

**VIDEOGAMES AS CONTEMPORARY DIGITAL FOLKLORE –  
DIGITALNA KNJIŽEVNOST I VIDEOIGRE BY ZLATKO BUKAČ**

(Zagreb, Zagrebački holding d.o.o. – AGM Branch, 2025)

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Digital media has really changed the way how we tell stories today. Contemporary narratives got a jolt as digital media evolved, pushing old-school literary genres and interactive technology into direct conversation. The book *Digitalna književnost i videoigre (Digital Literature and Videogames)*, the latest monograph by the Croatian author Zlatko Bukač, is a landmark work in this new approach to narrative. Bukač’s monograph provides a rich theoretical framework for scholars in the fields of literature, culture, and folklore to think about the digital screen as a space for deep storytelling. The author writes from a regional perspective, where videogames are being academically researched (ludology) are still finding their footing. His book goes further, urging a fresh look at the screen as a site for storytelling and building community, again from the context of a region where this academic field is still young.

Even the title of this review suggests that there is an intrinsic relation between studying of folklore and studying of videogames. Bukač treats videogames as more than just commercial products. They become tools for a new digital folklore; stories we perform together, myths we create, and communities we build, all through play.

One of the book’s biggest strengths is how Bukač structures his argument. The chapters ramp up in theoretical complexity, as laid out in the table of contents. The book starts with the “Press Start/Introduction” part (p. 6), where the author sets the frame, showing how literature and gaming interact. Bukač avoids the simple “narratologists vs. ludologists” conflict and goes for a more unified approach. “Tutorial/Toward Digital Literature” (p. 18) overviews and defines crucial terms, such as hypertext, cybertext and ergodic literature. In “Digital Stories – How to Analyze and Analyses / Play, Read, Repeat” (p. 32), he gives readers the basic analytical tools, arguing that understanding a digital story requires cyclical, repeated movements, by the actions of reading and playing, and not just a straight line from start to finish. “Basics of Video Games / Level Up” (p. 60) jumps into the mechanical and technical side. In “Ludo in Narrative – On Narrative Design / Story Mode” (p. 78), Bukač separates “narrative design” from old styles of screenwriting, looking especially at internal and environmental storylines. “Narrative Design and Affective Gaming / The Heart of the Game” (p. 88)

dives into emotions and explores how games create bonds between players and virtual worlds or avatars. “Gamification of Life / Life is a Game” (p. 106) explores how game concepts are translating into real life, even into corners of culture far from gaming itself. “Nostalgia and Fan Folklore: The Case of Final Fantasy VII Remake / Loading Nostalgia” (p. 118) studies how gaming ideas seep into everyday experience, and in “Conclusion / Game over. Continue?” (p. 130), Bukač ends with a question, without a straightforward answer, reminding readers that studying digital culture never really stops. He offers in a DLC (extra content, p. 137), a Glossary (*Pojmovnik*, p. 148), plus a thorough Ludography and Bibliography, precisely what is needed for new researcher into the field of ludology.

Chapter 8, “Nostalgia and Fan Folklore on the Example of Final Fantasy VII Remake”, is an exceptionally important chapter for contemporary folklorists. Bukač explains the concept of “secrets” (p. 130) in the realm of videogames as non-linear content that is carefully included in the gameplay in order to expand it and spark community discussion. He continues, stating that since the elusive information in the late 1990s became a “valuable commodity”, it spread through personal interactions. This created a new oral tradition in the digital age, where people learned through word of mouth or through specialized gaming publications. He notes that the real “fanatics” are those who play more, play harder, and care deeply. This is important, since it sets out the history of gaming culture in the Balkans, arguing that fans who share their passion through magazines or their own networks, are the “folk” of our digital era. Through these communities, “fan folklore” emerged – a collection of stories, jokes, and urban legends, where hidden game insights are shared among players in a manner reminiscent of how folk narratives were traditionally passed down “from generation to generation”. These processes and practices are something that the official game studios may never acknowledge because they are sometimes born from the community itself.

Bukač explores “Loading Nostalgia” using *Final Fantasy VII Remake* as a focal point. In folklore studies, nostalgia often reaches for a “pure” past. In digital culture, that shows up when old games are remade or remastered. There’s a push and pull between the “canonical” memories of the classic 1997 game and the “variant” delivered by the remake. Fans react to these new versions in a similar way to how folktales evolve and adapt. Bukač states that the player is not just a consumer (anymore) but a “prosumer”, that is, a producer and a consumer at the same time. So, meaning in digital folklore arises through playing, through performance. Each game story plays out differently, just as a folk song depends on who’s singing it.

When he talks about “Affective Gaming”, Bukač signals that we are living in an era where cultural heritage is both digital and physical. The

stories we exchange about our adventures, be it in Azeroth, Hyrule, or Midgar, stand alongside those once shared around the fire.

Before high-speed internet, hidden levels or non-linear paths were rare knowledge in videogames, and they are now considered also to be “valuable commodities”. This sparked social spaces, such as gaming cafés (*igraonice*), school corridors, university common rooms, all focused on sharing of this insider information. Bukač smartly calls this a “modern oral tradition” – these particular hints and tips passed from player to player, not available anywhere else, becoming a real tradition. And, just like in any folk culture, sometimes they even traded invented secrets.

Beyond passing around tips, Bukač dives into the creative, active side of fan culture: fan fiction. He points out that some communities rewrite or expand the “official story” of their favorite games, while others are happy just to interact passively. With fan fiction, especially in fantasy and science fiction, players can create their own relationships and endings. Bukač’s mention of the Hugo Award for Best Fan Writer is meant to show that this is now a legitimate genre, not just something one might do as a side activity or as a hobby. The reader takes the story, claims it, and turns it into living mythology.

*Final Fantasy VII* (1997) is the classic example, with its “secrets” and story gaps forming the core of a passionate late-90s fan culture. The Remake’s release was not just about selling a game but it was also a ritual. Bukač describes playing during the pandemic as “a loading of nostalgia”, tying together recent coffee shop debates and ‘90s schoolyard chatter. Zlatko Bukač shows how the gaming industry thrives on nostalgia as something that should not be underestimated. In the end, the book concludes that digital texts keep going, living inside the player’s cultural identity, becoming part of who they are, even when the console is turned off.

**ВИДЕОИГРИТЕ КАКО СОВРЕМЕН ДИГИТАЛЕН ФОЛКЛОР –  
DIGITALNA KNJIŽEVNOST I VIDEOIGRE ОД ЗЛАТКО БУКАЧ**  
(Zagreb, Zagrebački holding d.o.o. – AGM, 2025)

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Резиме

Приказот е посветен на монографијата на Златко Букач, под наслов: *Digitalna književnost i videoigre (Дигиталната книжевност и видеоигрише; Zagreb, Zagrebački holding – AGM, 2025)*, која дава значаен теоретски придонес во промислувањето на дигиталните наративи и лудологијата. Книгата е структурирана низ метафорични „нивоа“, кои се движат од воведниот дел “Press Start” („Кликувај старт!“) до заклучниот “Game Over” („Крај на играта“), со што авторот умешно ја поврзува формата на книгата со вообичаените структурни делови од многу видеоигри. Централната теза е дека

видеоигрите не се само комерцијални производи, туку дека тие претставуваат нов облик на дигитален фолклор, кој се заснова на: заедничко учество, создавање митови и негување на фолклорната традиција, на иновативни начини, меѓу играчите на видеоигри.

Посебен акцент во приказот е ставен на културата на фановите на видеоигри и на носталгијата, кои се анализираат преку примерот со римејкот на видеоиграта *Final Fantasy VII*. Букач го демистифицира стереотипниот идентитет на гејмерите (играчите на видеоигри), нагласувајќи ги инклузивноста и динамичноста на оваа заедница, со текот на годините, во која денес се вклучени припадници со различни заднина и профил. Тој ја воведува идејата за „современа усна традиција“ во која, на споделувањето на гејмерските „тајни“ (тајните на играчите) во физички простори (училишта, играчници) се гледа како на замена или „надоградба“ на некогашното пренесување на наративи „од колено на колено“. Преку анализа на фикцијата на самите играчи, напишана за видеоигрите, и нивната емотивна поврзаност со аватарите од различните видеоигри, Букач, во својата книга, заклучува дека дигиталниот текст продолжува да постои како дел од поширокиот културен идентитет на играчот дури и откако тој/таа ќе ја исклучи видеоиграта. Тој докажува дека во ерата на „афективно играње“, културното наследство е подеднакво дигитално колку што е и физичко.