

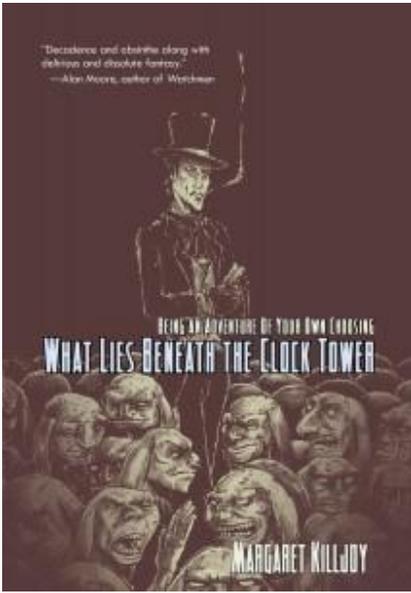
Why Write an Interactive Book?

Eight authors featured on my list of Contemporary Interactive Books for Adults share why they made the leap from a conventional structure to an interactive adventure.

James Schannep, author of [Infected](#)

“*Infected* and the other Click Your Poison books are, at their core, a form of collaborative storytelling. By letting the reader choose brazen action or reserved caution, for example, you get to create your own story world unlike any traditional novel. My books are meant to be re-read over and over again, with clues gained from earlier reads informing future decisions. This peel-back-the-layers approach of interactive storytelling allows for a unique experience only available to gamebooks. The immediacy of playing the role of protagonist changes the dynamic from shouting at a character, ‘Don't go in the house!’ to wondering, ‘Should I go in the house? Are the rewards worth the risk?’”



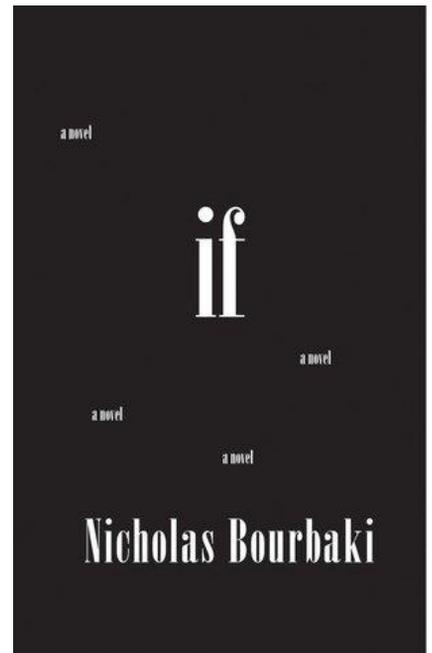


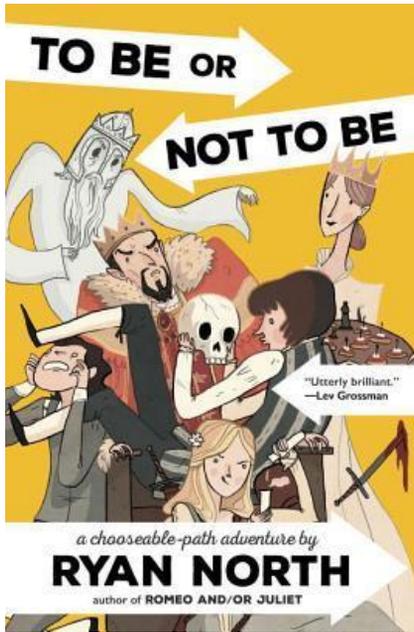
Margaret Killjoy, author of [What Lies Beneath the Clock Tower](#)

“I wrote this book interactively because I devoured interactive books as a kid. I loved how they felt like mazes. There’s also a certain beautiful kitsch to them. It’s a way of flagging, ‘Don’t worry, this isn’t high literature, it’s just a book. You’re meant to enjoy it.’ This particular book of course takes on more adult themes than the ones I read as a kid, so it was a way of signaling that other people besides children can and should have access to that kind of simple joy. Plus, interactive fiction allows interesting moral choices to be made, and allows the reader to feel invested in the choices of the protagonist.”

Nicholas Bourbaki, author of [If](#)

“I started *If* almost fifteen years ago and finished it about a decade ago. It began as a playful aesthetic experiment and evolved into a kind of moral horror story and philosophical reflection on free choice. *If* tests the limits of interactive fiction by placing difficult, traumatic material alongside apparently lighter episodes, with the genre and style of the writing continually changing. It is meant to be a disorienting experience, and it is not for everyone. In light of the novel’s many challenges, it has been surprising to see how it continues to be read (and misread) all these years later. There seems to be a need in literature to ‘make it new,’ and if nothing else, that is something *If* attempted to do.”





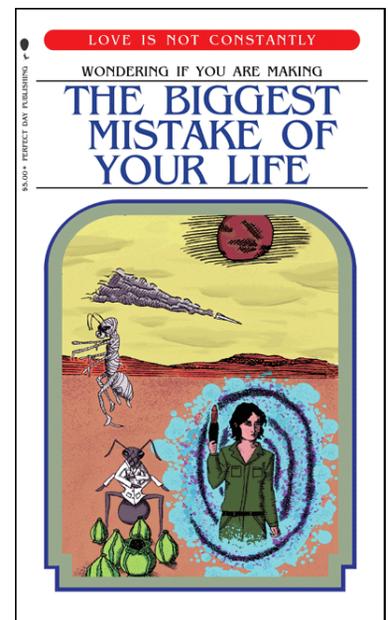
Ryan North, author of [To Be or Not To Be](#)

“The origin of *To Be or Not To Be* was the title: realizing it was structured like a choice, like in the Choose Your Own Adventure books I used to love as a kid. Once I had the premise, the rest of the book flowed easily: of course you could play as Hamlet, Ophelia, or Hamlet's dad—and if you chose him you'd die on the first page and then explore the story as a ghost! Of course we'd have a book within a book instead of a play within a play! It was one of those rare experiences where everything just clicked. One of the great things of working in non-linear books is that it's classically been a genre for kids, which means there's a lot of neat stuff you can do for adults that hasn't really

been explored before. There's parts where the choice structure is impacted by your narrative choices. There's hidden endings, unlockable secrets, and of course every ending is illustrated: I wanted it to feel like you'd unlocked art when you finished, rather than thinking, ‘Oh, I just lost at reading a book.’ So with ‘let's make this fun and inventive’ as my goal, that's the origin of *To Be or Not To Be* (and its sequel, *Romeo and/or Juliet*).”

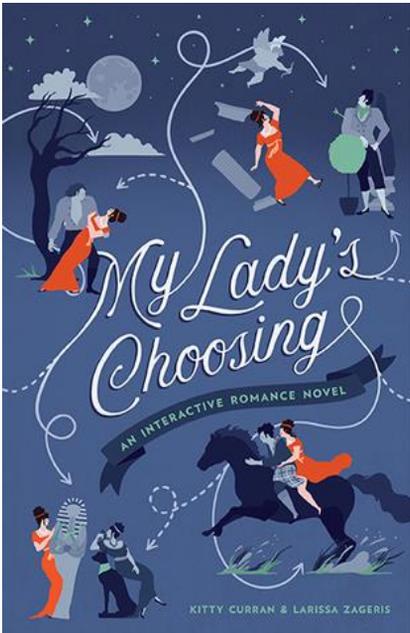
Anonymous author of [Love Is Not Constantly Wondering If You Are Making the Biggest Mistake of Your Life](#)

“*Love Is Not Constantly...* is a memoir about my relationship with a woman who suffered from alcoholism. Throughout our time together I never felt like anything I did, no matter how hard I tried, affected whether or not she drank. I decided to convey this feeling of futility and powerlessness by formatting the story like an interactive novel, one where the choices offered (guiding a starfighter pilot who has crashed on a planet of malevolent space ants) has no bearing on anything that happens within the narrative itself.”



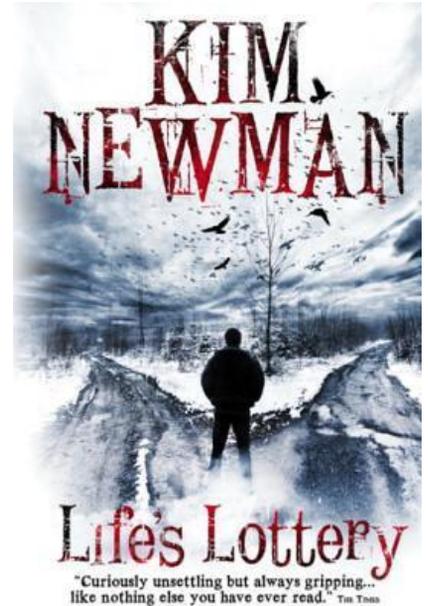
Kitty Curran and Larissa Zageris, authors of [My Lady's Choosing](#)

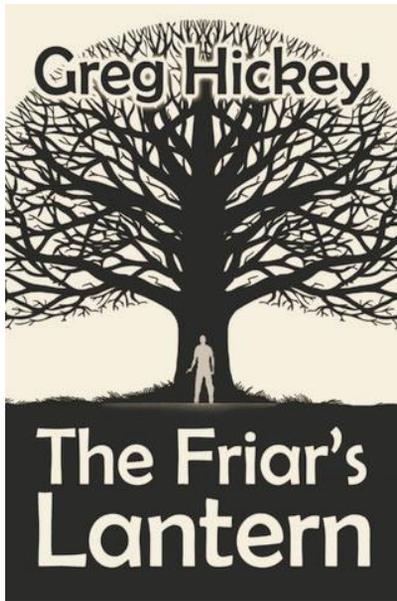
“We wanted to write the most hilarious, sexy, joyful, romantic, inclusive and satisfying Regency romance interactive book ever. So we wrote *My Lady's Choosing*. *My Lady's Choosing* features multiple main romance options, in a world somewhere between Jane Austen, Jane Eyre and Bridgerton. We did our best to make it an open-world gamebook. Meaning, you can romance side characters. Villains. Pirate queens or vampire vicars. And, if you play your cards right, an emo werewolf. Both of us grew up loving interactive books. Back then, most had many rotten ends, and one true path to survival. In *My Lady's Choosing*, we wanted all paths to lead to joy. And to make all choices the reader makes as ‘You,’ our main character, to be as impactful as possible. Larissa come from a screenwriting background and Kitty comes from a comics background. In scriptwriting, the story only moves forward when the character chooses an action. That action reveals who the character is... or could be. So we took our combined powers of scriptwriting, added in some BuzzFeed quiz personality test vibes, and amped up our choice offering so that any reader could pick up the book and not just choose their own adventure... but choose the adventure of a lifetime.”



Kim Newman, author of [Life's Lottery](#)

“Though I was a bit old for the craze, I noticed the ‘choose your own adventure’ [CYOA] books of the early 1980s and thought there was something interesting in the structure. With Neil Gaiman, I wrote a short humorous article using the format which was published in *UK Penthouse* in about 1984 (good luck finding a copy). It was technically interesting and Neil and I enjoyed the sadistic aspect of tricking the reader into unwise moves that didn’t get the avatar any closer to their objective. So, years later, I decided to do a literary novel with the CYOA format. I had an impulse to write something experimental, but wanted it to be accessible (and entertaining) to a wide readership. It occurred to me that the kids who’d read the first CYOA books had grown up and might be interested in revisiting the form as adults and—crucially—would know how to go about reading the book. A few grown-up readers/reviewers, of course, didn’t know the genre and were initially baffled by it—but I hope they picked it up pretty quickly. In the original game-books, choices were necessarily limited to practical things like picking a door to open. *Life’s Lottery* has some of those, but stresses moral choices or situations where you only seem to have a choice—which obviously has a thematic weight. It was, of course, a tricky book to write (not to mention edit, copy-edit and proofread) and I lived for a year with a chart full of post-it notes and arrows and numbers to keep track of the project.”





Greg Hickey, author of [The Friar's Lantern](#)

“I enjoyed the books in the original Choose Your Own Adventure series, and about fifteen years ago, I decided it would be interesting to bring that format to an adult audience. (As this list demonstrates, I wasn’t the only one with that idea.) Later, I realized that an interactive novel in which the reader has to choose how the story progresses would be a great vehicle to explore questions of choice: the factors behind our decisions, what happens in our brains when we choose, whether or not we’re even free to choose at all. Interactive books offer the illusion of free choice, because all the possible endings are ultimately written by the author. The question is whether or not all our real-life choices are similarly illusory.”

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