Playgrounds for Publishing:

Writers in Established Story Universes

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Shayla Olsen, B.Ed.

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Abstract

Generally downplayed in the literary world as trivial or hack writing, narratives set in established story universes continue to confound publishers, with licenced novels tied into film and television franchises often outselling original fiction, and fanfiction producing serious bestselling new authors from its large online communities. The specific ways in which these creative works may be improving or readying writers are worthy of note in an increasingly blurred publishing and media landscape. While extensive research has been undertaken in the dynamic and evolving topic of fanfiction, less has examined media tie-in writing, and less again has drawn these two forms together for a comparison of their benefits to writers. Outwardly appearing similar and sharing an audience, fanfiction and media tie-ins differ significantly in form, process, authorship, legalities, perceived legitimacy and the role of feedback and community, factors which impact on potential creative and learning benefits to the writers. Surveys and primary interviews with writers of both fan writing forms, critically discussed through a social constructivist lens informed by Vygotskian views on learning and creativity, highlight the advantages of 'playing' in established story universes, particularly in improving writer skill. This research will be of interest to researchers of fan studies and creative writing, to writers seeking pathways to improvement of their craft, and to publishing professionals seeking to better understand the misunderstood practice of writing in established story universes.

Certification of Dissertation

I certify that the ideas, experimental work, results, analyses and conclusions reported in this dissertation are entirely my own effort, except where otherwise acknowledged. I also certify that the work is original and has not been previously submitted for any other award, except where otherwise acknowledged.

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No feat or undertaking of any magnitude is ever accomplished entirely alone. We are social, creative beings, supported and challenged in our every decision by those we surround ourselves with, and, as a result, we grow. Growth is inherently difficult, but worth it, or so I want to believe, and I could not have managed this project without the support and positive challenges provided by the people around me.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

> I don't think of them as other people's universes, or at least not more than they're mine, because they became open to imagining when they were shared. – RivkaT, 2017

The demand for expanded storytelling from our favourite televisual fictions is very real: publishers continue to commission and produce media tie-in novels to keep up with fan appetites, and these continue to make bestseller lists, but for a large community of fans, this is neither fast enough nor immersive enough. Long disregarded as the cultish playground of the incompetent wannabe writer, fanfiction is now an everyday term to many media consumers and an increasingly acceptable hobby for writers, even cited by some as beneficial to their writing practice (Van Parys, 2011a; Hellekson & Busse, 2014; Harris, 2015). Recently, the monetisation of fan works and contentious bestsellers crossing into mainstream publishing have shifted public perception, and highlighted the online community of fandom as a viable and thriving alternative publishing platform from which serious authors are emerging, skilled and publishing-ready (Brennan & Large, 2014; Hellekson & Busse, 2014; Flegel & Roth, 2016). Fanfiction is a dynamic, complex thing, different in numerous ways from the traditional writing and publishing process. What is it, specifically, that is preparing and sharpening these authors, and is it doing the same for tie-in writers? This interdisciplinary research investigates the ways in which writing within an established universe improves writer skill through a comparison of survey and interview responses from writers of fanfiction and licenced tie-in books. These uneasy literary relatives share an audience and a set of established story elements (characters, histories, settings, story arcs) but differ greatly. Tie-in authors are typically highly established professional writers with a corpus of original writing to their name, while the unpaid league of fanfiction is comparatively an amateur's game, the roles of writer, editor and publisher indistinguishable from one another and meaningless in isolation (Clarke, 2009; Brennan & Large, 2014). In this introductory chapter, I will present the literature against which this research sits, demonstrating the current lack of research linking the craft of media tie-in writing with its wild online cousin, and the methodology by which this research is to be conducted.

Background

Academic interest in the fields of fandom is far from novel, but until now it has almost exclusively addressed media tie-in work and fanfiction as independent playrooms. A foundational text in the fanfiction realm is Henry Jenkins' 1992 book *Textual Poachers*. Quoted, cited and expanded upon by many of the authors to follow, Jenkins demonstrates the legitimacy of fandom as a field of study of cultural interest. Though dated now due to the then-unforeseeable social changes wrought by the internet, this landmark work challenges stereotypes of fans as outsiders and passive consumers of mass media content, and establishes the significance of fan writing as a pedagogical tool, capable of scaffolding both text construction and the development of specific technical writing skills (Jenkins, 1992). Jenkins examines the many facets of fandom as it existed in the 1980s and early 1990s from the perspective of both academic and fan, founding a definition of fan culture that lays firm groundwork for exploration by academic writers who came after him in the age of the internet. No foray, or trek, into this field would be comprehensive without mention of the work Jenkins did to define it.

Monica Flegel and Jenny Roth's 'Writing a New Text: The Role of Cyberculture in Fanfiction Writers' Transition to "Legitimate" Publishing' explores the value of the fanfiction writing community in the development of women writers' journey to publication (2016). This work draws on interviews with writers of fanfiction, touching on their experiences both as a member of the community and, in some cases, afterward, when they transitioned into 'legitimate' publishing (Flegel & Roth, 2016). It highlights the ways in which the online platform, the gift economy model, peer feedback and the female-dominated space benefited and challenged women writers, giving them the opportunities and tools they needed to develop confidence and skill, ultimately preparing them for their future careers as professional published authors (Flegel & Roth, 2016). While not a particularly 'meaty' or substantial work, this study begins to examine the benefits of fanfiction to prospective women writers moving into mainstream original publishing. A limitation to this work is a lack of primary evidence: writer responses and opinions used to inform Flegel and Roth's discussion were taken from an existing, publicly-available questionnaire. Also, writing here from the perspective of women fanfiction writers, Flegel and Roth do not specifically include writers licenced to publish within popular franchises, though this concept is touched on very superficially in their more solid 2015 work, 'Legitimacy, Validity, and Writing for Free: Fan Fiction, Gender, and the Limits of (Unpaid) Labor'. This paper draws attention to the feminisation of the online fan writing community and

the way this functions to devalue creative ventures undertaken in this space as 'fun' or 'play' as opposed to the 'real work' of anything copyrighted (Flegel & Roth, 2015).

In this current research, the concept of writing as 'play' has been adopted in a positive sense, stemming from the researcher's background in early childhood education, where it is established through the works of Lev Vygotsky (1956, 1960, 1962, 1967, 1978, 1982) that learning occurs naturally through social play. His research is generally considered linked with the development of very young children, on which many of his studies are based, but his works also encompass the development and maintenance of creativity in adult artists. When learners engage readily with a concept to experiment and imitate what they see being performed by experts, especially in conjunction with learned others, they build and refine knowledge, understanding and skill (Vygotsky, 1982). Scholars of creativity Seana Moran and Vera John-Steiner (2003) use Vygotsky's theoretical framework of learning and creativity as social processes to re-examine the field of creativity research. They apply Vygotsky's works to show how the creative process is interrelated with cultural and historical experience, the self, interactions with others, and the field in which creation is expected to take place (2003). Furthermore, in their 2004 book *Einstein Never Used Flashcards*, Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, Roberta Michnick Golinkoff and Diane Eyer draw on Vygotsky, his contemporary cognitive learning theorist Jean Piaget (1951) and the research of many others since to demonstrate the significance of play to learning. They also identify five elements that define *play*, which may be summarised as to say that *play* is pleasurable, spontaneous, voluntary, without extrinsic learning goals, and with the active involvement of the participant and an element of imagination (Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff & Eyer, 2004). As this rather aptly describes fanfiction and indeed fandom as a whole, it is this holistic, social perspective on learning that underpins the positive connotation to 'play' as a term in this dissertation.

As we all know, however, play is both enhanced and complicated by the introduction of others. In his doctoral thesis, *The role of feedback in two fanfiction writing groups*, Chad Littleton (2011) provides some of the groundwork for this project by demonstrating the place of peer review in fanfiction communities, and in the process of fan writing itself. He notes that little scholarly work has yet been done on the process in this setting, but shows how the peer review element of the fanfiction platform assists to improve writing (Littleton, 2011). Cited in this thesis is the work of Simmons (2003), who wrote on the topic of peer review. Littleton used a modified version of Simmons' categories of peer review – categories distinguishing between

comments by their nature and relationship to the text they are intended to review – as his tool to analyse the types of feedback left for fanfiction writers by their online audience, finding that much of it is simply global praise intended to hearten the writer without offering much direction, but a select fraction is indeed very meaningful and instructional. As Littleton discusses, a peer review feedback model is an integral component of the fanfiction publishing platform and community (Littleton, 2011; Brennan & Large, 2014).

The article, 'A big hand for fanfiction' by Australian contributor to the field, Narrelle Harris, quotes three traditionally published authors (herself included) on their reasons for writing in unpaid online fanfiction communities despite also making a living from professional writing (2015). She succinctly points out the creative benefits to writing for enjoyment's sake, without deadline and with the likelihood of immediate feedback, drawing on her own experience of overcoming writer's block through the 'fun' of writing fanfiction in response to prompts (Harris, 2015, p. 10). Harris credits her experiments in fanfiction for inspiring and enabling several of her published works, and claims that this less pressurised writing environment has given her the space to develop as a writer, improving in weak areas of writing and trying new forms and styles.

While still a creative literary excursion into established story universes, the media tie-in novel is, academically speaking, quite another area of study, and a largely underrepresented one. Randall D. Larson's (1995) book *Films into Books: An Analytical Bibliography of Film Novelizations, Movie, and TV Tie-Ins* defines the field and its key terms, and features a compilation of dozens of accounts of the experiences of tie-in and novelisation authors. Media tie-in novels, original stories written to expand upon film and television franchises, are less of a focus in this work than the more common direct novelisation (a book based on a screenplay, following the plot and direction of the screen narrative), but given the very limited landscape of research into either, this book serves as a solid foundation for this study.

A highly relevant work in this field, and one cited in a number of other related works, is M. J. Clarke's 2009 article 'The Strict Maze of Media Tie-In Novels'. Clarke's (2009) multiple case study of transmedia novels and their authors was constructed through interviews with the writers of *Alias* licenced works and a broad textual analysis of the books. The article examines the creative challenges faced by authors of this subgenre, including restrictions made by content creator/owners and dismissive or ambivalent attitudes surrounding the legitimacy of the creative work, and demonstrates the ways in which these authors overcome or manage these

difficulties (Clarke, 2009). Clarke finds that the organisational structure of production has textual consequences for the creative works.

Media tie-in research remaining vastly underrepresented in academic literature, the work of Thomas Van Parys on documenting the historical evolution of the novelisation and its cultural impact is justly a foundational text in any exploration of this topic. In 2009 he published 'The Commercial Novelization: Research, History, Differentiation' describing the earliest iterations of the form as it emerged alongside infantile cinema and the way publishing, culture and cinema interacted over the course of the twentieth century to produce the transmedia texts that sell today alongside other literary and genre fiction. While not specifically dealing with the media tie-in novel as we know it, Van Parys does paint the landscape from which this modern form arose, drawing from the American and French fields of cinema studies to depict a rich history producing many other familiar forms as well, from the critical film review to the synopsis (2009). His 2011 paper 'The study of novelisation: A typology and secondary bibliography' sets about clarifying the genre and form in the hopes of encouraging further academic interest in the field.

These similarities of writing forms within the novelisation industry to the diversity of fanfiction cannot be ignored, and so it is unsurprising that Van Parys makes comment on fanfiction in his works. He boldly suggests that the restrictive and uncompromising nature of tightening copyright laws during the cultural rise to power of Hollywood producers is to blame not only for the uncreative modern novelisation, but for the explosion of fanfiction on the internet. Were writers able to produce some of these stories through more acceptable channels, he implies, such as through the allowance of publishing numerous imaginative versions of film novelisations, there may be less of a temptation to engage in unsolicited fan writing (2009). But this is an argument for another day.

An uncomfortable realisation in reading the works of Van Parys is that the professor has little admiration for the producers of tie-in fiction and novelisations, his main area of interest. He comments that the author in this process is 'typically a hack writer, who regards novelising as a hack job and does not put much effort into the novelisation, and often a writer with a bad reputation to boot' (2011a, no page given). He also refers to their work as 'bad writing… unfortunately the rule rather than the exception' (2011a, no page given). No evidence for these statements is put forward, and flies in the face of the research of Clarke (2009), whose

interviewing process (similar to this study) found that media tie-in writers are generally very established authors with a long list of previous publications.

Publishing takes many forms besides prose in books. Writing about licenced comics rather than tie-in novelisations, Nicolas Pillai (2013) conducted an analysis of two comic stories from *The X-Files*. He examined the interplay between the parent source (in this instance, cult televisual serial storytelling) and the medium (the comic format) and drew on interview comments from the creatives involved to illustrate the artistic freedoms found in writing and producing transmedia texts. Pillai (2013) found that writing within an established universe, for a franchise with beloved characters and an ongoing parallel television narrative, came with both inherent limitations and creative opportunities. Like Clarke with tie-in novels, he notes that among the challenges of writing licenced comics is the necessity of making clear the relationship to the source material, and then of adding value to that story world by expanding upon it *without* complicating or contradicting it. Pillai's (2013) concluded benefits, however, include the opportunity to continue a narrative beyond its departure point from screens for the fan audience. For the writer specifically, he found that they are able to transcend the source narrative familiar to the reader, assuming knowledge (reintroducing characters and arcs rather than needing to introduce in detail) and playing the strengths of the new medium (comics and novels) to challenge, interrogate and explore the parameters of the established universe (Pillai, 2013).

As can be understood from the above discussion, this study is situated within an existing field of research, though is innovative in that it addresses the fact that little investigation has been done into established story universes specifically, or in examining the relationship between media tie-in fiction, fanfiction and learning through creative 'play'.

Chapter 2: Methodology

'Fan works' and 'transmedia texts' are broad-brush terms in the discipline of fan and cultural studies, pertaining to any artistic or literary response by fans to an original text (Brennan & Large, 2014). This can include creative expressions in the forms of video, sketches, graphic art, handmade craft, song, as well as written forms such as fiction and poetry. This research is limited in its discussion of fan works to unsolicited online fanfiction, known also as 'fanfic'. That is, works of fiction of varying lengths written by unpaid fans who perform the role of writer, editor and publisher either alone or as a collaborative effort with their community, without the consent of the copyright owners, posted to the internet either to a blog, forum or an archive (Brennan & Large, 2014; Riley, 2015). Though often also fannish in nature and sometimes categorised as fan works as well, this research differentiates 'tie-in novels' from fanfiction in an acknowledgement of their many differences. Tie-in novels are defined here as works of fiction of novel length, commissioned by copyright owners to expand a franchise, written by paid authors, edited by professional editors and published by mainstream publishing houses as paperback books and eBooks (Clarke, 2009). Other forms of fan works mentioned above, such as videos or images, are not covered by the scope of this paper. Likewise, nearby literary relatives to tie-in fiction, such as film novelisations, are not addressed by this research.

Through primary data collection and critical discussion of the key findings, this research has three main aims, around which the three major chapters of this work are formed:

- Identify the specific ways in which online fan writing may serve to improve/limit the skill acquisition of writers and their creative opportunities,
- Identify the specific ways in which licenced media tie-in writing may serve to improve/limit the skill acquisition of writers and their creative opportunities, and:
- Compare these and draw conclusions that may be of use to academics and professionals in the areas of publishing, creative writing and fan studies, specifically those interested in the nature and practical applications of established story universes

The research conducted for this dissertation takes a qualitative approach informed by the Vygotskian social constructivist model (Vygotsky, 1982), whereby learning is constructed through experience, understandings are built together through interaction and sharing of knowledge, and creative output is the result of social processes both in and outside of the self (Moran & John-Steiner, 2003). Vygotsky conceived of creativity as a point of tension between

personality and cultural experience, and between one's internal interpretation of these and their external reaction (creative output) (Moran & John-Steiner, 2003). Established story universes being a component of social and cultural property, this perspective reflects the value of participants' unique personal experiences and perceptions in their learning, their creative and professional journeys as writers, and the development of their artistic works (Kumar, 2014). This methodology has been selected because it aligns with the accepted approach of academics in the fan studies sub-discipline, which is to take a qualitative approach to their subjects (Hellekson & Busse, 2014; Bryman, 2016).

The study itself is structured as a multiple case study, comparing survey and interview responses from writers of fanfiction with responses from writers of licenced media tie-ins. This design reflects the studies of previous authors in this field of inquiry (such as Clarke, 2009; Flegel & Roth, 2016; Harris, 2015), enables patterns to emerge for analysis and comparison, improves validity of findings over singular case studies, and values the intrinsically human nature of the subject (Bryman, 2016).

The study's participants, five writers of fanfiction and five fiction authors who have written media tie-in stories, were invited to participate in a short-response survey to gauge the extent to which the fan/media tie-in writing medium has improved their writing skill, and in what specific ways it has benefited or limited them. Follow-up interviews were undertaken with some participants for elaboration on survey responses. These open-ended, untimed questioning methods support the social constructivist perspective of the research by allowing participants to express themselves in their answers, valuing their experiences and opinions. Ethical clearance for this human research was granted by the University of Southern Queensland's Human Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix A). Respondents took part under informed consent and were given the option to participate anonymously (see Appendix B). This request for anonymity, where made, has been respected.

The writers selected for the study are each successful in their own right. The media tie-in writers are published authors of both tie-in work of various franchises and original fiction from different genres, with multiple books under their belts and lengthy careers exceeding ten years. For the closest comparison, the fanfiction writers invited to participate in the study were chosen for their large corpus of novel-length online fiction completed over a period of ten years or more, and for their large followings of readers. This study acknowledges the success and authority of any writer who manages to complete a novel-length work to the praise of their

readership, and while positioning the two writing forms as being different enough as to be worthy of comparison, treats both forms and the experiences of their writers as equally creatively legitimate to those of any other writer. This study is concerned with the experiences of writers who develop full-length, sophisticated narratives within a story universe first established by someone else, an area of expertise shared by the participants in this study.

The responses were analysed for recurring themes and ultimately grouped under four categories (Kumar, 2014): Interpersonal, Writing Technique, Characterisation, and Enrichment and Professional Skills. Responses pertaining to the relationships between the author or the text and other parties, such as feedback, community, collegiality, stakeholders, readership exposure or fans, were categorised together as Interpersonal. Responses coded under the category Writing Technique refer to topics of writing skill, including the mechanics of writing itself or of genre, style, tense, points of view and transitions. Though Characterisation could indeed be coded under the category of Writing Technique, this was such a prevalent theme, treated quite separately by respondents in their discussion of technique, that it was necessary to organise it its own category. Writers participating in this survey identified the ways in which the established story universe provided the tools to develop their skills in character creation, character description, character realism and character contrast. The remaining content provided in participants' responses is diverse, however, all refers to ways in which writing within an established universe has affected the author personally, either professionally or emotionally, and is discussed under the category of Enrichment and Professional Skills.

A full analysis of the findings follows in the later chapters of this paper. A summary of the research findings have been tabulated and are included as Appendix C.

Chapter 3: Fanfiction

> 'Every act of reading constructs the text and actualizes its world in a different way.' Marie-Laure Ryan, cited in Jones (2002, p119).

With this line, Ryan sums up the fanfiction phenomenon – the hundreds of ways in which Buffy triumphs over evil and the thousands of first kisses between Harry and Hermione as told by fans writing their own adventure. Fandom is the very liberal relative of canon, maintaining a couple of ground rules that a participant can pick and choose to ensure the fiction is still recognisable as derivative from that story world but never restricting itself to only one interpretation. These readings of media content, whether read from pages as books or read from screens as television or films, naturally construct meanings and worlds in the minds of the engaged audience, and those most engaged audience members we call fans can sometimes find themselves motivated to explore these worlds more actively (Hellekson & Busse, 2006). When this creative exploration takes a written form and fans develop their interpretations of media into fiction that takes place within the story universe established by the works of others, we call this practice fanfiction (Coppa, 2014). This chapter discusses the responses received from fanfiction participants to the research questions about their experiences with writing in established story universes and the ways in which this has benefited them as artists refining and developing their skills.

Interpersonal

In the initial survey carried out for this research, responses with an interpersonal theme were the most prevalent from the fanfiction respondents. They were also the most varied, ranging from very positive to very negative, and were the least consistent. Participants commented on interpersonal factors unmentioned by other respondents, providing an insight into the highly personalised community experience of each individual participating in fandom culture.

Community

Community is central to fandom, and therefore to fanfiction as a practice (Coppa, 2006). Histories of fandom trace it back to science fiction fans opening lines of communication through the letters-to-the-editor section of magazines and their subsequent movement to their own fanzines and conventions, essentially shifting the locus of love for the story universe from the individual to the collective (Coppa, 2006; Van Parys, 2011a). Today, this collective is a bustling multi-site online community, a culture complete with rituals, a dynamic lexicon, and societal expectations and lore (Riley, 2015). A world without money, participants create

fanworks and contribute it to the community, and in return, the community shares it, builds upon it and comments upon it – the gift economy (Flegel & Roth, 2014; Riley, 2015).

Without nationally-bound currencies to segregate and complicate transactions between community members, fanfiction and fandom have flourished in the international environment of the internet (Riley, 2015). However, generally speaking, the language and culture of the English-speaking internet remains essentially American, which can pose unexpected inconveniences to Australian and other international participants in the fanfiction community. NettieC, an Australian contributor to numerous American legal-themed television fandoms, such as *Law and Order: SVU* and *JAG*, notes the irritation experienced in 'writing for an audience where some do not take on board that I am Australian… It is annoying to write a 5000 word story to have the reviewer only comment that my spelling needs work, as I have s and not z in words like recognise and I have a u in words like colour and labour.' She argues this is a downside to writing in an established universe, but also mentions elsewhere in her response that the community provides 'constructive criticism which I can choose to take on board or ignore'. This indicates an understanding of the difference between useful and non-useful community feedback and expectation that may have been further fostered by this particular characteristic of fanfiction writing.

This collaborative creativity and shared vision of the story world is foundational to fanfiction, and serves its members both positively and negatively (Hellekson & Busse, 2006). Very importantly, the community maintains a fan base for a story universe long after the original has finished airing or publishing in the commercial domain, or between books or seasons, keeping the flame of interest alight, which provides that metaphorical play structure for writers to climb onto and write their story from. It also lays down the rules, and not just the ones set forth by the original writers of the canon material (Brennan & Large, 2014). 'When you're new to a fandom, or the fandom isn't very active, it can be difficult to understand what is or isn't acceptable, what's the tolerance level,' says one writer. Fandom builds an extended framework beyond the source material for the fan to write in, a metaphorical DIY slide and swing set nailed to the side of our play gym, enabling writers to take their play past the tricks on the monkey bars performed by other fanfic writers and move into more experimental territory without losing their connection to the fandom. Every fandom has a different tolerance level for deviation from the source in terms of controversy, pairing and characterisation, and this tolerance level is built together just as surely as the rest of the fandom universe (Brennan & Large, 2014; van de Goor, 2015).

A repeated theme among fanfiction respondents was mention of the shared story context, and how this communal construction and understanding of characters and their universe eased the writing process (Hellekson & Busse, 2006). Once a work of fanfiction is posted to the internet with invitation for comment, it shifts from being the work of a single author to being a meaningful creative work in progress to each individual member of its audience (Hellekson & Busse, 2006, cited in Riley, 2015). However, as one respondent argues, 'Fandom is fickle. It's highly social. It's very passionate. There are Tumblr wars, comment wars, personal beefs, competition between writers (or beta readers), and, in general, a lot of nasty things can happen on that inter-personal level. The flip side is also true, but a lot harder to see because the lovely people in the fandom either stay quicket (sic) or send thousands of Private Messages.' Concerns about community and readership backlash were restricted to only two of the five respondents, but arose repeatedly within those responses, indicating again the very personal nature of fanfiction writers' relationships with their fandom community. Unpopular divergent portrayals of characters can set one offside with the group in some less tolerant fandoms. Inconsistent or 'late' posting of updates can be treated as an invitation to anonymously 'shame' writers. Even this, however, varies in apparent weight to the writers who took part in this study. One anonymous participant explains her choice to remain unnamed 'Because I take some swipes on readers, I'd rather not come off as ungrateful' while RivkaT nonchalantly writes 'You might get flamed, but that's a hazard of existing, especially as a woman, online.'

Feedback

Evolving out of this story-centric community has come the fanfiction model of instant voluntary peer feedback, whereby readers of a fanfiction can comment upon a story to share their thoughts as they read (Littleton, 2011). This can occur after a work is already completed and available to read in full online, but more commonly occurs at the close of each chapter while the work is still in progress, the author writing and making available one chapter at a time. Four of the five fanfiction respondents to this research identified the swift feedback they received from fellow fans as one of the aspects of writing in established universes that has improved their writing overall. As Littleton (2011) discusses, in fandom, community members are a writer's peers, and peer feedback has been shown both in fanfiction and in formal classroom settings to have a great impact on the teaching and learning of writing. In fact, in his meta-analysis of over 900 studies conducted on effective teaching practices, John Hattie (2013) identified feedback as one of the top ten influencers on learning, with a potential impact roughly twice the effect of the average teaching practice. This study was of course intended for the

education sector and for classroom implementation, but this impact size cannot be ignored here when discussing the opportunities for a leisure activity to improve or refine writing skill.

The obvious benefit to on-the-go feedback is the chance to likewise adjust and polish on-the-go. 'That helps you to see what's working and what isn't before you get too far into the story. If readers find something confusing or spot an obvious hole, you can fix that before you've built the entire story on a bad base,' writes one participant. Butler and Winne (1995, cited in Hattie & Gan, 2011) argue that feedback should be perceived as an integral component of knowledge construction and as a promotor of self-regulation of learning. Where feedback is effective, over time this internalises and becomes internal feedback – in fanfiction, the writer recognising their own plot holes before it being pointed out, or acknowledging and improving unclear writing before posting – and encourages self-regulatory learning behaviours, such as goal-setting and seeking specific feedback (Butler & Winne, 1995, cited in Hattie & Gan, 2011). The positive framing of commentary from respondents regarding the effect of peer feedback may be an indicator that these self-regulatory behaviours have indeed internalised for these long-term writers, who treat their readers' reviews as valuable and desirable. While it is true that the benefits of feedback are not limited to established universes, it is also true that feedback is a fundamental component of the fanfiction economy (Riley, 2015), a statement further substantiated by the repetitive nature of this theme throughout fanfiction writer responses to this research. This benefit is not so freely available to writers outside of established universes, lacking as they are in the community of peers invested in the collaborative building of narrative meaning and willing to provide on-the-go feedback (Riley, 2015). Writers playing in established story universes, then, at least in online fanfiction, have access to a tangible pedagogical advantage over writers who do not.

'Feedback from readers is both good and bad,' writes Anon. 'The instant responses help you to improve your writing, but they also have a tendency to influence it, and you find yourself giving in to what your reviewers want, rather than sticking to the story as you imagined it.' As Hattie and Gan (2011) warn, feedback is simultaneously one of the highest impact learning strategies but also one of the most varied in its effectiveness. Littleton's (2011) application of Simmons' (2003) categories of writing feedback to fanfiction confirmed that a lot of fandom commentary is of little use, taking the form of global praise ('This is amazing! You're a fantastic writer!') or personal reaction ('I really hope Phoebe and Paige forgive each other soon and find Piper. Please, the suspense is killing me!'). Magnifico, Curwood and Lammers' 2015 ethnographic study of interactions between fanfic writers and their reviewers found the same.

These personal reactions and pleas for particular outcomes can present a challenge for writers in established universes. 'There's a strange push for stories with romance to have explicit scenes,' writes another anonymous respondent. 'Most of the time they don't add to the story.' While this writer goes on to add that she feels pressure to include scenes of a sexual nature even when it goes against the intended direction of the story, and receives private messages querying why she hasn't, her awareness of the lack of value in this sort of feedback demonstrates that she is developing her self-awareness as a writer. The ability to distinguish useful feedback from that which is not, and the discipline to select and apply feedback without compromising the story being written, is an unexpected learning opportunity for writers in established universes.

One must, however, be careful not to become too reliant on the real-time feedback of fanfiction, as it does not carry over to other forms of fiction-writing unless the writer constructs it, such as the development of a writers' group. Laments one respondent, 'When you turn to original fiction, you miss those instant responses and find yourself struggling without them. You wonder if this plot point will be confusing or if you're over-explaining something, and you wish you could just post it and see.'

Readers
'Readers are (ironically) the downside to writing fanfiction.' This anonymous response to the initial survey is indeed ironic given the symbiotic relationship of reader and writer in the gifting culture of fandom. While many writers would claim to be writing fanfiction for the pure fun of it, it is interesting to note that not one respondent to this research mentioned 'fun' anywhere in their responses, whereas 'readers' were explicitly mentioned (and discussed to varying degrees) by every fanfiction participant – one of the few universal themes found by this research.

Readers are a desirable (and necessary) element of any publishing model. Writers write, the publishing platform makes the written text available, and readers step up at the last stage to do their part and consume. But in fanfiction communities, the process is less linear (Magnifico, *et al*, 2015). The readers exist *first*. They await the contribution of the writer to the community's greater shared wealth of cultural capital and engage with it actively, commenting, sharing, recommending, enjoying. Few first-time authors have access to this kind of ready-made audience when they start producing original fiction. And the numbers of ready-made readers are impressive. 'By publishing fanfiction on popular sites, I have access to a diverse readership who already have the background to the characters / show,' NettieC notes. 'Thousands of

people have read my fanfiction works, when I had previously written poetry and published on a respected site, readership was limited to a handful.' Certainly, this opportunity to be read without needing first to garner and develop one's own audience is a benefit reaped by those writing for an established story universe.

The downside cited by Anon above seems mostly associated with reader expectations, a theme brought up by two respondents but mentioned six times. An audience already to a story world they are invested in, genre fiction readers tend to know what they like, and what they don't, especially about characters they love. Writers express frustration with the demanding or expectant nature of a 'vocal minority' of readers. The fickleness of fandom makes this a difficult maze to navigate, though learning how to do so is arguably an interpersonal skill of benefit to any developing writer. 'Some readers complain that stories don't follow cannon (sic), that it is too out of character,' NettieC writes, 'however, the fact is it's all fiction. I am trying to tell a story and if I didn't diverge from the given, it would be impossible to place the characters in a new situation.' Another writer made a similar comment about reader perceptions with character portrayals: 'Believe me, you know you've done it right or wrong when the reviews come in. Going OOC [out of character] without the work can lose you a following in a single chapter… Stakes can be high, basically.' These stakes range from losing a following or receiving negative reviews through to the author being discussed publicly elsewhere in the community. 'No one's gonna comment, no one's gonna review, no one's gonna promote the story. Which is basically fanfiction death.'

Meeting these high expectations of readers is a challenge many writers face, whether they write for an established universe or not, and one might argue that reader expectations are less problematic in a context where the writer's works are derivative in nature – fanfiction and other derivative forms, after all, do not bear a strong reputation for quality (Van Parys, 2011a). However, if one takes her writing practice seriously, one does not adopt this attitude of near enough is good enough. Fanfiction is both a writing and social practice, and social standing is an important aspect of any community system. In regards to maintaining readership and community favour, one participant pointed out, 'Just like with original fiction, the writing has to be solid: characters, descriptions, dialog, plot. Maybe it even has to be better than the original since there are dozens/hundreds/thousands of people comparing one fic against another. In many fandoms, there are just a couple of "good" fics to choose from, but in the more popular ones, there are THOUSANDS.' This competitive element provides readers with a smorgasbord of diverse options to pick from, but also offers writers a plethora of public examples, both of

writing of varying quality with which to compare their own work and of reader responses to others' writing (Couzijn, 1999).

Reputation

The social element of fandom is impossible to overlook, and the potential benefits to writers of this element are numerous. One shaky aspect of the interpersonal theme of fanfiction is that of reputation – both of a writer within fandom, and of fandom itself. Fanfiction as a practice already sports a poor reputation as less legitimately creative than other forms of writing (Flegel & Roth, 2014), and writers who break into the mainstream publishing world of original fiction after a start in fandom must often take both this label and the reputation developed within the community on with them into this next stage of their creative journey (Brennan & Large, 2014; Flegel & Roth, 2016). This, too, can be a mixed bag. 'Within the *Harry Potter* fanfic community, there's a bit of a stigma against stories that redeem Draco. We have Cassandra Clair (sic) to blame for that: The trilogy takes Draco's flaws and either glosses over them or tries to pass them off as charming, and… gave us the term "Draco in Leather Pants," meaning any story that takes an unlikable villain character and glosses over their flaws, portraying their arrogance and dismissiveness as charming traits.' Indeed, young adult fantasy author Cassandra Clare acknowledges that she has largely taken the blame for this tag that has caused extensive discord between fans, though she reminds that many wrote in this manner before she did (epicyclical, 2003). This reputation has stuck with her, but with her publisher Simon & Schuster boasting of her 50 million books in print worldwide, it doesn't seem to have done irreparable damage (2017). Many other authors do experience fandom backlash for actions during their fanfiction time or for removing old works before publishing original fiction commercially (Brennan & Large, 2014; Flegel & Roth, 2016), a definite downside to developing writing skills in an established universe with such invested fans.

Only one respondent spoke about the tainted public image of fanfiction. Twilyght Sans Sparkles, a fanfiction writer for over a decade across multiple fandoms, writes, 'When I heard George R. R. Martin describe fanfic as "paint-by-numbers storytelling," I wanted to call him up and tell him how wrong he was, because it's not like that at all.' Though this stigma is something many other authors have overcome, it still presents a challenge to fanfiction writers, perhaps creating an even greater necessity to prove one's worth in the mainstream publishing world than would be required of a writer without a fanfiction background.

A strong argument against the creative validity of fanfiction is that it is, ultimately, an unsolicited and unpermitted use of another person's intellectual property. Established story universes are, or were at their time of publication, someone else's. Like other fan works, fanfiction is a derivative art form, unable to exist apart from the source content it calls its parent (Jones, 2002; Flegel & Roth, 2014), and simultaneously a step uninvited onto someone else's playground and a creative imitation intended as flattery and love to the original creator. Many intellectual property owners acknowledge the symbiosis of creator and media fandom as an important element of their success (Riley, 2015), but it can also be difficult for creators and owners to overlook some of the boundary-pushing and perspectives taken by certain groups within fandom (Japp, Meister & Japp, 2005). Collaborative reconstructions of canonical meaning within fandom can take general fan perception of characters or plot elements very far from the author's intended vision, and there would be very little an author could do to redirect this out-of-control play (Japp *et al*, 2005).

For writers experimenting with characterisation and storytelling within someone else's universe, however, the same can also be said in reverse. Disagreement with the original creator's views on their own work or discrepancy between fan predictions and later-published events are common pitfalls to fandom, and has different effects on writers following different media. Dropping the line 'Chris Carter nails it every time!' into an *X-Files* community discussion, for instance, would likely not be as well-received as announcing the same line about Gene Roddenberry to a group of Trekkers. For some fanfiction writers, the attitude of the author (in fandoms where the original creator is still seen as the authority on what is and is not canon) towards fanfic and/or aspects of their own work create a barrier to accessing the same benefits of writing in an established universe as others receive. Twilyght Sans Sparkles claims to have missed out on a wide scope of the *Harry Potter* fan readership due to J.K. Rowling's attitude towards her minor villain, Draco Malfoy, an opinion which divides the fandom (Japp *et al*, 2005). 'She doesn't like Draco. At all. She doesn't see him as redeemable, or worth writing about.' For this developing writer, her attempts to practise redeeming a complex and relatively silenced character through any combination of careful plotting and honest realism are, in her eyes, thwarted by the authority of the original author – an authority not usually considered a true member of fandom. 'I felt like Rowling was trying to kick me out of her fandom… I feel far less welcome in the *Harry Potter* fandom now than I did when I first started writing fanfic.'

WRITING TECHNIQUE

In the initial survey replies to this research, almost as prevalent as interpersonal responses were those regarding writing technique. These were more consistent, with each fanfiction participant noting it in their responses. This may indicate that unlike personal community experiences, technical advantages to writing fanfiction are more universal and may be applicable to writing in established universes in general.

Pedagogy

With this very clear and visual analogy, respondent and fanfic writer Twilyght Sans Sparkles summarises the pedagogical capacity of online fanfiction and of writing in an established universe.

> Suffice it to say, creating an entire world from scratch is a tall, tall order for any writer, and for a beginning writer, the task might be too great. It's like sending a novice cook to the store and telling them to buy ingredients for a restaurant-quality meal. They're not going to know what flavors pair well together, how to find quality ingredients, or even what questions to ask the store employees. Fanfic, for me, was like one of those meal-prep delivery services, where all the ingredients are pre-measured and you can follow a step-by-step recipe. Are you creating your own meals? No. If you tried to pass off those recipes as your own, people in the know would cry foul. But you're learning how to slice, how to sear, how to roast, how to deglaze a pan. You're learning what flavors go well together, what quality ingredients look and taste like, and—perhaps most importantly—what you like and dislike. Through writing fanfic, I was able to learn how to create believable characters, what good worldbuilding looked like, and what I did and didn't want from a story.

Each of us having at some point been confronted by a complex new process such as cooking or riding a bike will appreciate the effectiveness of having the overall process broken down into its component parts and being guided through with decreasing levels of assistance. In education, this is known as the scaffolding method, and is attributed to the works of social constructivist educational psychology theorist Lev Vygotsky (1982) and his theorised zone of proximal development (ZPD). This learning theory, upon which much of modern educational practice is based and which is connected further with Vygotsky's investigations into adult creativity (1936, cited in Moran & John-Steiner, 2003), builds on the prior works of other social constructivists such as Jean Piaget (1951). It suggests the image of the learner as an isolated individual in a world of potential knowing, whose current knowledge, skills and understandings

(actual development) can be enhanced by interaction with those knowledges and understandings that lie only slightly beyond her or his current ones (zone of proximal development). To begin with, the learner can only manage in this zone in collaboration with more capable others or through scaffolded tasks intended to 'bridge' between what is known and what is desired to be known (Vygotsky, 1982; Verenikina, 2003). In cooking this might be the recipe or the packet sauce; in riding a bike, it's the training wheels or dad holding the back of the seat. Complete acquisition of a skill or field of study is impossible to the first-time learner; but through stepped, steady interaction with component skills or topics just outside of what has already been grasped (the ZPD), especially in a social setting where more learned others may coax or enable this stepping out of the comfort zone into new territory, optimal learning takes place and soon internalises, widening the current knowledge base and bringing the learner closer to the goal skill (Vygotsky, 1982). Eventually, as actual development expands, total proficiency falls into the zone of proximal development, and is attainable (Vygotsky, 1982).

Fanfiction is easily argued as a scaffolded learning task, not dissimilar to how writing would be taught in an educative setting (Lewis, 2004, cited in Thomas, 2006; Magnifico *et al*, 2015). In a study conducted on the importance of scaffolding in the teaching of writing to English as a Second Language (ESL) students, Pilu discusses how the scaffolded instruction reduced student errors, progressed their grammatical skills, improved their grasp of genre and enhanced the overall cohesion of ideas connected throughout texts (2015). In other words, the reduced expectation on students to perform at total proficiency from the outset enabled higher levels of learning, and ultimately, progressed the students closer to proficiency. This is likewise reflected in the responses to this research, in which 'learning' was the most reported theme of all in any category, appearing either explicitly or implicitly on all responses, repeatedly. Respondents identified numerous ways in which writing fanfiction for established universes provided learning opportunities to improve their technique through scaffolded engagements.

Worldbuilding
'To a certain extent, fanfiction takes away the work of developing characters and the universe,' one fanfic respondent states, further verifying the Vygotskian capacity of fanfiction. When writing one's own original fiction, one develops their entire fictitious world quite literally from scratch – the metaphorical equivalent to the amateur cook in a kitchen full of raw ingredients or the young child plopped into the sandbox. The workload required from this starting point to create a masterpiece is immense (Lewis, 2004, cited in Thomas, 2006). Von Stackelberg and

McDowell (2015) define storyworlds as complex contextual rulesets (indeed, universes) that may transcend a single story, forming the foundation of the story and its action. Without this world established, there may be no story, and no further opportunities to learn writing skill. In fanfiction, the world is ready-made. Another chef has come in already and cut the vegetables in their correct portions; the child before you tipped water into the sand, built a castle and wall and left all his buckets and spades behind for you. From here, child in sandbox, you can perfect your shell-window-arranging, or your moat construction – a specific and advanced skill that may have been beyond your ability to perform, had you needed to build this whole thing yourself. Numerous respondents to this research identified the challenge of worldbuilding as an obstacle overcome by the pre-existing structures of fanfiction. Explains one writer, 'You're free to focus on your plot and on the specific aspects of the characters that you want to develop. You don't have to do the hard work of introducing the world or the canon characters, so it's an easy way to get into writing a step at a time, without having to develop all of the skills for original fiction at once.'

Boundaries and experimentation
Within survey responses coded under writing technique, a recurring topic is the helpfulness of boundaries, and, linked to this, the idea of experimentation (Thomas, 2006). It is a universally recognised tenet of purposeful research that limitations are foundational to any valid trial, creating a space in which variables can be adjusted to create deliberate change (Bordens & Abbott, 2002; Carpi & Egger, 2008; Kumar, 2014). The established story universe provides a framework around which the writer can build a new narrative and experiment with different styles, portrayals, perspectives, tenses and structures, and the purposeful writer aiming to learn and develop particular skills can take advantage of this as a bridge through the zone of proximal development (Verenikina, 2003; Thomas, 2006). 'Boundaries assist in creating good habits and learning proper storytelling,' claims one writer, while 'You can start with a story that's set entirely within the canon world, using the same point of view and tense that the author used,' writes another. 'Then, you can add original characters and plot twists. Then, you can play with a longer story with an original plot, or you can set the characters in another world or use another point of view or tense. Those steps make it easier to transition into original fiction.'

Technical skill acquisition
The scaffolded nature of writing in fanfiction allows for the development and internalisation of advanced specific technical writing skills, according to four of the five respondents to this research. 'You can experiment with different techniques and see what happens to your writing

as a result,' says RivkaT, a fanfiction writer across multiple fandoms since 1996, 'whether it's choosing between first, second, and third person; present or past tense; or something more exotic.' This concept of experimentation with particular technical aspects of fiction writing was repeated across other responses. An anonymous participant said, 'Prior to writing fanfiction, I assumed that I should write in third-person, past tense, in either limited or omniscient point of view. Then, I wrote a number of fanfictions in first-person, present tense, and that gave me the opportunity to explore the advantages and disadvantages of different tenses and points of view. When I returned to third-person, past tense, I felt much more certain of that choice and felt I could use the advantages it offered.' This increase in confidence in most effective use of point of view or tense indicates an internalisation of this skill, having been bridged through the ZPD with low-stakes scaffolded writing tasks into proficiency (Vygotsky, 1982). Of course, the advantages of experimentation in writing cannot be said to be limited to writing within established universes, however the supportive framework provided by the established elements naturally create the scaffolded learning opportunities without the necessity of a teacher or mentor's planning or intervention (Thomas, 2006).

The shared and collaborative nature of knowledge in fandom was also championed by respondents as an aide in developing technical writing skill (Kaplan, 2006). The awareness of what the audience could be assumed to already know about the world, its rules and its characters helps writers to learn 'what not to say, as well as what to say and how to say it,' according to an anonymous writer. This assumed prior knowledge is part of the internal story structure that creates the scaffolded learning opportunities for writers, and ties in with the concept of fanfiction as learning through imitation. The fan community, seeking as they are to engage with more of their fannish objects of adoration, support writing that mimics, in some way, the source material, a provision most convenient for writers in this space. Educational psychologist Piaget (2013, 1951) wrote extensively on the developmental nature of learning in small children, including the significance of imitation in play. Though Flegel and Roth (2014) argue that 'play' as a term in fanfiction is a reductive label intended to diminish the creative value of the practice (which is typically a woman's activity) in comparison to professional original writing by signalling it as the binary opposite to 'work' (presumably, man's work), 'play' throughout this paper has been treated with only utter respect for its vital place in the learning process. While intriguingly, not one respondent used the word 'fun', there were correlations between responses discussing the learning opportunities afforded through imitation. 'Writing pastiche is a really good way to learn technique,' says RivkaT. 'Doing is

how you learn.' Though the expert writer, the original creator, is not present in mind or body during this learning process, the results of their labours and their own learning – in the form of their creations – are available for other writers to examine and imitate, thus forming a teaching and learning partnership where the learner is scaffolded across the ZPD through acts of play-based imitation, expanding the actual development ever nearer to overall proficiency and making available opportunities to experiment in furthermore advanced skills (Piaget, 2013, 1951; Vygotsky, 1982). Skills, styles and forms previously outside the realms of attainable are experimented with in a supported manner, and internalised. 'I've always found it difficult to decide how much detail to include,' responds one writer, 'particularly in physical descriptions. It helped to rewrite a book from another character's point of view, because then I was very conscious of what was described and what wasn't in the canon work.'

Authorial experience

The wider authorial learning opportunities provided by fanfiction, according to respondents either explicitly or otherwise, are worthy of note here. One opportunity afforded by the scaffolded nature of learning in the fanfiction domain is the chance to explore genres, forms and styles a writer may previously have overlooked or dismissed as inaccessible. 'Writing in established universes allows me to… dip in and out of cannon (sic) and tell a wide range of stories which do not have to [be] sequential or related,' says NettieC. 'This means I can hone a particular style without having to create the entire story.' It also gives writers the space to consider 'what could have been,' according to Twilyght Sans Sparkles, and the dynamic nature of storytelling, whereby any number of endpoints may be possible or plausible, not only the path laid out by the original author, or indeed, by the writer's own first plan. These learning opportunities are certainly not limited to established story universes, but it cannot be disputed that the nature of fanfiction and pre-existing story worlds enable and scaffold this learning very effectively.

Characterisation

References to character and characterisation appeared in four of the five initial survey responses to this research. While few of the specific themes raised recurred more than once, the tone of responses grouped in this theme were similarly straightforward. They fell mostly under the umbrella of character-writing, with one participant speaking more about exploration of and interpretation of the established character in canon.

Character understanding

The familiarity with established characters provides yet another framework for fanfiction writers to build understandings (Thomas, 2006). Reading good characters in quality fiction exposes the writer to the building blocks of characterisation, but this understanding is internalised through practise in the zone of proximal development, enabled through imitation and active exploration of established quality content (Vygotsky, 1982). One participant comments, 'I think it's important to see your characters as fully-developed people and to write them naturally, rather than over-introducing them or over-explaining their actions. It's very easy to do that with fanfiction, because you already have a clear sense of who the characters are, and you can assume that your readers do, too.' This concept of seeing characters as 'natural' through the active engagement of fanfiction writing was noted in three responses, and seems to reflect Kaplan's assertion that fans desire to imagine their beloved characters as real people (2006). However, it should be mentioned here that all three of these respondents are, while fans, also writers in other senses – writers of non-fiction for the workplace, writers of academic essays, and, significantly, original fiction writers serious about publication. This perspective of the participants as writers outside of their fannishness suggests their valuing of understanding characters as believable or natural people is borne also of their desire to write quality characters of their own.

One respondent raised the notion of character empathy, referring to the canon character Draco Malfoy from *Harry Potter*, and discussed how writing fanfiction had given her the opportunity to explore this character in more depth than was possible through passive engagement with the source material. 'I identified with him,' says Twilyght Sans Sparkles, who recognised her own struggles against her family's values reflected in Malfoy's. 'Through writing these fanfics, I was able to see that I really enjoy stories of characters who drift from the wrong side to the right side, who begin as villains and become heroes.' This empathy not only deepens the writer's experience with the source content (Japp *et al*, 2005), it provides them with opportunities to learn about (and/or reject) character from published authors in their absence, and how character and storytelling impact upon one another. As Roth (2014) notes in her Masters thesis about fan reconstructions of arguably weak heroine Bella Swan of *Twilight* infamy, and Kaplan (2006) also demonstrates through her analysis of characterisation in three novel-length fanfiction works, fanfic sets the stage for writers to reimagine portrayals of character they do not identify with. Fan writers engage with established characters parasocially, as though they are real, and this empathy drives them to write detailed, sophisticated texts that

explore these characters and make them more relatable (Kaplan, 2006). Twilyght Sans Sparkles demonstrates these new understandings later in her response: 'A good Draco redemption fic should acknowledge those flaws and show how they can be overcome. He WAS arrogant. He WAS self-centred and spoiled, and he WAS racist… Those are flaws that need to be dealt with and refined out, and to me, a story that shows the refining process is vastly more interesting than one that pretends a deeply flawed character is perfect the way he is.'

Character development

According to three of the participants in the initial survey of fanfiction writers, fanfiction affords its writers the tools to hone their ability to construct, progress and portray character in their writing. In her essay 'The Sex Lives of Cult Television Characters', Jones (2002) demonstrates how the structure of television shows in particular, but also of serialised films, could be said to invite active fan engagement. Serial television and other modern narrative forms follow highly predictable patterns, whereby audiences familiar with the show can reasonably predict the outcome of most situations – within the span of a single *Xena: Warrior Princess* episode, for instance, Xena and Gabrielle will be confronted by a hostile force, and will find themselves in one or more hazardous scenarios they will have escaped by the end of the episode, and will remain alive at the episode's conclusion to take part in the following week's instalment (Jones, 2002). This linearity allows the cult television viewer's imagination to wander from the mundane of *what is happening* or *what will be the outcome* to *how is this happening*, *what is this revealing about this character* and other subtextual matters of interest, such as indications of relationships between characters and suggestions of character growth (Jones, 2002). This highly established, taken-for-granted fixed story world of characters, settings and narrative structure provides fanfiction writers with a solid framework on which to hang new ideas, concepts and character arcs. The reader comes to the story with all the same prior knowledge from the show; the writer has no responsibility to backfill or set the scene, able to jump into story events without preamble.

But more significant than the reader's familiarity with the source material is the *writer's*. The fanfiction writer knows already what will happen if Buffy is wandering a graveyard at night; she knows how Scully will respond to an outlandish paranormal theory; she knows what the Starks think of Cersei Lannister. As one participant comments, 'The carryover to original fiction is knowing what makes an engaging character, how to make them walk in 3-D, and what tropes bother you about known characters so you can avoid them… I think it really helped to establish the rules for creating consistent characters firmly in my writing practice.' This level

of understanding allows the sophisticated writer to direct creative effort into resolving more meaningful character-driven narrative queries than *what does he do next*, exploring the subtleties of motivation, reflection and interaction with more finesse and depth. The pleasure is in the metatext, in what is not quite said but can be assumed or imagined, both in the show and in the writing of transmedia texts, and this is where writers can most stretch their wings and refine this skill (Jones, 2002).

What is left *unsaid* and what could have been is often the source of inspiration for many fanfiction writers. Deliberately incomplete worlds, characters and resolutions are crucial for the pacing and mystery of a television show or film (Jones, 2002), trusting that an engaged, intelligent audience will fill in the blanks with the mundane (Chekhov shown fixing machinery, then on the next shot enters the bridge; viewers reasonably assume he walked the length of the *Enterprise* and we were simply spared watching) or will overlook for the sake of plot convenience (Scully woken from cryo-sleep in subterranean Antarctic cavern and stops breathing, requires CPR and to be carried, but able to pull own body weight up through manhole in tunnel ceiling). These same unexplained gaps, however, leave open entry points for the actively engaged fan writer to ask *how*, and *why,* and the sacred transformative question: *what if*? (Jones, 2002; Coppa, 2006). What if Harry and Draco's fates were reversed? How might this affect the plot, and how might events transpire to lead the reader, willingly, to this same conclusion? The emphasis on 'earning' story development through solid storytelling and considered pace arose in three instances from two participants. 'If I want to give someone a redemption arch,' says Anon, 'I have to really sell it and not with cute tricks or [sleight] of hand. I have to put in chapters of effort to redeem the unredeemable. Same with taking down the protagonist. If you wanna go bad, you have to make the fall realistic. If I want to take a fandom favorite and make the reader hate them, but still read my story to the end, I have to get to the psychology of the character and exploit it so it's not a step-function change, but a journey into hating their fave.'

Two fanfiction survey responses also made specific mention of dialogue, and the opportunities created by fanfic to practise this skill. In their study of 'written' speech in *Breaking Bad* fanfiction, Marone and Neely (2017) found that the task of representing the speech patterns and idiosyncrasies of familiar TV characters in their own dialogue-rich stories aided students in reflecting upon and developing skills in orality across modes. It also assists writers, through active interaction with these skills, bridged by the expertness of both the original creators and the fandom, to develop a sense of the distinctiveness of different characters' voices (Marone &

Neely, 2017). Confirms one Anon, 'I always struggled with writing dialogue before, so it was useful to match someone else's dialogue style for a while. That helped me figure out how much a character should say and when to cut them off, and also helped me to establish a different dialogue style for each character.' This benefit to writing in an established universe is certainly not one that would be found in original fiction, and unlike some other advantages noted in this section, seems not to be dependent on the fanfiction community or publishing platform but rather on the established universe itself.

Restrictions in characterisation

As opponents of the creative legitimacy of fanfiction as writing will be unsurprised to hear, two participants in the initial survey of fanfic writers raised the topic of restrictiveness in established character portrayals, although perhaps not in the manner expected. One writer spoke extensively about the difficulties faced as being part of a community where her representation of a canon character was not generally approved of. Presenting a popular villain in a sympathetic or positive light made it difficult for her to access the readership and other advantages of the community. Alternative portrayals of canon characters are a contentious issue, walking 'the line between being true to the original show/character while being able to develop my own storyline,' according to NettieC. Anon adds, 'Going OOC [out of character] without the work can lose you a following in a single chapter and get you talked about in the fandom as "well, it was going really good, but then A did Y, and I just can't after that."' As mentioned above, each fandom constructs and enforces its own tolerance levels for deviation from the original, and so while writing with established characters can be of benefit to the developing writer, the fanfiction platform can variably function as a help or hindrance to that end.

Enrichment and portable skills

The remaining responses to the initial survey from fanfiction writers tended to be those relating to impact or influence their fanfic experiences have had on them, either as writers or in a more personal sense. Writers also described their personal pathways into writing fanfiction, with three of the five identifying that they had begun writing original stories before 'discovering' fanfic, challenging the notion of fan writers as uncreative novice writers not yet capable of formulating their own story concepts.

Authorial skill opportunities

From the initial survey, personal impacts of fanfiction fell predominately into the realm of development of professional qualities, though these were mostly implied or implicit findings rather than overtly stated. Three of the five respondents made mention of learning through their experiences in writing in established universes, and two elaborated on this with claims that practising writing in fanfiction had enabled their growth and self-reflection as writers, in establishing what they did and did not like. The response of Twilyght Sans Sparkles, a fanfiction contributor for more than twelve years, is telling of that growth: 'When I first started writing fanfic, I was a sheltered teenager whose abortive attempts at writing original fiction usually all fizzled out before I'd reached the second chapter. I wanted to tell a story, but I didn't know how.' She goes on to describe how experimentation with the 'one-dimensional bully' character of Draco Malfoy led directly to the realisation of her preference for sophisticated character work, and comes to this conclusion: 'Writing is hard work… You need to have engaging characters that readers can relate to, or that they'll at least want to read about. You need an interesting world big enough for those characters to play in. You need an antagonist who is a threat to the characters, and preferably to the world at large… And there are so many other smaller things that can go into worldbuilding – politics, ecology, culture, societal taboos, prejudice, food, clothes – that examining them all would take up more space than I have.'

With this statement, this writer demonstrates the awareness of storytelling structures and elements that she has developed in her years of experience in fandom, an expertise she did not have beforehand and can now apply to original fiction, if she chooses to. Three participants identified fanfiction writing as requiring 'work' or 'effort' at different times, particularly when discussing goals such as appeasing their readership or developing a satisfying or sophisticated story arc. This indicates a prioritisation and commitment to producing quality writing. Discipline was another theme raised by two respondents in the initial survey, something they claim to have developed despite the general perception of fanfiction as purposeless, valueless play (Flegel & Roth, 2014). The archived word counts of the participating fanfic writers to this research are publicly viewable on their profiles, cumulative decades of fandom engagement evidencing their persistence and commitment to writing. While there is little to indicate that practise in established universes taught this quality – it is just as likely that these participants, being the sort of people possessed by the desire to write novel-length stories for an audience, were also already the sort of people possessed of the discipline required to write such a thing –

it seems that the time spent writing in established universes did offer opportunities to develop this trait.

The professional skills of perseverance and discipline were mentioned numerous times in the survey, though framed in different ways. Two writers made mention of the challenge of balancing reader needs with writer/narrative needs – taking reader feedback with a grain of salt, so to speak – an ability to discern between the useful and the unhelpful that can come only with experience. 'You start writing shorter chapters in order to post more often, to keep your readers happy,' one Anon laments as a downside to established universe writing, while NettieC cites her own agency as a writer when evaluating feedback, which she can 'choose to take on board or ignore', suggestive of a developed sense of awareness of what kinds of criticism are assistive. The focus to see a story to its conclusion, of course, is another manifestation of discipline. The expectations of the fandom community ensure that there is usually a demand for more content, encouraging the writer to keep writing in order to produce more while also steering the direction of the story and its quality with feedback. This meeting point of feedback, encouragement and frequent practise mimics the classroom learning environment (Hattie & Gan, 2011). For Twilyght Sans Sparkles, writing fanfiction meant 'most importantly, I was writing more or less constantly, which is the only way to improve one's writing,' a claim backed up by May (2008), who insists that practise is an integral element of bettering writing.

The other upskilling opportunity implicitly suggested by fanfiction respondents was that of flexibility and problem-solving. In her 2008 book *Adolescents and Online Fanfiction*, Black discusses the flexible and dynamic mindset of modern students, forged, as she cites from Lankshear and Knobel (2003), through interactions with texts, information and individuals in online spaces. While the fanfiction writing experience of all participants in this research eliminates any of them as adolescents, many of them found this hobby in their teens, and their self-driven journeys through fandom establish them as self-driven learners. Their unique and varied experiences within the online fan communities they have participated in have provided them with challenges they were compelled to overcome to both continue participation and to grow as writers. One example given by an anonymous respondent refers to some of the restrictions of the publishing platform, namely the chapter-by-chapter content release that enables the feedback model, which then has an impact on narrative development: 'Because you've already posted the earlier chapters. You can't go back and change them easily, so you have to write your way around problems that you discover later.' These creative and innovative

ways of thinking encouraged by the practice of online fanfiction continue to be sought-after professional skills, and will be into the future, argues Black (2008).

RivkaT's thought-provoking response to the initial survey question *Please respond to the statement: "writing in other people's universes has made me a better writer"* may explain why none of the fanfiction respondents mentioned copyright or intellectual property, referred to concerns about legality, or even spoke about characters as belonging or being owned by anyone else. 'I don't think of them as other people's universes, or at least not more than they're mine, because they became open to imagining when they were shared.' Banerjee and Vats (2015), citing Iser (1972), support this concept, claiming that a text only realises its dynamic potential as a complex literary or artistic entity when it is read and reflected upon, and that meanings made from a text belong to the reader. Meanings further explored, deconstructed or reconstructed through the active practice of fanfiction are not only legitimate and meaningful, but a means of giving the original text legitimacy and meaning (Iser, 1972, cited in Banerjee & Vats, 2015). In further correspondence, RivkaT was invited to elaborate on her position. 'I've written extensively about fan fiction as fair use. When the use is noncommercial--an increasingly contested concept in fandom--I would say that it's by default fair use, because it is making something new from the existing work, not just copying. Fan fiction tries new things with the text, even when it fails, and it's also directed at a different purpose--participating in a community and a conversation. Being noncanonical is itself a way to avoid competing with the original for interpretive authority, but also to stake out one's own view.' Riley (2015), in her examination of the fan site 'Archive of Our Own' notes the fannish gift economy and the delicate line walked by fan writers between copyright infringement and Fair Use (an American legal exclusion to copyright law, most similar to, but somewhat less stringent than, Australia's Fair Dealing law – see Suzor & Gough, 2017). The writers surveyed here, however, express no concern about this matter, suggesting it is not a significant influence on their writing practices.

In contrast, a topic raised by one writer is a strange reversal: 'Entitlement to "free" fiction is a problem in FanFiction. It's only free to read not to write and lots of readers don't get that.' The fanfiction gift economy, as discussed in depth by Riley (2015), relies not upon the capitalist system of give-and-take, but on the valuing of simply giving without an expectation of return. The writer writes, gifting her time; maybe someone comments, but the writer cannot demand or expect it, and is grateful for the notice. The reader reads; maybe the writer produces more, but the reader is not in a position to demand it. Unfortunately, this does not always translate in

reality, and readers can get pushy, forgetting that the writing of the fiction (while emotionally satisfying for the reader, and probably also for the writer) is taxing on the writer's time, which in the anonymous landscape of the internet, is an unknowable quantity. Speaking of the demand from readers to see explicit sexual scenes in romantic fanfic, Anon continues: 'For myself and other writers, it's not why we wrote the story, but I feel like I have to as part of the "pay-off" for the reader.'

Personal Growth

Perhaps the most obvious attraction to fanfiction is the freedom to creatively explore known and loved worlds repeatedly and in more emotionally satisfying ways. What fan hasn't been disappointed by a too-convenient plot twist or hurt by a favourite character's unsatisfying demise? Often, these undesirable creative choices – and even worse, plot discontinuity or missed dramatic opportunity – are assumed to be the unfortunate consequence of an artist's vision overruled by profit margins and committees, and one appeal to fanfiction is the opportunity to rewrite these perceived wrongs without the pressure of finance and sales teams, and without the concern of the 'one right way' (Coppa, 2014). This satisfaction was discussed in a response by one of the five fanfiction participants in the initial survey, but may reasonably be assumed to be more representative than was revealed here. A review of a prolific fanfiction writer's collection will show numerous works of different lengths, indulging different narrative questions asked by the writer. Given that the practice is ethically and legally questionable, unpaid and underground, what motivates writers to persist at this for so long, crafting such lengths of prose, but satisfaction and enjoyment? Though underrepresented as responses, these are evidently factors, and indeed benefits, to writing with established characters and settings.

Confidence was the main finding for personal benefits from the fanfiction respondents, directly raised by two respondents. In her 2006 study into the effects of long-term participation in fandom and fanfiction writing on an English language learner, Black highlights the impacts of these factors on identity and on confidence as a language user. Through an analysis of communications between the subject of her study and that young writer's readership, and of the development of the writer's fanfiction works themselves, Black (2006) shows how confidence with writing corresponds with a shift from writing what might be considered 'safe' work (tied closely to the source material, or snugly within the confines of what is typically found elsewhere in the fandom) to writing more expressively, creatively and, arguably, with more originality. As confidence as a writer improves, so too does the capacity to write, along with the motivation to do so (Black, 2006). NettieC confirms this when she writes, 'I have

always wanted to be a published author but had no confidence in my ability to create and sustain a captivating, unique piece.'

CONCLUSION

While it could be argued that a writer may sit at home with any story world they themselves independently conceive of, and they may write an infinite set of storylines for this universe, post it online for free and gain feedback and enjoy the same benefits of writing practise and improvement upon prior ideas, what is of interest for writers is that the fanfiction subculture is built upon and supports this practice. The established story universe is core to this subculture, and is what makes possible the numerous benefits found above. However, whether the story universe itself can be credited entirely is a very unstable argument, as many of the above advantages and opportunities listed by fanfiction writers are as much connected to the communal publishing platform as they are to the established nature of the narrative world. The following chapter deals with the responses of media tie-in writers, who also write in established story worlds but under different circumstances: paid, legal, commissioned work without the tight community of fandom.

Chapter 4: Media Tie-In Fiction

'*The love of cinema forwards the urge to write about cinema*,' says Thomas Van Parys (2009, p308) and so would agree the legions of media tie-in writers around the world whose imaginations have been sparked by the visual delights of beloved serial films and television shows. The desire to further explore cinematic stories through reading creates a market for the long-standing novelisation, and perceived gaps in films or shows – such as unaddressed character histories or timespans between instalments – offer writers the playing field to expand on beloved universes in the more specific form of the media tie-in novel (Clarke, 2012).

The landscape of Anglophone adaptation studies may have changed since Van Parys published in 2009, but what has remained consistent, and what he specifically noted, is the lack of academic writing and industry recognition centring on the film-to-book novelisation. An evolving literary art and publishing phenomenon spanning back as far as the beginnings of cinema, the modern descendants of novelisations, tie-in novels, now sport a chequered reputation: largely ignored by academia, viewed within publishing with anything from disregard to disdain, and yet popularly celebrated by the reading public (Larson, 1995; Clarke, 2009; Van Parys, 2011a, 2011b). There are around a hundred fiction authors with current memberships to the International Association of Media Tie-in Writers (IAMTW), professionally writing tie-in fiction that is licenced and paid work, many of whom can boast bestsellers and many of whom also write novels based in story worlds of their own creation (International Association of Media Tie-In Writers, 2017). Questions form: is this practice of writing within an established universe, similar in this way to the same practice in fanfiction, offering these professional writers the same benefits? Where writers are also authoring works seeded in their own inspired worlds, do they feel empowered and upskilled by their opportunity to 'play out' ideas in someone else's universe before transferring newly sharpened skills to new works, in the same way as fanfiction writers? There is little enough research into the genre itself, and less again yet exists to query whether their practice within established universes offers any benefits toward the refinement and creative development of writers (Van Parys, 2009; Goldberg & Collins, 2017). This chapter discusses the responses of participating media tie-in writers to the research questions, and examines how writing in an established universe may have assisted in developing their writing skill.

Interpersonal

Responses themed as interpersonal were among the most prevalent from media tie-in writers participating in the initial survey, along with those coded under enrichment and professional skills, arising in all five responses. There was a high rate of consistency, with most comments regarding reputation and intellectual property owners being repeated across respondents.

Someone else's universe

'The image has always been accompanied by the word,' says Thomas Van Parys (2009, p 305) when he describes the relationship between media tie-in fiction and original televisual storytelling. This quote suggests a harmonious, equal relationship that he soon demonstrates is rare. Despite the creative effort and processes that go into developing any new story, the established story universe in which media tie-in authors craft their plots and tales belongs, as four of the five survey respondents alluded, to somebody else. Allen (2001, pp 479, quoted by Tashjian & Naidoo, 2007, p 166) describes media licencing as 'a contractual arrangement that allows copyright holders to loan out their intellectual property for another company to use'. In the instance of media tie-in fiction, the intellectual property is the established universe of settings, characters and histories created in the source material, and this specification of 'loaning' is one of the difficulties mentioned by one of the respondents to the initial survey. 'Work for hire,' author John C. Sheldon defines, having collaborated on a work of licenced tie-in fiction, '[is] writing something that gets published without my being entitled to a copyright.'

This theme was raised in eight instances across the four responses, in different ways, mostly to differentiate media tie-in work from original fiction or to point out the place of the intellectual property owners in this creative production process. Together, these mentions of the owner's place and the differentiation between transformative and original works could be taken to point to the collaborative nature of media tie-in writing, as argued by Alan Dean Foster, Gary Brandner and others in Larson's (1995) collection. This validates the intellectual property owner's membership as a collaborator on the creative project despite the isolated nature of tie-in writing as presented in Clarke's (2009) depiction of the industry in his multiple case study. 'On the professional level… there's a big caveat – the approval of the owners,' writes survey respondent Stefan Petrucha, author of novels and graphic novels in various intellectual properties from *The X-Files* to *Nancy Drew* and more. The owners, having entered into a legally binding contract with the writers on these projects, play a significant, if distanced, role of power in the development of licensed narratives in established story universes (Clarke, 2009). This sometimes challenging interpersonal aspect of media tie-in writing is only explicitly mentioned

twice in the responses to the initial survey, but is explored in more depth elsewhere, such as in Clarke (2009), Hills (2012) and in Larson's (1995) collection of viewpoints from different novelisation and tie-in writers. Petrucha mentioned that 'while some licensors can be supportive, others are restrictive, leading to creative frustration.' Clarke (2009) and Pillai (2013) both discuss how the intellectual property owner of an established universe can influence and direct the narrative development of transmedia tie-in work with very little interaction with the author, determining guidelines and rules for the use of their characters and worlds to which licenced writers must abide if they expect their work to be published under that brand. In different ways, both of these authors present this restrictiveness as opportunistic challenge, encouraging creativity and innovation within the bounds of both the story universe and the brand (Clarke, 2009; Pillai, 2013), a theme mildly continued in the responses to the initial survey. Carrying on the play-based undercurrent of this thesis, Petrucha continues, 'The biggest downside is that it's not your sandbox, and the owners are in a position to tell you exactly how to play with the toys – and there can be several owners reviewing the same work, with different, sometimes conflicting opinions. Sometimes it works out great, and everyone is on the same page.'

Reputation

A theme evident in the literature review done preceding the survey and interviews (such as Clarke, 2009; Harper, 2013; and Pillai, 2013) indicates a tendency of modern publishing circles to look down on or disregard tie-in novelisations as a lesser art; as 'hack-jobs', as Van Parys (2009) so bluntly suggests. Tim Lebbon, a tie-in novelist of *Star Wars, Alien, Hellboy* and other franchises, has a 'writer friend… [who] calls it "word whoring", which is pretty demeaning'. Furthermore, survey respondent Kevin J. Anderson adds, 'Many colleagues still show a lack of respect for any writer who does media tie-in fiction, and some of the critical magazines in the field are openly scornful. This is mystifying to me.' The origin of the work in the world of film production instead of in the imagination of the writer seems paramount to this view: the commercialism of the work and its purpose as a promotional product for a film or television program degrades its status as a purely literary art form and a creative work, and thus its authors are perceived with less admiration. Though neither is the film world the issue. Kevin J. Anderson says, 'If a script writer is hired to write the script of the next *Star Wars* film, he or she is looked on with awe and respect. If a writer is asked to write a new novel for *Star Wars,* that is seen as hackwork.' Interestingly, this view is in direct contrast to the origins of tie-in novelisation, wherein the form accompanied the earliest narrative-form films and was

considered to 'complete' a filmgoing experience (Van Parys, 2009). And, as the authors surveyed here would attest, writing work is writing work. 'It's just another form of work for the working writer,' Tim Lebbon notes, 'and unless you're one of the very few bestsellers earning 6 figures per book – and there aren't many of those around – writing tie-in fiction is a good solid base for your income.'

While the reputation of tie-in writers among other writers seems negatively affected by their time spent in established universes, in other spheres the effect is the opposite. Three of five respondents identified their media tie-in work as improving their standing with readers, either in terms of sales or renown. 'While I had written a number of original comic series that earned me something of a reputation, my work on the *X-Files* comic for Topps in the 1990s was my first major hit in terms of sales,' says Stefan Petrucha. This broadened market reach is unsurprising given the trans-media strength of fandom. In a *Variety* discussion of 2014 book sales, journalist Kevin Noonan notes that of the top ten books of that year (as identified by Nielsen Bookscan), nine were connected to some kind of film franchise. Readers do not partake in the same marginalisation of tie-in fiction as do other authors – rather, they readily buy and read books from known story franchises, keen to engage more with worlds and characters they are already invested in (Tashjian & Naidoo, 2007). This has carry-over effects for tie-in writers. 'Writing *Star Wars* or *Alien* novels has put my name before certain fanbases who would otherwise never have heard of me,' writes Tim Lebbon. 'Whether this increases sales of my own original fiction is difficult to quantify, but any effect on sales must only be positive'. Kevin J. Anderson agrees, crediting his tie-in work for its part in developing 'an army of very loyal fans'. This would indicate that despite professional stigmatisation among colleagues, writing in established universes gives tie-in writers access to a ready-made audience of highly engaged readers who are already familiar to the story world, a general advantage in both sales and recognition among readers over those who would deride them.

Publishers, too, appreciate the unique skill of the tie-in writer (Larson, 1995; Clarke, 2009). Two respondents to the initial survey identified a bolstered reputation with publishers as one of the opportunities afforded by writing in established universes. Proving themselves as adept in keeping to very tight deadlines and developing commercially viable narratives within the bounds set out by intellectual property owners with their existing popular characters creates further job opportunities for tie-in writers, says Clarke (2009). Clarke's (2009) examination of the media tie-in industry within publishing also highlighted the tendency of tie-in editors to

hire only those writers they have worked with before, or who come recommended from fellow editors. 'Having done so many licenced works, and having a good sense of how to respond to editorial comments, I'm now in a position where publishers approach me for that sort of work,' confirms Stefan Petrucha. In a creative industry, any sense of work stability must be seen as an advantage.

Feedback and community

Hills (2012) notes that, with its numerous canonised novels, the BBC series *Torchwood* has more story in its media tie-in texts than on the screen in its original medium. One survey respondent, Kevin J. Anderson, having penned a shelf full of original *Star Wars* novels and contributed to the *Star Wars* expanded universe through numerous short stories and collections, could be said to have written as much *Star Wars* as its screenwriters have. These paratexts serve as invitations to audiences to view the snippet of the world portrayed in the source material as real, expanding realistically and coherently beyond the media frame (Hills, 2012). In this way, tie-in novels may be argued to further legitimise story franchises, a tradition stretching back to the silent and black-and-white film era, when the cultural dominance of the novel over cinema meant that the accompaniment of a tie-in afforded a film a certain degree of credibility it would otherwise lack (Van Parys, 2009). Beginning with the 1912 production *What Happened to Mary*?, the serial film became wildly popular with moviegoers in the 1910s as its 'chapters' ending on cliff-hangers mimicked the narrativity and continuity of novels (Van Parys, 2009). This popularity was supported and aided by the novelisation printed in parts in the daily newspaper (Van Parys, 2009), enabling transmedia immersion beyond the cinema.

Communities and cultural practices form around the worlds portrayed in these popular screen narratives, and tie-in media is generally taken by audiences as canon, something to be taken seriously. These fannish expectations can be difficult to live up to. However, fan expectations were mentioned by only one of the participants in the initial survey, and in a positive manner. 'I've always put in my very best work even in media tie-in fiction because I know a great many people will read it,' says Kevin J. Anderson, who self-identifies as a fanboy. 'If I ever expect them to read my original work, I have to do my best writing always'. This positive framing of the fan community and their part in the author's success appeared in two responses to the survey. Writers acknowledge the support of fandom – the communal shared understandings of characters and worlds that cushion and welcome tie-in stories – in their success. Clarke (2009) notes another power of fandom for the tie-in writer: the huge repository of knowledge of the established story universe. Fannish professional writers who know where to look or who to ask

can easily conduct on-the-go research into their contracted franchise as they work on their novel (Clarke, 2009). These community benefits exist due to the writers' work in the beloved established universe.

Another subject of note from the initial survey was the limited number of responses regarding feedback, which was mentioned only once. This respondent, while commenting on editorial revisions from the franchise owners, indicated that the revision process on tie-in work can, at times, be more painstaking than on an original work of fiction. Clarke (2009) depicts the feedback process of licenced works as being generally quite early in the development of the narrative, sometimes before the writing has even begun. The prevalence of this practice may be taken as an indicator of its success in effectively guiding the story development process.

Writing technique
This theme arose in three of the five tie-in participants' responses to the initial survey. There was little consistency between respondents, though some wrote at relative length regarding technique and technical aspects of writing, indicating its significance to those individuals.

Pedagogy
The topic of 'learning' appeared ten times across three responses in relation to writing, particularly in regard to specific technical writing aspects such as narrative development and personal style. Kevin J. Anderson writes:

> I had several novels under my belt before my first tie-in work, and they were good, but brash, angry-young-man books without sympathetic characters or anything a reader would want to cheer for. When I was given the very heavy burden of writing new Star Wars novels, I had to STUDY what had made those films so popular, WHY people liked those iconic characters, the heroes, the hero's journey, the humor, the romance. Every reader wants this, but my creative writing teachers had ignored instructing us on how to create something people LIKED.

These traditional elements of dramatic storytelling are often more evident in screen media and performance than in the novel, but transfer easily between formats (Collins, 2013) and, as Anderson notes above, these elements are successful in literature because readers connect with and enjoy them. An understanding of why, and how, they work within the structure of a story can be of benefit to the developing writer, forming what is known as discipline-specific knowledge, a component of one of three core features of creativity as identified by Amabile,

Barsade, Mueller and Staw (2005) and further discussed by Sawyer (2010). This knowledge coalesces as the learner's new actual development (Vygotsky, 1982) and, when met with the two other elements of creativity – motivation and creativity-relevant skills, such as discipline and non-conformity – enables original creation (Sawyer, 2003). As Norden (2007) agrees, the truly creative author branches away from a prescribed or 'closed' form when allowing her or his story to take shape. Much as an original story can develop more easily from the bones of an established universe, innovative storytelling grows readily from the same dramatic elements that spawned story (Collins, 2013). This opportunity to learn technique from the analysis and mimicking of effective, successful storytellers, regardless of medium, is an example of the established story universe facilitating learning in the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1982). The expertise of the screenwriter (bolstered by his budget and the talents of his team), in this instance, provide the supports for the writer to extend his understanding and skillset in creative writing, overall improving his practice (Sawyer, 2003; Vygotsky, 1982). As Kevin J. Anderson writes in his response, 'I have applied that [learning] to my own, award-winning original fiction.'

The boundaries, or constraints, of established story universes came up three times in the analysis of responses from the initial survey, from two respondents. This aspect of tie-in writing was identified as simultaneously a supportive element and a restrictive one, teaching discipline and assisting with the refinement of specific technique while also presenting a challenge for writers. 'I guess the actual writing process can be more challenging because there are more rules to follow – characters you can't kill, planets you can't blow up, characters who must be treated in a consistent way,' says Tim Lebbon. 'But that's part of the challenge, and challenges are good for writers.' Certainly, challenge is good for all learners, and can lead to more learning autonomy, provided it's balanced with support, argues Mariani (1997). However, too much support from mentors and experts creates dependence, whereas too great a challenge creates despondence and disengagement (Mariani, 1997). Between the two extremes is a whole continuum of differing degrees of autonomy along which learners find their own place and work (Mariani, 1997). This model for the place of the learner and the expert fits closely with Vygotsky's (1982) zone of proximal development, suggesting that that which is well beyond the learner's capabilities actually makes for ideal learning, if guided or scaffolded, but engagement with that which the learner can already do (their actual development) can support no new learning at all. The constraints discussed by the participants refer to the established 'rules' of the story universe in which they are writing, and are acting as the supports or scaffolds

for the learning taking place, allowing technical skill to develop and for the author to nurture their own consistency. 'I've found that my style remains my own whilst writing in these alternative universes – so my *Star Wars* novel was definitely a Tim Lebbon novel set in the *Star Wars* universe, rather than an attempt to write in a different style to suit that universe.'

One participant raised the topic of being stretched to write new genres they might previously have not attempted due to their employment as a tie-in writer. Of course, it might be argued that any writing practise in unfamiliar genres would develop skill in those areas, however if the genres are too extremely unfamiliar and too far outside of the learner's current understandings, engagement within these genres will not aid in effective learning or successful acquisition of those skills (Vygotsky, 1982). Challenge must be balanced with support in order to effect learning (Mariani, 1997). In this case, the supported exploration of an unknown skillset and genre is facilitated by the structure of the established story universe (Vygotsky, 1982).

Characterisation

Unlike with fanfiction respondents, this was an underrepresented theme in media tie-in responses to the initial survey. Three participants mentioned character or characterisation but none discussed in depth. In follow-up interviews, when prompted to discuss character, respondents indicated that established universes do provide opportunities for understanding character.

Character understanding and development

Batty (2014, 2011, 2010) writes extensively on the nature of character in film and the way character acts as the vehicle for audiences experiencing media and story. Action happens, drama happens, beautiful prose or superb transitions may elevate the enjoyment factor, but central to story is character (Batty, 2014). Survey respondent Kevin J. Anderson commented that being contracted to write for *Star Wars* prompted him to study the narrative elements of character development and character arcs, and importantly, what makes a character likeable or sympathetic to readers. It is through characters, Batty (2014) writes, that audiences understand and take meaning from plot and theme, and it is through particular hooks – such as complex backstories, unique personas, identifiable voices, perspectives, agency within the story – that the audience connects with fictional protagonists. This tells us that story and character are inextricably co-dependent, character providing a doorway to story and story giving shape to character (Batty, 2011). In a follow-up interview, author Stefan Petrucha elaborated on this interrelationship between character and story in an established universe: 'Simply put, it's easier

because the character is already in place, as defined by the creator/owner. They're basically *designed* to fit, or at least imply, a certain type of story, or conflict. The personality, history and dynamic is already established, so it becomes a question of putting that character in interesting situations, relative to their persona.'

The ultimate meeting point of story and character in any narrative is the protagonist's journey (Batty, 2011, 2010). Batty demonstrates how the hero's arc in a successful screen narrative necessarily takes the character on two distinct yet symbiotic journeys – one physical, one emotional – leading to the satisfying emotional transformation constructed or encouraged through the events of the action (Batty, 2011, 2010). While the mediums of screen and page are of course different, they each explore and exploit narrative in idiosyncratic yet similar ways (Pillai, 2013). The two forms sharing a long modern history, it is worth remembering that the conventions of screenplay evolved from the novel's narrative prose (Selby, Giddings & Wensley, 1990; Van Parys, 2009). In the case of media tie-in novels, the relationship is even closer, the familiarity with the content on-screen hopefully replicated in the depiction of the established universe in the novel (Van Parys, 2009, 2011b).

Among the strengths of the novel is its capacity for character, especially relative to the comparatively short time span of the film (Selby *et al*, 1990). As Pillai (2013) argues in his analysis of transmedia storytelling, where the televisual medium offers the lifelike pacing and the sensory stimulation made possible by lighting, camera angles and the addition of sound effects and soundtracks, the novel brings to the table its own strengths, many of which translate only very awkwardly back to screen. The inner monologue, for instance, is rarely elegantly executed in film or television, yet is a mainstay of the written narrative form, enabling the writer to more deeply explore character and to foreshadow motives and future events in a manner that feels authentic, without requiring open dialogue to express it (Pillai, 2013). These, and other such character-building opportunities such as point of view, reflection and irony give the novel form an advantage in exploring and portraying character (Selby *et al*, 1990). In the tie-in novel, these elements, already established and successfully executed on screen, are readily available for expansion in the novel form. More to the point, the novelist can take these familiar characters and exploit the opportunities left unexplored in film. In an interview not associated with this study, taken with numerous media tie-in writers (IAMTW, no date given), Nancy Holder expresses how much extra 'real estate' is available to a writer when the reader already knows the characters, the places and the stakes. Little needs to be said to describe or

set the scene – the action can commence. In the same interview, discussing his approach to writing tie-in novels, Kevin J. Anderson jokingly makes mention of the 'unlimited special effects budget' afforded to the novelist (IAMTW, no date given), celebrating the ability then to take beloved characters to settings and situations impossible to explore in a televisual medium where factors such as budgets, film schedules, travel and weather restrictions, and the safety of actors, must be taken into account.

The use of already-successful characters has other learning benefits to writers, according to Kevin J. Anderson. In a follow-up interview, elaborating on his survey response about character archetypes, he explains how the exercise of writing someone else's characters, and the inherent necessity of keeping them consistent and recognisable, taught him about classic characterisation. 'The extremely popular characters—in *Star Wars,* for example—are iconic archetypes. Previously, writing my own novels, I made up whatever characters I wanted, but in *Star Wars* I had to study what had made Han Solo so popular (the rogue with a heart of gold), Luke Skywalker (the lost prince who must discover his true calling), Leia (the spunky kid). I had never thought on those terms before, and because I was working in that universe, I HAD to make my characters react the same way.'

Continuing to draw links between performance and literary arts, as is especially appropriate when the forms are as tightly connected as films or television programs and their tie-in literature, the use of popular stock characters in original new scenarios is hardly a modern endeavour. Beginning in 16th century Italy, spreading across Renaissance Europe and still widely regarded in performance arts, the theatrical form known as Commedia dell'arte uses established characters, defined with a recognisable mask and behavioural traits, in loosely scripted acts that are predominately improvised according to the actor's interpretation of both the situation and the audience (Henke, 2002; Meagher, 2007; Rudlin, 2002). Familiar archetypes we see in narrative today – the bumbling fool, the star-crossed forbidden lovers, the dim-witted arrogant jock, the grumpy old man – can be traced to the depictions of famous Commedia dell'arte characters such as Arlecchino, Capitano and Pantalone (Henke, 2002). The longevity of these archetypes is testament to their success, and also to their appeal to the human psyche (Jung, 2014, 1959), showing that audiences enjoy reconnecting with characters they feel they know, whether because they *do* know them or because they subconsciously recognise the archetype. Interviewee Stefan Petrucha writes of his experience in working with established characters, 'The reader has to be able to recognize the character they're familiar with, but wants

to see them in fresh ways – so it's a balancing act, in a way defined by a phrase I may have already used in my previous answers - *exactly the same, only different*.' This practise with successful characters provides opportunity for writers to acquaint themselves with the archetypal forms that audiences connect with, while also providing the reading audience with the chance to experience that character in new scenarios, seeing them expanded and explored. In defining the media tie-in genre during initial communications regarding this study, Kevin J. Anderson emphasises the originality of the storytelling: 'Much of this, as with my original *Star Wars* novels, *X-Files* novels, *Batman* and *Superman*, etc. are ORIGINAL novels, stories created entirely by me but using an established universe (such as the *Star Trek* universe). This is exactly what a scriptwriter does when he writes a script for an episode of *Star Trek* or a new *Star Wars* film, only we do it in novel form.' His perspective demonstrates further links between performance and literary arts, and shows also how the writing of tie-in media is an interpretive improvisation of how stock characters in a stock universe, defined by someone else, might behave in a scenario devised by the tie-in author, just as a scriptwriter does for a new televisual instalment.

New characters

Unmentioned in the survey but expressed in follow-up interviews in response to a specific question was the topic of original character development. Often in media tie-in fiction, the lead characters and those they interact with tend to be those already established in the canon material. But this is rarely the whole cast. Who will get killed off if the main cast is untouchable? Who will guide or inform the characters when we know, from experience in watching this program, that none of them have the specialist knowledge or life experience to be able to convey this to the reader convincingly? Who will antagonise the cast if the main villain is unavailable due to conflicts with the established timeline (between seasons, prequel, sequel)? Such challenges are solved through the introduction of original characters, though even this is a constrained business. Asked about learning opportunities in characterisation or difficulties associated with developing original characters for established universes, interviewee Stefan Petrucha writes, 'Depends on the project – some licensors encourage experimentation, others want to see their regular slate of characters used exclusively. Generally, I'm free to create a villain, or some newcomer that provides a dramatic/comedic core, but again, they have to suit the existing dynamic. Just as the character design implies a certain type of story… it also carries implications for the sort of new characters they'd best interact with.' This dynamic, as he goes on to explain, is dictated by the aforementioned

'boundaries' or constraints established by the shared understanding of the story world. The potential for learning within these boundaries is high due to the balance of challenge and support, as described by Mariani (1997). Much of the world-building and cast is already in the minds of both the writer and the readers, leaving the writer freer than usual to focus on the development of new characters. In response to the same question about new characters in established universes, respondent Kevin J. Anderson writes, 'Creating my own characters to fit into the established universe, I had to study the ingredients of basic characterization in ways that never became important in my own work. Knowing that a million people would read the book, I had to bring in more effort, more attention to detail than ever before. I had to up my game, and that benefited me as a writer in all of my other work.' The scaffolded nature of the established universe in media tie-in fiction, conjoined both with the opportunity to observe and mimic masterful character writing and the pressure of a very wide and expectant readership, seems to benefit writers in their characterisation not only of the established characters, but of their own original characters as well.

Enrichment and portable skills
The remaining responses mentioned or alluded to some direct impact on the tie-in writer, either personally or professionally. These were found in all five initial survey responses. There was a high rate of repetition of topics between participants. Each writer emphasised that they are also writers of original fiction and/or non-fiction, and differentiated this from their tie-in publications either in terms of priority or process.

Authorial opportunities
As professional writers earning an income from their books, including works of tie-in fiction, it is unsurprising that the theme of professional opportunities arose significantly in the responses from media tie-in writers to the initial survey. The chance to learn through new experiences and writing something different or challenging themselves was most prominent, with mentions in four of the five surveys. Collaboration was mentioned by two. As Vygotsky (1982) found, learning is not (as it had previously been perceived by some schools of thought) a spontaneous event that takes place within the individual at the correct time, nor is it the natural successor of development and growth. While language acquisition and mastery does appear to come very naturally to learners, supporting those earlier theories, proficiency in writing does not (Vygotsky, 1982). Writing skill must be taught, through collaboration with others of differing skill levels and through scaffolded tasks outside of the learner's comfort zone (Vygotsky, 1982; Mariani, 1997). In the case of adult, self-driven learners, in lieu of a teacher

or classroom setting, the onus of finding and utilising these pedagogical opportunities rests with the learner. The repeated theme of 'learning' in survey responses clearly identifies the participating authors in this research as self-aware learners, seeking betterment of their craft and recognising the opportunities around them. 'Everything I do makes me a better writer,' notes an anonymous media tie-in writer, who typically writes original fiction but stepped into tie-in fiction as a favour to an editor friend, 'whether it's simply taking a walk and thinking, working on my own books, or doing the [tie-in work]. Nothing should be lost on a writer.'

The development of specific portable professional qualities were mentioned by participants to the survey, but not repeated between respondents, indicating the unique experience of every author professionally working in established universes. Discipline was raised by one; flexibility was brought up by another. However, these qualities and the chances to refine them were related repeatedly to the fixed nature of established story universes and the importance of maintaining the integrity of those established elements, both for legal and creative reasons. 'It does require a certain discipline having to follow certain rules and keep in mind constraints,' writes Tim Lebbon in the initial survey, in accord with Clarke (2009), who likewise found that discipline and efficiency in writing were qualities developed by and expected from tie-in writers. As he pointed out that most tie-in writers are employed repeatedly in this kind of work, those writers who exhibit the ability to commit themselves to a task and produce a publishable work of literature in a very short turnaround – fitting, of course, the guidelines set forth by the franchise owner – are in the better position to be employed again (Clarke, 2009), but so too are they in the better position to sharpen and demonstrate this ability. In researching the nature of creativity, Sawyer (2010, citing Amabile, Barsade, Mueller and Staw, 2005) argues that in fact, self-discipline and perseverance fall into the category of creativity-relevant skills, which are necessary to produce original, creative outcomes and are more important than technical skills or talents associated with the topic or area of work.

The finding of the author's voice is another topic that was repeated in two responses. Aczel (1998) draws on previous academics in the field to argue that voice is a stylistic textual effect of prose, not simply a matter of grammatical arrangements. Citing Genette (1983), he demonstrates the limitations of perceiving voice as only speakers and narrators within text, and suggests instead considering the author voice as a series of rhetorical devices and stylistic choices that are interpreted by the reader (Aczel, 1998). A complex matter linked but not synonymous with perspective or point of view (Aczel, 1998), voice nevertheless works through

the selected viewpoint or narrator to position the audience and inform their experience of the text (Selby *et al*, 1990). Authors practising any writing will find themselves refining this element of their own writing (as one respondent claims, 'Practice always makes one a better writer'), but with the characters, history and story world already established in tie-in writing, authors undertaking this work have less challenge to focus on and more capacity for development toward a consistent and recognisable authorial voice (Vygotsky, 1982).

Personal Affects
Writing is a personal thing, and a means of self-expression (Herrington & Curtis, 2003). The remaining responses related to the authors as people, and what affects, effects or influences tie-in writing has had on them personally. Four of the five participants to the initial survey indicated or explicitly stated that they gained pleasure writing in established universes, two self-identifying as fans of the franchises they have been hired to write for. In an interview following the initial survey, author of many books and comics across many intellectual properties Stefan Petrucha writes, 'Can one be a fan of the world one is writing for? Absolutely – I was a huge *X-Files* fan while I was working on the comic. But, as I think I said last time, those stories wouldn't exist unless I was hired to create them.' While enjoyment and pleasure is a benefit in itself, being paid to engage with one's favourite fannish objects is certainly a benefit these writers have that others do not.

One of the few topics to arise across all five participants was the distinction between original and tie-in work. Every tie-in writer made specific mention of their original work. The framing of this distinction spanned across a spectrum of views. 'The downside is loss of time when I could be working on my books. Still, a short story doesn't take as long,' writes an anonymous respondent. Another participant notes that while time spent in established universes is fun, 'my emphasis is always going to be on my own original fiction.' This viewing of tie-in work, by some of its authors, as something other than a justifiable creative output indicates a sense that writing in another's universe is a distraction from more legitimate, original writing (Flegel & Roth, 2014). As professional writers dependent on their reputations and their productivity, with many readers of their original works awaiting the next one, this can certainly be viewed as a disadvantage to writing in established universes. However, the notions of media tie-in writing as a collaboration between the franchise owner (and their guidelines) and the author, or as something to which the author has a weaker relationship due to issues of ownership, as raised earlier in this section, are likely to contribute toward these views.

Conclusion

From the discussion above, it is clear that media tie-in writing offers authors a range of benefits and disadvantages, both actual and perceived, and that many of these seem to be connected directly to the form of tie-in writing and its position in the traditional publishing sphere. Those benefits and disadvantages which stem from the established universe itself and the time spent creatively engaging with it are difficult to identify with any degree of surety. The following, concluding chapter will draw from the findings of this chapter and the responses from fanfiction writers in the preceding one to identify, through comparison and analysis, the common traits between the two forms of writing for established universes.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The analysis of survey and interview responses from fanfiction and media tie-in writers in the preceding two chapters has highlighted a number of benefits and disadvantages as perceived and experienced by writers within established universes. This chapter draws together those areas of overlap between the focus groups in a comparative analysis of the ways established universes may help or hinder the development or progress of writers.

Interpersonal

The most common area of correlation between the focus groups was the interpersonal theme, with numerous topics fitting into this category. Feedback, for instance, as well as community and fan expectations, were concepts mentioned by both fanfiction writers and media tie-in writers. However, closer analysis of the framing or specific nature of these topics between the focus groups indicates that they are not in perfect agreement. Feedback, as discussed by fanfiction writers, is a significant component of the online gift economy and of the social order of fanfic culture (Littleton, 2011; Riley, 2015). It has the potential to influence and improve the writing, bolster self-esteem or wound it, and is of immense value, something fanfiction writers identify as desirable. For media tie-in writers, however, this is not a feature of writing for established universes. Only one writer from this group discussed feedback, and not in a positive sense, saying that the stakeholders in franchised fiction can be very picky and request a high number of revisions. There was no indication that the writer felt he learned a great deal from this process, nor that it was desirable.

In terms of fans and their expectations, both fanfiction and tie-in writers find themselves writing for an established readership of fans who share the same love and understanding of the established story universe in which the narrative takes place. Fans of that original world and story can transfer to the new writer as they come to integrate the new narrative into their personal or collective interpretation of the original (Jenkins, 1992). This is something that writers of debut original fiction do not have, and therefore something connected directly to the established story world itself. However, the community structure of online fandom necessitates a closer relationship between writer and reader (Riley, 2015). While most fanfic writers surveyed expressed concerns about disappointing readers, worries about community backlash over stories not going in a popular direction or the challenge of resisting the expectations of other fans, the tie-in writers did not seem similarly troubled. The professional distance between

paid authors of fiction tying into beloved franchises and their readership differentiates this experience from that of fanfic writers.

A common thread between both focus groups, and the scholarly literature surrounding them, was that of stigma. Both fanfic writers and tie-in writers surveyed mentioned prejudices against their genre within their writing communities. While the scholarly literature on fanfiction typically discusses external disdain, this was not raised by any of the respondents as a concern. The legitimacy of creative writing that uses characters and elements developed first by someone else remains at question in some circles connected to mainstream writing and publishing, in spite of the popularity of these works and their authors (IAMTW, no date given). This is a disadvantage shared by both fanfiction and tie-in writers that is specific to the use of established universes.

Collaborative and communal practices were also discussed by respondents from both groups. For tie-in writers, there is the sense of the franchise owner and other stakeholders as collaborators on the project, since their opinion bears so much weight. Together, these rights holders and creators jointly develop a shared understanding of the new narrative's direction and what will be permissible within its established bounds. Much in the same way, readers— the stakeholders of fanfiction, and arguably the 'owners' of the fandom's collective understanding of the story universe and its level of tolerance for deviation—co-construct meaning and story with the writers in their community. This is a scenario unique to creative writing where some of the ideas belong to someone other than the new creator, including a fan base, resulting in this negotiation between parties, and can be viewed as a positive or negative element of writing in establishing universes, depending on the individual experience of the writer.

Writing technique

Little of correlation could be found between the responses of the focus groups under this theme. The main topic that did recur in each group can be specifically linked to the predetermined nature of established universes. The constraints created by the original creator's portrayals and descriptions of characters, places and scenarios give structure to the writer developing the new story, taking away some of the work and providing scaffolding for the development and refinement of specific writing skills (Vygotsky, 1982). This was more prevalent in fanfiction responses, indicating that other factors such as the platform or community may serve to

exacerbate or lessen the significance of this opportunity, however it is likely that the career stage of the participating writers play a part in explaining the discrepancy. Writers who are still working toward a publishing goal may be more likely to seek and appreciate opportunities to improve their technique than writers whose skill has already been acknowledged by a number of publishers taking on their books. Two of the five fanfiction authors stated in their description of their writing journeys that they had begun writing fanfic with the express purpose of improving their writing skill and technique, whereas all five tie-in writers (though they have written in established universes for a similar length of time) already had careers as successful published authors before commencing tie-in work. It is noteworthy, then, despite the difference in overall writing experience between the focus groups, that both agreed that there were learning opportunities inherent in writing within established universes.

Characterisation

The correlations between the two focus groups were most consistent under this theme. Both fanfiction writers and media tie-in writers identified how writing in established story universes gave them a direct insight into the aspects of character, and refined their ability to develop character. Iconic characters from film and television are shaped around archetypes familiar to and popular with audiences since times long past (Henke, 2002), and feature deliberate 'hooks' to invite audiences to connect with them (Batty, 2014). The successful translation of these existing characters onto the page for a new adventure prompts the writer into deeper character study than perhaps they felt necessary for the creation of their own, original characters. This is a learning opportunity arising from, but not limited to, writing in established universes. The study of character and classic archetypes is a learning journey available to all who wish to pursue it.

The opportunity to mimic masterful portrayals of character and extend those into new scenarios is one exclusive to established universes. The characters used by fanfic and tie-in writers are perceived by their fans as fleshed-out and complete people thanks to their consistent, predictable previous portrayals in their films and television programs (Jenkins, 1992). Their physicality needs little description, and they already have patterns of speech and behaviour that audiences can predict based on their prior experiences with this story world (Jones, 2002; Marone & Neely, 2017). Representing these characters in new situations allows writers to learn through doing, scaffolding writers in their own development of character through imitation (Piaget, 2013, 1951).

Enrichment and portable skills

Survey responses regarding the personal aspects of writing in established universes bore almost as much consistency between the groups as within them. Some themes mentioned by a fanfic writer appeared in only one other survey reply, that being a tie-in participant. Writing being a mostly solo mission and its experiences therefore unique to every individual and every field (Herrington & Curtis, 2003, 2000), this is perhaps surprising, but demonstrates that writing in established story universes offers opportunities to develop and refine a number of portable professional skills. Chief among these are discipline and professional and creative flexibility. Features of fanfiction and/or media tie-in writing include tight deadlines to coincide with popular trends, tight guidelines from owners or community-established tolerance levels for deviation, and a story universe shared among the collective consciousness of the entire fan base, with all its inerasable history and pre-determined rules. These aspects promote focused dedication to timely completion of writing projects, and also the ability to restrict creative writing to a prescribed brief. Deadlines and reader desires can exist for writers of original fiction too, of course, and evidently these writers also demonstrate dedication and can produce what is asked of them, otherwise they would not likely be published. However, these conditions are inherent for those writing in established universes, shaping their writing practice through disciplined, constrained creative endeavours.

The above conditions for writing in established universes, that eliminate some of the 'wiggle room' writers may be accustomed to in their own original projects, generate a restricted creative scenario in which experimental problem-solving is encouraged in order to manage issues that may arise (Thomas, 2006). In one's own wholly original story, if the narrative brings the cast to crisis point on a secret asteroid base, it is a simple thing to give one of the characters the ability to pilot a spacecraft to fly everyone to safety. In the *Stargate Atlantis* established universe, where spacecraft are quite standard, the diplomat character, Elizabeth Weir, cannot be expected to pilot anything, so a story arc or scene that ends with everyone's lives in her hands on said asteroid needs to be more creatively resolved or rewritten.

Flexibility and problem-solving skill in and out of narrative are fostered through writing in established universes. The many stakeholders and collaborators involved in the creation of these stories make known their expectations for the direction and content of the work, which have variable degrees of significance for the writer. Accommodating these expectations and guidelines into the development of the story, as well as navigating the social aspects of this

scenario, requires compromise and creative flexibility, sought-after professional skills that are cultivated in writing for established universes (Black, 2008).

Limitations and recommendations

This paper acknowledges that despite care and commitment to rigour, all studies have limitations. The sample size used in this study is somewhat small, with a total of ten writers from two different arenas of established universe writing, but as a qualitative study, this limitation does not adversely affect the validity of the data gathered. The wealth of experience of writing in established universes between the participating writers meant they could provide rich, articulate and in-depth qualitative responses. To confirm the results of this study, it is recommended that a repeat study be undertaken using a larger sample of writers.

A further recommendation, or perhaps plea, is for further research into the industry, practice and craft of media tie-in writing. While scholarly interest in fanfiction as a practice, a learning tool and a platform of social commentary is comparatively prolific, little academic work currently exists against which to frame new investigations that might draw tie-in writing – a bestselling mainstay of publishing – out of its stigmatised, silenced position among literature (IAMTW, no date given).

Concluding statement

In so many ways, media tie-in writing and fanfiction are polar opposites – one is paid, professional work, commissioned by the creators and/or owners to enhance and extend the established story universe, while the other is determinedly "outsider", unpaid, questionably legal (dependent on territory), outside the creative control of the creator but semi-moderated by a community of fans. The writers are at different stages of their creative and professional journeys and write for different reasons. The circumstances under which the creative works are written and shaped are entirely dissimilar. Yet both forms use the same characters inhabiting the same worlds, those first conceptualised and given shape by someone else, and both share many of the same fans. These established story universes are richly textured and deeply valued places in the shared consciousness of their fan bases, but so too are they vast playgrounds for writers, offering opportunities such as improvement of writing technique and characterisation skills, networking, and the development of other desirable professional skills. They are also places of unwarranted shame, where writers are disparaged for their desire to play in them. The flair and technique learned, and the originality of plotting necessary to build on an established

play structure, not fully appreciated by most of their peers or critics. But play should never be shameful. What this research shows is that play inside established story universes has benefits for writers that other forms of writing do not, including opportunities to learn – the noblest of pastimes – and better themselves as writers and professional artists. For writers on a pathway toward publishing fiction, established story universes are playgrounds worthy of consideration.

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Appendix A: human research ethics committee clearance

OFFICE OF RESEARCH
Human Research Ethics Committee
PHONE +61 7 4687 5703| FAX +61 7 4631 5555
EMAIL human.ethics@usq.edu.au

UNIVERSITY
OF SOUTHERN
QUEENSLAND

22 August 2017

Ms Shayla Olsen

Dear Shayla

The USQ Human Research Ethics Committee has recently reviewed your responses to the conditions placed upon the ethical approval for the project outlined below. Your proposal is now deemed to meet the requirements of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)* and full ethical approval has been granted.

Approval No.	**H17REA151**
Project Title	Playgrounds for publishing
Approval date	18 August 2017
Expiry date	18 August 2020
HREC Decision	**Approved**

The standard conditions of this approval are:

(a) Conduct the project strictly in accordance with the proposal submitted and granted ethics approval, including any amendments made to the proposal required by the HREC
(b) Advise (email: human.ethics@usq.edu.au) immediately of any complaints or other issues in relation to the project which may warrant review of the ethical approval of the project
(c) Make submission for approval of amendments to the approved project before implementing such changes
(d) Provide a 'progress report' for every year of approval
(e) Provide a 'final report' when the project is complete
(f) Advise in writing if the project has been discontinued, using a 'final report'

For (c) to (f) forms are available on the USQ ethics website:
http://www.usq.edu.au/research/support-development/research-services/research-integrity-ethics/human/forms

Samantha Davis
Ethics Officer

Appendix B: Participant information sheet

Participant Information for USQ Research Project Questionnaire

Project Details

Title of Project:	Playgrounds for Publishing
Human Research Ethics Approval Number:	H17REA151

Research Team Contact Details

Principal Investigator Details

Shayla Olsen
Email: U1077056@umail.usq.edu.au
Mobile: +61 434 901 509

Supervisor Details

Dr Dallas Baker
Email: Dallas.Baker@usq.edu.au
Telephone: 617 4631 5370

Description

Since storytelling moved from book to screen, writers have found the inspiration to bring it back to the page by weaving new stories with the characters, settings and scenarios their fellow fans will know and recognise. This interdisciplinary research investigates the ways that writing in established universes may improve writer skill, through a short questionnaire undertaken by writers of both online fanfiction and media tie-in fiction. Taking into account that fanfiction and media tie-in fiction are very different in process and purpose, the aim of this research structure is to identify what benefits authors perceive are specific to working within established universes.

This project is being undertaken as part of a Masters Project. The research team requests your assistance as an experienced writer in this field whose involvement with established universes may span many years and numerous creative works.

Participation

Participants should be 18 years or over.

Your participation will involve completion of an online questionnaire that will take approximately 15 minutes of your time. Questions will include your experience with established universes, benefits you ascribe to this practice and any challenges you find specific to this practice.

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. If you do not wish to take part you are not obliged to. If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you are free to withdraw from the project at any stage. Please note, that if you wish to withdraw from the project after you have submitted your responses, the Research Team are unable to remove your data from the project (unless identifiable information has been collected). If you do wish to withdraw from this project, please contact the Research Team (contact details at the top of this form).

Your decision whether you take part, do not take part, or to take part and then withdraw, will in no way impact your current or future relationship with the University of Southern Queensland.

Expected Benefits

While it is not expected that this project will directly benefit participants, findings may serve to build toward the betterment of both academic and public understanding and perception of writers working in established universes. Participants will be provided with the findings of the project at its conclusion.

Risks

Fanfiction writers: Please be reminded that the practice of fanfiction is in breach of intellectual copyright law in most jurisdictions. The research team will not disclose your identity for any reason except a demand from a recognised court, and does not anticipate this to be likely.

Media tie-in writers: There are no anticipated risks beyond normal day-to-day living associated with your participation in this project.

Privacy and Confidentiality

All comments and responses will be treated confidentially unless required by law. Names, pen names or screen names may be associated with your responses in print with your express permission, as noted on the questionnaire. You may opt to omit your name from publication with your data. Please note this at the relevant question on your questionnaire.

Comments and responses may be published as exemplars within the text of the thesis, and also in future publications based off this original data.

Email addresses and any other contact information will be used for the sole purpose of the research team contacting participants, and will not be shared with any third parties.

Any data collected as a part of this project will be stored securely as per University of Southern Queensland's Research Data Management policy.

Consent to Participate

The completion of the questionnaire is accepted as an indication of your consent to participate in this project.

Questions or Further Information about the Project

Please refer to the Research Team Contact Details at the top of the form to have any questions answered or to request further information about this project.

Concerns or Complaints Regarding the Conduct of the Project

If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project you may contact the University of Southern Queensland Ethics Coordinator on (07) 4631 2690 or email ethics@usq.edu.au. The Ethics Coordinator is not connected with the research project and can facilitate a resolution to your concern in an unbiased manner.

Thank you for taking the time to help with this research project. Please keep this sheet for your information.

Appendix C: Summary of survey results by theme

Playgrounds for Publishing Initial Survey Results Thematic Analysis

N = Number
p = Number of participants
i = Number of instances a theme is mentioned

Interpersonal		Writing Technique		Characterisation and Dialogue		Enrichment & Professional	
Fanfiction	*Media Tie-In*	*Fanfiction*	*Media Tie-In*	*Fanfiction*	*Media Tie-In*	*Fanfiction*	*Media Tie-In*
Feedback	**Feedback & Community**	**Pedagogical**	**Pedagogical**	**Character understanding**	**Character understanding**	**Author skill**	**Author skill**
Feedback improves (N=3p, 4i)	Feedback – revisions	*Learning*	*Learning*	Aspects of character	Character empathy	Practice	Practise
Instant feedback	Collaboration (N=2p)	Learning (N=5p, 14i)	Learning (N=3p, 10i)	Natural characters (N=3p)	Character aspects and archetypes	Finding inner writer (likes/ dislikes) (N=2p)	Flexibility
Feedback influences	Fan expectations	Starting small (N=2p)	Visualisation	Character empathy		Learn through experience (N=3p)	Learn through experience (N=4p)
Feedback – revisions	Fans/ readers assisting author success (N=2p)	Stepped/ scaffolded learning of skills (N=2p)	Narrative development (N=1p, 5i)	Already familiar with character (N=2p)		Author agency in accepting useful feedback (N=2p)	Professionalism (N=2p)
Dependence on reviews	Owner instructions	Imitation (N=2p)	Boundaries (N=2p, 3i)	Character exploration		Flexibility and problem-solving (N=2p)	Discipline
	Owner authority	Narrative style to borrow	Challenge of established world	Connection between own experience and character plights		Discipline (N=2p)	Studying new genres (N=2p)
Community			Range of stories			Applying skills to original writing	Solidifying voice/ style/ inner writer (N=2p)
Australian in an American-dom. community		*World-building*				Need for quality and hard work to change reader minds (N=2p)	
International community		World-building difficulties (N=4p, 5i)				Effort (N=3p)	
Shared knowledge (N=3p)		Boundaries (N=2p)					
Community backlash (N=2p, 5i)		Experimentation					
Finding your place in a new community							
Beta readers/ collaboration (N=2)							

Interpersonal		Writing Technique		Characterisation and Dialogue		Enrichment & Professional	
Fanfiction	*Media Tie-In*	*Fanfiction*	*Media Tie-In*	*Fanfiction*	*Media Tie-In*	*Fanfiction*	*Media Tie-In*
Reputation Stigma (N=1p, 2i) Fanfic as misunderstood Internal stigma of AU/ quality (N=1p, 3i) Fandom vocab gets misused	**Reputation** Reputation with readers (N=3p) Reputation with publishers (N=2p) Sales due to established readership (N=2p) Job opportunities (N=2p) Industry scorn/ stigma (N=2p)	***Technical*** Technical aspects of storytelling (N=2p, 3i) Focus on specific aspects due to assumed shared knowledge (N=2p, 3i) Tense and POV, and when best to use them (N=2p) Description ***Secretarial*** Grammar/ punctuation ***Authorial experience*** AU/other paths Range of stories Restriction of creativity vs faithfulness	***Technical*** Style, voice Consistency (N=1p, 2i)	**Character development** Character development (N=3p) Character complexity/ flesh out (N=2p) Dialogue (N=2p) Villain redemption/ character arcs as natural or earned, showing progress (N=2p, 3i) **Restrictions** OOC (N=2p) Different interpretation of character from author/ fandom	**Character development** Character journey Making characters likeable and real	**Personal** Personal growth Story world exploration (satisfaction) Confidence (N=2p) Choosing to use American language to fit in Feedback feeds self-esteem (N=2p) Feedback hurts (N=2p) Conforming to reader desires **Finding fanfic** Many pathways Began with original fic (N=3p)	**Personal** Enjoy (N=4p) Viewed as time wasted Freedom Trying new challenges (N=2p) Own original writing (N=5p) Applying skills to original writing
Someone else's universe Author authority, disliking character Author invalidating fan views Issue of 'free' Shared universe	**Someone else's universe** Someone else's/not own (N=4p, 8i) Owner approval (N=2p) Owner restrictions Many owners						
Readers Readers (N=5p, Readership reach (limited readership for original online fic) Fan expectations (N=2p, 6i)							