ABSTRACT

Technopolis Gotham: An Original
Transmedia Intellectual Property

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As the title indicates Technopolis Gotham is an original transmedia intellectual property. 'Transmedia' is an emergent trend in narrative design for commercial entertainment properties that focuses upon building a rich narrative universe wherein multiple stories can be told through a variety of media. This document contains three original artifacts which together constitute the basis for such a commercially salable Intellectual Property: a Codex (aka Story Bible), a Teleplay, and a Game Design Document. The three documents are included as Appendices A, B and C, and are preceded by a text originally constituted as the Prospectus for the project, reformatted and now including a chapter analyzing the production of the artifacts and a bibliography. *Technopolis Gotham* is intended for the upper range of the Young Adult spectrum, Juniors in High School to College Sophomores, and is written in the Science Fiction genre.

Technopolis Gotham: An Original Transmedia Intellectual Proptery

by

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A Thesis

Approved by the Department of Communication Studies

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PREFACE

The main body of this document describes the goals and methodology for my creative project thesis, including a description of the three artifacts which comprise the final product of the project and an annotated bibliography of the source material for my methodology; the three artifacts themselves are included as Appendices A, B and C.

The origination and development of an Intellectual Property is a highly complex and difficult process, even in well understood traditional formats such as book-to-film franchises like *Harry Potter* or *The Hunger Games*; the addition of the elements of the burgeoning 'transmedia' movement (I will discuss this term below) adds levels of uncharted intricacy. The main body of the document, formerly constituted as the project's Prospectus, is therefore vital in establishing my own perspective on the 'white space' within commercial entertainment production. In short, there is a market for deeply engaging narratives which encourage and incorporate audience collaboration: hence my path to charting a new 'blue ocean' within the entertainment sector focuses upon audience inclusion.

The three artifacts presented here represent a series of narrative innovations addressing the most prominent narrative media within the contemporary commercial entertainment landscape, all intended to act in concert towards a unified goal: a coherent and consistent approach to transmedia production that comprehends audience collaboration from the initial design phase all the way through product support. In short, this project is the culmination of years of dreaming and planning: it is an ambitious attempt to innovate within the meta-cultural institution of Storytelling, and I thank everyone taking the time to read this prospectus.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

CHAPTER ONE

Project Objectives: Storytelling, Educational, and Professional Goals

This project has two major objectives with one important corollary: first, I hope to innovate new storytelling techniques to maximize the historically unprecedented and richly complex media ecosystem of the 21st century; second, I hope to create a framework of entertainment properties with a very strong but subtle educational component. The corollary goal is to present, by achieving my two primary objectives, a highly polished and salable product that can establish my professional reputation as a storyteller and transmedia producer.

My first goal, the innovation of storytelling techniques, is predicated upon my own understanding of the transmedia philosophy. The first instance of the term 'transmedia' in the sense of contemporary usage is in Marsha Kinder's *Playing with Power* from 1993. Briefly, 'transmedia' is an emergent trend within IP production and marketing: while there is no universally accepted definition, two common components are present in most cases – the use of separate media formats to advance distinct plot lines that are interconnected in a metanarrative, and the matching of a given plot line with the medium most suited to the stylistic and thematic needs of that (sub-)plot. Some variation of this definition is currently used by academics such as Elizabeth Evans, in the recent *Transmedia Television*, and Henry Jenkins in a number of his books, as well as working practitioners like Jesse Schell in his *The Art of Game Design: A Book of Lenses.*

Relevant to the concept of transmedia is a practice traditionally called the "shared story world", wherein multiple authors contribute to the construction of a narrative – one commercially successful example is the *Wild Cards* series edited by

George R.R. Martin. By definition, transmedia projects are so large that they will inevitably be a shared story world to a greater or lesser degree: I have been unable to discover any major commercial property wherein all of the novels, graphic novels, screenplays, games etc. for a single property were written by a single individual. I believe that it is a natural evolution of transmedia narratives-*as*-shared story worlds to include the audience within this process. It is my view that audience members engaged enough to pursue multiple plot lines across various media at sometimes considerable expense will reasonably expect to have some degree of input into the curve of the metanarrative's arc, thus making audience collaboration the third pillar of my own transmedia philosophy.

The importance of audience collaboration is supported by the enormous amount of 'fan fiction' on the internet – unofficial non-canonical material written by fans passionately engaged in the *Star Wars, Star Trek* and *Harry Potter* universes, among many others. It is also underscored by the *Mass Effect* 'ending controversy' that has surrounded that franchise since the release of the final installment in the (initial) series on March 6, 2012. As of the time of this writing (4/15/12), over sixty thousand fans have signed up on the 'Retake Mass Effect' Facebook page – this group is determined to have studio and publisher, BioWare and Electronic Arts respectively, rework the ending sequence of the final game to provide what the marketing of *Mass Effect* promised: "Your choices matter." The players' responses underscore that the promised level of audience collaboration was not achieved, regardless of whether the ending was narratively coherent (or endings, as there were multiple, but ultimately similar, final cinematics).   This failure to meet expectations set by the producers themselves is of no

small interest to me, given my own professional goals, and I will return to this point when introducing my own model for transmedia development below.

My second goal, designing a substantial educational component within the IP originated in this project (and in all of my future IPs as well, as a professional goal), is just as ambitious an objective as the first goal. In the spirit of Benjamin Franklin's vision of an educated and volunteer-oriented American citizenry as the staunchest base for Democracy, liberty and freedom, I hope to provide both those still in the traditional educational system and those already in the workforce with the opportunity and encouragement to increase their literacy and numeracy in the humanities and sciences. To this end, I hope to provide inducements within the context of the IP's narrative universe to encourage player growth, such as the opportunity to have a player's avatar 'canonized' within continuity and the gaining of competitive advantage within multiplayer environments. The specific narrative and game mechanic innovations designed to implement this goal will be described in detail within the methodology and artifact sections; within this section it is necessary to discuss the larger intent – to support the beleaguered American educational system.

My mother, sister, mother-in-law, several aunts and cousins, as well as one of my closest friends are all public school teachers, and based on discussions with them I feel safe in asserting that our system, both in Texas and nationally, faces serious hurdles with more looming on the horizon. Democracy is built upon the concept of informed choice, and that concept is undermined in direct relation to the erosion of the educational system. It is not hyperbole to say that one of the greatest enemies facing American and international democracy is the slow decay into an overwhelmingly undereducated and uncritical society. In this Era of Wikipedia, real literacy, numeracy

and critical thinking ability are more important than ever to sustain this glorious American experiment of freedom, liberty and justice for all. Given the massive size and scope of the economic impact of the entertainment industries and their massive cultural roles as well, it is incumbent upon all of its constituent members that this sector provides social benefits beyond increasing profit margins and production efficiencies.

I believe that my professional goals for this project, namely finding a party interested in producing or financing the production of the intellectual property originated herein and thereby establishing myself professionally, will be a natural byproduct of successfully achieving my two primary goals. Regardless of whether that belief is born out, successfully achieving my primary goals will insure that this creative project is worthy of the attention of those interested in the future of storytelling and entertainment IPs.

CHAPTER TWO

Methodology

While guidebooks and reference works abound on the topic of creating individual media such as the novel or the screenplay, there is as yet no established methodology for designing a transmedia property. There in fact have been a plethora of works on the subject published within the last 18 months, as a quick search of Amazon's book section with the key word "transmedia" attests. Given the sheer newness of the term, manuals on the subject can be considered somewhat premature at this point: depending on the definition of the term, nearly every commercial IP, or conversely nearly none, may count as a transmedia project. Having defined my own three-pillared foundation for transmedia in the previous section, I will outline my own theory of transmedia design in this section.

Tailoring a design philosophy for transmedia production requires that it structurally comprehend the three pillars: multiple interweaving plotlines, matching individual plots with a fitting medium, and incorporation of multiple authors including audience members. While the implementation of the first two criteria will vary only slightly depending on the size and scope of the project, the third is perhaps the most variable, in that all contributors will not be equal and the requirements and costs of production vary widely from medium to medium. Some authors will be charged with writing whole arcs and creating casts of characters, while audience-level contributors may only have the capability to add stories of smaller scale, or even just individual characters, through official channels.

To better explicate my stance on this issue, let me use two terms borrowed from software design: extensibility and scalability. A program is extensible when it can easily handle the addition of new features without crashing – in the transmedia context, I say that a narrative is extensible when the rules of continuity are structured in such a way that collaborators have the freedom to add new settings, artifacts, and characters that do not contradict existing and future continuity. A program is scalable when it can handle an expanding user base and/or increasing volumes of data without crashing – in the transmedia context, I say that a narrative is scalable when it can handle an indefinite number of unique plotlines without losing the structure of continuity. In other words, the world and its properties must be expansive enough for contributors to author stories that express their own vision of the narrative universe while keeping that personal vision within the bounds of continuity.

To achieve this goal and establish the three pillars effectively, a transmedia design philosophy must therefore chart a methodological trajectory between a starting point and an end state - that is, a singularity of premise that is logically and aesthetically expanded into a fully-fledged narrative universe. This end state, the narrative universe, is in turn the ground bed for the creative energies of all involved – if sufficiently constructed it will channel all of excitement and passion of creators and audience alike without breaking. This may seem like an unwieldy mixed metaphor, but the process of transmedia narrative design itself is a complex amalgam of strategies originally devised within the various media that make up the contemporary entertainment ecology.

Within my design methodology, the first stage of narrative design for a transmedia property is the selection of a premise. That a story should be the

exploration or extrapolation of a single premise is a common theme within a variety of guidebooks on writing for all sorts of media: for the sake of citation I shall point to Robert McKee's *Story* (1997), which is focused upon the production of screenplays, but from a highly theoretical and abstract viewpoint, thus making it applicable to general narrative design. McKee's main argument on this point is narrative coherence: trying to include multiple premises quickly becomes a logistical problem on both thematic and structural levels. In his view, focusing upon a single premise allows the author greater creative freedom through clarity of purpose, and the quality of the story produced in such a manner will by nature of the process contain sufficient depth to please a variety of tastes; whereas the messy confusion of multiple premises is likely to please no reader.

McKee also breaks the traditional concept of premise into two parts, the premise and the controlling idea; it is still the case that each story should have only one of each. Premise, for McKee, is an opened ended question, always following the pattern of "what would happen if…" An example is: "What would happen if Humanity faced extinction at the hands of an alien species?" The controlling idea is the story's specific answer to that question, and is in turn generated from two parts: value + cause. The value represents the core moral or ethical ideal represented within the story, and the cause is the specific event (the climax), that renders that value positively or negatively. An example of a positive valuation would be: "The nobility (value) of Humanity overcomes the aliens' wanton destruction through the self-sacrifice of a band of heroes (cause)." A negative valuation would be: "The greed (value) of the aliens blinds them to Humanity's true worth, and they are defeated by a band of heroes (cause)." In general, a story gives either a positive valuation to the Protagonist's values, or a negative valuation to the Antagonist's values. As I will discuss more in a moment, one of the primary modes of

dramatization is to oscillate between positive and negative valuations as the plot progresses: i.e. the aliens greed will seemingly give them the upper hand, only to be revealed as the source of their greatest weakness; or the humans' nobility will seem to make them too weak to defeat the aliens, only to prove to be their greatest strength.

Within the context of a transmedia narrative, I believe that all the individual stories and plotlines should conform to the meta-premise that establishes the narrative universe, but should each in turn explore their own premise and controlling idea. This is the basis of building up a transmedia narrative: the metaplot should be constructed in a fractal mode, with the individual subplots combining to achieve the execution of the meta-premise/controlling idea. Let us explore this fractal nature of transmedia narratives in greater detail.

The narrative fractal, as I term it, is a four part structure that provides the framework for building scenes from events, and in turn subplots from scenes, stories from subplots, and the meta-story from stories; the four parts are: the Hook, the Turn, the Twist, and the Fork. This structure is a mélange of concepts from a large number of writers and theorists of writing, but I can point to McKee's *Story*, David Bordwell's *The Way Hollywood Tells It* (2006), and Chris Klug's insights in *Interactive Storytelling for Video Games* (Lebowitz, J. & Klug, C., 2011), as major contributors. In McKee's terminology, each story event or plot point should be a *reversal* of some sort: either a reversal of a character's expectations (and/or by extension the audience's expectations), or the reversal of the 'charge' of a value, i.e. switching the valuation of that moral ideal from positive to negative or vice versa. Thus a scene starts with the Hook: a character or group is pulled or 'hooked' into a situation to which they must react. Next comes the Turn, wherein their reaction results in a new condition or state that was unexpected: a

new course of action or new stance must be adopted. The reaction to the Turn causes yet another new condition or state, the Twist: the reality of the situation is revealed as contrary to the perceptions or wishes of the character, or unknown causal forces now become known. The reaction to the Twist results in the Fork: the character is changed on multiple levels (physical, psychological, social, etc.) each providing the narrative impetus for a new Hook.

My terminology for the narrative fractal is metaphorical. The Hook of each scene should be tied to the narrative thread of previous continuity. Even if the reader is unaware of that preexisting continuity, this will provide a sense of consistency that will stand up to scrutiny, and critical scrutiny is an unavoidable part of the transmedia experience. Fans will test the narrative coherence of the world through their passionate engagement and immersion – failing that test is a fatal flaw for transmedia properties. 'Turn' and 'Twist' are descriptors of the process of reversal, serving as reminders to the author that variety and originality must be infused as often as possible for the sake of depth and richness, two vital qualities for narrative in general and transmedia universes in particular. 'Fork' refers to the old idea, attributed to many different sources, that a good ending should 'open more doors than it closes,' an idea especially relevant to transmedia development. While each scene should be constructed on this model (with variability and flexibility), so should each Act, Chapter, or Sequence (depending on the medium in use) also be constructed on this model with scenes rather than events as the basic unit; and in turn stories should be built up out of Acts, Chapters, etc. following this model.

This is not to say that all Chapters in a novel should have four scenes, and that each novel's chapter count should be some multiple of four. Rather, as many events as it

takes to construct the model should be employed to build up a scene, and so on up the fractal scale. As an example, three events might be necessary to constitute the Hook for a scene: a character is introduced in her new workplace, a co-worker dopes her coffee with a mysterious liquid, and she is subsequently sent home after becoming ill; yet only one event might be needed to introduce the Turn, five for the Twist, and two to provide the Fork. Thus the narrative fractal is not a rigid structure that constricts creativity, but rather a flexible framework that empowers spontaneity and originality. In this manner, the narrative fractal is used to expand a single premise (and controlling idea) into a whole narrative universe.

The next component of a narrative design philosophy for transmedia involves the selection of medium most appropriate to a given story. In my view, there are two aspects of any given medium that are crucial to this selection process: formatting and structuring. By formatting I mean the specific design of the presentation and setting for consumption; by structuring, I mean the specific ways in which content must be structured for apprehensibility within that medium. For example, television and film share a common structuring, i.e. motion pictures and synchronized sound with conventions of aesthetic style, but they have different formatting (screen size, settings of consumption); whereas comics and novels have similar formatting, i.e. the folded 'book', but different structuring between the pure text nature of the novel and the hybridization of static image and text within the comic. These two aspects of a medium work in concert to shape the aesthetic experience of a narrative – reading *The Hunger Games* novel at home alone is obviously a very different experience than seeing *The Hunger Games* as a feature film in a theater with fellow audience members, which is in turn different than watching the feature as a TV broadcast, or on Blu-Ray, at home

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alone. A complete and thorough scheme for matching the artistic intent of a narrative with the aesthetic experience of a medium would require a thesis length treatise; for my present purposes it is enough to acknowledge these two vital factors, structuring and formatting, as the keys for selection.

One more important component is necessary for the construction of an immersive narrative universe or 'Secondary World,' as Tolkien called it. That component is a rule structure to act as prescriptive/corrective mechanism for authors: the basis for this idea is taken from the classic 'tabletop' Role Playing Game (RPG) *Dungeons & Dragons* (D&D), as well as Marc Leblanc's MDA game design methodology (Hunicke, Leblanc & Zubek, 2007). MDA stands for Mechanics, Dynamics and Aesthetics, which is a descriptive title for the process of iterative game design. Mechanics refers to the coding of the game's rules; Dynamics refers to the feedback loop between Player and Game State that emerge from the mechanics in and across game sessions, and Aesthetics for the emotional responses evoked within the Player by the dynamics. If the dynamics are not evoking the proper aesthetics, then the mechanics must be altered; hence the 'iterative' label for this design methodology.

By metaphorical extension to the process of transmedia narrative design, I see the 'Aesthetics' level as the emotional experience of the audience as evoked by the dynamics, 'Dynamics' as the interplay of narrative content and medium of presentation (specifically it's formatting and structuring), and 'Mechanics' as the rules of continuity that retain the coherence of that universe even as it expands. The importance of Mechanics for narrative can best be demonstrated by Gygax and Arneson's D&D (1977). D&D's statistical and mechanical approach to modeling characters, creatures and items, allows the Game Master to adjudicate the interaction of each of the three

with one another in a consistent and comprehensible manner. This framework allows player groups, guided by the direction of the Game Master, to spontaneously generate adventures that conform to the continuity of the D&D universe, even if they're not always conforming to the rules of good drama. This rule set for the universe can serve both as a template for game sessions and as a general guide for contributors in other media – there have been several notable characters created for novels set within the D&D universe, all of whom conform to the rules of the game. These mechanics do not have to take the form only of algorithms, data tables and dictums: the mechanics of Tolkien's universe are deep and rich, but presented entirely in prose narration in works like *The Silmarillion*.

I use the term *heximetry* to refer to this process of constructing the mechanics of the narrative universe: *hexis* is an Attic Greek word used by the Stoic Philosophers to refer to a state of being or condition of the universe (Sambursky, 1959). Heximetry covers the metaphysical and natural laws of the universe, as well as the social and cultural traditions, i.e. history and societies therein. *Idiotis* is the Attic Greek for person, and so *idiography* is the special sub-branch of heximetry devoted to the construction of characters and artifacts. *Chronos* and *topos* are the well-known Attic words for time and space, respectively, and thus *chronotopy* is the sub-branch of heximetry devoted to the construction of settings. The most common heximetry, found in works of realistic literary fiction, is simply the heximetry of Primary Reality, so-called by Tolkien; i.e. the story is set within our world. Fantasy, Sci-Fi, and Horror authors use heximetry altered from Primary Reality to a greater or lesser degree in order to create their own Secondary World. While I am the first to use this terminology of *heximetry, idiography* and *chronotopy*, this process exists (or fails to) in every narrative endeavor – failure to

produce a self-consistent heximetry will unfailingly result in plot holes and/or gaps in the story's internal logic.

So to sum up my methodological philosophy for transmedia narrative design: a meta-premise is extended into an entire narrative universe via the narrative fractal under the guidance of a heximetry unique to that world, selecting the appropriate medium for individual stories according to the aesthetic intent. This is a simple summation of a very large and complex process; to better understand both the process and its goals, I will now describe the artifacts which I will produce using this methodology in the fulfillment of my Creative Project Thesis.

CHAPTER THREE

Artifacts for the Project

The three artifacts which will comprise the Creative Project Thesis are: a screenplay which will act as the 'leader', introducing the audience to the world of *Technopolis Gotham*; a game design doc, which will describe the core of an exciting hybrid genre videogame that will allow audience members to create potentially canonical characters (more on that below); a 'codex', which serves as the equivalent of a 'story bible' as used in serialized TV production. These three artifacts will sufficiently establish the transmedia universe for full scale production, allowing for the realization of the property as well as providing room for expansion – a series of novels and comics might be warranted as more economical starting points for audience engagement, if the property is found to have merit by an interested production company or entertainment conglomerate (i.e. Disney, Electronic Arts, etc.). The first major arc of *Technopolis Gotham* will be modeled on the fractal: the screenplay will provide the Hook, the first videogame will provide the Turn, a second screenplay will provide the Twist, and a second game will provide the Fork – laying the groundwork for future major arcs set within the *TG* universe.

The cinematic medium is by definition best suited to the visual depiction of action in a linear narrative; hence a cinematic text will set the visual tone for an entire property, as well as providing the canonical physical description of important characters and settings. Whereas novels and comics allow the audience to fill in details with their own imaginations, and allow for the pleasure of pondering a given event or image, a feature film employs the power and majesty of pure spectacle to engage the audience

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and clearly delineate the world so that the whole audience shares the same imaginary space. This strategy avoids the difficulties associated with properties originated in novels which are then adapted or extended to the cinema, typified by the comments often heard in such situations, statements like: "This isn't how I imagined it to be…" and "It looked different in my head." By introducing the audience to a property via the cinema, such disappointment is avoided, although clearly at the cost of vastly increased production and marketing costs compared with the novel or a serialized comic.

Given this tremendous cost differential, the novel and the comic are arguably superior 'launch vehicles', and it must be stated that the time and technical constraints of this creative project thesis were factors in the selection of a 'leader' medium, thereby barring a novel or comic. However, these negative factors were not the main reason for choosing the feature film as 'leader'. The primary factor for selecting cinema as the introductory medium was the low total investment for the audience member. The cost of a movie ticket, Blu-Ray disc, iTunes or Amazon digital download is comparable to the price of a new hardback novel or the total cost of a serialized graphic novel (i.e. a comic series), while the time investment for 'consumption' of the film is significantly less than the latter two options. A second major factor in the selecting the medium of the moving image as 'leader' text for this property is the possibility for monetization of the artifact via ticket sales in theatrical release, sales of physical and digital copies for home theatre, and licensing fees for broadcast and streaming, all of which present significant opportunities to achieve profitability and to expand the audience base.

As the 'leader' text for the *Technopolis Gotham* property, the screenplay will introduce the world via the story of two teenage characters, Julia "Jules" Kidd and Ripley "Rip" Rayburn.   Structurally, the screenplay will be based upon the narrative

fractal as described above: along with the main plot, there are additional character development plots for the two main characters, each following the fractal. There will be an additional plot with its own fractal arc, serving as a set of 'act breaks' and an epilogue which will hint at further developments in the arc. This secondary plot will illustrate an important period in the youth of Nikola Tesla, a central character in the *Technopolis Gotham* universe – it will provide hints to the overarching plot of the entire first major arc set within *TG*. All of these various plots will tie into the metanarrative – in order to fit them all into film while staying within the standard runtime of contemporary cinema, many scenes will perform several duties at once, furthering multiple plotlines through the combination of dialog and action in each scene. The film will also hint at successful strategies for the first videogame, as well as give clues to the location of narrative and item 'Easter Eggs' hidden within the game.

The Moving Image, in its dual incarnations of Cinema and Television, was undoubtedly one of the great cultural achievements of the 20th century; it was also that century's most powerful and emblematic narrative medium. The Interactive Image, primarily in its most pervasive incarnation, the videogame, plays that role for the 21st century. While breathtakingly capable of incorporating most every preexisting narrative medium, with some necessary modifications of format, into a single text, uniquely the interactive image births a whole new cosmos of experiential possibility by generating a feedback loop between audience and text. In the midst of this innately innovative medium's aesthetic mechanics, a new cybernetic organism arises: each audience interaction with the text produces a new and unique experience going far beyond the bounds of traditional narrative media, transporting the inter-actor to a new plane of participatory art.

Port Radium, my design for the first game set within the *TG* universe, is a hybrid genre game that combines elements of the First Person Shooter (FPS), Role-Playing Game (RPG), and Adventure Game (AG) genres. Points of interest are the game's focus on fully customizable characters with extensive item & inventory management, open exploration and slowly mounting tension within the single-player content, and fast paced tactical action within cooperative multiplayer modes. Exposition of the narrative of *TG* will be expanded in scope and depth in *PR*'s single player mode, while 'environmental' and 'incidental' storytelling techniques will advance the narrative in the action-heavy multiplayer modes.

PR is intended to extend the audience base and deepen their level of engagement with unique gameplay mechanics, character customizability and advancement, while also serving as an entry point for audience collaboration: in *PR*, players will have the opportunity to craft 'canonical' characters. By advancing to a certain level of achievement and total play time, players are guaranteed that their character is granted existence within the canonical *TG* universe. This means that their character – complete with its specific look, name, and attributes (each when applicable) – may be used in the capacity of an 'extra', i.e. a non-speaking character used to fill out a scene or scenes, within future narratives in films/TV series/webisodes, novelizations, or serialized comics. Special events and achievements will allow a select group (i.e. a small number!) of player-characters to achieve the status of minor character, i.e. a character with lines of dialog and some impact on plot and/or major characters' development.

PR will use a core mechanic as an educational tool: a fictitious element 'dynamonium', has some amazing properties which serve as the narrative basis for fantastic powers within the world of *TG*. By subjecting dynamonium crystals to radio

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waves via frequency and amplitude modulation, 'piezo-energetic' effects are achieved: high, medium, and low categories in both types of modulation produce a total of nine base effects, which can be combined to create more complex effects. In this way, players will be exposed to a variety of scientific and mathematical concepts, such as wave theory, modulation, the piezoelectric effect (metaphorically extended here), oscillation, standing waves, interference, etc. By mastering this mechanic to advance their player character and customize the avatar's powers, the players will achieve greater numeracy and scientific literacy.

Codex is the term I have chosen for the 'Story Bible' of transmedia universes, in an attempt to differentiate it from those artifacts, primarily found in Television production. The impetus for this dichotomy is a desire to highlight the focus on the transmedia nature of content production as opposed to the purely single medium domain of the Story Bible. A writer for a TV series must peruse the SB to conform to the show's continuity, as well as being knowledgeable on every 'aired' episode of that series. A transmedia universe, such as *Star Wars*, is simply too large for most writers to be fully and intimately knowledgeable thereof, and it is with this in mind that the Codex differs from the SB. Just as with a SB, the Codex must be a living document, constantly incorporating newly developed content: one of its primary functions must be as a reference list for all published and canonical material. A Codex, however, must include a rules-based rubric for heximetry and its sub-branches of idiography and chronotopy, given that creators and writers may be working in media within which narrative is a secondary or corollary concern, such as card games, tabletop RPGs, and videogames. Hence the codex produced for *TG* will include the basic rubric, a set of character biographies, settings with histories, and the initial reference list (consisting of the

screenplay & videogame). The codex will also contain general art direction notes to guide the selection of medium and the production of aesthetic themes (both visual and aural) therein.

These three artifacts will provide a solid basis for launching production of the *Technopolis Gotham* universe; in particular, the codex will be a suitable foundation for the generation of novels and serialized comics, which can serve as lower cost leader texts. The *TG* universe is unique and innovative, and with the proper budgeting and marketing, it can become a successful long-term commercial property that provides engaging entertainment and educational value to millions of people in America and beyond.

CHAPTER FOUR

Review of the Literature

Over the last half dozen years or so, literally hundreds of books and articles have served as inspiration and have given direction to this project in terms of methodology and design philosophy: listing them all is at this point is a Sisyphean task which I will not undertake. The following works have contributed most directly to the current form of my design philosophy and production methodology. The first two entries are not in alphabetical order with the rest of the list, and they give the citation for the works as a whole, with the individual chapters cited below. These two books are edited works in a series, and both contain a wealth of material vital to my interests – this method of citing them, while somewhat atypical, is the most efficient; the chapters are listed alphabetically by author as a concession to APA formatting.

The following are all chapters within Harrigan, P. & Wardrip-Fruin, N, (Eds.). (2007). *Second Person: Role-Playing and Story in Games and Playable Media*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Borgstrom, Rebecca. "Structure and Meaning in Role-Playing Game Design." pp. 57-66. Using her design for the tabletop RPG *Exalted* as an example, Borgstrom discusses the unique, collaborative generation of meaning within that genre of games. The experience involved in playing tabletop RPGs is determined by each game's ruleset, and the player group's communal agreement as to the employment of that ruleset.

Costikyan, G. "Games, Storytelling, and Breaking the String". pp. 5-14. Costikyan discusses the union of game and narrative within modern popular culture by giving a brief history thereof. While he is a noted critic of seeing games as stories *per se*, in this essay he concedes that interesting hybrid forms are possible and will continue to develop.

Hite, K. "Narrative Structure and Creative Tension in *Call of Cthulu*". pp. 31-40. Hite discusses the ways in which the rules of the *Call of Cthulu* tabletop RPG universe work to impose a consistent narrative structure within and across play sessions. Unlike *D&D*, in which player-characters are ultimately limited only by the level cap (i.e. the highest level of achievement possible), *CoC* employs a mechanic whereby the P-C is inevitably driven mad by the weight of the horrors they encounter.

Martin, G.R.R. "On the *Wild Cards* Series". pp. 15-24. Martin, a noted author, discusses the nature of shared story worlds by relating his own experiences with the *Wild Cards* series, which he co-created and edited with a circle of friends. Interestingly, the series' genesis emerged from regular tabletop RPG sessions he game-mastered; the games were set in the *Superheroes* universe.

Mechner, J. "*The Sands of Time*: Crafting a Video Game Story". pp. 111-120. Mechner, the celebrated lead designer of the *Prince of Persia* series of games, uses that series to illustrate the very real differences between narrative in videogames and traditional, narrative-centric media. He stresses the commonly recited axiom that the story must serve the gameplay; he also provides examples of the spreadsheet formatting of game writing (as opposed to the screenplay or novel formats).

Mona, E. "From the Basement to the Basic Set: The Early Years of *D&D*". pp. 25-30. Mona discusses the development of *Dungeons & Dragons* by Gary Gygax and David Arneson. The game emerged from the War Game simulation genre, and its ruleset developed into the industry standard known today over a series of iterations.

Wilson, K. "One Story, Many Media". pp. 91-93. Wilson's short essay discusses some of the issues associated with adapting an intellectual property from one media to another; specifically, from videogames and tabletop RPGs to board games. He stresses the importance of capturing the 'essence' of the original property while utilizing the strengths of the target medium.

The following are all chapters from Harrigan, P. & Wardrip-Fruin, N, (Eds.). (2009). *Third Person: Authoring and Exploring Vast Narratives.* Cambridge: MIT Press. the book cited directly above.

Bartle, R.A. "Alice and Dorothy Play Together". pp. 105-117. Celebrated game designer Richard Bartle discusses the future of Virtual Worlds (and their subset MMOs) by introducing a new typology of the form. 'Alice worlds' give the player no direction and total freedom, taking their name from Alice of L. Carroll's stories; 'Dorothy worlds' require players to 'follow the yellow brick road', i.e. they give players little true freedom but with highly polished worlds and gameplay; 'Wendy worlds', provide a middle point, allowing players much freedom to explore, while also giving them direction and guidance. Bartle believes the most successful VWs and MMOs of the future will be Wendy worlds.

Glancy, A.S. "World without End: The *Delta Green* Open Campaign Setting". pp. 77-85. Glancy describes the intricate process of creating the setting for the *Delta Green* campaign, set within the *Call of Cthulu* tabletop RPG universe. The *CoC* universe is

based upon the Cthulu mythos, originated by H.P. Lovecraft and expanded by a variety of authors. Hence the Cthulu mythos and the process of writing and designing the *DG* campaign are both prime examples of transmedia production.

Hite, K. "Multicampaign Setting Design for Role-Playing Games". pp. 67-73. Tabletop RPGs are the most "open world" (i.e. player directed & authored) of all genres, in that the narratives generated by play sessions are primarily the product of the player group. Hite discusses the nature of designing settings that allow for the maximum flexibility of player choice while still presenting the probability of generating an interesting narrative experience for the players.

Laws, R.D. "Intellectual Property Development in the Adventure Games Industry: A Practitioner's View".   pp. 59-65. Laws, a veteran writer and game designer, discusses the unique challenges of developing transmedia properties (without explicitly invoking that term). He stresses that one point of major difficulty for writers of such properties is the desire for a wealth of detail on the part of RPG players and gamers, contrasted with the simplicity of plot demanded by many traditional narrative media (i.e. too many characters making for a bad movie or unreadable book). He also notes that there is currently no completely satisfying methodology for producing such properties.

Parkin, L. "Truths Universally Acknowledged: How the "Rules" of *Doctor Who* Affect the Writing". pp. 13-24. Parkin situates the *Doctor Who* universe, terming it an "unfolding text", within a tradition of multimedia, long-running narratives such as Sherlock Holmes, Robin Hood, and King Arthur. He notes that writers must obey both established continuity and the expectation of fans, which presents a sort of unofficial

ruleset of continuity: i.e. fans expect a *DW* story to 'feel' as certain way, regardless of that story's adherence to or deviation from prior stories.

Rolston, K. "My Story Never Ends". pp. 119-123. Rolston is the narrative designer of the first four *Elder Scrolls* games, among other work. He shares his experiences in creating both open world games and more traditionally structured questing games. He argues that one of the primary strengths of both tabletop and computer RPGs is that they do not need to end: there is no necessity for providing a conclusion as in traditional narrative media.

Williams, W.J. "In What Universe?". pp. 25-32. Williams discusses the work that goes into building a convincing fictional world (i.e. the processes of heximetry), as well as his own experiences writing in the *Wild Cards* shared story world. Despite enjoying collaboration with talented peers, Williams is somewhat pessimistic about Shared Story World anthologies and novels surviving as a generic form.
The following are all complete works or cited as chapters within an edited volume.

Klug, C. & Lebowitz, J. (2011). *Interactive Storytelling for Video Games: A Player-Centered Approach for Creating Memorable Characters and Stories*. New York: Focal Press. Lebowtiz expands his MA thesis from typology of videogame genres bases on narrative mechanics and a subsequent survey to determine the habits and preferences of players in relation to that scheme, into a full-fledge guide to writing interactive stories for videogames. Veteran author and game designer Chris Klug provides insights and a frequent counterpoint to Lebowitz's own theoretical stance.

Howard, J. (2008). *Quests: Design, Theory and History in Games and Narratives*. Wellesley: A.K. Peters. Howard uses the medieval concept of the allegorical Quest to discuss the generation of meaning in videogames, on both theoretical and practical

levels, going so far as to provide tutorial projects for the Neverwinter Nights modding software. One interesting highlight is his discussion of the work of Richard Garriott in producing various levels of meaning in *Ultima IV*. Overall, this is an excellent book for anyone interested in the narrative and game design.

Carroll, N. (1990). *Philosophy of Horror*. New York: Routledge. Carroll gives a four part formula for horror stories of the Lovecraftian variety: onset, discovery, confirmation, and confrontation. This four part structure is specific to detective/horror hybrid stories first made popular by H.P. Lovecraft, and is perhaps indicative of a more basic narrative pattern. This is one of the influences on the generation of my concept of the Narrative Fractal.

Huntley, H.E. (1970). *The Divine Proportion*. Mineola: Dover. This book is a non-technical mathematical work concerning ϕ, the Greek letter for 'phi', denoting the concept of the 'golden ratio'. Useful in the present context is Huntley's discussion of aesthetics and the nature of beauty: he describes beauty as the recognition of patterns in unexpected places and the discovery of new patterns. This is a crucial philosophical underpinning to the narrative fractal – I believe a story is beautiful when it conforms to the pattern described by the fractal in a unique and original fashion.

Sheldon, L. (2004). *Character Development and Storytelling for Games*. Boston: Cengage Learning. Sheldon provides his perspective as a veteran writer in games and traditional media, with a good combination of practical advice and theoretical discussion. Helpfully, in an appendix he adds a primer on building a writing team for larger projects.

McKee, R. (1997). *Story: Substance, structure, style, and the principles of screenwriting*. London: Methuen. McKee's work is already considered a classic by many writers across a variety of media, due to the deep theoretical approach he takes to the subject, making this book applicable to narrative design in general. As a rich resource on narrative mechanics, this book is another major inspiration for the narrative fractal.

Bordwell, D. (2006). *The Way Hollywood Tells It*. Berkeley: U. of California Press. Bordwell's book is an historical examination of the narrative structure and style of Hollywood films, from 1960 through the middle of the first decade of the 21st century. He discusses a four part structure, developed by Kristin Thompson, for analyzing the narratives in feature films: Setup, Complicating Action, Development and Climax, Bordwell's discussion of Thompson's system is another major influence on the narrative fractal.

Fine, G.A. (1983). *Shared Fantasy: Role-Playing Games as Social Worlds*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Fine uses an ethnographic approach to explore the world of gamers in tabletop RPGs, at a relatively early period in their [the games] development. Having participated in a large number of gaming sessions as a 'participant-as-observer', Fine relates discusses many topics still relevant today, particularly the relation of aggression and sexuality to gamers and their in-game personas.

van Vogt, A.E. (1964). Complication in the Science Fiction Story. In L.A. Eshbach (Ed.), *Of Worlds Beyond* (53-66). Chicago: Advent. One of the most successful of the early modern Sci-Fi authors, A.E. van Vogt gives practical advice on writing: he stresses that using a methodological framework to guide the writing process increases

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creativity rather than constricting it, by allowing the writer to weave multiple plot threads in a coherent manner.

Jones, G. (2002). *Killing Monsters: Why Children Need Fantasy, Super-Heroes, and Make-Believe Violence.* New York: Basic Books. Basing his argument in scientific research – clinical experimentation and ethnographic case studies supported by complementary anecdotal evidence – Jones makes a strong case that 'violent' media, including videogames, when properly designed and presented, actually helps children and adolescents develop fully rounded personalities, supporting their innate capability to channel their own natural aggression, as well as providing a place to deal with the violence of the modern world. Thus framed, the problem isn't exposing children to violent media, but when and how to expose them to it.

Despain, W (ed.) (2009). *Writing for Video Game Genres: From FPS to RPG.* Wellesley: A.K. Peters.This collection of essays on the specifics of writing for the various game genres runs the gamut from the more narrative-centric types such as the Role-Playing Game to games with seemingly little or no narrative content such as the broad Casual category (i.e. Tetris, Solitaire, Bejeweled, etc.). Helpful examples of documentation and formatting are included as appendices; despite each chapter being focused upon a single genre or thematic group (i.e. Sci-Fi or Fantasy), nearly every chapter contains insights helpful to any writer for games.

Rodowick, D.N. (2007). *The Virtual Life of Film.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press. Rodowick discusses the historical development of the film industry through the lens of the co-developed critical apparatus of Cinema Studies. While acquiescing to the fact that 'film' as a specific medium (i.e. silver halide crystals imbedded on a film strip) is

rapidly disappearing, the Moving Image is more alive than ever, and continues to build upon the conventions and traditions that emerged during its 'filmic' period.

Cohen, D.S. & Bustamante II, S.A. (2010). *Producing Games: From Business and Budgets to Creavity and Design.* Boston: Focal Press. Cohen and Bustamante bring their decades of combined experience in developing and producing games to bear in this excellent overview of standard industry practices and procedures. Emphasizing the need to stay on budget (financially & temporally) while maintaining a consistent creative vision, this book provides the template for my game design document.

Castronova, E. (2007). *Exodus to the Virtual World: How Online Fun is Changing Reality.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan. Castronova, a skilled economist and veteran gamer, discusses the ways in which gaming, especially MMO and VW games, is already causing significant economic and social impacts; he also discusses the potential future interaction of game design and governmental policy-making. Along with Jones' *Killing Monsters,* this book is one of the primary influences on my understanding of videogames as the most culturally significant narrative medium of the 21st century.

Johnson, B.D. (2010). *Screen Futures: The Future of Entertainment, Computing and the Devices We Love.* China: Intel Press. Johnson describes the socio-technological developments attending the seemingly endless stream of innovation in digital products: the limited consumer resources of time and money vs. the truly incredible amount of entertainment content available – a vital consideration for any transmedia production.

CHAPTER FIVE

Post-Production Analysis

There is always some level of disparity between any endeavor's initial goals and its ultimate achievements. Having completed the production work on three artifacts, I can state that as with many things in life, the journey was truly as important as the destination. I say "as important" rather than more important á la the folk wisdom, because of the nature of the work: these artifacts hopefully do constitute a salable product, and as such mark my entry into the world of professional narrative design. The theme of this analysis is *contingency*: the ever-present need to realign goals and objectives with reference to both internal and external limitations and opportunities.

The most pressing call of contingency in this process came with the limitations of time – for four and half months prior to my prospectus defense, I'd built up via handwritten notes a whole body of work to be transmuted into the three artifacts of Codex, Screenplay, and Game Design Document. With only five weeks for actual production time, the committee suggested a possible reduction in scope: specifically the excision of one or two of the artifacts from the project.

There are thousands of screenplays written each year, large numbers of story bibles and game design docs produced annually, most of which are lost in a sea of abundance. My hope in ambitiously choosing to produce all three was bipartite: to stand out from the crowd, so to speak, and to demonstrate an understanding of and basic proficiency in transmedia production. I therefore partially redesigned the structure of the property, replacing the series of feature films with serialized and

partially episodic content formatted as a 'TV show', but intended for internet streaming and physical media purchase (i.e. Blu-ray disc packaging).

This redesign was effective on a number of levels: it allowed me to complete all three artifacts on time at a satisfactory level of professional polish while also furthering internal goals of the project. Within the transmedia space, incorporation of the audience's innate desire to contribute material is not currently utilized by any major property, and hence exhibition of the audience's contributions is utterly lacking. A major intent of the project was to provide, originally through the feature films, a space to exhibit player-created characters in cameo and minor roles. The redesign to a serialized 'TV show' allows for more total content, and thus a greater number of opportunities to showcase player-characters.

Another area where contingency arose was the inclusion of educational content within the property design. While the property as-is contains 'spaces' so to speak to include educational content, explicit description of such content and its implementation is lacking. This is due to restrictions of industry standards: demands on the concision of information presentation as well as formatting conventions interrupted my plans to include detailed treatments of intended educational content. As stated above, this content can still be placed within the property with no major restructuring required.

Overall, this project was challenging in matching the scope of ambitions with the limitation of time. Meeting that challenge was excellent preparation for future challenges working within the professional entertainment environment. I once again would like to thank Chris Hansen, Corey Carbonara and Jeff Donahoo for their guidance and support in this process.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Codex for Technopolis Gotham

APPENDIX B

Teleplay

APPENDIX C

Game Design Document

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