

Spinning yarns on the Web

By PAMELA WEINTRAUB

NetGuide Magazine

To most of us, the word fiction still smacks of best-sellers by John Le Carre, say, or Jackie Collins, or grand old classics by such luminaries as Edith Wharton and Henry James.

But cyberspace seems to be shaking the fictional realm, just like everything else.

With the arrival of online services and the Internet, fiction as art form has evolved into a participatory experience, a kind of literary theater-in-the-round.

From interactive novels written by a dozen or more authors to comic strips that have multiple story lines, depending upon the view of the participating writers, the age of interactive fiction is here.

For those with an interest in the process, check out a scholarly and elegant site on the World Wide Web called Tree Fiction.

This rich arena describes the rules of the hyperfiction game for serious students of the form. Come here to learn the new protocol of Net collaboration, and to master the available venues, from the fully interactive fiction generated through automated story software to the conventional fiction narratives now reworked by the Net literati and presented online in hyperfiction form.

Address:

<http://www.cl.cam.ac.uk/users/gdr11/tree-fiction.html>

Meanwhile, if you can't wait to start your career as an online author, visit these interactive fiction sites to begin:

Stories From Downtown Anywhere. In this wonderful ode to locality, story lines are organized by the neighborhoods of the city in which they begin. Extensions must be approved by the site's editorial board before posting.

Address: <http://www.awa.com/stories/>

The Literature Page. The current work-in-progress is intriguing: "I don't remember how I had come to decide to grab a beer that night," the narrative begins. "It's not a usual habit of mine — and I just barely remember the friends I ran into at the pub, but I clearly remember Will, sitting with my friends in the corner booth, rolling an empty beer glass back and forth in his hands and staring idly at nothing in

particular. As I recall it now, I can even see the thin, looping scar on the heel of his left palm, and that's what lets me know that this is a manufactured memory, because it wasn't until much later that

his nearly invisible scar would come to have any meaning to me."

Have any brainstormers for follow-through? If site reviewers think you cut the mustard, they'll work in your additions.

Address:

<http://www.cs.washington.edu:80/homes/rajs/lit.html>

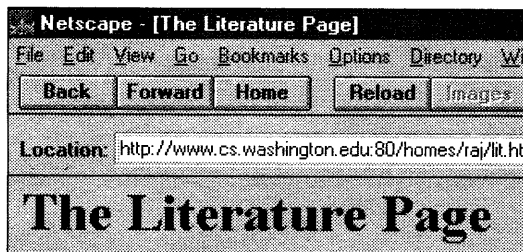
GEAS Village. The forerunner of interactive fiction, is, of course, the adventure-style role-playing game. One of the best is this city on the Web, produced by the Grand Edinburgh Adventuring Society. If you're game, visit this bustling metropolis of commerce, adventure and sin.

Address:

<http://www.ed.ac.uk/~geas/village.html>

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION: Will the advent of cyberspace change fiction as we know it?

No, says Ellen Datlow, long-time fiction editor of Omni magazine and, now, Omni Internet. According to Datlow, turning crystallized pieces of fiction into chunks of participatory group writing will only destroy the art. Thus, Datlow explains, while the rest of Omni

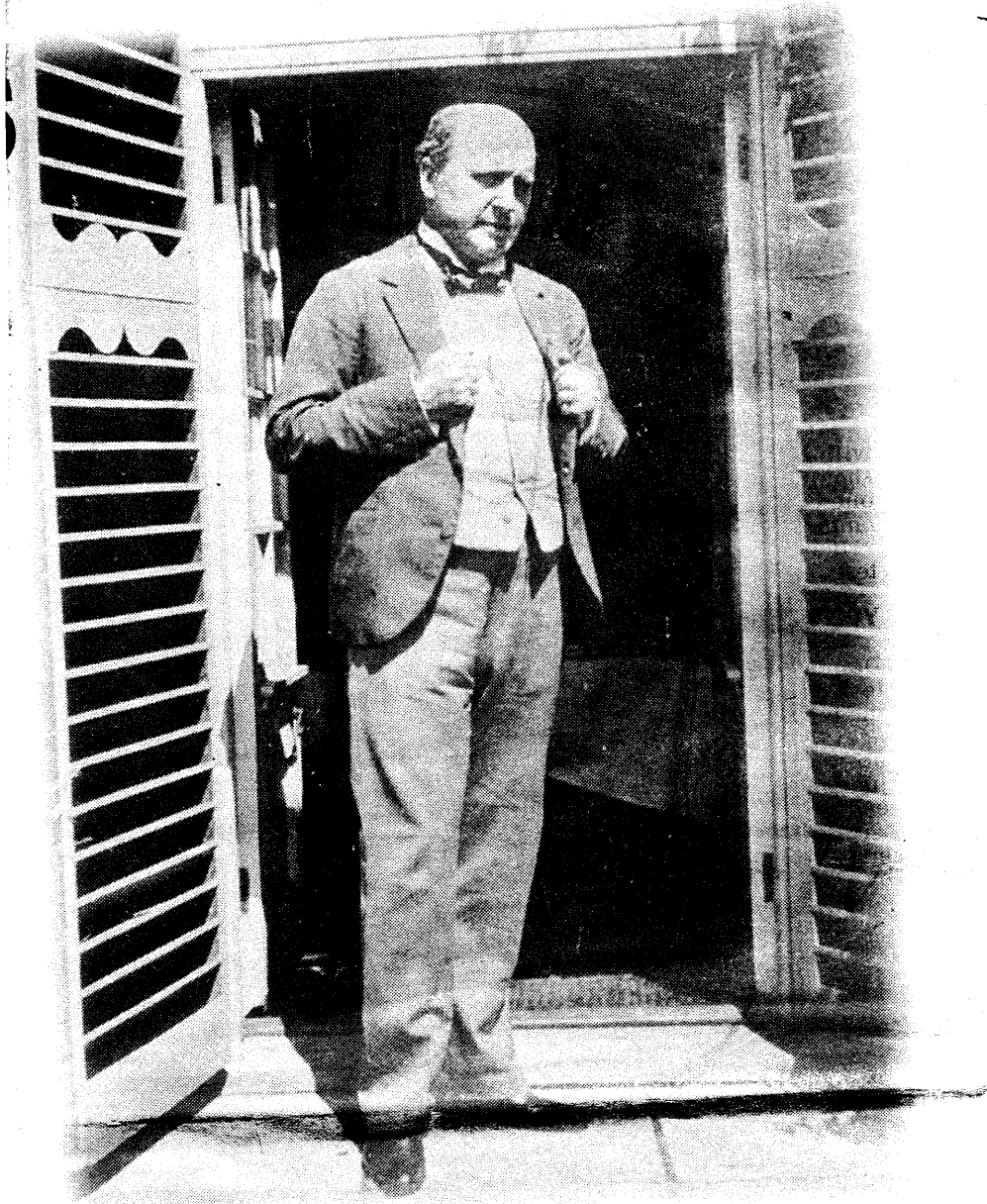


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THE WEEK



WOULD HENRY JAMES be writing interactive fiction if he were living in the cyber age? The Internet opens new avenues for creativity, one of them a kind of literary theater-in-the-round where readers and several authors can participate in writing.

has made a full-scale conversion from print-style stories to pieces geared just to the Internet, the fiction section of the site will remain true to the medium of the past, print.

Datlow's Universe, scheduled for launch sometime this fall on the Omni site, will include two online writing workshops for those who want to participate. But for readers, Datlow says, fiction will still be presented page by (Web) page along with relevant art.

duction to this dynamic new form of literary entertainment is, by far, America Online's Interactive Fiction site.

For a simple, no-fuss, no-muss approach to the art form, the AOL site hosts multiple bulletin boards and story lines under the usual genres, including science fiction, fantasy and romance.

Address: America Online; Keyword: Fictional; Click On: Interactive Fiction

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MAKE THE CONNECTION: The best intro-