

Interactive storytelling elements in R. L. Stine's "Give Yourself Goosebumps #2: Tick Tock, You're Dead!"

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Abstract

This study explores the captivating world of interactive storytelling, focusing on how it brings horror narratives to life through the lens of R.L. Stine's "Give Yourself Goosebumps #2: Tick Tock, You're Dead!". With storytelling evolving in the digital age, this study aims to unravel the elements behind what keeps readers hooked. This study uses a qualitative descriptive method, specifically using a literary analysis approach, dissecting the novel to uncover hidden gems and patterns. This study shows that interactive storytelling within horror narratives is not just about scaring the readers—it is a powerful tool that entertains, challenges, and inspires readers and authors alike. This study touches on interactive storytelling elements such as decision points, reader agency, consequences of choices, multiple storylines, and replay-ability, these techniques add layers to the horror narrative experienced by the readers.

Keywords: Give Yourself Goosebumps, Horror, Interactive Storytelling, Narrative, R.L. Stine

1. Introduction

Interactive storytelling has become a powerful and novel strategy for capturing attention, giving audiences the chance to dive into the process of an unfolding tale. According to a study conducted by Mohd Suki et al. (2021), the evolution trends in interactive storytelling will keep on increasing. The essence of storytelling lies in the relationship between the narrator and the story, where the teller becomes an integral part of the tale, shaping its meaning and conveying it to the audience (Diasamidze, 2014). Storytelling is a fundamental aspect of human communication, allowing individuals to share experiences, convey information, and evoke emotions through the use of narratives (Renjith et al., 2021). They greatly contribute to the relationships we build by enabling the sharing of perspectives between storytellers and audiences, which fosters ties between people (Bayer & Hettinger, 2019). These stories, at the very least, may not be carefully thought out or artistically crafted, but rather the casual chatter we make up as we go along. We report our own experiences and tell what others have said. Not only do we mould these stories, deep in our nature as natural storytellers but we also tend to sit and listen along as an audience (Glassner, 2004, p. 3). Storytelling holds significant importance in human existence, serving various purposes from daily communication to providing entertainment (Koenitz, 2016, p. 1). Storytelling can entertain, educate as well as inspire. It is a means of communication with considerable value and impact. By taking part in one session of storytelling, students can improve several essential literacy skills. These included the ability to create mental images, actively engage with the content, think critically, and organize story

elements according to a sequence (Agosto, 2016, p. 24). Storytelling helps us learn and have fun at the same time, making it a special way to share and understand important things in life.

Interactive storytelling is a form of narrative that engages the audience in an active and participatory role, allowing them to shape the story's outcome through their choices and actions (Green & Jenkins, 2014). The concept of immersing oneself in a captivating story and actively participating in its unfolding is a dream that resonates with numerous individuals. Despite the various terms used to describe this concept, the endeavour of establishing a widely accessible platform for such interactive engagement presents a challenging yet captivating pursuit (Glassner, 2004, p. 25). With the advancements in technology and the growing popularity of interactive media, exploring the techniques and strategies employed by skilled storytellers becomes paramount. This research aims to identify the interactive storytelling elements employed by renowned author R. L. Stine in his work "Give Yourself Goosebumps #2: Tick Tock, You're Dead!". Interactive storytelling refers to a narrative experience where the audience actively participates and influences the outcome of the story. Non-interactive storytelling, on the other hand, follows a more traditional linear format, where the audience is passive and acts as mere spectators (Wichrowski, 2014). Non-interactive storytelling relies on the skill of the storyteller to captivate and engage the audience through storytelling techniques, such as vivid descriptions, compelling character development, and emotional resonance. While non-interactive storytelling may not offer the same level of agency and personalization as interactive storytelling, it has its strengths in creating a cohesive and powerful narrative that unfolds in a carefully crafted manner.

Understanding interactive storytelling involves several key steps. First, we must identify the problem. Second, collect relevant information about the interactive storytelling work, including its target audience, narrative structure, interactivity mechanism, and technology used. Third, we come up with ideas, or hypotheses, about what makes the story effective or engaging. Fourth, we test these ideas against the actual story experience. Fifth, we evaluate the results of testing the hypotheses to determine the overall success of the interactive storytelling work and identify areas for further improvement. Finally, we use the insights gained from evaluating the interactive storytelling work to refine existing theories or develop new approaches for creating more effective interactive narratives (Crawford, 2005). However, due to limitations in this study, the writer will focus on the first step until the third step only. By following these steps, we can better understand and improve interactive storytelling.

While this research aims to provide an examination of interactive storytelling elements implemented in the novel, the case study does have its limitations. Research limitations are undertaken to ensure the feasibility of the research (Deli et al., 2021). The limitations of this study include:

- a. The interactive storytelling elements are implemented by R. L. Stine in "Give Yourself Goosebumps #2: Tick Tock, You're Dead!". Therefore, the findings and conclusions may not be directly applicable to other authors and other works; and,
- b. This study is based on the available technological resources at the time of the novel's publication, which may restrict the exploration of newer interactive storytelling advancements. It is important to consider that technological progress may have expanded the possibilities of interactive storytelling beyond what is examined in this study.

These limitations help to define the parameters; they also help to put the scope and applicability of the findings in perspective within very specific parentheses—that is, R. L. Stine's "Give Yourself Goosebumps #2: Tick Tock You're Dead!" and the research conducted for this study.

2. Theoretical Framework

There are also reviews of related literature that revolve around examining previous studies conducted in the realm of interactive storytelling and identifying the gaps within this body of research, they are as follows:

- a. The research titled “Experiencing Interactive Storytelling” was conducted by Christian Roth from the University of Amsterdam in 2015 (Roth & Ipskamp Drukkers, 2015), the research extensively explored user experiences within interactive storytelling applications, focusing on elements such as interaction, replay-ability, and user roles. While Roth’s study offers valuable insights into user experiences in interactive narratives, it takes a broader approach compared to this study. This study specifically investigates interactive storytelling elements in “Give Yourself Goosebumps #2: Tick Tock, You’re Dead!”.
- b. The research conducted by M. Marzuki, J.A. Prayogo, and A. Wahyudi from the State University of Malang in 2016 (Ananto Prayogo & Wahyudi, 2016), primarily focused on implementing interactive storytelling strategies in a classroom setting to enhance learners’ speaking ability, vocabulary mastery, and storytelling skills. In contrast, this study examines the interactive storytelling elements implemented by R. L. Stine in writing “Give Yourself Goosebumps #2: Tick Tock, You’re Dead!” Our focus is on how Stine utilizes interactive storytelling elements within a horror novel to captivate readers and create an immersive experience. This study provides valuable insights into the craft of interactive storytelling in literature.
- c. Research conducted by Flórez-Aristizábal et al. 2019 (Flórez-Aristizábal et al., 2019) explored the integration of technology and interactive storytelling applications in educational contexts, emphasizing the use of technology to engage students in collaborative storytelling activities. While their study focuses on technology’s role in education, this study centres on the literary elements within the horror genre. This study aims to uncover interactive storytelling elements employed to engage readers and create a gripping horror experience.
- d. Research conducted by Aslak Rustad Hauglid in 2016 (Hauglid & Hauglid, 2016) explored how horror fans actively engage with narratives, highlighting the pivotal role readers play in shaping the genre’s evolution. While Hauglid’s work sheds light on communal interactions with horror across different media, it overlooks the specific realm of interactive storytelling. This study steps into this gap by zooming in on how R.L. Stine’s stories leverage interactive elements to immerse readers in his chilling tale. By focusing on interactive storytelling techniques, my study adds depth to understanding readers’ participation and immersion within horror narratives, building upon Hauglid’s broader insights into reader engagement.
- e. A study conducted by Hermila in 2023 (Hermila et al., 2023) explored interactive storytelling in e-learning, emphasizing its engagement and feedback benefits, this study primarily focuses on e-learning outcomes, leaving a gap in understanding the specific narrative techniques used in interactive storytelling. In contrast, this study explores the elements of interactive storytelling through R.L. Stine’s novel, aiming to enrich our understanding of how authors engage readers.

In summary, while previous studies have explored various aspects of interactive storytelling, this study provides a focused exploration of R. L. Stine’s techniques in crafting an immersive horror narrative, filling a gap in the existing research. The writer believes that this study is important and unique because there are not a lot of horror books (traditional writings) with interactive storytelling elements in them. Thus, the writer aims to examine the techniques

R.L. Stine implemented in the novel to provide insights for future storytellers interested in crafting interactive horror novels.

3. Research Method

As for the research approach to be adopted, this study uses the qualitative descriptive method, specifically qualitative descriptive. Qualitative research approaches various textual materials and visual data, and its methods employ a broad scope of research designs and techniques (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 254). The author chooses to do qualitative research to discover elements that contribute to the book, specifically the qualitative descriptive method. The type of research described as descriptive-qualitative presents data as it is without manipulation or other treatments (*Al-Ubudiyah: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Studi Islam*, n.d.). The question of how interactive storytelling techniques can keep readers' attention in the horror genre cannot effectively be investigated using any quantitative methods.

a. Method of Data Collection

The author employs a method of data collection that involves gathering information directly from the novel "Give Yourself Goosebumps #2: Tick Tock, You're Dead!". Information gathered may include its structure, narrative, plot, and/or dialogue. The method mentioned may commonly be referred to as "textual analysis" or specifically "literary analysis." Literary analysis is a form of interpretation that serves as a public means of creating meaning, aiming to contribute to the collective understanding of literature as a whole and specific literary work (Kusch, 2016, p. 9). It focuses on extracting relevant data and insights from the text itself to understand its various elements and their impact on the overall work.

b. Method of Approach

The narrative analysis method is used in this study. Narrative analysis is concerned with the divisions in stories (such as parts, beginning, middle, and end, how plots are unfolded, and also how characters are built up). So, this method aims to explore how a story becomes significant and coherent in ways that fit its particular context or purpose (Silverman, 2017, p. 545). In this study, the writer will take a closer look at how the story is put together and how they work. Since the story changes based on what the audience decides to do, the writer wants to understand how these choices affect the story's direction. It is a qualitative method of studying narratives, or stories, and it consists of examining and interpreting them to understand the meanings, structures, and themes hidden within. Narrative analysis is the examination of the elements of a narrative, which include plot (actions), characters, setting, and dialogue. It also involves looking at the narrative structure and techniques used by authors to tell their stories.

c. Method of Data Representation

The data in this study is presented mainly through tables. Data can also be displayed in various forms—charts, graphs, maps, and tables—to make the data more communicative, concise, and interesting (Alwasilah, 2005, p. 80). By showing information differently, people can understand it more easily, and the writing becomes more interesting to read.

4. Findings and Discussion

This study aims to uncover a deeper understanding of the interactive storytelling elements employed by R.L. Stine in this particular book. This knowledge will not only enhance our appreciation for his work but also contribute to the broader understanding of interactive storytelling as a powerful tool for captivating readers and creating memorable experiences.

a. Decision Points

The narrative structure of “Give Yourself Goosebumps #2: Tick Tock, You’re Dead!” showcases a nonlinear format, presenting readers with various branching paths and decision points. According to Glassner, in a standard branching narrative, the audience is presented with a segment of the story and is then prompted to make decisions regarding the plot or characters (Glassner, 2004). The story starts with the reader and her/his family visiting the Museum of National History, inside the museum, the reader’s younger brother, Denny, would run off on his own, forcing the reader to look for Denny. When the reader is looking for Denny, the reader comes across a strange laboratory and meets Dr. Peebles who mistakes the reader for a time machine experiment volunteer. The first decision point can be found on the 5th page of the book, readers are presented with the very first choice:

Table 1. First Decision Point

Option A	<i>Choose to volunteer for Dr. Peebles’ experiment, or;</i>
Option B	<i>Choose to stay in the museum and look for your brother, Denny.</i>

In this instance, when the readers pick any option, readers would be redirected to another page to find out their awaiting fates:

Table 2. The Result of the First Decision Point

Option A	<i>(Go to page 71)</i> Accepting Dr. Peebles’ offer to volunteer in his experiment, Denny shows up out of nowhere and runs right into the time machine portal (<i>chronoport</i>) and the readers have to embark on a journey to find their brother who is now lost in time.
Option B	<i>(Go to page 62)</i> However, if the readers decline Dr Peebles’ offer to volunteer, the “book” would tell the readers that maybe this is not the right book for them readers and that this book is only for those people who are looking for an adventure, then the “book” would promptly ask the readers to re-consider their decision. In a way, the very first choice prompts the readers to start an adventure to find their brother in multiple timelines.

While not the best example because it forces the readers to continue anyway, some options can greatly affect the story, the writer will provide some more of the story branches and the outcomes of the options. Such as:

Table 3. The Past or the Future (Main Branch) on Page 47

Option A	<i>Travel to the future, or;</i>
Option B	<i>Go to the past.</i>

The reason the writer thinks those options are the main branch is because the main storylines that the readers can choose are among these:

Table 4. The Three Main Storylines

Storyline A	The readers have to look for Denny in the past, whilst trying to survive dangers that lurk in pre-historic and medieval timelines.
Storyline B	The readers have to look for Denny in the future, where the readers have to survive and escape a future ruled by evil robots.

Storyline C	A side story where the readers go into the near future, only one day, and find themselves trying to prevent an accident that will kill the readers' whole family.
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Now, let us take a look at what would happen if we were to choose the options from the main branch:

Table 5. The Results of the Main Branch

Option A	(Go to page 16) The readers will step through the time machine (<i>chronoport</i>), and in front of the readers are two scenes, <i>one shows a futuristic city with cars flying around like planes (Option A)</i> , and <i>one shows a familiar New York City scene with a child who looks like Denny disappears behind a tall building (Option B)</i> , the readers are prompted to make another choice of which scene to go to.
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Table 5.1 The Future Options

Option A	(Go to page 101) The readers go towards the futuristic city, New York City in the future perhaps. A cold hand closes on the reader's shoulder and says, "Human?" followed by "You're under arrest!", the readers turn around and see a metal robot with a policeman's badge.
Option B	(Go to page 54) The readers glide towards what looks to be present in New York City, maybe there is something wrong with the <i>chronometer</i> ? The readers look around for the child who resembles Denny but he is nowhere to be found. The readers notice a newspaper in the newsstand, the newspaper date seems to be tomorrow's date. The readers are one day in the future.

Option B	(Go to page 44) The readers will step through the time machine, and in front of the readers are two paths, <i>at the end of the left-hand path the readers can see a grand castle and a knight in shining armour riding a white horse going towards the castle (Option A)</i> , and <i>on the end of the right-hand path the readers can see a swamp with tall, strange-looking trees, and a dinosaur! (Option B)</i> . The readers then are prompted to decide which path to go through.
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Table 5.2 The Past Options

Option A	(Go to page 93) The readers take the left-hand path into the enormous castle, as the readers get closer to the castle, the knight approaches the readers at full speed while holding a spear and pointing it at the readers.
Option B	(Go to page 11) Denny loves dinosaurs, so the readers choose the right-hand path. It feels just like <i>Jurassic Park</i> . As the readers walk, the readers can hear a rumbling getting louder and louder. The readers then see in the distance, on a grassy plain, a <i>Tyrannosaurus rex</i> !

b. Reader Agency

Interactive frameworks shown in Tables 1 to 5 enable readers to actively engage with the story, making choices that shape the narrative trajectory and essentially leading to 20 different endings. This can be corroborated by (Hauglid & Hauglid, 2016) research, reader agency involves exploring reader intimacy and immersion from a distinct perspective: instead of pulling the reader into its narrative world, it overlays its world onto the readers.

c. Consequences of Choices

In R.L. Stine's "Give Yourself Goosebumps #2 Tick Tock, You're Dead!" each decision carries weight, determining the course of the protagonist's journey and ultimately influencing the story's ending. Stine ingeniously crafts consequences that are both immediate and far-reaching, adding layers of suspense and anticipation to the interactive experience. Whether readers opt to go to the past or the future, each choice propels them into a different storyline, rife with its own set of challenges and dangers. These consequences instil a sense of agency in readers, compelling them to carefully consider their options and actively engage with the narrative. This finding is corroborated by (Iten et al., 2018) research, where it is said that meaningfulness of choices plays a crucial role in enhancing player appreciation in narrative-rich games. As stated by Delatorre et al. (2019) research, highlights the importance of maintaining suspense and engagement through a balance of challenge and opportunity. By strategically managing the flow of information and maintaining a sense of urgency, storytellers can effectively heighten suspense and keep the audience invested in the narrative.

d. Multiple Storylines

As shown in Table 4, there are three main storylines in this particular novel. The element of multiple storylines adds depth and complexity to the interactive narrative. Through a non-linear format, Stine presents readers with branching paths and divergent story arcs, each offering a unique adventure and set of challenges. From exploring prehistoric dangers to navigating a future ruled by evil robots, readers are immersed in a rich tapestry of narratives that unfold based on their choices. Stine masterfully weaves together these multiple storylines, allowing readers to experience the thrill of exploring different temporal settings and encountering a diverse array of characters and scenarios. Whether embarking on a quest to find Denny in the past, or future or preventing a tragic accident shortly, each storyline offers its twists and turns, keeping readers engaged and eager to uncover all possible outcomes. This is supported by (Cai et al., 2007), who said in interactive storytelling the scriptwriter creates the story plot which contains multiple storylines.

e. Replay-ability

The element of multiple storylines above enhances replay-ability, readers can re-explore the storylines and find themselves in a different storyline and ending. According to (Crawford, 2013), a compelling narrative possesses the quality of being replayable, allowing the player to engage with it multiple times and experience a different and intriguing narrative each time. The different choices offered in the book would take the readers to multiple storylines that can be replayed anytime the readers want to. Ultimately, decision points, reader agency, consequences of choices, multiple storylines, and replay-ability are the key elements of interactive storytelling utilized by R.L. Stine in "Give Yourself Goosebumps #2 Tick Tock, You're Dead!"

5. Conclusions (and Suggestions)

Based on the examination of R.L. Stine's interactive storytelling framework in "Give Yourself Goosebumps #2: Tick Tock, You're Dead!", it becomes evident that the utilization of interactive elements impacts reader engagement and immersion in the horror narrative. Through a qualitative examination of the narrative structure and key storytelling techniques, a significant conclusion can be drawn. Stine effectively employs a nonlinear narrative format, characterized by branching paths and decision points, to empower readers with agency and control over the story's direction. By presenting readers with meaningful choices and consequences, he fosters a sense of involvement and investment in the narrative, leading to 20 different possible endings. The key elements of interactive storytelling identified in this study are decision points, reader agency, consequences of choices, multiple storylines, and replayability. They work together to create a dynamic and engaging reading experience. These elements enable readers to actively shape the narrative trajectory, explore alternate story paths, and experience a personalized journey through the story world. In conclusion, R.L. Stine's "Give Yourself Goosebumps #2: Tick Tock, You're Dead!" shows the power of interactive storytelling to captivate readers and create memorable literary experiences. Through its nonlinear narrative structure, engaging storytelling techniques, and immersive horror experience, the book demonstrates the potential of interactive fiction to entertain, challenge, and inspire readers of all ages.

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