Playing as a mutant in a virtual world: understanding overlapping story worlds in popular culture video games

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Abstract

On the basis of interview data with a video game designer, this author team explores the nuances of stories and story worlds in video games as complex multimodal, compositional processes that can be harnessed to our understandings about contemporary literacy learning. How we enter, exit, mediate and transmediate stories across media channels has been naturalised into the ways that we view and understand media texts, yet as literacy scholars interested in the role of media and literacy learning and teaching, do we actually understand the mediational practices and logic enacted when a story moves from a film to a video game? This article goes some way in extrapolating the process of story transformation when a 'canonical' story moves from a film text to a gaming text. By using *X-Men Destiny* as our exemplar, the article classifies and attends to three overlapping worlds that are negotiated when approaching adapted video games: a *canonical mythic universe*, the *adapted game world* and the *story world of a learner*, in order to enable the harnessing of video game practices for literacy contexts.

Key words: creativity, digital literacy/ies, media, multimodality, popular culture, storytelling

"Stories do not merely begin and end; they are spaces we inhabit, in which we dwell and seek solace, find comfort, and peace and sometimes provocation" (Vasudevan, 2011, p. 1168).

Introduction

As a mutant, the player enters the *X-Men Destiny* game prepared to fight with humans to stay alive. Players begin the game with a background and history: you have been separated from your family and are only now realising the full potential of your mutant powers. There are many options to select: from where to move, to what to say; and *X-Men* superheroes and heroines enter and exit the game all of the time to guide players through their journey. Such is the story of *X-Men Destiny*, a video game designed by Marvel Comics and Silicon Knights. In this article, we have come together as scholars working in different disciplines to consider how and in what ways learners negotiate overlapping worlds when playing video games. Within the author team, we work in different disciplines, from different epistemologies. The lead author is concerned with story and the production and materialisation of story; the second and third authors are concerned with the rhetorical analyses of games, as well as augmented and immersive worlds. In this article, we will interpret a video game and stories of its production and paratexts to address the complexities of negotiating overlapping storied worlds.

There is significant literature that explores how video games contribute to learning (Abrams, 2009; Beavis, 2006; Gee, 2003; Squire, 2008; Steinkuehler, 2007), but there is less literature on how gaming worlds draw on discourses, rhetoric and emotions to create storied worlds where students so often seek solace, comfort and provocation. By using *X-Men Destiny* as our exemplar, this article classifies and attends to three overlapping worlds that are negotiated when approaching adapted video games – a *canonical mythic universe*, the *adapted game world* and the *story world of the learner* – in order to enable the harnessing of video-game practices for literacy contexts. Although there are many video games that hinge on comic and/or film-inspired story worlds, it is rare to find a game that maintains the integrity of the original text or canon. In this article, we focus on *X-Men Destiny* as a video game that strives to maintain the canonical mythic universe of the *X-Men* specifically and Marvel comics more broadly but that is constrained by the game design in the process of establishing the adapted game world. The resulting consequence affords the learner the opportunity to imagine, create and negotiate with a story world, an act that makes video games so compelling.

Because of the interdisciplinary nature of the team, we draw on several methodologies. Most notably, the paper draws on data derived from an interview with one of the Silicon Knights designers. Further, we root terminology within a social semiotic theoretical framework that affords the learner/subject a capacity for creative meaning-making. Finally, we draw on a humanities-based reading of the *X-Men* mythic canon as it evolves historically in the resulting mass media.

The article will proceed in four parts. First, we define key terminology and draw on previous scholarship in these overlapping fields to provide a conceptual framework. Second, we offer a brief history of the canonical mythic universe that precedes the game and continues to evolve. This section explores the issues that transpire in the adaptation of the game using the character Wolverine as a focal point. The third part offers detailed analysis of how individual designers contribute to adapting and evolving the game world that ultimately becomes inscribed into the game. The fourth part attends to the story world of the learner. It extends the notion of transmedia intertextuality to a new genre: game walkthroughs that support video-game culture and the paratextual practices that accompany gaming.

Conceptual framework

Given their multimodal nature, video games are a popular forum to use when exploring new ways of thinking about literacy and meaning-making. There is extant literature on video games that vindicates their status from being perceived as senseless time-wasters to worthwhile pursuits that actually make one think and learn. In his book, *What Video Games Have to Teach Us about Learning and Literacy*, Gee (2003) offers 36 competencies that result from video-game play arguing that video-game play can be harnessed to develop critical thinking, active learning, problem-solving, self-knowledge and even embodied learning. In later work, Gee (2005) unravels gaming worlds in more detail, focusing on specific games. Here, Gee claims that if young people project their values, desires and fantasies onto a character, they can learn deeply – in the sense that issues, topics and content within video games become a part of themselves.

These claims can be located among the field of popular culture and popular cultural practices of young learners. Following work by Kenway and Bullen (1999), Marsh (2005) provides a useful definition of the term popular culture as "those cultural texts, artefacts and practices which are attractive to large numbers of children and which are often mass produced on a global scale" (Marsh, 2005, p. 2). Marsh goes on to point out that experiencing popular culture must also be recognised in terms of 'transmedia intertextuality', a term she borrows from Kinder:

> *"These goods are frequently linked by common themes, so that 'tie-in' goods are related to popular television or film characters and narratives. However, it is becoming increasingly difficult to identify the origins of themes, given the multiplicity of platforms on which they occur. Indeed, it is this 'transmedia intertextuality' (Kinder, 1991, p. 3) which is particularly appealing to children"* (Marsh, 2005, p. 2).

X-Men Destiny is an apt exemplar for transmedia intertextuality. As a game, it follows a long history of X-Men mythos that plays out across myriad "cultural texts, artefacts and practices" (Marsh, 2005, p. 2) that inform the canon. Indeed, Zeller-Jacques, (2012) article *Adapting the X-Men Comic Book Narratives in Film Franchises* explains the complexity of transmedia intertextuality when it comes to superhero texts:

> *"Superhero films can pose particular problems to the theorist of adaptation. The plethora of comic books, films, television shows, radio programs, advertisements, toys, video-games, and novels which comprise even a moderately well-established superhero's textual history problematize the process of adaptation in ways that are productive for thinking about adaptations in general. Such variety encourages us to think of adaptation not as a binary with 'source' on one side and 'adaptation' on the other, but instead as an ongoing process through which new adaptations continually (re)develop an ever-growing metatext – an intangible 'ideal' text formed by the agglomeration and interrelationship of all the texts which deal with a particular superhero's narrative universe"* (Zeller-Jacques, 2012, p. 143)..

Zeller-Jacques points out that superheroes such as *X-Men* characters operate in a constant state of dynamic redevelopment as they are embodied across such a broad 'textual history'.

For the needs of our paper, we offer three basic definitions of the overlapping worlds that are involved in the production of and participation within such transmediated texts:

- the *canonical mythic universe*. This term refers to the myth largely constituted by Marvel's franchise content. However, the canonical mythic universe also accounts for the 'ideal' text formed by what Zeller-Jacques calls "the agglomeration and interrelationship of all the texts which deal with a particular superhero's narrative universe" (Zeller-Jacques, 2012, p. 143);

- the *adapted video-game world*. Video games are constituted by three categories: game play (the player's actions, strategies and motives), game structure (the rules of the game, including simulation rules) and the game world (fictional content, topology/level design and textures) (Aarseth, 2003). An adapted video-game world has also undergone an additional process of translating a pre-existing universe requiring a fusion of the existing fictional content with game play;

- the *imagined story world of the learner*. The meaning transaction that happens between the story itself and gamer subjectivities is the imagined story world. Gee (2003) talks about how gamers project identities onto virtual characters, in his words forming a 'projective identity', that is, "projecting one's values and desires onto the virtual character" (Gee, 2003, p. 55). The imagined story world is the

transacted event – the transaction between the story and the player's agency and subjectivities into an imagined story world. To experiment with the notion of the imagined story world, we observed a 12-year-old play *X-Men Destiny* and project her identity onto the avatar, Aimi Yoshida, as she worked her way through obstacles and fought against humans with the help of *X-Men* characters during game play. The decisions that she made and mediational practices that she engaged in invoked an *imagined story world* that allowed her to engage in identity play.

The conceptual mapping of story worlds in video games will be explored in a later section of the article.

The canonical mythic universe of the *X-Men*

The *X-Men* comic series was created in 1963 by writer Stan Lee and artist Jack Kirby. It has reached iconic status in popular culture, leaping from the rectangular panels of processed colour printing to a global multimedia franchise encompassing graphic novels, feature films, cartoons, novelisations and video games. Although the stories of the *X-Men* feature outlandish characters, vivid imagery and super powers children daydream of possessing, their lasting popularity stems from the *X-Men* serving as a metaphor for any group or individual that has been marginalised by society, be it minorities, the differently abled, members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) community or the 'geeks and nerds' who formed the initial fan base (Sanderson, 1998).

Rather than come up with a different backstory for the dozens of characters he would ultimately create, Stan Lee tapped into the zeitgeist created by the cold war as the genesis for the *X-Men*. Genetic mutation triggered the superhuman abilities of his characters and ultimately divided his cast into *Homo sapiens* (regular humans) and homo superior (mutants). Adrift in a world that hated and feared them, the mutants of the *X-Men* universe found solace in each other but quickly split into two factions. Wheelchair-bound telepath Charles Xavier created the *X-Men*, a motley team who sought to use their abilities to better humanity. Holocaust survivor Erik Lensherr, a mutant known as Magneto, saw his kind as the next step in human evolution and formed the Brotherhood of Mutants, a cabal that sought dominance over mankind through violence and terrorism.

The adapted video-game world of the *X-Men* canonical universe

The lead author interviewed one designer involved in developing and creating the video game *X-Men Destiny* (created by Silicon Knights in 2011). In 2009,

the design team was given the difficult task of transforming a world with 50 years of popular culture into an interactive video game. To be clear, the game developers were not transforming a single story into a video game, but rather, a world. The narrative that unfolds through the playing of *X-Men Destiny* is unique to the game but must also remain true to the characters and rules that inhabit and circumscribe what is referred to by its fans as the Marvel Universe. Indeed, as Zeller-Jacques writes,

"With their variety of visual styles and their abundant, overlapping, intertwining narratives, long-running superhero comics like The X-Men are among the most varied and complex, or perhaps contradictory and over-determined texts ever to have existed. Thus the central question which should be asked of any new superhero adaptation, in terms of both its visual and its narrative qualities, is the same: what, exactly, is being adapted?" (Zeller-Jacques, 2012, p. 146)

How game developers answer this question will ultimately affect the success of their title. An example of the difficulty in transforming a mythic universe to an adapted game world is the character Wolverine, renowned for hand-to-hand combat. Wolverine possesses a mutant 'healing factor' that allows him to heal at a vastly accelerated rate compared with a normal human. In a traditional narrative, the author can integrate Wolverine's accelerated healing into the plot as he or she sees fit, but in the ludonarrative world of the video game, Wolverine's perpetual healing makes for problematic game development. If the developers remain true to the character, then players who control Wolverine are essentially immortal.

The problem becomes more lucid when the term 'game' is properly defined. McGonigal (2011) writes that any game has the same number of components: a goal, rules, a feedback system (to inform the player of their success or lack thereof) and voluntary participation. If the goal of *X-Men Destiny* is to defeat enemies in combat before the player is defeated and Wolverine is immortal, the achievement of the player's goal becomes a mathematical certainty. Players would not require skill, strategy, cunning or creative thinking – the creation and employment of which is a large reason children play – to achieve their goal, because victory is guaranteed before the game even begins. In video-game terms, this would result in a boring, unsatisfying experience because players could engage in combat without any fear of defeat and could simply 'mash' the attack button until the game ended. The problem, then, is that both in the canonical universe of the comics and in the adapted video-game world, Wolverine, by his very nature, does not play by the rules.

Our rationale for choosing *X-Men Destiny* as an example of a transmediated universe was the opportunity to interview one of the game designers at Silicon Knights,

who designed the game and managed this challenge (Rowsell, 2013). David Elton first came into the video-game industry through sales and merchandising and worked in a variety of roles in the video-game industry in the USA and Canada before he worked at Silicon Knights. During our interview, Elton described how the developers were allowed more design licence and expansion of modes by introducing new characters:

> "… for X-Men, we have the [Marvel] universe. We were fortunate enough in that we were able to create some original characters for it, which are actual playable characters in addition to the Marvel characters, but these characters still need to fit inside the universe".

What Elton enjoyed about working on the *X-Men* video game was having some artistic licence to create some new characters but always within the *X-Men* universe and aesthetic. Elton described this process as "fitting inside the universe of the story". When Elton met with the *X-Men* producers, he and his team talked about introducing new characters into the adapted gaming world. Elton described how players can take on the persona of new characters as their avatars but cannot take on an original character such as Cyclops because he is pre-existent with his own idiosyncratic look and behaviour. However, this is not to say that transmedia shifting is impossible or that efforts to undertake it by software developers always result in a poor video game. The title *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*, created by the development house Raven Software, successfully incorporates virtually all of the character's canonical abilities, motivations, personality and overall aesthetic while simultaneously creating a compelling adapted game world. As the video-game enthusiast website Cheat Code Central writes in their review:

> "In Origins, nearly everything [players] have seen Wolverine do in the comics is an attack [they] can control Years of dealing with the Marvel-verse have given [the developers] some incredible insights into the characters and story here and it's evident. Every remark, battle cry, and slash looks, sounds, and feels authentic to these characters" (Hendrix, 2009).

The developers at Raven Software dealt with Wolverine's immortality not by breaking canonical rules, but by reinterpreting them, just as storytellers do with a myth. In *Origins*, Wolverine can heal minor and major injuries (such as stabbings, clubbings or gunshot wounds), but a catastrophic injury, such as a grenade explosion, renders him incapacitated and results in the end of play. Later in the game, a more advanced level is prefaced by an in-game cinematic that details the temporary removal of his healing ability. Lazy or perhaps novice players who have relied on Wolverine's healing to survive earlier levels must come up with new strategies to defeat their enemies. In this way, the developers at Raven Software have woven

Wolverine's canonical abilities from the Marvel universe into the adapted game world they have created, which will then become part of the player's story world.

Just as a child playing with a Wolverine action figure has no restrictions imposed upon him by adults as to what his version of Wolverine can and cannot do (within reason), so too the ultimate goal of a game developer is to let the player imagine Wolverine in any way they wish that would still remain true to the character. It could be argued that the success or failure of a game is not measured by flashy graphics or a compelling storyline but by how well the developers bring a child's imagination to life.

The job of a video-game designer and design teams is therefore to mediate canonical, mythic universes within an adapted game world, bearing in mind a typical (if that is possible) "imagined story world" of players. In other words, developers must work within the boundaries of an existing story to transmediate and speculate on the idiosyncratic nature of possible gamers. Designers must maintain the integrity of the story myth or canon that extends across mediums and media. As well, game designers have to speculate on imagined story worlds. Of course, the idiosyncratic nature of gameplay makes it difficult to standardise *an* "imagined story world", so the challenge for designers like Elton is to design a world shaped around the canonical mythical universe, based on gaming logic and adapted story games, shaping it all around possible imagined story worlds.

Elton offered *X-Men* as an example of 'world building' or what we call in this article, *the adapted game world*:

> "When it comes to an idea for a story or concept or for building a world with a player, designers construct worlds around stories. One of the things that is in the toolbox for every designer is being able to communicate, and it is the same for a producer or people working in teams. You need to be able to communicate your ideas in ways that different people will be able to understand".

In this quote, Elton's emphasis on communicating worlds and stories to users refers to crafting a compelling plot through dialogue, graphics, words and illustrations, in order to translate interest from an existing story into an adapted version of the story.

During our interview with Elton, he emphasised the concept of "core ideas need(ing) to be communicated". Elton described how designers focus on particular features or elements of a story to create an adapted *X-Men* game world. He talked about creating *touchpoints* in designs that signal a mythic, canonical universe, yet he also discussed having freedom and licence to create gamer storied worlds. For instance, a player can select an avatar (e.g. Aimi Yoshida) at the beginning and

then select a trajectory for their character to project a certain pathway for *their* story and recruit the help of *X-Men* to help them with aspects of game play. In this way, a designer makes the game more idiosyncratic by offering flexibility in terms of actions but is constrained somewhat by aesthetics to exist within the canonical, mythic gaming universe.

A *touchpoint* can be a recurrent sound or musical motif, or it can be a visual that appears in particular instances to signal a story element that alludes to the mythic universe. For instance, the phrase "sworn to protect a world that hates and fears them" is the unofficial motto of the *X-Men* and appears or is alluded to in virtually all *X-Men* stories, regardless of media. Touchpoints can both reflect canonical worlds *and* they can signal ways of deviating from established story worlds. For example, when Wolverine extends his adamantium claws in the comics, the action is always accompanied by the word 'snikt', a visual onomatopoeic construction that serves to illustrate the sound of metal scraping against metal. Because video games are multimodal, the developers can choose to replace the visual representation with a sound effect or further illustrate this touchstone with the word appearing onscreen. Much like there is no way to truly express the auditory representation of a musical note in any other medium, there is no true way to literally translate 'snikt' to an aural medium or vice versa. Developers, then, must do the best with the resources they have available.

Another concept that recurred in the Elton interview is the notion of transmediation: migrating the canonical, mythic universe into an adapted media world. Siegel (2006) describes transmediation as a process when one mode switches into another mode. For Elton, moving a character such as Wolverine from an *X-Men* comic into a video game not only changes how the character is visually portrayed but also requires game developers to subtly shift character abilities for successful game-play requirements. When modes shift from a printed cartoon to a moving image to a video game, modal properties, affordances and constraints shift. As we discussed earlier with the example of Wolverine, there are effects that you can have in comics and movies that are far more difficult in game worlds. Game designers need to have creative and innovative ways of adapting a mythic universe into authentic and homologous gaming practices but still keeping with the integrity of the story.

There are several production practices implicit to the *X-Men* example: transmediation, bricolage and multimodal composition. Remix (the act of taking one thing and making into something else) represents the choosing, sorting, assembling, distributing and remixing practices that happen when turning one text into another one. It is about remixing one thing into another thing: a Marvel comic into a Marvel video game (but, importantly, not changing canonical characters or the

Marvel universe). Whereas remixing privileges a mixing and melding together of previously existing texts, discourses and 'stuff' (Gee, 1999), convergence privileges uniting technologies and functions, thereby gathering dispersed networks (Jenkins, 2006). To keep with the *X-Men* example, as mentioned earlier, remix is taking one thing and making into something else. Convergence is combining different technologies such as moving images that can be manipulated to create a different meaning-making and communicational experience. Jenkins writes about convergence culture and how media consumers choose among an array of forms to participate socially in new media cultures, blurring the lines between consumers and producers. During the interview with Elton, he talked about the remixing practices in which game designers engage. Within a game's visual design, remix and convergence take place when game designers combine vestiges of characters and embed them in the game. To offer an example of remixing in visual design, Elton discussed how designers take a familiar aesthetic such as Scarlett Johansson's body type or Angelina Jolie's lips and remix and converge these aesthetic features to design a character. Through bricolage (i.e. compositional practices with a range of forms and features), designers construct characters and backdrops that are remixed and converged versions of other texts. Aspects of visual design in video games, such as a character's hairstyle looking like Scarlett Johansson's, may be transplanted into another character, but they still serve as touchpoints to remind the player and/or viewer of the original character. For example, Jean Grey may have one of many different hairstyles, but her locks will always be fiery red, whereas Storm's locks will always be white.

During the interview, Elton described the facets of this complex process when a negotiated mythic universe merges with an adapted, transmediated text to create possible story-world trajectories for players to imagine.

Imagined story worlds

It is our view that video games offer new ways of telling stories. In *X-Men*, children's game play is complicated by the fact that they actually play a role in the telling of the story. They are both the character and the reader/player. To tell the story, they need to act it out – they need to *do* something, which is typically to complete a set of actions to make the game happen. To successfully play many video games, players need to live the transmediated story narrative. Gamers need to take on a role, forcing them to engage in cognitive processing (Gee, 2003). To role-play, one has to interpret elements, choose sides and know one's environment. Whereas many casual games such as *Tetris*, *Angry Birds* and *Peggle* have no storyline, most console-based titles (that is, games played on the Sony PlayStation, Microsoft Xbox or Nintendo Wii) feature a

story that serves as the skeleton for a title to hang its game play upon and to compel people to play.

Video games such as *X-Men Destiny* are nested within story worlds or transmediated story narratives. In this way, they can be considered modern-day cultural narratives (Lacasa et al., 2008). According to Lacasa et al. (2008), there are two main approaches to gaming and narrative: ludologists who prioritise game rules and narratologists who prioritise story and storytelling. Stories in games rely on narrative entry-points, which hinge on the different game narratives evident in the texts. Juul (2005) talks about event-based games. From this perspective, the video game relies on rules, and rules carry power for players. Alongside this, Juul identifies another narrative construct as "embodied fictional themes". These are game narratives that rely on emotions and affect. In other words, there are game narratives that function on experience and actions with rules shaping game play. Then there are games that work within imaginary worlds and that function on responding to and transacting with stories. These stories not only rely on the integrity of existing franchises such as the *X-Men* but also on the assumptions and predilections of the gamers coming into the experience. The video-game story as a narrative sets up a series of variables to exist in another domain entirely, allowing children and adolescents to take on different ways of talking, writing, understanding and producing images and experimenting with different parts of their identities.

Multiple play-throughs allow gamers to relive, again and again, the elements of a story. In other words, as Toscano (2011) describes it, players absorb the cultural messages of games. Gamers thereby exist in what is tantamount to a figured world (Holland et al., 1998) or what we refer to in the preceding text as an imagined world. For a gamer to exist within their own game story world, they need to adopt and project a particular identity into their avatar and to base their gaming practices and trajectory on combined properties from their own subjectivities and those of the avatar. Video games usher gamers into adapted story worlds, like a film, only the gamer enacts the plot for the film as they play. Video games could even be seen as enacted or remediated cinema. Video games are stories rendered live through objects that players can manipulate and act upon. Often narrative choices not only entail choice but also trajectories. Games tell stories: they are rich in description, displaying visual and aural material. In this way, games are not closed stories, but they are circular and iterative and can provoke multiple interpretations. However, because they are participatory media (Jenkins, 2006), video games require a player for their story to be told. Whereas a television show or movie theatre may broadcast their story from beginning to end to an empty room, a video game without a player will not progress and tell no story at all. The player and the story told by the game are therefore two sides of the same coin; one cannot exist without the other.

To build the argument that video-game practices afford the learner literacy opportunities, we acknowledge that paratextual practices around video gaming also contribute to the notion of the story world. Gaming is a social practice that extends into other social media forums.

On 28 September 2011, a gaming enthusiast named GhostRobo (2011) uploaded a video on YouTube called 'X-Men Destiny Walkthrough Part 1 – Emma, Where Are Your Clothes? – Let's Play (Gameplay & Commentary)'. To date, this video (the first of 18 videos for the video game *X-Men Destiny*) has been viewed 399,082 times. Game walkthroughs are usually created by an expert gamer who records a voice-over while playing a new title. With an authorial tone, the player walks the viewer through footage of the game offering advice, strategies, jokes and personal opinion as to the game's quality. Game walkthroughs on YouTube are a popular genre among audiences of not only those who play the game but also potential consumers looking for hands-on game-play footage instead of pre-rendered animations often shown in television commercials. Walkthroughs are also entertainment media for individuals who might never purchase the game. For example, children who are too young to play but are drawn to the popular mythos might enjoy watching the recording. The joke in the title of the video alludes to the *X-Men* character Emma Frost, a British telepath who can turn her body to diamond and who rarely wears more than lingerie; with a prudish tone, GhostRobo expresses his discomfort with her wardrobe. While walkthroughs are often comedic and light-hearted, they also reveal the social conditioning that goes on alongside game play in these paratexts. The *X-Men Destiny* walkthrough series is only one of a nearly 100-game walkthrough series that GhostRobo has produced in the last 2 years.

Game walkthroughs are a growing practice that contributes to the broader popular culture experience of gaming. Walsh and Apperley (2009) draw on Mia Consalvo's observation that walkthroughs are one form of gaming 'paratext', which:

> *"play an important role in creating connections and distinctions between individuals in gaming capital and are an important common ground for the basis of social relations formed around video game play" (Walsh and Walsh and Apperley, 2009, pp. 3–4).*

In their paper 'Gaming Capital: Rethinking Literacy', Walsh and Apperley theorise the importance of the notion of the student's 'lifeworld':

> *"This research hopes to explore the value of studying games in school because they play a vital role in young people's lifeworlds and in the development of their sense of self as well as their relations with others. We suggest that gaming capital is a valuable tool for conceptualizing the nexus of gameplayers, video computer games and gaming culture along with all of its accoutrements" (Walsh and Apperley, 2009, p. 10).*

In this formulation, the *X-Men Destiny* walkthroughs offer not only a means to engage in fan culture around the game but also an identity-building process, which contributes to the gaming and storying phenomenon as a whole.

Conclusion

Increasingly, video-game practices will be further incorporated into children's home literary practices. As such, literacy professionals will have to deal with convergence of imagined story worlds, adapted game worlds and canonical mythical universes and their impact on children's play and learning.

An aboriginal scholar by the name of Thomas King (2008) once said: "The truth about stories is that, that is all we are", which serves as a fitting coda for our article on overlapping story worlds in video games. Stories are age-old and where they used to be passed on in oral cultures, present-day storytelling has many manifestations such as video games. Epic ancient stories emerged from oral stories such as *The Odyssey* and many of the tropes within such stories buttress contemporary media. Archetypal heroes such as Odysseus setting out on adventures to face battles, friends and foes are the basis for video game plots such as *World of Warcraft* and *X-Men* video-games. Adventure stories have been passed down from generation to generation, taken up in many different iterations.

In this article, we examined a video game and stories of its production and paratexts to speculate on how learners negotiate overlapping storied worlds. Reinterpreting stories and tropes, characters and rhetorical devices in stories is not new in disciplines such as literary criticism, but within gaming literature, there is a gap in research that traces transmediated stories and the ways in which transmediation influences gamers and how they take up these worlds. Our explicit framing of the *X-men* story and how it transforms and morphs into something quite different in an adapted gaming world illustrates shifts in aesthetics, practices and navigational systems when a story migrates into a gaming text. Such an optic gives readers of this Special Issue not only a deeper appreciation for the complexity of story arcs in design and producing popular culture texts but also how integrity to story and to central substantive strands deviate to accommodate different media channels and modal constraints. We hope that this optic compels other researchers to dig down deep into stories and the shifts and diversions they take when they transmediate into other text genres.

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