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Under a Long Shadow
Sequels, Prequels, Pre-Texts, and Intertexts

In chapter 1, I offered multiple metaphors by which we can make sense of paratexts—as airlocks, as high priests of textuality, as overflow, as convergence—but on a basic level, we can understand them as intertexts. Intertextuality refers to the fundamental and inescapable interdependence of all textual meaning upon the structures of meaning proposed by other texts. In common usage, *intertextuality* refers to instances wherein a film or program refers to and builds some of its meaning off another film or program, and *intertext* to the referenced film or program. For instance, *West Side Story* invokes the intertexts of *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Colbert Report* relies on its viewers' intertextual knowledge of pundit shows to parody and satirize programs such as *The O'Reilly Factor* (1996–), and *The Sopranos* intertextually plays with and reworks gangster movie tropes. Intertextuality is a system that calls for the viewer to use previously seen texts to make sense of the one at hand. As Laurent Jenny notes, it "introduces a new way of reading which destroys the linearity of a text,"[1] instead opening the text up to meanings from outside, so that often much of (our understanding of) a text will be constructed outside of the text. And while it is more obvious in examples such as *West Side Story*, *The Colbert Report*, or *The Sopranos*, no text creates its entire meaning for itself by itself, as viewers will always make sense of a new text using structures and orders of meaning offered to them by other texts, genres, and viewing experiences. Intertextuality is always at work, with texts framing each other just as I have shown paratexts to frame texts. In this regard, paratextuality is in fact a subset of intertextuality. What distinguishes the two terms is that intertextuality often refers to the instance wherein one or more bona fide shows frame another show, whereas paratextuality refers to the instance wherein a textual fragment or "peripheral" frames a show.

However, paratextuality and intertextuality regularly bleed into and rely upon one another. As Genette uses the word "paratext," he implies a form of subservience to a greater entity. Even if textually the paratext may prove constitutive of that entity, paratexts are generally outgrowths of a film or program. But what of the instance when a show is seen as an outgrowth of another show, as an extension that is functionally subservient and dependent? In such cases, shows can and should be analyzed as paratexts. Paratextuality and intertextuality, though, are also intertwined in that intertextual frames are not wholly personal and insular. Rather, talk and discussion will circulate intertextual frames, suggesting ways that one might interpret a show, or forming an entryway or in medias res paratext that is as fully realized and powerful as are trailers, ad campaigns, or bonus materials. Intertextuality, in other words, often works through the calcified form of paratexts such as viewer discussion. Thus, this chapter will examine various ways in which paratexts do the work of intertextuality, and various ways in which paratextuality and intertextuality combine.

Michael Iampolski notes that "by creating a specific intertextual field as its own environment, each text in its own way seeks to organize and regroup its textual predecessors," thereby also creating "its own history of culture,"[2] but I will examine how paratexts—or shows working as paratexts—operationalize this process. In particular, I am interested in how such "intertextual fields" are created before we even sit down in the cinema or turn on the television. Valentin Volosinov argues that what is important about a text "is not that it is a stable and always self-equivalent signal, but that it is an always changeable and adaptable sign."[3] Tony Bennett explains Volosinov and Bakhtin's intertextual theory by observing that "the position of any single text in relation to other texts, and hence its function, is liable to constant shifts and displacements as new forms of writing transform and reorganize the entire system of relationships between texts."[4] In this chapter, I will focus on how paratexts manage such changes, adaptations, shifts, and reorganizations.

I begin by studying the process of adaptation, specifically how Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* books established a paratextual perimeter around their filmic adaptations for some would-be viewers, paratextualizing the films even before release. Moving from adaptation to more varied forms of intertextuality, I then examine how these films themselves became powerful inhibitors for audiences' reception of Peter Jackson's subsequent *King Kong* and of Andrew Adamson's filmic adaptation of C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Of interest to me is how

audience discussion, as paratext, works to cast a formidable shadow, in the form of the previous film, over the reception of the subsequent films. I then chart how such shadows become prominent enough that they can affect even the production of subsequent texts, as I study how *Batman Begins* maneuvered to escape the darkened shroud of Batman's previous cinematic outing, *Batman and Robin*. Finally, I study how intertextuality becomes a communal game, played in the realm of the paratext. I look at how audience discussion surrounding the release of *Lost* and *Six Degrees* created a paratextual perimeter in the form of notions of executive producer J. J. Abrams's supposed scripting style. Fans and once-fans of Abrams's earlier shows offered interpretive schemas for his recent shows, based on their understanding of how his shows worked. In doing so, they communicated intertextual knowledge (rightly or wrongly) to non-fans and non-viewers of that work, thereby illustrating how intertextual knowledge can reside in and disseminate via paratexts, not solely in and via personal viewing experiences.

Overall, the chapter examines the complex hall of paratextual and intertextual mirrors through which meaning and reception must pass, and how in this hall intertextuality will often work through paratexts. Nick Couldry asks the important question, "On what terms can we go on thinking, and talking, about 'texts' *at all* in a culture where, in a sense, we have too many texts"?[5] As does the book as a whole, this chapter suggests that relational, intertextual and paratextual studies are where our efforts might lie. Finding out which texts, or which parts and iterations of texts, are determinative and controlling of each other can tell us a great deal, and can help us to better understand how and where meaning begins and how it is extended and stretched elsewhere.

A Return to Middle Earth:
Pre-Viewing Lord of the Rings *(with Bertha Chin)*

In the early months of 2001, Bertha Chin and I conducted a somewhat peculiar research project: we examined audience interpretation of Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* nine months before the film was released.[6] We had not seen the film, nor had any of the audience members under examination; the film, after all, was still in the throes of production. However, though nine months away from cinematic release, the film was at least as many months bathed in hype: amidst continuing and excited press releases, magazine articles, and official website

updates, the movie had announced itself long before its Christmas 2001 release. On the Internet in particular, dedicated *Lord of the Rings* web discussion sites were thriving, often with multiple posts a day, producing a curious situation in which people were congregating to discuss a text that seemingly did not yet exist, often in great detail. Thus, whereas chapter 2 argues that texts often begin with their promos, here were individuals parsing and debating all manner of directorial decisions, talking excitedly about particular scenes, and grumbling about poor acting, long before New Line had released a trailer or poster, let alone the movie. Numerous audience researchers have observed the ease and efficiency of conducting their research online, but here we had an audience waiting for us before the film! If not "viewers" discussing a text, they were at the least "pre-viewers" discussing a "pre-text." And if, as Espen Aarseth has argued, "like electrons, [texts] can never be experienced directly, only by the signs of their behavior,"[7] why wait for the text when the "signs of its behavior" were already evident? Chin and I saw this as a golden opportunity to study how textuality begins, where it comes from, and how the text and audience meet.

We were not the first researchers to discuss the consumption of a text before it occurs. As described in chapter 1, Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott conducted a landmark study of James Bond as a "dormant signifier, inactive most of the time, but capable of being periodically reactivated."[8] Bond's multiple textual appearances, they argued, created an interpretive shorthand for audiences: when a new Bond film is on the horizon, we already have a clear sense of what to expect, and we already have a set of reading strategies and frames ready for use:

> The process of reading is not one in which reader and text meet as abstractions but one in which the inter-textually organised reader meets the inter-textually organised text. The exchange is never a pure one between two unsullied entities, existing separately from one another, but is rather "muddled" by the cultural debris which attach to both texts and readers in the determinate conditions which regulate the specific forms of their encounter.[9]

Performing audience research into the "unsullied entity" of *Judge Dredd*'s (1995) would-be audiences in 1995, Martin Barker and Kate Brooks examined how numerous audience members discussed the film before watching it. In particular, Barker and Brooks were able to isolate

various reading frames, ranging from, for instance, Stallone-followers, to action-film aficionados, to fans of the *2000 A.D.* comic books on which the film was based. High expectations and hopes, as well as expectations to be disappointed, were commonplace, and yet as they note, all such reactions pointed to the presence of an *ideal* text, suggesting the degree to which audiences use available intertexts (Stallone as star, blockbuster, *2000 A.D.*, etc.) to project outward an image of the text to come, one that they can "consume" and with which they can engage before the actual film is released.[10] How would the *Lord of the Rings* pre-viewers confirm, further illustrate, and/or challenge these findings?

Given the plethora of discussion in online forums, we felt it unnecessary to contact specific posters. Moreover, whereas media studies have long read viewers and the nature of viewers off the film or program, in a flip of this rubric, here we were attempting to read the text off its viewers. Since our intent was not to make sense of the individual viewers, we did not seek to contextualize their comments within the broader life histories to which one-on-one interviews give researchers greater access. We recorded and coded discussion from the film's official discussion board— www.lordoftherings.net—as well as from two Yahoo Groups boards ("lotr" and "lord_OT_rings_movie") and from www.tolkien-movies.com. Each of these sites is, of course, its own communally authored paratext and could be studied for its general framing of the *Lord of the Rings* books as text, but we aimed to cut a specific path through the wealth of material at each address. Of prime interest to us was any talk that constructed an image of the film, and hence that would provide insight into how a (filmic) pretext takes form and becomes a text: we were not seeking a representative response or even series of responses, but rather were interested in the form(s) that the text took during early pre-release discussion.

Immediately apparent was that all posters appeared to be devoted fans of Tolkien's books. Elsewhere, Ian McKellen, Liv Tyler, Peter Jackson, or fantasy fans, say, were undoubtedly conducting their own dialogue, but these posters displayed the utmost familiarity with and regard for Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. Many posters adopted Tolkien(esque) names, such as Éowyn, princeimrahil, Ms. Took, theprecious, and Mithril1960. Most filled their posts with references to the book, as when, for instance, one poster noted that s/he would "wait and watch carefully, like Elendil waiting for Gil-Galad." Outright statements of fealty to the books and/or to Tolkien were also commonplace, as when one poster wrote of how s/he "will always return to the books over and over"; another proposed, "If [the

movie] use[s] a narrator I think he should sound like Tolkien." On one level, we might see such verbal tags as expressing a certain sense of "guilt" over posting about the film, as if to do so was to "betray" the books, and thus performed to other posters a faithfulness to Tolkien and the books. On a simple level, though, they also show how many of these posters were longtime Tolkien fans who had come together as an online community with their love of the books as the common factor.

The posters were united by their love for the books, but opinions on the films diverged, ranging from those who raged about the adaptations to those whose excitement could barely be contained: as one poster noted gleefully, "when I found out they were making the movie I could have peed!!!!" To the purists (those who were not peeing with excitement), the films represented a considerable threat to the books, since they saw the story as the books, and any attempt to transplant that story elsewhere as a crime against the text. For instance, one poster explained:

> I'm afraid I'v[11] been gun shy of any movies, etc, of LOTR [*Lord of the Rings*]. Several years ago, I caught an animated version of the hobbit on TV. I couldnt bear to watch it, though, because the elves were purple. PURPLE! sorry, but in my book, they are not purple, or green, or any other color. Then, I had the misfortune of reading a play adaption of the Hobbit, which butchered the story beyond all recognition.

The poster's choice of terms—"gun shy," "butchered beyond all recognition"—signifies the degree to which the television and play adaptations were seen to perpetrate *violence* on the story. Similarly, others wrote of their fear of "Hollywoodification": "you know," wrote one, "having all the women run around with no clothes on, gratuitous sex scenes, getting rid of complicated concepts, etc." To these posters, the text of *Lord of the Rings* was immutable, best honored and respected by being left alone. "I can't help but feel," wrote one poster, "that it's gonna be screwed up and wrong. And be a total veggie effort."

Nevertheless, if only for the fact that these boards had been set up to discuss the film, complete and uncompromising purism was rare. More common was a negotiated position, whereby Tolkien fans *hoped* for three great films and were willing to allow the filmmakers some leeway in translating the beloved books to the screen, but remained somewhat skeptical and fearful. This sense of anxiety was particularly evident in the many postings that made predictions regarding specific scenes or characters.

Of the books' ending, for instance, many felt that New Line and Jackson would cut the last hundred pages or so, ending instead with the great victory at Mordor. "I think," wrote a poster, "that [using Tolkien's ending] will confuse the general film-going public"; another poster echoed, "The filmgoing public likes 'good' closure," and thus "would freak out and cry foul, as they have not the insight to see the true message here." Besides generalizing the "uninitiated viewer" in order to affirm the posters' own roles as acolytes of Tolkien and of Sense, statements such as these expressed an awareness that the text as these Tolkien fans knew and loved it would likely change along with the shift in medium and intended audience. Tolkien fans realized that the text could not translate *as is*, and their discussion and supposed ability to predict such changes became a way of preparing themselves for change.

Numerous postings included expressions of "understanding" why changes must be made. As mentioned above, the general viewing public and their supposed desires for a film were frequently listed as the guilty party, but as one poster stated, "I am not thrilled with the changes [. . . but] I am inclined to be the voice of reason." Along similar lines, another poster wrote, "Everyone should know that to condense such a huge book, with all of the background information into a Movie would be impossible." Or, using a different strategy to predict and reason away differences, many posters engaged in exaggerated and humorous predictions. One board, for instance, had an active thread in which posters offered alternative casting, including the proposal that television's Ally McBeal, Calista Flockhart, might play the shriveled-up monster Gollum. Amidst such anxious play, predictions, expressions of "understanding," and preparations for disappointment, as did Barker and Brooks,[12] we saw the omnipresence of ideals for the film: posters knew the text they wanted to see, often created images of texts they feared they might see, and then had to somehow make these different texts cohabit.

Just as with the coming film's detractors, though, all images and creations of the filmic text were conducted under the long shadow of the *Lord of the Rings* books. While fears and anxiety showed the obvious presence of an ideal text against which the films would be measured, so too did excitement operate under the book's long shadow. Central to the joys of what the adaptation might entail were hopes that the films might "bring the books to life" or "*keep* them alive"—the most commonly noted phrases in our research. "Finally," wrote one poster, "my favorite books of all time are coming to life!!" Another posited, "I'm not interested in

details about the movie. I'd rather think that Peter Jackson's work could be a good reason for us to re-think Tolkien's books in today's scenario"; a third poster hoped that "future generations will find enough merit in the story to re-film with special effects 50 years on." Many looked to the movies as breathing new and continued life into the books and reassuring their place in cultural history and their importance for years to come.

There was even an element of self-vindication in these glowing endorsements of the films, a feeling that "our only hope is [. . .] that [family and friends] see the movie. Then we can set back, smuggly and say 'see that's what I'm talking about!'" "I am so glad," added another, "that [the movies] will draw even more attention to the books." A clear desire of many posters, then, was that the movies would contribute further to the *books*' popularity and cultural presence, expanding *Lord of the Rings* with yet more (para)text. One poster in particular offered an analysis of his and his fellow fans' interest in the films as being

> based on a desire to extend, validate and prolong our own experience of the [books]. Having had our imagination fired, our emotions stimulated and our intellect piqued on the journey through Middle Earth, can we then just leave it behind? [. . .] Was Phantom Menace a good film (by Star Wars Standards)? No, It was not. Did it enhance the Star Wars experience? Yes, It most certainly did. Will Peter Jackson's version live up to expectations? I don't know, but come December, I intend to be one of the first people to find out. Will it enhance the Lord of the Rings experience? Look around you, it already has.

What we see happening here is a subjugation of the films under the long shadow of the books, or what this poster calls the "Lord of the Rings experience," accepting the extension of *Lord of the Rings* from a literary tale to a transmediated franchise. Similarly, another poster offers that "the entertainment value of an adaptation is indeed in anticipation," again signaling the degree to which the adaptation is tucked under the wing of the "original" text.

Whether the fans would ultimately revile the films, watch tentatively, and/or enjoy them immensely, the web discussion suggested that their reactions to the films would continue the experience *of the books*. To these fans, the films were functionally junior to the books, and any response to the films, to a large degree, *pre-exists* the films, belonging as much to the books. In Tolkien's *The Two Towers*, our heroes Frodo and Sam have

a deeply metatextual discussion about the ways in which stories are told, and to Sam's question, "Why to think of it, we're in the same tale still! It's going on. Don't the great tales never end?", Frodo responds, "No, they never end as tales. But the people in them come, and go when their part's ended. Our part will end later—or sooner."[13] Here, a similar process is at work, as the *Lord of the Rings* books, and reactions to or decodings of them, promised to live on in the shell of the *Lord of the Rings* films. John Fiske refers to intertextuality as "ghost textuality,"[14] a phrase that suggests texts living beyond their time, always with unfinished business to perform. The films might ultimately, as one poster proposed, "inform, expand and improve my vision [of Middle Earth]," but this paratextual vision was first and foremost a vision from, and affiliated with, the books.

The viewers whose responses we recorded may not have been "pre-viewers" of the films as much as they were simply viewers of the books, engaging with a text in a new textual body, anticipating one *with* the other, already reaching to one *by way of* the other. If we asked which text was primary, clearly the films were corollaries to the books. Bennett suggests that intertextuality can work as sedimentary layers,[15] yet these viewers' responses demand that we not limit our analysis of any text to its topmost, freshest layer. Rather, an "underground" layer may prove to be considerably more important to any given audience member, serving as bedrock to any new layer of silt, text to an adaptation's paratext. Of course, the degree to which different layers of sediment become controlling and determinative of the reading process will change from reader to reader, viewer to viewer. Furthermore, audiences will not share all of the same "layers": anyone who had not read *Lord of the Rings* or had not cared for it would approach the films without such "bedrock," just as a diehard Peter Jackson fan would arrive at the films with a completely different bedrock, or as a *Lord of the Rings* reader who is *also* a Peter Jackson fan may arrive with yet more complex striations and sedimentary history. But here, the films were turned into paratexts to the books' text.

The Ten-Ton Balrog in the Room: King Kong *and* The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe

The subsequent worldwide success of the *Lord of the Rings* films hardly needs recounting. According to the Internet Movie Database (IMDb. com), as of early 2009, *Return of the King* held the second spot on the all-time worldwide box office list, *The Two Towers* the ninth spot, and

Fellowship of the Ring the sixteenth, combining for approximately $3 billion. Our research uncovered many Tolkien fans declaring all-out war on the box office record set by *Titanic* (1997), calling on Tolkien fans to unite to ensure that their beloved text would sit atop the textual universe. While ultimately no single *Lord of the Rings* film beat *Titanic*, the trilogy's remarkable success still proved just how lucrative textual shadows can be for Hollywood's balance books: when loyalty to a pre-text sends viewers to the cinema with determination, Hollywood can only win.[16] Meanwhile, as chapter 3 examined, its DVDs became their own sensation. Thus, we might expect that while Tolkien's shadow loomed over the trilogy in early 2001, by the time the films had been released, they had become mega-blockbusters casting their own formidable shadows. In particular, when in 2005 Peter Jackson and New Line were set to release their next film, *King Kong*, and while Disney and Walden were gearing up to release an adaptation of C. S. Lewis's much-beloved *Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*, (pre)fan discussion of both films, and later reviews of them at IMDb suggested that the *Lord of the Rings* films had become their own powerful intertexts, framing and prefiguring the reception of these two new films. Whereas the title *Lord of the Rings* served as the intertextual bridge between books and films, now director Peter Jackson, his effects studio Weta Digital, and actor Andy Serkis bridged *Lord of the Rings* to *King Kong*, while *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* was bridged to *Lord of the Rings* by virtue of being a fantasy directed by a Kiwi in New Zealand, and as a result of Tolkien's well-known relationship with C. S. Lewis. Quite simply, too, these were two of the biggest blockbusters to hit the world since *The Return of the King*, and so comparisons to the last big thing were perhaps inevitable.

As we had found with the *Lord of the Rings* films in 2001, for many viewers *King Kong* and *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* seemed unable to step out of the shadow of *Lord of the Rings*. A scan through the several thousand reviews of *King Kong* at IMDb, for instance, reveals that for many, *Lord of the Rings* was a natural, obvious, and inescapable intertext for *King Kong*. One reviewer registers disappointment, elaborating that it is "maybe because I love Lord of The Ring trilogy so much that I expect Peter Jackson to make god like creations every time." Another complains that, "while there is no question Peter Jackson is a special effects master this film lacks the intrigue of the Lord Of The Rings series." Again and again, reviewers cannot discuss *King Kong* without reference to *Lord of the Rings*, illustrating the degree to which the trilogy

had prefigured their expectations and hopes and/or the degree to which, as reviewers, they assume that their readers *expect* to hear comparisons to *Lord of the Rings*. A reviewer notes sadly that "I didn't feel the same way of what I felt in 'Lord of the Rings,'" as if the new movie *should* have replicated the effects and affects of the trilogy, a response echoed by another reviewer, who asks, "So what has Jackson achieved? A remake which adds nothing, looks bad in places but has great landscapes well shot that just make us wish we were watching Lord of the Rings again. Sorry, I wanted to like this movie but I see little point to its existence."

Even some of those who loved the new film have the vocabulary and scenes of *Lord of the Rings* closest to hand when trying to explain how it succeeds, as when a reviewer glows that Jackson "was also able to masterfully capture some very frightening scenes in the movie, similar to what he did for Shelob's Lair in Lord of the Rings." Over the course of the three *Lord of the Rings* films, many viewers had come to know what to expect, and to like the familiar pleasures, gratifications, and affective registers of these films; the release of *King Kong*, along with its intertextual bridge to *Lord of the Rings*, allowed and encouraged them to project these pleasures onto the new film. Then, whether they found *King Kong* to live up to *Lord of the Rings* or let it down, those projected meanings and pleasures proved at least in part determinative of their viewing, interpretation, and reception of *King Kong*, as *Lord of the Rings* set up a perimeter around *King Kong*. Similarly, many of those who hated *Lord of the Rings* projected their dislike and dissatisfaction onto *King Kong*, forming again a framework for interpretation and reception that could not easily be avoided. Reading through IMDb's mass of *Lord of the Rings*–based reviews of *King Kong* thus affirms that long shadows are by no means the sole provenance of adaptations: though *King Kong* was of course a remake, *Lord of the Rings* references proved just as dominant, if not moreso, in reviews as did references to the previous *King Kong* films.

In such discussion, not only do we see *King Kong* function as junior to *The Lord of the Rings*, but as is similarly evident in the *Two Towers* bonus materials discussed in chapter 3, we also see the construction of Peter Jackson as author. Jackson becomes a brand and hence an inter- or paratextual framing device, a matrix of other (inter)texts that served a paratextual role in directing interpretation. In short, Jackson becomes a paratext that manages a broader textual system.

Meanwhile, however, December 2005's other blockbuster, *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*, similarly fell heavy prey to the *Lord of*

the Rings effect and shadow. Undoubtedly, *Lord of the Rings'* success was instrumental in opening up a window of opportunity for Andrew Adamson, Walden, and Disney to adapt C. S. Lewis's stories, making *Lord of the Rings* not only an intertext but a precondition for *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*'s existence on screen. Lewis and Tolkien have often been talked of as a pair, given their friendship, their interest in fantasy from within the hallowed walls of Oxford University, and their mutual interest in using fantasy to serve as religious allegory or national mythology. Just as *Lord of the Rings* helped create room for *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*, the latter's producers similarly clearly hoped to tap into the sizeable *Lord of the Rings* market, and thus the film's trailers, posters, and marketing all borrowed heavily from *Lord of the Rings*–type battle scenes, elaborate CGI, and general look. New Line had, four years earlier, actively hoped that Tolkien fans would project their reception of the books onto the films, and now Walden was similarly encouraging a projection of the pleasures and meanings, not just of the *Chronicles of Narnia* books, but also of *Lord of the Rings* onto *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*.

To judge from reviews at IMDb, this attempt at setting up an intertextual bridge was highly successful, though ironically perhaps *too* successful, so that *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* ended up pinned down under the weight of *Lord of the Rings*. One reviewer declares, "If you're like me you'll find yourself thinking 'why does this feel like a third rate LORD OF THE RINGS?'" This sentiment is echoed by numerous others:

> Adapting a book that so many audience members have read and cherish is surely a daunting task, but I believe it is also a great responsibility. Recently, Peter Jackson set the bar pretty high in this regard with the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy. Unfortunately, Adamson's "Narnia" wasn't quite up to snuff.

> The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe is a wonder, a delightful film, but it hasn't the visual richness of Lord of the Rings, nor has the story the complexity of Tolkien's elaborate mythology, or its immense variety, its real magic.

> Already spoilt by mega war scenes from the Lord of the Rings trilogy, Chronicles doesn't go one up against what audiences already experienced, safe to substitute Uruk-hais and various Orcs with animals and mythical creatures like the centaurs.

> Comparisons are inevitable. So here it is: Is this the new "Lord of the Rings"? Bloody hell, no.
>
> The other main gripe I have with the movie is its mimicry of the Lord of the Rings movies. Lots of armor and weapons and posturing and clashing of armies. Unfortunately, it's all pretty dull and hackneyed.

Just as many of Barker, Arthurs, and Harindranth's *Crash* viewers proved unable to watch that film free of the frames posed by critical reviews and the British censorship drive,[17] here *Lord of the Rings* (both films and books) clearly provided a list of demands and expectations for *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* that prefigured how at least some audience members would respond to and make sense of it.

IMDb reveals a whole host of other intertexts, though, as did the discussion board at www.narniaweb.com. At the latter, upon early announcement of the film, it was the author or brand function of Disney that concerned many posters more than Tolkien or *Lord of the Rings*. Though Walden would *make* the film and Disney *distribute* it, this distinction was lost on many fans, as a separate thread was set up to gripe about Disney's involvement. Disney was seen to be saccharine, juvenile, and too definitively "mass" media for many at the site who found the books to be more sophisticated, dark, and elite. Yet other intertexts joined the mix, too. One poster maps out her reactions to various intertexts:

> First reaction to hearing about the film: awesome! [smiley emoticon]
> Then I hear Disney is doing the movie: oh [worried emoticon]
> Then I hear Walden is doing the film: yeah! [smiley emoticon]
> Then I see the trailer for [Walden's] Around the World in 80 Days [worried emoticon]

Andrew Adamson's selection as director, meanwhile, scared those who felt his previous films *Shrek* (2001) and *Shrek 2* (2004) were unlikely to give him the skill-set needed for a serious live-action film, though his directorial history pleased others. As the release date neared, and as *Lord of the Rings* parallels became more commonplace, so too did *Harry Potter* comparisons race back and forth. Being yet another adaptation of fantasy material by an English children's writer laid *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* squarely under the large shadow of the *Harry Potter* franchise, and thus pre-release discussion and post-release reviews often framed

Adamson's film in Potteresque terms. Even *Passion of the Christ* figured heavily in *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* viewer discussion, given that both films were Christian epics (and both contain sacrifice on Calvary scenes that many viewers found to be deeply anti-Semitic), and Tilda Swinton fans heralded in other intertextual shadows by discussing her acting and characterization in such films as the gender-bending *Orlando* (1992). *Lord of the Rings* was, therefore, only one of the intertextual framing devices behind *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*, as a huge network of intertexts and of audiences' memories of those intertexts converged on the text at hand, invoked and recommended by the paratexts of audience discussion, and making it, as Julia Kristeva argues of textuality, "an intersection of textual surfaces," not a fixed point or meaning.[18]

IMDb and fan discussion boards in general become some of the key paratexts through which many of these intertexts, links, and preferences are offered to the public, serving as the evidence of past intertextual readings at the same time as they share those readings with others. In the next chapter, I will turn to a closer examination of how audiences use paratexts to prefer and proffer their own readings and interpretations.

For the time being, though, and looking back on our research from 2001, alongside viewer responses to *King Kong* and *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*, I am also struck by how *competitive* viewers can be with their intertexts. In 2001, Tolkien fans feared that the films might usurp the books, and yet hoped that they would eclipse *Titanic*'s success. Years later, a different set of fans of the *Lord of the Rings* films prickled at the notion that either *King Kong* or *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* could "better" their beloved trilogy. And one of the IMDb reviewers of *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* notes, "As a loyal Harry Potter fan, *it pains me to say* this film totally blows all four HP films off the map" (emphasis added). Elsewhere, *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* fans have endured a long feud, their divergent textual galaxies seemingly unable to cohabit in one universe. Not only, then, do texts cast shadows, but many viewers become invested in *how much* of a shadow they cast, often wanting their own beloved text to stand tallest, basking in the light as a dominant intertext, and attempting to reduce others to the status of sequels, copies, weak paratexts, and pale comparisons. Hollywood in part conditions us to think in terms of competition via the incessant reporting of box office records and the yearly parade of Oscar, Golden Globe, BAFTA, and countless other award ceremonies, all of which often seem more important for the second-guessing and competitive cinephilia that they induce than for the actual awarding of excellence. The industry is deeply invested in encouraging

us to "vote" for our favorite films at the box office. But to reduce a battle of the intertexts to industry programming would be insulting to the intelligence of movie viewers and to the rich affective involvement inspired by well-told stories. Powerful intertexts are those that some audience members find involving and elaborate enough that they can preside over many intertextual interactions, much as the Bible or Homer (the Greek poet *or* the Simpson patriarch) have. In this regard, as much as intertextuality and paratextuality are about framing and the prefiguration of textuality, they are also about, and are motored by, fans' (and others') desires for certain texts to stay alive continuously, reflected off, informing, and inspiring all manner of other texts.

A Dark Shadow over Gotham: Batman Begins

Thus far, I have considered the role of intertexts as pre-texts primarily when they are beloved and when they have inspired fandom and significant affective investment. However, texts can also cast dark shadows when they have been panned and hated. Here, I turn to the example of *Batman and Robin* and the intertextual pall it cast over the Batman film franchise. *Batman and Robin* is by most viewers' accounts an atrociously bad film, too bad even to be camp. At IMDb, the combined ranking of over 60,000 reviewers rates *Batman and Robin* 3.4 out of 10, and as one reviewer caustically comments of director Joel Schumacher:

> He treats the entire Batman franchise like a joke. Even if it was funny, this would be betraying the name of Batman. But here, seeing as it's NOT funny, it only succeeds in becoming the worst of the Batman movies, and, arguably, the worst film ever created[. . . .] Seriously, I'd have more respect for Schumacher if I discovered that he hated Batman, and had intentionally ruined it with this garbage. Then, this might actually be just his own personal joke. Instead, it borders on a travesty of good cinema.

Of course, as the reviewer reminds us, *Batman and Robin* came in a long line of Batman comics, films, television series, and toys related to the much-revered intertext and popular hero.[19] Former Batman screenings suffered mixed reviews, with a general furor surrounding the casting of Michael Keaton for the first film in 1989, and many a fan of the dark, gritty character reinvented by Frank Miller in his 1986 graphic novel, *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, grimacing at reruns of the "BAM! KERPOW!" sixties television Batman. Thus, *Batman and Robin* came in an already-turbulent

intertextual wake. But the previous films had at least been lucrative for Time Warner, resulting in a steady pace of one film every two or three years and plenty of spinoff merchandising. *Batman and Robin*'s near-universal panning, on the heels of poor reviews for the previous entry, *Batman Forever* (1995), finally appeared to have killed the franchise altogether, even when superhero films became all the rage, with hits such as *X-Men* (2000) and *Spider-Man* (2002). Then, in 2004 came the news that Time Warner was back with Batman, having hired Christopher Nolan to direct *Batman Begins*.

The tale of *Batman Begins* is one of how to escape a dark shadow. Audience and critical reception of *Batman and Robin* had been so near-universally caustic that it had set up a strong paratextual perimeter and a flaming hoop through which any subsequent Batman text would need to pass. *Batman Begins* and Time Warner needed to apologize for *Batman and Robin* and to erase any semblance of an intertextual connection: only Batman himself could remain, albeit radically reconfigured. They also needed to create for themselves a different paratextual perimeter and invoke a different set of intertexts. With this in mind, the studio hired Nolan to write and direct. Nolan was best known for his dark and edgy work on the tale-told-backwards *Memento* (2000) and on his adaptation of the Norwegian serial killer study *Insomnia* (2002), and thus was seen as untainted by big-budget Hollywood, regarded instead as a storyteller with considerable interest in character exploration. Casting similarly sought to veer away from the A-list car crash that was *Batman and Robin*. Nolan hired as his Batman Christian Bale, an actor who had grown up on screen, yet often in independent films and/or character roles, and who was most famous for his eerie portrayal of yuppie serial killer Patrick Bateman in *American Psycho* (2000). A director of a serial killer film and the star of another serial killer film were uniting. Nolan's love of Batman in his Frank Miller–inspired Dark Knight form was widely publicized, as marketing and hiring for the film announced that this movie would be a "return" to the brooding noir aesthetic and sensibility of Batman, skipping over his cinematic and televisual history.[20]

Meanwhile, Oscar winners and highly respected "austere" actors Morgan Freeman and Michael Caine were cast, as were the well-respected Liam Neeson, Tom Wilkinson, Gary Oldman, Rutger Hauer (famous for his villain role in the noir *Blade Runner*), and, hot off their breakthrough roles in *The Last Samurai* (2003) and *28 Days Later*, respectively, Ken Watanabe and Cillian Murphy. Casting and the hiring of production personnel is a deeply intertextual act, as producers bring together a whole host

Fig. 4.1. A prone Bruce Wayne is laid low and punished by Ducard in *Batman Begins*, paying for the crimes of *Batman and Robin* while earning his right to be Batman.

of intertexts through the stars' personae and histories.[21] Many of us create images of a film and its potential based solely on our knowledge of its cast and their former roles. By marshalling a host of "serious" actors and a "serious" director, *Batman Begins* and its early hype strategically overloaded the text with intertexts that they clearly hoped would contrast markedly to the casting of the former film, signaling a new era, and that would overload the film with intertexts other than *Batman and Robin*. Certainly, Batman aside, the prospect for many filmgoers of seeing a Nolan film with Bale, Freeman, Oldman, Caine, Wilkinson, Neeson, Watanabe, Murphy, Hauer, and (for measure) Katie Holmes may have been enticing.

Aside from the pre-production of *Batman Begins*, though, it is also possible to see the weight of the *Batman and Robin* fiasco on the plot of Nolan's film. The film opens with a weary and beleaguered Bruce Wayne struggling with his playboy status and living in the shadow of his father, unable to replicate Gotham City's savior and patron saint. Wayne seeks revenge against the men he believes to be behind his parents' death, but ultimately fails, instead fleeing Gotham. We next see him in a Chinese prison, having wondered aimlessly from home, fighting anyone without concern for his life, clearly a broken man. Liam Neeson's Henri Ducard arranges his release, encouraging him to climb a nearby mountain to a training facility, where Wayne is taught to fight with precision, discipline, and purpose. When Ducard reveals his ultimate plan, to lead an army of highly trained soldiers to destroy Gotham from the inside out, Wayne burns the training facility to the ground and returns to Gotham, where he

resumes his playboy lifestyle on the outside, while developing and designing the visage of Batman to wage war on crime and to protect Gotham by night. A running theme throughout the film involves the interrogation of who one "really is on the inside" (with the suggestion that Wayne becomes Batman's mask, not vice versa).

It is easy to read this first hour of the film in the frame of *Batman and Robin*, as a sign of Wayne, Nolan, and Time Warner serving penance for the crimes of Batman's previous cinematic outing. Wayne is a soulless playboy, emblematic of the mindless Hollywood blockbuster that was *Batman and Robin*, lost and without direction, mindful only of how far he has strayed from his father's footsteps, just as the Batman franchise had left its roots and what it "should" be, with films that took away from rather than added to the diegetic world of Batman. The pre-TomKat Katie Holmes serves as moral beacon (and film critic stand-in?), telling him that he is a disappointment. And thus he, Nolan, and Time Warner cannot simply *be* Batman—they must *earn* the right. Removed from home, battered in a prison, left to climb a snow-swept mountain in prison clothes and without equipment, and forced into an arduous training regimen that frequently belittles him, Wayne appears to be paying for Time Warner's past "sins" (fig. 4.1). Fresh from his role as Jedi trainer in the *Star Wars* prequel *The Phantom Menace*, Liam Neeson is seemingly invited to reprise his character, in order to make Wayne (and hence Batman) anew, and Wayne must similarly learn from Freeman and Caine (two wise old men of the film industry) before he is "ready" to become Batman. Of course, the myth of becoming has proven popular in superhero films, but given that this was the fifth film in the franchise, the choice to return to the drawing board was by no means natural. Meanwhile, Wayne is beaten and fashioned into Batman more significantly than other superheroes, many of whom discover their powers and responsibilities quite excitedly. The film is at pains to show us that he is haunted and tortured by his past and struggling to be who he should be. Thus, when Bale finally utters, "I'm Batman," well past the hour mark of the film, he and the filmmakers have performed a long and careful cleansing ritual attempting to earn the right to make such a declaration.

Moreover, the film ends with Batman promising to look into the rise of a super-villain, The Joker. A clear allusion to an impending sequel (*The Dark Knight* [2008]), this scene is also important for its act of trying to completely erase the prior four *Batman* films from the record: the first *Batman* (1989) not only featured the villain, but famously offered Jack Nicholson in the role, and thus for *Batman Begins* to announce its

intentions to "do over" both that film and Nicholson's performance is a bold statement that a new Batman exists.

Ultimately, then, *Batman Begins* exhibits the pressure placed on a film, not just in its reception, but also in the casting, hiring, writing, performing, directing, and promotion, when a previous film and its critical panning has cast a dark shadow over it. *Batman Begins* was faced not only with the task of winning audiences, but of winning them *back*, of recalibrating its intertexts, and of reinventing Batman. Influence, allusion, and intertextual borrowing have existed in all forms of art since time immemorial, but here we see an instance of a text that potential audience members arguably *required* to speak back to its intertexts, to delineate and announce its intertextual allegiances (the comic book Dark Knight over Schumacher's Batman), and hence to pull itself out from under a given intertext's long dark shadow.

In the wake of its success and popularity, *Batman Begins* may even have taught a trick or two to the production staff behind *Superman Returns* (2006) and *Rocky Balboa* (2006), two other franchises that returned after lengthy hiatuses and dismal otherwise final chapters. *Superman Returns* forced the diegetically five-year-absent-from-Earth hero to convince Lois Lane that the world once more needed him, while simultaneously bathing itself in the more austere elements of Superman's filmic past. Promotions for the film ignored outright *Superman 3* and *Superman 4* by positing it as a sequel of sorts only to the first two films, and its teaser trailers used little more than a voiceover of Marlon Brando's instructions to Superman from the 1978 film and John Williams's famed soundtrack. For its part, *Rocky Balboa* opened with Rocky emotionally battered by the loss of Adrian. For Superman and Rocky, then, onscreen penance was also required for the sins of the intertexts.

Sharing the Island with Others: J. J. Abrams and Collective Knowledge

The above examples examine how any given film, while supposedly a singular event, is often framed and interpreted by other films, especially when it is a sequel, prequel, spinoff, adaptation, or part of a series, but also due simply to its actors or other creative personnel. If films prove to be porous entities, however, as was argued in chapter 1,[22] television shows are especially porous and open to inter- or paratextual intrusion, given that we must piece them together bit by bit over long stretches of time during

which our reading frames may change. Thus we might expect to see long shadows aplenty on television, and we might expect that some intertexts would act like reference books for television reception, continually offering ways to make sense of what is happening in the here and now. As we saw in the case of Peter Jackson as film author, television authors similarly become paratexts in their own right, constructed by the industry, creative personnel, and viewers alike as signifiers of value—as was noted in chapter 3—but also serving as interpretive decoders and frames for viewers in various ways. Over time, for instance, Jerry Bruckheimer has become shorthand in both film and television for high-concept action populated by rugged, heroic men and petite but gutsy women; David E. Kelley is known for legal dramedies with outlandish cases and often explicitly liberal politics; Dick Wolf is known for a considerably more somber, neoconservative, and morally binaristic vision of law and order; and so forth. Viewers fashion notions of authors out of their previous work, creating an author function that works as a paratext of sorts and as a mediating figure through which intertexts affect current interpretive strategies.

Such was the case for *Lost* and *Six Degrees*, two shows executive produced by J. J. Abrams. In the early days of each show, fans and other viewers congregated to make sense of them online, and there viewers of Abrams's *Alias* in the case of *Lost*, and of *Alias* and *Lost* in the case of *Six Degrees*, offered predictions and evaluations of the new show at hand based largely on Abrams's earlier work. Elsewhere in this chapter, we have already seen how the author as paratext constructs expectations for future viewing, but my interest in the case of *Lost* and *Six Degrees* lies in how, through the prominent online television discussion site *Television Without Pity*, viewers of Abrams's past shows shared various versions of the Abrams paratextual frame with non-viewers. Thus, whereas it may seem that intertexts and paratexts rely on the vagaries of a person's previous viewing experiences, the case of *Lost* and *Six Degrees* shows that through audience and non-audience discussion, paratexts can be passed on to others who do not have the same viewing experiences (at either the film/television or paratextual level), thereby extending the reach of their long shadow. Particularly in the case of *Lost*, *Alias*'s niche fan audience was able to propose and share a series of viewing strategies and expectations with the broader, more mainstream audience that greeted *Lost* in its first season.

Writing of *Twin Peaks* (1990–91) discussion groups in the Internet's early days, Henry Jenkins noted with excitement how the advent of such

groups now allowed audience researchers "to pinpoint specific moments in the shifting meanings generated by unfolding broadcast texts, to locate episodes that generated intense response or that became particularly pivotal in the fans' interpretation of the series as a whole."[23] As Stanley Fish had noted with frustration (see chapter 1), too often analysts make sense of a text in its entirety after the fact, but online fan discussion allows a running catalogue and minute-by-minute register of how meanings are circulated, how the text is being interpreted, which intertexts are invoked, and, for our purposes here, how various paratexts are being discussed and activated. This becomes increasingly important in an era in which, as Jenkins has also observed, audiences are interpreting in groups, as a "collective." Drawing on Pierre Lévy's notion of "collective intelligence,"[24] Jenkins explains:

> The fan community pools its knowledge because no single fan can know everything necessary to fully appreciate the series[. . . .] Collective intelligence expands a community's productive capacity because it frees individual members from the limitations of their memory and enables the group to act upon a broader range of expertise.[25]

Yet fans are not alone in this respect, for increasingly, all sorts of viewers regularly "lurk" at supposed "fan" discussion groups, peeking to see what has been said or thought by others, and dipping into this collective knowledge. Hence, though till now this chapter's discussion of intertextuality, paratextuality, and interpretation may have implied a fairly personal, individualistic process of reception, such sites show us how quickly paratexts can spread through talk, making both reception and paratextuality deeply communal processes.

From its beginning in 2004, *Lost* seemingly demanded talk. A genre-bending program, *Lost* opens with a plane crash on a remote South Pacific island. As the survivors gather their wits, they become aware that a strange creature lives in the jungle. Then, as the show develops, viewers learn of a mysterious hatch on the island, leading to a research station, of a series of "cursed" numbers that have caused problems for the "Lostaways," and of a strange group of "Others" on the island who occasionally kidnap, study, and/or kill members of the group. All the while, each episode offers a flashback to the pre-crash lives of one of the characters (or, later, a flash forward to the post-rescue lives), hence adding a chronological element to the already firmly packed mystery. Given this

plethora of perplexing plot points and the lack of any definitive answer from the show to its many mysteries, many viewers of *Lost*, as did *Twin Peaks* viewers before them, have turned to the Internet and to others for help. Particularly in the show's early days, though, significant discussion and puzzle-solving at *Television Without Pity* revolved around mobilizing the author function that is Abrams and the intertext of his previous show, *Alias*.

   Alias had involved a convoluted mystery surrounding a series of "Rimbaldi artifacts," and thus many fans posited that the set-up and resolution of the Rimbaldi mystery on *Alias* might offer the key to interpreting *Lost*. To begin with, some floated the idea that the two shows might literally be connected, offering, for instance, "Perhaps [the] Island is the Horizon or part of Rimbaldi's artifacts." But beyond such suggestions—often more whimsical than serious—many *Alias* viewers waded into ongoing debates about *Lost*, using *Alias* scripting as evidence of what to expect. Thus, when fans had heard that the show was due to kill off a character, and speculation had turned to its being Charlie, one poster offered, "I've yet to see JJ actually kill off a main character (but please correct me if I'm wrong)." Or, in response to numerous fan suggestions that the Island might be Purgatory, or that the events may otherwise be interpreted within a religious framework, another poster insisted, "I highly doubt that this is what Abrams and Co. are trying to do, because the only 'religious' stuff that they've adhered to in the past is the imaginary Rimbaldi stuff on *Alias*." *Alias*'s use of the occult and mysterious Rimbaldi figure (a sort of Da Vinci meets Nostradamus) led many to look for or expect such thematic crafting on *Lost*. Other posters joined in by noting the presence of supposed Abrams "issues," such as one character's "Daddy Issues," or the love triangle between three others, and both cases required elaboration upon how *Alias* (and Abrams's earlier *Felicity*) might give clues regarding how such issues would be resolved. Frequently, such posts were met with curious replies, by those who had not watched *Alias*, and often lengthy explanations of intricate plot points from *Alias* followed, as posters worked to create a "collective intelligence" with fellow viewers, bringing them up to speed with Abrams's history and intertextual resonance. As Virginia Nightingale has noted, "The text, as work, has a finite quality[. . . .] But there is another text, just as important but infinitely more elusive. It is the text which lives in the community of its users and which 'enters into life.'"[26] Here we can see the second text forming.

Abrams and *Alias* further served to worry many *Lost* fans, who saw *Alias* as having "jumped the shark" with its overelaborate mysteries and prolonged failure to offer answers, and thus this framework was imposed on *Lost*. Early in *Television Without Pity*'s *Alias* deliberations, one poster noted, "If I hear one thing which remotely resembles 'Milo Rimbaldi,' I swear I'm going to shoot someone," clearly signaling intertextually inspired fear. Another echoed that "the [cursed] numbers are going to be *Lost*'s Rimbaldi," implying that the show was headed for doom. A third complained:

> "The Swan" and "The Dharma Initiative": Have you learnt NOTHING from doing those horrendous storylines—Rimbaldi and now Prophet Five (pardon if I got the names wrong. I really hate Alias and so obviously know nothing) on Alias? Does that mean Lost would turn into a show like Alias? I'm really scared now.

More generally, multiple posters expressed dismay that they cared about *Lost* and its mysteries but felt that *Alias*'s (to them) overdrawn process of revealing its own answers meant that they may be problem-solving in vain, since "Abrams and Co." may not even have answers to give. Interestingly, though, as is hinted at in the above non-*Alias*-fan quote, through *Alias* fans' drawings of intertextual links, many non-*Alias* viewers were able (and *encouraged*) to work with such intertexts themselves. Here, then, we see the construction of interpretive communities, and the establishment of communal paratextual frames, as viewers share not only viewing experiences but interpretive strategies based on these experiences.

Two years later, when *Six Degrees* was released, again we had an ABC and J. J. Abrams show that attracted viewer speculation based on *Lost* and *Alias*. By this point, some viewers had given up hope that Abrams could ever be trusted to provide answers, or to sustain a show, so that one poster, for instance, griped, "I'm digging this show. I probably shouldn't since [. . .] Abrams is good at creating compelling TV, but sucks at sustaining it. (Everything he touches seems to collapse within two seasons)." Another vented, "If we're supposed to believe that the interconnectiveness [between characters] is meaningful—then I think we'll be disappointed because—hello! JJ Abrams!!" A third noted, "I'm dying to know what's up with Mae though, but knowing JJ, I'll be probably finding out in S[eason] 2." Meanwhile, those for whom *Lost* and/or *Alias* were not worrying intertexts once again invoked Rimbaldi, and now the numbers or the hatch

from *Lost*, to make sense of a character's mysterious box, and they culled information from *Lost*'s interconnecting flashbacks to make sense of *Six Degrees*' fondness for interconnection and serendipity. Some posters even bypassed *Lost* and *Alias* to return to Abrams's *Felicity* or looked to his concurrent *What About Brian?* (2006–7) to enable a whole different set of intertexts of urban romance, not otherworldly mystery. Once more, too, the viewer discussion online often involved significant attempts to provide an interpretive decoder for those who had not seen the earlier show(s).

Considerable irony exists in the *Lost* and *Six Degrees* postings, given that, despite being an executive producer of both shows, Abrams was by most insider accounts only tangentially involved in either. As *Lost*'s star rose in popular culture, increasingly it became known as the product of Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, not Abrams, and as *Six Degrees* plummeted, Abrams can be thankful that the press was careful to spell out his lack of involvement. At the time of these postings, Abrams was a strong paratext, even though, in retrospect, his previous work was unlikely to provide answers to how these shows' writers and active producers scripted or planned their series. Watching *Lost* or *Six Degrees* through an Abrams filter would likely have proved unhelpful and misleading. Thus, as was seen with the *Six Degrees* hype and the American *Sweet Hereafter* trailer in chapter 2, paratexts can often lead audiences down blind alleys, and should by no means be considered inherently helpful, just as not every clue that detectives find at a crime scene will aid their investigation. Nevertheless, beyond appraisal of the relative helpfulness of Abrams as paratext lies the fact that viewers not only used them but circulated them to others, creating a perimeter and airlock around the new shows, and proposing set frames of interpretation and decoding.

Managing the Textual Realm

As this case renders clear, paratextuality and intertextuality are not always self-motoring systems. Harold Bloom has written of influence as requiring a text to engage in an Oedipal battle with its forefathers and predecessors,[27] but like numerous literary studies theorists of influence and intertextuality,[28] Bloom sees the intertextual paths and connections between texts as obvious, self-evident, and unavoidable. At times, Bloom is bound to be correct: sequels with numbers, for instance, implore us to consider the former (leading to the apocryphal story that Alan Bennett's play *The Madness of King George III* lost its roman numerals when adapted into a

film [1994], lest audience members be concerned that they had not seen the first two films!). Or, even more obviously, adaptations hit us over the head with intertexts, so that presumably few needed tipping off that *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* was based on Tolkien's hugely popular book of the same name. However, beyond the simple and obvious intertexts lie a vast realm of other intertexts that any given viewer can reference, and it is paratexts that quite often manage this realm. Intertextuality can play a determinative role in textual reception, and paratexts frequently conjure up and summon intertexts. Hence, the collective intelligence of an online discussion board could inform a would-be *Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* viewer that Disney was behind it, that director Andrew Adamson had previously directed *Shrek* and *Shrek 2*, that Tilda Swinton had been in *Orlando*, that the lion would be voiced by *Phantom Menace* and *Batman Begins* guru figure Liam Neeson, or that they should watch for biblical imagery. So too could reviews, previews, interviews, or any other paratext share such information, and in so doing, invoke intertexts, pointing to all manner of long shadows. As such, paratexts are not only forms of intertextuality, but they can control the menu of intertexts that audiences will consult or employ when watching or thinking about a text.

This chapter has involved consulting sites of audience discussion, both as a sounding board for how viewers are using and constructing texts, intertexts, and paratexts, but also as paratexts themselves. Inevitably, though, once one consults audience discussion, one starts to see both how radically and how subtly it can toggle, dismantle, or revise the careful planning of Hollywood's textual systems. At one level, this should remind us that any film or program's paratexts are no less contingent on the peculiarities of reception than are the films or programs themselves, and that the film and television industries' paratexts must always compete with other interpretive communities and modes of reception already under way. At another level, it also highlights the need to examine in greater detail viewer-created paratexts and their own intricate constructions of the text, a task to which chapter 5 now turns its attention.

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5

Spoiled and Mashed Up
Viewer-Created Paratexts

Many of the examples and case studies presented so far in this book examine industry-created paratexts, from hype and marketing, to spinoffs, to introductory sequences. However, audiences create paratexts too, and while they commonly lack the capital and infrastructure to circulate their paratexts as widely—or at least as uniformly—as can Hollywood, their creative and discursive products can and often do become important additions to a text. In its most common form, this audience paratextuality occurs anytime two or more people discuss a film or television program, but audience paratextuality also includes criticism and reviews, fan fiction, fan film and video (vids), "filk" (fan song), fan art, spoilers, fan sites, and many other forms. Type the name of almost any popular film or television program into Google, and beyond the first two or three links for official, industry-created paratexts, one will likely find several if not hundreds or thousands of pages with various forms of audience-created paratexts. In this chapter, I turn to the role that audience-created paratexts play in challenging or supplementing those created by the industry, in creating their own genres, genders, tones, and styles, and in carving out alternative pathways through texts.

I begin with a brief discussion of fan studies' wealth of material on more explicitly antagonistic paratexts, by way of underlining that my interests in this chapter do not reflect the totality of viewer-end paratexts, only one variety. Subversive fan fiction has attracted many a case study, but other viewer-paratexts—particularly spoilers and vids—remain relatively underexplored. My first case study draws on a survey Jason Mittell and I conducted to discover why *Lost* fans who read spoilers of upcoming events on the show enjoy doing so. Mittell and I initially approached the spoiler fans as an oddity, not understanding why they would ruin a good mystery by "cheating" and reading ahead, but we came to see that

the circulation and creation of spoilers helped many of those fans to en-gage with *Lost* on their own terms. The spoilers as paratexts helped carve a more personalized route through the text. This notion of carving out a particular route through a text is also central to my next case study, as I examine fan-made "vids" of popular film and television programs. Focus-ing on character study and relationship vids, I look at their capacity to create a reflective space in which viewers can engage more closely with the psyches, motivations, and specificities of multiple characters than they might be able to in the films or programs themselves.

However, to talk of viewer-end paratexts such as spoilers or vids is to talk of lesser-known paratexts—indeed, while I do not doubt that my readers are familiar with trailers, bonus materials, and sequels, for in-stance, I expect that at least some may be unfamiliar with even the terms "spoiler" and "vid," let alone with specific examples. Thus, toward the end of the chapter, I discuss the key issue of paratextual privilege—who gets to make them, and who has the power to circulate their own readings and versions of the text en masse. While the cases of spoilers or vids con-trast obviously with the industry-produced paratexts discussed in chap-ters 2–4, chapter 5's final case study turns to the more liminal example of press reviews. Mass-circulated via newspapers or prominent websites such as *Slate* or *Salon*, press reviews are written by relative insiders who have been allowed advance copies of shows, and yet they are also writ-ten outside a studio marketing team's immediate sphere of influence. As such, they enjoy peculiar powers of being able to set up initial frames for viewing—working as an anti-trailer—and to establish value—working as an anti–bonus material. I examine these in relation to numerous reviews for the debut episodes of NBC's *Friday Night Lights*. Throughout this and the other case studies, chapter 5 looks at viewer-end paratexts as traces of an individual's or a community's strategies of reading, as tools for better realizing those strategies, and as frames for others to use.

Viewer Cartographies, Routes, and Marginalia

As a wealth of fan studies literature has argued, fan-created paratexts can facilitate resistance to the meanings proffered by media firms through their own texts and paratexts. The products of fan creativity can chal-lenge a text's industry-preferred meanings by posing their own alternate readings and interpretive strategies.[1] Similarly, fan and audience discus-sion alone can become a strong paratext, as was examined in the previous

chapter. As Henry Jenkins argued in his seminal account of television fan-
dom, *Textual Poachers*, through fan activities and practices, fans "cease to
be simply an audience for popular texts; instead, they become active par-
ticipants in the construction and circulation of textual meaning," and they
"actively struggle with and against the meanings imposed upon them by
their borrowed materials."[2] As have numerous subsequent fan researchers,
Jenkins analyzed the social process of meaning construction that occurs
in fandom, whereby a significant portion of a text's value comes from how
it is used. Matt Hills notes that "the fan's act of appropriation of a text is
therefore an act of 'final consumption' which pulls this text away from (in-
tersubjective and public) exchange-value and towards (private, personal)
use value, but without ever cleanly or clearly being able to separate out
the two."[3] But fan appropriations are also acts of creation and production
that are frequently communal by nature. Challenging this notion of the
individual fan's "final consumption," Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse
write of the process by which fan communities distill a version (or ver-
sions) of the text—the "fantext"—that includes fan additions to the world
(not just "canon" but "fanon" too, source and fan paratexts), so that the
multitude of fan-created stories and variations therein becomes

> a work in progress insofar as it remains open and is constantly increas-
> ing; every new addition changes the entirety of interpretations. By look-
> ing at the combined fantext, it becomes obvious how fans' understanding
> of the source is always already filtered through the interpretations and
> characterizations existing in the fantext. In other words, the community
> of fans creates a communal (albeit contentious and contradictory) inter-
> pretation in which a large number of potential meanings, directions, and
> outcomes co-reside.[4]

Fan discussion of the text, as well as further fan creativity, will hence often
prove as aware of the limitations placed on interpretation as of the scope
for creative expansion provided by earlier fannish interpretive retoolings
of the fantext.[5]

If we analyze Jenkins's key metaphor for fan practice, borrowed from
Michel de Certeau's discussion of the practice of reading in general, the
notion of "poaching" suggests the complicated nature of cultural con-
sumption.[6] Whereas crude ideas of passive, mindless audiences deal only
with the territory on which consumption takes place, Jenkins demands
a human geography of consumption, realizing that just as understanding

the life of a nation requires more than lists of longest rivers and tallest mountains alongside pretty cartography, so too must textual analysis at some point take account of the readers who populate the text. Within this schema, we might regard paratexts as citizen-made structures that similarly change the nature of the geography, and that must be accounted for.

Much early fan studies work exhibited particular interest in fan activity that repurposed or resisted the territory. Constance Penley wrote of fans as giving a text a vigorous massage that might hurt but is best for it in the long run,[7] while Jenkins wrote of how fans treated the text like silly putty, "stretching its boundaries to incorporate their concerns, remolding its characters to better suit their desires."[8] Fan fiction, for instance, has been seen as a paratext with which fans can repurpose characters, whether by adding reflection on issues absent from the show, expanding the generic repertoire of the show (adding romance to science fiction, for instance), or multiple other strategies that reclaim ownership of the text, its characters, and its meanings. Fan creativity can work as a powerful in medias res paratext, grabbing a story or text in midstream and directing its path elsewhere, or forcing the text to fork outward in multiple directions.

However, in part because multiple fan studies have already mapped lines of textual resistance and rebellion, in this chapter I am particularly interested in paratexts that do not so much work against a show or radically alter the text as much as they invite increased attention to a given plot, character, relationship, or mode of viewing. On one level, viewer-created paratexts are pre-constituted audience research, providing evidence of how viewers make sense of texts. Just as H. J. Jackson notes of studying marginalia in books, paratexts reveal how text and viewer fashion themselves in relation to one another: "A marked or annotated book," Jackson notes, "traces the development of the reader's self-definition in and by relation to the text. Perhaps all readers experience this process; annotators keep a log."[9] On another level, though, since many paratexts are shared with others, a close study of viewer-paratexts can reveal ways in which *communities* of audiences interact with and thereby create texts, not just ways in which individuals fashion them. By nature of its popularity, any popular text must have popular meaning, which in turn means that viewer-created paratexts will surround the text. Those paratexts may echo industry-created paratexts, but they might also, as I will examine here, call for subtle changes in interpretation, valuing the text's various elements differently from industry-created paratexts, and opening up new

paths of understanding. Just as outright subversive readings of a film or television program destabilize the show as center of meaning, so too do supplemental paratexts challenge the primacy of the show.

No Crying over a Spoiled Lost *(with Jason Mittell)*

One such supplemental paratext is the spoiler. Spoilers include any information about what will happen in an ongoing narrative that is provided before the narrative itself gets there. To tell someone who will die on next week's show, what a film's key plot twist is, or what to expect next is to "spoil" the person and/or text. Spoilers can result from some viewers seeing a film or program before others, or from information gleaned through back channels that stands to spoil viewers ahead of time. Given different audiences' uneven paces of progress through many ongoing narratives, spoilers have become an increasingly touchy subject in today's media environment, as some producers have gone to inordinate levels of secrecy to protect news of what comes next, and as fans (or anti-fans) circulate spoilers to a mixture of chagrin, annoyance, disinterest, and enthusiasm. While movies with twists, such as the works of M. Night Shyamalan, or *The Crying Game* (1992), *Planet of the Apes* (1968), or *Soylent Green* (1973), stand out as particularly vulnerable to spoiling, serial television and film have also attracted a spoiler entourage, with their own dedicated websites, such as spoilerfix.com, and their own dedicated sections of fan sites.

As a mysterious show in which few solid answers exist as to why the characters are where they are, who can be trusted, and so forth, *Lost* has a particularly active spoiler fandom online and offline. Spoilers for *Lost* range from leaked plot points, leaked clues, leaked photos of filming, casting information, and plenty of "foilers" (fake spoilers) too. Precisely because *Lost*'s pleasures would seem to rely so heavily upon the enjoyment of its suspense and mystery elements, spoilers would seem to "ruin" *Lost* (hence their name: spoilers). Thus, in 2006, Jason Mittell and I set out with the challenge of working out why people would actively seek out spoilers, and what these paratexts did for or to their consumption of the show.

We approached the topic as outsiders, given that neither of us enjoyed spoilers, yet both of us greatly enjoyed *Lost*. To understand the spoiler world better, we designed an anonymous online survey addressing these issues[10] and posted an invitation to participate on five discussion boards (televisionwithoutpity.com; lost-forum.com; thefuselage.com; abc.com;

losttv-forum.com) and one listserver (LostGame@yahoogroups.com) dedicated to *Lost* and frequently the site of spoiler threads and discussions. Here, I summarize that research. The survey clearly attracted interest from the show's dedicated fanbase: within a week, 228 people visited the survey, with 179 completing at least half of its questions. Around 80 percent of respondents identified themselves as American, with seventeen other countries represented in the survey. Sixty percent of respondents were female, and respondents' ages ranged from eighteen to fifty-four, with a mean age of twenty-nine and median of twenty-seven. The survey combined open-ended questions with more guided choice questions, with topics ranging from the specific pleasures offered by *Lost* to the ethical implications of spoiling. While the invitation did not explicitly indicate that the survey focused on spoilers, as we wished to gather data from viewers who consume them and those who avoid them, the majority of respondents did indicate that they consume spoilers to some degree—37 percent frequently consume spoilers, 32 percent sometimes read them, and 14 percent both consume and disseminate them online, with only 16 percent of respondents indicating that they avoid spoilers as much as possible. Although this should not be mistaken for an accurate portrait of the spoiling tendency of all *Lost* fans, or even those who frequent online discussion boards, clearly a good number of active *Lost* fans engage in spoiler consumption.

In conducting this study, one of the few existing studies of spoiler fans that we had to work with was Henry Jenkins's analysis of *Survivor* (2000–) spoiling communities who research where the show is filming and who gets voted off when, and then post this material online. Jenkins's work poses spoiler fans as resistive, engaged in "a giant cat and mouse game that is played between the producers and the audience."[11] *Survivor* producer Mark Burnett, known to some fans as "evil pecker Mark," tries to hide his reality set and the elimination order, while "brain trusts" of fans pit their skills against his. Jenkins's study posits these spoiler fans as often working against the pleasures of the show, resisting both it and the creator, and as regarding their activities as a game unto itself, a contest between fans and producers. The fans develop "collective intelligence" and enjoy the communal relations of the spoiler-circulating community, but there is little sense of them engaging in reading and/or circulating spoilers as a way to enjoy *Survivor* itself. In short, their pleasures seem largely external to the show, even if they rely upon its existence. By contrast, our sense was that *Lost* spoiler readers often cared deeply about the show, and this

sense was quickly borne out by the data. Few if any spoiler readers pitted themselves against executive producers Damon Lindelof and Carlton Cuse, most were avid viewers, and little comment was made of the joys of the spoiler-circulating community. In other words, every sign pointed toward these fans using spoilers as a way of getting *into* the text.

While Mittell and I have published a fuller-length version of our research findings elsewhere, here I am interested in how spoilers worked as paratexts that negotiated particular ways of reading the text, not necessarily resistive but still less than normative. Given *Lost*'s frequent use of suspense, one might expect that viewers enjoy being surprised, experiencing a fresh plot that grabs them unaware, and that they are likely to focus primarily on plot developments as the source of narrative originality and pleasure. Our research, though, suggested that spoilers allowed some fans to experience the program in other ways, and that the practice of spoiler reading also rendered clear other appeals to this text in particular and to narrative consumption more generally.

First off, we hypothesized that spoiler fans might enjoy spoilers because they preferred to watch in-the-know and were more comfortable with seeing the known than the unknown. A second and accompanying hypothesis was that spoiler fans see the revelatory aspect of the plotline and pleasures of suspense as relatively unimportant, obscuring more enjoyable textual qualities that they seek out, such as narrative mechanics, relationship dramas, and production values. Martin Barker has argued that media studies have been wholly biased toward the specificities of plot, but in doing so have often taken their eyes off other elements of textuality.[12] The normative judgment of spoilers as "ruining" texts stems from this bias, but as Laura Carroll provocatively argues, the underlying assumption behind spoiler avoiding "doesn't imply much respect for anything that a fiction might offer you except abrupt and sensational narrative developments, or much long-term durability of a story. [. . .] A well-constructed story will stand up to decades of use and abuse, won't it?"[13] Carroll reasons that literature professors have long "spoiled" texts in their classes without concern for actually ruining the text, precisely because a text is about more than just surprises and plot-twists. In fact, the long history of storytelling suggests that unspoiled narratives are far less common than spoiled ones—from *Oedipus Rex* to *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Odyssey* to any historical narrative, many of our culture's most revered stories are "spoiled" from the outset. Meanwhile, Derek Kompare observes that much of television is reruns, sometimes new to any given viewer, but sometimes

not,[14] while Barbara Klinger notes that favorite movies are often watched again and again, whether on DVDs or on television,[15] meaning that consumption of the familiar often constitutes a considerable portion of our narrative engagements.

The survey data proved less conclusive for the first hypothesis, but stronger for the second. Many *Lost* fans still clearly enjoyed the suspense, with 90 percent selecting "I enjoy the suspenseful plot" as a reason for watching, and 24 percent listing this as their primary pleasure. However, echoing Carroll's commentary, one spoiler fan wrote, "The initial shock value may be ruined, but if a drama has nothing else to offer then it isn't worth watching in the first place." While such outright dismissal of shock was rare among respondents, many clearly allowed their foreknowledge of events to attune their viewing to other pleasures of the text. Spoiler fans noted that knowing what will happen does not take away from their enjoyment of the show's performances, dialogue, production values, humorous moments, and focus on character relationships and development. As one fan wrote, "The words of a quickly written spoiler don't do justice to the actual episode." For some, the reduction of suspense enables greater attention to these details, and even enables a level of emotional connection with characters—one fan wrote that he used spoilers to avoid investing his attention in relationships or characters that are doomed. Thus, for some, learning the events of an episode in advance can yield greater access to the show's other pleasures, allowing them to avoid being distracted by the moment-to-moment suspense. Mittell has argued that a key pleasure for many viewers of narratively complex television lies in the "operational aesthetic," whereby viewers are encouraged to watch the gears of the storytelling machinery while being taken for a ride.[16] For spoiler fans, having already discovered what will happen freed them to concentrate on the formal pleasures of innovative narration and inventive presentation. As one respondent wrote, "It's like reading a book and then watching the movie even when you know the ending."

Spoiler fans were often quick to point out that spoilers reveal the "what" but not the "how," and in doing so sidestep the risks of "ruining" the plot while increasing anticipation. As one respondent offered:

> When the Losties are going to discover something new about the island, and I already know about it, I still want to know HOW they find out. It's still just as exciting, if not more so, to see how they're going to come upon it. For instance, I knew about the Black Rock, and that it was a

boat, before they found it. But that didn't really TELL me anything about it, or why a boat would be in the middle of the jungle. It was even MORE mysterious to KNOW the "answer." That's why Lost is so fun, even with some spoilers.

Here, this respondent reverses commonsense logic regarding spoilers, arguing that they improve, rather than ruin, his experience of the text by focusing his attention on the unfolding story and its telling. Spoilers work to help fans concentrate on what they consider the most important elements of the show. *Lost*'s flashbacks, large cast size, complex narrative, and multiple concurrent mysteries clearly confuse—or at least run the risk of confusing—many viewers, and these viewers spoke of spoilers as focusing their viewing. Spoilers are enjoyable, noted one woman, "because you can pick up on subtle hints and clues between characters, and know what it means," while another talked of the "peace of mind of not having to take all info in at once." We might therefore draw a parallel to another established form of spoiler: study guide summaries of literary texts such as CliffsNotes. Like *Lost* spoilers, CliffsNotes allow a window into future narrative occurrences, so that the individual reader can follow ongoing events more easily: for instance, knowing that Magwitch funds Pip's rise to wealth in *Great Expectations* foregrounds themes of redemption that one may otherwise miss. As such, spoiler fans may not use spoilers to "skip ahead" as much as to "catch up" as they are watching, or to appreciate the fullness of a scene or episode's narrative dynamics. "They give me an idea," wrote one fan, "of what to look for in an action filled show like *Lost*."

Another reason for enjoying spoilers that revealed itself was that many saw *Lost* as a giant puzzle, and their primary interest lay in solving the puzzle rather than in following the plot in linear fashion. *Lost*, after all, is already a slippery, "messy" text[17] that tells its story across time, with the present of the island, flashbacks, and (though not used when we released our survey) flash forwards. Watching requires that viewers piece together information from an erratically drawn timeline. Meanwhile, through the show's transmedia strategies, which have included embedding potential secrets in alternate reality games (ARGs), jigsaw puzzles, a multitude of websites, and spinoff novels, *Lost* has already challenged its own textual boundaries, actively inviting fans to look for clues outside of the program itself.[18] If we think of *Lost* less like a conventional story and more like a puzzle or game, spoilers become appreciably more legitimate:

in attempting to solve any large-scale puzzle or game, players are encouraged to gather as much information and research as possible, not relying on one limited source. Moreover, given that spoiler sources are not always reliable, especially with both production staff and fans circulating foilers to dupe fans, rarely can fans rely on spoilers being accurate, thus rendering them yet one more piece of evidence to consider in fan speculations. Spoilers, as one fan noted, "intensify the mystery-solving aspect of the show"; another offered, "Spoilers make the difference between informed speculation and crackpot theories"; and a third said that she reads spoilers "to find clues to the game." For most spoiler fans, spoilers rarely foreclosed the text's meaning, much less its mysteries; instead, many talked of spoilers *adding* to the mysteries, so that "you find out one thing, but there are 10 new things that pop up from it." Typical spoilers may point to little pieces of the show's major enigmas, but rarely provide information that would reveal the larger mystery of the island. One fan wrote, "I like to know what questions or puzzles will be solved, but not what the *answers* will be"; as did many others, this fan saw spoilers as creating as many questions as they answer, and as enhancing the terrain for speculation about the general puzzle surrounding *Lost*.

Granted, not all shows or films are puzzles, and thus spoilers will work differently for different shows or films, with this study only examining one case that is not necessarily representative. But the audience members who responded to our survey clearly used spoilers to open up the text in ways that were meaningful for them, just as will spoiler fans for any text, even if in starkly different ways. In the case of *Lost* or other shows, paratexts manage the text, allowing fans to make of it what they want rather than simply follow a normative plot-centric approach.

A final way in which they used spoilers as paratexts, we observed, was to take control of their emotional responses and pleasures of anticipation, creating suspense on viewers' own terms rather than the creators'. On one level, spoilers serve to stoke the fires of anticipation for fans, working much as trailers and previews do for continuing texts (indeed, as some respondents felt, "next week on"–style trailers can be seen as industry-circulated spoilers). On another level, though, reading spoilers and debriefing them with friends proved a way of satisfying one's cravings to know what's happening. Serial television comes to us slowly, with weeks or even month-long hiatuses separating episode from episode. In this intervening time, then, spoilers can step in and fill the gaps with textuality. While the show is absent from the scene, the text nevertheless lives on through

the paratext (as will be discussed further in chapter 6). While spoilers do not outright cure the desire to reach the next episode, they help reduce anticipation between installments by reducing narrative suspense and giving fans a focus for their speculation, theorizing, and anticipation. Rather than obsessing over this week's cliffhanger, spoiler fans can attend to larger narrative issues and work on piecing together the big picture. And it is in such moments that the blurred line between text and paratext becomes particularly evident. Spoiler fans attempt to eliminate their undesirable anticipation for the next episode by reading spoilers, thereby creating a new form of anticipation for the pre-viewed events while watching each show. Spoilers, as such, become an intrinsic part of the text as experienced by the spoiler reader: the paratext allows a certain type of reading of the text, and in doing so becomes an inseparable part of the text, and a mediator of the spoiler reader's interactions with and reactions to the text.

While we began our project trying to make sense of the unknown, we came to realize the mediating role that spoilers, as paratexts, play in allowing viewers to find their own routes through *Lost*. Of course, the split side to this is that spoiler *avoiders* consciously keep their distance in order to maintain their different routes through *Lost*. From this example, then, one can see how varying paratexts can be consumed, dabbled in, and/or actively avoided as a way to chart different paths through a text, and/or as a way to open up texts to other consumptive pleasures. In this case, we saw that while a good story can be a well-told tale, it can also be a puzzle and a challenge, an object to be marveled at (directing focus to the well-told tale's actual *telling*), a familiar space, a complex network to be mapped, and a site to stimulate both discussion and the proliferation of textuality. Our choice of which paratexts to consume, and which paratexts to create, lets us work out what we want to do with any given tale before us.

"The Ultimate Close Reading":
Vidding Character and Relationship Studies

Earlier, I noted a parallel between media paratexts and the marginalia in library books. But surely all of us have had the experience of marveling at marginalia in a library book that made us wonder to what purpose the "vandal" was using the text. When placing books on reserve in my university library for students in a class, I have at times felt the need to instruct the students to ignore the underlinings when the scribbler clearly

followed a different path through the text than I wish my students to take. In short, I must plead for them to ignore the paratexts, lest their experience of the text be one that will not help them in my class. Likewise, I have at times hesitated to lend books to a friend, afraid that my own marginalia will betray my odd reading of these texts. And Jackson's careful study of marginalia takes as its data numerous books with famous marginalia writers, noting the titillating nature of reading someone else's marginalia, and thereby gaining a window into their own experience of a text. In a similar manner, all viewer-created paratexts can work as highlighters and underliners, plotting a course through a narrative and leaving tracks for others to follow. To highlight or to underline is to annotate, to choose a specific route through a text. To produce a paratext of any sort is similarly to engage in such route-making.

I have argued that spoilers show how some viewers experience the narrative as a whole. But paratexts can also draw our attention to specific characters and relationships, "highlighting" their path through a tale, and thereby drawing our attention to their peculiarities. In few sites is this process as obvious as in the thriving art form of fan vidding. Vids are music videos, usually made with a selection of clips from a given film or program that the vidder painstakingly juxtaposes with the lyrics of a background song in order to offer an interpretation of and/or argument regarding that show. To the newbie eye, vids can appear somewhat trailer-ish, with rapid-fire and (for the better ones) polished editing; however, with the exception of "recruiter vids," their primary purpose is to comment upon the show, not to sell it per se, and since they are song-length, they usually provide room for a more sustained examination of a show than do trailers. As editing software becomes cheaper and more user-friendly, an increasing number of fans are trying their hand at the art form, circulating their creations within interpersonal fan networks, via imeem (www.imeem.com), YouTube, personal websites, and/or at fan conventions, including Vividcon, an annual vidder convention.[19] Multiple styles and genres of vids exist, but in this section I wish to examine several vids' character and relationship studies and the ways in which these ask the viewer to engage with those characters and relationships.

Vidders Wolfling and Magpie offer a particularly effective character- and relationship-study in "Winter." Set to the slow and mournful song of the same title by Tori Amos, "Winter" edits together footage from the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy that follows Éowyn and her uncle Théoden. Éowyn has a few key moments in the films, most notably when she slays a

Fig. 5.1. Wolfling and Magpie accompany a clip from *The Two Towers* of a solitary and pensive Éowyn with lyrics that suggest her loneliness.

ringwraith in *Return of the King*, but it is otherwise somewhat easy to lose sight of her amidst the multiple other characters and storylines. However, "Winter" studies her relationship with her uncle, a character who we first meet in *The Two Towers* as a decrepit old king under the spell of the wizard Saruman. The vid focuses on tender moments when she tends to her uncle, and shows her as very much alone in Théoden's cold, wintery hall, especially following the loss of her brother (fig. 5.1). The song lyrics ask Éowyn on Théoden's behalf, "When you gonna love you as much as I do?" yet the vid shows no outward sign of his love, instead showing the niece care more for her uncle, and showing her cope on her own as those lyrics announce, "I hear a voice, / 'you must learn to stand up for yourself, / 'Cause I can't always be around.'" Then, when Gandalf frees Théoden from the curse, we are invited to see his return through Éowyn's eyes: where the scene is notable in the film almost solely for the editing and makeup that shows him lose many years of wrinkles before our eyes, the pathos of the song ("I tell you that I'll always want you near, / You say that things change my dear") and the focus on Éowyn now recontextualize the scene as deeply touching for her.

Yet despite the lyrics' brief mention of melting Winter, the joy is similarly brief. Théoden is still distant, as he must bury his nephew, then lead his men and (unknown to him) his niece into battle. As one watches his preparations for battle, one gets the sense of an uncle and niece who are unable to communicate, yet who are, or at least could be, each other's closest companions. Finally, Théoden is mortally wounded on the

battlefield, leaving Éowyn to avenge him. Wolfling and Magpie match this act of vengeance to a faster-paced section of the song and show us the uncle and niece's brief moment of togetherness before his death; however, the song's eventual return to a slower, sad pace once more suggests a pervasive loneliness, or Winter, for Éowyn. The song lyrics that "things are gonna change so fast" serve only as a taunt, as little changes for the character. Thus in six minutes, Wolfling and Magpie succeed in providing a masterful, detailed character study of Éowyn that matches the lyrics to a tee. The vid invites viewers to contemplate the character, her motivations, and her relationship with her uncle, and allows viewers the time and reflective space to do so that the films never truly provide. Éowyn is one of only three substantive female characters in the trilogy, too, so this act of highlighting her and her story tries to carve out space for a female character and journey in what can otherwise be quite the boy's story and world, and for readers to appreciate the depths of this character.

Another character and relationship study vid by Wolfling, "Sick Cycle Carousel," examines the anger and rage of Anakin and Luke Skywalker in the *Star Wars* films, and Obi-Wan Kenobi's own entrapment within that cycle using the Lifehouse song of that title. Although this vid focuses on three characters that are at the center of the *Star Wars* trilogies, its deft act of collating and juxtaposing many of the films' scenes of Skywalker anger and of Skywalker–Kenobi conflict invites viewers to contemplate Luke's, Anakin's, and Obi-Wan's inner psyches arguably more than do the films. Moreover, as does "Winter," it provides space for the reflection upon these psyches. The title of the piece immediately suggests a pattern of cyclical rage, as do Lifehouse's alternative rock sound and lyrics about an unhealthy relationship and the singer's struggle to end it:

> So when will this end?
> It goes on and on
> And over and over and over again
> Keep spinning around
> I know that it won't stop
> Till I step down from this for good.

Yet gradually we see Luke and Anakin triumph over this rage, and thus where the films contextualize Anakin's eventual, dying act of heroism in macro terms, as saving the universe and defeating its prime evil, "Sick

Cycle Carousel" contextualizes his triumph as a personal and familial one, a last-ditch attempt to end the "sick cycle" that has enveloped him and his son.

This ability of vids to drill deep into a character's psyche leads to many of the form's better offerings. For instance, while the show *Dexter* is remarkable for being one of the few on television to study one character's psyche in depth, and for using voiceover from Michael C. Hall and flashbacks to open the character's mind up to the viewer, Luminosity's vid "Blood Fugue" arguably opens that mind up yet further. Drawing heavily from clips at the end of the first season that revealed Dexter's horrific past—watching his mother be slaughtered with a chainsaw in front of him, before staying locked in a cargo container in a pool of her blood—"Blood Fugue" offers a three-minute examination of Dexter's bloodlust and of the genesis of a serial killer. While *Dexter* itself hardly shies away from creating reflective spaces for the consideration of its titular character, never has it offered such a sustained period of introspection, more commonly employing dark comic relief and/or subplots to break up its journey into the passages of Dexter's mind. All the while, too, "Blood Fugue" is set to Dog Fashion Disco's "Mature Audiences Only," a frenetic string piece that puts the viewer on edge with mumbled phrases such as "there was blood everywhere," "I'm losing my mind," "these dark sexual urges," and "there are many demons I face every day" sampled into the music. As Kristina Busse writes:

> There are many quick cuts between past and present, job and secret life, victim and killer, interspersed with slower moments of Dexter's introspection, often accompanied by images of water/blood/drowning. The voice over the heavy violins (sounding like saws?) whispers of blood and dark sadistic urges, and the screams mid-vid offer a vision of Dexter that the show whitewashes to a degree. In fact, the entire vid seems to resurrect the violent unconscious that somehow, even amid all the blood and torture and murder isn't quite present on the show itself.[20]

Luminosity makes it darker still, then. And what Luminosity does for a reading of Dexter, obsessive24 does for a reading of *Fight Club*'s narrator in "Cells" or *Heroes*' Sylar in "One of a Kind"; here's luck does for a reading of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s Spike in "Glorious," Willow in "Atropine," or the relationships between Buffy and Faith in "Superstar" or Willow and Tara in "Writing Notes"; Shalott does for a reading of the *Star Wars*

trilogies' Amidala in "Kid Fears"; and countless other vidders do for readings of what makes many central or peripheral film and television characters and their relationships tick.

Such is the development of vidding as an art form that several versions of vids have been made with a commentary track overlaid. These allow us access to the vidders' intended meanings and suggest that the casual vid watcher may wish to engage more closely with the nuances of edited storytelling. Of a crucial segment in her vid "Change (in the house of flies)," about the Clark Kent and Lex Luthor friendship in *Smallville* (2001–), obsessive24 notes what her vid dramatically shows and argues, that Superman failed Lex as a friend, a notion that opens up significant ground for new, or at least more nuanced, readings of the two characters and of the Superman mythology more generally. She states:

> And here we come into the crux of this vid, which is: Lex will save Clark, but in the end Clark doesn't save Lex. Sure, he saves him in superficial ways, in the same way that he saves anyone else, but I guess what we're talking about here is a spiritual saving, where Lex propels Clark onto his path as Superman. But what does Clark do in return? He does the only thing that he can do under circumstances, also on his path of destiny, which is to cast Lex down into the abyss[. . . .] Clark is really almost a villain in this story, because they made each other who they are. In Lex's case, he made Clark great, but in Clark's case, he kind of failed in making Lex the man that Lex had originally set out to be. He wanted to be good, but later, much later in the future, Lex couldn't remember this, and I doubt that Clark could either, but the audience can, and I guess that's where the tragedy lies.[21]

When television shows have multiple seasons behind them, the visual catalogue open to the average vidder is huge, allowing significant ground for character and relationship studies, arguments, and observations that pull together scenes and moments from across the series, as does obsessive24, meaning that some of the more thoughtful and thought-provoking commentary on such longrunning shows as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Smallville* exists in the world of vids.

In an email interview, obsessive24 wrote to me of the importance of using trusted betas (editors), but if repurposed, her comments provide a way of thinking of the relationship between the film or show and the vidder for character study or relationship vids. She wrote:

I'll try to take on all of their suggestions even where I don't personally agree. This is because I think the artist him/herself has blind spots when it comes to actually communicating to the audience what s/he wants to say; it's a beta's job to point out the bits that don't work and force you to change it, even if you love it personally.

Perhaps, just as betas help vidders to communicate more clearly, so too do vids help the film or show to communicate more clearly. Or, as obsessive24 also notes of her own character study and relationship vids, many are "trying to 'read deeper' into what's already there and [are] bringing it out so that other people can see it more easily." In another email interview, here's luck observes, "Vidding is the ultimate close reading: a vid sends the vidder, and possibly the viewer as well, back to the text in a profound and literal way." As all of the vidders and vid-fans to whom I talked noted, many of the better vids have something interesting, substantive, and/or revelatory to say about the show. Many of the better vids send us "deeper" into and "back to the text," having said something of substance about it.

here's luck's declaration of a vid being "the ultimate close reading" is highly apt, given a good vid's ability to unlock and make sense of parts of a text while being considerably more entertaining and affectively gripping than are most close readings. To this end, here's luck notes, "I'm not sure that vids allow me to say things I otherwise couldn't; [but] they do allow me to say some things more elegantly or persuasively or quickly. And they allow me to invite an audience to collaborate in making meaning with me, which I think is pretty cool." Vidding's "elegance" lies in the fact that it is its own art form, presenting its case in a visually and aurally pleasing manner. Hence, just as Jenkins notes that spoilers might become the text itself for spoiler fans, as those spoiler fans circulate them and engage in a giant "cat and mouse game" with the producers more for the sake of it than for the enjoyment of the text being spoiled, so too have vids become texts in and of their own right, watched closely, parsed for meanings, eagerly anticipated, traded in fan communities, given commentary tracks, and becoming the basis for their own conventions.

Another helpful way to understand vids, both as texts in their own right and as paratexts, is offered by academic, fan historian, and vidder Francesca Coppa, who argues that fan fiction in general follows dramatic rather than literary modes of storytelling. Responding to the endless and frequently facile criticism of fan fiction being "merely derivative," Coppa states that

in literature, fan fiction's repetition is strange; [but] in theatre, stories
are retold all the time. Theatre artists think it's fine to tell the same story
again, but differently: not only was Shakespeare's *Hamlet* a relatively late
version of the tale [. . .] but we're happy to see differently inflected ver-
sions of the tale. Moreover, there's no assumption that the first produc-
tion will be definitive; in theatre, we want to see *your* Hamlet and *his*
Hamlet and *her* Hamlet; to embody the role is to reinvent it.[22]

Coppa's argument suggests that we could see gifted vidders as thoughtful
actors or directors working with a script, not simply repeating the lines of
a "derivative," stale performance, but trying to make new sense of a char-
acter or characters. Meanwhile, just as many theater buffs attend multiple
*Hamlet*s, *Macbeth*s, and *King Lear*s over the course of their lives, each
hopefully further fleshing out the plays' enigmatic figures, vid audiences
similarly watch to see and hear new or developing interpretations of char-
acters. Fan fiction, writes Coppa, "is community theatre in a mass media
world,"[23] a staging and therefore a reading of a text.

Further echoing this notion of vids as performative, Luminosity ex-
plained to me, "Vids allow me to *show*, which is better than tell," and she
later added:

All of my vids are personal expressions. [. . .] I don't know if it's my age
or the fact that I have been an artist all of my life, but I "own" everything
about my vids. They're moving paintings of my thoughts about specific
issues or events within the universe of the show or movie—or maybe
about just one thing, or maybe even about a universal thing that I choose
a specific source to explore. For example, my father died in 2004, and
I was very close to him. Part of my working through my own grief in-
cluded making the vids "Art of Dying" and "Serenity." If I had been paint-
ing then, I would have painted my grief instead, but I was vidding. When
I look back at those two vids, I'm able to see how I channeled my sense
of loss into them. I suppose that's where "personal expression" really lives,
and it's something that I do a lot. [. . .] I tend to explore my own psyche
when I vid (as well as the imaginary characters' motivations, etc.).

Luminosity's narrative suggests a complex yet energizing relationship be-
tween text, paratext, fantext, vidder, and audience member. She suggests a
process whereby her personalized construction of and relationship to *Kill
Bill*, vols. 1 and 2 (2003, 2004), and *Firefly* (2002), respectively, based in

part on a grieving process following her father's death, is worked into her own artistic performance and act of creating the vids, and is thus communicated to and shared with a broader audience or community of vid watchers. She therefore in part close-reads those texts and directs her audience to resonances of *Kill Bill*, *Firefly*, and *Serenity* that they may have overlooked, and in part adds new meanings and resonances to them, broadening viewers' understandings of the texts.

Given the degree to which vids carry resonances and messages that will prove more meaningful for a particular community of fans with the necessary fannish and interpersonal knowledge to decode them in full, some vids operate within these communities and not more broadly for a wider audience. While some observers may see the result as an insular art form, it also shows how paratexts can domesticate texts to specific communities (as does community theater), offering the prospect for those communities to construct a more intimate relationship to what may otherwise seem a "mass" text. Moreover, not all are so insular. Vids, after all, are also vehicles for some fantastic songs, for small stories and arguments, and they can also exhibit significant editing prowess, none of which necessarily require knowledge of the fan object. For instance, a particularly famous vid, "Us" by Lim, juxtaposes numerous clips that are often used in vids or that have become iconic for fans, but it also uses a catchy song by Regina Spektor and shows off Lim's significant editing and animation skills, making it visually stunning for the uninitiated viewer. Others approach the level of parody, and thus have comic potential in and of themselves, as is the case, for example, with Luminosity's "Hopeless," which playfully examines the love affair between various *Lord of the Rings* characters and the ring, while set to the cheesy Olivia Newton-John song. Regardless of their intended audiences, however, vids can offer fascinating close readings that energize many of a text's elements, lighting up the vidder's path through a text while also cutting deeper, often more nuanced paths into the text for others to follow, and thereby contributing to what Hellekson and Busse call the fantext.

"You" and Your Limits: Privileged Paratexters

While the vids that I focused on above illustrate viewer-paratexts' abilities to study characters and relationships, of course other viewer-paratexts will study other aspects of texts, illustrating considerable variety in paratextual focus. The fanvid itself is a diverse form, and character study and

relationship vids are only two related genres within a wider catalogue. Other viewer-paratexts change focus too. Fan-written episode recaps, for instance, can range from those that function strictly as plot recaps, to those that treat the characters as eye candy and focus on the show's erotic elements,[24] to many of *Television Without Pity*'s recaps that call for a playful, ironic reading of the episode. Each style will simultaneously provide evidence about how any given community or individual watches the show in question, and it will serve as a paratext that encourages others to watch in a similar manner. By contrast, some media-related wikis (such as *Lostpedia* or *Wookieepedia*) tend to treat texts as expansive universes with dense histories and sociologies that require archiving and the constant oversight of a fandom's collective intelligence. Other wikis actively invite audiences to continue the creation and performance of the text themselves, as with *Wikiality* (fig. 5.2), a wiki based around *The Colbert Report*'s slyly satiric celebration of style over fact, and of white conservative American chauvinism.[25] Posing itself as a *Wikipedia* for "truthiness" (Colbert's term for opinions that hold no factual basis but that "feel" true), and claiming to host 10,747,142 articles in "American" at last visit (early 2009), *Wikiality* includes entries, for example, on "Global Warming" that at present calls it "a complex consumer confidence scam put forth onto the American public by Al Gore and the Weather Channel," and on Colbert's parodic target and conservative pundit, Bill O'Reilly, that calls him "a godlike killing machine, liberating the world from the liberal, ivy-league media elite and their front politicians known as democrats." Here, fans are invited to continue Colbert's brand of ironic punditry and to enjoy each other's wit. Indeed, since Colbert's satire relies quite heavily upon the ironic juxtaposition of his own supposedly cult-like fans—"the Colbert Nation"—to the allegedly unthinking, sheeplike fans of self-worshiping American conservative pundits such as O'Reilly, the wiki's removal of Colbert from this supposed altar to the character, and its fans' ability to produce a similar brand of humor without Colbert present, is arguably important in assuring that the ironic contrast holds. These and countless other examples of viewer-created paratexts all invite different relationships to the associated film or television program, and all stand to recalibrate the text's interpretive trajectory as a result.

However, while audiences and fans can and regularly do create their own paratexts that privilege their own readings of texts and their own interpretive strategies, we must avoid the trap of seeing these as necessarily of equal presence and power as those created by film and television
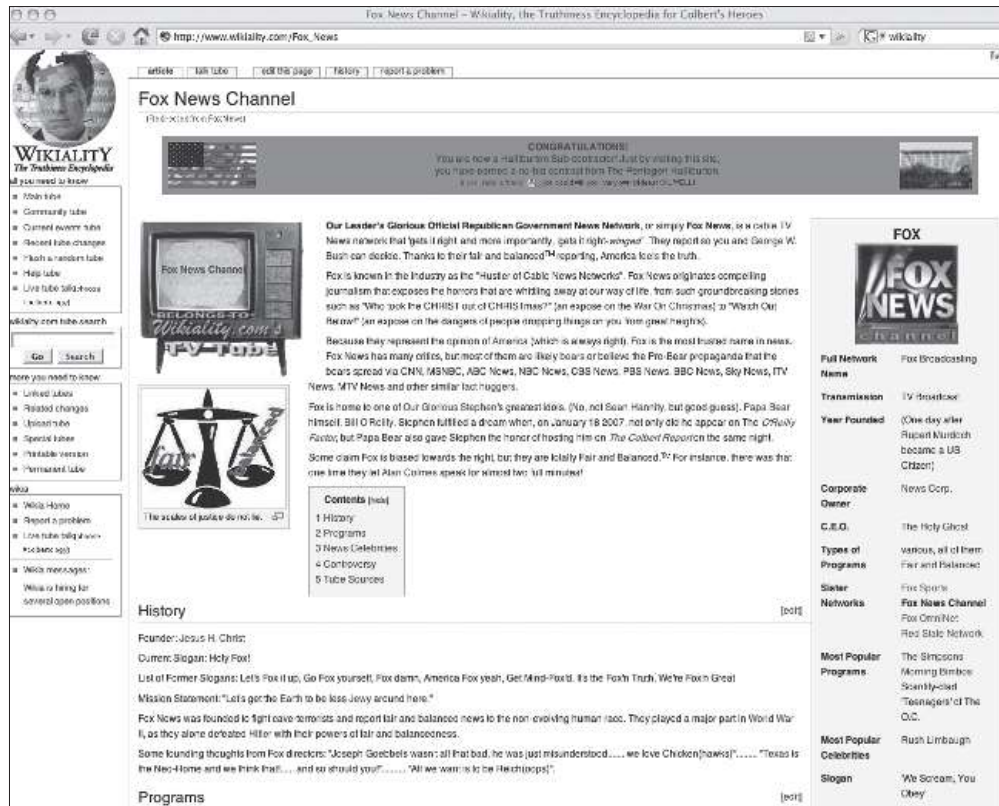
Fig. 5.2. A page from *Wikiality*, a wiki playing along with and honoring *The Colbert Report*'s satiric take on the state of American politics and media.

producers and their marketing teams. Bruce Leichtman, president and principal analyst of Leichtman Research Group, Inc., while presenting at 2008's National Association of Television Production Executives convention in Las Vegas, was particularly keen to dispel some of the digital era's utopian rhetoric, noting the fact that on an average day, YouTube attracts as many viewers as does one episode of FOX's prime-time karaoke competition *Don't Forget the Lyrics* (2007–). Even on YouTube and imeem, viewer numbers suggest that many more people have seen the *Iron Man* trailer than even the most-watched vids, while on the average day *Lost* spoilers likely reach fewer readers than did *Six Degrees*' New York hype campaign at its peak. The recent advent of online communities, social networking, and video-sharing sites, as well as various digital platforms and technologies that assist in ripping and burning video, has led to much "You-topian" rhetoric of which we should be wary. In 2006, *Time* announced that its Person of the Year was "You," thereby repeating

many popular and academic accounts of the rise of audience power. Much of the hoopla surrounding Web 2.0's multiple sharing sites, such as YouTube, MySpace, and Facebook, has focused on how they challenge corporate culture and logic, opening up cultural production, authorship, and distribution to seemingly anyone. In the face of such excited rhetoric, though, we must remember that "You" still require significant technology and communications infrastructure to be able to enjoy this new era, and hence "You" often excludes all of those on the other side of the digital divide who do not own computers with editing software and high-speed Internet service. Also, media multinationals frequently have considerably more time and resources than do "You" to produce, publicize, and circulate paratextual entourages.

Legally, these multinationals also have considerably more clout to police the acceptable edges of textual universes. Trailer editors, hype campaign designers, and other industry-made paratextual artists rarely have their names attached to their work, but no litigation would likely follow from the release of such names. By contrast, most vidders use aliases, some admittedly for other reasons, but some in fear of reprisal from a grumpy and aggrieved media production company's law firm. Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof's publicly voiced distaste for *Lost* spoilers[26] and J. K. Rowling's elaborate legal attempts and threats to keep *Harry Potter* news under wraps till her publisher's release dates[27] further warn of the acceptable limits of paratextual production for insiders (whether *Lost* cast or crew member, or Bloomsbury or Scholastic typesetter). Even some reviewers have been threatened, not with lawsuits but with blacklisting, when their caustic comments stand to damage a show's public reputation. And though legal scholars have argued for fan fiction's legality,[28] the lack of case law to serve as precedent has notoriously enabled media firms to send cease-and-desist letters with wild abandon, and with little consistency as to what constitutes (to their mind) acceptable use of a show's diegesis.[29]

Hence, if media multinationals and individual audience members or communities have varying interpretative, framing strategies that are built into their paratexts, media multinationals have a significant advantage in both blanketing the media environment with their own images, and making that environment inhospitable for others' images. Despite the enthusiastic discussion of YouTube's or Web 2.0's prospects for developing grassroots politics, everyday creativity, and a more democratic version of cultural production, then, YouTube and friends are also home to thousands

of film and television trailers, many with viewership in the millions, while the Internet more broadly is populated with hundreds of glitzy official film and television show web pages, complete with their small armies of paratexts. Moreover, rather than see media firms' paratexts and fans in competition or contrast, we should also acknowledge the increasing incidence of media firms creating policed playgrounds for fans, setting up fan sites that invite various forms of fan paratextual creativity and user-generated content, yet often imposing a set of rules and limitations and/or claiming legal rights over the material. Thus, several companies have experimented with releasing clips from shows and encouraging fans to edit together a montage or trailer to be entered into a competition at the show or film's official website. Similarly, fan film and fan fiction have at times been brought under the "protective umbrella" of various media firms, while representatives of the producer's or marketer's staff regularly expunge fan discussion at official fan sites when they deem it to be offensive or inappropriate.

The power to create paratexts is the power to contribute to, augment, and personalize a textual world. Thus, many media firms' frequent acts of filtering acceptable content from fan creations (whether film, fiction, or simple discussion) seek variously to outright deny fans the right to contribute, augment, or personalize; seek to co-opt and profit from fans' paratexts; and/or seek to strictly limit the scope of possible meanings that fans can attach to a text. Most notoriously, slash fiction and fan film—those that posit a same-sex relationship between two characters—are often met with disapproval by media firms' moderators. But on the less overt end of the scale, media firms can still subtly reinforce their own preferred meanings by privileging certain fan products whose meanings wholly conform to those of the firm, and hence that effectively echo the firm's own paratexts and paratextual meanings.

Many media firms' restrictive reactions to fan creativity tellingly reflect on the degree to which they realize the power of paratexts. For instance, when Lucasfilm drew a hard line that fan creativity could be parodic but not expansive of the *Star Wars* universe, their decision was likely forced on one hand by precedent regarding the legal status of parody, and on the other hand by the knowledge that fan creations could hijack "their" text.[30] Viewer-made paratexts are resources with which, whether through creation, consumption, or both, viewers can add their own voice, interests, and concerns to a textual world. They give partial ownership of a text to those other than the initial creators. And thus Hollywood has often

come down hard on paratexts, or on certain types of paratexts, in order to maintain ownership privileges and rights. Of course, such proprietary acts are often futile. As discussed in chapter 1, a text only becomes a text, only gains social meaning and relevance, at the point that it comes alive with its audience. Therefore, a text is always already a collaboratively created entity, and regardless of how media firms rewrite copyright law to give them power of attorney over a text, the only texts incapacitated enough to be ownable are those that have absolutely no social relevance or audience attention. At the moment that audiences care about a text, it has multiple creators, and that creation is often maintained by paratextual creation and consumption. Along with Henry Jenkins, then, I am depressed by some media firms' dogged refusal to accept what is already occurring, and by their desperate attempts to keep proprietary status over their texts. As Jenkins notes, "Over the past several decades, corporations have sought to market branded content so that consumers become the bearers of their marketing messages," and yet, he also notes, the same corporations have a tendency to cry foul "once consumers choose when and where to display those messages, their active participation in the circulation of brands" now stunningly becoming "a moral outrage and a threat to the industry's economic well-being."[31] Never will such legal maneuvers ever truly exclude audience readings and strategies altogether, but their ramifications for the scope of fan paratextual creativity can often be significant.

Moving the Goal Posts: Press Reviews and Friday Night Lights

Beyond media firms, though, we might also look to other privileged paratextual creators. Audiences, after all, are by no means equal. A prominent vidder with a large audience will enjoy privileged status as a paratextual creator over someone whose viewing circle of friends is small. A person with a fancy, well-funded website with thousands of viewers can similarly enjoy privileged status. Anyone with the capacity to reach a large audience will have greater potential power to offer his or her interpretive strategies to others and to gain converts. A particularly prominent example of such a privileged decoder is the critic. Critics occupy a hybrid space between the media and the audience, frequently receiving copies of shows before the rest of us, yet not officially affiliated with any media firm and thus supposedly neutral and objective. Prior to the release of a new film or television show, press reviews can catch the audience at a decisive pre-decoding moment, just as the text is being born. But even for long-

running television shows, as Amanda Lotz points out, in a post-network era with hundreds of channels in many homes, "Critics become increasingly important as their reviews and 'tonight on' recommendations provided promotional venues to alert viewers of programming on cable and network channels they did not regularly view and as legitimate, unbiased sources within the cluttered programming field."[32] Of course, just as audiences might miss or ignore the hype, they might miss or ignore critics' reviews. Nevertheless, upon release, as does a network's marketing machine, reviews hold the power to set the parameters for viewing, suggesting how we might view the show (if at all), what to watch for, and how to make sense of it.

Barbara Klinger clearly illustrates the subtle power of reviews in her discussion of *Home Theater* magazine's regular feature, "Snacks, Wine, and Videotape." Here, the editors review films by way of suggesting food pairings. As Klinger notes of their pairing of *Shawshank Redemption* (1994) with filet mignon and exotic marinade, the effect is to suggest a decidedly more upmarket film, whereas their pairing of *Ed Wood* (1994) with hamburger

> suggests that the film's concerns (i.e., cross-dressing, drug addiction, and bad filmmaking) give it a more questionable, campy status that detracts from its consumption as "serious." However, even here, hamburger is made more respectable by associating it with Dijon mustard, Thousand Island Dressing, and chilled grapes. Thus, the hamburger is rescued from ordinariness by accompanying relishes and food items.[33]

Albeit in less graphic or appetite-inducing manner, all reviews similarly try to pair a film or television program with an image. Labeling *Ed Wood* as a "hamburger with Dijon and chilled grapes"–type film firmly places it on a value hierarchy, but also suggests something of its meanings and the attitude with which viewers should approach the film. While it is a frequent retort from aggrieved creators to harsh critics to "do something" rather than "just" criticize, their criticism very much "does something," mediating and hence co-authoring a media text at the constitutive moment when it becomes a text and launches itself into popular culture and/ or an audience member's mind.

Seeking other examples of where reviews dictated textual meaning, in the fall of 2006, I collected multiple reviews for several of NBC's new shows using an online review aggregator—Metacritic (www.metacritic.

com)—and later I examined them for the rhetorical and hermeneutic moves they make in trying to position the shows. My interests lay in how paratextual authors play an intermediary role between production and reception, as part author/encoder, part privileged reader/encoder. Elsewhere, I discuss the reviews of *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip* (2006–7) and *Heroes*,[34] but a particularly stark attempt at recoding the marketing rhetoric was evident in the reviews of *Friday Night Lights*. Though the show's interest in high school football allowed reviewers plenty of opportunities for football puns, most reviewers were also quick to insist that the show is not "just" about football, or not *even* about football. Thus, the reviews tried to move the show's generic goal posts.

Reflecting quite openly on the opportunity that the football show allows him, for instance, Matthew Gilbert begins by noting:

> One way to praise NBC's "Friday Night Lights" would be to say, "It's a stand-up-and-cheer drama about football!" And then to use football metaphors such as "Catch this TV forward pass." Because, as the show's Dillon High Panthers wrestle for a Texas state championship on the field, you'll want to stand up, cheer, and program the series onto your DVR. But "Friday Night Lights," which premieres tonight at 8 on Channel 7, is more than a football drama for ESPN types.[35]

The show was widely praised by reviewers, yet often with surprise. The cause of the surprise is obvious—many thought it would be "just" a football show, "just" a high school drama, or worse yet, just a high school football drama (fig. 5.3). Tim Goodman notes that *Friday Night Lights* "manages to be everything you don't expect it to be—a finely nuanced drama instead of 'Beverly Hills 90210' [1990–2000], a portrait of small town life instead of a cheesy back-lot fantasy, and even a sports story with real authenticity, from the preparation to the game action." The show, he states, "has to overcome so many preconceived notions, so many reasons not to watch, that it's the dramatic equivalent of a Hail Mary pass falling miraculously into the hands of an open receiver." Thus he marvels that what producer Peter Berg "manages to do here is wholly impressive. If you don't care for football, or high school football in particular, or even the concerns of a bunch of high school kids and their fanatical grown-ups—which plenty of viewers probably don't—Berg makes you care."[36]

The litany of "this is not a football show" resounds throughout a reading of multiple *Friday Night Lights* reviews, as many reviewers share
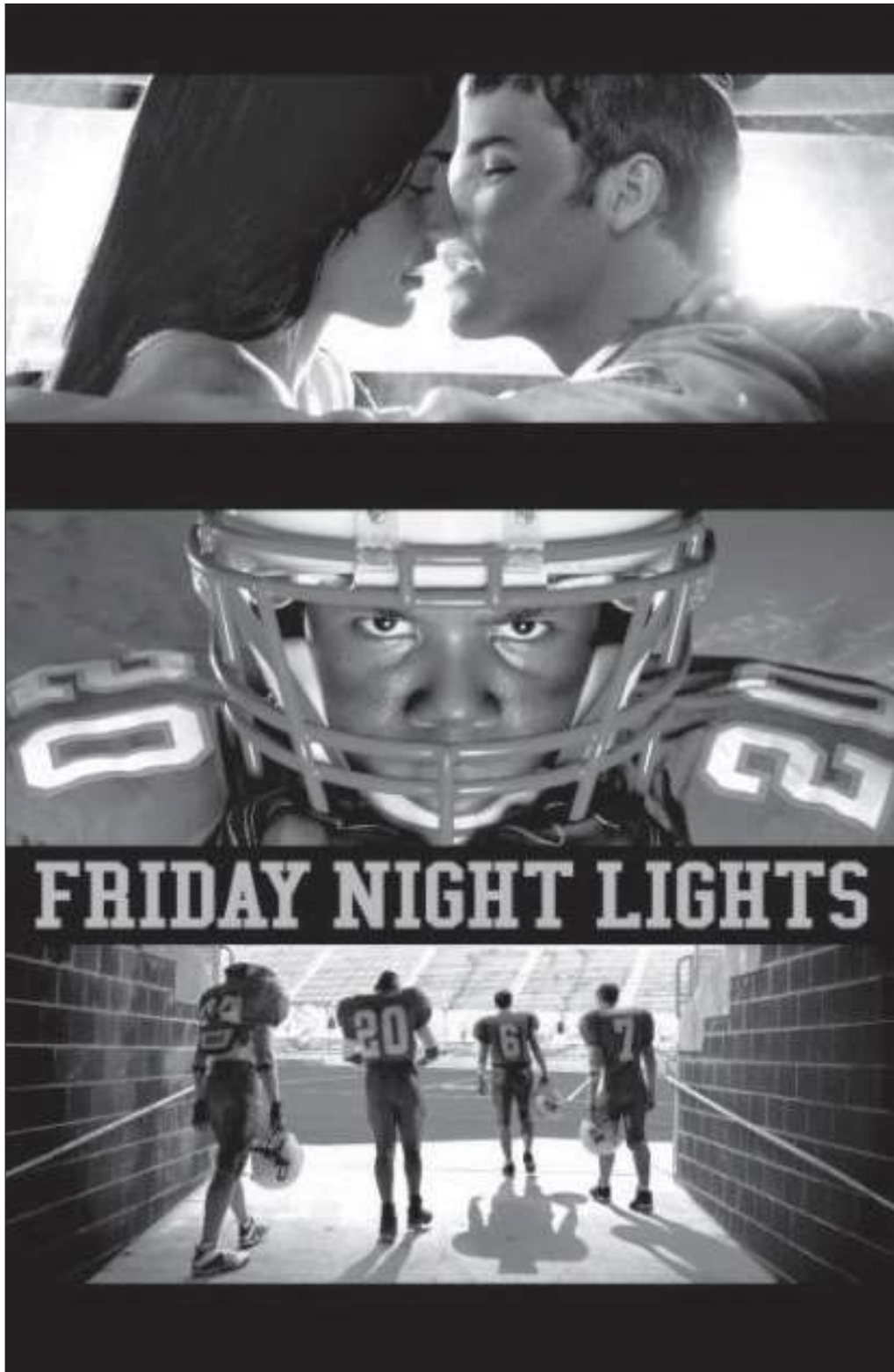
Fig. 5.3. A poster advertising *Friday Night Lights* hails football fans and teen-drama fans, two groups away from which many press reviews seemed determined to shepherd the series.

Goodman and Gilbert's dislike of football and/or football shows, as well as of high school dramas, yet also share their desire to paint the show as much more than either genre. Regarding the football, we're told that *Friday Night Lights* "isn't just about the gridiron,"[37] that "football is only the kickoff,"[38] and that "even skeptics, even people who hate football, could easily be caught up in the drama."[39] While on one level, this description is reasonably accurate, the declaration is often intoned with gratitude and relief, the "skeptics" of this latter quotation clearly including the critics themselves, who furthermore imagine their audiences to be skeptics. Doug Elfman states point blank that the show "makes me care about a subject I have zero, or possibly negative, interest in, no matter how rah-rah I was as a teen: high school daddy ball in rural Texas, where prayers are reserved for scoring touchdowns."[40]

Yet if the danger of a football show requires a "hard defensive line" to deflect, Elfman's invocation of his former, lesser teen self also reflects a general sense in the reviews of the high school drama being a lesser genre. Gilbert glows, for example, that "there's nothing corny or precious about Dillon—none of the soapy romanticism of the towns in 'One Tree Hill' or 'Dawson's Creek.'"[41] *One Tree Hill* (2003–) proves a common intertextual contrast, as a "soapy" program that lacks *Friday Night Lights*' humanity, grit, and realism. Even if they don't actively distance the show from the high school drama label, many reviewers are keen to crown it as the best of the lot, and another variety altogether. Diane Werts states that "none of this plays as soap opera, or perhaps it actually is soap opera in the finest sense, as a penetrating moral compass on the way humans privately direct their lives."[42] Hal Boedeker writes, "Television needs a good high-school drama, and NBC's Friday Night Lights is a great drama."[43] And Melanie McFarland observes that *Friday Night Lights* represents a new brand of family-friendly programming, "stylish, intelligent and blissfully free of teen caricatures. Granted, the teenagers in 'Friday Night Lights' are TV beautiful, but the characters are steeped in an authenticity that serves as an antidote to all the MTV reality images that have been pumped into our culture."[44]

We therefore have a case of reviewers keen to "rescue" a show from its low-culture connotations. Perhaps concerned that they need to justify the presence of their columns in a medium that is mostly regarded as higher and more literate than the object of their criticism, many press critics worked hard to frame *Friday Night Lights* as unlike the "low" genres of football shows and high school dramas. Witness, for instance, Alessandra

Stanley struggling to justify *Friday Night Lights'* inclusion in her decidedly upmarket publication, the *New York Times*:

> [*Friday Night Lights* is] not just television great, but great in the way of a poem or painting, great in the way of art with a single obsessive creator who doesn't have to consult with a committee and has months or years to go back and agonize over line breaks and the color red.[45]

Stanley also invokes *Rebel without a Cause* (1955) and *Splendor in the Grass* (1961) as similar (inter)texts, while *Slate's* Troy Patterson compares the show to *Moby-Dick*,[46] and Elfman calls it the closest thing network television has to HBO's critical darling *The Wire*.[47] The intertexts are mobilized to shepherd the would-be audience toward seeing the text as a very certain product: *The Wire–*, *Moby-Dick–*, and poem-like, not *90210-*, *One Tree Hill–*, or ESPN-like.

Ironically, of course, such reviews might have *lost* audiences as well. NBC's loss of NFL broadcast rights had played a key role in their ratings drop in the previous two seasons, and 2006 marked not only *Friday Night Lights'* premier, but the return of the NFL to NBC; thus, the network would no doubt have loved to capitalize on NFL–*FNL* synergy if possible. Yet when the reviews work so hard to state that the show is *not* a football show, they risk alienating a large segment of the potential audience, and when they similarly try to distance *Friday Night Lights* from high school dramas, they also risk turning off the eighteen to twenty-four demographic, a group that is much beloved by networks. Gilbert and Brian Lowry both almost snidely note that *Friday Night Lights* is the kind of show that middle America longs for—set in a small, God-fearing town, focusing on family relationships—yet never actually watch;[48] however, most of the reviews (Gilbert's in particular) try to sever ties between a working-class audience and the show by insisting upon its high-culture credentials. Little do they realize that in so doing they may be contributing to the eventual failure of *Friday Night Lights* to reach said audiences. Victoria Johnson has written of the "Heartland myth" that lies at the center of significant discussion about television, whereby "flyover country" is seen as providing "a short-hand cultural common sense framework for 'all-American' identification, redeeming goodness, face-to-face community, sanctity, and emplaced ideals to which a desirous and nostalgic public discourse repeatedly returns," while also functioning "as an object of derision—condemned for its perceived naiveté and lack of mobility as

a site of hopelessly rooted, outdated American past life and values, entrenched political and social conservatism, and bastion of the 'mass,' undifferentiated, un-hip people and perspectives."[49] NBC was undoubtedly hoping that its show would be received as appealing to the former, uplifting facet of the myth, yet the reviewers seem mindful of the risk that such an image would involve (or even be swallowed by?) the latter facet of the myth, and thus they move quickly to recharacterize it as comfortably hip, gritty, quality fare worthy of an upscale, urban audience.

Admittedly, *Friday Night Lights* is quite boldly innovative at mixing genres, and subsequently succeeded in attracting a (small) high-end audience. All the same, many critics' odd rhetorical strategy of *excluding* audiences of football and high school dramas is shown to be unnecessary by Alan Sepinwall's review, a lone exception in my sample that welcomed and embraced the frame of it being a football show, even as Sepinwall shares his press critic colleagues' enthusiasm for the program. He writes:

> The best sports movies and TV shows provide us with a kind of certainty, the knowledge that you'll get to witness either a clear win ("Hoosiers," "Major League") or some kind of moral victory (Rocky going the distance, Rudy getting on the field). So when I say that virtually every development in the "Friday Night Lights" premiere will be telegraphed well in advance, I don't mean it as a bad thing. The drama is one of the season's best because it makes you care even when you know something big is coming—and because it finds pleasant little surprises along the way.[50]

To Sepinwall, the show can be a great football show *and* one of the season's best. It could also be a show that plays to "the Heartland" *and* to an upscale urban audience. Jason Mittell has written of the rocky path that genre hybrids frequently walk, as expectations and codings of each genre might conflict with the prospects for enjoyment and/or understanding of the other.[51] Many critics' reviews of *Friday Night Lights* expressed anxiety at the prospects for their beloved show to fail, but their subsequent solution was to try to remove the show from its rocky road and place it on what they saw to be a safer road called "quality television." Ultimately, though, this was an act with significant interpretive ramifications, for it involved framing the show in ways that neglected and/or excluded other potential ways of enjoying it.

Thus, press reviews provide a clear example of how privileged paratexts can work to offset or otherwise revise a marketer's paratexts and hype. As

this example also shows, and as argued in chapter 3, paratexts can often position a text on value hierarchies. Television critics occupy liminal space in hierarchies of taste, on one hand writing for newspapers and working in the austere tradition of criticism, yet on the other hand writing of the "low" culture form that is television, and frequently consigned to the same section of their newspapers as reports on Britney Spears's latest antics. In this regard, and as self-appointed taste leaders, they often play a key role in mediating television shows' standing in hierarchies of taste and value, at a key time in the text's birth into popular culture. Individual reviews' powers will of course depend upon the individual reader's own level of interaction with and regard for other paratexts and the show itself. On one end of a spectrum, we could imagine many readers who have eagerly anticipated a show long before the reviews came in, and who do not care about them; on the other end of this spectrum, we should expect to find some readers who have heard little if anything about the program, who greatly value the critics' opinions, and perhaps who do not even watch the show, comfortable to let the critics' opinions at least temporarily substitute for their own. Consequently, realizing the power of reviews to co-create texts does not necessarily allow us as analysts any special predictive powers of how popular culture will receive a text and of what interpretive communities will dominate. Nevertheless, a close analysis of reviews does allow us greater knowledge of the semiotic environment into which new shows arrive, and of the reviews' role both in creating that environment and in co-creating the text.

A Paratext of Their Own

Chapters 2–4 focused largely on how the entertainment industry can fashion a text at its outskirts, using paratexts to set the parameters of genre, style, address, value, and meaning. In this chapter, however, I hope to have shown that audience members are involved in this fashioning of the text not simply as consumers of text and paratext, but as creators of their own paratexts. The industry usually has considerable interest in trying to set its own textual parameters, and it will at times reinforce this semiotic act with legal ones, literally closing off opportunities for its texts to grow in certain directions. But audience members have a built-in interest in fashioning the text themselves. At a rudimentary—though by no means insignificant—level, the paratext of everyday discussion will forever play a constitutive role in creating the text. How we talk about texts affects how

others talk about and consume them, as was seen in chapter 4. We can also "talk" through more elaborate forms of paratexts, whether they be spoilers, vids, recaps, wikis, reviews, or other viewer-end paratexts such as websites, campaigns, viewing parties, or so on. Some such forms of "talk" will be louder and more readily accessible than others, some directed at small communities of like-minded audiences, some emanating out to the public sphere more generally. The latter may even in due course come to determine the public understanding of a text. Others allow viable alternatives to the public script to emerge, thereby multiplying the text into various versions. All, though, underline the considerable power of viewer-end paratexts to set or change the terms by which we make sense of film and television, and, hence, to add or subtract depth and breadth to a text and its storyworld.

6

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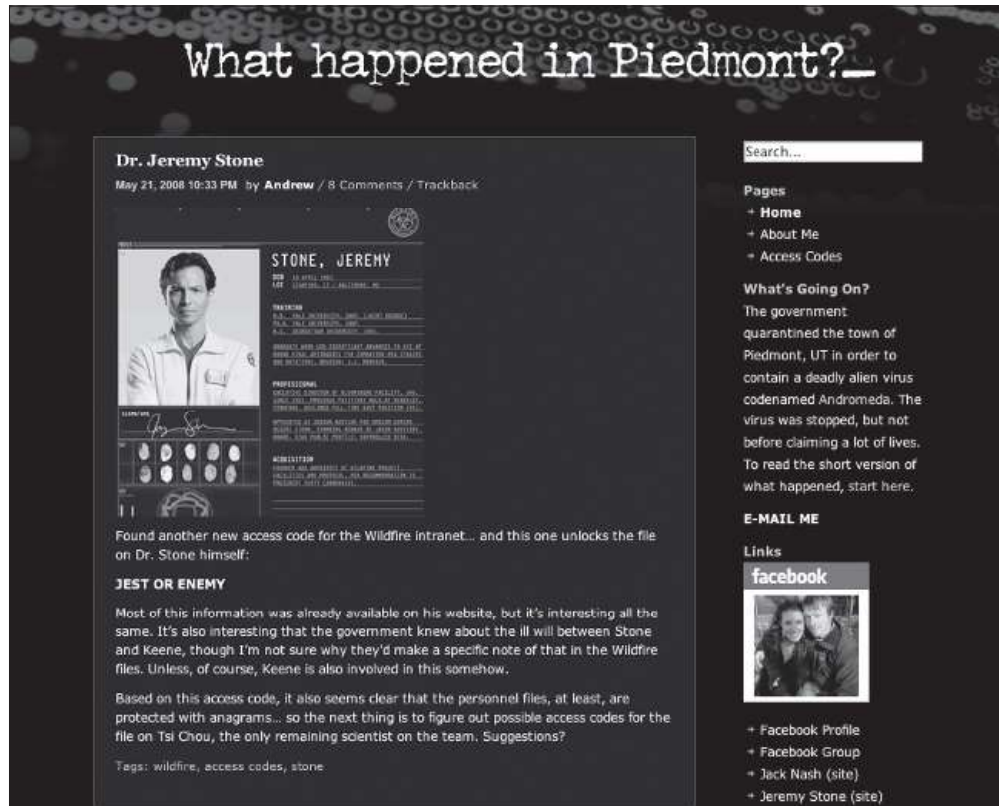
Fig. 6.3. "Andrew Tobler" posts information at ARG *What Happened in Piedmont?* on an individual possibly involved with mysterious happenings in Tobler's hometown of Piedmont, Utah.

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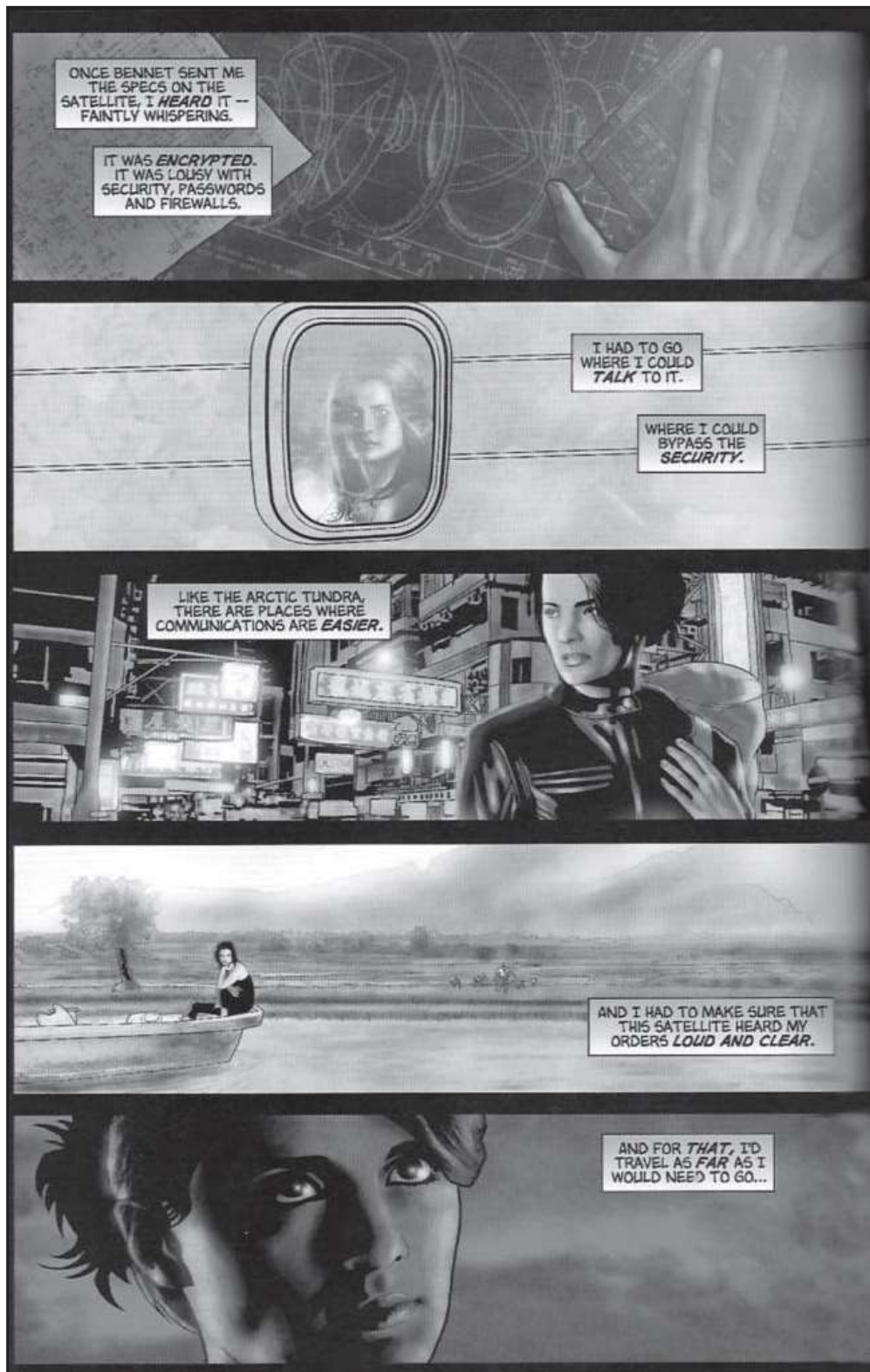
Fig. c.2. A page from the *Heroes* graphic novel following the adventures of the transmediated hero Hana Gitelman.

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.