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Bringing Storyworlds To Life



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ABSTRACT



Stories have always fascinated people. Both telling and listening to them could be legitimately considered one of the human kind's favorite and most distinctive activities.

Almost everyone can say to have a favorite story, that, as a child or as an adult, charmed them with the tales of an adventure inside a mysterious world.

As children, we heard bedtime fairytales told by our parents, we leaf through illustrated storybooks, we watched cartoons.

Many of us have grown with unforgettable stories, that shaped our dreams and expanded the realm of our imagination, pushing through the boundaries set by the reality, in a never-ending flow of emotions and wonder.

In time, we witnessed some of those stories evolving into a more complex reality, breaking the limits of the media through which they were firstly introduced, expanding their universes, exploiting different channels, where new narrative treads found place, growing the interest of new audiences and, sometimes, of new generations, becoming massive commercial successes. It is actually amazing how a single story, born from the imagination of one author, can grow in time to become a massive franchise, a milestone for the pop culture, a reality firmly printed in the collective imagination.

At the end of 2019 I came into a novel which hadn't been published yet, characterized by a unique narrative style along with a complex, wide, intriguing fantastic storyworld: *Agapanto*.

This novel presented all the elements to give life to a brand new narrative universe; but standing out today means facing a crowded panorama of competitors, and the publishers aren't always open to invest into a new book without guarantees of economic success.

If only this fascinating storyworld had the chance to come in contact with the public, coming out out of the pages of the book, if it could present itself in all of its originality and wonder in a way that the public, once they have got to know it, will be lured to the book, excited to explore more of it.

All of those communication channels and digital devices we have at our disposal today seem to suffocate the book market; but if exploited in the right ways, digital technologies can actually enhance books, channeling the users' attention to them, and the great stories that we have seen evolving into huge franchises are the tangible proof of it.

By studying the structure of storyworlds, understanding the behavior of the audiences and analyzing examples of successful projects, we want to follow a design process that will ultimately answer the question that the case of *Agapanto* raised: how can we bring a storyworld to life, and is digital interaction a valid support?

INTRODUCTION



We tell stories across multiple platforms because no single media satisfies our curiosity and no single platform our lifestyle.

(Robert Pratten)

There are many ways to tell stories, very different between them. The one aspect that actually stands out, clear and inevitable, is that as the story is told, in all the different possibilities, the public develops a very strong emotional involvement with it. In a very high saturated market of stories, all of them following the example of the ones become of world-wide phenomena, for a new narration, especially for the newcomer authors of books, standing out and being noticed by the public is a very tough wager, even if the quality of content they are proposing is high and absolutely original.

Among all the possible media used to tell a story, perhaps the one most exposed to this risk is the book. When a movie, a videogame or a TV series can be approached first by trailers, featurettes, TV commercials, sneak peeks, and a comic book or graphic novel can be physically browsed to get a feeling of the mood, a book can lure us with its cover, title and little else. The world inside a book, with its mood and its rules, its characters with their personalities become clear only once it is read, which implies the use of a lot of attention and time; in other already used words, the very first approach happens when the reader's emotional engagement is already at the highest. Thus the risk of being exposed to disappointment is high.

For people who is used to fully immerse themselves in the book's world while reading, being thrown all the sudden in a whole new storyworld may feel disorienting. For someone reading a book means to temporary change your mindset, just like your brain were building a new, complete, immersive, parallel reality, with its own society, environments, inhabitants, language, even sensations.

The book's content isn't immediately visible, the user needs



a slow, well-focused approach to get to know it, unless they choose to rely on the opinions of other people who already read it. A book provides content through texts, which is absolutely not immediate; it needs time, attention, and in the most cases this means you'll have to buy the book, or borrow it from a library. In both cases a complete fruition of a book will result in an investment, both in terms of time and money, with no guarantee that it will be worth it. Approaching a new book (and by "new" we mean a whole new original story, without any relation to an already existing saga or franchise) means choosing one out of a very crowded panorama; the reader can be confused, overwhelmed with a lots of titles, and then picking the right book can be a difficult process, even a sort of wager.

From the newcomer author's perspective, emerging out of this ocean of competitors where you are nothing but a single waterdrop, capturing the attention of the public as one of the authors of the moment is very unlikely, the possibilities to remain unnoticed are very high. An even bigger wager, to be sure.

This is why today we are witnessing new ways to divulgate stories, exploiting different channels, presenting themselves through the architecture on which the narration is built: their storyworlds.

They are realms of possibility, a mix of familiar and unfamiliar, permutations of wish, dread, and dream, and other kinds of existence that can make us more aware of the circumstances and conditions of the actual world we inhabit.

(Mark J. P. Wolf)

Part 1



*Stories, audience
and media*

1.

DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE

WOLF AND THE STUDIES ABOUT STORYWORLDS

1.1 WORLDS WITHIN THE WORLD

“Worlds can exist without stories, but stories cannot exist without a world”.

(Mark J. P. Wolf ¹)

When Alice let her curiosity lead her into the White Rabbit’s hole, everything changed. All of the sudden, animals could speak, cats smiled, card decks were busy painting white roses in red to please the Queen of Hearts. Impossible, absurd things: for someone coming from our world, absurd indeed. But for someone belonging to that world, where everyone is mad? Perfectly normal. Welcome to Wonderland, Alice. The secret path you discovered was only the start of an adventure that would have later opened a brand new world for everyone to explore.

Ever since Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland was published by Lewis Carroll in 1865, how many readers have followed Alice down the Rabbit Hole? Safe, in the warmth of their homes and with a book in their hands, instead of a dangerous fall into a dark, deep burrow; but still, either for curiosity, or fun, or willing to escape from the way too fa-

¹ Mark J. P. Wolf is Professor of Communication at Concordia University Wisconsin. He is the author of *Myst and Riven: The World of the D’ni*, editor of the two-volume *Encyclopedia of Video Games*, and co-editor with Bernard Perron of *The Video Game Theory Reader 1 and 2*, among other books.



FIG. 1.1
Mia Wasikowska as Alice Kingsley in a scene from Tim Burton’s *Alice in Wonderland* (2010).

miliar rhythm of the everyday life, these people had the opportunity to dive into another world. A world so different from ours, where the rules we know have no relevance at all, where everything is upside down; everything a surprise, one discovery after the other, the thrill of a constant state of wonder.

Alice lives in every one of those who love stories; the part of us which is constantly researching a breach in our world to enter another one. Exploring, discovering, learning; all of this happens every time we approach a new world, whether it is carried by a narration or a different experience, through all the possible channels we have at our disposal today.

We call these worlds that await beyond the Rabbit Hole storyworlds, literally the world inside the story.

At this point it is very important to clarify the difference between the two terms story and storyworld, as their meaning is often confused or overlapped.

The “story” shows up as a course outlined by the author, by the narrator, which enables the audiences to gain access to a world. A story that might be rich and articulated but that enables only a small part of the narrative world to be rendered “visible”. (Mariana Ciancia, 2018, p. 53).

Thus the storyworld is a wider construction on which a story is built, providing the dimension where the narration takes place, a base where the narrated facts can find consistency and a rational explanation; well, rational for the stan-

dards of that world, of course.

A complete analysis of the nature of storyworlds can be found in Mark J. P. Wolf's essay *Building Imaginary Worlds – A theory and history of sub-creation* (2012).

The creation of imaginary worlds is, in the first place, introduced as an activity deeply rooted in the human nature, observing that world-building has been constantly present since ancient times in human history, from the narration of myths often rooted into a religious belief, to the great classic poems such as Homer's *Odyssey*; again, such an activity is observable in children's play since early stages: setting the environment around them to simulate a fortress, a pirates' ship, a space station, then creating playgrounds with blocks, LEGO and action figures (Wolf, 2012). In adulthood, this attitude evolves into the ability to envision other realities in boardgames settings, role-playing games; for those gifted with high creativity and unleashed imagination, such an ability results into the creation of new worlds, meant to be ultimately spread through narrations across different media. Wolf remarks how the building of storyworlds is an essential activity to support a narration; from the concept stages to audio-visual development and channel distribution, the architecture of a world plays a crucial role into the creation of an experience capable of engaging the audience in a pleasurable way. If in the narration economy newcomer writers are often advised to cut on insights and digressions which are not strictly related to the main storyline, in the world-building activity the details are what satisfies the most the curiosity of the Alice inside the audience: the exploration is never enough, the desire to learn about a different dimension leads them to an endless search for new elements, able to surprise them.

Worlds extend beyond the stories that occur in them, inviting speculation and exploration through imaginative means.

Whether through verbal description, visual design, sound design, or virtual spaces revealed through interaction, it is the world [...] that supports all the narratives set in it and that

is constantly present during the audience's experience (Wolf, 2012, p. 25).

Wolf refers to the storyworlds also as secondary worlds, where the Primary World is the real world, the tangible reality we live into, and the storyworlds become the secondary ones as they layer on the Primary, everyone with a different amount of diversity, merged into the Primary or physically divided by a sort of barrier.

The two different storyworlds of *Harry Potter* (J. K. Rowling) and *The Chronicles of Narnia* (C.S. Lewis) are suitable examples of how secondary worlds could come in contact with the Primary World: the first one is developed as an invisible underlayer of the non-magical world, visible only to those who know about magic, though accessible from almost everywhere in the world; on the other hand, *Narnia* seems to live in a dimension which is parallel to the primary world, completely separated in space and time, and the points of contact are very rare and sporadic.

This comparison opens us to how various and different each storyworld can be, coming from the infinite possibilities that human imagination can reach, and exploiting all the different channels that media can provide.

However, Wolf remarks how these worlds should always rely on common structures and rules; meant to be constructions open to an active and participative access of the audience, storyworlds are built on principles that aim to guarantee the inner consistency that is essential for the whole architecture to work. In other words, for the story to have a chance to be successful.

1.2 MORE THAN A STORY: SHAPING A WORLD'S STRUCTURE

Topos, epos, ethos, logos, genos, telos, chronos

Every narrative world is based on different dimensions that combined constitute its identity. According to Pinardi and De Angeli (2006), these dimensions are *topos*, *chronos*, *epos*, *ethos*, *logos*, *genos*, and *telos*.

Topos refers to the spatial dimension the story is settled in. It describes the environment, with its natural and artificial elements, where the events of the narration take place. *Chronos* is the time the world as described in the narration exists. These two primary elements are what immediately define the level of diversity between the dimension of the Primary World and the secondary. According to the story's purpose, the level of precision of the spatial-timing placement could vary a lot. When Harry Potter received for the first time his letter from Hogwarts, he lived, as the address written on the envelope precisely reported, in "the cupboard under the stairs, 4 Privet Drive, Little Whinging, Surrey", and from the date of death of Sir Nicholas de Mimsy-Porpington ("Nearly Headless Nick"), revealed in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, we deduce that Harry was attending his second year at Hogwarts in 1992. Those are definitely very precise information about the storyworld, probably willing to push the contemporary readers to feel even more engaged, thinking about all of that magic so close to the reality they lived in, yet so invisible to "Muggles"³. In the same way, *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*, the second chapter in the book saga *The Chronicles of Narnia*, opens telling us that the story begins in London during World War II, specifically during the aerial attacks from the Nazi. On the other side, everyone of us has been told as a child a tale beginning with "Once upon a time, in a land far, far away": no further information given, but still what of most simple and effective it takes to separate our reality from the tale's one, an universally known

FIG. 1.2

In the background: Alan Lee's illustration of the map of Middle-Earth for *The Lord of The Rings*.



phrase that sure has inspired the iconic line "A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away...", opening every *Star Wars* movie. In this case, the lack of a precise relation to the space and time of the Primary World brings us as far as possible from it, leaving the audience impatient to discover this completely new universe.

Defined time and space, the third dimension of the story-world is *epos*, the historical memory and shared knowledge about the events that were significant to the development of the world. Everyone in *Harry Potter* knew the history of the four co-founders of Hogwarts (Godric Gryffindor, Helga Hufflepuff, Rowena Ravenclaw and Salazar Slytherin), whose names were still the ones of the Houses young wizards were sorted in.

In *The Lord of the Rings* (J.R.R. Tolkien, 1954-1955), the times when Sauron gain power through the Ring were remembered, after centuries, as a crucial moment in the world's history, from Elves, Wizards and those who were passed on the memory; to others, instead, the story was told in form of myth or legend. But still, undeniably those days changed the destiny of Middle Earth forever.

In *Star Wars*, we know first from Obi-Wan Kenobi in *Episode IV* (George Lucas, 1977), and then from the Prequel Trilogy (George Lucas, 1999 - 2005) that the Jedi had been the guardians of peace and justice in the Republic for over a thousand generations before the end of the Clone Wars and the rise of the Galactic Empire.

From the world's history derive (or at least they should) all of those social and moral rules, behavior and conventions that constitute the world's *ethos*. *Universal ethos* are the attitudes everyone or the majority of people in the world conform to. For example, inside the magical community of *Harry Potter* nobody dares to pronounce out loud the name of the most feared dark wizard ever, Lord Voldemort: the common *ethos* brought to consider those who said that name foolish and disrespectful. Wizards like the great Albus Dumbledore, though, always considered pointless this sort of superstitious

behavior, and encouraged the magical community to give up this habit: we are here in front of an *individual ethos*, the moral that a specific character has developed due to its own reasons and experiences.

Sub-worlds and sub-cultures inside the storyworld can at last present a *particular ethos*, rules and morals shared by a restricted group, like the Jedi and the Sith, the first relying on inner peace and compassion to use the Force, the second giving into strong emotions like hatred and revenge.

Telos is the category describing the common goals; this level is strictly related to the *ethos*, since the evolution of the last one influences the evolution of the *telos* itself.

Logos is the linguistic system adopted by the culture (or the different cultures) of the world; it can include only new terms, ways of saying, different ways to use already existent words, to complete, articulate new languages: the elvish language from *The Lord of the Rings*, named Quenya, or the Na'vi in James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009), are two examples of original, entire languages with full grammatical structure, created as a support to the storyworld.

At last, *genos* is the system that rules the relationships between people and characters, on different levels (from families to cultures).

Invention, completeness, consistency

Set the World's primary coordinates, Wolf describes *invention, completeness* and *consistency* as the properties that make an imaginary world believable and interesting; clearly a secondary world could never be as complete or consistent as the Primary World, but still it is essential to reach a balanced level of these attributes during the creation process.

The first of these principles, invention, is the level of difference that occurs between the Primary World and the secondary world: geography, timing, zoology, civilizations, magical elements, science-fiction, everything new that separates the

fictional dimension from the reality that we know.

Wolf individuates four further levels of the differences that invention generates, named realms of invention. The first is the nominal realm, referring to all the changes of language that are introduced by the storyworld; into this category we find, in the first place, all the proper names of the characters and places making their first appearance with the world, but also all the names given to new objects or concepts. Names that can belong to the Primary World as well, but used with a different purpose inside the storyworld: the *Force* in the *Star Wars* universe², or the *Vaults* in the *Borderlands* games series (Gearbox, 2009 - 2019)³.

Next we find the cultural realm, a classification including all of the human (or humanoid) organizations introduced from the storyworld; civilizations, societies, orders, groups absolving to a function strictly related to the reality they belong to. The two following realms are those that mark more visibly the difference from the Primary World, for they can't be associated to human control: the natural realm, including all the plants, animals, sentient species, landmasses, celestial bodies not belonging to the Primary World; lastly, the ontological realm, dictating the behavior of physics, space, time. Storyworlds that present a remarkable level of invention usually belong to the genres of fantasy or science fiction, where the differences from the Primary World justify the events occurring in the main storyline, and their purpose is clear and fully acceptable.

Thus the importance of presenting these differences in a believable way; to this purpose, Wolf inserts in his studies about this matter the hilarious disclaimer about bad visual

² Inside the *Star Wars* storyworld, the term "Force" refers to a mystical power, an energy that makes possible the existence of life itself, surrounding every living being and holding the Galaxy together. The Jedi and the Sith orders gained their powers and abilities through the use of the Force.

³ "Vault" in the *Borderlands* game series is a term to indicate a type of ancient alien constructions set on the planet Pandora, holding endless treasures and riches, usually guarded by a monster.



FIG. 1.3
Symmetriad, illustration by
 Dominique Signoret for
 Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris*.

effects in B-movies, where fictional elements are presented in a grotesque way because of the insufficient funds and the inadequate tools used.

Rather we refer to the credibility derived from the design process at the beginning of the conceptual generation of the storyworld, in which every invention element must absolve to a clear function, or find a reasonable explanation into the world's preset rules. The system must allow the audience to relate somehow the secondary world to the Primary, as a reflection into another dimension of the hierarchies and the society they already know; otherwise, they will ultimately result confused and disoriented, given that this isn't what the author is aiming to, like the planet-wide and apparently sentient ocean in Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris* (1961), which behavior goes beyond the capability of human intelligence.

An useful observation is that, through narration history, many invention elements have grown so popular to become part of the collective imagination and folklore, thus used by many different authors in various storyworlds.

Successful invention may spill over into other worlds; objects and ideas that prove useful or solve narrative problems can appear in multiple worlds and even become generic conventions. Faster-than-light spaceships, laser guns, magical swords, incantations, wormholes, changelings, anti-gravity technology, elves, dragons, clones, force fields, sentient robots, and other tropes of science fiction and fantasy have all transcended their worlds of first appearance to become familiar and acceptable conventions that need little explanation or justification when they appear in a new world, provided the work they appear in is of the right genre (Wolf, 2012, p. 41).



FIG. 1.4
 A frame from *Star Wars - Episode IV: A New Hope* (1977) showing the Lars' homestead on the planet Tatooine.

Secondary worlds are, for their very nature, incomplete; it is in fact impossible to reach the same level of completeness of the Primary World, but it is one of the goals of the world-creator to give at least an illusion of completeness, that will satisfy the audience making the world believable.

As previously mentioned, worlds playing a foreground role in their story are often wider than what is immediately visible through the narration itself; a higher level of detail defined in its structure is what gives them a higher appearance of completeness, and then credibility.

When a society is presented, the world builder should envision also the political system, the economy, the laws, the habits, the behavior, as well as the most basic tasks like eating, dressing, working...

On this purpose, Wolf brings as an example the planet Tatooine from the *Star Wars* franchise.

The question is how would people and animals get food from a completely desert planet (its surface consist, from what seen, exclusively in sand, rocks and canyons): assuming that people could rely on intergalactic food trade, how would the native animal species get their nourishment? A good question indeed, whose answer could be the moist present in the atmosphere most human settlements were farming for water, but still, we got an idea of what speculations the level of completeness of a world could lead to.

Of course, speculating and theory formulating is one of the favorite activities of the audience when it comes to exploring a storyworld, thus the relevance of the incomplete nature of



FIG. 1.5
The Child, become popular as “Baby Yoda”, in a scene from *The Mandalorian* (2019).

the secondary worlds; there is a delicate balance though between the incompleteness that creates curiosity and wonder, and opens new paths to explore, and the gaps in the matrix that will ultimately bring the world to lose its credibility. Significant is George Lucas’ opinion about this matter.

The careful tending of the Star Wars continuity has yielded great wealth, but the key to a productive farm is to leave some fields fallow. A complete Holocron would leave little room for fantasy—for fans who, as [Henry] Jenkins says, “love unmapped nooks and crannies, the dark shadows we can fill in with our imagination.”

That’s something that Lucas understands. For instance, the origins of the Jedi master Yoda, his species, and his home planet are off-limits. (Wolf, 2012, p. 61)

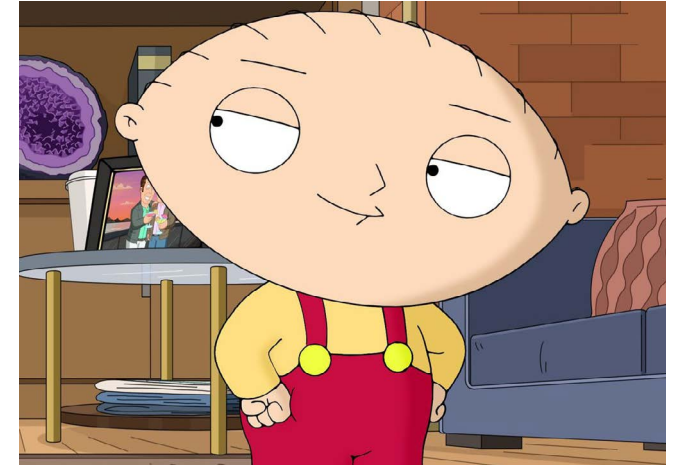
True, the release of the new *Star Wars* tv series *The Mandalorian* (2019) seems willing to lead to the exploration of this new path, but at least before it, Yoda’s backstory “doesn’t exist, except maybe in George’s mind,” Leland Chee says. “He feels like, ‘You don’t have to explain everything all the time. Let’s keep some mystery’” (Chris Baker, “Master of the Universe”, *Wired* 16.09, September 2008, page 141).

The next concept we find is *consistency*.

Consistency is the degree to which world details are plausible, feasible, and without contradiction (Wolf, 2012, p. 47).

Speaking in terms of credibility, as a world grows it is of a major importance for the author to keep every part of it in

FIG. 1.6
Stewie Griffin, the youngest member of the Griffin family from *Family Guy*, created and voiced by Seth MacFarlane.



line with primary rules and fundamentals; as in the main storyline inconsistencies can create confusion and disappointment in the audience, and in secondary trends similar gaps can be seen as random and pointless, in the same way inside the storyworld every author choice must find a reasonable explanation inside the world’s structure.

This given that the world has to be taken seriously, for there are many examples of storyworlds where inconsistencies are part of their very nature. Just think about popular tv shows as *The Simpsons* or *Family Guy*: being broadcasted for decades, the characters have remained always the same age, children never grew up (Maggie and Stewie), yet the world surrounding them keeps evolving in touch with the times. We witness technology changing drastically, from early 90’s state to modern smartphones and tablets, and real historical events have a precise contextualization through the different seasons, and yet the characters never age.

Now, it is clear that similar storyworlds aren’t meant to be taken seriously, and time inconsistency occurs as the very suspension of disbelief, serving the satire and humor purpose. Things change drastically when a world, for how different it might be from the Primary, has to be believable, thus such inconsistencies are not tolerable.

Imaginary, yes, but structured: we can accept its rules, as nonsense as they can be, as long as it has been previously decided and made clear by the author. Impossible, yes, but lawfully impossible. Otherwise, we immediately perceive if something is out of place.

Backing to *Star Wars*: it’s settled in a galaxy far, far away,

where traveling from one solar system to the other aboard a ship that can reach light speed is perfectly normal. We know it, we give it for true. Now, imagine that the new storywriters for a supposed upcoming spin-off tell you that once Emperor Palpatine teleported to the Death Star to see how the works were going. Clearly this sentence can't work. Not because building a moon-sized space station capable of destroying entire planets is physically impossible, since that is firmly likely and real inside *Star Wars* universe. But teleporting was never mentioned. It doesn't exist in that universe. Thus it's not acceptable.

Another example of a massive storyworld: *Harry Potter*. All over the world wizards and magical creatures exist in parallel with the world we know, conducting their lives (magical works, instruction, even wars) keeping everything secret from the non-magical community.

Dragons, spells, flying broomsticks, elves, ghosts, they're all real and well hidden. True and acceptable. Even obvious. Now someone tells you that Hogwarts freed all of its house elves and now they rely on an alien food-delivery service coming from some Orion's belt star system for dinner at the school canteen, since Dumbledore had always wanted to hire them.

Why not, if we are into an imaginary world? Because in that particular storyworld that is impossible, not acceptable. Even if J.K. Rowling herself came out with such a revelation nobody would accept it. Goodbye *Harry Potter*.

Just like in the real world, a fictional world must be regulated by its own rules, and those rules must be clear and well contextualized.

In these cases we are speaking about particularly lucky storyworlds that have evolved into humongous franchises, spread across the most various channels and featuring many different narrative treads. It appears clear now that as much as a world grows, keeping everything consistent becomes more and more challenging.

For this reason, in the early 2000s, after decades of movies, comics, novels, tv series and videogames, Leland Chee has

collected inside a huge database every element of the storyworld from the *Star Wars* franchise that defines the universe's canon: narrative treads, characters, planets, nature, technology, historical events, everything catalogued into the world's bible of continuity, named the *Holocron* (inside the *Star Wars* universe, the *Holocron* is a particular artifact capable of individuating every force-sensitive living being).

After the release of the new *Star Wars* trilogy - *The Force Awakens* (J. J. Abrams, 2015), *The Last Jedi* (R. Johnson, 2017) and *The Rise of Skywalker* (J. J. Abrams, 2019) -, it has become clear how the universe created by George Lucas has gone through all the risks that a massive world growth can create, bringing a significant part of the audience to question its credibility: inconsistencies have occurred in the ways the Force was used, the behavior of well-known characters, even the excessive use of comedy in the script, often perceived as totally out of place⁴.

Discussions of canonicity and speculation as to how inconsistencies might be resolved can be found on various Internet forums for a variety of franchises. What is interesting is the degree to which fan communities want to see inconsistencies resolved; although they would seem to threaten the believability of a world more than the lack of completeness or invention, inconsistencies are treated by these fans as though they are merely gaps in the data, unexplained phenomena that further research and speculation will sort out and clear up (Wolf, 2012, p. 48).

⁴ The eighth chapter of the *Star Wars* saga, *The Last Jedi*, directed by Ryan Johnson and released in 2017, divided the opinion of the fans because of several inconsistencies that occurred between its script and the one of the previous chapters, like the way General Leia saves herself from dying ejected in outer space by literally flying towards the spaceship, an ability never seen in the other movies, or Luke Skywalker's selfish and immature attitude.

1.3 CANON VS LEGENDS: CIRCLES OF AUTHORSHIP

The work carried out by Leland Chee on the Holocron for the *Star Wars* franchise remarks how important it is to keep a distinction between what is canon and what is not inside a storyworld, especially for a growing one. A primary definition of “canon” can be what was decided and written by the author; in this dimension we envision the author as the ultimate creator, the one who really owns the right to write and add content to the world.

This definition becomes a little restrictive when we deal with massive storyworlds that last for years, even decades, and have spread through almost every distribution channel. In situations like this, among which we can still find our beloved *Star Wars* example in all of its might, the whole attribution to a singular, supreme author becomes rather questionable. It appears clear that along with the growth of a world, especially as it becomes always more transmedial, a single author couldn't handle the whole construction itself, rather they would rely on the help of secondary figures, personalities chosen to help in the process of world-expansion, whose authority is now comparable to the author's one, so that they can actually generate further content that will constitute the canon.

Authorship, then, can be conceptualized as a series of concentric circles extending out from the world's originator (or originators), with each circle of delegated authority being further removed from the world's origination and involving diminishing authorial contributions, from the originator and main author to estates, heirs, and torchbearers; employees and freelancers; the makers of approved, derivative, and ancillary products that are based on a world; and finally to the noncanonical additions of elaborationists and fan productions (Wolf, 2012, p. 235).

The circles of authorship, as Wolf explains, can change and grow as long as we are dealing with an open world, while they won't find further space inside a close world. A world is closed when the author declares, directly or indirectly, its conclusion, thus the impossibility for anyone to add more of-

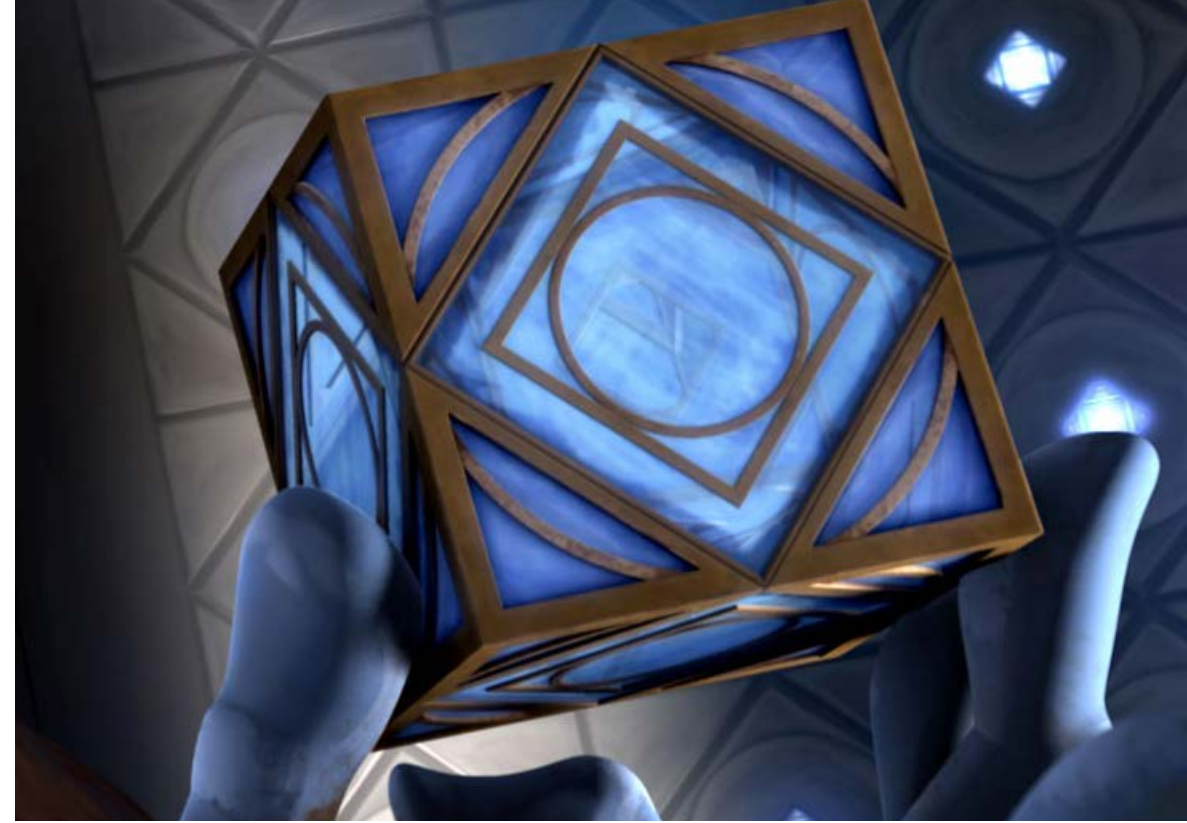


FIG. 1.7

A Jedi Holocron, appearing in an episode from the *Star Wars* animated series *The Clone Wars*, Season 2 (2009).

ficial content to it: whatever were added by another author would be considered as unauthorized, then non-canonical. Open worlds, on the other hand, are those which continue to grow, as long as the original author is still active, or as the authorship has passed in the hands of other creators, even though the activity of the original author has come to an end. The closure of a world doesn't necessarily coincide with the end of the activity of the author, for it is possible that they could pass the authorship to a successor, a co-worker. The Tolkien's universe of Arda is to be considered closed, as after Tolkien's death no more content has ever been added by authorized personalities.

The *Star Wars* universe, with all of the announced works in progress (*The Mandalorian* Season 2, *Star Wars: The High Republic*, the Obi-Wan Kenobi Disney+ series, just to name a few) is very far from being close, even if we haven't seen its original creator, George Lucas, at work since the conclusion of the Prequel Trilogy in 2005.

Another example of an open world is the more recent but not less remarkable phenomenon of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU): a case unique in history of cinematic sagas

for the high number of released movies and public reception (*Avengers: Endgame* (2019) stole James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009) record as the most successful movie at the box office worldwide), the world of the superheroes created by Stan Lee is in continuous growth, as the five next movie titles have already been announced.

As we can imagine, the bigger the world the more authors will be involved in the creation of the canon, and the more difficult could result keeping consistency within it.

When Lucasfilm Ltd was sold to Disney in 2012 and the project of *Star Wars – Episode VII, VIII and IX* was finally defined, the franchise was already dealing with a storyline delivered by the Expanded Universe where everything that happened after the events of *Return of the Jedi* (Richard Marquand, 1983) had already been written thoroughly: how the Republic and the Jedi Order were restored, the families that the protagonists built, the destiny of their children, the new menaces they had to go through. What the new direction of Lucasfilm did was to make a drastic distinction between what was canon and what “legends”, declaring non-canonical everything that happened in the expanded universe that couldn't find place in the new storyline that was about to come along with the cinematic sequels. A risky move, that was perceived as a critical hit by many of the fans who had been following the expanded universe for years.

Decisions like this come definitely with big risks if we consider that the growth of a storyworld is a consequence of the positive reception of the audience; matching expectations, after years of engagement and excitement, is as much challenging as essential.

FIG. 1.8
Cover Art by Tsuyoshi Nagano for *Star Wars - The New Jedi Order*, novel by Michael A. Stackpole, and R. A. Salvatore, 1999.



FIG. 1.9
Cover art for the Sequel Trilogy of *Star Wars* (2015 - 2019), the saga that re-defined the Canon of the *Star Wars* Universe.





1.4 TRANSMEDIAL GROWTH AND ADAPTATION

Despite the reason most of the imaginary worlds we know are created is to support a narration, we have seen how, with their growth, they have revealed their independent nature, expressing their identity as they are distributed through different channels, new canonical content is added, new narrative treads are built into them. In time, the narration that got us to know the world in the first place takes a back seat while the universe stands in the foreground as a standalone reality. Though George Lucas conceived *Star Wars* as a cinematic epic tale, rotating around the story of the Skywalker family, we have witnessed how far from this original tread the following works built into the galaxy far, far away have pushed themselves. Now we are in front of an analog process with the *Harry Potter* franchise, after the release of the new *Fantastic Beasts* saga, beginning fifty-four years before Harry's birth. The "Harry Potter world" has now officially become the *Wizarding World*, going way beyond the story of the young wizard.

The growth and adaptation of a world [...] goes beyond narrative, and may even have very little to do with it. Some degree of a world's aesthetics (the sensory experience of a world) and a world's logic (how a world operates and the reasons behind the way it is structured) must be carried over from one work to another or from one medium to another (Wolf 2012, p. 215).

A storyworld which grows spreading across different channels goes essentially through two processes, identified as

FIG. 1.10

Promotional image for the movie *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (David Yates, 2016), the saga that expanded the universe of *Harry Potter* with the introduction of a brand new storyline.

transmedial growth and adaptation.

Transmedial growth is a concept we have already encountered, being the process of addition of canonical content to the storyworld through different channels.

The exploitation of different media offers the opportunity to explore the storyworld in a multi-sensorial way, offering audio and visual content whenever we had originally only texts, adding interactivity, and vice versa, novelization and de-interactivity when we take games as a starting point.

We speak about adaptation when a work is transposed from one medium to another.

Here goes a premise: whatever channel will be chosen to tell a story, even in the first place, that will be a mediation of the story itself, as each channel provides specific levels of sensorial experience, interactivity, description, details, resulting into different forms of engagement.

Let's consider, for instance, a book adapted into a movie. Now, books and cinema have very different languages; being one of the best known examples of adaptation, it is well clear to the audience how the process of transposition involves the loss of mediation for aspects like descriptions, the characters' inner thoughts, secondary narrative treads, details and scenes not included. But a cinematic transposition also adds a whole new level of mediation, related to all the audio-visual dimension that a book clearly can't provide. Production requirement as budget and timing clearly play an inevitable role on the result of the adapted product, but also the taste and the choices of the director, that, as the new mediator, can decide to add new levels of interpretation of the story.

During the move from one medium to another, forms of mediation may be lost or gained, causing the material of a story or world to be changed. These processes also occur as the world itself comes into being, moving from a conception in the author's mind to an incarnation in mediated form; thus even a work that is not transmedial undergoes at least one of these transformations (Wolf, 2012, p. 219).



FIG. 1.11

Viggo Mortensen as Aragorn and Liv Tyler as Arwen in a scene from *The Lord of the Rings - The Two Towers* (Peter Jackson, 2002). In the cinematic adaptation the love story between these two characters was deeply amplified compared to the books.



FIG. 1.12

Tom Bombadil by Greg and Tim Hildebrandt (1976), a character present in the original novel *The Lord of the Rings - The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954) by J. R. R. Tolkien, that never appeared in the cinematic adaptation.

For how much a *Harry Potter* fan can love the books better than the movies, it is undeniable that the visual shape the story took through its cinematic adaptation is now printed firmly into the mind of everyone; and if this aspect could have created some disappointment in those who imagined the looks of the characters or the places differently, nobody could ear in their mind the original musical theme composed by John Williams for the movies, which has become undeniably such an iconic leitmotiv to immediately transport us to Hogwarts just by the reproduction of the first notes.

In Peter Jackson's cinematic adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings*, some scenes and characters never appeared on screen (like Tom Bombadil, or the many songs characters like Galadriel were supposed to sing), but many of the action and battle scenes were emphasized, due probably Jackson's background of horror movies director and his love for monsters; the romance between Aragorn and Arwen had much more space on the screen than it had in the book, where it was presented only as a background fact (Wolf, 2012).

In general, similar choices are made by the producers not only because of economic and realization restraints, but also as an answer to the audiences' tastes and expectations; every channel has a different kind of audience, that learned to know and appreciate the language of that specific media, and grew into it.

The transmedial and participative level the storytelling culture has now reached from several years, where the communication channels have brought producers and audiences closer than ever, has brought the public to play a crucial role into the development and growth of the storyworlds, as we will see in the next chapters.

2.

EVERYONE THINKS THEY'RE THE HERO OF THEIR OWN STORY

THE FAN CULTURE

2.1 "GET A LIFE!": DEMOTED BY THE DOMINANT CULTURE

We mentioned how determinant is the reception of the audiences in the process of growth of a storyworld. The ability to engage them in a pleasurable way is what makes the fortune of an author and then possibly of the narrative universe beyond the primary work.

This is why we find very important now to focus on the study of the audience itself: who are these people, why they love stories so much, what are their expectations, and what active role they play in the modern transmedial scenario of storytelling.

Once upon a time (September 8th, 1966), the first episode of *Star Trek* was for the first time broadcasted on NBC; by then, the pop culture witnessed the growth of a never seen before phenomenon of world-wide success, a story that inspired a cult into the mass media community, counting nowadays thirteen movies, seven TV series, one animated series, and we don't even get started with comics and novels published about this storyworld.

What was happening for probably the first time ever in the history of entertainment was the creation of a fandom, a group of loyal, enthusiastic followers with a high emotional engagement towards the series, who didn't only enjoy the show, but also created a sort of sub-community the mass media called the "trekkers", or "trekkies" (in a more pejorative way). The loyalty to the show apparently constituted the ticket of entrance inside a group of people who identified under the flag of the TV show, continually challenging each other on the level of knowledge of the series facts, collecting props and memora-



FIG. 2.1

A defeated Handsome Jack confronts his rival, Rhys, in a scene from the fifth episode of the game series *Tales from the Borderlands* (Telltale Games, 2015), pronouncing the emblematic phrase "Everyone thinks they're the hero of their own story".

bilias, even developing a sort of language code, like the Vulcan hand greeting.

This kind of behavior was hardly understood by the dominant culture, and people who weren't fond of the TV show just couldn't explain themselves this weirdly loyal attitude.

On December 20th, 1986, an episode of *Saturday Night Live* portrayed in an iconic way the vision the contemporary American society had about trekkies, and, in general (but implicitly), about the fandom culture.

In the original sketch, a group of *Star Trek* fans gathered at the "16th *Star Trek* Convention" in NYC; the presents are only males, both children and adults without any difference of attitude, unattractive, dull, willing to spend tons of money on useless props, with a higher than necessary care about the most insignificant details about their beloved TV show.

Their pointless confrontation about who knows best about the convention's trivia is interrupted when the guest everyone was waiting for makes his appearance to answer the public questions: William Shatner, aka Captain Kirk, comes face to face with an adoring public.

Shocked about the level of awkwardness and superficiality of



FIG. 2.2

The clumsy crowd of Trekkers portrayed by *SNL* on December 20th 1986, broadcasted on NBC.

the trekkies surrounding him, bombarding him with questions about the most useless details of the series, the actor can't help but shout at them the iconic phrase: "GET A LIFE! [...] It's just a TV show!"

Everyone freezes, like the colorful bubble of the fantasy they had lived in suddenly popped, revealing the sad reality, how much these people had embarrassed themselves, the time they wasted in something so worthless as a TV show, the steps they missed in real life (they never moved from their parents' basement, they never kissed a girl...).

The sketch put the public in front of the most classical depiction of the fans' stereotype: brainless consumers, buying anything associated with the TV show; people devoted to worthless knowledge, overestimating devalued cultural material ("Just a TV show"); social misfit, as they are represented like desexualized beings, through their intimate engagement with mass culture. Childish, immature, unable to separate fantasy from reality.

The word "fan" itself has a negative derivation, as its roots comes from "fanatic", an evolution of the Latin term "fanaticus": at the beginning denoting a temple servant, a devotee,

FIG. 2.3

William Shatner (aka-Captain Kirk) appearing on the *SNL* sketch, delivering the famous "Get a life!" quote.





FIG. 2.4
Don Quixote illustrated
 by Scott Gustafson.

the word has later acquired the negative meaning “Of person into orgiastic rites and enthusiastic frenzy” (Oxford Latin Dictionary).

We now refer to “fanatic” as “excessive forms of religious beliefs”, “excessive and mistaken enthusiasm”, ultimately resulting in madness from “possession by a deity or a demon” (Oxford English Dictionary).

Definitely not a very good start.

The meaning the word “fan” has today though has firstly come in use in the late XIX century, to indicate followers of sport teams; then it became the way to call whoever was passionate to a certain entertainment product.

Henry Jenkins⁵ (1992), in his social studies about fan culture, individuated this demoting attitude towards the media fans coming from the dominant culture, the one our society has brought to a higher level during the centuries, that hardly tolerate an “obsessive” attitude about something belonging to the “lower” culture, like the content the mass media generates.

In particular, what is seen as very disturbing and inexplicable in the fan attitude is the high emotional engagement that generates an observant devotion to entertainment products, just

⁵ Henry Jenkins (born June 4, 1958) is an American media scholar and Provost Professor of Communication, Journalism, and Cinematic Arts, a joint professorship at the University of Southern California (USC) Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism and the USC School of Cinematic Arts.

FIG. 2.5
 Kathy Bates as Annie
 Wilkes in the movie
Misery (Rob Reiner,
 1990), adaptation of
 Steven King’s book
 (1987).



like they were real cults.

The dominant culture, as Jenkins observes, found itself in front of a “scandalous category”, whose obsession with a story, a show or a celebrity was seen as an answer to common traits as unrewarding lives, few social ties, unsuccessful relationships, like sorts of modern *Don Quixote* (Miguel de Cervantes, 1605) or *Madame Bovary* (Gustave Flaubert, 1856).

In the world of music this phenomenon can be more clearly observed, where we find huge crowds of teenage girls, screaming and unleashed, in an apparently without control desire for their favorite celebrity: the kind of “orgiastic fans” and “groupies”, described in songs like Michael Jackson’s *Billie Jean* (1982) and *Dirty Diana* (1987).

In the darkest scenarios, this behavior is feared to lead to anti-social attitudes, obsessions that turn into insanity; a fear incited by real infamous facts like the murder of John Lennon by his fan Mark David Chapman in 1980, or works like Stephen King’s *Misery* (1987).

Understanding the logic behind discursive constructions of fans starts from framing what we mean by “taste”. In the dominant culture’s accepted meaning, taste reflects “good taste, proper conduct, aesthetic merit”. A convention not natural or universal, but rooted in the social experience, reflecting the interests of a particular class, determining what’s considered “desirable” and “undesirable”.

The stereotypical conception of the fan [...] amounts to a projection of anxieties about the violation of dominant cultural hierarchies. (Jenkins, 1992)

From the voices of fans we actually realize how distorted the “obsessed” and “dangerous” stereotypical depiction actually is, almost a justification by the dominant culture of a newer portion of society they actually don’t understand, therefore considered “inconvenient”.

What may make all of this particularly damning is that fans cannot as a group be dismissed as intellectually inferior; they often are highly educated, articulate people who come from the middle classes, people who “should know better” than to spend their time constructing elaborate interpretations of television programs. (Jenkins, 1992)

When fans often appear to be out of control, obsessed, we may actually find people unimpressed by cultural hierarchy, struggling to construct their own cultural canons, freeing themselves from the leading boundaries relegating them to the unacceptable “childish” and “immature” level.

We remark here also the tendency of fans to make a clear distinction among the mass media products, their need to distinguish good pop products from bad ones, claiming some of them as structured, innovative and relevant, while some others childish and banal, made with the only purpose to sell to the mass-media.

To speak as a fan is to accept what has been labeled a subordinated position within the cultural hierarchy, to accept an identity constantly belittled or criticized by institutional authorities. Yet it is also to speak from a position of collective identity, to forge an alliance with a community of others in defense of tastes which, as a result, cannot be read as totally aberrant or idiosyncratic. (Jenkins, 1992).

Raiding mass culture products, fans demonstrate the will to build their own cultural creations and social canons, revealing their participative attitude and ability to create meaning inside the sub-culture they have created.

2.2 “TEXTUAL POACHERS”: FANS CREATE MEANING

Far from being writers [...] readers are travelers; they move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves. (Jenkins, 1992)

Textual poachers is the title Henry Jenkins chose for his publication about the fan culture, in 1992: with a singular and strong metaphor, Jenkins manages to describe the constant, endless research of the story-lovers of different experiences across the imaginary worlds the pop culture put at their disposal.

An emotional journey, in which, at different levels of consciousness, fans continually find and create new meanings, making out of their poaching experience, as Michel De Certeau⁶ (1984) writes, “advances and retreats, tactics and games played with the text” (175), salvaging bits and pieces of the found material in making sense of their own social experience.

Fan audiences, as they approach their favorite stories, are not only watching from the outside a tread of fictional events, but they are actually living those adventures, rejoicing with the protagonists for their victories, suffering with them, entering in empathy with the characters just like they were real friends or family, and traveling their world feeling them as a second home.

How many *Harry Potter* readers did finally feel at home whenever, after the summer, Harry finally left the Dursley’s place to join the Weasley at the Burrow? How many chapters they felt the need to read to finally reach the point the narrative knot loosened, Harry was finally relieved for the victory at the Quidditch tournament and at the dawn of

⁶ Michel de Certeau (17 May 1925 – 9 January 1986) was a French Jesuit and scholar whose work combined history, psychoanalysis, philosophy, and the social sciences. He was known as the philosopher of everyday life and widely regarded as a historian with interests ranging from travelogues of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to contemporary urban life.

4.00 am they could finally put the book aside?

These stories become the fans' stories: they develop a high emotional involvement, they picture themselves inside them alongside the characters. They envision their own adventure, receiving the letter from Hogwarts, shopping for their wand, their broomstick and their owl.

Since 1997, many eleventh birthdays have been ruined by the missing owl-delivered letter.

The worlds they move into don't belong to them, as they are the result of the work of somebody else, an author that built it and made it available for the public.

Fans operate from a position of cultural marginality and social weakness: like nomads, they cannot settle down; they are at the mercy of natural forces they cannot control (Budd, Entman, Steinman 1990).

Fans are painfully aware of this state, and they struggle to play a role of their own inside the worlds they love.

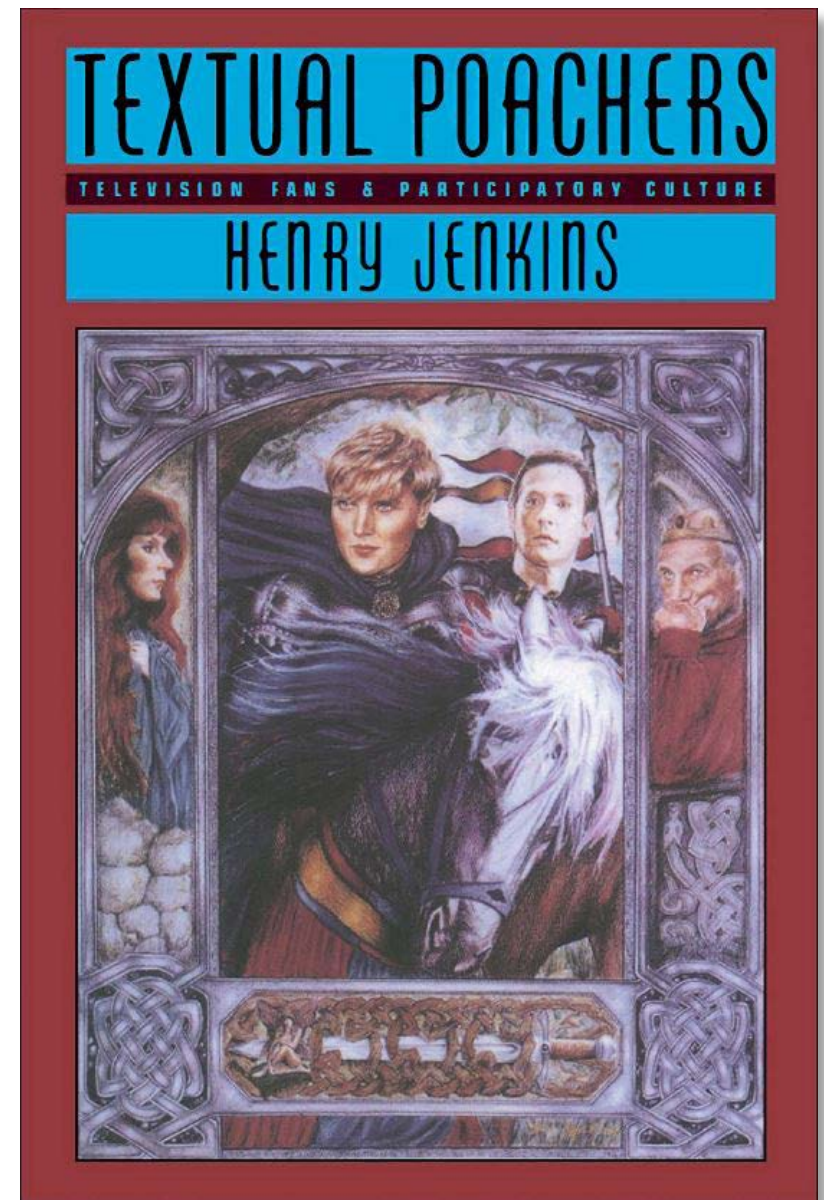
"Everyone thinks they are the hero of their own story" said once the ruthless Handsome Jack (*Tales from the Borderlands*, Telltale Games, 2015), reflecting on how miserable was the existence of those, like his rivals, struggled to stand out in a universe shaped by somebody else's decisions.

Still fans, through the years, have demonstrated how actually they can become part of those worlds: the "trekkers" offered a clear example of how fandoms develop a collective attitude, they gather and they become a strong, active and participative culture, whose voice can finally be heard, and eventually listened.

We are now in front of a strong participative culture, where, through the use of social platforms, authors and producers interface continually with the audiences, considering suggestions and proposals, scouting new talents, evaluating desires and tendencies, in a continuous exchange of ideas that ultimately generates new content added to the storyworld. The activity of the fans shapes and influences the stories they love. They might not be "the heroes", but surely they play a determinant role into their growth.

FIG. 2.6

The cover of *Textual Poachers* by Henry Jenkins, Routledge, 1992.



2.3 LET THE POACHERS POACH: CREATORS AND GIFT ECONOMY

Assuming that speaking as a fan is a defensible position within the debates surrounding mass culture, fans are active producers and manipulators of meanings, spectators who transform the experience of watching television into a rich and complex participatory culture [...] Their activities pose important questions about the ability of media producers to constrain the creation and circulation of meanings (Jenkins, 1992).

Fans are a participative culture that plays an active role in the generation of meaning inside a storyworld's franchise. The digital communicative tools we have at our disposal today make even more relevant their presence, as the internet users react immediately whenever new content is released, putting the producers in front of a real-time, direct feedback from the public. Social media users' receptions of trailers and sneak peeks have managed sometimes to change aspects of upcoming movies, games and series, requiring the production crew to fix those visual aspects, or even narrative treads, that the first reaction of the audience perceived negatively, as a clear warning of a potential failure.

When the first teaser of the live-action *Sonic the Hedgehog* (Jeff Fowler, 2020) was released, the public of the internet heavily criticized the final look of Sonic's 3D model, finding its proportions neither realistic nor similar to the original animated character, describing it rather as "creepy". Aware of the negative receptions, and with the frames from the teaser already turned into bad taste memes all across the Internet, it didn't take long for the producers to replace Sonic's model with a new one, way more similar in its proportions to the anime version, which eventually was kept for the final release of the movie.

The relationship between the producers and the audience have revealed a communication culture where emerges the *crowd intelligence*. The voice the audiences have in answer to the release of entertainment products, especially on websites like Reddit, has now become an opportunity for all of those newcomers authors, film-makers and artists who can grow their public online before the actual publication of their products. In the processes of *crowdsourcing* and *crowdfunding*⁷ what happens is studying in the first place the reception of the internet users, working on their feedback, growing

FIG. 2.7

A frame from the first teaser of *Sonic The Hedgehog* (Jeff Fowler, 2020), released in April 2019, featuring the first version of Sonic's character design.



FIG. 2.8

The same frame but with a new design for Sonic, as it appears in the final version of the movie.



their interest, in order to ultimately submit a product to a producer, with the support of the presence of an already formed community.

These scenarios are the result of a fan culture which has evolved to become always more participative, we are no longer in front of a consumer crowd, but a conscious audience with an active behavior.

Even before the era of digital media, the readers' activity has never been passive, there has always been an internal manipulation of the systems (De Certeau, 1984). One reading experience is never equal to another, the activity of the reader itself marks a difference between their interpretation and the author's, shaping already new meanings inside the storyworld's universe.

The emotional engagement with a story that a fan develops has pushed beyond the personal, intimate level blooming with the first approach to the texts, which finds place inside the individual's mind or little elsewhere (like some posters on the bedroom's walls); those feelings are now meant to be shared with all of those who experienced the same tale, scavenging the net and the social media to find more and more of them, people that mostly never met each other before, but united by the fraternal bond of love for that story.

Blogs, pages, profiles, forums, those platforms are a paradise for fans who want to share their opinion, confronting other thoughts, speculating, elaborating theories, sharing continually content and material. Inside the fan community, *creators* find the perfect place to share their products, such as artworks, audio and video content, original scripts and so on.

With these tools at their disposal, fans have switched from simple access to the entertainment product to negotiation, ownership, involvement in a practical dimension.

⁷ Crowdsourcing is a sourcing model in which individuals or organizations obtain goods and services, including ideas, voting, micro-tasks and finances, from a large, relatively open and often rapidly-evolving group of participants. Crowdfunding is the practice of funding a project or venture by raising small amounts of money from a large number of people, typically via the Internet.

The *creator*, as described by Paul Saffo (Moggridge, 2010), is the figure that best represents the passage from passive spectator to active role player inside the franchises' existence. As much as it is true that they are consumers of an entertainment product, it is also undeniable that *creators* won't be satisfied with their experience unless they can make their contribute, and generate content to be put at the disposal of the entire fan community, for everyone else's enjoyment. An attitude that creates the perfect base for a *gift economy* inside the storyworld market. Generally speaking, a *gift economy* or *gift culture* is a mode of exchange where valuables are not traded or sold, but rather given without an explicit agreement for immediate or future rewards (Cheal, 1988). In the specific case of the fan online communities, this definition reflects on the continuous generation of material from the creators fans, which, whether for personal achievements reasons or common interest, is put at the disposal of the entire Internet public, without any meaning of profiting.

That is why *creatives*, the elite who works on texts and officially release them (Saffo in Moggridge, 2010), tent now to create scripts that leave space for other writers to fill in with their own creations: aware that commercial profit-based economy and gift economy do coexist without damaging each other, but rather enhancing, the entertainment industry pushes towards the design of narrative products that from a tread evolve to take the shape of a universe, open spaces meant to be spread across different channels to reach always more people, attracting larger audiences, and giving the opportunity to the *creators* to find their space and share their content through the mediatic tools they prefer.

Those *poachers* wandering across lands not belonging to them (Jenkins, 1992) are now welcome from the very authors, as their scouting activity, just like in a symbiotic connection, is what enriches the storyworld of new meaning, ideas, resources, ultimately leading to the lasting persistence of the world itself.

3.

“THERE”, HE SAID, POINTING AT THE MOON

STORYWORLDS AND MULTICHANNEL

Narrative worlds are mostly created as a support to a story, but once they are revealed they affirm their own identity, whose rules and mythology take place inside the pop culture as an independent system. Its various aspects, shaping into multimedia products, will end spreading across different channels. Fans scout endlessly these declinations, to find their own place and be an active part of the system, creating new meanings, interpretations and content.

In this chapter, we will take a look to the multichannel communication paradigms and structures, their definitions and the key role they play as a support to the distribution of narrative worlds.

3.1 COMMUNICATION PARADIGMS: MULTIMEDIA, MULTICHANNEL

The participative attitude of the audiences, no longer passive consumers but active parts of the system and *creators* (Cfr. 2.3 – Let the poachers poach), has made clear how the single media distribution of a story is no longer enough; thus the entertainment industry is always more pushing towards the creation of narrative structures built on a multichannel spreading model, reaching larger audiences and engaging more people.

The challenge producers today face is to design *experiences* related to the same storyworld, where different interaction models are mixed, playing with different channels and exploring the opportunities that each one of them offers; this

FIG. 3.1

On the background, an illustration by Barbara Gualandris for Timothée C. Fiçinnas' unpublished novel *Agapanto*.

way, the audiences are no longer simply told a story in the form of a single narrative thread. Instead, the goal is now to educate, instruct the public about a storyworld, raising, through entertainment, awareness towards the story, its universe, its mood.

As Christine Dena explains (2009), the distribution of texts through the different channels available isn't a new phenomenon, since we can find examples of this practice back in centuries, where probably one of the most notorious examples is the productions of the Bible copies in 1455 by Johannes Gutenberg, as he invented the movable type printing technique.

As the technologies evolve, the concept at the base remains the same, but the results really changes thanks to two paradigms contending the today's mediatic scenario: *multimedia* and *multichannel* (Ciancia, 2018).

Like many definitions regarding the area of media and communication, along with these terms comes confusion and overlapping, so it is useful to go ahead and explain the meaning of these two different concepts.

With *multimedia* we refer to a communication product that conveys different media that serve to divulgate information inside the same context. About this matter, Giovanna Cosenza⁸ (2008) introduces the definition of “syncretic

⁸ Giovanna Cosenza is professor of Philosophy and Communication Studies at the University of Bologna, Ph.D. in Semiotics under the supervision of Umberto Eco.

as the result of the combination of different semiotic systems, combined into one communication product (text, images, video, audio...).

Multimedia texts have been delivered since the 90s: interactive encyclopedias, documentaries, games, distribute on CD-ROMs, DVDs and websites.

When we speak about *multichannel* we refer to the dimension of the process where content coming from the same information area is spread across different platforms; beyond the typology of the content, this definition rather focus on the modalities used to distribute it on different, independent channels.

It is to the *multichannel* paradigm that belong the phenomena of *crossmedia* and *transmedia*. Both referring to modalities of spreading narrations through different channels, they define two different processes, thus they shouldn't be confused, and they deserve a more detailed analysis.

3.2 CROSSMEDIA

Crossmedia is the involvement of more media, both analogic and digital or only digital, supporting each other thanks to their specific strength points, with the final goal of a combined production (Boumans, 2004). So, what we are dealing with here is a single story or theme, adapted to be delivered multiple times across different media, different devices, supporting it in other ways thanks to their own properties, engaging the audience on many levels of interactions.

On an international scale, we use today the term *crossmedia* to refer to narrative forms involving different media, though remaining identical in their declinations on different platforms (Giovagnoli, 2013, p. xvii).

The same story is presented on the different channels exploiting their own interaction models, as opportunities to reach the wider audience possible, where everyone is free to access to the narration in the way they find more intriguing or they are more familiar with.

In *crossmedia* practice, the ability of the distributors lays into a proper exploitation of the opportunities offered by the single tool to combine different levels of interaction, bringing out the strength points of the narration.

In this field we encounter once again the concept of adaptation described by Wolf (2014), the process that witness a story being transposed from the channel it was originally presented through to one or more different channels, where the emphasis goes where the new channel's strength point reside. Books are adapted into movies, movies into videogames, comics, tv series and more (Cfr. 1.4 – Transmedial growth and adaptation).

The *Harry Potter* saga, born as a book series, has been the protagonist of a multitude of adaptations that turned it into a *crossmedia* phenomenon, first in 2001, with the release of the first movie based on the adventures of the young wizard, with seven more sequels to follow, the videogame series developed by EA Games, the *Pottermore* website experience (2012). Every single one of this examples offered a different

user experience from the other adaptations, but always delivering the same narration, where what really differed was the interaction modality with the public; that was before the release of *Harry Potter The Cursed Child* (Jack Thorne, 2016) and *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (David Yates, 2016), that turned the storyworld into a *transmedia* model. Economically speaking, this type of distribution optimizes the chances of success of the entertainment product: exploiting different channels clearly means speaking to different kinds of audiences, each one with different media habits. This plan will likely result into brand awareness, and return of investments (Aarseth, 2005).

3.3 TRANSMEDIA

The definition *transmedia* was first introduced in 1991 by Marsha Kinder, American film scholar and Professor of Critical Studies at the University of Southern California, who described the concept of “superentertainment system” in her essay *Playing with Power in Movies, Television and Videogames: From Muppet Babies to Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (that is quite of a title).

The term was also reprised by Henry Jenkins in 2003, throwing the definition of “transmedia storytelling”.

Beyond the narrative treads of a single story, transmedia is a practice where different channels, with their own characteristics, contribute to the expansion and the understanding of a narrative universe (Jenkins, 2006).

Being a newly introduced concept, *transmedia* still doesn't count on a single definition, there are actually many of them, but it is undeniable that works built on this model share three common characteristics: the presence of a well defined and structured storyworld, with a certain grade of completeness, responding to the characteristics already discussed (Cfr. 1.2 – More than a story), the distribution of pieces, elements, treads, characters across different channels and, finally, the engagement of the public. While *crossmedia* projects exploit different channels to create adaptations of the same narration, without adding further knowledge to it during the process, in *transmedia* systems every touchpoint contributes in a distinct way to compose eventually the totality of the narration (Ciancia, 2018).

Transmediality also suggests the potential for the continuance of a world, in multiple instances and registers; and the more we see and hear of a transmedial world, the greater is the illusion of ontological weight that it has, and experiencing the world becomes more like the mediated experience of the Primary World (Wolf, 2014, p. 216).

The Star Wars universe is one of the most popular examples of storyworld built on a transmedia model, as the main cinematic narrative tread has always been supported by a

vast production of content distributed through different media. Ever since the release of *Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope* (1977) comics, books, games have given the fans the possibility to explore more deeply the universe of the “Galaxy Far, Far Away”, a process becoming always wider through the years, after the release of the Prequel Trilogy (Episode I: *The Phantom Menace* - 1999 -, Episode II: *Attack of the Clones* – 2002 - and Episode III: *Revenge of the Sith* – 2005 -) and then the passage of property to the Walt Disney Company, to which followed the release of the sequels, the first cinematic spin-offs (*Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* – 2016 - and *Solo: A Star Wars Story* – 2018 -) the videogame *Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Order* (Respawn Entertainment, 2019) and the original TV series *The Mandalorian* (2019). Among all of these works, only the nine chapters of the movie saga develop the main storyline, while all the other products focus on secondary narrative treads, both directly related to the main saga events or following parallel treads inside the same universe.

The transmedia process can be found as well in the non-digital dimension: *The Spiderwick Chronicles* is a fantasy book series for kids, written by Holly Black and illustrated by Tony Di Terlizzi, where a dimension full of magical creatures, invisible to the human eye, inhabit the world all around us. After the publishing of the books featuring the main storyline, the two authors published *Field guide to the fantastical world around you* (2005), a fully illustrated encyclopedia describing in detail the magical creatures belonging to the books’ world. Brought as a support to the main narration, as a piece of the universe come to life (in the main narration, the *Field Guide* is actually featured as a handwritten book created by magical-researcher and artist Arthur Spiderwick), the guide offered a pleasurable approach to the storyworld also to those who weren’t familiar with the book saga, but grew interested in it thanks to the alluring looks of the volume, featuring whimsical graphics and magnificent illustrations.

Inside the transmedia dimension though occurs a further distinction between two methods to deliver a narration: the franchise transmedia and the portmanteau transmedia.

Star Wars and *The Spiderwick Chronicles* are examples, on different scales, of franchise transmedia models; according to Christy Dena (2009), belong to this category those project whose transmediality is given by the relation existing between multiple and distinct product systems. Each of the platforms composing the systems is independent, except that they cover different areas in time and space inside the narrative universe (like prequels, sequels and spin-offs).

On the other side, in portmanteau transmedia systems contents belonging to the same story are presented across different media, that are strictly related to each other; far from being independent stories, they are pieces of the same narration that needs to be combined to gain access to the full story and understanding its plot. Like in ARGs (*Alternate Reality Games*), each piece can be compared to a puzzle’s ones, they must be assembled to complete the picture.

Two examples of portmanteau transmedia are *The Beast*, an ARG commissioned by Warner Bros. to 42 Entertainment to promote Steven Spielberg’s *A.I. – Artificial Intelligence* (2001), and *Cathy’s Book: I Found Call (650) 266-8233* (Sean Stewart and Jordan Weisman, 2006), an experimental narration publishing where the reader has to collect pieces across different media, hinted inside the book, to reconstruct the events of the story.

FIG. 3.2

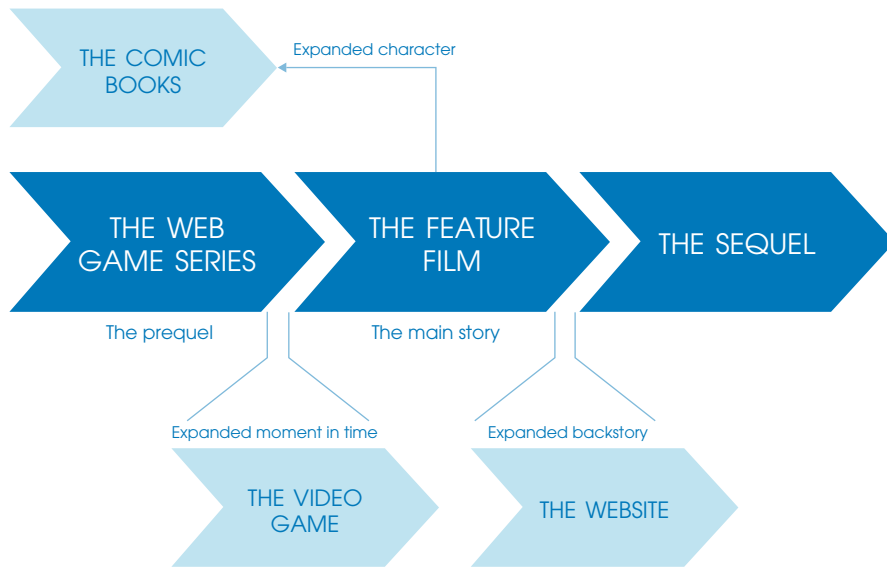
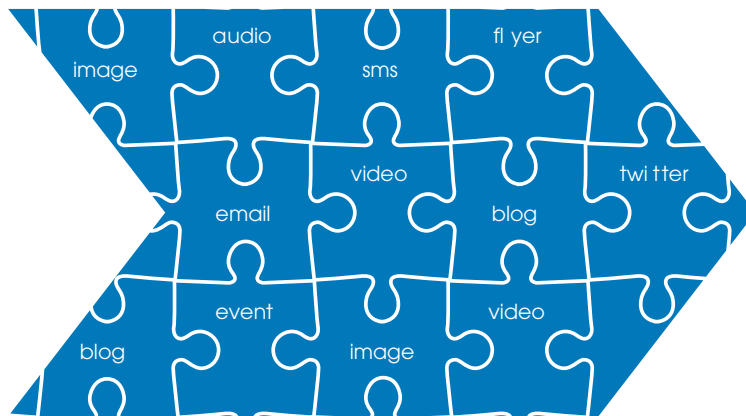


FIG. 3.3



Multiple platforms contribute to single experience

These schemes represent the two different models of franchise transmedia and portmanteau transmedia; in FIG. 3.2, the franchise transmedia presents a tree structure symbolizing the relation of the different mediatic products, deriving from one main storyline, though keeping their independence as narrative threads; in FIG. 3.3, the portmanteau model's scheme underlines the strong relation that occurs between different pieces, working together to compose the final story structure.

3.4 DEVELOPING A PARTICIPATORY STORYWORLD

Creating a participatory storyworld is a complex operation that goes beyond the purely creative invention when occurs when an author describes a narrative universe. While we design transmedia, we are not only projecting the emotional engagement with the story, but also with the experience we provide. It requires organization and strategies, as well as putting the creatives in front of objective limits (time, money, ability). According to Robert Pratten⁹ (2011), to project a successful transmedia storytelling one should start with the question: "What type of story or experience format is right to you?"

I believe the best of all creative people will imagine their audience experiencing their art. That's what enables them to really optimize their creative – the story is in sync or in context with certain audience behavior. (Pratten, 2011, p.13).

In fact, basing on what model we want to design, he suggests different approaches; if we are designing for a *portmanteau transmedia* system we shouldn't focus on designing for a first platform where to originally deliver the story, since it has to work for a system where each piece has the same relevance; if we are creating for a *franchise* model, it is the opposite, as he recommends to start writing the story considering the properties of the first channel where it will be released.

We want to optimize the advantages that transmedia gives us which is to deliver the right content to the right device and at the right time (Pratten, 2011, p.13).

That is why Pratten delivered and shared a methodology framework he called *Active Story System*TM, a process to cre-

⁹ Robert Pratten is a London-based, transmedia consultant who helps clients develop participatory stories across multiple media platforms. He is the founder of Transmedia Storyteller Ltd and creator of Conductor - an online service for interactive, multi-platform learning, entertainment and marketing.

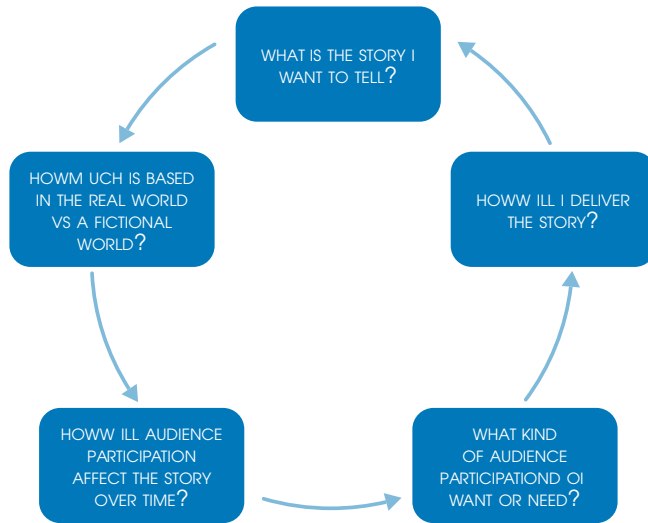


FIG. 3.6
The five questions to start designing a *transmedia storytelling* system, featured in Pratten's *Getting started in Transmedia Storytelling*.

ate engaging storyworld experiences. The *Active Story System*™ is characterized by the following properties:

- It is goal-oriented;
- It is designed for commercial & creative success;
- It integrates engagement, social media & content strategy.

Central to *Active Story System*™ are two basic beliefs: first, content creators need to bake the marketing into the entertainment. That is, that audience discovery, retention, engagement, social spread and word-of-mouth need to be designed at the same time as the story is written and built into the foundations of the world. This approach treats all stories as an experience that must be designed and planned for; second, storyworlds should be participatory. That is, that the storyworld is a living, breathing world with which the audience can interact and possibly contribute to (Pratten, 2011). The *Active Story System*™ is in two core parts or stages. Definition of the participatory storyworld:

- The world – agree who it's for, the goals and the underlying transmedia format

- The story – identify key parts of the narrative that can be used for participation
- The experiences – identify different opportunities for participation (i.e. many executions)
- The execution – identify when and how the experiences will be delivered
- Design of the participatory experience(s) (i.e. a particular execution of the storyworld):
- Write a synopsis for this execution/project
- Breakdown the synopsis into scenes (and beats)
- Design the engagement – why and how will people engage with this experience
- Design the interaction – where and how
- Design the operations – understand how the project will be supported once launched

The concept of participatory storyworld involves the active participation of an audience, who needs to continually be engaged and supported. Hence, according to Pratten, the need for a *Participation Bible*, that documents the following aspects:

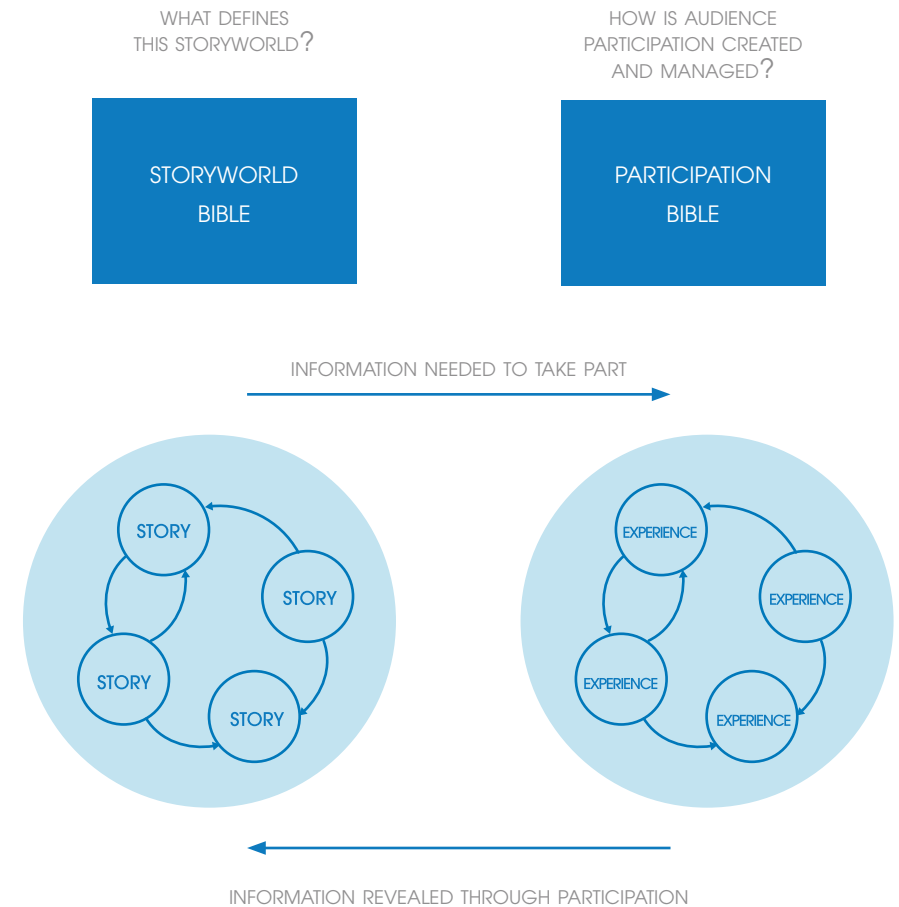
- Goals for audience participation (commercial & creative objectives);
- Policy (for treating fans consistent with company core values);
- In-world Design (e.g. storytelling);
- Gaming/Role-playing/Observing/Exploring;
- Platforms;
- Events;
- Timing;
- Out of World Design (e.g. company policy);
- Social media policy (communication style, crisis management);
- Community policy (rewards, highlighting, banning, legal action);
- Editorial policy for fan-generated content (encouraged, allowed, ignored, removed);

- Legal policy;
- Escalation procedures.

As shown in picture 3.7, the two cores are mutual working realities that put the storyworld architecture and the Participation Bible in relationship with each other, designing the experience in function of the elements of the narrative world resulting into one system.

From the analysis of these designing tools emerges the central role that the audience has inside the architecture of a participatory world experience; while projecting, it is essential to keep in consideration the target we are addressing to. Audiences have different mediatic habits, depending on crucial factors like age, gender, geographical context, working or studying background, defining different goals, needs and expectation. In the following chapter, we will have a closer look to what audiences we are dealing with, understanding better their attitudes and framing their profiles.

FIG. 3.7
Storyworld Bible vs Participation Bible.



4.

WHAT KIND OF FAN ARE YOU?

In order to bring a storyworld to life, we need a public to interact with. In chapter 2 we have described a unique kind of users, those who bring the enjoyment of an entertainment product to levels of deep feelings and emotional engagement. We are talking about the fans, of course. Those “textual poachers” (Jenkins, 1992) who scavenge endlessly worlds belonging to somebody else (the author) to make them their own, finding room to negotiation of ownership. In their poaching activity, fans reveal their unique attitude that marks a big difference with other types of audiences: they are creator of meaning. They are actually capable of adding new dimensions to the stories they love, through interpretations, levels of reading, theories; they offer new points of view, they reveal possible future treads; there are creators among them that share their original content to be put at everyone’s disposal, following the model of a *gift economy* that producers are embracing more and more (Cfr. 2.3 – Let the poachers poach).

But to study a target in a realistic way, we can’t just assume that all fans produce content and meaning in the same way. We are talking about one cultural dimension where a category of people strongly identifies themselves, recognizing immediately other fans like them, especially since their attitude is mostly against the paradigms that the dominant culture imposes (Jenkins, 1992); however, we are still talking about individuals, with different age, gender, backgrounds and habits.

If we want to make a primary distinction, for instance, we could already find that the most popular stereotypical visions of fans are actually two: on one side, we have the clas-



FIG. 4.1
The famous library scene
in Disney's Classic *Beauty
and the Beast* (Gary
Trousdale, Kirk Wise,
1991)

sical “geek” fan; mostly imagined as male, between 20 and 30 years old; dull, unattractive, desexualized, obsessed with his favorite stories at the point that he loses perspectives about his life outside his parents’ basement, missing life’s most important steps. Just think about the *Trekkies* depicted in the famous sketch of *SNL* (Cfr 2.1 – Get a Life!), or the four protagonists of the show *The Big Bang Theory* (2007 - 2019). On the other side, we have a complete opposite profile: the level of obsession for the entertainment object is still the same, but here we have a screaming, uncontrolled subject; female, in her teenage years, whose affection mostly includes a real love attachment to a character or a personality. Her fantasies, filled with erotism, are likely to be translated into bad quality written fictions to share with a community made of other girls screaming for the same reason, and her emotional struggle for something that doesn’t exist in real life brings her to exaggerate reactions in which most people almost see a possession by a demon.

These stereotypes are indeed starting points, for it is interesting to see how a common starting point (the love for a story) brings to very different behaviors. But, since it is very unlikely that all the people composing a fan audience are social misfit grown babies or girls possessed by Satan, it is probably more balanced to have an objective look and conducting a proper research, using the knowledge we developed researching the first three chapters of this essay, and actually have a talk with some real users, calling themselves “fans”.

4.1 INTERVIEWS WITH FANS

Our goal is to achieve believable profiles to help us in the individuation of a target to work with.

First, it was necessary to gain data by the analysis of the attitude fans are unique for: the generation of content.

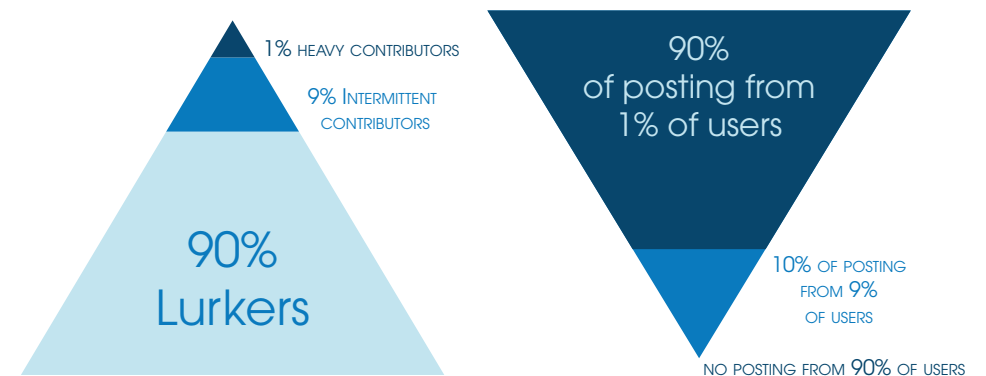
About this matter are very significant the studies conducted by Jakob Nielsen¹⁰ in 2006 about the participative attitudes of Internet users, in his essay *The 90-9-1 Rule for Participation Inequality in Social Media and Online Communities*. As the title implies, the research revealed that the participation of users of digital platforms is far from being uniform. With the 90-9-1 Rule, in fact, he framed a picture where the level of content generation was strongly indirectly proportional to the number of users creating it. As a result, only 1% of the Internet users are Heavy Contributors, which means they are regularly posting and writing; 9% are just Intermittent Contributors, interacting every once in a while.

Finally, a massive 90% are the kind of users that Nielsen calls Lurkers, as they don’t contribute to the generation of content, they are just readers “lurking” in the background.

Being the social online media the main platforms where fans interact with their community, it is very likely that the 90-9-1 Rule is valid for them too; the imbalanced participative atti-

FIG. 4.2

The schemes from Nielsen’s essay about participation inequality offer a graphic overview of the activity of the web users; on the left, the community participation pyramid highlights the situation of a small 10% of users actively participating, while the remaining 90% “lurks” in the background. On the right, the imbalanced contributions pyramid shows how, consequentially, the whole content we are able to see online is generated only by 10% of the users.



tude will result in fans having both different levels of impact on fandoms and creation of meaning.

At this point it all comes to understand which are the platforms fans engage with their favorite storyworlds and what level of importance they cover in their experience.

To do so, we went ahead and asked a selected group of fans of different stories five questions, in form of unstructured interviews, focusing on their experiences with the stories they loved, in order to understand better their habits and expectations.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE STORY?

If you could pick one story out of movies you have seen, games you have played, books you have read (and so on), which one would it be?

WHAT CHANNEL INTRODUCED YOU TO THE STORY?

How did you discover or come in contact with this story in the first place (frame the media)?

HOW MUCH HAVE YOU EXPLORED THE WORLD?

Did the passion towards this story bring you to explore more stories belonging to the same world? Did you enjoy them, as well?

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE WAY TO HAVE A STORY TOLD?

Speaking in terms of channels, do you prefer books,

movies, games, tv series...?

What are the narrative aspects specific to this format that you enjoy the most (descriptions, graphics, sounds, narrative threads, exploration of the Universe...)?

OUT OF THIS CHANNELS, WHICH DO YOU USE TO FOLLOW YOUR FANDOM?

Social media: direct contact with the producers;

Blogs: inner fandom discussions and opinion exchange;

Art websites: Sharing original content inspired to the World;

Livestreams: following influencer, youtubers speaking about one topic or playing live (in case of games);

Server playing: Collective web playing experience, creating new content (like players in *Minecraft*);

Conventions: gatherings, fairs, seminars, conferences, beta-testing, face-to-face with the authors.

We faced fans who identified their favorite story in works very different from each other, belonging to different genres and channels: just to name a few, we got *The Lord Of The Rings* (J.R.R. Tolkien, 1954), the *Outlander* saga (Diana Gabaldon, 1991), *Hunter × Hunter* (Yoshihiro Togashi, 1998), *Harry Potter* (J. K. Rowling, 1997), *Legend of Zelda* (Nintendo EAD, 1986 – 2013), *Fairy Oak* (Elisabetta Gnone, 2005), the *Star Wars* cinematic saga (1977 – 2019). Despite this fact, it was possible to frame common traits in the habits of this group of lovers of stories, among which stands out the common desire to keep in touch with the news and the facts about their fandom through social media platforms.

Being our sample composed mainly by young adults (18 –

¹⁰ Jakob Nielsen (born 5 October 1957) is a Danish web usability consultant. He holds a Ph.D. in human–computer interaction from the Technical University of Denmark in Copenhagen.

35 years old), it was actually not surprising that the privileged channels were Facebook and Instagram, followed by Twitter, YouTube and Reddit. Along with the main social networks, we find blogs, where the members of a community can discuss topics of common interest; those who love sharing their creations spend a lot of time on art websites, such as DeviantArt, ArtStation and Patreon, where eventually, by springing to premium membership, they can get financial support to their work. Player fans often follow livestreams of gameplays on platforms like Twitch, or enjoy server playing remotely with other members. Out of the digital dimension, we find the ultimate gate for the fan gathering, the comics conventions: during these events, a huge number of fans take part to seminars, conferences, beta-testing, workshops, coming in direct contact with the reality and the personalities they love.

We now move on the outcomes about the generative process: along with meaning, we told fans produce content. We were able to frame, through the interviews, different shapes the content generated by fans can take:

Feedbacks

Comments on social media, official profiles, constitute a cluster of thoughts and opinion (with different levels of usefulness);

Blogging

Through their activity on blogs, fans can leave their own reviews and thoughts about a specific content; discussions are absolutely free, ideas are shared with no fear;

Visual content

Pictures are possibly one of the strongest types of media ruling the web today: videos, memes, comic strips, photos and illustrations have an immediate fruition and are easily deliverable. This wide category includes from the dumbest meme made out of a viral picture to professional videomak-

ing, high quality illustration and art, homemade pictures of family reunions... the possibilities are really infinite.

Written content

This may actually be a group including the content inside the blogs, but more specifically we refer to original scripts and fanfictions. Now, the quality of the fanfiction content is often questionable, since many writers leave their imagination unleashed, free from boundaries set by the market, clients or other fans and the rules of the storyworld they work with occur to be broken. This is due mainly to the fact that fanfiction authors share their content without any profit purpose. These attributes may actually lead to very good products, that occasionally will lure the attention of many members of the fandom, and in exceptional cases arrive to the industry itself, opening a path to the writer as a newcomer author.

Unfortunately, there are also a lot of examples of how the lack of boundaries leads authors to share very low quality scripts, a mixture of gross fantasies and cringy characters, which probably should never leave the mind of their creators'.

The generation of content appears to be the decisive variable to individuate the different profiles of fans: the amount of it, the way they spread and access to it, its quality.

4.2 PROFILES CREATION PROCESS: VARIABLES

After a qualitative analysis of the outcomes of the interviews we can translate the attitudes of the fans in five main variables, described as following.

CANON LEVEL

Fans who produce content, both shared with the community and private, always conduct their own “poaching” activity across one or more storyworlds, which leads them to the creation of their own head-canon, a sort of puzzle of pieces selected from the narrative worlds’ original structure, to be recombined into a new, syncretic storyworld suiting the most their personality and desires. The question is: how far is their head-canon to the authorial one?

PARTICIPATIVE ATTITUDE

Fans are unique types of “text users”, because of their active participation to the story’s developments and their will to express their opinion about it. Different levels of participative attitude changes their impact on the fandom.

CREATION OF MEANING

When a fan becomes an active member of the fan community, they bring to the storyworld a new, personal interpretation and vision, thus creating new meaning, a new possible level of interaction, that will eventually enrich the fandom.

IMPACT ON FANDOM

Participation and creation of meaning can become weapons the fans will serve to actually influence some decisions of the producers, making the future developments of the entertainment product to match their expectations. This way, fans become part of the decisional mechanism. Suggestions, feedbacks, desires, but also complaints and disappointment expressed through the right channels can actually happen to change the authors’ mind in some occasions.

USE OF PLATFORMS

How much the various fans use the communication channels and social media individuated, as simple followers or willing to leave their mark inside the fandom community.

4.3 PROFILES CREATION PROCESS: PERSONAS

As often happens in the design process, we found useful to create “fake” user profiles to help framing the user target: these profiles, called personas, describe users that don’t actually correspond to real people’s, but still synthesize a realistic scenario of characteristics, habits, goals, needs and aspirations belonging to real users, thus personas portray a user category in a realistic way. In the creation of the personas, the five variables previously individuated and the Participation Inequality rule by Jakob Nielsen were the factors that distinguished five different fan-personas, identified with proper names, but also with “classes”: *The Author*, *The Padawan Learner*, *The Lurker*, *The Agonist Fan*, *The Dream-pusher*.

THE AUTHOR

Timothy Fisher, aka *The Author*, is the one who gives life to a storyworld. Newcomer or worldwide known, one thing doesn’t change: he is the one who decides the rules, his approval defines what is canon and what is not inside his storyworld.

The content he creates inspires a new generation of fans. He operates mainly on the social media, to keep the fandom in touch with news about the development of his work. He can be found as a guest at comic conventions, where he answers the fans’ questions and share his experience. Occasionally he will participate to livestreams or interviews online to express his impressions and professional opinion about other entertainment products with the Internet users. Still, Timothy remains a fan himself, for his work is the result of a huge amount of time spent on poaching his favorite storyworlds by other authors, who influenced his style in creating his own narrative universe.

FIG. 4.3
The *Author*’s persona chart.



“ I couldn’t but share with other people the inner world I have been carrying all time along with me. ”

GOALS: Bringing his story to popularity and creating his own fandom.

STRENGTHS: Determination, deep knowledge of pop culture.

PAIN POINTS: Difficulty to stand out in a crowded panorama of competitors.

Timothy Fisher, AKA *The Author*

Description:

32 years old, publishing editor assistant, communication studies background.

His fervid imagination, creative skills and determination eventually lead him to create his own storyworld and publish the outcome; now he has to face the reception of the public, but he is positive that life-time pop/fiction cultural knowledge, and being a fan as well, had actually helped him achieve a strong judgement on fandoms’ tastes and expectations.

1% - Heavy Contributor



- Canon level ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
- Participative attitude ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
- Creation of meaning ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
- Impact on fandom ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
- Use of platforms ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

Content creation contribution

THE PADAWAN LEARNER

Bea Faith represents the class of the *Padawan Learner*. The word “Padawan” comes from the *Star Wars* universe, indicating the younglings who are training by the Jedi Order to become Jedi Knights themselves. They pledge to the Order’s rules learning how to use the Force in order to achieve knowledge and extraordinary fighting abilities. That is analogue of what Bea behaves with fandoms. She is not only fascinated by them, but she also wants to learn, to become part of the generative process that bring those fantastic universes to life. She commits her skills to the creation of quality content that will eventually get her closer to that world she loves: study from masters to become a master yourself.

Thus she is very respectful of the storyworld’s canon, taking slightly different paths from it only when she has to put on display her creative skills, but still contributing with ideas that are consistent to the world’s rules.

She consciously uses social media and art websites as portfolio for her works, she follows official profiles to keep in touch with news and opportunities. Comic conventions are a must to attend for her, for there is the place where she comes closer with the world she dreams to be part of.



Behind those stories we love as fans, there’s a process of creation: that is where I want to be.

GOALS: Becoming active part of the industry.

STRENGTHS: Strong skills, produces high-quality content.

PAIN POINTS: Approaching the narrative industry is very hard.

Bea Faith, AKA *The Padawan Learner*

Description:

24 years old, graphic designer graduating student

Bea wants to turn her life-time passion her future job. She is not only a fan, she is also a “connoisseur”; behind the story there’s always a process of creation, and there is where she wants to be. She often produces quality content to grow her portfolio, to be noticed by the industry, and she is ready the catch the right occasion.

9% - Occasional Contributor



FIG. 4.4
The *Padawan Learner*’s persona chart.

THE LURKER

Al Douglas would describe himself as a “casual” fan: though he loves reading, watching movies, following TV series or playing videogames, he prefers to stay in the shadows, not participating to the fan community in an active way. He represents the category of that 90% of web users Jakob Nielsen named “lurkers”, hence the name of his “class”. This doesn’t mean he doesn’t browse the fandom activity: he actually follows updates on social media, he reads blogs to keep in touch with the news about the fandoms he is interested in, but his role remains the one of a passive spectator. Rarely he will leave feedbacks or post reviews. He treats fandoms as a spare time amateur hobby, that coexists on a separate level from his work life and duties.

His approach to canon is equally casual: if it reflects his taste and matches his expectations he remains loyal to it; otherwise, he prefers to conceal in his mind those aspects of the story that displeased him, and moves on to what actually makes him feel good.



“Fandoms to me are an hobby, I enjoy them because they are fun. Hobbies keep you mentally healthy!”

GOALS: Explore fandoms to enjoy them as a spare time activity.

STRENGTHS: Open-minded, ready to move on.

PAIN POINTS: Feels powerless before questionable author’s choices, ruining the stories.

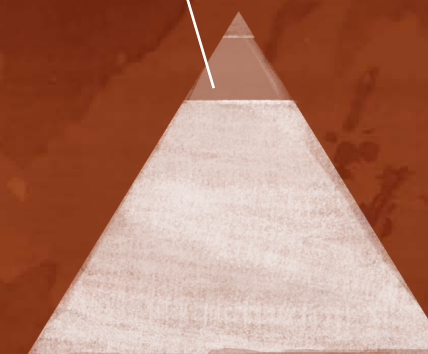
Al Douglas, AKA *The Lurker*

Description:

26 years old, educational sciences graduating student

He has a part-time job, he loves reading books and watching tv series in his spare time, as well as palaying sports and hanging out with friends. Sometimes he enjoys reading online blogs about his favorite fandoms, or following them on the social media, but he rarely leaves a feedback. There are some stories he is particularly fond of, but once they’re over, it is time to move on.

90% - Passive reader



Canon level ●●●●●

Participative attitude ●●●●●

Creation of meaning ●●●●●

Impact on fandom ●●●●●

Use of platforms ●●●●●

Content creation contribution

FIG. 4.5
The *Lurker's* persona chart.

THE AGONIST FAN

Leo Whites “practices” fan activity just like he would practice a sport: it is not related to the work dimension, and, contrarily to the Padawan Learner, he never considered making his passion for stories a job in his future, rather approaching it as a valid hobby. But, as an interest, it is worth growing and improving with dedication. That is why Leo participates with a certain regularity to the fan community activity, sharing his opinions and theories, leaving reviews and feedbacks, confronting other fans and the posts of the producers themselves. He has a deep knowledge of the storyworld and the production mechanisms behind it, exploring rehearsals, interviews, creation processes, and also collecting artifacts priceless to him, like props, memorabilia, t-shirts and action figures. His serious dedication brings him to be a strong creator of meaning, growing high expectations in his mind, elaborating ideas of what, according to him, would be the best for the future development of the narrative universe. Thus he will grow a strong head-canon, characterized by a high loyalty to the world’s primary rules.

Whenever the production crew behind storyworlds will take questionable paths in the continuation of the narration that still, coming from authorities, define official canon, he will feel very disappointed and betrayed, and he will not hesitate to publicly take distance from those directions. His voice, going against unproper canons and narrative choices, could be actually able to reach the producers, and taken into consideration.

FIG. 4.6
The Agonist Fan’s persona chart.



“ Stories are my favorite hobby, a way to escape from everyday duties and stress. As a passion, I like to grow it in the best way possible. ”

GOALS: Leave his mark in the fandom, for what he consider the best for it.

STRENGTHS: Active and determined, his contribution is precious.

PAIN POINTS: Because of his high emotional engagement, author’s questionable choices strongly affect him.

Leo Whites, AKA *The Agonist Fan*

Description:
22 years old, informatic student

When it comes to fandoms, to Leo thing get serious: as much as he is aware those stories are an hobby, he also is convinced that they are a valuable activity, just like practicing a sport. Loyal fan and good connoisseur of the narrative Worlds, he is an active memeber among the fan communities, as he takes part in discussions on dedicated blogs and social media. Though fandoms are to him on a separate level from the work/study zone, as an agonistt he feels able to leave his mark.

9% - Occasional Contributor



Content creation contribution

Canon level ●●●●●

Participative attitude ●●●●●

Creation of meaning ●●●●●

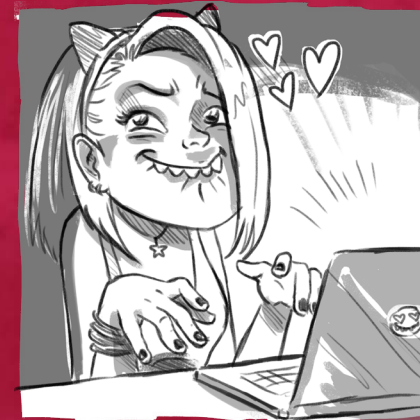
Impact on fandom ●●●●●

Use of platforms ●●●●●

THE DREAM-PUSHER

Diana Fury’s class is what goes closer to the “crazy fangirl” stereotype. She is a *Dream-pusher*, which means she elaborates and shares with the fan community complex fantasies about stories and characters, that she constantly dreams and craves for, to the point she has actually developed strong feelings and real sentimental engagement. Her attachment to one or more particular characters she finds attractive, far from being intimate or secret, will be spread on her favorite platforms in the shape of fanfictions, comic strips or original art. Loyalty to authority-approved canon matters very little to Diana, since the practice to create her own, unique, syncretic *head-canon* constitutes the base of her work. She finds very satisfying her activity, for she is conscious that by “pushing” her dreams they will not only be making her able to finally visualize them, but they will also make the enjoyment of other fans that, like her, find pleasure in the elaboration of similar fantasies, but they are too shy to share them, they don’t feel they have the ability to craft them, or they simply belong to the *Lurkers* class.

Diana’s production is wide, making her a heavy contributor; however, her level of creation of meaning or impact of fandom remains quite low, due to the quality of her content being often questionable.



“ I just love to escape in my own imaginary world, writing my own fanfictions gets me closer to it; sharing them will allow other fans like me to live the same dream...”

GOALS: Immersion in the world approval by the community.

STRENGTHS: Free and creative.

PAIN POINTS: The risk to fall into cringe in her works is very high, since sometimes she exposes her emotions too much.

Diana Fury, AKA *The Dream Pusher*

Description:
21 years old, psychology student

Diana is an unstoppable reader, true loyal fan: she is literally obsessed with a fandom, that eventually leads her to emotional attachment to particular character from that World, just like they were real and tangible. Picturing herself inside the narrative world, she feels the need to tell her own story as a part of it, and shares it with other members of the community who, reading those fanfictions, may identify themselves as well into them, and live Diana’s dream.

1% - Heavy Contributor



Content creation contribution

FIG. 4.7
The Dream-Pusher's persona chart.

5.

OUTCOMES AND PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

We all become Alice when we approach a new storyworld, somehow. We are given the opportunity to look into a universe we don't belong to, different from ours.

Imaginary, yes, but structured: we can accept its rules, as nonsense as they can be, as long as it's clarified somewhere. Impossible, yes, but lawfully impossible. As much as the storyworld is absurd, if put in a given context, we immediately perceive if something fits it or it is out of place.

There are plenty of ways to tell stories, many of them very different from each other.

The one aspect that actually stands out, clear and inevitable, is that as the story is told, in all the different possibilities, fans develop a very strong emotional involvement with it.

For some stories this involvement is stronger, and this is where they become obsessed: they follow its official or unofficial developments, they take part to conventions, collect memorabilia, write fan-fictions, make cosplays...

And what if they don't like one particular story, for their own personal reasons? It is unlikely for a fan person to just pass and ignore them. It is much more probable for them to hate the story. They would also put a lot of effort in constructing structured arguments about why it is so bad.

The fan's mindset is such that their emotional involvement as they are exposed to a narration is always there. Thus they often develop strong reactions towards it.

For fans, coming in contact with a new story resemble an investment, given the amount of energy they will inevitably put in it.

They love the story, the energies are put in the right place. They feel rewarded and satisfied.

They hate the story, their energies were wasted. They exposed their most vulnerable points (feelings) and their most precious resources (time and money) to something that filled them with disappointment, thus feeling betrayed.

Bringing storyworlds to life involves both following rules and methodology to make it consistent and believable (Cfr 1.2 – More than a story) and create a dialogue with the audience, from the first approach to educate them to the narrative universe, and then keeping them engaged, creating an experience they can be an active part of. The wide range of digital tools we have at our disposal today, which are also those our audiences are most familiar with, offer the opportunity to create *transmedia* systems to spread the various dimension of a storyworld, based on the active interaction of the fan-users.

The way they prefer the story to be told may depend from subject to subject. There are the ones who prefer movies, the one who lose themselves in the pages of a book, printed or digital, there are compulsive gamers who love to play and interact with the characters and the world, there are those who love collecting comic books on their shelves and keep staring in awe at the quality of the illustrations, and cannot wait for the next issue to come out to know how the story continues, those who live for TV series, and there are those who love all of the activities mentioned.

The best way a storyworld can reach these audiences is speaking all their various languages, shaping into treads that can suit different channels, reaching a wider public than the one it would gain if delivered only through one media; a story declined in a *transmedia* system is much more likely to match the habits and the expectation of a public including different classes, whether they are *Authors*, *Padawans*, *Lurkers*, *Agonists* or *Dream-Pushers*.

The most successful stories have likely exploited this opportunity, pushing beyond the limits of the single media the storyworld was first presented with; the next steps will be choosing one story and its original media, and, analyzing suitable examples of existing projects, starting framing the bases of the concept for the construction of a *transmedia* system.

Part 2

Framing the brief

6.

THIS IS OUR MOST DESPERATE HOUR

A PANORAMA OF THE STORY MARKET

6.1 NARRATIVE TOOL: THE BOOK IS OUR CHOSEN ONE

There are some stories that made history within the fan culture, stories that stood out as statements of an era, stories that, no matter how much one liked them, every one has at least heard of. Some of these stories have conquered the enthusiasm of the public from the very beginning, just along with the release of their original product, whether it was a book, a movie, a TV series, a game, a comic series.

The Lord of the Rings (1954), *Star Trek* (1967), *Star Wars* (1977), the DC and Marvel comic universe, *Harry Potter* (1997); these stories represent unique phenomena, they were almost immediately noticed by the public because of the novelty they represented, their originality, their intriguing and wonderful narrative universe.

The example of their success inevitably opened a path to follow for other authors in the years to come, many stories since then have been created, belonging to the same genres, sometimes become a real trend in the entertainment industry. *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* definitely lured the public towards science fiction and space adventure, fascinating them with the wonder of interstellar traveling, visiting other planets, seeing the human race interact with robots and alien life forms; a proper timing in history line for sure, with the US and URSS racing to space during those years, the mediatic attention on the Apollo missions, as well as the industry of visual and special effects taking a jump forward with the birth of *ILM*, founded by George Lucas in 1975.

A jump of twenty years and, in 1997, when the fantasy genre was known to be bound on celtic folklore and medieval



FIG. 6.1

An iconic frame from *Star Wars - Episode IV: A New Hope* (George Lucas, 1977), where Princess Leia (Carrie Fisher) calls for help from Obi-Wan Kenobi through a pre-recorded hologram message, referring to that moment as their “most desperate hour”.

settings, J. K. Rowling publish a novel about a orphan kid named Harry, living with his uncle and aunt in contemporary ages, in a boring British neighborhood, bullied by his cousin who didn't let him use his PlayStation or watch cartoons on TV¹, discovering all of the sudden to have magical powers and finds himself to attend the most wonderful and amazing school ever, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. *Harry Potter* becomes a worldwide phenomenon, introducing the public to the possibility to have a storyworld where the most strictly fantasy elements, such as wizards, witches, wands, broomsticks, ghosts, elves, dragons and unicorns exist alongside the Primary World, invisible and secret to the non-magical community, and where magic and spells are subjects of teachings in a school for young wizards. In the early 2000s, the success of *Harry Potter* redefined the concept of the fantasy genre, inspiring a huge production of stories about magical kids learning spells, a continuous publishing of new works, a countless number of titles; during those times, entering a bookshop was an overwhelming experience, so many fantasy *Harry Potter* inspired books, everything was blurred. A process that kept repeating, through the years, ever since a successful title was published it was followed by a stream of new stories by other authors, inspired by the popularity the story guide achieved. Another example in publishing is the saga of *A Song of Ice and Fire* by George R Martin; begun in 1996, the last title, *A Dance with Dragons*, was published in 2011, and the popularity of the saga has increased also thanks to the TV series adaptation *Game of Thrones* (2011 - 2019). The epic and dark narration style cut another tread inside the public view of the fantasy genre, a space now generously filled with other new similar titles as well. Needless to say it, we are in front of a high saturation of the story market, a condition felt the most by the publishing industry, with the huge release of books whose writing was inspired by one or more examples of successful stories that stood out, along with their good quality, because of particularly fortunate circumstances. Those chances, as the number of competitors grow, are inevitably, drastically reduced. How does a new novel stand out, in such a crowded panorama, with such high expectations to match?

Unfortunately, the quality of the narration is no longer a guarantee; even if the project of a newcomer author makes it to the market and gets published, what are the chances it can actually engage the public and get its own audience? If the author has treated their publication as a stand-alone episode, maybe a warm reception and some positive critics are enough. But if the project extend further, if the author is planning to release a saga, supported by a complex storyworld, engaging an audience to create a fandom around the narrative universe could be very difficult with the release of the book as the only media; with the wide range of stories at their disposal, readers have become picky. They rely on their knowledge about pop culture, they always have in mind standing-out works as comparison, that forged their reader's taste and mind-setting; in other words, they have high expectations.

Other types of media can count on visual to present themselves to the public, though teasers, trailers, banners, sneak peeks; images are an immediate and powerful communication method, a few of them can in few seconds offer a clear view of the concept and the mood of a movie, a TV series, a videogame. A book would open to its user only through the reading of its texts, an activity that requires a lot of time and dedication; its storyworld won't be "visible" until the reader has already pledged themselves to it.

This is why we chose to work starting from a story inside a *book*: the user needs a slow, well-focused approach to get to know it, unless they choose to rely on the opinions of other readers who already read it. A book provides content through texts, which is absolutely not immediate; it needs time, attention, and in the most cases this means you'll have to buy the book, or borrow it from a library. In both cases a complete fruition of a book will result in an investment, both in terms of time and money, with no guarantee that it will be worth it. This ultimately results in many storyworlds to pass unnoticed, never actually coming to life.

6.2 A BOOKSTORE EXPERIENCE

Walking in a bookstore, people are surrounded by many books; it could be hard to choose which new book to buy, because the book could not match the expectations, perhaps it could be just another competitor of the most well-known book of the same genre, trying to cut out its own space in a high saturated market, such as the fantasy/sci-fi narration, overwhelmed by stories that turned into massive franchises.

Also, we must consider the intentions a customer has when they enter a bookstore: for somebody reading is a major hobby, and thus they are more willing to purchase new books, while for occasional reader the choice could be way harder. It's much "safer" for audiences to stay into their comfort zones, to enjoy products related to a storyworld they already know.

When a regular reader enters a bookstore, there is a very high chance that their purpose is to actually buy a new book for his own spare time.

First, they are attracted by the "best sellers" desk, already offering the customer a selection of what is currently in evidence; they pick one book that they can tell at first sight it belongs to a genre or author they like, or they are familiar with; the judgement comes with the evaluation of different elements: the cover, the captions, the ratings, the plot summary, a peek to the first page, the familiarity with the author or even the already existent narrative world the book could belong to (as an eventuality). If they are undecided on some other books, they repeat the same actions on the others, maybe moving from the bestsellers desk to their favorite genre's department in the bookstore.

They check the prices, since usually books, especially long novels with a rigid ligature, can come with high prices; when a book wins this tournament the customer purchase it and goes home.

But this isn't over: the journey ends after the reader has actually read the new book.

There are two main possibilities for the ending: if the reader

enjoys the book, they will recommend it to other people, they will leave positive feedback on dedicated channels, and they will be very likely, in the future, to purchase a sequel of the book, or another title from the same author.

On the other side, we have occasional readers, people who prefer other media to have a story told; reading isn't their favorite activity, even if perhaps sometimes they happened to enjoy very much a few of them.

They still love narration though, and they are very captured by some story divulged through tv series, movies, games or comics: we can say they are much more into visual.

When this kind of user enters a bookstore, they will be automatically driven to check on music, films, comics or art-books. When it comes to books, they are lured by the covers they find more captivating, with a catchy image and title. What are the chances they will actually buy the book that captured their attention? Very few. They will come out the store with a new Moleskine or a graphic novel very probably, though. Now, let's focus on the mental processes that prevent this user to purchase a new book.

First, the money issue: as mentioned previously, books are moderately expensive. Maybe they will buy things that other people would definitely consider useless, but that kind of merchandise matches their interests, so that's where they tent to invest.

6.3 FRAMING OUR TARGET: WANTS, NEEDS, GOALS

Among all the possible media used to tell a story, we individuated the book as the most exposed to risks of economic failure: audiences that don't make regular readers probably won't come in contact with them, missing the opportunity to experience their storyworlds. When a movie, a videogame or a TV series can be approached first by trailers, featurettes, TV commercials, sneak peeks, and a comic book or graphic novel can be physically browsed to get a feeling of the mood, a book can lure us with its cover, title and little else.

The world inside a book, with its mood and its rules, its characters with their personalities become clear only once it is read, which implies the use of a lot of attention and time; in other already used words, the very first approach happens when the fan's emotional engagement is already at the highest. Thus the risk of being exposed to disappointment is high.

Readers approach books to spend their time in a pleasurable way; what they want is an engaging experience, they wish that out of reading they could make an escape to their routine, feeling the thrill of being part of a world full of wonders and adventures, just like Alice entering Wonderland to escape the rigid etiquette of the Victorian society, or Belle from Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*, dreaming of magic and fairytales through books, feeling out of place in her "provincial town" where everyone saw her as "odd".

However, having this kind of experience isn't granted by every book; not only the novel has to be well written, but it should also match the taste of the reader, engaging them in a way they find satisfying. Thus the reader needs to know what type of story they are approaching with the new book, if it has actually the potential to please them with an enjoyable reading experience, if they are holding captivating storyworlds worth being explored.



WANTS

- MAKING THE **RIGHT CHOICE** OF STORY
- INVESTING THEIR **MONEY** IN THE **RIGHT PRODUCT**
- SPENDING THEIR **TIME** IN A **REWARDING ACTIVITY**



NEEDS

- A **CLEARER VISION** ABOUT WHICH STORY TO APPROACH NEXT
- MORE **INFORMATION** ABOUT THE BOOK
- ENSURE THAT THE BOOK WILL **MATCH THEIR PERSONAL TASTE**



GOALS

- BEING ENGAGED BY NEW **STORIES**
- DISCOVER CAPTIVATING **STORYWORLDS**
- ENJOYING THEIR READING **EXPERIENCE**

6.4 FORMULATING PROPOSAL: WHAT, WHY, HOW

Our readers want to make the right choice of story, making a good investment in terms of time and money, to ultimately be able to enjoy new engaging stories and storyworlds; thus they need a clearer view of what they are about to approach, some reassurances, being able to tell if they are making the right decision by purchasing that book.

Approaching a new story is like closing a deal: once you're in, you've signed for it, and you become part of it.

If we could have an anticipation of what it actually feels like to be part of that storyworld, before buying the book, things would be way easier. We would be able to see the environments, approach the story, talk to characters, just like a graphic adventure... a sort of "tour", of free trial that will help us out in the final decision.

We will get a previous "out of book experience": get to know the story not only through texts, but we can approach it first through visual imagery, concept arts of its environment, characters. We have to let the storyworld speak to them. A storyworld architecture is a complex system whose elements could suit many other channels beyond the book itself. Exploiting those channels would mean communicating the world through different levels, with the use of other media, where images could be a strong support to capture the attention of an audience relying more to the visual dimension of storytelling. The digital communication channels offer us a big opportunity to spread the world in other dimensions, reaching a wider range of users who would be free to interact with it in the way they are more comfortable with, increasing the awareness among the public towards the newcomer book and its universe.



WHAT

A **STORYWORLD** WILL BE SHAPED THROUGH A FORMAT THAT WILL PROVIDE **VISUALIZATION AND INTERACTION WITH THE USER**, ALLOWING THE PUBLIC TO **HAVE A PREVIEW** OF IT BEFORE THEY ACTUALLY PURCHASE THE BOOK THAT CONTAINS IT.



WHY

- TO CREATE **AWARENESS AMONG THE PUBLIC** ABOUT THE BOOK, TO **REACH A WIDER AUDIENCE** THAT INCLUDES NOT ONLY THE REGULAR READERS, BUT ALSO THE USERS WHO ARE MORE COMFORTABLE WITH OTHER FORMATS AND CHANNELS
- TO OFFER THE POTENTIAL READERS A **PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE**, THAT WILL **GUIDE THEM INTO THE BOOK'S UNIVERSE**, TO GET THEM FAMILIAR WITH IT BEFORE THEY EVENTUALLY DECIDE TO PURCHASE IT.



HOW

THE STORYWORLD OF A NOVEL WILL BE TRANSLATED INTO A **TRANSMEDIA SYSTEM**; THROUGH **DIFFERENT DIGITAL CHANNELS, VISUAL MEDIA** WILL CONSTRUCT A JOURNEY INSIDE THE BOOK'S STORYWORLD, OFFERING A STRUCTURED, OFFICIAL PREVIEW TO IT.

7.

STUDY THE GREAT, BECOME GREATER

CASES STUDY

7.1 TEXT POACHING: COLLECTING CASES

Some of the most known stories have evolved in time into massive franchises, creating wide *crossmedia* and *transmedia systems*. From the processes of adaptations, to the release of new storylines set into the same storyworld, spin-offs, canonical and non-canonical contributions from other authors, to the content produced by fans, these universes have successfully passed the “I have become immortal” test. These projects have proved how powerful the exploitation of the potential of a storyworld is, and, hence, how important is the design of a complex, complete and consistent world architecture (Wolf, 2012).

We have collected some cases study of successful projects that offer valuable examples to follow in the design process both of the architecture of a storyworld and of a *transmedia* system starting from a narration.

FIG. 7.1

A frame from a deleted scene of *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (Chris Columbus, 2002): Harry Potter (Daniel Radcliffe) and Ron Weasley (Rupert Grint) have to fill a quiz with a ridiculous amount of questions about the life of Professor Gilderoy Lockhart.





7.2 ARCHITECTURE OF A WORLD:
THE UNIVERSE OF ARDA, AVATAR

When we think about the process of creation of a storyworld, with its own timing, space, nature, animal species, societies, cultures and all of the information that it can carry with it (Cfr chapter 1.2, More than a story), two examples of architectures that immediately come to our mind are the world of Arda created by J. R. R. Tolkien and Pandora from James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009).

Created more than sixty years apart from each other, belonging to two completely different genres, these two worlds, apparently so distant, share the fact to be built on complex and structured storyworlds, whose level of completeness have reached in both cases the point of generating new languages with a full grammar, the Elvish language *Quenya* and the *Na'vi*, just for the sake of the credibility of the universe.

Fantasy, of course, starts out with an advantage: arresting strangeness. But that advantage has been turned against it, and has contributed to its disrepute. Many people dislike being "arrested".

They dislike any meddling with the Primary World, or such small glimpses of it as are familiar to them. They, therefore, stupidly and even maliciously confound Fantasy with Dreaming, in which there is no Art; and with mental disorders, in which there is not even control: with delusion and hallucination... Fantasy also has an essential drawback: it is difficult to achieve. Fantasy may be, as I think, not less but more subcreative; but at any rate it is found in practice that "the inner consistency of

FIG. 7.2
A still from the movie *Avatar* (2009).



FIG. 7.3
Minas Tirith, city of Gondor, in Middle Earth, illustrated by Alan Lee.

reality" is more difficult to produce, the more unlike are the images and the rearrangements of primary material to the actual arrangements of the Primary World. It is easier to produce this kind of "reality" with more "sober" material. Fantasy thus, too often, remains undeveloped; it is and has been used frivolously, or only half-seriously, or merely for decoration: it remains "fanciful". Anyone inheriting the fantastic device of human language can say the green sun. Many can then imagine or picture it. But that is not enough—though it may already be a more potent thing than many a "thumbnail sketch" or "transcript of life" that receives literary praise.

To make a Secondary World inside which the green sun will be credible, commanding Secondary Belief, will probably require labour and thought, and will certainly demand a special skill, a kind of elvish craft. Few attempt such difficult tasks. But when they are attempted and in any degree accomplished then we have a rare achievement of Art: indeed narrative art, storymaking in its primary and most potent mode.

(J. R. R. Tolkien)

The universe of Arda was firstly introduced with the publishing of *The Hobbit* in 1937; already praised by the public, the universe was delivered to immortality with Tolkien's ultimate publication: the saga of *The Lord of the Rings*.

Published in 1954, the first book was originally thought as a sequel of *The Hobbit*, but it ended to stand out as a statement of fantasy literature of the XX century, with its outstanding, epic narration, whose inspiration came from the tales of King

Arthur in the Matter of Britain and Celtic mythology. Tolkien imagined Arda as the Earth in the distant past. During the Third Age, when the planet had already changed its shape from flat to spherical, the only continent known was Middle-earth, and it was populated, along with Men, by other races among which we remember the immortal Elves, the Dwarfs, the Orcs and the Hobbits. If Men sailed over Middle-earth, they would but end going on a circle and land on the other shore of the continent. Elves, though, could go straight over the horizon and reach the Undying Lands of Aman.

The facts of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* happen during the Fourth Age, after the fall of the dark lord of Mordor, Sauron, the creator of the One Ring.

The full mythology and structure of the world is described inside *The Silmarillion* (1977).

If the universe of Arda captured the public through the pages of a book, carrying narrations framed by long descriptions about the world mythology, James Cameron with *Avatar* played the card of visual spectacularity; entirely thought as the ultimate expansion of the possibility of computer graphics and digital technology as a support to the narration, *Avatar* redefined the limits of visual effects, bringing to life a whole new universe with a captivating allure.

The story takes place in year 2154, when humanity has pushed beyond a dying Earth to find energetic resources, setting mining sites on Pandora, a moon orbiting the fictional planet Polyphemus in the solar system of Alpha Centauri.

Pandora is a moon of outstanding beauty, with wide rainforests populated by a rich wildlife, where the local sentient humanoid community, the Na'vi, live in harmony with the nature surrounding them.

The work carried out on the imagery and concepts of the film makes *Avatar* one of the most visually stunning storyworlds ever realized.

FIG. 7.4
Rivendell, an Elven valley
in Middle Earth.



FIG. 7.5
The bioluminescence
forest of Pandora at
night in a scene from
Avatar (James Cameron,
2009).



FIG. 7.6
Jake Sully (Sam Worthington)
riding his banshee in a scene
from *Avatar* (James Cameron,
2009).





7.3 A TRANSMEDIA EMPIRE: STAR WARS

“A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far, away” ...

The opening catchphrase appears on the screen and the title pops majestic accompanied by the main orchestral theme, moving away among the stars of the background, while the opening prologue appears, flowing from bottom to top in central perspective.

Everyone with a little cinematic culture recognize immediately in this description the now iconic format that makes the intro of every *Star Wars* movie.

For more than four decades, the imagery of the epic space saga created by visionary storyteller George Lucas has captured many generations of fans, and inspired story writers and producers to follow his footsteps and contribute to the expansion of the movie’s universe.

When Lucas started working on *Star Wars*, back in 1975, he had to deal with a tough social and political scenario, where newcomer directors (Francis Ford Coppola, Martin Scors-

FIG. 7.6

A scene of the Battle of Endor, with the Death Star II and the Millennium Falcon, in a still from *Return of the Jedi* (1983).

ese, Steven Spielberg to name a few) were called to bring on screen the struggles that the young American society was living those years; none would have expected a space adventure, none believed really in the potential of Lucas’ project. Then 20th Century Fox decides to give him a chance fund the project. Then history speaks for itself.

More than science fiction, *Star Wars* is a fantasy set in space, with a storyline that follows the structure of King Arthur’s, where Excalibur is replaced by a lightsaber (“an elegant weapon, from a more civilized age”¹) and the mentor figure of Merlin is played by former Jedi Knight Obi-Wan Kenobi. Space battles, lightsabers duels, the mystical Force, spaceships that travel across the galaxy at lightspeed, moon-sized space stations capable of destroying entire planets, droids, warrior princesses and alien species: a storyworld so rich and intriguing couldn’t but take over the interest of the public, unleashing their imagination, making them aching to see more of it.



FIG. 7.7
A promotional picture for *Star Wars - The Clone Wars* (2008).

From the very beginning, after the release of *Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope* (back then only “*Star Wars*”) in 1977, the space epic story spread its wings across all the different channels available, expanding the narration not only with the cinematic sequels *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980) and *Return of the Jedi* (1983), but also through comic books and original novels, introducing new trends never shown in the films, new characters, new places, new species.

Star Wars is an outstanding example of a storyworld that from the start has been able to exploit its success reaching the public through new channel, engaging new audiences, becoming a *transmedia* phenomenon among generations of fans.

There are countless projects related to this storyworld, involving, beside the now nine chapters of the Skywalker movie saga (Episode I-IX), including novels, comic series, graphic novels, games.

Out of these projects, we have chosen to bring three examples of mediatic success, milestones in the process of trans-media expansion of *Star Wars*.

After the release of the final chapter of the Prequel Trilogy *Revenge of the Sith* (2005), a 3D *Star Wars - The Clone Wars* was firstly broadcasted in 2008; the series tells about the full story of the Clone Wars, a conflict that was never furthered in the movies, as they presented only its beginning in Episode II and its end in Episode III. The Clone Wars introduce new characters, like Anakin’s Padawan apprentice Ahsoka Tano, and brings back others from the movies, like Darth Maul, who survived after the duel of Naboo, and he has a full story tread dedicated along the series. The show



FIG. 7.8
Darth Maul (on the left) with his apprentice Savage Opress (on the right), in a scene from the series.

is fascinating because of the insights it brings about already known characters and new ones, revealing plots and narration knots that justify some of the events seen in the movies. The public was also introduced to new cultures, new environments, other mysteries that the Force held.

The series count seven seasons, the latter of which was broadcasted on Disney+ in 2020.

In 2016, the *Star Wars* franchise, passed under the propriety of the Walt Disney Company, opened the project of an anthological series of movies with the release of the first movie set in the Star Wars universe which didn’t represent an episode of the Skywalker Saga: *Rogue One - A Star Wars Story* (Gareth Edwards, 2016).

The story is the explanation of how the group of rebel spies mentioned in the opening prologue of Episode IV managed to steal the technical plans of the Death Star, the ones that Princess Leia gave to R2-D2 at the beginning of the 1977 movie, that would have eventually lead the Rebellion to destroy the most feared Imperial weapon during the Battle of Yavin.

Rogue One follows the story of a group of outcast: Jyn Erso, a bandit who lost both her parents as a little girl and grew up in a life of crime and hiding, join reluctant the Rebel Alliance as her help is essential to achieve infos about the Empire’s ultimate weapon, the Death Star. The engineer who led the construction of this fearsome menace is on fact her own father, who was separated from her many years back, the same day Jyn’s mother was killed by the Empire.

Along with disillusioned rebel captain Cassian Andor, a de-

factor Imperial pilot and a couple of ex Jedi Temple Guardians, now living on the streets, Jyn will ultimately follow her father's instruction, who revealed that he betrayed the Empire by designing a major weakness inside the Death Star, which could be exploited to destroy it.

Rogue One, with his dramatic tones and suffering characters, is a story of redemption, where the protagonists, from people with nothing left to lose, discovered that there was still something worth fighting for, bringing hope inside a galaxy torn by a long civil war.

As a spin-off of the main storyline, the movie offered the public a new perspective, showing the Rebellion in a more realistic way, providing a narration of high intensity whose direction style was very different from the Skywalker saga's. A work cutting its space in a channel different from cinema is *The Mandalorian* (2019), an original Disney+ series created by John Favreau, probably the first canonical project following a narration completely unbound from the events of the Skywalker saga (*Rogue One*, despite having different protagonists, was a knot thought to construct the bases for the events of Episode IV).

The story of *The Mandalorian* follows the adventure of the Mandalorian bounty hunter "Mando", whose life suddenly changes when, during one of his jobs, he discovers that his catch was actually a baby of an unknown species, which the public immediately recognizes as the same one the great Jedi Master Yoda belonged to.

Pledging his life to the protection of the child, Mando is willing to face any adversity to keep the young one safe.

The Mandalorian introduced a further narratio style inside the *Star Wars* universe, presenting itself as a sort of space western, showing a side of the galaxy that, a few years after the fall of the Empire, doesn't know who to rely on yet, and, without a guidance, rogues and warlords make their own rules.

FIG. 7.9

A promotional picture for *Rogue One - A Star Wars Story* (2016), featuring Felicity Jones as Jyn Erso.



FIG. 7.10

A promotional picture for *The Mandalorian* (2019).





FIG. 7.7
The Hogwarts Express in a screenshot from pottermore.com, as it appeared in 2012.

7.4 ANOTHER WAY TO EXPLORE A WORLD: POTTERMORE

In April 2012 J. K. Rowling, in collaboration with Sony, launched a new experience online for the fans of *Harry Potter*. As both the book and the cinematic sagas had come to their end (*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* was published in 2007, while the *Part 2* of namesake movie chapter was released in 2011), the writer of the worldwide known adventures of the young wizard came up with a brand new format to explore the world of the books.

Pottermore was announced by J. K. Rowling herself as an opportunity for the fans of the saga to relive the story in a new way, and reaching a new younger generation as well, through digital exploration and interaction, offering them access to exclusive content, never released through the books.

Pottermore was delivered as a website where the user could create their own magical profile, being chosen by their wand, sorted into one of the four Houses of Hogwarts (Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw and Slytherin); they had access through a graphic exploration of each of the chapters of the seven books, released periodically, where they could browse beautiful interactive illustrations, collecting objects and badges, learning spells and brewing potions, earning House Points that at the end of the year would actually have rewarded them and the other community members with the House Cup, unlocking extra content as the ultimate prize.

From October 2019, pottermore.com has been officially replaced with wizardingworld.com, where most of the content has migrated, to suit the recent expansion of the world that now includes the *Fantastic Beasts* cinematic saga, with Newt Scamander the magizoologist as its protagonist.

FIG. 7.8

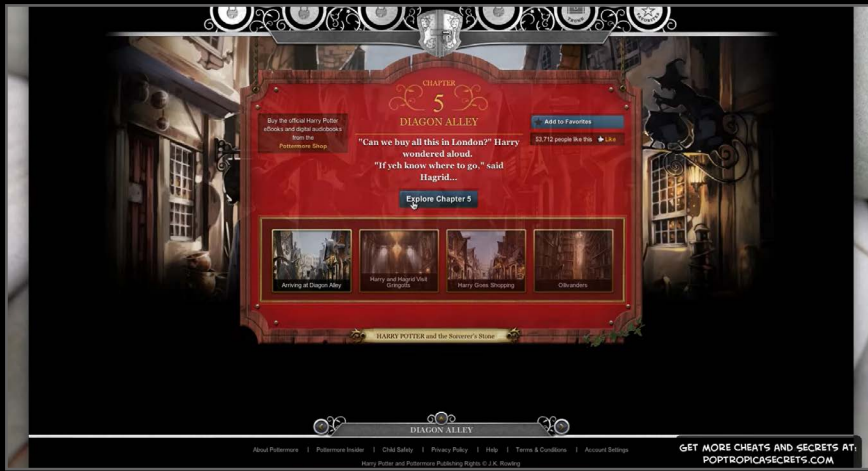


FIG. 7.10



FIG. 7.9

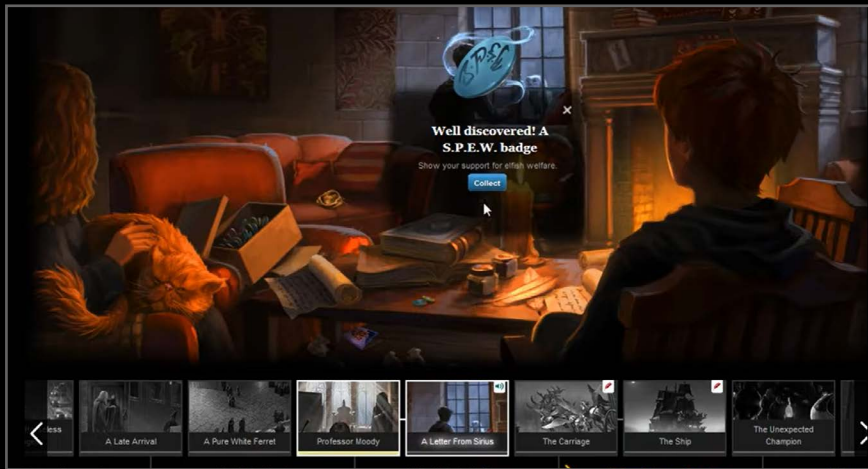


FIG. 7.11



In FIG. 7.8 we can see a screenshot from pottermore.com in 2012, moments before the jump into chapter 5 - Diagon Alley. FIG. 7.9 shows a screenshot from the website in 2014, with the achievement of a "S.P.E.W." badge from *Harry Potter and the Globet of Fire*.

Artwork from Pottermore for *Harry Potter and the Globet of Fire*. FIG. 7.10: wizards restraining dragons for the First Task of the Triwizard Tournament. FIG. 7.11: Harry, transformed through the Gillyweed, encounters the Merpeople living beneath the Black Lake during the Second Task.

FIG. 7.8

A screenshot from the gameplay of Episode 2 of *Tales from the Borderlands* (Telltale games, 2015).



7.5 SPEAKING ANOTHER LANGUAGE: *TALES FROM THE BORDERLANDS*

If somebody told me that one day I would have become a compulsive lover of a looter-shooter video game, I would have literally laughed in their face.

With very little and old gaming experiences, if I had to choose a game to play I would have probably picked a graphic adventure: little, simple mechanics, lots of story and visual.

And that is what happened with *Tales From The Borderlands*. Developed by Telltale Games, the company that counts in its projects titles like *The Walking Dead* (2012) and *The Wolf Among Us* (2013), the game is an episodic series created in collaboration with Gearbox and 2K Games, the creator of the *Borderlands* game series (2009 - 2019).

Borderlands is sci-fi looter-shooter videogame, set in a distant future when many corporations set their sight on the wild, dangerous planet of Pandora (not the *Avatar* one), offering as many natural resources as chances of being killed by the moment one steps on it, being populated by ferocious creatures and blood-thirsty bandits. The ultimate prize Pandora offers are the Vaults, mysterious alien treasure troves holding endless riches.

The series, counting four chapters, gained great popularity in the gamers community because of the ridiculous amount of guns the player can loot from enemies, its hilarious comedy and cartoonish graphics, with 3D models entirely rendered and textured with black outlines.

Borderlands 2 is also credited with the introduction of one



FIG. 7.9
A screenshot from the gameplay of *Borderlands 2* (Gearbox, 2012), showing the classic first person view, pointing a gun towards the target.

of the most loved villains ever known in videogames, the murderous, psychopath, narcissistic Handsome Jack, CEO of the arm-dealing Hyperion Corporation.

What Telltale managed to do in the creation of *Tales from the Borderlands* was introducing the audience to the violent and grotesque storyworld of the original game series, keeping the same narration tones, bringing NPCs that were already introduced with them, recreating the mood of the storyworld even with a completely different game mechanic. The story, official part of the *Borderlands*' canon, is set shortly after the events of *Borderlands 2* and the death of Handsome Jack. It follows the adventures of the two playable characters, the protagonists of the game: Rhys, a middle manager working from Hyperion, and Fiona, a Pandoran con-artist, who team up once they find themselves on the way to find a Vault. Things start getting a little more complicated when Rhys, whose body counts of cybernetic parts, accidentally uploads in his head an AI version of Handsome Jack, a backup of his personality created by a Hyperion scientist before his death.

The play mode is the classic format of Telltale games: the story adapts to the player's choices, who can decide the playable character's actions and words, unlocking different paths inside the story.

The player can also explore different environments analyzing objects, speaking with NPCs, finding hints and cues, discovering more of the *Borderlands* storyworld.

An interesting mechanic in this sense is the ability of scanning elements of the surrounding world while playing as

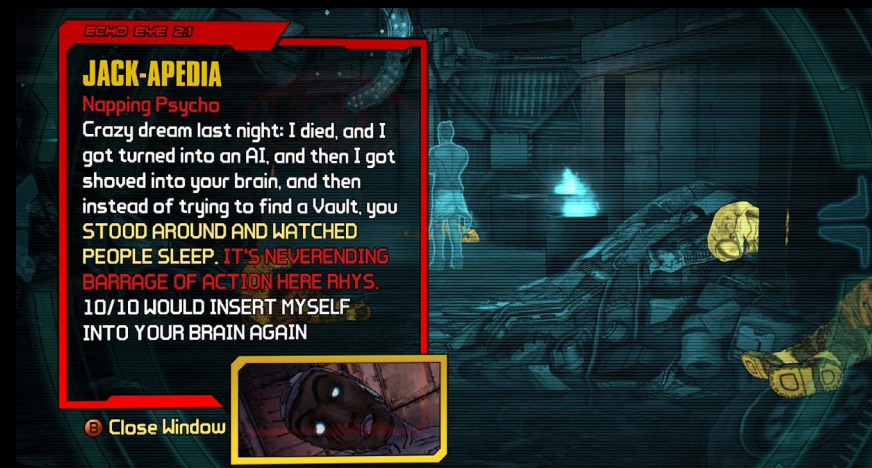


FIG. 7.10
A screenshot from the fourth episode of *Tales from the Borderlands* (Telltale games, 2015), showing the moment of the interaction when, as Rhys, the player can scan the objects of the environment. In this case, the description is provided by Handsome Jack's AI, who delights us with his own view of an accurate scientific analysis.

Rhys, who has a cybernetic eye that provides him access to the Hyperion database.

The result of the analysis pops on screen in a window next to the object, providing more or less accurate descriptions. The tones of these captions are often funny and grotesque, bringing also on the written level a lawful representation of the mood of *Borderlands*' overall narrative style.

This is a very suitable example of how a storyworld can reach other types of audience speaking a different language in terms of interaction with the user, a way to be introduced to a narrative universe and possibly growing into it, without the obstacle that a videogame with complex mechanics could represent for non-gamers.

In my personal experience, I witnessed the effectiveness of this expansion as I started approaching the universe of *Borderlands* from the *Tales*, realizing that this storyworld totally matched my taste, and becoming a fan of it I eventually ended trying the original FPS games, appreciating them so much that now I've become a gamer, something that honestly I would have never expected.

And Handsome Jack is awesome.

Part 3

*Agapanto, a storyworld
brought to life*

8.

AGAPANTO

INTRODUCING THE MINING SITE

8.1 A PARTICULARLY FITTING ARTIFACT

From what we learned so far, it appears clear that a story-world lures our curiosity because of the differences occurring between it and the Primary World. Whenever some variance is presented, it is worth exploring and examine it: discovery is the key for the fun and the engagement in the experience of a new storyworld. The higher the difference, the more of the exploration.

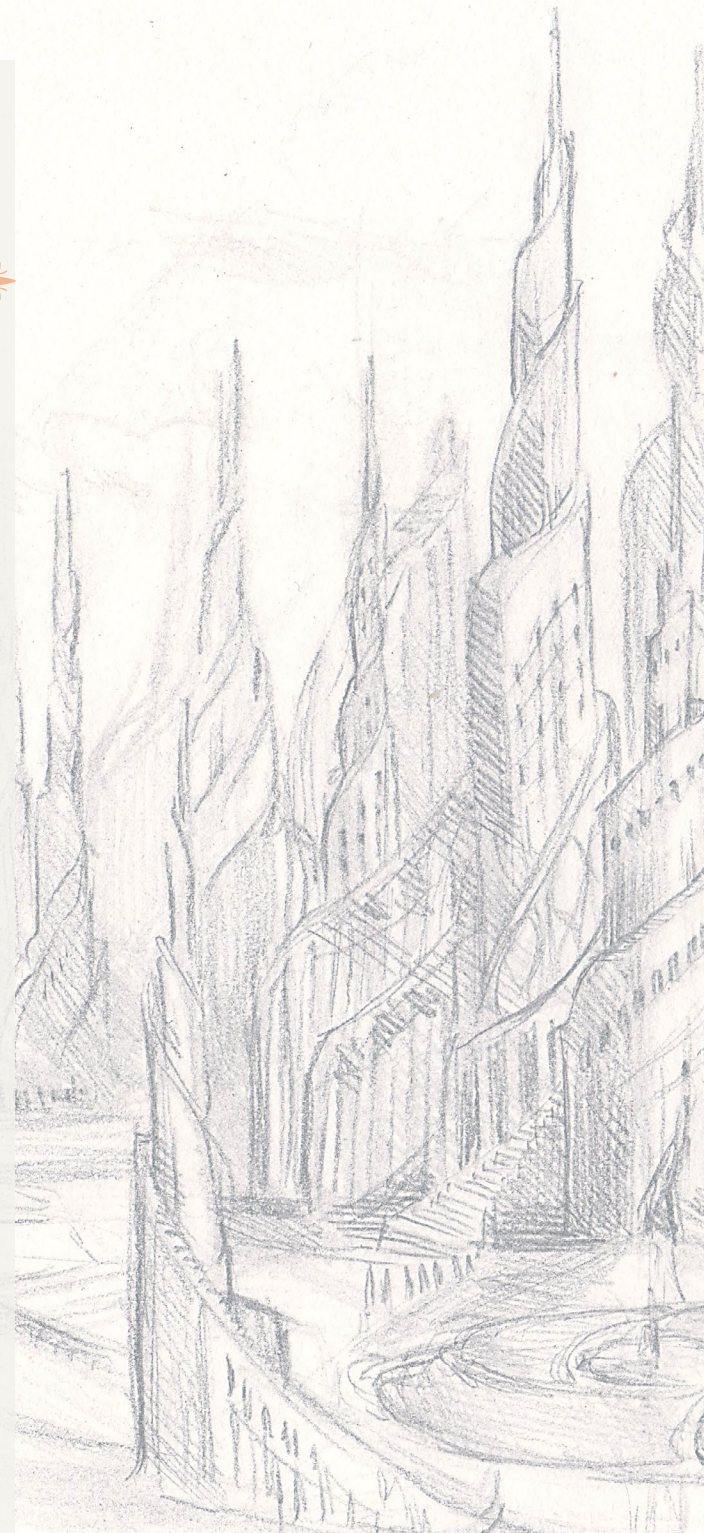
There are plenty of storyworlds that have been already explored, visualized, experienced out there.

To truly deal with the expansion of a storyworld from the very beginning, we need a story that has just started its journey, a blank canvas, a land to be explored, an experience to be built from the start.

This opportunity has materialized during a two-people meeting, when a newcomer author introduced, at the end of 2019, the fruit of a work lasted sixteen years: a magnificent hand-written novel, about, in the words of the author himself, “ten wishes and a revenge”, whose title was as much enigmatic as intriguing, *Agapanto*.

From the beginning of the reading, the reasons why *Agapanto* would have made a very good artifact to build a project on were clear.

The book presents a whole new universe to imagine: settled in an entirely original storyworld, which is completely different from the one we live in, we are given the opportunity to explore something new, fresh, everything to tell, everything to be learned. The narration itself is alternated all along with



descriptive sections reporting insights about the world’s science and events.

Since it wasn’t still published, we had the chance to work with something nobody has touched yet, bringing a narrative world to life from zero, working in direct contact with the author.

The narration itself is presented through different styles: this would fit perfectly a transmedia-distributed model of concept; if we are going to provide hints, captions, sneak peeks of the storyworld, the use of different shapes could make the discovery much more interesting.

Agapanto made an unique opportunity, carrying along a rich and complex storyworld, just waiting to be brought to life.

FIG. 8.1
On the background:
Ungulion, pencil sketch
by Barara Gualandris

8.2 Book ID

Title: *Agapanto*

Author: Timothée C. Fiçinnas

Year: Finished writing in 2019

Genre: Fantasy, Sci-Fi, New Weird

“L’Antico Dio disse [...]: «Sia». Così si conclusero gli Ultimi Giorni ed ebbero inizio i Primi”¹.

(Timothée C. Fiçinnas, *Agapanto*, 2019)

Planet Earth, one thousand years after the end of the Last Days and the beginning of the First. Little is known of what the world was before the Apocalypse, that erased from the memory of people almost everything about the past. The majority of the population of the Twelve Continents actually live in rural towns, they can barely write or read, and all of their concerns are mostly farm the harvest, raising cattle, surviving the cold season and the adversities of nature, that has taken over their lives, just like in our Middle Ages.

Those which Karma gave the fortune of living in the major capitals may have happened to study all about those days’ human knowledge, advanced technologies and science, and become alchemists, surgeons, or even Artificers, that is actually somebody capable of producing spells, a wizard.

Somebody else could study deeper into the nature of the most influent and mysterious entities known on Earth, such as the Eye in the Earth, the Timii descending periodically the Sky on their giant pods or the Wanderers of the Myriath.

But knowledge is not the only way to acquire authority and respect: some individuals are gifted with incredible powers from the moment they are born. Such are the

Talented, wielding one or more super-human skills they master without the aid of any study.

Finally, there is the rarest, most respected as well as the most mysterious category of human beings: the Eimnos, people owning, from the first moments after birth, a Guardian, a creature whose only purpose is keeping its Eimnos safe from harm.

Being Eimnos, or being related to one, assures you a permanent stay at Ungulion, the Great Mother, the city from the High Towers, where, as told, life passes among amenities and luxury.

The narration follow the story of Mo, born a farmer with no special powers at all, in a small, rural village with no name. Ever since Eno the Multitude, the most feared and powerful Eimnos ever known, destroyed Mo’s village marching on it with its huge, brutal army of Guardians, Mo dedicates his existence to the purpose of taking down Eno and get his vengeance. A kid, alone, child of farmers, without any special power, armed with nothing but his infrangible will of accomplishing his vow, will have to exploit all the knowledge the world could give him to have a chance against the ultimate terror, the scourge nobody has ever survived from.

In this fierce scenario, none seems to remember the pages of a diary belonging to a kid named Timotheus, written during a long forgotten time, when the world used to be as the reader knows it today. Apparently so far from Mo and Eno, the story Timotheus wrote in his diary held secrets that both of them would have been blown by, if only they had been preserved to their present.

¹ Translation from Italian by Barbara Gualandris:

“The Ancient God said [...]: «So it be». So the Last Days came to their end, and the First Days began.



8.3 STORYWORLD

After a brief introduction to the genre and the story of the book, it is essential to conduct a further analysis of its storyworld's structure. As a base to start projecting from, the decomposition and study of its architecture will bring to light its strength points to focus on, to shape an experience for our target as a consequence. In this process, we will rely on the tools provided by Mark Wolf (2012) in his studies about narrative worlds (Cfr. 1.2 – More than a story).

The storyline of *Agapanto* is structured as an alternation of the points of view of four characters, bringing us their versions of the story, taking different places in time and space. That is why we found useful to frame the storyworld's elements basing on each of the four different narrative treads, as each character presents a different perspective which can be very distant from the others'.

We will report by following the summary of each plot, alongside the characters' wheel (an analysis tool that displays the personality's built in answer to the surrounding world) and the portion of the storyworld that they experienced.

FIG. 8.2

On the background:
The Eye in the Earth,
pencil sketch by Barara
Gualandris

Mo

Mo came to the world without any special power or wealth: born in a poor, rural, nameless village, nobody would have ever heard of him, if it weren't for a tragic event that would have changed forever his existence. One day, while he was casually out of town, his village and every living thing in it was massacred by the fierce rage of Eno's army of Guardians. Since that moment, Mo committed his life to vengeance against Eno: his determination will bring through many adventures and tasks, that will eventually lead him to acquire extraordinary physical strength and height, deadly fight skills, advanced magic knowledge and mastery. Thanks to his force of will, training and the precious help of a powerful ally, Mo will at last be ready to face Eno, believed by everyone to be absolutely invincible.

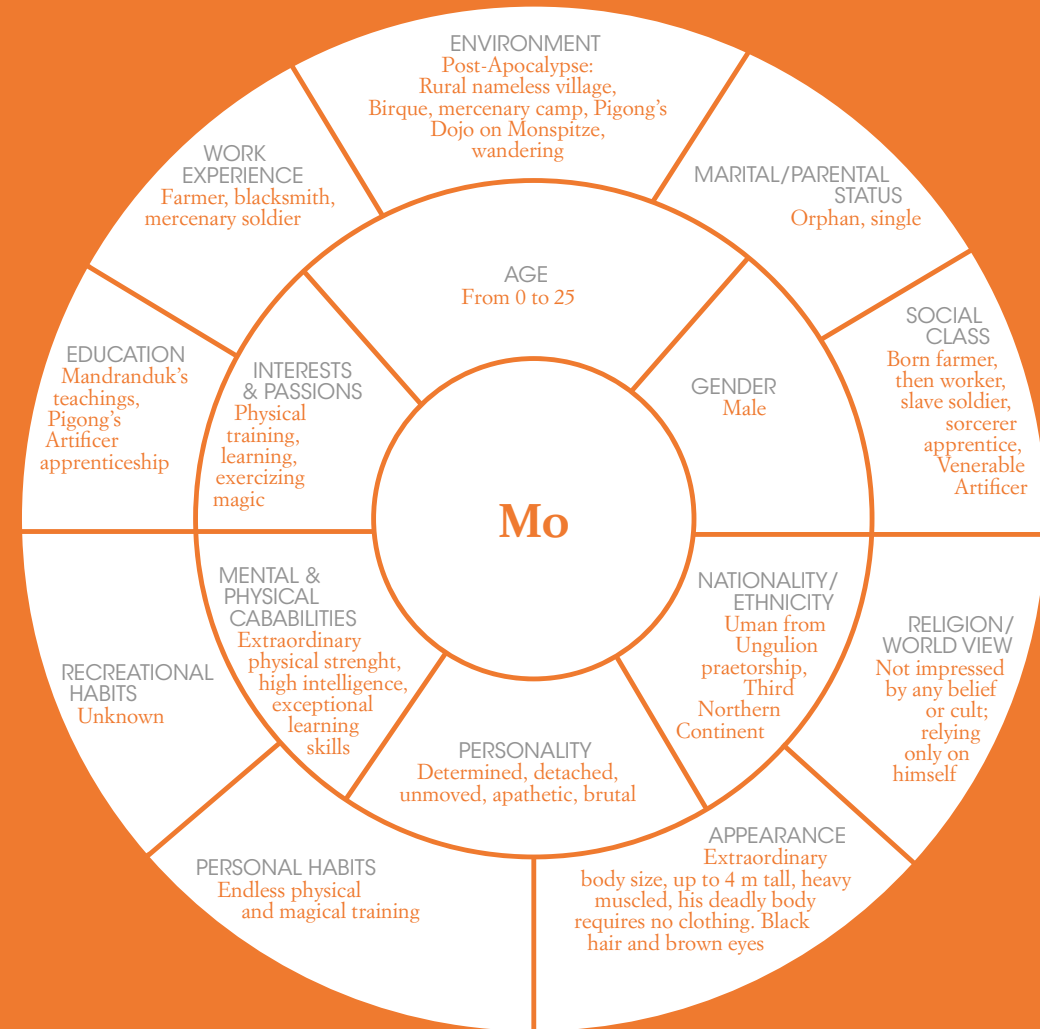


FIG. 8.3

Mo's Character Wheel.

The character wheel (designed and tested by Mariana Ciancia, Francesca Piredda and Simona Venditti, 2015) proposed during the course to outline the various characters and their stories within the universe + ref

Mariani, I., & Ciancia, M. (2019a). Building Interactive

Narratives: Characters, Stories and In-Betweens. Experiments and Critique. EDULEARN19 Proceedings, 6844-6853.

Mariani, I., & Ciancia, M. (2019b). Character-driven Narrative Engine. Storytelling System for building interactive narrative experiences. Proceedings of the 2019 DiGRA International Conference: Game, Play and the Emerging Ludo-Mix, 1-19.

Eno

Eno is world-widely known as the most powerful and dangerous Eimnos ever lived. The human beings who become Eimnos, that is owners of a Guardian, are very rare, and the cases of Eimnos carrying more than one Guardian are even rarer. Eno is called “the Moltitude” because he carries an army of countless Guardians. And what’s more, these creatures are extremely aggressive and violent; constantly surrounded by this lethal company, Eno’s closeness means only certain death. From moments after he was born, that is when his Guardians firstly appeared, the slaughter began, not even his mother, running in a desperate try of saving herself, was spared. The only person who ever survived was Eno’s nurse: thanks to her Eno grew up, in a never-ending wander, carried by his Guardians in the litter where his mother gave him birth. His fame soon rose as the leaders of the reigns witnessed his untamed destructive fury, making him a desirable ally at battle. Eno accepted the tasks in exchange for food and rest. His existence continued, miserable and painful, in the certainty that nobody would have ever been powerful enough to stop him. At least until he met Mo.

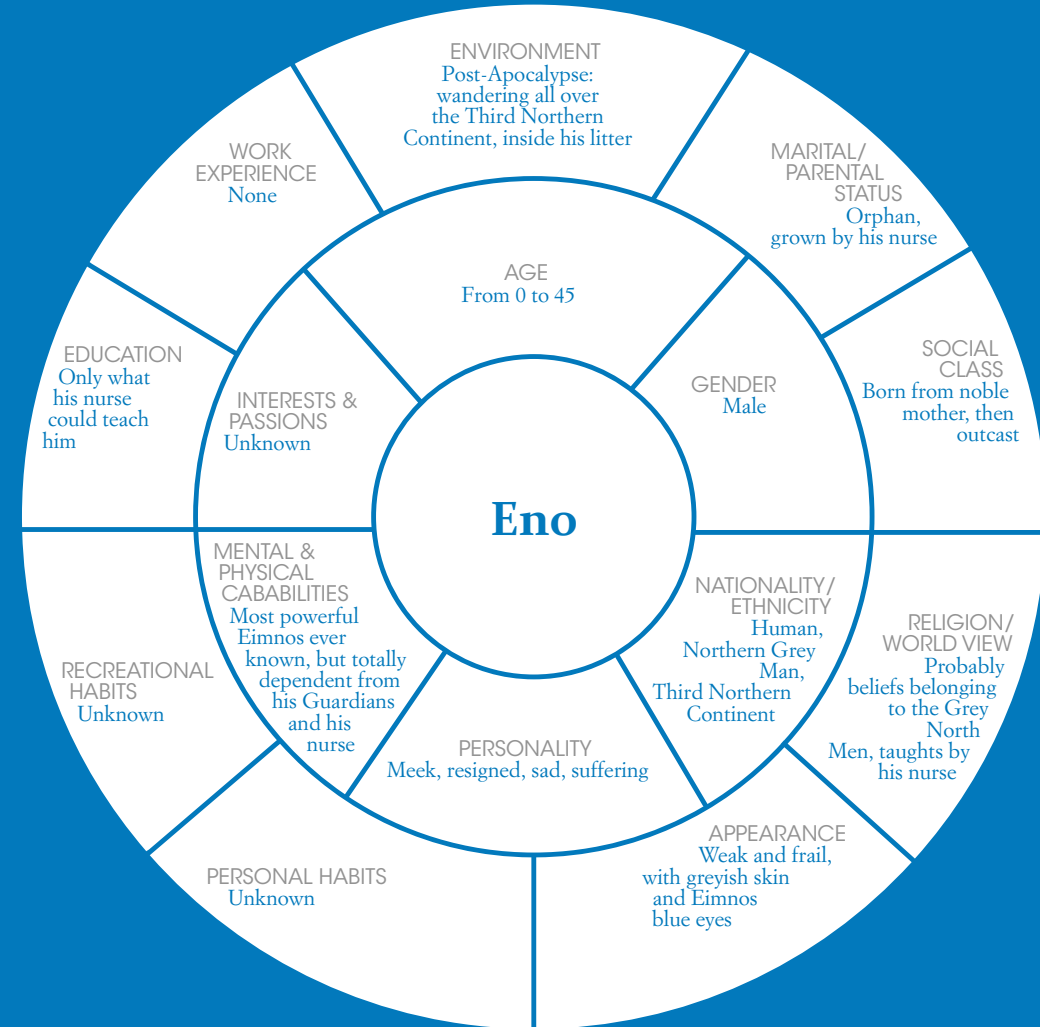


FIG. 8.4
Eno's Character Wheel.

Gazpar

Born in Suus, a great city under Ungulion's praetorship, Gazpar is a clever member of the army, dealing daily with bandits' hunt, arrests and crime persecution.

One of the last quest he was assigned was possibly the most prestigious one, the one he had been always waiting for: capturing Twelve Hu, the most skilled Talented known, guilty of numerous crimes. Nobody has ever managed to capture him, because of his supernatural powers, twelve different abilities, as his name claimed.

But Gazpar's investigation will be suddenly interrupted by the news of Hu's death, who fell of a cliff after engaging a fight with Mo.

Gazpar hasn't much time to grudge in disappointment, as he will be soon asked to investigate about a fact never happened before: after taking part to an important convention, all the Eimnos known never returned.

Gazpar, focused on his policeman job, detached and cynical, wasn't actually ready for what happened next, neither he could imagine he was accidentally following the tracks left by Mo and Hu's newborn alliance.

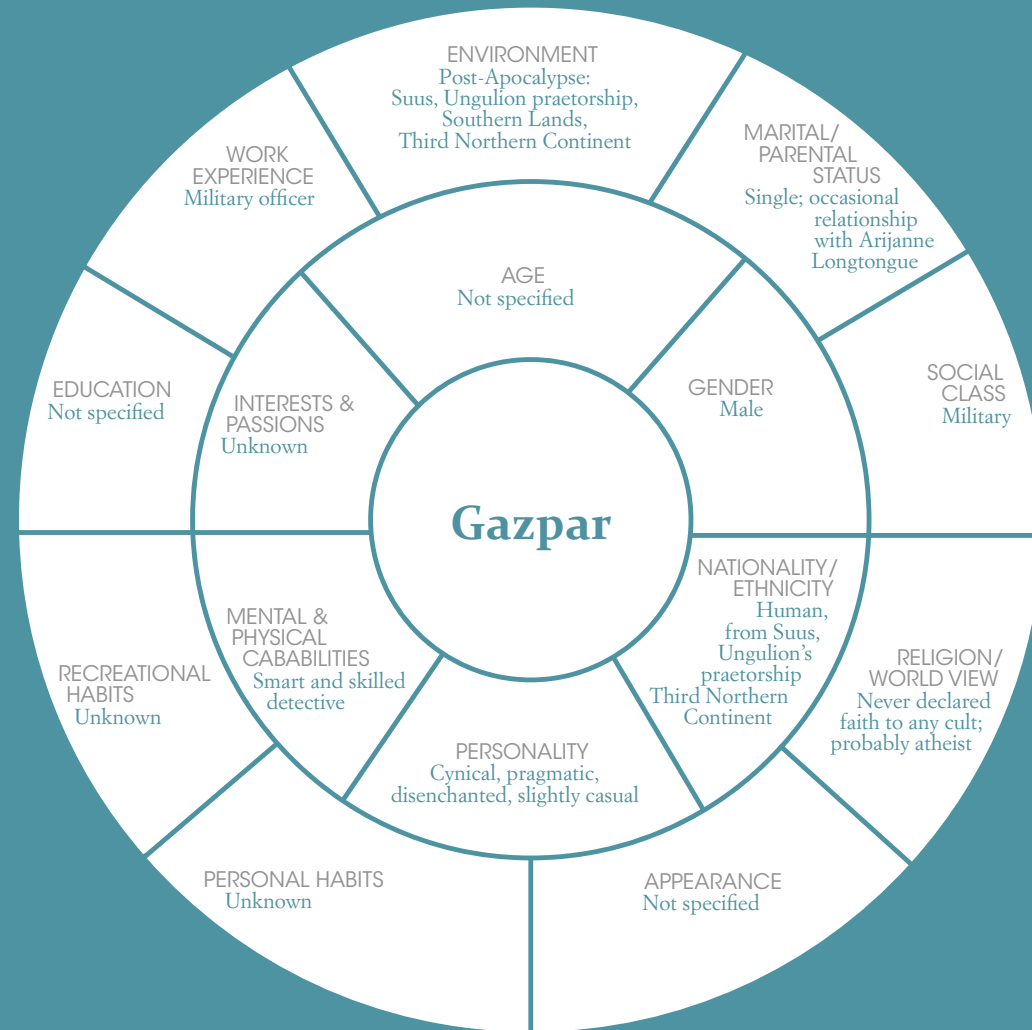


FIG. 8.5
Gazpar's Character Wheel.

Timotheus

Timotheus, nicknamed “Timmy”, is a ten-year-old boy living in what appears to be the world as we know it today. He attends the elementary school, and his teacher gives to his class the assignment to keep a daily diary where to write their day, in order to practice their writing skills.

We learn from Timmy’s diary that he has a very peculiar family: he is the youngest of ten siblings, living with no parents, where the elder provide for the rest of the family.

Another weird aspect are the names of the siblings: apart from Timotheus and the eldest sister, never named by Timmy but as “Big Sis”, the kids carry very bizarre ones.

Apart from that, everything in Timmy’s life appears pretty normal, but the balance of the family will eventually cringe as a strange entity enters in their life. First through common nightmares, hallucinations, behavioral changes from some of the kids, and lastly as a physical presence, a supernatural, ancient creature will change their lives and the destiny of the world forever.

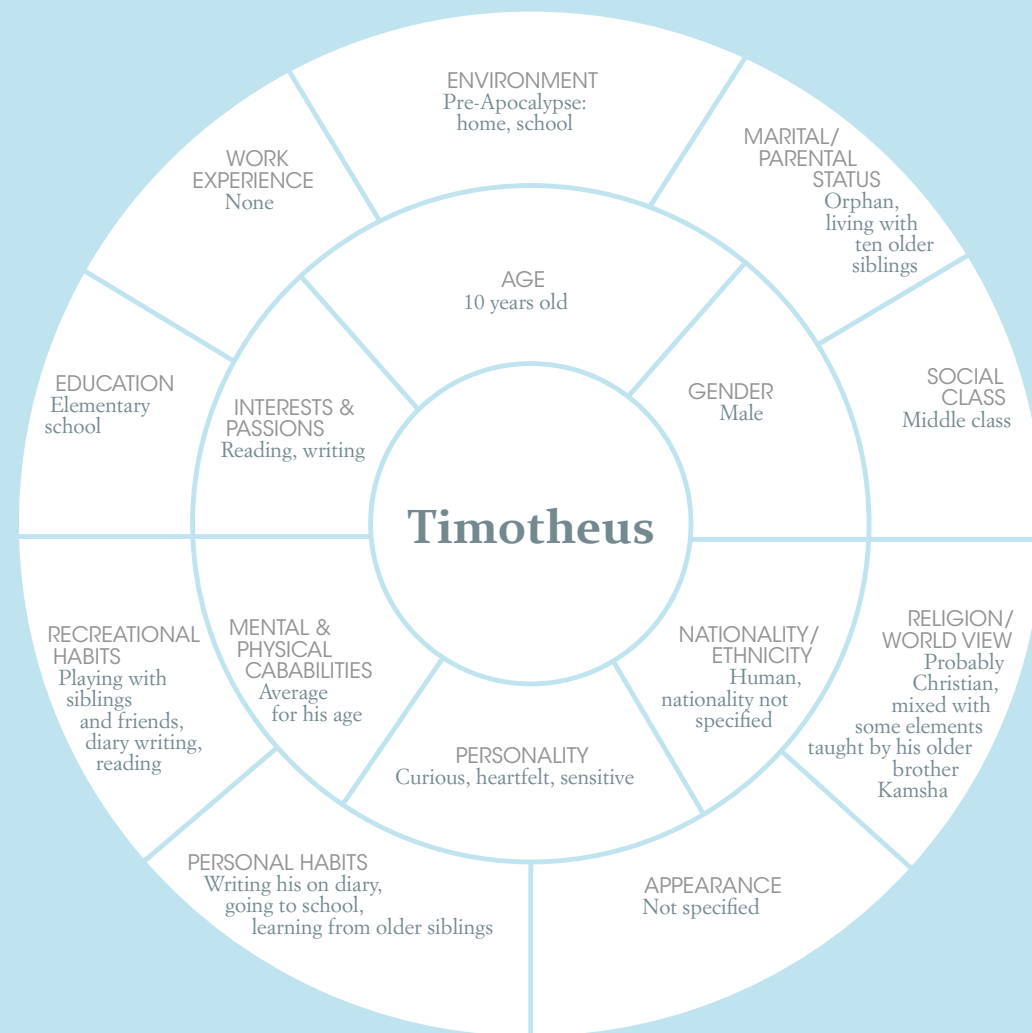


FIG. 8.6
Timotheus' Character Wheel.

Twelve Hu

Twelve Hu is a Talented, which means a person born in possession of supernatural powers, named Charismas, able to use them since the beginning of their life, without the need to learn, unlike the Artificers. Hu, in particular, has the extraordinary characteristic to own, like said, twelve of these powers, hence his nickname.

Not all of his Charismas are known to people, but what he possesses for sure are teleportation, telepathy, telekinesis, domain of water, air, ground and fire; of the other five abilities, there are only speculations.

Abilities that made Hu extremely famous, or, more precisely, infamous: he is in fact one of the most dangerous bandits known, as he uses his Charismas for illegal acts such as multiple murders, theft, resisting arrest, for he is, for clear reasons, almost impossible to capture.

Despite his criminal life, though, Hu conserves a strong moral bound to ideals of honour and respect of the weak, probably derived from his Western ethnicity. His encounter with Mo will mark a significant turn in history. He is also at the center of Gazpar's investigations.

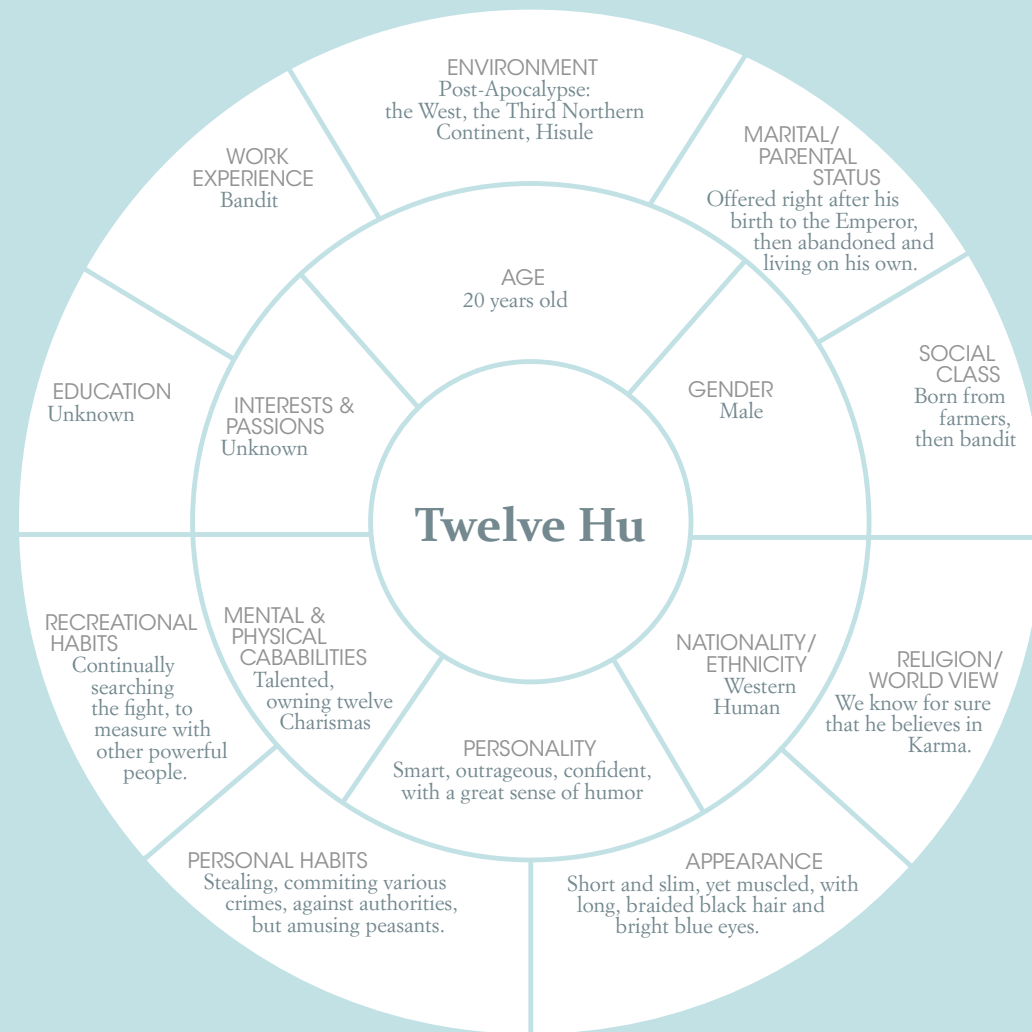


FIG. 8.7
Twelve Hu's Character Wheel.

The blacksmith

We don't know much about the blacksmith, but without his help, Mo would have died for sure. The man, in fact, found Mo at the end of Winter; the boy survived miraculously for the whole season inside Tororindor's Deadly Woods, where he ran after his village was obliterated by the passage of Eno. The blacksmith rescued Mo and offered him shelter in his house at Birque, a small rural town inside Ungulion's praethorship. It was from the blacksmith that Mo learned the truth about the doom of his village, along with the existence of Eno and the Eimnos, and from that revelation he suddenly grew his desire of vengeance. However, the blacksmith wasn't willing to let that frail boy that he saved go and face certain death; instead, he made a deal with him; he would have let Mo go when the boy had grown big enough to fill General Tororindor's shirt; meanwhile, he would have repaid his life debt by working at Birque as his apprentice. Nobody knows how the blacksmith was in possess of the famous General's huge piece of clothing, but the small Mo accepted the challenge, and after three years of training and labor, he eventually succeeded, and he left Birque.

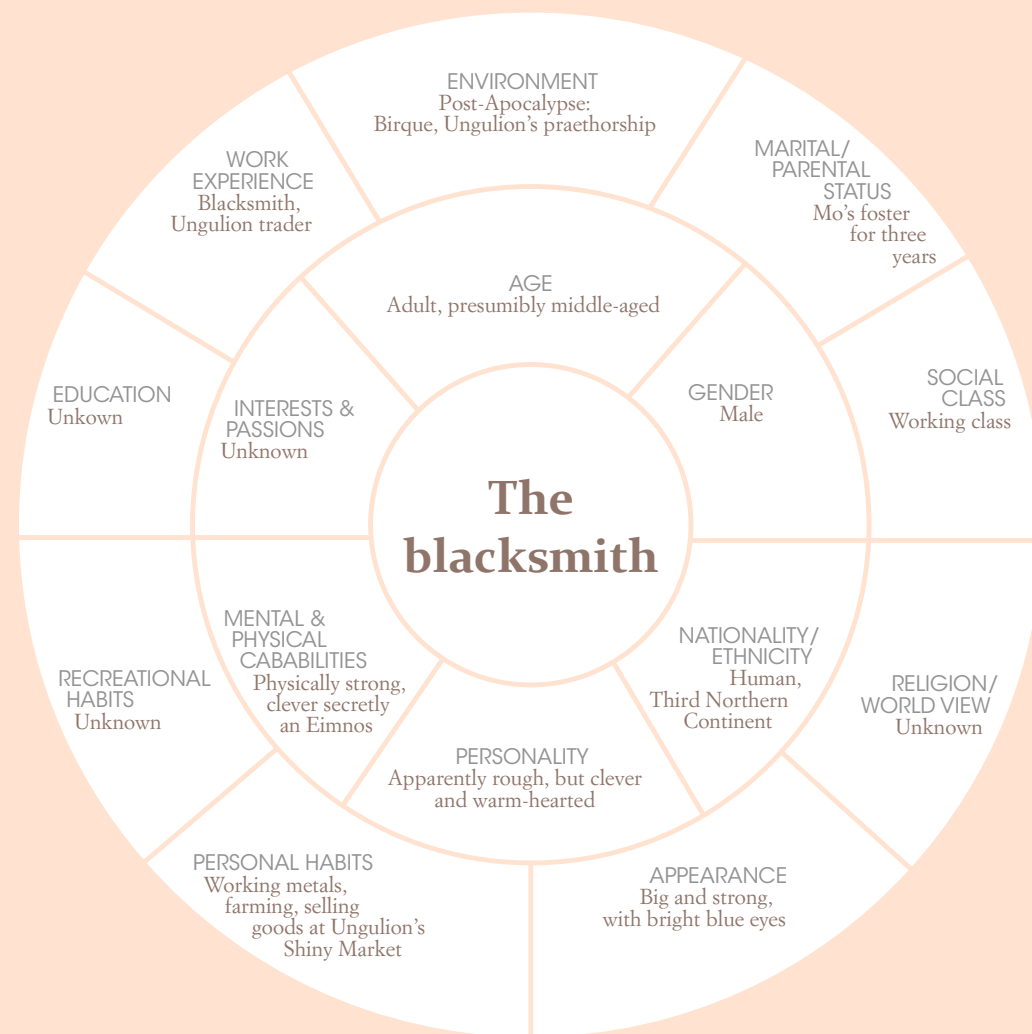


FIG. 8.8
The blacksmith's Character Wheel.

8.4 NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

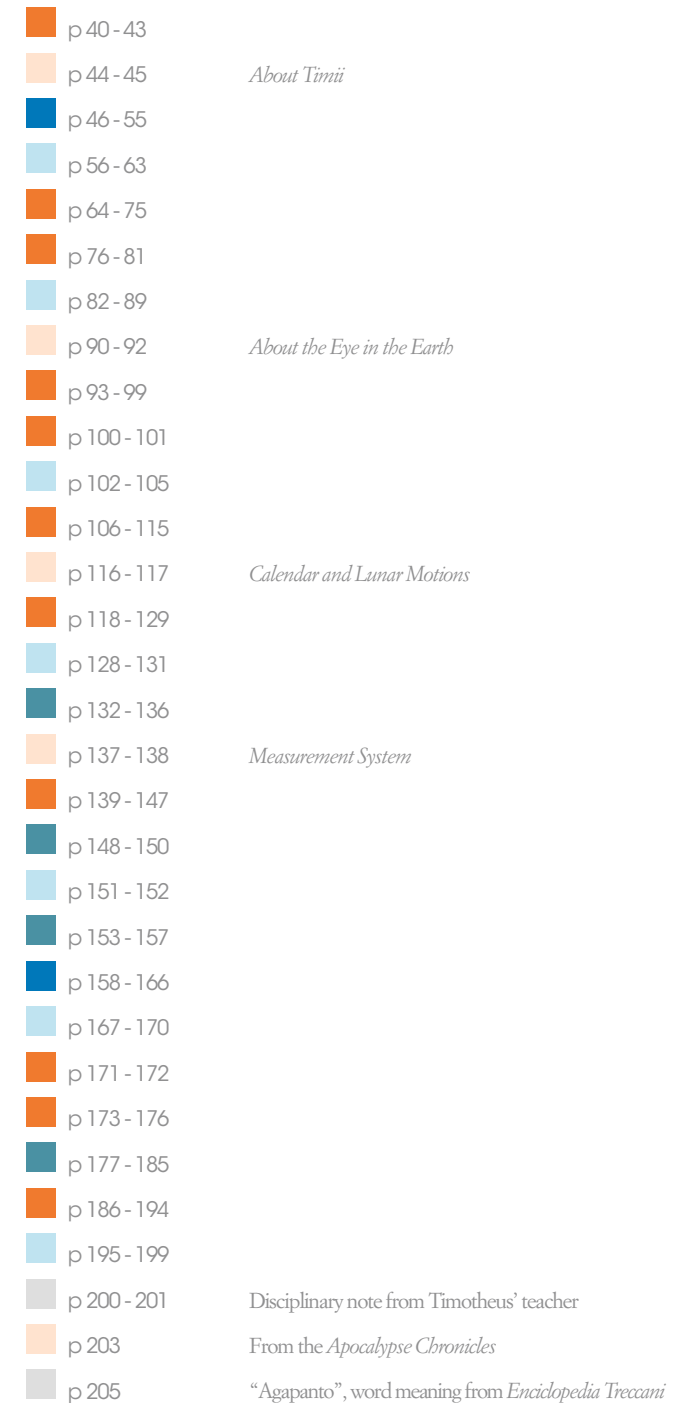
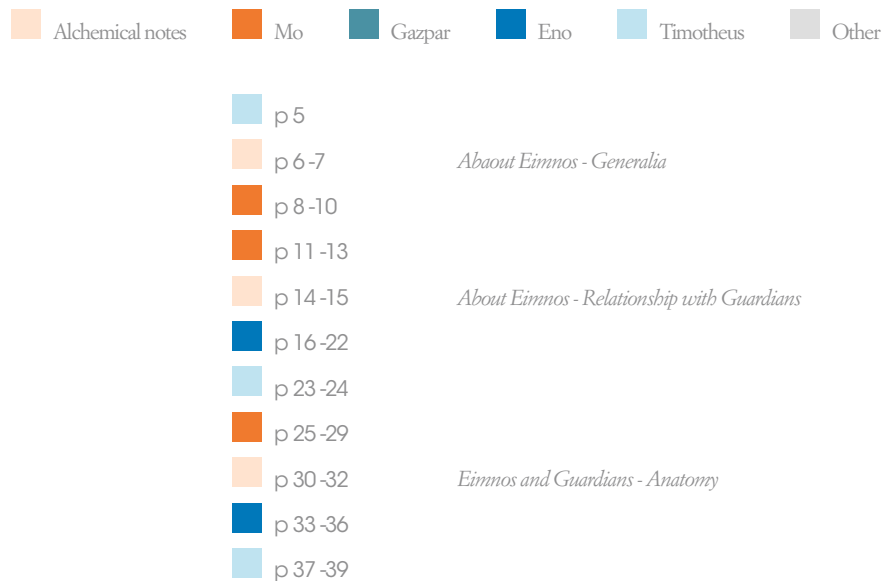
Agapanto presents a complex, non-linear narrative structure. Beside the four different point of view already analyzed, the narration is frequently interrupted by pages of scientific descriptions or historical reports, providing further knowledge about the world to the reader. Moreover, the plot mostly doesn't follow the chronological order of the events. Thus, we found useful to graphically visualize the plot's structure, representing graphically the alternation of the narrative treads, how frequent they are and, quantitatively speaking, how much space inside the totality of the narration they take.

Structure of the plot

The following list represents the succession of the single chapters, each one specifically dedicated to and named after the character whose story progression is told inside.

FIG. 8.9

Colors key



Treads distribution

The figure reported represents on a horizontal space the succession of the chapters proportionally to the number of pages they occupy in the book, giving a general visualization of the book's structure.

FIG. 8.10

Colors key

Alchemical notes Mo Gazpar Eno Timotheus Other



FIG. 8.11

Treads: percentage on the narration totality (200 written pages)

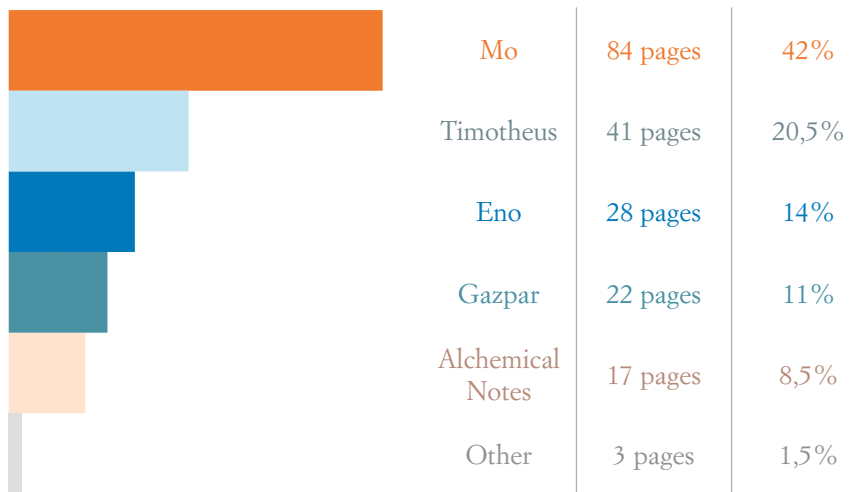
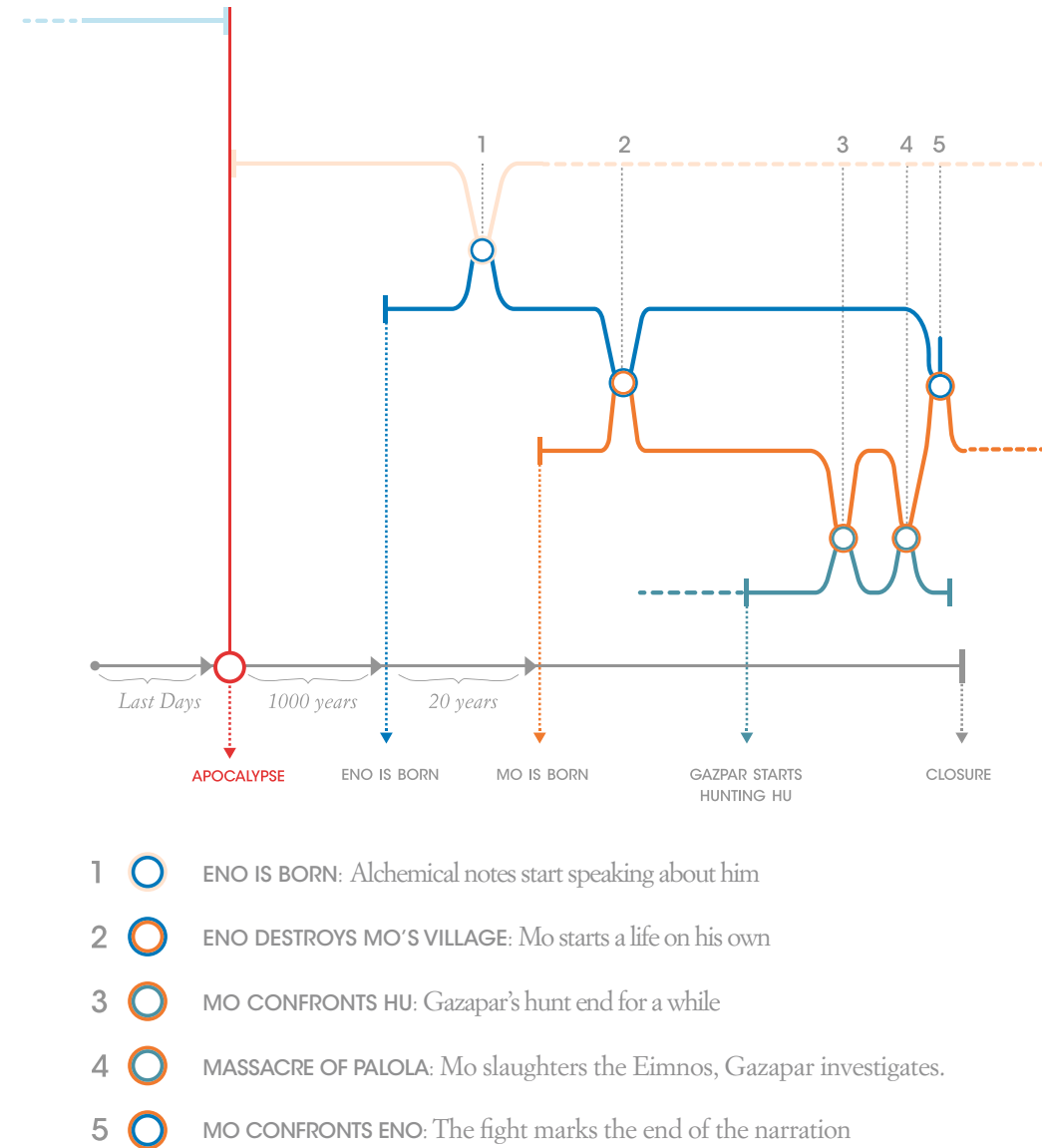
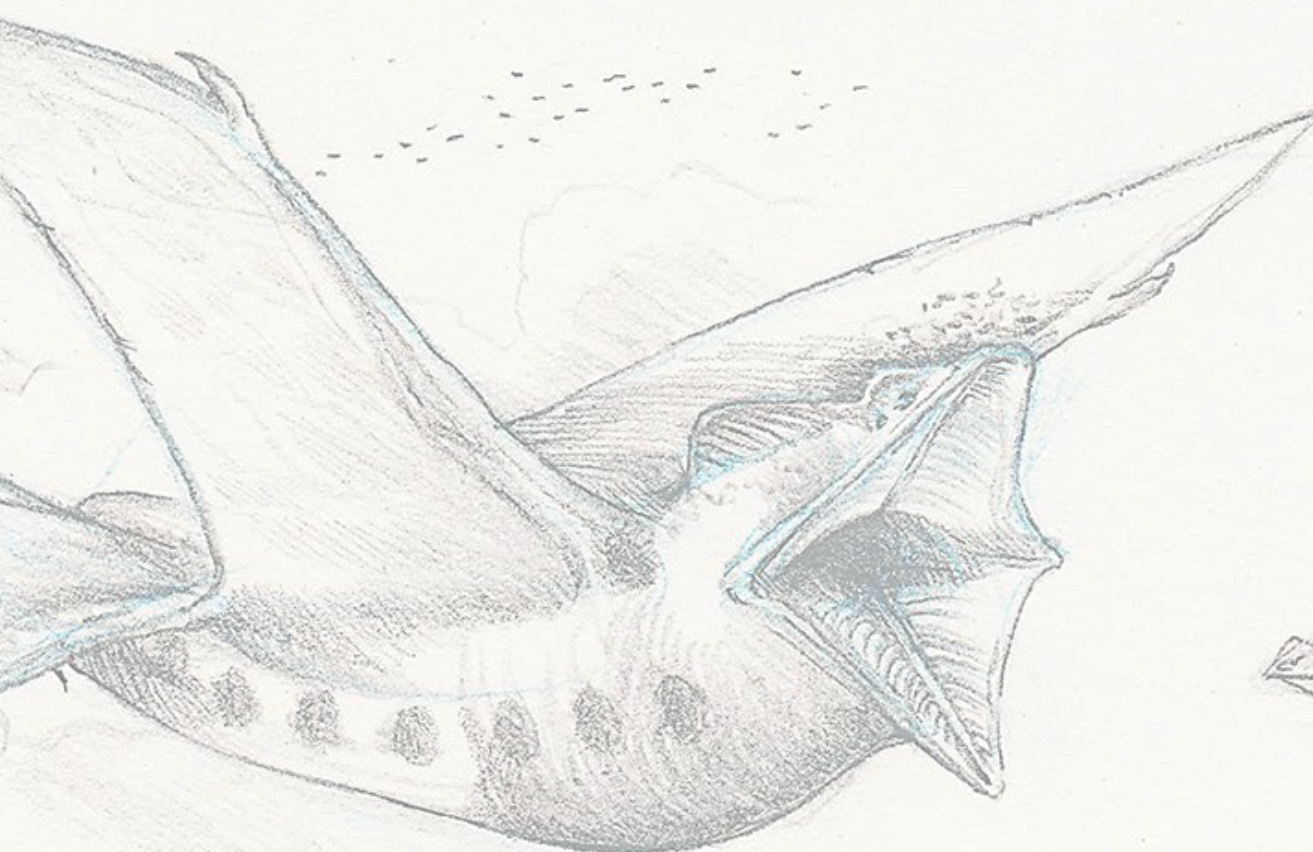


FIG. 8.12

Chronological plot representation with narrative knots between the different treads.





8.5 ONE STORYWORLD, ONE PROTAGONIST

As we have seen, *Agapanto* is structured in multiple layers and treads which proceed separated, almost parallel to each other; from what we could see, the knots where they come in contact are very few. Each character is focused on their own story and objectives, on their survival inside the world they found themselves thrown in. This particular fact leads the reading to be split on two levels: the evolution plot and the presentation of the storyworld. Unlike many stories where the world is created to serve on the purpose to frame a narration, *Agapanto* brings the reader to the discovery of a storyworld, where the narration is the entrance ticket. We didn't mean to bring any spoiler, but spoiler alert: Timotheus' tread is actually about how the world Mo, Eno and Gazpar live in came to be. And since Timotheus' space inside the book is second only to Mo's, we can say that a fourth of the book is the explanation about how a new world was born.

A world dominated by new rules, where the Sun rises from the West, the Moon has two companion satellites orbiting around the Earth with it, the continents emerging from the ocean are six. New living species made their appearance, inside and outside the Earth; science, magic, supernatural entities changed entirely the life of humanity. The story offers views and peeks of this world, but the reader knows that much more has still to be told.

This storyworld stands out as the protagonist of the story itself; this makes it very different from many other narrative world. It is just like it has been there all the time, then waited for an author to be written in the pages of a book, and now it is craving to extend into different dimensions of perception, spreading across other channels; that is how powerful *Agapanto's* universe is, and we are just about to set it free, for everyone to explore.

FIG. 8.13

On the background:
Study for Airphant, pencil sketch by Barara Gualandris

9.

AN UNEXPECTED JOURNEY

PROJECT REFERENCE DOCUMENT

9.1 GENERALITIES

Title

Agapanto – The Journey

Tagline

“I wish all of this were real”.

Genre

Fantasy, Sci-Fi, New Weird

Target

Young adults (18 – 35)

9.2 OBJECTIVES

The Journey inside the world of *Agapanto* aims to create awareness among the Internet public about the book. Through the use of a *transmedia* model, in fact, we can reach different types of audience, engaging them in the way they are more comfortable with, from the start with a rabbit hole to the full tour of a final digital platform where the world of the book will be presented and visualized through the interaction with the user. The storyworld inside a book, and storyworlds in general, carry with their own nature the ability to fit different and multiple channels, adapting to different kinds of public, each one speaking a different “interaction language”.

We can exploit all of these languages to achieve the same result: the engagement of an audience that could potentially turn into a fandom.

9.3 POSITIONING

The project can be compared to other existing ones considering two variables: multichannel and audience awareness. The first variable is about the use of different media and platforms other than the original channel where the storyworld was firstly delivered, while the audience awareness keeps in consideration the knowledge about the storyworld that was already spread across the audience at the moment of realization of the project, thus how much it contributed to the creation of a fandom around it.

Pottermore (2012) is probably the closest project in terms of format, to *Agapanto – The Journey*, since it took a very different path from the original media, the *Harry Potter* book series; however, the project was delivered after more than a decade during which the universe around the young wizard raised a fandom of huge dimensions, almost unique in history, thanks of the fortune of the books, adapted into a movie series, videogames, LEGO and more. A similar example is *A Journey through Middle-earth* (2013), an interactive adventure inspired by Peter Jackson's trilogy of *Hobbit* films. Delivered as a Google Chrome Experiment, the project counted on a legacy long half a century, with the Tolkien's universe of Arda become a phenomenon in literature as well as in cinema (Peter Jackson's *The Lord of The Rings* and *The Hobbit* adaptations are still two of the biggest colossal sagas known).

Both these projects counted on an already existing, huge, loyal fandom, those their purpose was more likely to keep them engaged with the use of different channels, more than the creation of a new audience, a challenge which is, on the other side, at the base of the project on *Agapanto*, being the book not yet published or advertised.

Netflix's series *The Witcher* (2019) is a good example of a project which was capable of engaging a new audience in the discovery of a storyworld, which was originally delivered inside a book series by Andrzej Sapkowski, and then adapted into a videogame series (*The Witcher*, *The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings*, and *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*), developed by

CD Projekt Red. The success of the show brought the story of Geralt of Rivia (aka *The Witcher*) under a new light, raising the awareness of a new portion of the fandom, the TV series lovers, at the point that, in May 2020, the book series had sold over 50 million copies worldwide. However, more than a transmedia design project, *The Witcher* has faced an adaptation process in its various declinations, for each one of them was designed for a single, specific platform.

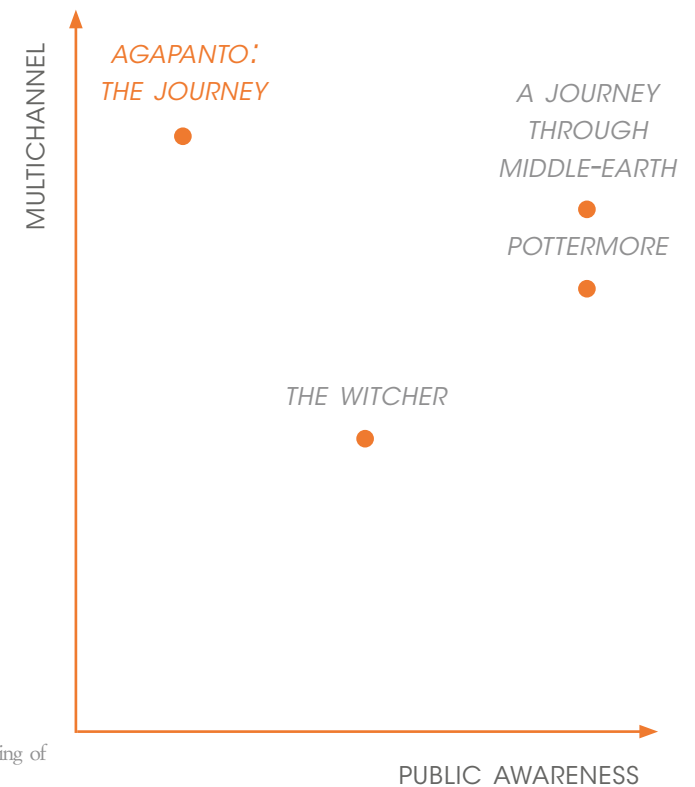


FIG. 9.1
Scheme of positioning of the project.

9.4 FRAMING THE EXPERIENCE

We are designing a project that will let *Agapanto*'s storyworld to spread across different channels to engage different audiences. When we say "engage" we are already thinking of a user meant to be an active part inside the system. As we learned from the studies on fans and audiences, here we are dealing with a target characterized, in a large part, by a participative attitude. Let's have again a look to our actors, the five personas that represent our target, to see how we can provide a meaningful experience for each of them, to ultimately design our system.

THE AUTHOR

Timothy is a creator; the external world, including other storyworlds, is a continuous source of inspirations, that he would ultimately convey into his creation. And that creation is meant to see the light, to be shared with a public. A satisfying experience for Timothy should not only allow him, but encourage him to express his talent. From the inspiration come to the exploration of *Agapanto*'s storyworld, the system would challenge him to put his skills to work. His efforts would be eventually rewarded with the public sharing inside the system, opening him a path to a possible collaboration with the authors of the system.

EXPECTATIONS: CREATING AND SHARING
THE SYSTEM'S OFFERS: EXPLORATION, CONTESTS

THE PADAWAN LEARNER

Bea, the Padawan Learner, is curious and creative. She keeps in touch with the storyworlds' production processes through social platforms to learn about a world she aims to be part of. She shares her works periodically on selected platforms, and she is always happy to take part to contest and challenges thrown by the social media to grow her popularity as an artist and improve her skills. The experience about the storyworld of *Agapanto* would get her inside a community relating directly with the authors of the system, challenge her to prove her skills, providing frequent chances to grow and opportunities to become part of the production world.

EXPECTATIONS: LEARNING AND GROWING
THE SYSTEM'S OFFERS: COMMUNITY, CONTESTS

THE LURKER

Al, as a lurker, prefers to remain unnoticed, but that doesn't necessarily mean passive. As a fan he finds very satisfying reading and exploring new worlds, and he is very intrigued by interactive experiences, nobody has ever said that a reader can't be a gamer... An experience that will lead him to the discovery of a new storyworld, related to a book he could be interested reading could sound like interesting material to him. Engaged at the beginning, a lurker should be kept engaged, and since communities and contests are not for him, what about a system that keeps expanding, revealing a little bit more of itself every once in a while? More paths to be explored, and only more there could be after purchasing the book.

EXPECTATIONS: EXPLORING, BEING ENTERTAINED
THE SYSTEM'S OFFERS: EXPLORATION, READING

THE AGONIST FAN

Leo is the voice of the fandom. To him, a storyworld is exploration, scouting, learning about every little detail, and then formulate his own interpretation, to be shared and discussed with other members of the community. For a fan like him, the social contact with a group of other fans is essential. That is why, alongside the exploration of a storyworld, the system will offer Leo a platform where he can share his opinions, expectations and discoveries with other users. His voice could make a valid aid to the authors of the system to take determinate directions in the future development of the storyworld, for he brings to their attention the expectations of the fan community.

EXPECTATIONS: EXPLORING, DISCUSSING
THE SYSTEM'S OFFERS: EXPLORATION, COMMUNITY

THE DREAM-PUSHER

Diana is at the same time similar and opposite to Timothy: like him, she loves to create and share, but, unlike him, she would never take part to official contexts to share her creations. In fact, since she doesn't share with Timothy and Bea the ambition to work as a producer, she just enjoys giving shape to her dreams and fantasies, deriving by her own, personal, unique *head-canon*. A blog-like community, with topics and discussions would be way more suitable to her, where she can find her space inside a dedicated discussion to freely share her creations, without burdens like scores or judgements.

EXPECTATIONS: DREAMING AND SHARING
THE SYSTEM'S OFFERS: READING, COMMUNITY

We have different expectations to work with here, and, for each of them, we have provided a part of what will constitute the full experience spectrum; we are not forcing the different users to go through every part of this experience, but we are rather providing a range of possibilities of different interactions, that will possibly match the expectations of every fan type. If they will ever be willing to take a step out of their comfort zone, we will be happy to consider that a plus. That said, we can make an overview of what our full experience will offer: the exploration to the storyworld inside *Agapanto*, that will get the users familiar with the book, that they are invited to read to complete their journey; an active platform engaging the most creative users in storyworld-related production contests; finally, an online community for the users, to exchange opinions about their experience and share their contents.



FIG. 9.2
The user expectations and the answers of the system to them.

9.5 SHAPING THE STRUCTURE

The experience we are building includes different types of engagement activities, that will be translated into different channels and touchpoints; more than a product we are designing a system, whose multichannel properties and content distributions coincides with the profile of a transmedia system. Thus we have to focus on the channels that will convey the parts of the experience and their different touchpoints.

THE NEXUS

The main landing site of our system is a website, both for desktop and mobile, which holds the core of the interactive experience of *Agapanto – The Journey*. The website features different levels of interaction: the Journey, the community, the store where the user can purchase the original book, news about contests and expansion of the Journey, information about the original book and the project.

The Journey

A visual tour inside the universe of the book, the Journey will feature illustrated interactive pages displaying the different environments of the storyworld, where the user can examine natural and artificial elements and being provided with information coming directly from the world's famous texts of knowledge: The Alchemical Encyclopedia, The Animalarium, The Forbidden Artifices, The Apocalypse Chronicles, The Alchemical Notes, The Book of Unknown Words.

Along with the Journey, the user will grow into the storyworld of *Agapanto*, discovering creatures, objects, phenomena, speaking with townsfolks. By logging in and creating a profile ID, the user will be able to register their progresses, browsing their own collection of information achieved and unlocking badges, in a sort of RPG approach, which often results to be highly motivating.

Not all the knowledge will be delivered from the first approach, though, for two main reasons: we want to keep the users engaged in time, allowing them to witness the expansion of the world, adding new areas to explore, and also if we told them everything

about the secrets of the universe and the story of its characters we would take away from them the pleasure to read the original book, which is meant to hold the ultimate knowledge.

That is why we are projecting towards a freemium format with the platform, where part of the content is accessible since the beginning, before the reading of the book, and the rest of it will unlock only after it.

This way we have our audience motivated to buy the book and actually focus on the first channel the story was delivered with.

THE *JOURNEY'S* PARTICIPATORY STORYWORLD

RATING: 18+

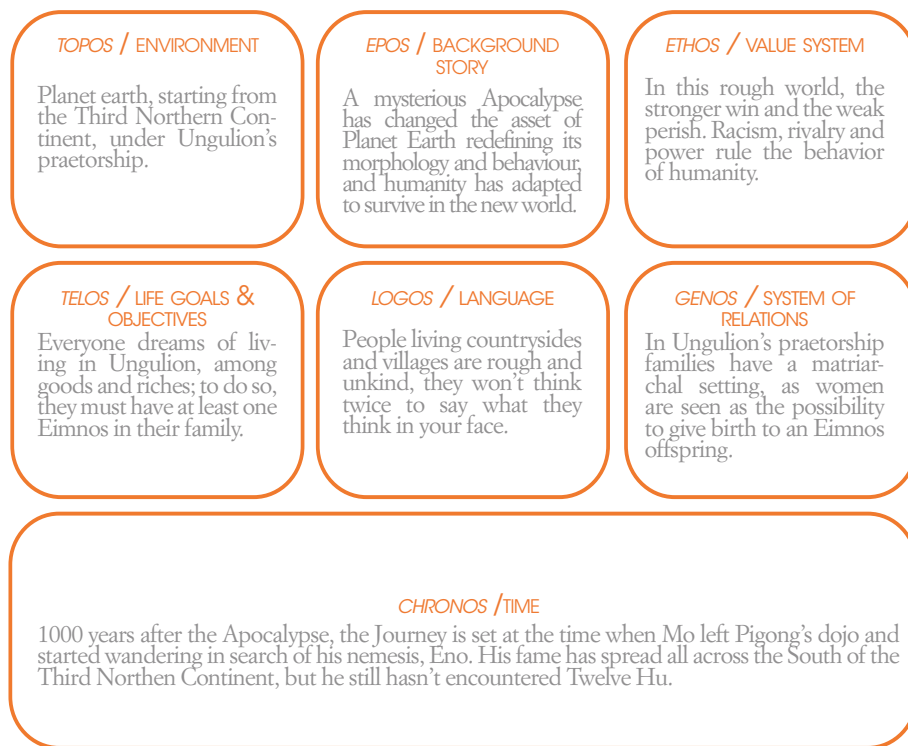
GENRE: Fantasy, Sci-Fi, Adventure

narrative style: Brutal, sometimes grotesque, yet alien, fascinating and mysterious: for a public who doesn't love soft stories, but likes worlds' exploration and adventure. The world is all new, all to explore.

RELATION WITH THE PRIMARY WORLD: it's still the Earth, but 1000 years in the future, the lands have morphed into twelve new continents, the planet has inverted the rotation sense, with the Sun now rising from West, and now three moons orbit around it; humanity still exists, but the appearance of new races have divided it; animals and plants from the Primary World exist alongside new species. Deities are a certain reality most of the humanity is aware of.

TIMING: The Journey is settled deep through the events of the main storyline presented by the book, when Mo already gained power and popularity, and he was preparing to face his nemesis, Eno, and at the same time Gazpar started the investigations for the capture of the infamous criminal Talented Twelve Hu.

FIG. 9.3: The *Journey's* Storyworld Canvas. The storyworld canvas is a tool created by Mariana Ciancia, Francesca Piredda and Simona Venditti, 2017, starting from the work of Pinardi & De Angelis, (2006) to extrapolate the various elements that make up the storyworld.



The Community

The website will feature an area with the format of a blog, where the user can come in contact with other members to share their experience about the Journey and the book, as well as discussing their opinions about the most recent developments of the platform, exposing their expectations and impressions. With a topic organization, they will be also free to join the discussions they are more interested in and ignore others, for instance if they are lovers of content sharing or not.

The Book Store

The store area of the website will give the users the opportunity to directly purchase the original book *Agapanto*, if they have grown interested in the story and they consider to expand their possibilities inside the Journey by unlocking the premium content, accessible through codes provided in the pages of the book. Different versions of the book will be released, with different price tags; the digital version, standard or "deluxe", with illustrated sections, in the standard formats for desktop, mobile or e-reader; the printed versions will be available on order.

In time, the results of the contests could make available exclusive versions of the book, with the contribution of the creatives members of the community.

Contests

With the periodical release of contests, presented in the "News" area of the website, the users will be challenged to create new content, such as illustrations, graphic novels, original scripts, new layout for the book. The most creatives fans will have the opportunity to share their skills with the rest of the community, and the winners could be rewarded with the publication on the store of their creation to purchase as exclusive content alongside the standard versions of the book.

Information and sneak peeks

The website will feature a main description about both the storyworld of *Agapanto* and the structure of the project; an ex-

ternal visitor is always more comfortable if told clearly what an experience is about, what are its purposes and who is behind the production.

The area will provide general information about geography, timing, entities and phenomena, completed with art galleries and looks about the production (early ideas, concept art).

RABBIT HOLES: SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE BOOK

The entry points inside the systems are meant to capture the user's attention spawning inside a channel they are used to casually browse, luring them towards another landing platform, which in our case is the *Nexus*. Rabbit holes will be delivered by the social media, where *Agapanto* will have dedicated profiles, redirecting the user to the main platform by reporting the links' URLs.

The social network that visually and structurally suites the most this format is Instagram: it will feature a main profile for the whole experience, reporting the URL of the homepage of the *Nexus*, while the single posts, released periodically, will address to secondary profiles entirely dedicated to a specific area of the *Journey* inside the *Nexus*, containing in the description the URL of a specific area.

A post containing a Rabbit hole features a visual sneak-peek of an unexplored part of the storyworld, that can be related to an animal species, a place, a culture, an historical event. In terms of content, the posts will come in the shape of a visual detail or a small animation, that must be cryptic and triggering, in order to raise the curiosity of the user towards the path that will unlock the new area of the *Journey*.

In the case someone is already in possession of the book, the pages themselves will become rabbit holes to access the *Journey*, bringing with them information about the project and codes to unlock premium content.

PATHS

We call *path* the tread formed by one or more links that eventually address the user to a to an unexplored part of the *Journey*. A path is opened through a particular post on one of *Agapanto*'s social media profiles: Instagram, Facebook, Twitter.

Whenever a new Rabbit hole post is uploaded on the social media, it comes with a link to another webpage; it could address directly to the *Nexus*, or bounce the user into different post, both inside the same channel or different ones, leading the user into a "hunt" along the *path* for the final cue that will lead to the *Nexus*, and so to the new discovery.

FIG. 9.4

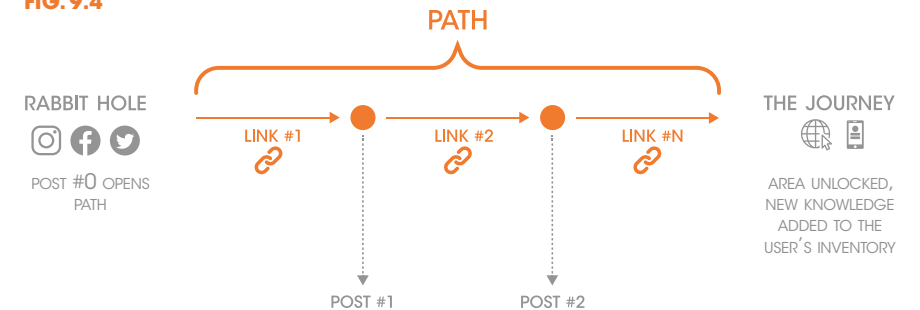


FIG. 9.5

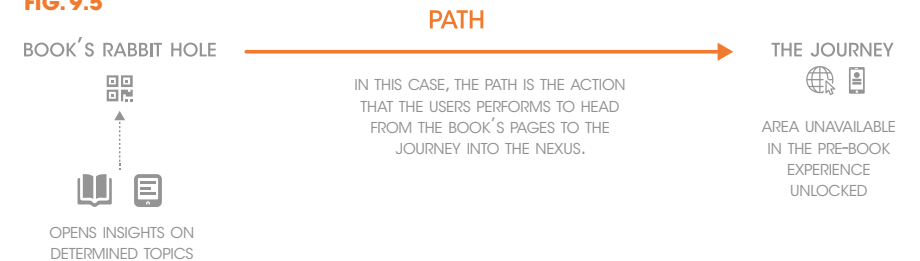


FIG. 9.4: the Bottom-Up process in the following of a path starting from social media;

FIG. 9.5: The Top-Down process in the following of a path starting from the book.

10.

“I WISH ALL OF THIS
WERE REAL”

BRINGING THE UNIVERSE TO LIFE

FIG. 10.1

The pathseeker, illustration from *Agapanto - The Journey*, Barbara Gualandris.



10.1 CHANNELS

The main touchpoints involved in the system are, as we previously mentioned, the *Paths*, the *Nexus*, the *Journey* and the book. Translated in terms of functionalities, they respectively represent the rabbit holes posted on social media; the platform embedding the community, the infos, the contests and the bookstore; the graphic adventure about the exploration of the storyworld of *Agapanto*; the novel itself, both physical and digital.

The first *Paths* will be delivered on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter, at the same time and in the social media in question most suitable form. *Agapanto* will count on its own profiles and pages on all of these socials; other special *Paths* will be held inside the pages of the book itself, thus being available only for the readers.

In the case of Instagram, one profile will be dedicated to the whole experience, providing the rabbit holes, while other profiles, where the user will be redirected to, will represent the landing site and address inside the *Journey*.

The *Nexus*, also containing the *Journey*, will be delivered through a website, for desktop, and an app for mobile.

It will be possible to purchase the book directly from the store inside the *Nexus*.



FIG. 10.2: Mediamix scheme, highlighting the channels involved in the system and their relationships.

10.2 USER JOURNEYS

In the construction of the *User Journey* we combined the five different experiences the transmedia system offers with the channels it uses; in this grid, we marked the ideal journeys of each one of the five personas profiles, where most of the experience could interest everyone, while other levels of interaction suit the habits and the expectation of only a group of them.

READING KEY:

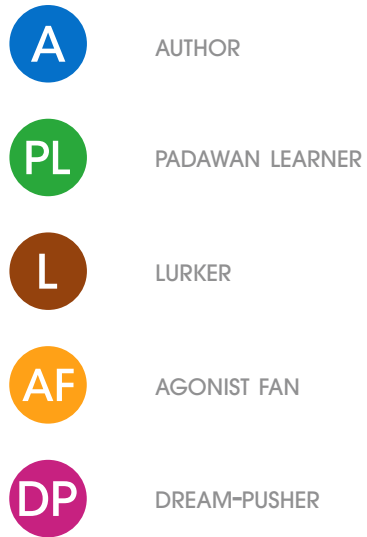
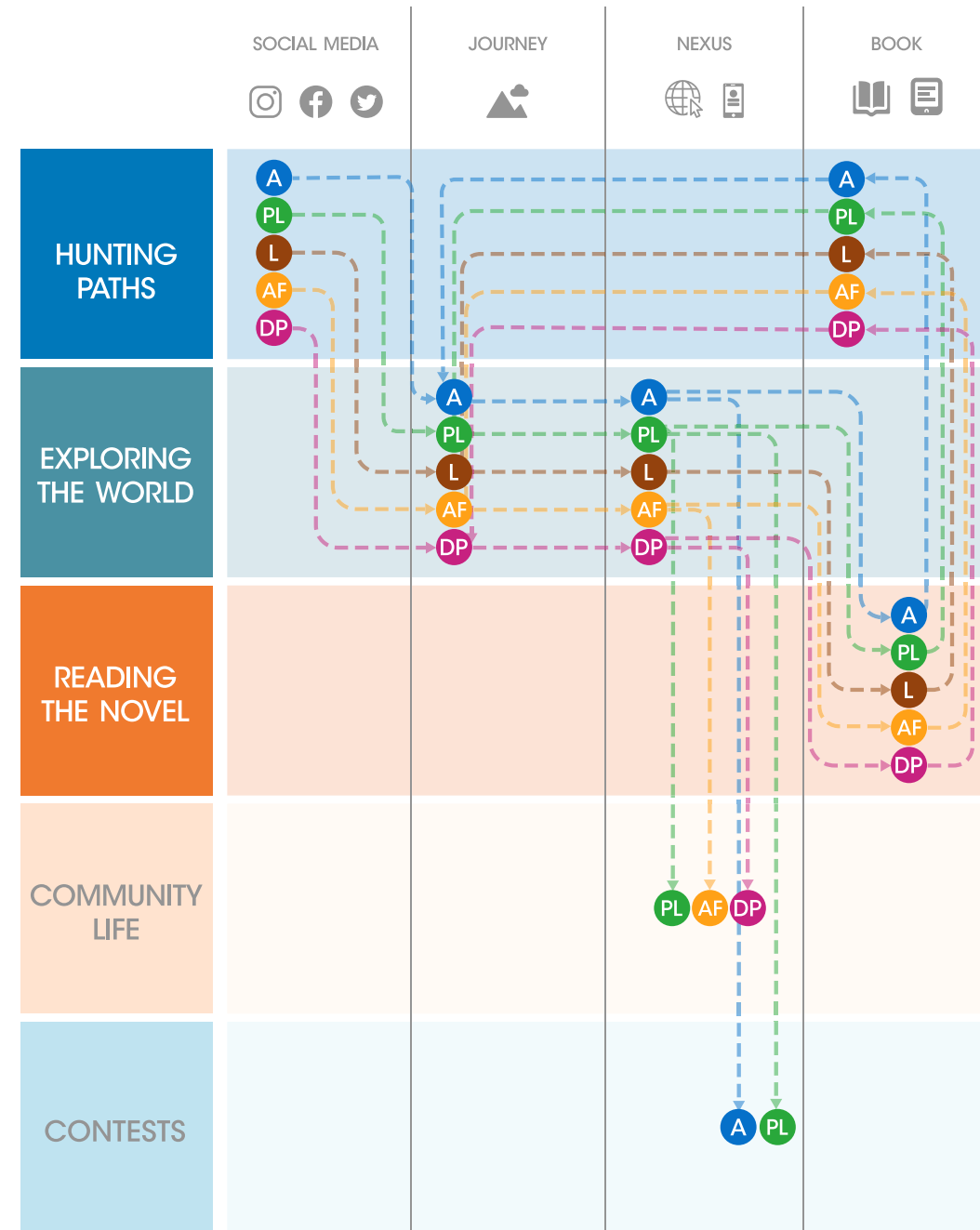


FIG. 10.3: The *User Journey* highlights the experience that each one of our personas is free to follow among the possibilities that the system offers.



10.3 RABBIT HOLES AND PATHS

The *Paths* are divided in two categories: free and premium. The free *Paths* open through a rabbit hole on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter, so that every user can potentially access to it and land into the *Journey*; other *Paths* are available only to the actual readers of the book, for they are accessible only through QR codes printed on the pages.

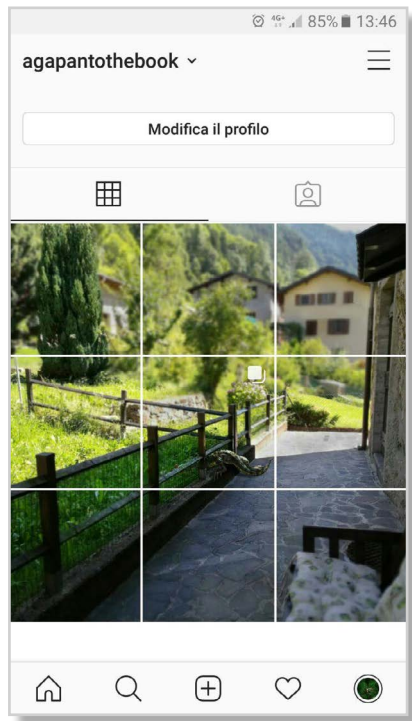


FIG. 10.4 The main Instagram profile of Agapanto releases the first Path with the publication of a grid of nine posts, eight of which are just fillers, and one is a slideshow that marks the beginning of the Path.

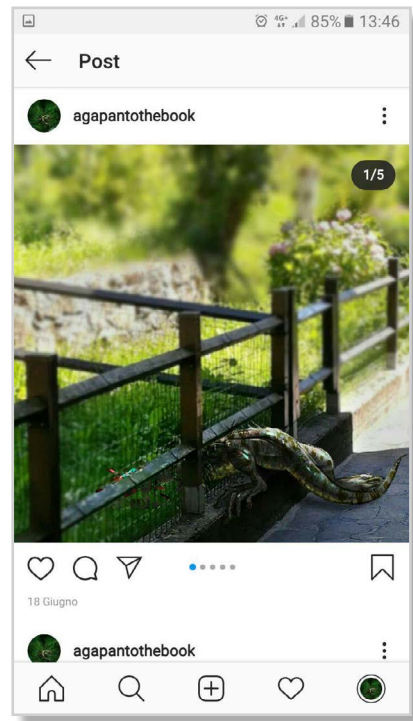


FIG. 10.5 The post marking the beginning of the Path shows an unknown creature sneaking into the Primary World, advertising the viewer that something is out of place.

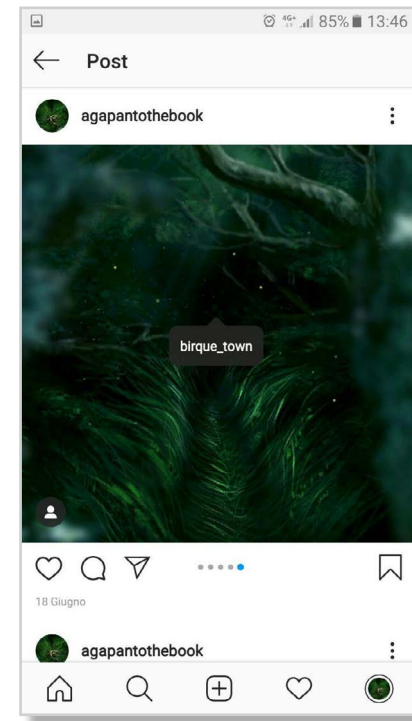


FIG. 10.6 The last image in the slideshow presents a tag of another profile, which addresses the user deeper into the Path.

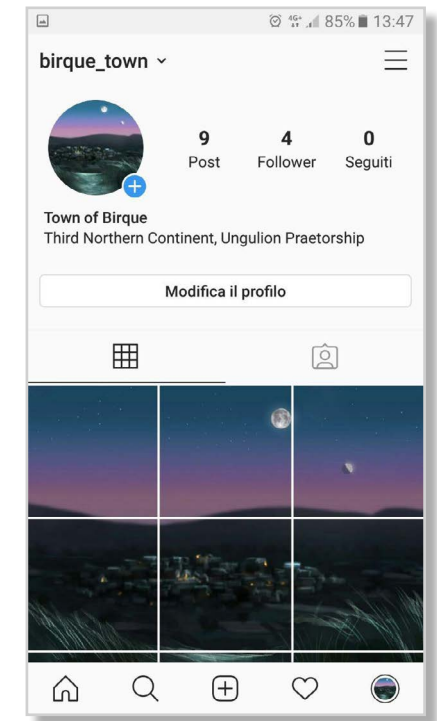


FIG. 10.7 The landing profile is the Journey's location dedicated profile, which carries in the description the URL link to the Journey inside the Nexus.

10.4 THE NEXUS: WEBSITE

The Nexus' website is a platform that fully explains the project systems, embedding the link to the Journey, the user dedicated area, the community section with discussions and contests, the bookstore where to purchase the book *Agapanto* and the contacts to social profiles.

FIG. 10.8 Wireframe of the Homepage of the Nexus website section.

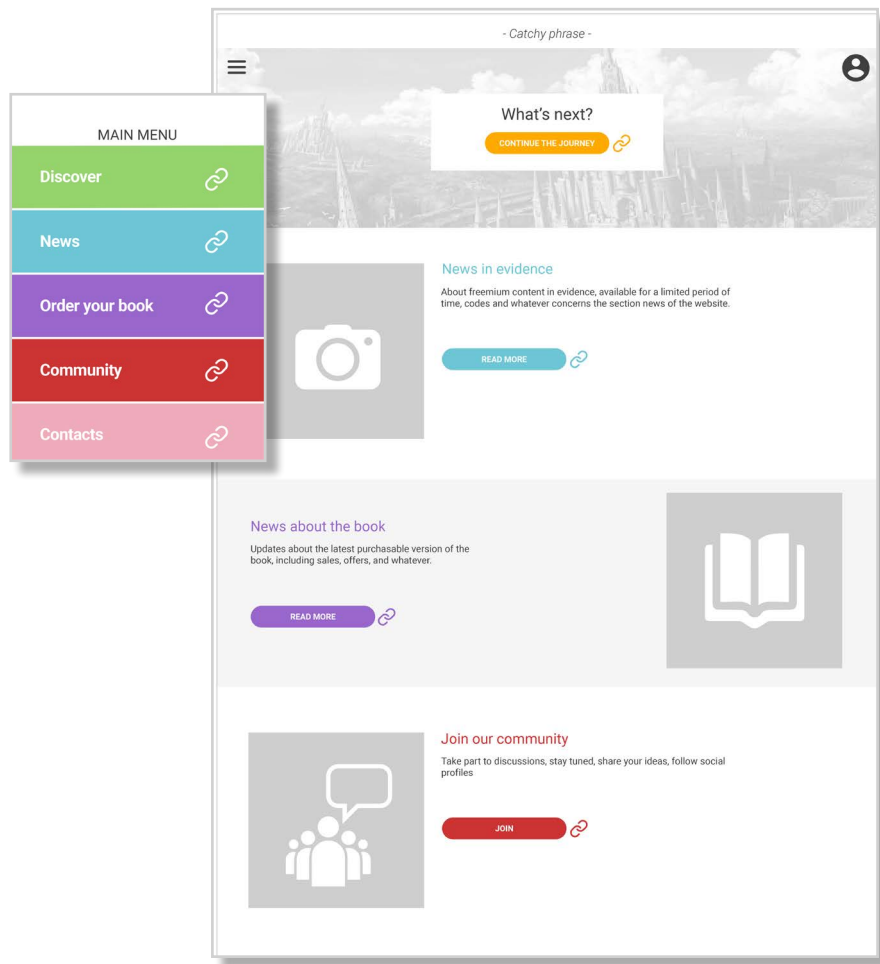
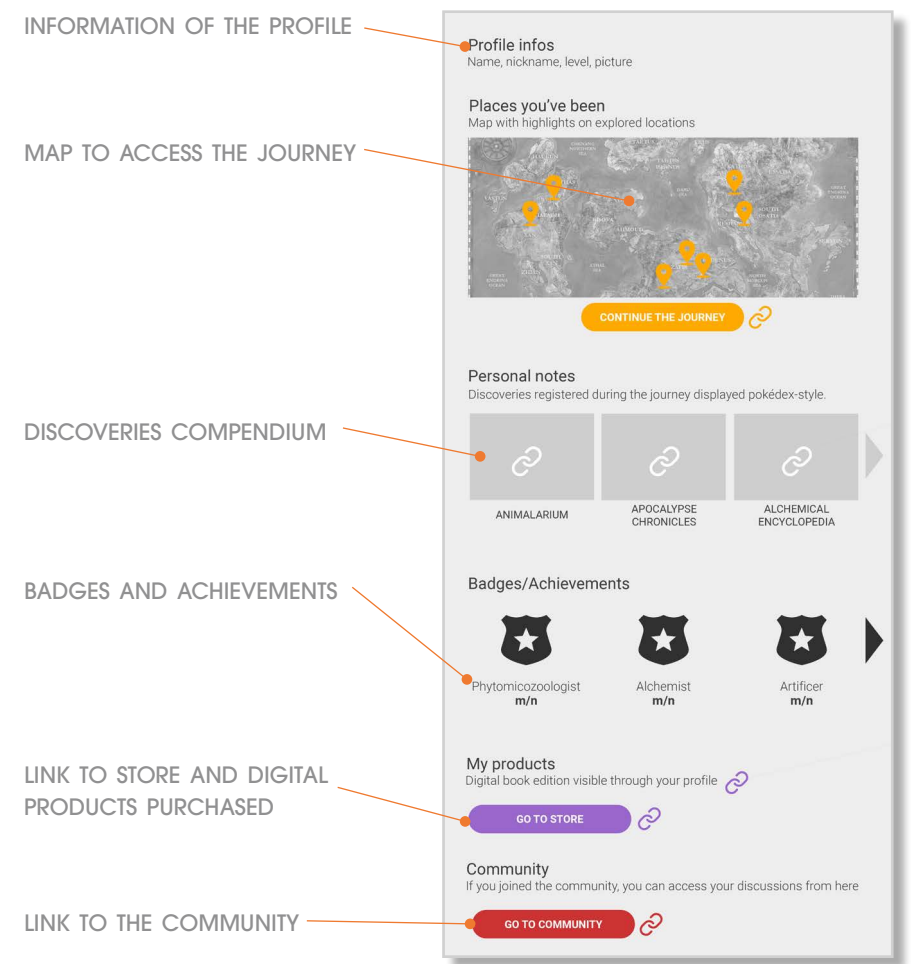


FIG. 10.9 Wireframe of the User Profile.



10.5 THE NEXUS: JOURNEY

The Journey is the section of the Nexus dedicated to the visual and interactive exploration of *Agapanto's* storyworld.

General setting

After following the first Path, the first landing site the user gets to in the Journey is the Baboon Valley, a flat space crossed by the river Baboon, where they can find the town of Birque. Going to Birque, the user can speak to some townsfolks. One of them reveals to be the blacksmith who hosted Mo during the three years that the now famous personality spent at Birque, before leaving to find Eno.

The blacksmith offers to host the user as well, providing them the room that will become the lodge where it will be possible to access all the features of the users' profile: information, compendiums, map, books, community.

Before entering the lodge, the new user will be finally asked if they are willing to continue the adventure: if they are, it is the moment when they legitamaly sign up in the website; if they are not, their progresses will be lost.

Interaction levels

When a user follows a Path, they are adressed ultimately to a location marked on the map on their profile.

New locations appear on the map when the user discovers them by direct access from the previous location.

Every location is composed by one or more of these interactive screens, and they provide five different interaction levels, of which we report also the final icons:

- scrolling the image horizontally and vertically to see more of it;
- look, which allows to have a zoom on the elements;
- examine, which means visualizing a page of information about the object;
- talk to, in case in the scene there are people that have something to say;
- go to, to change location.



FIG. 10.10

Preparatory sketch for the environment of Birque.

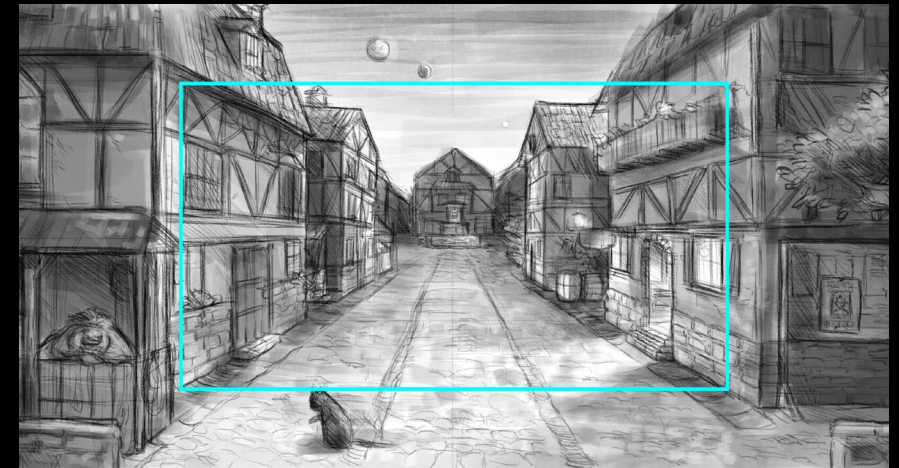


FIG. 10.11

Preparatory sketch for the the room lodge.



FIG. 10.12

Simplified scheme of the scroll interaction. The full illustrations have a resolution of 3840 x 1920 pixels, while the portion visible is 1920x940.



FIG. 10.13

Simplified scheme of the zoom interaction. Interactive objects highlight with a surrounding halo when touched by the mouse.



FIG. 10.14
Simplified scheme of the “examine” interaction.

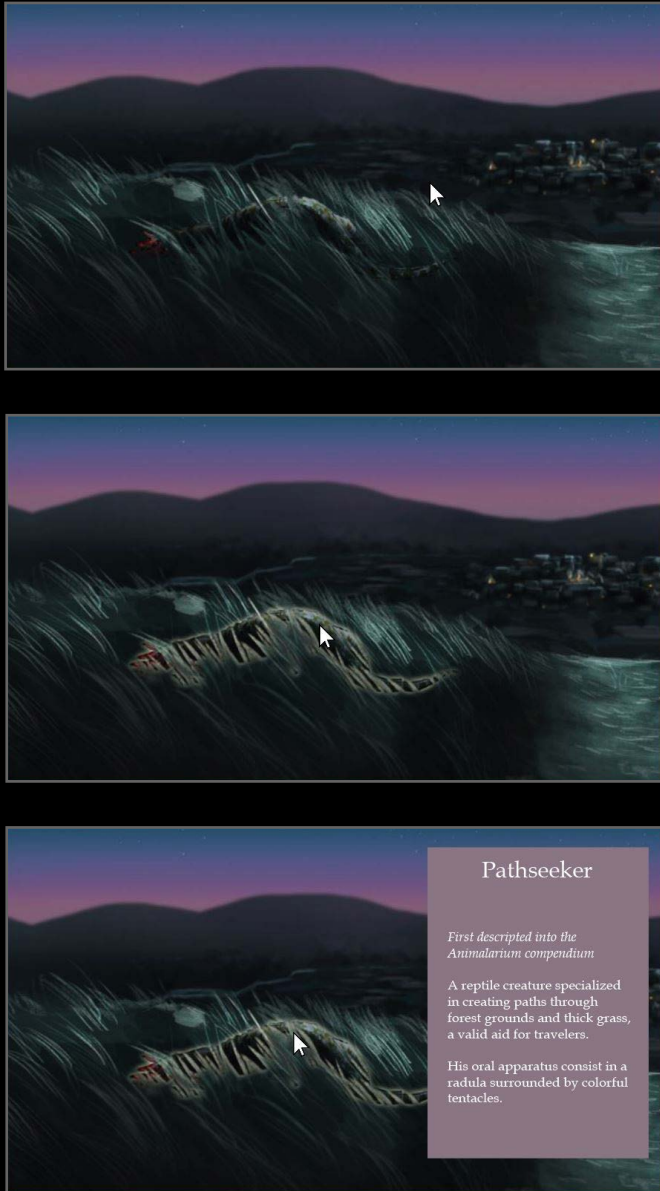


FIG. 10.15
Simplified scheme of the “go to” interaction.



FIG. 10.16
Simplified scheme of the “talk to” interaction.



10.6 VISUAL AND ART DIRECTION

The visual style of *Agapanto - The Journey*, features detailed realistic illustrations and graphic elements like old papers and page decorations, that remind of ancient medieval times. The illustrations are realized in Adobe Photoshop CC 2020.

Fonts

Two fonts were chosen for the visual of the Journey: Costantia, a serif font, and Avant Garde Gothic, sans serif.

Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg Hh Ii Jj Kk Ll Mm
Nn Oo Pp Qq Rr Ss Tt Uu Vv Ww Xx Yy Zz

Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg Hh Ii Jj Kk Ll Mm
Nn Oo Pp Qq Rr Ss Tt Uu Vv Ww Xx Yy Zz

Floral motif

The floral motif decorating the titles has been designed to resemble the flowers of apapanthus, a bulb plant springing bunches of pale blue flowers, that gives the name to the novel *Agapanto*.



FIG. 10.17
Floral motif of agapanthus flowers.

FIG. 10.18
Study for Pathseeker.

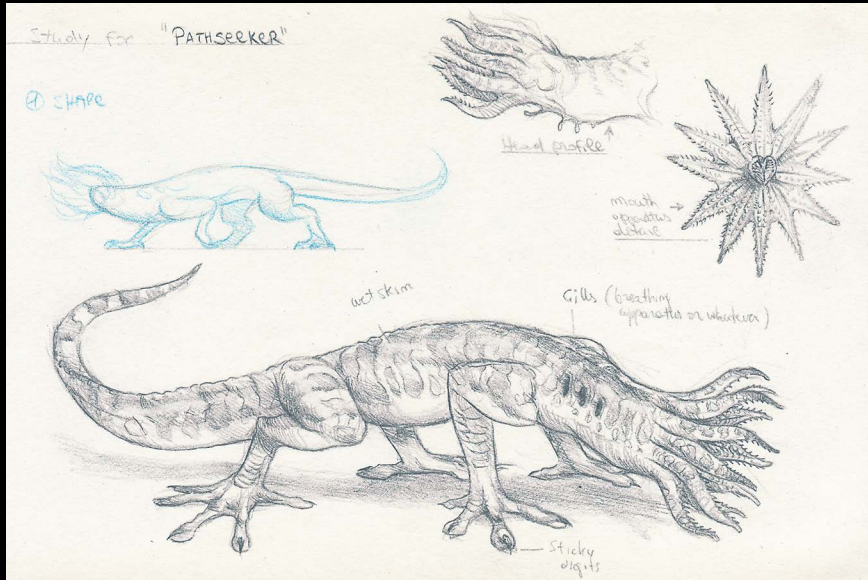


FIG. 10.19
Study for Night Grozo

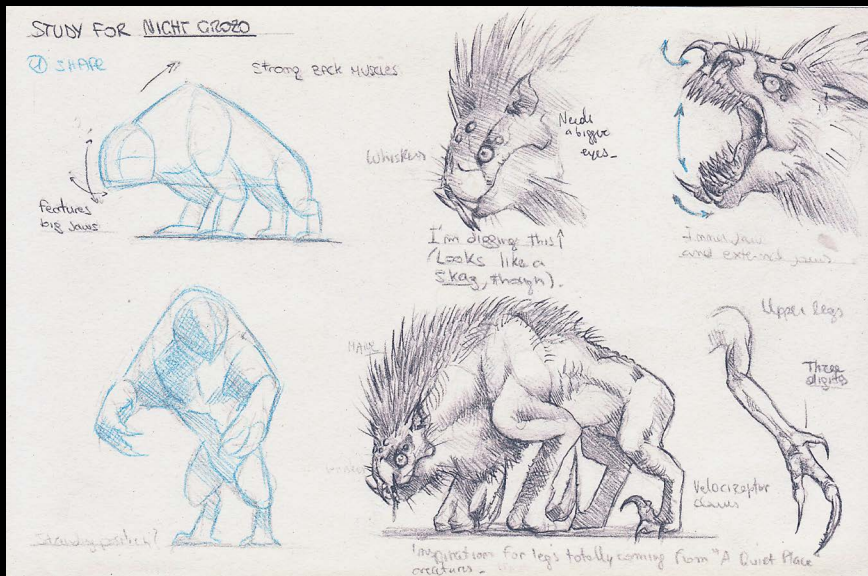


FIG. 10.20
Study for Quotz

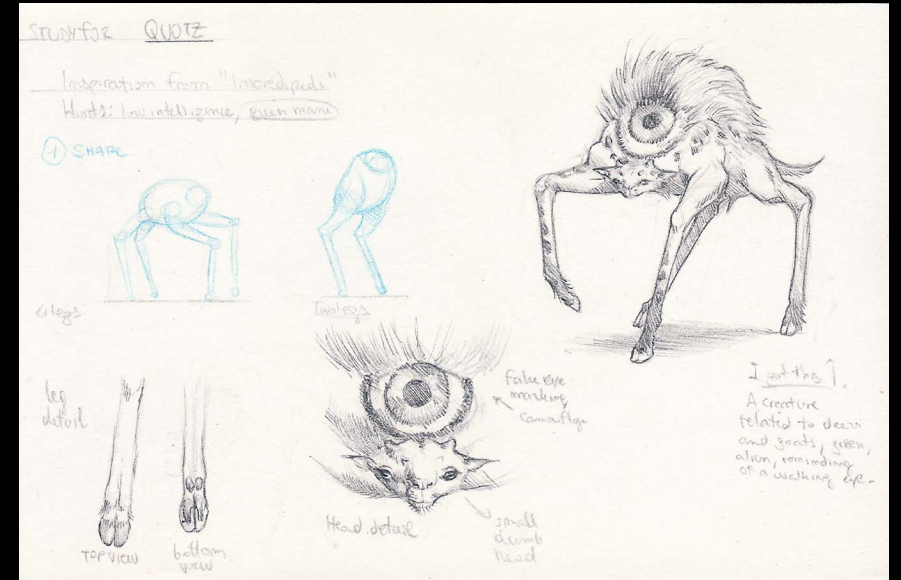
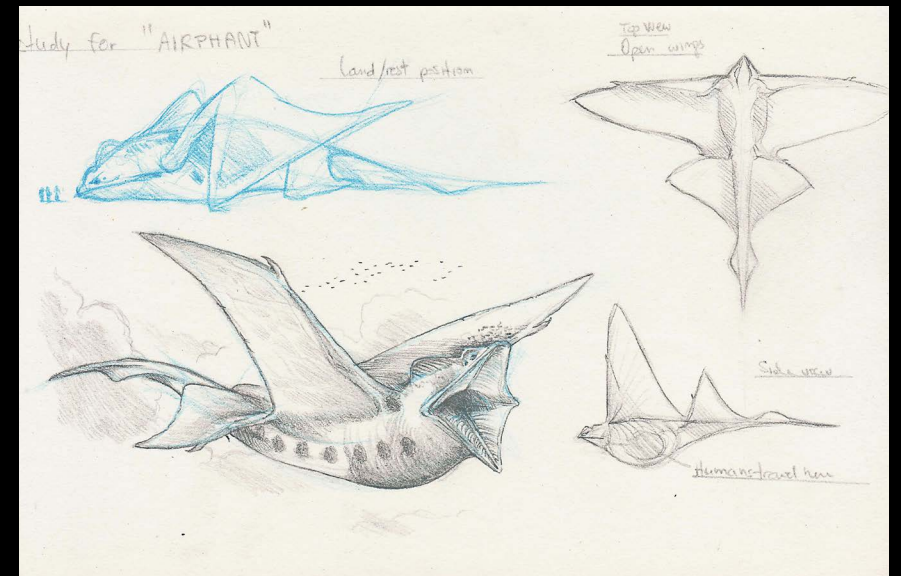


FIG. 10.21
Study for Airphant



10.7 MOCKUP GALLERY

FIG. 10.22
Baboon Valley discovery screen



FIG. 10.23

Interaction with Pathseeker element.



FIG. 10.24

Interaction with Town menu.

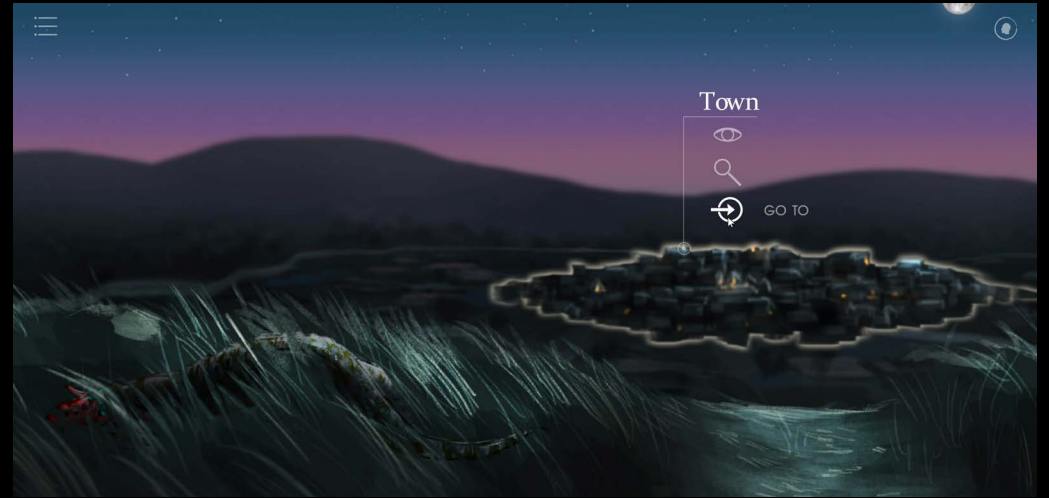
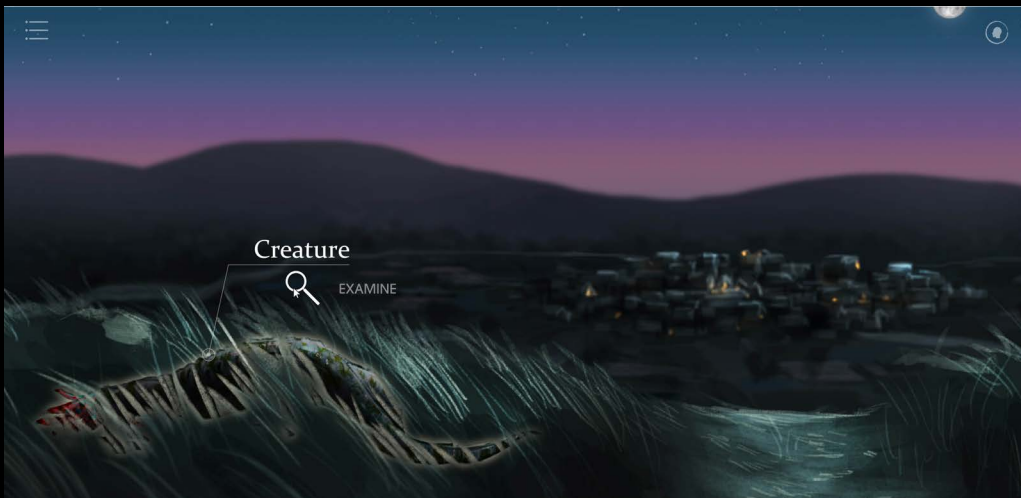
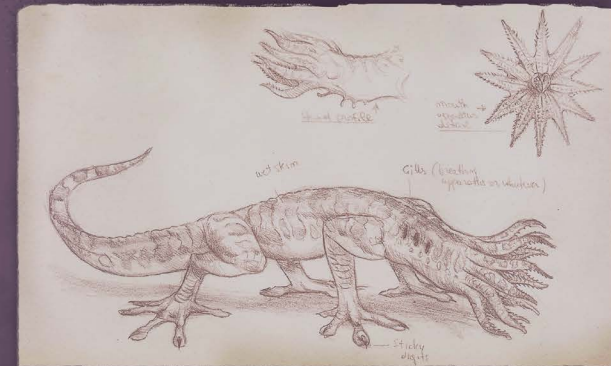


FIG. 10.24
Analysis chart of the Pathseeker.



Pathseeker



From the *Animalarium Compendium*:

Scientific Name: *Varanus Coryodoras*

Family: Radulioriformidae

Class: Reptalamphibian

Kingdom: Animalia

Pathseeking abilities: Nobody does it like them

A reptile creature specialized in creating paths through forest grounds and thick grass, a valid aid for travelers.

His oral apparatus consist in a radula surrounded by tentacles, a powerful vacuum suction to clear the ground from grass and finding food. The bright colors of the head, a trait better observed in male specimens, are an appreciated attribute during mating rituals.

Despite somebody's best efforts, they won't compromise and serve as a personal mower for your yard.

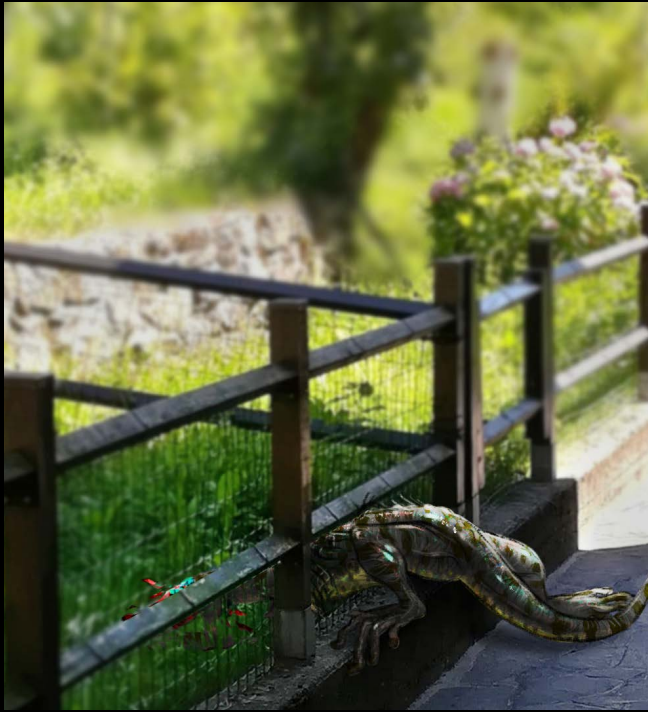


FIG. 10.25
illustration for first Path.



FIG. 10.26
illustration for first Path.



FIG. 10.27
illustration for first Path.

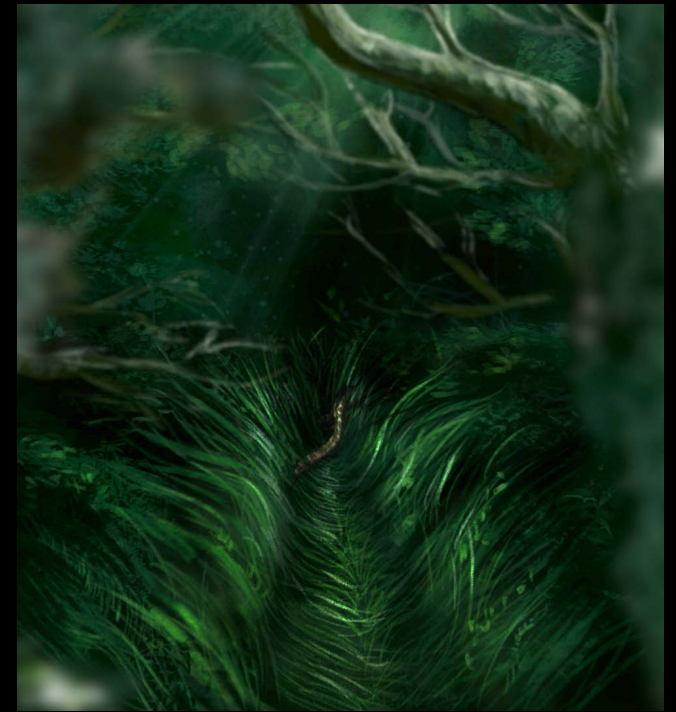


FIG. 10.28
illustration for first Path.

CONCLUSIONS



This all journey started with a question: how do we bring a storyworld to life, and is digital interaction a valid support? To answer this question, we researched about storyworlds' structures and about the habits and the expectations of the audiences; we learned that the universes behind stories are systems unbound from the narrative treads, and a single channel is not enough to express all of their potentials, as they will, in time, break the edges of their original container and spread across new media. We also learned that our audiences are fans, a highly engaged public, who won't set to remain a passive consumer, being rather poachers (Jenkins, 1992), cutting their own space in worlds belonging to others, always bargaining with the authors to be part of these worlds. They are constantly producing content and meaning, each one of them in a different form, through different channels, in different quantities, depending on the class (or classes) they belong to: Authors, Padawan Learners, Lurkers, Agonists, Dream-pushers.

But most importantly, we learned that the way to deliver a new story has changed: the technological evolution changes the habits of the audiences, the way they approach information, making them free to choose among a wide range of channels and media, where the digital dimension is the protagonist, with its intrinsic ability to interactively engage people.

A newcomer novel like *Agapanto* has to face this changes, as the only publishing of the book will probably result in the story to be overwhelmed by a incredibly crowded panorama of competitors; not because the writing is not good, but because it is no longer enough.

If a story really wants to come to life we must work thoroughly on two dimensions: the expansion of the storyworld across different channels and the engagement of the public.

Storyworlds are what of more powerful narrations carries: if well constructed, if consistent, complex and complete (Wolf, 2012) the architecture of a world can be declined in many oth-

er treads, through different media, speaking to new possible audiences with different habits.

Not really into the Skywalker Saga? *The Mandalorian* is a completely different story inside the same storyworld.

Not a fan of looter-shooter videogames? You can explore the Borderlands of Pandora in a graphic adventure.

Not too keen of books? *Agapanto* is also a visual exploration, a community, an Instagram profile.

It is no longer about delivering entertainment products, the deal now is setting the rules of a system, speaking to the audiences, as they will witness the expansion of the storyworld for the days to come.

We bring a storyworld to life through its expansion, in a *trans-media* model, across the different possible channels, engaging wider audiences, answering to the expectations of the different types of fans, and, considering the panorama of today's technologies and communication streams, digital interaction is the one of the most powerful tools at storyworlds' disposal.

SPECIAL THANKS



To Timothée C. Fiçinnas, talented storywriter with an Eimnos name, with who I have been collaborating since the times of E.A.C. and Sgudrus, without who nothing of this would have ever been possible, and without who I would still probably here crying in agony and despair as I couldn't find such a perfect work as *Agapanto* as a source of inspiration for this project. May this be the beginning of a prosper future for your outstanding novel.

To Mariana, for the dedication, the competence and the patience she showed in the long period of generation of this process, who followed and encouraged me despite my unbelievable ability to procrastinate till the last second. Never I could ask for a better tutor.

To Chiara and Susanna, may the Coyote group live of memes and unicorns in the centuries to come.

I would thank also my family, but they would probably punch me in the face, and I would deserve it.

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