

“Millions of Voices: *Star Wars*, Digital Games, Fictional Worlds, and Franchise Canon”
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“I felt a great disturbance in the Force, as if millions of voices suddenly cried out in terror and were suddenly silenced.”

—Obi-Wan Kenobi, *Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope*

In today’s media landscape of conglomeration and convergence, one of the major discourses in and about transmedia franchises is one of canon. If a story develops across multiple media, what is essential to the cosmology of the franchise? Which aspects of it are authentic? What is consistent across multiple texts? When do franchise texts count as legitimate and canonical, and when are they secondary or peripheral? The industry, franchise producers, critics and fans attend closely to such questions throughout the development and reception of franchise texts or products. As one of the most prominent and popular transmedia franchises, *Star Wars* offers a rich field to study discourses and practices of canon, to tease out its implications, and to reconsider its terms. Like other franchises with active fan communities, the *Star Wars* franchise has come to be defined by its emphasis on a singular, cohesive canon and fictional universe. Through various ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ articulations of this canon, and the attendant debates, a *multiplicity* of seemingly unified visions of the *Star Wars* universe are, and have been, articulated. Since the 1982 release of *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back* for the Atari 2600, digital games have played an increasingly central role in the *Star Wars* franchise, as the medium has come into own as a cultural form. But how can the interactive, playable, non-linear nature of digital games be rationalized as part of a singular, continuous canon centred on the six *Star Wars* feature films? Digital games sometimes allow for significant variation even within the basic experience of gameplay. For example, many *Star Wars* digital games, including the critically acclaimed *Knights of the Old Republic* series, the *Jedi Knight* series, and the more recent *Force Unleashed* games, present players with the choice between branching good and evil storylines – between following the light and

dark sides of the Force – each with a completely different ending. Can any *one* of these storylines be considered more true or authentic for the expansive fictional universe of *Star Wars*? If some of these ways of playing are more canonical or “official” than others, then the discourse of canon and continuity effectively invalidates certain experiences of the *Star Wars* franchise, relegating them to the status of apocrypha or, worse, inconsequential ephemera.

This chapter considers the theoretical and methodological implications of the tensions produced in transmedia franchises for scholars examining them, looking not only to the “official” canon put forward by Lucasfilm but also to fan versions of the canon such as the Wookieepedia,¹ Nathan P. Butler’s “Star Wars Timeline Gold” and Joe Bongiorno’s “Complete Saga of the Star Wars Expanded Universe.” Both kinds of sources are key to the discussion of transmedia franchises because, adopting the language of Rick Altman's genre theory, franchise canon and continuity “serve diverse groups diversely” (207-08). In order to fully understand the meaning of *Star Wars* games and their imaginary worlds, they must be situated as part of a heterogeneous networks of discourse and practice, as sites where many different “users” of the franchise compete for legitimacy. By analyzing how continuity is asserted in the face of the non-linearity of digital game fictions and the overwhelming incoherence and complexity of transmedia franchises, and by questioning the tendency to emphasize coherence, singularity, and continuity in academic work dealing with franchise media, I will illustrate a critical approach that better accounts for the multiplicity inherent in both digital games and franchises. The peculiarities of digital games as a cultural form illuminate and exacerbate existing tensions and cracks in the dominant discourse of canon and continuity. These tensions must not be ignored or glossed over in favour of neat hierarchies of primary and secondary texts; they necessitate and enable a critical rethinking of how transmedia franchises work.

The term “canon” in this context is adopted from its use in actual fan and industry discourse to describe both the authenticity or legitimacy of individual franchise texts and accepted truths about the

fictional universe those texts describe. This usage is related to the more conventional notion of a canon of great works, but is specific to a given franchise and is concerned not only with quality, but also fictional consistency. Canonicity is a quality ascribed to legitimate texts. The religious implications of the term are apt, given the almost religious fervor that fans hold for the “sacred texts” of a franchise (one need only consider fan reactions to George Lucas' perceived tampering with the *Star Wars* films in various special editions to see this is not an exaggeration). Building on the idea of franchise canon, I also employ the concepts of franchise apocrypha and ephemera—the non-canonical and unacknowledged aspects of a franchise. In a sense, franchise canon possesses an aura, that special quality of authenticity and originality. Unlike the well-worn Benjaminian conception of the artistic aura, destroyed by mechanical reproduction, this authenticity is no longer associated with any one individual object but rather with a singular, transcendent storyworld, established by the ‘original’ texts and expanded by subsequent additions. The authenticity and legitimacy of franchise texts are measured according to their perceived fidelity to this ideal fictional universe: canonical texts derive their value from the aura, while non-canonical texts are denied. This, of course, is backwards: in fact, the storyworld and its aura are produced and constructed through the canonization of franchise texts, not the other way around. As I will argue, the construction and maintenance of franchise canon is an active, dynamic and multiple process that belies the complete *lack* of consistency or consensus inherent in its own construction. Adaptation studies has long understood this. As Brian MacFarlane writes, “the insistence on fidelity has led to a suppression of potentially more rewarding approaches to the phenomenon of adaptation,” (387) while Dudley Andrew suggests a sociological turn away from discussions of fidelity, so that adaptation can be used “as we use all cultural practices, to understand the world from which it comes and the one toward which it points.” (378, 380) Rather than obsessing over the authenticity of adaptations, authenticity itself, and the socio-cultural processes by which it is constructed, is the object of study. However, the study of transmedia franchises tends to reproduce

rather than examine these processes. By constituting a literal space for play within the *Star Wars* franchise, digital games counteract and destabilize the purportedly unified and authentic *Star Wars* canon, laying bare the multiplicity of the transmedia franchise as a complex, incoherent network of texts, meanings and users.

Maintaining the canon

As Will Brooker has demonstrated, canon in the *Star Wars* franchise is a highly contentious battleground. In addition to the many competing notions, both ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’, of what elements are and are not canonical in a given text, the complexities and incoherencies of such a long-running and expansive franchise make it impossible to pin down any fixed, singular canon. However, as Brooker argues, fan culture thrives on debate, and there seems to be little interest in consensus or compromise in debates about canon; after all, it wouldn't be any fun if everyone agreed (113). Many of these debates are extensively documented online – see, for example, the “The Star Wars Canon: Overview,” “The Wong vs. G2K Debate,” and “Endor Holocaust.” In addition to the logistical challenges presented by the multiplicity of competing perspectives, the analysis of franchise canon is complicated by the constantly shifting nature of these very discourses. Over time, ‘official’ and fan conceptions of the canon are adapted repeatedly to account for new additions to the franchise. Changes and additions to the various special editions of the *Star Wars* films, retroactive modifications to continuity necessitated by new canonical franchise texts (such as the prequel trilogy), and partially- or wholly-abandoned texts (such as the 1978 “*Star Wars* Holiday Special”) have each, in turn, required the re-framing of many other aspects of the canon and continuity, as well as the fictional cosmology, of the *Star Wars* universe.

Officially-licensed publications such as *Star Wars Insider* magazine, Stephen Sansweet's *Star Wars Encyclopedia* (1998-2008), and the ongoing series of *Essential Guides to Star Wars* characters, timelines, fictional weapons and technology, and so on (1995-present), have all served to document,

maintain, update, and distribute the ‘official’, Lucasfilm version of the *Star Wars* canon. In 2000, however, Lucas Licensing established for its own, exclusively internal use the Holocron continuity database. Leland Chee, a *Star Wars* fan and former LucasArts video game tester, was hired to be the “Keeper of the Holocron.” This database, named for a fictional Jedi information-storage technology, is currently considered the highest authority in *Star Wars* canon by Lucasfilm as well as by most fans—his statements on canon and continuity are cited on virtually all fan timelines and throughout the Wookieepedia. According to a 2008 *Wired* interview with Chris Baker, Chee’s job is to index the up-to-date canonicity of virtually every conceivable aspect of the franchise—from films and books, to toys and games, to characters and places, to ideas and abstract concepts like The Force—and to work alongside Lucasfilm creators to ensure that continuity is maintained. “The thing about Star Wars is that there’s one universe. Everyone wants to know stuff, like, where did Mace Windu get that purple lightsaber? We want to establish that there’s one and only one answer,” Chee explains, demonstrating his dedication to the ideal of a unified canon. (quoted in Baker). Chee also blogs and answers user-submitted questions on the official *Star Wars* website, via Twitter and Facebook, and in *Star Wars Insider* magazine, thus acting as a gatekeeper and mediator between the “official” Lucasfilm canon and fans.

The Holocron database is divided into five categories. “G-canon” is the inviolable (but unpredictable and shifting) George Lucas Canon, comprising the six main *Star Wars* films and all other ideas originating with Lucas. “T-canon,” or Television Canon, includes recent television productions such as the computer-animated *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* series (2008-present) and a long-gestating but still untitled live-action series. “C-canon” is the Continuity Canon, mostly made up of texts from what is often called the “Expanded Universe,” including canonical-but-not-primary texts such as novels, comic books, and straight-to-video films, all of which are considered fully canonical except when contradicted by G- or T-canon sources. The majority of *Star Wars* games, including digital

games, board and card games, and tabletop role-playing games, are categorized as C-canon, and thus as part of the Expanded Universe. “S-canon” (Secondary Canon) consists of mostly older, outdated texts (such as the earliest *Star Wars* novels) and elements of texts that, while not explicitly contradicted by canonical texts, are not considered essential to continuity. S-canon texts may be freely embraced or ignored by creators. Finally, “N-canon” (Non-canon) contains the apocrypha of the *Star Wars* franchise: those elements that have been removed from canon (such as the Holiday Special), that are deliberately separate from canon (such as the “what if” stories depicted in *Star Wars: Infinities* comics), or that are otherwise inconsistent or incompatible with higher levels of canon (Baker). Only N-canon texts are positioned completely outside the “official” canon, with the other four levels representing varying degrees of wiggle room *within* continuity for creators.

It is important to note that, although these categories may seem strict, part of the function of the Holocron is to enable and track the *movement* of texts and elements between categories over time. If an S-canon or non-canonical element is referenced in a G-, T-, or C-canon text, it is ratified and gets ‘upgraded’ in the Holocron hierarchy. For example, the Galactic capital planet of Coruscant, previously featured only in *Star Wars* novels, was up-jumped from C-canon to G-canon after the release of the prequel film trilogy, which depicted the planet (Baker). Likewise, early novels such as Alan Dean Foster’s *Splinter of the Mind’s Eye* were initially received as fully canonical but have subsequently been demoted to secondary canon (most problematically, the novel develops a romantic relationship between Luke and Leia Skywalker, who were later revealed in the films to be siblings). Fan fiction, fan films, and other fan productions, as well as fan versions of *Star Wars* canon and chronology, are completely absent from the Holocron (they don’t even merit N-canon status in the “official” categorization), and Chee has emphatically denied that a fan canon (popularly referred to as “fanon”) exists or can exist: “I don’t like the term. There’s no such thing as fan continuity” (quoted in Baker).ⁱⁱ The activity and engagement of fans, evidently, is an ephemeral discourse and practice that exists

beyond even apocrypha according to the dominant ‘official’ version of the *Star Wars* canon.

Playing games with the canon

Digital games, as a cultural form and as *Star Wars* texts, offer a unique opportunity to interrogate the construction and organization of the ‘official’ *Star Wars* canon, as well as the relationship between ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ discourses and practices within transmedia franchises in general. As Jesper Juul suggests, digital games can be productively understood as a negotiation between rule-based systems and fiction (1). The complex process of adapting certain aspects of a fictional world into a coherent and enjoyable rule-based system can thus be observed in games based on existing fictional universes such as the *Star Wars* franchise. For example, in many *Star Wars* games the player's avatar has Force powers. In G-canon texts, the Force is an invisible, silent, magical field that only becomes visibly manifest in certain situations (such as Emperor Palpatine's deadly Force lightning in *Return of the Jedi*). Digital games, however, tend to visualize these powers. In *Super Star Wars: Return of the Jedi* (1994), the Force is represented as sparkling yellow and orange lights accompanied by a tinkling sound; in more recent games, such as *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed* (2008), it is depicted as an ethereal, gaseous blue cloud and sounds like gusting wind. In some cases, light and dark powers are color-coded blue or green and red (presumably by analogy to the color-coded lightsabers of good and evil Jedi in the *Star Wars* films). This kind of audiovisual feedback is useful from a game design standpoint: the player needs to visualize and understand what's going on, and whether their inputs are working the way they intend. (Additionally, by the aesthetic standards of contemporary mainstream games, invisible powers are simply not very exciting or marketable.) Another related instance of the necessary mediation of canon for the purposes of gameplay is the curtailing or scaling of powers. In many *Star Wars* games, the player must gradually unlock powers that may otherwise be considered standard for the character in question in order to preserve the difficulty curve of the game and the pacing of the narrative. In other words, if an avatar based on Luke

Skywalker commanded the full power of the Force at the beginning of a game, a player might be invincible and thus could easily finish the game in short order. This allowable flexibility of canon acts in service of both the player's experience of the game and the unfolding of the game's fiction, as well as Lucasfilm's profit margin. Additionally, in games that are based directly on other *Star Wars* texts, canonical scenarios may be extended or contracted for the sake of gameplay, producing new, playable versions of iconic scenes that do not match their cinematic counterparts (“Canon”) – the first *Star Wars* game, *The Empire Strikes Back*, is based entirely on the famous battle scene on Hoth.

In spite of their incongruity with more canonical representations in other media, the game design strategies listed above are nevertheless central to an enjoyable gaming experience. This general tension between rules and fiction is framed in discourses of canon as a sort of grey-area, wherein games, given their lower status in the official franchise hierarchy, are allowed leeway with the canon in service of playability and marketability. According to the Wookieepedia and other sources, while the fictional elements of *Star Wars* games—the stories, scenarios, settings, and characters—are canonical, game mechanics are considered to be allowable artistic license, related to the particularities of different media. “The overall scenario and documentation (cutscenes, manuals, strategy guides etc) are proper [Expanded Universe]. This, however, doesn't apply to ‘game mechanics’ and stats” (“Canon”). In the same way that variation in audiovisual style is allowed within the canon (consider the impressionistic watercolours of the *Star Wars: Dark Empire* comic books, and the polygonal, exaggerated cartoon style of the CGI-animated *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* TV shows), game mechanics are discursively framed as a superficial, interpretive aspect of a text that does not subvert the more fundamental canonicity of the game's fiction.

Yet, in games, narratives sometimes end abruptly, without conclusion or resolution. In most *Star Wars* games, it is possible for the player's avatar to die, and in virtually *all* games it is possible for the player to fail, abandon, ignore, or otherwise not fulfill the game's narrative arc. Perhaps

unsurprisingly, failure, a fundamental aspect of gameplay, is also considered non-canonical. It is assumed that the canonical version of a digital game's narrative is “the fullest and best” outcome possible: “[*Star Wars* video game protagonists] Kyle Katarn, Keyan Farlander, Maarek Stele, Jaden Korr, etc. never failed their quests” (“Canon”). Playing a *Star Wars* game successfully is seen as *adhering to* or performing the canon, and failure to complete the game is, therefore, non-canonical. As Alexander Galloway convincingly argues, however, digital games as a medium encompass the entire gaming context of culture, player, software, and hardware; the notion that the canonical ideal of success can stand in for every other possible iteration of the gaming context is, from this perspective, highly suspect (2). Even in the most linear games, such as *Star Wars: Rebel Assault* (1993), the player is presented with affordances and limitations, producing a space of possibility within which the player is able to act more or less freely. Accordingly, the choice of weapons, powers, moves, and strategies will vary significantly from player to player. To make matters even more complicated, many more recent *Star Wars* games present an even more open possibility space for non-linearity and variation in gameplay. Games such as *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* (2003) and *Star Wars: Jedi Knight—Jedi Academy* (2003) offer players a wide range of customizable options for their avatar, from physical appearance to statistics representing abilities and powers, and feature branching storylines with multiple conclusions, usually demarcated as “good”(or light side) and “bad” (or dark side) endings. The player, in these cases, has an influence far beyond the minutiae of moment-to-moment gameplay, which extends to the narrative continuity of the *Star Wars* imaginary universe. These are highly desirable aesthetic features in digital games. Gamers and critics alike tend to fetishize non-linearity and player choice as essential features of the best digital games. The discourse of canon and continuity must consequently account for such features in a way that satisfies the privileged ideal of a unified, coherent fictional universe.

Smaller player decisions such as those involved in tactics, strategy, and the specific events of

any given play-through are easily reconciled as part of the artistic license that excuses game mechanics. Games, by nature, offer varied experiences, but these slight variations are unlikely to present serious threats to the sanctity of canon. Avatar customization, on the other hand, presents a rather tricky challenge. Is the main character of a *Star Wars* narrative canonically male or female? Human, Rodian, Hutt, or Twi'lek? What do they look like, and what clothing do they wear? According to the logic of canon, in which Lucasfilm and *Star Wars* fans alike are deeply invested, these questions are hugely significant and must be answered unambiguously. Most sources, “official” and ‘unofficial’, state that, if avatar customization is allowed in a *Star Wars* game, the canonical version of that character is assumed to be male and human (“Canon”).ⁱⁱⁱ Although it is not made explicit for obvious ideological reasons, it would not be a stretch to add ‘white’ and ‘heterosexual’ to that list.^{iv} These partially-unwritten rules of avatar identity are problematic from a sociopolitical perspective, but they also usefully highlight some of the underlying tensions and contradictions that discourses of canon by nature attempt to erase to produce the semblance of unity.

Narrative choices in digital games create even larger problems of continuity. Even some games that are carefully woven into the mythology of *Star Wars*, such as the *Force Unleashed* series, offer players branching narratives. The choice between good and bad endings has become a familiar, marketable feature in *Star Wars* games (and indeed, in games generally). According to Lucasfilm, in games with multiple diverging endings, the light side ending is always canonical. When summarizing the canonical narrative of digital games, the Wookieepedia and other fan timelines likewise generally assume that the player made exclusively ‘good’ choices throughout, the implication being that this comes under the same heading as player failure: as noted above, the “fullest and best” outcome is always considered canonical:

In side-choosing games such as the *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* series and *Dark Forces* saga where the player has the choice between light side and dark side, as of

yet, the light side ending has been verified as canonical by Lucasfilm in all games . . .

Wookieepedia articles assume that the player picks the light side choice for all scenarios; therefore, even the secondary choices and events pertaining to the dark side or triggered by relevant choices, are considered non-canon. (“Canon”)

However, unlike an avatar's death (which, within the structure of a game, is usually understood to be a negative, undesirable outcome for the player), making evil choices, developing dark Force powers, and pursuing a dark side ending are not at all analogous to a *failure* to complete the game. It is completely inaccurate to refer to a player who deliberately finishes *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed* with an evil avatar as unsuccessful. This problem arises most obviously in games which have direct sequels. If a player achieves the dark side ending of *Star Wars: Dark Forces II—Jedi Knight* (1997), his or her avatar, Kyle Katarn, becomes a new evil galactic Emperor; upon playing the sequel, *Star Wars: Jedi Knight II—Jedi Outcast* (2002), the player will be disappointed to learn that their avatar does not start the game as a cruel, all-powerful Sith dictator, but rather a pure, noble, evil-vanquishing Jedi hero. The troublesome distinction between canonical and non-canonical player choices breaks down even further when one considers games such as the *Knights of the Old Republic* series that allow the player to remain in a neutral middle ground between dark and light in the course of a branching narrative (although the ending is ultimately binary). The potential for narrative and moral variety and ambiguity presented by digital games is largely unaccounted for in the discourse of canon. This effectively invalidates some players' engagement with the franchise and the *Star Wars* universe – the limiting imagination of a unified canon deems certain kinds of fictional and gameplay experiences to be *less meaningful* than other experiences.

It bears mentioning that some other digital games have attempted to rehabilitate this problem in novel ways. BioWare, the developers of the first *Knights of the Old Republic* game, have gone on to produce their own space-opera franchise with the popularly- and critically-acclaimed *Mass Effect*

trilogy (2007-2012). Unlike the *Star Wars* games discussed here, the player has the option of importing their *Mass Effect* avatar's appearance, character background, relationships, statistics, and choices from game to game, as the narrative unfolds across each iteration.^v *Mass Effect* executive producer Casey Hudson explains, “We have a rule in our franchise that there is no canon. You as a player decide what your story is.” By the end of *Mass Effect 3* (2012), there may be significant differences in the narrative and fictional world from player to player, ranging from simple differences in avatar appearance and personality to the deaths of several important characters and even the annihilation of entire alien races.^{vi} Similarly, in BioWare's high-fantasy role-playing games *Dragon Age: Origins* (2009), *Dragon Age: Origins—Awakening* (2010), and *Dragon Age II* (2011), players' actions and the impact of their choices on the fictional world can be carried over to set the stage for the next game. Although players are required to create a new avatar for *Dragon Age II*, in-game references to the identity and actions of their previous avatar preserve and validate the player's earlier experience. Rather than attempting to create a monolithic, “official” continuity by imposing a single canonical narrative that invalidates all other versions, BioWare has instead endeavoured to preserve the multiplicity of individual, internally-coherent continuities that are an inevitable by-product of nonlinear digital gameplay (and indeed of *all* engagement with transmedia franchises, as I will argue presently).

These are just a handful of examples of the complex relationship between franchise canon and digital games. Cooperative games, multiplayer games,^{vii} non-narrative games, the LEGO- and Fisher Price-licensed *Star Wars* games aimed at children, non-digital games, toys and unstructured play offer other challenges.^{viii} But where does all this leave the study of *Star Wars* digital games, and transmedia franchises more generally, and the actual work of theory? Whether or not the commercial products of a multi-billion dollar industry conform to the selfish desires of privileged *Star Wars* fans and gamers is not a particularly pressing concern. However, the questions raised by digital games, as well as other tensions and cracks in the dominant discourse of canon and continuity, represent a challenge that

necessitates and enables a critical rethinking of the field of transmedia and convergence studies.^{ix}

Understanding the canon

Ironically, it is precisely the problematic dominant discourse of canon and continuity that guides and structures many existing scholarly approaches to transmedia franchises. In his often-cited (indeed canonical) work on media convergence and transmedia storytelling, Henry Jenkins insists on the aesthetic and theoretical value of continuity, internalizing rather than interrogating its logic. Jenkins's ideal conception of a franchise is a “unified experience” developed systematically and without redundancies across multiple media platforms, emphasizing coherence and plausibility in fictional universes (96). Given this tendency to participate in rather than deconstruct processes of canon maintenance in media studies, the actual complexity of transmedia franchises is frequently ignored and under-theorized. More recently, he has come to acknowledge that multiplicity is important in some franchises (particularly those centered on superheroes), but his understanding of multiplicity is no less problematic. Jenkins asserts that some franchises

use multiplicity—the possibility of alternative versions of the characters or parallel universe versions of the stories - as an alternative set of rewards for our mastery over the source material. Multiplicity allows fans to take pleasure in alternative retellings, seeing the characters and events from fresh perspectives . . . where we embrace a logic of multiplicity, they simply become one version among many which may offer us interesting insights into who these characters are and what motivates their behavior.

(“The Revenge”)

In spite of this attempt to incorporate the idea of multiplicity into his thinking, Jenkins has continued to privilege consistency and clarity over multiplicity and heterogeneity, and he persists in understanding franchises in terms of the supposedly unified fictional universes they create, rather than as complex, diverse systems of discourse and practice. Jenkins conceives multiplicity in hierarchical terms as a set

of alternatives to an implied “official” or “original” version (“The Revenge”). Note also his emphasis on knowing “who these characters are,” suggesting a fixed, transcendent form from which all instances of the character are derived (“The Revenge”). Jenkins's version of multiplicity is just as orderly as his version of continuity, but the fact of the matter is that transmedia franchises are not orderly. As cultural and discursive fields, they are messy and incoherent, and it is highly problematic for scholars to map coherence onto franchise discourse in this manner. For all that the entertainment industry attempts to determine the meaning and control the uses of its products, it inevitably fails; as Jonathan Gray argues, “film and television narratives are open for business—or, rather, for play—and have been for many years, whether media firms and their legal teams like it or not” (187). I would suggest that Jenkins and the numerous others who adopt his model paint an incomplete picture of the many phenomena that make up transmedia franchises by taking the privileged status of canon and continuity produced within franchises (as well as their implicit hierarchies of ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’) at face value. It seems to me that this conservative, old-fashioned approach runs counter to Jenkins's general project of elevating and exploring the marginal discourses of fans and other groups in pop culture. Digital games and gameplay, by failing to conform to presumed distinctions between canon, apocrypha and ephemera, clearly demonstrate the limitations of approaches to transmedia franchises centered on storytelling, fictional universes and story worlds, and exemplify the need for a more nuanced theoretical framework. Active engagement, dissensus, negotiation, play and pragmatic appropriation should be seen as the norm, not as an idiosyncratic exception, in all franchise discourse and practice, both ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’.

To return to my analogy between franchises and genres, Altman and other contemporary genre theorists argue that close attention must be paid to the multiplicity and discursivity of transmedia cultural fields like franchises and genres, because any given field is a site of “struggle and cooperation among multiple users,” constituted by a host of different discourses and practices, each working to

define the imagined whole (Altman 208). Jason Mittell's theory of television genre describes genres as cultural categories, and “situates genre distinctions and categories as active processes embedded within and constitutive of cultural politics,” not something that inheres within texts (xii). Franchises, too, are meaning-making and value-assigning categories that must be understood as being constructed through active cultural processes. Evidently, the ‘official’ discourse of canon and continuity (and its function in the industrial organization of the entertainment industry) is significant, but only if it is contextualized in relation to other discourses and practices. Digital games highlight what has always been true about transmedia franchises: that by their very nature, they counteract and disrupt canon even while they construct it. It is necessary that scholars acknowledge and account for the ways in which different users of transmedia franchises construct and organize vast, incoherent multiplicities of voices, texts, paratexts, and meanings into seemingly coherent (but tentative and constantly shifting) unities, and for what pragmatic reasons. By conceptualizing transmedia franchises as complex networks of discourse and practice that produce cultural categories, distinctions and value hierarchies, rather than as transcendental, unified fictional universes, and by considering apocryphal, ephemeral, and otherwise marginalized aspects of franchises—such as the supposedly non-canonical experiences that emerge in the process of digital game play—I believe they can be more fully, productively and critically engaged.

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- ⁱ “Wookieepedia,” *Wookieepedia, the Star Wars Wiki*, n.d., <http://starwars.wikia.com>. As Jason Mittell pointed out to me, fan Wikis are particularly useful for studying franchises because they manifest the complex discursive processes of meaning-making that subtend their seemingly coherent and final content by tracking changes over time and preserving “edits” to pages (not to mention debates between contributors).
- ⁱⁱ This is in spite of the fact that many fans explicitly engage in the construction of alternative canons.
- ⁱⁱⁱ One notable exception is the protagonist of *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords* (2005), who is referred to as “heroine” in other canonical sources and is therefore considered canonically female and human (“Canon”).
- ^{iv} A heated debate about the canonicity of homosexual *Star Wars* characters ensued in 2009 after a BioWare forum moderator asserted that the concepts of “gay” and “lesbian” do not exist in the *Star Wars* universe. See Funk, John. “Do Gays Not Exist in Bioware’s *Star Wars*?” *The Escapist*. 28 Apr. 2009. Web. 25 Feb. 2011.
- ^v Some of BioWare’s earlier games have similar, but less fully developed, features.
- ^{vi} Although beyond the scope of this paper, interestingly there has been a strong backlash from some fans against *Mass Effect 3*’s ending, who argue that it betrays this sense of a “personal” story and canon. The debate is still unfolding at the time of writing, but BioWare has announced an “Extended Cut” of the game addressing fan concerns, due out in Summer 2012.
- ^{vii} The BioWare-developed massively-multiplayer online RPG *Star Wars: The Old Republic* raises a wide variety of challenges to the discourse of canon. Some of these challenges are addressed on the Wookieepedia discussion page for the game: “Forum:CT:TOR and Video Game Canon.” *Wookieepedia, the Star Wars Wiki*. Web. 15 Apr. 2012.
- ^{viii} For an interesting example of the potential impact of informal play with *Star Wars* action figures on the larger franchise, see Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 115. Will Brooker and Jonathan Gray also discuss the importance of toys and play in relation to franchises.
- ^{ix} See also Felan Parker, “Official Apocrypha: Elseworlds, What If? and the Transmedia Franchise” (presented at *The New Narrative: Narrative Arts and Visual Media*, University of Toronto, 2010).

Within Star Wars canon, he's noted as being the single most powerful user of the Force ever. This makes for a great game, but it also raises questions about the entire franchise. For example, Galen is shown to be fully capable of ripping a Star Destroyer out of orbit, a ship that weighs around 6.4 millions tons. Now let's do some math " as we all know, Force = Mass x Acceleration, which mean Marek just being able to move this thing at all means he's capable of producing at least 6 billion Newtons of force, using the Force. Every fight in the Star Wars trilogy should have ended in about three seconds, and consisted entirely of a Jedi launching a piece of debris into someone's face at 300 MPH. 4. The Matrix: The Agents Should Have Been Able to "Dodge This".