

# Star Wars and the History of Transmedia Storytelling

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## 9. Publishing the New Jedi Order

Media Industries Collaboration and the Franchise Novel

*Sean Guynes*

In April 2014, two years after Disney's purchase of Lucasfilm and its constellation of intellectual properties (IP) in October 2012, Lucasfilm/Disney announced plans to create the Lucasfilm Story Group that would establish a single canon for the franchise and coordinate world-building efforts across all forthcoming narrative media. Establishing a "true canon—a single, cohesive *Star Wars* storyline" meant jettisoning the EU of comics, video games, television shows, made-for-TV movies, and novels created since 1977. As the report of the Story Group's new canon project attested, the EU was largely conceived of as those adventures in the *Star Wars* storyworld taking place "beyond what is seen on the screen."<sup>1</sup> To save those off-screen stories, the EU was recycled in the new Legends publishing line to encourage continued revenue from no-longer-canonical sources. The header image of the announcement tellingly displayed the new Legends cover for Timothy Zahn's *Heir to the Empire* (1991), the first of the Thrawn Trilogy that formed the cornerstone of the EU's popularity with hardcore fans at a time when *Star Wars* was thought to be a franchise beyond licensing revivification.

In terms of sheer quantity, most of *Star Wars* has taken place on the printed page—in well over a thousand comics and novels. Yet, what scholarship exists on *Star Wars* continues to circle around film, television, and video games, while printed media, especially novels, are often worth little more than passing mention.<sup>2</sup> Even Chris Taylor's massive *How Star Wars*

1 "The Legendary *Star Wars* Expanded Universe Turns a New Page," *StarWars.com*, April 25, 2014, accessed March 1, 2017, <http://www.starwars.com/news/the-legendary-star-wars-expanded-universe-turns-a-new-page>.

2 Recent analyses giving any significant attention to novels include: Crystal Renee White, "How Media Created by *Star Wars* Defines the Franchise," in *Myth, Media, and Culture in Star Wars: An Anthology*, edited by Douglas Brode and Leah Deyneka (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2012), 101-112; the third chapter of Carolyn Cocca, *Superwomen: Gender, Power, and Representation* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016); and the sixth chapter of Colin Harvey, *Fantastic Transmedia: Narrative, Play, and Memory across Science Fiction and Fantasy Storyworlds* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

*Conquered the Universe* treats such fictions anecdotally.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, despite the crossing of media boundaries implied by the term “transmedia,” its scholars seldom attend to printed media beyond comics, which were central to providing the IP licenses that led to the development of multibillion-dollar film franchises. This lack of attention to other printed media does make some historiographical sense, since the study of transmedia emerged from Henry Jenkins’s notion of convergence culture, the term he gave to practices of twenty-first-century “new media” defined as “the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want.”<sup>4</sup>

Focused as Jenkins was on the productive and participatory uses of media by its consumers and on the responses to those uses by media industries, Jenkins’s influence led a generation of scholars to look at particular types of media, sidelining, for the most part, the publishing industry and prose fiction. Novels became a part of transmedia and media studies primarily in the dressing of adaptation theory, which focused heavily on novel-to-film adaptations.<sup>5</sup> But with the exception of the film novelizations, Star Wars novels are not adaptations in Linda Hutcheon’s strictest sense;<sup>6</sup> they are not transpositions of existing storylines from one medium to another so much as they are storyworld expansions that make up a part of what Matt Hills calls the “endlessly deferred hyperdiegesis” that constitutes a given transmedia fiction’s expansive storyworld.<sup>7</sup> In this way, a Star Wars novel hardly differs from other transmedia fictions, like video games or comics.

But novels are fundamentally different from other media within the Star Wars franchise. Not only have they been treated as such within transmedia studies, but they also offer different modes of narration, have been historically significant to fan engagement with franchises, and are doubly ghettoized in the literary market for their dual position as genre fiction

3 Chris Taylor, *How Star Wars Conquered the Universe: The Past, Present, and Future of a Multibillion Dollar Franchise* (New York: Basic Books, 2015). Taylor devotes the nine-page chapter nineteen, “The Universe Expands” (286-295), to the entirety of Star Wars franchise novels.

4 Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 2.

5 The section on novelization in Thomas Van Parys and I.Q. Hunter, eds., *Science Fiction across Media: Adaptation/Novelization* (Canterbury: Gylphi, 2013) is an important exception and includes chapters by well-known novelization writers.

6 Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (Routledge, 2006).

7 Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 142.

and franchise production. I argue, therefore, in this chapter that *franchise novels*<sup>8</sup> provide unique insight into the relations of industrial collaboration that constitute media franchises by highlighting the often lucrative licensing partnerships between publishing companies and the audiovisual media industries. By focusing on franchise novels, I emphasize the key role they have played in the transmedia history of Star Wars. Following a survey of Star Wars franchise novels through the late 1990s that contextualizes their position within the larger field of Star Wars world-building, this chapter turns to a specific instance: the nineteen-book New Jedi Order series (1999–2003; hereafter NJO), an unprecedented publishing project to create a multi-authored mega-series designed by the publishers and Lucasfilm representatives, with input by Lucas, and carried out by individual authors. I demonstrate how tactics of industrial collaboration have come to account for the current production of Star Wars “by committee” via the Lucasfilm Story Group. In attending to NJO as an example that situates the franchise novel as a practice of industrial collaboration and transmedia world-building, I claim that print media and the novel in particular are critical to transmedia studies and in particular to studying transmedia as a media franchising strategy.

## Publishing Star Wars, 1977–1999

Matthew Freeman’s notion of an early-twentieth-century model of “building” transmedia worlds<sup>9</sup> defined the growth of the Star Wars franchise in the late 1970s and 1980s. This world-building strategy contrasts with the more recent, convergent model of transmedia storytelling that utilizes established interconnections among media industries and within media conglomerates to forge synergized storyworlds that flow across multiple media platforms.<sup>10</sup> Star Wars developed not as a set of predetermined, interrelated convergent narratives, but as a hodgepodge storyworld built up through a series of punctuated media extensions licensed by the newly created Lucasfilm company. These extensions, which famously included

8 What I call the franchise novel is commonly referred to as the *media tie-in novel*. But the term “tie-in” suggests a secondary, anecdotal relationship subordinating such novels to the “main” or “source” medium of storytelling. For many fans, however, these novels are vital to the experience of a transmedia franchise’s storyworld.

9 Matthew Freeman, *Historicising Transmedia Storytelling: Early Twentieth-Century Transmedia Story Worlds* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

10 Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 282.

toys, television shows, made-for-TV movies, and video games, began in the world of print media, with the novelization of *A New Hope* appearing in December 1976 and Marvel's release of a six-issue comics adaptation of the film timed so that the first three issues were available before its opening. Star Wars thus began for some fans in print before continuing into licensed comics and novels.

Lucasfilm capitalized successfully on the rich possibilities of a 1970s media ecology that was disposed to storyworld extensions through original novels, as franchises had been doing for decades. It makes sense, therefore, that in addition to the first film's novelization and the quick commission of a quasi-novelization-become-standalone-novel (Alan Dean Foster's 1978 *Splinter of the Mind's Eye*<sup>11</sup>), the company also licensed major science-fiction publisher Del Rey to publish original novels. Under their short-lived license, Del Rey released six novels in two trilogies, one each for Han Solo (1979-1980) and Lando Calrissian (1983), targeted at the growing Star Wars fandom and tied to the release schedules of *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*. The two trilogies, written by the relatively unknown science-fiction authors Brian Daley and L. Neil Smith, were set in locations invented by the authors. They followed the title characters on adventures that placed them in conflict with local law enforcement, gangsters, and goons of corporate enterprises. Setting the novels outside of the storyworld-to-date and before the events in *A New Hope* ensured that the books did not conflict with Lucas's ongoing storytelling.

The Star Wars storyworld went into hibernation in the mid-1980s, shortly after *Return of the Jedi*.<sup>12</sup> As one potential licensee told Howard Roffman of Lucas Licensing in the 1980s, "*Star Wars* is dead."<sup>13</sup> Although it expanded into the realm of TRPGs in 1987 with West End Games's *Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game*, Star Wars was not revived until it returned to bookstores in 1991, when Zahn's *Heir to the Empire* presented fans with the story of what happened after *Return of the Jedi*. *Heir to the Empire* and the two novels that completed this new trilogy (1992, 1993) were authored with a greater level of oversight from Lucasfilm than were the Daley and Smith trilogies or Marvel's comics, the latter of which led to occasionally bonkers storylines. In exercising greater control over Zahn's novels, Lucasfilm hoped to establish

11 See Matthew Freeman's chapter in this volume on the media-historical context of what he calls Foster's quasi-novelization.

12 Two Ewok-centered made-for-TV movies (1984, 1985) failed to encourage further interest; in 1986, Marvel ceased publishing its Star Wars comics and the animated children's television series *Droids* and *Ewoks* were both cancelled.

13 Taylor, *How Star Wars Conquered the Universe*, 284.

a relatively consistent storyworld through the new novels and, as such, directed Zahn to draw on *Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game*'s encyclopedic rundown of the storyworld's elements, which included names, attributes, and histories of virtually all characters, species, and locations from the films. Zahn's success was a shock for Lucasfilm, but expected by Bantam's science-fiction imprint, Spectra. Founder and editor Lou Aronica had felt aggrieved by what he considered the "so-so" quality of monthly novels published by other media franchises.<sup>14</sup> But recruiting the Hugo award-winning author Zahn<sup>15</sup> and getting Lucas's go-ahead to tell stories set after the films did the trick: Star Wars became a major property for Bantam Spectra and thereby a coveted publishing license.

Aronica hoped to publish one bestselling hardcover per year. But the series's profitability and reader demand drove the number of yearly novels higher, even as critics and fans agreed that the books' quality deteriorated. By 1996, Bantam Spectra was publishing at least ten novels per year in addition to the numerous junior and YA novels licensed by other publishers specializing in children's literature. Bantam ended up publishing over 50 novels before Lucasfilm moved the license back to Del Rey in 1999 in anticipation of a renewed interest in the franchise that would follow the release of *The Phantom Menace*.<sup>16</sup> The return to Del Rey was also motivated by Lucasfilm's dissatisfaction with the rapid sprawling of the EU and the uneven quality of the novels; they wanted the EU instead "to slowly build up a vast and complex mythology."<sup>17</sup> To begin crafting this mythology, positioned as an extension of the Skywalker story, Lucasfilm, Del Rey, Dark Horse Comics (the comics IP licensee), and several authors therefore planned NJO as a publishing blockbuster equivalent to the filmic saga.

14 Taylor, *How Star Wars Conquered the Universe*, 288.

15 On the process of planning and writing Zahn's Thrawn Trilogy, and the negotiations between him and Lucasfilm over control of the storyline, see Taylor, *How Star Wars Conquered the Universe*, 290-293. On the process of writing Star Wars franchise novels under Bantam, see Roger MacBride Allen, "Media Tie-Ins: Why They Are Nearly Impossible for Beginners to Publish," *SFWA.org*, January 4, 2005, accessed March 1, 2017, <http://www.sfw.org/2005/01/media-tie-ins-why-they-are-nearly-impossible-for-beginners-to-publish/>.

16 Bantam was allowed to finish publishing books already contracted, so Bantam released three final novels in the *X-Wing* series, the final in a trilogy about bounty hunters, and the final in a series of short story anthologies in 1999.

17 Taylor, *How Star Wars Conquered the Universe*, 293.

## Industrial Collaboration and The New Jedi Order, 1999-2003

Franchise novels are products of industrial collaboration. Franchises, Derek Johnson argues, “do not replicate themselves” *ex nihilo* but, rather, “are produced in negotiated social and cultural contexts.”<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, “the replication of franchising extends not from the agency of corporate monoliths, but from producers working for and within industrial power structures.”<sup>19</sup> In other words, media franchises are constituted in industrial processes sustained by IP, licensing, and the profit from both. But they must also be understood as complex configurations of labor, legal, and socio-cultural forces produced through a network of collaborations that connects IP rights holders, licensees, creators who make products utilizing IP, and audiences. Audiences, in turn, consume and, through their consumption practices, respond in turn to the licensed product, franchise, and network that led to the product’s production and the franchise’s replication.

NJO offers a unique case study in the network of media franchising collaborations with the publishing industry since the series followed from an explicit attempt by the IP rights holder to redirect a franchise’s relationship with the publishing industry to better enact a particular transmedia world-building strategy. Moreover, NJO raises questions about the various levels of creative collaboration required to plan, write, and publish a nineteen-novel book series—from collaboration between the NJO planning committee entities and their various creative and industrial purchases on the project, to that between individual authors and editors as well as, ultimately, to economic and cultural stakeholders.

If NJO is remembered for anything, it is for the death of Chewbacca, a soul-crushing event for many Star Wars fans that took place in the initial novel of the series: *Vector Prime* by R.A. Salvatore, acclaimed author of *Dungeons & Dragons* franchise novels. Since the killing off of major characters had been a no-no for Star Wars novelists from the beginning, Chewbacca’s death signaled to readers that NJO meant to raise the stakes significantly by changing the Star Wars storyworld.<sup>20</sup> *Vector Prime* introduced a series of

18 Derek Johnson, *Media Franchising: Creative License and Collaboration in the Culture Industries* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 3.

19 Johnson, *Media Franchising*, 4.

20 Responding to criticisms of Chewbacca’s death, Salvatore explained, the planning committee “decided that we had to make the point clear that when [the main characters are] in a fight, you really should be on the edge of your seat. In any book, at any time, someone could go” (bracketed text in original). Helen Keier, “R.A. Salvatore,” part II, *TheForce.net*, December 1999, accessed March 1, 2017, [www.theforce.net/jedicouncil/interview/salvatore2.shtml](http://www.theforce.net/jedicouncil/interview/salvatore2.shtml).

minor plots subject to the galaxy's invasion by a heretofore unencountered extragalactic species, the Yuuzhan Vong. The Yuuzhan Vong were both fascinating and repulsive: a species beyond the Force, unable to be sensed by the Jedi; a society with bio-organic technologies that violently eschewed all mechanical ones, possessing organisms bred to be starships, weapons, armor, and more; and a culture dedicated to the eradication or enslavement of all others, hell-bent on domination, and devoted to bodily mutilation in order to gain social prestige. In short, NJO was less sanitized in its presentation of violence, blood/gore, death, and trauma than any prior storyworld text, and thereby introduced more adult themes into the Star Wars universe.

NJO takes place 25 years after *Return of the Jedi*, far enough into the "future" of the Star Wars universe that the series had all of the EU as retrospective, a vast repository of horizontal memory that NJO planners and authors plundered to great effect. NJO writers, for example, relied on a massive cast of characters found only in novels and comics, as well as using a superweapon (an EU plot favorite) from Roger MacBride Allen's Corellian Trilogy (1995), *Centerpoint Station*, which proved vital to the defense strategy of the Rebellion's intergalactic successor state, the New Republic. NJO also expanded the mythology of the Skywalker family from the original trilogy, the origin of which had begun to be told in *The Phantom Menace*, by making Han and Leia's children—twins Jacen and Jaina and younger brother Anakin, born and given backstory in numerous EU novels—central to the multi-book story. Moreover, the series was a logical extension of a major plot begun in Kevin J. Anderson's Jedi Academy Trilogy (1994) and continued in numerous novels throughout the 1990s to train a new generation of Jedi (including the Solo children) in fulfillment of *Return of the Jedi's* titular promise to reestablish the Jedi Order. NJO thus validated Bantam Spectra and other publisher-licensees' Star Wars world-building while also rewarding long-term fan-readers with the horizontal extension of those earlier novels' storytelling. At the same time, NJO charted the storyworld's growth more closely in consultation with Lucasfilm as the transmedia franchise's key stakeholder.

What is clear from interviews and secondhand accounts of the planning and development of NJO is that Del Rey's editorial director, Shelley Shapiro, wanted to give Star Wars novels a new face. A few years after Aronica had set out to make Star Wars novels better than "so-so," Bantam's franchise novels were starting to look like "Star Trekish formula pabulum," as NJO co-planner Michael A. Stackpole put it.<sup>21</sup> The Bantam novels, in other words, jumped

21 Helen Keier, "Michael A. Stackpole," *TheForce.net*, November 1999, [www.theforce.net/jediecouncil/interview/stackpole2.shtml](http://www.theforce.net/jediecouncil/interview/stackpole2.shtml).

around the Star Wars timeline, occasionally contradicted themselves, and were plotted with little concern for consistent world-building. Through a series of meetings in 1998, Shapiro worked with Lucasfilm managing editor Sue Rostoni, who had been in charge of basic continuity since the 1970s; Lucy Wilson, Lucasfilm's director of publishing; representatives from Dark Horse Comics, including Star Wars comics editor Randy Stradley; a handful of authors, including Stackpole and James Luceno; and various editors at Del Rey,<sup>22</sup> to plot an outline of 29 novels to be released over five years—though this was later reduced to nineteen over four. In addition to being designed by a committee of industry higher-ups, franchise stakeholders, and authors who would be involved, the series' major plot details—e.g. who would die—were ultimately checked with Lucas.

As a complexly plotted series, NJO was both a significant collaboration between multiple creative laborers and franchise stakeholders operating at various levels within the media industries, but it was also a continuity and world-building strategy devised purposefully by Lucasfilm. Wilson, for example, had long lamented that Star Wars novels were too much the creation of authors telling stories based purely on their individual whims. In a round-robin interview, Wilson recalled that “[t]he Bantam books were very much determined by what each writer wanted to create and were either one-off titles or trilogy series. [...] But as the universe got more complicated, it was clear we had to take more control over where the stories were going in order to maintain this continuity.”<sup>23</sup> To reassert a semblance of control over franchise novel continuity, Lucasfilm included “a new spin-off fiction program that would be one big sequential story” in the contract it negotiated with Del Rey for the rights to produce prequel film novelizations and spin-off novels.<sup>24</sup> In other words, the idea for NJO was part of a strategic contract negotiation to effect a switch from one publishing licensee to another in an effort to produce a more unified, franchise-controlled linear expansion of the transmedia storyworld. More than an unprecedented publishing project, NJO was a franchising move that reestablished Lucasfilm's oversight of the Star Wars brand and was, no doubt, also an effort to increase revenue from its publishing licenses.

Lucasfilm and Del Rey treated their novels as a departure from Bantam's book series. This is especially evident in Del Rey's marketing and

22 For the most complete rundown of all involved, see “*Star Wars: The New Jedi Order Round-Robin Interview*,” *Unifying Force*, by James Luceno (Del Rey, 2003), appended interview, n.p.

23 “Round-Robin Interview,” n.p.

24 “Round-Robin Interview,” n.p.

merchandising tactics, its efforts at intramedial storytelling (through connections with non-NJO Star Wars novels published during the same period<sup>25</sup>), and their choice of authors. With the prequel trilogy sure to inspire a renewal of popular interest in Star Wars and a new generation of fan-consumers, Lucasfilm viewed a publishing license switch-up as a new start for Star Wars novels and readers, some of whom would be coming to the novels for the first time. NJO provided an important point of entry, then, since it neither inhibited prequel spin-off storytelling nor retreaded the shakily established EU continuity to date. Moreover, NJO's debut also followed two years after the original trilogy special editions were released in 1997, opening a new market for the films and tie-in merchandising, and introducing a younger generation—including many six-year-olds like me—to the first films. This context further layered the ways in which NJO was positioned to catch the attention of possible Star Wars audiences. In this way, NJO worked to rebrand the Star Wars franchise novel, as the examples of their strategy below demonstrate.

Del Rey rebranded, in part, through targeted marketing, a visual shift consistent across all book-cover art from painted to digitally produced,<sup>26</sup> and adapted merchandise, including a series of audiobook productions and a *Star Wars: Roleplaying Game* NJO sourcebook. One key marketing strategy was the production of a television commercial for *Vector Prime*. Until the 1990s, book commercials were prohibitively expensive for publishing companies, but they became more affordable with the advent of cheaper digital production tools that then prompted cable channels to begin offering “targeted, inexpensive advertising opportunities for publishers anxious to reach” new readers; by 1994, such commercials were commonplace, though still reserved for projected blockbuster novels.<sup>27</sup> Del Rey took advantage of this new advertising medium for books with a 30-second television spot that aired on the Sci-Fi Channel in the months leading up to *Vector Prime*'s November 1999 publication. The spot featured a montage of clips from the original trilogy, including digital shots introduced in the 1997 special

25 For example, Greg Bear's *Rogue Planet* (2000), which introduced a living planet key to defeating the Yuuzhan Vong.

26 The first three NJO books were covered with art by famous science-fiction artist John Harris, a break from the previous Star Wars novels signifying a mainstream significance of the series; every NJO and franchise-line cover was created digitally thereafter.

27 Doreen Carvajal, “Promoting Books via TV Commercials and Movie Trailers Has Become Affordable,” *The New York Times*, April 28, 1997, accessed March 1, 2017, [www.nytimes.com/1997/04/28/business/promoting-books-via-tv-commercials-and-movie-trailers-has-become-affordable.html](http://www.nytimes.com/1997/04/28/business/promoting-books-via-tv-commercials-and-movie-trailers-has-become-affordable.html).

edition, as Mark Hamill provided an ominous frame for NJO: “I have fought the worst of all wars and witnessed the redemption of evil. [...] Now, with my loved ones and my loyal allies, I face a new challenge unlike any before. And I’m not sure if this time we can win.” The commercial concludes with a pull-back from a close-up of the cover to reveal Salvatore’s novel, as a different voice-over actor announces “the first novel of the New Jedi Order.”<sup>28</sup> Although Del Rey’s commercial appeared on a genre-specific channel, it signaled a desire to grab new franchise readers by presenting NJO as a sequel to the original trilogy, burying the EU’s complexities through a rapid temporal shift from the “then” of *Return of the Jedi* to the “Now” of NJO. The commercial also capitalized on visual references to the recently re-released original trilogy and the cultural capital tied to hearing Luke himself vet the novel as the continuation of his story—one with a mysterious enemy and an unsure, unpredictable outcome.

Del Rey’s selection of authors for the series was equally important to NJO’s rebranding of the Star Wars franchise novel. Inviting authors new to the EU (Elaine Cunningham, Troy Denning, Shane Dix, Greg Keyes, James Luceno, Salvatore, Matthew Stover, Sean Williams, Walter Jon Williams) to work alongside those who helped pioneer it (Aaron Allston, Michael A. Stackpole, Kathy Tyers) was a simultaneous appeal to longtime reader-fans and newcomers. Bantam’s pool of Star Wars writers had grown stagnant, even if those regulars were producing novels that were well-liked by readers. Stackpole’s involvement in particular gave NJO a certain amount of credibility for die-hard reader-fans. The presence of other Star Wars well-knowns, like the occasional X-Wing series writer Allston and Tyers, author of the early EU novel *The Truce at Bakura* (1993), ensured a sense of creative continuity between Bantam’s punctuated expansion of the storyworld and Del Rey’s more systematic approach. At the same time, the infusion of nine new authors into the Star Wars writers’ fold added stylistic and tonal variety to the storyworld and had the added bonus of ensuring new readers would not be intimidated by too many authors with a long backlist of Star Wars titles. It also meant that the franchise could piggyback on the popularity of the new authors, all of whom were respected in various arenas of fantasy and science-fiction writing. NJO’s selection of new and carryover authors thus positioned the series and its beginning of a new era in Star Wars publishing to take advantage of multiple potential reader audiences.

28 “The New Jedi Order *Vector Prime* Commercial,” YouTube video, 0:29, posted by lugia6, May 30, 2010, accessed March 1, 2017, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P13oUIn4BtU>.

## New Jedi, New Order

NJO ended in November 2003 with Luceno's *The Unifying Force*. Like most of the novels in the series, it landed on *The New York Times*'s best sellers list, debuting at number ten before quickly dropping off.<sup>29</sup> Through its new partnership with Del Rey, Lucasfilm wielded greater editorial power in its relationship with the publishing industry, and the unprecedented NJO novel series constituted an attempt to create a more coherent transmedia storyworld for a new generation of fans. Of course, Del Rey's NJO-led rebranding of the Star Wars franchise novel and its attempt to develop a single continuous storyworld together with Lucasfilm was hardly any more successful than Bantam's. Since the late 1990s, there has never been a year in which fewer than ten Star Wars novels were published;<sup>30</sup> rather than reducing Bantam's sprawl of franchise novel extensions, Del Rey actually exacerbated it in response to a growing Star Wars fandom. In spite of the continuity "problems" posed by such a massive number of Star Wars novels, the EU created by the various transmedia licensees supplied one of the franchise's most valuable assets. As noted in Disney's 2012 press release statement of intended acquisition, the Star Wars "universe of more than 17,000 characters inhabiting several thousand planets spanning 20,000 years offers infinite inspiration and opportunities."<sup>31</sup> In other words, the franchise was a lucrative IP farm for Disney, nearly all of which had been supplied by transmedia extensions of the film franchise—especially the EU and its novels.

NJO ultimately marked a shift in the production of Star Wars franchise novels and the relationship between licensor and licensee. The series paved the way for the tightly knit inter-industrial relationships that define the current Lucasfilm Story Group's approach to planning and producing not only franchise novels but the entire transmedia storyworld. NJO's unique position in the history of the franchise novel therefore calls for a closer attention to print media. Such attention is especially significant for studying a storyworld like post-Disney Star Wars, since the now equally canonical status of all narrative media, the plunderability of old EU IP to craft new tales, and the Story Group's attempts to produce a single, unified storyworld

29 "Best Sellers: November 30, 2003," *The New York Times*, November 30, 2003, accessed March 1, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/30/books/best-sellers-november-30-2003.html>.

30 Taylor, *How Star Wars Conquered the Universe*, 290.

31 "Disney to Acquire Lucasfilm, Ltd," *The Walt Disney Company*, October 30, 2012, accessed March 1, 2016, <http://thewaltdisneycompany.com/disney-to-acquire-lucasfilm-ltd/>.

across a quickly rising number of media texts is unheard of. A grounding in the novels and in other licensed print media, for example comics, will help us better understand transmedia world-building by reconceptualizing the primacy of media types in our analyses of the interconnections among franchising and transmedia world-building strategies. That is, where the pre-Disney Star Wars canon model saw the films as more important than other media permutations of the storyworld (liable to be wiped out of continuity should a new film or television show contradict it), Lucasfilm's approach to building the Star Wars transmedia world in the Disney era demands that we give equal weight to the novels. This change in the Star Wars world-building model requires a shift in perspective on the part of transmedia scholars in order to fully grasp how the franchise's storytelling is evolving under a new set of strategies and how the industrial processes of convergence, profit, creative license, and negotiated authorship are unfolding in this new design-by-committee era of Star Wars.

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