TOM DOWD MICHAEL FRY MICHAEL NIEDERMAN JOSEF STEIFF

STORYTELLING
Across Worlds

TRANSMEDIA FOR CREATIVES AND PRODUCERS

Storytelling Across Worlds: Transmedia for Creatives and Producers

Praise for *Storytelling Across Worlds*

"For anyone interested in transmedia storytelling this book is a fantastic starting point – stimulating, observant, and insightful. It's a panoramic view of this fascinating new arena of storytelling."

— Carlton Cuse, Writer/Executive Producer/Showrunner *LOST*, *Bates Motel*

"Storytelling Across Worlds" acknowledges that, increasingly, all media is transmedia. As part of working in television, I've found myself creating webisodes, podcasts, games, comic books, motion comics, short stories, fictionalized twitter feeds and web sites set within the parent shows' fictional worlds. This book draws on contemporary examples to provide perspective on this huge, and somehow still growing, creative world. Any book would be challenged to get its arms around a topic that is defined by its unconstrained scope. This one grabs transmedia in a mighty hug and doesn't let go."

— Jane Espenson, Television writer/producer*: Buffy The Vampire Slayer*, *Battlestar Galactica*, *Once Upon* A *Time*, *Husbands*

"How often in life have you been warned that "there are rules"? *Storytelling Across Worlds* delightfully dispenses with antiquated narrative limitations by throwing open the endless possibilities of sophisticated narrative through transmedia storytelling as the actual, practical bedrock of modern entertainment. With this book, the authors have crafted an elegant and masterful dissection of narrative's new world order."

—Vlad Woylnetz, President of Production, Cineflix, Executive Producer *Torchwood*, Executive in Charge of Production *Mad Men*, *Breaking Bad*, & *Walking Dead*

Storytelling Across Worlds: Transmedia for Creatives and Producers

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Preface

> *Transmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story. So, for example, in the Matrix franchise, key bits of information are conveyed through three live action films, a series of animated shorts, two collections of comic book stories, and several video games. There is no one single source or ur-text where one can turn to gain all of the information needed to comprehend the Matrix universe.*
>
> **—Henry Jenkins ("Transmedia Storytelling 101," accessed April 25, 2012, http://www.henryjenkins.org/2007/03/transmedia_storytelling_101.html)**

Transmedia storytelling is storytelling writ large, across multiple platforms, media, and story words. The modern narrative property cannot exist in one form alone. Freely absorbing multiple channels of media constantly, today's audience has an almost insatiable desire for *more* of its current favorite property or franchise. From film to television to games to webisodes to novels to alternate-reality games to comic books, and beyond, any major media property that expects to stand out from the crowd has to do so on multiple platforms. Traditional single media or simple adaptations – where the storyline from one media piece is adapted into another medium – are rapidly becoming old school. In its place is the idea (and ideal) of transmedia storytelling, where one broadly-conceived, engaging story is told across multiple media, with each platform telling its own contained story, but at the same time only part of the larger story. (The Producers Guild of America, a trade organization whose members are television, motion picture, and new media producers, recently recognized the new above-the-line credit of "Transmedia Producer" in acknowledgment of the field's rapid development.)

Watch the movie, and you experience one complete, satisfying story, but that's only part of the larger possibilities. Now play the game or read the novels, and learn more about what else is going on in and around the story. You may even see some of the events from the film in a different light. For producers and property-rights holders, transmedia storytelling is the avenue to multiple-platform monetization of the larger story, and for "creatives" (writers and other creative contributors) it is the art of world building and the opportunity to tell stories, reveal characters, and explore worlds as never before.

Times have changed. We live in a time when we are all connected by technology of one kind or another. We absorb information from multiple, parallel channels constantly. True multi-tasking may or may not be a real thing, but it often feels like we're absorbing all of these channels simultaneously in one great wave of information. We're not, but it feels like we are.

One of the reasons we, the authors, sat down to create this book is not only our own involvement in transmedia creation, but our experience discussing transmedia and transmedia storytelling with our graduate and undergraduate students. The deeper we take them into Alice's rabbit hole, the more excited they become. Not only do they realize that this is something that they *want*, but that it has been, subconsciously for some, what they *expect*. When there isn't a video game tie-in to a blockbuster movie or when they can't find more stories about their favorite television series on bookstore shelves (virtual or physical), they're surprised and disappointed. The fact that some of their favorite franchises have had cross-media support has conditioned them to expect it from all of them, especially the ones that excite them the most.

Our students have been filmmakers, television writers and producers, video game designers, aspiring novelists … media creators of all flavors. But we've also spoken to industry professionals of all shapes, sizes and backgrounds about transmedia and though their eyes collectively light up over the subject, there is a haze of uncertainty and confusion that quickly settles in. More than one media producer expressed to us that they wished a book like we intend existed when they were trying to explain transmedia to other more traditionally entrenched producers and executives.

We suspect this book has the most value for newcomers to the realm of transmedia storytelling, but we hope seasoned creators and producers can find value as well. We intend this book as a practical primer (albeit introductory) on the conceptualization, structuring, writing, execution, management and marketing of a transmedia property that manifests on multiple media and shares a single interwoven story. Frankly, in order to fully understand the transmedia storytelling creation process one has to be versed well enough in all of the media involved, and all of the processes involved. The task is probably too large for one book to cover completely. In fact, the scope of this project – and the thinking involved (yes, there was some) – required four authors, each with particular knowledge, experience and insight into the different areas the book covers.

Even with that we fully recognize that this book does not, and cannot, cover everything – past, present or future – in transmedia storytelling. This means that invariably some property or franchise, some transmedia storytelling project or expression (undoubtedly your favorite and the one you think is the *most important* example of the form) will get the short shrift, or be insultingly ignored entirely. For that, we apologize in advance, but we knew going in that we were going to have to make significant content and coverage choices and decided to focus on the larger, mass-media transmedia storytelling franchises and possibilities.

One way we thought about this was that we were focusing on transmedia projects "writ large." Others, such as transmedia producer/creator Andrea Phillips (*Perplex City*, *Routes*) would place this book firmly in the "West Coast" or "Hollywood" camp of transmedia, versus the more indie, intimate, personally interactive "East Coast" transmedia. While we hope that this characterization won't fuel something rivaling the East Coast–West Coast hip-hop wars, we would agree with her. We're also going to avoid wading into the academic end of transmedia analysis and theory too deeply, but some of it will be necessary (and we do open the book with a quote from Henry Jenkins.) Some of that discourse will be useful, but this book is about doing, not just considering.

This book is for everyone curious about transmedia storytelling in one form or another, coming at it from nearly any medium. We're going to focus primarily on motion pictures, television, and video games as the primary launch medium (or "mothership" – but more on that in a bit), but delve into other areas such as novels, webisodes, graphic novels, and so on. The three chapters on motion pictures, television, and video games in Part 2 of the book respectively exist to provide practitioners and managers who may exist in one of those fields, but don't fully know the others, a basic overview and introduction of the structures and practices of these other areas while exploring the presence of transmedia storytelling in each area. Thus far, creatives and producers have focused on single areas of production – motion pictures, television, or video games. For those going to participate in or supervise the creation of a transmedia property, a minimum understanding of all the important media is required. Each field has its seminal works on theory (and we'll point you at them) for additional detail and understanding. For the heavy lifting, however, we *strongly* encourage recruitment of experts in the individual media areas who live and breathe those platforms. Film is not television, television is not video games, and so on. What is normal, commonplace, assumed, or standard in one is not in the other. Some core ideas move laterally across media, but some basic

conceptions do not. We encourage anyone involved in the transmedia production process to make use of such experts as much as possible, especially those with a multi-disciplinary mindset.

Transmedia storytelling is the new frontier. Don't let anyone tell you that the old rules don't apply anymore – many of them do – but many of them require a different critical, creative, and managerial eye to make work. We're in the early days of deliberate transmedia storytelling, so be prepared to explore and experiment. New thinking and new approaches are required, but the possibilities and the rewards are staggering.

Tom Dowd, Michael Fry,
Michael Niederman, and Josef Steiff.
Chicago, Summer 2012

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Part 1

Understanding Transmedia Storytelling

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Chapter 1

One Story

With transmedia you're not repeating the same story on a movie screen, a TV screen, a novel and a videogame. You are using each one to tell a complete piece of your story and combined they can all become a deeper, richer and more immersive experience.

—Jeff Gomez, CEO, Starlight Runner Entertainment[1]

What Is Transmedia?

Transmedia has many definitions, some of them new, some of them legacy and some of them based in non-storytelling mediums, such as marketing, merchandizing, and advertising. In many of these definitions, transmedia is conceptually interchangeable with terms like "cross-media" "multimedia", "multiplatform storytelling", "franchise" or even "interactive media" – associations and uses that can make the concept of "transmedia" a bit confusing. The definition of a transmedia narrative property used by the Producers Guild of America (which we'll get to shortly) differs from the definition used by transmedia/alternate-reality game pioneers like Jordan Weisman, who see transmedia as the use of multiple media fragments to reveal a previously unknown, or unexpected, hidden story.

In this book, we are expressly talking about the process of storytelling, of building the transmedia narrative property (the end product) in all its forms. We are particularly looking at how to tell stories that come from and exist in a larger intellectual property universe carefully designed and built to allow multiple iterations, expressions, and platforms simultaneously and sequentially. Though there are implications in the delivery of transmedia stories that fall within the territory of marketing, we are principally concerned here with those aspects that directly relate to the creation of narrative. The term we're using is *transmedia storytelling*. It is a bit cumbersome, so we'll often just say transmedia. If we're meaning transmedia marketing, or some other use of transmedia, we'll specifically call that out. So, if you see transmedia it means transmedia storytelling.

[1] "5 Questions with Jeff Gomez, CEO, Starlight Runner Entertainment" accessed July 25, 2012, www.dmwmedia.com/news/2011/04/11

More and more, audiences want their entertainment experiences to transcend the medium itself and transmedia storytelling provides this by creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience that builds from multiple encounters with the narrative and elements of the property's universe, each medium making its own unique contribution to the unfolding story.

The Producers Guild Definition

Our cornerstone is the motion picture Producers Guild of America's definition of a transmedia producer credit, established in 2010, which has more or less set the industry standard for transmedia:

> *A Transmedia Narrative project must consist of three or more narrative storylines existing within the same fictional universe.*
>
> **Producers Guild of America, Code of Credits – New Media**[2]

(The entirety of the Code of Credits entry for transmedia producer is reproduced in Appendix F.)

The piece of language quoted above is interesting in that it specifically calls out a transmedia narrative project as having *three or more narrative storylines existing within the same universe*. It does not differentiate between how many platforms these discrete storylines must exist on, but we're going to operate under the distinction that a true transmedia narrative property has to utilize at least two different platforms – the more the better – to tell its stories.

The transmedia producer is responsible for a significant portion of the transmedia property's long-term planning, development, production and/or maintenance of story continuity across the multiple platforms and creation of original storylines for new platforms. This can include the creation and implementation of interactive endeavors to unite the audience of the property with the narrative, as long as they are related directly to the narrative presentation of the project and not simply marketing extensions. Media properties like *Glee*, *True Blood*, and *Game of Thrones* have been successful at developing interactive projects that engage their audiences through a variety of means, though not all of these have been transmedia storytelling.

For a property to be transmedia, it also has to be more than just adapting the same story to different media. Each expression has to tell a complete piece of a larger story. This is not an arbitrary decision – we as transmedia producers have to identify those aspects of the story or universe that are best served by the specific strengths of a particular medium. Our goal is to create multiple expressions of the story across various platforms that when taken as a whole create a deeper, richer and more immersive experience for the audience.

Transmedia is most conducive to those stories where there is a complex universe and rich backstory or mythology that can extend into an exploration of that universe via multiple (potentially interrelated) characters, each with their own stories that expand and deepen our understanding of that world. As Henry Jenkins pointed out in the Preface, *The Matrix* (Warner Brothers, 1999) is a good example of this. Our understanding of the property comes from information conveyed through three live-action films, a series of animated shorts, two collections of comic book stories and several video games. Much of the pleasure for the audience is in compiling this range of experiences and the story information gathered from each into a meaningful larger view of the universe, characters, conflicts and themes we call *The Matrix*. This said, not all stories should be a transmedia experience and one of our tasks as a transmedia producer is similar to that of all producers within individual mediums – figuring out whether this is the best possible expression for the story we want to tell.

This is one of the toughest lessons for novice producers – the temptation is to think any story can be told in any medium. But there are some forms of stories or story elements that work best as a live theatre and others that work

[2]accessed July 20, 2012, http://www.producersguild.org/?page=coc_nm#transmedia

best as novels and others that work as TV series and … you get the idea. The core elements of your story – character, conflict, and so on – all have to work in any of the media, however.

If we do have a property that does benefit from or work best with multiple expressions of the story, each individual expression must be a satisfying experience on its own terms and yet also make a contribution to the larger intellectual property narrative as well. In other words, we need to be able to watch J. J. Abram's 2009 and 2013 *Star Trek* (Paramount Pictures) films and have a complete coherent story experience, but at the same time, if we have read the prequel comic series *Star Trek: Countdown* (IDW, 2009) (which bridges the 2009 motion picture and the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* television series) or the *Star Trek Ongoing* (IDW, 2011 – present) comics (which bridges the 2009 and 2013 motion pictures *and* connects the new films with events seen in *Star Trek: The Original Series* in the 1960s), we learn additional narrative information that makes for a deeper and more complex understanding of the larger story. Transmedia guru Henry Jenkins has pointed out that this is similar to game designer Neil Young's concept of "additive comprehension" or the ways in which we compile information from each part of the story we encounter which then causes us to reconsider or revise our understanding of the larger narrative as a whole (Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collides*, NYU Press, 2006).

Transmedia, Intellectual Property and Franchises

Before we dig much further in, we're going to lay out a set of definitions that hopefully make what comes after easier to understand. If you are hip-deep in media production and transmedia, you probably already know these terms and if not here they are.

According to the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO):

> *Intellectual property (IP) refers to creations of the mind: inventions, literary and artistic works and symbols, names, images and designs used in commerce.*
>
> *IP is divided into two categories: Industrial property, which includes inventions (patents), trademarks, industrial designs and geographic indications of source; and Copyright, which includes literary and artistic works such as novels, poems and plays, films, musical works, artistic works such as drawings, paintings, photographs and sculptures and architectural designs. Rights related to copyright include those of performing artists in their performances, producers of phonograms in their recordings and those of broadcasters in their radio and television programs.*
>
> **What is Intellectual Property**[3]

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy further elaborates:

> *Intellectual property is generally characterized as non-physical property that is the product of original thought. Typically, rights do not surround the abstract non-physical entity; rather, intellectual property rights surround the control of physical manifestations or expressions of ideas. Intellectual property protects rights to ideas by protecting rights to produce and control physical instantiations of those ideas.*
>
> **Intellectual Property**[4]

Both of these definitions/explanations focus heavily on the idea of legal rights associated with the dissemination, distribution, publication or control of otherwise intangible ideas. For us transmedia professionals (or aspiring) the majority of concepts and issues around intellectual property are outside our concern. When we talk about *intellectual properties*, or IP as it is often abbreviated, we're talking about a universe of story possibilities presentable and creatively expressible in a variety of media. Let's reiterate: when we talk about intellectual property we're talking

[3] accessed July 27, 2012, http://www.wipo.int/about-ip/en/

[4] accessed July 27, 2012, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/intellectual-property/

about an overall or over-arching story that can be told in a number of media. And when we're talking about a story, we're not just talking about the simple expression of a story, like "Bob loves Alice, but Alice is actually leader of a band of rebellious ghosts seeking more fulfilling after-lives. Can true love prevail?," but rather all of the creative effort and expression that goes into it – what the story is about literally (rebellious ghosts), figuratively (the quest for true love) and thematically (what defines life and living), what actually happens in the story (the plot sequence and elements), the characters of Bob, Alice and whomever (or whatever) might be in the story, the world and setting the story takes place in (is it our realistic world, or something more heightened or stylized?) and the overall style and tone of the story (tongue-in-cheek? serious and gory?). For us, the intellectual property is all of the narrative-related creative components.

As transmedia-makers we care about all of these things because these are our building blocks. Our main project may directly tell the story of Bob and Alice, but we can create a tie-in novel that deals with Alice's backstory before she met Bob, or an interactive tablet game that focuses on Fizzle, her sarcastic but equally ghostly cat sidekick. We can tell other stories of other ghosts in the world, or if there's a ghostly version of our world we can tell stories there.

All these components, all these elements – *story/theme*, *plot*, *character*, *setting* and to some extent *style/tone* (which informs the other elements) – are valued parts of our intellectual property. If our property is solid, they are all working together to support each other and if they aren't, there will be problems. As transmedia-makers, we have to understand how all these parts fit together since in many ways it is a big three-dimensional puzzle; moving or changing one of the pieces in the wrong way could blow the whole thing apart.

Throughout the book we'll use the terms *intellectual property* and *property* synonymously. We'll use the terms *platform* or *medium* to refer to the type of expression of the property, such as motion picture, television series, video game, novel, comic book and so on. So a given intellectual property can have multiple expressions on a variety of platforms or media.

We'll also use the term *franchise*, and for a long time franchise and intellectual property basically meant the same thing. We're going to broaden the term franchise to include the intellectual property, all of the various platform expressions, all of the marketing … everything, the whole burrito related to the property and how the market experiences or access it. (And that's the last crappy food analogy we're going to use. We hope.)

Stumbling Toward Transmedia

While we can talk about the ideal transmedia development process as the careful planning and development of a larger narrative that has a coordinated presentation to its audience via multiple methods or storytelling platforms, the reality is that there are few great examples of that process … yet. Many of the properties we might call transmedia include iterations of story that were not conceived simultaneously, but rather were created sequentially. *Alien* (20th Century Fox, 1979) did not start out as larger intellectual property, but grew from the original motion picture to a sequel (*Aliens*, 20th Century Fox, 1986) that spawned its own sequel (*Alien*^{3}, 20th Century Fox, 1992) and branched out into video games, comics, novels and additional films, and even crossed over into two other film franchises, *Aliens vs. Predator* (20th Century Fox, 2004) and *Prometheus* (20th Century Fox, 2012).

The process here is similar to building a house by adding rooms to a small existing structure (a shed perhaps?) rather than designing and creating a blueprint for all the house's rooms at once. Our goal in transmedia development is to design a house – not build a room and then keep adding to it. We want to treat transmedia as simultaneous

development of its various (or at least its initial multiple) expressions rather than think of it as a sequential series of additions to the mythology, themes, conflicts and universe.

For all these reasons, you will see the term transmedia used in a variety of ways to refer to a variety of projects and intellectual properties, regardless of how they came about. At best, we can identify some of the ideal defining characteristics for transmedia, but the terminology is still in flux. The bottom line is that transmedia *storytelling* is about *story*, a story whose individual components have to capture the imagination and fully engage an audience who wants to discover a larger universe filled with narrative possibilities. And *transmedia storytelling* is what we are all about.

Transmedia Storytelling for Producers

We've just gone on somewhat about what transmedia storytelling is, isn't and might be to some. Since we're targeted this book at both producers and creatives currently working in different media it makes sense to first define what we mean by a "producer"… and that depends on what medium we're talking about. (We'll look at transmedia for creatives later in this chapter.)

Different media (and we're focusing on our "big three" here – motion pictures, television and video games) define the term "producer" differently and in fact they have different roles and responsibilities in each of those media. Though we're going to touch on each of those and their differences, in many ways we're really talking about any producer of transmedia narrative properties, which is to say any individual responsible for overseeing and managing one or more interconnected transmedia narrative projects. The credit/title of transmedia producer that we mentioned earlier is one bestowed by the Producers Guild of America and pertains to motion picture and television projects under their jurisdiction, but members of the Producers Guild aren't going to be the only managers, coordinators or facilitators of transmedia narrative properties.

First, let's look at the different roles of producers in each medium and then a look again at who a transmedia producer (as per the Producers Guild) or transmedia producer (not part of the Producers Guild) could be. Each of the examples below are quick-and-dirty explanations for those who may not know what each type of producer does in the different areas. (If you are in that medium as a producer, you know full well that your role and responsibility is far more complicated than we've depicted here, for brevity's sake.)

Motion picture producers: In motion pictures, the designations and roles for members of the producing team have evolved over the decades. Currently, there are several tiers of producer titles, but the ones most pertinent to us as transmedia storytellers are executive producer, producer (sometimes now referred to as creative producer but still credited as producer) and line producer.

The motion picture executive producer's role is primarily one of financial and organizational responsibility. It is also the executive producer's responsibility to act as a liaison to the producing studio, as well as any independent backers.

The (creative) producer finds the original idea, hires the scriptwriters and director, helps develop the story material into a producible script, and helps bring together the financing. The producer then coordinates and oversees the actual production of the motion picture with the assistance of the line producer, who keeps an eye on and manages the schedule and budget on a day-to-day basis. A motion picture producer has supervisory business and creative responsibilities for the production and has direct participation in the decision making, but is not an implementer of those decisions. Line producers will coordinate between departments, oversee logistics, and facilitate the day-to-day running of the production.

In smaller independent productions these different producing roles might be combined.

Television producers: There are actually different professional descriptions of the television producer depending on if they are working on a long-form (television movie) or series production. Long-form producers have roles and responsibilities very similar to their motion picture counterparts. Producers of television series have different responsibilities. The television series executive producer has the final responsibility for all of the business and creative aspects of the production and is responsible to the financial backers of the series. The executive producer is often also referred to as the showrunner, which in a nutshell explains his role and responsibility. On some series the head writer also receives the title of executive producer. Producers, as listed in television series credits, may have financial and budget responsibilities for the show, or they may be staff writers on the program. Producers with day-to-day production responsibilities are usually designated by the title coordinating producer or associate producer.

Video game producers: The exact role of a producer in video games varies somewhat depending on the company making the game. In some companies, the executive producer is the senior creative and production team member, with overall authority on the project. In some companies that responsibility is split between a creative director (creative) and executive producer (budgetary and coordination.) Again, depending on the company, and the relationship between the publisher (financial backer) of the project and the development studio (the production house), the executive producer may be working at the publisher, or may be on-staff at the developer, in which case the individual responsible at the publisher is known as the project or product manager. Producers are usually on-staff at the development house and are responsible for working with the production team on budget, scheduling and coordination issues. Sometimes, though, the publisher has a producer also attached to the project. Confused yet? Welcome to the game industry …

What this all means is that depending on which medium you are working in and which medium those you are working with are in, similar titles could very well mean different roles and responsibilities. So, understand that your title of producer in one medium may not entail the same responsibilities as someone titled producer in a different medium. We're singling out these particular producer roles because even though the Producers Guild has recognized the transmedia producer credit for their members, producers in other fields (particularly video games) are very often involved in transmedia storytelling projects. For the remainder of this section, however, we're going to roll all the "producers" out there together and use the term to refer to someone who, to use the Producers Guild definition is:

> *the person(s) responsible for a significant portion of a project's long-term planning, development, production and/or maintenance of narrative continuity across multiple platforms and creation of original storylines for new platforms. Transmedia producers also create and implement interactive endeavors to unite the audience of the property with the canonical narrative and this element should be considered as valid qualification for credit as long as they are related directly to the narrative presentation of a project.*
>
> **Producers Guild of America, Code of Credits – New Media**[5]

The Role of the Transmedia Producer

Remembering that the language in the preceding section defines a transmedia narrative property or franchise as consisting of three or more narrative storylines existing in the same fictional universe on multiple platforms, it becomes very clear that someone who is a transmedia producer could be doing so from a great number of entry points. There's a commonality to the responsibilities of "producer" as well in the explanation of the different types of producers in motion pictures, television and video games that applies to the transmedia producer as well. Let's lay them out:

- Finding the idea
- Determining the scope/setting the budget

[5] accessed July 20, 2012, http://www.producersguild.org/?page=coc_nm#transmedia

- Building the team
- Setting the schedule
- Overseeing production

We address many of the bullet points above in sections throughout this book, but some we do not, or only lightly touch upon, because they are so specific to particular circumstances. We're going to look at each of them briefly in the following sections and then leave you to dig into details later on.

Finding the Idea

This usually comes about in one of two ways – you seek an original property to build a transmedia franchise from, or you are associated with an existing intellectual property that is expanding through transmedia storytelling. To a large extent in this book we're assuming the latter, but everything that we talk about pertains equally to what would make an original property or an existing one successful as a transmedia storytelling property. It does require careful analysis and consideration: transmedia storytelling does not happen by magic. You cannot simply decide to extend a property through transmedia storytelling and expect success, as the managerial, production and creative processes involved are complex and sometimes cumbersome. Frankly it's hard, and if it wasn't, everyone would be doing it successfully all the time, and they're not. We're not trying to dissuade anyone from undertaking a transmedia narrative project, but it is important to understand that the degree of difficulty (to toss in the obligatory sports metaphor) is notably higher than the already significant challenges present in producing a story-driven property in a single medium.

Hopefully this book will help you identify the elements of a successful transmedia storytelling property and understand what needs to be done to bring it to life.

Determining the Scope/Setting the Budget

How big, how many properties, how many stories … these are all difficult questions to ask and answer. This is somewhat of a cop-out answer, but so much depends on the particulars of the specific project. Understanding the realities of your budget and production realities will in and of itself answer many of the scope questions. A major motion picture of the summer blockbuster variety can cost upwards of $150 million, while limited-scope productions like *Paranormal Activity* (Paramount Pictures, 2007) can cost in the tens of thousands of dollars and still be very successful both commercially and artistically. A television series can likewise cost millions of dollars an episode, whereas the webisode series content of a transmedia project like *Collider* (www.colliderworld.com) costs magnitudes less. Video game development for a huge Playstation 3/Xbox 360/PC project like *Mass Effect 3* (Electronic Arts, 2012) can easily cost tens of millions of dollars (and then some), but a web-delivered or mobile game such as the *Doctor Who: The Mazes of Time* (BBC Worldwide, 2010) game for the iPad costs significantly less. Novels, comic books and graphic novels are all viable alternatives on a limited budget, but have differing levels of impact and different exposure patterns.

While budget and scope are production reality issues, the creative scope must also be considered as well. Transmedia storytelling projects can get narratively big and unwieldy quickly as multiple projects have to be cross-referenced for consistency and continuity. How much new story material will be created and how quickly? Who has to review and approve it all? How quickly does this approval process have to happen in order for the various projects to stay on schedule? Again, there are no simple answers. A screenplay might be relatively easy to vet, whereas as the contents of a novel are significantly denser … but a motion picture has visual and production design elements (costumes, makeup, etc.) that have to be reviewed. Who's going to do that and how quickly?

One obvious course of action in trying to overcome budgetary constraints is to reach out to production partners who are willing to take on part of the financial risk in return for some of the profits. These can be complex deals to achieve and may themselves be outside the scope of a brand-new transmedia franchise. It is easier to find production partners for properties with established track-records, or properties from producers with established track-records.

Building the Team

Perhaps the single most important thing a transmedia producer can do is find the right people for the right job. One of the purposes of this book is to introduce producers and creatives who currently exist in one of the common transmedia storytelling property mediums to enough aspects of the other mediums that they can carry on a conversation with other practitioners. But we're not trying to turn everyone who reads these pages into an expert at everything. Those who are truly multi-medium savants are few and far between, so we strongly advocate that the transmedia producer seek out those who are skilled in a particular medium to create for that medium.

Ideally, you want a team that has some inter-disciplinary knowledge or experience, but it is more important to make sure that the person hired to write your kick-ass screenplay knows how to write for motion pictures, and that the team that you hire to design your awesome iPad game has experience making video games. Don't fall into the trap of assuming too much overlap in the skill sets of those experienced in these different areas. Continuing the previous example, writing a great story for a motion picture is not the same as writing a great story for a video game, even though both are visual mediums that seem to have a great deal in common.

So, it is important that the team you assemble to oversee the transmedia storytelling properties is either comprised of those individually strong in the different areas, or have some multi-disciplinary knowledge themselves. It is also important that whoever on the transmedia property management team that is interfacing with those producing material in a particular medium is able to speak-the-speak of that medium. Being able to at least somewhat walk-the-walk and actually having some real production experience in that area is even better. Nothing is a substitute for actually making something in the medium.

Lastly, make sure the people you hire are passionate about your project, truly and deeply, since that passion manifests in what they produce. Their technical skills need to be up to snuff, but their energy level and love of your property have to match that. Be careful of production or development studios that can muster a great pitch for your project, but don't have a team backing them that matches that vim and vigor. You are handing off your baby, your prized possession, to acquaintances … spend the time making sure that they're the right people for the job.

Setting the Schedule

Knowing in what order to release the elements of a transmedia storytelling property is an art. You could go big and release the primary property and then trail any secondary or ancillary material a short time after it, and then release a medium-sized project a little time after that to keep interest up. Alternatively, you could release some smaller transmedia narrative pieces before the primary property to build anticipation and then debut the main project.

Many of the answers to these questions are determined by the realities of your projects and the realities of the markets you are releasing into. In many ways, this is more of a question of the marketing strategy that you choose for the property. We're stumbling into cart-before-the-horse or chicken-or-the-egg territory here, but how you decide to use transmedia to tell your story could affect your release schedule, but in all likelihood your marketing strategy will have as much impact as anything else. Will you need to fund and produce viral videos? Can your

project be teased through a broad under-the-radar social media campaign? Do you want to release your webisodes all before the primary platform release, or just before and continue with more through the release? We'll get more into the marketing aspects of your transmedia property, but be prepared to find out that the release schedule and its impact on what projects you can produce, and vice-versa, is as complicated as producing the actual story material.

Understanding the timetables of the different mediums in production is one critical aspect of setting the schedule. (In Part Two we talk about how long it takes to make something in each major transmedia storytelling medium and how much risk there is in terms of production schedule.) Once you understand how long it is going to take to make each different project or expression you can create a schedule that staggers the production start times so that everything releases in relation to the other elements.

As an example, it is difficult to create video game tie-ins for major motion pictures because of the realities of production scheduling. Depending on the length of postproduction, the time from when a script is green-lit (approved for production) to when it launches in theatres can be significantly shorter than the time it takes to make a video game of comparable scale and scope. So, if you are making a big-budget action film the realities of production scheduling could require you to start the video game development *before* the studio approves your script for production. Clearly this could be problematic, both in terms of financing and of content creation if there isn't a final, or near-final, script available for the game developers to spring-board from. This means that either the scale and scope of the video game has to be narrowed to fit the production time, or the game's schedule has to be compressed and rushed, significantly increasing the risk of creating a flawed or inadequate game. If, however, the project was conceived as a true transmedia narrative property, the motion picture script and the game design could be developed simultaneously and synergistically with funding arranged for the entire project, not just the piecemeal elements as they ramp up into production. You can probably guess which approach we advocate.

Overseeing Production

Once the various transmedia narrative elements are in production, the best thing a transmedia producer can do is let his skilled teams do their job, while keeping an eye on them to insure that not only are they doing what they're supposed to be doing, but they're doing it well and at the level of quality the project demands. It is difficult for the transmedia producer to find the right balance of hands-off or hands-on interaction with the projects in production, and in truth how firm of a hand to apply will be based entirely on the projects, the teams and the producer. Please remember our warnings about making sure that whoever is providing feedback or guidance to a particular production team knows how to talk-the-talk in that area and has some relevant experience.

"Trust, but verify" is a great piece of advice when overseeing transmedia narrative productions, or really productions of any kind. If you've hired the right people for the job, you need to let them do their job … at the same time you need to be sure they're doing it the way it needs to be done, without constantly interfering with their process or progress. (If you really truly figure out a best practices way to do that, please let us know!)

Audience, Presentation and Platforms

Hopefully, as you are selecting or creating a transmedia narrative property you consider who the audience for this property is going to be. Nailing down who your audience is and how big an audience you are going for (with the overall property and with each element of it) will tell you a lot about how you're going to tell your stories.

First, unless you are venturing out into completely unknown market territory, look at what's come before you, both in traditional linear presentation and in transmedia narrative (if any). If there haven't been any transmedia narrative ventures in the area that you're looking at, you need to look at similar linear ventures in each of the mediums you're targeting. Deconstruct what's worked and what hasn't. Figure out if there were key elements that helped its success, or notable areas that contributed to its failure. Learn from the past.

Look at the demographics of those who consume the different types of media and the different genres presented by each. Is the belief that fantasy attracts a younger, more female audience true? Or that hard-core science fiction is predominantly male and older? You need to know. Don't be seduced by the apparent power of demographics, however – think about who *could* or *should* be a market for your property as well.

That said, if you are doing a show like ABC Television's *LOST* (2004–2010), you need to understand who watched that show, and why. You need to figure out who consumed that franchise's transmedia content, and why. You also need to understand why NBC's *The Event* (2010–2011) or Fox's *Alcatraz* (2012) failed to recreate the *LOST* formula. Was it the narrative? Was it the production? Was it the transmedia content (or lack thereof?) Were there other factors (time slot, current events, etc.) that contributed to the misfire?

Also start to understand how the audience you've chosen for your transmedia franchise consumes media. The old media ingestion patterns are changing … you're thinking of a television show, but does your target market still watch television as we've traditionally considered it? Clearly many still do watch television shows, but is it as habitual and reflexive as it used to be, or are viewers lured to that medium by exposure in other mediums that they spend more hours per week in? Are they social media followers or broadcasters? Focusing on the idea of the television series just as an example, does your audience view the airing of a new episode as a "must-see" time and date event that requires them to be ready to watch on their couch when the episode first airs, or are they time-shifters who record the show and then watch it at their convenience, or catch it on-demand or via some other off-time broadcast technology? Do you care? Do you want your show to be a continual burn where the conversation plays out over the time between episodes, or do you want the conversation – be it online or at the water cooler – to spike the day after the episode airs? What can you do to maximize that decision? Is there additional content you can release the day after to drive the spike, or other content to trickle out over the week to maintain the burn?

These are all strategies for managing the transmedia property that depend a great deal on the audience you are engaging. We talk more about engagement later in this chapter, but understand that knowing your audience is required for understanding how to engage them.

Presentation and Platform

When we say platform we're referring to the media delivery or presentation system. For example, a motion picture that shows in theatres and is then distributed via Blu-ray/DVD as well as Netflix and cable-on-demand is being presented on three platforms, with the greatest distinction being between the first and the last two as a group. The least distinction is between the last two, Netflix and cable-on-demand, because they are both video-on-demand systems accessible through the same, or similar technologies (living room TVs or set-top boxes, game consoles and home computers).

Given the blending of production and presentation technologies, some of the platform distinctions get rather blurry, especially since elsewhere in this book we'll be looking at the various platforms in terms of the storytelling impact, at which time you'll see the lines move all over the place.

We're seeing more and more secondary content effort put into so-called "second screen" experiences where a viewer at home can access additional behind-the-scenes or narrative content on their laptop or tablet while a television episode is airing. This isn't all that different, conceptually, from some of the on-screen, or picture-in-picture commentary or behind-the-scenes features available on Blu-ray or standard DVDs, but the technology behind it and the user experience are different.

Microsoft's Xbox SmartGlass technology is, as the maker described it in a press release on June 4, 2012 "an application for Windows 8, Windows Phone and other portable devices that connects phones, PCs and tablets with your Xbox console to make your entertainment smarter, more interactive and more fun." Is the platform the Xbox? Is it a movie DVD or Netflix stream playing on the Xbox, or is it the tablet used to manipulate the interactive content? How long before Sony comes out with a competitor for the PlayStation 3/PlayStation Network, and should we view that as a different platform? The answer is complicated.

Building on this example, we group the major video game consoles – the Microsoft Xbox, the Sony PlayStation 3, the Nintendo Wii/Wii U – into one platform often referred to simply as "game consoles," yet the home computer is often viewed as a separate platform due to the difference in the user location (office vs. living room) and the control input (keyboard/mouse vs. game controller). Given the increasing number of home theatre personal computers that sit in the living room, game consoles that sit on the desk or multi-platform games that are released on both game consoles and for the home computer, the platform distinction seems fuzzy (especially in terms of storytelling.)

The decision that a video game is going to be a platform for the transmedia franchise is, initially, a more important one than which game console, home computer, portable game system and so on is to be supported. That decision can be made later when it comes time to look into partnership and production realities. Initial platform decisions for transmedia franchises need to be made in terms of user experience not technology implementation.

So, what are the platforms to consider?

Motion Pictures

We're all pretty familiar with motion pictures and when we talk about them in this book, understand we are talking about the common cinema experience – a linearly presented audio/visual experience undertaken out of the home, in a movie theatre, with a crowd of (presumably) strangers. Budget is initially irrelevant and whether the movie was recorded on film or high-definition video or is being projected on film or digitally is irrelevant as well.

The important thing to understand about the medium is this:

- The audience has to learn about it from another source (though they may have learned about it from a trailer at another movie).
- The audience has to be engaged or interested enough to change their schedule to accommodate the time and place of the presentation.
- The audience has to be engaged enough to incur all of the associated costs (gas, parking, tickets, food, time, etc.) with the presentation.
- The experience is transitory, meaning that it occurs and is done. If the audience wants to repeat the experience they have to repeat the entire process. (Or experience the production again, albeit differently, with the Blu-ray/DVD or video-on-demand release.)
- The experience is passive – the audience watches and does not interact (shouting at the screen does not count).

- Setting and character elements are presented in an intense manner that tend to lock an audience's perception. (For example, many movie goers who go to see an adaptation of a favorite book report that after seeing the movie they see and hear the characters in the book as the actors they saw on screen.)

Yes, your motion picture can be experienced on Blu-ray/DVD or through video-on-demand, but those are secondary channels for the primary medium. If you are directly targeting Blu-ray/DVD or video-on-demand distribution your production decisions will probably be different, and more like those of television discussed next.

For more on motion pictures, see Chapter 3 of this book.

Television

We should all also be familiar with television and television series. We've also seen a significant shift in the presentation options for television series in recent years, with the experience transitioning from a "you must be ready on your couch at 9 pm" to anywhere, anytime, when-you-want-it viewing. When we're talking about a television series we're talking about episodic television, be it a limited duration mini-series or multi-season television series. If you are producing a made-for-TV movie, your production decisions probably have more in common with motion pictures than television series.

And if we're talking about episodic television as a format, we're really looking at a variety of possible platforms for content delivery. Short-form episodic content could be produced as webisodes for delivery through the Internet or a mobile platform. The traditional television series content is now delivered through "normal" broadcast or cable channels, via video-on-demand (especially with Netflix producing original content), or through various Internet broadcasting services, including Netflix, Hulu, Crackle and others. Regardless of the final delivery methodology, many of the important considerations are the same:

- The audience may have learned about it from another source entirely, or it may have been through advertising on the delivery channel.
- With the rise of on-demand viewing and time-shifting, the audience can alter their viewing patterns to match the rest of their schedule. This is a profound change from when the scheduling of when the viewer had to be in front of the television affected other scheduling decisions.
- Putting aside channel subscription costs, which viewers do not normally associate with the viewing of one particular episode or series, there is no immediately perceived financial cost to sitting down to watch a television show, so the required level of engagement to compel watching is reduced. This also means that it is easier to ignore or defer. Video-on-demand (VOD) or rental window decisions are made at the time of purchase so the return on dollars spent is immediate.
- Digital video recorders mean that television viewers can retain the broadcast program for as long as their technology permits. Some viewers let a number of episodes of their favorite show "pile up" and then watch them all in a mini-marathon.
- Related to the above point, some viewers of television series will wait until the program is released on Blu-ray/DVD and then watch the entire season or large chunks of it one after the other. One view of this phenomenon is that some viewers become impatient with the gap between episode broadcasts and want their absorption of the property to occur in bulk, as it were. One benefit of transmedia storytelling is that it can be used successfully to bridge those gaps and keep the audience sated longer.
- The experience itself is passive – the audience watches and does not interact (and, as we have said before, in motion pictures, shouting at the screen does not count). The presentation, if on disk or video-on-demand can

be interacted with in that pause or rewind can be used to alter the flow of presentation, but the content itself does not change.
- Setting and character elements are presented in an intense manner that tend to lock an audience's perception of the characters and story.

The increasing amount of additional material provided on Blu-ray/DVD releases of television series (regardless of their origin) reflects not only a value-added marketing perspective for increasing the buy-appeal of the product, but also of increasing the transmedia content. Note the inclusion of additional un-aired "between-the-episodes" scenes in the recent compilation releases of the current BBC *Doctor Who* series and the second-screen content provided during the original and repeat broadcasts of HBO's *Game of Thrones* (2011–present) series.

For more on television and television series, see Chapter 4 of this book.

Video Games

Frankly, video game development is probably the production area the majority of readers of this book know the least about. Compared to motion pictures and television, the medium is relatively new but has grown to rival both in terms of participation and awareness, cultural impact and even production budget and profits. Video games have platform fragmentation similar to the presentation of television series, but in some ways it is more profound because the primary distinctive element of video games – interaction and gameplay – differs significantly depending on where and how the game is played. When we talk about games, we're talking about console (Xbox, PlayStation 3, Wii), home computer (PC or Mac), portable (Nintendo 3DS or Sony PlayStation Vita), web-delivered (Flash, Java and most recently HTML5), or mobile (iOS or Android). There's a production problem associated with video games as well. While you can produce a motion picture for the theatre and you can convert it relatively easily for distribution via Blu-ray/DVD, broadcast television, or video-on-demand, the same it not true for video games. There is no easy way to translate a game between the different game platforms we just listed. Some are easier than others (Xbox to PC, for example, or iOS to Android depending on the production methodology), but in general different releases of the same game on different platforms require parallel or near-parallel development and production efforts. We just hit on an important thing to understand about this medium, but here are some others:

- The audience has to learn about it from another source.
- The audience is able to engage in the product when they choose (for the most part) either at home at their convenience, or out of the home at their convenience on a mobile or portable platform. Both of these, however, assume the game can be relatively easily stopped and then returned to (at that same point) some other time.
- Console and video games are relatively expensive – roughly a $60 price point for console games and roughly a $40–50 price point for the same game on the personal computer. This makes the purchase of the game an expensive proposition for some game players and requires budget planning and consideration if multiple high-profile or desired games are releasing relatively close to each other. Mobile and smaller console or personal computer games have lower price points (from free or $0.99 to less than $10 for mobile games, to roughly $40 for portable games) with those in the lower price range (especially on mobile) profiting (pardon the pun) from the impulse buy price point.
- Gamers expect long games. Large-scale role-playing games like *Skyrim* are expected to include 40+ hours of gameplay, while high-profile action titles like *Mass Effect 3* or the *Modern Warfare* series come under serious criticism if they take less than 12 hours to complete.

- Video games generally have "difficulty levels" which affects how hard or easy the game is, and can therefore radically change the experience. Additionally, some recent story-driven games explicitly call out a "story" or "cinema" mode as the description of one of the easy game difficulties.
- Multiplayer gaming, where game players can play directly against other players competitively or (less frequently) cooperatively using the Internet or dedicated services like Microsoft's Xbox Live or Sony's PlayStation Network, is becoming more and more expected.
- The experience is inherently interactive – video game players expect to feel like participants in the storytelling (whether they really are or not) and not just observers or along for the narrative ride. Games are about what the main character does, not what the player watches.

It is important to understand that video games, in terms of conception, production and to some extent distribution are very different beasts from motion pictures and television series. See Chapter 5 of this book for more on video game development.

Comic Books and Graphic Novels

Comic books and graphic novels are a great medium for transmedia storytelling, both as an intellectual property source and as a medium to extend the narrative. They are visually dynamic (be sure to check out the new generation of interactive comics available on tablets, like Marvel's Infinite Comics format), capable of powerful storytelling and relatively inexpensive to produce, market and distribute. Beyond the "big two" publishers of Marvel Comics (owned by Disney) and DC Comics (owned by Warner Brothers), there are scores of smaller and independent creators, studios and publishers able to partner with you to deliver your transmedia experience.

Some things to consider:

- The audience probably learned about it in connection to your transmedia franchise, or if they are comic book or graphic novel fans, they may have come across it without knowing the connection to your property and may now be drawn to it.
- The audience is able to engage in the product when and where they choose, especially with digital distribution to mobile and portable devices.
- The cost of entry is relatively affordable for a single comic book, to more expensive than a movie ticket or video-on-demand rental, but less than the cost of a Blu-ray/DVD seasonal boxed set.
- Comic book and graphic novel readers tend to be collectors and so there is additional attraction to having something permanent to return to in the future. The impact of digital distribution and mobile presentation on this aspect isn't yet known.
- In physical form the experience is passive, but the new-generation of interactive comics allows a linear interaction. The story doesn't change, but the viewer feels a degree of control over the presentation.

For more on comic books and graphic novels, see Chapter 6 of this book.

Novels

Hopefully your community still has a bookstore. Go there. Walk into the science fiction and fantasy section and look for what is probably the single largest sub-section there – the movie, TV and video game tie-in novels. There you'll find novels (and comics and graphic novels) set in the universes of *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *Doctor Who*, *Dungeons and Dragons*, *Underworld*, *Halo*, *Supernatural*, *Mass Effect*, *Warhammer: 40,000*, *Assassin's Creed*, *Gears of War*, and others, including continuations of canceled television series like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Stargate Atlantis*, and *Charmed*.

Some are adaptations of motion pictures or television episodes, but the majority of them are original stories. (Whether they are "official" stories and part of the franchise canon varies. See the section in Chapter 3 called Continuity, Canon and Consistency as to why that could be very important to a transmedia property.)

Even if your community doesn't have a bookstore, the growing popularity of dedicated e-readers and e-reader software for the various mobile platforms shows that the consumption of novels, especially adaptation and tie-ins (transmedia storytelling or not) remains high. Like comic books and graphic novels, traditional novels are a great way to extend and support your transmedia narrative relatively inexpensively and with significant impact and beyond the big publishers. There are scores of smaller and independent publishers able to partner with you to deliver your transmedia experience.

Some things to consider:

- The audience probably learned about it in connection to your transmedia franchise, or if they are avid readers they may have come across it without knowing the connection to your property and may now be drawn to it.
- The audience is able to engage in the product when and where they choose, especially with digital distribution to mobile and portable devices.
- The cost of entry is relatively affordable for a paperback novel, about the same as for a movie ticket. Hardbacks not so much.
- Novel readers tend to be collectors and so there is additional attraction to having something permanent to return to in the future. The impact of digital distribution and mobile presentation on this aspect isn't yet known.
- The increase in the use of e-readers and software cannot be underestimated as it increases the opportunities for digital or direct distribution and reduces the price point. See the next section on Mobile Apps for additional possibilities.

For more on traditional novels, see Chapter 6 of this book.

Mobile Apps

Separate from games are a whole category of applications (programs) for mobile platforms that can be created in support of your transmedia storytelling property. We're already talked about second-screen support for Blu-ray/DVD releases or for television series accomplished through mobile apps and there are scores of other opportunities. For example, there is a popular iOS app for the Apple iPhone and iPad called the *Game of Thrones Companion*, which acts as a reference work to the characters, places and events of the George R. R. Martin novel series *A Song of Ice and Fire* (Bantam Books, 1996–present), upon which the HBO television series *Game of Thrones* is based. The fan-produced app is not an official or licensed release from either the novel series publisher or HBO, and at the time of this writing remains for sale in the iTunes store. (There are other similar apps also available in the iTunes store.) It is fan-produced, much like many popular websites produced in support of motion picture, television or video game franchises. Interestingly, again at the time of this writing, HBO has not elected to produce a stand-alone app in support of *Game of Thrones*, presumably relying on the content and experience provided by their own second-screen capabilities built into their *HBOGO* app, but there is no reason they could not produce an app that is synchronously tied to a television episode that provides similar, but not identical, functionality.

Interactive novels, which are not technically games though often grouped with them, are another avenue for providing transmedia storytelling support for your franchise. There are a large number of apps that are nearly identical structurally to the tried-and-true "Choose Your Own Adventure" format books, as well as many others with significantly enhanced audio-visual components. (Check out Her Interactive's 2011 *Nancy Drew: Shadow Ranch HD*

for the Apple iPad for one example.) Additionally, there is no reason the wonderful "viral" videos produced for the summer 2012 motion picture release of Ridley Scott's *Prometheus* couldn't easily have been assembled with other discoveries into an engaging piece of transmedia storytelling disguised as an app from the Weyland Corporation. (See our interview with Phil Hay later in the book for some thoughts on this.) There's no question that many of these opportunities overlap with marketing initiatives, but it's very easy to slip some real transmedia storytelling into these products.

The Internet

This is a big subject with bigger opportunities. The most important thing to understand about the Internet is that it's just a delivery and interaction mechanism for nearly anything that you can think of to support your transmedia storytelling project. Instead of trying to address the Internet as one big thing, let's break down some things that it can do:

Content distribution: the Internet can deliver audio-video content in a variety of forms and styles. We'll talk about it in Chapter 4, but the web presence built for the NBC television series *Heroes* (2006–2010) with its co-complimentary assortment of video, graphic novel and other methodologies did a great job of pulling fans of the series to the website to give them more of what they wanted and equally pushed those who discovered and were intrigued by the website independently toward the television series. We already mentioned the character-driven video teasers for the motion picture *Prometheus* that appeared scattered across a variety of sources prior to the film's release. (We'll get to audience communication in a moment, but a quick trip to http://www.prometheus-movie.com shows how they blended the motion-picture marketing support site with the fan engagement/discussion site. We're not fans of blackmailing fans by making them sign up to remove the annoying external ad content, however. It's important to create and maintain a direct channel (in this case, email) to your property's fan base, but we're not sure that annoying them to get them to sign up is the best way to do it.)

YouTube and similar services are well known for video content delivery, but exclusive use also means surrendering branding and presentation control of your content. Fortunately, many of these services allow you to make use of their delivery infrastructure while keeping the content (primarily) on websites under your direct control. Other content distribution services, such as Akamai, are also available but aren't free. There can also be issues of content ownership when material is placed on sites like YouTube, Facebook, Google+ or similar services with complex end-user license agreements.

Audience communication: Audience participation and engagement is critical to the success of a transmedia storytelling property. We talk about exactly that in its own section, but these days the Internet (and we're going to include social media like Facebook and Twitter under that umbrella) is the primary channel for communication to and from your audience. Name a popular genre motion picture, television series, video game, novel or graphic novel series and you are more than likely to find more than one official and/or fan-driven website out there. Some of them are more, shall we say, professional and polished than others, and for that reason it is often wise to create a home for your property on the Internet and try and direct traffic and interest to that site, while at the same time encouraging and supporting fan-based sites. (Fans, bless 'em, 'cause we include ourselves in with them, aren't always able to match their enthusiasm with web design and content management skills.)

If you are lucky, your audience is going to want to talk about your property and it is better they do it where you can see what is being said and can respond to it. Yes, respond to it. We're not saying your showrunners or lead writers should be constantly responding to audience chatter, but there's real value in having some form of community manager who can answer questions, guide discussions and generally act as a liaison between the audience and the

franchise. The more an audience feels part of the process, even superficially, the more engaged they are and the more loyal.

Overt and viral marketing: Hopefully it is obvious that the Internet is a great way of directing relatively low-cost impact at very specific demographic groups. This isn't just through buying ads on relevant websites, but through maintaining solid promotional relationships with existing blogs and media sites. When the Paramount/Bad Robot J. J. Abrams *Star Trek* revival was underway in 2007–2009, its makers understood that they had to not only broaden the appeal of the franchise in order to re-ignite it, but they had to reach out to the existing hardcore fan base who was more than a little nervous about what was being produced. In 2006 *Star Trek* fan Anthony Pascale started a fan blog at www.trekmovie.com dedicated to following events of the movie as it entered preproduction, production and beyond. The site quickly became one of the "go-to" sites on the Internet for information and discussion about the upcoming film, so much so that *Star Trek* executive producer and co-writer Roberto Orci started regularly visiting the site and posting in its discussion threads under the not-so-pseudonym "boborci." While television showrunners like Ron Moore (*Battlestar Galactica* Sci-Fi, 2004–2009) and J. Michael Straczynski (*Babylon 5* Warner Brothers Television, 1994–1998) are well-known for their frequent direct communication with their fan base, it was pretty unheard of for feature films of the magnitude of the *Star Trek* film. To many, however, Orci's presence and willingness to discuss his thoughts and views on *Star Trek* in general and discuss the current production (within reason) proved a major public relations boon for the production with the hardcore fan base. This level of communication with fans has become typical for most Bad Robot productions since then. We would argue that this approach came naturally to Bad Robot writers/producers like Roberto Orci, Alex Kurtzman and *LOST's* Damon Lindelof, who also see themselves as fans and understand exactly what a franchise needs to interest them and keep them engaged and so are willing to provide exactly that to the fans of their own work (within reason).

All of the above is pretty overt, and there's an entire sub-genre of marketing known as "viral" marketing where video clips, images, entire websites, fictitious web accounts, web-based games, social media messaging and a variety of other techniques are used to lure potential fans to more directly branded franchise sites. Sometimes the marketing campaign has an overt component that connects to vaguer viral elements that reflect back to the main campaign. Sometimes the viral campaign has only tangential connections to the property being supported, as was the case with 42 Entertainment's *I Love Bees* 2004 alternate reality game (ARG) masterminded by company founder and veteran game design Jordan Weisman and built to promote the Microsoft/Bungie Xbox game *Halo 2*. (We'll talk more about alternate reality games in the next section and elsewhere, and you'll find an interview with Weisman later in this book.)

One of the interesting things about *I Love Bees* was that it was only loosely related to the *Halo 2* and *Halo* franchise storyline. Later, some of the elements present in the alternate reality game were formally added to the *Halo* Universe in supplemental material. What *I Love Bees* did, however, was get *Halo's* potential audience wound up and talking about the game's story and universe. In a very real way it generated a buzz that simple advertising and marketing may not have been able to.

Alternate Reality Games

Alternate reality games use real-world technology, devices, locations and sometimes people to create an engaging story-driven experience for its players. There are always one or more mysteries to be solved and a long, involved chain of clues scattered around the real world (or real world accessible) that as unveiled tell the game's story. ARGs aren't video games in the traditional sense even though computers, cell phones and other mobile devices are often

used as part of the discovery process. Alternate reality games may also rely on actors playing key character roles and real world events and interactions to help tell the story.

A key element of an alternate reality game is that the players of the game often act cooperatively to solve the mystery with fan-produced websites and discussion forums appearing specifically to compare notes and exchange clues, because a key component is that no single player can discover all of the clues and solve the mysteries on their own. This led to early ARGs, like *The Beast* created by Microsoft (and Jordan Weisman again) in support of Steven Spielberg's 2001 motion picture *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* or Electronic Art's 2001 Windows game *Majestic*, having to scramble to keep up with content production as collaborative groups of users found and solved mysteries at a staggering pace.

Alternate reality games are inherently transmedia and in fact the ARG community (perhaps rightly) takes a great deal of ownership in the term. All forms of media are routinely used in an ARG, often simultaneously and synchronously, to propel the story. The fact that alternate reality games exist in so many shapes and forms, from the aforementioned *I Love Bees*, to the Audi car promotion *The Art of the Heist*, to the puzzle-card driven *Perplex City*, to *Why So Serious …* for *The Dark Knight* motion picture, to ABC TV's *Push Nevada* television series, to *The LOST Experience* for that same network's series *LOST*, to … well, you get the idea, makes them very difficult to categorize or quickly explain.

There are so many types of ARGs and so many possibilities to how alternate reality games can be used to support a transmedia storytelling project that there's no way we can cover it in sufficient depth in this book. We'll try and do it justice in a later chapter, but we're clearly giving short-shrift to such a potentially powerful platform.

Transmedia for Creatives

Transmedia storytelling creatives, or those who develop and make transmedia content, have a unique set of responsibilities to satisfy an inquisitive and insatiable audience. The rising generation of media savvy consumers are adept at using social media tools to find information. They are "seekers" who do not want to be given all of their content in one place, but are willing to be hooked by the primary platform and then asked to seek or search for ever deepening levels of story and character served up via multiple creative and distribution platforms. ABC's *LOST* was a tremendous television success, but creators give some of the credit to their savvy transmedia approach, seeding the series online with leaked clips and continuing the online fan relationship with specially designed web based content to deepen the audience's relationship to the story, the world and the characters.

Seekers want to interact with their content, to comment and "play" within the worlds of their characters. They are active members of what Henry Jenkins has termed "participatory culture," a culture that does not only want to view media but participate in the media, to have an effect on the story and even to utilize fan fiction to tell their own versions of popular narratives. (Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collides*, NYU Press, 2006). The transmedia creative is not making for one audience, i.e. a film audience, but for many audiences over multiple platforms, often times simultaneously.

A Story for All Screens

Because of the need to create across media platforms, the transmedia creative must see their core narrative or story as not being tied to one media platform, i.e. a motion picture, video game or television show, but rather developed to have multiple lives on multiple screens.

As an example, characters developed as the main, or even minor characters of a movie must have deep enough back stories to provide a year's worth (24 episodes distributed bi-weekly) of a 2–3 minute web series that focuses only on the minor characters and their past, unseen in the film. So it is a deeper way of thinking about character, that you must be able to extend their narrative across multiple creative and distribution platforms.

The need to explore a single segment of a core narrative on multiple media platforms can be determined by an audience's desire to see more of a character, or to explore a riddle or a mystery within the core narrative. A good example of this was the fan fervor associated with knowing more about *LOST's* Dharma Initiative, a strange cult-like scientific faction that occupied the island before the plane crash. These inhabitants, the so-called "Others," took on something of a life of their own online, generating fan fiction, creator-based web content, as well as merchandising opportunities. Was that a planned relationship? Did J. J. Abrahams and the Bad Robot production team seed the story with the Dharma Initiative to start a transmedia strand? Or did fans connect to this part of the narrative first and then Bad Robot fed the excitement? We will explore this more closely in Chapter 5.

One World, Many Stories

What is a world? Well, in terms of storytelling, a storyworld is a fictional or constructed setting that may differ dramatically from the real world or may be historically accurate or consistent with the real world except that there are certain elements and/or characters that, being fictional, differ from the real world.

An imagined or constructed fictional world is the context within which stories are told. It provides an all-encompassing backstory without which the story would not make sense. It sets up the history of the world, the geography, the physical rules that govern the natural and elemental aspects, and creates or defines the usually sentient beings, whether human or other, that populate and interact within the world. Within these defined populations exists the cultural, political and intercultural relationships of the world. This includes government, politics and commerce as well as the level of technology and whether or not magic and the supernatural are at play. It establishes the hierarchical rules that allow for the understanding of power differentials amongst individuals and cultures as well as any mythological or religious elements. It will also establish existing conflicts, alliances and important pre-existing personal relationships. The world must contain all that is needed for the story to begin … and to be believable.

The process of crafting worlds is called world building and will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. For now it is sufficient to say that world building is the act of designing and constructing believable fictional universes. The backstory contained in this world will give a context to the story and aid in the creation of a "suspension of disbelief." The concept most likely comes from the poet William Taylor Coleridge who is quoted as saying in 1817 in his *Bibliographia Literia* with regard to poetry, "That willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith" and refers to a reader's (or audience's) willingness to accept the author's vision of a time, place, world, or characters that, were they not in a work of fiction, would be unbelievable. The audience has to be willing to put aside the fantastical, the incongruous, the unlikely and even excuse narrative shortcuts or streamlining in order to accept and be engaged by the story.

The author or creator must literally "play God," in that he or she must create a "world" and the lives of those who dwell there, whether that world be a story-specific set of characters and situations that exist within our world or that live in a world much like Earth or that function in a world completely different from Earth with its own

physical rules geography, ecology, history, cultures and mythologies. From the fertile world crafted by the author, many stories, many lives and their struggles must be able to flow forth.

In the genre of transmedia, a world would be defined as a single intellectual property or concept that extends into multiple creative and distribution iterations or "stories." The rule being that with each iteration, story and/or characters must change. We see this idea of "one world, many stories" as the pillar of transmedia storytelling. An originally conceived transmedia world must be spacious and detailed, rich and fertile enough to allow for growth over time with the ability to be slightly different in each medium. The world must either be based in our real world with elements and/or characters that differ, or if an entirely fictional world and characters are presented, there must be universal human elements or themes that allow us to connect to and believe the constructed world and allow the audience to be willing receivers of the intended story.

Adaptation vs. Extension vs. Expansion

When working with story material from one medium to another, there are several different strategies, each with its own strengths and challenges. Sometimes people talk about these different strategies as if they were equivalent, but in fact they are quite different. Applying processes of translation, interpolation and inspiration to the same story material results in very different results.

Adaptation

Adaptation retells the story told in one medium in another, with applicable changes depending on the requirements of the new medium. At its core, this is a translation process, much like we might try to translate an English phrase into another language. This is a process of adapting the material to a new form, remaining as faithful to the source material or original story elements as possible. We want to retain the meaning of the original phrase as closely as possible, but each language has its own syntax.

Adaptation transfers the story elements to another medium, creating a derivative work. Many if not most of the films made in Hollywood are based on story material that originated in another medium, whether that was prose (*Fahrenheit 451*, 1953), radio (*The 39 Steps*, 1935), plays (*Wait Until Dark*, 1966), games (*Silent Hill*, 1999) or graphic novels (*From Hell*, 1991).

The attraction to adapting material is that there is already a built-in audience, people who already love the intellectual property and are eager to experience it in new ways. The challenge is to somehow be both familiar (so the fans feel that the fidelity of the original material has been kept) and new (so the fans feel there's a value in seeing the adaptation by discovering new aspects to the original story) at the same time, a tough line to walk. Just think about controversies surrounding the casting or costumes of certain films.

In general, we do not think of adaptation as a transmedia process because it implies that we're simply taking a story and presenting it in a different medium. The differences between the adaptation (or adapted form of the story) and the source material is solely the result of the fact that each medium has its own storytelling and aesthetic conventions, its own syntax (to extend our earlier analogy).

There may be times, however, when an adaptation contains additional information not present in the original that blurs the line. For example, the 1982 Paramount Pictures film *Star Trek: The Wrath of Khan* featured a new character named Saavik, played by Kirstie Alley. In the film, Saavik appears to be fully Vulcan, albeit with some interesting

mannerisms. The novel adaptation of *Star Trek: The Wrath of Khan* was written by Vonda N. McIntyre, based on the screenplay by Jack B. Sowards, from the story by Harve Bennet and Jack B. Sowards. The novelization includes the detail that Saavik is in fact half–Vulcan and half–Romulan, which was included in the original screenplay, but cut before production. (If you are not a *Star Trek* fan, trust us when we say that it's a notable distinction.) We talk about canon (official elements of the universe) in the next chapter, but this is a case where this particular fact was originally part of the official story, but was cut, and because of its inclusion in the novelization – the official adaptation of the motion picture – is viewed by many fans as "canon."

With that said, there may be times when adapting material may involve just one story within a larger intellectual property universe, so we cannot say that adaptation is never a part of transmedia, just that it cannot be the only approach. If it is, then it does not meet the accepted definition of transmedia storytelling.

Extension

Extension draws from the narrative elements of the original source story. At first glance, it may seem that we're telling the same story, but unlike adaptation, we do not need to remain as faithful to the original material as possible. An extension includes new narrative elements that build directly on the pre-existing material, but does not extensively introduce new story elements. In some ways, this is akin to interpreting the material, finding nuances and new inferences in the plot and or characters that can be further explored and developed, but in effect, it is interpolation, inserting new material into existing material. As a result, this process creates a richer and more defined text. It could be argued that the *Wrath of Khan* adaptation just discussed is in fact an extension due to the "new" material in it, but it was intended to be an adaptation.

When we extend the universe, we are deepening the storyworld and our understanding of it. This extension might provide insights into the backstory, such as the original website for *The Blair Witch Project* (http://www.blairwitch.com) which establishes a context for the film crew and events that happen to them, or help us better understand specific characters, such as the deeper portrait of Gaeta in the third web series for *Battlestar Galactica* (Sci-Fi, 2003–2009), or bridge two iterations of story, such as the *Star Trek Ongoing* comic book series that connects not just J. J. Abram's two *Star Trek* films but also links his films to the original 1966–1969 TV series universe.

Extensions can also build off of the original material's loyal fan base while making the new iteration of the story exciting because it mines the original material for deeper characterizations, mythology or events. The risk is that audiences may find that the new material contradicts their view or interpretation of the original material.

Expansion

Expansion broadens the story, introducing parallel or companion narratives that often provide new perspectives, insight or clarity to the existing story. As a process, this is developing new story material that's inspired by the original narrative or universe. We are no longer tied to the specifics of the original story as long as we follow (or at least do not contradict) the established rules of the previous versions of the intellectual property – we draw inspiration from it.

Aliens and *Alien*[3] are particularly interesting case studies of the ways in which each new writer and director expanded the story mythology of the film(s) that preceded it – not just in terms of themes but in terms of the aliens' behavior and characteristics – and built upon previous story strategies and aesthetic considerations, such as changing the genres that are hybridized, the characterizations and the visual look in each film. Even the much later Ridley Scott motion picture *Prometheus* attempts to expand the *Alien* universe without contradicting the previous films (at least the ones

before Predators got involved). Some audiences already familiar with the intellectual property find these new stories exciting ways to experience the original property afresh, while others may be distressed by the fact that their favorite character doesn't appear in the expansion or events evocatively alluded to are now made more literal.

One of the counterbalances to the challenge of expanding the storyworld is that expansion is where interactive components of transmedia can be most easily introduced, allowing the audience to be more than just viewers but also co-creators, contributing narrative elements or singling out characters for further thought and development.

In all of these cases, these processes are primarily governed not by co-creation but rather licensing, where subsequent iterations of the story material remain faithful and subservient to the original narrative property. The more we want to create complex and co-created worlds, whether with our creative and production teams or with our viewers/users, the more thought we need to give to the universe from the concept's very inception in order to create a rich, complex world in which to create or facilitate meaningful narrative expressions.

Where to Start

To begin the creation of a transmedia property one must either find an existing core narrative property and extend it or develop an original core narrative rich enough to be told across multiple media platforms. It should be noted that the term transmedia is often associated with big franchise science fiction and fantasy properties like *Star Trek*, *LOST* and *Star Wars (Lucasfilm*, 1977–present) but we needn't limit transmedia to these kinds of stories. Any story set in a well-developed world with characters that have sufficient backstory and conflicts to sustain them through multiple story-strands via multiple platforms, can become transmedia. The CBS Television series *NCIS* (2003–present) and *NCIS*: *Los Angeles* (2009–present) tell different stories set in the same fictional universe, which seems to be shared with *Hawaii Five-0* (2010–present), based on the cross over episode with *NCIS: LA*. Is this Transmedia or shrewd marketing? We think the latter, but you get the idea. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (WB/UPN, 1997–2003) and its spin-off *Angel* (WB, 1999–2004) shared the same "Buffy-verse" universe and were tied closely enough in creation and production that they could be viewed as transmedia storytelling.

Finding the Starting Concept

Different creatives begin the development of a story from different starting points, but most will agree that the first big step to creating a story is to find the concept. A concept consists of characters in a setting soon to be involved in a meaningful struggle. A good question to ask at this point is "What am I trying to tell the world? What do I want to say?" "Do I want to warn the world of the dangers of developing sentient machines?" This would have been a possible jumping off point for many popular science fiction stories, including James Cameron's *Terminator*, the popular television series *Battlestar Galactica* as well as classics like the motion picture *2001: A Space Odyssey* (MGM, 1968) and the original Isaac Asimov novel *I, Robot* (Gnome Press, 1950).

Universal human themes are a great place to begin mining for stories and for the motivations and conflicts of character. These themes are at the core of most stories as well as character relationships and conflicts. They are needs, wants and desires shared by all humans regardless of who they are, where they are or even when they were born. They are needs that humans have had since the beginning of time, although as we become more complex, the addition of themes that reflect our complexity are added to the list. Examples include: the need to be loved, to be happy, to have sex, to survive, to protect that which is yours, to belong, to enact revenge, to take what isn't yours, to feel superior to others, etc. If you examine James Cameron's *Avatar* (20th Century Fox, 2009) you will find many of these both at the core of the narrative and the character's motivations.

From these universal human themes one can extract a core need to be further developed and then populated with characters that are in sympathy or conflict with the core need. For example, in *Avatar* humans had a core need to extract Unobtanium at any cost. In conflict with this core need was the core need of the natives to protect their heritage as exemplified by the "tree" that happened to be sitting smack dab on top of the largest stock pile of Unobtanium. It is the age-old story of "outsiders," usually technologically superior, invading a "tribal" society and "stealing what's not theirs" while the tribal society feels the "need to protect" what is theirs. Universal human themes create universally understood conflict.

So conflict is essential and a conflict that has its roots in universal human themes is sure to trigger an emotional response from its human audience. We are drawn to that which feels familiar, even in unfamiliar settings.

Conflict usually demands that we choose sides, that we root for one side and against the other. Thus we have the age-old terms of "antagonists and protagonists," although in a 21st century context these delineations are often blurred and even interchangeable. We tend to want "villains" who we sympathize with and even root for. And still, we decide at some point during the story that we want someone to "win," and that is usually the someone whom we have the most in common with, or who is at risk in a way that makes us feel vulnerable.

This is why so many successful transmedia properties are science fiction and fantasy. These types of stories usually have risks we easily understand and sides we can choose quickly. In short, there are bad guys and good guys … and gals. We need only look at the ongoing transmedia success of Marvel and its Marvel Universe where heroes fight villains. No guessing, no confusion, Spider-Man is the hero and Lizard is the villain, even if sometimes the villains are tinged with shades of sympathetic gray. That said, the best heroes are flawed, as we are, and the best villains, even the Joker, have aspects that we feel sympathy for.

And so after we have developed a concept and characters based on universal human themes, needs and desires we must make sure that the characters have a clear conflict that matters to the audience. If the hero does not get what he or she wants, then either we may be adversely affected or a character that we care about will be adversely affected. In order for an audience to be endeared to content, they must perceive that something is at risk that is of value to them or to a character that they care about.

Sufficient jeopardy is especially important for building a transmedia property because the audience must care enough to not only view the primary form but to seek out extended story across multiple media platforms. If there is not enough at risk, then the audience loses interest. Big science fiction and fantasy franchises tend to literally put Earth, mankind or entire species at risk or they place the main characters that we care about, in extreme jeopardy.

When we have a conflict and characters involved in that conflict, we can work outwards to construct a storyworld that will be the context or setting for the conflict to go into full swing. We will speak in depth later about top-down or bottom-up development, but suffice it to say that the characters and what is at risk for them must have a world in which to play out. That world must have geography, ecology, cultures, religions, alliances and conflicts (see Chapter 2).

Reboot and Reinvention

To look at many transmedia properties, you would think we've run out of new ideas and are recycling old ones. In fact, we don't even have to look at transmedia properties. Films, TV series, games, graphic novels – lots of singular media experiences build off of pre-existing material. This can range from remaking previous material as faithfully

as possible – Gus Van Sant's 1998 near shot-for-shot duplication of Hitchcock's original film *Psycho* (Paramount Pictures, 1960) may be the extreme example of that impulse – to rebooting old TV shows like *Battlestar Galactica*, reinventing them to be relevant and/or entertaining for a modern audience. In fact, *Battlestar Galactica* is the television series known as much for popularizing the term "reimagining" as for its actual storylines.

With transmedia, our goal is not to literally adapt or simply recreate, replicate or remake pre-existing material but rather to reinterpret it, to make it reflect the interests of the present-day audience. Reboot has traditionally been used in comics to mean that we discard much, if not most of the continuity, with the source story and start afresh as if it were a new property, even if there are knowing nods to the original that can please its diehard fans. In television and now transmedia intellectual properties, the term usually means something a bit less aggressive with the source material, though we might use the terms reimagine or renovate to indicate a substantial break with previous continuity and the effort to use the source material as the barest of skeletons on which to build a new beast (or pet).

Reboots can be seen as *relatively* safe bets for producers – there's a built-in audience who already have a certain loyalty to the material and yet by treating the property as if it were new, there's the opportunity to lure new viewer/users to it. This process can invigorate franchises that are seen as stale or having backed themselves into a corner through a dense and complex recorded mythology and backstory (*Star Trek*, anyone?), bringing in new revenue.

For every success we could name – TV's *Battlestar Galactica* and *Hawaii Five-0* for example – we can also identify recent failures – *Bionic Woman* (NBC, 2007) or *The Night Stalker* (ABC, 2005–2006). All four of these projects tried to retain certain narrative traditions established by the source material while taking certain liberties with specific details (Starbuck! A man! A woman! Kolchak! Old! Young!).

All four took similar approaches toward their source material and yet the two that succeeded perhaps succeeded for different reasons – *Battlestar Galactica* took itself very seriously, reflecting contemporary cultural anxieties in much the same way that some have argued the original series did as well. *Hawaii Five-0* didn't take itself too seriously at all, embracing its sheer adrenaline-based entertainment value much like the original series did. Maybe that's the similarity in their success – their tonal similarity to the original material.

If that's the case, we can just as easily find exceptions or contradictions to that theory. The films *21 Jump Street* (Columbia Pictures, 2012) and *Dark Shadows* (Warner Brothers, 2012) not only redesign certain story elements but also change the mood and tone of the source material, taking a young adult police drama and a supernatural soap opera and turning them into (self-referential) comedies.

As we noted earlier, we owe the concept of reboot to comics, where there is a certain tradition of taking long-standing franchises and reinventing them, in effect breathing new life into them and enticing audiences who have drifted away or lost interest to come back. This process can invigorate not just the audience and the property but the creative team as well.

As with the term transmedia, many of the words used for when we base a property on pre-existing material are softly defined and a bit confusing. However, this idea of developing new intellectual properties by taking pre-existing material and expanding it into a more complex universe that can allow us to tell stories that will reach today's audiences is not that much different from some of the mashups we hear in music – we're like a DJ who's not just re-recording a song, but we're actually adding new material to it, creating something that is not quite like either element and yet harkens to both, ideally better than its individual components and greater than its sum.

Good stories are good stories, whether we thought of them today or we license them from someone who thought them up years ago.

Cornerstone Platform/Property

In masonry, the cornerstone is the starting point, the first stone set in the construction of a foundation. This cornerstone is essential because it determines the position and way in which the entire structure will be built; all other stones will be set in reference to it. We can easily see how this notion has come to be applied to the key basic indispensable element – or foundation – of anything that is constructed or developed, whether an actual building or a persuasive argument or a transmedia property.

Even with the ideal of a holistic multi-faceted approach to universe and transmedia property development, there is little question that the initial introduction of the universe occurs through one primary form or medium which is then supported by other mediums. All other media expressions depend on – or are created in reference to – this initial cornerstone platform and property.

In our conversations with Carlton Cuse (*Nash Bridges*, *Adventures of Brisco County Jr.*, *LOST*) which you can read later in this book, he used the term "mothership" to refer to *LOST* in relation to its associated transmedia expressions. We'd not heard that term in that context before (except that the original *Law and Order* television series is sometimes referred to as the "mothership" of the franchise) but it seemed a fitting one for the primary transmedia property, from which all expressions spring. You'll find us using the terms cornerstone and mothership interchangeably throughout this book. One way to think of it might be that when you are crafting the transmedia property prior to launch, the primary property is the cornerstone and once it launches, it becomes the mothership.

The transmedia cornerstone or mothership introduces the key narrative elements of the overall intellectual property, including the rules of the world as well as significant characters, conflicts, themes and aesthetic styles. The cornerstone is not necessarily the first visible expression for the intellectual property.

The cornerstone for the recent *Star Trek* re-iteration is J. J. Abram's 2009 film, but in fact, the key narrative elements of the new universe were established in the 4 IDW comic books (*Star Trek*: *Countdown*) released just prior to the film. These were intended to service the hardcore *Star Trek* fan's narrative concerns and to provide deeper backstory and setup for the events of the film, which allowed the movie to have a broader or more casual feel. As a result, the film was able to draw in both longstanding *Star Trek* fans and people new to the franchise.

From a narrative aspect, the IDW comic series enhances the viewer's experience of the film as well as help publicize and generate interest in the films, particularly exciting the fan base and enticing readers to see the first movie. This enticement adds a marketing aspect to the comics' release, reflecting the ways in which various expressions of an intellectual property can bring an audience to other manifestations of that intellectual property. How this differs from historical marketing techniques is that the primary goal in these transmedia expressions is to provide first and foremost meaningful narrative experiences within the intellectual property universe. Each platform or property becomes a potential entry point that will lead or encourage the audience member to embrace other components of the larger narrative.

Story and Medium

Choosing which should be our first block or cornerstone of the universe requires an understanding of the various advantages and disadvantages to starting the intellectual property's expression in a particular medium. In the

following chapters, we will discuss in more detail the unique (and shared) characteristics of storytelling in film, television, game, novels and comics. Having an understanding of these will help us better decide which property should be our cornerstone and how to build out the intellectual property from there. In addition, we need to consider not just the storytelling aspects of each medium, but the audiences that medium is most likely to reach and the production timeline each medium requires.

Television, comics and webisodes each provide a medium for serialized storytelling, building a longer story arc that is presented to the audience in installments. Much like the chapters in a novel, each episode can cover a specific portion of the narrative without requiring a seamless, continuous or uninterrupted connection to the surrounding chapters. The scale of the longer story or the amount of material that needs to be covered in each episode will be one of the factors determining which of these you might choose. For example, *Battlestar Galactica* provides several interesting examples how a 42-minute television episode develops narrative elements in comparison to a 3-minute webisode installment.

Each of *Battlestar Galactica*'s three series of webisodes is structured and placed within the intellectual property's timeline differently. Just looking at the first series that bridges seasons 1 and 2 of the broadcast series, we see that the webisodes introduce or follow several secondary characters from the television show. However the time constraint of a webisode does not allow for full character development and the strength of these webisodes lies in their ideas and provocative concepts. It is in these webisodes that the cultural relevance of *Battlestar Galactica* came into full focus, drawing from the audience's anxieties about terrorism and the Iraq War and inverting those with the events on New Caprica. Thus, webisodes may be a great way to parse out conceptual ideas within the universe or a broad (and therefore less personal) overview of the conflicts or certain events while TV episodes allow for a deeper exploration of the impact of narrative events on the characters.

Films offer a more streamlined and focused story that takes place over a relatively limited time span in the narrative but engages the audience only 90 to 180 minutes (with the average being around the 2-hour mark). In a sense, within a transmedia property we could consider our film similar to an episode, though we usually consider it more complex and on a larger cinematic scale than a TV episode. Films also tend to have much higher budgets than a single television episode, so they often feature special effects or spectacle that a web series or TV series cannot. The challenge for the transmedia producer is that if the film seems too much like an episode rather than a full cinematic experience, such as the last *The X-Files* movie, *The X-Files: I Want to Believe* (20th Century Fox, 2008), the audience can be disappointed. We expect the story in film, while streamlined, to be on a grander scale than can be captured in a single TV episode or webisode.

Generally, all of these media discussed so far are considered one-way interactions with the audience, the producer and creative team the primary shapers of the content and pushing it out to the viewers/users.

Video games require a much more active viewer/user than films, television or webisodes and interestingly, there is a sort of inverted relationship between audience and protagonist in terms of activeness and passiveness. Ignoring interactive programming such as social television, we can generalize that films, television and webisodes usually feature an active protagonist and require a (happily) passive audience; games require a passive (controllable) protagonist and necessitate an active audience.

Web content can run the gambit between these two extremes, ranging from the one-way passive audience response to highly interactive or social content in which audiences are active not just in controlling a limited avatar but

become fully engaged co-creators in the intellectual property universe, contributing to or shaping the narrative experience for themselves and even sometimes for others.

Audience and Medium

Audience demographics are shifting in all media and as a transmedia producer, it is important to look at the current data and trends. As an example, in the 2011 Nielsen State of the Media Cross Platform Report, analysis found that age, gender and ethnicity are significant factors in how an audience accesses media. Each age group dominates a specific platform: the largest segment of the traditional television audience in the first quarter of 2011 was made up of adults 50–64 (25%); the largest segment Internet video audience was adults 35–49 (27%) – though 12–17 year-old Americans, who were a smaller percentage of audience, actually spent a higher percentage or one third of their Internet time watching streaming video; and the largest segment of the Mobile video audience was adults 25–34 years old (30%). In terms of gender, women watched TV programming more than men, though men consistently spent more time watching streaming video. African Americans watched more traditional TV programming, Asians spent more time watching video on the Internet and Caucasians watched the most time-shifted (DVR) TV.

During roughly the same period, the Motion Picture Association reported that most moviegoers were 25–45 (over 20%), that women went to more movies than men and more Caucasians (over 60%) went to movies than any other ethnicity – though a higher percentage of the total Latino population went to movies more than the percentage of any other ethnicity.

The demographics of who plays video games is changing as well, though the Entertainment Software Association reported in 2012 that the average game player was 30 years old and had been playing games for 12 years; 47% of all game players were women (ESA, 2012, http://www.theesa.com/facts/pdfs/ESA_EF_2012.pdf). In 2011, Nielsen found that African Americans spent more time playing games than Caucasians in the 18-to-49 age group.

Likewise, the audience for graphic novels and comics is broadening, though a poll by Harris in 2010 indicated that readership still skews young and male. At that time, 18% of 18–33 year olds had read a graphic novel while only 4% of people over 65 had; 15% of males had read a graphic novel, but only 8% of females had.

Development, Production and Medium

Once we determine the strategy for dispersing our story content, which platforms we will be using and which will be our cornerstone, we have to consider the time it will take to develop and produce that content in each medium. We will talk more about this later. For now, what's important is to remember that each medium has its own timeline and process for implementation. This means that while your cornerstone property will be the first property released to the public, it may not be the first property you need to develop and produce. This is where having a thoroughly conceived intellectual property bible/transmedia bible can be invaluable, especially one that considers or anticipates production issues.

Once we consider the larger overall narrative, the strengths of various platforms for conveying specific story material and the timeframe each medium requires for development and production, we are ready to identify our cornerstone property. Don't take anything for granted. Always work from the latest data and update your intellectual property strategy periodically so that you are always anticipating, responding to and maybe even shaping the trends. This will help assure that your cornerstone and overall intellectual property are as dynamic and as engaging as possible.

Engagement and Participation

> *The toughest aspect of getting transmedia right is that you have to build two-way communication into the apparatus of your narrative.*
>
> **—Jeff Gomez, CEO, Starlight Runner Entertainment[6]**

One of the most exciting aspects of transmedia is the ways in which storytelling can become a more dynamic relationship between the creator(s) and the viewer/user(s). Old notions of "writer" and "reader" are giving way to the idea of "co-creator" or "collaborator." Not all transmedia properties are created equal in this regard and some have more potential than others. Certainly too, there can be a marketing imperative at play here – the more engaged a potential audience member is, the more likely they are to consume other iterations of the intellectual property. But those enticements designed purely from marketing considerations provide pretty limited engagement, simply channeling the audience to another medium. The challenge for a transmedia producer is to identify and plan for the parts of the narrative that can be best experienced as a collaboration or dialogue with the audience.

With careful thinking about and planning of the story universe, and integrating into those earliest stages of development additional avenues for audience engagement and participation, we can maximize impact. For example, as successful as *The LOST Experience* was in teasing audience expectations and assumptions about the ABC Television series *LOST*, it ultimately only provided superficial connectivity with the program itself since it was crafted after the primary creation of the series, rather than alongside it. *The LOST Experience* was treated as a marketing extension, rather than a narrative extension and so contained very little content that really affected how the viewer experienced the television program. Similarly, *Eagle Eye Free Fall* and *The Beast* were in effect simply promotional tools for the feature films *Eagle Eye* (Dreamworks Pictures, 2008) and *AI: Artificial Intelligence* respectively.

Ideally, engagement is a type of relationship. It is an active courtship. A continuous wooing and responding. An unrequited coupling. Interactivity has been the gateway to audience participation, with technology innovations that allow users/viewers to interact with content, alter it and even the ability to vote during live events or on posted videos, see the results and get feedback from the content makers. This kind of intellectual property expression breaks the fourth wall, the sense of being shown or observing a story rather than being an active participant in the intellectual property Universe or even co-creating the narrative. Sean Stewart describes this as making the audience part of the play:

> *you can make works of art that feel intensely personal in ways other artforms are hard-pressed to match. When I read about Lucy going to Narnia or Harry Potter entering Hogwarts, I have a wonderful second-hand experience of exploring a mysterious new world. If I can use my browser and my phone to enter a fiction, however, that experience isn't second-hand any more. I am not imagining what it would be like to explore that world, I am actually exploring it.*
>
> **—Sean Stewart[7]**

A complex transmedia property can be more than one individual can reasonably explore, encouraging interaction not just with the property but with other viewer/users. Henry Jenkins has compared this aspect of audience engagement and participation to Pierre Levy's concept of collective intelligence, where participants pool information as they work together, citing the map flashed in a second-season episode of *LOST* that fans then captured as

[6] interviewed in www.dmwmedia.com/news/2011/04/11

[7] "Interactive Fiction," accessed June 22, 2012, http://www.seanstewart.org/interactive/