D* game mechanics in the narrative. *The Adventure Zone* graphic novels also use intertextuality through parody, pop-culture references and metafictional storytelling to create a complex story that both compliments and critiques traditional fantasy storytelling. Following this, I argue that *The Adventure Zone* graphic novels challenge traditional narrative structures through the usage of *D&D* mechanics, merging improvisational storytelling and humor with rule-based action to create a hybrid narrative that challenges the conventional literary form.

### 1.2 Previous Research

There has been limited research conducted on the different versions of *The Adventure Zone*. While the original podcast has received some scholarly attention, the predominant focus has been on the podcast and its narrative in relation to transmedia storytelling and audience participation, and other issues related to the collaborative aspects of the original podcast. Examples of this are "Serial fiction podcasting and participatory culture: Fan influence and

representation in The Adventure Zone" by Robert Yeates and "Collaborative storytelling and canon fluidity in the adventure zone podcast" by Jasper Wyld. I have not been able to find another study that focuses on the graphic novel adaptations specifically, and I likewise have not found any studies that focus on the narrative structure of the story. Multiple Queer analyses of the character of Taako and other explicitly or implicitly queer characters do exist, such as "Bury and unbury your gays in the adventure zone" by Jessica Seymour, and "Inclusivity and diversity in 'Actual Play': Studying The Adventure Zone" by Ryan Stanton and Mark R. Johnson. This indicates that there is a potential knowledge gap about this specific piece of media, especially where it concerns the question of how the narrative is developed after its adaptation from a podcast and into a graphic novel.

## 2. Theory

### 2.1 Narrative Theory

James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz's work *A Companion to Narrative Theory*, will be used to examine focalization and point of view and the actions of the storyteller (126), as well as what the storyteller wishes to impart upon their audience. Phelan and Rabinowitz present the main functions of a narrator through heuristic typology as presences who; "…report on characters, facts, and events; …evaluate or regard the characters, facts, and events" and "…interpret or read the characters, facts, and events." (94)

Furthermore, the role of the narrator is determined through *focalization* (Phelan & Rabinowitz, 124), also often described as "point of view", which is the determined center of consciousness inhabited by the narrator. Focalization as such "...does not differ from ''point of view,'' except that it defines ''point of view'' not as a matter of looking from a certain position, but rather as a matter of getting things in focus when looking through some device or other" (125). Phelan and Rabinowitz also argue that another way to express this idea is to say that terms like "center of consciousness", "point of view" or "focalization", while central to contemporary literary theory, are ultimately figures of speech (125), as "no consciousness as such exists in any novel, only the representation of consciousness in words. No looking or bringing into focus exists in any novel, only the virtual phantasm of these as expressed in words" (125). This posits that there is no direct observation or emphasis concerning the concept of "point of view" within a narrative itself, but that these ideas are simply our interpretations of the structure of that narrative.

## 2.2 Intertextuality

Graham Allen's *Intertextuality* and Lissi Athanasiou-Krikelis' *Mapping the Metafictional Picturebook* will be used to apply postmodernist theories of intertextuality and metafiction to the *D&D* mechanics and pop-culture references in the graphic novel, as they are important parts of the story which play a large role in the narrative as a whole, even in the graphic novel adaptation.

Allen opens his text by challenging the idea that literary meaning lies inside a single work. He proposes that "texts, whether they be literary or non-literary, are viewed by modern theorists as lacking in any kind of independent meaning. They are what theorists now call intertextual." (1). He emphasizes that reading is not about extracting fixed meaning, but about tracing "a network of textual relations" (1), the idea that all texts work in collaboration with each other. Allen explains reading as a "process of moving between texts" (1), while also acknowledging the importance of understanding that intertextuality is not simply defined to the study of texts, but can be applied to other art forms as well. Furthermore, Allen argues that textual meaning, "[t]he idea of the text, and thus of intertextuality, depends on the figure of the web, the weave, the garment (text) woven from the threads of the 'already written' and the 'already read'." (6), and the idea that intertextuality promotes "a vision resistant to ingrained notions of originality, uniqueness, singularity and autonomy (6)." In other words, intertextuality does not insist on all works being completely original and instead focuses on acknowledging and discussing the similarities between different texts and how they constantly and continually inspire each other. This challenges traditionalist views of the author as the sole origin and creator of meaning, and Allen emphasizes the instability of meaning and the relational nature of language (6), underpinning the idea that texts, despite continuous evolution and innovation, all inherently draw inspiration from each other. Allen's work examines intertextuality in relation to global cultures and new media, showcasing its broad scope and applicability when it comes to studying various pieces of media. The scope of intertextuality is thus not limited to the study of literature, as it can be "a term by no means exclusively related to literary works, or even simply to written communication" (5), within which both visual, auditory and literary mediums can be included.

Postmodernist theorists often claim that it is no longer possible to "speak of originality or the uniqueness of the artistic object, be it a painting or a novel, since every artistic object is so clearly assembled from bits and pieces of already existent art" (Allen, 5), and the emergence of the internet and other mass media is seen as a contributing factor of this idea. Our new technologically advanced society "is dominated by reproductions of original

works" (181), but this does not have to mean that it is impossible to create new and novel ways of experiencing and enjoying stories, such as parodies and retellings of already established tropes and narratives. Athanasiou-Krikelis argues that "metafictional parodies combine the modes of parody with metafiction to comment on existing works of art and invite reconsideration of conventional structures" (355), such as the established rules of genres and narrative. She creates a proposed taxonomy which "defines metafictional picturebooks as books that direct attention to themselves on their pictorial and linguistic levels, that actively implicate the reader, and that acknowledge their reality as mediated" (370), like instances of fourth-wall breaking and acknowledging of the structural rules of the medium the story operates within.

## 2.3 Fan Fiction Studies

When examining the assertion that "(...) fan fiction develops in response to dramatic rather than literary modes of storytelling and can therefore be seen to fulfill performative rather than literary criteria" (Coppa, 218), it becomes easier to see how *The Adventure Zon*e relies on similar dramatic techniques. This theatrical flair functions as both a humorous addition to the story in the case of all the three main characters and Griffin, and as a way for the creators to express their appreciation for the media that they enjoy. This interaction with other types of media "celebrates, analyzes, and negotiates with stories" (Busse & Hellekson, 218) in a similar vein as regular fanfiction, with the key difference being the fact that most characters in the story are original to its specific narrative.

When considering fan fiction and fan activities using a broader perspective, one could say that *The Adventure Zon*e becomes both a parody and fanfiction of the traditional fantasy narrative itself, bringing in a multitude of references and ideas from other media in the same way that "...fans of mass media write fan fiction-which […], is more a kind of theatre than a kind of prose." (Coppa, 219). Both the podcast and the graphic novel exhibit a similar kind of theatrical rhythm as fanfiction often does, focusing more on character development and characters being at the center of the narrative world, which stems from the fact that the creators were roleplaying their characters in the original medium, thus injecting a certain amount of theatrical flair which is not often used in standard fiction (Coppa, 236). Similarly, Coppa presents the idea that "...the writer is part of an interactive community, and in this way, the production of fan fiction is closer to the collaborative making of a theatre piece than to the fabled solitary act of writing" (236), which is particularly poignant when looking at *The Adventure Zone*. The overall narrative was largely improvised through roleplay and affected

by fans who sent in ideas and suggestions between episodes of the podcast, and the adaptation into a graphic novel where the artist Carey Pietsch had to look at the extensive collection of fan art available online and determine the most appropriate way to visually represent the characters and the world which thousands of other artists had already done. Every part of the narrative and world building was thus influenced by multiple sources, multiple creators, even after the initial podcast was over, creating an internal form of intertextuality surrounding how each character should be depicted.

**3. Analysis - Narrator or Narratee?**

When opening *The Adventure Zone: Here There Be Gerblins*, the reader is greeted by an introduction of our three main characters: Taako, Merle and Magnus. This introduction includes important and relevant information connected to the game rules and game mechanics, such as race and class (where class refers to things such as whether a character is a Wizard, Cleric, Fighter, et cetera). Additionally, parts of their personalities are apparent in the discussion they have with each other about what their next intended course of action for the adventure they have set out on should be. During these first two pages of dialogue, everything generally appears like any other graphic novel or comic, with pictures and speech bubbles. This quickly shifts on page 5 however, where another character suddenly appears in his own separate bubble next to the standardized and orderly panels of the rest of the comic. He interrupts the characters in the middle of an action and brings the entire narrative to a halt for a moment, asking them to make a perception check (an important mechanic in *D&D*), and then directly addressing the characters again by saying "Guys! It's me: Griffin! Your D.M.!" (5). This serves as a clear example of the distance that is upheld between the different types of character roles that they all embody. Griffin is clearly treated as something distinct in comparison to the other characters, even if the narrative itself does not explicitly acknowledge this difference.

When it comes to Griffin's involvement in the story, he is both similar to and different from the concept of the "omniscient narrator" (124), whom Phelan and Rabinowitz describe as a narrator who "...might be defined as a consciousness of the consciousness of others" (124), in other words, a form of all-encompassing, knowledgeable presence who sees all, knows all and hears all, then retells it to the audience. This is often done both in such things as describing an environment, as well as describing what a character is saying, feeling and the actions that they wish to take. As the Dungeon Master, Griffin has the most knowledge about what will happen next in the story, he has the ideas for future plot-points, he

creates friends and adversaries for the characters, and he also builds upon their history and creates a deeper and more complex past history for each character as the story goes on, and decides whether a character or adversary can or cannot take specific actions at any time.

It is easy to argue that the Griffin McElroy who appears in the original podcast format of the story is the one true narrator of *The Adventure Zone*. He is the only character who almost always knows what will happen next, who steers the narrative towards certain directions, and keeps secrets that the other characters do not know about. However, things still do not always go the way he plans them to, since the decisions made by the other characters have the potential to, and often succeed in, disrupting his plans and thus calling for improvisation from both him and the other characters. In the format of a graphic novel that is already aware of all the twists and turns that the story will take, can his role as a narrator truly be maintained in this new narrative style that the graphic novel must employ? When listening to the podcast, most of the story is essentially experienced from the point of view of the three main characters as a collective group since they can usually all hear what Griffin is saying, but when changing the narrative to fit the graphic novel format, some changes can be made. There are more opportunities to showcase the specific "point of view" of each character as they make different decisions, and Griffin then has the opportunity to speak "one-on-one" to each character in a different capacity than what was done in the original podcast. In this sense, his role in the story is consequently transformed from what it was in the original podcast. In the graphic novel, he is still the narrator of *The Adventure Zone*, yet in a select few instances, he disappears from the page and another voice takes up the narration. In these instances, he is no longer the narrator, as he is momentarily replaced by this new disembodied voice.

### 3.1 Intertextuality as a building block of storytelling

Due to the story's origin as a *D&D* podcast, there are a lot of examples of intertextuality that are naturally and intrinsically connected to the story. The entire narrative is built on *D&D* rules, character classes, and storytelling structure. This means that the graphic novels often need to visually represent dice rolls, spell effects, character and item statistics, and turn-based combat. This can be such things as Griffin interrupting the character and asking them to roll the dice for a specific reason, like checking whether or not they are proficient in a certain skill, if they noticed something about an item or room, or whether or not they were able to fool another character. Without at least basic knowledge of the rules of *D&D*, or a similar game, this element has the potential of confusing readers who have not interacted with a

similar type of media before. Basic knowledge of the intertextual relationship that the graphic novel has with the game of *D&D* is thus somewhat needed in order to fully appreciate and understand the story that is being told. This is an interesting direction to go in when adapting something into a graphic novel. It means, as Allen explains in his text, that the very act of reading becomes "a process of moving between texts" (1). If one does not know the rules of *D&D*, they may take some time to look them up using different websites and then go back to the story with new knowledge which will help them interpret the text at hand. They might thus find new meaning in the text, a meaning that Allen describes as "something which exists between a text and all the other texts to which it refers and relates, moving out from the independent text into a network of textual relations" (1). Intertextuality can also be found within "...discussions of cinema, painting, music, architecture, photography and in virtually all cultural and artistic productions" (178), where both the original podcast's game structure and the graphic novel's parody and meta-storytelling can fit within the framing of intertextual media when considering the jokes that are often present in both conversations and fight scenes within the story, which are more often than not referential in nature.

### 3.2 Pop-culture, fanfiction and meta-storytelling

Pop-culture certainly plays a large role in the narrative of *The Adventure Zone*. Without it, large parts of the story would simply not exist. Since the story is intrinsically tied to the ideas and mechanics of *D&D*, as well as traditional Fantasy narrative conventions and stereotypes, pop-culture thus fundamentally serves as a large building block for the plot as a whole. Without the use of *D&D* as a concept, the story would be undeniably changed by its presence or absence in the story. Without it, the story never would have existed in the first place, and with it, the story occupies a niche within the Fantasy genre which is still expanding to this day, with other *D&D* podcasts like *Critical Role*, *Dungeons and Daddies* and *Dimension 20*, among others, which are all based on the real time play and interactive format of *D&D*.

Further instances of pop-culture references are the various jokes made by the characters. Such interactions often happen during moments of stress, where the characters use humor to interrupt Griffin or their enemies, or quiet and serious moments where they fill the silence with jokes. This adds yet another layer of meta-storytelling to the narrative, expanding the story to incorporate material beyond the pages of the graphic novel. The character of Barry Bluejeans in particular requires a certain level of pre-understood knowledge and understanding of American celebrities and contemporary pop-culture that many readers who

live outside of the United States might not have, as Griffin spends some time deciding exactly which mix of male actors the character looks like;

> "John Goodman! ... No, John Stamos. No... the exact median between John Goodman and John Stamos… Tom Arnold!" (32).

It turns out to be the actor, Tom Arnold. The graphic novel here spends a few panels on illustrating this by rendering portraits of each real-life actor in the same style as the fictional characters, resulting in a break in the flow of the story where the reader could potentially be completely thrust out of the narrative to momentarily focus all of their attention on this instead of the dire situation that the characters are still finding themselves in. The inclusion of Tom Arnold in the story can be seen as a form of metafictional parody, a form of parody which combines "the modes of parody with metafiction to comment on existing works of art and invite reconsideration of conventional structures" (Athanasiou-Krikelis, 355). Further examples of this can be found when Taako disagrees with Griffin about what a spell should be called;

Griffin: "Taako casts magic missiles"-
Taako: "Ouch rays!"
Griffin: "Sorry, ouch rays."
Taako: "I'm trying to build my brand."
Griffin: "I like it! It almost sounds French!" (132)

Similarly, Taako previously stops in the middle of an action to ask Griffin whether what he wants to do is possible or not within the rules of the game and Griffin gives him a thumbs up as answer (48). The story thus mimics the back and forth dynamic of spoken conversation that is present in the source material, where pop-culture references and meta-commentary blends together with the evolving plot line. The blending of pop-culture and lighthearted arguments thus becomes a large part of the story and reading experience as a whole. This "reconsideration of conventional structures" (Athanasiou-Krikelis, 355), thus results in the fact that the plot is, more often than not, driven forward by the jokes and arguments that the characters have, both with each other and with Griffin. This specific comedic angle is especially strong in this first volume of the graphic novel, where both the

story and characters are still being explored and the real stakes and goals of the narrative have yet to be fully determined and realized.

As stated, pop-culture references play a huge part in the narrative and particularly the jokes in *The Adventure Zone*. This can sometimes manifest as jokes about what certain fantasy races can and cannot do and supposed stereotypes of a certain race when it comes to both abilities, personality and appearances, or more specific references to other pieces of media, such as when Griffin, annoyed by the numerous jokes and the often entirely unserious way that the characters approach a situation, sarcastically describes their word choices as "Perfect. Wonderful. Tolkien-esque" (12). When examining his facial expression as he speaks, the comment clearly reads as sarcastic in nature and a complaint from Griffin about how the other characters are not taking the story seriously at that point, making the story the exact opposite of "Tolkien-esque" due to their actions. The same can be said for many more of the characters' actions, but Griffin's reactions to those instances are, more often than not, positive after that point in the story. The jokes and jabs quickly become deeply rooted in the narrative as the story moves along, and both Griffin and the other characters constantly play off of each other to make more jokes whenever the opportunity arises.

In *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader,* Abercrombie and Longhurst examine how fan production intersects with mainstream media, blurring the line between amateur and professional (135-136), creating a multitude of intertextual relationships between different pieces of media. This study does not examine fanfiction of *The Adventure Zone*, which there is plenty of, but rather proposes that *The Adventure Zone* itself can be compared to the category of fanfiction and other fan productions due to its extensive ties to the game of *D&D* and fervent use of pop-culture references. It is, for example, not inherently *Lord of the Rings* fanfiction, yet Griffin's use of the word "Tolkien-esque", suggest that the story is likely influenced by its various versions and other similar fantasy works consumed by its creators. When Griffin says "He's not *Beetlejuice*" (124) when the other characters comment on the name of a character, or "You look like a medieval Mary Poppins" (198), when Taako picks up a magical umbrella, they are also essentially "fans" interpreting and rewriting existing works into new ones, intertwining them with others, like the concepts of *D&D*, and thus creating a new creative work which remains undeniably connected to its source materials and creative references. Without these references, much of the humor in the story would be lost.

When further considering the characters played by the creators, one could consider Coppa's idea that "the existence of fan fiction postulates that characters are able to 'walk' not only from one artwork into another, but from one genre into another; fan fiction

articulates that characters are neither constructed or owned, but have, to use Schechner's phrase, a life of their own not dependent on any original 'truth' or 'source.'" (223). This can be especially stated regarding both Griffin as a character and narrator, and the character of Barry Bluejeans. Both are technically based on real people, Griffin "plays" himself, and Barry Bluejeans is essentially the actor Tom Arnold, renamed and used to "play" the character of Barry Bluejeans, despite the actor himself not actually being connected to *The Adventure Zone*. He instead potentially falls under the category of fanfiction that "...exists about books, movies, television, comics, cartoons, anime, bands, celebrity culture, and political culture..." (222), since he in the podcast is described as looking exactly like Tom Arnold, and the graphic novel similarly chooses to keep this portrayal and present his character as looking exactly like Tom Arnold. These decisions could potentially further be interpreted to help pose the question, is *The Adventure Zone* Tom Arnold fanfiction? When considering the genres of fanfiction presented by Coppa above, one could certainly postulate that this is the case. The area of *D&D* based stories additionally skirts the line between what could be considered fanfiction and theatrical performance, as the rulebooks and campaign books provided by the game could be classified as a sort of media that is then expanded upon by "fans" of the game, who use the pre-made characters, stories and locations to create new and unique stories from these existing ideas. *The Adventure Zone* is not fanfiction, yet the creative use of pop-culture referencing lends it much of the same feelings of fan appreciation and collective creativity often associated with fanfiction.

The reference-laden and comedic way that the story is approached by the characters also mirrors Francesca Coppa's idea that fanfiction is a theatrical performance, emphasizing embodiment and iteration over literary originality (196-197), it uses the references to intentionally connect itself with other pieces of media and create intertextual ties that further the enjoyment of the story for the reader beyond the confines of its pages. It can also be argued that the story follows similar rules to Coppa's idea of fanfiction as a collaborative playing field, where fans share tropes and canon to build community narratives around certain ideas or stories (197), since a lot of the jokes and ideas in *The Adventure Zone* are based on themes from Tolkien and other prominent Fantasy media and story structures.

The comedic and theatrical function of the story needs this embodiment of existing tropes and ideas to effectively practice its comedy, due to the fact that the comedy is often heavily reference-based. The levels of meta-storytelling in the graphic novel also vary between chapter to chapter, with the more combat-focused chapters generally having less jokes than the more dialogue-based ones. Most of the time, it is Griffin or one of the other

characters making a joke or referencing something else outside the story, but there is one more level to the storytelling in the graphic novel. There are 3 instances where someone is narrating the story where it is not explicitly visually shown to be Griffin narrating anymore. On page 79, Griffin begins his narration as usual but as the page turns and moves onto a new chapter, it is not clear whether it is still him speaking or if the narration has been handed over to some other sort of omniscient unnamed narrator, as it starts with him saying "Not if you travel via- Travel montage!" (79-83), which is then followed by the first page of the next chapter beginning with a simple text block that says "One travel montage later..." (87) and no clear character who could be interpreted as speaking these words. The same thing can be discussed about a panel on page 15, where a change in time and location is indicated by a simple text panel that is not "voiced" by a character, which narrates the transition as "One boring slog through the woods later..." (15), after which the characters have arrived in a new place. It is not a character speaking as there is no clear speech bubble or image of a character speaking, it is simply a text that explains the current situation in the story.

When these instances of a differing narrative style happen, the feeling of the narration clearly changes in the context of the story. It then becomes markedly similar to the regular standard format of a graphic novel or comic book. From the readers' perspective, after being immersed in the story up until this point, it may feel quite jarring, as the sudden shift in the storytelling technique could be experienced as quite unexpected within the context of the narrative. It appears to seemingly come out of nowhere, after the reader may have gotten used to Griffin taking the role as a de-facto narrator. With this in mind, it becomes less obvious to assess who really is the narrator in this story.

## 4. Conclusion

Concerning the inclusion of pop-culture references and humor in *The Adventure Zone*, the instances where it happens are deeply tied to the narrative as a whole. Any story made today will inevitably be compared to and connected to a myriad of other stories and texts, building upon their ideas and concepts. This is true for comedic pieces of media as well, where references to other works are used for jokes, and parody merges them into the narrative as critical parts of the story.

Concerning the use of parody and humor present in *The Adventure Zone*, without the intertextual relationship and parody of including the actor Tom Arnold, a very important character would be missing from the story. Even though he is called Barry

Bluejeans in the text, it is not hard to imagine that the story in itself would be very different if the character had been a completely original creation. The humor would not be experienced in the same way, as the absurd notion of Tom Arnold the real life American actor taking part in this entirely fictional fantasy narrative, greatly contributes to the humor of the narrative overall, especially when looking at the story in the visual medium of a graphic novel and seeing the similarities to the real life actor depicted in the illustrated pages.

The narrative in itself, with Griffin McElroy playing a central part, is additionally uniquely connected to the experience of both listening to and reading the story of *The Adventure Zone*. Whereas conventional stories may have one or multiple different narrators, points of view, and reliable or unreliable narrators, the narration in *The Adventure Zone* becomes unique in the sense that there is not quite a narrator as seen in the traditional sense of neither a graphic novel, nor a book or a play. There appears to be one omniscient, unnamed and unseen narrator who appears during time skips and montages, while Griffin McElroy becomes both a character and a pseudo-narrator during the majority of the rest of the narrative, where he describes both what happens in the story, who does it, and what they are feeling and saying during important moments. He both is, and is not, the narrator of *The Adventure Zone*.

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