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A Theoretical Prototype for Narrative and Interactive Development within a Theme Park Parade

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A THEORETICAL PROTOTYPE FOR NARRATIVE AND INTERACTIVE DEVELOPMENT WITHIN A THEME PARK PARADE

by

CARSON LUTER
BS University of Central Florida, 2018

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in the Department of Theatre in the College of Arts and Humanities at the University of Central Florida Orlando, Florida

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ABSTRACT

While theme park parades have developed with technology and guest demands, there is an opportunity to continue innovating the medium with additional guest interactivity. This thesis tracks experiential comparatives that provide iterative components to be utilized for a new theme park parade concept; parade “show stops” that allow for guests to approach the parade floats up-close, participatory entertainment offerings with live actor-driven branching narratives, roleplay and gameplay-driven interactive experiences, and theme park parades that follow a direct linear narrative. What follows is a theme park parade design concept, accompanied by a production and operational plan, that combines the existing spectacle of these productions with: guest-driven storytelling alongside parade performers; guest agency through active design decision making; and technology-driven interactives that drive guest repeatability. The intent of this thesis is to provide a template for realized designs to be implemented in theme parks, including application of intellectual property, an effervescent element in the success of modern-day theme park parades.

Keywords: Theme Parks, Themed Entertainment, Themed Experience, live entertainment, parades, theme park entertainment, guest interaction, live action roleplay, interactive attractions, participatory theatre
For my future wife and friends, alongside whom I share some of my most cherished memories marching down the streets of Magic Kingdom Park, bringing moments of joy and escapism to millions of guests.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to my thesis committee: Peter Weishar, Dr. Carissa Baker, and Elizabeth Brendel Horn. Elizabeth, thank you for your support and excitement in participating in my thesis as well as our program. Dr. Baker, I will always value your affirmations and your immense knowledge of our industry. And Peter, thank you for being an outstanding mentor, leader, educator, advocate, and much more to all of us as we got this program going.

Thanks to my themed experience professors: Aram Ebben, Mike Wallace, Patrick Brennan, and Allison Moran. You are a huge part of the reason I feel so prepared and empowered in my career.

Thanks to my themed entertainment industry friends and mentors; the passion we all share for this unique art form is part of what drives this thesis.

Thanks to my family for supporting me over my nearly ten-year journey at UCF. Five Luters have graduated from UCF, and I surely won't be the last.

And thanks to Samantha. I'll have more time to plan our wedding now.
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A daily parade is one of the few unique experiences offered by theme parks. One could visit a county fair or beach boardwalk for a funnel cake or a ride on a rollercoaster just like in a theme park, but the daily roving spectacles of music, color, and performance that comprise parades are rare and most associated with theme parks. Theme parks often serve as collections of intricate theatrical sets, which serve as an ideal backdrop for intricate floats and colorfully costumed performers. Whereas many theme park live entertainment offerings are limited to a theater, stage, or small area, parades allow the opportunity to turn a significant area of a theme park into a show space. Parades hold a unique position within a slate of theme park offerings because, unlike rides that may have barriers to entry in terms of safety or experiential restrictions, they are fully accessible and centrally located experiences that should strive to offer something for every type of theme park guest.

As a master's candidate in Themed Experience and a former theme park parade performer, I see the opportunity parades have for continued innovation and substance. While I was performing, I felt that additional interactions with guests would vastly improve the experience, something beyond a simple wave or acknowledgment of the guest. I recognized the uniqueness of the roles I performed and costumes I wore, accompanied by massive and intricate parade floats, could be easily reworked into a more intimate, isolated experience with smaller groups of guests. I noted the simplicity and abstractness of the stories we told, and actively saw how the guests that viewed the parade were attentive and interested enough to take in a linear narrative. I interacted
with many guests who were passionate about parades and live entertainment, 
frequently visiting multiple of the same shows throughout the day, establishing 
connections with parade casts and performers. These observations, I believe, can 
combine to create a compelling and unique new type of parade performance that draws 
from what has historically made theme park parades great.

Since the debut of the *Main Street Electrical Parade* (Disneyland Park and various Disney parks, 1972 – Present), theme park parade designers have strived to 
weave new performance technologies into parade offerings. However, unlike other 
themed experiences which began to place a greater emphasis on narrative and 
storytelling, most present-day theme park parades seem to focus innovation solely on 
spectacle. Two notable recent theme park parades are *Universal Spectacle Night Parade* (Universal Studios Japan, 2018 - Present) and the *Paint the Night Parade* 
(Hong Kong Disneyland and Disneyland Resort, 2014 – Present). These parades 
contain several separated units based on popular intellectual properties which present 
advances in audio distribution, projection mapping, animated figures, programmed 
lighting, video media, costuming, and parade float technology; but ultimately offer no 
cohesive linear narrative. Why does this matter? The template for theme park 
attractions has evolved into big-budget thematic storytelling (Niles 2020), and theme 
park parades should look to embrace these tenets of modern themed design as well.

A belief among some themed experience designers is that theme park parades 
are an insubstantial conveyance for the detail and linear storytelling that can be found 
within other theme park offerings. Chris Merritt, designer of the *Hollywood Dreams*
Parade (Universal Studios Singapore, 2011 – Present), states “In a parade, you don’t want to do something with a beginning, middle, and end, you want something with looping gags, much like you do in a ride” (Younger, 2016). Why then are theme park rides expected to uphold a beginning, middle, and ending despite utilizing the same looping gags found within parades? Merritt continues; “You don’t want to do a narrative, unless you can stop the whole parade and make people watch it” (Younger, 2016).

Indeed, show stops are the typical method of conveying direct narrative within a parade structure. However, there are opportunities to convey a compelling linear narrative over the course of a theme park parade and reformat the existing parade show stop structure into a prior scheduled occurrence where additional story information is disseminated. To demonstrate this, I created an overarching theme park story that utilizes a parade as its climax while also telling a specified linear narrative within that parade. This story tells the tale of a land called Evu, where five families peacefully coexist and celebrate their shared unity with an annual celebratory parade. Guests, known as Wanderers, have the opportunity to get as involved as they want into the various stories of Evu, which play out over the course of the day and culminate with the nighttime parade performance. Wanderers can truly become part of the cast of characters that make up Evu, serving as active participants in decisions that influence the parade as well as in the stories of the characters they encounter throughout the park.

I hypothesize that, utilizing existing theme park storytelling methods and the tenured general theme park parade structure, a new type of parade structure can be formed. This structure emphasizes performer-guest interactivity while establishing
guests as active participants in the narrative, bringing theme park parades into the modern storytelling era that theme parks are currently in today.
CHAPTER TWO: CLARIFICATION OF TERMS

The concept of “immersive live entertainment” for theme parks will be referenced throughout this thesis. This idea calls for live performers portraying characters to populate a given themed environment. These characters would interact with park guests, offering new pieces of story information or sending guests on tasks or quests. Tenets of this concept, to be explored later in this thesis, have existed in a small variety of themed entertainment installations. However, I look to replace the term “immersive” with the term “participatory” when referencing this thesis concept or any experience that relies heavily on guest interaction. Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines immersive as “providing, involving, or characterized by deep absorption or immersion in something (such as an activity or a real or artificial environment)” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The broadness of this definition allows the term to be applied to multiple forms of media and entertainment, including books, video games, virtual and augmented reality experiences, themed experiences, and films. This, as No Proscenium’s industry resource the *Immersive Entertainment Industry Report* states, has allowed immersive to “become one of the world’s biggest buzzwords” (Brigante, R., Elger, S., Nelson, N., 2020). The report provides qualitative results based on survey responses that points to negative aspects of immersive experiences, with the second most received answer representing misrepresentation of “immersive” in experience-provided marketing. Media perception of “immersive experiences” spans from those that are truly participatory like *Star Wars: Galactic Starcruiser* (Walt Disney World Resort, 2022 – Present) and Puy Du
Fou (1978 – Present) (Storey, 2022) to art installations and pop-up experiences (Grumet, 2022) that appear mostly as technologically innovative museum exhibits.

This required additional specificity for this thesis, as the applicability of the term for this thesis is more in line with that of participatory performance scholars like James Frieze, who defines an immersive experience as “a valorization of cultural forms that offer the chance to do more than ‘just’ observe or study; they offer the chance to interact with, even become, the object of attention” (Frieze, 2017). The participatory experience concept described in this thesis draws on the tenets of traditional participatory theatre (call and response, involving volunteers, physical movement, gameplay), but adds the experiential by establishing the guests as characters and empowering them with multiple interactive moments and elements. Establishing this delineation in verbiage helps unblur the gap between this thesis project and experiences that, while captivating, do little to establish any sense of diegesis when addressing the guests.
CHAPTER THREE: AN EXAMINATION OF CHARACTER AND INDIVIDUAL ROLES WITHIN A THEME PARK ENVIRONMENT

With many theme parks worldwide adopting the notion that the theme park is a “show,” there arises a question of roles among all present. At the Disney Parks, all employees assume the role of “Cast Member,” which encompasses anyone from those working custodial, to merchandise, attractions, and performers that are part of a cast within a stage show. In doing this, Disney aims to have the Cast Members that populate each themed area of the parks exist as “characters” akin to the actors and costumed characters that can also be found there. When asked in an interview about the potential for creatures and droids originally featured in promotional materials to be added to Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge (Disney’s Hollywood Studios and Disneyland Park, 2019 – Present), then head of Disney Parks and Resorts Bob Chapek instead asserted that Galaxy’s Edge “had more characters than any land we’ve ever done, because each one of our Cast Members has a backstory” (Attractions Magazine, 2019). Indeed, as theme parks continue towards the trend of hyper-immersive themed lands like Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge, The Wizarding World of Harry Potter (Universal Orlando Resort and various Universal Parks, 2010 – Present), and Pandora: The World of Avatar (Disney’s Animal Kingdom, 2017 – Present), the lines between traditional live entertainment performer and park employee are becoming more and more blurred. Also contributing to this are attractions where an elevated level of performance from employees is implied, such as The Haunted Mansion (Disneyland Park and various Disney Parks, 1969 – Present), The Twilight Zone: Tower of Terror (Disney’s Hollywood Studios and Walt
Disney Studios Park, 1994 – Present), *Men in Black: Alien Attack* (Universal Studios Florida, 2000 – Present) and any attraction that contains a spiel, such as *The Jungle Cruise* (Disneyland Park and various Disney Parks, 1955 – Present) or *Jaws* (Universal Studios Florida (previously) and Universal Studios Japan, 1990 – Present). Guest expectations and history have now placed the burden on park employees, many of whom are not trained performers, to “make or break” the experience by delivering stage energy, great comedic timing, or significant adherence to a storyline. While empowering non-performer employees to essentially act as an additional cast of characters, due diligence is being done to populate a story universe, but potential for operational issues arise. Author David Younger suggests “while employees are often intended to portray a portion of the fictional inhabitants of the land they occupy (costumed, and primed with themed phrases to greet the guests) there are practical limits to how far this diegesis can go” (Younger, 2016). While non-performer park employees are expected to strictly adhere to their land or attraction’s story, they are also required to deliver guest service and assistance. This places employees in tough positions, oftentimes having to break the story or theming to provide adequate help to a confused guest. Referencing again *Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge*, the casual, average theme park guest will accept a non-affirmative response from Cast Members performing as Kylo Ren or a First Order Stormtrooper if they genuinely ask where the nearest restroom is. Asking a non-performer Cast Member the location of the nearest restroom only to hear back “Restroom? I’ve never heard of that. However, there is a refresher (the *Star Wars* in-
universe name for a restroom) nearby is one example of where Cast Members being heavily relied upon to provide story causes conflict with genuine guest service.

But what of the theme park guest? For most theme parks and themed lands, they are just that: a guest. But upon entering a themed area or attraction with an independent story, the guest’s role may immediately change. For instance, upon entering Universal Studios Florida, a guest’s role is as themselves visiting the studio park, but changes while in the park’s various attractions. Upon entering Despicable Me: Minion Mayhem (Universal Studios Florida and various Universal Parks, 2012 – Present), the guest’s role has changed to that of a Minion Recruit. In Transformers: The Ride 3-D (Universal Studios Florida and various Universal Parks, 2011 – Present), the guests are again recruits but this time for the Non-Biological Extraterrestrial Species Treaty (N.E.S.T.) forces. At Men in Black: Alien Attack, guests start as visitors to a World’s Fair style exhibit before it is revealed to be a front for the Men in Black (MIB), who mobilize the guests and change their role from visitor to MIB Recruit. Within The Wizarding World of Harry Potter – Diagon Alley (Universal Studios Florida, 2014 – Present), the guest’s role changes based on their personal involvement. Donning a Hogwarts robe, receiving a wand from Ollivander’s, or participating in any of the interactive wand magic activities would establish a guest in the role of witch or wizard. The average guest who is just there to look around, get some food, and ride Harry Potter and the Escape from Gringott’s (Universal Studios Florida, 2014 – Present) is assuming the role of a “Muggle” (the word for non-magical person within the Potter universe), as is in line with the land’s story: that the magical spell that hides Diagon
Alley from Muggles has been lifted, and they are now free to explore and potentially open an account at Gringott’s Bank.

Within the context of this thesis concept, I seek to clearly establish and delineate guest roles. Much like The Wizarding World of Harry Potter, a guest’s role should be able to differentiate based on their level of involvement and participation. Referencing again the Immersive Entertainment Industry Report, report authors created four levels of Participation/Interaction. As described by the report, a Participation level of zero implies no interaction and a passive guest role: “Most older and traditional theme park rides are Level Zero interaction as they are entirely passive, in which the customer sits and simply observes the story and action unfolding around them” (Brigante, R., Elger, S., Nelson, N., 2020). Level One interaction exists with optional interactions, which may allow for limited interaction with live performers but also gives guests the opportunity to explore and investigate the themed environment if desired. Level Two “contains interactions that are designed to encourage the audience to “play along” in order to enhance and in some cases maintain the illusion of the experience” (Brigante, R., Elger, S., Nelson, N., 2020). The final Interaction level is Level Three, where interaction is required, such as escape rooms and Wand Magic experiences found throughout The Wizarding World of Harry Potter.

An example of the dichotomy between Interaction Levels is Mission: Space (Epcot, 2003 – Present), where guests are given roles (Navigator, Pilot, Commander, Engineer) and called upon to press buttons that trigger show moments based on those roles within the attraction. If a guest does not hit their respective buttons, the attraction
automatically deploys the show moment to continue the attraction. This gives only the appearance of interaction while not truly being participatory, cementing its’ categorization as a Level One experience. *Mission: Space* is similar to *Millennium Falcon: Smuggler’s Run* in terms of assigning specific roles to guests (Pilot, Engineer, Gunner), but *Smuggler’s Run* exists as a Level Two experience due to the direct impact a guest’s participation has on sequential story moments and final score outcome.

Assessing the theme park experience once again as a “show,” I propose five levels of diegetic guest roles within a theme park attraction, named in cohesion with the showbusiness terminology utilized in theme parks. These guest role tiers map to the participation tiers proposed by the *Immersive Entertainment Industry Report* but provide additional context for the guest’s specific role within an overarching story. The first level is **Background Extras**, where guests are inhabitants of a themed land or area with no elevated level of responsibility. This would encompass any variation of the “tourist” role, whether it be interplanetary traveler, explorer, or demonstration attendee. The second level is **Ensemble**, where all guests have been empowered with an active level of responsibility. This would encompass any recruit, trainee, or employee type roles in attractions. The third level is **Cameo Appearance**, where the guest is singularly (or within a small group) given elevated status but isn’t necessarily vital or making changes to the overall plot. An example of this would be a guest (or guests) briefly being brought in front of a crowd to partake in a performance. The fourth level is **Side Character**, where a guest’s role is extruded from the populace and repeatedly called upon to provide plot support to the main cast of characters. The fifth and final level is
**Protagonist**, where a guest (or guests) is elevated to the role of a main character and is more vital to the success of the plot than all other characters involved. This encompasses many interactive shows and attractions that ultimately can’t continue without the participation of a guest or small group of guests. Further examples of these proposed diegetic role tiers for theme park guests can be found in *Table 1*. 
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role Tier</th>
<th>Example(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cameo Appearance</td>
<td>“You Charmed the Heart Right Out of Me” Onstage Volunteer in <em>Celestina Warbeck and the Banshees</em> (Universal Studios Florida, 2014 - Present), Extras in the <em>Indiana Jones Epic Stunt Spectacular</em> (Disney’s Hollywood Studios, 1989 – Present), Chromakey/Green Screen Volunteer (Any “Film Production” based show at theme parks worldwide)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Referencing Level Two experiences, the *Immersive Entertainment Industry Report* states “Guest reactions have been mixed on this type of experience, as some guests long for a more active role with greater impact while others desire a more passive one that’s closer to a traditional ride” (Brigante, R., Elger, S., Nelson, N., 2020). This conclusion provides additional evidence that not every theme park guest is the same, and while difficult, new theme park experiences should make a concerted effort to appeal to as many types of guests as possible. *Table 2* provides additional information on how this thesis concept draws from the *Immersive Entertainment Industry Report*’s Interaction/Participation levels, as well as mapping those levels to my created Guest Role Tiers.
### Table 2: Thesis Concept Experiences Compared to Interaction Levels and Guest Roles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thesis Concept Experience(s)</th>
<th>Immersive Entertainment Industry Report Interaction Level</th>
<th>Guest Role Tiers (referenced in Table 1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Watching the parade, watching show moments but not interacting with performers</td>
<td>Level Zero</td>
<td>Background Extras, Ensemble (depending on specific location)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investigating the parade float design, briefly interacting with a roaming performer, utilizing the interactive mobile application during the parade</td>
<td>Level One</td>
<td>Ensemble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a participant in one of the show moments</td>
<td>Level Two</td>
<td>Cameo Appearance, Side Character (depending on specific role in Show Moment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating a character and live action roleplaying with performers and show moments</td>
<td>Level Three</td>
<td>Side Character, Protagonist (depending on specific role in Show Moment)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Is there any potential for the role of a traditional character, such as any character performer or characters presented in the context of an attraction or show, to be diminished as the assumed roles of both guests and employees continue to expand? An attempt to make the guest the sole main character of an attraction was attempted in the original *Fantasyland* dark rides at Disneyland Park, for instance: the character Snow White didn’t initially appear on *Snow White’s Enchanted Wish* (Disneyland Park and various Disney Parks, 1955 – Present) as the guests were meant to be playing her role. Attraction Imagineer Ken Anderson stated “One thing we intended was that everybody
on the ride would understand that they were Snow White (...) And nobody got it. Nobody actually figured they were Snow White. They just wondered where the hell Snow White was" (Janzen, J., & Janzen, L., n.d.)! Animated figures of Snow White were eventually added to the attraction in response to guest confusion. Author David Younger offers further elaboration on the pitfalls of replacing main characters with guests, stating “Firstly, it means that the character is absent from the attraction meaning the guest does not see their favorite character, and secondly it produces the contradictory situation of the guest being the character at the same time every member of their party around them is simultaneously that character” (Younger, 2016). This particular situation also invites an interesting predicament of forcing guests into a role they may not want to participate in, as opposed to imagining their own role within an attraction or story.

While the trend of interactive attractions in theme parks that push the guest farther and farther towards a main character role continues, it is evident that attraction characters will always be necessary. In a non-intellectual property-based attraction, they are there to facilitate the story and provide the inciting incidents for the guest’s story. In intellectual property-based attractions, characters provide the same role while also serving to recreate the emotional attachments between themselves and guests learned from the piece of media they originated from. Imagineer John Hench referenced this phenomenon specifically stating, “We do try to use the material that’s in film because people know it and recognize it. It helps a great deal to have something they already know, something we know they already love” (Surrell, 2006). Imagineers Kevin Rafferty and Bruce Gordon added, “they bring to the ride a “built-in” mythology and design
theme based upon the story developed at length in their respective films” (Rafferty, K., & and Gordon, B., 1996). Ultimately, while some theme park guests may be inclined towards live-action roleplay and be subject matter experts of a particularly intellectual property, they should not be called upon to facilitate plot and serve as the emotional link to an intellectual property. At most, guests should be empowered to serve as an active participant and should help established characters make decisions on plot and story.

Similarly, non-performer employees should not be held to the same level of interactive and storytelling capability set forth by entertainment performers and actors. While both may be considered “Cast Members,” a performer’s sole job is to establish story moments and information to the guest, while non-performer employees are also called upon to operate a point of sale, give non-themed assistance and directions, ensure safe operations are being upheld within an attraction, maintain the cleanliness of an area, and so on. The idea of “eliminating” entertainment performers with non-performer employees could potentially prove detrimental to one of two areas: story cohesion or guest service. Based on experience in this exact situation, stereotyping every theme park employee as passionate and dedicated to a storyline often backfires, as, like any workplace, there are many employees who see their employment as “just a job.” Inversely, non-performer employees may find themselves too wrapped up and immersed in a storyline that their required duties go ignored or mishandled, opening possibilities for guest or safety issues.

In conclusion, is there a clear winner in the theme park characterization tug-of-war that exists between guest, employee, and performer? Ultimately, I believe all are
important in solidifying the story of a land, attraction, or experience, but a clear
delineation must be present. Performers and attraction characters should remain the
arbiters of the story, providing major information and facilitating inciting incidents. Non-
performing employees should reinforce the story, providing themed language and
costumes while populating spaces. And guests should be the executors, exploring,
interacting, and learning while serving as active participants in the storyline.
CHAPTER FOUR: THEME PARK PARADE HISTORICAL REFERENCE

The progenitor of the modern theme park parade is The Walt Disney Company, with Walt Disney himself recognizing the impact a parade could have on visiting guests by implementing a parade on Disneyland’s opening day. Since then, there have been over sixty seasonal, holiday, promotional, anniversary, nighttime, and street party parades presented at Disneyland Park. Early Disneyland parades were simple, featuring mainly the Disneyland Band and the Main Street Vehicles (Logan, R., Anello, J., 2000).

By the early 1970s, daytime parades at Disneyland had become an expectation from guests. Inspired by Walt Disney World’s Electrical Water Pageant (1971 – Present), the Disneyland entertainment team devised a plan for a first ever nighttime parade: The Main Street Electrical Parade (1972 – Present). Famous for its “thousands of sparkling lights and ‘electrosynthomagnetic' musical sound” (Wagner, 1972), the parade became the blueprint for all nighttime parades that “replaced” it. The Main Street Electrical Parade was a popular enough installation, however, that it was subject to the idea of “plussing” typically reserved for Disney attractions, including major overhauls to the parade floats, design, and music in both 1977 and 1985 (Gordon, B., & Mumford, D. (2000). Walt Disney World’s SpectroMagic (1991 – 2010) became a spiritual successor to Main Street Electrical Parade, despite deliberate decisions to have the parade’s music be “the opposite” of MSEP’s with triple meter against MSEP’s duple meter and orchestrated tracks instead of synthesized tracks (Logan, R., Anello, J., 2000). SpectroMagic began the tradition of new Disney parades offering a level of
technological innovation, with some key parade pieces utilizing state-of-the-art fiber optic lighting against solely utilizing MSEP’s “Christmas Tree” style twinkle lighting. (Hill, J., 2002).

Following SpectroMagic was Disneyland Paris and Tokyo Disneyland’s Disney’s Fantillusion! (1995 – 2001), a parade specifically designed as a condensed version of Disneyland Park’s Fantasmic! (1992 – Present) show, even featuring three distinct “acts” based on the original show in an attempt to convey a true linear narrative within the confines of a continuous parade. Albeit condensed, these three acts mirrored that of a traditional story arc: beginning with a cheerful normal world before hinting at impending danger. The arrival of the Disney villains acted as the story’s climax before their vanquishing ushered in the falling action and return to the normal world. However, this linear narrative was achieved utilizing show stops, eliminating it as an example of a traditional continuously moving parade with a clear linear narrative.

Attempting to create a hybrid show and parade, Disneyland Park’s entertainment team created the Main Street Hop (1988) as part of the park’s larger Blast to the Past celebration. Main Street Hop was a collection of small parade floats, vehicles, and motorbikes that rolled out onto Main Street and stopped for a ten-minute show themed to the American 1950’s. This show inaugurated the idea of a “show stop,” which remained a consistent part of Disneyland parades to come, including the Party Gras Parade (1990) and The Lion King Celebration (1994 – 1997) (Hill, J., 2002). For Walt Disney World’s 25th Anniversary (1996), Remember the Magic Parade was introduced at Magic Kingdom Park. This parade offered something unique: multiple show stops
throughout the parade route that brought guests into the street to interact with parade performers in “Magical Moments” based on Disney animated films. (Fickley-Baker, J., 2014). This theme park parade wasn’t just a passive experience to be watched from the sidelines. These brief encounters with performers and characters via street-bound production numbers continue to this day with the various Disney Parks street parties of recent years (*Block Party Bash* (2005 – 2013) and *Move It! Shake It! Dance and Play It! Street Party* (2014 – 2020) among others) that hinge entirely on bringing guests into the streets for interaction. One iteration of the *Move It! Shake It! Dance and Play It! Street Party* that I personally performed in at Magic Kingdom Park even allowed guests, albeit in a minor way, to influence the show in two ways. Using a hashtag, guests had the ability to Tweet photos taken during the street party which were then displayed at the show’s end via video screens located on parade floats. The street party host also presented three choices for a finale song that guests would vote on (through cheering) to receive the instant gratification of that song playing. Despite these interactives, these experiences are dance parties that can be alienating to park guests that are not inclined to participate in group dances while also lacking the experiential depth that comes from the presence of a compelling story. To implement more inclusive participation into a theme park parade, this thesis concept will describe a breadth of participatory activities that appeal to multiple types of theme park guests.

In the late 1990s, a decision was made to replace Disneyland Park’s *Main Street Electrical Parade* with a new nighttime offering. Eschewing the title of “parade” for the more fitting “streetacular,” the $40 million *Light Magic* (May – September 1997) opened
at Disneyland Park (Krosnick, B., 2014). Consisting of four eighty-foot-long identical rolling stage floats adorned with fiber optic lighting synchronized to music and retractable projection screens, Light Magic lived up to its “streetacular” moniker by only revealing its technologically innovative components and performers at two show stop moments: one near it’s a small world adjacent to where the parade “stepped off” (entered the park), and a second on Main Street, USA. (Hill, J., 2002). The danger of implementing show stops into any parade or “streetacular” is that guests not viewing the experience from the designated show stop location are ultimately missing out on a sizeable portion of the show. This example in particular inspired my thesis concept, where clearly advertised scheduled show moments at a known, consistent location tied to each parade float ensure that guests are receiving all necessary story information and interactive moments. Relatedly, Light Magic was another attempt at achieving a linear narrative through this medium, telling the story of a band of magical pixies that awakened the Disney characters to learn about their magic. The “pre-show” setup for this storyline, which was to include “Pixie Hunter” characters that roamed the parade float as guests lined up to disseminate story information and voiceover narration, was deemed unnecessary and scrapped (Hill, J., 2002). The show’s confusing content and limited performance area, combined with Disneyland Park guests deeming it an unworthy replacement of Main Street Electrical Parade, led to its immediate unpopularity and closure after just four months. In addition to the technological advancements included on the floats, Light Magic marked the first time the surrounding park areas had been altered to meet the needs of a parade. At the first show stop, an
extra bypass path was built, as well as a tiered viewing area with large towers which contained additional lighting and projection equipment. On Main Street, additional lighting and projection equipment was hidden within the street facades, as well as fiber optic trim added to much of the outside of the buildings (Hill, J., 2002). These alterations were permanent, and still exist in Disneyland Park to this day. *Light Magic* was a failure, but there are unique elements to the “streetacular” that I believe could prove successful if correctly utilized: namely the originally planned “pre-show,” onboard media projection, and environmental projection and lighting as the parade floats pass through the parade route. Also of note was the *Light Magic* creative team’s attitude towards the floats, designing and considering them as more of mobile tiered stages than a traditional parade float. While this thesis concept expects performers to roam guest areas to interact and provide story information, the show moments that provide required narrative information fit more into the structure of a live show which drives the necessity of having a more traditional stage. The included conceptual imagery provides designs that are in line with the “mobile stage” look of *Light Magic*’s floats.

Following the return of *Main Street Electrical Parade* after *Light Magic*’s closure, Disney’s live entertainment team created the *Paint the Night Parade* (2014 – Present) for Hong Kong Disneyland and Disneyland Park. This parade marked another innovation as Disney’s first ever completely LED-lit parade, with some floats also containing integrated media screens. Also new was a slate of interactive merchandise, including a paintbrush peripheral that allowed guests to change the color of the parade performer’s costume from their vantage point (Roseboom, M., 2014). Although not
currently being performed, both versions of the parade are still intact, but it was announced on February 22, 2022, that the Main Street Electrical Parade would return to Disneyland Park yet again on April 22, 2022 (Gustin, S., 2022).

The modern Disney Parks parade continues to incorporate technological innovations, including global positioning system (GPS) tracking of parade floats to distribute audio to “zones” of speakers as it moves through a theme park (Loar, J., 2019). The production design and artistry of Disney parades continues to expand, even utilizing known musical talent, such as Adam Young (Owl City) for Paint the Night Parade and Todrick Hall for the Magic Happens (Disneyland Park, 2020 – Present) (Ramirez, M., 2019) parade, to provide music and songs for parades. In terms of instilling true interactivity into parades, materials from Disney claim Mickey’s Waterworks Parade (Hong Kong Disneyland, 2007 – 2013) to be “interactive” (Malmberg, M., 2010), but the parade consisted of floats, units, and performers that sought to drench guests with water. The guests are engaged as the performers blast them with water, but true interactivity would perhaps involve arming guests with water weaponry and encouraging them to drench performers in a “water war.” Disney promotional materials similarly marketed the March of the ARTimals (Disney’s Animal Kingdom, 1998 – 1999) parade as “interactive” (Malmberg, 1998), despite this parade offering nothing than a typical Disney parade except some live music. It should be noted that the second most utilized marketing term (behind “immersive”) collected by the Immersive Entertainment Industry Report was “interactive” (Brigante, R., Elger, S., Nelson, N., 2020). Promising true interactivity, where guests are active contributors to
the parade experience in multiple ways, is one of major cornerstones of this thesis project.

Gathering inspiration from structure instead of content, *Universal’s Superstar Parade* (2012 – Present) individually dispatches each of its parade floats and accompanying parade units for smaller pop-up shows before the assembled parade in the evening. These shows are relatively short, quick dance-party style events that create an opportunity to use the expensive floats as a striking centerpiece for these performances. They instill more life into the park during the day. Significant for this thesis is the shift scheduling structure of three to four small shows leading up to the nighttime parade. Also significant is that these three to four shows are different, split into “A”, “B”, and “C” shows. These shows all feature the same casts and float, but feature different staging, choreography, and music to offer a unique experience show to show.

The *Let’s Dream!* (Lotte World, 2014 – Present) parade offers a unique approach to disseminating story information. Describing the parade’s pre-show, designer Taylor Jeffs stated, “ten minutes before the main show begins, we have six storytellers come out on magic bikes and park themselves at different points along the parade route (…) the audience in that specific area is told one of six unique ‘bedtime stories,’ each one telling the story of one of the parade’s units. (…) all six stories are interconnected, so to truly understand the parade’s backstory, guests will have to watch the preshow from all six different zones” (Young, J., 2014). This structure of giving guests the option and incentive to show up to the main show with all the necessary prior knowledge, while
also letting other guests who didn’t participate in the same depth have a positive experience just viewing the parade as is, is an important feature of this thesis concept.

While theme park parades often present the semblance of a narrative, a vast majority of these offerings are often comprised of a collage of stories. To the best of my knowledge, no classification system exists for methods of storytelling within theme park parades, so I propose a set of categories from which parade stories can be identified (Table 3). Much as there are genres of film, literature, or theme park attractions, the same can be done for determining theme park parade narrative methodology. These categories, based on a sample size of approximately one hundred theme park parades through the medium’s over sixty-year history. The parades range from abstract and loose storylines to micro-vignette stories that play out repeatedly throughout the parade route.
Table 3: Parade Storytelling Methodology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vignette Storytelling</td>
<td>Brief story sequences – vignettes – are conveyed in a looping manner throughout the course of a parade. A unit in <em>Universal’s Spectacle Night Parade</em> includes a battle between Hogwarts students and Death Eaters that loops repeatedly.</td>
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<td>Individualized Storytelling</td>
<td>Stories are conveyed during a show stop moment that are viewed only by the guests in that show stop area. <em>Let’s Dream! Parade World</em> features visits from storytellers that convey a specific story (each tied to a parade unit) to a certain area of guests.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interactive Storytelling</td>
<td>Dramatic storytelling is rescinded in lieu of bringing guests into the parade area for interactive moments. <em>Sesame Street Party Parade</em> (SeaWorld Orlando, 2019 – Present) seeks to bring guests into the street to dance and play games under the guise of a celebration with the characters.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kickoff Storytelling</td>
<td>A high-energy parade type that “kicks off” (or inversely ends) with its largest or highest demand unit. <em>Mickey’s Soundsational Parade</em> (Disneyland Park, 2011 – 2019) featured a high-energy drumline opening featuring Mickey Mouse, then endeavored to match that energy throughout the parade’s loose musical theme.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expansionary Storytelling</td>
<td>The parade is utilized to tell a story that serves as plot expansion to an existing film or intellectual property. <em>Hercules Zero to Hero Parade</em> (Various Disney Parks, 1997 – 1998) told the story of what happened to Hercules following the events of the film.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thematic Celebration</td>
<td>Linear storytelling is eschewed in favor of an emphasis on unit-divided imagery and song under an overarching theme. The most common type of theme park parade, where any sense of storytelling is divided up per unit, oftentimes with each unit celebrating a different intellectual property.</td>
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</table>

In conclusion, theme park parades have long been established as a unique method for storytelling and technological advancement much in the vein of all other
theme park attractions. While oftentimes overlooked, there are a multitude of theme park parades that can be pointed to as major innovations and developments within theme park history, such as the iterations of the Disneyland nighttime parade that began with *The Main Street Electrical Parade* and continues with *Paint the Night Parade*. While consistently striving to offer unique new aspects, true interactivity and linear storytelling have been missing from theme park parades, something this thesis concept looks to remedy.
Aside from theme park parades, various live participatory and interactive entertainment experiences from theme parks offered inspiration for this thesis. Disneyland Park’s *Legends of Frontierland: Gold Rush* started in 2014 as an initial kickoff playtest that introduced the idea of an entertainment experience that offered a Live Interactive Narrative directly influenced by guest participation. Akin to a “Choose Your Own Adventure” style novel, this Live Interactive Narrative offered branching storylines with multiple story beats that presented themselves based directly on the guest’s prior actions. Guests had the opportunity to choose sides between two feuding factions that are waging a land war throughout *Frontierland*. (Zylstra, 2014). Guests completed tasks, challenges, and games to earn “bits” that would allow them to purchase control of more land and buildings for their faction. Aside from gameplay, guests were encouraged to establish themselves as characters within the universe of the game as they interacted with dozens of actors who facilitated gameplay and story. In doing so, guests were able to actively alter their surroundings (creating and posting signs, wanted posters, maps and more) and impact a day’s storyline (like facilitating a wedding between two characters who were interested in each other or convincing the saloon owner to let an aspiring dancer character get up on stage) rather than just participate in a rigidly structured series of events. (Zylstra, 2014). Ultimately, *Legends of Frontierland* never transitioned into a permanent installment and lasted only 2 months in the Summer of 2014. A document published from Disney’s own Disney Research
division, released well after *Legends of Frontierland*, offers potential insight as to why this experience was so short lived, stating Live Interactive Narratives “remain a niche form of entertainment, partly due to the cost of designing and operating them. Unlike virtual experiences, real-world resources such as actors, rooms and props incur significant operating cost” (Azad et al., 2019).

In 2016, Ghost Town Alive! debuted at Knott’s Berry Farm. Like *Legends of Frontierland*, Ghost Town Alive! is a participatory live entertainment experience set in the Old West. However, Ghost Town Alive! has successfully found a way to utilize existing park resources (locations, staff). It is presented as an annual offering for the summer season at Knott’s Berry Farm. Ghost Town Alive! focuses on conveying a compelling story via interactions with live actors in a linear narrative that unfolds throughout an entire day as opposed to the complex gameplay model of *Legends of Frontierland*. Also missing is a great deal of control that guests held over the overarching experience in *Legends of Frontierland*, due to the regimented schedule of show moments required to advance the narrative. Dr. Carissa Baker recounts this storytelling structure, stating “While the storyline itself is fixed, linear, and concludes every day (accounting for single-day guests), it is also branching because guests can modify the outcomes in at least some ways” (Baker 2018). In between these show moments, guests can explore the much more expansive Ghost Town area to interact with characters and participate in period authentic activities (blacksmith demos, gold panning, visiting livery stables). There were even opportunities for guest statements, gathered by a reporter character, to appear in an in-universe newspaper (printed
multiple times throughout the day) as part of reactions to major story moments (Baker 2018). Of particular interest for this thesis is Ghost Town Alive’s scheduled day-long show structure, that peppers in major story moments during smaller shows before building to a finale event at the end of the day. Also notable are the levels of participation from guests, described by Dr. Carissa Baker: “the most distant would be an observer who simply watches a small event or two … The middle level might be what I did, where I spent hours watching the story unfold, participated in some of the daily events (sworn in as a Calico citizen, voted for sheriff, walked through with a posse …) The final level of engagement is the most participatory, as it includes acting as a town message distributor or package deliverer (Pony Express) for hours or even creating a new character, inserting oneself into the storytelling, or wearing a costume” (Baker 2018). Whereas similar experiences that have inspired this thesis concept imply an elevated level of participation, I will endeavor to offer participation levels like that of Ghost Town Alive!

Evermore Park opened in Utah in 2018. Touted by industry professionals as the future of themed experiences (MacDonald 2019), this fantasy-based “immersive experience park” offers guests (known as World-Walkers) the opportunity to join a guild and participate in scavenger hunt-style quests throughout the grounds of the park (Haines 2020). More so than its comparative predecessors, Evermore Park encourages the amount of live action roleplay (or LARP) that this type of experience invites. Evermore’s existence has been plagued with legal and financial issues (Foreman, 2020) However, it has remained open for multiple “seasons” throughout the year instead of
daily operation. Of note is Evermore Park’s devoted fan community, passionate about repeat visitation and roleplaying alongside their guilds and fellow players, “donning their self-made costumes to become a character in a live action role-play style, ready to interact, discover, and even challenge what the Evermore team has in store for them” (Haines 2020).

Aside from parades, the Disney theme parks have delved into participatory and interactive entertainment throughout its entire history. Even in Disneyland Park’s first days, Frontierland was populated with roaming performers and pop-up live shows: “Frontiersman wearing buckskin and fringe also met guests as they moseyed along the wooden-plank sidewalks, while desperados and heroes would leap from buildings and brawl in the streets” (Nichols, C., 2018). Over time, these daily offerings faded into nonexistence, only emerging again for playtest-style experiences such as Legends of Frontierland. In the 1980s, another push for this level of atmosphere entertainment emerged within Disney, hallmarked by the improvisational comedy-based World Showcase Players (Epcot, 1982 – 2014) and expanded further with The Adventurer’s Club (Disney Springs, 1989 – 2008) and the introduction of “Streetmosphere” (Disney’s Hollywood Studios, 1989 – Present). “Streetmosphere,” a term coined by program developer and Imagineer Craig McNair Wilson, represents a combination of “street theatre” and “atmosphere characters,” as the new offerings for Disney’s Hollywood Studios couldn’t be considered one or the other (Hochberg, M., 2009). World Showcase Players existed as more traditional street theatre, but The Adventurer’s Club and “Streetmosphere” (eventually known as the Citizens of Hollywood) mixed roaming
character interactions with show moments that assembled the casts of characters together to address a crowd. Notable is the cast structure of *Citizens of Hollywood*, where actors cast in a role are encouraged to create a sense of individuality for their character and differentiate themselves from the other actors portraying the same “role” on another day (Younger, 2020). “Streetmosphere” as a concept within the Disney parks has vastly expanded to other “Citizens” offerings on *Main Street, U.S.A.* (Disneyland Park and Magic Kingdom Park, 1990s - Present) and *Buena Vista Street* (Disney California Adventure, 2012 – Present), as well has become a staple of many other parks worldwide.

Character “meet and greets” at the Disney Parks have evolved from lines to take quick pictures with characters in front of a backdrop or publicly accessible areas to private, elaborate dimensional environments where guests are playing an assumed role. For instance, guests meeting Chewbacca at *Star Wars Launch Bay* (Disney’s Hollywood Studios and various Disney parks, 2015 – Present) are meant to be in-universe participants in an overarching story that sees them visiting the Wookiee at a hidden Resistance Base to provide intelligence or steal Resistance secrets on behalf of The First Order. Having this character experience exist as a one-on-one moment between a group of guests and a character amidst a themed microenvironment is meant to fully entrench the guests in the universe of the story and differentiate these experiences from simply posing with costumed characters to a legitimate encounter with major figures of modern popular culture mythology. Having meet and greets set up this way eliminates some of the magic and spontaneity of watching a character “appear”
within a themed land but instills a level of storytelling not typically associated with these types of experiences while also attempting to manage the demand of character interactions while mitigating issues of capacity that stem from low theoretical hourly capacity (THC) associated with character meet and greets (Younger, 2016). Theoretical hourly capacity is a target number used by theme park operators to gauge potential capacity for their theme park attractions. THC is determined by multiplying an attraction’s number of dispatch intervals per minute (for instance, every time a ride vehicle is dispatched into an attraction or every time a new group goes up to meet a character) by an attraction’s vehicle capacity (how many guests can fit in a ride vehicle, or an average group size that visits a character per interaction), ultimately multiplied by sixty to extrapolate for the hourly capacity. THC for character meet and greets is typically low, as these “dispatch intervals” typically consist of one small group at a time with interaction intervals that aren’t automated or quantifiable. For instance, a rare and best-case scenario would see a character interacting with a group of four people every sixty seconds. This would equal a THC of 240, a number in stark contrast to the many theme park attractions that possess a THC of 2,000 to 3,000. And drawing from personal experience participating in character meet and greets, many group interactions oftentimes took up to three minutes with group numbers varying wildly from single people to large groups. Multiple permanent Disney Parks meet and greet locations have attempted to remedy issues of low THC by offering multiple hidden rooms featuring the same character meet and greet fed by a unified queue. This thesis concept seeks to not solve the problem of low THC found in character meet and greets, but instead distance
these offerings from meeting a quantifiable statistic. Unlike theme park rides that are highly engineered to maintain consistency which can be tied to a target throughput, live entertainment offerings are inherently unpredictable and spontaneous, a result of live performer interactions and direct input from guests.

Interactive live shows are also a trend that has been recently adopted by the Disney Parks. Young participants in the Jedi Training: Trials of the Temple (Disney’s Hollywood Studios and various Disney Parks, 2006 – Present) show assume the role of Jedi Padawans and are taught a lightsaber combat combination before coming face to face with Star Wars villains in battle. And a slate of announced but mostly never built (Attractions Magazine, 2009) participatory live entertainment experiences based on the Disney Princesses for an expansion of Magic Kingdom Park’s Fantasyland sought to involve guests in interactive moments and storytelling alongside characters. Several of these experiences were included in an initial concept presentation, but only the interactive live show Enchanted Tales with Belle (2012 – Present) was built. Here, guests travel to the Beast’s castle where a select few are chosen to surprise Belle in a live retelling of her story. Enchanted Tales with Belle draws heavily from participatory theatre, giving volunteers roles to play as well as empowering audience members with reactionary moments. Of particular interest among the never-built experiences is an interactive show based on Disney’s Sleeping Beauty, wherein guests had the opportunity to create physical birthday cards before presenting them to Princess Aurora herself.
In addition to installations in theme parks, several regularly presented and related themed experiences rooted in guest interaction within an overarching narrative have influenced this thesis project. French historical theme park Puy Du Fou offers four spectacles immersif, including Les Amoureux de Verdun (2015 – Present), which places guests in the middle of the French-German Christmas Day Armistice of World War I. Immersive theater company Punchdrunk’s multiple productions of Sleep No More (2003 – Present) allow guests to freely roam through various environments while interacting with film noir and Shakespeare-inspired characters. Secret Cinema (2007 – Present) offers experiential screenings of films like Back to the Future and The Empire Strikes Back, with live performances and explorable environments that allow guests to serve as characters within the screened film. And Star Wars: Galactic Starcruiser, a two-night lodging experience with a multi-thousand-dollar price tag, invites guests to play an active role in a Star Wars story where their actions and interactions with characters unlock new areas, information, and story moments. These experiences, however, are oftentimes paired with barriers to entry including high cost (Galactic Starcruiser, Secret Cinema), content (Puy du Fou presents content advisories for Les Amoureux de Verdun and Sleep No More is meant for adults), and experience (Sleep No More and Galactic Starcruiser both hold extensive runtimes and call for participation that some guests may find uncomfortable). While these experiences (except for Galactic Starcruiser) advertise guests as active participants, there are no opportunities for guest actions to directly influence the outcome of the story being told. Star Wars: Galactic Starcruiser elevates guests above passive background extras to empowered characters a la Legends of
*Frontierland*, i.e., a guest activating the ship’s hyperdrive on the bridge triggers media throughout the rest of the ship that shows the jump to lightspeed. In addition, *Galactic Starcruiser* takes advantage of modern-day smartphone usage by establishing guest’s phones as part of the story. Guest “Datapads” are used to carry some of the experience’s interactivity, including messaging back and forth with characters and solving puzzles.

Concluding the contextual and historical section of this thesis paper, *Table 4* offers a summation of the entertainment, theme park parade, and themed live entertainment experiences that provide direct inspiration and influence on this thesis concept.
Table 4: Summary of Inspiration for Thesis Concept

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience Name</th>
<th>Character Interactions</th>
<th>Design Decisions</th>
<th>Branching Narrative</th>
<th>Interactive Gameplay</th>
<th>Show Moments</th>
<th>Tangible Elements</th>
<th>Mobile Interactivity</th>
<th>Guest as Character</th>
<th>Three-Act Structure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fantillusion! (Disneyland Paris)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Combining the storytelling and interactive moments found in these live entertainment-based experiences with the traditional structure of a theme park parade is something that I hope appears straightforward. Participatory and gamified experiences
are what guests have now come to expect from new theme park experiences, and that expectation should apply to all theme park attractions as the industry strives for increased interactivity on all fronts.
CHAPTER SIX: CONCEPT EXPLANATION AND CHALLENGES TO SOLVE

Introduction

While a major portion of this thesis paper is meant to explain the thesis concept and parade framework, additional context for the original story I created to fill the concept is necessary. What follows is a summary of the created story, please reference Addendum A for complete story context on the park, parade, and characters.

Welcome to the land of Evu, where five families (Aquelar, Igniri, Aesus, Silvara, and Terrum) live in mutual cooperation and celebrate their greatest historical memory every year with a unity celebration and massive parade. Centuries ago, the five families of Evu were separated by mysterious natural obstacles. These obstacles dissipated, and the families journeyed outside their lands for the first time to discover a sprawling canyon. It was in this canyon where the five families first made contact with each other, initially confused and apprehensive about their newfound neighbors. However, in attempting to communicate with each other, the five families found they had a single word in common: “Pangun.” While meaning a slightly different thing in each respective language, the definitions of Pangun all centered around unity or coming together. Taking this as destiny and recognizing the value to be found in each family’s uniqueness, the families made a pact of mutual coexistence and everlasting cooperation. They named the canyon, which connected all five lands, the Pangun Pass in remembrance of their unification. The families of Evu celebrate that union annually
with the Pangun Parade, where all the people of Evu gather in the Pangun Pass to celebrate amidst massive and ornate parade floats that pay tribute to each family.

Guests visiting the land of Evu, known as “Wanderers,” enter the land on that day of the unity celebration and the Pangun Parade. As the Wanderers explore each of the five family lands, they will meet the people of Evu and become entrenched in their stories, as well as actively helping make finishing touches to preparations and Pangun Parade floats.

The genesis of this thesis concept centered around determining what the next big innovation in parades could be. While there have been advances in effects and technology as they pertain to parades, the overarching structure of “floats rolling down the street” has remained mostly the same. While the traditional parade procession can be part of a parade’s use, there is opportunity for expansion with additional interactivity and participatory moments. These advances would help to dissolve the traditionally held notion that parades are “hands-off” guest experiences.

With the Pangun Parade, I strove to open as many opportunities as possible to bring guests into the action. The base of interactivity stems from the ability for the guests to meet each parade character and learn their story. Ideally, this would create emotional attachments to certain characters and drive the narrative that is being conveyed. Next, giving guests the opportunity to act as active decision makers in a portion of the parade’s presentation gives each participant the “I helped with that” factor as the parade float rolls down the street in front of thousands of others. This same philosophy applies to two “tangible” interactive options to be explained in greater detail.
later in this paper. In a way, guests are not only active participants in the parade stories but instilling a piece of themselves and who they are as part of the completed design of the parade float.

Park Layout

Addressing the importance of parade route design, designer Norm Doerges stated “Parade routes were generally decided upon after the theme park was built. (…) From an operating perspective, this made parades terribly difficult to manage. By introducing a design programming approach, we were able to resolve many of these issues” (Pulk, N., 2009). As a theme park parade’s structure is heavily dependent on the layout of a theme park, and this theme park parade concept’s structure involves dispatching floats to various theme park lands throughout the day, I have created a theme park concept and story that encompasses the parade. I designed the park thinking about the layout of modern theme park lands (smaller, immersive, heavy on show set) but paid special attention to how the parade route and associated elements could drive the overarching park structure. It’s evident that the winding, intimate theme park lands of today (*The Wizarding World of Harry Potter*, *Pandora: The World of Avatar*) aren’t meant for parade floats, thus eventually limiting a parade’s ability to traverse the entirety of a park. I recognized, however, that limiting a parade route to a centralized area would provide a more communal viewing experience, as is in line with the parade and park storyline. Relegating the parade to one area of a theme park may also resolve certain issues of access, as parades that snake through an entire park
often create choke points that block guests from entering areas and accessing attractions. In this park design, each area of the park’s main entrance is located in the central area where the parade would be held, but guests can alternatively travel through narrow “fox hole” pathways that connect adjacent lands. *Figure 1* demonstrates the proposed park layout utilizing the Evu case study, with special attention paid to the park backstage access road, large vehicle entry gates, and parade route.

*Figure 1: Theme Park Concept with Parade Concept Details*

Each land contains strategic access gates all leading to an encircling backstage access road that gives all parade floats easy entry and exit from the park as they drive to and from the parade storage building. This is unique, as some theme parks (such as Magic Kingdom Park and Disneyland Park) contain only two entry and exit gates for
parade floats. Each land having parade float access will allow the floats to serve as additional show set for the lands, as they host fifteen various “show moments” that introduce interactives, characters, and story to guests. These floats would be strategically parked away from high-traffic areas such as near major attraction entrances to reduce overcrowding and establish a “show area” that guests will know to return to throughout the day to experience each show moment. The park’s entrance area has a smaller vehicle gate to allow for the entry and exit of the comparatively compact storyteller vehicles, which assemble in the entrance loop area for the park’s opening moment. Floats will enter their respective lands in an additional bonus show moment in the morning and leave after the land’s final parade-based show moment to assemble for the larger parade. Figure 2 provides a visualization of the show structure utilizing the Evu case study, showing how each parade float is dispatched to their respective lands at the start of day before moving through three show moments and assembling for the nighttime parade.
The park’s parade route does a completed circuit of the park’s entrance area. Guests will be able to see the same float twice, as the second pass of the floats introduces minor changes that serve as progression to the parade’s linear storyline. Former Disney Entertainment executive Ron Logan stated in reference to parade routes, “Ideally, you want a circular parade route. That allows more performance time “on stage.” We don’t have that in all our parks, which is too bad because performance time and money is wasted" (Logan, R., & Anello, J., 2000). The two-tiered structure of the entrance area (Pangun Pass) will provide overhead parade viewing space for guests. The resulting high cliff walls of Pangun Pass will also allow for projection
mapping effects that will enhance the overall parade experience. These two design facets are unnecessary to the core structure of the parade but would provide additional capacity and show quality not found in other parade installations.

**Interactives Layout**

Eschewing the typical parade “show stop” structure for isolated show moments throughout the day, I sought to innovate the traditional form of parade interactivity that solely involved guests coming into the street to briefly dance and play with performers before returning to the sidewalk.

Guests will have the opportunity to influence design decisions (fire color, scent, song lyrics, dance combination, costume pieces) that will be displayed to the entire park, giving them a sense of agency in the production. In addition, guests will be able to create paper “well wishes” that will be strung across the parade float. Since emotional connections are meant to be a crucial part of this experience, guests will be able to retrieve these paper flags after the parade is completed as a tangible memento of their participation in the experience.

Participation through a mobile application will allow for a digital interactive in the form of a floating lantern. Guests will fully customize a unique floating lantern on their phone which can then be “sent” to each parade float as it passes by for the entire assembled crowd to see. Lantern customization also serves as the primary reward system for interactivity in the park. Repeat visitors and guests who complete additional quests and tasks will unlock additional customization options (including slots for
additional stored lantern designs), and regular and seasonal app updates will also provide more ways to customize your lanterns. Ideally, the lantern would also serve as a visual representation of the character(s) a guest most identified with, decorating the lantern with that character’s colors or symbols, and sending it to that character’s float. In addition to the digital interactive element, the park’s mobile application will provide attraction wait times, help, maps, and other operational information in addition to story recap videos and graphic novels. These provide refreshers and additional context to the lore of the characters, land, attractions, shows, and park.

Aside from these direct interactives, meeting face to face with the many characters will add another layer of interaction. Guests will be able to interact one-on-one with these characters, helping them complete tasks, playing games, singing songs, dancing, exploring, telling stories, and more. The hope is for guests to feel a sense of alignment with a character group and purchase merchandise that signifies their loyalty, providing an optional roleplay element for guests that are inclined. Table 5 provides a summation of the interactivity that can be attached to this thesis concept, with the four included examples being implemented into the Evu case study.
Parade Float Design

For this parade concept, a portion of the experience’s interactivity hinges on the scheduled show moments that take place in a float’s associated land, so I opted for the “moving stage” parade float style featured in *Light Magic* (Disneyland Park, 1997). Show moments would begin on these large floats before performers dismounted and began to roam and mingle with guests.

As this is a night parade, special attention needed to be paid into how the float would be illuminated. In the universe of this created story, only natural sources of light exist, so all lighting could only be electronic in function but not physical appearance. On-
float projection equipment would display guests’ lanterns that would be sent from their phones as parade floats passed by.

   Each float design would have a “canopy” style covering to provide shade for performers during show moments and hide integrated lighting and projection equipment. Each parade float would have a monumental structure at its bow, serving as a design element and tribute to the character group, but also serving as the compartment for the concealed parade float driver. *Figure 3* shows a proposed parade float design within the Evu case study, showing the elongated “mobile stage” look of the float, nighttime lighting, canopy structure, and concealed driver compartment.

   Additional images of the parade float concept physical models I created can be found in Addendum B.
Challenges to Solve

The hypothetical nature of this thesis project seeks not just to develop a new experience, but also solve the many problems and challenges that to date have significantly hampered the continued operability of participatory live entertainment experiences. Thus, I have recognized various issues that oftentimes stem from these experiences and how this thesis concept, while also referencing prior installation history, looks to solve those issues.
Staffing and Scheduling Logistics

Perhaps the greatest issue stemming from participatory entertainment offerings is performer staffing. It takes an extensive cast of live performers for an area to feel truly populated and build branching interactives. Similarly, a theme park parade calls for an extensive cast with multiple performer types. In today's theme park parade operations, a single parade performance is just a piece of a performer's shift for the day, such as the scheduling of performers (three to four small shows before an assembled parade later in the day) in *Universal's Superstar Parade* (Universal Studios Florida, 2012 – Present). However, instead of scheduling performers for dance party shows, they would instead be scheduled for roaming sets and narrative shows that advance the overarching parade narrative. These shows would take place at the associated parked parade float, serving as a “home base” for guests to return to so they can obtain additional story information.

In the Pangun Parade concept, I developed an intricate schedule that divides performers into multiple casts to achieve a goal: ensuring that some form of live entertainment is taking place at all points of the day within a land. A themed environment feels most alive when it is populated by characters, so having shows, stories, and roaming sets constantly taking place is necessary to keep guests engaged and participating in the story. All performers are being utilized across multiple offerings, including variety-type performers who typically wouldn’t participate in roaming sets. These shows are more traditional seated twenty-minute theme park shows that provide additional context to the overall parade storyline but stand independent from that
narrative sphere. Please reference *Table 6 – High Level Schedule for Linear Narrative Entertainment Offerings* and *Table 7 – Detailed Level Schedule for Single Parade Unit Linear Entertainment Offerings* for additional clarification on this scheduling structure.

While suspension of disbelief is necessary across most themed experiences, the reality is that the characters encountered by guests are performers who require downtime and breaks, in some locations per union contracts (i.e., Walt Disney World, where character performers are part of the Local 385 Teamsters Union). How can these spontaneous moments between characters and guests still meet operational requirements? Citing again Disney’s own research on Live Interactive Narratives, the paper states that “interactions between actors and players may be of uncertain lengths, which is a challenge to LINs’ operation” (Azad et al., 2019). The solution here lies not with AI-based scheduling programs but instead with empowering performers with enough control to self-regulate situations while providing training on how to keep interactions moving while still providing story information.
Table 6: High Level Schedule for Linear Narrative Entertainment Offerings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Entertainment Offering</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:45 – 9:45 AM</td>
<td>Welcome Moment in Park Entry Hub (Tellers’ Morning Welcome)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00 – 11:15 AM</td>
<td>Story Group 1 Show Moment Type A (Aquelar Shared Story)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:30 – 11:45 AM</td>
<td>Story Group 2 Show Moment Type A (Aesus Shared Story)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00 – 12:15 PM</td>
<td>Story Group 3 Show Moment Type A (Silvara Shared Story)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:30 – 12:45 PM</td>
<td>Story Group 4 Show Moment Type A (Terrum Shared Story)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:00 – 1:15 PM</td>
<td>Story Group 5 Show Moment Type A (Igniri Shared Story)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:15 – 2:30 PM</td>
<td>Story Group 1 Show Moment Type B (Aquelar Tale to Tell)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:45 – 3:00 PM</td>
<td>Story Group 2 Show Moment Type B (Aesus Tale to Tell)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:15 – 3:30 PM</td>
<td>Story Group 3 Show Moment Type B (Silvara Tale to Tell)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:45 – 4:00 PM</td>
<td>Story Group 4 Show Moment Type B (Terrum Tale to Tell)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:15 – 4:30 PM</td>
<td>Story Group 5 Show Moment Type B (Igniri Tale to Tell)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:45 – 5:15 PM</td>
<td>Story Group 1 Show Moment Type C (Aquelar Wanderer’s Duty)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:15 – 5:45 PM</td>
<td>Story Group 2 Show Moment Type C (Aesus Wanderer’s Duty)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:45 – 6:15 PM</td>
<td>Story Group 3 Show Moment Type C (Silvara Wanderer’s Duty)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:15 – 6:45 PM</td>
<td>Story Group 4 Show Moment Type C (Terrum Wanderer’s Duty)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:45 – 7:15 PM</td>
<td>Story Group 5 Show Moment Type C (Igniri Wanderer’s Duty)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:00 PM</td>
<td>Nighttime Parade (Pangun Parade)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00 PM</td>
<td>Nighttime Spectacular (Evu: Emergent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30</td>
<td>Evening Goodbye in Park Entry Hub (“Final Bow” from All Main Characters)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This schedule only includes the offerings that contain the necessary information for Wanderers to fully understand the five linear stories that are being told throughout the day. This schedule does not include roaming sets and live shows that contain context for the story universe but aren’t required to fully understand the Pangun Parade story.
Table 7: Detailed Level Schedule for Single Parade Unit Linear Entertainment Offering

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10:00 – 10:20 AM</td>
<td>Aquelar Shared Story (Cast A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:20 – 10:40 AM</td>
<td>Aquelar Roaming Set (Cast A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:40 – 11:40 AM</td>
<td>Aquelar Roaming Set (Cast B, Teller)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:40 – 12:20 PM</td>
<td>Aquelar Roaming Set (Cast A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:40 – 1:10 PM</td>
<td>Aquelar Songs of the Sea Show (Variety Cast)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:20 – 1:40 PM</td>
<td>Aquelar Tale to Tell (Teller)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:40 – 2:00 PM</td>
<td>Aquelar Teller Roaming Set (Teller)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:40 – 2:40 PM</td>
<td>Aquelar Roaming Set (Cast B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:40 – 3:40 PM</td>
<td>Aquelar Roaming Set (Cast A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:50 – 4:20 PM</td>
<td>Aquelar Songs of the Sea Show (Variety Cast)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:40 – 5:00 PM</td>
<td>Aquelar Wanderer’s Duty (Cast A, B, Teller)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:00 – 5:40 PM</td>
<td>Aquelar Roaming Set (Cast B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:40 – 6:40 PM</td>
<td>Aquelar Roaming Set (Cast A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:00 PM</td>
<td>Pangun Parade (All Casts)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Hesitance to Tell a Linear Story within a Parade

Referencing again the stance of parade designer Chris Merritt, theme park parades have been pointed to as a poor medium for conveying linear stories. I argue that not only can parades have a linear story, but each parade unit can play a part in a larger unified story that plays out over the course of an entire day.

The Pangun Parade serves as the final act of the five different storylines (known within the concept as Shared Stories) that guests will become active participants throughout the day. At the same time, the story of the five foxes and their attempts to join in the parade serves as an additional linear story that is exclusive to just the parade performance. To ensure that this storyline is clear, and to avoid the referenced pitfalls of Light Magic (Disneyland, 1997), additional performers will roam the parade route a few
minutes prior to the parade to reinforce the parade’s “Five Foxes” storyline, similar to the arrival of the storytellers on bikes as a pre-show to the *Let’s Dream!* Parade (Lotte World, 2014 – Present).

*Economics of Parade Float Usage*

In addition to the staffing issues previously mentioned, parades can employ several highly expensive parade floats. Far removed from bunting-adorned moving platforms, high-end theme park parade floats rival the detail and intricacy found in fixed theme park installations. In Disney Parade history, recycling parade floats across multiple installations is common, such as the reuse of some of the floats from the *Jubilation! Parade* (Tokyo Disneyland, 2008 – 2013) in the *Festival of Fantasy Parade* (Magic Kingdom Park, 2014 – Present), or the restructuring of floats from *The Lion King Celebration* parade (Disneyland Park, 1994 – 1997) into the mobile show units for the *Festival of the Lion King* show (Disney’s Animal Kingdom, 1998 – Present). Rolling these floats out at a maximum of twice a day during peak times limits overall guest exposure to these oftentimes awe-inspiring show pieces. Realizing that distributing the parade floats throughout the day for shows and appearances may limit their impact, the floats ultimately won’t reach their “full potential” in terms of performers, effects, and technology until the nighttime performance.

Parking the floats for the Pangun Parade in each of the five family lands doesn’t just provide a compelling backdrop for show moments, its presence is a centerpiece of the story itself. With the entire park concept’s story orbiting around the idea of this
parade climax, the parade float decision-making show moments (known as Wanderer’s Duty in the parade concept) directly instills guests into the rising action of the day-long story being experienced by all park guests.

I recognize that some of the appeal of a parade is the grand reveal of the parade floats, and the ability for guests to repeatedly see parade floats as they are parked in various locations may detract from some of the initial surprise provided by the appearance of the floats. For the Evu case study and all other nighttime parades that could fit within this framework, however, I believe the transformative nature of nighttime lighting and effects provides enough differential to establish these floats as unique again. There are also surprises to be found in the digital interactives and linear story being told.

**Variability and Theme Park Parades**

Despite the nature of live performances being inherently variable as each performer or cast brings something different to a role, there are multiple opportunities to empower theme park performers with instances of interactivity and improvisation. By adopting variability methods utilized in various theme park attractions, a parade can switch up effects, music, costume, and float order to produce a massive number of performance options. This paired with performer and technological interactives would probably establish a parade as required viewing with each visit to a park.

While the overarching story aspects of the Pangun Parade will remain the same between viewings, there are multiple opportunities to provide variability built in. Each
decision point in Wanderer’s Duty show moments offers three to five different choice options that will serve to differentiate details from performance to performance. All characters and performers would either have extensive backstories created or empowered to create their own backstories. Even though a guest may interact with a character on multiple visits, they may hear a different story or learn a new thing each time. Creating Well-Wishes is a way for repeat visitors to find new enjoyment in every viewing as they create unique paper flags and digital lanterns each time.

Appealing to Each Type of Theme Park Guest with a Parade

Referencing again the Immersive Entertainment Industry Report’s Interaction/Participation Levels and Table 2, I am able to account for every level of guest involvement in the Pangun Parade concept, assessing involvement ranging from simply viewing the parade and show moments, to actively roleplaying in storylines and purchasing in-application upgrades and experiential enhancement merchandise.

Operational and Safety Challenges

As with any theme park parade, there are a multitude of safety issues that require additional staff and restricting access to onstage and backstage park areas. Additional employees are needed to ensure the parade route is cleared and roped off prior to the parade performance, as well as restrict traffic backstage as parade floats move into position. As the floats enter the park, parade float spotters are also required to ensure that no guests enter the parade route or get close to the floats. The Pangun
Parade concept utilizes this additional staff, as they are vital to the safe and successful operation of the parade.

Within the highly participatory and story-driven environment established by the Evu and Pangun Parade case study, there are potential safety and operational questions that arise. For instance, in an environment where guests are encouraged to dress up and take on active roles, it becomes increasingly difficult to differentiate between guest and employee, the latter of whom are trained specifically to facilitate safety-related issues. *Star Wars: Galactic Starcruiser* recently implemented a non-themed “orientation” as part of the overall experience, that described a complete stoppage of show and theming as a result of a safety issue or evacuation. In a theme park where guest and employee may even be dressed similarly, there would be due diligence paid to provide information to guests on who specifically to seek out for assistance and what to look for.

Additionally, with increased participation and character interaction, a unique issue that I have personally seen happen also exists. Theme park guests have been known to develop attachments to theme park performers that performers are oftentimes uncomfortable with. Historically, the performers themselves are able to diffuse any uncomfortable situations, while also relying on management and security if they bring attention to any potentially dangerous situations. The Evu and Pangun Parade concepts specifically call for emotional attachments to be made between guest and performer as they share in stories of shared humanity and escalate storytelling. There is a potential for these attachments to make performers uncomfortable and unsafe, which would
necessitate the need of additional support staff (such character escorts or attendants) that ensure the safety of the performers.

*Engaging Guests Emotionally through Live Entertainment*

Theme park live entertainment designer Ron Schneider laid out his “Five Keys to Great Themed Entertainment,” being: “Deliver What You Promise,” “Don’t Waste My Time,” “Make Me Laugh,” “Surprise Me,” and “Move Me” (Schneider, R., 2012). With this concept its simple to deliver what is promised: a nighttime parade with multiple interactive and participatory elements. With the rigid show and entertainment structure, no guests’ time will be wasted as show moments need to possess strict succinctness to move guests onto the next show moment somewhere else in the park. The parade’s linear story and banter between other characters instill humor into all applicable experience. Some of the show moment storylines may end predictably, but there are plenty of surprises within from the spectacle of the parade production and linear narrative.

Referencing the “Move Me” key, if not for the sounds, visuals, or interactives; the various stories contained within the Pangun Parade are purposely included to appeal to a portion of the human experience all guests encounter at some point in their life. I believe the next frontier in themed experience storytelling is true relatability and a sense of allegiance with alike characters, something that viewers of a film or television show come to expect. It is one thing to compel with spectacle, but opportunities for true
empathic moments shared with multidimensional characters is what I strove to design with this concept.

Table 8: Theme Park Parade Concept Foundations

Before moving into the applicability of this parade framework, Table 8 provides a visual representation of the foundational requirements of a theme park parade, with additional building blocks that draw from the Pangun Parade concept. Required elements refer to the basic tenets of theme park parades and their safe, show-driven operation. Expected elements refer to technological or performance aspects that aren’t necessary to a parade’s success but have become commonplace and potentially
expected by theme park guests. Innovative elements are those that either haven’t been part of a parade or exist as emerging trends. Finally, I deemed the most aspirational element of a theme park parade to be emotional resonance through story, achieved through interactivity and providing guests multiple stories they can relate to.
CHAPTER SEVEN: APPLICABILITY AND CONCLUSION

The overall structure of this parade concept can be used independent of the include story concept and related design. My goal was to establish a framework with four pillars: Scheduling, Casting, Infrastructure, and Interactivity. Using this concept as a template, it is simple to switch out the described design for any other story or intellectual property.

For example, parade floats themed to each land of Universal’s Islands of Adventure could be dispersed through each themed area throughout the day for show moments, assembling at night for a unified celebration parade. As long as the needed infrastructure exists (i.e., vehicle gates and access roads, see Figure 4 for an assessment of the existing infrastructure), parade units can be designed and performers trained to the interactive specifications laid out in this concept.

Scheduling these experiences is as simple as balancing populating all theme park spaces with appropriate downtime for performers. A general rule is that a performer should be on a break at least for the amount of time they spent in a show, performance, or set. For consistency within the overarching interactive narrative, it is crucial that the shows and moments that contain vital story information be spaced out and not overlap, with at least fifteen minutes in between each so that guests may experience all of them.

Casts of live performers are not meant to consist of four to five characters, but instead be various and expansive, just as the population of any real-world space would be. Utilizing the same performers for a parade a theme park may already operate solves
the greatest issues of participatory entertainment: cost and staffing. Performers should be empowered to get creative with their character and backstory, as well as be empowered to facilitate spontaneous and exciting moments with guests as arbiters of the story universe being presented.

Speaking on infrastructure, land-specific parade float entry from backstage could be factored into new build theme parks to utilize the floats as additional show spaces for the same show moment structure. Most theme parks, however, already possess large vehicle gates at multiple locations for service vehicle access that would also allow a parade float to enter a given area. Utilizing again the proposed example for Universal’s Islands of Adventure, areas of the park were built for vehicle traffic (Toon Lagoon originally featured a “Toon Trolley” vehicle that characters rode into the land on, Seuss Landing at one time featured the arrival of the Grinch aboard a “sled” parade float, and Marvel Superhero Island still features wide streets to accommodate the daily vehicular arrival of the Marvel superheroes) that could still easily accommodate a parade with lessened impact on capacity. Additionally, the proposed parade route only travels through about half the park, leaving the park’s other half (featuring the park’s highest-visited attractions) untouched and guest flow upheld. The greatest infrastructural impact a parade can have on a theme park is in support staff, so the addition of a parade to Universal’s Islands of Adventure would call for an increase in workforce that would include parade float spotters and Parade Access Control (PAC) Team Members. Figure 4 shows a proposed parade route for Universal’s Islands of Adventure, with existing large vehicle gates for land float entry and backstage access road notated.
Figure 4: Proposed Parade Route for Universal’s Islands of Adventure

Proposed parade route is represented by the dashed blue line. Large vehicle gates for float entry and exit are indicated by the yellow dots. And the necessary backstage service access road for parade float backstage movement is shown in red.

Satellite image retrieved from Bing, covered under Fair Use.

Instilling interactivity requires only an operational commitment to the impact live entertainment and character interaction can have on guests, especially bolstered by
intellectual properties, stories, and characters that guests have a preexisting familiarity with. Consideration of a mobile application tie-in has become an expectation across themed experiences, and while it offers an elevated experience for those guests who are inclined to participate, it is not a requirement to achieve successful interactivity. Oftentimes, a simple paper craft can be more memorable and compelling than a digital file. Table 9 provides a summary of the four tenets of parade concept applicability described in this section.

Table 9: Pillars of Parade Concept Applicability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TENETS OF PARADE CONCEPT APPLICABILITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SCHEDULING</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategically scheduling parade cast shifts for additional entertainment offering participation and ensuring some form of entertainment is always happening.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ultimately, there is no singular way to create these participatory experiences, but the goal of this thesis is to provide multiple avenues to economically, operationally, and creatively achieve the latest evolution in themed experience design. While entrenching guests in a fully themed environment is enough for many park guests, the opportunity to fully assume a role in the world being presented is the next big way we can move theme park guests. Specifically referencing the Pangun Parade concept, imagine the impact that could be had as a park guest, assuming the role of Wanderer, meets a character whose story revolves around something that is directly happening to that guest in their own life. At the time of writing this paper, I am preparing for a wedding at the end of this year. The opportunity to share in the anxieties of preparing for a wedding with a character whose story tells of a very similar situation would be second to none. There are several emotions typically associated with positive experiences at a theme park: joy, awe, nostalgia. Adding deeper emotions like genuine catharsis to that list has the potential to captivate guests more than any roller coaster launch or backwards plunge on a flume ride.
APPENDIX A: THESIS CONCEPT STORY INFORMATION
Long ago, the world was a treacherous place filled with insurmountable elevations, unnavigable seas, disorienting forests, and brutal weather conditions. Five families – **Aquelar, Aesus, Igniri, Silvara, and Terrum** – developed completely independent of one another, believing that there was nothing but death and destruction to be found past their respective natural obstacles. Each family had a distinct culture and way of life, both of which were influenced by their surroundings. The daring Aqular (ah-kay-lar), whose land was mostly covered with water, learned to live a life at sea. The land of the powerful Aesus (ee-soos) family was found to be rich in metal deposits, and the Aesus people learned to craft metal tools, structures and, most importantly, weapons. The passionate Igniri (ig-nee-ree) family learned to adapt to their volcanic surroundings, discovering many uses for their natural heat sources. The proud Silvara (sil-vah-ra) family lived amongst dense forests and fertile land, eventually learning everything about farming, woodwork, and textile production. And the humble Terrum (ter-oom) family, who lived in the mountains, established at utmost oneness with their land and surroundings. Despite their insular thriving, each of the families couldn’t help but feel a sense of loneliness within their lands. What if something *could* survive out there?

Things soon began to turn. Environmental and natural conditions continued to worsen, and the five families feared the worst: the end of days. Each family used their respective expertise of their land to build shelter from what seemed like the beginning of an extinction event. Everything came to a head all at once: great tidal waves lurched out of the seas, volcanoes bellowed with explosions of lava and rock, gales ripped trees
and growth from the ground, and great earthquakes cracked mountain ranges in two. Then, suddenly, it all stopped. The seas were quelled, the earth settled, the winds died, the lava hardened. The five families emerged from their shelters and looked out across the destruction that had ensued. Something was different: the obstacles at their borders no longer existed. Strange new paths in the landscape had appeared that each family was eager to explore, and the leaders of each family set out to discover what was out past their borders. Each found their trail led to a great canyon, the crowning achievement of the elemental upheaval. There the five families found something they thought they’d never see: each other. All this time, the lands of the five families had unknowingly shared borders. Each family was confused and apprehensive at first: these new people didn’t look like them, talk like them, dress like them, or act like them. This impromptu summit began unsuccessfully as each tried to establish some common ground until each family found they all had two things in common: their humanity and a single word: “Pangun.” Despite different connotations and context amongst the five cultures, “Pangun” meant the same thing: coming together, gathering, unity. These people were all incredibly different, but the family leaders thought back to the isolation they felt before meeting their new neighbors. They pondered what other dangers may lie outside their other borders. At the edge of the canyon, the families noticed a peculiar structure. Glistening in the light from embedded mineral deposits, it was part rocky crag, part molten rock, dotted with vegetation and waterfalls that spewed runoff from the nearby sea. If the families weren’t going to decide to coexist, fate had already decided that a mutual existence under Pangun was most advantageous.
One thousand years have passed. The five families rebuilt with help from one another, each family land now easily accessible. They found their ways of life improved with new foods, clothes, tools, techniques, music, stories, medicines. They developed a common language to communicate with each other, while still holding firm to their native tongues and cultures. They named their unified land Evu, with the great canyon where the five families first met now known as the Pangun Pass, a bustling location for collaboration and trade among the five families. The structure at the canyon’s end is now called Uoez, a naturally created symbol of Evu’s unity. Every year, the five families of Evu gather in the Pangun Pass to celebrate their unity. Each family provides a float representing their individuality that combines into a massive nighttime parade. These efforts are led by Tellers, who are responsible for keeping the stories, history, and mythology of their respective families alive.

Wanderers (park guests in the world of this story) to the land of Evu arrive on the day of the annual celebration and visit all five family lands to learn stories and mythology, meet their people, and help complete final preparations for floats in the Pangun Parade that evening. Following the Pangun Parade is a nighttime spectacular Evu: Emergent that gives an abstract retelling of Evu’s history: the era of isolation, the great catastrophe, and the triumphant unification of the five families and founding of Evu.

Upon first entering Evu and arriving at the foot of the Pangun Pass, Wanderers are met by a Teller from each of the five families. The Tellers, aboard distinct vehicles that serve as part of the parade, invite Wanderers to come visit them amidst their own
lands, where they will be regaled with Tales to Tell that recount the great stories of each land. Each Teller has many, many stories to tell, so it is possible that Wanderers may never hear the same story despite repeat visits.

While visiting each family land, Wanderers will come across a marquee storyline that touches on a relatable aspect of our shared humanity. These Shared Stories play out in a linear fashion throughout the day, as Wanderers discover more and more information about the people involved by interacting with them and others.

The parade is such a massive undertaking that everyone must lend a hand, Wanderers included. Wanderers are expected to perform their Wanderer’s Duty by helping with last minute preparations across the five lands. In addition to completing Wanderer’s Duty, Wanderers are called to participate in another tradition of Evu: Well-Wishing. There are two methods of creating Well-Wishes, and Wanderers can do one or both. Wanderers can create paper flags that serve as a representation of their Well-Wishes for another and string them onto the parade floats. Or, using their Wrecked Angles (an Evu misunderstanding of the word rectangle, which is also a misunderstanding of a smartphone), Wanderers can create a floating lantern for Well-Wishing that appears on their parade float of choice as it passes by.

While either lining up for the Pangun Parade or having been in and out of the Pangun Pass all day traveling between family lands, Wanderers will learn about the plight of Five Foxes, members of the only non-human species that call Pangun Pass home. These creatures have devised a plan to sneak into the parade this year with the help of Pangun Pass residents and the support of the Wanderers.
After viewing the Pangun Parade and Evu: Emergent, guests begin to exit the Land of Evu, but not before one last goodbye from the new friends they’ve made all throughout the day.

Aquelar Family Expanded Story (Shanties and Seafaring with the Aquelarians)

**Background:** The adventurous and devil-may-care Aquelar family are the seafaring fishermen of Evu that occupy the land’s northwest corner bordering the Sarose Sea. An Aquelarian nautical band entertains Wanderers with a musical comedy show within the port’s local haunt, where it is unclear if the floor wobbles from the adjacent tides or the strong libations.

**Tale To Tell:** The great waves were a key part of the creation of Evu, but the Teller has a tale to tell about one brave Aquelarian who rode one of the great waves on a plank of wood.

**Shared Story:** Aquelar and Evu are welcoming to people from distant lands who want to come make a life there. Follow the story of the newest Aquelarian, a seafarer who has finally decided to settle down and is struggling with anxieties about fitting in in a new place.

**Wanderer’s Duty:** Their Aquelar parade float, which approaches from a show lagoon and drives up onto land for its first daily appearance, is one of the family’s modified sailing ships. The people of Aquelar are musicians and retell their seafaring tales through song. Wanderers will assist the Aquelar in selecting lyrics for the sea shanty that will be sung tonight.
Aesus Family Expanded Story (The Warrior Ways of the Aesusians)

**Background:** The strong and stoic Aesus family are the metalworkers and skilled craftspeople of Evu. Despite no semblance of any military threat to Evu, the Aesusians are overly prepared, crafting an endless amount of weaponry and training for battle for generations. Seeing the visiting Wanderers as a potential for additional military recruitment, Wanderers of all ages can join up in Warrior Camp where an Aesusian general leads them in instruction.

**Tale To Tell:** When the great catastrophe took place, the people of Aesus hid underground in their extensive network of mines. The Aesusian teller recounts an epic battle with a mysterious beast the family found deep, deep underground. Wanderers can then enter the cavernous Foxhole Mines, where this very battle took place and take part in a thrilling, high-speed adventure.

**Shared Story:** One of Aesus’ proudest traditions is when a young person comes of age to officially become a Family Warrior. The final trial coincides with the day of the Pangun Parade, where the potential new Warrior duels the War Captain (the character’s parent) atop the parade float. Follow the story of the newest Warrior Initiate, who is confident but expectedly apprehensive about the responsibility that comes with being a protector as well as the expectations of their lineage.

**Wanderer’s Duty:** The Aesrian parade float is a structural network of steel beams, glowing with radiating heat as metal does when forged. Atop these beams and on the ground will be Warriors practicing their fighting forms. Skilled in the flowing
movement of battle, Aesusians have likened their movements to a dance. Wanderers will help to “choreograph” a new fighting formation for tonight’s festivities.

Igniri Family Expanded Story (Feeling the Heat with the Igniri)

Background: Zealous and spontaneous, the Igniri family has learned to master fire and its various uses: including cooking and baking. The personalities of the Igniri people mirror that of fire itself, warm and comforting for one moment before erupting into fits of passion about whatever is on their mind. The Igniri are excited to share their love of fire deep within an ancient cave, where a fire twirling spectacle awaits.

Tale To Tell: Igzi is the massive active volcano on Igniri lands, and its eruption was one of the most devastating parts of the great catastrophe. Hear the story of the first Igniri master chef who would scale Igzi to find their ingredients.

Shared Story: Love is another thing the Igniri take very seriously, and they honor one couple every year to be married atop the float for the Pangun Parade. Tonight is the first time a young person from the Igniri family marries another young person from a different family of Evu during the parade. Meet the engaged couple and follow along with the nerves and frantic final preparations typically found on the big day.

Wanderer’s Duty: The Igniri parade float is constructed of the same glowing molten rock that dots their land, heralded with a tribute to the great volcano Igzi. A fire dancer twirls a flaming baton atop of the float, while dancers lead the way with glowing fans. Wanderers will learn about the assortment of colors the Igniri family can burn fire in and will help to select the ideal color for tonight’s celebration.
Silvara Family Expanded Story (Forests and Fashion with the Silvarans)

**Background:** Occupying the dense forests of Evu, the proud and creative Silvarans are expert woodworkers, loggers, and farmers. Flipping the stereotype of the traditional farmer, the Silvarans take extraordinary pride in their position as Evu’s textiles craftspeople, donning unique fashions and always appearing their best. Some of the local loggers are eager to show off their tree-chopping skills to visiting Wanderers in a live competitive lumberjacking stadium show.

**Tale To Tell:** Found on Silvaran lands is Ver, a giant tree that survived the great catastrophe unscathed and is now home to the leaders of the Silvaran family. Hear the story of Ver and its roots that are said to stretch for miles and miles across Silvaran land.

**Shared Story:** Bringing new things into the world is something the Silvarans are adamant about, and children are no exception. So, imagine the excitement when it appears the newest member of the Silvaran family is set to arrive tonight. Wanderers will meet the coming child’s parents as well as many, many others who have inserted themselves into the situation.

**Wanderer’s Duty:** The Silvaran parade float is constructed with great timbers and lit with a mysteriously glowing moss found in the forest. Wanting only their best fashions to be worn during the Pangun Parade, Wanderers will assist the Silvarans in final outfit selections for tonight.
Terrum Family Expanded Story (Getting Down to Earth with the Terrums)

**Background:** The calm and freewheeling Terrum family has sought to become as close to their sacred land as possible, establishing them as the healers and mystics of Evu. The Terrum people have lived amongst the cliffs and high elevations of their land for centuries and are expert climbers, a point of pride for the Terrums that has developed into somewhat of a daredevil nature. Wanderers can witness some of these daring feats in a cliffside stadium stunt show.

**Tale To Tell:** Hear the tale of an ancient Terrum who grew tired of climbing everywhere and wanted to fly instead. Or the first ever Terrum who decided to take the plunge down the waterfall that adorns the tallest cliff in Terrum land: Kreg. Wanderers can then relive this journey themselves while riding aboard special logs created by Terrum’s Silvaran neighbors.

**Shared Story:** Living amongst a population of people who enjoy treacherous climbs and literally jumping off cliffs is tough when you have aged out of those activities. Wanderers will meet with the Terrum family’s oldest member, who is frustrated by aging and is beginning to feel overlooked. What this person does not know is that their fellow Terrums are planning to surprise them with a celebration of their exciting past and sagacious future during the Pangun Parade.

**Wanderer’s Duty:** The Terrum parade float echoes that of their land, hearkened by towering boulder formations with cascading waterfalls. Terrum elders meditate on outcroppings aboard the float while other Terrums scale the rock formations all around.
Recalling their position as healers, Wanderers will help the Terrums select which scent will be burned as incense from the float.

**Pangun Parade Expanded Story (The Foxes of Pangun Pass)**

**Background:** Just as the five families of Evu learned to coexist, the same was true for Evu’s wildlife. The fox is a significant animal in each Evu family’s history, as each family has lived alongside their species of fox for generation. When Pangun Pass was revealed and Evuuans could walk between families, the foxes could too. The narrow passages and steep cliffs of the Pass were perfect for foxes, and now each family’s fox population has relocated to Pangun Pass. All throughout Pangun Pass, Wanderers will hear legends about the foxes and their significance to the people of Evu. Wanderers will even get to interact with five foxes, each physically and behaviorally aligned with their respective family. Unfortunately for them, they are excluded from being in the Pangun Parade, which is meant to be a celebration of the human unity in Evu. For this year’s parade, however, these foxes have hatched a plan. Gaining the sympathy of some merchants and tradespeople in Pangun Pass to communicate their plight to the Wanderers, the foxes are going to get onto those floats tonight.

The linear narrative of the Pangun Parade, despite also serving as the conclusion to five Shared Stories, revolves around the foxes’ heartwarming and comedic attempts to become part of the parade. As Wanderers line up for the parade, Pangun Pass residents will roam the parade route and inform them of the foxes’ plan and request the Wanderers’ support. On the floats’ first pass, guests will see the unique
schemes each fox has cooked up to get aboard the float. Some have stowed away, some rappel down or launch themselves onto the float. During the floats’ second pass, the foxes are successful and are accepted as part of the festivities, adding another layer of story to the multiple storylines that are already playing out during the parade.

Characters: The five foxes, while sharing some physical characteristics under the same genus, are meant to be as physically and emotionally diverse as their human counterparts. The fearless Terruman fox Teru’s (tay-ru) plan to get into the parade involves a crude flight machine that he believes will propel him from a cliff down onto the Terrum float. The hard-working Silvaran fox Vara (vah-ra) has sketched out an intricate network of tunnels that she believes will take her from her fox hole into the parade route. The sneaky Aqualarian fox Aqar (ah-car) plans to stow away in a piece of scenery that is to be placed aboard the Aquelar float. The excitable Iggi (ih-gi) looks to create a diversion in the form of a small explosion that will allow her to quickly scurry onto the Igniri float. And the logical Aere (ee-ruh) sees no other option in joining the parade except constructing his own tiny parade float and riding behind the Aesus float.
APPENDIX B: ADDITIONAL PARADE FLOAT CONCEPT MODEL IMAGES
Figure 5 - “Moving Stage” Style Parade Float Concept Model (Atmospheric)
Figure 6 - “Moving Stage” Style Parade Float Concept Model (Daytime)
Figure 7 - “Moving Stage” Style Parade Float Concept Model (Illuminated)
Figure 8 - “Moving Stage” Style Parade Float Concept Model (Atmospheric)
Figure 9 - “Moving Stage” Style Parade Float Concept Model (Daytime)
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