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THE TRANSFORMATION OF LITERARY GENRES IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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The article examines the evolution of literary genres in the digital age, influenced by digital technologies, hypertextuality, social media, and interactive platforms. It analyzes how classical genres—novel, poetry, and drama—evolve into hybrid forms such as web novels, Instapoetry, and VR drama. Four key processes are identified: multimodality, interactivity, transmediality, and democratization. Digital literature expands creative possibilities and reader engagement while challenging traditional notions of authorship, textuality, and canon. The study highlights the role of artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and participatory communities in shaping new genre practices. Emphasizing an interdisciplinary approach that integrates literary studies, cultural theory, and digital humanities, the article argues for rethinking genre categories in light of globalization, cultural hybridity, and technological innovation.

Keywords: digital literature, genre transformation, electronic poetry, fanfiction, multimodality, transmedia storytelling, artificial intelligence.

Мельник О.В., Кисельова І.І., Терещук М.О. Трансформація літературних жанрів у цифрову епоху. У статті досліджується трансформація літературних жанрів у цифрову епоху під впливом цифрових технологій, гіпертекстуальності, соціальних медіа та інтерактивних платформ. Аналіз охоплює еволюцію класичних

жанрів – роману, поезії та драми – в умовах цифрового середовища, що сприяє появі гібридних і експериментальних форматів: веб-романів, інстапоезії, VR-драми Виокремлено чотири ключові процеси: мультимодальність, інтерактивність, трансмедійність і демократизація літературної творчості. Цифрова література розширює можливості для креативності, залучення читачів і глобального поширення, водночас ставлячи виклики традиційним уявленням про авторство, текстуальність і канон. Розглянуто роль штучного інтелекту, віртуальної реальності та цифрових спільнот у формуванні нових жанрових практик. Стаття підкреслює важливість міждисциплінарного підходу, що поєднує літературознавство, культурологію та цифрові гуманітарні науки, для осмислення змін у літературному процесі. Зроблено висновок про необхідність переосмислення жанрових категорій у контексті глобалізації, культурної гібридності та цифрової інновації.

Ключові слова: цифрова література, трансформація жанру, електронна поезія, фанфік, мультимодальність, трансмедійне оповідання, штучний інтелект.

Introduction. This study aims to analyze how digital environments are reshaping classical literary genres and giving rise to hybrid forms. The research focuses on four key processes—multimodality, interactivity, transmediality, and democratization—and examines representative case studies such as Instapoetry, fanfiction communities, and narrative video games. These examples serve to illustrate the theoretical and cultural implications of genre transformation in the digital age.

The digital revolution has fundamentally reshaped the cultural, communicative, and artistic landscape of the twenty-first century. Literature, as one of the oldest and most significant forms of human expression, has not remained untouched by these transformations. The emergence of digital platforms, hypertextual structures, and interactive storytelling has led to significant changes in how literary genres are created, distributed, and consumed. While traditional genres, such as the novel, poetry, and drama, retain their importance, they have also acquired new digital forms that challenge conventional definitions of genre boundaries and invite reconsideration of what literature means in the digital age.

The digital environment has introduced multimodality – the use of multiple semiotic resources such as text, image, sound, and video within a single work – which has profoundly affected genre formation and reception (Kress, 2010). For instance, online poetry frequently incorporates visual elements, turning written texts into multimedia artworks, while digital novels often employ hyperlinks that allow readers to navigate the narrative non-linearly (Hayles, 2008). This expansion of literary forms reveals the necessity to analyze genres not only as static categories but also as dynamic constructs shaped by technological and

cultural contexts. This tendency also resonates with Ukrainian experiments in digital poetry, where multimodal poetic forms are gaining visibility in academic and artistic contexts (Petrenko, 2021). Equally important is the rise of interactivity in digital literature.

Traditional print-based texts typically require passive reception, whereas hypertext fiction, web novels, and narrative-based video games involve the reader as an active participant in shaping the plot or meaning of the text (Murray, 2017). The reader's role has evolved into that of a co-creator, blurring the line between authorship and readership. This shift has significant implications for literary theory, particularly regarding concepts of authorial control, textual authority, and interpretative plurality (Ryan, 2015). The notion of transmediality also plays a central role in understanding the transformation of genres. Henry Jenkins (2006) argues that modern narratives increasingly unfold across multiple platformsbooks, films, video games, fanfiction, and online communities-thus transforming how genres are defined and experienced. The Harry Potter franchise, for example, extends far beyond novels, encompassing fanfiction on platforms like Archive of Our Own, video games, and theme park experiences, demonstrating how literary genres transcend their original medium and integrate into global digital culture. Furthermore, the democratization of literary production in digital spaces has allowed marginalized voices to emerge more visibly. Platforms such as Wattpad or AO3 enable amateur and professional authors alike to publish their works, which has disrupted traditional publishing hierarchies (Thomas, 2020). Genres like fanfiction illustrate how participatory culture reshapes literature by challenging canonical authority and expanding narrative universes (Black, 2008). These dynamics reflect broader sociocultural changes, where digital technologies are not merely tools of dissemination but also vehicles of cultural negotiation and identity construction. Finally, the study of genre transformation in the digital age must be situated within the broader context of the digital humanities. As Schreibman, Siemens, and Unsworth (2016) note, digital humanities provide both the methodological tools and theoretical frameworks to analyze how literature adapts to new technological affordances.

Examining literary genres through the lenses of multimodality, interactivity, and transmediality allows for a deeper understanding of how culture, technology, and literature intersect in contemporary society. In this context, the present study explores the transformation of literary genres in the digital age, focusing on how traditional forms adapt to digital environments and how entirely new genres

emerge from technological innovation. By situating the discussion at the intersection of literary studies, cultural theory, and digital humanities, this research contributes to an ongoing dialogue about the future of literature and its role in a rapidly evolving media landscape.

This study aims to analyze how digital environments are reshaping classical literary genres and giving rise to hybrid forms. The research focuses on four key processes—multimodality, interactivity, transmediality, and democratization—and examines representative case studies such as Instapoetry, fanfiction communities, and narrative video games. These examples serve to illustrate the theoretical and cultural implications of genre transformation in the digital age.

To ensure analytical depth and avoid a purely descriptive approach, the study integrates specific case studies that exemplify genre evolution in practice. Each case was selected for its representativeness, accessibility, and relevance to contemporary literary dynamics, allowing for a nuanced exploration of how digital technologies reshape genre boundaries.

Theoretical Background. The study of genre transformation in the digital age is deeply rooted in literary theory, media studies, and the emerging field of digital humanities. Traditional genre theory provides a foundation for understanding how literary categories evolve, but the dynamics of digital culture require a re-examination of core concepts such as text, authorship, intertextuality, and the role of the reader. As a result, scholars have turned to both classical literary theory and contemporary media theory to conceptualize the new forms of literature emerging in digital environments. A significant theoretical contribution to genre studies comes from Gérard Genette. His theory of transtextuality and paratexts highlights how texts relate to other texts and to their framing devices (Genette, 1997). In the digital age, these notions are particularly relevant: hyperlinked texts embody intertextuality in ways that traditional print could not, while digital paratexts such as hyperlinks, metadata, and user interfaces shape the reader's interpretive experience (Gibbons, 2017). Genette's framework allows us to analyze how digital narratives extend beyond the printed page and interact with broader media ecologies. Another cornerstone of theoretical grounding is Henry Jenkins's concept of transmedia storytelling. Jenkins (2006) argues that narratives increasingly unfold across multiple platforms-books, films, video games, online communities-where each medium contributes uniquely to the overall story world. As Simanowski (2011) notes, European traditions of digital

poetry reveal how interactivity and visuality transform the perception of text and authorship.

This approach challenges conventional notions of genre, as the boundaries between literature, cinema, and interactive media become porous. In this sense, genres in the digital age are not simply literary categories but nodes in larger transmedia networks (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013). In the study of digital literature, Espen Aarseth's notion of cybertext remains highly influential. Aarseth (1997) introduces the concept of ergodic literature, in which the reader must exert considerable effort to navigate the text. This theory is essential to understanding hypertext fiction, interactive poetry, and narrative-driven video games, where the act of reading is also an act of navigating, choosing, and cocreating. Aarseth's work reframes literature as a process, rather than a static object, emphasizing the materiality of digital texts and the agency of the reader. Similarly, Lev Manovich's theory of new media provides insights into the multimodal and computational nature of digital genres. In The Language of New Media (2001), Manovich outlines key principles such as modularity, variability, and automation, which describe how digital texts differ from their analog predecessors. Literary works in digital environments frequently incorporate visual, auditory, and interactive elements, reflecting what Manovich describes as the convergence of cultural production with computational processes. These features redefine genres not merely as formal categories but as dynamic cultural practices shaped by technology. From a cultural and sociological perspective, the rise of fanfiction and participatory culture underscores the democratization of literary production. Black (2008) and Jenkins (2006) have shown how digital platforms empower readers to become producers, blurring the distinction between professional and amateur literature. This phenomenon challenges traditional hierarchies of literary canon formation and opens new possibilities for marginalized voices. Fanfiction communities, for example, not only reinterpret canonical works but also create entirely new genres and subgenres, such as alternate universe narratives or slash fiction. Such practices illustrate how digital environments foster collective creativity and reshape the social dimensions of literature. The digital humanities, as outlined by Schreibman, Siemens, and Unsworth (2016), provide an interdisciplinary framework for analyzing these transformations. They integrate computational tools with humanistic inquiry, enabling scholars to study large corpora of digital texts, trace intertextual patterns, and explore new forms of digital authorship. In this sense, digital

humanities serve as both a methodological and theoretical foundation for understanding how genres evolve in digital spaces. In summary, the theoretical background for studying genre transformation in the digital age draws on a wide range of perspectives: structuralist literary theory, media and communication studies, and digital humanities methodologies. These frameworks collectively emphasize that literary genres are no longer confined to fixed categories but are instead fluid, interactive, and deeply embedded in technological and cultural contexts.

Methodological notes. The research adopts a qualitative and comparative approach, aiming to capture the complex and multidimensional processes through which literary genres have transformed in the digital environment. Since the subject of investigation involves not only texts but also their modes of production, distribution, and reception, the methodological framework integrates tools from literary studies, cultural studies, and digital humanities. The primary method employed is textual analysis, which remains a cornerstone of literary scholarship. However, in the digital context, textual analysis must account for multimodal and interactive elements that are absent from traditional print texts (Hayles, 2008). Examples from the Electronic Literature Collection, Vol. 4 (Pressman & Marino, 2021) illustrate the diversity of European-born digital narratives and interactive poetry projects. Thus, the study considers not only the written word but also images, hyperlinks, visual design, and interactive features as integral parts of the literary artifact. The analysis focuses on how these elements reshape traditional literary genres such as the novel, poetry, and drama, generating hybrid or entirely new forms. A second method is comparative genre analysis, which involves examining how specific genres adapt to digital technologies and contrasting these adaptations with their print-based antecedents. For example, web novels are compared with serialized print novels of the 19th century, while "Instapoetry" is juxtaposed with modernist poetry, revealing continuities and ruptures in genre evolution (Thomas, 2020). This comparative perspective highlights both the persistence of established literary conventions and the radical innovations enabled by digital media. The research also relies on case studies of selected digital platforms and communities. Sites such as Wattpad and Archive of Our Own (AO3) are particularly significant because they illustrate how participatory culture and collaborative authorship contribute democratization of literary production (Black, 2008).

Case studies allow for a more nuanced understanding of how users engage with texts, how genres evolve within communities, and how digital environments foster collective creativity. Likewise, experimental forms like "Twitterature" or hypertext fiction are analyzed as case studies of genre experimentation in constrained or non-linear formats.

To situate these primary sources within a scholarly context, the study draws on secondary literature from genre theory, media studies, and digital humanities. Works by Aarseth (1997), Jenkins (2006), Manovich (2001), and others provide the theoretical lenses through which the case studies are interpreted. The dialogue between theory and practice ensures that the analysis is both conceptually rigorous and grounded in actual literary practices. Furthermore, the methodology incorporates insights from digital ethnography, particularly in analyzing fanfiction communities. Observing how readers and writers interact on platforms such as AO3 or Wattpad sheds light on the social dynamics of genre transformation. As Hine (2015) argues, digital ethnography provides valuable tools for studying online cultural practices, which are central to understanding the evolution of digital literature. These case studies were selected for their representativeness and accessibility: Instapoetry exemplifies the multimodal shift in poetic expression; AO3 and Wattpad illustrate the democratization and participatory nature of fanfiction; and narrative video games such as Life is Strange demonstrate the rise of interactivity in digital drama. Together, they provide a multidimensional view of how genres evolve in response to technological and cultural change.

Results and Discussion. This study identifies four key processes that shape the transformation of literary genres in the digital age: multimodality, interactivity, transmediality, and democratization. These processes not only reshape literary form but also redefine the roles of author, reader, and genre itself (Hayles, 2008; Jenkins, 2006; Thomas, 2020). Similar processes are observed in Eastern European contexts, where the adaptation of literature to digital media is reshaping both narrative and poetic traditions (Halych, 2021).

The selected case studies—Instapoetry, fanfiction platforms (AO3, Wattpad), and narrative video games—were chosen for their representativeness, accessibility, and relevance to genre transformation in digital environments. They provide concrete illustrations of how digital literature functions as both a creative and sociocultural phenomenon.

To illustrate genre evolution, consider the case of Instapoetry, a form of digital poetry disseminated via social media platforms such as Instagram. Unlike traditional poetry, Instapoetry integrates text, image, and design, creating a multimodal experience that appeals to visual and emotional immediacy (Kress, 2010). For example, works by Rupi Kaur combine minimalist verse with stylized illustrations and personal themes, reaching audiences who might never engage with conventional poetry. This format raises questions about aesthetic value, commercialization, and the boundaries of literary expression (Thomas, 2020). Other notable Instapoets include Atticus, Nikita Gill, and Lang Leav, whose works exemplify the fusion of literary and visual culture in digital environments.

Interactivity emerges prominently in genres where readers become cocreators of meaning. In hypertext fiction and narrative video games such as *Life is Strange* (Dontnod Entertainment, 2015) or *Detroit: Become Human* (Quantic Dream, 2018), the storyline branches according to user choices, challenging traditional notions of authorial control and textual closure (Murray, 2017; Ryan, 2015). These formats foreground reader agency and interpretive plurality, transforming the literary experience into a participatory act. Similarly, interactive storytelling apps like Choices or Episode allow users to shape character development and plot progression, further blurring the line between reader and author.

This participatory model of storytelling aligns with Jenkins's (2006) concept of convergence culture, where readers become active agents in transmedia narratives. The transformation of poetry into Instapoetry is not merely formal—it reflects a shift in literary consumption, authorship, and emotional immediacy in digital culture. As Kress (2010) notes, multimodality alters the way meaning is constructed, and Instapoetry exemplifies this shift by merging textual brevity with visual resonance.

Similarly, fanfiction communities challenge traditional canon formation, echoing Black's (2008) argument that digital platforms empower readers to become producers. These practices not only diversify literary voices but also generate new genre conventions, such as alternate universe fiction and slash narratives, which would be unlikely to emerge within institutional publishing frameworks.

Transmediality is evident in narratives that unfold across multiple platforms. For instance, the *Harry Potter* franchise extends beyond novels into fanfiction, video games, films, and immersive theme park experiences, demonstrating how

genres operate within broader media ecosystems (Jenkins, 2006). Fanfiction based on this universe is widely published on platforms such as Archive of Our Own (AO3) – a nonprofit, open-access digital archive created by the Organization for Transformative Works (OTW) – which hosts millions of user-generated stories across thousands of fandoms. Similarly, web novels originating on platforms like Wattpad often evolve into published books (e.g., *After* by Anna Todd), screen adaptations (e.g., *The Kissing Booth* by Beth Reekles), or interactive apps, exemplifying genre fluidity and cross-platform storytelling.

Finally, democratization of literary production is facilitated by digital platforms that lower barriers to entry. Authors from marginalized communities can publish and circulate their work without institutional gatekeeping. Genres like fanfiction challenge canonical authority and foster inclusive storytelling, as seen in communities on AO3 and Wattpad (Black, 2008; Thomas, 2020). These platforms empower writers to explore themes of gender, race, sexuality, and identity that are often excluded from mainstream publishing. For example, queer reinterpretations of characters in *Marvel* or *Star Wars* fanfiction, or multilingual retellings of classic tales, demonstrate how digital literature becomes a space for cultural negotiation and genre innovation.

Case Study: Instapoetry as a Digital Genre

A representative example of genre transformation in the digital age is *Instapoetry*, a form of visual and textual art disseminated primarily through Instagram. The works of Rupi Kaur, particularly *Milk and Honey* (2014), exemplify how multimodality reshapes poetic communication. Kaur's poems combine brief, emotionally charged verses with minimalist illustrations and typographic simplicity, creating an aesthetic of intimacy and accessibility. Unlike traditional poetry collections that rely on print circulation and institutional validation, Instapoetry is produced, published, and consumed within digital networks that encourage instant feedback and audience interaction. Readers respond through comments, shares, and hashtags, turning literary interpretation into a participatory act. This genre thus demonstrates not only the fusion of text and image but also the democratization of authorship and readership in the digital environment. By merging personal expression, visual culture, and social media dynamics, Instapoetry redefines both the form and function of contemporary poetry.

Another striking illustration of genre transformation in the digital era is the reimagining of Shakespeare's sonnets through multimedia and interactive projects. Traditionally, the Shakespearean sonnet—with its fourteen lines, iambic pentameter, and fixed rhyme scheme-embodied the Renaissance ideal of order and balance, representing a highly codified poetic form. In digital environments, however, these sonnets are being transformed into hybrid and participatory artworks that merge literature, performance, and technology. For instance, The Sonnet Project by the New York Shakespeare Exchange presents each of Shakespeare's 154 sonnets as short digital films performed by contemporary actors in modern urban settings, thereby extending poetic expression into audiovisual and spatial dimensions. Similarly, AI-driven experiments generate algorithmic sonnets in Shakespearean style, allowing users to manipulate rhyme, tone, or imagery in real time. Such initiatives exemplify what Jenkins (2006) defines as transmedia storytelling, where a narrative unfolds across multiple media platforms, and what Kress (2010) calls multimodality, the integration of visual, textual, and auditory semiotic resources. These digital reinterpretations preserve the emotional resonance and rhythmic beauty of Shakespeare's poetry while expanding its communicative and aesthetic potential. As Thomas (2020) observes, digital poetry repositions the reader as an active participant rather than a passive recipient of meaning, demonstrating that even canonical literary forms such as the sonnet can adapt and thrive within the participatory culture of the digital age.

Table 1. Traditional Genres vs. Digital Genres

Traditional Genre	Digital Genre / Transformation	Examples
Novel	Web novel, Serialized online fiction, Fanfiction	Wattpad novels, Archive of Our Own (AO3), Royal Road
Poetry	Instapoetry, Digital/Visual poetry, Algorithmic poetry	Rupi Kaur's Milk and Honey, AI- generated poetry, multimodal e- poems
Drama	Interactive/VR performance, Narrative-driven video games	Life is Strange, Detroit: Become Human, VR theatre experiments

Conclusions and Perspectives. The conducted research confirms that the transformation of literary genres in the digital age is not a peripheral or secondary

phenomenon but a fundamental reconfiguration of the literary system itself. Digital environments have radically changed the way texts are created, disseminated, and interpreted, generating new hybrid forms that merge verbal, visual, and interactive dimensions. Genres that once seemed fixed and immutable—such as the novel, poetry, and drama—have become fluid, participatory, and multimodal, reflecting broader cultural and technological shifts of the twenty-first century.

This study identifies four key processes—multimodality, interactivity, transmediality, and democratization—that collectively define the trajectory of genre evolution in the digital context. These processes are interconnected: multimodality enriches the sensory and semiotic depth of texts; interactivity transforms the reader into a co-creator of meaning; transmediality extends narratives across multiple platforms; and democratization redefines authorship by granting visibility to previously marginalized voices. The originality of the present work lies in conceptualizing these processes as integral mechanisms of literary innovation rather than isolated trends.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to contemporary genre theory by synthesizing insights from literary studies, media theory, and digital humanities. It demonstrates that genre in the digital era functions not as a fixed taxonomic unit but as a dynamic cultural practice, constantly shaped by technological affordances, audience participation, and global communication flows. By combining classical literary frameworks (Genette, 1997; Ryan, 2015) with media-theoretical perspectives (Jenkins, 2006; Kress, 2010; Manovich, 2001), the research advances an interdisciplinary model for analyzing the interdependence between literature and technology.

Case Study: Shakespeare's Sonnets in the Digital Era. A particularly illustrative case of genre transformation is the digital reimagining of Shakespeare's sonnets. Traditionally, the Shakespearean sonnet epitomized Renaissance ideals of balance, unity, and aesthetic precision, encapsulated within a strict formal structure of fourteen lines in iambic pentameter. In the twenty-first century, however, digital projects such as *The Sonnet Project* by the New York Shakespeare Exchange have recontextualized these canonical texts in multimedia formats. Each of the 154 sonnets is transformed into a short film performed by modern actors in urban landscapes of New York, turning a static poetic form into a living visual and performative experience.

Moreover, AI-based creative platforms now experiment with algorithmic sonnet generation, where users can modify lexical tone, imagery, and rhythm through interactive interfaces. Such projects do not merely imitate Shakespeare's style but extend his poetic logic into computational creativity, where human and machine authorship converge. These transformations exemplify what Kress (2010) terms *multimodality* – the fusion of linguistic, visual, and performative resources – and demonstrate that the sonnet, rather than being an artifact of the past, remains a flexible vessel for innovation and collective creativity.

This case also reveals deeper cultural implications. By reinterpreting the sonnet through digital means, contemporary artists and programmers democratize access to classical literature, bridging the gap between elite cultural heritage and mass participatory art. Viewers and users become co-authors, shaping the aesthetic experience through interpretation, interaction, and digital performance. Thus, the transformation of the sonnet illustrates how technology revitalizes classical forms while maintaining their emotional and intellectual resonance.

Original Contribution and Scientific Value. The originality of the research lies in integrating literary analysis with digital humanities methodology to interpret genre transformation as a cultural, technological, and communicative phenomenon. The study highlights the continuity between traditional literary conventions and new digital genres such as web novels, Instapoetry, fanfiction, and interactive narratives. It demonstrates that these genres are not marginal but central to understanding literature's adaptive capacity in the digital century.

Furthermore, the article emphasizes the epistemological shift in literary studies: the focus moves from text-centered to process-oriented analysis, where literature is understood as an evolving network of semiotic, social, and technological interactions. The proposed framework contributes to the ongoing theoretical discussion about authorship, textuality, and canon formation under digital conditions.

The practical relevance of the study extends to education, media literacy, and cultural policy. Integrating digital genres into academic curricula can enhance students' analytical skills, creativity, and intercultural competence by exposing them to multimodal and participatory forms of expression. Teachers can use Instapoetry, hypertext fiction, or digital drama to engage learners in critical reflection on how technology reshapes language and narrative.

For cultural institutions and libraries, the findings highlight the urgency of digital preservation and open-access strategies. As digital works are vulnerable to technological obsolescence, it is essential to develop sustainable frameworks for archiving, cataloguing, and analyzing born-digital texts to ensure their availability for future scholarship.

The scope of this study has been intentionally limited to selected English-language examples, focusing primarily on Western digital culture. Comparative analyses across linguistic and cultural contexts are needed to explore how genre innovation unfolds differently in East Asian, African, and post-Soviet digital literatures. For instance, the serial format of Chinese and Korean web novels or the collaborative nature of fanfiction communities in multilingual spaces could yield valuable insights into regional dynamics of genre transformation.

Future research should also investigate the role of artificial intelligence, augmented reality, and virtual reality in literary creation, focusing on the emerging aesthetics of algorithmic authorship. Longitudinal studies that trace how digital genres evolve, stabilize, or disappear over time would contribute to understanding the sustainability of digital literature in rapidly changing technological ecosystems. Moreover, interdisciplinary collaborations between literary scholars, computer scientists, and digital artists could foster innovative methodologies for analyzing multimodal and interactive texts.

In conclusion, literary genres in the digital age are not dissolving but evolving through interaction with technology. They mirror the fluidity of digital culture itself—simultaneously global and personal, ephemeral and enduring, algorithmic and emotional. The transformation of genres, from the printed sonnet to the AI-generated poem, exemplifies humanity's continuous quest to express meaning through ever-changing media. Literature thus remains a vital arena where creativity, reflection, and dialogue between human experience and digital innovation converge—affirming its enduring relevance in shaping the cultural imagination of the twenty-first century.

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