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In the World, Just Off Screen

Toys and Games

As I have been arguing throughout this book, a proper study of paratexts and an attention to off-screen studies challenge the logic of "primary" and "secondary" texts,[1] originals and "spinoffs," shows and "peripherals" often used to discuss paratexts. That logic traditionally regards the film or television program as the center of the textual interaction and the only source of authentic textuality, while peripherals are relegated to the role of nuisances cluttering streets, screen time, cyberspace, and shopping malls, and are seen as tacked on to the film or program in a cynical attempt to squeeze yet more money out of a successful product. What I hope to have posed is that the "peripherals" are often anything but peripheral. Instead, they often play a constitutive role in the production, development, and expansion of the text. Granted, the existence of the film or program usually remains a precondition for the paratext's existence, and thus the film or program remains important, but it does not do its work alone, nor will it necessarily be responsible for all of a text's popular meanings.

Inevitably, paratexts will exist on a sliding scale of importance and prominence, whereby the same paratexts will prove meaningless to particular audiences at particular moments in time, but may mean a great deal to other audiences at other points in time. Thus, for instance, as I suggested in the Introduction, for a year or more in the early 1990s, Bart Simpson "Underachiever" t-shirts became active generators of the *Simpsons* text, but their moment has since passed, leaving the average *Simpsons* t-shirt as little more than an interesting totem to most audiences. Trailers, too, likely lose many of their powers on audience members once they have watched the film. However, if paratexts slide along scales of importance and prominence, they do not slide only from irrelevance to middling importance and back; rather, as both Bart t-shirts and trailers

illustrate, they can easily slide *past* the film or television show, moving from "secondary" to "primary," or at least working with the film or show as a bona fide part of the text. Furthermore, while many of the paratexts studied so far lend themselves to more fleeting existences—t-shirts likely dying with the vagaries of fashion, trailers enjoying but a brief moment in the sun, spoilers soon rendered moot, DVD commentary tracks probably watched only once, and so forth—other paratexts lay down deeper roots and both encourage and allow a substantially larger time investment from audiences.

This chapter turns to such instances, when the paratext either stands in for the entire text or becomes a key and "primary" platform for that text. First, I will examine one of the entertainment industry's most successful examples of media-related merchandise, the *Star Wars* action figures. While few other paratexts are as denigrated as are licensed toys, and while few others are regarded by cultural critics with as much suspicion, I will argue that the *Star Wars* toys were and are central to many fans' and non-fans' understandings of and engagements with the iconic text that is *Star Wars*. Through play, the *Star Wars* toys allowed audiences past the barrier of spectatorship *into* the *Star Wars* universe, thereby complicating established dichotomies of the authentic text and the hollow, cash-grab paratext. I will then shift from the analog to the digital, examining how various licensed videogames allow audiences to set foot in their various storyworlds' diegetic spaces. As are kids playing with their film or television toys, gamers are offered the chance to perform in and explore both on-screen spaces and those pockets of space just off screen. When they accept such offers, gamers expand the text, changing what it is and how it happens. Following an examination of videogames, I will look at several other forms of games, in particular the increasingly popular "alternate reality games." Using the case of *What Happened in Piedmont?*, an innovative multimedia story, puzzle, and experience that preceded and played through the broadcast of A&E's miniseries *The Andromeda Strain* in 2008, I will explore the degree to which paratexts can either work with or independent from their associated film or program. *What Happened in Piedmont?* did not attract as many viewers or players as did the broadcast, which had an estimated 4.8 million viewers per episode, but many of the former arguably received an experience that was as or more engaging than the miniseries, or that expanded and intensified the experience of the miniseries when both were consumed. Throughout the chapter's various examples, then, my interests lie in exploring how storyworlds can

develop and come to life in paratexts, thereby challenging the widespread textual hierarchy that sees films and television programs as necessarily superior to paratexts, and as the center of narrative universes.

Learning to Use the Force: Star Wars *Toys and Their Films*

Though *Lord of the Rings*, *Dora the Explorer* (2000–), *The Simpsons*, and *Harry Potter* have provided heavy competition, *Star Wars* still has arguably the most voluminous paratextual entourage in entertainment history. Writing in 1992, before the franchise's proliferation of videogames, and before the second trilogy opened the floodgates for yet more merchandise sales, Stephen Sansweet noted that *Star Wars* had amassed over $2.5 billion from merchandise alone.[2] Moreover, though *Star Wars* hardly invented the licensing and merchandising game, with *Lone Ranger* and other properties making considerable profits in previous years,[3] the phenomenal success of its merchandise, along with George Lucas's coup of retaining merchandising and licensing rights, began a new era. Spearheading *Star Wars* merchandising were its action figures, with 250 million selling by the early 1990s, and 42 million in the first year alone, producing profits of $100 million for toy company Kenner in 1977.[4] The host-selling era of 1980s television followed hot on these four-inch-tall figures' heels, and countless other films and television programs would try—with varying levels of success—to replicate *Star Wars*' mastery of the mall.

Ironically, despite its iconic status in licensing and merchandising history, *Star Wars*' merchandising has attracted remarkably little attention within media and cultural studies. The more usual citations for discussions of licensed toys in general are either Stephen Kline's "Limits to the Imagination: Marketing and Children's Culture" or Thomas Engelhardt's critique of "the Strawberry Shortcake Strategy."[5] Both writers note that a toy line can make an entertainment property significantly more profitable, but they see such toys as using and abusing children and parents along the way, offering little more in return than mindless consumerism and hunks of plastic to brag about to one's friends. Another key reference on licensed toys, Ellen Seiter, refreshingly uses a cultural studies approach in *Sold Separately: Children and Parents in Consumer Culture* to discuss the possible meanings and uses that licensed toy buyers might have for them. However, she still sees their uses largely in relation to those of the associated entertainment property. For instance, offering a defense of *My Little Pony* toys, she notes that the program "emphasizes the loyal community

of females"[6] and in general values girl culture, but she has little to say of the toys as generators of their *own* meanings and/or as contributors to the meaning of the text. Offering the hint of a theory of the toy as paratext, she notes that "because they are mass-media goods, these kind of toys actually facilitate group, co-operative play, by encouraging children to make up stories with shared codes and narratives," and by way of child psychologist Erik Erikson, she argues for toys' therapeutic value[7] and suggests that they might allow different forms of engagement and consumption than do the film or television program. Nevertheless, this still leaves the licensed paratext as important only because of the meanings inherited from the program, or because of the uses inherited from being a toy. How might toys feed back into the meanings of the program, and/or use their functions as toys to change the nature of the text as a whole?

A more involved set of answers to this question comes from Dan Fleming's study of toys, *Powerplay: Toys as Popular Culture*. Fleming balks at the idea that toys are mere spinoffs of other properties, and instead argues that they generate their own textuality as events in an ongoing process of textual phenomenology.[8] "There may be a great deal going on," he notes, "when a child plays with the [licensed] toy, for which a TV programme cannot be held responsible."[9] Key to Fleming's interest in licensed toys is their ability not only to continue the story from a film or television program, but to provide a space in which meanings can be worked through and refined, and in which questions and ambiguities in the film or program can be answered. Turning specifically to the *Star Wars* films and toys, Fleming notes first that central character Luke Skywalker is "a rather softly defined character," thereby allowing children playing with the toys to give the film's apparent hero a more resolute character in their play, or to identify with any of the other characters/toys instead. Similarly, he regards the toys as providing a relatively open field of play for children, opening up what *Star Wars* meant or could mean with a "deliberate generation of complexity" and an "ultimate refusal of narrative closure."[10] Where the films required set plots, themes, and endings that would in turn aim for resolution, the toys allowed children to play up or down established themes and make their own substantial imprint on the *Star Wars* universe. Thus Fleming sees the toys as variously able to strengthen or weaken established meanings in the films. In particular, for instance, he notes that with a "softly defined" hero surrounded by a motley crew of aliens, creatures, ships, and weapons:

> Perhaps unwittingly, what Kenner had tapped into with their original range of ninety-two small *Star Wars* figures (with more for the succeeding films) was precisely those contexts in which the original character of Luke Skywalker had been meaningful. The little plastic version of Luke seems very much at home surrounded by his menagerie of odd associates. And fitting him neatly into a plastic spacecraft with lots of opening panels, movable bits and quirky shapes was precisely the point—the technological environment was being adapted to offer a human "fit" and qualities of human variety.[11]

The toys, in other words, may have accentuated the films' narrative of a youngster coming to terms with difference and with all the technologies that surround him. Luke's mastery of this environment grows throughout the films, but with all the figures under his or her control, the individual child's control would have been significantly more assured, hence strengthening the narrative's theme of growing up.

A closer look at the figures reveals many other ways in which they accentuate the films' themes. We begin with what the figures do and what they do not do. With no bendable limbs, only swinging legs and arms, and notoriously delicate turning heads, the figures hardly offer much versatility or range of positions. Instead, accessories provide this versatility. Most figures come with at least one blaster, lightsaber, or other elaborate weapon. Displayed separately in the plastic bubble that encases the figure on its cardboard backing, these weapons are immediately given considerable power and relevance, firmly positioning many of the characters as warriors, often and even when their film referents appear peaceful. Combined with the packaging's habitual "masculine" color scheme of black, blue, and occasionally dark reds or greens, these figures clearly declare themselves as *action* figures, built not for tea parties, but for conflict (fig. 6.1). Moreover, beyond supplying one's toys with mere blasters, one can also provide them with any number of an impressive array of spaceships and cruisers. Each toy's feet have slight notches, allowing the owner to attach them to any of the battle stations and dioramas available for purchase. At first glance down the list of available toys, it may seem as if everything from the movies has been turned into a toy and is equally represented, but this is not the case. Rather, weapons of war and vehicles predominate. Thus, a Cantina playset was available, but should one have walked through the once large *Star Wars* sections of Hamley's in London or FAO Schwarz in New York, one would have been greeted instead by endless boxes of

Fig. 6.1. Complete set of 1978 *Star Wars* 12-Backs, the first twelve figures released. From the collection of Gary Wines. Photograph by Gary Wines.

fighters, gunships, and gladiatorial attack beasts. In short, the bulk of *Star Wars* figure accessories consist of exactly those things one needs to fight a battle of good and evil, producing a situation in which, although the *Star Wars* movies have a lot going on in them, the action figures underscore the plural in the title, declaring the central frame and theme to be that of a never-ending series of grand and cosmic battles of mythic proportions.

This concentrate of meaning became even more pronounced with the second trilogy's figures, as their packaging now sported character blurbs on the back, which introduced and contextualized the characters. Reading several blurbs, one sees considerable repetition of themes, adjectives, and verbs. Many of the figures, for example, are said to be defending or rescuing others, at war or in battle, or escaping one another. In blurb after blurb, we are treated to two-sentence tales of intrigue, danger, and a perpetual threat of violence, replete with recurring adjectives used to describe the characters such as "powerful," "fierce," "resourceful," "dangerous," "loyal,"

"deadly," "tireless," and "courageous." Running throughout the blurbs is also the constant threat to peace—the Battle Droids, we are told, "invaded the peaceful planet of Naboo," while "Kit Fisto (Jedi Master)" is "dedicated to the goal of maintaining peace throughout the galaxy." And when war comes, it is intergalactic and all-encompassing. With their buy-me rhetoric, the blurbs situate almost all of the characters in terms of their importance to the battle of right versus wrong and their role in assuring that good or evil triumphs in the end, even when their on-screen equivalents are not depicted at war. Quite apart from the films, the toys establish the war that is waging and what is at stake. Admittedly, the fact that the toys settled on these meanings is unsurprising, and my argument is not that they *transformed* the meanings of the text; rather, I argue that they played a key role in refining and accentuating certain meanings, multiplying them and carrying them beyond the film into the child's play world, while also inviting the child to enlist in the "Star Wars."

In evaluating the potential strength of the toys' messages about the film, it is important to remember that *Star Wars* fans had to wait for three years between films, stringing each trilogy out over six years. Thus, it is equally important to consider the phenomenology of *Star Wars*, since between 1977 and 1983 in particular—a remarkably long time for a child—it was primarily the toys that kept the trilogy alive. The late 1970s and early 1980s came before the ubiquitous presence of VHS in Western homes, and so if *Star Wars* was to live and to be saved from becoming its own cold war, it had to enter the body of paratexts. As Bob Rehak writes of the soundtracks, they were "the closest I could get to 'replaying' the movie—often I listened while poring over the album covers, which featured stills from the films, or while doodling my own spaceships and superheroes or even writing little Star-Warsy screenplays."[12] Toys, too, became ways to keep the series alive. As Matt Hills explains, fan cultures require a text with some form of "endlessly deferred narrative,"[13] and particularly between *Empire Strikes Back* (1980) and *Return of the Jedi*, young fans were left with multiple questions (*is* Darth Vader Luke's father? Will the Rebellion rise again? What's happened to Han Solo? Will Luke become a Jedi?) that necessitated a transference of text to toy/paratext for many young fans.

What happened during those years, as Fleming suggests, is that *Star Wars* invited young fans to take over to a certain degree. With the backdrop of a cosmic battle between good and evil, as Fleming states (here of the *GI Joe* toy line), "what perpetuates the whole line in all its interrelated

forms, is perhaps the child's endless pursuit of the story within the story, of what is really going on while the aggression rages."[14] Fans were being asked to fill in the spaces that existed just off screen. With *Star Wars*, no less, George Lucas even allowed for time to have passed diegetically between films, almost as if to respect the young fans' own narratives, and creating the possibility that much of what was played out in the schoolyard might "actually" have happened. A grand, protracted war of mythic proportions had been set up, an army of figures and vehicles sold, and the individual child was left in charge, hence becoming, in play, part of the battle, balancing right and wrong. The child was asked to bring all sorts of concepts—good and evil, science and nature, rationality and intuition, childhood and adulthood, power and responsibility, familiarity and otherness—together to provide synthesis.

Interestingly, too, many of the action figures are of characters who prove entirely peripheral in the films. Characters who literally walk across the screen as alien extras become full-fledged figures, and many characters are named only in toy-ification. Several of the toys' one-man rigs and vehicles, moreover, did not appear in the films, thus suggesting an overflow not only of narrative but of gadgets, weapons, and spaceships into the toy world; as Sansweet notes, they look "as if they *could* have been in the film, but maybe were just out of sight of the camera."[15] Endlessly deferred narratives and "hyperdiegesis"[16] are common in cult texts, but in creating toys for these characters, *Star Wars* specifically offers them up for audience narrativization. To take one example, "Hammerhead" appears briefly in the Cantina scene in *Star Wars: A New Hope*. S/he has no lines, nobody references him/her, and we learn nothing about him/her. Thus, when faced with the toy, the playing child can assign Hammerhead a gender, can make him/her a "good guy," yet another Imperial, or something altogether different, and can perpetuate his/her peripheral status or assign Hammerhead new importance. In his book on *Star Wars* fandom, Will Brooker tells of how as a child he "elevated the trilogy's minor alien characters to a mercenary group called Hammerhead's Gang,"[17] while to others Hammerhead could have been Admiral Ackbar's lover, an ace Rebel fighter pilot, an elementary school teacher, and/or Mos Eisley's town drunk.[18] In no small way, then, these toys allow children to feed meanings back into the proscribed narratives. Here we can draw parallels with what many commentators have noted of fan fiction's expansive capacities,[19] a key difference being that the toys are licensed, as is play, and so presumably no group of six-year-olds were ever in danger of being dragged into court by Lucasfilm.

A fascinating character in this opening up of meaning is that of Boba Fett. Fett has remarkably little screen time in the original trilogy, and all we learn of him is that he is a highly equipped and feared bounty hunter, fond of disintegrating his victims. "He" could even be a she, as an online campaign for a female Boba Fett attested to, and following *Return of the Jedi*'s suggestion that bounty hunters often use voice modulators. More importantly, though, he is a really cool toy: with impressive armor, jet-pack, wrist-harpoons, and various colored platings, Fett rocketed to popularity. Initially, too, one could only acquire Fett by sending in coupons, and the early Fett's missiles could actually fire until redesigned for a safer model. From the outset, then, Fett was a rare and precious commodity, thereby solidifying his peculiarly popular role in *Star Wars* fandom. For somebody so peripheral in the films, I believe the answer to the riddle of his success is in large part the toy. And in a case of this feeding directly back into the text, it appears obvious that Boba and father Jango Fett were featured so prominently in the second trilogy due to Boba Fett's established cult status. Even the news that Fett would be central to the films was announced in a press release by Lucas, and within minutes it was all over *Star Wars* fan sites. The toy was returning.

With such examples, we see how the toys not only intensified several themes of the films—the focus on the cosmic battle, and the voyage of personal discovery especially—but also allowed individual children or communities of children playing together to personalize these themes, situating the child in the middle and as active participant—a true member of either the Rebel Alliance or the Empire—not just as distanced spectator. And perhaps most importantly, they kept those meanings and the text itself alive and thriving. The toys worked to ensure that *Star Wars* and its meanings stayed relevant and kept circulating, being added to and refreshed. It is perhaps no coincidence that in the mid-1990s, as Lucas officially decided to make another trilogy, new toys (and, now, videogames) were sent forward as minions to throw coals on *Star Wars* fans' old flames. The toys, in other words, have never merely been "secondary" spinoffs or coincidental: they have played a vital role in, and thus have become a vital *part of*, the primary text and its unrivalled success. Each movie brought to a head years of play, and characters with long toy histories.

But what of *Star Wars* as a family saga and as shining, nostalgic reminder of youth for those who grew up with it? For many fans, the toys may well have created a significant amount of these meanings. To a degree matched by few other fandoms, to many *Star Wars* is wrapped up in

nostalgia for childhood. As Brooker observes, a frequent retort to adult "bashers" of the more recent trilogy has been the "eyes of a child" defense that rebukes such bashers for no longer seeing the film as children.[20] This rebuke suggests that the right and proper way to view *Star Wars* is precisely with children's eyes, and hence it also indicates the frequency with which, more than thirty years on, many original fans still watch with children's eyes. Even in studies of other older cult texts, such as *Doctor Who* (1963–89, 2005–)[21] or *Star Trek*,[22] there is little discussion of childhood nostalgia, little sense that the text engages in such a rewinding of the clock. Something about *Star Wars*, though, fills many of its fans with memories of play with friends or siblings and of being taken to the cinema by mothers and fathers. It would be a true challenge for many of the films' original fans to talk about their fandom without figuring their family into the story at an early point.

Of course, there are roots for this in the films. Both trilogies are, after all, about growing up and going into the wider world. Particularly for boys, moreover, they are tales of becoming an adult, *Lord of the Rings* in space. However, this cannot explain all of the text's magnetic pull, even allowing for the films' mythic, narrative, and visual resonance. Rather, we can again look to the toys for the keystone in the bridge between *Star Wars*, nostalgia, and family. Here we need to ask where toys came from, not in a production sense, but in a "who was this gift from?" or "who paid my allowance / pocket money?" sense, and we soon arrive at family as likely benefactors and providers. Then we can ask where toys were played with and with whom, and the familiar environments of the home with friends or siblings, or of the schoolyard, surrounded by friends, would appear natural answers. At this point, we can start to see *Star Wars* toys as bringing together friends and families, particularly at those times that many of us seem to remember most clearly and when children are most likely to get more toys, birthdays and other holidays. To this end, we should also note that the purchase and display of *Star Wars* figures by adult fans is commonplace, signaling again the importance of the toys themselves. If *Star Wars* can act as a doorway back in time, for many fans toys serve as a key to this door. Building off Hills's work on fan cultures, which poses that fan texts become Winnicottian "primary transitional objects," offering a warm sense of security and familiarity to fans,[23] Cornel Sandvoss has noted that the objects associated with fandom can just as easily work as primary transitional objects themselves,[24] once again illustrating the paratext's capacity to move to "primary" status for any given fan.

With this in mind, it is interesting to speculate about how much stronger the connections between *Star Wars*, moral decision, personal discovery, family, and childhood are becoming now that many of the children of the 1970s and 1980s have their own children, nieces, and nephews who they have introduced to the films. Brooker writes of a young fan whose uncle acted almost Jedi master–like,[25] training him in the ways of *Star Wars*; Brooker's focus is on the child, but what of the uncle? When fans engage in such practices as proudly and happily accompanying them to the second trilogy, or buying them *Star Wars* toys for Christmas or birthdays, surely the adult fans strengthen their own associations between *Star Wars* and family. When these adult fans buy *Star Wars* toys for a child, what they may be trying to hand over as a gift is their own nostalgically remembered relationship with the text that came at least in part from the toys. And in the process, of course, they may well be succeeding, ensuring that another generation of fans will grow up associating the films with family, with childhood, and with moral guidance.

Hills writes, "An important part of being a cult fan [. . .] involves extending the reader-text, or reader-icon, relationship into other areas of fan experience"[26]; I argue that, to its fans, *Star Wars* has not only extended itself but at times *resided* in toys/paratexts. Thus, while to *Star Wars* historian Stephen Sansweet, "If *Star Wars* had taken one visionary to bring the story to life on film, it took another to reduce the characters to under four inches high,"[27] I want to argue that these "visionary" acts may be more linked than they are merely parallels of each other. *Star Wars*, I believe, owes a considerable amount of its success, and of the intensity with which its meanings have been taken on by so many fans, to the toys. In *Star Wars*, Obi-Wan Kenobi explains that The Force is "an energy field created by all living things," and so too has *Star Wars*' textuality been created by multiple entities. As Jedi-like guardians and hosts of the text for considerable portions of its life, the *Star Wars* toys have been as central to what we understand of *Star Wars* today as have the lightsaber or Darth Vader.

Of course, the "we" in my previous sentence needs qualification. On one level, we as analysts should recognize the role that the toys likely played in gendering *Star Wars*, and hence in directing the text's address to boys in particular. In chapter 2, I argued that *Six Degrees*' promotional campaign announced the text as being for women, yet the toys' masculinization of the *Star Wars* universe has been considerably more pervasive and has endured over many more years, working both as entryway and in medias res. Kenner packaged the toys in a masculine color scheme, and

their framing of *Star Wars* as battle- and conflict-driven similarly hyper-masculinized the toys, as did their later release of the buff and muscular Power of the Force toy line. Ads then carried this further, as did the packaging itself, which inevitably depicted young boys at play, not young girls. And toy stores often completed the gendering, by grouping the toys with other "boy" toys. For instance, to even reach the formerly longstanding *Star Wars* toys section of New York's FAO Schwarz, one had to voyage through a narrow tunnel of *GI Joe* toys, and while the neighboring Barbie section sported pink floors, the *Star Wars* toy section was all blacks and dark blues. Toys in general can wear their "proper" gender on their sleeve more than many other commodities, giving rise to many liberal parents' concerns about their child's early exposure to gender coding, and *Star Wars* offered no exception. Of course, the individual child could buck the coding or queer the toy, placing Boba Fett in Barbie's summer home, or staging Luke and Han's wedding, so the gendering is not set in stone. Nevertheless, with the toys directing much of their address at boys, it is no wonder that *Star Wars* has the reputation of being a quintessentially male text, and we might expect the textual universe to have literally proven larger for boys and men.[28]

At the same time, however, if one considers the near-omnipresence of *Star Wars* toys in Western society, particularly in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and even the authority given to knowing and involved audiences by other, non-fan audiences to dictate meaning,[29] then the toys, both directly and indirectly, can still be seen as having played an important role in determining what *Star Wars* is and means to society as a whole. Children need not have played with the toys, and adults need neither have bought them or been implored to buy them, for the toys to register as central to popular culture. Indeed, a young girl who had been turned away from *Star Wars* by the hyper-masculinizing of the toys would have relied more heavily, if not totally, upon the toys' paratextual meanings, her understanding of the text created by the toys. As such, the toys and their (apparent) meanings likely figured just as centrally if not more so in many non-fans' and anti-fans' understandings of the *Star Wars* universe as they did for young boys playing with their Chewbacca and Nien Nunb figures.

As has been said, *Star Wars* was by no means the first film to sell licensed toys, or to embed itself within a large collection of paratextual extras. But *Star Wars*' success led to most media companies realizing the gold mine that lay within merchandising. Equally, its success in all likelihood played a part in teaching those who came of age in the 1970s and

1980s that paratextual entourages could and should be expected. To offer an example, Jesse Alexander, former co-executive producer and writer of *Heroes* (to which we will turn in the Conclusion) and a force behind *Heroes*' and *Lost*'s development of transmedia, gives pride of place to *Star Wars* toys in his own personal history of realizing what transmedia could do and why it matters. Similarly, when I asked *Lost* executive producer Damon Lindelof about transmedia's potential at the IRTS and Disney Digital Media Summit in 2008, he began his answer by giving a long history of the Boba Fett toy and of *Star Wars*' mastery of transmedia storytelling. What *Star Wars* represented to many, Alexander and Lindelof included, was a belief that media worlds could and should be somewhat *inhabitable*.

In this regard, we should criticize the self-serving hypocrisy of media firms that hype their licensed toy lines, only to clamp down on multiple other forms of paratextual play. The example of *Star Wars* toys has suggested that we as media analysts should regard toy lines as more than hypercommercialized cash-grabs, and I have argued that toys contribute to the storyworld, offering audiences the prospect of stepping into that world and contributing to it. So too must media firms realize that while a toy line may improve their profits, it also licenses and openly *encourages* play with the storyworld. Though *Star Wars* toys offered many implicit and explicit "proper" uses, in the schoolyard, garden, or on the bedroom floor, children could do anything they wanted with those toys, from the "proper" to the "improper." Having sent such a message, Lucasfilm or other media firms would be both disingenuous and foolishly misguided to try later to close down the prospects for play. Buoyed by the invitations of licensed toys and other childhood merchandising, film and television narratives are open for business—or, rather, for play—and have been for many years, whether media firms and their legal teams like it or not. Paratexts have extended this invitation to play, as they have contributed to the text with their own suggested meanings, and have offered consumers opportunities to contribute further to the text themselves.

Die in the South Pole or Live in the North: Licensed Videogames

Through play, *Star Wars* toys owners could explore and create great expanses of the text's storyworld, thereby making it more accountable to and reflective of their own interests, and ensuring that this storyworld would always be greater than the sum of the six *Star Wars* films. To play with or

in a storyworld is to gain more ownership of it, to personalize it, and to move it out of the space of the spectacle and render it a malleable entity. Toys will thus always pry open storyworlds, and, especially when they enjoy huge popularity within children's popular culture, they will offer multiple opportunities for community engagement, not just individual personalization. That said, inhabiting a storyworld is not just a child's game. Rather, multiple forms and styles of media-related games exist, addressing a wide range of audiences.

The most prominent and profitable form of media-related game is the licensed videogame. The videogame industry has become a juggernaut, with U.S. retail sales in 2005 reaching $7 billion and worldwide retail sales estimated at triple that figure.[30] Despite its reputation as a teen's or geeky twenty- or thirty-year-old man's medium, over a third of American and Japanese gamers are women[31] and the Interactive Digital Software Association estimates that 55 percent of regular console gamers are over the age of thirty-five.[32] While many of the medium's popular and more lucrative titles, such as *Halo* (2001–) and *Grand Theft Auto*, stand alone, centering their own franchises and networks of paratexts, games licensed by the television and film industries have also enjoyed a sizeable portion of the market from the medium's early days. Successful films in particular can net a studio approximately $40 million in license fee and royalty revenue.[33] Many of these have also been phenomenal failures, provoking the ire of film and television show fans and game players alike. *E.T.*, for instance, produced a game that to many remains a paragon of poor design and cynical product exploitation. As was the case with *E.T.*, and as will be discussed further in the Conclusion, too many game companies have rushed the design process to capitalize on a film or television show's buzz before it dies down, and as a result, too many licensed games rely on the presence of film or television characters and voiceovers to rescue what is basically an uninspired offering with tepid gameplay. However, even when slightly lackluster, licensed games often succeed at opening up storyworlds in new and interesting ways, and occasional hits excel at doing so. Licensed games allow their players to enter these worlds and explore them in ways that a film or television show often precludes, and/or that amplify the show's meanings and style.

An interesting example of such a game is *The Thing* (2002), presented as a sequel to the 1982 remake of the 1951 classic, *The Thing from Another World*. John Carpenter's 1982 *Thing* is set during perpetual nighttime at a remote research station in Antarctica, where the unearthing of a spaceship

results in the release of an alien life-form-cum-disease. This "thing" inhabits a person's body, taking them over and first making them homicidal, then later exploding the host's body. The film relies upon the dual fears of being stuck in the middle of a remote and hostile environment and being surrounded by people one cannot trust. The game begins three months after the end of Carpenter's *Thing*, when two military rescue teams have been sent to investigate. More than just continuing the plot, though, it effectively captures the sense of paranoia, horror, and confusion that pervades the film by putting the player's avatar in charge of a group who may or may not become "infected." The pervasive cold means that the player must hurry when outside, yet moving too quickly results in one's group members falling behind, off the screen where they may become infected. Similarly, group members' fear rises over time, and the quickest way to reduce their fear is to give them a weapon; however, arming an infected group member could prove perilous. One soon learns, then, to hate the cold and pervasive darkness, and to trust nobody. The game thereby places the player within the horror of *The Thing*.

Just as nightmares induced by watching a horror film often heighten its terror by transporting the viewer-dreamer into the film's world of predator and prey, uncertainty, anxiety, and visceral fear, so too does the game create a new, arguably more direct relationship between the individual player and the storyworld. Writing of horror games in general, Tanya Krzywinska notes first of horror films that the genre "derives much of its power to thrill from the fact that the viewer cannot intervene in the trajectory of events. While viewers might feel an impulse to help beleaguered characters in a horror film, they can never do this directly."[34] When watching a horror film, we can only watch in terror as a character heads into the dark woods, and likely a gruesome death, after hearing a scream. Krzywinska writes of this feeling of losing control, and of the supernatural force's threatening of human agency, as central to the pleasures of horror. However, toward this end, she sees horror games as potentially better able to capture this experience than films, precisely because they can offer the illusion of control and moments of legitimate control, only to steal them away at any time, so that though "the player does have a sense of self-determination; when this is lost the sense of pre-determination is enhanced by the relative difference."[35] While much rhetoric surrounding games talks of their "interactive" quality, Krzywinska shows how horror games can heighten the sense of horror by denying that interactivity at any point. She also sees the game's ability to give us a first-person perspective (only

truly matched by *The Blair Witch Project* and *Cloverfield* [2008] in film) as further placing the player inside the horror, but even when, as in the game of *The Thing*, one watches the action in third-person, the stark vulnerability of one's avatar is arguably more visceral given the player's seeming ability to control him. Moreover, given that Carpenter's *Thing* ends with all but one of the characters killing each other or exploding, its conclusion hangs like a guillotine over the player's neck, creating a sense of the near-inevitability of failure.

Krzywinska also notes the bind in which a horror game places the player, with relation to the exploration of space. As I will elaborate upon below, a common difference between films or television and games is that "games are organised around the traversal of space, to which narrative is often secondary."[36] Space must be explored, often multiple times over, to conquer the game. Hence, one of the appeals of the game of *The Thing* is the ability to explore the story space more fully. However, for a horror game, herein lies a dilemma, since such curiosity in horror films is inevitably punished: the eager teen who goes into the woods to see what that scream was, the young woman who goes into the old house to ask for help, the person who opens a door into another dimension, are all the fools at whom we yell in the theater. But in a horror game, we are forced to become the fool. In games, "the player is encouraged to assert an active, rather than passive, mode of looking, that may endanger them but without which progression through the game cannot be achieved."[37] And since games use ellipses or cuts in space or time more sparingly than do films,[38] the player is left with little external relief from the building tension. *The Thing* game, then, allows players to explore the world, but also further realizes aspects of the film's horror. Just as the *Jaws* poster could begin the text's horror, as described in chapter 2, *The Thing* videogame can continue and heighten its text's horror.

The Thing translates a horror film into the videogame space, but its act of placing the player into the storyworld is duplicated across multiple other licensed games from multiple genres, including gangster (*The Godfather: The Game* [2006]), detective (five *CSI* games to date), comic-book action (*Spider-Man* [2002]), quiz show (the *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* pub game), espionage (*24: The Game* [2002], James Bond films, *Alias* [2004]), science fiction (*Star Trek: Armada II* [2001]), fantasy blockbuster (*The Lord of the Rings* games), satire/parody (*South Park* [1998], *The Simpsons* games), soap (*Desperate Housewives: The Game* [2006]), children's

(*Dora the Explorer* games, Disney and Pixar games), and sports (EA's *NHL*, *NBA*, *Madden NFL*, and *FIFA* series).

Transporting players to a wholly different storyworld than *The Thing*, for instance, *The Golden Compass* game (2007) offers the player the chance to become Lyra Belacqua, the hero of Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* series of books, and of the feature film of the first book, *The Golden Compass* (2007). When Lyra gets to the North Pole and commissions the Panserbjørn (talking polar bear), Iorek Byrnison, to help her, as soon as she climbs on his back, the player then controls Iorek. Whereas the film in particular adopts a breathless pace, moving quickly from event to event, location to location, the game allows the player to slow the progression down and to explore nooks and crannies of the film's and book's spaces, as well as other storyworld spaces that are just off screen or off page.

Narrative, character, and special effects may be primary in the film, but in the game presence, space, and "a protracted sense of projected embodiedness in the virtual world" are also important.[39] While film adaptations of books have long attempted to realize visually the book's characters and events, the pace of and attention to various aspects of that realization remain wholly within the director's hands. Videogames do not open up spaces from within the storyworld with complete freedom, but they do at least allow players to dawdle in some spaces through which a film charges, and they often render these spaces with considerably more attention to detail than do the films. Albeit in restricted and literally preprogrammed ways, then, the player can briefly inhabit both the world(s) of the story and its characters. While *The Thing* throws the player into the middle of the horror, *The Golden Compass* throws the player into the middle of the heroic quest. Lyra's travails and worries now become the player's, as do her successes. We might therefore regard the game as encouraging a different approach to the story. This different approach is less concerned with "narrative" as we often use the term—though, as Wee Liang Tong and Marcus Cheng Chye Tan note (using Stephen Heath's writings on narrative space), narrative is not just about plot, and games such as *The Golden Compass* allow players to visualize their own events and actions, "to re-present and express a moment of narrative significance visually and stylistically."[40] Narrative is still important, then, but games allow players a different entry point into that narrative, and in so doing, as did the activities of *Lost* spoilers, they illustrate how varied viewers' uses for and pleasures from narrative are.

In writing of adaptations, Linda Hutcheon defends their oft-maligned artistic value, insisting that "to be second is not to be secondary or inferior; likewise, to be first is not to be originary or authoritative."[41] Instead, she states, the process of adaptation frequently moves a story across different modes, opening up new possibilities for both the storyteller(s) and the audiences. In particular, she notes three modes of narratives: *telling*, as in novels, which immerse us "through imagination in a fictional world"; *showing*, as in plays and films, which immerse us "through the perception of the aural and the visual"; and *participatory*, as in videogames, which immerse us "physically and kinesthetically."[42] Thus, a videogame adaptation—or at least a good one—is not merely an attempt to rehash or to copy; it moves the story, its world, and its audience to a different narrative mode, wherein the audience can step into (parts of) the storyworld. To understand a videogame "adaptation" or extension, we might ask how well it would fare if its characters, plot, and world were not rooted in a film or television program's diegesis. For players who do not know the film or program, of course, this will be their de facto experience of the game, and the better licensed games may be enjoyed by audiences whose appreciation of the game is based wholly on its superior design. For other licensed games and their players, part of the attraction would seem to lie in the heightened play of being able to "inhabit" the world and its characters and to enjoy a different relationship to them than the film or program allows. Adaptation involves repetition, Hutcheon writes, but it also represents "the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise,"[43] as licensed videogames create a bridge to a known storyworld, but also "surprise" the audience by expanding the world, and by changing their relationship to and "consumption" of that world and that text.

Another illustrative example is found in *The Simpsons Hit and Run*. One of several *Simpsons* games, *Hit and Run* loosely follows the *Grand Theft Auto* game model, with third-person control of Homer, Marge, Lisa, Bart, or Apu, the ability to commandeer vehicles on the streets of Springfield, and interlacing missions. The game required substantial amounts of new artwork and animation, was penned by *Simpsons* writers, and includes new voicework from the *Simpsons* voice actors, alongside some fan favorite sound clips from the show. Many of the characters and settings of the television program are encountered throughout the game, from the family's house to lesser-known locations such as Kamp Krusty. And cut sequences offer a plot concerning a new cola that reanimates the dead, involving Simpsonesque tropes such as the evils of advertising, parodic

Fig. 6.2. *The Simpsons Hit and Run* videogame allows one to explore Springfield.

commentary on televisual style, and satiric commentary on American life. One of the more titillating aspects of its gameplay, though, lies simply in the ability to explore Springfield (fig. 6.2). The television show has created many locations, but has rarely shown how they connect. Playing the game, by contrast, allows one to walk, run, or drive between locations, thereby seeing, for instance, how to get from the Simpsons' house to Cletus's farm, or what separates The Android's Dungeon and Krusty Studios. Along the way, one encounters most of the show's regular and semi-regular characters, and one's actions result in various funny comments from one's avatars, as when, for instance, Bart occasionally utters, "Ouch, my ovaries!" when crashing into something with a vehicle, or when Homer insists that "that older boy told me to do it" after he has hit someone. As with the *Grand Theft Auto* "sandbox" style, too, though completing missions advances one through the game to new areas, one has the freedom—with scripted limits, of course—simply to wander the streets and talk to random characters.

With an expansive storyline and space for gameplay, yet also with original animation, original dialogue, and an original script, the game provides significantly more *Simpsons* than an episode of the television program. Just as I have argued of *Star Wars* toys and of the various online ads for *The Simpsons Game*, the game challenges the logic of text and paratext, or of primary and secondary texts, itself occupying liminal space between these classifications. As Hutcheon suggests of games, it also allows one to slow down the rapid-moving world of Springfield, step into it, and engage with it in different ways. Thus, rather than simply acting as another episode offering yet more *Simpsons*—albeit on a game console, not the FOX Network—it expands the world of *The Simpsons* and the modes of engaging with this world. Few are likely to see the game as trumping the television show in importance, so in this respect the game is unlikely to *flip* the rubric of primary and secondary texts, but it does position the game alongside any other *Simpsons* episode as a viable contributor to the world of Springfield.

Another prominent example of licensed games opening up a world comes once again from the *Star Wars* franchise. The sheer range of *Star Wars* titles is amazing, numbering over one hundred, and covering multiple styles and genres, from the early arcade game with simple line graphics that invited players to destroy the Death Star, to today's *Star Wars Galaxies* series (2003–), a massively multiple-player online role-playing game (MMORPG), and to the multi-player military combat games *Star Wars: Battlefront* (2004) and *Star Wars: Battlefront II* (2005), first-person shooters such as *Star Wars: Dark Forces* (1995) and *Star Wars: Bounty Hunter* (2002), flight simulation games *X-Wing* (1993) and *Tie-Fighter* (1994), racing games such as *Star Wars: Episode 1 Racer* (1999), fighting games such as *Star Wars: Masters of Teräs Käsi* (1997), educational games such as *Star Wars: Droid Works* (1999), computerized board games *Star Wars Chess* (1994) and *Monopoly: Star Wars Edition* (1997), real-time strategy games such as *Star Wars: Galactic Battlegrounds* (2001), and even playful-parodic games such as *Lego Star Wars: The Video Game* (2005) and *Lego Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy* (2006). Through these games, the *Star Wars* universe has been able to "colonize" multiple game genres, as the text expands ever outward. Many of these games have also made communal imprints on the universe more possible, as they offer two-player, networked, or online modes that require a group performance of the universe and result in a complex social environment that mixes computer-, game designer–, film or program writer–, and human-generated actions and narrative imprints.

The *Galaxies* series in particular, as the *Star Wars* MMORPG,[44] has made possible daily, evolving exploration of and contributions to the storyworld, profoundly reshaping some players' understanding of the nature of the storyworld in the process, as is subtly alluded to in the title's pluralization of the films' "galaxy far, far away." Even non-gamers therefore now know *Star Wars* as more of a varied universe than a tightly scripted galaxy.[45]

Star Wars' game proliferation is aided by its openness as a text, and by the lack of a master plot that set in and took root following *Return of the Jedi* in 1983. *The Simpsons* is also aided by its form, being a fairly circular world, with no character aging discernibly (save for Apu and Manjula's octuplets), few lessons carried over from one episode to another, and no serialized master plot. But arguably the boldest experiment in videogame licensing and storytelling is *Enter the Matrix* (2003), given that this game actually interlaced its plot with *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003), making it a viable generator of "canonical" plotline. With a storyworld in which all of humankind is revealed to be living an elaborate computer-generated simulation of life, *The Matrix* was a film virtually crying out for a licensed game. As its hero Neo booted in and out of The Matrix, it only seemed natural that a game could seemingly allow the player to boot in and out of the game, and how better to capture the experience of a computer-simulated avatar existence than through a computer-simulated avatar existence? As do several other films that interrogate the borderlands between reality and computerized reality, such as *Avalon* (2001) and *Strange Days* (1995), and with its hyper-slow-mo, ludicrously well-armed action sequence style, *The Matrix* already responds to and invokes videogame play. But rather than simply place the player within the storyworld, the Wachowski brothers and *Enter the Matrix*'s designers made the game a site of the ongoing narrative. Players can choose between two avatars, Ghost or Niobe. Both are minor characters in the film, but cut sequences filmed by the Wachowskis give Ghost and Niobe significantly more dialogue in the game. In a reverse form of avatar identification, then, the game does not offer players the chance to take charge of lead characters Neo, Morpheus, or Trinity; instead, it develops Ghost and Niobe to the point of becoming co-leads in the story. Moreover, the game explains important background to several events in *The Matrix Reloaded*, while also running concurrent to the action, woven into the storyline. Thus, the game rewards players with information and significantly raises the stakes of gameplay. As its title suggests, spatial exploration is still a mainstay of *Enter the Matrix*, but plot development now occurs too.

Enter the Matrix suggests an intriguing step forward in transmedia storytelling, precisely because of this raising of the stakes. Put simply, in plot terms, the game *matters*, with exploration of the game's spaces or networking with other fans who have played the game becoming an almost-necessary element of engaging with the entire story and text. As Jenkins states, "*The Matrix* franchise was shaped by a whole new vision of synergy," making it "emblematic of the cult movie in convergent culture," with its paratexts offering a "more intense, more immediate engagement" for some fans.[46] Certainly, gamers repaid the Wachowskis for this vision, with almost six million sales by the end of 2005.[47] However, as Jenkins has also discussed, while the game may have benefited from this approach, the *Matrix* sequels themselves may ultimately have suffered with other viewers because of it. He argues that the *Matrix* sequels' film critics, "who were used to reviewing the film and not the surrounding apparatus,"[48] thus concentrated only on the films, not the entire "apparatus." But the widespread criticism of the films came from viewers as well, thereby suggesting that many were unwilling to play the videogame, watch the associated *Animatrix* shorts, read the comic, or consult fans who had done any or all of the above. As such, *Enter the Matrix* serves as a warning to transmedia and paratext developers: *allowing* audiences to explore a narrative invites play with a world and an expansion of how it can operate, but *requiring* that they explore that world risks restricting how the film or television program can operate. At root here is an ongoing tension and task for producers of paratexts: how to create and pitch them successfully to address both the general audience and various forms of fans. *Allowing* fans, and giving room to play, is often of vital importance, but *requiring* that all viewers be fans is an immodest and potentially destructive move, even for sequels of cult properties such as *The Matrix*.

Playing Your Own Games

Above, I have discussed videogames, but multiple other forms of game exist for a variety of films and television shows. Role-playing games (RPGs) exist for *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Doctor Who*, *Firefly*, *Ghostbusters* (1984), Indiana Jones, James Bond, *Stargate SG-1* (1997–2007), *Star Trek*, and *Star Wars*, among other films and television shows. In an RPG, several players congregate to work their way through a "campaign" or "module" developed either in concert between professional game designers and the "game master," or by the latter alone. While the game master sets the parameters of

the campaign, each player develops his or her own character, and the story develops through the interplay of loose story design, chance, performance, and the luck of the dice. As the name suggests, they are the pre-genesis of MMORPGs, except played in real life; like MMORPGs, they render a pre-designed storyworld open to performance, inhabitation, and hence personalization. Film- or television show–based games—as Kurt Lancaster has written of the role-playing game, war game, and collectible-card game of *Babylon 5*—on one hand allow fans the chance to recapture the original cathartic moment of watching the television show, hence, in performance studies terms developed by Richard Schechner, "restoring" character behavior. They also keep alive (and "restore") some of the escapist and fantasy desires—in *Babylon 5*'s games, notes Lancaster, for humankind to populate space—that form the bedrock for fan engagement with the root show.[49] On the other hand, drawing on Daniel Mackay's work on RPGs, Lancaster notes that such performances are not simply "recapitulations," summaries, or rehashes; rather, they are also "recuperations," *inspired by* the original show, and developing from it, thereby moving the storyworld into a new consumptive and performative space personalized to the assembled group of players, and expanding its parameters much as RPG players force the game master to expand his or her own parameters on the fly.[50] And unlike MMORPGs, actions must not necessarily have been approved or programmed as possible beforehand, opening the storyworld up significantly.

Even within the computerized space, games can be hacked and programs rewritten. Some such hacks come from the production staff themselves, as "cheats" are common in the game world,[51] allowing one unlimited ammunition or infinite lives, for instance. Other reprogramming comes from tech-savvy players capable of entering the game's design structure to make changes in the form of "mods" or "skins," or, more commonly, from players of expansive, open-ended games who use them as engines and sets to tell stories about characters whose actions are restricted in the licensed game itself. Creative productions of the latter sort have resulted in what is called *machinima*, an elision of "machine," "cinema" and "animation."[52] *The Sims* series (2000–), for instance, has served as a particularly useful engine for many such stories, given that the game allows the player to personalize characters and control their actions in a wide-open universe. A machinima creator can generate characters in *The Sims*, make them resemble characters from a film or television program,[53] then use them as children may use their toys or as a director may use his or her actors, "filming" this narrativization to share with others.

Many of machinima's more popular instances exist within the videogame fan world itself, as with, for instance, the remarkably popular *Red vs. Blue* series made with *Halo* and boasting over 900,000 downloads a week.[54] But some machinima creators have used games to create extended narratives set in the storyworlds of popular film and television.[55] The machinima artist Ravensclaw, for instance, has made numerous films with *Sims* "skins" that are set in the worlds of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Charmed* (1998–2006). When screened for others, machinima works much like vids or fan fiction, adding stories to the text's expanding diegesis, perhaps even giving visual form to the fantext and fan canon, or "fanon." For the individual machinima artist, though, the challenge lies in repurposing a game to create a recognizable storyworld and performing one's own stories within that world. Moreover, as Louisa Stein points out, since *The Sims*' props and settings are predominantly domestic, "the fan generic category of domesticfic, with its concerns with the everyday and the familial, finds a good fit in *The Sims*,"[56] making possible the exploration of the intimate, personal lives of filmic or televisual characters whom fans may ultimately care more about than *Buffy*'s or *Charmed*'s Monsters of the Week. If videogames allow considerable possibilities for the exploration of narrative space, machinima artists, by repurposing them to create machinima, also open up considerable room for the exploration of character.

Games can be decidedly lower tech and much less taxing on one's intellect and creativity, too—as with the drinking game, usually involving a list of events or phrases specific to a film or show, each of which requires that all or some of the party of viewers drink. At the lower end of the spectrum of both game or paratextual complexity, drinking games are nevertheless another viewer-created activity that can recalibrate what matters, opening up a storyworld to the viewers' interests. Often, such games work with a camp sensibility, rewarding a film for its formulaic or repetitive qualities, and drawing attention to them more than to its artistry. Or they might celebrate "improper" interpretations of a show, offering public and communal testament to that interpretation. A *Beverly Hills 90210* drinking game, for example, may call for everyone watching to drink when the character Steve pulls a "concerned" face, or a *Lord of the Rings* drinking game may call for everyone to drink when Legolas looks at Aragorn like a wistful yet aggrieved lover. As was examined with various viewer-created paratexts in the previous chapter, such games cut a personal or communal groove into a text's weft and woof.

Slightly more complex is the sports fantasy league. While most of this book's examples have been of fictional storyworlds, sports fans have long participated in fantasy leagues, thereby staging a remarkably popular game. Such leagues require players to "draft" athletes from across the available teams, and they then gain or lose points as the sport's season progresses depending upon how their personalized "team" fares. As with other games, fantasy leagues allow the player into the textual world, here giving them a greater stake in the nightly or weekly competitions between professional sports players, and making victory or loss a personal possibility, not just a vicarious pleasure or sorrow. Fantasy leagues add new dimensions to sports' competitive atmosphere, hence amplifying aspects of the text. However, like machinima, they also allow players to create new, even rival, pleasures within the textual world. Much of the hype and reporting that surrounds professional sports is based on the narrative hooks of which teams will win and which will lose, with team composition ("Are the interpersonal dynamics 'right' this year?" "Is such-and-such a player a benefit or a curse in the dressing room?") and team wins or losses of primary importance. Fantasy leagues can recalibrate what matters for individual fans, as the personal statistical successes or failures of their players now take center stage. A hockey player could have a fantastic game and be a dominant presence on the ice, for instance, and as a result his team might win, yet he could fail to register a goal or an assist, thereby offering the fantasy league "manager" nothing in return. Or two teams could face off against one another, with television coverage framing the match as a battle of two forces, while a fantasy league manager may have players on both teams, meaning that s/he would prefer a high-scoring affair, but that s/he is ultimately ambivalent about which team actually wins. For such a game player, the other paratexts of team jerseys, bedspreads, and the like may be moot, working against the fans' own method of engaging with the "text" of the game or season, or providing a simultaneous and competing logic that s/he must balance against his or her desire to win the fantasy league when watching.

Popular talk of fantasy leagues and related competitions such as sports brackets is rife with rueful discussion of those uninitiated sports newbies who, having picked their players or teams at random, still clean up the office pool. Such instances illustrate how varied the reasons for participating in any game might be—to win, to engage further in the sport, to have something riding on all games, to fit in with others, and so forth. Learning from this, we cannot assume that engagement with a media-related game

is necessarily engagement with the show—the paratext/game may have become the text itself. However, just as chapter 5 showed that spoilers, vids, reviews, and wikis can reflect viewers' preferred modes of engaging with a textual universe, so too do viewers find other ways of personalizing their modes of engaging with a textual universe through games.

What Happens in Piedmont Stays in Piedmont: The Alternate Reality Game's Dual Address

Numerous alternate reality games (ARGs) provide a more dynamic instance in which the game actually trumps the show. The ARG, a relatively new addition to the roster of games, is a multi-site, multimedia puzzle or game, often associated with a television program or film. ARGs have worked as entryway games, introducing an audience to a show's genre and style, building up a fan base, and offering the textual personalization and expansion of play before the show arrives on the scene. They have also worked in medias res, especially during the summer hiatuses of television programs, as a way of keeping an active fan base and layering a storyworld for the truly engaged. ARGs regularly require communal puzzle-solving; for instance, some require players to scour a web page's code for embedded clues, translate passages in obscure languages, refer to ancient history or folklore, or engage in careful freeze-frame analysis. Jenkins has thus expressed interest in their fostering of "collective intelligence" and in their commitment to a truly participatory culture.[57] We might also look at them as viable generators of textuality and storyworld.

An intriguing example of the ARG began on April 16, 2008, when a blog called *What Happened in Piedmont?* was started.[58] The blog posed itself as written by Andrew Tobler, a journalism student at University of California, Berkeley. Tobler's initial post, entitled "Not sure what's going on," expressed concern with an answering-machine message he had received from his sister in Piedmont, Utah. Included as a sound file on the blog, the message starts out uneventfully and mundanely enough, until the speaker clearly spots her mother in physical distress. The young girl starts screaming, and the message then cuts out. Tobler slightly downplays the rather shocking audio, saying he might be overreacting, and explaining that his mother has for a while suffered from cardioneurogenic syncope, "which is basically an occasional, brief loss of consciousness due to a decrease in blood flow to the brain. Sometimes she faints or falls down, and a couple of times we had to take her to the doctor after she hit her head.

But it's not the end of the world." Yet he notes that all attempts to call home resulted in no answer, even from others in Piedmont: "Uncle Kyl, Al's, the diner, even the police." The post ends with a request to readers that is simultaneously a pregnant invitation for speculation: "So if anyone has any idea why I can't get in touch with a single person in the town of Piedmont, Utah, can you let me know?"

His next post, offered a day later, casually expresses surprise at the large number of comments and site traffic his blog has attracted. "Tobler" further creates a sense of verisimilitude, establishing the *alternate* reality, or what ARG players and designers often call the "This Is Not a Game" (TINAG) aesthetic. For instance, he explains where his town is to an audience who may well have found out by consulting Google that Piedmont, Utah, doesn't exist. Only those from the town "or the next [unnamed] town" know it, he says, and he notes that its population is 183, "182, since I left for college . . . though the Ritters had a little girl just after Christmas, so I guess that evens it out." Developing the story further, he later informs his readers that he has learned of a possible chemical spill in the area via a Google email alert, and later still he tells of a friend who tried to drive through Piedmont, only to be stopped by the military twenty-five miles away. Successive posts reveal information from a reporter for NNT Morning News and a video intercepted from a secure military digital feed (both available on YouTube), a photo of an object falling from the sky supposedly sent to him from a person who had been hiking near Piedmont, and classified documents that found their way into his hands.

Off-site, Tobler had web presence, particularly on Facebook, where his profile showed a picture of him and his girlfriend Kirsten, also on Facebook. The NNT reporter, Jack Nash, had his own website, sporting a picture of his book, *A Battle to the Top*. So too did Jeremy Stone, a doctor to whom Tobler's research led (fig. 6.3), and Wildfire, a "Bio-Defense" company. And friends that Tobler mentioned on his blog or his Facebook profile also had Facebook profiles. Thus, through various strategies, and despite a discrete disclaimer in the blog's Terms (of Use) that clearly stated that this was fictional, Big Spaceship, the as-yet-uncredited creators of *What Happened in Piedmont?* surrounded the entire ARG with an air of verisimilitude. Occasional "friends" of Tobler would break the fictional frame on his Facebook wall, only for those comments to soon disappear, while the filtered comments to his blog posts stayed wholly within frame. And whether posted under yet more Big Spaceship pseudonyms or legitimately by "players" who wished to contribute to this fictional frame, many

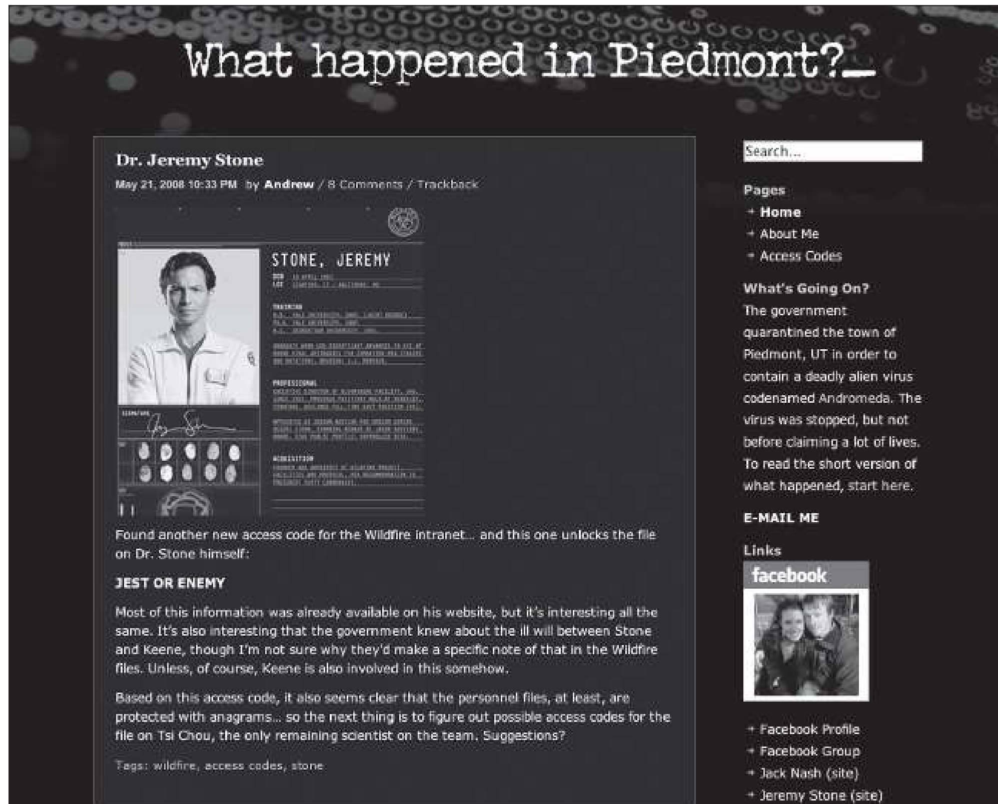

Fig. 6.3. "Andrew Tobler" posts information at ARG *What Happened in Piedmont?* on an individual possibly involved with mysterious happenings in Tobler's hometown of Piedmont, Utah.

of these comments furthered the development of this growing conspiracy theory. One poster, for instance, wrote of similar events in Arizona in 1969, while many others gave advice about dealing with the military, about biochemical disasters, and so forth. Ironically, too, Big Spaceship Creative Strategist Ivan Askwith told me in an interview that the *What Happened in Piedmont?* puppetmasters regularly received posts from readers who clearly did not understand that this was fictional, and from many others whose in-frame postings made it unclear whether they believed in the conspiracy or were simply playing along.

What began as a simple blog and a Facebook account thus quickly picked up momentum. Tobler soon had a small legion of readers trying their best to scour the Internet for information, much of it planted by Big Spaceship. *What Happened in Piedmont?* was an elaborate conspiracy story, somewhat *X-Files*-esque in its mysterious nature and supposed

ties to shady government activities. The government, the Army, the media, aliens, the paranormal, elusive companies, and biohazards all figured in the various theories regarding what happened. Those who wished to "play" the game could scour through code, Google, and the documents that Tobler uploaded to find clues (some in Korean) and could post responses and suggestions to Tobler, while others could simply watch the story or game develop and read the blog postings and theories as their own text.

A few days into this game, observant players and readers would have noticed that *What Happened in Piedmont?* bore the fingerprints of the forthcoming A&E two-part special, *The Andromeda Strain*. "Nash" was Eric McCormack, television's Will from *Will and Grace* (1998–2006); Jeremy Stone was Benjamin Bratt, well-known to many for his four seasons on *Law and Order*; and *Lost*'s Daniel Dae Kim also made an appearance as Tsi Chou, a scientist working for Wildfire. *What Happened in Piedmont?* was designed to create buzz for *The Andromeda Strain*. As an entryway paratext, it had established the storyworld and genre, readying viewers for a tale about a deadly alien disease. In this regard, it hearkened back to one of the Internet's more famous stunts, the webpage that set up the supernatural mystery surrounding *The Blair Witch Project* (see chapter 2). Moreover, as did the *Blair Witch Project*'s website and accompanying multimedia existence, *What Happened in Piedmont?* became more than just a signal of the genre and a brief taste-test: it worked as its own story, and as a puzzle and a game that tested various players to beat the story to the answers. Should *What Happened in Piedmont?* readers or players have watched the mini-series, its text would already have been operative for them, but should they have simply not bothered, that text—complete with a full story with a beginning, a middle, and an end—would still have existed for them.

What Happened in Piedmont? worked as an "articulated" text in the sense that Stuart Hall suggests when he writes of articulated theory:

> In England, the term has a nice double meaning because "articulate" means to utter, to speak forth, to be articulate. It carries that sense of language-ing, of expressing, etc. But we also speak of an "articulated" lorry (truck): a lorry where the front "cab" and back "trailer" can, but need not necessarily, be connected to one another. An articulation is thus the form of the connection that *can* make a unity of two different elements, under certain circumstances. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute, and essential for all time.[59]

Textually, the ARG could quite literally be separated from the mini-series, at no discernible cost to either. Indeed, while *The Andromeda Strain* is at the time of this writing available only in repeat or via fans' tapings, *What Happened in Piedmont?* and many of its links are readily accessible for anyone with an Internet connection. *Should* one have put the two together, however, just as the *Star Wars* toys expanded and developed the text beyond the scope of its six films, *The Andromeda Strain* and its storyworld would have expanded and developed well beyond the scope of the mini-series.

This "articulation" also undoubtedly resulted in the complete invisibility of *What Happened in Piedmont?* to many viewers. Many other ARGs have similarly flown under mainstream popular culture's radar, rarely popping their head out for many casual viewers. As do most games, then, their strength lies in their paradoxical "articulated" power to transform a text for some viewers while remaining totally irrelevant and inconsequential for others. Interestingly, of course, *What Happened in Piedmont?* retold this story, of an important and shocking event that remains covered up to popular culture and knowledge at large, thereby arguably multi-layering the experience of play for players. Their own consumption of the ARG placed them in a position not unlike that of Andrew Tobler, grappling at and occasionally finding shreds of a larger textuality, yet aware that others had no sense of (or interest in) it. Hence, whereas *The Matrix* struggled somewhat to corral its various paratexts in a way that addressed both heavily and lesser-engaged audiences, *What Happened in Piedmont?* (and several other ARGs, many of which are fond of conspiracy theory or mystery formats) built this dual address into its structure and narrative, so that *The Andromeda Strain* did not rely on *What Happened in Piedmont?* yet the latter's more engaged players could experience a broader textual universe.

ARG production has become a minor industry, and was even recently added as an award category (for Interactive Television Program) to the Emmys and British Academy Television Awards. In 2007, the Emmy went to Matt Wolf of D20 (who had also worked on *The Simpsons Hit and Run* game) and Canadian-based Xenophile Media for "The Ocular Effect," an ARG associated with ABC Family's *Fallen* (2006–7). The story, which examined suggestions of fallen angels on Earth and took place across five continents, attracted more than 2.5 million viewers. Xenophile also won an International Interactive Emmy that year for another ARG attached to the Canadian show *ReGenesis* (2004–8) that called upon players to work

toward stopping a bioterrorist attack. In such instances—including the most reported-on ARG of recent years, *Lost*'s "The Lost Experience"—ARGs have often worked best with storylines that posit a hidden truth that requires uncovering, as their interactive, puzzle-based nature can prove more conducive to the immersion that some players seek than do their accompanying shows. In a personal interview, Patrick Crowe, founder of Xenophile, talked with considerable passion of ARGs as "a test run for the Holodeck," alluding to the immersive virtual-reality environment of the *Star Trek* series and films, and thus to ARGs' abilities to create text outright. While fan pilgrimages to sets or filming sites have flourished in places such as New York, Vancouver, New Zealand, Hawaii, and Los Angeles, offering, as Brooker writes, acts of creation, performance, disguise, and carnival,[60] ARGs aim to bring these prospects to the viewer, albeit in a starkly different manner.

Rules for Play

In chapters 1 and 2, I described how entryway paratexts establish a perimeter around a text, so that they become our first port of entry—the "airlock," as Gerard Genette poses it—acclimatizing us to the text. Some toys and games will continue to work at a text's perimeter, filling in details at its outskirts and giving meaning to its underexplored portions. Some will also push against the text's borders, expanding its scope, meaning, and uses. However, the risk in discussing paratexts as working at the outskirts of a text is that we reify notions of paratexts as peripheral. Thus, this chapter has argued that for some viewers, the text is at its most interesting, engaging, and/or meaningful at the outskirts. For some, in other words, the outskirts *are* the center. In such cases, the rubric of center and periphery, text and outskirts, must be revised to account for the individual viewer's or community of viewers' migrations to and from the outskirts—or their *sometimes* migration to and from the outskirts—and the concurrent decreased importance of what we as analysts might otherwise be tempted to regard as the "core" of the text, the film or television program. The chapter has also been about how we play with texts; but to talk of play is to talk of the ground rules for that play, and therefore I pose that we might regard paratexts as setting the ground rules for play with the text as a whole. Engaging with any form of entertainment, particularly of a fictional nature, is a form of play, and thus texts are essentially spaces for play and the reflection it inspires. Licensed toys and games frequently

amplify, expand, or outright create these spaces, for both themselves and for the text more generally.

Many analysts and media producers alike still see toys and games as wholly peripheral, as they do most paratexts. However, as particularly the cases of *Enter the Matrix* and *What Happened in Piedmont?* illustrate, some film and television franchises have embraced the creative and contributive capacities of paratexts and have moved toward a model of media creation that works across media, networking various platforms, styles, and even textual addresses to fashion a more developed text. Though revenue-generation must of course still be a concern for any instance of commercial media, some have engaged (even if unintentionally) in bold and innovative practices to displace the film or television show as the necessary center of the text and franchise, or as the privileged site of meaning-generation. Since these rare examples have embraced the logic on which this book is based—namely, that the paratext is a vital part of the text—by way of a conclusion, I will now turn to a discussion of textually vibrant and textually void paratexts.

Conclusion

"In the DNA": Creating across Paratexts

Balancing alternate-sized textual universes is rapidly becoming a key task for media producers. Furthermore, since each paratext can toggle or even short-circuit the text (as examples throughout this book have illustrated), another key task is for media producers to streamline their various paratexts. And a third key task is to open sufficient room for storyworlds to be inhabitable, so that viewers have the interest in commandeering portions of the world, as well as the ability and freedom to create their own parts of and paths through this world. Making all of these tasks considerably harder is many companies' and shows' apparent lack of dedicated creative personnel whose job it is to oversee the smooth flow of textuality and meaning between films, programs, and paratexts. Many paratexts fall under a company's marketing and promotions budget, meaning that the show's creators may have little or nothing to do with their creation, thereby producing ample opportunity for creative disconnects, and for uninspired paratexts that do little to situate either themselves or the viewer in the storyworld. Interviews with creative personnel abound with tales of production or promotional personnel tasked with overseeing an established franchise about which they know nothing. At the level of production, relative chaos and piecemeal construction of paratexts on an ad hoc basis can often prove the norm. To conclude this book, therefore, I will now examine the issue of textual *cohesion*, and of how texts are variously put together.

While I argue for the creative potential that is fostered by streamlining shows and their paratexts, and while I am critical of some instances when show and paratext work independently, by no means do I wish to suggest that all texts *should* reign in their paratexts. At times, the push and pull between different meanings among paratexts or between the show and a paratext will be responsible for some of the text's vitality. As chapter 5

examined, paratexts can offer us new ways to make sense of or interact with a world. At other times, a proliferation of competing paratexts will be a text's saving grace, ensuring that its world is varied and disparate enough to welcome a wide range of viewers and interests. Any text that has caught the public's attention and imagination will be surrounded by such a preponderance of paratexts that they could never all agree. Ironically, for all their poor planning and coordination of in-house or commissioned paratexts, many media companies boast legal teams and/or control-freak creative personnel who take decisive action when viewers create paratexts that run counter to their own desires for the text, a move which I do not support. However, to argue, as I have done, that paratexts contribute to the text and are often vital parts of it is to argue that paratexts can be part of the creative process, and not just marketing "add-ons" and "ancillary products," as the media industries and academia alike have often regarded them. To ignore paratexts' textual role is to misunderstand their aesthetic, economic, and socio-cultural roles, and hence I conclude this book by examining what we might call textually "incorporated" and "unincorporated" paratexts.

The Dark Knight's Pepperoni Pizza: Unincorporated Paratexts

In chapter 1, I compared paratexts to ads, which are charged with the task of *branding* the product that is the text. Here, it is worth returning to this comparison, especially since throughout this book I have written of paratexts as textual, not as economic. Such a choice may have sat uneasily with some readers. Writing of ARGs, for instance, Henrik Örnebring complains that "there is relatively little academic concern with how ARGs function as *marketing tools*," and further states that "their primary purpose is not to create new opportunities for interaction, networking and audience participation in mediated narratives, but simply to create an enjoyable experience that will build the franchise brand in the minds of media audiences."[1] He is correct, of course, to point out that most ARGS are designed to advertise and to create buzz; many are allowed to exist because they brand the text. So too are all of the industry-created paratexts discussed in this book in one way or another "marketing tools." But as this book has also argued, Örnebring's hard-and-fast division between marketing and branding on one side, and interaction, networking, and audience participation on the other, ultimately cannot hold. As argued in chapter 1, branding is the process of making a product into a text; thus, when the product is

itself a text, branding need not mean anything more than adding sites of construction for that text. What Örnebring calls the ARG's "simple" task "to create an enjoyable experience that will build the franchise brand in the minds of media audiences" will quite often *require* that the ARG works "to create new opportunities for interaction, networking and audience participation in mediated narratives." His division, as such, folds back on itself, illustrating the degree to which much paratextuality confuses the industry's and academia's binary of marketing and creativity.

Örnebring's criticism offers something of a red herring. Of course the profit imperative of an ARG may dictate the course of the story, and may considerably hamper the scope of the narrative. But this is a problem endemic to all commercial media, and hence to films and television programs too, not just to paratexts. We also see "marketing tools" in other seemingly innocuous activities: within academia, for instance, the job talk or any conference paper from an individual "on the market" is a marketing tool, but its marketing prerogative does not necessarily obviate its substance. Anything a head of state does could be regarded as a marketing tool for the next election, but this does not necessarily evacuate it of meaning. In the case of film and television, the profit imperative is bound tightly to the narrative impulse, but this does not necessarily overwhelm that impulse. By no means do I suggest that we should drop our concern with rampant commercialism and with the problematic nature of stories that aim to sell, but once more this is an issue endemic to film, television, and popular culture as a whole, not just to ARGs, spinoff toys, DVDs, trailers, and the like. If it is the marketing that concerns us, since paratexts frequently outpace the film or television show itself in economic terms, in such cases do we criticize the show as a mere marketing tool for the paratext? Or, since ARG creator and game developer Matt Wolf notes the irony that while many within the media industries regard ARGs as strictly promotional, yet these promotions need their own promotions, what are we to make of marketing tools for marketing tools?

Paratexts confound and disturb many of our hierarchies and binaries of what matters and what does not in the media world, especially the long-held notion that marketing and creativity are or could be distinct from one another. As such, I pose that a key concern as analysts should be the textual impact of the paratext. In cases when the paratext adds nothing or harms the narrative or storyworld, we can more easily criticize the paratext for being merely a marketing tool; in cases when the paratext adds to the narrative or storyworld and develops them, we have a more complex entity.

Hype, synergy, and paratexts often annoy consumers. But they are likely to do so only when the consumer does not care about (or actively dislikes) the related text, or when it contributes nothing or takes away from the text. As I write this Conclusion, for instance, following the recent release of *The Dark Knight*, many a television ad break contains a pitch for Domino's "Gotham City pizza." As critics tout the film's dark aesthetic, many impressed that a summer blockbuster superhero film would tread on such dark ground, I am forced to wonder what a pepperoni pizza is supposed to add to *The Dark Knight* as text. *The Dark Knight* was preceded by an elaborate, year-long ARG, in which Domino's and the Gotham City pizza feature, but they add nothing to that story either. The pizza's and the ad's sole contribution, then, is to signal the size of the film ("it even has a pizza named after it"). This move hardly seems necessary, and is trumped by the pizza's and ad's act of taking away from the film, making it seem, well, cheesy. The paratexts are wholly unincorporated, therefore, not a problem because they are an ad and a pizza, but because they are an ad and a pizza that contribute nothing meaningful to the text or its narrative, storyworld, characters, or style. By contrast, such a promotion may have fit *Spider-Man*, given alter ego Peter Parker's stint as delivery man, or *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1990), given the characters' love of pizza. For *The Dark Knight*, they are *only* ads and pizzas.

Alongside the Gotham City pizza, we can place countless other examples of paratexts that fail to add anything substantive to the storyworld, or even to sample that world for would-be viewers. We could also point to cases when the paratext's meanings clash with those of the text, as was seen in chapter 2 with *Six Degrees*' promotional campaign and *The Sweet Hereafter*'s American trailer. In both cases, while the show was heading in one direction, the paratext was heading in another, likely hurting the text's chances of receiving a wider, appreciative audience in the process.

"360°" Storytelling: Incorporated Paratexts

By contrast, this book has also presented numerous cases of paratexts that were "incorporated," adding to the storyworld and allowing viewers chances to explore that world further or even to contribute to it. The Canadian trailer to *The Sweet Hereafter*, the *Star Wars* line of toys, *What Happened in Piedmont?*, and the *Lord of the Rings* DVDs, for example, all either fleshed or teased out their respective narrative worlds.

I have attempted to offer a wide variety of examples, but we might also turn to several examples of texts whose incorporation extends to numerous paratexts. Kristin Thompson's highly detailed study of *The Lord of the Rings*, for instance, shows how Middle Earth overflowed from books to films to merchandise to games to DVDs and so on, all contributing not only to the franchise's monumental profits, but also to its success at attracting audiences.[2] Another, more recent example of what some in Hollywood have started to call "360 degree" storytelling lies in NBC's *Heroes* (2006–). The show tells the tale of people from around the world who develop super powers, ranging from invincibility to mind-reading or teleportation. Over time, they must deal with various threats from super villains, nefarious organizations, and shadows of the past. In addition to the television program, though, *Heroes* works on various platforms, using a variety of paratexts in innovative ways. Thus, for instance:

- A day after broadcast, each episode appears again online with cast commentary.
- An interactive section on the site's web page allows viewers to catch up on missed information and plot developments.
- The show is accompanied by an online comic, *9th Wonders,* with several pages worth of story accompanying each episode. This comic fills in character background and plot details, tells new stories involving the same characters, and appears within the show's diegesis.
- When enough of the online comic existed, it was published as a graphic novel, with alternate covers by famed comics artists Jim Lee and Alex Ross.
- Another Heroes publication, the novel *Saving Charlie,* examines what happened during one of time-traveler Hiro's jumps to the past, which created a love interest that the show itself did not follow up on.
- Numerous websites exist for organizations within the show's story-world, some mere transmedia window-dressing, some offering helpful information. The character Hiro also has his own blog.
- Viewers were invited to sign up to receive text message clues as part of the "Heroes 360 Experience," later renamed "Evolutions" (fig. c.1).
- A videogame is in the works at the time of writing.

All of these venues, as well as others, have frequently released information not (yet) in the television show. Uniting several of them, too, was the figure of Hana Gitelman, a hero introduced in the online comic and at the center of the show's transmedia presence for a while (fig. C.2). Gitelman has the ability to serve as a transmitter and receiver for virtually any form of electronic message through thought alone. Thus, her powers loan themselves to being situated in the show's complex network of mobile and online transmedia. And while the various paratexts and platforms flesh out the world of *Heroes*, any vital information is later shared on the show itself, ensuring that one can engage with the show alone without feeling left out or confused.

Lost, too, has become a standard-bearer for today's generation of transmedia world-generation, with ARGs, creative sponsorship extensions,[3] a

Fig. C.1. The *Heroes* "Evolutions" website offers a portal into some of the show's many transmedia platforms.

Fig. c.2. A page from the *Heroes* graphic novel following the adventures of the transmediated hero Hana Gitelman.

videogame, a book written by an in-world character, numerous webpages, DVDs with expansive bonus materials, character appearances on *Jimmy Kimmel Live* (2003–), and various mobisodes or in-world ads. Hannah Montana and Miley Cyrus similarly exist across a broad range of media, as television stars, in concerts, in a 3-D concert video, on webpages, and in mobile media. Disney's other children's media behemoth, the *High School Musical* franchise, has not only traversed television, concert halls, mobile media, and webpages, but has also been remade in various international versions and as a stage musical. The worlds of Marvel and DC Comics can at times appear to be conducting a colonial occupation of the summer box office, while simultaneously developing strong presences in televised animation, videogames, and merchandising. Marvel and DC have trained audiences to expect infinite reboots and alternate universes, a strategy that allows James Bond–like ease of movement across media venues, but also restricts the prospects for a continuing narrative to be told across those venues.[4] As such, just as primetime television hosts both procedural, problem-of-the-week programs and serials, transmedia storytelling also has both rebooted and serial forms. Meanwhile, even shows not known for their paratexts can offer amusing, one-off paratexts, as with Showtime's *Dexter*, which produced a video postcard generator that allowed one to insert friends' names and a taunting message into a mock television news item warning of the serial killer's next likely victim.[5] In such cases, both producers and audiences are encouraged to look upon the paratexts as far more than just a marketing tool, though they may well be that as well. Rather, they are invited to incorporate the paratext into their text, and to see the creation of that paratext as part of the act of creating the text in general.

"In the Bloodstream": Producing Paratexts

Though this book has taken a predominantly text- and audience-centered view of paratextuality, its argument has ramifications for production studies too. Key to an understanding of any given production culture is an understanding of that culture's shared or contested opinions regarding who and what has value. My argument has been that paratexts have significant value, in and of themselves, but also as components of larger units of entertainment. To say this is to say that they are not "just promotional" or "just marketing tools," and thus that we might reconsider which workers are coded as "marketers" and which as "creative." To point to the

value of paratextuality is also to call for greater study of the production of paratexts. If paratexts border the realms of promotion and creativity, more work could illuminate how the media industries value or devalue paratexts by categorizing them as creative labor or as promotional and ancillary. Already, significant evidence exists to suggest that the latter is more often the case. During the Writers Guild of America (WGA) strike of 2007–8, though media reports often focused on the issue of DVD and online royalties, arguably as important was the issue of compensation for writers' involvement in paratexts. Currently, creative personnel are not paid for their work on most paratexts, the film and television industries choosing instead to see such work as strictly promotional. When a cast member records a commentary track, when a writer works on an ARG or a mobisode, and when the showrunners of complex, transmediated shows such as *Heroes* or *Lost* try to coordinate and incorporate various paratexts into the grand narrative, they must usually do so for free and for the love of their text; participation in all "promotions" is a part of their contractual agreement. When the WGA went on strike, the only paratext creators who were on strike were those also hired as writers who gifted their time toward creating transmedia. While audiences may be just as if not more captivated by paratextual creativity, Hollywood still tends not to count this as creativity.

A familiar refrain exists throughout my research, which is that successful paratexts tend to be incorporated, while unsuccessful paratexts tend to be unincorporated. Of the latter, for instance, in chapter 6 I noted how often licensed games underwhelm their players. Brian Leake, Vice President of Technology at Disney Interactive Media Group, explained to me that this is because games have often been considered totally secondary and ancillary. Game developers were given too little time to produce spinoff games, which had to be released in tandem with the film or program in question. Producing licensed games could often be "like a starting pistol," therefore, with the developer required to start immediately. Matt Wolf similarly told me that "day and date" productions—those intended for release on the same day as a film, for instance—nearly always suffered. However, Wolf, who worked for *Simpsons* producers Gracie Films to ensure an "authentic" Simpsonian experience on *The Simpsons Hit and Run* game, noted that such games can benefit greatly from not being tied to any particular release date, thus allowing room for real creativity. Leake too felt that game designers will inevitably produce their best, most creative work when allowed the time and chance to "spin" a show, and to add

"a little bit extra" to the text themselves. He also suggested that more film and television creators are aware of the importance of games today, and hence that they are getting more involved in the process.

Echoing Leake, Thompson notes that more directors are getting involved in game design, citing specifically Peter Jackson's dedication to the *Lord of the Rings* games. She quotes Neil Young, executive producer of the games, as stating: "Usually here's how games based on movies get made[. . . .] You interface exclusively with the licensing arm of the distributor—the movie studio. Maybe you get a script. You might get some photos from the set. If you're lucky you might get a cuddly toy or a cup. If you're really lucky, you might get a visit to the set."[6] However, Jackson and New Line allowed Young an almost unprecedented level of access to properties from the show. And yet, when Jackson moved on to his next project, *King Kong*, he wanted more involvement in the process himself and hence worked with a different company.[7] Wolf, too, noted Gracie's amenability to work with the game designers, and Leake, who also worked on *Hit and Run*, talked of the huge "Bible" of *Simpsons* information that the designers received from Gracie. Clearly, for licensed games to work, film and television creators need to get more involved, and they need to allow game designers more freedom and more information, inviting them into the creative process of the text as a whole, while not abdicating as much of the narrative foundations to the games as did *The Matrix*.

Writing of the landmark *Lord of the Rings* DVDs, Thompson also notes how important it was to Jackson and their producers that the DVD production arm be just another part of the film, not an independent, isolated entity. Their producer, Michael Pellerin, told Thompson, "We were in the bloodstream of the production, as well as for security reasons, we were given production offices in the film production offices. We literally became another little department of the movie," also insisting that "to this day (even with Universal and *King Kong*) I have never experienced more of a synergy created between the filmmakers, the DVD producer, the menu and package designers than I did on *The Lord of the Rings*."[8] Pellerin and his staff were on set from day one, as opposed to the former tendency in Hollywood to construct piecemeal DVDs after production had wrapped, based on whatever scraps were available to the producer. Again, Jackson was so involved in the process that on *King Kong* he began to produce his own production diary video blog posts, which he later placed into *King Kong: Peter Jackson's Production Diaries*, a set of DVDs released before the

film. Meanwhile, David Jessen, Vice President of Blu-Ray and DVD Creative Production at Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment, told me that standard operating procedure at Disney is now that he is on the set from the moment a show is given the green light, ensuring that he too is, in Pellerin's words, "in the bloodstream."

Given *Heroes*' particular success at crafting a story across various paratexts—winning them an Emmy for creative achievement in interactive media in 2008—I also interviewed the show's former co-executive producer and writer Jesse Alexander, its former associate producer and transmedia head Mark Warshaw, and NBC-Universal's Senior Vice President of Digital Development and General Manager of NBC.com, Stephen Andrade. All three have significant prior experience with transmedia: Alexander worked as a writer on *Lost* and *Alias* before coming to *Heroes*, Warshaw developed an extensive transmedia entourage for *Smallville*, and Andrade has worked in the field at an executive level for many years.

Warshaw told me of needing to run ideas by the showrunners, studio, and network with past projects, while Andrade alluded to some showrunners' disinterest in developing other platforms for their narratives. However, *Heroes* had a dedicated transmedia team (called this, too, following the team's interest in Henry Jenkins's work and use of the term "transmedia"). At the same time, the core of this team, noted Alexander, were the writers of the show, in particular himself, Warshaw, Aron Coleite, and Joe Pakaski. Hence, stated Warshaw,

> the producing team is very transmedia focused so there is more collaboration in the idea generation. Jesse Alexander, who is an executive producer on the series, is obsessed with transmedia and is easily television's foremost thinker in the field. Because of this, the transmedia department on "Heroes" was truly an extension of the writers' room.

The team's love of transmedia is evident: Alexander notes that the writers are "superfans" of transmedia, his personal blog *The Global Couch* (globalcouch.blogspot.com) is all about transmedia, and he and Warshaw have been keen attendees and presenters at MIT's Futures of Entertainment conference (where both introduced themselves to me after hearing of this project). When I asked Alexander if he would be as committed to *Heroes* if it lacked a transmedia component, he responded that he would not, since, in his opinion, "transmedia content is the way of the future of entertainment, and any show—certainly a genre show and a triple-A

franchise like *Heroes*—needs transmedia to be part of doing business." "Everything I do," he added, "is gonna have a transmedia component."

While Alexander, Warshaw, and Andrade were all polite in not naming names or expanding upon other less-rewarding experiences, all three clearly felt that a commitment to transmedia must come from above. Alexander spoke of how important NBC's support and follow-through had proven to be, alluding to the need for corporate support, while Andrade spoke both of how much more exciting the possibilities for transmedia development became once NBC head Jeff Zucker was on board with the concept, and of what a treat it was to work with the *Heroes* producers, given their openness and complete commitment as creative heads to offering multiple venues for the *Heroes* story. As a result, transmedia concepts are included in thinking from the beginning, "immediately," Alexander stated, and "in our DNA and so organic to how we tell our stories." Whereas paratexts are frequently conceived of as add-ons, after-the-fact supplements to a preconceived narrative universe, Alexander, Warshaw, and Andrade spoke of the value of creating with transmedia multi-platforms involved in the story from the outset.

At the same time, Warshaw in particular spoke of the structural struggles that transmedia has faced. Transmedia, he states,

> was this square peg that came along when most of what TV had to offer was a bunch of round holes. No one knew if it was marketing or content yet. No one knew a lot of the answers. So there were growing pains during this discovery phase. We had to figure it out along the way. When I was hired on "Heroes," the transmedia storytelling concept was pretty foreign to the studio, network, and some parts of the show. New structures had to be built and ways of doing business defined. They literally created a transmedia production manual. Now there are templates.

A key tension seems to be the push and pull common to television as a whole, between creative and advertising impulses. Andrade offered a telling metaphor in speaking of transmedia as a "three-legged stool," promoting the show while serving as both a vehicle for ads and a site for story development. Transmedia's success and commercial viability, he argued, relies on all three legs being strong. Ivan Askwith has written of how these legs risked breaking with *Lost*'s ARG when advertising took over in the case of Sprite's Sublymonal campaign. Viewers and players were

encouraged to visit Sprite's website, with no payoff whatsoever. By comparison, Jeep and Monster invoked less player outrage, and more respect, when the former buried clues and secret documents in a company website, and the latter added a job search website for careers at the in-world Hanso Foundation.[9] Thus, commercial television–centered transmedia operates as does commercial television in general, requiring a careful balancing act between creative and corporate desires. As *Lost*'s executive producer Carlton Cuse noted at the 2008 IRTS and Disney Digital Media Summit, the key challenge for paratextual production is how to "embed content in marketing" in a way that avoids the crass consumerism of most advertising and that ensures that the content is still king.

Another huge task for paratextual development is for Hollywood to expand its notion of who belongs to the production team. At the 2008 IRTS and Disney Digital Media Summit, Cuse also noted that he and writing partner Damon Lindelof realized early on in *Lost*'s tenure that they were not the people best equipped to make many of its innovative paratexts come to life. Thus, they needed to be able to farm these out. A small group of companies and individuals have started to specialize in such work, from Warshaw to Matt Wolf's D20, Xenophile, Big Spaceship, Hoodlum, Starlight Runner, 42 Entertainment, and others. Film and television have always been collaborative media, but the small, elite club of "above the line" creators may need to open its doors if its members are dedicated to integrating paratexts seamlessly and intelligently. A common complaint from transmedia creators—and one that is evident in many a paratext—is that the network or studio allowed little or no real collaboration or discussion between paratext creators and the film's director or the television program's writing staff.

Nevertheless, Warshaw insists that transmedia remains a particularly exciting space in which to work given that its newness has ensured that television networks do not know exactly how it works or how they *want* it to work:

> Transmedia storytelling has been and still is thrilling and very satisfying to me because there are very few boxes—no rigid pre-established creative structures to work within based on years of data collection and trial and error. There are very few preconceived notions about what does and does not work yet. This has allowed me a lot of artistic freedom and is the reason I leap out of bed excited to go to work most mornings.

Andrade, too, told me, "Everything's a jumpball right now, with all of us [media corporations] trying to invest in everything," until the picture of transmedia's future becomes clear. To this end, and working together, Alexander and Matt Wolf are floating the idea of creating a storyworld that precedes any of its given media iterations, rather than follow the current status quo of letting the transmedia follow the individual show. Whereas the Wachowski brothers may be seen as having done this with *The Matrix*, in truth the original film preceded its paratextual proliferation. By contrast, if incorporated paratexts confuse the boundaries between story and promotion, narrative center and narrative periphery, Alexander and Wolf propose a literalization of this confusion, by creating a storyworld that is from the beginning transmediated, with no paratexts, only textual iterations. Their plan is to start with the DNA code of the story before creating any of its bodies or incarnations.

Videogames, DVDs, and ARGs all present themselves as obvious storytelling extensions for a new brand of media creator, but drawing on chapter 2, we might also wonder about creators' role in streamlining trailers, movie posters, and the like. Further research must also be conducted on production cultures surrounding paratexts, for here I have only scratched the surface and have been forced to take various producers' accounts of their own work at face value. Up-close observation of the day-to-day task of synching films, television programs, and paratexts may well indicate a more complex set of realities. Such analysis might also shed better light on the degree to which the industries' paratext creators work alongside and/or against the interests of viewer-creators. All of the paid paratext creators to whom I spoke talked of fan involvement with their shows with considerable passion and enthusiasm, with Alexander stating that it shouldn't just be the writers "who get to have all the fun, the fans should get to have fun as well." But surely not all fan practices are equal in all creators' eyes, and production ethnographies and histories would undoubtedly uncover the areas of tension better than have my own questions. Toward these ends, Thompson's *Frodo Franchise*, Henry Jenkins's ongoing interviews with transmedia artists on his blog *Confessions of an Aca-Fan*, and Avi Santo's historical work on the paratextual proliferation of *The Lone Ranger*[10] all provide helpful steps forward, but more still is required.

In the DNA

The production cultures around paratexts still need more study, but I hope in this book to have shown how vitally important paratexts are at a textual level and at the level of the audience's understanding, enjoyment, and use of texts. Paratexts fill the media landscape and can be as responsible for popular culture's encounters with countless storyworlds and texts as are film and television. As media cultures evolve, analysts have often paid close attention to the dominant shifts and newcomers, from the development of photography to that of film, from radio to television, and now to "new media" such as the Internet and mobile telephony. But paratexts have often filled the gaps between media, never a true medium unto themselves, and thus rarely attracting their due attention. As paratexts, convergence, and overflow increasingly bring texts together, however, and as it therefore becomes increasingly difficult to study any one medium in isolation, paratextual study will become all the more important and all the more helpful, and paratextual creation will similarly become all the more vital for any would-be successful text or franchise. In his playful book on literary paratexts, tellingly entitled *Invisible Forms*, Kevin Jackson notes that while there are thousands of books designed to tell one how to write *books*, few if any tell one how to write paratexts.[11] Similarly, while many books ask us to *study* books, films, and television programs, few ask us explicitly to study their paratexts. With this book, I hope to have done exactly that, by showing how these sometimes "invisible," "peripheral," "ancillary" entities are as intrinsic a part of a text's DNA as are the films and television programs that have usually been regarded as the entirety of the text, and that they frequently support, develop, and enrich.