Interplay:

The Adaptive Contexts of Videogame

Adaptations and Franchises Across Media

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Abstract

Videogame adaptations have been a staple of cinema and television since the 1980s and have had a consistent presence despite receiving overwhelmingly negative reactions. Recognising the perseverance of videogame adaptations, I examine some of the key issues and debates surrounding the genre with in-depth analysis of the source material, the machinations of the film and videogame industries, and the films themselves, specifically relating to three prominent onscreen videogame adaptations.

Following an introduction to the various theories and areas of study already performed in this field, all of which I incorporate into an intricate, blended methodology, I explore issues of fidelity, localisation, and evolution that occur when adapting *Sonic the Hedgehog* out of the confines of its limited narrative. In examining adaptations of *Mortal Kombat* and *Street Fighter*, I explore how cinematic genres (such as the Hong Kong martial arts and American action movies) have influenced the creation of videogames and the production of their film and television adaptations. Finally, I delve into the history of zombie horror films, which influenced the *Resident Evil* franchise. As this became the longest-running (and, by extension, most successful) live-action videogame franchise, I explore the complex production of videogame adaptations, their critical and financial reception, and their ability to evolve into multimedia franchises.

Overall, my work is designed to take videogame adaptations seriously by examining them through in-depth analysis, exploring how they convey the gameplay mechanics of their source material, analysing why they remain so popular despite their negative reputation, and by establishing an academic framework by which to discuss them with the same reverence afforded to literary adaptations.

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Introduction

Overview

Interplay is a text-based, methodical analysis of the adaptive contexts of videogame adaptations and franchises across media. While videogame adaptations have had a consistent and tumultuous presence in cinema and television since 1982, there has yet to be a serious attempt to examine the genre. *Interplay* changes this by infusing the genre with a legitimacy and significance that has been sorely lacking. The following chapters each focus on videogames that have been adapted not just into live-action or animated films and television shows, but also complex multimedia franchises. This allows *Interplay* to reveal the intricate complexities of videogame adaptation, the ways they reconfigure theoretical thinking (particularly in adaptation theory), and brings to light how videogame adaptations are quickly becoming an exciting, new critical battleground.

i.i Understanding Videogame Adaptations

Adaptations of videogames have long had a notable presence in cinema and television; blockbuster Hollywood films are regularly accompanied by a videogame tie-in and videogame franchises are frequently, and increasingly routinely, adapted into live-action, or animated, movies and television shows. Indeed, "best-selling science fiction, fantasy, crime, and thriller novels all translate fairly readily to video games by virtue of their mission-based structure and action heroes" (Cutting, 2011: 169).

With adaptations of videogames into films and animation proliferating cinema and television screens since 1982, the question of why they are so popular and what they can teach about adaptation theory becomes particularly relevant. As videogames are inherently active – players directly influence the actions they witness onscreen – as opposed to film and television's passive nature, "Literary scholars, educators, and game designers all potentially have something to learn from the process of conceptualizing […] apparently impossible adaptations" (ibid).

Videogame adaptations have a tumultuous history and are often met with apathy, negativity, or dismissal. Indeed, although videogame and cinema development has become increasingly intertwined, "critics often assume Hollywood 'can inject the gaming medium with the same revitalizing energy and innovative vision' that their directors bring to the screen" (Moore, quoting McEachern, 2010: 185). However, one of my key observations is the inherent differences between videogames and film and how videogames have been adapted into other media. As a result, while Ben Fritz (cited by Moore, ibid: 186), observes that videogame players "view film-to-game adaptations with a fair amount of scepticism", playing a videogame is a vastly different experience than watching a movie despite both mediums following a similar formula "—establishing conflict, playing out conflict, and finally resolving conflict—video games prioritize the second stage [and] are very much about *playing out* narrative conflict" (ibid, quoting Hutcheon).

Interplay specifically addresses the complex methods of adaptation at work in videogame adaptations. Moore (ibid: 185) notes that, just as film adaptations have long struggled to break free from the shadow of literary works, "game adaptations struggle to cast off the reign of Hollywood films. Within the film world, video games are often dismissed as purely derivative works, secondary productions beholden to

their theatrical source texts". *Interplay* illustrates that, beyond simply exploiting popular franchises for profit, videogame adaptations have come to expand upon and inform their source material, generate ongoing canonicity debates within fan communities, and conform to new genres.

Compounding the reception of videogame adaptations is what Henry Jenkins observes to be "the popular conception of games as a technological toy, undeniably out of place in productive society" and the placement of videogames within Hollywood's economic tapestry (cited by Moore, ibid). Within the Hollywood studio system, videogames are a secondary concern, licensed products that exist simply to promote blockbuster releases and "provide movie fans with yet another opportunity to buy into the film franchise" (ibid: 186). This thinking is nothing less than a disservice when one views videogame adaptations within historical context and by blending together multiple methodologies. Chapter One expands upon how *Interplay* blends adaptation theory, film theory, videogame theory, and fan theory together with the complex issues of adaptation, fidelity, economics, appropriation, and genre at work within videogame adaptations.

Consequently, my research focuses entirely on analysing videogame adaptations with the same critical thinking and intellectual significance afforded towards literary adaptations. As there has yet to be a definitive attempt to discuss videogame adaptations at a critical or intellectual level, or to truly take them seriously as a viable genre of adaptation, videogames "present a relatively uncharted field [for] adaptation scholars" (Cutting, 2011: 181). Videogame adaptations are thus a bold, fresh, relatively untouched field wherein, as Cutting (ibid) states, "there is no stable body of adaptations into or from videogames that we can look back on as definitive,

not merely indicative, both because games are rapidly evolving and because they are as yet culturally somewhat narrow and especially divided from literary fiction".

Rather than limit adaptation theory to literary adaptations, videogame adaptations provide an exciting opportunity to analyse "areas of undeveloped potential so as to discover how the seemingly unplayable […] could in fact become playable" (ibid). Similarly, when approached from a perspective that is removed from "filmic fascination, the world of video game adaptations becomes quite broad" (Moore, 2010: 186), encompassing a variety of ancillary media, including toys and comic books. Typically, academic writing focuses less on screen adaptations of videogames and more on videogame adaptations of films, specifically relating their incompatibility by highlighting the notorious failure of Atari's *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* (Atari Incorporated, 1982; Herman, 1997: 76).

Conversely, *Tron* (Lisberger, 1982) "took film audiences inside a videogame" (Howells, 2002: 110), and the film's videogame adaptations, mainly inspired by existing arcade titles (Herz, 1997: 19), allowed players to experience a videogame based on a movie based on videogames. This signalled that levels of interactivity in videogames were becoming increasingly cinematic as technology progressed; yet Trevor Elkington (2009: 214) observed that, because "licensed adaptations are commonly dismissed by critics and players as nothing more than cynical attempts to cash in on hype", videogame adaptations of movies are also often ill-received due to "incompatible production practises between film studios and game studios, as well as the resistance of critics and fans with incompatible expectations drawn from the original medium" (ibid).

Similarly, both methods of adaptation must appeal to multiple audiences who "expect a certain adherence" to the source material alongside "adherence to common

notions of gameplay" (ibid: 215). As with film adaptations of videogames, these expectations are often soured by flawed products and a negative reputation (ibid). *GoldenEye 007* (Rare, 1997) is a notable exception; still considered "the greatest licensed game of all time and one of the greatest games of all time" (Bissell, 2010:131) and highly-rated among videogame adaptations of films (King and Krzywinska, 2002: 7; Newman, 2004: 150), despite "Many gamers and game reviewers [being], not unreasonably, suspicious of directly movie-linked games, many of which are viewed as transparent attempts to cash in on successful movie franchises with products that lack much in the way of compelling gameplay of their own" (King and Krzywinska, 2002: 7).

It is much harder to pinpoint such a universally praised counterpart film or television videogame adaptation: "There has never been a standout movie, one with a compelling plot and A-list acting, made from a videogame […] videogame movies have sucked" (Goldberg, 2011: 209). This opinion originates from the assumption that cinema should only adapt culturally respected works (Leitch, 2007: 258) – indeed, while it would be highly "misleading to apply adaptation studies solely to cinematic versions of canonical plays and novels, […] that is perhaps its most common and easily understood manifestation" (Sanders, 2006: 23). Yet videogame adaptations have endured alongside literary adaptations to become an integral part of Hollywood's transmedia strategy of franchising, world-building, and seriality (Bourdaa, 2013: 208). My research demonstrates that they have also become commercially viable franchises in their own right, to the point where "Considering the large number of video games licensed by Hollywood studios, there will be more adaptations than ever in the years to come" (Picard, 2008: 296).

Nevertheless, what separates *Interplay* from other research is my principal focus on taking videogame adaptations seriously by analysing them through textual analysis, the application of multiple theoretical prisms, and research into production, to bring an academic perspective to the genre. The apathetic reception towards franchised videogame adaptations, Parody (2011: 216) observes, demonstrates how "Conscious artistic endeavour is made invisible within both popular and academic discourse on franchised videogame adaptations, negated or overwritten by the transparent economic motivations undeniably also at play". Indeed, critics usually adopt a condescending position towards videogame adaptations rather than taking them seriously as legitimate media.

Thus, franchised adaptations – especially in and of media such as videogames, which have long struggled for artistic legitimacy – are often regarded as "forms of advertising or merchandising, as products, or even paratexts more than texts" (ibid). Parody (ibid) also suggests that it would be more constructive to "recuperate this figuring as a way of opening up, rather than closing down, readings of franchise adaptation as a creative practice". As a result, I have framed *Interplay* around in-depth research into the history and longevity of videogame adaptations; Appendix One provides a comprehensive list of videogame adaptations from 1982 to the present day and beyond. While this is far from a complete list – many are still to be produced, others are languishing in obscurity in Japan and other parts of the world, and Appendix One also does not include the multiple fan-made efforts available online – Appendix One nevertheless lists *hundreds* of screen adaptations of videogames and quite blatantly demonstrates their prominence.

i.ii Existing Work

As no other research takes into consideration the extraordinary number of videogame adaptations as listed in Appendix One, *Interplay* specifically addresses what makes videogame adaptations so prominent and how they appropriate the various gameplay mechanics, narrative threads, and cultural aspects of videogames. The sheer number of videogame adaptations alone makes them a worthwhile topic of discussion and worthy of in-depth, critical analysis. *Interplay*'s blended methodology accomplishes this in ways no other research has attempted before and demonstrates that approaching videogame adaptations seriously reveals surprising insights into both the Hollywood and videogame industries and the roles of adaptive texts within these industries.

Each chapter of my research takes existing work within this field and pushes it further. Yet, as significant as Austin (2002), Bordwell and Thompson (2010), Brookey (2010), Geraghty (2008), Herman (1997), Hutcheon (2006), Leitch (2007; 2008; 2015), Perron (2003; 2009), Pétronille and Audureau (2012), Russell (2005; 2012), Tobin (2004), Wolf (2001; 2003; 2008; 2012), and many others, are to *Interplay*, I am not concerned with fighting the same arguments as books-to-film adaptations once did or conducting the same research. Instead, *Interplay* broadens and applies their theoretical prisms, intellectual frameworks, and insightful observations towards adaptation theory, film theory, and videogame theory within a unique focus towards the complex process of adaptation and appropriation at work in videogame adaptations.

Chapter One details how these aspects are blended together into my unique methodology, which provides a distinctive answer as to why these films exist and

what do they tell us about cinema, television, videogames, genre, fidelity, and franchising. While also critiquing these adaptations, my research is not concerned with whether videogame adaptations are "good" or "bad" but rather what they do with, and to, their source material, how they expand upon and perpetuate both fan communities and popular genre conceptions, and the implications of their financial success and critical reactions. Therefore, I adopt a reflective positioning that regards issues of taste and judgement concerning the quality and reception of videogame adaptations as arising from discussions of canon and fidelity.

Additionally, in order to gauge the complex issues regarding the reception of videogame adaptations, I have also referenced various magazines and texts specifically designed to critique the lineage and economic value of both videogame franchises and their adaptations. Given that such magazines are designed primarily to give a sense of a videogame's economic worth, it is significant to address that – especially in their early days – "Videogame writers [were] dyed-in-the-wool fans who looked at the company with subjective eyes. Very few had hard news backgrounds; they didn't need any semblance of objectivity when press releases and tips about how to play were all kids who played seemed to want" (Goldberg, 2011: 69).

Also, particularly in Chapter Two, I have referenced online fan communities and forums. However it is not my intention to present an in-depth fan study; such referencing is simply to acknowledge the added pressures that fan opinions have on the general perception of videogame adaptations. It would be a mistake to disregard such opinions entirely as the views and judgments of fans have increasingly become harder to ignore as online social media has grown over the years. Indeed, analysing the conflicting and often contradictory views of fan communities illustrates the ongoing debate regarding fidelity's importance to adaption studies. While fan

communities generally base an adaptation's success on its fidelity to the source material, such an approach is generally dismissed in adaptation theory; as Dicecco (2015: 164) states: "the assessment of an adaptation in terms of its closeness to a source disregards both material differences between media and the autonomy of the newly produced artwork".

Dudley Andrew observes that "discussions of fidelity [are] 'frequent and tiresome' because they assume 'that the task of adaptation is the reproduction in cinema of something essential about an original text'" (quoted by Dicecco, ibid). Andrew thus encourages fresh critical thinking regarding videogame adaptations; indeed, the genre's unrealised potential to equal the recent influx of successful comic book adaptations alone makes this field exciting and new in ways that comic book adaptations were some fifteen years ago. Just as comic book adaptations came to, in Ioannidou's (2013: 230) view, "defy stereotypical ideas about audience involvement in mass cultural entertainment, while also enhancing convergence," videogame adaptations can "motivate audiences to engage in the hunt for further information […] in other media".

Significantly, my serious, in-depth analysis of videogame adaptations unveils how much more complex their production process is due to various convoluted licensing issues, which then affect issues of authorship and canonicity within the source material. Faubert (2010: 184) notes that authorship (alongside appropriation and intertextuality, two other key terms throughout this thesis) offers "a way of considering current tendencies within critical work on adaptation [and] remind us that the field is moving quickly away from the precept, once so central to its methods, that film is a substratum of literature […] current work points ultimately to an understanding of adaptation as a form of discourse".

Indeed, *Interplay* openly encourages discourse and further work on videogame adaptations with the same critical focus on their multiple levels of coherence. As a new, growing field, there is still much work to be done in order that scholarly approaches refrain from merely mentioning videogame adaptations in passing or repeating the same discussions about videogame adaptations of movies. I have taken the first step towards this through *Interplay*'s blended methodology and by using existing work and theoretical prisms as a tool to establish a framework that encourages serious analysis of these adaptations and invites further research.

i.iii Chapter Synopsis

The comprehensive catalogue of videogame adaptations listed in Appendix One identifies the most enduring and consistent videogame adaptations. By delving into existing work, including a variety of online sources, regarding the lineage of videogame adaptations, the most influential examples to the creation, maintenance, and reputation of the genre – and its impending future – become apparent and *Interplay*'s following chapters expand upon these through a series of extensive investigations.

Arguably, any of the videogame adaptations listed in Appendix One could be selected to conduct similar research and several publications already exist that have chosen this route.[1] Also, the franchises I have chosen may not be highly regarded by mainstream critics, but each has achieved some measure of success, in addition to being the most *consistent* franchises in terms of adaptation. This consistency within a genre often so readily dismissed is further grounds to focus on these particular

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[1] Tobin (2004), for example, has compiled some significant and influential work regarding *Pokémon*. Herbst (2004) and Russell (2012), among others, focus on the live-action *Tomb Raider* films, while Sheff and Eddy (1999) choose to focus on the *Super Mario* franchise.

examples and analyse how each has shaped the perception and reputation of videogame adaptations and, in turn, illustrate how each franchise enables new discussions regarding adaptations.

Interplay begins with 'A Brief History of Videogames and their Adaptations', a brief overview of the three theoretical perspectives central to this research: adaptation theory, videogame history, and the reputation of videogame adaptations. This chapter lays the foundation upon which the remainder of my research is based and introduces the various methodologies that form the basis of my research – including seminal work regarding adaptation, appropriation, and videogame theory, an explanation of some of key terms and practical prisms, an examination of videogame history from the arcades to home consoles, and some early examples of videogame adaptation.

Given that I primarily analyse the *adaptive contexts* of videogame adaptations and franchises *across media*, adaptation theory alone is not enough to understand the intensity of complexity in videogame adaptations. Indeed, as Voigts and Nicklas (2013: 140) observe, "The assumption that a comparative analysis of great books/films is sufficient to be counted as good work in Adaptation Studies is one of the tragic misconceptions in the field". Consequently, as multiple factors (including economics, fidelity, and genre, among others) contribute to the complexity of videogame adaptations, the genre does not fit into standard taxonomies of text-to-text transmission due to their levels of *interactivity*.

This chapter consequently illustrates how my blended methodology is necessary to understand these texts as standard taxonomies are insufficient to the task of taking videogame adaptations seriously or understanding how they are underlined by generic features that transcend media. Additionally, this chapter introduces some

of the ongoing features – including audience factors, fan studies, political economy, commercial factors, and textual issues and transnational issues – that all act as pressures on videogame adaptations.

The second chapter, 'Japanese Videogame Culture as International Multimedia', evaluates how videogame adaptations have expanded upon the limited narratives of their source material and elaborates on the "Console War" of the nineties through an intricate analysis of Sonic the Hedgehog. Pressured by the success of Nintendo's mascot, Super Mario, SEGA sought to usurp not just Nintendo's domination over videogames, but animation as well through a mascot of their own. *Sonic The Hedgehog* (Sonic Team, 1991) allowed SEGA's products to outsell Nintendo's by almost two to one and propelled SEGA to the forefront of the home videogame market (Herman, 1997: 170).

After *Sonic the Hedgehog 2* (Sonic Team/SEGA Technical Institute, 1992) sold over 6.3 million copies (Rivera, 2011), becoming the second-best selling Mega Drive title, Sonic followed Mario into syndicated animation. This chapter specifically addresses the numerous *Sonic* cartoons and anime throughout the nineties, as well as the later anime and computer-generated imagery (CGI) productions, and details how each crafted a unique take on the source material and created entirely new canons through localisation (Newman, 2008: 63).

This chapter expands upon the influence of Japanese materials in shaping canonicity, despite Sonic's adaptations being equally at odds with their source material, and analyses how localisation affected Sonic's narrative elements and resulted in a culturally divided franchise. With SEGA under pressure to craft an international videogame success (ibid, 2004: 55), Sonic underwent major aesthetic

and narrative alterations for his American debut, and even more when adapted to animation.

What began as a simple one-button videogame became the tale of an intergalactic outlaw environmentalist who fought for freedom against industrialisation (Davis and Shoemaker, 2000; Shadzter, quoting Naka, 2010). Sonic simultaneously became a slapstick adventurer, a freedom fighter, a rebellious prince, and a nonchalant saviour throughout the nineties despite these characterisations being popularised in Sonic's ancillary media rather than his videogames. Both Newman (2008: 64) and Sanders (2006: 45) illustrate how SEGA's later attempts at reconciliation created only further contradictions, eschewing notions of an "official", *Sonic* canon, especially amongst fans.

This chapter consequently illustrates the pressures SEGA's franchise felt from a vocal, highly-critical fan community; Moore (2010: 183) is just one of many to note that "the line between media production and media consumption has always been blurred [as] fan communities continually engage with and rework the media that speak to them". Subsequently, just as Poore (2012: 159) relates how "fans of classic works of fiction inflect their preferences with moral force, praising screen and stage adaptations for being 'truthful' or else excoriating them for infidelity [and] misrepresentation", this chapter references fan-created and fan-moderated websites and forums to highlight the pressures they have on shaping Sonic's videogame canon. While far from an in-depth study of fandom, my use of fandom and emphasise on reaction theory as an analytical tool highlights the *Sonic*'s popularity and the difficulties of appeasing an invested audience.

The third chapter, 'Unifying Action and Culture through *Mortal Kombat*', explores American and Japanese action movies as generic precursors to the beat-'em-

up genre specifically through the controversial *Mortal Kombat* franchise. Beginning

with a brief background into martial arts movies and American action films, this

chapter details their influence on the beat-'em-up genre, specifically *Street Fighter II:*

The World Warrior (Capcom, 1991). Unlike *Street Fighter* (Capcom, 1987), *Street*

Fighter II was a major arcade success, and even more so on home consoles, with sales

exceeding $1.5 billion in 1993 (Kirsh, 2006: 228). Amidst a slew of imitators, *Mortal*

Kombat's (Midway, 1992) macabre gore sparked controversy and became an instant

hit (Jensen, 2004: 462). Thus, as Leigh Alexander's article for the website Gamastura

notes (2009), the two fighters began a close rivalry.

Both franchises also feature prominently in adaptation: *Street Fighter* (de

Souza, 1994) failed to match the popularity of its source material despite an

impressive $99 million worldwide gross, with scathing reviews cementing it as a

notorious example of videogame adaptation (BoxOfficeMojo, 2011; Russell, 2012:

152). Conversely, *Mortal Kombat* (Anderson, 1995) reaped a total worldwide gross

of over $122 million (ibid: 153); by appropriating from classic Hong Kong martial

arts films, specifically *Enter the Dragon* (Clouse, 1973), *Mortal Kombat*'s cult

following ensured it became one of the more successful videogame adaptations – until

Lara Croft: Tomb Raider (West, 2001) and, later, *Resident Evil* (Anderson, 2002)

usurped it financially and sequentially (ibid: 153/166).

This chapter analyses how episodic narratives are more suited to tournament-

based videogames as, while *Street Fighter* maintained a consistent animated presence,

including high-quality anime productions, *Street Fighter: The Legend of Chun-Li*

(Bartkowiak, 2009) only compounded its predecessor's detrimental impact.

Similarly, *Mortal Kombat*'s ill-fated sequel and television outings, alongside

Midway's financial troubles, threatened the franchise's end. Joseph Jordan, writing as

Ikusaba for GameInformer's website (2011), notes that *Mortal Kombat* (NetherRealm Studios, 2011) reinvigorated the franchise after years of being outclassed by other fighters. Additionally, Kevin Tancharoen's re-envisioning of *Mortal Kombat* led to an online live-action series through Machinima's YouTube channel (2011); in an online article for The Escapist, Tom Goldman (2011) noted that this indicates the influence fan-created content has on videogame adaptations.

Finally, 'The Appropriations, Economics, and Interplay of *Resident Evil*', explicitly addresses the economics of videogame adaptations and their contribution to sustaining the zombie horror genre through the longest-running (and, by default, most successful) live-action videogame adaptation franchise, *Resident Evil*. Developed in Japan as *Biohazard*, *Resident Evil* (Capcom, 1996) predominantly mirrors major American cities, characters, and organisations. Tobin (2004: 10) relates that, as Japanese videogame developers interpret popular American cultural expectations and sensibilities for international appeal, Japanese videogames are informed by American society and culture alongside a reflection of Japanese culture and society.

Videogame adaptations are also informed, however indirectly, by this same global cultural sensibility, resulting in a complex adaptation procedure that appropriates from conflicting cultural interpretations of vastly different societies and popular filmic conventions. *Resident Evil* specifically evokes American zombie horror films, essentially presenting the Japanese perspective on a genre made popular, and informed by, American sensibilities. Consequently, the chapter opens with a brief overview of the zombie horror genre as popularised by director George A. Romero and details their influence on *Resident Evil* videogames.

Although *Resident Evil* pioneered the survival-horror genre (Rehak, 2007: 185), its adaptations shift from atmospheric tension to an action/horror mould similar to *Aliens* (Cameron, 1986) that appropriates the basic influences of zombie films (Keane, 2007: 109). While genre is important to *Resident Evil* in similar ways to those explored through *Mortal Kombat*, this chapter is more production-based and more directly informed by the economics and critical reception of Anderson's film franchise. Although *Resident Evil*'s adaptations have grossed over $900 million worldwide (The Numbers, 2015), their critical reception varies wildly from hesitant praise to the familiar tones of disappointment that perpetuate reviews of videogame adaptations (Moody, 2010). This chapter details that, despite this, their income has kept the films in production, and analyses how this indicates the lucrative investment of these adaptations.

While primarily appropriating *Resident Evil*'s most successful aspects, these films have maintained a distinct identity, with unique characters and narrative threads. Ergo, they are not literal adaptations and their fidelity is minimal; this chapter assesses the consequences of this, and Anderson's original contributions to both the zombie genre and videogame adaptations. As *Resident Evil* spawned numerous

cinematic sequels, this chapter analyses how Anderson has kept videogame

adaptations alive in the consciousness of the general audience, verifying their tenacity

despite their reputation through a close critical analysis of *Resident Evil*'s numerous

adaptations.

Ultimately, *Interplay* concludes by illustrating how the individual issues and

observations raised in each chapter illustrate the complexities of videogame

adaptations. Moreover, misconceptions and disregard about the genre have

overlooked the various ways videogame adaptations resonate with reoccurring key

issues in adaptation theory, such as audience and fan studies, economics, new media

theory, and transnationalism. Thus, *Interplay*'s concluding chapter includes an

intricate analysis of how cinema and ancillary media have informed videogame

adaptations, how they have adapted active gameplay elements into passive viewing,

and the financial gain from licensed videogame adaptations.

Even with *Interplay*'s seminal work, the study of videogame adaptations is

still in its infancy and, consequently, research into the field is still ongoing. By

emphasising that videogame adaptations show no signs of receding in the immediate

future, I conclude that the genre's consistency alone invites further research and

establish a working framework to make further examination of videogame adaptations

easier and far more fruitful than repeating the same research over and over.

i.iv Conclusion

Parody (2011: 210) once called for "further critical consideration of how the identity

and status of adaptation as cultural practice and fictional form may need to be

reappraised and re-theorized in the light of trends towards convergence in

contemporary media landscapes and the coterminous saturation of these landscapes with a range of genres of cross-media content and textual re-visions". Videogame adaptations represent an unfairly-overlooked, intensely complex mode of cross-media adaptation and *Interplay* analyses, in-depth, some prominent videogame franchises. Each has constantly and consistently been in the public consciousness and has been directly influenced by cinema, mined as a franchise, and been part of an intricate strategy of media synergy.

Jenkins (quoted by Bourdaa, 2013: 203) states that 'a transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole. In the ideal form of transmedia storytelling, each medium does what it does best". Applying this to videogame adaptations through my blended methodology, *Interplay* not only does the work that others have previously only hinted at but also counteracts intellectual disregard to videogame adaptations by taking them seriously as a form of transmedia storytelling.

Unique in its serious approach to the complexity and interconnectivity of the videogame adaptation, my research analyses how the adaptation process has affected each adaptation to detail how, and why, they have deviated from their source material and the consequences of this in regards to the perception of videogame adaptations. Finally, I illustrate throughout that the ongoing, persistent production of videogame adaptations forms not only complex pressures on media (and multimedia), but also new ways of approaching adaptations in general. Indeed, the relative lack of a coherent, scholarly approach towards videogame adaptations advantageously allows me to not only analyse them at a unique intellectual level, but also to position future discussions regarding videogame adaptations as a new, exciting critical battleground.

Chapter One

A Brief History of Videogames and their Adaptations

Overview

Examining videogame adaptations is difficult because videogames are "ignored in almost every book on the history of computer technology" (Feintein, 1997: xi) and regarded "as being a children's medium", a triviality that will be grown out of (Newman, 2004: 5). This chapter will present and briefly relate the academic approaches – including adaptation and videogame theory – that constitute the central elements of my blended methodology, establish the history of the videogame industry, and analyse the primary ways that cinema and videogames have influenced each other. Additionally, this chapter evaluates some of the earliest examples of videogame adaptations and their influence upon the genre, which form the academic basis for the remainder of the thesis.

1.1 Theory and History

While *Interplay*'s serious, analytical approach to videogame adaptations makes it unique, my research is based heavily on the work already conducted in various academic fields, chief among them adaptation and videogame theory. Considering this work has usually been preoccupied with taxonomies, definitions, or bringing credibility to both genres as an art form, there has not been an extensive monograph or singular work on the videogame adaptation, making this still a relatively new and underdeveloped field. Nevertheless, the first step at taking videogame adaptations

seriously and analysing their adaptive contexts is, naturally, the examination of the genre as a form of adaptation first and foremost.

This makes adaptation theory one of the most significant tools of my blended methodology. Linda Hutcheon, a primary voice in the field of adaptations, observes that adaptations have a long history within popular culture, as even "Shakespeare transferred his culture's stories from page to stage and made them available to a whole new audience" (2006: 2). Adaptations have been popular in both cinema and on television, and their continued presence in both mediums has encouraged numerous critical debates, some of which are referenced throughout this thesis.

Significant to the study of videogame adaptations as a relatively untouched genre within adaptation theory, there has long been a debate concerning what actually constitutes as an adaptation and numerous attempts to create taxonomies to define the term. Moore (2010: 179), who utilised videogames in his case study on adaptation and new media, argued that "adaptation suggests not only the preservation of narratives, themes, and rhythms but also a keen recognition of technical constraints and social practices, both within the original medium and its adaptive counterpart". While adaptation theory clearly permits the re-interpretation of media, Hutcheon (2006: 8) states that adaptations can be "An acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works […] A creative *and* an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging [or] An extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work".

Dicecco (2015: 161) observes that, as adaptation studies "continues to expand and become more inclusive […] it is increasingly difficult to determine a cohesive theory that accounts for the division between adaptation and other intertextual modes: allusions, plagiarisms, remakes, sequels, homages, mash-ups, appropriations, and the

list goes on". Similarly, what makes videogame adaptations so unique, even within the multifaceted adaptation genre, is that they do not fit into pre-structured taxonomies.

Primarily because "there is no one mode for creating or analyzing an adaptation [and] there cannot be a particular sample of films that will illustrate how being an adaptation affects our understanding of particular works" (Geraghty, 2008: 5), it is the principal perspective of this thesis that anything reinterpreted from one form to another can be regarded as an adaptation. While I admit that this is a broad approach to adaptation theory, this allows one to approach texts that have previously been overlooked in adaptation theory, such as videogame adaptations, or films "based on previous sources that go unacknowledged as adaptations: the book is not well-known, the film does not draw attention to its status as an adaptation, and the publicity machine ignores the original source" (ibid: 3). This allows a consideration of adaptation's intertextual nature, how they incorporate influences from other media sources, and how they utilise ancillary media to help bolster and promote their primary source (in most cases, the film itself).

Without a doubt, due to the complex intertextual nature of adaptation theory, it is up to the individual to determine for themselves the theoretical framework that constitutes an adaptation and what impact this has on media and the use of media as a synergistic tool (Moore, 2010: 179). Diecceo (2015: 161) states that "adaptation studies is ill-served by centralizing a model of adaptation that is at base formal or aesthetic, and that critics have more to gain by exploring what discourses of adaptation *do* in the cultural arenas where adaptations circulate". Furthermore, Semenza (2014: 79) believes that "adaptation scholars will benefit […] not only from a consideration of the ways in which adaptation scholarship and criticism are haunted

by the moralistic language born of adaptation's epistemological uniqueness, but also from deeper consideration of the opportunities adaptations offer for considering fundamental questions about art". *Interplay* capitalises on these statements by analysing a field hitherto overlooked through an in-depth analysis of the intricate levels of adaptation and appropriation at work in videogame adaptations and the various ways they have come to influence, and be influenced by, other media.

Generally, adaptations are positioned "precisely as an adaptation, and studying [them] involves both textual and contextual analysis" (Geraghty, quoting Grant, 2008: 4). Geraghty (ibid: 3) also observes that film adaptations often draw attention to their "literary origins […] but the act of comparison invited […] might also draw on memories, understandings, and associations with other versions of the original, in a variety of media […] some of this referencing will be made explicit in the publicity material and reviews, which ensure that the audience is alert to the fact of adaptation". Directly referencing the adaptation's literary roots thus aims to establish artificial legitimacy by referencing an "accepted" artistic mode.

Dicecco (2015: 161) observed that once "adaptation studies shifted towards intertextuality as its governing theoretical framework in the early aughts, […] critical consensus overwhelmingly pointed out that fidelity criticism was a theoretical dead end, and the variety of scholarship produced under the umbrella of adaptation ballooned at a dizzying pace". As a result, I incorporate many theories of adaptation; Faubert (2010: 181), for example, builds upon Guerric DeBona's revisionist approach to adaptation studies, which highlights "three theoretically informed categories— *appropriation*, *intertextuality*, and *authorship*—each of which is proving influential in pushing the field of adaptation studies forward".

Faubert (ibid) indicates that these three categories, while widely used to address adaptation as a cultural force, are unable to account for "the complex and sometimes contradictory process through which ['Hollywood adaptations'] come into being". A common parallel to adaptation theory is discussions regarding appropriation; indeed, "contemporary scholars propose adaptation as a form of cultural dialogue engaged in what is increasingly, and in a positive sense, spoken of as appropriation" (ibid: 182). Inherently similar to adaptation, and a central part of this research's blended methodology, appropriations are separated from adaptations by, as Sanders (2006: 2) states, "how explicitly they state their intertextual purpose". Where adaptations sometimes involve a director's personal vision (which could involve a form of cultural location or updating) or a shift into a new generic mode or context, the intertextual relationships in appropriations "may be less explicit, more embedded" (ibid).

Indeed, while adaptations invariably signal a relationship with an informing source material – sometimes even by incorporating the author's name into the film's title as in the case of *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (Coppola, 1992) – an appropriation "frequently affects a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain. This may or may not involve a generic shift, and it may still require the intellectual juxtaposition of (at least) one text against another" (ibid: 26). This definition of the subtle differences between adaptation and appropriation is a significant aspect of Chapter Three and Four, which both detail the complex ways videogame adaptations have been inspired by the structure, themes, and tropes of other cinematic genres and specific films.

Similar to Semenza (2014: 73), these chapters use the terms adaptation and appropriation to emphasise how certain popular filmic conventions have come to

inform videogame adaptations both individually, and as a collective genre. Indeed, as Faubert (2010: 186) relates, "When considering how a Hollywood adaptation appropriates its literary source, adaptation scholars must account in significant detail for how the cultural dialogue initiated by an adaptation is shaped by Hollywood's commercial aesthetic". Videogame adaptations align closely with Hollywood's desire for commercial franchises, sequels, and world-building intellectual properties quickly becoming an important aspect of the product of videogame adaptations (Moore, 2010: 197). Indeed, whenever a videogame title earns "hefty revenues and recognition, Hollywood executives seem unable to keep their distance" (ibid: 184/185) and Hollywood adaptations are "almost exclusively subject to the economic logic of the Hollywood studios" (Faubert, 2010: 186).

I expand on Faubert's analysis by illustrating how the cultural meanings that videogames adaptations represent reflect the cultural climate of the media they appropriate in addition to "the presence of Hollywood's production trends and imperatives[,] key filters that precede any cross-media negotiation of the critical engagement—comparative or otherwise—of a literary source" (ibid). Taking Sanders' (2006: 18) positioning of adaptation as a "transpositional practice [that casts] a specific genre into another generic mode, an act of re-vision in itself", I also relate (specifically in Chapter Two) how videogame adaptations routinely indulge in the exercise of not only trimming and pruning, but also "addition, expansion, accretion, and interpolation" in order to make their source material "'relevant' or easily comprehensible to new audiences and readerships via the process of proximation and updating" (ibid: 18/19).

Adaptation theory becomes further complicated by the many subgenres that permeate filmic adaptations: Geraghty (2008: 15) primarily focuses on "what is

perhaps the most familiar example and one that tends to shape the debate—the adaptation of a classic, literary novel", while; Ioannidou (2013: 230) chooses adaptations of superhero comic books to "demonstrate how media convergence may actually trigger the integration of the traditionally 'subcultural' comics into the mass cultural film and potentially result in the former's erasure". Pietrzak-Franger (2011: 108), covering the fifth international association of adaptation studies conference, demonstrated the range of adaptation theory by reporting of "papers ranging from Shakespeare on Twitter (Maurizio Calbi) to the levels of adaptation in online games (Rosamund Davies)". Indeed, focusing on "non-traditional" forms of adaptation, such as the videogame adaptations finally given their academic due in this thesis, fuels the unique critical debate that can only be realised by going "beyond the traditional range of topics and methodologies that characterize adaptation studies" (ibid).

Each subgenre of adaptation deals with its status as an adaptation differently and have, as Hutcheon (2006: 2/4) relates, long fought for critical recognition, potentially because "in both academic criticism and journalistic reviewing, contemporary popular adaptations are most often put down as secondary, derivative […] For some […] literature will always have axiomatic superiority over any adaptation of it because of its seniority as an art form".

This is especially apparent in videogames, which are rarely afforded academic merit as "even parts of the videogame industry seem embarrassed about their business" (Newman, 2004: 5). However, I have addressed this thinking though an expansion of Moore's (2010: 191) view that "the study of adaptation is necessarily the study of media itself—of the protocols that support both the adapted medium and the medium to which a work is being adapted" and that videogames, especially, "emphasize protocols as much, if not more, than thematic and narrative elements".

Academic merit is difficult to ascribe to videogames simply because videogames are an inherently *interactive* experience, meaning their appraisals typically provide a sense of economic value, rather than analysing fundamental aspects and workings (Bissell, 2010: xii). Yet, videogame theory represents another crucial tool of my blended methodology, being essential to reference when analysing videogame adaptations not just to call attention to another similarly burgeoning field of study but also to establish the key terms and theoretical understanding of videogames and their unique interactive elements that must be negotiated during the adaptation process.

Videogame adaptations, whether of films or as films, "cannot easily adapt [what] novels portray so well […] the space of the mind […] because when psychic reality is shown rather than told about, it has to be made manifest in the material realm to be perceived by the audience" (Hutcheon, 2006: 14). Thomas Leitch (2007: 258) expands upon this, and the observation that even adaptation and film studies theorists largely disregard videogame adaptations, by stating that "neither reviewers nor theorists have developed a way of talking about postliterary adaptations that has progressed much beyond sarcasm or outrage. The problem is especially acute in the case of movies whose sources are not only nonliterary but nonnarrative".

Videogame theory is often prefaced by an historical overview of the videogame industry, resulting in "many fine books about the game industry, the theory of game design, and the history of games" (Bissell, 2010: xiii) which form the basis of videogame analysis. Feintein (1997: xi) observes that there are many misconceptions surround the videogame industry, many of which treat videogames "so flippantly as to propagate myths like "*Pong* was the first videogame" or "*Sprint*" was the first arcade game to use a microprocessor". Mark J. P. Wolf, a central advocate for videogame theory, believes that such misconceptions indicate a disregard

for videogames that is indicative of modern culture, alongside a resistance to analysing videogame evolution and its impact on culture and society, similar to cinema and television, which both "took a while […] to attain the status of an artistic medium" (2001: 13).

However, like academic discussions of videogame adaptations, Wolf and fellow advocate Bernard Perron (2003: 1) observe that videogame theory is still in its infancy; only after all their achievements did scholars recognise videogames as an important cultural product. Videogame theorists seek to provide an analytical framework for examining videogames and their social influence by utilising an industry-related perspective to legitimise videogames as other theorists have done with literature and film. As a result, "the field of video game studies is now a healthy and flourishing one" comprised of an increasing number of publications (Perron and Wolf, 2009): 1). While most attempt to define "what the individual game represents, how it relates to other games […], how it communicates its meanings, how it functions as played event, and how engagement with it through play generates pleasure" (Atkins and Krzywinska, 2007: 2), many emphasise the industry's growth and development, and their philosophical (Konzack, 2009), interactive (Myers, 2009), and emotional (Järvinen, 2009) experiences, in continuing attempts to legitimise videogames.

Videogames find their origins with Dr. William Higinbotham and Bob Dvorak, who created "the first videogame […] Tennis for Two" more than fifty years ago (Goldberg, 2011: xv). His work, while revolutionary and ambitious, was largely forgotten for many decades, though inspired Ralph Baer's 1966 Magnavox Odyssey, which in turn "seemingly inspired" Nolan Bushnell's 1972 founding of Atari and the birth of the videogame industry as we know it today (ibid: 1-9; 27). More popularly,

Steve Russell's *Spacewar!*, created in the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) laboratories in 1962 (Herman, 1997: 1-9; Herz, 1997: 5-12), began what Newman (2004: 1) called "a chain of events that would change not only computing, but also entertainment and popular culture – not immediately, and certainly not knowingly, but decisively and permanently".

Within ten years, this had developed into mass consumption as arcade games like *Pong!* (Atari Incorporated, 1972) and *Breakout* (Atari Incorporated, 1976) swamped America. Initially, videogames remained an unrivalled American commodity until Japanese manufacturers soon produced arcade games to supersede their American counterparts (Wolf, 2001: 13) – *Space Invaders* (Taito Corporation, 1978) introduced hostile enemies and a "High Score" for players to aim for (Herman, 1997: 34). Soon, Japanese titles like *Pac-Man* (Namco, 1980) and *Donkey Kong* (Nintendo, 1981) quickly replaced *Asteroids* (Atari Incorporated, 1979) as the most popular arcade games (ibid: 103). With Atari successfully importing to Japan, and licensed to produce home ports of *Space Invaders*, American manufacturers turned towards home console assembly (ibid: 43).

During 1979 and 1980, home consoles became increasingly popular; even *Space Invaders* and *Pac-Man* imitators "sold an astonishing fifteen million copies" and were released "*hundreds of times* by the dozens of companies, so much so that the gamer couldn't really trust the hype that preceded a game's introduction" (Goldberg, 2011: 48/54). Goldberg (ibid) goes on to state that, quickly, there were "too many consoles and too many games released by too many companies to sustain a boom"; the resultant economic crash devastated the once-mighty Atari and "no one wanted to take a chance on games—not investors, not retail chains, not consumers".

The 1983 debut of Nintendo's Family Computer (Famicom) signalled a turning point after achieving record sales in Japan when, in 1985, Nintendo included copies of *Super Mario Bros.* (Nintendo R&D4, 1985). Motivated by the success of this strategy, Herz (1997: 117-118) notes that Nintendo replicated this process for the Famicom's American counterpart, the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES), ensuring its success and transforming "Nintendo into one of the world's most profitable companies" (Sheff and Eddy, 1999: 5). Nintendo has since become one of Japan's biggest and most successful cultural exports, and Mario their most recognisable cultural representative (ibid: 10; Katsuno and Maret, 2004: 261). While America essentially birthed the 1970-1980 arcade boom, Japan capitalised on the infamous early-eighties videogame crash to become the world's largest videogame producer, allowing the industry to recover "from its brief but grim recession" so much so that the home market "accounted for a healthy $450 million in sales" (Goldberg, 2011: 74-75) by 1986, with the NES eclipsing both Atari and SEGA at 1,100,000 units by 1987 (Herman, 1997: 123).

It is only by acknowledging the various approaches to adaptation theory and videogame theory that one can build a framework to approach videogame adaptations seriously. As videogame adaptations are tasked with adapting a highly interactive source material into a passive viewing experience, one must consider the various levels of adaptation and appropriation at work in order to first understand them *as* an adaptation. After delving into the complex layers of adaptation and appropriation at work within the videogame adaptation to turn interactive gameplay elements and the videogame's narrative structure into a film or television show, one must turn to the work of videogame theory in order to fully understand how these elements are integral to the videogame experience. By blending these two methodologies together, an

understanding begins to form as to why videogame adaptations focus on narrative

elements over gameplay mechanics and how the two mediums have come to influence

and imitate each other over the years, allowing an academic basis for taking

videogame adaptations seriously to gain tangible form for the first time.

1.2 Cinema(tic) Immersion

In this section, I analyse the similarities between cinema and videogames, their

influences upon each other, and the complex ways videogame theory distances itself

from comparisons to cinema. During Atari's prime in the mid-seventies, "Hollywood

seemed to be waking up to the fact that a major shift in pop culture was underway" –

Steven Spielberg was so besotted with the videogame industry that he established "a

cordial working relationship" with Atari programmer Howard Scott Warshaw, and it

seemed every Hollywood studio wanted in on the latest cultural trend (Russell, 2012:

25/31). Certainly, as Elkinton (209: 213) states, both industries have shown

"increasing aesthetic and procedural similarities", with videogames progressively

becoming "more narrative-based and increasingly [drawing] upon film-like special

effects and celebrity-power to stand in the marketplace".

Unlike cinema, videogames emphasise interaction, allowing direct narrative

influence: "one increasingly popular term of praise for a certain sort of exploration

videogame is to say that it is like an 'interactive film'" (Poole, 2000: 78). Though

videogames adapt cinematic conventions to illicit physical and emotional responses,

they are often only addressed as "a cultural object that [fits] into a larger social and

economic context" (Wolf and Perron, 2003: 5). This is mainly because videogames

are harder to master as a "text" as "game-playing skills […] or some puzzle-solving

ability may be needed just to enter a locked door […] in the diegetic world" (Wolf, 2001: 7). Therefore, theorists such as Ensslin (2012: 1-3) often emphasise the videogame industry's growth away from "relatively isolated groups of society" into "one of the major creative industries sectors in the USA, Europe and Japan" and to atone for decades of academic denigration by establishing "respectability [within] academic disciplines".

Furthermore, some believe videogames influence perspectives on modern culture and society and feel obliged to build their legitimacy in the hope that videogame theory will be held in the same high regard as literature or cinema (Bissell, 2010: xii-xiv; Herz, 1997: 1). Others provide a comprehensive factual history on the formation of both videogames and major videogame industries (Herman, 2004), revealing the tumultuous history of an industry in which corporations have competed for profit, often leading to former pioneers losing their authority (Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter, 2009), decisions regarding hardware production leading to further industry competition, or developers going out of business entirely (Herz, 1997: 116).

In recovering from the videogame crash, the videogame industry began to adopt Hollywood's synergistic models, producing ancillary products from their most popular franchises (Nichols, 2008: 133). I expand upon this strategy and align it closely with Henry Jenkins' work on media convergence and transmedia storytelling – "the idea that all media are moving toward the same spot, a central ground in which texts begin to behave similarly, thus mandating a similar approach to developing a film, a game, or any other related product" (Elkington, 2009: 232). Newman (2008: 50) observed that Jenkins regards transmedia narrative as "a 'textual activator' that demands not only engagement but also assessment, production and archiving and is a form that is ideally suited to the collaborative social structures of 'collective

intelligence'". This analysis is entirely suitable to videogame adaptations, which, like

other forms of ancillary merchandise, "may be understood as parts of a mechanism by

which gamers are given permission to play with videogames" (ibid).

For Jenkins, (quoted by Poore, 2012: 169), transmedia storytelling will

inevitably reach a breaking a point – a time when "franchises cannot be stretched,

subplots can't be added, secondary characters can't be identified, and references can't

be fully realized" – and the dilution of the original source material through the

adaptation process may very well be one step towards reaching this breaking point.

Indeed, while it is true that videogame adaptations call attention to their source

material, they also (as I elaborate) appropriate elements from other media in order to

aid the transfer for interactive media to passive media. As Elkington (2009: 232)

observes, both mediums have different strengths and weaknesses and "the successful

management of a film, television series, or game presents its own practical production

challenges. It requires different skills, resources, and schedules to develop different

media commodities".

Accordingly, I have expanded upon Elkinton's suggestion that, "In order for

the evolving practice of transmedia storytelling to result in works that will be well-

accepted by consumers and reviewers alike, the production methods and social

positioning have to evolve accordingly" (ibid). *Interplay*'s subsequent chapters

illustate the complex ways videogame adaptations have had their unique elements

transposed into an entirely different medium by incorporating transmedia storytelling

as a new aesthetic, born from media convergence, that actively encourages audiences

to "[chase] down bits of the story across media channels" (Ioannidou, quoting

Perryman and Jenkins, 2013: 230). Significantly, as I elaborate in Chapter Three,

Ioannidou (ibid) relates that Jenkins does not view media convergence "as the

survival of one single medium that will eventually absorb all other media, but rather recognizes a new balance in media relations".

The videogame adaptation is a prime candidate for this strategy as audiences are naturally encouraged to engage with the film or television show either through their prior knowledge of the videogame source material or by playing (or, even better, purchasing) the original videogame itself. In the case of videogames based on movies, however, a process of fragmentation can invariably occur; while a videogame tie-in may reflect the plot of its filmic source, it may also contain additional elements not seen in the film in ways that significantly expand the film's plot at the same time as extending the play time of the videogame (Elliott, 2014: 203). As a result, audiences "are forced to 'actively engage with a franchise that flows across different platforms' [to gain] 'new levels of insight' into their favourite series (Ioannidou, quoting, Perryman and Jenkins, 2013: 231).

Hollywood's strategy of exploiting their franchises across multiple platforms is far from new, but its intensity has increased significantly to the point where today's major studios goals involve releasing "a few tentpoles for the holiday and summer seasons, and a variety of films at different price levels to feed the multiplexes" (Balio, 2013: 25). As illustrated throughout this thesis, animation has significantly influenced the multimedia expansion of the videogame industry, particularly in the form of videogame adaptations. The multimedia of potential of videogames affords them a flexible intertextuality that can be adapted into "a variety of media such as movies, TV series, comics, toys and associated merchandise" (Iwabuchi, 2004: 63). Notably, *Pokémon: Blue* and *Red Version* (Game Freak, 1996) expanded into a multimedia brand that included an anime series, which debuted in Japan in 1997 before receiving an English dub localisation in 1999.

Rather than focus exclusively on the *Pokémon* franchise – an exercise rendered mute by the work complied, and produced, by Tobin (2004) – I instead refer to *Pokémon* (specifically its influential adaptations) as a helpful reference point to bolster my own conclusions. As of this writing, *Pokémon* has aired almost nine-hundred episodes alongside numerous spin-offs and animated movies, making it easily the longest-running and most successful videogame adaptation (Hanson, 2012: 128). This kind of consistency is reflected in numerous videogame adaptations listed in Appendix One; clearly, the potential for success is evident in the production of videogame adaptations as another aspect of Jenkins' "category of 'economic convergence', according to which the entertaining industry proceeds with the 'transmedia exploitation of branded properties' […] primarily motivated by the perspective of gaining greater profit out of trademark names rather than by the desire to preserve the 'medium'" (Ioannidou, quoting Jenkins, 2013: 234).

Given that the demand for ancillary videogame products is almost as high as the demand for the videogames themselves (Tobin, 2004: 3), tie-in merchandising operates as part of a complex, and progressively important, marketing strategy (Brookey, 2010: 5). Elliott (2014: 195) expands upon this by stated that "Tie-in merchandise is an economic as well as semiotic and aesthetic mode of adaptation; films that lose money at the box office can still make significant profits through tie-in merchandise". Videogames tie-ins also operate as "a reminder of the film […] no different from a promotional T-shirt or a fast-food souvenir cup" (Brookey, 2010: 19), manufactured to coincide with their cinematic counterpart, and across multiple media platforms, to ensure maximum publicity.

Of course, the complexities of tie-in merchandising are not merely limited to the production of ancillary media; as Elliott (2014: 199) observes, it "expands to tie-

interactivity in tie-in games, in which consumers not only dress as and look like branded characters, but furthermore act as characters in interaction with other characters in character worlds, thereby taking the incorporation of consumers and merchandise one step further".

Furthermore, the current similarities between videogame and DVD/Blu-ray cases, which, as Brookey (2010: 11) notes, utilise recognisable promotional materials for their covers, ape Hollywood's strategies, and Sony and Microsoft incorporate DVD/Blu-ray players to make their videogame consoles multi-functioning media hubs (ibid). Just as videogames evolved in content and design, the technology behind them has advanced exponentially, resulting in sophisticated hardware and software (Robinett, 2003: viii). Finally, videogame sales have occasionally exceeded box office ticket sales (Donovan, 2010: 93; Nichols, 2008: 132; Slovin, 2001: 139), though videogame designers are rarely held in the same artistic regard as writers or directors (Robinett, 2003: vii).

Notably, just as "movies are starting to look more and more like games […] the aesthetics of videogames' virtual worlds have infiltrated cinema [and] today's blockbuster filmmakers are using digital tools to craft imaginary worlds out of nothing but bits and bytes" (Russell, 2012: 5). A defining difference between the two mediums is the interactivity afforded by a videogame's gameplay mechanics; action-orientated functions and rules coded into a videogame, the mastery of which is an ongoing "learning process leading to better analytical and implementation skills" (Arsenault and Perron, 2009: 119). In side-scrolling platform videogames, for example, players are often tasked with increasingly complex jumping physics, while first-person shooters (FPS) force players to take cover from enemy fire, acquire limited ammunition, and often require precision aiming.

Gameplay mechanics take many forms and incorporate a wide variety of functions including the acquisition of health and item power-ups that afford the player attribute bonuses, the ways players navigate through gameplay environments (or "levels") and the objectives they must fulfil in order to be successful, and the various confrontations with enemy and end-of-level "boss" characters. Ensslin (2012: 41) observes that, while some players favour researching a videogame's gameplay mechanics beforehand, "others prefer to throw themselves right into the action and use a variety of coping strategies, including trial-and-error interaction with the user interface, tapping into the knowledge they have acquired from previous experience with the same and other game genres, and communication with other players, either face-to-face or online[, and] use a multitude of semiotic, kinetic and communicative strategies to identify ways of advancing in a gameworld". Utilising the physical videogame controller, player success is largely dependent on gameplay mechanics and digitally-coded physics; failure to abide by them gameplay can lead to failure or unexpected gameplay bugs.

Videogame designer Jesse Shell (quoted by Bissell, 2010: 58) observes that "If you compare games to more linear experiences [books, movies, etc.], you will note that linear experiences involve technology, story, and aesthetics, they do not involve mechanics, for it is mechanics that make a game a game". Gameplay mechanics are what make videogames unique as it is these elements that make up the time-consuming, entertaining, interactive portions of the videogame experience and separate videogames from other media forms. Yet, a principal similarity between cinema and videogames is their reliance on narrative and character (Picard, 2008: 305); like movies, videogames incorporate passive gameplay mechanics – cinematic

sequences, or "cutscenes" – to progress the narrative and increase the player's emotional investment (Rehak, 2003: 111/118).

Howells (2002: 116) notes that, in cinema, this is a given as the entire experience is a passive journey alongside a variety of characters through a narrative. Videogames, however, break away from in-game action through cutscenes, often awarded for navigating difficult levels or defeating powerful bosses, which incorporate many cinematic techniques, camera angles, framing and editing devices, and a heavy musical emphasis (King and Krzywinska, 2002: 12). So commonplace are cutscenes that they have become an integral gameplay aspect, serving to emphasise both the visual beauty, and the immersiveness, of a videogame's narrative and characters (Newman, 2004: 72).

Cutscenes primarily exist to introduce a videogame's general premise and establish its plot, with subsequent cutscenes furthering these aspects. By stating the goals of the narrative, players must fulfil objectives that bring them closer to that goal and be told, via cutscenes, how to proceed further. Arguably, videogame narratives thus "adhere even more rigidly to the classical formula than film" as, after being told their objectives, players are afforded the ability to take direct action rather than simply observe actions taking place, as in film (Howells, 2002: 113).

Cutscenes appeared very early in videogames; restricted by available technology, early cutscenes amounted to limited narrative breaks to display text (ibid: 110). As videogame technologies progressed, the use and function of cutscenes increased; *Pac-Man*, for instance, utilised short intermissions that depicted the eponymous hero chasing his enemies (ibid: 111). These early cutscenes enhanced the videogame's narrative and, while often limited to short bursts of information and

comedy, are one of the earliest examples of cinema's influences on videogames (ibid: 112).

Technological advances allow videogames to be tremendously expressive and address fundamental questions regarding the direction and complexities of their narratives and characters (Bissell, 2010: 71). The gameplay mechanics of role-playing games (RPGs), like *Final Fantasy* (Square, 1987), emphasise narrative and exploration as much as action and feature copious in-game dialogue, relying on text boxes and non-interactive cutscenes to advance the narrative. Modern videogames incorporate increasingly high-quality pre-rendered cutscenes ("cinematics") and CGI that becomes "iconic of a game, standing in for it in the public mind" (Howells, 2002: 115). Indeed, as Bissell (2010: 112) observes, it is often cutscenes, rather then gameplay footage, which encompasses the majority of a videogame's publicity.

Ironically, *Sonic The Hedgehog*'s (Sonic Team, 2006) first public footage was an impressive cinematic sequence that was overshadowed by eventual gameplay flaws. Conversely, *Final Fantasy VII*'s (Square, 1997) marketing consisted solely of high-quality cinematics, using "the audio and 3D capabilities of the PlayStation to create an epic tale of fantasy [to become] the first Japanese role-playing game to really make it big outside Japan[, selling] more than eight million copies [worldwide], and [providing] one of the most iconic moments in game history" (Donovan, 2010: 279; Brookey, 2010: 94; Howells, 2002: 112).

Modern cutscenes can be particularly extravagant and expensive aspects of videogames: *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots* (Konami, 2008) contains enough cutscenes to rival Hollywood features, with "four separate scenes [adding] up to 71 minutes of non-play", and also holds the Guinness World Record for one cutscene that lasts for twenty-seven minutes by itself (Rouner, 2014).

This achievement alone is enough to change the way one thinks about "interactivity"; watching cutscenes can hardly be defined as "play time", but their exposition further tests the player's ability to process and store information in order to remain immersed in, and aware of, the plot (Newman, 2004: 89/93). Nevertheless, active gameplay can equate to nearly eighty hours of playtime, meaning players invest as much time into narrative (certainly as much as they would watching films) as they do gameplay, all with the intention of completing said videogame. Newman (2008: 52) goes on to relate that cutscenes thus exist as the videogame equivalent of narrative progression, and their meaning "is made in the context of playing with the 'game system' just as this play and its meaning exist and are made in the context of other cutscenes".

Many videogames employ quick-time events (QTEs), a gameplay mechanic designed to test player's reaction skills – on-screen button prompts must be entered quickly to ensure success. While QTEs are relatively commonplace in-game, they can also appear during cutscenes, which can be a jarring experience – players are conditioned to accept that cutscenes allow a break from interaction, and sudden QTEs during a cutscene's passive "safety" reinforces interactivity and further emphasises the videogame's principal defining trait of being an interactive experience.

Interestingly, Ubisoft game developer Clint Hocking regards cutscenes as a difficult, time-consuming, expensive, and restrictive process because "Once a cut scene is built and in the game, you can't change it […] They [take] time away from making the game more fun" (Bissell, quoting Hocking, 2010: 148). Thus, videogames like the *Batman: Arkham* series (Rocksteady Studios/Warner Bros. Games Montréal, 2009-2015) sometimes employ "in-game cutscenes" that take place either amidst, or without cutting away from, the in-game world to one of pre-rendered

CGI (ibid: 149-151). Generally, cutscenes suppress gameplay interaction as action gives way to inaction (Newman, 2008: 52) – gameplay, Hutcheon (2006: 136) notes, is often guided specifically to trigger non-interactive cutscenes, reducing players to mere spectators as they wait to return to the immersive gameplay environment – but "in-game cutscenes" allow videogames to remain interactive.

For a medium that has struggled to legitimise itself academically, labelling videogames as being "interactive" bestows a natural, empowering descriptive that moves the medium away from being labelled as "childish". Concurrently, this label gives videogames an advantage over literature or cinema, which have to, in a sense, "create" their audiences. Videogame players, by comparison, are immediately empowered and thrust into an influential role within the videogame narrative through the principal gameplay mechanic of the player-controlled avatar (Newman, 2004: 26), the next subject of analysis in this chapter.

Avatars are symbolic of videogames requiring strong, iconic characters (within a fully detailed fictional world) for audiences to identify with to achieve narrative success (Bissell, 2010: 78). Avatars ape film characterisations in the same way that cutscenes ape cinematic devices; in filmic narrative, described by Bordwell and Thompson (2010: 79/82) as being based on "*a chain of events*", characters facilitate the causes and effects that precipitate this chain: "Within the film's formal system, [characters] make things happen and respond to events. Their actions and reactions contribute strongly to our engagement with the film" (ibid).

Videogames heavily emphasise this through the player's unique ability to "become" the protagonist/s and play an active role in narrative progression, which has changed perceptions about interaction in modern media (Wolf, 2001: 14). Arguably the best format for avatar immersion is the RPG, where exploration, combat,

discourse, and side quests are the principal emphasis. Since its 1987 debut, the *Final Fantasy* franchise has since become one of the most complex RPG franchises, consisting of fifteen core titles and numerous spin-offs, each featuring a lengthy narrative ripe with multifaceted characters. Much like *The Legend of Zelda* (Nintendo R&D4, 1986) and its sequels, the gameplay mechanics of many *Final Fantasy* titles emphasise avatar customisation; unlike *Zelda*, however, a "party" of avatars is generally available, with each being fully customisable.

As the avatar exists as the player's onscreen manifestation, with the physical (or "real world") manifestation being the gamepad that controls said avatar, this customisation allows players to technically place themselves into the videogame world. Rehak (2003: 103) describes avatars as amalgamating interactive participation and passive spectatorship since players can interact with the videogame through their avatar but also, simultaneously, watch these actions onscreen, as well as the avatar's characterisation during cutscenes.

Generally, avatars are clearly defined characters, with distinct traits, and, by controlling them, players are encouraged to assume an active role in influencing, creating, or otherwise experiencing the narrative. Mirroring the human life cycle, avatars are "born" onscreen through the loading of a videogame, Christened, and serve as eyes, ears, and motor functions (ibid: 106-107). While subjected to a constant cycle of violence and rebirth – being killed onscreen or ceasing to exist once the player quits, only resurrecting upon their return – avatars are also gifted with a degree of immortality. Extra lives allow multiple tries to complete tasks and can be acquired, and invariably stockpiled, through various means. Finally, if all else fails, continues, passwords, and save features allow players to constantly save and re-load

progress; earlier videogames employed limited continues (restricted in arcades only by the amount of money players carried) or restricting password systems.

The avatar's tenacity parallels, and is dependant upon, the player's commitment to gameplay; avatars exist to be controlled, and their fate is firmly, and literally, placed in the player's hands. The avatar's ability to succeed is directly linked to the player's skill – King (2002: 52) notes that, the more experienced and familiar players become with gameplay mechanics, the more skilled their avatars become. Just as filmic characters have "*traits*: attributes, skills, habits, tastes, psychological drives, and any other qualities that distinguish the character" (Bordwell and Thompson, 2010: 82), RPG gameplay mechanics allow avatars to earn experience points that bolster their speed, strength, and other attributes ("levelling up"). RPG players must constantly be aware of their avatar's capabilities and limitations, which is a vastly different strategy to other videogame genres.

As the player's "eyes", avatars are directly linked to the in-game camera position, which is often framed so the avatar clearly faces the camera's direction (third-person perspective) or through the avatar's eyes (first-person perspective) (Natkin, 2006: 141/145). Accordingly, King and Krzywinska (2002: 58) observe that players must avoid onscreen hazards to ensure the avatar's safety; if their attention lapses then the avatar's health will be drained and the game will end. Therefore, players become inherently aware of ways to utilise the gameplay mechanics and environment to increase their success – finding cover, collecting power ups, or employing more powerful weapons and healing items – in order to advance.

In film, characters drive narrative: "A character wants something. The desire sets up a *goal*, and the course of the narrative's development will most likely involve the process of achieving that goal" (Bordwell and Thompson, 2010: 102). Like

cutscenes, avatars are essential to the videogame's position as filmic, and yet *not* filmic, being heavily involved in the narrative, and only by directing the avatar accordingly can players reach the final goal. Ergo, players become heavily invested in the avatar's wellbeing as they are responsible for the avatar's success.

Unlike reading a book or watching a film, where the passive audience cannot influence the character's wellbeing, gameplay holds players directly accountable. Thus, videogames uniquely separate themselves from literary and cinematic characters, as the avatar becomes both a virtual double for the videogame player and a character that players invest time in growing and nurturing.

1.3 Reputation

The reputation of videogame adaptations is largely negative and laced with scepticism and even hypocrisy as, to quote Elkinton (2009: 214), while videogame adaptations "usually do not fare well among critics and audiences, […] they are capable of performing well at the box-office". Before using my blended methodology to take videogame adaptations seriously, I must first address the perceived reputation of videogame adaptations to establish that, while they are largely considered notorious, they continue to be produced in cinema and television (Picard, 2008: 296).

When *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* set "a new record for a movie based on a videogame" with its worldwide box office gross of "just under $275 million", it seemed to legitimise "interactive entertainment as potential movie franchise material [and] showed studio executives that they needed to start taking the videogame sector seriously" (Russell, 2012: 166). Modern-day Hollywood is built on a repetitive process whereby existing products with both brand name recognition and a ready-

made fanbase are built into movie franchises – while Ioannidou (2013) writes

extensively about how this has proven successful for superhero movies, "Lara Croft

was the first videogame character to prove that games could be as valuable as comics

to producers hungry for [intellectual properties (IP)] to adapt" (Russell, 2012: 167).

Yet, by 2005, "videogame movies were still floundering on the edge of

respectability"; *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider: The Cradle of Life* (de Bont, 2003)

"suffered a disappointing opening weekend at the US box office and limped by on its

foreign grosses" and other videogame adaptations failed to raise the profile of the

genre (ibid: 231-232).

Russell (ibid) goes on to state that the issue has not been helped by Uwe Boll,

whose numerous productions further detracted from the reputation of videogame

adaptations in the eyes of critics and academia established by the poor performances

of *Super Mario Bros.* (Morton and Jankel, 1993) and *Final Fantasy: The Spirits*

Within (Sakaguchi, 2001) (White, 2008). Indeed, Rob Vaux (2005) believes that

calling *Alone in the Dark* (Boll, 2005) a failure is "an insult to failures everywhere.

The totality of its incompetence has rarely been exceeded, even by the most fumbling

and desperate filmmakers [who] can rest a little easier now". Despite examples like

In the Name of the King: A Dungeon Siege Tale (Boll, 2008) making $5 million on a

$60 million budget (Duke, 2009), Boll's efforts suitably prove that a keen market

exists that will "willingly buy tickets for or DVDs of any movie that had a videogame

brand name slapped on it; and that game companies were willing to use such movies

as marketing extensions" (Russell, 2012: 233).

According to Peter Moore, former president and chief operating officer at

SEGA of America (SOA), Boll bought the rights to videogame properties as part of "a

marketing play. The rights sale generated only a couple of million dollars […] It was

the publicity – and the perceived aura of legitimacy – that mattered" (ibid, quoting

Moore). Boll further compounds matters with his comments that videogames are

hardly renowned for their "complex characterisations and sophisticated narratives"

(Gibson, quoting Boll, 2006); Boll believes *House of the Dead* (Boll, 2003) successful

because the videogame was "a brainless shooter, where you shoot zombies into pieces

[…] it's not [*28 Days Later* (Boyle, 2002)], because [it's] about how it's a lot of fun

to shoot zombies" (ibid). Finally, Boll also believes he should be praised for his

efforts as, "It's tough to convince someone from the studio system to believe in a

videogame-based movie. It's way easier to have a great book or to have a comic book

[…] because these studio guys, they know […] that kind of stuff" (ibid).

    While these claims only work against videogames by treating them as a lesser,

disrespected medium, which in turn affects the quality of their adaptations, it further

confirms that videogame developers are rarely involved in a film's production.

Instead, as Russell (2012: 14/18) states, they "simply sell off the license and then

forget about it". Russell further relates how Warner Communications, after

negotiating "a $28 million deal" to purchase Atari, "weren't interested in games or art,

they simply wanted a product they could stamp *Superman*'s logo on".

    Ironically, *Final Fantasy* creator Hironobu Sakaguchi was heavily involved in

Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within, "[fussing] with the screenwriters' interpretation of

his story [and authoring] a story that was as hard to follow as a cockroach in a dark

room [rather than] a compelling treatment that was a tasty bite from the universe

where good fights evil" (Goldberg, 2011: 209). Finally, Boll blames his criticism on

the fans and the press, who inevitably dismiss videogame adaptations simply *because*

they are videogame adaptations: "When I try to get videogames turned into movies,

and get videogames accepted as [the equivalent of] best-selling books for the younger

generation, I get only [hassle] from the videogames press […] instead of being happy that there's a movie getting made of a game" (Gibson, quoting Boll, 2006).

Fittingly, *Interplay* is primarily structured around the reactions and misconceptions of videogame adaptations shared by academia, fans, and critics to the reputation of videogame adaptations. Indeed, as I highlight throughout, positive reactions to videogame adaptations do exist; not just within fan-moderated online forums and websites, but also in the scholarly work and critical publications referenced throughout this thesis. Much of this praise is highly contextual, reliant upon the admirable ways videogame adaptations have adapted and appropriated from other sources or heavily based on nostalgia; this is highly appropriate given that this thesis analyses videogame adaptations from a contextual perspective through numerous critical and analytical frameworks.

Also significant is the tendency of videogame adaptations to amass a cult appeal not unlike that seen in action, horror, and science-fiction genre movies for one reason or another, which each chapter also expands upon. Yet, despite these instances of positivity towards videogame adaptations, until the research conducted in this thesis, academics and critics have tended to disregard videogame adaptations due to their perceived negative reputation (whether warranted or not) based on poor box office performances and because they are made simply for profit.

Thus, the negative reputation of videogame adaptations comes from multiple contributing factors, primarily "the gaming companies, whose technology nerds don't understand the linear nature of movie storytelling [and] the movie companies, whose executives are only in it for the synergy of branding, trying to cash in on the latest trend" (Goldberg, 2011: 209-210). While videogame adaptations often fail *as* adaptations due to the numerous changes made to the source material overwhelming

the finished product, Hutcheon (2006: 16) relates that this is to be expected during the adaptation process. Yet, even when knowing this, those who critique adaptations do so to test their faithfulness and equivalence to a source material that is, by comparison, awarded primacy and authority simply because it "came first" (ibid).

Dicecco (2015: 164) observes that adaptation theorists such as Dudley Andrew, Deborah Cartmell, and Imelda Whelehan are exhausted with the imprecision of fidelity as a concept, viewing it as both a tiresome critical strategy and "an inexact science deployed to compare often something as inchoate as the 'spirit' of the thing"". Leitch (2008: 63) echoed these sentiments in his obvious relief that pioneering work by Brian McFarlane, Deborah Cartmell, Imelda Whelehan, James Naremore, Sarah Cardwell, Robert Stam, and Alessandra Raengo has successfully reoriented "adaptation studies decisively from the fidelity discourse universally attacked by theorists as far back as George Bluestone to a focus on Bakhtinian intertextuality — with each text, avowed adaptation or not, afloat upon a sea of countless earlier texts from which it could not help borrowing".

The rejection of fidelity as constructive analytical discourse has been described as essential to adaptation theory as "fidelity to a source does not make sense as a critical framework because literal reproduction, which may or may not even be a formal possibility, is actually a relatively uncommon motive for adapters" (Dicecco, referencing Hutcheon and Leitch, 2015: 164). Indeed, the very act of discussing fidelity is to express personal disappointment when an adaptation "fails to capture what we see as the fundamental narrative, thematic, and aesthetic features of its literary source" (ibid, quoting Stam), none of which is generally viewed as constructive to adaptation theory.

Fidelity, then, is often championed in fan-orientated discourse and fan-made productions, which neither borrow nor intersect, but rather *transform*: "These transforming adaptations strive for 'fidelity to the spirit, to the . . . tone, values, imagery, and rhythm' of the source material" (Moore, quoting Andrew, 2010: 189). Fan-made videogames, Moore (ibid) notes, "balance fidelity with first-hand game play experience. These adaptations do not hope to become facsimiles, but rather, expressions of fans' desires—realizations of what the original game could have been". However, there are many motivations behind the adaptation process, like the desire to challenge the message and mechanics of the source material as much as pay homage to it (Hutcheon, 2006: 55), which renders fidelity disputes trivial to adaptation theory simply due to adaptation's principal aims to appropriate, salvage, interpret, and, ultimately, create something new out of an existing work (ibid: 20).

This thesis is based on a perspective similar to Leitch's, that "fidelity is the question that 'earlier adaptation theorists routinely pursue as soon as they have disavowed it'" (Dicecco, quoting Leitch, 2015: 165). While fidelity may be flawed and detrimental to the greater aim of adaptation theory, "Adaptation studies as a field, after all, is predicated on there being a discrepancy between two sides of the community" (ibid: 172). Consequently, the blended methodology of this thesis at least recognises fidelity's persistence within the academic field and utilises it as another tool by which to support, or disavow, the often conflicted viewpoints raised in fan-based theory.

This is particularly relevant in the perceived belief that videogame adaptations generally fail to take advantage of their new medium, alienating the target audience – namely, videogame fans. Like Desmond and Hawkes (cited by Leitch, 2008, 70), many fans "consider adaptations only in terms of their relationships to specific

sourcetexts whose elements they simply 'keep, drop, or add'" and, while I illustrate rare instances of these changes actually proving successful, sometimes even entering videogame canon, the alienation of a videogame adaptation's target audience inherently compounds their perceived reputation. Chapter Two elaborates on the fickle nature of target audiences; while successful videogames generate an in-built target audience willing to pay to see an adaptation based on the title alone (ibid, 2007: 262), this results in few videogame adaptations amassing much of an audience beyond the fans of the source material, and even then the adaptation is often the subject of continued derision (Poole, 2000: 85). This parallels the adaptation of films into videogames; adapting successful movies ensures videogame sales, no matter how substandard the product is (ibid: 85).

Often, videogame adaptations distance themselves from their source material (Leitch, 2007: 265); *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* avoided overly-choreographed fight sequences and bright, primary colours (traits that were vivid allegories to the videogame origins of *Mortal Kombat* and *Super Mario Bros.*), recalling its origins only in the film's opening fight sequence (ibid). Despite developing beyond the confines of its videogame origins, *Tomb Raider*, like *Resident Evil* and *Doom* (Bartkowiak, 2005) after it, was required by the restrictions of linear narrative to construct a story centred around a definite goal – often derived from a source otherwise not associated with the original videogames – rather than an endless series of quests for smaller talismans scattered with continual battles against progressively stronger enemies (ibid).

Central to the reputation of videogame adaptations is their notorious critical reception; Goldberg (2011: 213) relates that it is "a genre full of poorly made movies", regarding *Resident Evil*'s adaptations as "predictable and poorly acted" –

symptomatic of "every movie made from a videogame". This negativity also surrounds videogame adaptations of movies, which "are rarely as engrossing as the movie, because you already have a preconceived notion of what the movie is" (ibid: 210).

Additionally, Elkington (2009: 219) and Poole (2000: 85) observe that, just as players recognise flawed products that exhibit minimal production efforts, videogame adaptations of films often receive scathing criticism as shallow attempts to exploit a film's success. The results are trivial, unchallenging gameplay experiences with questionable aesthetics and a narrative so slavishly devoted to recreating film events that any element of suspense is completely eliminated. Players are presented with an embarrassing list of options, simplistic level design and gameplay mechanics, and linear missions that reiterate the film's narrative with poor voice acting and graphics.

Concurrently, videogame reviewers largely expect less of adaptations because of their negative reputation. This may be traced back to a Nintendo fanzine in the eighties launched not to "report objective news, but to sell more games by saying nice things about Nintendo" (Goldberg, 2011: 69). The fanzine's success meant this became "the sad template for much of gaming "journalism" for many years to come" (ibid). Many reviews now revel in the opportunity to prove their prejudices correct (or, rarely, incorrect), much like reviews of film adaptations of videogames will often reiterate the negative reputation of previous adaptations in a method of criticism that borders on attack (Elkington, 2009: 223).

With so many videogame adaptations proving flawed, such reviews lament poor scripts, pitiable direction, subpar acting, and lacklustre effects, and these feelings are frequently echoed in academia even when attempting to assess the complex interplay of homage and appropriation at work in many of these films (Sanders, 2006:

17). Videogame adaptations are thus categorised by their formulaic and predictable plots, usually centring on a lone hero, or small group, opposing the impending threat of the destruction of modern society through a variety of increasingly-difficult fights and obstacles generated by a maniacal despot who is usually in possession of endless wealth and resources or some assortment of magical or superhuman abilities (Leitch, 2007: 268).

With videogame adaptations being box office underachievers, a standard complaint surrounds the relative importance of narrative, be it structure or development (King and Krzywinska, 2002: 9), a key element to a film's configuration and pacing. Thus, if the source material has very little plot, its adaptation must expand upon this limited narrative in order to satisfy the audience's expectations (ibid: 21). Sconce (1993: 103/106) relates how this parallels the reception of action, horror, and science-fiction genres, which frequently generate scepticism thanks to 1950s B-movies, gore-fests like *The Evil Dead* (Raimi, 1981), and hypermuscular actors like Arnold Schwarzenegger. These genres are frequently required to present something groundbreaking to receive critical success, despite rarely being made with that intent. Concurrently, as Chapter Four details, George A. Romero's *Living Dead* movies (Romero, 1968-2010) gained not only cult popularity but also received, or was nominated for, numerous accolades (Holguin, 2011), with *Night of the Living Dead* being inducted into the National Film Registry for its cultural and historical significance (Allen, 1999).

Similarly, Chapter Three illustrates how Schwarzenegger defined the muscle-bound action hero archetype, emphasising physical action and stunts over heavy exposition and complex dialogue – a suitable format, Grant (2007: 83) relates, for unashamedly displaying masculine power and dominance in the face of incredible

odds. However, not all of Schwarzenegger's films were as over-the-top as *Commando* (Lester, 1985); *The Terminator*'s (Cameron, 1984) "box office takings were good, if not astounding ($30 million, although on video it would become a huge sleeper hit)" (Saunders, 2009: 75) and it was also inducted in the National Film Registry (BBC News, 2008).

Thus, while these genres may often be overlooked and of questionable quality, many are regarded as classic cinematic works. However, each receives its share of negative criticism and critical backlash due to various low-budget direct-to-DVD (and made-for-television) releases, and their tendency to rely on clichés rather than reinvigoration, like videogame adaptations. As videogame adaptations often fall into these ill-received film genres, they become a form of exploitation as they target a very specific audience – 15 to 30 year old males, the same demographic as FPS, action/adventure, and fighting videogames (Elkington, 2009: 218; Leitch, 2007: 269).

While videogames use cutscenes to appeal to movie-savvy players using familiar cinematic techniques and aesthetics (Howells, 2002: 113), the FPS blatantly appropriates visual and thematic aesthetics from films like the *Matrix* trilogy (Wachowski Brothers, 1999-2003) and *The Terminator* to immerse players in an interactive gaming world that is both unique and familiar to create a sense of convergence between videogames and cinema (Bryce and Rutter, 2002: 67/77). Furthermore, they often contain questionable, forced storylines and acting alongside sensory thrills and mindless entertainment within a typically mission-based environment. Players guide their avatar through an enclosed space or restricted, faux open-world environment, to the end of the level, encountering numerous enemies and obstacles along the way in the pursuit of an over-arching goal.

Essentially, however, these genres are not typically geared towards complex thought or emotion, and are not aiming to change perceptions about cinema or society. Maltby (2003: 14) states that Hollywood designs its productions "to be consumed in a single viewing, and the audience's experience of an individual movie is fleeting, lasting only as long as the movie is on screen", providing a venue for escapist fantasy and quick, pleasurable thrills. Facilitating this, *Doom* (id Software, 1993) famously evoked terror from the safely of a computer screen – a visceral thrill, but a safe one, similar to watching an intense horror movie or a rollercoaster (Herz, 1997: 88). *Doom*'s co-creator John Carmack ironically once stated: "Story in a game […] is like a story in a porn movie; it's expected to be there, but it's not that important" (Kushner, quoting Carmack, 2004: 105).

Additionally, action/adventure videogames may have simplistic plots, yet *Super Mario Bros.* revolutionised videogames by introducing whimsical humour and wit (Sheff and Eddy, 1999: 3); *Street Fighter II* may not have *Final Fantasy VII*'s complex story but countless players spent their coins playing the original arcade release; and not every FPS is lauded like *Call of Duty: Black Ops* (Treyarch, 2010) but the genre remains popular among online gamers (IGN, 2003; Sakinah, 2010). It is the addictiveness of gameplay which draws players back; with increased emphasis on providing a suitably engaging multiplayer experience, both on- and offline, these genres have been able to persevere, offering addictive and entertaining gameplay that override any inane notions of a complex narrative or deep, multifaceted characters.

1.4 The Japanese Connection

One thing every adaptation I analyse in *Interplay* has in common is their origins in Japan, with the original videogames intended to appeal to an international (specifically American) audience, and this connection comes to be reinforced through videogames, and their adaptations, taking on a transnational complexity. The videogame industry shares the same transnational nature as the film industry, though the scope of the videogame's industry is noticeably concentrated on three specific markets: North America, Europe, and Japan, which each market imposing regionalised restrictions of videogame titles to limit their transnational compatibility (Nichols, 2008: 135).

The European market tends to be far from the epicentre of the transnational videogame industry; European consumers are consistently made aware that the tempo is set by North American and Japan "whenever a new videogame system is launched. Generally it does not arrive in European shops until after its release in Japan and the USA – often at a higher price (Lange, 2002: 47). Nichols (2008: 136) relates (by referencing Aoyama and Izushi and Guth) that, in Japan alone, "almost 80 percent of households own and play video games […] Japan is the second largest market for video games behind the United States and has served as the first market for a number of games". Indeed, Japan is the home of Sony and Nintendo, two of the biggest and most prolific hardware and software producers in the videogame industry, and the Japanese market "has proven to be a remarkable test of which games will be successful globally" (ibid, referencing Nelson).

Iwabuchi (2004: 53) relates that "Japanese cultural industries and cultural forms have played a growing role in the transnational flow of media and popular

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culture" since the late-eighties. Iwabuchi goes on to highlight "Sony's purchase of Columbia in 1989 and Matsushita's purchase of MCA (Universal) in 1990 [as] key events [that] marked the entrance of Japanese hardware conglomerates into the production and distribution of software".

While acquisitions such as these were, in Iwabuchi's words, "greeted by disdain by many Americans who believed that technologically obsessed hardware manufacturers would stifle the creativity needed for software development" (ibid), Japan's influence on videogame production and adaptation continued unabated. Indeed, throughout the late-eighties and early/mid-nineties, many of the videogame adaptations produced were Japanese-exclusive original video animation (OVA) productions, anime serials,[2] or feature films that adapted Japan-exclusive videogames – many sexual in nature, like the *Welcome to Pia Carrot* (1997-2002) series, as catalogued in Appendix One.

Despite the cultural significance of Japan's transnational success, Iwabuchi (ibid: 56) notes that, aside from Japanese management models, "Japanese cultural power has not been widely discussed outside of Japan". Iwabuchi (ibid) attributes this to "a discrepancy between actual cultural influence and perceived cultural presence" yet, through Japanese audiovisual exports (televisions, videogame consoles, stereo systems, and many more), Japanese consumer technology has impacted society in a way that is, arguably, greater than the impact of Hollywood films (ibid).

Japan's transnational success can be best measured through the *Pokémon* franchise, which expanded from a videogame franchise to a complex multimedia brand by its North American debut in 1998 (Donovan, 2010: 335). *Pokémon* exploited its brand name across every conceivable ancillary product and ensuring,

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[2] OVAs are usually released straight to video and are not shown in cinemas and have a higher budget than television anime, while anime can be produced for both television serials and cinema.

through widespread merchandising, that its mascot, Pikachu, "could be found on everything from bed sheets to takeaway hot dog trays to airplanes and toy shop shelves" (ibid). This strategy ultimately resulted in the *Pokémon* anime becoming the most-watched children's show within only a month of its American debut; within seven months, "more than 2.5 million *Pokémon* video game cartridges and 850,000 sets of *Pokémon* trading cards had been sold [and *Pokémon the First Movie: Mewtwo Strikes Back* (Yuyama, 1998) earned] more than $160 million at the box office and spawn numerous sequels" (ibid).

The international success of *Pokémon* subsequently led to a rapid spread of Japanese pop culture, specifically anime and manga, throughout North American and Europe. While *Pokémon*'s transnational success came to be "a source of national pride in Japan, a confirmation that the country was a cultural, as well as economic, power capable of influencing culture on a global scale (ibid: 336), and signalled that Japan's "export strategy has gradually shifted from an emphasis on the sophistication of its technologies to the appeal of its animated and digitized products" (Iwabuchi, 2004: 54). *Pokémon* thus became simply another global commodity, a product of seemingly of universal (or, more fittingly, transcultural) appeal that "carried the creative imprint of the originality of a producing nation" (ibid).

Traditionally, Japanese audiences, especially the youth demographic, are accustomed to adult themes and situations appearing in anime; the adult content (partial nudity, sexual content and references, swearing, blood, and death) of *Dragonball* (1986-1989), and its successor, *Dragonball Z* (1989-1996), was censored for international audiences and only restored when Funimation began releasing more Japanese-accurate depictions on DVD (psfrontline, 2009). Furthermore, the *Pokémon* anime differed from its Japanese depiction due to localisation (Katsuno and Maret,

2004: 81). Certainly, Japan's differing social and cultural climate is reflected in their anime and films, where standard depictions of "good" and "evil" are often blurred (ibid: 83). Unlike the clear-cut nature of American cartoons, anime protagonists often question themselves or their actions, or act in ambiguous and complex ways (ibid: 84).

Anime protagonists are therefore generally more relatable because of their flaws: they are not perfect and must learn from their mistakes and to overcome their imperfections. Additionally, Katsuno and Maret (ibid) postulate that audiences are invited to sympathise with antagonists, or given substantial exposition into their motivations in order to develop an understanding behind each character, thus making their description as a "villain" much more indefinite.

Pokémon also often places protagonists (invariably young children) in considerable danger; Satoshi/Ash Ketchum (Rica Matsumoto/Veronica Taylor) has been threatened at gunpoint, or physically assaulted, which never appeared in international broadcasts (ibid: 89). Alongside toning down violence deemed inappropriate for American target audiences (both younger and less desensitised than their Japanese counterparts), anime adaptations often also suffer from poor dubbing and a number of mistranslations. To make anime more accessible to international audiences, references to Japanese society and culture are often edited out frame-by-frame (ibid: 86). Rather than attempt to transform the Japanese aesthetic into an American one (which would require costly and time-consuming animation), international dubs expand upon anime's traditional national ambiguity – "*mukokuseki* (no-nationality) style", where characters showcase little racial diversity (ibid: 88) – to make the location equally ambiguous.

Iwabuchi (2004: 59) states that the tendency of anime to position itself and its characters as "non-Japanese is evidence that a Western-dominated cultural hierarchy continues to govern transnational cultural flows". Indeed, alterations to Japanese products, such as anime, are often intentionally added in order to make Japanese products more suitable for the intended audience and cultural climate. Similar errors are also found in videogames and were especially commonplace in the eighties, when hardware limitations made the translation of *Final Fantasy* titles even more daunting and resulted in various alterations during the localisation process. Mistranslations occur when the original Japanese text is erroneously interpreted through transliteration, changing *Final Fantasy VII*'s Aerith into "Aeris" (Ambigore and Piersa, 2000). Due to the difficulty in translating Japanese, translation errors were notorious in early videogames, anime, and movies imported from Japan.

Habitually, the original text is simplified for its new cultural audience since Japanese references, puns, and social satires lose their meaning internationally. *Pokémon* saw significant narrative differences and widely contrasting characterisation between cultures; Allison (2004: 39) notes that 4Kids Entertainment, specifically Norman Grossfield, sought to eliminate moral ambiguity in international broadcasts. In *Pokémon the First Movie*, Grossfield enforced a dramatic rewrite to ensure Mewtwo's actions would be viewed as clearly "evil" while Ash's defiance would be identified as "good". This was facilitated by Mewtwo's telepathic abilities, which conveniently avoided costly lip synching to better reflect its new motivations. *Pokémon*'s movies continue to prominently feature psychic Pokémon and perpetuate traditional American conventions of clear-cut heroes, rather than Japan's ambiguous blurring of reality, fantasy, good, and evil (ibid).

Further transnational complexity necessitated modifications to the Japanese and American versions of *Final Fantasy*, *Resident Evil*, and *Street Fighter II*, whose various early errors were amended in subsequent re-releases. International *Final Fantasy* consumers saw the franchise jump from *III* to *VII* with no explanation when, in reality, "*Final Fantasy II*" and "*Final Fantasy III*" were *Final Fantasy IV* (Square, 1991) and *Final Fantasy VI* (Square, 1994), respectively, with titles that better reflected the then-current international numbering system. Due to the effort required to translate the videogames, none of the subsequent entries made it to Western consumers following *Final Fantasy*, meaning the series seemed to undergo dramatic graphical and story improvements within a comparatively short space of time.

Following *Final Fantasy VII*, all subsequent numbered titles followed the original Japanese design, and those that never made it to the Super Nintendo Entertainment System (SNES) were later re-released (GameTrailers, 2007; Spenser, 2007). This reproduction seems motivated to take advantage of new technologies and innovations (such as motion controls or 3D) and coincides with the ever-present need to improve the gameplay mechanics and the interface between player and avatar. The result is a change within the fundamental presentation of, and interaction with, videogames, with new control schemes, new camera perspectives, and more dynamic gameplay mechanics (such as QTEs) being incorporated which can, sometimes, completely change a franchise's ambiance and direction.

Chapter Four details how *Resident Evil*'s distorted camera angles and restrictive controls, in conjunction with an immersive and atmospheric soundtrack, overcame the PlayStation's limitations, allowing for a constant sense of threat. As technologies improved, Capcom attempted to adapt to the expectations of a new generation of players used to more complex and free-roaming gameplay experiences.

This resulted in a complete mechanical overhaul in *Resident Evil 4* (Capcom, 2005) –

and continuing into subsequent titles – that saw player perspective shift over-the-

shoulder and eliminated restricted environments.

Additionally, while *Resident Evil*'s increasingly convoluted narrative

progressed beyond its B-movie-inspired beginnings, the franchise continually returns

to the original narrative threads made famous in *Resident Evil 2* (Capcom, 1998) and

Resident Evil 3: Nemesis (Capcom, 1999). Consequently, no less than seventeen

Resident Evil titles either concern, or return to, the original Raccoon City zombie

outbreak, excluding the numerous remakes and hardware ports. The prioritising and

reemphasising of *Resident Evil*'s popular qualities is juxtaposed with the live-action

movie franchise, which largely avoids reproducing the events of its source material.

Remakes and ports of popular franchise titles allow for improved translations,

graphical updates, and even additional gameplay mechanics to retroactively reinforce

continuity and allow previously-vague franchise tropes to become more explicit, a key

point in Chapter Two. Additionally, translation errors have noticeably improved,

thanks largely in part to these re-releases – previously, as Newman (2008: vii) relates,

dedicated fans had to manually translate the original Japanese text to uncover

additional exposition on their favourite videogames.

Thus, it is important to realise and address the transnational complexity of

Japanese and international videogame franchises and their ensuing adaptations, and

one of the common threads throughout this thesis is the strong cultural divide between

the West – Hollywood, the United States, and Europe – and the East – specifically

Japan. While Hollywood may dominate the cinema industry as the premier global

economic power (Gomery, 2005: 3), Japanese industries primarily produce content

aimed specifically at Western audiences (Iwabuchi, 2004: 54). Indeed, Nintendo

purposely developed *Pokémon* to be easily imported and internationally accessible (Buckingham and Sefton-Green, 2004: 17; Iwabuchi, 2004: 67).

As related by Allison (2004: 34), this strategy saw the super-cute Pikachu – regarded as Japan's long-awaited counterpart to Mickey Mouse – share the American marketing spotlight with his human co-star, Ash, as American audiences often better identify with stronger, "cool" characters (ibid: 38). This was despite the fact that Japan's primary interest in producing "cute" characters had led to increased economic revenue for Japanese products worldwide. Indeed, after generating $8 billion in 2001, Japan's cultural presence was increased globally, significantly increasing international demand for videogames, anime, and manga (ibid: 36). After its American debut, *Pokémon* produced over $5 billion – almost equal to the entirety of the American videogames industry gross that year (Buckingham and Sefton-Green, 2004: 13). This result is even more significant considering that, while eventually spending allegedly well over $50 million marketing *Pokémon* to American consumers, Nintendo of America (NOA) were originally sceptical of *Pokémon*'s ability to appeal to Americans (Iwabuchi, 2004: 66).

With prominent videogame producers having worldwide offices, each producing ancillary products, divisions arose between videogame narratives and canons produced in America to those that originated in Japan, sometimes due to copyright laws. Rodney Greenblat (quoted by Elkington, 2009: 218) considered this a key reason behind the "messy" adaptation of his *PaRappa the Rapper* videogame (NanaOn-Sha/Sony, 1996), which generated conflicting narrative and continuity discrepancies with the source material. Popularly, this also necessitated the swapping of boss character names in *Street Fighter II*'s American release to avoid a potential lawsuit from Mike Tyson, to whom the boxer character M. Bison shared a likeness.

Bison's name was swapped with the masked cage fighter Balrog, who became Vega, the Japanese name for the final boss who became M. Bison internationally and these alterations have continued ever since, while the Japanese entries retain the original character names (Capcom Europe, 2010).

Simply for economy, Japanese videogames either specifically target American consumers or attempt to reflect American society and sensibilities, sometimes to the point of parody. Indeed, while other Japanese film genres imported internationally contain the original Japanese dialect with subtitles, the majority of Japanese anime is dubbed into English in order to increase their foreign sales. Likewise, videogame developers intentionally create ethnically ambiguous characters in order to appeal to a global market, rather than one specific country. While anthropomorphic characters often bypass this, or at least make aesthetic adaptation easier as they are not representatives of a specific real-world culture, Iwabuchi (2004: 67) notes that Mario illustrates that the transnational complexity of a major Japanese videogame company's mascot not aesthetically invoking the image of Japan in any way.

1.5 Early Videogame Adaptations

Videogame adaptations have long been a staple of cinema and television, becoming live-action movies or television shows, cartoons or anime, or sometimes encompassed each format in an effort to translate their pixelated success into multimedia hits. This section analyses some of the earliest screen adaptations, notable examples that set the template for all that followed, and explores how they have attempted to face the challenge of "not only of adapting things like genres, plots, characters, themes,

audiences, and ideologies but also of recreating one media within the social and technological affordances of another" (Moore, (2010: 180).

Picard (2008: 298) argues that, ever since videogames became a popular cultural phenomenon, they have had an intertextual relationship with television that is significantly different to the one shared between videogames and film, which generally approach videogames as either an ancillary product or a means to exploit an existing franchise. As a result, while *Tron* was the first film to adapt videogame elements into its plot, television was the first home to screen adaptations of videogames. After gobbling an "estimated $1 billion in quarters to become the hottest item in the video-game market" (Time Magazine, 1982), *Pac-Man* became the first videogame to expand into the realm of multimedia. Not only did *Pac-Man*'s spin-offs dominate arcades of the eighties, the title also spawned a 1981 top ten single (ibid; Howells, 2002: 111) and a forty-two episode animated series in 1982 (Picard, 2008: 298).

While Mäyrä (2008: 73) argues that *Pac-Man*'s sprites illustrate "how simple digital characters can have a look and feel that creates a sense of personality for the player", *Pac-Man* was still limited in its narrative beyond simple intermissions. Pac-Man was merely an avatar – albeit a considerably advanced one through which players assumed a clear and identifiable role, unlike earlier, less detailed avatars (Herz, 1997: 163). Despite being intentionally designed to be featureless (Poole, quoting Iwatani, 2002: 77), which allowed players to *become* him by imprinting their own imagination onto his formless sprite (Herz, 1997: 163), Pac-Man's animated series elaborated upon the artwork heavily featured on his arcade cabinets, which clearly depicted a bipedal protagonist.

Though the series ended in 1983, it influenced its videogame counterpart considerably: *Pac-Land* (Namco, 1984) and *Pac Man 2: The New Adventures* (Namco, 1994) contained various elements from the series in their gameplay and narrative, redesigning Pac-Man and popularising the notion of two versions of Pac-Man: one a chomping, pixelated head, the other a humanoid figure who races go-karts and participates in party games. This latter version later starred in the CGI animated series *Pac-Man and the Ghostly Adventures* (2013-2015), while *Super Smash Bros. for Nintendo 3DS* and *Wii U* (2014) depict Pac-Man as being able to switch between his humanoid and pixelated form in order to fight other franchise characters.

Able to evolve through adaptation, Pac-Man became a more versatile and dexterous character. Animation allowed Pac-Man, already an expressive avatar, to express a full range of emotions and influenced his abilities and gameplay mechanics in his consecutive videogame outings. This aligns with Bissell's (2010: 75) view that videogame avatars "frequently resemble cartoon characters. Both are designed, animated, and artisanal—the exact sum of their many parts". For Bissell, their fundamental difference lies, again, in the fact that cartoon characters act independently from the viewer's influence and inhabit closed spaces and videogame avatars are given life by the player and inhabit open situations that often emphasise graphical photorealism (ibid).

Pac-Man: The Animated Series also inspired the production of multiple animated videogame adaptations throughout the eighties, as illustrated through an article published online by Retro Junk (blueluigi, 2014). *Saturday Supercade*, for example, produced ninety-seven episodes between 1983 and 1985 and featured adaptations of arcade titles like *Frogger* (Konami, 1981) and *Pitfall!* (Activision, 1982), and also Mario's animated debut. This paved the way for Nintendo's coming

domination of Saturday morning cartoons, beginning with 1989's *Captain N: The Game Master*, which adapted multiple Nintendo franchises, effectively being a twenty-two minute advertisement for Nintendo's merchandise, which continued in Valiant's Nintendo-related comic books (Thompson, 2008).

Captain N's appropriation of *Tron*'s basic premise illustrates what Semenza (2014: 79) calls the intrinsically intertextual nature of adaptations and their tendency to "establish similar ethical-hermeneutical frameworks as other self-reflexive texts". Undeniably, *Tron* positions itself as incredibly self-reflective through not just appropriating "the aesthetics of video games, but also [incorporating] them into the narrative" (Brookey, 2010: 106). Similarly, *Captain N* incorporated top Nintendo franchises like *Castlevania* (Konami, 1986), *Kid Icarus* (Nintendo R&D1, 1986), *Mega Man* (Capcom, 1987), *Metroid* (Nintendo R&D1/Intelligent Systems, 1986), and even a sentient humanoid Game Boy in a stunningly unsubtle piece of product placement.

Captain N aired alongside the obscure, short-lived *King Koopa's Kool Kartoons* and the more famous (and, arguably, infamous) 1989 *Legend of Zelda* series. Comprised of thirteen episodes, and loosely based on *The Legend of Zelda* and *Zelda II: The Adventure of Link* (Nintendo R&D4, 1987), the *Zelda* cartoon incorporated numerous sound effects, items, and enemies from the videogames. Mirroring its source material, Link defended the titular Princess Zelda from the iniquitous Ganon with an energy-emitting sword, much like in the original *Zelda*, and closely resembled his in-game sprite, despite dramatic alterations to his characterisation.

This was perhaps unavoidable, especially in 1989, when Link had very little characterisation. Despite looking exactly the same in each title, he is rarely ever the

same character, and though players can rename the avatar, his true name, Link, is

derived from the emotional and immersive "link" players are intended to experience

during gameplay. Creator Shigeru Miyamoto (2013: 2) "named the protagonist Link

because he connects people together" and "this 1:1 interaction with Link [helps] you

feel closer to the character […] to actually feel as if they were going on the adventure

themselves, rather than just controlling a character down a path" (RawmeatCowboy,

quoting Miyamoto, 2010).

      Link is famously mute in the videogames – the exception being a quick yell of

"Come on!" in *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker* (Nintendo EAD, 2002) and

implied conversations taking place unseen in the onscreen dialogue boxes – and each

title alters or expands his origins and motivations. For example, in *The Legend of

Zelda: A Link to the Past* (ibid, 1991) Link is descended from ancient knights, but in

The Legend of Zelda: Spirit Tracks (Nintendo EAD Group No. 3, 2009) he is a train

engineer – though his destiny is always to rescue Princess Zelda and/or become the

world's saviour.

      Subsequently, Link was designed to allow players to bond with their avatar;

players would assume Link's role and journey *as* him, rather than *with* him. Thus, if

the player is an obnoxious, lethargic, childish prankster, then the animated Link would

be a startlingly direct interpretation, but such qualities oppose Link's fundamental

characterisation as related through in-game references and instruction manuals, where

he is described as bold and courageous, but also humble and polite. The *Zelda*

cartoon consequently presents Link in the infancy of his heroic career, yet to learn

either humility or fully develop into an honourable hero; he is a flawed character who

must learn to assume great responsibility.

This allowed *Zelda* to teach lessons in modesty, humility, and social responsibility, and children were invited to learn alongside Link. However, just as Semenza (2014: 63) observes that "Adaptations of textual sources that do not meet a critic's approval often are lambasted as offensive in their desecration of the source", Link's animated portrayal has drawn substantial criticism, particularly evident online. Plunkett's (2011) article on Kotaku's website, for example, condemns Link's juvenile characterisation and voice as marking the character as being distinctly removed from the "real" Link of the videogames. Importantly, however, while Plunkett slates the quality of the cartoon's animation and writing, he relates that "there's something [charming] about [the show] that defies genuine ridicule". Simultaneously, Plunkett as acknowledges that there is plenty to be angry about for fans of the videogame and, as Chapter Two expands upon, this same seemingly hypocritical stance between outrage and nostalgia is common in videogame fan communities, especially regarding their adaptations.

This is essentially why an understanding of videogame culture is so important to my blended methodology as it, in Newman's words (2004: 148), "highlights the myriad ways in which videogames provide a stimulus for social activity and privileges the complex sets of reading and production activity that explicitly decry the designation of videogaming as trivial or asocial". Newman, referencing Bourdieu and Jenkins, further elaborates the tendency of fan cultures to "disrupt and revisit cultural hierarchies not only in the voracity of their interest in trivial, low texts, but also because fans appear to engage in types of activity that run contrary to interpretative practises preferred by bourgeois culture" (ibid).

Significantly, while a mature rendition of Link appeared in *Captain N*, apparently having grown up in the interim (blueluigi, 2014), Nintendo's mascot,

Mario did not, and his *Saturday Supercade* appearance was essentially an adaptation

of *Donkey Kong* – itself influenced by *King Kong* (Cooper and Schoedsack, 1933)

and *Beauty and the Beast* (Sheff and Eddy, 1999: 47). Sheff and Eddy go into great

detail regarding the global success of Mario and his brother, Luigi; sales of the NES

version of *Super Mario Bros. 3* (Nintendo R&D4, 1988), for example, exceeded $500

million (ibid: 3), thanks largely to its inclusion in *The Wizard* (Holland, 1989), which

heavily promoted *Super Mario Bros. 3* (ibid: 191).

Echoing the views of Tom Bissell stated previously, the popularity of *Mario*'s

videogames can be attributed to their "cartoon aesthetic[, which], may be read as an

appeal to young players[, and] in particular the ways in which [the] games encourage

replay and re-engagement, [which signals] their addictiveness" (Newman, 2004: 62).

Interestingly Mario's influence on videogame adaptation is just as substantial, but

with less critical success; Mario became the first ever videogame character to reach

the cinema screen with *Super Mario Bros.: Peach-Hime Kyushutsu Dai Sakusen!*

(Hata, 1986).[3]

Exclusive to Japan, this anime loosely adapted gameplay mechanics like

Mario's various power-ups and what limited story was available, from its source

material, and attempting to either expand on, or literally translate, it: the Mario

Brothers are retail workers who are unwittingly pulled into the Mushroom Kingdom

to save Princess Peach from Bowser's clutches with three power-ups appropriated

from the source material. Playing with intertextuality, the anime initially depicts

Mario playing a videogame remarkably similar to *Super Mario Bros.* and Peach,

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[3] Roughly translated as *Super Mario Bros.: The Great Mission to Rescue Princess Peach!* (Hackett, 2013).

Bowser,[4] and Bowser's minions entering the "real world" through Mario's television in a reverse of *Tron* (though the Mario Brothers use a traditional pipe to travel to the Mushroom Kingdom). The anime also included sound effects and music from the videogames, pioneering the animated tradition of a Mario "*boing!*" sound effect whenever characters jump, and creatively expanded upon on its source's limited rescue plot in order to artificially extend its length.

The Mushroom Kingdom (2015), an appropriately-named fan-created website, also mentions a three-part *Mario* OVA produced by Amada Anime, which may be even more obscure. These fifteen-minute long episodes, released in 1989, "[placed] characters from *Super Mario Bros. 3* in classic fairy tales: *Momotaro*, *Issunboshi*, and *Snow White*" and featured improved animation compared to its predecessor in addition to the characters being based on their official designs (ibid). Yet, once *Super Mario Bros.* contributed to the sales of NES consoles, Mario was propelled into an international, multimedia icon (Herman, 1997: 137).

This eventually led to the production of *The Super Mario Bros. Super Show!*, which featured a live-action Mario (famously portrayed by "Captain" Lou Albano) and Luigi (Danny Wells) alongside animated adventures that were based on *Super Mario Bros.* and *Super Mario Bros. 2* (Nintendo R&D4, 1988). Mario and Luigi were Brooklyn plumbers who travelled to the Mushroom Kingdom via magical pipes to defend Princess Toadstool from King Koopa; enemies, locations, music, sound effects, and various power-ups from both videogames were present. Fifty-two episodes were produced throughout 1989, with *The Legend of Zelda* making up the remaining episode count of sixty-five.

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[4] In Japan, Mario's nemesis was initially named "the Great Demon King Koopa", while American instruction manuals referred to him as "Bowser", leading to his designation as "Bowser, King of the Koopas" (Mandelin, 2013).

In 1990, a new series of twenty-six episodes ran in tandem with *Captain N*; *Captain N & The Adventures of Super Mario Bros. 3* would later be separated into two independent shows (blueluigi, 2014). Although none of the live-action segments returned, the cartoon was a direct continuation of Mario's previous adventures, with King Koopa being joined by *Super Mario Bros. 3*'s Koopalings – albeit with different names to their videogame counterparts (Frye, 2014). An emphasis on greater continuity between episodes and fidelity was apparent alongside more "real world" locations and characters, as opposed to just Brooklyn.

Finally, in 1991, came *Captain N & The New Super Mario World*, but only thirteen episodes were produced, and the subsequent DVD releases are comparatively limited. Loosely based on *Super Mario World* (Nintendo EAD, 1990), this cartoon introduced Yoshi and was set entirely in Dinosaur World. Although also a sequential continuation, *Mario World* featured several original characters and exhibited many aesthetic differences to its videogame counterpart: some locations and enemies were renamed, and the Mario Brothers and Princess Toadstool still resembled their NES sprites despite them being redesigned for the SNES.

These animated exploits represent the most successful *Mario* adaptations, being almost excessive in their fidelity, adapting each title much closer than either the anime or live-action attempts, while still incorporating expansions and changes to enhance the narrative. Restricted by NES hardware, all character names and characterisations were provided in instruction manuals, which, as Chapter Two will detail, vary in content, canonicity, and meaning from location. Nevertheless, Mario's core characterisation is present: he is an Italian-American plumber who defends a princess and her Mushroom Kingdom. Like Pac-Man, Mario's adaptations introduced more complex characterisations as the Mario Brothers' status as ordinary working

class people (and, by extension, unlikely heroes) was emphasised whenever the narrative took place in the "real world". Other characters also received deeper characterisations, with the Princess able to contribute, rather than simply being a damsel-in-distress, and Yoshi being far more coherent than his videogame counterpart.

Unlike Pac-Man, Mario's videogames took very little inspiration from these adaptations; the only tangible element is Luigi's exaggerated cautiousness, which eventually led to him becoming a complete coward. *Peach-Hime Kyushutsu Dai Sakusen!* remains an enigma; the anime received a Japanese theatrical (and video) release but was never imported overseas, never released on DVD, and, like the Amada Anime series, is obscure even in Japan.

Nevertheless, Mario's constant animated presence was indicative of his popularity, leading to the now-infamous live-action adaptation. Sheff and Eddy (1999: 192) relate that production began in early 1990 as the brainchild of Bill White, Nintendo's director of advertising and public relations, amidst Nintendo's animated exploits. NOA president Minoru Arakawa recommended meticulous research before embarking on the project, though there was significant interest from both Hollywood studios (Arakawa apparently turned down 20th Century Fox because "they didn't understand the character") and prominent actors (ibid: 193); Dustin Hoffman remained at the forefront of negotiations despite Nintendo favouring Danny DeVito, though his representatives later denied any interest, and Tom Hanks purportedly accepted the role for $5 million, but it eventually fell to Bob Hoskins (ibid).

Blade Runner (Scott, 1982) co-writer Barry Morrow produced the original film script, though significant rewrites occurred since his involvement; Russell (2012: 140) states that pages were "rewritten on a daily basis" so the "actors didn't

bother reading the new pages, knowing full well that more would likely follow".
Super Mario Bros. depicted Mario and Luigi (John Leguizamo) as Italian-American plumbers transported to "Dinohattan" (where dinosaurs have evolved into a humanoid species), where they become unlikely heroes to prevent King Koopa (Dennis Hopper) from conquering Earth.

Budgeted at $42 million and grossing just under $21 million, critics like Wilington (1993) panned the film at the time, criticising the script, acting, lack of engaging characters and narrative, and an overall lack of inspiration to be anything more than a videogame endorsement. *Super Mario Bros.*' legacy is intrinsically linked with this perceived notion of the film as being a failure and being the first of many big-budget cinematic failings for videogame adaptations. Even Bob Hoskins vehemently criticised the movie, claiming it was the "worst thing" he ever took part in, and that the entire filmmaking experience was a "nightmare" (Hattenstone, quoting Hoskins, 2007). Russell (2012: 140) echoes this sentiment, stating that the general atmosphere on set has been described as "anarchic", with Nintendo being "nowhere to be seen [and without] a representative present during the shoot". Additionally, many accounts pointed to the directors being "out of their depth, pulled between the demands of the producers, their attempts to rewrite on-the-hoof and the logistical enormity of the production" (ibid).

Compounded the film's reputation is academic disregard and misconception; Brookey (2010: 4) claimed that *Donkey Kong* "provided a rather limited narrative arc with which to span a full-length feature film", despite the obvious absence of a giant ape in favour of the more traditional, if formulaic, rescue plot.[5] This emphasises the lack of academic precedence given to videogame adaptations and their status in

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[5] While *Donkey Kong*'s success led to the *Super Mario* videogames, *Donkey Kong*'s protagonist, "Jumpman", would not be identified as "Mario" until the following release of *Mario Bros.* (Nintendo, 1983).

academic circles, which, given the pioneering theoretical developments that have

turned adaptation studies towards intertextuality (Dicecco, 2015: 161), has gone on

for far too long. *Interplay*, however, usurps this status quo, expanding upon

Dicecco's observation that adaptation studies is now far more comfortable with

previously-undesirable ideas: adaptations are not always necessarily worse than their

source material and have multiple, complex purposes that reach beyond slavishly

reproducing their source material (ibid). Additionally, my research builds upon

Dicecco's notion that "all sorts of media can be involved in processes of adaptation"

and that "adaptations can have multiple sources, including other adaptations; and,

changes in context can be as important to the meaning of an adaptation *qua*

adaptation as are changes in medium or form" (ibid).

Also important to note is that positive endorsements for the film do exist;

Ryan Hoss, creator of the Super Mario Bros.: The Movie Archive website, lists

excerpts from various media publications at the time which indicates a fair amount of

praise amidst the negative or ambivalent points (2007). Janet Maslin of the *New York*

Times identified that it was made for Nintendo's principle demographic, children, who

delight in special effects, cheesy one-liners, and slapstick action sequences (Brookey,

quoting Maslin, 2010: 4). Hal Hinson of the *Washington Post*, while categorising the

film as "junk, but…superior junk", claiming that *Super Mario Bros.* had a

"rambunctious toss-away spirit" (1993). Furthermore, Thomas Leitch admirably

illustrates the film's contribution to the field of adaptation by detailing how film-

making techniques substitute for the layout of, and interaction with, the videogame

world: "[*Super Mario Bros.*] not only retains but constantly emphasizes the title

characters' absurd names[,] their professional status as plumbers, their unlikely

credentials as heroes, and their quest to rescue a kidnapped princess" (Leitch, 2007: 263).

Additionally, due to the videogame's heavy emphasis on jumping and running, the production design features "strong verticals [that] provide many reminders of its heroes' relative freedom from gravity" (ibid: 270) and the Mario Brothers are "constantly jumping, falling, and swinging through a series of unusually vertical sets" to reinforce "the ability of video game heroes to surmount obstacles and enemies by [simply] jumping over them" (ibid: 264). The film also inspired an online fan-made comic book sequel (made in collaboration with one of the movie's original writers, Peter Bennett), furthering the notion that the film has its fair share of supporters (Applebaum, *et al*, 2013).

Such praise is made possible through the flexibility and nuance of adaptation theory, which allows a deeper understanding of the ways *Super Mario Bros.* has transposed the gameplay mechanics of its source material into aesthetic and cinematic qualities. Indeed, Guerric DeBona's revisionist approach to adaptation studies (as quoted by Faubert. 2010: 181) is particularly relevant to this perception of videogame adaptations, "suggesting that a consideration of the 'industrial choices, audience reception and sociocultural environment guiding the production of a cinematic text' leads to an understanding of adaptation more fruitful than those achieved through comparative analyses, even those informed by cultural studies".

DeBona's view allows a deeper understanding of the complex layers of adaptation and appropriation at work in videogame adaptations, including David Snyder's background with *Blade Runner*'s murky, industrial aesthetic being invoked through Dinohattan. *Super Mario Bros.* also references, through parody, *The Wizard of Oz* (Fleming, 1939) and *Star Wars* (Lucas, 1977) as a framework for its genre,

aesthetic direction, and atmosphere (Leitch, 2007: 267). The film also appropriates elements from the numerous *Mario* videogames that existed as inspiration: the rescue plot comes primarily from the original title, for instance, and Princess Daisy from *Super Mario Land* (Nintendo R&D1, 1989).[6]

Furthermore, the movie also references *Super Show* and *Peach-Hime Kyushutsu Dai Sakusen!* through the Brooklyn-born roots of "Mario Brothers' Plumbing" and their status as working-class individuals. Despite the anime's obscurity, it is interesting how similar both adaptations are in plot and characterisation. The Mario's are unlikely heroes who are smart enough to avoid direct confrontations with their enemies unless necessary and become heroes in the Mushroom Kingdom and are changed by their adventures (Sheff and Eddy, 1999: 3).

In an interview with Edge, Shigeru Miyamoto claimed that he "tried to emphasize […] that the Mario Bros. games are fun as videogames and [the] movie should be entertaining as a movie, and not a translation of the videogame […] the movie may have tried to get a little too close to what the Mario Bros. videogames were […] it became a movie that was about a videogame, rather than being an entertaining movie" (Hoss, quoting Miyamoto, 2007). This wisely encapsulates the main issue with the live-action *Super Mario Bros.*: as an advertisement for Nintendo's videogames, it is wholly inferior to its source material. Neither the live-action or anime adaptation are as literal as Mario's animated outings, with both seemingly attempting to distance themselves from Nintendo's products through creative license while contradictorily acting as a visual endorsement of those same products (Leitch: 2007: 264).

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[6] Potentially replacing the traditional Princess Peach since it was not until *Super Mario 64* (Nintendo EAD, 1996) that the name "Princess Peach" became widely used outside of Japan – internationally, she was simply "Princess Toadstool" (Mandelin, 2013).

As the first videogame character to transition to live-action cinema, the perception of *Super Mario Bros.* as a box office failure further places Mario as a principle figurehead of what has since developed into the negative reception of videogame adaptations. Russell (2012: 137) discusses, at length, the film's chaotic production, stating that the film's "production could be taken as a blueprint of how not to adapt a videogame", and admonishing the film's screenplay for "[having] little to do with the games it was based on" (ibid: 138). Yet, while Russell's personal views regarding the film are mainly rooted in its infidelity, his work reveals much about the complex production process behind videogame adaptations. From the start, the production was torn between producer Roland Joffé's desire for the film to appeal to older audiences and co-director Rocky Morton's belief that "Audiences would expect Mario to be a cute, family movie" (ibid: 139).

The clash of ideals and intentions is a common theme throughout this thesis in the production of videogame titles, the marketing of their iconic characters, and in the making of videogame adaptations. Daily script revisions and conflicting interests affected *Super Mario Bros.*' production and, ultimately, came to reflect negatively on the film itself despite it being a relatively enjoyable family adventure movie. Significantly, Russell expands on a key point of this chapter in that, despite the film's disappointing box office return, Nintendo and their videogame franchise were completely protected from any critical damage (ibid, and quoting Joffé: 144).

Although *Super Mario Bros.* was not the only videogame adaptation to be a critical and commercial failure, by virtue of being "the first" it exists as a perpetual reminder that videogame adaptation is difficult and often disappointing. Despite its failure at the box office, movie studios quickly exploited videogame adaptations to entice videogame players into cinemas and allowed the videogame industry the

opportunity to license their franchises out with little to lose (Picard: 2008: 295). As a result, Hollywood continues to attract reasonable budgets and high-profile actors and production stuff to videogame adaptations despite the genre "[failing] to receive much in the way of critical or commercial success" and Uwe Boll's ill-received contributions (ibid).

A principal issue with videogame adaptations, as Wolf (2008: 304) relates and which Chapter Two expands upon, is the lack (or weakness) of plot in videogames, especially earlier titles. Ensslin (2012: 26) relates the importance of instruction manuals in relating the rules and gameplay mechanics of videogames; with the exception of videogames (such as RPGs) that feature heavy in-game dialogue, instruction manuals often contain the bulk of a videogame's narrative, particularly in early videogames. Mario's manuals and ancillary products perpetuated his depiction as a dimension-hopping plumber, but his videogames imply his trade and that all *Mario* characters originate from the Mushroom Kingdom.

Both videogames and cinema use narrative as a dominant aspect (Wolf: 2008: 304), yet videogames cannot be experienced passively; as Catfield (2010: 132) states, "To consume a game is by definition to experience it, from moment to moment, as a gradual encounter with a space and a set of ideas". This makes it necessary to analyse, as this thesis does, how videogame adaptations have expanded upon the limited narratives of their source material. Indeed, a central conclusion of this thesis expands on Leitch's (2007: 272) observation that, in order to adapt into an entirely passive experience, some of the most successful videogame adaptations have "combined elements of the genre with elements of other genres" in order to, paradoxically, "identify themselves with the video games on which they are based while making unusually strenuous attempts to disavow those identifications".

1.6 Cross-Media Complexity

In order to address the multifaceted narratives at work within videogames, this section introduces some of the rich complexity that can exist within a videogame's tangents and narrative threads. This is especially relevant given Wolf's (2003: 59) observation that early videogames borrowed from genres made popular by movies and television and were greatly dependant on the imagination and patience of the player to fill in any narrative gaps. For Wolf (ibid), videogames are an abstract art form that has long struggled to develop their own independent identity; this is especially true of earlier videogames, which had to overcome their technical limitations in service of the player's entertainment (ibid). This has led to some surprisingly complex mythologies and vocabulary in videogame genres, perhaps no more so than in RPGs, which greatly emphasise narrative and character. In exploring *Final Fantasy*'s adaptations, this section will lay the groundwork for the intricate detail that will feature in the proceeding chapters and highlight just how convoluted videogame study can be.

Videogame adaptations also provide examples of the complexity of sequels, franchises, and spin-offs across a variety of media. Grodal (2003: 151) relates that, essentially, videogames emphasise the acting out of various emotions, causing or otherwise influencing the fates of multiple characters, and allowing a certain level of catharsis through the emotional connection with the avatar and supporting characters. This connection was lacking in *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within*, whose realistic CG effects and over $130 million budget make it the most expensive videogame adaptation ever made (Guinness World Records, 2011). Prominent actors provided their vocal talents (though not their likenesses) in an attempt to lend the legitimacy of

a big-budget Hollywood production in very much the same way that videogames have turned to Hollywood actors for legitimacy (Bissell, 2010: 9; Russell, 2012: 208).

The Spirits Within also highlights another integral aspect of this thesis' blended methodology, which is the consideration of authorship to adaptation studies. Faubert (2010: 183) remarks that many critics turn to authorship and "the authorial intent discernible in the secondary work, in the adaptation" in an attempt to steer away from intertextuality and in service of constructing a working structure to contain adaptation theory. The study of authorship allows on to approach a text with the specific purpose of identifying "the distinguishing characteristics placed there by the human agent of its creation" (Olson, referencing Caughie and Bourdieu, 2004: 118).

While isolating an individual creator can often be problematic (ibid), some notable exceptions are worth highlighting. Faubert (2010: 183), for instance, notes that Thomas Leitch utilised authorship as a tool by which to "give meaning to the diverse adaptations made by Alfred Hitchcock". Leitch (quoted by Faubert, ibid) suggested that Hitchcock used adaptation to assimilate "both known and unknown literature into a unique directorial style" and to wrestle authorship away from the source material to better assert this own presence as an author. The lack of association of a prominent author so closely related to a franchise invites a reconsideration of authorship. Brookey (2010: 28) uses Francis Ford Coppola to illustrate this point as Coppola "refused to participate in the development of *The Godfather* video game, and […] Although Coppola's authorship is closely associated with *The Godfather* franchise, the game allows the player to construct a new narrative that intersects the films' narratives but stands apart from Coppola's own".

A consideration of authorship is thus a necessary aspect of analysing *The Spirits Within* as the film was directed by *Final Fantasy* creator Hironobu Sakaguchi,

who also oversaw the film's plot. Further emphasising the importance of authorship as a tool for studying videogame adaptations is that fact that *The Spirits Within*'s science-fiction aesthetic and plot mirrors that of *Final Fantasy VII*, which Sakaguchi also wrote. *The Spirits Within*, however, fully embraced this in a way the franchise never had before and, to facilitate this original narrative, featured very few similarities to its source material as a result.

Interestingly, like Mario, eight years before *Spirits Within*, the OVA *Final Fantasy: Legend of the Crystals* (Hayashi, 1994) acted as a sequel to *Final Fantasy V* (Square, 1992) and consequently became the first true continuation of a *Final Fantasy* story, as well as Square's first expansion into multimedia. Set two hundred years after *Final Fantasy V*, *Crystals* does not continue the adventures of *Final Fantasy V*'s Light Warriors ("Valiant Ones" in the anime's English translation), but rather their descendants and their opposition of the malevolent Ra Devil (Kenichi Ogata/Michael Sorich).

Marketed internationally in a strictly limited capacity, *Crystals* is particularly rare, though comparatively easier to obtain than *Peach-Hime Kyushutsu Dai Sakusen!* despite only receiving an American VHS release (Amazon.com, 2016). Its obscurity means that few audiences are even aware of its existence, resulting in it being scrutinised almost exclusively by die-hard anime and *Final Fantasy* fans. In an article written for Akemi's Anime World, a website specialising in anime and anime reviews, Marc (2010) emphasised that *Crystals* "doesn't even "feel" like Final Fantasy", that it is "as if someone explained the concept of a Final Fantasy game to the production team, but they never actually played one", and categorising it as a parody of other, more successful anime.

Yet many of these concerns are addressed in *Crystals'* context: as *Crystals* occurs two hundred years after *Final Fantasy V*, various technological and natural changes, evolutions, and variations have developed that account for the aesthetic discrepancies. *Crystals'* scarcity is disappointing given its entertaining appeal; the animation is clear and charming, the characters given life and humour, and the story is, while simplistic, rather engaging. The headstrong-but-brave Prettz (Rica Matsumoto/Matt Miller) shines as a charismatic protagonist, with his hot-headed personality striking a witty contrast to the reserved Linaly (Yūko Minaguchi/Sherry Lynn).

The time jump incorporated by *Crystals* misrepresenting the original Light Warriors, who only appear in flashbacks or dialogue, favouring original characters for a completely separate adventure set in a time far into the future of the original videogame. The only recurring character, Mid (Etsuko Kozakura/Julia Fletcher), is a ghost who serves to assist the heroes – a priority superseding Mid's previous characterisations. Thus, *Crystals* is less a *Final Fantasy V* adaptation and more a traditional sequel to the original videogame, much like how its successor, *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children* (Nomura and Nozue, 2005) continued *Final Fantasy VII*'s story rather than being a direct adaptation.

Notably, when *Spirits Within* was released in 2001, Square had produced nineteen *Final Fantasy* titles – ten numbered entries in what can loosely be described as the main series – each with a unique narrative, characters, and distinct worlds. *Final Fantasy* is rarely a sequential series, though the videogames share many common elements; while the aesthetics and technology are all often very similar, clear distinctions make each entry bigger and more unique than the last. *Final Fantasy VII* famously eschewed medieval aesthetics for a science-fiction setting yet retained many

series tropes in a marriage of sword-and-sorcery and science-fiction. Ergo, players could visit technologically-advanced cities alongside lost ancient civilisations, while cybernetics existed alongside magical spells.

Although the transition was somewhat jarring to the established franchise model, *Final Fantasy VII* became the most successful videogame of 1997, selling in excess of ten million units worldwide (Kent, 2001: 543; Webster, 2010). In comparison, Russell (2012: 267) notes that *The Spirits Within* was "greeted by a combination of wonder and total indifference […] Critics [acknowledged] the movie's technical triumph [while] Gamers were left hanging since the film owed little to the role-playing franchise apart from its title and thematic concerns. Non-gamers were baffled by the abstruse script". However, *Spirits Within* is not an adaptation of any entry in the franchise; instead, like its source material, *The Spirits Within* is a standalone story that appropriated recognisable series narrative tropes into an entirely original narrative, rather than be enslaved by fidelity or sequential narrative.

The Spirits Within's $85 million worldwide gross against its estimated production budget of $137 million was deemed a commercial failure (Brookey, 2010: 95). Contrary to the previously-stated notion that the failure of a videogame adaptation has no financial impact on the videogame publishers, "the resulting losses bankrupted Square Pictures" (Picard, 2008: 295) and delayed Square's merger with Enix (Long, 2003). These financial ramifications contribute to the case against producing videogame adaptations; whereas *Super Mario Bros.* was criticised for the quality of its production, the financial loss suffered by Square served also to further sully the reputation of videogame adaptations despite the film's technical presentation (King and Krzywinska, 2002: 20).

Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children, part of *Compilation of Final Fantasy VII* – a multimedia celebration of *Final Fantasy VII*'s tenth anniversary – fared much better, allowing Square Enix to recoup some of the losses it faced from *The Spirit Within*. This compilation included videogame prequels and anime shorts that expanded upon *Final Fantasy VII*'s story, with *Dirge of Cerberus: Final Fantasy VII* (Square Enix, 2006) and *Dirge of Cerberus: Lost Episode: Final Fantasy VII* (Square Enix/Ideaworks3d, 2006) being direct sequels. Furthermore, *Compilation* illustrates another other key aspect to the blended methodology of this thesis, which is that of what Parody (2011: 211) identifies as "franchising storytelling". The exploitation of videogame franchises across multiple media platforms and the building of videogame properties as film franchises is a reoccurring theme of this thesis, most notably in Chapter Four. Indeed, Jenkins (cited by Parody, ibid: 214) observed that franchise entertainment is "organized by and oriented around worldbuilding [and] the creation and evocation of fictional worlds is the 'core aesthetic impulse' of the art".

In videogames, worlds are built from code and restricted by artificial physics, imposed boundaries, and gameplay mechanics. The more players interact with their digital environment, the more varied and accessible they become; once the "core gameplay becomes exhausted, players end up centring on the reflexive undoing of the gameworld; pushing it to its limits, exploring and exploiting glitches, tricks, aberrations in the system" (Surman, 2007: 205). Sequels, expansions, ports, and downloadable content often augment and increase the scope of the artificial gameworld while also introducing new gameplay mechanics, characters, and narrative progression. When videogames branch out into these areas, in addition to ancillary products like comic books, toys, and adaptations, they become part of a "prolonged, multitextual, multimedia fictional experience" (Parody, 2011: 211).

Franchise storytelling illustrates the complexities of cross-media ventures; to use Arnett's (quoted by Parody, ibid) terminology, *Compilation*'s "aggregate texts" encompassed a co-ordinated strategy of transmedia storytelling. By adapting *Final Fantasy VII*'s RPG aesthetics into other videogame genres, with varying results, *Compilation* systematically branched and extended *Final Fantasy VII*'s "narrative across multiple media outlets, [offering] a palimpsest of a storyworld and its inhabitants built-up over time from repeated remakes, reimaginings, and remediations" (ibid). *Dirge of Cerberus*, for example, diverted into third-person action/shooting, and critics such as Gamespots's Greg Mueller (2004) and Eurogamer's Rob Fahey (2006) targeted the videogame's awkward camera, shooting and RPG mechanics, complex storyline, and repetitive elements. Conversely, IGN's Ryan Clements (2008) praised *Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII* (Square Enix, 2007) for offering a more challenging gameplay experience by adopting a mission-based narrative and admirably marrying RPG mechanics with real-time battles.

Final Fantasy: Advent Children boasted impressive CGI, particularly in characters' facial expressions and wild, exciting fight sequences, ensuring a methodical balance between poignant reflection and action-orientated feats. The Anime News Network, which purports to be "the internet's most trusted anime news source", reported that the feature sold over 2.4 million copies worldwide in 2006 (Anime News Network, 2006), with around 1.3 million sold in America, at least one million in Japan, and 100,000 in Europe, and was named the best anime feature at the 2007 American Anime Awards (ibid, 2007).

This illustrates how franchise storytelling can provide "producers with streams of revenue across the gamut of media outlets" (Parody, 2011: 211). Expanding upon Parody's classification, franchising storytelling also allows *Advent Children*'s

narrative links to *Final Fantasy VII* to offer audiences a fictional experience with "length, depth and breadth, and multiple avenues of engagement" with a much-loved fictional property" (ibid). Parody claims that adaptation is "fundamentally sympathetic to the aims and protocols of franchise storytelling" as it effectively allows an intellectual property to be exploited to its maximum potential across multiple platforms and encourages audiences to engage with each piece of ancillary media (ibid). Yet, Geraghty (2008: 15) advises that the adaptation of media from one form to another carries with it the promise of not only reinvention for a new audience, but also "changes and transformations not only of the original source but also of the screen adaptations that have preceded it".

Accordingly, while *Advent Children* features every character from the original videogame, gameplay mechanics were omitted or toned down. *Final Fantasy*'s trademark random battles are removed in favour of intense acrobatic feats as characters, Cloud (Takahiro Sakurai/Steve Burton) especially, utilise their "Limit Break" abilities as attacks. Thus, *Final Fantasy VII* is grounded in reality: tedious gameplay mechanics such as levelling up, constant battling, resting at inns or utilising healing items are downplayed in favour of high-octane action and narrative exposition.

Jesper Juul (referenced by Egenfeldt-Nielsen, *et al*., 2008: 121) proposed a distinction between "*play time* (the "real" time a player spends playing a game) and *event time* (the time that passes in the game world during this game)" that is particularly relevant to this point. When playing *Final Fantasy VII*, monotonous, repetitive gameplay mechanics are central to levelling-up and are analogous to everyday activities for the characters. The concept of *play time* and *event time* varies between videogame titles and genres, and the dichotomy between the two illustrates

how players "understand the mapping between their actions and the game's fictional world, but it does not tell us a lot about the gameplay itself, since in principle, every game is played in *real time*" (ibid). As a result, when adapted onscreen, the emphasis on role-playing and *play time* events is heavily reduced; the audience is not required to assume Cloud's role; they are merely required to watch rather than actively advance the plot.

For the consummate videogame player, well-designed gameplay is as much of a craft as storytelling: "When gameplay fails, we know it because it does not, somehow, feel *right*. Failed storytelling is more abject. You feel lots of things—just not anything the storyteller wants you to feel" (Bissell, 2010: 11). Arguably, *Advent Children*'s strong narrative links to *Final Fantasy VII* means that those unfamiliar with the videogame would have difficulty in following the film's plot. However, given that "Adaptation and adaptations that are situated in a transmedia project are the products of a particular market strategy" and the film was aimed specifically at *Final Fantasy VII* fans, the consumer is assumed to have some familiarity with the original videogame before viewing it (Parody, 2011: 212).

Parody also believes that understanding franchised adaptations "requires confronting how far contact with the protocols of franchise production dislocates and modifies adaptive practice from its paradigmatic forms" (ibid). The example illustrated by *Final Fantasy VII*'s expansion into aggregate texts introduces the concept of videogame properties as a marketable franchise. Chapter Four expands upon this point significantly by taking Parody's "thoughts on the particularities of adaptation in the context of the modern fictional franchise [and illuminating] the nature and role of adaptation in contemporary media landscapes" and applying them to videogame adaptations.

Ultimately, *Advent Children* proved especially popular amongst *Compilation*'s offerings, spawning the extended Blu-ray-exclusive *Final Fantasy: Advent Children: Complete* in 2009 (Makoeyes987, 2009) that sold over 49,000 units (Anime News Network, 2009). This, in addition to the forthcoming long-awaiting high-definition remake of the original videogame (Schreler, 2015), further emphasises *Final Fantasy VII*'s popularity and lingering cultural impact, as well as *Advent Children*'s status as a successful videogame adaptation (Mielke, 2005).

Conversely, the anime series *Final Fantasy: Unlimited* ran for twenty-five episodes between 2001 and 2005. Despite avoiding existing *Final Fantasy* tropes, certain character names (like Chaos and Omega) remained and maintained some ambiguous ties to their videogame counterparts. Additionally, *Unlimited* contained recognisable musical themes, gameplay mechanics, and frequent vague references to recognisable franchise elements, like Kaze's (Nobutoshi Kanna/James Brownlee) aesthetic similarities to Vincent Valentine, fully-furred Chocobos, and certain weapons and enemies.

However, an article on the now-defunct website Infinite Ammo by a writer calling himself Chaos Mechanica (2012) criticised *Unlimited*'s "extremely formulaic" for being the same set of circumstances repeated over and over. Additionally, *The Spirits Within*'s failure forced *Unlimited*'s premature cancellation, "leaving a lot of unanswered questions, and a lot of possible plotholes" (ibid), a view shared by Cidolfas of the Final Fantasy Compendium website (2001). *Unlimited*'s reception remains mixed; while marrying 3D and traditional 2D animation relatively well, and artistically evoking *Final Fantasy* character designer Yoshitaka Amano, *Unlimited* was unable to compete with more popular anime (Mechanica, 2012). Carlos Ross (2011), writing for the anime-centric website T.H.E.M. Anime Reviews, remarked

that *Unlimited*'s use of traditional 2D cel-shaded animation was not as impressive as the anime's CGI animation and served only to reflect on the anime's "intentions as more of a children's show than a show for older *Final Fantasy* fans".

Thus, like *Pokémon*, *Final Fantasy Unlimited* resembles Westernised dubs like *Dragonball Z* not just because the action and narrative are repetitive and drawn out, but also through how it was localised for international (or, more specifically, American) audiences. Referring to "the process of adapting a global product for a specific market" (Katsuno and Maret, 2004: 82), localisation becomes another significant tool in the blended methodology of this thesis through its similarities to adaptation. This is particularly evident through the effort that localisers go to translate and alter media products from one culture to another; a process "influenced not only by sociolinguistic and cultural differences between Japan and the United States, but also by political, economic, and historical discourses that circulate within and between Japan and the West" (ibid). This culminates in "glocalisation" (global localisation), a form of cultural hybridity between not just Japan and America but the rest of the world, too. Glocalisation, as defined by Buckingham and Sefton-Green, (2004: 17), is a capitalist-driven occurrence born from an international corporations desire to produce products that can be easily "exported and adapted to local needs and traditions" and tailor-made for local markets (Brookey, 2010: 91).

Analysing *Final Fantasy Unlimited* also emphasises the tenacity and loyalty of a franchise's fan community, another concept that is central to this thesis. *Unlimited*'s abrupt cancellation meant the series had to be continued through Japan-exclusive ancillary products, leaving international fans to rely on online resources. Chapter Two expands upon this by specifically drawing upon the work of James Newman (2008), who observed that fan communities illustrate a commendable passion for

scrutinising videogame franchises by interrogating and consulting "vast arrays of supporting texts, often in translation, so as to better understand the objects of their fandom, perhaps seeking to make sense of apparent inconsistencies in the backstories that weave together two titles in a series, for instance" (ibid: vii).

Beyond succumbing to the consumer-centric strategy of localisation (Katsuno and Maret 2004: 85), fan communities demonstrate a keen awareness of ancillary media and obscure information sources through rudimentary translation of Japanese materials (instruction manuals, magazines articles, even anime in some cases) in order to "[explore] at the edge of the canon, expanding, modifying, enriching, while also preserving, policing and remedying" (Newman, 2008: 64). Chapter Two expands upon this significantly by illustrating how the efforts of fan communities to shape their own canons and share obscure transmedia knowledge can put immense pressure on not only the perception of a videogame franchise, but also the production of videogame adaptations.

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter has established the theoretical framework that dictates the direction of this entire thesis by introducing and expanding upon each of the key tools that make up the blended methodology so central to taking videogame adaptations seriously as a legit form of both media and adaptation.

Fundamentally, these products are adaptations and, by introducing the concept of adaptation theory and establishing its use as a theoretical tool, this chapter has positioned videogame adaptations as both underrated and a fresh, new field that can broaden the scope of adaptation theory. Videogame theory, a field that is still

attempting to gain academic legitimacy, allows an understanding of how different, and yet similar, videogames and movies are; while one is a purely passive form of entertainment, the other is naturally interactive, yet the two industries have influenced each other in a variety of ways over the last three decades.

The intertextual link between videogames and cinema and adaptation and videogame theory brings with it a variety of additional theoretical tools, all of which have been incorporated into the blended methodology of this thesis and introduced in this chapter. As a result, this blended methodology allows a consideration of how videogame adaptations use appropriation to aid their transition into passive media, raises questions of authorship when one analyses the complex production of a videogame adaptation, and challenges notions of fidelity by using adaptation theory to analyse the expectations of fan communities and videogame theory to assist in illustrating how gameplay mechanics often give way to narrative and character.

This chapter has also introduced the concept of media convergence through ancillary media, intertextuality, and transmedia storytelling. Each allows videogame adaptations to become part of a capitalist-driven multimedia franchise to expand beyond the gamepad and into movies, cartoons, comic books, and a near-infinite number of related products. Significantly, this chapter has established that videogame adaptations are influenced not only by a variety of cinematic genres, but invariably also by the entire scope of the source material. Consequently, videogame adaptations often incorporate either the most general concepts of their source material, or the most popular aspects, to craft similar but markedly separate worlds where recognisable tropes are implemented in unique, but identifiable, ways.

Furthermore, I have introduced the significant influence of Japanese culture and business strategy to videogame adaptations; *Interplay* expands upon Japan's

various attempts to appeal to international markets though their videogames and how their products have been altered through localisation. Additionally, by highlighting some of the earliest and most notable examples of videogame adaptations, I have addressed the perceived notion that the genre is made up of box office failures. Establishing the poor reputation of videogame adaptations is important as it directly contradicts their ongoing production (as best illustrated through the exhaustive list available in Appendix One), the continued attempt to craft franchises out of videogame properties, and the positive endorsements that do exist for the genre.

I have also illustrated that adopting a blended methodology – one that incorporates all of these individual aspects and theories as practical, analytical tools – is an essential requirement for taking videogame adaptations seriously. By understanding that the adaptation process necessitates change from the source material, it is possible to identify how videogame adaptations best make use of their new passive format. *Interplay* emphasises how videogame adaptations achieve this by appropriating from other cinematic genres, how animation, television, and online media have allowed videogame characters and narratives to grow beyond the limitations of their hardware, and illustrate how videogame adaptations may not necessarily be "good" or "bad" movies, but are still successful multimedia franchises in their own right.

By recognising existing academic work surrounding videogame adaptations and incorporating online resources this chapter has constructed the essential theoretical framework one must consider when approaching videogame adaptations. Because videogame adaptations do not fit into standard taxonomies laid out by either adaptation or videogame theory, acknowledging the relationship between cinema and

videogames allows one to construct a suitable academic language by which to approach this previously-overlooked field.

Finally, the specific time period of this thesis has been established from exploring the history of the videogame industry prior to analysing some early examples of videogame adaptation. While Appendix One also illustrates that the proliferation of videogame adaptations continues to this day (and many more are still scheduled to be released in the near future), I am primarily concerned with some of the more recognisable examples of videogame adaptation from the mid-nineties into the nearly days of the millennium, while still including contemporary examples. This time period is highly influential to the study of videogame adaptations as it marks is a time when home consoles began to render arcades obsolete, when Nintendo and SEGA began a war over home console supremacy, and when "videogame movies were the kiss of death after the corrosive impact of *Super Mario Bros.*" (Russell, 2012: 147), yet videogame adaptations continued nevertheless.

Appendix One also emphasises that videogame adaptations dramatically increased during this time as videogames began to expand in both prominence and multimedia both nationally and internationally. This is also where the interplay between cinema, television, and videogames proves the most influential to the genre of videogame adaptations. As a result, this is the perfect time period to apply my blended methodology in order to best explore the adaptive contexts of videogame adaptations. While the study of videogame adaptations is still in its infancy, emphasising the intensity of complexity at work in them allows this thesis to not only illustrate how videogame adaptations can teach new things about adaptation and videogame theory, not only how they transcend media and become fully-fledged media franchises in their own right, but also the complex pressures that make

videogame adaptations an exiting, new critical battleground that deserves to be taken

seriously and given academic legitimacy.

Chapter Two

Japanese Videogame Culture as International Multimedia

Overview

Robinett (2003: vii) observed that videogames are often considered to rank low on "the artistic food chain", yet they are quickly gaining academic precedence as part of recent approaches to media that postulates that it is "no longer possible to talk about transmedia franchises without including video games" (Wolf and Perron, 2003: 1/5). In this chapter, I provide an academic critique on the complications of multimedia adaptations using the enduring videogame icon Sonic the Hedgehog as my primary focus and through the use of both published texts and online resources. After a brief overview of SEGA's rivalry with Nintendo, I explore Sonic's creation and development and examine the multiple pressures (from canonical, financial, cultural, and fan-based) upon SEGA to transplant Sonic's videogame success into adaptation. Detailing the complexity of the adaptation process reveals how this process has affected Sonic's jump not only into animation, but also across the world, as the cultural differences between not only Japan and America, but the rest of the world see Sonic undergo many radical alterations.

2.1 The Console Wars

To place this chapter in historical context, I expand upon the dominance of home consoles over arcade machines in the eighties. This produced one of videogaming's most iconic figureheads, Super Mario, pressuring SEGA into creating their own

mascot and precipitated a marketing war between Nintendo and SEGA that led to Sonic's groundbreaking debut. By 1982, despite the burgeoning home console market, Atari – the company most synonymous with arcades (Herman, 1997: 43) – "had become the single biggest business in the Warner Communications conglomerate" as audiences chose "the electronic thrills of the arcade" over cinema and vinyl records (Donovan, 2010: 93). However, after Japanese manufacturers took interest, arcades were swamped with competitors – compared to 1978, when "US sales of home and coin-operated games stood at $454 million […] that figure soared to $5,313 million" in 1982 (ibid: 81).

Japanese contributions like *Donkey Kong* "confirmed Nintendo's new status as a member of Japan's video game elite alongside Taito, Sega and Namco" and contributed to the success of Japanese arcade games in the United States (ibid: 155). Herman (1997: 103) relates that it was not long before "all of the major arcade companies, including Atari, began importing games from Japan"; yet simple economics favoured home consoles because, despite the hardware being "retailed as loss leaders", manufacturers profited from software sales and licensing. Thus, by mid-1982, arcades were declining after decades of supremacy (Kent, 2001: 226); as arcade cabinets only promoted one game or franchise at a time at a revenue of "only a dollar or two per play", focusing on home consoles became the obvious choice for videogame manufacturers as "new game software can start at price points of $40 and above" (Brookey, 2010: 7).

Consequently, by 1983, "a flood of execrable games drowned companies like Atari and Coleco in a sea of consumer contempt" (Herz, 1997: 116). Within a year the videogame industry collapsed; what was once a "$3 billion industry shrivelled to a fortieth of its previous size" in the infamous videogame crash examined in Chapter

One (ibid). With the market quickly saturated, "poorly made licensed games" such as

E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial contributed to the crash – *E.T.*'s monumental failure made

it "an icon of the crash",[7] which, coupled with *Tron*'s "commercial failure […],

helped push Hollywood away from CGI technology and the whole video game

industry for a decade" (Picard, 2008: 294; Russell, 2012: 40).

While American manufacturers failed to recover from the crash, Donovan

(2010: 172) describes how Japan was able to capitalise on the resultant market gap;

when Nintendo's Famicom came to America in 1986 as the NES, it was "just another

example of how American business was being crushed by Japan's economic

steamroller". The NES successfully dominated through ports of classic arcade titles

like *Donkey Kong* and the benchmark *Super Mario Bros.* Bundled with NES consoles

(Herz, 1997: 117), *Super Mario Bros.* became one of the most successful videogames

ever as "many people bought the NES just to get the game" (Herman, 1997: 118).

Accordingly, by early 1987, consoles were once again selling "at a phenomenal pace",

only now consumers were limited to three major competitors: the Atari 7800, which

sold "100,000" six months after its debut, SEGA's Master System, which sold

"125,000 […] in only four months", and "the clear winner", Nintendo, "which sold

1,100,000 NES consoles in just fourteen months" (ibid: 123).

This unprecedented success saw Nintendo exclusively produce NES software

for the rest of 1987 as the console continued to sell at an "incredible rate" thanks,

largely, to *Super Mario Bros.*, which spawned eight subsequent titles between 1985

and 1991 alone (ibid). Sheff and Eddy (1999: 55) observed that, consequently,

Mario's creator, Shigeru Miyamoto, became "the most successful game designer in

the world" at the time as an "astounding 60 to 70 million were sold—either

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[7] "*E.T.* sold around one-and-a-half million copies [but] shipped more than twice that amount […] the
overheads involved in the game's licensing and Spielberg's royalty payment [made this] disastrous […]
Atari was left with a glut of millions of unsold games" (Russell, 2012: 38).

individually or packaged with hardware as an incentive to buy Nintendo systems",

with *Super Mario Bros. 3* topping "$500 million" in America alone (ibid: 3),

solidifying Mario as Nintendo's family-friendly mascot.

It was into this burgeoning financial climate that SEGA saw a chance to

capitalise on Nintendo's success with a videogame mascot of their own. Marc

Pétronille and William Audureau, in their comprehensive and invaluable *History of*

Sonic The Hedgehog tome (2012), explain that SEGA began as the Hawaiian-based

Standard Games, founded in 1940 by "three entrepreneurial Americans […] Martin

Bromely, Irving Bromberg, and James Humpert […] to entertain the local U.S. Army

troops with one-armed bandits, jukeboxes, and pinball machines" (ibid: 12).

Relocating to Tokyo in the sixties as Service Games, they merged with Rosen

Enterprises to "compete with Taito in the growing market of entertainment

machines", birthing SEGA Enterprises – the name being "composed of the first

syllables in […] "Service Games"" (ibid).

SEGA produced arcade cabinets in both Japan and America and was also a

successful exporter; *Periscope* (SEGA, 1968), which was housed in "the largest

arcade cabinet ever created at the time" (ibid), established SEGA as "one of the

pioneers in the video game industry" and, by the eighties, they were not only "a

pioneer in Japanese arcade games" but had also "made a major impact […] in the

United States" with *Frogger*, which successfully "overshadowed *Pac-Man* and

Donkey Kong in some venues" (ibid: 14).

SEGA's "SG-1000 – a forerunner to the Master System" debuted in Japan

alongside Nintendo's Famicom as part of the "new wave of Japanese home game

consoles with interchangeable cartridges" (ibid). While American companies

deserted the crisis-stricken videogame industry, these Japanese manufacturers

maintained confidence. During the early eighties, SEGA's majority shareholder, Gulf & Western, "sold SEGA's manufacturing division to the American pinball manufacturing company Bally", making SEGA "more of a game creator than manufacturer, at least in arcade venues" (ibid: 15).

Japan-based Hayao Nakayama became CEO in 1983 and decided that SEGA needed a mascot to truly compete at an international level (ibid); yet, as Kent (2001: xiv) relates, while SEGA's Master System was technically more impressive than the NES, it was outmatched once Mario put a NES "into more than 60 million homes worldwide, while […] the Master System, had to make do with just 13 million" (Jones, *et al*, 2011: 25). In Tobin's view (2004: 3), it is clear that emblematic mascots are extremely important to hardware and software sales, and become intrinsically linked with the effort to ensure worldwide success and manufacture products "like Barbie and Legos, that would sell forever, and [characters] like Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck, [that] would become enduring icons worldwide".

In 1988, SEGA's 16-bit Mega Drive (released as the Genesis in America) gained "a two-year head start" on Nintendo's SNES and was to be accompanied by a marketable mascot (Jones, *et al*, 2011: 25). At the time, SEGA's closest attempt was *Fantasy Zone*'s (SEGA, 1986) "ovoid spaceship Opa-Opa" (ibid, 2012: 46), and their best alternative was Alex Kidd. Though "Younger and more athletic", Alex sported big fists, large ears, and considerable jumping prowess in a shameless imitation of Mario (ibid: 46).

Alex Kidd in Miracle World (SEGA, 1986), despite being "included in the internal memory of most SEGA Master System […] consoles" (Pétronille and Audureau, 2012: 19), had little appeal due not only to his similarities to Mario but also Alex's lack of charisma (ibid). While Alex Kidd failed to meet SEGA's

expectations, the 1989 release of the Genesis in America garnered considerable

success due to its "impressive visuals and early library of arcade tie-ins" (Jones, *et al*,

2012: 46).

Obsessed with Nintendo's success and burdened by the SNES's impending

release (ibid; Pétronille and Audureau, 2012: 20), Nakayama enforced a company-

wide initiative to create their mascot (Donovan, 2010: 219; Sheff and Eddy, 1999:

359). In an article published in *Retro Gamer* magazine chronicling Sonic's twenty-

year anniversary, Jones, *et al* (2011: 25) observes that, while Mario's design came

from the "limitations of 1981's visual technology", by 1991 "technology had

progressed to the point where just about any character could be represented on

screen", and both SEGA's Eastern and Western divisions were invited to contribute.

SEGA of Japan (SOJ) "received more than 200 sketches" within a month

(Pétronille and Audureau, 2012: 20), with Naoto Ôshima's long-eared rabbit

garnering "unanimous support" (ibid). Yuji Naka, who had achieved success with

Master System ports of SEGA's arcade titles (ibid: 17/21), was drafted to create the

first SEGA "game that was slated to sell one million copies [and] help the Genesis

become known internationally" (ibid: 20). Naka drove himself to out-do *Super Mario*

Bros. by using the Mega Drive's impressive processing power to craft "an ultra-fast

game that would rely on an equally fast horizontal scrolling speed" (ibid: 21).

Though Naka tasked Ôshima to craft a "rabbit with long ears that could catch

and throw items at enemies" (ibid), this dramatically interrupted the videogame's

action. Pétronille and Audureau (ibid: 21/22) further relate that Naka desired to trump

Mario's limited speed and innovative two-button controls with high speed play

through just a single action button. After scrapping Ôshima's rabbit, level designer

Hirokazu Yasuhara contributed in revisiting the early concept art to find a more

suitable character and form Sonic Team. An armadillo concept, which later became

the obscure character Mighty the Armadillo, was deemed unsuitable for an action-

orientated title, but its ability to roll and shield itself enthused the selection of

Ôshima's superfast hedgehog concept, who attacked his enemies whilst jumping (ibid:

23).

The crude black-and-white sketch, dubbed "Mr. Harinezumi", or "Mr.

Needlenose" – literally "spiky rodent" (ibid: 24) – was an immediate hit. As Ôshima

refined his sketch, Mr. Needlenose adopted a more comical and refined appearance,

Newman and Simmons (2007: 197) observe that the character began to evoke classic

American cartoon characters Felix the Cat and Mickey Mouse with his large white

gloves and comically-expressive, saucer-like eyes. Intended to represent SEGA

internationally, Ôshima coloured Mr. Needlenose blue in "a strong and direct tribute

to the company's colours" and because blue represented "peace and coolness"

(Pétronille and Audureau, 2012: 25, and quoting Ôshima: 98). A subsequent article in

Retro Gamer magazine detailed that Mr. Needlenose wore red-and-white sneakers

inspired by "the cover to [Michael Jackson's] *Bad*" and Santa Claus, whom Ôshima

regarded "at the time as the most 'famous character in the world'" (Jones, *et al*, 2012:

47). Finally, to emphasise his speed, he was dubbed Sonic; while Japanese

promotional materials dubbed him "Supersonic", Al Nilsen, then-head of marketing at

SOA, "stated that Sonic was not just a hedgehog, but THE hedgehog, and that "the"

should be capitalized accordingly" (Pétronille and Audureau, 2012: 36).

SEGA swamped the media with promotional advertising that claimed that

"SEGA does what Nintendont" as SEGA emphasised the Mega Drive's power, speed,

and performance, with Sonic at the forefront, by placing "16-Bit" right on front of the

console (ibid: 38). When *Sonic* first debuted at the 1991 International Consumer

Electronics Show, SEGA boldly displayed "screenshots of its key product alongside *Super Mario World*, which Nintendo had only just revealed at the event" (ibid: 37), making the SNES seem "old and far less impressive than what SEGA could offer" (ibid: 38). Sonic also made cameos in other SEGA titles – fitting, as he was intended to be synonymous with the SEGA brand name – in a display of "the mascot's popularity within the company, the teams' dedication to their games, and the employees' collective support for the company's ambitions" (ibid).

Determined to capture Western audiences, *Sonic The Hedgehog* debuted in America in June, 1991, nearly a month before its Japanese release. Pétronille and Audureau explain that, in order to compete with Nintendo's 70% control of the marketplace (ibid), SEGA ensured "a free copy […] with every purchase of a Genesis from July 1st to August 31st" (ibid: 31) in a deliberate attempt to undermine the forthcoming SNES. With many gamers purchasing a Mega Drive simply to play *Sonic*, "almost 15 million Genesis consoles" were sold during its American debut, while "Nintendo practically gave SEGA a free run during the holiday shopping period [in Europe], with [*Super Mario Bros. 3*] as [Sonic's] only opponent" (ibid: 39). This, coupled with SEGA's aggressive marketing campaign, ensured that *Sonic* sold over "four million copies" worldwide and that SEGA quickly became Nintendo's hottest competitor "with a 65% share of the market for next-generation consoles in North America" (ibid: 40).

Donovan (2010: 22) concludes that the Mega Drive's success "in North America and Europe [ensured] there was no way Nintendo could recapture the level of dominance it had enjoyed in the days of the NES". SEGA had also crafted an emblematic character they could build a franchise around and represent their company: "the 1993 "Q" survey […] showed that Super Mario was still more popular

than Mickey Mouse, but that [Sonic] was the most popular of all" (Sheff and Eddy,

1999: 431). SEGA's success birthed an active fanbase that exerted their own

pressures onto Sonic's eventual iconography that is important to consider when

analysing Sonic's various adaptations; though this research seeks to acknowledge the

presence and importance of such fanbases, it seeks more to address how these

pressures have influenced the forms that Sonic has taken.

When the SNES finally launched, "one of the biggest and most memorable

console wars in gaming history" began (Jones, *et al*, 2012: 49), forcing further

pressures on both companies to compete and out-do each other. Newman and

Simmons (2007: 198) observed that technical specifications were a principal weapon

as manufacturers touted console performance capabilities: "Wearing its technical

credentials proudly on its sleeve with '16-bit' emblazoned in gold lettering on the top

of the otherwise black console, […] Sega's marketing took great pains to point out the

technological superiority of their device in comparison to Nintendo's aging 8-bit

NES". While essentially amounting to "whose blades justified the purchase of one

£250 razor over another – the competitors' blades being mutually incompatible"

(Herz, 1997: 117), Gavin Greene's retrospective online article for VentureBeat (2015)

relates that Nintendo and SEGA's private war would define "a generation of child

gamers through tribalism and exclusives […] What became known as the Console

War is both a relic of its time and a more direct foretelling of what would become the

future of a lot [of] advertising psychology".

Videogame manufacturers continued to push their hardware's technical

specifications even as technology progressed towards the third dimension and,

pressured to crack this emerging 3D market, Atari and SEGA rushed in with little

validation. AtariAge, an online resource specialising in Atari consoles and

videogames, details that while the Atari Jaguar was advertised as the first 64-bit console, many developers struggled to produce content for it as "Atari did not have sufficient development tools" (AtariAge, 2006). The Jaguar was soon eclipsed by the SEGA Saturn and Sony PlayStation, which proved superior despite Jaguar's boasts of superior processing power (ibid).[8]

SEGA also attempted to prolong the Mega Drive's life through expensive peripherals; in relating SEGA's most notorious manufacturing flops, a blogger known as The Jester (2011) recounts that neither the SEGA/Mega-CD nor 32X sold well despite boasting smoother frame rates, CD-quality sound, and 3D efforts amounting to then-technically-impressive polygonal titles. Chris Mawson (2014), in an article for the website Power Up Gaming, details that lack of high-quality titles and third-party developers crippled the 32X and that SEGA's financial pressures only continued to mount following the release of not only the Nintendo 64, but also newcomer Sony's 32-bit PlayStation.

Sony had originally worked alongside Nintendo in creating a CD SNES attachment conceptually similar to the Mega-CD; however, when those plans fell through, Sony went solo (Poole, 2000: 18). The PlayStation, while suffering from the early problems of 3D videogames,[9] pioneered CDs over traditional cartridges; CDs were comparatively cheaper to manufacture and held more data, allowing PlayStation titles to utilise CD-quality sound, impressive CGI cutscenes and movie clips. In comparison, SEGA struggled to gain a significant 32-bit foothold; the Saturn had touted its "advanced platform based on Model 1 technology", but the PlayStation

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[8] "Some people claimed [that the Jaguar] was simply two 32-bit processors working in parallel" (AtariAge, 2006), yet Atari rationalised that the Jaguar had "the data shifting power of a 64 bit system, which is what matters for games", making it "reasonably […] considered a 64 bit system", though not necessarily "64 bits throughout" (Anderson, 2002).

[9] Draw distance meant artificial "fog" clogged up screens, and the low-resolution polygonal in-game models paled in comparison to modern efforts, or even those of then-modern PCs (Wolf, 2012: 269-273).

"was far more impressive […] because its graphics capabilities were twice as powerful as Model 1's" (Pétronille and Audureau, 2012: 54).

By 1997, SEGA had already lost the 32-bit market to the PlayStation in Europe and America, with only Japan holding out "thanks to games designed specifically for Japanese audiences and an effective marketing campaign" (ibid: 55). As Herman (1997: 234) observed, the Saturn was ultimately deemed a failure after selling only 120,000 units during its first six months versus Sony's 200,000 PlayStation units over two months.

Under increasing financial and competitive pressure, SEGA attempted a comeback with their most powerful console to date, the Dreamcast, which would be spearheaded by Sonic, who had been notoriously absent during the 32-bit era. After *Super Mario 64*'s (Nintendo EAD, 1996) success, SEGA enticed Yuji Naka back to Japan to rejoin Sonic Team in creating the first-ever fully 3D *Sonic* title (Pétronille and Audureau, 2012: 66-67). Inspired by RPGs, *Sonic Adventure*'s (Sonic Team, 1998) fully-realised, dynamic 3D world allowed diverse gameplay in vibrant environments. To contend with its competitors, *Sonic Adventure* featured a deeper narrative than previous titles that reintroduced *Sonic*'s characters and gave them a voice for the first time in a videogame: "we wanted the game to have a big, epic feel. Because it was to be more story-focused it only made sense that the characters would speak to each other" (Jones, *et al*, quoting Iizuka, 2011: 34).

Pétronille and Audureau (2012: 70) note that *Sonic Adventure* became "the best-selling Dreamcast game of all time, with almost two and a half million copies sold". Both the narrative and gameplay were further "refined and composed" (Jones, *et al*, 2011: 35) in *Sonic Adventure 2* (Sonic Team USA, 2001); in contrast to *Sonic Adventure*'s "decidedly more Japanese design" (Pétronille and Audureau, 2012: 75),

Sonic Adventure 2 emphasised action, the Western influence on the videogame's locations (ibid: 74),[10] and the concept of "Light" and "Dark" characters in a science-fiction-orientated narrative.

Unfortunately, *Sonic Adventure 2* marked SEGA's end as a hardware developer (ibid: 76); despite "its critical success" and selling over "11 million units" (ibid: 76/77), the Dreamcast failed to compete with Sony's PlayStation 2, which sold "over one million" units within its first week alone (Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter, 2009: xv; Brookey, 2010: 121). Under the pressure of economic failure, SEGA was forced to cease hardware development. Now producing videogames for their former competitors, SEGA found that, thanks to "its decades of experience designing video games", their former rivals "immediately approved the projects that [SEGA] had planned for their respective machines" (Pétronille and Audureau, 2012: 78).

Pétronille and Audureau (ibid: 80) further recount that, while SEGA initially entered into a Nintendo-exclusive deal, *Sonic Heroes* (Sonic Team USA, 2003) marked the company's debut as a multi-platform manufacturer. With SEGA relegated to software development, the Console Wars drew to a surprising end with Microsoft, Nintendo, and Sony left struggling for dominance and to reinvigorate home consoles through gimmicks like motion controls, voice-activation, and online capabilities. Yet two consistencies remain: Nintendo and SEGA still produce *Mario* and *Sonic* videogames, with the two even collaborating "under the banner of the Olympic games, […allowing] gamers to pit Mario, Sonic, and their friends against each other on a level playing field, and in the spirit of friendly competition" (ibid: 88-89). While SEGA is no longer a hardware developer, Sonic has endured to become world-renowned as one of the most iconic figures of videogame history.

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[10] Fitting as, similar to how "*Sonic The Hedgehog 2* was designed by the American team at SEGA Technical Institute (STI), after the first title had come from Japan", *Sonic Adventure 2* was developed by Sonic Team USA, based in San Francisco (Pétronille and Audureau, 2012: 72).

2.2 Building a Mascot

SEGA were under immense pressure in the late-eighties to early-nineties to create a mascot and a product that could rival Nintendo; while Mario boasted simplicity thanks to sprite limitations, Sonic was purposely built to appeal to a worldwide audience and take advantage of new technologies. This section expands upon the complex decisions and cultural changes that befell (and came to define) the development of Sonic's character and narrative both in Japan and internationally.

When Naoto Ôshima's "Mr. Needlemouse" began striking dynamic poses that depicted him as mischievous, determined, and impatient [*fig 2.1*], this "fresh, dynamic design rapidly received unanimous support" from SEGA (ibid: 25). Ôshima also produced concepts for Sonic's enemies and fantasy-inspired world; however, as "the theme of animals turned into robots had not yet been established", these included many obscure designs (ibid: 35) [*fig 2.1*]. Collaborating with Yuji Naka and Hirokazu Yasuhara, Ôshima developed Sonic's scenario: as a "big fan of pop music", Ôshima originally "made Sonic the leader of a rock band" that was to be included in *Sonic*'s sound test (ibid: 30/48) [*fig 2.1*].

Additionally, Sonic had a love-interest: Madonna, a blonde human female groupie "inspired by the American pop star of the same name" (ibid: 30) [*fig 2.1*]. Madonna was to be a damsel for Sonic to save, though Naka (quoted by ibid: 92), "thought this would be too close to Mario saving his princess, so even though [he] still thought it would be a good idea, [they] had to give up on it". Ôshima's concept art of a bumblebee-clad figure eventually became Sonic's nemesis, Doctor Eggman [*fig 2.1*]: if Sonic represented speed and nature, Eggman symbolised machinery, oppression, and maniacal greed (ibid: 217).
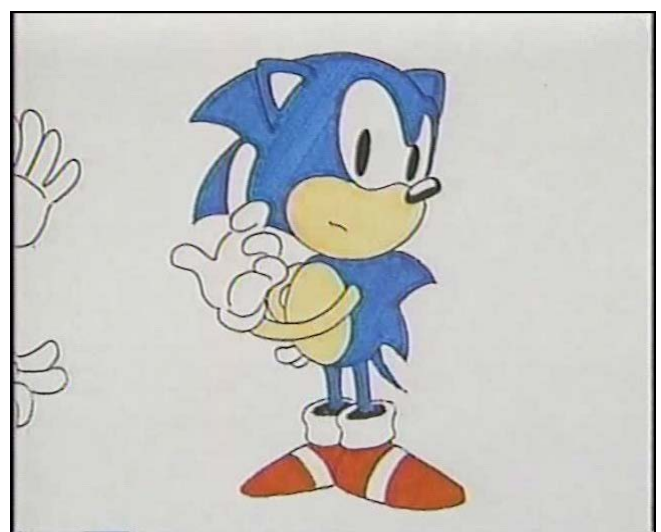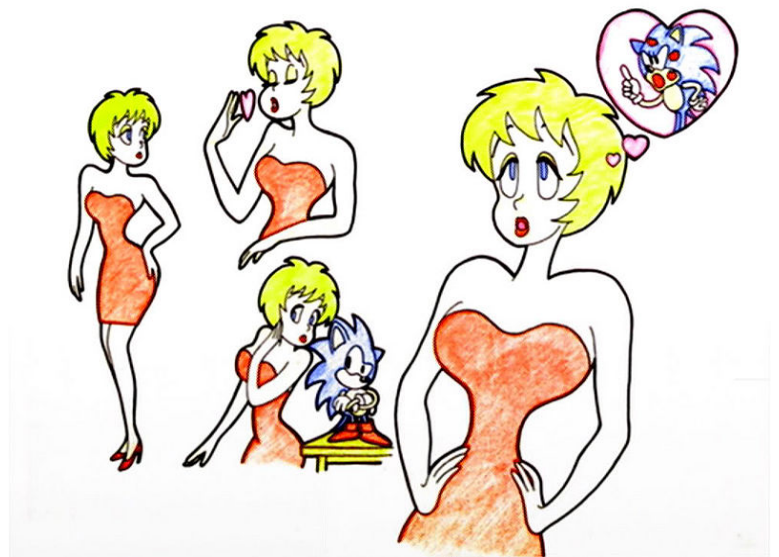
fig 2.1: Early *Sonic* concept artwork depicting his wilder appearance, the surreal monsters creatures of his world, the proposed rock band and groupie that were eventually scrapped, and the final designs of Dr. Eggman and Sonic (Sonic Retro, 2014; Towell, 2011).

Their fantastical world now featured Eggman's robotic Badniks, anthropomorphic characters, and divine jewelled artefacts. However, Tom Kalinske, then-head of SOA, "categorically refused to associate a strange little blue animal with a human girl in a romantic way" (ibid: 30) and SOA's product manager, Madeline Schroeder, wanted neither Madonna nor the rock band: "I think the scenario imagined by Ôshima-san was too Japanese. [SOA] wanted a more American universe, and I can assure you that the changes made by the U.S. business team were hated by Sonic Team" (ibid, quoting Toyoda). While the original concepts had little to identify them as being aesthetically or culturally Japanese, Sonic Team relented as they needed *Sonic* to be an international success: "I hated the decision of the American division […] But with some insight, this change made by SEGA of America was one of the reasons why *Sonic The Hedgehog* was such a big success" (ibid, quoting Naka: 31).

Wolf (2001: 6) postulates that videogames have been largely ignored in academic media studies because they are simply games to be played, which "separates [them] from traditional media such as books, film, radio, and television, despite its audiovisual nature and often narrative basis". While early videogames were "very simple graphically and narratively, and rather limited in subject matter", Wolf notes that "graphics and storylines have improved, warranting more analysis and comment" (ibid). This evolution from narrative simplicity to complexity was blatantly explicit in the localisation efforts made by SEGA designer and game counsellor Dean Sitton

Sitton produced a comprehensive internal document for SOA that provided a "localised history and overall philosophy for Sonic and the Sonic universe" (Nemesis, *et al*, 2009). Sitton, under the pseudonym "DeanSatan", made his "Sonic The Hedgehog Bible" openly available by visiting the forums of Sonic Retro, an online resource specialising in obscure *Sonic* knowledge and fan-created content (ibid).

Developed "in-tune with getting the game from SOJ", Sitton had "little to no exposure to the original Japanese fiction at that time" (Fletcher, quoting Sitton, 2009).

This resulted in ideas completely separate from the videogame, "Like the one in which he grows up as "Sonny Hedgehog" in Hardly, Nebraska" (Fletcher, 2009), as listed in Appendix Two. Thus, SOJ's Sonic lived on an unnamed fantasy world where anthropomorphs and humans co-existed, while Pattenden (1993: 3/4) portrayed SOA's Sonic as living "177.63222 light years […] from Earth [on] Mobius". Tristan Oliver, in an exclusive interview with Sitton for the *Sonic* news website The Super Sonic Zone (2009), related that the only known human in this world was Sonic's adversary, re-christened by Sitton as Doctor Ivo Robotnik.

Whereas SOJ's Sonic was an adventurer hailing "from Christmas Island" constantly searching for adventure (Pétronille and Audureau, 2012: 35/217), SOA's Sonic was an orphan transformed into "the hedgehog with attitude" after Professor Ovi Kintobor helped him to break the sound barrier. Kintobor, who wished to suppress Mobius's evil into six Chaos Emeralds (Pattenden, 1993: 7-9), was subsequently transformed by Chaos Energy into Robotnik, an egg-obsessed dictator fixated on locating the long-lost seventh Grey Emerald, destroying Sonic, and conquering Mobius (ibid: 13-15).

This was a far cry from the Japanese scenario, where Eggman was simply a maniacal genius obsessed with proving his superiority and creating "Eggmanland", a mechanical amusement park in his image. Eggman's strength lay "in his intelligence and ability to create anything", his ability to "exploit the vulnerability of people weaker than he", and his status "– despite his legendary clumsiness – [as] a wicked villain" (Pétronille and Audureau, 2012: 239). Yet localisation pressures necessitated these alterations as, "In America, Sonic looked ridiculous because a hedgehog is a

small animal, and on top of that, it was blue" (ibid, quoting Kalinske: 31).

Internationally, Sonic's design was also altered from SOJ's head full of spikes, stern

frown, and pudgy body, to SOA's spiked Mohawk, cocky grin, and noticeably

slimmer, segmented body shape (Kamakai, *et al*, 2013; Jones, *et al*, 2012: 49) [*fig

2.2*].

fig 2.2: SOA-Sonic (left) vs. SOJ-Sonic (right) (Solus, 2011).

While SOA's changes initially "didn't go down too well with […] Sonic

Team" (Jones, *et al*, 2012: 49), the pressure of *Sonic*'s development schedule forced

Naka to concede for Sonic to make his debut (ibid: 42). Thus, when *Sonic* premiered

in America, the accompanying instruction manual used the Robotnik name and all

promotional material depicted SOA's re-envisioned scenario (Pattenden, 1993), while

the Japanese release followed SOJ's scenario. In the United Kingdom, Ladybird and

Penguin publications took "the world presented in the games as gospel in the absence

of creative input from the character's creators" and continued the Mobius scenario

first depicted in an American promotional comic book (Hazeldine, 2014: 23; Recalled

Comics, 2016), which led to Fleetway's *Sonic the Comic* (*StC*), a 223-issue comic

book published between 1993 and 2002 and continued online by fans (Sonic the

Comic Online, 2016).

The sheer number of ancillary products relating *Sonic*'s many and varied

canons is listed in Appendix Two, a comprehensive list of *Sonic* products – from

videogames to comic books and cartoons – produced throughout the years. This multimedia influx aptly illustrates just how *complex* adaptations can become when their canons are significantly altered across cultures. *Sonic The Hedgehog Story Comic*, for example, was a Japan-exclusive three-part manga published in 1991's *Mega Drive Fan* magazine that depicted Ôshima's original backstory: Sonic was the lead singer of a band spurred into action when Eggman invades South Island.[11]

Interestingly, Western instruction manuals never mention "Kintobor" and generically supplant "Mobius" for "world", "planet"; South Island Stories, an online resource for translated *Sonic* materials, reveals that SEGA's PC division also commonly used "Earth" in place of "ground" (Sega PC, 2007). *Sonic The Hedgehog Spinball* (Polygames/SEGA Technical Institute, 1993) and *Dr. Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine* (Compile/SEGA Technical Institute, 1994) were the exception as their instruction manuals specifically referenced "Planet Mobius" (SEGA, 1993: 8; ibid, 1994: 1) due to being "inspired by Sonic's cartoon adventures" (Pétronille and Audureau, 2012: 185).

Nevertheless, SOA's concepts were prominent in promotional materials, comic books, and Sonic's mid-nineties animated shows. Ironically, *Sonic The Hedgehog* contained no allusions to either scenario within its gameplay – there are no cutscenes or story text to indicate that either events are taking place, though this has little impact on the gameplay. Indeed, "some gamers concentrate more on the rule system and play [videogames] to win or finish […] without much regard for the game world or its backstory" (Mäyrä, 2008: 18); Naka believed that "one of the reasons is probably because you can enjoy [*Sonic*'s] games even if you miss a few details here and there" (Pétronille and Audureau, quoting Naka, 2012: 95),

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[11] Scanned pages from the manga in their original Japanese are available for viewing online at the Sonic the Hedgehog Database (ICEknight, 2010), a fan-moderated website specialising in early *Sonic* concepts and prototypes.

Sonic instead plays in a very arcade-inspired pick-up-and-play format where players control a superfast hedgehog battling a maniacal fat man's robots in "an easy-to-grasp environmentalist theme" (ibid: 31). Beginning in the picturesque Green Hill Zone, Sonic faces progressively more mechanical obstacles before finishing in the fully-industrialised Scrap Brain Zone. The Sonic Stadium, a prominent fan-moderated online resource, posted excerpts from Yuji Naka that elaborated on this clear environmentalist theme, which turns Eggman into "a slightly radical representation of all humanity and the impact humanity is having on nature" (Naka, quoted by Shadzter, 2010). Naka claims that, in 1991, this "was a very sensitive subject" and that *Sonic* gave him the "opportunity to express [these] views in a different way […] showing Robotnik using pollution and creating machinery which desecrates the environment and [driving] Sonic to change his ways" (ibid).

However, such environmentalist themes are relatively commonplace in Japanese anime and manga: McCarthy (1999: 72) observed that *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (Miyazaki, 1982-1984) and its anime adaptation (ibid, 1984) depicted "distant future [where] war has destroyed most of mankind's technology and polluted the environment seemingly beyond repair". *Nausicaä* was Miyazaki's response to the Mercury pollution of Japan's Minamata Bay, which "rendered the fish inedible" (ibid: 74). Similarly, *Neo-Human Casshern* (Koyama, 1973-1974) featured a cyborg protagonist battling a robot army bent on destroying the natural environment and replacing it with a machine world.

Despite SOA's changes, *Sonic*'s tremendous success put pressure on SEGA to produce a sequel. Pétronille and Audureau (2012: 42) relate that Yuji Naka, who had been equally pressured to "meet the production schedule for *Sonic The Hedgehog*", had subsequently relocated to America's STI to work on other projects. By

November 1991, SEGA's marketing division coerced Naka to develop the sequel by promising complete freedom over the project, despite a mere nine month schedule. Naka drafted "other members from [SOJ's] Sonic Team" to work alongside their American counterparts (ibid: 43) and, despite the cultural differences, *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* built, and improved, upon "the same foundations as its predecessor" by introducing many franchise staples: an additional seventh Chaos Emerald, Super Sonic,[12] an outer space finale, and simultaneous play through the two-tailed fox Miles "Tails" Prower (ibid: 46/122).

To capitalise on Sonic's popularity, SEGA launched another aggressive marketing campaign to ensure that "the company's hot new commodity [appeared] everywhere" (ibid: 47); in addition to the multiple ancillary products listed in Appendix Two, Sonic as appeared at the 1993 "Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York" (ibid: 48). Accordingly, *Sonic 2* sold "around 500,000 units in North American alone" just five days after its initial release and eventually sold over "six million copies" (ibid: 47), cementing *Sonic*'s place as the "the icon of a whole generation" (ibid: 124).

Alongside *Sonic 2*, Naoto Ôshima directed a Japanese team on *Sonic The Hedgehog CD* (Sonic Team, 1993), which utilised the Mega-CD's larger data capacity to showcase high-quality anime cutscenes developed and supervised by *Dragon Ball*'s Toei Animation (ibid: 131). Due to the difficulties of developing a CD-based title, *Sonic CD* was eventually released "almost a year after *Sonic The Hedgehog 2*", though still "performed incredibly well" despite the Mega- CD's poor circulation (ibid: 45).

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[12] "In this golden form – which looked very similar to *Dragon Ball Z*'s Super Saiyans – Sonic would become faster, jumped higher, and was almost invincible." (Pétronille and Audureau, 2012: 122).

Expectations were high for Sonic's inevitable third outing, which saw Naka return to Japan in 1993 to supervise production under the original Sonic Team (ibid: 51). Back in a familiar, comfortable environment, Naka pressured himself to "flesh out the scenario to explore Sonic's universe, and this decision made the project even bigger than it [already] was" (ibid). Accordingly, SEGA launched another internal contest within the STI to design a brand new character that would be integral to Sonic's narrative expansion, resulting in Takashi Yuda's red echidna, Knuckles, who symbolised "power and strength" against Sonic's speed (ibid: 51).

Knuckles, depicted as a shrewd trickster manipulated by Eggman into hindering Sonic and Tails, and his mysterious Floating Island and ancient heritage expanded Sonic's mythology as much as *Sonic The Hedgehog 3* (Sonic Team/SEGA Technical Institute, 1993) stretched the Mega Drive's capabilities. SEGA eventually split it in two to allow Naka's team the time to properly complete *Sonic 3* and increase their profit margin by selling two cartridges instead of one. *Sonic & Knuckles* (Sonic Team/SEGA Technical Institute, 1994), released eight months after *Sonic 3*, featured the unique ability to "lock-on" to, amongst other titles, *Sonic 3* to access the entire *Sonic 3 & Knuckles* experience as Naka originally intended (ibid: 53).

Yet, despite its epic scope, Pétronille and Audureau (ibid: 127) remark that *Sonic 3* failed to be as successful as its predecessor despite selling over "nearly two million copies" , while *Sonic & Knuckles* garnered only modest sales as gamers turned towards 32-bit consoles (ibid: 53). Sonic's world grew, and deviated further from the Japanese source, with each subsequent title, leading to speculations regarding "the possibility of the apparent inconsistency being a localisation issue where in-game and supporting text is translated for different territories (in this case, from the original Japanese to English)" (Newman, 2008: 64).

For instance, SamIAm, an independent translator on the South Island Stories website (2007), illustrates that *Sonic 2*'s Japanese manual features an intricate, mythological narrative, while Western manuals are greatly simplified to imply the same location as the first videogame (SEGA, 1992: 6). Japanese manuals also detail Tails' first meeting with Sonic after stumbling upon his bi-plane, the *Tornado*, and chasing him in the pursuit of adventure, while the Western manuals imply that Tails grew up with Sonic and "dreamed of being like [him]" for years (ibid). *Sonic 3*'s Western manuals also describe Knuckles as "strong, athletic, and clever" (ibid, 1993: 16), while the Japanese learn he is "Mentally slow and trusting; easily fooled" (SamIAm, 2007).

Faced with the pressure of competing in a reinvigorated videogame industry, Sonic's success propelled SEGA to the forefront of the home console market, which in turn pressurised SEGA to license their popular franchise into ancillary merchandise. While *Sonic*'s videogame plots soon became very repetitive, as 16-bit technology progressed, *Sonic* titles employed more in-game cutscenes and story text and offered multiple story options in "a precursor to [*Sonic Adventure*]" (Pétronille and Audureau, 2012: 128). As ancillary products were the preferred method of expanding Sonic's appeal and narrative, SEGA naturally began exploring other forms of adaptation.

2.3 Developing a Franchise

In this section, I analyse how *Sonic Adventure* allowed Sonic to expand in "a bold new direction" (Jones, *et al*, 2011: 30) and SEGA's attempts to consolidate the Japanese and American depictions of Sonic into one identifiable image, in addition to

exploring the influence of the fan community in consolidating these issues for themselves. I also detail SEGA's initial efforts to create animated *Sonic* adaptations and the complex methods undertaken by DiC to bring such an abstract character to television screens in a coherent way.

Sonic Adventure was pressured not to be "a simple 3D interpretation of the classic *Sonic* games" but to incorporate "many contemporary ideas such as vast explorable areas in addition to its linear, rollercoaster-like levels" (ibid). *Sonic Adventure*'s many cutscenes explored Sonic's mythology and gave its characters voices, "almost turning the game into an interactive cartoon" (ibid). Sonic voice actor Ryan Drummond was under immense pressure to bring the character to life as "The direction [he] got […] was more of a question: 'If you heard a voice coming out of that blue hedgehog, what would it sound like?'" Even after reasoning that "Sonic was all about energy and speed and youth, [he still] didn't even know what the voice was going to sound like" to begin with (ibid, quoting Drummond: 31).

Based on Yuji Uekawa's redesign of Sonic's cast, *Sonic Adventure* was clearly intended to be a "soft reboot". In defining this concept for the website Study Breaks, Jacoby Bancroft (2015) states that soft reboot's allow for "slight changes to be made without having to completely scrap the franchise and start over". The opposite, a "hard reboot", occurs "when a project needs to be completely rebuilt because either the previous iteration sucked, or too much time has passed to make a logical continuation" (ibid), like in *Batman Begins* (Nolan, 2005) or *DmC: Devil May Cry* (Ninja Theory, 2013).

Ryan Lambie's article at Den of Geek! (2015) adds that a soft reboot "gives writers a chance to set aside years of increasingly complex canon and start again with a clean sheet, while at the same time retaining enough of the original property's DNA

to keep long-term fans satisfied", like *Live and Let Die* (Hamilton, 1973) and *Super Mario 64*, whose mission-based 3D environment retained the aesthetic appeal, familiarity, and basic gameplay elements of its 2D predecessors. Concurrently, Sonic was now "Taller, slimmer and somehow spikier", replacing his friendliness with "an anime-style cool" (Jones, *et al*, 2011: 31). Re-imagined flashbacks and allusions to past encounters served as a subtle backstory, while "unique stages modelled after magnificent real-world locations like the American rainforest" expanded the franchise's scope (Pétronille and Audureau, 2012: 68).

Fan theory, and discourse of fandom, is a significant aspect of *Interplay*'s bended methodology, particularly in relation to this chapter. I have referenced various online resources – including fan-created websites and fan-moderated forums – to emphasise the additional pressures fandom placing on shaping canons. Fandom extends well beyond simply discussing (or, in many cases, arguing) the particulars of a particular text; while Jenkins (cited by Moore, 2010: 182) states that fans have always created and engaged with media, new media's move into the digital realm has encouraged fans to engage in a very active way to create their own "critical interpretations and deliberate reworkings in the form of fan communities, fanfiction, and fanzines" (ibid: 183).

Additionally, as referenced through websites like Sonic Retro, fans have taken to crafting their own videogames through code modification: "Modding can be as simple as changing a few textures—for instance, a character's appearance—or as complex as rebuilding a new game on pre-existing foundations" (ibid: 188). Henry Jenkins (cited by Poore, 2012: 159) notes that it has taken a long time for fans to be viewed as "as more than simply lonely people with poor social skills and a shaky grasp of reality", and the annual Sonic Amateur Games Expo (SAGE) online event

allows modders to showcase their work and have it critiqued by the larger online *Sonic* community.

For Jenkins (ibid), fans are characterised as "intelligent individuals who have historically been in rivalry and competition with academics"; I, however, agree with Jenkins' assertion that "it has now become possible to declare oneself both academic and fan" (ibid). Yet fandom is often at odds with Hollywood's strategy of media convergence; fans seek to preserve "what is felt to be pure, true and distinctive about a given mythology or 'universe', [while] convergence is about developing new markets, media platforms, and types of interactivity" (ibid).

Sonic's active fanbase, already a significant pressure on Sonic's iconography, became noticeably divided after years of opposing regional narratives; after *Sonic 2*'s immense success, SEGA eagerly cashed in, never thinking "that their new mascot's popularity could ever wane" (Pétronille and Audureau, 2012: 50). Sonic "garnered a passionate fanbase" that, even in those early years, delighted in debating the particulars of the franchise; indeed, as Pétronille and Audureau (ibid: 49) underscore, debates about "which version of *Sonic CD*'s soundtrack, the Japanese or the American version, is superior" continue on Sonic Retro's forums (ICEknight, *et al*, 2011; The Kazeblade, *et al*, 2012).

Before the internet afforded greater freedom to vocalise multiple, conflicting opinions and produce "several comprehensive online Wiki resources, capable of furnishing exhaustive detail on any given topic" (Hazeldine, 2014: 8), Sonic's popularity in the mid-nineties could be measured by the feedback published in *Sonic*'s comic books, which indicated just how "fiercely loyal" Sonic's fans were beyond simply buying videogames (Pétronille and Audureau, 2012: 87).

In keeping with Sanders' (2006: 45) analysis that "Adaptation and appropriation are dependent on the literary canon for the provision of a shared body of storylines, themes, characters, and ideas upon which their creative variations can be made", Sonic's adaptations bred new continuities, new sub-cultures of *Sonic* fans, and fuelled debates regarding canonicity. Each placed immense pressure on Sonic's brand image as "[Gamers] tend to denigrate the official localisations and translations. There is a shared feeling that those […] either take liberties with or are simply insufficiently well versed in the minute detail of the canon to produce a sensitive English language version" (Newman, 2008: 61).

Indeed, as Sanders (2006: 45) also relates that audiences "must be able to participate in the play of similarity and difference perceived between the original, source, or inspiration to appreciate fully the reshaping or rewriting undertaken by the adaptive text", fan response to *Sonic*'s inconsistencies varies considerably: "The *Sonic the Hedgehog* canon does not automatically encompass every official game release from [SEGA]" (ibid: 60). Instead, many consider "the involvement of the originating developers" as the benchmark for canonicity (ibid), with SOJ's authority overriding SOA or SEGA Europe materials, which are regarded as "disloyal as they frequently invent new narratives and explanations rather than faithfully translating and duplicating the canonical Japanese materials" (ibid: 61).

The inclusion of fan theory illustrates *Sonic*'s popularity as a franchise and the difficulties of appeasing a very invested and connected audience. As writers of *Sonic* fan fiction, fans delight in crafting their own fictions, often creating anthropomorphic representations of themselves to insert into *Sonic*'s canon (Poore, 2012: 168) and, increasingly, "today's amateurs are tomorrow's professionals, the keepers of the franchises" (ibid: 169). Parody (2011: 216) notes that fans expertly shift between

numerous canons to understand how to interpret a franchise, often to showcase their

mastery over a franchise text. As Bourdaa (2013: 205) emphasises, transmedia

storytelling, which "develops a whole universe instead of only adapting the same

storylines to different platforms", allows fans to "participate in seemingly endless

interpretations [and widely discuss] their theories and thoughts in communities of

shared practices".

Because of inconsistencies between *Sonic*'s Eastern and Western

interpretations, fans delight in attempting to both reconcile these discrepancies and

exhibit "their intimate knowledge and mastery of the games" (Sanders, 2006: 62).

Simultaneously, fan sub-divisions – fans of *Sonic*'s animated exploits or comic books

– often conflict with *Sonic*'s videogame fans: "[such] theorising and collective

recuperation of the canon may be read both as an attempt to maintain or restore

perfection in the canon and as a means of [protection] against the charges of

detractors that this series is inferior to others" (ibid: 65).

Sonic Adventure attempted to consolidate these pressures by reconfiguring

Sonic's world to resemble our own, albeit with anthropomorphic characters, and

removed Mobius from official canon completely. Additionally, Doctor Robotnik was

internationally recognised as Doctor Eggman; Clyde Mandelin (2013), whose

Legends of Localisation website specialises in translation and localisation in

videogames, states that a confrontation between Sonic and Eggman was used by

"localizers […] to start the name change transition" and to "add in "attitude" with

name-calling and insults". However, after years of fan debates, regionalised

differences, and conflicting ancillary products, this only encouraged further fan-based

canon pressures as explaining the "flaws in or in between the reversed canonical texts

appears to be partly motivated by a desire to imprint oneself onto the canon thereby becoming closer to the game and its creators" (Sanders, 2006: 64).

Consequently, *Sonic* fans continue to expand, modify, enrich, preserve, police, and remedy *Sonic*'s canon to align with their personal, and occasionally unified, perspectives (ibid) – best illustrated through the online debates surrounding *Sonic*'s characterisation and plot on Sonic Stadium's forums, for example (Sapphire, *et al*, 2014). Accordingly, they may also be influenced by, or only concerned with, *Sonic*'s adaptations, specifically the ongoing series of comic books published by Archie Comics; head writer Ian Flynn (2014: 4) stated that, between 1994 and 1998, Archie "had to find their own way to tell their stories, and only had a limited amount of lore to pull from".

Archie were pressured to find inventive ways to weave together conflicting narratives, eventually amalgamating "over seventy-five issues of comic continuity" with *Sonic Adventure*'s "in-depth story driven game continuity" (ibid: 5). Notably, Archie's *Sonic* originated as an amalgamated spin-off of two *Sonic* cartoons and eventually became the spiritual successor of the more popular of the two,[13] emphasising the popularity of not only *Sonic* videogames but their adaptations as well.

Like Nintendo, SEGA aimed to capitalise and expand their mascot's presence and recognition through animation. Despite being glorified advertisements for Nintendo's products, Nintendo's cartoons, as detailed in Chapter One, nevertheless successfully adapted many elements from their respective franchises and, arguably, assisted in developing Nintendo's characters beyond their videogames. These

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[13] "In the beginning, SEGA instructed our editorial team to reflect the art and story styles of the syndicated series, but it soon became apparent from fan reaction that the Saturday morning series was the one striking a nerve. The comic soon followed suit with a mix of the two styles, but a heavier emphasis on the dramatic" (TheAmazingSallyHogan, quoting Castiglia, 2013).

cartoons were produced by DiC Entertainment, which, according to the Big Cartoon

Database (2014), an online repository for animated media, was originally founded in

1971 by French businessman Jean Chalopin. Writing for the New York Times in

1987, Andrea Adelson (1987) described how DiC produced "concepts, sketches and

designs" in America but outsourced the "inking, painting and photographing of

animation cels […] overseas". DiC also expanded internationally in 1982, setting up

a headquarters in Burbank, California and placing "Andy Heyward and Bruno Bianchi

[alongside] Chalopin" in charge (The Big Cartoon Database, 2014).

Heyward, who had "helped develop […] Scrappy-Doo" in the 1970s (Pfanner,

2006), conceived *Inspector Gadget* (1983-1986) alongside Chalopin, allowing DiC to

largely dominate eighties children's television (Adelson 1987). In 1986, Heyward

(alongside other investors) purchased Chalopin's interest by selling "the foreign rights

to [DiC's] extensive library to Saban Productions" (ibid); Saban later sold them to

Chalopin, embroiling DiC and Saban in a five year legal battle (The Big Cartoon

Database, 2014).

Heyward re-acquired DiC in 2000 and after attempting to fund DiC's further

international expansion, merged DiC with Cookie Jar Entertainment in 2008 (DiOrio,

2000; Hefner and Radmanovich, 2008) before DHX Media's acquisition in 2012

(DHX Media, 2012). While DiC has since become a name-only subsidiary, its

prominence during the late-eighties and nineties cannot be understated; their

experience in promoting Nintendo's products made DiC a fitting home for Sonic,

whose "trending popularity" meant an animated series was inevitable. Producer

Robby London, though not a gamer, had one of the "DiC artists […] play it for a

video capture" (Jones, *et al*, quoting London, 2011: 29).

While recognising that *Sonic* "had a very charismatic lead character and an interesting look", London struggled to make "sense of the story elements" as "the lore behind most games to be elusive and impenetrable" (ibid). Under Heyward, London, and Kent Butterworth's production team, DiC produced a pilot episode and drafted Jaleel White to provide Sonic's vocal work; White was "a big, big star at ABC" (London, 2008) as Steve Urkel on *Family Matters* (1989-1997). As DiC were planning to sell their pilot to ABC, London believed that "packaging Jaleel in that would make it more appealing" (ibid) as he was already under contract with the network and it "was an easy move to capitalize on already-accessible talent, as well as make a few bucks off [Sonic]" (Bozon, 2007).

The slapstick pilot episode, which never made it to television but was made freely available for viewing on YouTube by dvariano (2009), was deemed by ABC to be unsuitable for a Saturday morning slot and requested an alternative presentation. Rather than discard their efforts, DiC produced their initial pilot for syndication while simultaneously working on an entirely different adaptation (Pétronille and Audureau, 2012: 49; Sonic HQ, 2014); one would air "Monday through Friday, the other only on Saturday morning" (GamesRader_US, 2012).

2.4 Sonic the Animation

This section details Sonic's animated adaptations throughout the nineties and how they attempted to reconcile Sonic's gameplay mechanics, conflicting narratives, and fundamental concepts into a series of wildly different animated endeavours that greatly contributed not only to Sonic's identity outside of the videogames, especially outside of Japan, and continue to influence his videogame portrayal.

DiC's initial pilot eventually became *Adventures of Sonic The Hedgehog* (1993), which adopted a comedic, slapstick narrative style reminiscent of Warner Bros.' cartoons, with Sonic and Tails (Christopher Welch) often donning bizarre disguises and using comical methods to outwit and humiliate the bungling Doctor Robotnik (Long John Baldry) and his ludicrously incompetent Badniks.

Adventures debuted in September, 1993, eventually airing 65 episodes and one Christmas-themed special. According to Sonic HQ (2014), another comprehensive online resource, *Adventures* is also "the only Sonic cartoon that's been consistently on the air since it debuted". *Adventures* catapulted Sonic's eventual animated dominance at a time when the *Super Mario Bros.* movie was failing both at the box office and at replicating the success of its animated counterparts (Sheff and Eddy, 1999: 431).

This achievement is substantial considering critics like Michael Rubino (2007), in reviewing *Adventures*' for the website DVD Verdict, believed the cartoon was "one of the truly awful videogame cartoons to come out of the gaming boom of the Nintendo-Sega race of the '90s" by failing to endure over time and properly convey what made the videogames so popular, something Mario's adaptations found comparatively more success with. Under the pressures of capitalisation, the Console War unashamedly used "children's cartoons to sell software (because, as history has shown us, kids want any toy that's connected with a cartoon)" (ibid). Despite how unfitting or obscure some merchandise may have been – "there's no reason for Sonic to endorse shampoo" (ibid) – an article on GamesRadar's website claims that none "[tarnished] the brand's image" more than *Sonic*'s nineties cartoons, particularly *Adventures* (GamesRader_US, 2012).

While SEGA "had approval rights on all the […] various other creative elements [and] gave notes and requested revisions from time to time", they provided

no specific instructions on *Adventures*' production beyond emphasising "how crucially important and valuable Sonic was to them" (Jones, *et al*, quoting London, 2011: 29). Given DiC's "history of dealing with outside rights holders and their flagship characters" (London, 2008), DiC submitted character designs to SEGA and incorporated any comments they had, "mostly to ensure there was conformity across all the *Sonic* products they were licensing" (ibid; Jones, *et al*, quoting London, 2011: 29).

While this indicates that SEGA played a relatively minor role in Sonic's adaptations, it confirms that "[SEGA] absolutely looked at what [DiC] did and were very […] active in looking everything over, and making sure they were comfortable that [DiC] were respecting the character and not doing anything at all to […] harm [the] franchise" (London, 2008). Thus, while GamesRader (2012) also believed Robotnik was "used as a vehicle for every fat joke in the Fat Lexicon circa 1993", Sonic little more than "a chili-dog obsessed idiot", and that the supporting cast "wholly uninteresting, unfunny and just all around annoying", the only authority to reject *Adventures* was ABC, which failed to keep it off the air. Yet, for many, *Adventures* is "a grueling trip down memory lane[,] filled with bad jokes, ugly design, and the nasally voice of Urkel" (Rubino, 2007).

Sonic HQ (2014), however, praises *Adventures* for unashamedly revelling in "in its own corny nature" by turning Sonic into "an odd mix of Bugs Bunny and the Roadrunner", with Robotnik and his Badniks playing "Wile E. Coyote and being victimized either by Sonic or by Robotnik himself". Fittingly, Sonic's enemies "use a series of elaborate schemes and contraptions to try and get the job done" and yet constantly fail either due to their own incompetence or Sonic simply outsmarting them through his own wits and skills or because the plot demands it (Rubino, 2007).

Although "opting to keep things simple in pretty much every aspect of the show" (ibid), artist Milton Knight attempted to deepen Robotnik's characterisation to avoid him becoming a simple, generic villain. Knight believed Robotnik to be "the perfect image of self love […] He is actually extremely excited by the fact that he exists, and the fact the others do not feel the same way simply spurns him on to greater heights of villainy. He is jealous of [Sonic's] popularity" (Knight, 2007).

Indeed, Robotnik is portrayed as politically influential as well as a tyrant, often deceiving Mobius into forgiving his transgressions or voting him into positions of power, and various episodes detail his troubled childhood under his equally-cruel mother. A four-part saga even centred on Robotnik's search through time and space for four Chaos Emeralds in one of the better examples of animation and plot throughout the series, despite radically altering the Chaos Emeralds. Overall, however, continuity and plot are often ignored in favour of self-contained "basic cat-and-mouse chases" (Rubino, 2007).

Given DiC's cost-cutting (Wood, quoting De Celles, 2007), *Adventures* featured "a planet devoid of any sort of detail, an environment that can be traversed in mere minutes", yet Rubino's (2007) view is that this world was also "filled with about as much character as a Hawaiian shirt", and its unique, vast alien landscape was populated by diverse characters, from anthropomorphic creatures to humans, aliens, and robots.

Adventures featured multiple "catchphrases and character traits to make Sonic stand out from the crowd" – no matter how obscure the situation, Sonic always excelled and justified his stardom. As London believed Sonic's most important characteristic to be his attitude (Jones, *et al*, quoting London, 2011: 29), Sonic is imbued not only with "an unhealthy addiction" to chilli dogs (Rubino, 2007), but the

same "cockiness, perseverance and a sort of devil-be-damned outlook" reflected in SEGA's "original design of the character" (Jones, *et al*, quoting London, 2011: 29).

Yet, Rubino (2007) also saw Sonic as aloof and childish; despite his strong morals, Sonic rarely taking threats seriously and constantly mocking the "slowness" of others, even his friends. This was offset by *Sonic Says*, "traditional public service [announcements where] Sonic and Tails teach kids not to steal, get in cars with strangers, or eat chili dogs without sharing" (ibid), which gained online notoriety from online forums (Zero-V, *et al*, 2005) and websites like Know Your Meme (2014) and Meme Generator (2014). Accordingly, Sonic mentors Tails how to be a world-renowned "Freedom Fighter" and, as Sonic's heroic reputation often precedes him, his self-assuredness mimics Western propaganda at the time, which often stated that Sonic is "not a hero – [he is] a Superhero" (Pattenden, 1993: 1/2).

Adventures established many conventions for Sonic's animated incarnations, introducing "the phrase 'fastest thing alive', the signature arms-crossed, impatient foot-tapping pose, [and] the catchphrase: 'I'm waiiiiting'", all made possible by animation's ability to surpass "the limitations of videogames at the time" (Jones, *et al*, quoting London, 2011: 29). Sonic's contrasting character (a selfless hero who is also quite childish) also became a staple: "[These traits] lend themselves really well to an animated character for a television cartoon and can be significantly enhanced in that medium. [We] created a lore and a context and situations for Sonic to demonstrate this persona with a richness that was not possible in the game" (ibid).

Julian Hazeldine (2014: 27) stated that, as Sonic "was still rather under-defined in the US when the series entered production, DiC had to make a number of leaps in characterisation for the then-silent hero, of which the more successful were retained in future incarnations". *Adventures*' influence was soon apparent: *Mean*

Bean Machine featured "characters from the cartoon" (Pétronille and Audureau, 2012: 187), Robotnik's *Adventures* depiction appeared on the international cover art for *Sonic Spinball* (SEGA Interactive Development Division, 1994) and *Sonic The Hedgehog: Triple Trouble* (Aspect, 1994) on the Game Gear (Yash, 2014), and Robotnik was somewhat-controversially "changed into that weed from the rubbish cartoon series" by *StC*'s twenty-second issue (Fielding, 1995: 32; Kitching, *et al*, 1994: 1-7).

Additionally, the episode 'Attack on Pinball Fortress' (Butterworth, 1993) began a nineties tradition of loosely adapting *Sonic Spinball*; *Sonic Spinball* later influenced 'Game Guy' (Myrick, 1994) of *Adventures*' sister-series and eventual successor,[14] and was loosely adapted in *StC* (Millar, *et al*, 1996: 1-7) and Archie's *Sonic* comic books (Gallagher, *et al*, 2011: 24-32), making it one of the most adapted of all *Sonic* videogames. Finally, while *Adventures* depicts Sonic as a glutton, his love of chilli dogs eventually became so iconic that it featured not only in *Adventures*' successors and various comic books but also the videogames.

While *Adventures* faced a lot of criticism (much of it retroactive), even detractors like Rubino (2007) admit that there was little plot in *Sonic* to begin with beyond foiling Robotnik's current scheme. Simultaneously, despite the trend "to draw butts on everyone" in children's cartoons at the time, "the character design is actually pretty good […] Sonic, Tails, and Robotnik […] are designed with colorful accuracy" (ibid), while Sonic HQ (2014) attests that *Adventures* was "the only DiC cartoon that put much effort into following the games at all". Scratch (Phil Hayes), Grounder (Garry Chalk), Coconuts (Ian James Corlett), and Badniks like Buzz Bomber, Chopper, and Jaws were all adapted from *Sonic 2*, "although they had little

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[14] SOA "seemed to have high hopes for [this tie-in…] All art assets and sprites were created especially for the title, being strongly influenced by the industrial SatAM aesthetic" (Hazeldine, 2014: 35).

resemblance to the originals" (ibid); *Adventures* is the only *Sonic* adaptation to feature "a remixed version of Sonic's theme song [and] was also the only DiC Sonic cartoon to feature Tails in a prominent role" (ibid).

Nevertheless, *Adventures* is notorious for its simplistic, slapstick nature, and inconsistent animation standards. Once *Adventures'* syndicated run was complete, DiC's resources favoured their other adaptation, which was forged from amendments to their earlier pilot. DiC's retooled concept aired, as originally intended, on ABC on December, 11 1993 – shortly after *Adventures'* syndicated debut. Titled simply *Sonic The Hedgehog*, Hazeldine (2014: 33) explains that the cartoon is dubbed *SatAM* "by fans […] due to its Saturday morning transmission slot" and to differentiate it from *Adventures*.

After its initial thirteen episodes, a further thirteen followed *Adventures'* conclusion, resulting in a two season, twenty-six episode production between 1993 and 1995. *SatAM* favoured a surprisingly dark tone, depicting Sonic, Tails (Bradley Pierce), and a cast of original Freedom Fighters waging a seemingly unwinnable campaign against Doctor Robotnik (Jim Cummings), portrayed as a merciless dictator formally known as Julian: "Most of [Sonic's] missions see him sent to the grimy city of Robotropolis, a world away from the brightly-coloured pop-art environments found on the Mega Drive" (Hazeldine, 2014: 33). Despite the bizarre nature of *Adventures*, animation supervisor Pierre De Celles (quoted by Wood, 2007) stated there was no pressure to compete and that the two shows had little influence over each other: "Ours was more fun and humorous while the other was serious and heavy […] we had no contact with the other team and [were] too busy [to compete]".

Before *SatAM*'s ABC debut, DiC originally envisioned an alternative visual style and character line-up more inspired by the source material. *StC* advertised this
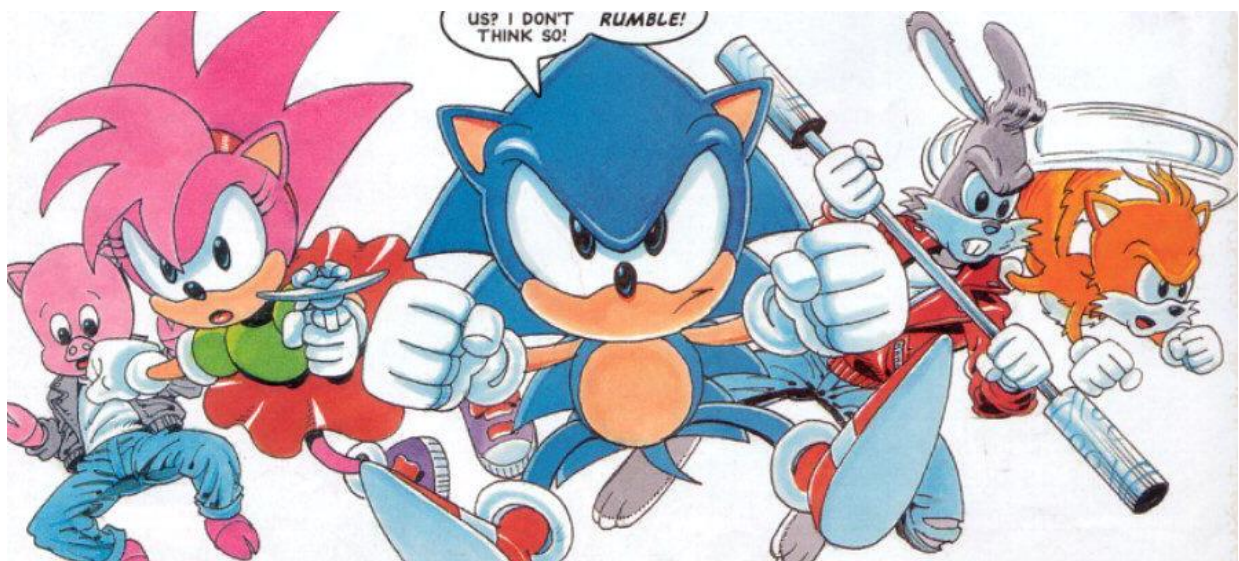
fig 2.3: Concept artwork of the "Freedom Team" and Robotnik that precedes *SatAM* (Sonic HQ, 2014); *StC*'s eerily similar Freedom Fighters; *Sonic the Hedgehog*'s Animal Friends that inspired the Freedom Fighters, and the final *SatAM* line-up (PorpoiseMuffins, 2010).

"Freedom Team" as part of a teaser for Sonic's upcoming new show [*fig 2.3*].

Concept art, available online at Sonic HQ (2014), illustrated that this team adapted

Sonic's traditional Animal Friends into larger figures sporting biker jackets and

shades; likewise Robotnik was depicted as a monstrous amalgamation of his eventual

SatAM design and his videogame counterpart (ibid) [*fig 2.3*].

While these designs eventually developed into their more recognisable *SatAM*

counterparts,[15] the Freedom Team greatly resembles *StC*'s Freedom Fighters, who

began sporting similar attire by issue twenty-one (Kitching, *et al*, 1994: 1-7) [*fig 2.3*].

In an email exchange with *SatAM* fan website Saturday Morning Sonic, *StC* lead

scribe Nigel Kitching commented on these similar adaptations with: "[The "Freedom

Team"] is just artwork that Fleetway had – looks American to me, it was certainly not

produced by any of us UK freelancers. I just ignored stuff like this"

(PorpoiseMuffins, quoting Kitching, 2010).

Nevertheless, the resemblance is uncanny; when interviewed by Adamis of

Sonic the Comic Online (2007), *StC* artist Richard Elson claimed that "[Nigel]

assumed that he was to use all of [*SatAM*'s] characters for the comic, [but *StC* editor]

Richard Burton informed him that Sega didn't own the rights" as the characters were

DiC's creations. Kitching claims that *StC*'s Freedom Fighters came from a desire to

introduce "a new direction […] in which Robotnik would become the dictator of

Mobius and Sonic would form a gang of Freedom Fighters" to create "far more

interesting stories" (PorpoiseMuffins, quoting Kitching, 2010). The suggestion

apparently occurred during a meeting with "[a] (supportive) woman [from] Sega

Europe"; Kitching later "realized that [she] had probably taken this idea from the TV

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[15] Alternative concepts depicted Robotnik as a horned demon and a more literal cyborg, Sally being far more humanoid, and Bunnie as being far more robotic than her final design, indicating the length and diversity of *SatAM*'s design process (Hogfather, 2014).

series", though claims to have had "no knowledge of this series at the time" and that all he had to work with "was the term 'Freedom Fighters' and no more" (ibid).

Eventually, the "Freedom Team" was altered to the now-iconic Freedom Fighters: Princess Sally (Kath Soucie), Bunnie Rabbot (Christine Cavanaugh), Rotor (Mark Ballou), and Antoine Depardieu (Rob Paulsen). While each is roughly adapted from *Sonic*'s Animal Friends [*fig 2.3*], they also have aesthetic influences from the "Freedom Team" (PorpoiseMuffins, 2010). Additionally, *SatAM*'s prototype introduction depicts a tone similar to *Adventures*' alongside SEGA-styled designs for Sally and other characters (ibid), and aspects such as these are further examples of the differing cultural pressures influencing *Sonic*'s numerous adaptations.

SatAM's pilot episode, 'Heads or Tails' (Grusd, 1993), also featured subtle differences to later episodes, something reflected in Archie's *Sonic* comic books. Former Archie editor Paul Castiglia, quoted on TheAmazingSallyHogan's Tumblr webpage (2013), stated that "As the comic series and the animated shows were simultaneously developed, the tight, advanced scheduling of the comic industry kept us from keeping up with last-minute changes made to the shows". Nevertheless, by the following episode, 'Sonic Past Cool' (Sebast, 1993), what would become *SatAM*'s recognisable aesthetic, at least for the first season, was established. Like *Adventures*, *SatAM* begins *in medias res*, expositing information over time and through the title sequence: Robotnik has roboticized the majority of Mobius during a coup d'état, and Sonic and a handful of Freedom Fighters oppose him. The aforementioned prototype introduction further depicted events that would not be explored until *SatAM*'s second season.

SatAM's production appears to have been on a higher level than its sister-show, presumably to win the coveted ABC timeslot. In an interview for the *SatAM*

DVD set, series writer Ben Hurst stated that, initially, the writers were simply "shown three or four levels of the videogame on a video projection board", rather than actually playing the videogame (Hurst, 2007). Bourdaa (2013: 202) explains that television producers often use transmedia storytelling to "to engage viewers in their story arcs [and] provide a story world scattered on multiple media platforms, each piece offering an entry into the universe". The incorporation of transmedia storytelling suggests that a story, even one as limited as early *Sonic* titles, is "complex enough to create and expand a whole coherent universe around it" (ibid: 203). Accordingly, the pressure on Hurst to consolidate the gameplay into animation was alleviated by series creator Len Janson's comprehensive *SatAM* "Bible", which detailed "who the characters are, […] the interactions between them [and] what the world is" (Hurst, 2007).

This bible enabled the adaptation of *Sonic*'s more obscure elements into "things that were more screen-friendly. It became more of an animation, almost feature film quality" (ibid), emphasising Janson's influence in defining *SatAM*'s recognisable elements and "[having] strict guidelines for every episode". Such as, with the exception of the two-part 'Blast to the Past' (Myrick, 1994), each episode "had to stand on its own merits so that, if somebody just dropped in […] and happened to watch one episode, it would still keep their attention and they wouldn't feel like they'd just come into an ongoing soap opera" (Hurst, 2007). Yet, especially in the second season, *SatAM* featured episode-spanning story arcs, emphasising Bourdaa's (2013: 203) observation that "seriality and narrative complexity ensure that episodes are not closed entities and that story arcs live and continue across the show".

SatAM further embraced Bourdaa's definition of narrative complexity, which "implies that TV viewers have to remember details of the narration and of the story

arcs" (ibid), by including recurring characters locations, and themes across multiple episodes.[16] Furthermore, Janson wished the protagonists to suffer both wins and losses in order to heighten the "emotional closure with the show" (Hurst, 2007); Sonic and the Freedom Fighters were constantly against the odds, "sometimes they lost things, they lost people […] so you actually believed what was happening, and I think that's what's kept the series alive for so long is that it's believable" (ibid).

For Hurst, Janson's decree that *SatAM* should address some "universal truths" enabled *SatAM* to separate itself from the competition for being not just darker and more serious than *Adventures*, but also translating very realistic, adult themes into a children's medium, and through its message that "freedom is good and tyranny is bad" (ibid). Hurst (quoted by PorpoiseMuffins, 2010) explain that Janson's Bible was less concerned with relating Sonic's videogame history and more about presenting "a "White Paper" that created a history for [*SatAM*'s] characters".

Though far from a "definitive backstory", Janson's vision deviated from *Sonic*'s pre-existing canons, depicting a post-apocalyptic future wherein Julian and Snively left Earth in "about 2200" as part of a space expedition and narrowly escaped a botched takeover of their space colony (ibid). In the interim, a nuclear holocaust mutated animal life into anthropomorphs and, due to the effects of "faster-than-light space travel […] thousands of years [pass] by the time Julian and Snively returned to find this "Animal" world", which they immediately plot to gain control of" (ibid). While 'Blast to the Past' related this, and it was significantly expanded upon in Archie's *Sonic*, *SatAM* emphasised characterisation over exposition (ibid).

In his interview for the *SatAM* DVD set, Jaleel White (who returned to voice Sonic) stated that he "deliberately wanted to make him […] of another race" to give

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[16] Recurring themes included not just the overarching plot to defeat Robotnik but also Uncle Chuck (William Windom) posing as a spy, the Void portal, the attempt to build a network of Freedom Fighters, and the second season arc regarding Robotnik's Doomsday machine.

the impression that he was defined only by their terms "hero" and "fast" (White, 2007). While very similar to his *Adventures* incarnation, *SatAM*'s Sonic looks and acts slightly older, recognising the seriousness of their situation, but refusing to let it cramp his style or spirit. Sonic maintains his impatience and arrogance but is arguably braver given *SatAM*'s higher stakes. Crucially, Sonic is a key player in an extremely outnumbered revolutionary movement; Sonic and the Freedom Fighters evoke Robin Hood (which, as Kitching (quoted by PorpoiseMuffins, 2010) observed, was true of *StC*), though in *SatAM*, Princess Sally assumes the leadership role. However, due to Sonic's impulsive nature and his thirst for action and adventure, he frequently acts alone not just to be a showman but also to protect others.

These attributes contribute to Sonic's heroic reputation amongst the Freedom Fighters and also his notoriety in Robotropolis as "Hedgehog: Priority One", which he touts proudly. Similar to *StC*, Sonic's heroic deeds are offset by an irritable personality; his numerous character flaws and weaknesses (not shared by his *Adventures* counterpart) deepen his characterisation. Impulsive actions often cause him to miss obvious traps and, while he has no fear of water, he does fear failure, and numerous episodes force Sonic to use his intelligence to overcome obstacles rather than simply relying on speed.

Simultaneously, Robotnik becomes a merciless, semi-cybernetic dictator; while he has rare moments of ineptitude, Robotnik is far more efficient and ruthless than his *Adventures* counterpart. Robotnik's depiction as a cruel despot became his prototypical American characterisation for many years thanks to *SatAM* and Archie's comics. This version of Robotnik, as noted by PorpoiseMuffins (2010), turns *Sonic*'s "simple environmental allegory about technology in the hands of evil" into a tool of oppressive dictatorship. Arguably, *Sonic*'s environmental message has never been

more explicit than in *SatAM* and Archie's comics, where pollution and technology are Robotnik's primary weapons for enforcing and extending his power, allowing Sonic to serve as "a beacon of freedom; a solitary hero able to come to the aid of the rest of the animal citizenry" (ibid).

IGN's Mark Bozon (2007), however, offsets the depth of characterisation given to Sonic and Robotnik by critiquing *SatAM*'s "amazingly uninspired" supporting characters. GamesRader_US (2012) concurs, regarding *SatAM* as "worse" than *Adventures* because it dared to "take itself seriously, [crafting] a nonsensical 33rd-century plot about a hedgehog wearing nothing but red shoes" and criticising the Freedom Fighters for being one-dimensional stereotypes. For Bozon (2007), *SatAM* is just another attempt "to bank off SEGA's lead franchise in 1994" featuring "ludicrous" writing and an "off the cuff" plot designed to "keep youngin's glued to the tube".

Despite Sonic HQ's (2014) astute observation that *SatAM* was the "antithesis of Adventures - emotional, dramatic, and extremely dark [and featuring] a continuing storyline", the pressure of adapting *Sonic*'s gameplay elements into a purely passive media form ultimately disregarded much of the source material. With Tails taking "a back seat to the Freedom Fighters", Robotnik's darkest aspects made blatantly extrovert, and *SatAM*'s "dark settings [being] contrary to the stylized zones generally associated with Sonic" (ibid), *SatAM* "irked some fans with just how different it was. In fact, the cartoon title and the presence of Sonic, Tails, and Robotnik were just about the only things that hinted at the fact that it was a Sonic cartoon" (ibid). Reviewing *SatAM* for the website DVD Talk, Todd Douglass Jr (2007) stated that, despite some notable episodes, *SatAM* ultimately failed to surpass its competitors,

despite being "one of the better of the Nintendo/SEGA cartoons", as it "has not withstood the test of time well".

SatAM, like *Adventures*, had minimal impact on *Sonic* videogames, reflecting how few gameplay mechanics featured in *SatAM*, though the protagonists did appear in *Sonic Spinball* (PorpoiseMuffins, 2010). Pétronille and Audureau (2012: 58) note that, in 1993, STI produced a *SatAM*-based concept title for the Mega Drive tentatively titled *Sonic-16*, though "Yuji Naka was not impressed, and the project never went beyond a concept video". *SatAM* later influenced *Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood* (BioWare, 2008), sparking former Archie writer/artist Ken Penders' allegations "that [*Sonic Chronicles*] infringed on his copyrights of […] various characters" (TheAmazingSallyHogan, 2013; Hazeldine, 2014: 34; Pétronille and Audureau, 2012, quoting Darrah: 208).

Archie comics had "secured the license for Sonic the Hedgehog (and all spinoff characters such as Knuckles)" from SOA in 1992, gaining "exclusive rights to publish Sonic comics" in America, "with SEGA always renewing the agreement before the expiration of the license" (TheAmazingSallyHogan, 2013). Archie's comics "quickly became a companion to [*SatAM*]" under Mike Kanterovich, Ken Penders, and Scott Fulop and stuck closely to *SatAM*'s aesthetic and narrative style, and initially incorporated some of *Adventures*' aspects (ibid). Yet Archie's *Sonic* was not a continuation of *SatAM*, merely a closely-associated canon simply because "DiC - just like SEGA - refused to cooperate […] in allowing […] access to their material [to tie] together the continuity of the book with the show" (ibid). Indeed, DiC only became involved when *SatAM*'s future was undecided, "probably out of hope that maybe the book would help attract more viewers if it were tied in more closely with the show" (ibid).

Penders had originally wanted to tie-in more closely with *SatAM*, but, when *SatAM* was cancelled, decided to "proceed as if the book were the third season and continuing beyond that" (ibid). Ironically, this was to ensure that the comic survived beyond the videogames and the animated series; after *SatAM*'s cancellation, Fulop "assumed the Sonic comic would be canceled within a year" and intended Penders' 'Endgame' storyline to conclude the series: "when sales actually went up [Penders] quickly retooled the ending of Endgame to allow the title to survive" (ibid). Archie's *Sonic* comic books remain in publication today and, as detailed in Appendix Two, spawned numerous spin-offs, graphic novels, and related publications. In 2008, the series was recognised as the "longest-running comic series based on a video game" by the Guinness Book of World Records (Paulson, 2008).

Given Douglass Jr's (2007) view that, "Statistically speaking any show derived from another medium with the sole purpose of being a marketing tool is going to fail […] to do anything other than sell toys", *SatAM* "remained pretty steadfast about whom its target audience was". Yet *SatAM* faced the pressure of competing "against the white-hot *Power Rangers*" and was frequently pre-empted for Saturday morning sports, making a very inconsistent broadcast schedule (Hurst, 2007). Re-runs increased *SatAM*'s exposure but, when ABC replaced the head of children's programming at the end of that year, "*Sonic* was just simply taken off the slate" (ibid).

Hurst (quoted by PorpoiseMuffins, 2010) attributed this to Sonic "never [generating] the big numbers that keep a show on the air", despite a "core of steadfast fans", because of *SatAM*'s "lackluster marketing". These pressures meant that *SatAM* never "generated a "Ninja Turtles" or "Power Rangers" type of popularity required to keep network executives interested" and *SatAM* ended on a cliffhanger, despite the cast and crew "anticipating doing a third season" (ibid). Hurst, left especially

disappointed, openly shared his grandiose plans for *SatAM*'s third season and encouraged petitions for *SatAM*'s return before his unfortunate passing in 2010 (Oliver, 2010; PorpoiseMuffins, quoting Hurst, 2010). However, the closest *SatAM* fans would get to actually seeing these ideas come to fruition would either be through fan-made works or similar storylines in Archie's *Sonic*.

Japan juxtaposed *Adventures* and *SatAM* with a two-part *Sonic* OVA in 1996, *Journey to Eggmanland* (Ikegami, 1996) and *Sonic vs. Metal Sonic* (ibid). Visually resembling *Sonic CD*'s impressive anime sequences*,* and loosely adapting its plot, the OVA was initially exclusive to Japan was to be the first of an ongoing series. However, according to Hazeldine (2014: 55), "this venture underperformed due to public indifference rather than managerial timidity, and no further episodes of the show were produced".

Many international audiences were unaware of its existence before ADV Films "finally released [it on VHS] outside Japan on September 8, 1999, to roughly coincide with the release of the Dreamcast" as *Sonic the Hedgehog: The Movie* (Sonic HQ, 2014). Sonic (Masami Kikuchi/Martin Burke), Tails (Hekiru Shiina/Lainie Fraiser), and, making his animated debut, Knuckles (Yasunori Matsumoto/Bill Wise), were lured into a trap by Doctor Robotnik (Junpei Takiguchi/Edwin Neal), now resembling his videogame depictions as a devious but somehow loveable mad scientist, and forced to fight Hyper Metal Sonic.

While *Sonic the Hedgehog: The Movie* did receive a VHS and DVD release, copies are becoming increasingly difficult to obtain; recently, both the Region 1 and Region 2 editions have dramatically increased in price (Amazon.com, 2016; Amazon.co.uk, 2016). This is unfortunate given Sonic HQ's (2014) belief that, unlike its Western counterparts, the *Sonic* OVA better captures the spirit and character of the

videogames despite significant deviations. An online article for Retro Junk by "WinegumZero" (2010) characterises Sonic as not just cocky, but also extremely arrogant, surprisingly lazy, quick to anger, and uncouth, something the "current gen Sonic games seem to forget and this film illustrates perfectly". While still heroic, Sonic prefers to wait until the very last second, or needs considerable persuasion, to act; Sonic desires challenge and, without it, is mainly lethargic. This is best depicted in his intense and escalating battle with Metal Sonic wherein Sonic's stupor gives way to a passionate desire to defend his pride and identity

Similarly, Tails' high intellect and mechanical ability mean "people often tend to forget that he's 5 years old, Sonic included" (ibid). Thus, while Pétronille and Audureau (2012: 227) observe that Tails proactively urges Sonic to help others and is "a little calmer and more controlled", he is also afraid of lightning and "often throws tantrums when Sonic is reluctant to help" (WinegumZero, 2010). Unlike other animated depictions, Tails is more Sonic's equal – he presumably augmented their South Island home (clearly evoked in *Sonic Adventure*), easily repairs the *Tornado*, effortlessly modifies a wrist-mounted navigator to partially reprogram Metal Sonic, and is far less reliant on Sonic.

Similarly, Robotnik is less a bumbling fool or tyrannical dictator and more akin to his videogame counterpart, being "Scary smart, strangely childish, scheming and deceptive till the end, and […] a complete egomaniac and megalomaniac" (ibid). Indeed, Pétronille and Audureau (2012: 239) note that the OVA showcases Robotnik's "clown-like character, showing his human side despite his evil plans". In comparison, Knuckles is portrayed as "Sonic's best friend" and the two have a very amicable friendly rivalry. Unlike modern depictions, which caricature Knuckles as either a gullible fool or a volatile muscle-head, here Knuckles is "Street-wise,

dexterous, and […] rational" (WinegumZero, 2010); though he also has a temper, Knuckles is competitive, loyal, and deeply knowledgeable about Planet Freedom. Some of these aspects reappear in *Sonic Adventure*, where Knuckles has a philosophical, almost pacifist mentality alongside his gullible and brash nature.

The OVA is also populated by bizarre original characters; the President (Yuzuru Fujimoto/Edwin Neal) sends assignments to Sonic and Tails through Old Man Owl (Chafurin/Charles Campbell). Writing for T.H.E.M. Anime Reviews, Tim Jones (2013) describes Old Man Owl as a "typical clueless guy" who provides brief comic relief. Jones continues to state that the "whiny and overprotective" President is powerless against Robotnik (ibid), while his daughter, Sara (Mika Kanai/Sascha Biesi), exists simply to further the plot by acting as the love interest of both Sonic (who only agrees to save the planet when Sara asks) and Robotnik (who wishes to marry her). Though her feisty and demanding temperament makes her more than a simple damsel-in-distress, her pseudo-anthropomorphic design, which incorporates "cat ears and a monkey tail", seems an awkward inclusion (ibid).

Unlike its American counterparts, the OVA featured a fairly simplistic story, but one given greater depth by its diagetic world. While some exposition exists regarding Planet Freedom and its two opposing "dimensions", it is clearly not Earth, Mobius, or the Japanese videogame world either, despite its aesthetic resemblances. Instead, Planet Freedom is a post-apocalyptic alternate Earth where some calamity has caused the planet's surface to break away and reduced the lower surface to ruins. Accordingly, WinegumZero (2010) describes the OVA's visuals and scenery as "nothing short of amazing [and truly looking] like the levels featured in the Sonic games". This, coupled with the OVA's musical composition, evokes *Sonic*'s spirit in a way that its counterparts failed to do; by appropriating numerous anime tropes and

conventions, "characters act the way you expect them to and the action is fast-paced and fitting" (ibid).

Fittingly, given that Toei Animation produced *Sonic CD*'s animated sequences that clearly influence the OVA's animation, Sonic's action sequences recall *Dragonball Z*, with Sonic's rescue of Old Man Owl perfectly showcasing Sonic's speed and agility in ways not seen in Western *Sonic* cartoons. As Jones (2013) aptly states, "considering the low-budget look and feel of the movie, General Entertainment Co. Ltd. kept true to the Sonic spirit as much as possible, and the Sonic cast look almost exactly like the art from Sonic 3 shows them".

Indeed, OVA criticism generally focuses on the English voice acting; rather than spouting endless quips, Sonic's tone awkwardly changes pitch compared to Jaleel White's work. Similarly, Tails often speaks incoherently and Robotnik adopts "an annoying German accent" (ibid). Ironically, the OVA has been referred to as "one of the *better* dubs from ADV's Monster Island recording studio" (ibid). Given that it was also ADV's "first dub of a kids' anime", there are a few alterations from the original Japanese version, mostly relating to swearing and rude gestures, though some examples did surprisingly slip through (ibid).

Being so obscure, the OVA's influence on *Sonic* canon remains largely minor; though briefly referenced in Archie's comics (Bollers, *et al*, 2001: 1-17; Penders, *et al*, 2004: 14-26), its primary influence was in bridging the silent, regionally-conflicted videogames of the nineties videogames to Sonic's vocal 3D incarnation. Jones (2013) emphasises that the OVA's flaws come from being a poor dub rather than the quality of the anime; yet, interestingly, though it has the high-quality whitewash of respected Japanese anime to bolster its critical reception, *Sonic The Hedgehog: The Movie* remains almost as separate from its source material as any of the American

animations, though ironically is able to better convey the essence of said source material better than any *Sonic* animation produced throughout the nineties.

With the OVA relatively obscure, the slapstick nature of *Adventures*, and the widespread production of *SatAM* both on American television and in comic books, *SatAM* unsurprisingly emerges the dominant of these three adaptations. *SatAM*'s presentation significantly differed from anything presented in, and outside of, the videogames but came to define the franchise for the longest time, especially as Sonic was largely absent during the 32-bit videogame era. Even now it is difficult to separate *SatAM*'s influences from Sonic's depictions, especially given the multiple allusions that arise within both videogames and the modern Archie comic books.

2.5 International Multimedia

This section details Sonic's international adaptations once his onscreen animated presence dwindled after *SatAM*'s cancellation. Herein, I further explore *SatAM*'s popularity and influence alongside SEGA's attempt to consolidate Sonic's multiple conflicting interpretations into an international franchise, which further divided *Sonic*'s canon within both the fan community and the franchise itself.

Following *SatAM*'s cancellation, TMS Entertainment, a Japanese animation studio subcontracted to assist with *Adventures* (Sega Retro, 2012), produced a short *Sonic* animation for *Sonic Jam* (Sonic Team, 1997), but Sonic remained off television until 1999, when SEGA commissioned DiC to produce another *Sonic* cartoon to promote the Dreamcast's impending release. First premiering in France as *Sonic le Rebelle*, producer Robby London explained in an interview for *Sonic Underground*'s DVD set that the cartoon was a "completely new […] music-driven show" inspired by

the success of "*Alvin and the Chipmunks*, which [DiC] had produced for a while"
(London, 2008).

Former *SatAM* writer Ben Hurst (quoted by PorpoiseMuffins, 2010) believed
this approach intentionally sabotaged a continuation of *SatAM* because DiC could
make "deals with songwriters to split or sign over the rights to their compositions"
(similar to how DiC forced "the writers and story editors to sign over all rights to their
stories"), allowing DiC to recoup all residual payments – "even the royalties set aside
for creative people in Europe (based on blank videotape and audio cassette sales)".
London (2008) admitted that DiC were specifically planning to transplant *Alvin*'s
formula into *Sonic* but "make it a little darker, and a little more rock-orientated",
though claimed that "the germ of the idea [came] from [Executive Producer] Andy
[Heyward]". With this basic concept established, London and his producers "[threw]
around ideas for an origin story, and what the lore would be", which was adapted into
a series bible by Phil Harnage (ibid).

Rather than integrate former *SatAM* staff, "a DIC story editor" instead invited
them to "a [writer's] cattle call"; while Hurst initially refused, he was enticed by the
guarantee of "at least a few episodes" (ibid). Ironically, the writers were shown a
first-season episode of *SatAM* "to "illustrate the background" of the characters",
before *Underground*'s premise was explained and Hurst and Pat Allee were invited to
"write the pilot episode" (ibid). After SEGA read their script, Hurst and Allee
replaced the story editor and were forced to work alongside "another team of story
editors", who were soon replaced by "a few fledgling writers" (ibid). Nevertheless,
Hurst attempted to "embrace the spirit of the original SatAm characters" by inviting
Len Janson to contribute and attempting "to incorporate as much of the humor, wit,
action and adventure of the original Sonic SatAm continuity as [they] could" (ibid).

Sonic Underground, despite aesthetically resembling *SatAM*, re-imagined Sonic as one of three royal prodigies. Alongside his sister Sonia and brother Manic (all voiced by Jaleel White), Sonic travelled a Mobius now terrorised by Doctor Robotnik's (Gary Chalk) military, political, and economic power. Sonic and his siblings formed a travelling rock band, openly opposing Robotnik whilst vainly searching for their missing mother (and Mobius's true ruler), Queen Aleena (Gail Webster),[17] and taught social and moral lessons through rock songs. *Sonic Underground* ran for forty episodes between 1999 and 2000, though Sonic HQ (2014) states the cartoon "had an extremely limited release in syndication - in many large areas of North America, it never went on the air, and those stations that did show it played its 40 episodes out of order".

Like *SatAM*, *Underground* abruptly ended with no resolution; Archie's Ian Flynn (cited by Oliver, 2013) claimed that Archie's planned epilogue was indefinitely postponed because *Underground*'s canon is "not [allowed] to mix in–not even as a one-off", potentially because, although a "small but loyal fan base" existed, "many Sonic fans [disliked *Underground*]" (Sonic HQ, 2014). Hurst attributes this to DiC "racing through the series at 2 episodes a week - an insane pace and one calculated to maximize their profits", meaning Hurst struggled to establish a definitive lore and was "unable to tie everything together" (PorpoiseMuffins, quoting Hurst, 2010). *SatAM*'s influence permeates *Underground*, however, particularly in the (sometimes multiple) story-arcs: several episodes focus on Sonia and Manic's temptation to return to their previous lives and Sonic's aquaphobia.

Underground loses Tails in favour of previously-unseen siblings alongside several original characters and what GamesRadar (2012) called an "overly complex

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[17] As a result, the siblings' father is never mentioned. The fan website Manic Panic (2010) notes that the original French opening song mentions that "the throne is kingless", potentially because London "never really gave thought to […] who Sonic's father is" (London, 2008).

plot". Reviewing *Underground*'s DVD box set for DVD Talk, David Cornelius

(2008) believed *Underground*'s concepts – such as the siblings wielding magical

medallions that transformed into weaponised musical instruments – were "a testament

to how quickly children can pick up on such wildly overstuffed mythologies".

However, *Underground* boiled down to the same simple premise as its predecessor –

"on a bad planet ruled by a bad guy, Sonic and pals fight back", with the morally-

guided rock songs attempting to provide a fresh angle (ibid). While this makes for

"unmemorable, generic" adventures that are "too repetitive, too loud, and too flimsy,

with limp jokes, obnoxious characters and mediocre cost-cutting animation" (ibid),

some variations exist, notably the arcs involving the Chaos Emeralds and Knuckles

(Brian Drummond), whose four episode appearances (three being directly episodic)

loosely adapt *Sonic 3 & Knuckles* and even foreshadow *Sonic Adventure*.[18]

Unlike his OVA incarnation, Knuckles is the traditional last-surviving echidna

and Floating Island guardian; he is easily tricked, initially-antagonistic, a formidable

fighter and skilled hunter, habitually avoids the affairs of outsiders, and has intricate

knowledge of the Chaos Emeralds. Again, contrary to his modern depictions as a

gullible meat-head, Knuckles is largely a pacifist, fighting only to protect his home

and, eventually, his friends. Unlike *SatAM*'s semi-cybernetic dictator, Robotnik

favours political, social, and financial methods alongside mechanical pawns.

Robotnik spares Mobians as long as they swear allegiance, and make regular financial

contributions, to his empire, and is both a corrupt politician and a maniacal dictator.

Underground depicts Sonic much like his *SatAM* counterpart: he was raised by

his "Uncle" Chuck (Maurice LaMarche), a *SatAM* mainstay, to be the Freedom

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[18] 'Friend or Foe?' (Boreal, *et al*, 1999) depicts Robotnik's plot to steal the Chaos Emerald and
Knuckles learning to trust the heroes. The titular, Death Egg-like 'Flying Fortress' (ibid) is powered by
a Chaos Emerald, and 'New Echidna in Town' (ibid) tests Knuckles' loyalties, echoing *Sonic 3 &
Knuckles*. Characters also refer to "Chaos" as the destructor of Mobius and Chaos Energy transforms
Dingo (Peter Wilds) into a mindless beast, similar to *Sonic Adventure*.

Fighter's "secret weapon". Having anonymously plagued Robotnik for a year prior to the first episode, Sonic is the only one of the siblings actively involved in the resistance movement from the beginning, while the others must suffer the roboticization of their loved ones to oppose Robotnik. Notably, Sonic also exhibits an almost crippling aquaphobia in a very literal adaptation of Sonic's notoriously poor swimming skills.[19]

Beyond wildly deviating from the source material and *SatAM*'s lore, *Underground*'s greatest notoriety is its musical numbers. As he explains in his interview for *Sonic Underground*'s DVD set, episodes were frequently storyboarded around Mike Piccirillo's songs; while "the writers usually said in the script [that] the song should say something about […] whatever the lesson was, whatever the moral was", Piccirillo was free to incorporate a range of musical styles and sounds (Piccirillo, 2008). Consequently, "Every episode includes one jingly pop tune, late-90s versions of what kids might find rockin' [and] parents will find […] insufferable" (Cornelius, 2008).

Robby London himself wrote the title song (London, 2008), which accompanies the opening animation sequence in "recapping the convoluted backstory with a flair for hard rock sincerity", much like *SatAM*'s opening sequence (Cornelius, 2008). While Jaleel White flexed his acting abilities by providing three distinct voices for Sonic and his siblings, "he wasn't really a singer", necessitating the commonplace use of vocal sound-a-likes for *Underground*'s musical pieces (London, 2008). Ben Hurst (quoted by PorpoiseMuffins, 2010) admitted that he was "surprised it's as good as it is" in retrospect; while he believed *Underground* yielded "mixed

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[19] In the videogames, Sonic sinks "right to the bottom of any body of water he enters. In order to breathe, Sonic must find air bubbles" (Pétronille and Audureau, 2012: 225) because Yuji Naka mistakenly believed that hedgehogs could not swim (Kelly, 2009).

results", there were "certain episodes and sequences and dialogue exchanges that [he was] very proud of".

While Hurst believed that the "biggest boost […] was that, with only a very few exceptions, we were able to assign scripts out to very experienced writers", he also openly apologised for disappointing fans of *SatAM* (ibid). Ultimately, "Rebooting the entire franchise was a bold risk" given *SatAM*'s popularity (Cornelius, 2008), a revival of which Hurst (quoted by PorpoiseMuffins, 2010) believed was a potential "gold mine". Robby London admitted to having "a particular affinity for *Sonic Underground*" simply because he wrote the title theme (London, 2008). However, *Underground* remains one of the more unusual *Sonic* adaptations because, while most fans were uncomfortable with the many changes to not just the source material but *SatAM*'s lore, *Underground* did "win a small but loyal cult following" for its unique slant (Cornelius, 2008). Yet, overall, despite "all the cleverness that went into crafting an all-new backstory, the episodes themselves are uninspired" and *Underground* fails to surpass its predecessor (ibid).

Tellingly, *Sonic Underground* barely influences *Sonic* canon, featuring only briefly in Archie's *Sonic* (Slott, *et al*, 2011: 10-34; Penders, *et al*, 2004: 18-25; ibid, 2004: 13-20). Instead, *Underground* shows that a successful adaptation, however dissimilar it may be from its source material, does not always generate a successful, sequential franchise. While it is interesting that DiC never sought to capitalise on *SatAM*'s cliffhanger, especially given the sequential nature of their earlier *Super Mario Bros.* cartoons, Robby London (2008) claims that "It's very rare in animation for you to end something because […] you're sort of cutting off your own nose if you write an ending on episode 26 and then a miracle happens and somebody wants another 26 […] So there was never really any thought given to writing [a finale]".

With Sonic largely absent during the 32-bit era, and SEGA eventually eliminated from hardware manufacturing (Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter, 2009: 74), re-runs of Sonic's nineties cartoons perpetuated a rapidly outdated visage of SEGA's mascot. Bozon (2007) believes that, consequently, Sonic's cartoons quickly joined the infamous genre of "franchises that seemed cool when you watched them decades ago, but in all reality bring the "suck" every second of every minute of *every* freaking episode".

Yet these re-runs maintained Sonic's presence in the cultural consciousness: "children's animation […] doesn't die. There are generations […] that will watch episodes of *Sonic The Hedgehog* and it has a shelf life that's almost forever" (White, 2007). However, *Sonic Adventure 2: Battle* (Sonic Team, 2002), *Sonic Adventure DX: Director's Cut* (Sonic Team, 2004), and *Sonic Heroes* proved to SEGA that Sonic still equalled success amongst gamers (Pétronille and Audureau, 2012: 79/81) and, to coincide with these titles, SEGA commissioned TMS Entertainment to create a brand new Japanese *Sonic* anime. *Sonic X* (2003-2006) initially appeared to be the most faithful of all *Sonic* adaptations (GamesRadar_US, 2012); the original Japanese pilot depicted Sonic, Tails, Knuckles, and all their post-*Adventure* friends battling Doctor Eggman, Shadow, and Rouge on a planet of anthropomorphs.

Sonic X carried an air of authenticity simply for being a Japanese animation, indicating the prestige of Japanese anime lends. Indeed, Allison (2004: 34/37) relates that, after decades of American dominance over "mass fantasies for children with worldwide cachet", Japan's cultural power has come to be "recognized and spread around the world". Allison (while citing Kondō, ibid: 37) closely associates Japan's growing influence with "the circulation of its (entertainment or recreational) goods overseas. Products […] are the currency by which Japanese culture enters the United

States". Crucial to this was the "cultural presence on the global scene through the export of *anime*" and videogames; anime first became internationally successful with *Akira* (Otomo, 1988), and "the quality and allure of "Japanimation" has been increasingly acknowledged" ever since (Iwabuchi, 2004: 53).

Unlike DiC's previous efforts, Hazeldine (2014: 75) notes that "Sega's involvement [with *Sonic X*] was extensive, with […] Yuji Naka undertaking promotional duties for the project". However, *Sonic X* was localised by 4Kids, who had previously worked on *Pokémon* (Tobin, 2004: 3) and, like *Pokémon*, its translation was "under the control of Americans" (Iwabuchi, 2004: 69), notably Michael Haigney – who, in an interview with David Rasmussen (2006) for the website Anime Boredom, admitted he had "never played [a *Sonic*] game, seen the series or read the comics" – Julie Rath, and Jordan Podos. After receiving translations of *Sonic X*'s original scripts, 4Kids eliminated or otherwise replaced any "Japanese puns and cultural references that would be meaningless to a U.S. audience", in addition to replacing "all music and [creating] many new sound effects" and correcting lip synching (ibid).

Katsuno and Maret (2004: 96) explain how 4Kids notoriously removed Japanese cultural references in *Pokémon*; anything that marked it as "as a distinctly Japanese space were muted, softened, removed, or obscured […] The most obvious and consistent [being] the removal of Japanese signage and lettering. Overt visual references to Japanese culture, daily life, and diet were often eliminated or deemphasized in the editing process".

Such localisation pressures are commonplace, especially in early anime localisations; *Nausicaä* lost "Almost half an hour of exposition and character development" to emphasise "only the action-adventure aspects of the story", which

producer Isao Takahata (quoted by McCarthy, 1999: 78/79) claimed was "absolutely horrible! […] All these movies are grounded strongly in Japanese culture and are not made with an eye to export. Censoring them is worse than betraying them". Haigney (quoted by Rasmussen, 2006), stated that, while their licensers are not necessarily trying to make Japanese-centric shows, "certain references and behaviors that are strange to U.S. viewers are in these series simply because they are part of the collective experience of the Japanese creators who, most times, intend to create "universal" characters and situations, albeit for, primarily, Japanese viewers", and emphasised that he had "nothing against this, but [his] job [was] to remake these series for a mass U.S. audience".

Additionally, as *Sonic X* was broadcast on Fox Box in America, 4Kids were bound by the Fox Broadcast Standards and Practices, which forbade "smoking, firing realistic weapons and, generally, any kind of violence that would be easy for kids to imitate" in accordance with the Federal Communications Commission (ibid). Therefore, "scenes containing the threat of violence [are] often altered or eliminated [as] Violence on children's television programming has long been a source of controversy and even panic in the United States" (Katsuno and Maret, 2004: 89). Haigney agreed, disliking "realistic violence in the context of kids' cartoons" (Rasmussen, quoting Haigney, 2006); however, unlike *Pokémon* (Serebii, 2014), no full episodes of *Sonic X* were omitted due to content violations.

Haigney (quoted by Rasmussen, 2006) recognised that "many fans of the Japanese series vilify 4Kids for changing the content", but maintained that "the changes we make […] have nothing to do with a capricious desire to "ruin" or "destroy" them, as some "purists" seem to feel", and simply explained that, "Our

sensibilities can be different from the Japanese. The U.S. is a larger, more culturally

diverse country with more, varied sensitivities to contend with" (ibid).

The website Anime News Network (2014) lists *Sonic X* as debuting in Japan

on April 6, 2003 and in America the following August; while concluding at episode

52 in Japan, poor ratings meant the next 26 episodes, despite being produced in Japan,

would only air internationally (Jones, 2014). Nevertheless, at 78 episodes, *Sonic X* is

"the longest running Sonic TV series" (Sonic HQ, 2014); however, *Sonic X*

underwent some overhauls since the original pilot. Sonic (Junichi Kanemaru/Jason

Griffith) and his friends now came to Earth from an unnamed planet, befriended a

lonely rich boy and his friends, fought Doctor's Eggman's (Chikao Ōtsuka/Mike

Pollock) mechanical creations, and sought to return home. As Jones (2013) observed,

unlike its predecessors, *Sonic X* incorporated every post-*Sonic Adventure* character,

utilised gameplay elements, and featured "an actual, ongoing plot" throughout its run.

A major complaint against *Sonic X*'s revised synopsis stemmed from an

increasing dislike for Sonic's supporting cast – "Knuckles and Amy Rose signified

the start of a worrying trend towards unnecessary, annoying new characters that

would only get worse as the years went by" (ibid, 2011: 27) – and the inclusion of not

only human characters, but human children (GamesRadar_US, 2012). Largely

superseding Sonic's videogame cohorts are Chris Thorndyke (Masakazu

Morita/Michael Sinterniklaas) and various clichéd characters, including the

"stereotypical Japanese butler and stereotypical black maid […] who, of course, is

fat" (Jones, 2014). While these characters are largely inconsequential and

unobtrusive, Chris, an "obnoxious […] dull, boring, uninspired character[, ...] serves

to slow down the pace of the series and point the obvious to the audience" (ibid)

rather than acting as an audience surrogate.

Similar to Ash Ketchum in *Pokémon*'s early seasons, Chris is young, untested, and immature; his character arc involves learning to be mature and self-reliant. Applying Buckingham and Sefton-Green's (2004: 20) examination of Ash, Chris also has to "repeatedly [learn] from his experiences, and from the advice of his elders and betters"; by the episode 'Friends 'Til the End' (Kamegaki, 2004), Chris can admit his fears and "overcome his impulsive and emotional side and learn self-control" to allow Sonic and his friends to return home (ibid). Yet, the following episodes, 'A New Start' (Kamegaki, 2005) and 'A Cosmic Call' (ibid), reveal that Chris never truly learnt this lesson, as he spends six years working to travel to Sonic's world and rekindle their friendship. The only consolation is Chris's improved depiction for the final 26 episodes; although the journey regresses Chris to a boy, he retains the intellect and maturity of his eighteen-year-old self and is a far more competent and useful character than in earlier episodes.

While many early episodes quickly became formulaic, *Sonic X* integrated its original characters into adaptations of the *Sonic Adventure* videogames and *Sonic Battle* (Sonic Team, 2004), and appropriated many elements from *Sonic Heroes* and *Shadow the Hedgehog* (SEGA Studio USA, 2005), making it the first *Sonic* animation to incorporate narrative videogame elements. Concurrently, the videogame characters, who, despite often being relegated to "tag-along characters (along with Chris) on Sonic's misadventures" (Jones, 2014), generally mirror their *Adventure* counterparts: Tails (Ryo Hirohashi/Amy Palant) has a small role as the team's mechanic and pilot, Knuckles (Nobutoshi Kanna/Dan Green) is mostly a loner but exhibits his now-stereotypical temper, and Amy is suitably obsessed with Sonic and shopping. As a relatively new character at the time, Cream's (Sayaka Aoki/Rebecca Honig) personality as the young, innocent pacifist is largely defined by *Sonic X*, while

Rouge's (Rumi Ochiai/Kathleen Delaney) is actually expanded upon through her pivotal recurring role.

Similarly, while initially depicted exactly as in *Sonic Adventure 2*, Shadow's later appearances transplant the alien origins of his videogame counterpart to explore Shadow's conflicting personality. While suffering amnesia and having been rescued from death by Eggman, as in *Sonic Heroes* and *Shadow*, Shadow often sides with Eggman and attacks the protagonists, though his actions just as often aid the heroes, rendering him more of an anti-hero.[20] While Eggman retains his *Adventure*-era depiction, eschewing the sadistic dictator mould in favour of a mad scientist suffering from a severe personality disorder, Sonic loses much of Jaleel White's attitude.

In the earlier episodes, "Sonic only shows up at the beginning and ending of each episode for the most part, only showing himself […] when Eggman's robot of the day needs to be destroyed" (ibid). Rather than being a cheeky, arrogant speedster, *Sonic X* depicts Sonic as extremely blasé and far more courteous towards others, especially Cream, and far more likely to spout positive advice than sarcastic comments. Indeed, the only characters he mocks are Knuckles, Shadow, and Eggman, whom he enjoys goading into, or while, fighting. While Sonic's aquaphobia returns, his natural abilities are wildly inconsistent: Sonic can move faster than sight but largely relies on Gold Rings to destroy Eggman's creations. While *SatAM*-Sonic gained a boost from Power Rings, he did not rely on them, whereas *X*-Sonic's solution to "any problem involving any of Eggman's robots" is simply to grab a Gold Ring and spin through them (ibid). While this Sonic does not hesitate to stand up to oppression and craves adventure, he is just as likely to take a nap or pick flowers (ibid).

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[20] Similar to *Shadow the Hedgehog*, where Shadow often aids both to achieve his own goals, Shadow's amnesia and angst culminate in an extremely volatile individual who, over the remainder of *Sonic X*, once again must learn to accept his destiny as a saviour rather than a destroyer of worlds.

Despite the animation quality and the heavy emphasis on incorporating gameplay elements, *Sonic X* was ultimately a "human character tagged on to a show that masquerades as Sonic The Hedgehog" and removed everything likeable "about [Sonic's] character", proving "a disappointment to the Sonic name [...] that would be totally looked over if it wasn't for the word "Sonic" in its title" (ibid). Conrad Zimmerman (2010), writing for the website Destructoid, targeted "the horrible localization that American audiences experienced" for *Sonic X*'s issues, which was somewhat allayed when uncut, subtitled episodes were made available through the online videostreaming service Hulu in 2010. Michael Haigney (quoted by Rasmussen, 2006) asserted that, "4Kids has probably brought more anime to more viewers than any company in the world. It may not always be in the way some fans would like, but I think 4Kids has contributed greatly to the interest and availability of anime worldwide".

While *Sonic X* had little influence on *Sonic* canon, inspiring a short-lived Archie comic, it fundamentally changed the videogames by replacing their voice actors with those from *Sonic X* to create brand consistency (Seriously Funny, 2010). This decision polarised fans on The Sonic Stadium (ChaosIncarnate, *et al*, 2014), especially as long-standing Sonic voice Ryan Drummond was unceremoniously replaced despite attempting to accommodate 4Kids' agenda (Drummond, 2004). Even when SEGA replaced the cast again in 2010, with the exception of Mike Pollock (Shadzter, 2010), these debates continued, proving the fickle and divisive nature of the fan community (ChaosIncarnate, *et al*, 2014). Despite this, SEGA's bold attempts to create consistency in one of videogaming's most inconsistent franchises are best illustrated by *Sonic X*, which sought to broaden Sonic's appeal to a new generation of

viewers perhaps more susceptible to accepting his modern depiction, which now

visually and vocally resembled the character seen in *Sonic X*.

2.6 Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, I explore Sonic's inability to recapture the success he found

in the nineties on modern consoles and SEGA's continued attempts to expand Sonic

into multimedia productions. Since *Sonic X*'s conclusion, SEGA focused on

celebrating Sonic's 15th anniversary with 2006's *Sonic The Hedgehog* on PlayStation

3 and Xbox 360 which, with its intentionally-realistic aesthetic, "was developed as if

it was the very first episode of Sonic" (Pétronille and Audureau, quoting Naka, 2012:

82). Unfortunately, Pétronille and Audureau (ibid: 84) relate that a rushed

development schedule caused Naka to leave SEGA, and left the title buggy and

defective, meaning *Sonic (2006)* received "the worst reception of any game in the

long-running franchise".

  With Sonic's reputation once again in question, Sonic Team endeavoured to

make amends with *Sonic Unleashed* (Sonic Team, 2008); lacking the time constraints

of its predecessor, *Sonic Unleashed* garnered far more favourable reviews despite the

criticisms of its Werehog mechanics (ibid: 84/86).[21] To accompany *Sonic Unleashed*,

SEGA commissioned a short CGI movie to be streamed from the videogame's official

website (Dreadknux, 2008). Developed by SEGA's resident CGI development team,

Marza Animation Planet (then known as SEGA VE Animation Studio), *Sonic: Night*

of the Werehog (Nakashima, 2008) became the first direct tie-in to an existing *Sonic*

videogame. *Night of the Werehog*'s high-quality presentation soon became a staple of

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[21] "[*Sonic Unleashed*] was divided into […] the daytime stages were Sonic kept his usual appearance
and sped through the levels, and the nighttime stages where he turned into a werehog to fight with his
arms and legs, like in many action games" (Pétronille and Audureau, 2012: 85).

modern *Sonic* titles and inspired discussions, and rumours, of new adaptations that followed this aesthetic on The Sonic Stadium's forums (speedhog58, *et al*, 2014) and website (Street, 2009).

Rumours of a live-action, CGI, or hybrid *Sonic* movie have long persisted; Ben Hurst (quoted by TheAmazingSallyHogan, 2013) even attempted to collaborate with Ken Penders on a potential *SatAM* movie. However, after consulting Penders of his plan to "[interview SEGA's] game designers, execs, etc [to] develop a story line that would fulfill the third season - and simultaneously give them creative ideas to develop new games", Hurst received an angered response after Penders had related this "in a less-than-flattering way" (ibid). Penders, who believed that Hurst's plan was "unrealistic" as it amounted to receiving funding from SEGA (ibid), found his solo efforts equally in vain: despite claiming to have "made presentations to SEGA with favorable responses, and [assembling] a "pitch" rough draft of the plot, an outlined budget, production art, financial backers" and a producer/director in Larry Houston, the project never materialised as his plot was "seen as a "rival" to Sonic X" (ibid).

Since then, fans have attempted to produce their own *Sonic* adaptations, some of which are mentioned in Sonic Retro's (David The Lurker, 2013) review of the live-action/CGI hybrid short, *Sonic* (LeBron, 2013), which returned Jaleel White to his iconic role (T-Bird, 2013). Despite The Sonic Stadium reporting that the short gained "200,000 views" within 24 hours of its debut, *Sonic* met mixed response (ibid): while showcasing the potential of a live-action/CGI *Sonic* adaptation, with its plot largely

adapting *Sonic Adventure*, *SatAM*, and *Sonic*'s classic Western mythology,[22] the relatively poor performances and CGI effects were heavily criticised (ibid).

Recently, *Sonic Boom*, a 52-episode all-CGI animated show, attempted to further expand Sonic's multimedia presence (Hogfather, 2013). With such a short run-time devoted to each episode, *Sonic Boom*'s primary focus is humour and action rather than ongoing story-arcs and each episode tells a self-contained story. In this incarnation, Sonic (Roger Craig Smith) and his friends are joined by Sticks the Badger (Nikka Futterman), "a predominant character across both all aspects of the Sonic Boom franchise" (Hogfather, 2014), and live amongst a small village of minor supporting characters. Episodes generally focus on Eggman's attempts to defeat Sonic, though the two are portrayed as sharing a begrudging, friendly rivalry more than a deep-rooted hatred of each other.

While Boom includes *Sonic*'s contemporary voice actors (ibid, 2014), initial response was sceptical due to *Boom*'s dramatic character redesigns, which included a radical redesign of Knuckles (ibid). Bob Rafei (cited by Brad, 2014), co-founder and CEO of Big Red Button, the studio behind the Nintendo-exclusive videogames accompanying the cartoon, justified the redesigns as essential to "attracting people who had possibly never heard of--or knew little about—Sonic" (McGee, quoting Rafei, 2014) and giving each character "distinct shapes so you can quickly [internalize] the variety between them" (ibid). Furthermore, SEGA quickly emphasised that *Sonic Boom* would not supplant the existing *Sonic* canon, and instead function as a spin-off ancillary franchise intended to appeal to audiences beyond the videogames (Brad, 2014; Powell, quoting Frost, 2015).

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[22] Robotnik (DJ Hazard), formally Kintobor, is a self-styled dictator with a fleet of Egg Carriers and an army of E-100 Robots, who decimates South Island to eradicate anthropomorphs and roboticizes anyone who gets in his way in an appropriation of multiple *Sonic* storylines.

Despite the lacklustre reception of the accompanying videogames, producer Stephen Frost (quoted by Powell, 2015) believed that *Sonic Boom* successfully fulfilled these criteria based on the high sales of *Boom*-related merchandise and viewing figures, as opposed to sales figures of the tie-in videogames. Quite separately, SEGA also announced plans for an unrelated series of live-action/CGI hybrid *Sonic* movies (Brad, 2014; Hogfather, quoting Robichaux, 2014), which threatens to further disorganise the franchise. Indeed, Hazeldine (2014: 128) emphasises that the "realities of the global marketplace call for two radically different visions of Sonic, with Sonic Team's crusading animal-protector appealing to Japanese children [and] the travelling adventurer [being] better-placed to reach their western counterparts". *Sonic Generations* (Sonic Team, 2011) attempted to reconcile these two depictions in response to years of fan backlash against Sonic's modern interpretation, as illustrated in ScrewAttack's article by blogger HelloImEagle (2012).

This nostalgia for Sonic's glory days generated numerous ancillary products depicting classic *Sonic* characters alongside their modern equivalents, which now co-exist with not only *Sonic Boom* merchandise, but those based on *Sonic*'s multiple other spin-off titles (and, inevitably, alongside any merchandise to accompany the planned movies), resulting in not two but multiple marketplace visions of Sonic. With Sonic's animated exploits readily available to view, SEGA consistently re-releasing their popular titles (Bartman3010, 2013), and Archie's *Sonic* comics just as strong as ever, Sonic has arguably never been more inconsistent and accessible, in some form or another, than he is today.

Sonic thus illustrates not just the complexities of adaptation but also the multiple pressures – financial, contextual, fan-derived, and more – that are so prevalent in the videogame adaptations that are the focus of *Interplay*. While his

image and personality may alter and his supporting cast and narrative world may change, Pétronille and Audureau (2012: 217) emphasise that Sonic remains "one of gaming's most beloved series and SEGA's timeless mascot" who "quickly became the idol of a whole generation, standing in stark contrast to the soft and toned down image of Mario". Complex pressures and processes of adaptation transformed a simple one-button platformer with vague environmentalist themes into a vast, multifaceted multimedia franchise with several iterations and adaptations that have, over time, informed and intertwined with each other. This ultimately turned Sonic from a videogame icon to a cultural icon that remains steadfast and resilient no matter how many times his formula is transformed and adapted.

Chapter Three

Unifying Action and Culture through *Mortal Kombat*

Overview

In 1973, Bruce Lee's performance in *Enter the Dragon* popularised martial arts
cinema and inspired numerous tournament-based beat-'em-up videogames,
principally Capcom's *Street Fighter* and Midway's *Mortal Kombat*. In this chapter, I
explore the complex ways these franchises conform to filmic genres during their
adaptation to cinema and television. Although Paul W.S. Anderson's *Mortal Kombat*
adaptation evoked Hong Kong cinema for its cinematic debut, Steven E. de Souza's
Street Fighter adaptation embraced the exaggerated nature of American action films.
This chapter illustrates the cinematic precursors to, and briefly analyses the evolution
of, the modern beat-'em-up. I follow this with a detailed investigation of *Mortal
Kombat*'s various adaptations, specifically in relation to *Enter the Dragon*'s influence
on Anderson's film and in comparison to *Street Fighter*. This chapter primarily
investigates how videogames and films influence each other through intertextuality
and complex methods of adaptation.

3.1 Martial Arts Cinema

In this section, I briefly explore and examine the history of Hong Kong martial arts
cinema, the foremost precursor to the videogame beat-'em-up. The physical nature of
Hong Kong martial arts, which often heavily emphasised tournament-based
narratives, is a clear influence on many beat-'em-up videogames, and as such requires

analysis to highlight the intrinsic intertextual heritage of the beat-'em-up genre and

the adaptations that came out of it.

The most obvious link between Hong Kong martial arts cinema and

videogames is their inclination towards tournament structures, which allows fights to

be staged onscreen not merely for our viewing pleasure but as necessary narrative

components. These battles become a literal "game of death" based around

increasingly-difficult fights between diverse characters; Leon Hunt (2003: 192) states

that this allowed Hong Kong cinema and videogames to become related in their

"*affectivity* – their capacity to act directly on the body". Hunt (ibid) continues to

relate that, while most videogames feature variety, beat-'em-ups promise "relentless

excitation [and] constant gratification or its opposite, abject defeat [as] one's fallen

"digital selves" sink to their knees in humiliation".

Prior to the 1970s, the phrase 'kung fu' – which, as David West (2006: 87)

explains, "loosely means 'hard work' in Cantonese, but is commonly used to refer to

Chinese martial arts" – meant little to international audiences, who "were more

familiar with Japanese and Okinawan martial arts like Karate, Judo and Ju-Jitsu"

(Hunt, 2003: 1). Yet, ten years after Bruce Lee's *Chinese Gung Fu: The*

Philosophical Art of Self Defence was published in 1963, kung fu "was the name of a

television show, a genre, a pedagogic industry, the subject of comics, magazines and

other merchandising" (ibid). Martial arts films – or *wu xia pian* – typically use

martial arts (*wu*) to express chivalry (*xia*) (ibid, quoting Che: 6) and, as Craig D. Reid

(2010: 6/12) relates, have been produced in Hong Kong and other Asian territories

since 1905, with kung fu movies being around since 1949.

Many divide *wu xia pian* into two forms: the kung fu film and the swordplay

film; Hunt (citing Teo, 2003: 6) "suggests that *wu xia* has become synonymous with

the swordplay film", which favour "'Knight-Errants' and 'Lady Knights' in ancient dynasties" (ibid). Stephen Teo (2009: 1) explains that this form exists as "the oldest genre in the Chinese cinema that has remained popular to the present day"; kung fu films are the antithesis of swordplay films, featuring "more recent and comparatively realistic settings, favouring those that feature foreign aggressors" (Hunt, 2003: 7). Teo (2009: 2) elaborates:

> '*wuxia*' and 'kung fu' are genre-specific terms, while 'martial arts' is a generic term to refer to any type of motion picture containing martial arts action […] It is perhaps more useful to consider the martial arts cinema as a movement […], rather than a genre, we can then see more clearly how it engenders the genres of *wuxia* and kung fu and influences other genres

Bey Logan (1995: 9/10) details that Chinese martial arts films developed from traditional Peking Opera, which incorporated "extravagant costumes, bright full-face make-up, [and] Olympic-class gymnasts" with "a gruelling [training] process […] that left the performer well-equipped for the demands of kung fu film-making". Arguably, Peking Opera influenced kung fu films far greater than American film genres, like Westerns, as, after the Opera's popularity wavered during the 1940s and 1950s, "classically trained performers turned to the relatively new Hong Kong movie industry to make a living" (ibid: 9).

By 1966, Hong Kong film producers aimed to conquer Western cinema within five years (Hunt, citing Rayns, 2003: 3), and were effectively successful with *Five Fingers of Death* (Chung, 1972), internationally released as *King Boxer*. While "approximately three hundred kung fu films" were produced for international

audiences between 1971 and 1973 (ibid), many were "chaotic garbage" revealing little about China's history and culture (Meyers, *et al*, 1985: 45).

Conversely, Logan (1995: 15) states that *King Boxer* became "one of the most successful Chinese films released" internationally; by incorporating traditional sensibilities of American Westerns, *King Boxer* showcased that kung fu "should be used for righteous purposes and not for hurting" to international audiences for the first time, alongside extreme violence (Reid, 2010: 140). While *King Boxer* "was the first Chinese film to penetrate the American market", the legendary Bruce Lee spearheaded "the first Hong Kong production to become a commercial hit overseas" (Logan, 1995: 31).

Fists of Fury (Wei, 1971), internationally marketed as *The Big Boss*, introduced Lee to worldwide audiences, simultaneously launching a kung fu craze in the West and revitalising the industry in the East (Reid, 2010: 32). *The Big Boss* also displaced the *wuxia* genre by allowing Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan, and Sammo Hung to become international stars, and incorporating "contemporary forms and trends" into Hong Kong cinema in opposition to *wuxia*'s traditional, "historicist form" (Teo, 2009: 169). Teo (ibid: 5) also clarifies that, while *wuxia* traditionally emphasised "chivalry, altruism, justice and righteousness" and mythological or historical settings, kung fu films stressed "the training and techniques of martial arts".

Indeed, fist-fighting, kicking, "and even head-butting" challenged *wuxia* principles and kung fu therefore emphasised realistic action and application of martial arts, as opposed to *wuxia*'s more abstract and fantastical elements (ibid). Bruce Lee's skill and charisma represented this by embodying frantic, heavily-kinetic energy that was apparently without boundaries (Hunt, 2003: 17).

Logan (1995: 25) relates that Lee, who was born in America and raised in Hong Kong, starred in multiple black-and-white Hong Kong films before achieving notable international success as Kato in *The Green Hornet* (1966-1967). Lee applied many different martial arts styles into "his trans-cultural no-style Jeet Kune Do" (Hunt, 2003: 17), "a highly syncretic form of martial arts which 'synthesizes any skill functional and effective, regardless of cultural, national, sectarian boundaries'" (Teo, quoting Leung Li, 2009: 75). Thus, his fighting style showcased the very best of Chinese martial arts and broke martial arts cinema's *wuxia* mould in a purposely international way – while Lee's school of martial arts was not authentically "Chinese" (ibid), it was "mobilised *for* 'China'" (Hunt, 2003: 17).

Bruce Lee's tragic early death greatly contributed to his iconic status and, while many of his films fail as "examples of high cinematic art", he remains the quintessential "martial arts action star all others are compared to" (Logan, 1995: 23). This is due to the physical skill of his fight sequences (Lee was an exceptional fight choreographer) and his undeniable onscreen charisma – "Bruce Lee placed a new emphasis on individual, authentic virtuosity, displacing trampoline-aided stars […] and embodying the "stuntman as hero"" (Hunt, quoting Abbas, 2003: 23). Additionally, Lee's roles often exuded an intensity rarely matched by his peers: "Lee's 'presence' is attention-getting and sexually magnetic – the curled lip, smouldering stare or mocking smirk, his trademark gestures (thumbing the nose, his cocky 'bring it on' hand gesture to opponents)" (ibid: 43).

Bruce Lee's greatest contribution to martial arts cinema was the exceptionally influential *Enter the Dragon*, commonly referred to as the greatest martial arts movie ever made (Reid, 2010: 87). Producer Fred Weintraub adored Chinese martial arts films, especially "the last ten minutes, when the hero would take on an army of crooks

and defeat them all barehanded" (Meyers, *et al*, 1985: 24). He pushed *Enter the Dragon*'s production, a "$500,000-budgeted gasp of fresh air" in which "Bruce Lee officially [united] Hong Kong and Hollywood under the parasol of kung fu" (Reid, 2010: 87). Lee was reinvented for international appeal; while previously an "aggressively populist in his Hong Kong films", a "super-patriot" or "a fish-out-of-water country boy", his role as Lee, a Shaolin monk and comparatively meditative individual who could instantly become a "lethal whirlwind", made him a Shaolin philosophiser-come-avenger (Hunt, 2003: 67).[23]

Enter the Dragon's plot was "simplicity itself" (Meyers, *et al*: 1985: 24): Lee – alongside Roper (John Saxon), a gambler, and the arrogant Williams (Jim Kelly) – infiltrates a tournament to bring the host, Shaolin renegade Han (Shih Kien), to justice for criminal actions. Largely predictable due to the film's "dialogue and situations […] all [being] borrowed from 007 adventures" (ibid), West's (2006: 133) view is that *Enter the Dragon*'s "script and direction are dreadful, full of the worst American clichés and misconceptions concerning the Far East".

Logan (1995: 39), however, illustrates that the film primarily excels through Lee's intense choreography, which continued to impress during the eighties when "big-budget Hollywood productions [were] excellent in every aspect *apart* from their unarmed combat sequences". This simplicity allowed Lee's martial arts prowess and onscreen charisma to outshine the film's issues: "This was Lee's showcase […] every fault only served to bolster Lee's participation. He was truly the best thing about the movie […] it could not have been a better vehicle for him" (Meyers, *et al*, 1985: 28). Additionally, comparisons between Lee and Bond are eliminated by the conclusion,

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[23] *Kung Fu* (1972-1975) had previously introduced Shaolin monks "in the most positive way imaginable […] the true epitome of a martial artist who traditionally trains not to fight and learns to heal rather than hurt" (Reid, 2010: 142).

where Lee's motivations are revealed as revenge for his ancestors rather than espionage (ibid: 31).

After *Enter the Dragon*, Lee was nationally celebrated, becoming *the* hottest martial arts commodity (ibid: 32), despite being "Lee's least successful release in Hong Kong, where the Chinese didn't take kindly to the mangling of their culture" (West, 2006: 133). Unfortunately, six days before *Enter the Dragon*'s U.S. premiere, Bruce Lee died, and his legacy was somewhat tainted by the posthumous, butchered release of *The Game of Death* (Clouse, 1973). Previously, Lee produced between 40 and 90 minutes of film footage to address "his philosophy about the existence of martial arts" (Meyers, *et al*, 1985: 108). With Lee's untimely demise, stand-ins and reshoots began a period of what Reid (2010: 13) describes as "Bruceploitation, [where] a variety of actors that looked like Lee […] tried to act and fight like him".

Indeed, Lee "haunted" martial arts films for decades, and not just through "Leealikes" (Hunt, quoting Logan, 2003: 78; Logan, 1995: 24) – Hunt (2003: 78) reveals that Jackie Chan's early career was so dominated by director "Lo Wei's determination to package him as the 'new' Lee" that Chan eventually reinvented "himself as the antithesis of Lee (comic underdog, as opposed to macho superman)". Yet audiences flocked to *Game of Death*, and other inferior productions attempting to capitalise on Lee's legacy, purely "to see those precious 11 minutes and 32 seconds because at that time, who knew if there would ever be another opportunity to see them?" (Reid, 2010: 108).

Lee's legacy thus marks both the high and low point for martial arts cinema; his "presence and contribution created a sensation and instituted an American martial arts movie genre which became enfeebled after his death" (Meyers, *et al*, 1985: 236) to the point where, even now, "the average person in the street will cite 'Bruce Lee'

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when asked to name either a kung fu movie star or a famous martial artist" (Logan, 1995: 42). Simultaneously, as Reid (2010: 109) states, Lee's "name, films and images have largely been relegated to the dungeons of money and business for those who can tap into his success [with] *Game of Death* [being] a financial pawn in the Bruce Lee game of entertainment". During his career, Bruce Lee greatly contributed to establishing "a sense of pride and national identity" for China, in addition to "essentially [making] the martial arts film genre a worldwide phenomenon" (ibid).

Lee's largely-unmatched talent contributed to the West's inability to replicate his successes – "English-speaking filmmakers just aren't that good at this kind of […] moviemaking […] So what remains are people tearing at his legend with inferior product, misdirection, or outright deception" (Meyers, *et al*, 1985: 39). Bruce Lee's success is surprising, given that "anti-Asian sentiment had not been so high since World War II" during 1972, when the Vietnam War was well underway. Lee's heavy emphasis on kicking was unique at the time and "his dynamic facial contortions, rapid-fire punches, greased-lightning kicks and high-pitched phoenix screeches, […] single-handedly gave Chinese martial arts cinema legitimacy and the Chinese people an identity" (Reid, 2010: 87).

As in many martial arts films where wirework enables seemingly-superhuman kung fu, exaggeration is a key emphasis for beat-'em-ups, where blows send opponents reeling "into corkscrew spins" (Hunt, 2003: 191). Moreover, Hunt continues (ibid: 193), "Hong Kong choreography's rhythmic principles partially determine the role of combos in the more 'realist' fight games, those which downplay [anime] fantasy effects". This allows one to identify 'cheap' players who repeatedly use the same basic moves, and dedicated players who have mastered their avatar's move-set. Combos are analogous to wirework, which "is a reminder that not every

aspect of performance can be credited to the performer alone (or at all)" (ibid: 43), because of their "preset status – once an animation has started, it must be finished and there is no chance of either changing tactics or designing one's own combos" (ibid, quoting Poole: 193).

While Reid (2010: 87) believes that Bruce Lee may have done "more for spreading the world of martial arts throughout the world than anyone else in history" his films also popularised audience's appetite for violence and action. While Bruce Lee starred in videogames, either as himself or in thinly-veiled homage (Hunt, 2003: 191), whenever beat-'em-ups utilise combos they allow players to emulate Hong Kong martial arts stars like Jet Li as combos represent "the most choreographed' element in the game" (ibid). Consequently, Hong Kong action stars fit perfectly into tournament-based beat-'em-ups rather than action-orientated genres. Indeed, their few narrative elements are usually structured around characters competing to disrupt or destroy the tournament chief, usually for personal reasons. This pandering to audience's appetite for action and violence may have been laced with a sense of duty and chivalry in the East, but for the action genre of the West, particularly in the eighties, audiences were bombarded with a sensory overload that came only to be matched in action videogames.

3.2 The Action Genre

Contrasting Hong Kong martial arts cinema are the action movies of the West, particularly from Hollywood, and most popularly produced throughout the eighties. In this section, I briefly introduce the prevalent themes and popular writings and

theories surrounding these bombastic productions in order to emphasise their stark contrast to their Eastern counterparts.

While martial arts movies generally favour chivalrous, noble warriors seeking justice, the predominantly-muscular, sharp-witted action heroes of the West are as quick to act as they are to shoot, as Harvey O'Brien (2012: 1) explains:

> Action cinema is not about hesitation: it is about *taking* action. It is a cinema of will: the attempt to change the world, transcending the moral limits of a society that has failed its heroes […] Action heroes do not seek out adventure, they respond to dire necessity

Action movies typically feature hypermasculine stars using violence for redemption or vengeance and separated from "a morally justifiable framework such as legitimate warfare (the war movie), police procedure (the crime thriller) or the *realpolitik* of political revolution" (ibid: 1/2). Action movies are framed within a kinetic and visually-entertaining structure; the narrative is often as fast as the physical action, which dominates over dialogue, character development, or plot. Indeed, Barry Keith Grant (2007: 83) emphasises that the genre is geared towards the "the definition and display of male power and prowess".

Susan Jeffords (1994: 148) believes that, in the eighties and nineties, in a historical reflection of American culture, masculinity was "defined in and through the white male body and against the racially marked male body"; accordingly, Sylvester Stallone, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Bruce Willis, Jean-Claude Van Damme, among others, defined the action genre. Unlike their seventies predecessors, like Dirty Harry (Clint Eastwood), who were lone heroes "pitted against a widely corrupt society, the

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hard-body films of the 1980s [present] men who are pitted against bureaucracies that have lost touch with the people they are trying to serve, largely through the failure of bureaucrats themselves" (ibid: 19). For these heroes, the criteria was "more on musculature than Method acting" (Grant, 2007: 83) as they put their bodies on display and sacrificed them to conquer obstacles.

Conversely, early-nineties action films "repudiate many of the characteristics" of the action hard-body "—its violence, its isolation, its lack of emotion, and its presence—they do not challenge the whiteness of that body, nor the "special" figuration that body demands" (Jeffords, 1994: 148). These action films eschew racial mistreatment in favour of heaping mental, physical, and emotional burdens onto the white body (ibid). While Grant (2007: 83) explains that some view hypermasculinity "as an expression of American ideology regarding politics and gender, reasserting male power and privilege during and after the Reagan administration", Chris Holmlund (1993: 213) regards masculinity as a complex masquerade rather than mere performance, something which became increasingly important as the action genre – and its stars – evolved to reveal new sides of their personalities.

Accordingly, it has been noted that Schwarzenegger was once the "perfect embodiment" of excessive physicality; his status as a former bodybuilder lent him the qualities to be physically superior to other "lesser" men (Grant, 2007: 84). Additionally, following *Rocky* (Avildsen, 1976), some regard Stallone as personifying "unquestioned virility, unassailable heterosexuality, and a US might and right which is, most decidedly, white" for audiences worldwide, yet also as spearheading dramatic changes for the action hero by the late-eighties (Holmlund, 1993: 214).

Jeffords (1993: 245) notes that, in this time period, Hollywood approached masculinity "through spectacle and bodies, with the male body itself becoming often the most fulfilling form of spectacle". Jeffords also attributes the external spectacle of weapons, explosions, and car chases as emphasising the "volatility of this display", emphasising that the audience's "attention, desire, and politics" should focus on the hero, his body, and the trials they both undertake (ibid).

Consequently, Jeffords also explores the tendency to underemphasise the internal conflicts of eighties action heroes; very little of *First Blood*'s (Kotcheff, 1982) "film time [explores] Rambo's internal feelings" and the focus is less on his "emotional state than upon the externalization of those emotions as violent and destructive actions […] And the effect […] is less to comment on Rambo's state of mind than to transfer guilt for his mistreatment from the mall-town sheriff who harasses him to the society at large" (ibid: 246).

Jeffords further observed that eighties action sequels generally abandon even these "brief moments of emotional insight […] in favor of the externalized spectacle [and] more explosions, more killings, and more outright violence" (ibid). Yvonne Tasker (1993: 230) believed that Stallone, Bruce Willis, and Kurt Russell exemplify "an awareness of masculinity as performance", often portraying powerless action figures, devoid of resources, and enduring a cycle of suffering, often verging on torture, which "operates as both a set of narrative hurdles to be overcome, tasks that the hero must survive, and as a set of aestheticized images to be lovingly dwelt on" (ibid).

Comparatively, Van Damme showcased the more agile American action star, one whose strengths were in finesse and acrobatic martial arts as much as physical stature. Many of Van Damme's films showcase a repeating pattern to his feats that

involves "jumping, spinning kicks, all of which are performed with his right leg, never throws or complicated combinations, and […] the splits", which become his trademark fighting style even when portraying contrasting techniques like Muay Thai (West, 2006: 220).

O'Brien (2012: 45) examined the prominent inequality amongst masculine action heroes through the "qualitative difference [between] the hyperbolic, bemuscled […] Schwarzenegger body and the leaner, more agile […] Van Damme". Indeed, while themes of vengeance and physicality unite seventies and nineties action stars, "their visual pleasures (and level of spectacle and display) are different" (ibid). Van Damme, whose his legitimate martial arts background is chronicled online by Paul Maslak (2012), had early success in Americanised appropriations of kung fu's standards, typifying "what David Desser calls "the rise of white male martial arts stars who, in a sense, co-opt the Asian martial arts for the American action hero [… Chuck] Norris and Van Damme, who both play villains in Hong Kong, seem to embody a colonial 'reclaiming' of Asia […] Van Damme 'conquers' other parts of South-east Asia in *Bloodsport* (1987) and *Kickboxer* (1989)" (Hunt, 2003: 10).

West (2006: 254) illustrates that "American filmmakers have faced a unique set of problems in their presentation of martial arts in cinema" because of the "inherently foreign nature of the martial arts themselves [being] an obstacle many filmmakers have been unable to overcome or are oblivious to". Van Damme's popularity amongst Hong Kong filmmakers (Hunt, 2003: 179; O'Brien, 2012: 82) and his work on *Hard Target* (Woo, 1993) "established that a Chinese action movie director could work within the Hollywood system" (Logan, 1995: 7). The resultant "influx of directors, stars and choreographers from Hong Kong has had a profound impact upon the quality and character of American action films" (West, 2006: 54).

While Schwarzenegger embodied the unstoppable, hypermuscular American action hero in *The Terminator*, O'Brien (2012: 1) believes Bruce Willis represented the tough-talking, tenacious-yet-jaded protagonist in a situation "of crisis and *reaction* […] attempting to restore agency through force of will". Similarly, Tasker (1993: 239) observed that, while *Die Hard*'s (McTiernan, 1988) John McClane was certainly presented as an action hero, his *persona* was markedly different, defined "through the voice, more wise-guy than tough-guy". Unlike *Commando*'s John Matrix, who paralleled dry humour with an unshakable focus that made him invulnerable, McClane was a "perpetual adolescent [who seemed] to be playing games" (ibid). McClane cracked jokes and carried "a sense of surprise and confusion that [the] explosive events are happening to him", personifying a more relatable, rugged 'Everyman' action hero; proactive individuals who faced danger not just with a fist or a gun but a smirk and a hefty amount of icy dialogue (ibid).

In the same way, Holmlund (1993: 214) observed that, just as *Lock Up* (Flynn, 1989) alluded to Stallone's "established tough guy image, built on muscles as a masquerade of proletarian masculinity", *Tango & Cash* (Konchalovsky and Magnoli, 1989) fundamentally transforming Stallone's onscreen persona through partnership. Unlike Rocky, the ultimate underdog, or Rambo, the one-man army, Stallone was accompanied by a partner so similar in physicality and persona that the two are virtually identical (ibid). Gabriel Cash (Kurt Russell) "looks, talks, and acts like Stallone" and draws upon buddy-cop dynamics defined by Martin Riggs (Mel Gibson) and Roger Murtaugh (Danny Glover) in *Lethal Weapon 2* (Donner, 1989).

Geoff King (2000: 122) observes that, by *Lethal Weapon 2*, Riggs' previous struggle with insanity and suicide is largely abandoned thanks to Murtaugh's influence, and the two freely bicker through their action sequences. This led to

Holmlund's intricate 'queer reading' (1993: 215), which noted that Ray Tango

(Stallone) and Gabriel Cash are so "fond of each other" that Cash "evokes the butch

clone, the homosexual who passes as heterosexual because he looks and acts 'like a

man'".

Tasker's (1993: 234) view is that Stallone's recasting was a deliberate attempt

to ground his perceived onscreen image "after a series of dents in his public persona".

Presented as the opposite of Rambo's hard, uncompromising killing machine, Stallone

became more accessible to audiences by adopting the form of "a softer, more likeable

guy both in 'real life' and his films". This was facilitated by emphasising the verbal

over the physical – "the shock value of the fact that the hulk could talk, was echoed

and exploited in the surrounding publicity" (ibid).

Jim Kendrick (2009: 65) observed that film violence became readily available

during the eighties, with multiple "action/spectacle films [depicting] violence with

bloody verisimilitude, but within a traditionally reactionary narrative framework that

made for a pleasurable viewing experience". Even Van Damme, whose physicality

has been noted in allowing him to exceed "ordinary movement", was not beyond

transformation onscreen, becoming a cyborg, time-traveller, and clone in his

continued attempts to push "the body's limits in an evermore fantastical attempt to

maintain agency against increasingly phantasmic opposition" (O'Brien, 2012: 82).

This continued in the nineties alongside the genre's preference towards "all-male

environments as the stage for [masculine] performance, arenas such as sport, prison,

[…the] military and the police force. The family [was] generally avoided" (Tasker,

1993: 236).

Dave Saunders (2009: 149) believes that, by *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*

(Cameron, 1992) even the most unsympathetic action heroes could become softer,

protective individuals. Arnold's new-found fatherhood coincided with a general shift in the action genre that focused on attracting a "family-friendly" audience; violence became tempered by child sidekicks in accordance with ensnaring this wider audience. Arnold, especially, evidently sought "roles that revealed this concerned side apposed with a certain macho toughness […] Arnold's 1990s daddies are therefore resilient, ultra-hetero playmates and mentors, whose purpose is the reclaiming of masculinity from the tempering of the women's movement" (ibid).

Accordingly, Jeffords (1993: 254) notes that, whereas the T-800 (Schwarzenegger) had originally been programmed to assassinate humanity, *Terminator 2* reconfigured the character ("even Schwarzenegger's chest size is somewhat diminished") into a substitute father-figure. "Throughout the late 1980s, fathering was a key characterization and narrative device for displaying the 'new' Hollywood masculinities" in the wake of feminism, and to show how masculinity has reproduced itself through inversion, rather than duplication (ibid: 248).

Lisa Purse (2011: 94), however, emphasises the impact of the AIDS epidemic on eighties action heroes, believing that the AIDS scare made the "pumped-up strong bodies of 1980s action cinema" appear awkward and untrustworthy as male health could no longer be judged from external appearances. Accordingly, Saunders (2009: 109) considered Schwarzenegger's dramatic role changes to be indicative of a prudent, unsubtly diminishing of "embodying economic or military bigness […] in inverse proportion to relative American influence (and public resentment of the debts and deficits that helped achieve this)". Furthermore, bodybuilder physiques became notably "redundant as a symbol of male vitality and strength" and were supplanted by the leaner physiques of Keanu Reeves, Nicholas Cage, and Tom Cruise, all of whom continue to contribute to the action genre to this day (Purse, 2011: 94).

King (2000: 111) regards the reconfiguration of male action stars into softer figures, and their female counterparts into more proactive individuals, as being indicative of "the gender politics of the time[, which] saw the rise […] of hyper-muscled performers […] The popularity of such figures has often been seen as part of a backlash against the demands of feminism, reasserting a particular brand of macho heroics". This ultimately led to the T-800 being "explicitly described as an obsolete model superseded by a much more effective female terminator machine" (Purse, 2011: 96) by *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* (Mostow, 2003).

The action genre underwent a further shift in the new millennium when increased emphasis on fantastical narratives and superheroes allowed younger action heroes to flourish through entertaining escapism (Gray II, *et al*, 2011: 3). *The Matrix* allowed everyday people to become superhuman through virtual reality; by literally plugging into computer terminals, *The Matrix*'s protagonists download various combat skills – primarily kung fu and assorted martial arts techniques – and perform reality-bending manoeuvres by manipulating their virtual reality environment (Hunt, 2003: 180). O'Brien (2012: 77) observes that this effectively eliminated Hong Kong cinema's traditional training montage – no longer were protagonists required to undergo harsh and rigorous training; instead, computers allowed action heroes to perform any task through CGI and wirework.

The Matrix facilitated "a new template for the 'Asianisation' of Hollywood" by blending Hong Kong choreography with Hollywood CGI in a cross-cultural unification (Hunt, 2003: 157), which included the "'authenticating' [of] Hollywood stars when Yuen [Wo-ping] had the cast trained so that they could perform their own fight scenes" (ibid: 180). This emphasised the film's homage to Hong Kong cinema traditions, as, while "digital spectacle is supposedly about "surpassing the real" […],

the kung fu film has largely retained its investment in the 'real'" (ibid, and quoting Hayward and Wollen: 185).

Inevitably, *The Matrix* also explicitly references videogame tropes. Steven Padnick's article for Tor.com (2012), illustrates that, "by embracing the parts usually left behind in movie adaptations, undeveloped characters and repetitive story structure, and [marrying] them to the impossible visuals that video games excel at", *The Matrix* captures "the feeling of playing a video game [and appropriate] video game characters and story structure without being about video games really at all" (ibid). Fittingly, as Akin Ojumo's article for the Observer (2000) relates, *The Matrix*'s fighting sequences were principally inspired by the videogame *Tenchu: Stealth Assassins* (Acquire, 1998).

The Matrix showcases the extreme complexity of adapting videogame elements to the screen as these elements "are wrapped up in the overall virtual dynamics of the film as [the protagonists] essentially make use of those elements to help them through" (Keane, 2007: 102): Neo (Keanu Reeves) and Morpheus (Laurence Fishburne) spar in "a virtual elaboration of the training mode available in most 'beat-em-ups' – the space where you master Ken or Ryu's [Hadoken]" (Hunt, quoting Hayward and Wollen, 2003: 185), their progress in the Matrix is constantly overseen by an external "Operator" sitting at a keyboard and monitor, and characters regularly activate "cheats" that allow them to instantly download new skills (Keane, 2007: 102). *The Matrix* explicitly addresses the relationship between gamer and avatar and the nature of videogames, becoming a live-action videogame experience as Neo not only controls, but *becomes*, the avatar.

Teenage male heroes became the norm in contemporary action films following successes like *Spider-Man* (Raimi, 2002) and *Transformers* (Bay, 2007). Purse

(2011: 106) observes that such teen stars portrayed "a different brand of playful masculinity", especially when partnered with older action stars. Lacking the physical strength and skills of their predecessors, such teenage action heroes are generally portrayed as somewhat nerdy, everyday kids suddenly thrust into action-packed scenarios comically beyond their expertise, and "which they respond to with wry commentary" (ibid).

This emphasis on the dynamic between the 'old guard' and the new action hero was explicit in the *Expendables* films (2010-2014), which placed the volatile personalities of iconic seventies and eighties action heroes alongside a handful of their contemporaries. Indeed, the *Expendables* films are indicative of a movie genre that is not about termination, but constant renewal and reinvention – adapting to changes in political, social, and physical climates – in "an apt summation of the [genre's] formal and historical trajectory[, facilitating] the fusion of contemporary and classic cast members in an avowedly 'old school' mercenary narrative" (O'Brien, 2012: 16).

Gladiator (Scott, 2000) previously heralded an aggressive statement of masculine power through the explicit spectacle of the male physique, similar to nineties action films, though "*Gladiator*'s spectacle of masculine power is deadly serious, a sincere assertion of morality and the rightness of a mightily physical male body" (Purse, 2011: 97). Once vengeance-orientated narratives like *Taken* (Besson, 2008) began revisiting seventies tropes through "deconstructive postmodernism" (O'Brien, 2012: 16), these two representations of action co-existed with a contemporary focus on anxieties regarding masculine identity, power, and age – contemporary action stars like Jason Statham and Karl Urban appeared alongside their action forefathers while John McClane teamed with young male sidekicks in *Die Hard 4.0* (Wiseman, 2007) and *A Good Day to Die Hard* (Moore, 2013).

O'Brien (ibid: 90) believed that the return of aging action heroes contributes to a renewed emphasis on "the physicality of action, together with its consequences (wounds, injuries, violent and up-close-and-personal death and torture)" in American action cinema. This focus appeals directly to "the culture of 'old-school' fundamentalism where direct action […] necessitates an experiential, kinesthetic sensation for cathartic effect" (ibid). By placing former action heroes within modern society, action cinema facilitated the process of reinvention by renewal through a reconstitution of classic action heroes "in the framework of reactualisation and return" (ibid).

These renewals are laced with intertextuality and nostalgia: most audiences experienced the latter-day *Die Hard*, *Rambo*, or *Expendables* films with at least some knowledge of their predecessors or an "understanding [of] the iconic resonance of its cast, combining old stars and new in an avowedly reconstitutive artifice" (ibid: 97). Placing John McClane's no-nonsense attitude into modern times revealed that underneath the technologically-driven modern society lies the aging hard body of an arguably simpler time in American history, "and that the application of decisive strength will always be the best defense" (ibid: 104).

Conversely, Rambo's return symbolised "a very pure, very direct neo-classical action movie" in its depiction of action *as action*, with all the explicit, unapologetic violence and disregard of "relativism or reflexivity", in a celebration of the American action film's staple of one man taking action in the face of evil (ibid). Finally, *Terminator Genisys* (Taylor, 2015) explicitly asserted that the T-800, though visibly aged and battle-weary, was "not obsolete" in either the modern world or the fight to secure mankind's future in a blatant retraction of *Terminator 3*'s early statements.

Like their Hong Kong counterparts, American action cinema has often been adapted into videogames; their extraordinary effects, spectacular stunts, and elaborate characters are akin to live-action videogame experiences. Action heroes are capable of increasingly fantastic physical feats that require them to *take* action: King (2002: 51) observed that the *Die Hard* videogames primarily establish "situations of gameplay from which narrative itself tends largely to be absent". Players must fulfil objectives that mirror the films, are limited to a set route, and unable to affect the film's pre-set narrative other than failing their mission. Players are encouraged to become John McClane and facilitate the action of the *Die Hard* films – "The film viewer performs none of the active, *shaping* role that is permitted in the game, even if the game only allows this within pre-structured limits" (ibid: 52).

Unlike Hong Kong cinema, which is often structured around one-on-one fighting, American action films often emphasise a series of increasingly-difficult challenges faced by one man, who must overcome multiple opponents through increasingly over-the-top methods. This may explain why American action cinema tropes are adapted not into a straightforward tournament-structured videogames, but rather a series of action-orientated missions, or events, where players assume iconic action roles, rather than selecting from a diverse range of fighters.

Additionally, after *The Matrix* eliminated the need for action heroes to be physically capable of fighting, the assumption that American action heroes were also proficient fighters became almost a given; action heroes were now not only skilled marksmen but also wire-assisted martial artists, effectively making American action cinema a live-action videogame experience.

Clearly, action cinema has remained prevalent as "spectators' desire to witness fantasises of empowerment embodied through this vigorous mode of masculine

physicality had not dissipated" (Purse, 2011: 98). Action cinema's resilience is intrinsically linked to its ability to adapt to shifting cultural and social climates and incorporate and repurpose "generic tropes from other popular genres, most obviously the western, but also melodrama, romance, science fiction and horror to name the most common" (ibid: 1/2).

O'Brien (2012: 2) established that action heroes are constantly fighting to remain heroes, essentially becoming "heroic through the act *of* fighting" and embodying the notion that fighting and *taking* action are vital to enacting one's will. Philosophically, action heroes must thus have complete mastery, and accept the constraints, of their bodies and assume command of them (ibid, and quoting Nietzsche). While issues of gender and masculine identity often frequent examinations of the action genre, it is this same mastery that gamers must channel when playing videogames but beat-'em-ups reward the mastery of an avatar's body and fighting skill with bombastic in-game action and violence.

3.3 Arcade Duelling

This section explores the influence of Hong Kong martial arts cinema and American action films on the beat-'em-up videogame genre. The consistency, evolution, and popularity of beat-'em-ups, which juxtaposed the popularity of martial arts and action movies during the late-seventies to mid-nineties, influenced the creation of this chapter's principal focus, *Street Fighter* and *Mortal Kombat*, and I illustrate how these franchises (and their resulting adaptations) came to be influenced by cinema.

Writing for the website Eurogamer, "Spanner Spencer" (2008) observed that beat-'em-ups are often regarded as "overly austere, and perhaps even too lowbrow for

the serious gamer […] Inherently shallow and restricted [and seemingly contradicting] what many users consider being a worthwhile application of a computer or console". Indeed, as Brain Ashcraft and Jean Snow (2008: 96) detail, beat-'em-ups were unpopular in Japan during the late-seventies and mid-eighties, as "Japanese game centers were still dominated by shooting games". Lack of exposure and control issues hampered the genre from finding an appropriate audience, yet two distinct generalisations soon emerged: one-on-one tournament-style bouts, and side-scrolling battles against waves of adversaries (Spencer, 2008).

Retro Gamer magazine regarded *Heavyweight Champ* (SEGA, 1976) as "a spiritual forerunner to modern one-on-one fighters, [and] the first competitive fighting videogame" (Jones, *et al*, 2012: 63), though Tristan Donovan (2010: 221) believes that *Karate Champ* (Technōs Japan, 1984) – a "colourful and highly accessible coin-op karate simulator" (Spencer, 2008) – popularised the genre. *Karate Champ*, and *Kung-Fu Master* (Irem, 1984), drew inspiration from Hong Kong martial arts films, with the latter appropriating elements from *The Big Boss* to envisage "fighting games as a journey, challenging players to battle through hordes of attackers to reach an end goal" (ibid).

Comparatively, *Karate Champ* pitted players against "a computer or second person in a bout of one-on-one combat"; while both titles set the tone for "almost every subsequent fighting game" (ibid), *Karate Champ* distinguished itself by incorporating specific button-and-joystick combinations for special moves. *Way of the Exploding Fist* (Beam Software, 1985) proved extremely popular on 8-bit home consoles (Spencer, 2008), and incorporated "a points system rather than employing energy bars, just like real-life [martial arts]" (Jones, *et al*, 2012: 63).

By *Yie Ar Kung-Fu* (Konami, 1985), beat-'em-ups were steadily increasing in number and popularity (Spencer, 2008). Yet little separated the competition beyond aesthetics and accessibility, meaning "*Yie Ar Kung Fu* [was] probably the better game" when compared to *Street Fighter*, which was simply another one-on-one fighting game with difficult controls and a steep learning curve (ibid). Yet *Street Fighter* featured both diverse and colourful characters and the opportunity to battle one-on-one against another player on an equal playing field.

While *Street Fighter* was far from the first beat-'em-up to include competitive fighting, it popularised the concept of progressive playability. One player could challenge another and the winner would either tackle the single-player mode, or the next player in line – Chris Carle (2010: 32) explains that "A fighting game rite of passage was born […] Machines were no longer monopolized for hours while the local ace worked on his Donkey Kong score".

Although *Street Fighter* was only a "moderate success" (ibid), *Street Fighter II: The World Warrior* improved upon every aspect, including eight diverse avatars and fully embracing the competitive fighting that was a mere afterthought of the original. Importantly, the controls were completely overhauled; gone were *Street Fighter*'s three pressure-sensitive buttons, replaced with a six-button layout that became a genre standard (Jones, *et al*, 2012: 62). The controls now properly registered quick player inputs and special moves, allowing unique move combinations through a design bug – players could cancel moves mid-animation and follow with another attack, birthing the modern combo system (ibid: 64).

Street Fighter II's colourful and varied avatars, "spanning a handful of stereotypes and clichés, [were] easy to identify with" (ibid), and players could select an avatar that suited their play-style. In return, they were rewarded with unique

designs, move sets, stages, music, and endings for each avatar – "Gamers could now

[…] flex their individuality like never before and align with a fighter would spoke to

them on many levels" (Carle, 2010: 45). Also, while players often favoured a single

character, players had to experience the gameplay-styles of *every* character in order to

sufficiently dominate human-controlled opponents (ibid: 57).

In David Surman's (2007: 209) view, *Street Fighter II* thus revolutionised the

"gameplay quality of the genre" by allowing players to strategise their attacks,

introducing blocking and combos, and inspiring a "tournament culture" within "the

urban centres of Japan and the United States" (ibid: 210). Players only became

acknowledged as being "hardcore gamers" through the "mastery of revolutionary

special moves and attack combinations" (ibid).

Street Fighter II changed the way both gamers and videogame developers

approached beat-'em-ups; it not only defined direct, one-on-one competition as

opposed to simply achieving the highest score, it also popularised the importance of a

wide variety of unique characters (Jones, *et al*, 2012: 65). *Street Fighter II*'s home

console success mirrored that of its arcade counterpart, particularly on the SNES,

where it sold "over six million units", thus making it "the top-selling console game

ever for Capcom" (Carle, 2010: 159).

Naturally, arcades were soon swamped with imitators looking to capitalise on

Capcom's success (Jones, *et al*, 2012: 65). Chief among them was *Mortal Kombat*,

which differentiated itself through "digitised graphics and controversial levels of

gore", which contributed to it becoming a "mainstream success" (ibid). When

interviewed for *Retro Gamer* magazine, *Mortal Kombat* co-creator Ed Boon (quoted

by ibid, 2007: 27) stated that the title was developed to introduce Midway into the

"fighting arena", to showcase their "new digitised images technology" with "big

images", and because Midway were "all fans of those cool (and sometimes cheesy) martial arts movies like *Enter the Dragon*, *Bloodsport* and *Big Trouble in Little China*".

Initially, to diversify *Mortal Kombat*, Boon and co-creator John Tobias sought to involve a world-renowned action star, "someone who fit the image of the kind of fighting they would show in their game" (Kent, 2001: 462). Van Damme's efforts in *Kickboxer* and *Bloodsport* made him an obvious choice, however his agent claimed that the star "was [already] in discussion with Sega" (ibid). Unfazed, Boon and Tobias instead created their own unique world, rather than settle for a lesser-known martial artist. John "Velociraptor" Guerrero, writing for the competitive fighting website EventHubs (2015), mentions that popular franchise character Johnny Cage was subsequently created to fill the void left by Van Damme as a spoof of the actor.

While they were enthusiastic and confidant, Boon and Tobias were aware of *Street Fighter II*'s popularity and so concentrated on creating a unique, enjoyable gaming experience rather than competing with Capcom directly (Jones, *et al*, 2007: 27). Yet, *Mortal Kombat* was completed within "roughly eight months" in order to "counter the success of Capcom's seemingly unstoppable beat-'em-up behemoth as quickly as possible" (ibid: 27/29).

Mortal Kombat's control scheme deviated from *Street Fighter II*'s by utilising four buttons instead of six and including a revolutionary fifth button exclusively for blocking, providing deeper interaction as blocking became *deliberate* rather than *automatic* (ibid: 29). Much like *Street Fighter II*'s combo system, *Mortal Kombat*'s unique juggling mechanic – whereby "a skilled fighter [could] continually pummel his opponent while they were helpless in the air" (ibid) – was discovered by accident,

while digitised graphics were chosen to directly counter "Capcom's cheerful-looking brawler" (ibid).

What made *Mortal Kombat* unique was its blood and gore; a macabre humour was embedded in *Mortal Kombat*'s gameplay, allowing groin punches, impalements, and gruesome finishing moves. After a decisive victory, players are given a small window to "finish" their opponent, and correctly entering specific button presses resulted in a gruesome "Fatality" and the opponent's dismemberment (Kent, 2001: 464). Michael R. Goldman (1996: 1) detailed that the resultant controversy and media attention only made *Mortal Kombat* more attractive to gamers, and contributed to the creation of the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) in 1994 to regulate videogame content and assign age certificates. The gore also caused problems for *Mortal Kombat*'s home conversions as Nintendo, a markedly "family-friendly" company, requested that the "graphical content […] be toned down" (ibid: 30). As a result, the SNES version lacked blood and featured extremely neutered Fatalities, meaning Nintendo's sales paled to SEGA's, as the Mega Drive version had no such limitations (ibid).

Mortal Kombat's success – especially evident when the home console version alone "broke all existing industry records for unit sales across all formats internationally" (ibid: 2) – placed it in direct competition with *Street Fighter II*. *Mortal Kombat II* (Midway, 1993) expanded everything, with more characters, more Fatalities, more special moves, and increased stakes by introducing principal series antagonist Shao Kahn and expanding the fantastical storyline into the alternate dimension, Outworld (Jones, *et al*, 2007: 31). While Capcom made innovative advances with each *Street Fighter II* revision, Midway changed very little about *Mortal Kombat*'s core gameplay – "Each character may have looked different, but

unlike Capcom's pugilists, the Midway fighters performed exactly the same attack styles and as a result experts could pretty much beat novices with whomever they chose" (ibid).

This was a result of *Mortal Kombat* favouring digitised graphics over traditional sprite-based avatars, which remained a series staple for many years and caused the series to languish against its competitors. While *Mortal Kombat 3* (Midway, 1995), and its expansions *Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3* (Midway, 1995) and *Mortal Kombat Trilogy* (Midway, 1996), offered extremely comprehensive narrative and characterisation, their gameplay additions – "a 'Run' button, pre-programmed […] 'Chain Combos'" (ibid: 32), "Animalities", and the "Aggressor" bar (Midway's answer to Capcom's "Super Meter") – were minor compared to *Street Fighter Alpha* (Capcom, 1995), "a complete reinvention of the series that featured a brand new fighting system and superb cartoon visuals" (ibid).

Even *Mortal Kombat 4*'s (Midway, 1998) 3D format failed to alter the core gameplay; indeed, in attempting to subvert the franchise's increasingly slapstick nature with renewed macabre grit, *Mortal Kombat 4*'s gameplay was comparatively stripped, eliminating all extraneous finishing moves and including an awkward weapon system. Compared to *Street Fighter III: New Generation* (Capcom, 1997), which flaunted gorgeous manga-based 2D sprites, *Mortal Kombat 4* seemed dated, and it was unable to compete with other 3D fighters' degree of control and movement, visual presentation, or "absorbing gameplay" (ibid).

Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance (Midway, 2002) sought to reinvigorate the series; avatars finally not only looked unique, but *played* unique – each sported two fighting styles (modelled after real-life martial arts) and a more fully-developed weapon system. Character models were greatly improved, allowing for "greater

freedom of movement in the 3D playing arenas" and "while still behind the likes of

Tekken, *Virtua Fighter* and even Tecmo's *Dead or Alive*, [*Mortal Kombat*] was back

on track and fans were eager [for more]" (ibid: 33). *Deadly Alliance*'s improvements

and innovations, which included full-motion videos, a "Krypt" of unlockable content,

and a comprehensive training made ("Konquest"), were carried over into its

successors, *Mortal Kombat: Deception* (Midway, 2004) and *Mortal Kombat:*

Armageddon (Midway, 2006).

True to form, each title convoluted the gameplay with an increasingly complex

narrative; while *Mortal Kombat*'s in-depth storyline separated it from its rivals, it

became so full of characters, over-lapping narratives, contradictions, and fragmented

plot threads that it became almost unwieldy (ibid: 32). While *Mortal Kombat* had

become phenomenally successful during the nineties, this achievement was clouded

with the poor reception of spin-off titles; despite selling "over 1 million units", *Mortal*

Kombat Mythologies: Sub-Zero (Midway, 1995) was "critically panned the world

over [as] a terrifyingly bad game that features atrocious gameplay and tired-looking

aesthetics" (ibid: 31).

Similarly, *Mortal Kombat: Special Forces* (Midway, 2000) was widely

considered "to be the worst ever *Mortal Kombat* title, [and] marked the departure of

co-creator John Tobias and several other key Midway staff[, meaning] the game was

quickly rushed for a budget release" (ibid). Although *Mortal Kombat vs. DC*

Universe (Midway Amusement Games, 2008) sold "over 1.9 million units", making it

one of Midway's "most successful titles" (United States Security and Exchange

Commission, 2008: 6), IGN reported that Midway officially filed for bankruptcy in

2009 (IGN Staff, 2009).

Fortunately, Midway was purchased by Warner Bros. that same year (United States Security and Exchange Commission, 2009), and continued production as NetherRealm Studios, with their first priority being the reinvention – and salvation – of *Mortal Kombat* (McWhertor, and quoting Boon, 2010; Murphy, 2010). *Mortal Kombat* (NetherRealm Studios, 2011) literally returned the series to its roots: featuring every character from the first three titles, players returned to a familiar 2.5D perspective armed with heavily-complex (yet easy to master) move-sets tailored to each individual character, more gore, and the most extreme Fatalities yet. By also including an in-depth Story Mode that retold the original trilogy, *Mortal Kombat (2011)* sought to establish, once and for all, exactly what happened, to whom, and who lived and died.

The result was a well-received franchise reinvention; Gamespot's Brendan Sinclair (2011) reported that, by September 2011, *Mortal Kombat (2011)* had sold almost 3 million copies worldwide – more than compensating Warner Bros.' expenditure after acquiring Midway's assets. Game Rant's Rob Keyes (2011) also reported that the title also won best Fighting Game in the 2011 Spike Video Game Awards, among other accolades. The title's sequel, *Mortal Kombat X* (NetherRealm Studios, 2015), capitalised on the capabilities of modern-day consoles to improve graphical presentation, deepen the story considerably to include a new generation of fighters, and improve upon every aspect of its predecessor to deliver what Game Informer's Brian Shea called "one of the best fighting games in years" (Shea, 2015).

This return from the brink of videogame mediocrity allowed *Mortal Kombat* to come full circle and to mirror its original astounding successes. While Carle (2010: 78) explains that exact statistics regarding *Mortal Kombat*'s arcade revenues "are impossible to calculate due to the fact that arcades were largely a cash business",

Mortal Kombat II cabinets "had record sales of $50 million in the first week". The New York Times (1994) reported that this exceeded "the opening week receipts of the summer's top grossing films"; it also signalled the onset of *Mortal Kombat*'s brief domination of nineties pop culture through multimedia from videogames, soundtracks, toys and actions figures, and, of course, film and television projects.

3.4 Adapting *Street Fighter*

Before I examine the various *Mortal Kombat* adaptations and their intertextual links to Hong Kong cinema in depth, I must first address the similar links seen in *Street Fighter*'s adaptations. Not only did *Street Fighter* precede *Mortal Kombat* in arcades, its live-action adaptation came a year earlier as well, and here I briefly detail *Street Fighter*'s tumultuous adaptation history and the intertextual links the franchise has to both martial arts and action cinema.

Street Fighter II had previously been parodied onscreen by Jackie Chan in *City Hunter* (Jing, 1993) and *Future Cops* (ibid, 1993), which "deployed thinly disguised *Street Fighter* characters" (Surman, quoting Hunt, 2007: 216). Conversely, as Jamie Russell (2012: 152) explains, the official live-action adaptation "didn't quite break even at the US box office"; though foreign earnings increased *Street Fighter*'s total gross to three times its $33.5 million production budget. Richard Harrington, writing for the Washington Post (1994), noted that, despite boasting Jean-Claude Van Damme's star power and Raúl Juliá's acting prowess, *Street Fighter* featured a "programmed" plot, mere mimicry of the videogame's vaulted action, disconnected plot threads, and "cheesy" special effects and costumes.

While the Internet Movie Database (IMDb, 2013) lists that Juliá received a posthumous Saturn Award nomination for Best Supporting Actor, 411mania's Vince Osorio (2011) wrote that *Street Fighter* "was met with complete apathy [despite] making three times its budget in worldwide ticket sales, [and] overall it was considered a disappointment, for both a Jean Claude Van Damme vehicle [and] a heavily-promoted video game adaptation". Thomas Leitch (2007: 273) elaborated that *Street Fighter* abandoned the martial arts heritage of its source material and fastidiously avoided its videogame origins beyond "the names of its leading characters and their inclination to battle each other" and instead mirrored the sensibilities of mid-nineties American action films, where "Violence of some kind is the problem and, more frequently than not, also the solution" (Kendrick, 2009: 69).

Street Fighter II pioneered a deeper level of player-avatar interaction through intricate backstories and personalised endings, which "added another layer of originality, and gave gamers something tangible to relate to and look forward to" and made the videogame something more than "just a bunch of people beating each other up" (Carle, and quoting Dunham, 2010: 60). Chris Plante (2014), writing extensively about the film's production process for the gaming and media website Polygon, stated that director de Souza "had established himself as a screenwriting wunderkind" and "amassed enough creative capital" from a dozen blockbusters to become a director. Yet he reworked many of the character's motivations to focus not on series protagonist Ryu, but Guile (Van Damme), whose vendetta against Bison (Juliá) drives the film's geopolitical plot and clearly outweighs the various sub-plots of the comparatively-neutered supporting characters.

Thus, as Leitch (2007: 273) observed. "the series of battles it [descends into involves] different combatants fighting simultaneously in separate locations [all] owe

less to its nominal source than to the Jean-Claude Van Damme action/kickboxing

[vehicle *Universal Soldier* (Emmerich, 1992)]". As a result, *Street Fighter* owed less

to Hong Kong kung fu and more to American action films that encompassed de

Souza's career, which included screenwriting credits on "*Commando*, *The Running*

Man, […] and *Die Hard 1* and *2*" (Plante, 2014).

        Consequently, the onscreen depiction of martial arts is limited, practically

personified by Van Damme, in favour of large, cartoonish action set pieces – fitting,

as de Souza "relished the notion of making a Bond-style action film" (ibid). Indeed,

at de Souza's pitch to Capcom, "both parties agreed they had no interest in making a

tournament movie", instead favouring "a mission story with the game's coterie of

colorful characters taking sides on a global conflict" (ibid). Initially, de Souza

convinced Capcom to divide the film's screentime between seven primary characters,

rather than showcase the entire roster, as Capcom desired (ibid, and quoting de

Souza).

        While "lesser-known specialty actors, like martial artists, comedians and

former body builders" rounded out the cast, the film's priorities were clear: Juliá

provided "the gravitas of a classically trained actor" while Van Damme – always

Capcom's first choice for Guile – "brought looks, star power, the attention of gossip

rags and, most importantly, the ability to do the splits in midair without tearing his

groin" (ibid). Unfortunately, "Van Damme also came with baggage: a nasty cocaine

habit and some pending legal troubles from his third divorce", was frequently late,

and difficult on set, often demanding unnecessary reshoots (ibid).

        Exhausted by the entire experience, de Souza soon acquiesced to Capcom's

request to add more characters to the script (ibid). With the film's focus thus divided

between so many characters, many only get to flex their muscles late in the film's run

time, with the majority of the film's action being represented by gun fights, explosions, and brief scuffles. Despite the film's prominent use of guns and military might, *Street Fighter* regards guns in a similar vein to *Enter the Dragon* (Logan, 1995: 115) – Leitch (2007: 269) expanded on the film's statement that guns are inferior to the "purity of unarmed combat", explaining that they are reserved "for defensive actions against villains who can be defeated in no other way", and thus the issue of a physical challenge is seen as a matter of honourable duty rather than simply an excuse to fight.

As *Street Fighter* progresses, the characters eventually assume the appearance and mannerisms of their videogame counterparts, with the exception of Bison, who appears in an extremely faithful rendition throughout. Thus, by the time Ryu (Byron Mann) and Ken (Damian Chapa) have donned their familiar white and red *keikogi*, they fight in a way that apes their sprite-based equivalents. Yet, as Surman (2007: 216) appropriately observed, rather than throwing Hadokens and Shoryukens, they resort to striking "signature poses during action sequences, [that are] clearly reminiscent of the special moves and production artwork released by Capcom".

Indeed, even when characters perform their signature moves, such as Van Damme expertly performing Guile's Flash Kick, these "are not reflexively 'announced' in the same way the player-character cries [out] in-game", rather their inclusion in the film "is central to the appeal of the film to fans of the videogame […] to assure that the iconicity of the videogame is rehearsed with due thoroughness" (ibid).

In the videogames, special moves "were crucial to the success of the series" and players were separated by their ability to perform special moves – and, indeed, their knowledge of such techniques. Carle (2010: 38/39) relates that Capcom's

intentional secrecy about the special movies created "a furor of information-gathering on the part of arcade-goers seeking an edge [as gamers] became obsessed with pulling off these special attacks". On film, the absence of special moves is attributed to the forced removal of action and special effects by Capcom and the film's rapidly decreasing budget (Plante, quoting de Souza, 2014). Their brief appearance is perhaps the only redeeming feature to "an otherwise underwhelming film adaptation of the videogame, though it is clear that to remediate the special move and so convey the core characteristic is something of a challenge" (Surman, 2007: 216). Ultimately, *Street Fighter* suggests that physical skills are indicative of "true men" but that weapons and intimidation can prove just as effective.

Hong Kong cinema's influence was strongly felt in *Street Fighter II*, whose tournament to decide "the "strongest street fighter in the world" and […] global cast of characters" closely mirrors *Enter the Dragon*'s structure. Additionally, the archetypal "Evil Mastermind – 'Final Boss'" is appropriately represented through Han, whom Hunt (2003: 189) regards as "the predecessor of [M. Bison]", who even brandishes a hand-claw similar to *Street Fighter*'s Geki (and, more famously, *Street Fighter II*'s Vega). However, *Street Fighter*'s live-action adaptation is more analogous to bombastic American action movies than Hong Kong cinema. While the frail Han seemed reliant on underlings who effectively become "formidable sub-bosses" (ibid), this merely concealed his true physical threat, which is capable enough to cause considerable damage to Lee's previously-impervious body.

In comparison, Bison's character and appearance are the antithesis of Han: depicted as an imposing, Caucasian dictator, Bison commands considerable resources and wields a supernatural power that sets him worlds apart from Han. Yet Bison is cast as a foreign enemy out to destroy civilised society, one who employs various sub-

bosses as underlings and who regularly hosts a fighting tournament. Also, by chaining together special moves and combos similar to a human opponent, requiring a true test of the player's skill, Bison comes to resemble Han quite closely despite never aesthetically evoking Han's "Yellow Peril" menace.

Juliá's Bison supplants this menace with a twisted code of honour that regards "respectful combat" as the only way to truly defeat a worthy opponent, as it allows personal satisfaction at humiliating one's adversary, and an army of superhumans as being acceptable for wiping out entire "creeds and nations". While this does essentially mean that *Street Fighter* makes every attempt to emphasise the importance of physical skill, it does not feature the same narrative structure or opportunity to present these skills as *Enter the Dragon*, whose "tournament structure allows narrative to progress *through* a series of fights" (ibid).

Instead, *Street Fighter* favours numerous sequential group gunfights or scuffles. The finale is unfortunately hampered by Juliá's failing health, as mentioned in Scott Mendelson's (2009) review for the Huffington Post and by actor Damian Chapa (quoted by Plante, 2014). However, but the decisive battle between Ryu, Ken, Sagat (Wes Studi), and Vega (Jay Tavare) was soured by pressure from Capcom to focus on "immediate turnaround, [meaning] the stunt team couldn't prep actors for upcoming shoots. Some cast members tried to pick up technique [*sic*] from anyone with a whiff of expertise" (Plante, 2014).

After both *Aliens* and *RoboCop* (Verhoeven, 1987) had "spawned gory toy lines, parent advocacy groups had become sensitive to R-rated toy tie-ins" (ibid). As a result, both Capcom and Hasbro agreed that *Street Fighter* "wouldn't have an MPAA rating higher than PG-13" (ibid). Multiple edits required action scenes to be trimmed down and "Many scenes were botched or dissected in order to remove a

bloody nose or bloody lip from frame" (ibid). Upon release *Street Fighter* was almost

unanimously lambasted, opening "third at the box office on December 23, 1994 [and

suffering] the second-highest drop in ticket sales between Friday and Saturday of its

opening weekend" (ibid). Despite this, Plante reported that Capcom were pleased

with the film – it had their iconic characters, special moves, the star power of Van

Damme, and accumulated "a total worldwide gross of nearly $100 million" (ibid)

from what Carle (2010: 166) calls a "loyal, galvanized fanbase".

However, *Street Fighter*'s flaws, brought about by numerous pressures forcing

production into a chokehold, "helped to start another, less desirable trend: that of the

bad video game adaptation" (ibid). *Street Fighter* exists not as a live-action

adaptation of the multi-layered storylines and physical action of its videogame

counterpart, but more as a by-the-numbers Hollywood action vehicle to showcase Van

Damme's impressive fighting prowess and increase the scope of his audience towards

young male fans of the videogame series, while simultaneously (and unashamedly)

attempting to "[boost] sales of the game series" (Leitch, 2007: 273). Following *Street*

Fighter, Van Damme's career began a nosedive from which it would take the better

part of a decade to recover, while de Souza, despite being burned from his debut

directorial effort, "was credited for the story in *Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Cradle*

of Life" (Plante, 2014).

3.5 Franchising *Mortal Kombat*

In this section, I detail *Mortal Kombat*'s efforts to appropriate from Hong Kong

cinema for its live-action adaptation as a counterpart to *Street Fighter*'s live-action

adaptation owing little to its martial arts heritage. I also illustrate how the decision to

franchise *Mortal Kombat*'s narrative and capitalise on its popularity led to its live-action adaptation explicitly emphasising its intertextual legacy to Hong Kong by blatantly evoking the imagery, philosophy, and structure of *Enter the Dragon*.

      Mortal Kombat's initial success during the early nineties quickly captured the attention of Hollywood, despite this being far from the mind of co-creator Ed Boon (Goldman, quoting Boon, 1996: 2). While Goldman also stated that *Mortal Kombat* "became the most popular video game in history" between 1992 and 1995 (ibid), Midway had no interest in pursuing movie ventures given the poor reputation of previous videogame adaptations, yet *Mortal Kombat*'s popularity and product and licensing revenue meant that an adaptation was simply inevitable (ibid). Admirably, Roger Sharpe, Midway's Director of Licensing at the time, resolved that a *Mortal Kombat* adaptation had to "remain faithful to what we had created with the game", feeling it was imperative to "find the right people to make the film the right way" (ibid, quoting Sharpe: 3).

      Previously, Lawrence Kasanoff had anticipated *Mortal Kombat*'s impending success outside arcades and secured the film rights before its release on home consoles (Russell, 2012: 146-147). Kasanoff had previously worked at Lightstorm Entertainment to adapt *Terminator 2* into a videogame, and approached *Mortal Kombat* with a specific vision of how best to adapt the videogame's narrative, characters, themes, and situations into a multimedia venture. By September 1993, Kasanoff entered a deal with Midway that included not just a live-action adaptation, but animation, soundtracks, and other ancillary products, purely based on Kasanoff's experience with science-fiction and fantasy genres: he "recognized how important myths and legends are to the back-story and how each character was original and different" (Goldman, quoting Sharpe, 1996: 3).

Kasanoff's attempts to sell *Mortal Kombat* around Hollywood were fruitful as its success had made studios aware of the brand, though few understood the concept or were put off by its videogame roots – Russell (2012: 147) explains that "Hollywood, always risk averse, was convinced that videogame movies were the kiss of death after the corrosive impact of Super Mario Bros.". Kasanoff (quoted by ibid) stated that he was repeatedly warned off the project, which would surely "ruin his career", before approaching New Line Cinema, then a top independent film studio, who understood *Mortal Kombat*'s story and characters and even played it in their office (Goldman, quoting Kasanoff, 1996: 5).

Importantly, Kasanoff knew that New Line's summer schedule lacked a blockbuster hit, and used this – and his reputation – as leverage during his negotiations with New Line's Chief Operating Officer, Michael De Luca (Russell, 2012: 148). Within a month, Kasanoff agreed to half his initial fee provided that New Line financed and distributed *Mortal Kombat* while he retained "sequel, merchandising and TV rights" similar to "George Lucas's deal with Fox on Star Wars" (ibid). Naturally, once *Mortal Kombat* became the success that Kasanoff believed it would, he profited immensely, incurring some resentment from the studio, who constantly tried to retrieve those now-lucrative rights (ibid). As part of the deal, Kasanoff (quoted by Goldman, 1996: 5) insisted on "[hiring] the best special effects people, the best martial artists in the world [and] to take these people halfway around the world to shoot the movie". New Line defied normal Hollywood conventions by agreeing to a production deal, rather than a developmental deal, meaning they would be committed to making a movie no matter what (ibid).

As Kasanoff had always intended to develop not just a *Mortal Kombat* movie, but an entire franchise (Russell, quoting Kasanoff, 2012: 147), he believed the best

avenue was to "to base the movie not on the video game itself, but on the Mortal

Kombat story" (Goldman, quoting Kasanoff, 1996: 5). This approach permeated

every aspect of Kasanoff's multimedia production, and was made explicit in Sean

Catherine Derek's writer's guide for 1996 animated series,[24] *Mortal Kombat:*

Defenders of the Realm (1996): "we're not creating media based on a video game per

se, but we're creating media based on the story the video game comes from" (Derek,

1996).

Kasanoff was adamant that *Mortal Kombat* would succeed where other

videogame adaptations had failed if the film was based around the story – "The story

is the centre of the wheel and the videogame is the extension of one of the spokes"

(Russell, quoting Kasanoff, 2012: 148). That story, "rich in mythology, character,

adventure, excitement and positive messages" regarding the sanctity of life (Derek,

1996), was further elaborated upon when Kasanoff involved Boon and Tobias in the

film's production by requesting they produce a comprehensive *Mortal Kombat* Bible

(Russell, 2012: 147; Goldman, 1996: 6).

A fan and practitioner of martial arts, writer Kevin Droney produced

comprehensive approaches to *Mortal Kombat*'s story based on this bible,

understanding that mythology and fighting would not be enough to sustain the film,

and believing that "a story with a reluctant hero, humor, and simple good versus evil

themes would really appeal to fans of *Mortal Kombat*, as well as to those who had

never played the game" (quoted by Goldman, 1996: 6). Droney developed distinct

personalities for each character, infused a sense of order and purpose, and produced a

solid structure wherein the action continuously rose, rather than keeping things

stagnant (ibid: 7). Droney worked to meet Kasanoff's vision of a "martial arts quest

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[24] The writer's guide was made available for download on the forums of the fan-moderated website
Mortal Kombat Online (Derek, 1996).

epic" that was "a cross between *Enter the Dragon* and *Star Wars*" and filled with

"colorful, fun, hip, and recognizable characters" (ibid, and quoting Kasanoff: 6).

To direct, Kasanoff selected Paul W.S. Anderson, a graduate of the University

of Warwick, who was a relatively new and young director at the time, having

completed only one feature film, *Shopping* (Anderson, 1994). Nevertheless, Kasanoff

was impressed and offered Anderson the job, despite Anderson's comparative

inexperience, because he seemingly embodied the "Young and hip […] energy"

Kasanoff envisioned for *Mortal Kombat*: "We wanted a totally different look, and I

thought Paul would give us that" (ibid: 7).

In keeping with Kasanoff's vision, Anderson approached the film as "an old-

fashioned mythic movie with a simple premise of good guys on a quest and bad guys

out to thwart that quest", one he often compared to *Jason and the Argonauts* (Chaffey,

1963), claiming he was attracted by *Mortal Kombat*'s basis in "classic mythology"

(ibid, quoting Anderson; The Arrow, quoting Anderson, 2002). Like Kasanoff,

Anderson also firmly believed that videogames "were a justifiable intellectual

property to adapt into movies. It was just that no one had made a very good movie

out of one yet that reflected the game correctly and that was also a movie-going

experience that pleased fans as well as non-gamers. Mortal Kombat was probably the

first movie to deliver that" (quoted by Russell, 2012: 149).

Much of *Mortal Kombat*'s estimated $20 million budget was spent on

replicating the videogame's special effects, hiring martial arts choreographers, and

flying around the world to shoot the picture (ibid: 150). While Pat Johnson (who had

previously worked with Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan, and Chuck Norris, among others)

was chosen as martial arts coordinator, Kasanoff often argued with New Line

executives regarding the martial arts talent – "You'd tell them: 'I have to fly this guy

in […] because he's the best wushu kicker in the world' and they'd [say]: 'Who cares? Just kick somebody'. But that's not what you do. We took extraordinary care with the martial arts. The biggest tenet of Mortal Kombat is the martial arts" (ibid, quoting Kasanoff: 151).

Indeed, rather than parodying Hong Kong movies or diluting the story with mindless violence, *Mortal Kombat* aimed to bring the purity and sincerity of Hong Kong martial arts to American audiences. Johnson, well-known for his flexible approach to fight choreography, ensured that each character had a distinctive fighting style, working closely with each actor to develop a style unique to their character's strengths and individuality. Goldman (1996: 11) details that Robin Shou, a Hong Kong veteran cast as protagonist Liu Kang, worked closely with Johnson to develop an entirely new fighting style for the film that transposed his usual discipline.

In Shou, Kasanoff believed they had found a star comparable to Bruce Lee, one who was physically capable of bringing genuine Hong Kong martial arts to a big-budget Hollywood production as Lee had in *Enter the Dragon*, and who could also speak fluent English. In addition to acting and performing all his own stunts and fight scenes, Shou also choreographed "two of the movie's most crucial fight scenes— Johnny Cage's battle with Scorpion and Liu Kang's encounter with Reptile" (ibid: 16/17).

While *Mortal Kombat* had the benefit of a workable, fantasy-based story, its cast almost undeniably raised the film above other videogame adaptations. Cary-Hiroyuki Tagawa was "the *very first* and *only* actor considered for Shang Tsung" (ibid, quoting Kasanoff: 15), filling the role so perfectly that he arrived to his audition in full costume, regaling the crew with "stories of sorcerers, demons, mystery, and magic" (ibid).

Mortal Kombat's multi-national, cult flavour was further emphasised by the casting of Christopher Lambert as Raiden.[25] Lambert, already known in international circles and having achieved cult success through films like *Highlander* (Mulcahy, 1986), was already "familiar with the video game" and impressed with the film's script, which he described as "a great action-adventure story that's consistent with the video game, but on a much grander scale" (ibid, and quoting Lambert: 16). Lambert's portrayal of Raiden as a teacher-figure who guided the Earthrealm warriors yet spoke in riddles and had a distinct sense of humour considerably expanded upon Raiden's videogame counterpart who, originally, displayed far less nobility [*fig 3.1*].
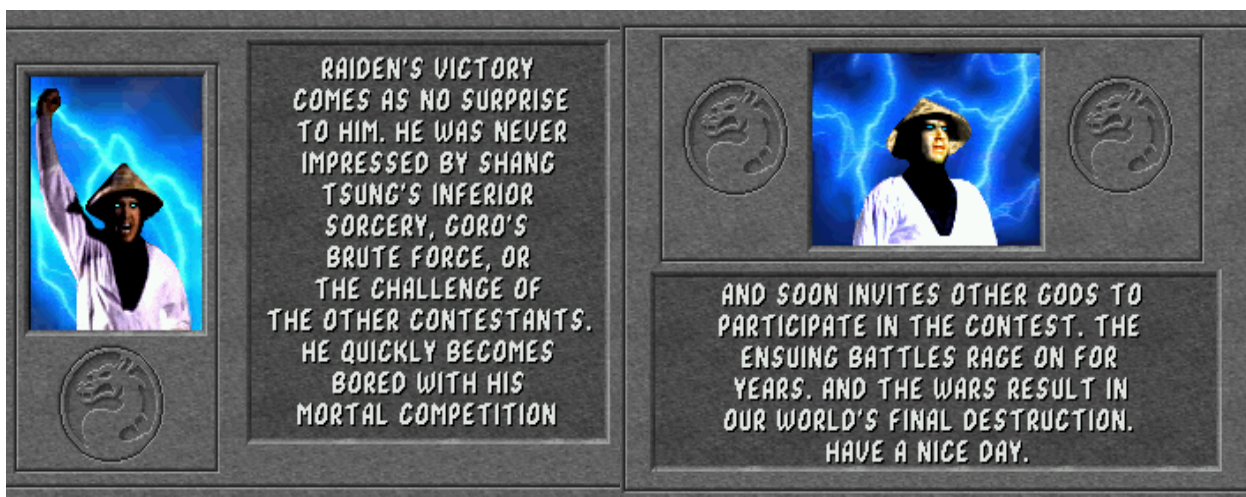
fig 3.1: "Pik", a member of the *Mortal Kombat* fan website Kamidogu (2010) illustrates that Raiden's original in-game portrayal was far from the benevolent teacher popularised by his live-action counterpart.

Similarly, as Kano, Trevor Goddard delivered such "a fantastic portrait of the kind of guy you love to hate" (ibid, quoting Kasanoff: 41) that his videogame counterpart was later altered in homage to Goddard's performance [*fig 3.2*]. Comparatively, the animosity between Scorpion (Chris Casamassa) and Sub-Zero (Francois Petit), portrayed by two of "the world's top martial artists" (ibid: 19), was dropped in favour of largely non-speaking roles.

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[25] In a debate started by user RaisnCain in the Mortal Kombat Online forums, it is discussed that Raiden was often credited as "Rayden", possibly due to legal issues (Mortal Kombat Online Kommunity, 2006). On social media website Twitter, Ed Boon attributed the change to Acclaim, who supervised *Mortal Kombat*'s home console ports, and claimed to have hated it (Boon, 2010).
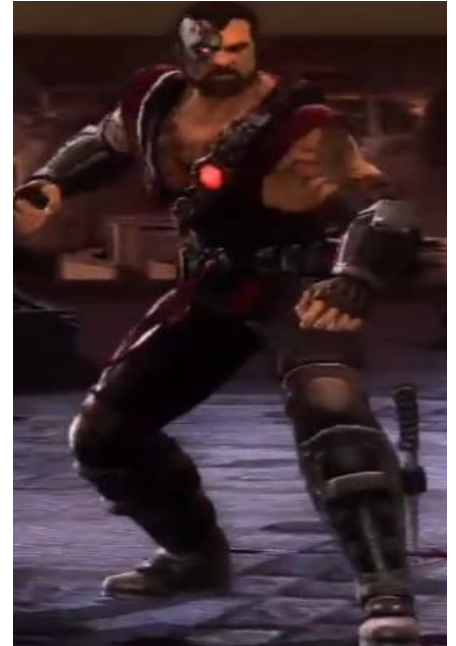
fig 3.2: Kano's in-game depiction not only adopted an Australian accent, similar to the one assumed by Goddard as reported by the Sydney Morning Herald (2003), but was also modelled to resemble him, as illustrated by Mortal Kombat Secrets (2011), Filmweb (2013), and Comic Vine (2015).

Yet, though underdeveloped onscreen, these characters were crucial in delivering many of the film's "most important martial arts sequences", which featured several "complex gymnastic stunts […] pulled off without trick photography" (ibid: 66), a key component behind the casting of all of *Mortal Kombat*'s fighters – "we sought out extraordinary martial artists who could do their own stunts […] without having to cheat and cut around them, as is usually done these days in American martial arts films" (ibid, quoting Kasanoff: 31).

Omitting this rivalry allowed a narrative focus on the dynamic between Liu Kang, Johnny Cage (Linden Ashby), and Sonya Blade (Bridgette Wilson), three relatable protagonists forced to adapt to, and battle through, their fantastical situation (ibid: 27/37). *Mortal Kombat* evokes its videogame origins by staging these battles through what Leitch (2007: 264) describes as "a series of ritualized man-to-man [(or woman)] combats in a series of two-dimensional spaces […] and accompanies them by the exaggerated percussive sounds common to [videogames]".

Mortal Kombat also bolsters its videogame "atavistic [narrative] by invoking other, more respectable, narratives from generic borrowings from Hollywood action films to more specific references" (ibid: 266), specifically *Enter the Dragon*'s structure and character portrayals. Rather than be detrimental to *Mortal Kombat*'s status as an adaptation, this appropriation of "other fictional or historical narratives" allowed the film to be distinct amongst other videogame adaptations by establishing a "distinctive genre that both acknowledges a debt to their originals and maintains a distance from them" (ibid: 268).

Russell (2012: 151) describes how, after *Mortal Kombat*'s initial test screenings yielded requests for more fighting rather than talking, among other changes, New Line begrudgingly funded additional reshoots to augment the fight sequences. Yet, even after subsequent test screenings proved extremely enthusiastic, Kasanoff relates that "no one had faith in it, neither at New Line or Midway. Or even in Hollywood generally", with both New Line and Midway's chief executive, Neil Nicastro, explicitly criticising the production (Russell, and quoting Kasanoff, 2012: 151-152). Defiantly, *Mortal Kombat* "took over $23 million in its opening weekend" and eventually grossed over $122 million worldwide (ibid: 153) – a notably impressive figure that made *Mortal Kombat* the "most successful [videogame adaptation] of all time" until *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*'s gross of over $274 million (Jones, *et al*, 2007: 39; Russell, 2005: 176).

Mortal Kombat garnered a cult reputation –Thought Catalog's Ezra Riemer (2010) believed it was "modestly celebrated as an enjoyable piece of camp" – and its financial return caused Kasanoff's detractors to reverse their opinions. Encouraged by his massive gamble paying off (and with dividends), Kasanoff used *Mortal Kombat*'s success to begin "what would become a $3 billion cross-media franchise"

(Russell, 2012: 153) that would include "an animated video special, a live-action tour […], a series of toys and merchandise licenses, a making-of-the-movie book, a novelization […] a live-action TV show, and an animated series" (ibid, quoting Kasanoff).

Anderson's *Mortal Kombat* aimed to "create a heightened reality world" in which the fantastical nature of *Mortal Kombat* seemed believable and based in a tangible reality (Goldman, quoting Kasanoff, 1996: 20). Beyond taking the cast and crew to real-world locations to shoot exterior scenes, extremely complex sets and practical effects allowed the protagonists to enter a familiar, and yet mystical, world.

Although Liu Kang was raised with knowledge of both Outworld and Mortal Kombat, in the film he is a non-believer who initially rejects the notion that "men fighting in a simple contest" could decide the fate of the world. Yet, when the reality of Mortal Kombat is revealed, Liu is forced to realise that his upbringing was based on truth, and becomes a secondary source of exposition to his ignorant companions.

Mortal Kombat's reality, as related by Liu and Raiden, is that mortals must defend their existence, and that only self-belief and fighting skill can conquer the forces of Outworld. Thus, when thrust into Shang Tsung's deadly tournament, the time for talking and reason is over, and the protagonists must fight to defend not only their lives and souls, but those of everyone in Earthrealm as well, evoking the classic chivalrous *wu xia pian* spirit.

To facilitate this, the filmmakers sought to include some of "the most ambitious, most gruelling, and the most realistic [fight scenes] ever put together for any American film" (ibid: 58) in order to give each character a sense of identity through their fighting styles as much as anything else. Just as Hunt (2003: 189) believed *Enter the Dragon*'s protagonists anticipated "the racial-cultural inclusivity of

fighting games" through a cast that represented "as many different fighting styles as possible", *Mortal Kombat* avoided the then-traditional fast-paced, quick-cut editing of American action movies for "the Hong Kong style of film martial artistry", which included "actual combat fights [and] complete, cohesive fights shot at wide angles" (Goldman, 1996: 20).

Principally, *Mortal Kombat* acted as a loose remake of *Enter the Dragon*, taking the beat-'em-up genre back to its cinematic influence, "albeit with Ray Harryhausen-style fantasy trappings – the main characters' arrival on the island, welcoming feast, and the Han-like speech of 'Main Boss' Tsang Sung [*sic*] consciously invite such a comparison" (Hunt, 2003: 189). Hollywood's obsession with Hong Kong in the seventies could be seen "to be positioned precariously between 'Asiaphilia' and Asiaphobia. Both can be seen in the way *Enter the Dragon* both fetishizes the 'Orient' and replays 'Yellow Peril' archetypes" (ibid: 158). That *Mortal Kombat*'s threat is stated to be otherworldly is by no means an exception as its antagonists, particularly Shang Tsung, are portrayed by Cantonese actors indicative of "Hollywood's 'romance' with the 'Orient'", which, in Hunt's view (ibid), "has always been deeply contradictory, and is made no less so by the requirements of 'political correctness'".

Hong Kong cinema's aspirations for worldwide appeal have long seen a disassociation with their cultural heritage in order to better appeal to international audiences, particularly in "Jackie Chan's later Hong Kong films", which restructured Chan's persona "for the global marketplace" (ibid: 160). An emphasis was placed on having Chan travel to numerous, often exotic, international locations similar to James Bond's globe-trotting adventures and "ethnocentric representation of other cultures" (ibid, and quoting Fore). Hong Kong's cultural identity has been further negated by

"transnational/Hollywood films made by Hong Kong film-makers" that constructed Hong Kong as an "identity" that transplanted all others in "a form of 'marginal imperialism'" that arguably held back the development of "Taiwanese cinema, just as Hollywood did to Hong Kong itself after 1993" (ibid, and quoting Ding-Tzann Lii).

Tsung's status as a soul-stealing, shape-shifting Outworld sorcerer – and the clearly Cantonese appearance of both him and his masked underlings – represents both an Asian and supernatural threat, one with power and traditions far beyond Western understanding. It is thus unsurprising that the only mortals aware of, and best suited to combating, this threat are Orientals (specifically Shaolin monks), while Westerners like Johnny Cage and Sonya Blade are ignorant towards it. *Mortal Kombat*'s archetypal, Orientalised mastermind clearly evokes *Enter the Dragon* far more explicitly than *Street Fighter*, as Tsung takes the form of a frail old man to conceal his true powers in a reverse of Bison's more imposing (and Caucasian) physique. In the first *Mortal Kombat* videogame, Tsung's limited move-set relies on consecutive projectiles and his true threat was his ability to shape-shift into other fighters and the preceding sub-boss, Goro, against whom players face a greater physical threat.

For Anderson's film, the protagonists are faced with a series of challenges, both physical and personal, with only Liu Kang's first opponent being of little consequence beyond showcasing Tsung's ability to steal souls. In the film, Tsung is flanked not only by Goro but a series of sub-bosses who present physical, and emotional, challenges to the heroes. Kano is the most obvious example, as his history with Sonya extends to events prior to the film, but Scorpion, Sub-Zero, and Reptile (Keith Cooke) all present similar challenges to Cage and Liu, respectively (Goldman, quoting Francis, 1996: 10).

Early on, Scorpion and Sub-Zero intimidate the mortals with their outlandish powers and silent demeanour, while Reptile constantly stalks them whilst invisible. Thus, when the protagonists face these opponents, the audience becomes aware that this battle has more meaning than a simple scuffle with Tsung's henchmen. This is made explicit twice in the film: first, when Kitana (Talisa Soto) purposely throws a fight with Liu in order to relate Sub-Zero's weakness, implying that these opponents are so formidable that the protagonists must not only be fully proficient in their martial arts skill but also extremely innovative. The second time is when Cage overcomes his ego to challenge, and eliminate, Goro and allow the protagonists to progress without Goro's threat. Notably, when Cage and Liu travel to Outworld, the last obstacle they face before Tsung is Reptile, whose highly-anticipated assumption of a human form is presented as an epic battle.

Like the Scorpion/Cage battle, the Liu/Reptile fight was purposely choreographed by Shou to showcase "more of the all-out Hong Kong fighting style […], giving them a different, rougher look" (ibid, and quoting Shou: 68). Shou believed that, "The problem with Hong Kong movies is that they are a bit too stylized […] they're great, considering their budget [but to] me, a free-form kind of fight, not so choreographed, is better" (ibid).

Consequently, Reptile is faster, stronger, and wilder than his predecessors, and Liu is only able to defeat him by utilising a special move (the Bicycle Kick), indicating that Liu's belief in his abilities has allowed him to perform even more impressive martial arts skills. This mastery of both physical and spiritual energy is further illustrated in Liu and Tsung's climatic battle, wherein Liu triumphs with a flash of light that somewhat resembles his fireball attack from *Mortal Kombat II*, indicating that Liu's mastery has allowed him to utilise *qi*-based attacks. During this

climactic battle, after Tsung's sorcery fails to best Liu, he resorts to hand-to-hand in a desperate attempt to emerge victorious.

Hunt (2003: 189) describes how *Enter the Dragon*'s three protagonists were all given a backstory, with each receiving "a flashback to motivate their entry into the tournament (revenge/honour, gambling debts, problems with racist cops)". Anderson likewise ensured that *Mortal Kombat*'s characters complement each other: Sub-Zero represents *qi* turned to evil, while Liu eventually masters his physical and spiritual self to turn it to good; Tsung represents magic corrupted into darkness, while Raiden wields his with restraint and responsibility; Scorpion represents death, literally dragging Cage to Hell to fight, while Cage exhibits the ingenuity of human life; Goro represents the impossible, a veritable man-mountain whose power cannot be matched and must be outwitted, while Sonya comes to represent faith and trust against Kano's selfish gluttony. Like *Street Fighter II*, *Mortal Kombat* explicitly evokes "other cinematic referents for [their] visual (and aural) spectacle, which conspicuously avoids the B-movie ambience of *Enter the Dragon*" and *qi*-based projectile attacks (ibid).

According to the Hong Kong Film Archive (quoted by ibid: 190), "[*wu xia pian* techniques used] *qi* to "drive a sword […] and behead enemies hundreds of miles away", a technique "as accurate as any modern day missile". *Qi* allowed for spectacular stunts, special effects, and deaths, and "*wu xia*'s *fantastique* tradition has always been dependant on special effects – wires, reverse footage, even animation" (ibid). *Qi* was popularised by Japanese anime like *Dragonball Z*, where *qi* renders already-superhuman characters capable of destroying planets, and *Fist of the North Star* (1984-1989), where pressure-point attacks cause "exploding heads and bodies

(gory 'fatalities' that anticipate the head, heart and spine-removals of *Mortal Kombat*)" (ibid).

In *Enter the Dragon*, *qi* is represented through Lee's spiritual nature, his sacred training, and martial arts philosophy, which *Mortal Kombat* evokes through Liu's aforementioned character arc. Similarly, Raiden and Sub-Zero exhibit elemental powers, but Raiden's are attributed to his Thunder God status, while Sub-Zero's – though a form of *qi* in the videogames – are left unexplained, and the film suggests (through the omission of Sub-Zero's backstory) they are a by-product of Outworld. The use of *qi* is presented in a largely negative light as dark magic that the protagonists must overcome, though only the three central protagonists are shown to find ways around these magic-wielders through innovation and skill.

Ultimately, *Mortal Kombat*'s success stems from its ability to capitalise not just on the success and notoriety of its source material but from an intricate marketing and licensing strategy from producer Lawrence Kasanoff. By emphasising *Mortal Kombat*'s narrative elements and making explicit their debt to classic Hong Kong cinema, and by specifically drawing upon *Enter the Dragon*'s structure and plot, Kasanoff established a template for videogame adaptations to follow.

As I explore in Chapter Four, with Hollywood wary of their negative reputation, videogame adaptations came to be approached as genre pieces as part of corporate synergy, developed as semi-independent film productions largely outside of mainstream Hollywood and incorporating financial, and cultural, influences from Europe and Asia. What separated *Mortal Kombat* from *Street Fighter* was an inherent desire to utilise the best of its cult trappings, an intentional plan to succeed where others had failed, and the ability to evoke *Enter the Dragon*'s atmosphere rather than degenerating into incoherency.

3.6 Cult Success and Aftermath

In this section, I further examine Kasanoff's attempts to franchise *Mortal Kombat*

following the film's unprecedented success in a genre otherwise adversely affected by

poor adaptations. While *Mortal Kombat*'s videogame influence began to wane, *Street*

Fighter's grew steadily, and both attempted to branch into television, animation, and

online adaptations. This section details their various successes in these mediums and

further analyses their attempts to be successful outside of the videogames.

Kasanoff's first attempt to capitalise on *Mortal Kombat*'s cinematic success

was the straight-to-video animation, *Mortal Kombat: The Journey Begins* (Francis,

1995). While Derek (1996) alleged that *The Journey Begins* sold "close to one

million copies domestically" and "immediately [reached] number one on the

Billboard kid vid sales and rental charts" (Derek, 1996), Game Front's CJ Miozzi

(2011) found fault with the feature's poorly-rendered CGI, dubious animation, meagre

voice acting, and for being "more boring and longer to digest than a Wiki".

In 1996, the thirteen-episode animated series *Mortal Kombat: Defenders of the*

Realm was produced on the USA Network alongside the twenty-six-episode *Street*

Fighter animated series produced between 1995 and 1997. Both ventures continued

and referenced their respective live-action films yet, ironically, given the anime

styling of its videogame roots, *Street Fighter* opted for more traditional American

Saturday morning cartoon animation while *Defenders*' aesthetic closely mirrored

Mortal Kombat 3's promotional artwork [*fig 3.3*]. Unlike their live-action

predecessors, both fully incorporated special moves and their appropriate

announcements. Interestingly, while *Street Fighter* directly referenced death, while

fig 3.3: Pictures from JoeBattleLines (Scarlett, 2010) and Damaged Goods (Ho, 2014) illustrate how *Street Fighter* aesthetically resembled American animation like *G.I. Joe: A Real American Hero* (1983-1985). Similarly, Lazy Gamer (Bonthuys, 2012) and Mortal Kombat Online (ShingoEX, 2009) demonstrate how *Defenders of the Realm* mirrored *Mortal Kombat 3*'s promotional artwork.

Defenders avoided directly making such references to emphasise the strength of the human spirit (Derek, 1996).

Despite Miozzi (2011) regarding it as "an abomination" and 1UP.com's Dustin Quillen (2011) viewing it as "a terrible, one-liner-packed train wreck of a kids' show", I contest that *Defenders*' episodic nature facilitated the franchising of *Mortal Kombat* not only by balancing multiple character arcs in a way a single movie could not, but also by utilising transmedia storytelling. Television's production processes have fast become common knowledge, primarily due to the influence and legitimacy the medium has earned in contemporary, everyday society. Consequently, Ellis (2004: 275) believes that any emerging cultural phenomenon must inevitably involve or touch upon television due its dominance in modern society.

Television is thus an essential tool for transmedia storytelling, a strategy that, as Jenkins (cited by Bourdaa, 2013: 202) established, allows fictional narratives and worlds to be spread across media outlets, with "each piece offering an entry into the universe". This was central to Kasanoff's plans to expand *Mortal Kombat* beyond the videogames; transmedia storytelling is mainly directed towards franchise fans, who deeply engage with the narrative. As I detailed in Chapter Two, fans are more than willing to dig into and engage with a franchise on multiple levels; Jason Mittell (quoted by ibid: 211) describes transmedia storytelling and franchising as encouraging "a mode of forensic fandom that encourages viewers to dig deeper, probing beneath the surface to understand the complexity of a story. Such programs create magnets for engagement, drawing viewers into the story worlds and urging them to drill down to discover more".

In comparison, *Mortal Kombat: Annihilation* (Leonetti, 1997) ignored the sequential narrative of *Defenders* and flooded its narrative with characters and

convoluted plot points. Produced on an estimated budget of $30 million, *Annihilation*

featured only two returning cast members – Robin Shou and Talisa Soto – with

Anderson passing on directorial duties (The Arrow, quoting Anderson, 2002; Russell,

2012: 153). Despite Box Office Mojo (2013) stating that the film grossed just over

$51 million worldwide, Quillen (2011) lamenting *Annihilation*'s "D-list" cast,

"ridiculous CG monsters […] wafer-thin plot and superhumanly bad acting [and] sub-

made-for-TV quality special effects". Riemer (2010) notes that *Annihilation* is all but

"indefensible", with each subsequent viewing "revealing a new terrible line or

incompetent special effect", and whose "only saving grace was its kind-of-awesome

soundtrack".

      This is the result of *Annihilation*'s close adaptation of *Ultimate Mortal*

Kombat 3's convoluted narrative, featuring practically every character from said title

and following the same basic plot. *Mortal Kombat* had grown increasingly unwieldy

during the mid-nineties and the influx of characters (particularly palette-swapped

avatars), each with their own elaborate storylines, began to negatively affect the

franchise's popularity and reception (Jones, *et al*, 2007: 32). This was reflected in

Annihilation; where its predecessor had focused on three protagonists and surrounded

them with visually interesting opponents, *Annihilation* bloated its narrative with

multiple characters, many of whom were either only briefly mentioned ("Kabal and

Stryker"), never named onscreen, or reduced to brief cameos.

      Despite its flaws and also juggling multiple characters, *Street Fighter* still

managed to make even the most one-dimensional characters relevant to the plot in

some way, even if they were ultimately insignificant compared to Guile. *Annihilation*

opted to replace the recently-deceased Johnny Cage (Chris Conrad) with Jax (Lynn

Williams) and add a host of antagonists (with Brian Thompson's Shao Kahn being a

poor substitute for Cary-Hiroyuki Tagawa's menacing Shang Tsung), effectively

removing the "charm and authenticity of Anderson's original" (ibid: 29).

Additionally, *Annihilation*'s fight scenes were sub-par compared to its predecessor

(ibid), regressing into what Osborne (1998: 97) viewed as "a series of boring,

repetitive fight sequences that would make Bruce Lee turn in his grave. It's just 12

samey scenes, one after the other, with very little in between"

       Meanwhile, the high-quality anime feature *Street Fighter II: The Animated

Movie* (Sugii, 1994), dubbed and released internationally soon after the live-action

iteration, brought the franchise some much-need adaptation credibility. As anime

aesthetics had significantly influenced *Street Fighter II*'s popularity (Carle, and

quoting Killian, 2010: 68), adapting it into anime was fitting and resulted in what

Marc "Makosuke" Marshall (2012) of Akemi's Anime World called "one of the best

looking" anime ever produced, featuring "some of the most solid, semi-realistic

brawling in any anime, period". *The Animated Movie* effectively countered its live-

action counterpart by explicitly evoking the sensibilities of Japanese anime, yet it

embraced a "notably Hollywood-action-movie style of directing and storytelling",

which compensated for the relatively basic plot by "at least giving the impression that

you're not just watching a string of fights" (ibid).

       Unlike its live-action counterpart, *The Animated Movie* featured every

character from *Super Street Fighter II: The New Challengers* (Capcom, 1993) in

exactly the same roles fans expected – Ryu (Kōjirō Shimizu/Skip Stellrecht) was the

principal protagonist, for example, and each performed their special moves in a series

of intense, gravity-and-logic-defying action sequences. Surman (2007: 210) notes

that special moves give players "two pleasure registers; first in viewing the

spectacular representation of the special move […] and secondly in a sense of reward

or gratification – a confirmation of the player's successful mastery of the videogame control inputs".

This correlation creates "a heightened sense of gratification on the part of the player as she or he 'becomes' their chosen martial arts superstar" (ibid). Thus, incorporating special moves allowed the anime to generate a greater appeal amongst *Street Fighter* fans, who have become intrinsically invested not only in their avatar's appearance and backstory but also in their special moves. Indeed, Bison's (Takeshi Kusaka/Tom Wyner) plot to harness Ryu's powerful *qi* allows special moves to become a narrative catalyst, which continued in subsequent *Street Fighter* anime, which explored Ryu's struggle to control the *Satsui no Hadō* (ibid: 217).[26]

According to Derek (1996), whose promotional literature was designed to license *Mortal Kombat*, by 1996 *Mortal Kombat* was allegedly "one of the largest, best known and most popular entertainment franchises in the world". Anderson's movie helped the franchise gain "100% name recognition in [the US]"; its target audience of "males ages 4 – 18 [exhibited] virtually a 100% extraordinarily strong likability factor towards the property and a phenomenal knowledge of all the characters" (ibid). *Annihilation*'s poor reception came during the franchise's waning popularity in the face of other, more competitive fighting videogames. Yet, Kasanoff's multimedia ventures continued with *Mortal Kombat: Conquest*, a live-action prequel to Anderson's film, aired twenty-two episodes between 1998 and 1999.

Cancelled after only one season, Miozzi (2011) claimed *Conquest* was "Another failed foray into the TV medium", Riemer (2010) regarded it fondly as "a darker, less coherent version of that Kevin Sorbo Hercules show", and Quillen (2011) saw it as a "wire-fu disaster". Warner Bros. shared *Conquest*'s production costs with

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[26] The "Surge of Murderous Intent", basically the power of *qi* put to evil, best personified by the practitioner and master of the *Shun Goku Satsu* ("Instant Hell Murder"/"Raging Demon"), Akuma (known in Japan as "Gouki") (Moylan, 2010: 8).

TNT, who aired *Conquest* right after World Championship Wrestling's (WCW) *Monday Nitro*, allowing *Conquest* to reach its target audience in a convenient timeslot. Consequently, however, *Conquest*'s Executive Story Consultant and Writer James Cappe, in an interview with the *Mortal Kombat Conquest* site (2003), claimed they were "ordered" to guest star WCW wrestlers in the show, and that budget and time constraints precluded *Conquest* from producing "better scripts [and] more spectacular action".

In a series of subsequent interviews for the same website, a staff member known as "Dreth" reveals that, despite its opportune timeslot and "great ratings" (quoting Maropis, 2006), "Warner Bros. Distribution and TNT were unable to sustain market interest in the product for another season" (ibid, quoting Barnes, 2002), potentially due to *Mortal Kombat* being "blamed for the Columbine shootings at that time" (ibid, quoting Maropis, 2006). Despite its cancellation, *Conquest* gained a cult following, mainly due to the cliffhanger ending that saw the entire cast killed off: "We wanted to come up with a cool season finale. We had every intention of returning and bringing back most of the characters […] When the series was cancelled we never had the chance […] it's a terrible series finale" (MKCSite, quoting Cappe, 2003). This was especially disappointing to the cast and crew (ibid, quoting Barnes, 2002), most of whom were enthusiastic about *Conquest*'s continuation (Dreth, quoting Casamassa, 2006).

Following *Conquest*, *Mortal Kombat* avoided multimedia ventures to rebuild and refocus the videogame brand. While Capcom followed suit, numerous *Street Fighter* anime ventures continued to be produced, before Capcom returned to live-action with *Street Fighter: The Legend of Chun-Li*, which followed Chun-Li's

(Kristin Kreuk) effort to rescue her father from M. Bison (Neal McDonough), rather than being a sequel to the original 1994 production.

Legend was produced on an estimated budget of $50 million (IMDb, 2013), yet reaped only $12 million worldwide (Box Office Mojo, 2013), barely beating its predecessor's return, and received scathing criticism. Although including and exploring *qi* in a way that its predecessor did not, Jeremy Wheeler, reviewing the film for TV Guide (2009), criticised *Legend*'s underwhelming […] cornball ineptitude", "dull moments and barely inspired fight scenes […] and hammy performances". The film avoided its predecessor's "cartoonish" approach in an attempt to find "a balance between nonsense and fairly grounded dramatics" – a "bipolarity that undoes the flick, even through the eyes of a bad movie lover" (ibid).

Legend only added to the negative reputation of videogame adaptations largely fuelled by its predecessor, though *Street Fighter IV*'s (Capcom, 2008) success ensured it did little to damage the reputation of the videogame series (Jones, *et al*, 2012: 68), if nothing else. *Mortal Kombat*, meanwhile, received a dramatic revision with the eight-minute live-action online short *Mortal Kombat: Rebirth* (Tancharoen, 2010), with Josh Wigler (2010) of the Comics Alliance reported that the short was director Kevin Tancharoen's gritty, noir-style pitch to Warner Bros.

Rebirth depicted Deacon City Police Captain Jackson Briggs (Michael Jai White) and his partner Sonya Blade (Jeri Ryan) recruiting Hanzo Hasashi/Scorpion (Ian Anthony Dale) to infiltrate a tournament and assassinate Shang Tsung (James Lew). *Mortal Kombat* co-creator Ed Boon (quoted by Graft, 2010) was "really impressed" with *Rebirth*, stating: "I think it's a very legitimate alternate universe Mortal Kombat, and so I was excited about it".

Filmed on a self-funded budget of $7,500, *Rebirth* was never intended to be publicly released; yet, as reported by Gigaom's Liz Shannon Miller (2011), its initial YouTube posting "received almost a million views in less than 24 hours, eventually reaching more than seven million views". Tancharoen (quoted by Schaffer, 2011) stated that Warner Bros. were "very receptive" of the short, and Miller (2011) – and The Escapist's Tom Goldman (2011) – soon reported that Lance Sloane, Head of Digital Productions, had approved a ten-episode follow-up web series. *Mortal Kombat: Legacy*, which "received around 5 million hits within its first week of airing" on Machinima's YouTube channel (Russell, 2012: 287).

Unlike *Rebirth, Legacy* reintroduced *Mortal Kombat* to new audiences, rather than being a "realistic" reboot, in anticipation of *Mortal Kombat (2011)*'s then-impending release: "I was allowed to inject a handful of my ideas […] But the overall design of this series is to help promote the game, get the Mortal Kombat name back out there. And everyone wants to see a live-action Mortal Kombat. This was a nice way to do all of that at the same time" (Schaffer, quoting Tancharoen, 2011).

Legacy avoided a tournament structure for a series of character studies that, like *Mortal Kombat (2011)*, retold the classic narrative of the original videogames in a way that was both familiar and new by incorporating the narrative developments of the franchise. This allowed Scorpion and Sub-Zero's (Kevan Ohtsji) rivalry to be fully explored: their individual ninja clans, true names, and familial lineage are depicted, as is Quan Chi's (Michael Rogers) involvement in their feud.

In *Legacy*, Tancharoen (quoted by Weintraub, 2010) included supernatural elements "in a very tasteful way […not] too campy or too cheesy" by following Anderson's lead in assigning these elements to supernatural origins. Thus, Scorpion only gains supernatural abilities after his resurrection at the hands of Quan Chi, a

Netherrealm denizen. Only the episode "Raiden" reflects Tancharoen's *Rebirth* approach, depicting the titular Thunder God (Ryan Robbins) confined to a mental institution. Though severely weakened by human intervention, he remains a God; the aim being not to diminish Raiden's character but to better explore him *as* a character by making him more human, similar to Lambert's portrayal (Goldman, 1996: 29).

After *Legacy*'s US-exclusive Blu-ray release, a second season debuted online in 2013; *Mortal Kombat: Legacy II* revolved around the eve of the latest Mortal Kombat tournament. Tancharoen's influence comes to the forefront here; in an online interview with SuperHeroHype, Tancharoen (quoted by Perry, 2013) stated his intention to reconfigure Liu Kang's (Brian Tee) "dated […] boy scout" persona into an embittered, violent individual seduced into opposing the morally-pure Kung Lao (Marc Dacascos). Significantly, *Legacy II* saw Cary-Hiroyuki Tagawa reprise his iconic role as Shang Tsung, ensuring an explicit consistency with Anderson's popular adaptation, thereby allowing *Legacy* the opportunity to be perceived more favourably by its intended audience (Wolf, 2009: 218/219).

Additionally, *Legacy II* takes place after Liu's victory and largely appropriates from *Mortal Kombat II*, and also postulates that Earthrealm warriors possess dormant superhuman abilities which only awaken in Outworld, emphasising that there is more to a chosen Earthrealm warrior than martial arts skill. Supported by Ed Boon and NetherRealm Studios, Tancharoen was afforded invaluable input and support and an impressive degree of leeway: "[NetherRealm] don't force you to adhere to certain rules for the game because they know this is a new medium" (quoted by Perry, 2013).

Legacy successfully overcame the restrictions of its budget and utilised its episodic format to emphasise focused, character-based stories in a similar vein to *Mortal Kombat*'s televised incarnations, allowing a deeper exploration of the

franchise's central characters that, as discussed, live-action films have struggled with. *Street Fighter* achieved similar online success when Joey Ansah's proof-of-concept *Street Fighter: Legacy* (Ansah, 2010) led to the twelve-episode web series *Street Fighter: Assassin's Fist* (ibid, 2014). This live-action rendition of Ryu (Mike Moh) and Ken's (Christian Howard) training garnered positive responses from Continue Play's Shehzaan Abdulla (2014) and IGN's Jesse Schedeen (2014), and a DVD/Blu-ray release (Anime News Network, 2014). Variety's Marc Graser (2014) also reported that a sequel, which will incorporate storylines from *Street Fighter II*, is also currently in development.

While a third live-action *Mortal Kombat* has long been rumoured online, often tentatively titled *Mortal Kombat: Devastation*, either as an alternative sequel or a complete reboot (Clint, 2008; Miozzi, 2011; Sinclair, 2009), nothing ever materialised due to Midway's bankruptcy. Following the positive reception of *Legacy* and *Mortal Kombat*'s videogame resurgence, Toby Emmerich of New Line Cinema – Warner Bros' sister-studio and the original financer and distributer of Kasanoff's *Mortal Kombat* ventures – announced plans for a new *Mortal Kombat* feature film (quoted by Staskiewicz, 2011).

Originally in development with Tancharoen set to direct and promising to emphasise "brutal" martial arts (ibid, quoting Tancharoen), Tancharoen's plans to "add another layer" to *Mortal Kombat*'s "20+ year" legacy (Perry, quoting Tancharoen, 2013) were ultimately dashed when SuperHeroHype's Silas Lesnik (2013) and Nerd Reactor's John "Spartan" Nguyen (2014) reported his sudden departure in 2013 in favour of other creative prospects. However, with James Wan recently signed as a producer (Lesnick, 2015), the potential for a new *Mortal Kombat* movie continues to live on.

3.7 Conclusion

Having delved into the rich, layered history of Hong Kong martial arts cinema and the traditional Hollywood action movie, I have examined the clear influence that these two genres have had on beat-'em-up videogames. By evoking the imagery and structure of martial arts cinema and the bombastic action of Hollywood blockbusters, these videogames satisfied an appetite for action and violence that has long been a staple of cinema audiences. When these videogames come to be optioned for adaptations, their intertextual heritage comes to the forefront, yet I have demonstrated that *Street Fighter* and *Mortal Kombat*, while similar, are as different as American action films are to Hong Kong martial arts cinema.

Teo's (2009: 4) exploration of *wu xi pian*'s emphasis on "chivalry and the pursuit of righteousness" through the art of swordplay reveals how this was embodied through the martial arts of kung fu films, specifically through "martial arts [and] fighting traditions […] from different schools, namely Wudang and Shaolin". Conversely, Kendrick (2009: 90) established that American action films employ the physicality of their action heroes and frequently place "male bodies on display, from the lean and muscular physiques [of] the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s […] to the muscle-bound 'hard bodies' of the 1980s". While notions of duty and honour are present, American action films often differ greatly from their Oriental counterparts by emphasising not "qualities of knighthood and heroism" (Teo, 2009: 2), but "spectacular physical action; narrative emphasis on fights, chases and explosions; and the use of special effects and stuntwork" (Kendrick, 2009: 90).

Principally, while Hong Kong kung fu films generally explore a deeper, spiritual meaning behind martial arts, American action films are "a predominantly

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male genre that uses violence to provide appealing, if unrealistic models of masculine power" (ibid). The result is that *Street Fighter*, having originated in Japan, offers "increasingly intricate gameplay" and a wide variety of fighting styles, yet – as Hunt (2003: 194) details – its roots are firmly entrenched in anime traditions rather than "live-action martial arts and has less of an investment in 3D mimesis than some other games".

I have also explored the direct contrast between the American-made *Mortal Kombat*, which incorporated digitised actors to enhance the realism of its avatars, placing them within a violent, elaborate fantasy inspired by Oriental mythology (ibid; Goldman, quoting Tobias, 1996: 1). Indeed, while both are structurally similar as tournament-based beat-'em-ups, their narratives, aesthetics, and gameplay mechanics differ wildly, and, crucially, the influence of both American and Hong Kong action cinema play an integral part in determining the success of their cinematic adaptations.

Accordingly, videogame narrative becomes as important as gameplay in separating a franchise from its rivals and laying the foundations for live-action adaptations (Goldman, 1996: 1). *Mortal Kombat* took "its inspiration from numerous cultures and mythology, including China and Japan [and] has often frustrated fans due to the often-conflicting storylines that conveniently forget key revelations that appeared in previous games" (Jones, *et al*, 2007: 32). Yet *Mortal Kombat*'s intertextual links to mythology and fantasy allows its characters to constantly evolve across the franchise. For example, Liu Kang develops from a Shaolin monk into the Mortal Kombat champion and key defender of Earthrealm, before his death and subsequent resurrection in a zombie-like form. Comparatively, throughout the entire *Street Fighter* series, Ryu's portrayal is consistent – a skilled martial artist, pure of heart, battling his inner demons and seeking greater challenges. *Mortal Kombat*'s

characters were thus so complex and varied that they superseded the franchise's more macabre aspects to become the focus of its adaptations.

Hunt (2003: 9) views Bruce Lee as embodying an almost-unmatched physical authenticity by grounding "his action in crisp, rapid techniques, multiple kicks, 'realistic' exchanges and a fluid grace" and allowing both Hong Kong cinema's international expansion and its influence on videogames. While "Kung fu's global appeal seemed to die with Lee, […] he arguably paved the way for Western martial arts stars like Chuck Norris, Stephen Segal [*sic*], Jean-Claude Van Damme" (ibid), and profoundly influenced the creation of *Mortal Kombat*, *Street Fighter*, and the entire beat-'em-up genre. Surman (2007: 208) illustrates that this is largely due to the unprecedented international success of *Enter the Dragon*:

> The basic conventions of the beat-'em-up genre […] had been defined [by] titles such as [*Karate Champ* and *Yie Ar Kung-Fu*]. These games invariably featured a player-character skilled in martial arts […], set against exotic martial arts sects or cults, gang-land bosses […] and the like, or […] in the context of a larger martial arts tournament, reminiscent of [*Enter the Dragon*…] these games adapted the themes and conventions of the 1970s and 1980s martial-arts action movies coming out of Hong Kong

Undoubtedly, *Mortal Kombat*'s controversial brutality cemented its popularity as a direct competitor to Capcom's more "wholesome" brawler, yet the franchise's inability to offer gameplay variety saw the series lose significant credibility over time. While Capcom continually reinvented *Street Fighter* with innovative gameplay and produced a succession of high-quality anime adaptations, despite deviating very little

narratively, *Mortal Kombat* struggled with the transition to 3D videogaming. *Mortal Kombat (2011)* and *Mortal Kombat X* finally returned the franchise to a traditional 2.5D perspective that included deep, innovative gameplay mechanics rather than being contrived and laborious, returning *Mortal Kombat* from the brink of obscurity, following Midway's bankruptcy, as a serious contender amongst modern beat-'em-ups.

Yet, I have illustrated that *Mortal Kombat* produced one of the more successful videogame adaptations largely due to its explicit evocation of the formula laid out by both Bruce Lee and *Enter the Dragon*. *Mortal Kombat*'s emphasis on its three human protagonists fighting against overwhelming odds and impressive, increasingly-challenging fight sequences owe more than a debt to the legacy of *Enter the Dragon*, it perhaps owes its very existence. Additionally, the importance of the episodic format to videogame adaptations cannot be understated as this allows for a more accurate portrayal of the intertwining, convoluted storylines of the source material.

Similarly important to videogame adaptations is the influence of anime as *Street Fighter*'s anime productions accurately translated not only the videogame characters but their recognisable and popular gameplay styles as well. This allowed the franchise to weather poorly received live-action adaptations while still proving innovative and successful in subsequent videogame releases. As I have emphasised, both franchises have seen significant success when incorporating influences from Hong Kong cinema, whereas the bombastic, comparatively simplistic nature of American action films tends to dilute the adaptation process with incoherency.

To conclude, given that both franchises sought to incorporate both Eastern *and* Western cinematic influences in the production of the videogames and their

characters, it is clearly the delicate equilibrium between the high-octane stunts and

thrills of American action movies and the contemplative, highly skilled kung fu of

Hong Kong cinema that leads these titles to multimedia success. Despite no longer

being attached to direct a *Mortal Kombat* feature film, Kevin Tancharoen's dark,

gritty, semi-realistic work on *Mortal Kombat* is easily the most successful *Mortal*

Kombat adaptation in years, lending the hope that *Mortal Kombat*'s cinematic future,

however controversial and troublesome it may be, could be as blood-soaked, intricate,

and entertaining as its earlier glory days once were.

Chapter Four
The Appropriations, Economics, and Interplay of *Resident Evil*

Overview

This final chapter is the synthesis of the complex methods of narrative reinvention,

franchising, and genre adaptation from my previous chapters. By focusing on the

pressures of corporate film production and franchising, I demonstrate that the

unprecedented financial success of Paul W.S. Anderson's *Resident Evil* franchise

emphasises that videogame adaptations can be economically successful and popular.

Additionally, given the influence of Western zombie films on *Resident Evil*, I briefly

explore the development of the *Resident Evil* videogames and zombie cinema,

establish their recognisable tropes, and detail their appropriation into Anderson's live-

action franchise. Furthermore, I examine Anderson's other appropriations from key

cinematic genres, particularly female-orientated action pieces, to reinforce themes of

gender, action, and franchising and adapt the source material's atmospheric horror

into an action-orientated film franchise. Finally, I analyse Anderson's success in spite

of negative criticism, address the rationale behind the production of videogame

adaptations, and investigate *Resident Evil*'s cinematic history.

4.1 Zombie Cinema

Given the close association *Resident Evil* has with the Western zombie genre, which

is a focal point of this chapter, I begin with a brief overview of zombie cinema to

explain how early zombie films, and the works of George A. Romero in particular,

established the key themes of the genre that would later prove so influential to the *Resident Evil* videogames and, by extension, their cinematic adaptations.

Joe Kane (2010: 1) believes that, in a genre ripe with monstrous icons, from "vampires, the Frankenstein Monster, the Mummy, […] and werewolves", the living dead have proven surprisingly popular among horror audiences. Unlike modern depictions of vampires, Zachary Graves (2010: 6) describes zombies as being grotesque rather than alluring, and often utilised as allegories for the breakdown of society and morality. Yet, while zombies are commonly portrayed as mummified, or reanimated, flesh-eating cannibals, they have been figures of both horror and comedy (ibid: 7). Zombies are often used in conjunction with, or to signal the onset of, an apocalyptic scenario where the living dead have overrun the world and humanity is all but extinct, yet Kim Paffenroth (2006: 13/14) observes that zombies also exhibit an "undeniable humor […] no good zombie movie takes itself, or us, entirely seriously. A pretentious zombie movie is really an oxymoron".

Zombies have also endured decades of reinterpretation, having been born from misconceptions and sensationalism surrounding Haiti's Vodun religion, which the film industry came to interpret as "voodoo" (Graves, 2010: 21).[27] William Seabrook introduced the term "zombies" in his 1929 book *The Magic Island*, which described "first-hand experiences" of slaves resurrected as tireless manual labourers (ibid: 69). *White Zombie* (Halperin, 1932) furthered Seabrook's notions, portraying zombies as mindless slaves whose "only scary element [was] the prospect of becoming one[, which] would only happen if you ventured to Haiti or some other exotic locale" (Flint, 2009: 16). Thus the horror of early zombie depictions surrounded society's fear of the

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[27] Haitian Vodu teaches that a living essence can be enslaved. Paralysing drugs would simulate death, allowing the victim's exhumation and enslavement via ancient rituals (Graves, 2010: 38). Rather than Hollywood's cannibalistic corpses, these zombies were pitiful, relatively harmless creatures devoid of any willpower or individuality.

foreign "other"; despite being a product of the times, this established early on that the zombie's horror would be a subtle one, one that reflected the mindset of current society whenever they appeared.

When Hollywood experienced a science-fiction boom in the fifties and sixties, audiences' fear of extraterrestrial horrors escalated accordingly; *Invisible Invaders* (Cahn, 1959), *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (Wood Jnr, 1959), and *Astro Zombies* (Mikel, 1968) "merged zombies with a more contemporary trauma, the ever-present alien threat" (Kane, 2010: 4). However, Jamie Russell (2005: 47) describes how low-budget productions resulted in the "worst decade" of zombie films ever before *The Last Man on Earth* (Ragona and Salkow, 1964), an adaptation of Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* (1954), showed that zombies could horrify without being controlled by higher powers through the concept of the "zombie apocalypse". Ostensibly depicting the dead rising from their graves to infect and devour the living, the zombie apocalypse has become inextricably linked with the genre "and carries with it many themes, including the idea that the modern world reduces us all to automatons, or that we are all guilty of destroying ourselves and the planet through wars and industrialisation, so much so that we, too, will eventually be destroyed" (Graves, 2010: 87). The continued reliance upon this apocalyptic scenario, and its thematic parallels to climate change, global destruction, and capitalist greed, notably separates the zombie genre from its competitors, to the point where it became a standard depiction of the living dead (ibid).

Significantly, David Flint (2009: 38) mentions that the film was a key inspiration for the unrivalled father of the living dead, George A. Romero, just a few years after its release, despite featuring "vampires" rather than conventional zombies. This modification was indirectly responsible for Romero's popularisation of zombies:

Matheson's vampires were fast-moving, adaptable creatures, much like screen zombies later became, yet in *The Last Man* they are slow-moving, relatively weak alone, but formidable in groups. The imagery of "boarded-up windows with the creatures' hands thrusting through them, an infected child, human bonfires, and many other key elements" (Kane, 2010: 7) are instantly recognisable to those familiar with Romero's later work (Flint, 2009: 38/39), and Matheson's apocalyptic vision influenced the ensuring slew of zombie movies (ibid: 162).

In Paffenroth's (2006: 1) view, *Night of the Living Dead* (Romero, 1968) "defined the zombie genre since its release" and Romero's "movies and their related progeny are enormously popular in the United States and even more so worldwide, despite their very low budgets and lack of any bankable stars". Whatever zombies were before Romero, they were not menacing; *Night* "introduced a new type of zombie to the cinema screen, giving it a lurid 'horror' twist with lashings of gore" (Graves, 2010: 10) and famously avoided the term "zombie" or even explaining their origins to emphasise the conflicts between his protagonists. Romero's films emphasise "the state of damnation, of human life […] without any hope of change or improvement"; yet, because zombies symbolise the breakdown of civilised society, "it is the human characters who in fact embody the majority of the seven deadly sins" (Paffenroth, 2006: 23). Graves (2010: 11/12), meanwhile, describes that Romero used zombies to personify death, the apocalypse, infection, and oppressed minorities (whether class, race, or (rarely) gender), and this became their standard zombie depiction, with few alterations, for decades.

Yet *Night of the Living Dead* portrays zombies with notable differences to Romero's later instalments; the ghouls are far more capable and mobile, lacking the rigor mortis of their successors. Romero refined quintessential zombie behaviour in

Dawn of the Dead (Romero, 1978) by paralleling horror with black comedy to caricature 1970s consumerism (Kane, 2010: 112). The survivors gorge themselves inside an abandoned mall as the zombies overwhelm the living outside, driven by perpetual hunger and the deep-rooted need to consume without regard (Graves, 2010: 11). Thanks to Tom Savini's detailed effects, zombies assumed their trademark decomposing, dishevelled appearances, and their physical threat became emphasised – alone, the zombie is glaringly vulnerable, susceptible to a blow or gunshot to the head or scared by fire, but capable of laying siege to the living with little effort when gathered together.

Dawn defined the zombie's recognisable traits; significantly decomposed, they are rigid, forceful, and somewhat clumsy, and this ostentatious characterisation became the prototypical zombie behaviour for the vast majority of zombie films that followed (ibid, quoting Savini: 126). *Day of the Dead* (Romero, 1985) depicted zombies as the dominant race while the fundamental aspects of human civilisation and social etiquette are strained to breaking point, being "a tragedy about how a lack of human communication causes chaos and collapse even in [a] small little pie slice of society" (ibid, quoting Romero: 139). Many zombies appear dried out and gaunt, often herded like cattle for Dr. Logan's (Richard Liberty) bizarre experiments, becoming a frustrated majority looking to destroy the last vestiges of a decadent, living social order. Logan, who successfully domesticated the zombie Bub (Sherman Howard) by rewarding compliant behaviour with living flesh, reveals that zombies are much more durable than previously believed, functioning with multiple limb and organ loss. They also, with time and effort, recall basic memories and etiquette, as Bub follows orders and uses tools.

Following *Day of the Dead*'s mixed reception (Flint, 2009: 89; Kane, 2010:

145), the zombie genre continued unabated; though *H.P. Lovecraft's Re-Animator*

(Gordon, 1985) infused a Gothic-style horror, the dominant model popularised by

Braindead (Jackson, 1992) and *Evil Dead II* (Raimi, 1987) married gore with black

comedy (Graves, 2010: 158). Significantly, *The Return of the Living Dead*

(O'Bannon, 1985) and its sequels countered Romero with nigh-indestructible zombies

that cracked jokes and yearned for "Braains!"

Conceptually, however, zombies remained unchanged from Romero's

template until *28 Days Later* re-tooled them as rage-induced animalistic humans.

This new depiction merged with Romero's films, in a somewhat removed context, in

Dawn of the Dead (Snyder, 2004), which portrayed traditional Romero-like zombies

as being infinitely more aggressive than their predecessors. Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr,

(2011: 18) believed that Snyder's remake also showed that, "no matter how influential

Romero's work has been on the zombie subgenre, even remakes of Romero are

profoundly shaped by the other zombie/"infected" [*sic*] narratives".

Kane (2010: 188) observed that Snyder's remake also proved a competent and

relatively successful film and that its "monetary success (over $100 million

worldwide) […] helped Romero to find funding to revivify his long-dormant

zombies". By *Land of the Dead* (Romero, 2005), zombies had been established as a

legitimate and recognisable cinematic monster; multiple productions capitalised on *28*

Days Later's success, contributing to "a larger zombie culture that has transcribed

Romero's creation" (Wetmore, Jr, 2011: 18). With *Land*, Romero sought to reinstate

his zombie lore over those that had been inspired by him and re-establish his

philosophy behind zombie infection: "anyone who dies becomes a zombie. If you get

bitten, you get infected and become a zombie much sooner because you die that much

sooner" (ibid, quoting Romero: 191).

Land expands upon Romero's themes of zombie evolution; Big Daddy

(Eugene Clark), an especially intelligent zombie, organises a strategic march against

the living, positioning zombies as an oppressed minority – under his guidance,

zombies utilise tools and weapons in a rudimentary (and often comedic) fashion. Big

Daddy helps his kinsmen overcome the living's weapons and defences (Fessenden,

2010: 190), forming an organised group seeking both revenge and a unique society for

themselves. In an allegory for modern society, Romero's living protagonists were

divided by social class as much as their inability to agree on how to deal with the

zombie apocalypse. Kane (2010: 190) also highlighted Land's larger political

context, wherein Romero "openly [apes]" George W. Bush's response to 9/11, which

"effectively argued for an isolationist, vigilante position, presenting America as

fighting single-handedly against an 'axis of evil'" (Graves, 2010: 142). Fortified

defences and powerful weapons make the living complacent and foolhardy; only

Riley (Simon Baker) realises that zombies are becoming more co-ordinated and,

perhaps, deserving of their own place in the world, and more than capable of fighting

for it.

While zombie films increased after 28 Days Later, many seemed

uncomfortable with their zombie origins, often intentionally avoiding identifying the

creatures as zombies in service of other goals, or poorly-produced affairs, remakes, or

direct-to-DVD releases. Yet, despite deviating from Matheson's text (Flint, 2009:

204), Today's online article by the Associated Press (2007) reported that I Am Legend

(Lawrence, 2007) nevertheless dominated the U.S. box office with its sophisticated

depiction of a post-apocalyptic world plagued by zombie-like creatures. Despite

comedic ventures like *Shaun of the Dead* (Wright, 2004) adhering closely to Romero's template, films such as *I Am Legend* and *28 Weeks Later* (Fresnadillo, 2007) favoured the depiction of fast-moving zombies, Romero's pet-peeve (Flint, 2009: 97), Romero continued his zombie canon with *Diary of the Dead* (Romero, 2008), returning to the early stages of the zombie apocalypse to render zombies physically incapable of fast movement.

Despite Fessenden's view (2010: 194/195) that "*Diary* [played] more tired than Dead, more self-imitation than fresh exploration", and barely topping the "$5 million domestic box-office mark", Romero garnered sufficient funding for *Survival of the Dead* (Romero, 2009). By this time, USA Today's Robert Bianco (2008) noted that the success of *Twilight* (Hardwicke, 2008) and *True Blood* (2008-2014) saw vampires become Hollywood's fashionable movie-monster, leaving zombies confined to low-budget direct-to-DVD productions, and *Survival* was no different, despite carrying Romero's coveted name. *Survival* readdressed Romero's themes of zombie domestication and emphasised that, while zombies can theoretically be controlled, the living are incapable of controlling themselves or to unite against a common, destructive enemy (Kane, 2010: 196). This recalls *Land of the Dead*'s themes of zombies as the uncharacteristic, uncomfortably sympathetic oppressed to highlight mankind's ceaseless animosity, even in the face of extinction.

Though Romero's zombie legacy endures, Flint (2009: 96/97) believed that *Diary* and *Survival of the Dead* removed any subtlety from his views on society or his beliefs concerning zombie behaviour, using his characters to "sledgehammer [his] point home" and attacking running zombies both in interviews and through onscreen dialogue "'because their ankles would break'". While Romero's classic zombie depictions remain a standard, even he could not halt their reinterpretation onscreen as

more aggressive creatures. The subtle horror of the zombie as a reflection of society or class, a representative of death and infection, became a very explicit horror as gore-drenched, cannibalistic superhumans ferociously pursued their prey. Graves (2010: 170) observed that a divide soon emerged as, despite *28 Days Later* being an international success (ibid: 185), "Purists dismissed [the film] because the zombies are not the undead […] and they can run", echoing Romero's own protests.

However, when this behaviour influenced traditional zombie depictions, zombies became more aggressive and resilient than ever, as Flint (2009: 185) explains: "the impact of the fast, running 'zombies' can't be overstated. The shuffling dead would never seem so threatening again". While the conclusion of this chapter details that the cinematic popularity of zombies may have declined in favour of notable depictions in comic books, literature, television, and videogames, with some prominent exceptions, Romero "purists" had no choice but to turn to low-budget, direct-to-DVD productions for "classic" zombie depictions. This chapter illustrates how it falls to the videogame adaptation, specifically Paul W.S. Anderson's *Resident Evil* franchise, to perpetuate Romero's traditional zombie template through a complex method of appropriation that also came to incorporate the fast, more aggressive depiction of zombies.

4.2 Developing *Resident Evil*

In this section, I explore the production of the *Resident Evil* videogames and the influence that Romero's movies had upon their conception. Where zombie films are explicitly akin to videogames in their depiction of survival, videogames, especially the *Resident Evil* series, freely appropriate from the genre. Presented in more

proactive environment, and embracing the B-movie trappings of their cinematic predecessors, *Resident Evil* comes to emphasise the themes of infection and bio-engineered weaponry.

In 1996, *Resident Evil* invited gamers to take control of either Jill Valentine or Chris Redfield, operatives of S.T.A.R.S.,[28] and enter the labyrinth-like Spencer Mansion, populated by the Umbrella Corporation's Bio Organic Weapons (B.O.W.s). Limited ammunition, health, and save points worked in conjunction with puzzles, claustrophobic camera angles, and relentless zombie attacks to deliver a tense, atmospheric gameplay experience.

Donovan (2010: 275) related that Capcom were initially developing a remake of *Sweet Home* (Capcom, 1989), a "role-playing game for the [NES] based on a Japanese horror film of the same name". *Sweet Home* involved navigating a haunted mansion with limited supplies and struggling to overcome monstrous enemies; these mechanics, dictated again by hardware limitations, provided ample inspiration for *Resident Evil*'s atmospheric techniques.

Although *Alone in the Dark* (Infogrames, 1992) was technically the first "survival-horror" videogame, Matthew Weise (2009: 242) explains that the term "did not exist as a phrase in popular video game terminology prior to [*Resident Evil*]", with some videogames being retroactively labelled as survival-horror titles "in spite of the fact that they predate *Resident Evil* by several years" (ibid).

Likewise, zombies have appeared prominently and consistently in videogames dating right back to 1984 (Graves, 2010: 184), although *Resident Evil* notably eclipsed its predecessors (Keane, 2007: 110; Weise, 2009: 252). This was no doubt facilitated by, as Capcom Investor Relations (2012) notes, the title selling over 2,700

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[28] Special Tactics and Rescue Service (known as Special Tactics and Rescue *Squad* in Anderson's adaptations).

units. Survival-horror is specifically named for its "narrative and aesthetic qualities, which relate to horror, and their gameplay qualities, where the game goal is survival" (Taylor, 2009: 48). In order to evoke horror in the player, survival-horror aims to maintain "a state of player vulnerability […] The word "survival" indicates that we are in a world of diminished expectation; it isn't called victory horror" (Niedenthal, 2009: 170).

Zombie movies appear similar to videogames in their depiction of characters surviving against insurmountable odds, struggling to find first aid, weapons, and supplies, and their navigation of enclosed spaces. Accordingly, survival-horror videogames procedurally emulate the tension of the movies they are inspired by, often evoking "visual and audio iconography self-consciously drawn from horror narrative culture" to create situations where players must solve puzzles, combat enemies, and navigate maze-like areas to survive (Kirkland, 2009: 62). Fittingly, given the numerous appropriations laced throughout Anderson's *Resident Evil* adaptations that are my focus, Martin Picard (2009: 98) characterised the survival-horror genre as incorporating "numerous influences and borrowings, both from their own culture, media, and art forms, and from Western popular culture, primarily American".

Appropriately, *Resident Evil* producer Shinji Mikami (quoted by Weise, 2009: 252) cited *Dawn of the Dead* as inspiring his creative thinking behind *Resident Evil*'s gameplay mechanics, specifically referencing *Dawn*'s focus on character drama and the vivid depiction of society's breakdown: "no one wants to actually live in such a world, and get killed, but with a game it's possible to satisfy your imagination and feel like you're actually experiencing it".

Ironically, as Steve Rawle (2014: 223) relates, Japanese zombie films differ significantly from their American counterparts and only came into prominence

relatively recently after "the enormous global success" of *Resident Evil*. Japanese

zombies "are not reanimated corpses but irradiated living victims transformed into

monsters" in a precursor to *28 Days Later*'s rage-infected humans, mainly because

"films about reanimated corpses "don't work in cultures that practice cremation""

(Wetmore, Jr, and quoting Harper, 2011: 6).

    Resident Evil, however, set "a template for the transnational adoption of a

Western model of the zombie movie, derived from classic American zombie films

[…] where the undead are cannibalistic infected humans" (Rawle, 2014: 223). In an

interview for the official *Resident Evil* comic book, Mikami (quoted by Wildstorm,

1998: 18) claimed that *Night of the Living Dead*'s zombies produced abject terror in

audiences, for whom the terror was all too real, because of their mindless hunger for

flesh. Developed in Japan as *Biohazard* – a title that Capcom's Chris Kramer (quoted

by Elston, 2009) stated would have been impossible to register in the US – *Resident

Evil* compensated for the PlayStation's hardware limitations by restricting gameplay

to the claustrophobic Spenser Mansion and the Umbrella laboratory hidden beneath it.

    By cleverly utilising a map sub-screen in the inventory menu, players are

forced to memorise the mansion's complex layout through continual backtracking as

they find items and solve puzzles; often, players must carry and combine several

items in their limited inventory in order to progress further. Players could also store

inventory in item boxes and use ink ribbons to save at typewriters, though *Resident

Evil*'s ranking system encourages few saves alongside a fast playtime. Weapon

upgrades and limited ammunition, health-restoring herbs and first-aid sprays, and text

documents that provide exposition or hints to solve puzzles are scattered throughout

the environments. Players are attacked by B.O.W.s, all of which are infected or

mutated by Umbrella's Tyrant Virus (T-Virus), the most common being zombies, but

Umbrella's "research projects have also resulted in the increased size and aggressive behavior of ants, bees, spiders, snakes, sharks, worms, dogs, etc" (Perron, 2009: 129).[29]

Mikami (quoted by Wildstorm, 1998: 14) believed *Resident Evil*'s success was directly tied to its main theme, terror: "Terror can be perceived by everyone, and we have succeeded in generating an unprecedented level of terror". Thus, while enemies are relatively sparse, a sinister soundtrack and startlingly-jarring camera perspectives keep players constantly on edge and disorientated. Frequently the lack, or sudden insertion, of sound or music effects indicates impending attack or rest periods, while the disjointed, immovable camera masks the approach or number of enemies, creating "an effective claustrophobia [and] an initial sense of being completely powerless" (Keane, 2007: 111). Consequently, players are forced to be vigilant and "[master] skills in order to avoid zombies as much as confronting them head on" (ibid: 110); strategic ammo conservation and item management is key, and players are rewarded with different endings and rankings should they perform exceptionally well.

Not content with altering the videogame's title, upon viewing its contents Capcom USA requested that the American version's difficulty be amplified to increase sales (Wildstorm, quoting Mikami, 1998: 19), which also occurred with the sequel (ibid: 15). Russell (2005: 172) detailed that *Resident Evil*'s success effectively reinvigorated the cinematic zombie genre, particularly in Asia, and, after generating over $600 million, became "more profitable than most zombie movie releases put together […achieving] something that nothing else had ever managed: it made Romero's zombies into A-list stars" (ibid: 175). Heavily influenced by cinema – especially zombie movies (Wildstorm, 1998: 36) – *Resident Evil* naturally utilises

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[29] A relatively comprehensive list of *Resident Evil*'s enemies can be found on the fan-moderated website Biohaze (2014).

cinematic devices to direct or subvert the player's aim in a specific direction. While Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska (2002: 12/13) noted that the fixed camera perspectives could be "frustratingly limited", they served to highlight key items through subtle glimmers of light in darkened rooms.

Of course, the cinematic influences become even more specified in the Romero-like zombies (Wetmore, Jr, 2011: 97); additionally, the zombie apocalypse depicted in *Resident Evil 2* and *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* explicitly evoked *Dawn of the Dead*'s opening moments. As the titles progressed, zombies became increasingly diverse and dangerous – lunging, vomiting, and crawling tenaciously. Yet, the quintessential Romero-written rules for combat remained, with some modification for balanced gameplay: zombies are "slow […] stupid[, biting] the player if not shaken off [and] instantly killed by a blow or bullet to the head" (Weise, 2009: 253). Unlike *The House of the Dead* (Wow Entertainment, 1996), where players have unlimited ammunition at their disposal, *Resident Evil*'s stringent lack of supplies mean "Flight and fight are both good options, [players] can't do both" (Niedenthal, 2009: 174) – yet, as Weise (2009: 253) emphasised, "gameplay primarily [revolved] around zombie combat".

Unlike Romero's zombies, *Resident Evil*'s avatars progress without fear of zombie infection – even in the graphic "You Died" scenes, avatars are generally beset, and torn apart, by zombies rather than infected. Additionally, "although destroying the head is the quickest way to kill a zombie, it is not the *only* way […] If they sustain enough damage, they will eventually not get up" (ibid: 253-254). While it is far more effective to attempt an instant-kill headshot, restrictive controls allowed players to "choose which zombie to shoot, but not where to shoot them […] It is thus impossible

to aim at a zombie's head in *Resident Evil*, ironically enough, as all shots hit either zombies across their mid-section or not at all" (ibid: 254).

Resident Evil's protagonists may be "calm and collected when faced with fantastic terrors" (ibid: 244) but the zombie's threat is diminished as avatars can "have their flesh chomped within an inch of their life and still fully recover" and thus can "afford to make mistakes in ways zombie film protagonists cannot" (ibid: 254). Finally, Flint (2009: 76), Kane (2010: 66), and Tony Williams (2003: 28) point out that *Resident Evil* provided a definitive origin for the zombie, something Romero left characteristically vague.

While *Resident Evil*'s sequels retained the original restrictive gameplay and improved upon its mechanics, numerous spin-offs offered alternative gameplay experiences before *Resident Evil 4* drastically shifted away from "formulaic survival horror[, allowing] players nearly unrestricted ammunition, […] convenient saving, and [three-dimensional] visual presentation" (Taylor, 2009: 54). The trade-off for increased manoeuvrability and combat effectiveness was greater, and arguably more intelligent, enemies.

Resident Evil 5 (Capcom, 2009) and *Resident Evil 6* (ibid, 2012) further enhanced these mechanics, while *Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City* (Slant Six Games/Capcom, 2012) favoured purely third-person action and squad-based shooting. In an interview with Gamastura, *Resident Evil: Revelations* (Capcom/Tose, 2012) producer Masachika Kawata (quoted by DeMaro, 2012), explained that this was geared specifically towards capitalising on North America's action-orientated FPS market, yet equally stressed that "[*Resident Evil*] doesn't have to be a straight up shooter […] we can still have the numbered titles keep their identity about what Resident Evil is supposed to be, but still expand and hit other markets as well".

Even when *Resident Evil* titles do not feature zombies, recognisable zombie behaviour and aesthetics can be seen in common enemies and Romero's themes of contagion and militant paranoia remain constant. The presence of Romero-inspired zombies and apocalyptic themes remain clear indications that the franchise has selectively appropriated from Romero's iconic zombie movies in service of *Resident Evil*'s unique narrative (Weise, 2009: 252). With *Resident Evil* incorporating so many cinematic techniques into its narrative and presentation, coupled with its popularity and success as a videogame franchise, a live-action adaptation seemed all but inevitable.

Fittingly, Yoshiki Okamoto – whom 1UP's James Mielke and Sam Kennedy (2008) state is "often cited as the single most important force in building Capcom into the company it is today" – affirmed that the series was "Ostensibly based on aspects of George Romero's *Living Dead* […] trilogy" (Keane, 2007: 109). In a DVD interview for *Resident Evil*, Okamoto (2002) also stated that the title was amongst the first videogames "to be claimed as cinematic […Capcom] had been told that the game contains movie elements, and we hoped, that the game would become a movie as soon as possible". The inevitable process of adapting *Resident Evil* into a live-action series was fraught with development issues but reaped substantial financial rewards for all involved. As I established in Chapter One, this financial success makes the franchise unique, and I explore the consequences of this in the remainder of this chapter.

4.3 The Economics of Adaptation

This section delves into the tumultuous production process behind *Resident Evil*'s live-action adaptations and evaluates how they have maintained their economic

success, despite negative criticisms, in arguably the best example of a financially

viable videogame adaptation. Furthermore, I explore the financial success that

Anderson's *Resident Evil* franchise has earned, particularly through DVD sales.

Unlike other videogame adaptations, *Resident Evil* generated an unprecedented

number of cinematic sequels, all of which have garnered mixed critical reactions, and

yet the franchise remains consistent and popular amongst its intended audience.

To examine this, I build upon Faubert's (2010: 194) belief that, "Without a

close analysis of the financial and industrial imperatives behind the production of

adaptations, a fuller and more complex understanding of the cultural context in which

they emerge is unobtainable". Also beneficial to this analysis is Kristin Thompson's

(cited by ibid) suggestion that "the current proliferation of adaptation is evidence that

Hollywood studios are looking for something more than a well-crafted film".

Specifically, Hollywood is seeing not just sequels but franchises, preferably

multimedia franchises, "as a form of financial investment" (ibid).

Resident Evil's first cinematic foray was a Japan-exclusive 3D CGI movie,

Biohazard 4D-Executer (Ohata, 2000), a joint venture of Capcom and the Tokyo-

based Visual Science Laboratories that debuted at the 2000 Tokyo International

Fantastic Film Festival. Stereoscopic glasses provided the 3D effect and Capcom,

Flagship, and Digital Amuse collaborated on an interactive theme park ride to

showcase the film. *Resident Evil* fan-moderated website The Horror is Alive (2008)

described that, "The ride would blow air onto the audience, jostle their seats and give

the sense that they were part of the movie itself, hence to "4D" name".

Eventually, the ride's appeal faded and "it moved to different amusement

parks under various forms" (ibid). *Executer* remains relatively obscure, even in

Japan, though is readily available for viewing online at YouTube (Kolpax, 2014). In

1997, Variety reported that German production company Constantin Films successfully negotiated the right to produce a live-action *Resident Evil* adaptation, with Capcom appointing Yoshiki Okamoto as their representative producer and comic-book writer Alan McElroy as script-writer.

Rumours of Romero's involvement swiftly followed, becoming official in 1998 when Romero was approached to submit a script treatment after producing a live-action, Japanese-exclusive *Resident Evil 2* advertisement (Kane, 2010: 171). Despite his lack of enthusiasm for videogames, Romero collaborated with Peter Grunwald on a screenplay after viewing videotaped footage of *Resident Evil* (Flint, 2009: 93). Romero's script adhered closely to the videogame's characters and narrative, despite some questionable dialogue and character moments and favouring action over Romero's characteristic social commentary (ibid). Yet his script was ultimately rejected due to, according to Okamoto, its poor quality (Kane, 2010: 171).

Romero (quoted by ibid: 171/172) claimed: "I don't think they were into the script […] and wanted to make it more of a war movie, something heavier than I thought it should be". Specifically, in order to garner the greatest financial success, *Resident Evil* had to reach the widest possible audience with an R-rating (Anderson, 2004), far outside of Romero's usual unrated affairs.

Flint (2009: 88) attributes Romero's success within mainstream Hollywood to a niche, cult-like following for his gore-drenched movies; his rejection of mainstream Hollywood expectations famously saw him shun a $7 million offer to produce an R-rated version of *Dawn of the Dead* in favour of an unrated cut. Indeed, *Land of the Dead* signalled Romero's first real production to "benefit from major studio backing, and as such, the director was contracted to deliver an R-rated movie" (ibid: 94). This collaboration was necessary to accommodate Romero's grandiose visions of a large-

scale zombie apocalypse, which "would require a budget of the kind of size he'd be

unlikely to raise for an independent feature", but meant Romero had to compromise

"his trademark splatter in order to secure the inevitable R-rating" (Russell, 2005:

164).

R-rated horror films were slowly becoming prominent in Hollywood, much to

the chagrin of horror veterans, who, like Romero, regarded "ratings-friendly,

mainstream-orientated *product*" with utter disdain, and treated Romero's departure

from *Resident Evil* in a similar vein (ibid: 175). Following this, Variety's Dana Harris

(2000) and Cathy Dunkley (2001) reported that Constantin Film would collaborate

with Davis Films (with Samuel Hadida as executive producer) and Intermedia to co-

finance and distribute *Resident Evil*, providing a $40 million preliminary budget.

The agreement placed Intermedia "responsible for arranging distribution

contracts worldwide with the exception of North America, Germany, Austria and

Switzerland, which [would] be handled by Constantin" (ibid), and was eagerly

embraced by Constantin's then-chairman, Bernd Eichinger, who saw Intermedia as

"the ideal partner" to expand Constantin's "international production volume" (quoted

by Harris, 2000). By 2001, Sony's Columbia TriStar subsidiary had negotiated North

America distribution rights (Dunkley, 2001), which eventually passed to Sony's

auxiliary production company, Screen Gems, in 2005 (McClintock, 2005).

Entertainment website and blog TNMC (2002) chronicles that, with Romero

out, the project (briefly carrying the subtitle *Ground Zero*) was offered to various

directors and screenwriters. Variety's Andy Horn (2011) noted that Eichinger, who

had been "impressed" by *Shopping*, soon negotiated to return Paul W.S. Anderson to

videogame adaptations. As I illustrated in Chapter Three, Anderson's work on *Mortal

Kombat* had produced perhaps "the only commercially successful videogame

adaptation in cinema history" (Russell, 2005: 176). Since then, Anderson had produced films such as *Event Horizon* (Anderson, 1997) and *Soldier* (ibid, 1998), and Eichinger's desire to work with Anderson led to a partnership between Constantin Films and Impact Pictures, Anderson's production company co-founded with his producer partner Jeremy Bolt, which lasted over twenty years (Horn, 2011).

Coincidentally, just as this partnership had been solidified, Anderson had become interested in adapting *Resident Evil*: "they had a property that they had been developing unsuccessfully, and I came in with passion and energy to breathe new life into it" (ibid, quoting Anderson).

Regardless of *Mortal Kombat*'s success as a videogame adaptation, Anderson's previous directing efforts had garnered mixed reviews, being genre-pieces with high ambition but noticeable flaws, generally regarding acting, pacing, or special effects. DVD Verdict's Bill Gibron (2006) believed that Anderson represented "a single step up from the dopey Dr. Uwe Boll in the world of speculative cinema […] As much as fans profess to hate his efforts in translating the objects of their obsession into semi-solid films […], he still gets hired to helm high-concept, big-budget fare". Accordingly, in 2000, Anderson was officially announced as *Resident Evil*'s writer and director and the film finally began pre-production (Harris, 2000).

In an online interview for JoBlo Movie Network, Anderson (quoted by The Arrow, 2002) details that he first "went to Japan and consulted with Capcom" and Mikami about the script, incorporating their input and changing "a few things because of that". Unlike Romero, Anderson was "a big fan of the [videogames]" and professed to "do a film that the fans would really like […] to make a movie that they would embrace and really like" (ibid). Crucially, Anderson was open to downplaying gore to reach a wider audience, believing it unfeasible to replicate "splatter" movies

like *Dawn of the Dead* and aiming to recreate the tension and atmosphere of the videogames over "dated" make-up effects (Russell, quoting Anderson, 2005: 176). Romero purists, however, lamented that, despite being "the first big-budget, mainstream zombie production in seventy years", *Resident Evil* "was apparently ashamed of its heritage and was directed by a filmmaker desperate to distance his work from the splatterfests of Romero […] the very films that the videogame's creator cited as the chief source of inspiration" (Russell, 2005: 176).

Yet *Resident Evil* maintains elements of its source material in its pacing, unfolding "very much like a video game – the cast move through various levels, are given clues and have to solve puzzles to reach their destination" and, despite minimal gore "rendered less extreme through CGI […] the action comes thick and fast" (Flint, 2009: 181). Leitch (2007: 263) emphasised that the principal framing for videogame stories is heavily influenced by Hollywood narrative; specifically, the avatar's attempts to overcome multiple obstacles to reach a distant goal "corresponds closely to the unvarying formula of the contemporary action film".

Furthermore, Steve Neale's (2002: 23) view is that "the need to appeal to young people" determined that "fantasy, science fiction and occasionally horror, but most often action-adventure films" are the "most common genres for [cinematic] blockbusters". Thus, just as Anderson facilitated the appropriation of *Mortal Kombat*'s narrative and focused on character over explicit content, Anderson's reliance on videogame-like action rather than gore for *Resident Evil* ensured that *Resident Evil* fit into the template of mainstream action genres and, as a result, could attract a wider audience. Additionally, *Event Horizon* had afforded Anderson "a lot of experience on what the ratings boards will or will not accept for an R rating",

resulting in *Resident Evil* achieving "the R rating the first time" (The Arrow, quoting Anderson, 2002).

Though Variety's Ed Meza (2011) reported that part of the deal with Constantin meant that the company "owned a majority stake in […] Impact Pictures", Anderson benefitted from increased directorial freedom, certainly more than any of his previous films (The Arrow, quoting Anderson, 2002): "I deal with [two producers] and that's it […] There's no one to stop us and there's no one to hold us back, and that allows us to work really fast" (Horn, quoting Anderson, 2011).

Given the limited budget, *Resident Evil* was almost entirely shot at Germany's Studio Berlin, who were eager to increase their exposure to international film and television markets (Meza, 2001), continuing the tendency for videogame adaptations to be slightly removed from mainstream Hollywood productions. Essentially a niche, modestly budgeted exploitation movie (or "B-movie") at heart with significant studio backing and financing, *Resident Evil*'s independent, Euro-centric financing was arguably responsible for Anderson's creative freedom; had the film been financed "in a more traditional kind of studio route", it would likely not have had such a bleak, desolate ending (The Arrow, quoting Anderson, 2002).

Previously, Anderson had been frustrated with *Soldier*'s marketing as an action piece rather than "a relationship picture" and strongly desired "more control" over every aspect of *Resident Evil* to ensure it reached its intended audience (ibid). In breaking free of its cult-like origins to fit more accepted cinematic genre modes, specifically the action genre, *Resident Evil* recalls its B-movie status purely through its depiction of zombies and its European financing.

These unorthodox production methods are more akin to Anderson's independent roots, rather than big-budget Hollywood productions, and reiterate

Hollywood's uncertainty regarding videogame adaptations as viable commodities deserving of anything other than a quasi-B-movie production. Yet, significantly, many audiences gravitated towards "the b-movie feel" of Anderson's franchise and (Donovan, 2010: 275), certainly, he was able to craft a successful franchise, arguably *the* most consistently successful horror franchise in this category, from a videogame adaptation, and this has become the template by which Hollywood approaches videogame adaptations.

Though Romero purists denounced Anderson's involvement, Graves (2010: 180) suggests that "Romero's screenplay may just have not been good enough for [the] producers", a fact that "was clearly too much for the faithful to contemplate". Speaking on a DVD documentary for the film, Anderson (2002) believed his enthusiasm made him more suitable to delivering an R-rated film that captured the "brooding, suspenseful atmosphere" of the videogame, which Anderson believed translated "very well into a movie". This also urged him to "stay true to the game, true enough to please the creators of the game" in order to "make a movie that the fans'll be happy with as well" (ibid).

Constantin Films maintained a constant vigil throughout production through the presence of producer Robert Kulzer; Variety claimed Kulzer remained "deeply involved" with the franchise following his initial collaboration with Anderson on *Resident Evil* (Hernandez, 2011; Meza, 2011), while Okamoto served as a producer before his departure from Capcom in 2003. Anderson eventually brought *Resident Evil* in at $33 million, and the film ultimately grossed over "$102 million worldwide" and sold over a million DVD units (Russell, 2012: 232).

Although Graves (2010: 170) notes that the film was a financial success, critical reception was decidedly mixed – on his website, Roger Ebert (2005) criticised

the over-the-top action and detrimental plot. Russell (2005: 177) viewed it as "a completely formulaic adventure […] Unable to combine its videogame plotting with the requisite sense of menace need to make its setup scary" and lacking "even the shock value of its pixelated counterpart". In comparison, Graves (2010: 180) observed that, while *Resident Evil* was subjected to the same critical mauling as other videogame adaptations, it became "the most commercially successful zombie film to date".

Ultimately, despite the mixed critical reaction which was, by this point, seemingly inevitable for videogame adaptations, *Resident Evil* "kickstarted an on-going, billion dollar movie series for Sony Screen Gems, making it Sony's most profitable franchise after *Spider-Man*" (Russell, 2012: 153). Anderson was undeterred by his detractors, regarding himself as "a popular filmmaker" who makes "movies for audiences...not for critics" (The Arrow, quoting Anderson, 2002).

Resident Evil's very nature is thus to appeal to multiple audiences; by carrying a popular title and weaving recognisable videogame elements into an entirely new, action-orientated framework – one that prominently draws from Romero just as *Mortal Kombat* drew from *Enter the Dragon* – the film successfully slips into its action-horror, R-rated genre margins.

Russell (2005: 177), however, argues that *Resident Evil* "Rarely [strayed] from the realms of videogame fantasy, [and] simply [ignored] Romero, Fulci and others more often than borrowing from them". However, in the director and producer's commentary for the sequel (2004), Anderson stated that he "always [saw] *Resident Evil* as being more than just an undead movie […] it's as much about the creatures […] and the conspiracy as it is about the undead", and turned to Romero only to depict zombie behaviour (Weise, 2009: 253).

Romero always employed zombies metaphorically, usually as victims, and to express his political and socio-economical views; while *Resident Evil*'s zombies open themselves up to analysis in the same way (and especially in their depiction as tools for warfare), the films do not encourage this as explicitly as Romero. Deriding *Resident Evil* based on its inability to replicate either the social commentary or the gore of Romero's films seems futile given that this was never the film's intention, especially as the videogames rarely contain the same subtle nuance as Romero's films, utilising egomaniacal (and comically exaggerated) dialogue and villains.

For the sequel, *Resident Evil: Apocalypse* (Witt, 2004) Anderson relinquished directorial duties to Alexander Witt due to his obligation towards *AVP: Alien vs. Predator* (Anderson, 2004), remaining the principal producer and writer (Anderson, 2004; The Arrow, 2002). Witt, making his directorial debut, explained in an interview with IGN's Jeff Otto (2004) that he was mostly known as a camera operator and second unit director in mainstream Hollywood, and that his primary directorial efforts were rooted in advertisements.

Influenced by the framing and action sequencing, respectively, of directors like Ridley Scott and Jan de Bont, Witt was far from "a zombie connoisseur", being more influenced by post-*28 Days Later* zombie films (ibid). As a result, Witt mirrored Anderson's emphasis on fast-paced action and stunts in stark contrast to the videogames' more atmospheric moments.

Apocalypse was afforded a $45 million budget, yet only marginally exceeded its predecessor's worldwide gross at nearly $130 million, and critical reactions remained mixed: Leonard Maltin (2006: 1072) claimed it a "Tiresome follow-up [that] plays more like a remake" and TIME criticised the film for nullifying the zombie's horror (Time Staff, 2008), though David Kehr of the New York Times

(2004) responded well to the film's over-the-top premise and action sequences. In the DVD's director and producer's commentary (2004), Anderson stated that Capcom's original doubts concerning *Resident Evil*'s adaptation had been quashed by the film's performance and that, "by the time [*Apocalypse*] rolled around, of course they were just a joy to deal with because the first film had really worked; it'd been a huge hit, particularly in Japan, and I think had shifted a lot of extra videogame units for them".

As a result, a third entry was approved, with Anderson returning as the principal writer and producer and Russell Mulcahy directing. Cinema Review's (2012) production notes for the film emphasise that Mulcahy was known for his distinct, kinetic camera techniques. New York Entertainment's Charles Kaiser (2000) also noted that Mulcahy "first gained fame directing visually striking music video clips" and was famously "known for the imaginative visual style of his most successful feature, *Highlander*", while IMDb (2016) list his numerous television ventures. For *Resident Evil: Extinction* (Mulcahy, 2007), a zombie apocalypse and destroyed virtually all natural life, providing a post-apocalyptic aesthetic mirroring *Mad Max* (Miller, 1979).

The vast desolation of the Nevada desert removes the claustrophobic settings of its predecessors, allowing for more grandiose action sequences in full daylight alongside a renewed emphasis on horror and gore amongst big action sequences (Cinema Review, 2012). The desert's vastness was sharply contrasted with dark, tension-inducing indoor sequences that recalled the more traditional atmospheric claustrophobia of the videogames, creating "a refreshing and surprising look, a very visceral look, without taking away any elements of the game" (ibid, quoting Mulcahy).

Like Witt, Mulcahy's background mirrored that of Anderson's, and his enthusiasm for the project – he "storyboarded the entire movie" for his first meeting with Anderson and Kulzer (ibid, quoting Kulzer, 2012) – was explicit in his insistence on "keeping true to the spirit of the game" (ibid, quoting Mulcahy). Anderson's similar assertions have often been clouded by his dramatic re-envisioning of the source material, and, for *Extinction*, Anderson was seemingly determined to subvert the audience's expectations since *Resident Evil 4* successfully "progressed and broadened out" the gameplay mechanics (ibid, quoting Anderson).

To facilitate this, *Extinction* appropriates much of *Day of the Dead*'s themes, specifically in Umbrella's attempts to render zombies docile and controllable; the entire philosophy and methodology behind Dr. Isaacs' (Iain Glen) experiments closely mirrors those of Dr. Logan. Perhaps in lieu of *Apocalypse*'s box office, *Extinction* was produced on the same $45 million budget, yet Box Office Mojo (2012) reports that the film ultimately reaped nearly $150 million worldwide.

Critics remained either split or disparaging: A.V. Club's Steven Hyden (2007) admired *Resident Evil*'s staying power and recognised its appeal to a certain audience segment despite being somewhat predictable, while Games Retrospect's Eric Sandroni (2012) considered *Extinction* "one of the worst films in the franchise" and recommended playing the videogames rather than watching the film. However, it was through DVD sales that Anderson's films truly showcased their popularity; Russell (2012: 232) observed that there was a clear "audience for this material, an audience of gamers – and, judging by the numbers, non-gamers – who enjoyed Anderson's throwaway blend of eye-candy actresses, zombies and non-stop action" which allowed the franchise to make for successful business "with their relatively small outlays for big profits" despite never being "Hollywood blockbusters".

While Anderson initially had "the idea for [three] movies mapped out", these plans only became a reality once "the first movie did the business it did" (The Arrow, quoting Anderson, 2002). Indeed, Anderson's statement on *Extinction*' director and producer's commentary that he "always conceived of *Resident Evil* being a trilogy of films" (2007) strongly suggests that *Extinction* was to be the series finale. Yet a scene depicting the film's survivors reaching safety was excised to maintain an ambiguity regarding their fate. Additionally, in an interview with MTV News, Anderson (quoted by Adler, 2008) steadfastly maintained that he would not produce a fourth film "just for the sake of it". *Extinction*'s lucrative return, however, eventually saw Anderson return to helm *Resident Evil: Afterlife* (Anderson, 2010); The Wrap's Daniel Frankel (2010) reported that Screen Gems paid "Constantin Film, Davis Film and Impact Pictures $52 million" to distribute in North America and "most key foreign markets".

Empire's Owen Williams (2015) reported that *Afterlife* would be shot in 3D, which brought about significant cinematographic and choreographic challenges; the fast cuts of its predecessor's gave way to methodical, deliberate pacing. Collider's Steve Weintraub (2010) noted that the film's lengthy dialogue scenes were filled with additional props to augment the 3D, making *Afterlife* more character-driven, interspersed with high-octane action, rather than the more action-orientated approach of its predecessors. To facilitate *Afterlife*'s 3D production, Variety's John Hopewell and Elsa Keslassy (2010) reported that the film received a $60 million budget – $15 million more than *Apocalypse* and *Extinction* and nearly double *Resident Evil*'s budget – making it the "biggest 3D Euro-production" of 2010.

Released over the Labour Day weekend – which Brooks Barnes of the New York Times (2010) noted is typically regarded as the year's slowest weekend –

Afterlife faced little competition, ultimately surpassing its predecessors by amassing nearly $300 million worldwide (Box Office Mojo, 2012), almost equal to the combined final numbers of its predecessors, proving particularly successfully amongst "younger men" (Fritz, 2010). Clearly, *Resident Evil* had found its "niche during this time period", as *Apocalypse* enjoyed comparatively strong results during the same weekend in 2004 (Frankel, 2010).

The usual mixed reviews accompanied *Afterlife*; Variety's Andrew Barker (2010) proclaimed it "moribund, and perhaps even more shamelessly derivative" and lacking a "hint of suspense or excitement", while the Chicago Reader's Andrea Gronvall (2010) criticised *Afterlife*'s convoluted plot and its inability to maintain action-orientated momentum. Conversely, Michael Ordoña of the Los Angeles Times (2010) praised the use of 3D, the sleek, polished aesthetic, and the methodical cinematography, which all allowed *Afterlife*'s fight scenes to be less chaotic. This more coherent editing style and narrative focus allowed *Afterlife* the time to develop areas that were previously lacking, namely characterisation and plot consistency.

While *Extinction* concluded with an army of superhuman clones ready to destroy Umbrella, Anderson literally waved this away to focus on a small group struggling to survive a post-apocalyptic world plagued with ever-changing zombies. Interestingly, in the film's director and producer's commentary (2010), Anderson noted that his original draft ended hopefully and was only changed when studio executives requested the now-traditional cliffhanger ending, as though fearing the premature end to the wealth of income generated by the franchise.

While the website Beyond Hollywood reported that the studio was considering a complete franchise reboot titled *Resident Evil Begins* (Nix, 2009), *Afterlife*'s lucrative financial return actually inspired Anderson to produce two back-to-back

sequels. Quickly, these plans were changed due to Anderson's desire to "take the movies one movie at a time because we put so much effort into them" (quoted by Weintraub, 2012); instead, Anderson prioritised the fifth and retained a definitive plan for a sixth to "make two full trilogies and then just bring everything to an end" (ibid). Anderson, who further expressed his regret at not directing *Apocalypse* and *Extinction* (ibid), embraced the opportunity to helm *Resident Evil: Retribution* (Anderson, 2012) and aimed to reinvigorate the franchise with "more location work, more camera movement, and more aggressive camera movement" (ibid).

Budgeted at $65 million – $5 million more than *Afterlife – Retribution* sought to push 3D cinema's boundaries through its action scenes as Anderson believed "people's tolerance for what they can watch in 3D [had] obviously [become] stronger" and so incorporated "more kind of muscular camera moves" to accentuate *Retribution*'s action scenes (ibid). Additionally, by this point *Resident Evil*'s success had been assured; at a time when videogame adaptations were "unfashionable" and still considered perilous by Hollywood studios, Anderson's franchise had preserved despite being an equally unfashionable R-rated affair and being "financed all out of North America" (ibid). Even when Sony became involved, Anderson was pressured to deliver as there was a sense that, if the film failed to perform suitably, it "could have put the movie straight to DVD" (ibid).

In spite of negative criticism, *Resident Evil*'s success drove Anderson to remain with the franchise to ensure that it didn't go in the "wrong direction" (ibid). *Retribution* drew from modern blockbusters like *Inception* (Nolan, 2010) and other science-fiction movies in its attempt to skew audience's perceptions by emphasising Umbrella's cloning facilities, which allowed previous characters (and their actors) to return (Washington, quoting Bolt, 2012).

Simultaneously, Anderson included more fan-favourite characters because "All of the fans were pretty vocal about how these were the characters that they really wanted to see" (ibid). Anderson maintained a "close and open dialogue with Capcom", trawled their *Resident Evil* forums for feedback (ibid), and went to great lengths to "get people who looked as much like their characters as possible from the game" (quoted by Chitwood, 2011). Though *Resident Evil 4*'s success – Game Informer's Ben Reeves (2012) reported that the title had sold 7.03 million units by July 2011 – may have contributed as much as fan requests to Leon S. Kennedy's live-action debut.

Despite this, Box Office Mojo's Ray Subers (2012) described that *Retribution* debuted "first place" at the U.S. box office before dropping "to fifth place with $6.7 million […] a steep 68 percent decline […] the worst drop so far for a Resident Evil movie". Worldwide, however, *Retribution* beat *Afterlife*'s opening weekend "with $49.6 million from 50 markets", proving especially popular in Asia, Taiwan, and Malaysia, and achieved "the best Hollywood debut [for 2012] in Japan" (ibid). A predictably-mixed critical reception followed, with notable movie review and ratings website Rotten Tomatoes (2012) summarising the film as "Another predictable entry in the Resident Evil franchise that seems to get more cynical and lazy with each film".

Star Milla Jovovich (quoted by Fretts, 2012) was unfazed by this predictable reception, however: "If we got credit critically, the movies would bomb […] We've had great luck getting bad reviews and having successful movies". Anderson echoed these statements: "If critical reaction were really crucial to a director's career, Michael Bay and I would both be working at Starbucks" (ibid, quoting Anderson).

Notably, *Retribution*'s worldwide gross totalled over $200 million, significantly less than *Afterlife* (Box Office Mojo, 2012). Yet Anderson maintained

his enthusiasm, justifying his action-orientated approach with the belief that "one of the things that the games have done [is] kept an element of horror but they've become increasingly action-driven games with these phenomenal action sequences" (Chitwood, quoting Anderson, 2012). Certainly, Capcom incorporated this methodology to maintain player interest, but Anderson believes his direction broadens the target audience: "If you make just hardcore horror, there's a limited audience for that. Whereas if it's horror mixed with action, I think you kinda broaden your potential fanbase" (ibid).

Undeniably, this direction has proven successful; despite mixed critical reviews and their B-movie origins, Anderson's *Resident Evil* franchise has proven consistently popular. Stephen Kline (quoted by Leitch, 2007: 257) stated that, in 2001, Sony was attempting to capitalise on the increase of "U.S. game revenues […] to $10.6 billion[, surpassing] total annual box office for movies", with Anderson's first *Resident Evil* given that the original videogame had already sold over "17 million units […] worldwide" and the franchise was "valued at more than $600 million" (Dunkley, 2001). Anderson's ability to translate this success into an equally, if not more, lucrative live-action franchise is a testament to the popularity of his films amongst audiences, whether it was in cinemas or home media. Additionally, *Resident Evil*'s success became the template for videogame adaptations and conformed to Tino Balio's (2013: 25) observation that mainstream Hollywood requires "more and bigger franchises that are instantly recognisable and exploitable across all platforms and all divisions of the company".

Parody (2011: 215) stated that franchise adaptations "need to be understood not only as inflected by the aims and protocols of entertainment branding but also, moreover, as complicit in them". Certainly, Sony's ownership of the *Resident Evil*

franchise is a clear synergistic link to Capcom's production of *Resident Evil*

videogames for Sony's home consoles, strengthening Parody's observation that

"adaptation in a franchise context can be read as an act of brand management" (ibid).

Danny Adams, writing for GamersFTW (2014), related how *Resident Evil* has

"always had its strongest following" on its debut console, Sony's PlayStation, despite

previous exclusivity deals with Nintendo and SEGA. Furthermore, Leitch (2007:

273) noted that, rather than relying on the "structural or thematic elements" of

Resident Evil's videogame series beyond cursory homage, Anderson's franchise

benefits Sony with "a new trademark", a new synergistic method, to increase and

extend the source material's audience and extend it further to boost videogame sales:

"the supreme token of genre literacy, it seems, is the appetite for new versions of a

familiar story in whatever mutually supporting medium generates them".

 While many videogame adaptations actively "disavow their video-game

roots", Anderson's *Resident Evil* franchise fills "out their games' atavistic narratives

by invoking other, more respectable, narratives from generic borrowings from

Hollywood action films" (ibid: 266). While this is common amongst videogame

adaptations (ibid), Anderson appropriates enough elements from popular action,

horror, and science-fiction films, married with tried-and-tested themes from Romero's

zombie lore, to produce a franchise that has not just been successful, but lucratively

so. Despite none of the *Resident Evil* adaptations ranking in the top-grossing box

office zombie movies, the franchise nevertheless dominates the list, with *Afterlife*

being the most financially successful (Box Office Mojo, 2015).

 This is impressive, and practically unheard of, for a live-action videogame

adaptation and indicates a strong audience for this franchise despite its negative

critical reception. Given Sony's production schedule with the previous films,

Anderson's forthcoming sixth and final entry should allow him to convey his vision for a "satisfying" finale to the most successful videogame adaptation in history (Weintraub, quoting Anderson, 2012).

4.4 Personifying Adaptation

In this section, I explore a key strategy behind the success of Anderson's *Resident Evil* franchise in the face of its negative criticism, namely how his franchise appropriates from other successful genres. I illustrate the significance of this as, while the franchise has generated a clear following noticeably removed from fans of the videogame series, it cannot be denied that Anderson's success comes less from appropriating recognisable videogame elements and more from other film genres and his claims of authorship. This section details the methods Anderson undertook to introduce cinematic audiences to his vision of *Resident Evil* and the further genre appropriations he employed in service of that goal.

On the commentary track for *Resident Evil* (2002), Anderson states that he approached *Resident Evil* as a live-action prequel to the original videogame which, while avoiding familiar characters, would serve as a fresh introduction for audiences and yet still be familiar enough to appeal to fans through intertextual references. Indeed, Anderson, Bolt, and various members of his cast and crew continued to treat the film as a prequel, even when the final product deviated somewhat from this concept. Anderson believed that "To be scary you have to be unpredictable" and that including familiar characters like Jill Valentine and Chris Redfield destroyed any tension because "the fans would know [those characters weren't] going to be killed because [they appear] in the later games. The suspense dynamic of who is going to

live, who is going to die and what people's allegiances are, was only going to work with new characters" (quoted by Spong Staff, 2001).

Instead, Anderson introduced Alice (Milla Jovovich), a former Umbrella employee, to be an audience surrogate and the central protagonist of his franchise. In order to instil her with qualities that would be recognisable to *Resident Evil* fans, Anderson incorporated elements of Jill Valentine into Alice's character: "Milla Jovovich […] sure as hell looks like and acts like Jill" (quoted by The Arrow, 2002). While Anderson acknowledged that fans feared that he "would deviate too far from the video game [by] choosing not to use characters from the game", he continually emphasised his aim to capture "the spirit of the game" by featuring different characters: "each of the games featured different characters […] When I played Resident Evil 2, my first response wasn't like to throw my joystick to the ground and say "Where […] is Jill Valentine? I hate this video game!" (ibid).

To make Alice a strong female protagonist, Anderson "took a lot of inspiration from" *Alien* (Scott, 1979) to make Alice a natural parallel to Ripley, the all-action heroine of the *Alien* franchise made famous by Sigourney Weaver (ibid). Faubert's (2010: 194) observations regarding the importance of appropriation, intertextuality, and authorship to the exploration of adaptation are particularly relevant here, in addition to the remainder of this chapter. Just as Faubert believes these criteria aid an understanding of "how adaptations develop a set of meanings that lie outside the sources from which they adapt", Alice's appropriation of the characteristics of action stars like Ripley, as well as her videogame counterparts, makes her the personification of Anderson's focus on action, rather than horror.

By following the template set by *Aliens*, including the use of an action-orientated heroine, multiple drone-like assailants, and trigger-happy mercenaries

doubling for *Aliens*' iconic Marines, Alice is symbolic of Anderson's intention to make horror subordinate to action sequences. In Chapter Three, I detailed that action cinema is often defined by the display and exertions of a powerful body, one Purse (2011: 3) identified as being "physically empowered […] strong, agile and resilient" and asserts itself "in the field of action and risk" to re-enact "fantasies of empowerment". It has likewise been established that powerfully-built men presented their perfectly-honed bodies as the "site of ordeals they must undergo in order to defeat the villains" (Grant, 2007: 83), with Arnold Schwarzenegger embodying this perfectly as a physically superior masculine force of justice armed with a variety of high-calibre weaponry and "mordant one-liners" (Donaldson, 1998: 2).

However, in expanding upon the points made in Chapter Three, action cinema "has always incorporated and repurposed generic tropes from other popular genres", and achieved "cultural and commercial resilience" due to its adaptability (Purse, 2011: 1/2). Thus, just as Balio (2002: 174) believed that Bruce Willis heralded "a new breed of action hero" who survived "multiple milestones" in an explicit correlation between "heroics [and] masculinity, patriarchy and their mythic representations […] defeating the villains [and reclaiming] masculine potency and his wife" (Grant, 2007: 84), similarly "tough women [exploded] in the popular media—including films, television shows, comic books, and video games" (Inness, 2004: 1). While Lara Croft led the way in videogames (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, *et al*, 2008: 82), Ripley fast became "one of the toughest females to appear in the mainstream media" (Innes, 2004: 3), proving that "both sexes could connect powerfully to the image of a […] heroine getting sweaty and bloody in brutal physical combat with a monster" (ibid, quoting Jones).

While I concluded Chapter Three with the notion that masculinity remains "the "structuring norm" of the [action] genre", it also "acts as the structuring norm of femininity, since heterosexual gender stereotypes are based on binary oppositions and are thus defined through the exclusion of each other's characteristics and their antithesis" (Adamou, 2011: 94). Indeed, a compelling pleasure surrounding the evolution of cinematic heroines into action-orientated figures "is the radical change in the women's body language—posture, gait, and gesture", the prominence of which involves the reconstruction of women, rather than the revelation of natural femininity, and emphasises "the body's constructed character as costume, a costume that asks us to read it both as machine and as masculinity" (Willis, 1993: 127).

As a result, Sarah Connor (Linda Hamilton) transformed from an "uncertain, frightened, and weak" victim in *The Terminator* to a "buff figure [who] showed that women could compete with men as action-adventure heroes" (Willis, 1993: 3) in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*. *Terminator 2* also used Sarah's sheer physical excess to revise the "equation of resistance with humanity implied in *The Terminator*"; Sarah's physical reconstruction makes her "physically formidable" by acquiring "the soldier and survival skills displayed by Reese in the first film" from "mercenaries, ex-Green Berets, *contras*, and other dubious sources" (ibid: 239; Jeffords, 1994: 160). Jeffords (ibid: 163) believed that Sarah's acquisition of masculine traits has made her "more an animal than a human, or, better yet, a human whose animal instincts have been brought out in the face of death", her character arc in *Terminator 2* is reclaiming her maternal role and, by extension, her femininity from the T-800 (ibid): "Sarah Connor must run on into the unknown, perpetually supplemental to Arnold's macho but desexualised robot, an emissary of never-ending patriarchy" (Saunders, 2009: 160).

Claudia Herbst (2004: 37) describes how Weaver and Hamilton's success as strong female characters inspired a wave of action heroines who wear "their bruises like badges of honor" and are "depicted as combatants, enduring and casually dismissing grave injury". Jeffrey A. Brown (2004: 68) stated that their influence came to ensure that "every action heroine is a combination of conventional sexual attractiveness and violent abilities, symbols of fear and desire". Thus, action heroines embody aspects of both genders, proving suitably sexually attractive and vulnerable, yet physically gifted and powerful in a playful distortion of social norms and illustrating "not only that gender is primarily a performance of culturally determined traits and conventions but also that these traits and conventions do not have to symbolize sexual difference" (ibid: 69).

Consequently, just as Anderson appropriated characterisations of Jill Valentine into Alice, he also appropriated from her action-heroine forbearers: Jovovich (quoted by Harper, 2007) once referred to herself as "a young Sigourney Weaver" and even designed a gown for the first *Resident Evil* with the intention of "recreating the feel of the underwear outfit from the controversial closing scenes of [*Alien*]". Such appropriations are commonplace within videogame adaptations and allow these films, and their characters, to reference not only their source material and videogame origins but also popular cinematic modes and yet still remain entirely separate from both in what Leitch (2007: 271-272) called "a self-contained universe whose rules and boundaries are familiar to the target audience yet constantly subject to change".

When first introduced, amnesia makes Alice confused and vulnerable; she serves as an audience surrogate for those unfamiliar with *Resident Evil* and, as she learns more about Umbrella's experiments and herself, the audience learns alongside her. It is through Alice's successful combat with Umbrella's B.O.W.s that the

audience learns the strengths and weaknesses of both Alice and her enemies; rather than wasting ammunition on zombies as Rain (Michelle Rodriguez) does, Alice attempts a headshot or pummels adversaries as her military training kicks in.

As the others fall victim to panic or overconfidence, "lack of audible breath sounds confers a stoical, trained physicality on Alice" (Purse, 2011: 73), who only allows herself emotional reprieve between combat: "action is framed by Alice's breath sounds – an audible intake of breath as she reacts with shock to the situation, an audible exhale of relief at the end of the sequence" (ibid: 64). Alice's initial exploration of the mansion briefly recalls the source material as she examines photographs, statues, and surroundings in an attempt to jog her memory. The moment Umbrella's Special Forces Commandos arrive is the moment the film deviates significantly into pure action, rather than horror.

This genre shift is most pronounced in the film's pacing, which is noticeably faster than early *Resident Evil* videogames; rather than exploring, examining, and acquiring artefacts and keys in order to access new areas, the protagonists follow a clear set of objectives under the leadership of One (Colin Salmon). Eventually, Alice is revealed to have been covertly working to expose Umbrella's experiments before being neutralised by an amnesia-induced nerve gas, which afforded her not only detailed information regarding Umbrella's experiments, but also an impressive array of physical abilities and marksmanship.

As the movie progresses, Alice showcases many impressive physical feats through sudden recall triggered by adrenaline (ibid: 73). Though nothing like her later superhuman abilities, Alice is shown to be strong and capable, yet also intelligent enough to recognise greater dangers. This last is not shared with One's team, who are summarily executed by the Red Queen's (Michaela Dicker) laser defences, effectively

reducing the protagonists from an unwieldy eleven to a paltry six. This pruning is ironic as, unlike their videogame counterparts, Anderson's protagonists are heavily-armed and well-trained.

Wetmore, Jr (2011: 3) explains that, in typical zombie horror, "the viewer almost always sides with the survivors" as a source of wish fulfilment: "When the dead rise we are free to shoot, torture, destroy, burn, and collect and use any and every weapon imaginable to do horrible things to zombies (and sometimes to other living humans)" (ibid). Anderson's well-trained, well-equipped Commandos seem to fulfil these criteria and stand more of a chance against zombies than any gamer with the videogame's limited supplies.

Resident Evil players were encouraged to *think* as much as *fight*; typically, fleeing was more prudent; Carl Therrien (2009: 36) explained that, "if players empty their pistol clip on the first zombie they encounter instead of fleeing, their chances of survival [are] limited considering the scarcity of ammunition". Inevitably, however, players are often *forced* to fight a final boss, and usually against a time limit as such final battles are habitually staged in the final minutes of a computer-initiated self-destruct sequence. Additionally, players would also be fighting with the restrictive controls that "change based on the location in the game" (Taylor, 2009: 52).

As a result, these boss battles, while exhilarating, never provide the player with the same physical empowerment exhibited by Alice, whose reactions are both faster and more powerful. Her weapon proficiency and physical abilities are not hindered by controls, camera angles, or hardware limitations; only the Licker's speed and ferocity hinder her inevitable victory. Interestingly, Bernard Perron (2009: 7) observed that *Resident Evil 4*'s gameplay mechanics allowed "more heroic, tough and robust protagonists whose attacks are more centered on shooting, with more powerful

firearms and more ammunition", effectively allowing players physical abilities and spatial awareness in close parallel to Alice's abilities as a "gun-toting, ass-kicking [character] readily identified as [a performer] of masculinity" (Brown, 2004: 48).

By lending "a higher gloss to relatively low-budget productions, [and working] within the MTV aesthetic of filmmaking" (Kane, 2007: 112), Anderson incorporated both static camera shots reminiscent of the videogames with fast-paced editing whenever characters are attacked *en masse*. The effect is a rapid, disorientating effect, creating a sense of panic and urgency, especially as the survivors and their supplies are outnumbered by zombies. Significantly, however, this fast-paced editing tends to slow down to a crawl, utilising "bullet-time" effects made popular in the *Matrix* trilogy, in order to properly showcase Alice's latent martial arts training. While retroactively alluding to Alice's later superhuman abilities, this diminishes the potential threat of her enemies through Alice's psychical prowess and her assumption of a proactive, action-heroine role (ibid: 113).

Resident Evil players assume this role by acquiring more powerful weapons, but only after solving puzzles or attaining high rankings. Conversely, Alice naturally acquires superhuman abilities as she recovers her memories – and even more so after she is mutated by the T-Virus – to become "not so much efficient as indestructible" (ibid). In *Apocalypse*, Alice's abilities and prominence become fully established as she fights through a distinctly Romero-inspired zombie apocalypse in a way none of Romero's protagonists ever could (Paffenroth, 2006: 73; Russell, 2005: 93). By also liberally appropriating from *Resident Evil 2*, *Nemesis*, and *Resident Evil: CODE: Veronica* (Capcom Production Studio 4/Nextech/SEGA, 2000), Anderson crafted "a fully loaded action movie" (The Arrow, quoting Anderson, 2002) in which Alice

finally meets her videogame counterparts amidst an urban zombie plague (Flint, 2009: 182).

In the director and producer's commentary for *Apocalypse*, Anderson explains that, while he intended *Resident Evil* to be "a prequel to the videogames" that used "locations that were familiar to the gamers but a new set of characters", he wanted "the survivors of the first film [to] meet up with the characters from the videogame" for the sequel. However, despite the presence of familiar characters Jill Valentine (Sienna Guillory) and Carlos Olivera (Oded Fehr), they are constantly overshadowed by Alice – Umbrella's motivations centre around determining the superior between Alice and Nemesis (Matthew G. Taylor), and Alice's narrative importance is heavily emphasised by her personal vendetta against Umbrella. Additionally, *Apocalypse* affords Alice superhuman abilities from off-screen T-Virus exposure, and she complements this evolution with a cold, aggressive effectiveness, effectively allowing Anderson to appropriate elements of *The Matrix*'s Neo into his Ripley-surrogate (Russell, 2005: 178).

Ultimately, Alice is unbound by limitations, blasting through innumerable zombies without hesitation, making for exciting action sequences at the detriment of familiar videogame characters. Stephen Harper, writing for Jump Cut (2007), noted that Alice and Jill's relationship is "distinctly cooler than that between Alice and Rain", lacking their accompanying "hierarchical relationship". Though, while "Alice and Jill are presented as near-equals", Jill freely admits that she's "good…but not *that* good", establishing a more competitive relationship between the two (ibid).

Anderson explained in *Apocalypse*'s commentary (2004) that Jill's inclusion allowed the franchise to progress into more familiar territory and, given that Jill is "probably the sexiest character in [*Resident Evil*,] she was a definite must". Jill is

introduced as capable and with an assumed experience and assertiveness that, in the film's context, is reinforced through the brief onscreen inclusion of newspaper clippings (much like the documents found scattered throughout the videogames), which detail Jill's suspension from the Raccoon City Police Department (RPD).

While seasoned *Resident Evil* players are aware of Jill's expertise and capabilities, *Apocalypse* offers no explicit exposition into Jill's proficiency, preferring to rely on promotional material that has since been rendered non-canon [*fig 4.1*]. Ironically, much of Alice's repertoire is adapted from Claire Redfield's in *CODE: Veronica* in order to both appeal to fans of the videogames and produce exciting action sequences (Anderson, 2004). In *CODE: Veronica*, these actions were surprising additions to Claire's repertoire but not the result of her being superhuman; instead, it is assumed that Claire's capabilities improved between titles. However, Alice's abilities are derived from the T-Virus, allowing her to perform feats far beyond the player's abilities; it is no coincidence that the majority of Alice's superhuman acts are derived from passive cutscenes rather than in-game actions. Alice's superhuman abilities allow Anderson to avoid rudimentary gameplay mechanics such as weapon mastery and acquisition, and instead adapt the more "movie-friendly" passive, action-orientated cutscenes to make an action spectacle.

This is showcased to the fullest through *Apocalypse*'s portrayal of Nemesis as Alice's dark opposite, representing mutation rather than evolution and control over freedom. Nemesis, regarded by What Culture's Clare Simpson (2013) as "one of Resident Evil's most terrifying villains", becomes the catalyst by which Major Timothy Cain (Thomas Kretschmann) wishes to test Alice's capabilities. This desire suggests Umbrella's preference for more recognisably-human super soldiers and their willingness to settle for monsters if Nemesis proves superior.

The Raccoon City Times

S.T.A.R.S. Cop Suspended Over Alleged Zombie Sightings

TODAY RACCOON CITY LOST ONE OF ITS BRIGHTEST POLICE OFFICERS, Jill Valentine, due to a temporary suspension. The suspension was issued by Captain Henderson of the elite Special Tactics and Rescue Squad (S.T.A.R.S.). She was well-known to Raccoon City as the unit head for Drug Enforcement and Organized Crime and was responsible for many high-profile arrests.

By NEWS STAFF REPORTER

Ms. Valentine's suspension stems from her assertions that strange "happenings" have occurred in the Arklay Mountains surrounding Raccoon City. According to Valentine, zombie-like beings are living in the Arklays, feeding on human flesh and attacking unsuspecting inhabitants of the region. Valentine has gone on record with her report and has the support of several other S.T.A.R.S. Officers.

During yesterday's press conference, Captain Henderson noted that Officer Valentine had been suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder due to the recent death of her partner, Leon Kennedy. "Jill Valentine is one of our most gifted and intelligent police officers, but she just needs a good rest right now," said Captain Henderson. "She made wild accusations of monsters living in the Arklay Mountains. I think this leave of absence will give her time to clear her head," Captain Henderson continued.

Officer Valentine has remained more or less silent about the issue of her temporary dismissal and did not attend yesterday's press conference. In a prepared statement read by one of her fellow officers, Sergeant Gil Peyton, she stated, "I believe Raccoon City is under serious threat. I have seen human creatures eating each other as well as other humans. I am not deluded. Soon the inhabitants of Raccoon City will see these terrible creatures, and all of you will know I am not making this up. I believe the Umbrella Corporation is somehow to blame for the unfortunate fate that has befallen these individuals. I cannot explain it further. I beg all of you, citizens of Raccoon City, to prepare to fight this force. It will soon be upon you."

Immediately following the reading of Officer Valentine's statement, the conference was halted and questions were referred to the R.P.D. Media Relations Officer, MacGregor Austin-Olsen.

A spokesperson for the Umbrella Corporation issued a statement in a separate press briefing yesterday denouncing allegations made by Valentine. The alternative media reported earlier this week that Officer Valentine, along with a least three other Raccoon Police and S.T.A.R.S officers, had seen what they described as "mutant, or zombie-like" beings near the entrance of the Umbrella Corporation's research compound.

Killing Rampage Takes 8, Wounds 2

Execution-style killings stun Raccoon City Police

By NEWS STAFF REPORTER

RACCOON CITY — On Monday, police said they could use some help with their investigation in the second incident of mysterious massacres in and around Raccoon City within the last two months. The most recent occurred last night around 4 a.m. Investigators have linked the murders due to the similar execution style. Eight residents were found dead with strange blackened eyes and numerous bullet wounds to the head and chest region.

Two survivors, who suffered similar injuries, are being treated at an undisclosed hospital. A hospital representative said that while the men are in critical condition, their bodies have been inexplicably regenerating at an accelerated pace. Their minds, however, seem to be severely damaged, leaving the men in a waking vegetative state.

Raccoon City Safety and Security spokesman Blake Johnston visited the scene and is appealing to the public to come forward with information on the gruesome attack.

"It is appalling to see human beings massacred in this way. It was clearly a planned execution, which suggests that it is a matter of organized crime," Johnston told reporters.

R.CPD confirmed that a high-level integrated task team known as S.T.A.R.S. (Special Tactics And Rescue Squad) has been assigned to investigate the initial incident. Recent development within the group includes the suspension of Jill Valentine, announced today, for purporting unsubstantiated sightings of strange creatures during her investigation.

When questioned as to whether the killings were murders or in-fact execution-style kills of zombies, Johnston denied Valentine's reports stating, "No stone will be left unturned to ensure that the perpetrators of this despicable crime are brought to justice."

The bodies were found in the 7000 block of Slate Avenue. When police arrived on the scene, they encountered the victims, wounded and writhing in agony on the floor. One of them somehow managed to escape, although he too had been shot in the chest. He made his way to a nearby gas station where he eventually collapsed.

Johnston described the scene as "disturbing." According to neighborhood residents, Slate Avenue is considered a quiet area. But recently, the police have been summoned at night after receiving complaints about wild dogs barking.

MISSING PERSONS REPORT

An anonymous family member of Janus Prospero (known only as Alice to her friends and family) stepped forward today, accusing the Umbrella Corporation of kidnapping. The heralded head of the Umbrella Corporation's security department, Prospero was last seen six months ago. According to the family member, when the Raccoon City police investigation turned up few leads, Prospero's relatives decided to hire their own private investigator. They are now seeking further counsel before filing a lawsuit against the Raccoon City Police Department itself. The investigator claims the police department was paid off by the corporation to bury the case.

A spokesperson for the company has denied the allegations, calling them preposterous, "Prospero was a valued team leader, and we miss her as much as anyone." The Police Commissioner was not available for comment.

fig 4.1: Online promotional material for *Apocalypse* that delivers exposition not seen onscreen, which was later rendered mute by *Retribution* (IDMARCH, 2012).

While players battled Nemesis using a variety of weapons, finally achieving catharsis after enduring multiple encounters and a gruelling final bout, Alice opts for a fist-fight that exposes Nemesis as bulky and cumbersome, and triumphs with little difficulty. As thematic opposites, both Alice and Nemesis are cold, efficient, and deadly individuals, executing impressive physical force and weapons proficiency, yet Alice is capable of independent thought, whereas Nemesis is Umbrella's puppet. This duality is made explicit through Nemesis's capacity for heroism and self-sacrifice and Alice's sadistic decision to throw Cain to his zombies rather than allow him a quick death.

Anderson continues to parallel Alice with thematic opposites in *Extinction*, using Umbrella Chairman Albert Wesker (Jason O'Mara) as Alice's elusive final goal and Dr. Isaacs, the creator of Nemesis, as the central antagonist. By appropriating the characteristics of Romero's Dr. Logan, Isaacs becomes willing to sacrifice others for his research, successfully domesticate zombies to a limited degree, and demonstrates an abject disregard for authority, whether military or otherwise (Kane, 2010: 141; Paffenroth, 2006: 83; Wetmore, Jr, 2011: 190; Williams, 2003: 135). Obsessed with capturing Alice, Isaacs defies Wesker's authority and creates a batch of "Super Undead" to engage Alice. Isaacs' mental state deteriorates, however, when he is bitten by one of them and, as a result of overexposing himself to the anti-virus, mutates into a Tyrant.

While the fan forums of the Horror is Alive (2009) describe how series-staple Dr. Birkin was supplanted for Anderson's Dr. Isaacs, this arc closely mirrors the plot of *Resident Evil 2*. Anderson was also able to both include a fan-favourite enemy (Cinema Review, quoting Anderson, 2012) and use the Tyrant as a thematic representation for what Alice could become from T-Virus exposure – Isaacs believes

he is "the future" and that his physical and mental superiority render all other lifeforms obsolete. While vocal, intelligent enemies and bosses would not become truly prominent until *Resident Evil 4*, and videogame Tyrants were little more than aggressive brutes, Isaacs retains his intellect, becoming the first rational creature in the film series, in addition to sporting similar psychic abilities to Alice.

The Tyrant's inclusion echoes the first film rather than *Apocalypse*, allowing for deeper onscreen characterisation, which was previously downplayed in favour of intense action sequences. Yet *Extinction*'s characters – even Umbrella antagonists – are given far more development, even amidst sporadic zombie attacks. While *Extinction*'s central focus is still Alice, who has become a self-imposed exile between films, Claire Redfield's (Ali Larter) convoy is presented as a likeable, relatable, diversity of skill and personality.

Returning from *Apocalypse* are Carlos and L.J. (Mike Epps) and, while Carlos' depiction continues to greatly differ from his videogame counterpart, he is presented not only as integral to the convoy's survival, but also as Alice's male counterpart. Furthering his role from *Apocalypse*, Carlos is propelled from simply supporting Alice to almost her equal, and a degree of sexual chemistry is strongly implied between them, though this is unrealised due to Carlos' courageous self-sacrifice. In their DVD commentary for *Extinction* (2007), Anderson and Bolt expressed that this additional characterisation allows audiences to feel a deeper connection to the characters and attach greater significance to their deaths.

Undeniably, both Carlos and L. J. benefit from this in a way that Rain could not due to the audience's familiarity with L.J.'s likeable (if sometimes infuriating) character. This is again appropriated from Romero's zombie movies, which, despite only featuring recurring characters in the latter-day productions, emphasised

characterisation over action. Audiences became intimately familiar with *Dawn* and *Day*'s survivors and (Russell, 2005: 94/145), when their own human nature or the zombies consumed them, audiences were affected because of the close relation towards both the setting and the subject (Kane, 2010: 34).

In contrast, protagonists of the *Resident Evil* videogames, despite a number of attempts at the contrary, invariably reappear, usually better equipped and experienced than before. *Resident Evil* protagonists are rarely normal, everyday people; they are usually specially-trained police officers, well-equipped secret agents, or career mercenaries, and even when they *are* regular people they are still far more capable and durable than the average person, and the adaptations are no exception.

Resident Evil's horror, whatever its form, stems not from the invitation to assume the role of a casual, unequipped person amidst a zombie outbreak, as in Romero's films, but more from the unpredictable, overwhelming nature of the enemies and the sheer lack of supplies. As each videogame, and film, has progressed, however, the fear associated with unfamiliarity or the enemies naturally dwindles as players, avatars, and characters onscreen possess more capable methods and the experience necessary to intelligently survive.

No one is more equipped and capable of facing these threats than Alice; by *Extinction*, Alice's abilities have progressed at the cost of social interaction. In *Apocalypse*, Alice was very aggressive and almost devoid of emotional attachment due to her previous experiences, but glimmers of humanity appeared as she bonded with her fellow survivors, particularly Angela Ashford (Sophie Vavasseur).

Alice's subsequent attempts to avoid Umbrella's influence lead her to isolate herself from others, painting her as significantly vulnerable in *Extinction* (Cinema Review, quoting Jovovich, 2012). Alice's solo campaign is as much against Umbrella

as it is against her own chaotic abilities, though she immediately regroups with others when she learns of a potential haven in Alaska, which introduces her to Claire and her convoy.

Claire's videogame counterpart often exhibited strong maternal instincts and a desire to protect others but was also a proactive heroine; as I detailed earlier, Claire came to exhibit impressive physical attributes that Anderson appropriated into Alice's character, rendering Claire significantly less physically capable than her videogame equivalent. Instead, it is Claire's ability to effectively lead that earns her Alice's respect (ibid, quoting Larter); just as *Resident Evil* mainstays Jill and Carlos had previously give their approval to Anderson's original protagonist, Claire's approval eases her convoy's fears regarding Alice's abilities.

Though her psychic abilities are draining, and instantly alert Umbrella of her exact location, Alice is so far beyond weakness that she is even able to overcome Umbrella's influence simply through willpower. Alice fears only what she could become if Umbrella gains control over her and only the loss of her friends truly hurts her; this, coupled with her doubts concerning her value and her fears over the unpredictable nature of her powers, makes her more like Neo than ever before.

Within the Matrix's virtual reality, Neo is thoroughly unmatched, exhibiting superhuman physical and mental abilities. Yet, in the real world, Neo's doubts come to the forefront, though he ultimately resolves to ensure the safety of others. Indeed, it is only when matched against an opponent largely of his own making – Agent Smith (Hugo Weaving) – that a true challenge to his otherwise God-like abilities presents itself. Alice mirrors this internal and external struggle, overcoming every obstacle without incurring lasting physical damage, and consequently prevailing over her own insecurities. This parallels the player's struggles against *Resident Evil*'s final bosses,

where multiple tries are required for victory; Herbst (2004: 37) described the difference as being that videogames offer "a simulated reality in which no action has any lasting consequences; characters are reborn with each new game".

Additionally, while the avatar's death can be frustrating, players may succeed through persistence and preparation. While Alice is often under threat of death, she has escaped its clutches enough times to be considered a cinematic appropriation of a videogame avatar. Her constant persistence and innovation, and the array of increasing physical and mental abilities afforded to her, make this all the more explicit, as she literally upgrades herself with each movie to become stronger and more efficient, just as an avatar must do to succeed.

Furthermore, Alice gains the benefit of an army of her own clones, effectively stockpiling the cinematic equivalent of a videogame's extra life; notably, Alice is only able to defeat the Tyrant due to the intervention of one of these clones. Throughout *Extinction*, Alice struggles to trust others and has only been able to rely on herself; in the end, while the other, noticeably less superhuman survivors must flee to an uncertain future that Kane (2010: 141) noted is reminiscent of Romero's endings, Alice is only able to rely on herself (her abilities) and herself (her clone) to best the Tyrant.

Finally, the imagery of Alice's multiple discarded clones recalls both the finale of *Apocalypse*, which sees Alice killed and then reborn by Umbrella, and explicitly reflects the videogame origins of the series: "one must learn as one plays, watching the protagonist of the game get killed multiple times in order to find out how to beat the current level […] The game player and the Umbrella Corporation are equated: both require a large number of deaths in order to advance" (Wetmore, Jr, 2011: 191).

The explicit reinforcement of *Resident Evil*'s videogame roots emerges in the opening moments of *Afterlife* where Wesker (Shawn Roberts) abruptly removes Alice's superhuman abilities, similar to how many videogame sequels will strip the avatar of all but the most rudimentary of gameplay skills, tasking the player with re-acquiring upgrades and weapons from the previous title. In his DVD commentary for *Afterlife*, Anderson demonstrated how he appropriated this common gameplay mechanic in order to humanise Alice through a hitherto-unseen physical vulnerability.

Ironically, this action appears completely meaningless and Alice's vulnerability instead stems from a measure of self-doubt reminiscent of her initial characterisation and a newfound yearning to rejoin society. Immediately after receiving Wesker's serum, Alice survives a catastrophic helicopter crash and, while seemingly exerting more energy in fights and no longer exhibiting psychic abilities, she continues to physically dominant her adversaries. Just as the videogame avatar maintains a degree of combat effectiveness, especially in the hands of a seasoned player, so too is Alice's strength, skill, and endurance largely unaltered.

Consequently, Alice continues to dominate supporting characters: once freed (by Alice) from Umbrella's mind-controlling scarab-device, Claire's subsequent amnesia reduces her to Alice's sidekick rather than equal, retroactively calling her physical prowess into question. Amongst the new crop of survivors they team up with is, conveniently, another popular *Resident Evil* character – Claire's brother, Chris (Wentworth Miller). Much like Wesker and Jill, what we learn about Chris comes from exposition and heavy assumption regarding his abilities. Additionally, while Chris seems devastated that Claire does not remember him, their relationship – a strong connection in the videogames – is downplayed significantly. Tellingly, Miller (quoted by Lo, 2010) revealed that it was *Resident Evil*'s cultural significance and the

popularity of Anderson's franchise that drew him to the role, rather than his familiarity with the videogames, emphasising that, by the fourth instalment, the success of Anderson's films was garnering significant attention within the movie industry.

However, *Afterlife* implies that Chris and Claire have previously opposed Wesker, seemingly referring to events the audience has not witnessed, and the presence of the siblings in the finale implies that they are as capable as Alice at facing his superhuman abilities. Yet there is a distinct lack of onscreen evidence for this beyond the desire to include Chris due to his "beloved" status among fans, as Kulzer explains in *Afterlife*'s DVD commentary (2010). Much like Jill in *Apocalypse*, Chris's subdued inclusion facilitates Alice's larger and more prevalent role: rather than being, as Michael Harradence of PlayStation Universe (2011) states, the *Resident Evil* "nucleus" or being "synonymous with the venerable horror series as the zombies and unintentionally hilarious, cheese-tastic dialogue", Chris serves only to further endorse Alice's unmatched superiority.

Additionally, *Retribution* reconfigures Jill as the film's primary antagonist, now seemingly capable of equalling Alice due to the latter's uncharacteristic behaviour. Despite being aware that removing the scarab-device will restore Jill's free will, Alice opts to use deadly force against her former comrade at every opportunity, and only targets the scarab out of desperation rather than experience. Rather than being enhanced by Las Plagas, as "Bad Rain" is, Jill's sudden ability to match Alice appears to be based on Alice's new-found "motherhood". Feeling responsible for Becky (Aryana Engineer), a clone engineered by Umbrella to recognise Alice as her mother, Alice rediscovers maternal instincts previously

underdeveloped in earlier instalments that render her vulnerable due to her inability to

cope with such emotions.

This maternal connection, however, is tenuous, at best, and is unashamedly

appropriated from a similar relationship seen in *Aliens*. Indeed, Alice's rescue of

Becky from the giant Licker strongly echoes Ripley's rescue of Newt (Carrie Henn)

from *Aliens*' Xenomorph Queen. Like Ripley, who awakened in each *Alien* film to

discover she had lost more of her life and her loved ones, Alice must also rebuild her

life and her allies with each *Resident Evil* film, culminating in her being forced to ally

with untrustworthy individuals by *Retribution* in the absence of her more trusted

comrades. Just as Paul Wells (2000: 100) explained of Ripley, Alice is also portrayed

as a senior professional and careerist "of high achievement" (Alice was previously

head of Umbrella security), responding to a "perpetually sexist and patriarchal

culture" (Alice opposed various male Umbrella figureheads), and as re-configuring

"her body and identity by fully embracing the things she most fears" – for Ripley it

was the Xenomorph, for Alice it is her superhuman powers.

Retribution forces Alice to directly acknowledge her maternal instincts, which

ultimately causes her to make uncharacteristic mistakes and leaves her vulnerable.

Previously, Alice was always fixed and driven in battle; while this remains true in

Retribution, her abilities, already "subdued" by Wesker's serum, are clearly supposed

to be influenced (if not hindered) by her emotional turmoil, which is exacerbated by

her discovery that Umbrella's cloning experiments have resurrected her former

associates.

Alice's evolution throughout Anderson's franchise is sporadic and heavily

reliant upon the appropriation of characteristics from both recognisable videogame

characters and iconic action heroines. Over the course of the series, she has gone

from an audience surrogate to the saviour of humanity against a planet-wide zombie apocalypse; fighting becomes her life, and she begrudgingly comes to embrace violence as a natural part of her existence (Weintraub, quoting Jovovich, 2012). By incorporating popular elements of established characters from both videogames and movies, and by explicitly having said characters acknowledge Alice's superiority, Anderson has attempted to craft a protagonist who is the personification of his stringent focus on action and spectacle over the tension and mounting horror of the source material.

4.5 Further Appropriations

While Anderson clearly appropriated many of the popular characteristics of iconic action heroines and *Resident Evil* characters into his primary protagonist, these are far from the only elements of popular movie genres that came to be incorporated into his *Resident Evil* franchise. In keeping with Anderson's specific vision of how to adapt *Resident Evil*, these adaptations and appropriations are often very explicit in the way they reinterpret familiar cinematic modes or gameplay mechanics into the "generic" context of an action movie (Sanders, 2006: 2). In this section, I explore the various other embedded intertextual appropriations in Anderson's films that inescapably represent the "political or ethical commitment" that shaped Anderson's "decision to re-interpret a source text" (ibid: 3).

The first, and most obvious, example of appropriation in Anderson's films is that of the distinctly Romero-inspired zombies and the apocalyptic themes that I explored earlier in this chapter. Given Wetmore, Jr's (2011: 97) recognition of the dominance of Romero's zombie tropes over "the development of zombie-based video

games", it is only fitting that this influence is then felt in the adaptations of those videogames in an endless cycle of adaptation and appropriation (ibid).

Yet, while Anderson retained Romero's traditional zombies, it is unmistakable that they are *Resident Evil*'s weakest, most common enemy; the real challenge – and Umbrella's goal – comes from the monstrous B.O.W.s (Perron, 2009: 129). Thus, zombies remain expendable next to creatures like Nemesis since, like the videogames, "the strength of the *Resident Evil* movies is that they're not just zombie movies" (Cinema Review, quoting Anderson, 2012). Furthermore, *Apocalypse*'s visual, unsubtle style and rapid editing allowed Anderson to comfortably avoid overblown exposition because his intended audience would "get" the point due to their familiarity with the "classic undead" (Anderson, 2004).

Perhaps reflecting how *28 Days Later* reinvigorated not only the zombie genre but also Romero's films, indirectly, through Zack Snyder's use of super-fast zombies in his *Dawn of the Dead* remake (Flint, 2009: 187), *Extinction* supplants the traditional Romero zombie with Super Undead far more akin to this new interpretation of zombies: "We felt it was time to speed the zombies up […] We'd stayed very traditional to the videogame [with] traditional slow, Romero zombies [but] we wanted to mix it up a little bit" (Anderson, 2007).

This ultimately expands upon *Apocalypse*'s "frenetic" action, whereby zombie attacks blur past in a haze of confusion and noise in an appropriation of a similar, superior technique utilised in *28 Days Later* (Flint, 2009: 182/185; Graves, 2010: 160; Kane, 2010: 187; Keane, 2007: 53-55; Russell, 2005: 179-180). Additionally, in the DVD commentary for *Extinction*, Anderson and producer Jeremy Bolt (2007) were quick to add that this change "parallels to what Capcom did with the game" when the series began to incorporate more mobile zombie-like enemies. Nevertheless,

Extinction's reliance upon *Day of the Dead*'s desolate aesthetic and zombie portrayal is clearly evident: zombies have overrun the planet and continue to survive because they do not require sustenance, appearing gaunt and dried out.

Therefore, just as *Day*'s central protagonists take shelter in an underground bunker, Umbrella's employees are unable to leave their underground facilities until the zombie epidemic is eradicated. Despite Umbrella's portrayal as a nigh-unstoppable global threat, they are forced to rely on Dr. Isaacs' experiments to provide a solution to this, yet the organisation remains far more prominent and powerful than their videogame counterpart, which was dismantled and supplanted by other, thematically identical, organisations.

Isaacs' Super Undead soon usurp the traditional Romero-zombie as the principal zombie representative in Anderson's films, but his cloning research also foreshadows the end of the zombie's threat in these adaptations. *Retribution* reveals that Umbrella mass produced clones to test their viral weapons and opens itself up to numerous retroactive continuity changes on Anderson's part that detail Umbrella's ability to not only endlessly manufacture clones, but also input memories, personalities, and abilities to create formidable opponents.

Indeed, Jill directly commands, and favours, evil clones of Rain, One, and Carlos, and they achieve the highest body count of the antagonists, outshining zombies at every turn. Unlike the zombies of the videogames, which were a basic side effect of the T-Virus and *supposed* to be inferior next to Umbrella's B.O.W.s, Anderson's clones appear so advanced that it seems counterproductive to even experiment with viral warfare to produce superhuman soldiers. Therefore, by *Retribution*, zombies had declined in their onscreen threat despite the majority of the planet being infected with the T-Virus.

While their attack patterns evoke the vicious, frantic hunger of Snyder's *Dawn of the Dead*, Alice's superhuman feats paint zombies as more of an annoyance than a true threat. *Retribution* attempts to appropriate Romero's themes of zombie evolution in "Las Plagas Zombies", who brandish weapons (one wields a chainsaw in a clear evocation of *Resident Evil 4*'s Chainsaw Majini) in scenes that evoke *Outpost* (Barker, 2008) or *Dead Snow* (Wirkola, 2009), and are under the control of the Red Queen (Megan Charpentier and Ave Merson-O'Brian).

Romero purists may lament the neutering of the zombie threat, but, as noted, *Resident Evil*'s primary goal was never to be a pure "zombie videogame" or "zombie movie", necessitating the inclusion of more powerful, challenging enemies in both incarnations. This led to Anderson elevating the Licker, a standard mid-level videogame enemy, to the primary antagonist of his first film. Whereas the Licker's videogame counterparts were far more agile, durable, and dangerous than zombies, they were nevertheless easily dispatched. Onscreen, the Licker shares similarities with *Resident Evil 2*'s primary antagonist, "G"; its tenacity, various mutations, and final assault are largely reminiscent of *Resident Evil 2*'s boss battles and penultimate escape.

While Russell (2005: 177) criticised Anderson for being "More interested in this CGI creation than any of the lo-fi zombies", Anderson admitted in *Apocalypse*'s DVD commentary (2004) that the Licker's inclusion was last minute, which significantly affected the creature's CG effects. Anderson recognised that the Licker was "one of the weakest visual effects in the first film" and purposely included them in the sequel to make amends for this (ibid). Yet the Licker's inclusion is two-fold: it sets up the cliffhanger ending by infecting Matt Addison (Eric Mabius) with a

mutated version of the T-Virus, and principally serves as the survivors' final obstacle in an appropriation of the traditional videogame boss battle (Russell, 2005: 177).

Another prominent method of adaptation and appropriation at work in Anderson's films is, unsurprisingly, the inclusion of key characters and gameplay mechanics from the source material. Notably, *Apocalypse* emulated *Resident Evil*'s fixed camera angles, which Richard Rouse III (2009: 23) observed "allowed the games to pull off some uniquely "cinematic" scare moments", as Dr. Ashford (Jared Harris) guides the protagonists using CCTV cameras (Keane, 2007: 112). Additionally, *Afterlife* appropriates many elements of *Resident Evil 5*, specifically by augmenting traditional Romero zombies with a horrific split jaw, increased intelligence, and the ability to run. In *Afterlife*'s DVD commentary, Anderson (2010) explains that these "Majini Undead" were specifically included due to their horrific aesthetic qualities, though the Las Plagas parasite would not feature in his films until *Retribution* (and in a decidedly altered form), which also clarified that these Majini-inspired aesthetics were T-Virus mutations.

Such mutations, while commonplace in the videogames, where the majority of mid-to-end level bosses undergo several mutations, have purposely appropriated more of the "the imagery, the story, and the characters" of *Resident Evil 5* than its predecessors (ibid). This is explicit in the inclusion of both *Resident Evil 5*'s Executioner (credited in *Retribution* as the "Axeman") and a blow-by-blow recreation of a memorable cutscene from the same title. An exact adaptation of the Executioner, the Axeman is a particularly durable enemy briefly encountered in *Resident Evil 5*, whose appeal Anderson believed came from its inherently vague backstory (ibid). Rather than substitute the Axeman for a more "traditional" *Resident Evil* mid-level enemy, such as the Hunter or Licker, Anderson purposely included the Axeman for its

visual variety despite it being both scarcely reminiscent of its videogame counterpart and comparatively weaker than its cinematic predecessors (ibid).

Like *Resident Evil 5*, *Afterlife*'s primary antagonist is Wesker, whose characterisation differs from that of *Extinction*'s elusive puppet-master to closely align with the cunning and ruthlessness of his videogame counterpart. Wesker deviates significantly by retroactively becoming the primary antagonist of the entire series due to being Umbrella's figurehead, rather than a rogue agent. Like all of the videogame characters appropriated for Anderson's films, as I demonstrated previously, much of Wesker's prominence relies almost entirely on inference, exposition, and audience familiarity with the source material. Additionally, Wesker also becomes a thematic parallel to Alice by exhibiting an identical repertoire of superhuman abilities loosely related to those of his videogame counterpart.

These abilities are showcased in the final confrontation against Alice, Claire, and Chris Redfield, a step-by-step adaptation of an identical confrontation between Wesker, Chris, and Sheva Alomar in *Resident Evil 5*. Again, it is the non-interactive, movie-like qualities of the videogames that find themselves most faithfully recreated in Anderson's movies, rather than specific gameplay mechanics, and including this pivotal moment explicitly displays Anderson's intention to capitalise on *Resident Evil 5*'s popularity: this fight was "recreated […] very much blow-by-blow [as a] treat for the fans of the videogame [and] also non-fans as well" (ibid).

Retribution continues the appropriation of fan-favourite characters with the introduction of Ada Wong (Li Bingbing), Barry Burton (Kevin Durand), and Leon S. Kennedy (Johann Urb). This is made explicit in the opening titles as only actors portraying videogame characters receive actor and character credits in an explicit attempt to accentuate the increased presence of familiar videogame characters.

Similar to Wentworth Miller, Johann Urb (quoted by Weintraub, 2012) was more familiar with Anderson's franchise than the canon of the videogames and attributed the success of the live-action series as contributing to his enthusiasm for signing on. Again, these popular characters exist solely to lend credibility to Alice's abilities and the majority of their character development is assumed, inferred, or downplayed (ibid, quoting Bingbing, 2012). Anderson continues his reliance on audience familiarity to explain their motivations and backstory, seemingly content to accurately adapt only their appearances – "not only is [Urb] a really good actor but he looks like Leon Kennedy" (ibid, quoting Anderson, 2012).

Influenced by Parody's (2011: 215) belief that "adaptation induces and trades on memory and nostalgia", I have explored how Anderson uses adaptation and appropriation as a "transpositional practice", an act of re-vision, in order to transplant both Romero's zombie movies and the survival-horror of the *Resident Evil* videogames into another mode, that of the action movie (Sanders, 2006: 18). This strategy is particularly evident in the *Resident Evil* franchise but is also largely prevalent in all the videogame adaptations I have explored in *Interplay*, and reinforces Parody's (2011: 215) views on the importance of appropriation and intertextuality to the study of franchised adaptation.

As I detailed in Chapter Two, videogames can have surprisingly complex narratives and, as I emphasised in Chapter Three, they can also showcase complex links to other cinematic genres. This conforms to Leitch's (2007: 260) view that videogame adaptations have always had a tradition of producing "loose adaptations that either narratize or denarratize their originals [that] ignore their originals' narrative functions or invent their own in the absence of a preexisting narrative". Similar to the editorial act of pruning and the "amplificatory procedure" of expanding upon popular,

recognisable genre modes (Sanders, 2006: 18), Anderson has been able to make his franchise "'relevant' or easily comprehensible to new audiences and readerships via the process of proximation and updating" (ibid: 19).

4.6 Beyond Anderson

Anderson's *Resident Evil* franchise is prominent not just for sustaining interest in the zombie horror genre or enduring through negative criticism, but also for appropriating multiple cinematic influences. Notably, *Resident Evil*'s association with Hollywood has existed since the first videogame, which, as Krzywinska (2002: 211) observed, utilised "pre-rendered" cutscenes to "make them appear closer to cinema than other parts of a game". This association has continued into a series of CGI movies that directly correlate and align with the canon of their source material; these additional adaptations are the subject of this section in order to establish how they handle the adaptation of the characters, gameplay mechanics, and narrative of the videogames and how this differs from Anderson's franchise.

While Anderson freely acknowledged the influences of John Carpenter and the *Alien* series on his work (Anderson, 2004), much like the other videogame adaptations I have explored, Anderson's *Resident Evil* movies are not direct adaptations but instead films slightly removed from their source material to tell "slightly different stories with slightly different characters" (ibid, 2007). Believing slavish fidelity would "be a very boring thing to do" primarily because audiences would be fully aware of "which characters are going to die at which point at the hands of which creatures" (ibid), Anderson sought to include "cues from the games as much as

possible", and even cited that the videogames came to be influenced by his films (ibid).[30]

Considering the importance Parody (2011: 215) places on cross-platform production to entertainment branding in convergence culture, the expansion of the *Resident Evil* brand into further media avenues is not entirely surprising, especially considering the observations I made in Chapter Two. Cross-platform production not only "multiplies the number of sites on which a consumer may be exposed to a brand" but each production "stakes a claim to it as an item of intellectual property on a new media territory" (ibid). Indeed, due to *Degeneration*'s canonical status, its events are separate from Anderson's films, providing an alternative *Resident Evil*; like *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children*, as I detailed in Chapter One, *Degeneration* was aimed specifically towards those fully engrossed with the franchise's narrative developments and characters.

Thus, *Degeneration* arguably alienates the uninitiated in a way Anderson's franchise does not – each of his films habitually explains its predecessors to inform uninitiated viewers of current events. Interestingly, however, while it is intended to bridge the gap between *Resident Evil 4* and *5*, *Degeneration*'s canonical influence on the source material is minimal. Wired's Chris Kohler (2008) criticised *Degeneration* because watching it was like watching a videogame play itself, like the audience was simply sitting through an extended cutscene over which they had no direct influence, and which contained all the same clichés and restrictions – namely poor voice acting and lip synching, stilted movements, and a largely convoluted and inconsequential plot.

A principle emphasis throughout my research has hinged on, and built upon, Leitch's (2007: 263) view that the principal difference between videogames and

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[30] The videogames' growing emphasis on action-orientated gameplay over exploration and puzzle-solving seems indicative of Anderson's films, and *Resident Evil 4*, specifically, evoked Anderson's laser grid sequence.

cinema is "the loss of interactivity and the substitution of a single linear narrative for a multifoliate narrative". While a console's reset button mirrors cinema's "cliffhangers and hairsbreadth escapes" (ibid), movie audiences are not afforded the same freedoms and strategies as the videogame player but are granted a greater survival rate for their onscreen avatars. Therefore, videogame adaptations appropriate multiple cinematic genres and conventions alongside a "playfully ingenious recycling of elements from the original game" to present familiar videogame characters and situations in familiar cinematic genres in order to create something more appropriate for its non-interactive presentation (ibid).

While Anderson accomplished this by appropriating from action genres, *Degeneration* reproduces the same high-quality CGI of the modern videogames, features the same voice actors for Leon (Paul Mercier) and Claire (Alyson Court), and is canonical with the source material. *Degeneration* thus explicitly presents itself as being more akin to its videogame precursors, more true to that accepted mode of communication, than Anderson's franchise. Rather than being increasingly removed from their source material, *Degeneration* replicates entirely the same visual and oral mode of storytelling seen in the videogames, rather than appropriating them into entirely new contexts informed by multiple other cinematic genres, as in Anderson's franchise.

Garnett Lee (2008) of 1UP observed that *Degeneration*'s "story filled in a lot of blanks and went a long way to establishing some continuity for the series as it grows out of the Umbrella Corporation days". Notably, WillPharma has succeeded Umbrella in producing and selling the T-Virus in service of worldwide viral terrorism and, when their plot is exposed, their assets are acquired by *Resident Evil 5*'s Tricell, Inc, yet another maniacal corporation. However, Umbrella is continuously mentioned

in *Resident Evil* videogames and *Degeneration* contains numerous references to Umbrella and flashbacks to *Resident Evil 2*. While other corporations may have taken their place, Umbrella remains "the source of all that is wrong in the world" (Wetmore, Jr, 2011: 190) throughout the series, primarily by dictating or directly causing the events of every *Resident Evil*, explaining their continued existence in Anderson's films.

Degeneration mainly separates itself from Anderson by appropriating more of *Resident Evil*'s gameplay mechanics; while mystery, investigation, and exploration infrequently featured throughout Anderson's films, they have always been quickly overshadowed by action sequences. *Degeneration* presents the opposite, with action sequences bookending the film, and a pensive investigation taking place during the interim, similar to the pacing of many earlier *Resident Evil* titles, which immediately began with players battling through enemies before a balance between action, suspense, and exploration is established. *Degeneration*'s opening illustrates this perfectly, with its initial moments serving as the "introductory cutscene" to the impending zombie firefight that begins once Leon appears, exactly like beginning a new game on *Resident Evil 2*.

Over the course of the film, Leon and Claire's separate narratives converge for the finale, also similar to *Resident Evil 2*'s branching storylines, relegating the bulk of *Degeneration*'s action sequences to the beginning and the conclusion's prerequisite B.O.W. confrontation. With a run time far shorter than any of Anderson's films, and certainly less than the average *Resident Evil* playtime, *Degeneration* emphasises *narrative* expansion, something that videogame cutscenes and documents have always attempted and alluded towards but had been unable to truly delve into due to the increased emphasis on in-game action and horror.

Anoop Gantayat (2012) of the Japanese videogaming website Andriasang reported that, after selling over 1.6 million copies worldwide, *Damnation* was inevitably followed by a sequel, *Resident Evil: Damnation* (Kamiya, 2012), this time to coincide with *Resident Evil 6*'s impending release. Far from a direct continuation, *Damnation* functions more as a sequel to *Resident Evil 4*; *Damnation*'s emphasis on Ada's (Courtenay Taylor) involvement in a Leon-centric story – one that takes place in an Eastern-European setting – closely resembles *Resident Evil 4*.

Being far more action-orientated than its predecessor, *Damnation* actively emphasises modern *Resident Evil* gameplay mechanics. Just as in *Resident Evil 6*, Leon showcases a variety of physical skills, a penchant for firearms, and employs a degree of stealth tactics. Contrary to Anderson's films, the returning *Resident Evil* characters are portrayed exactly as they are in the source material and the emphasis is on developing their characters, rather than utilising them to bestow prestige onto Anderson's superhuman protagonist. Kamiya's films appropriate their visual, narrative, and character cues directly from the videogames; thus it is assumed that audiences watching *Degeneration* and *Damnation* have played *Resident Evil* titles and are aware of their complex canon.

Despite the multinational nature of Anderson's films, they are nevertheless presented as very mainstream action-horror genre pieces. Conversely, Kamiya's CGI alternatives may offer a viewing experience that is aesthetically closer to their source material, yet they are still unable to completely adapt every element of the *Resident Evil* videogames due to the passive nature of film. Arguably, the inevitable emphasis on attacking zombies and monsters in order to survive brings the *Resident Evil* videogames closer to the cinematic action-horror genre as the series has never sought to emulate Romero's introspective, metaphorical use of zombies, only his *depiction* of

the undead. Given that the *Resident Evil* videogames have come to embrace more action-orientated gameplay, it is also understandable that these elements are emphasised in their various adaptations, and the fundamental difference between Anderson and Kamiya's films possibly lies in their presentation of recognisable elements from the source material more than anything else.

Given that the success of Anderson's franchise was recognised by the 2012 *Guinness World Records: Gamer's Edition* (Reeves, 2011), the franchise is clearly a lucrative investment for Constantin Films. While Kamiya's films may serve as a more faithful alternative, Spencer Perry of ComingSoon (2015) reported that Anderson's franchise is heading into its sixth entry regardless, having recently completed production. Anderson (quoted by Orange, 2012) promised that *Retribution*'s cliffhanger signalled "the set-up for an epic, and truly spectacular finale", which is reflected both in the sixth film's *Final Chapter* subtitle and reports of popular franchise characters and locations returning for the finale (Chitwood, 2014; CS, 2015).

Kamiya's films, however, do display an alternative method to adapting *Resident Evil*, one that contains plenty of action and marries this with characters and narrative threads instantly recognisable to the source material. Indeed, amidst previously-stated rumours of a series reboot, Anderson and Jovovich (cited by Schaefer, 2015) have intimated in the past that *Resident Evil* could continue without Alice, perhaps in a more horror-orientated direction reminiscent of the atmospheric tension of the original videogames and of Kamiya's CGI series, following the conclusion to Alice's story.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has served as the culmination of many of the observations made in my previous chapters, with *Resident Evil* at the forefront, emphasising how complex videogame narratives have been distilled by the adaptation process and reconfigured into new cinematic modes, similar to the multiple adaptations of *Sonic The Hedgehog*. In an expansion of the franchising nature of Hollywood I have previously explored, my detailed examination of *Resident Evil*'s box office results has emphatically shown the profit that can be made from videogame adaptations.

More than any other of its genre, Anderson's *Resident Evil* franchise has performed consistently well onscreen. Tim Dirks, writing for AMC Networks' Filmsite (2015), chronicles that *Resident Evil*'s domestic box office success of over £244 million, while not comparable to that of blockbuster Hollywood productions like those released by Marvel Studios (over $3.382 million) or even the *Alien* franchise (over $500 million), is still significantly higher than Romero's *Dead* films (over $45 million) and of comparable value to many similar action/adventure and horror franchises, such as *Predator* (1987-2010; over $260 million) and *RoboCop* (over $160 million).

Resident Evil's success was further bolstered by home media sales, an obvious audience for Anderson's franchise, and its successful appropriation of popular cinematic modes. Fittingly, given Anderson's involvement, *Resident Evil* appropriates genre tropes just as *Mortal Kombat* did previously, specifically from action and science-fiction genre pieces, and presents them in a highly exaggerated manner alongside clear appropriations of Romero's zombie depictions. Just as Parody (2011: 215) observed that "Adaptation […] is a particularly useful strategy for

prolonging consumers' encounter with an entertainment brand and refreshing their awareness of it [by inviting] consumers to *remember* other branded products and experiences, I have detailed that Anderson's franchise reinvigorated the zombie horror genre, which, at the time of *Resident Evil*'s PlayStation release, was "in terminal decline […] Reduced to a seemingly endless collection of amateurish, clumsy gore-for-gore's-sake video atrocities made by increasingly incompetent fans" (Flint, 2009: 177).

Regardless of Hollywood's cyclical nature, the idea of zombies returning to cinematic prominence "seemed laughable" (Anderson, 2004), yet Anderson's *Resident Evil* franchise heralded a dramatic increase in zombie horror films by "[reminding] consumers of the part that the entertainment brand has played in their cultural and social life (Parody, 2011: 215). The influential nature of Anderson's franchise on the zombie horror genre cannot be underestimated (Bishop, 2010: 10); rather than being gore-drenched cult movies primarily attracting a niche audience, Anderson's franchise is very much at the forefront of mainstream Hollywood, despite being produced largely outside of the typical Hollywood studio system.

Flint (2009: 179) observed that, while "Fundamentalist zombie fans invariably hated it, […] *Resident Evil* was in fact just the kick in the ass that the sub-genre had needed to put it back on the mainstream agenda". Consequently, Zack Snyder's *Dawn of the Dead*, Uwe Boll's *The House of the Dead*, and George Romero's *Land of the Dead* all became hot properties as Hollywood moved to profit from the latest zombie craze (Russell, 2005: 178). Even considering that fluctuating audience popularity is commonplace with zombies, *Resident Evil* demonstrated "that the zombie film as sociophobic metaphor [was] still dominant and still relevant" (Wetmore, Jr, 2011: 227), allowing a reinvigoration of not only traditional Romero-

inspired zombie horror and the more modern depictions of zombies, but also of zombie media in comic books, literature, and on television.

As a result, while zombies have since faded from cinematic prominence in recent years, *Warm Bodies* (Levine, 2013) perpetuated their comedic value, *World War Z* (Forster, 2013) maintained the threat of the zombie apocalypse, and *Maggie* (Hobson, 2015) emphasised the intense interpersonal conflicts that can arise from zombie infection. In addition to zombies being consistently present in literature and comic books, Den of Geek's Ryan Lambie (2010) and Games Radar's Lorenzo Veloria (2013) illustrated that zombies continue to be present in videogames as many titles incorporate zombie content or centre on a zombie apocalypse.

Zombies also feature prominently in a variety of direct-to-DVD features and also, arguably more significantly, through television; Samantha Leffler (2014), of the entertainment website Wetpaint, emphasised the popularity and success of *The Walking Dead* (2010-present), a live-action adaptation of Image Comics' long-running comic books.[31] Indeed, ever since their cinematic debut, "and particularly in light of the increased cinematic, literary, and multimedial productivity of the early twenty-first century – the zombie narrative has proven itself to be just as popular, lasting, complex, and revealing as other, more established Gothic traditions" (Bishop, 2010: 31).

However their depiction, and in whatever medium they may be presented, "audiences continue to be horrified, entertained, and amused by the traditional zombie cinema formula, filmmakers, authors, video game designers, and graphic novelists will continue to mine the genre's past in […] attempts to recapture the aesthetic and financial magic enjoyed by Romero and his immediate imitators" (ibid: 203-204).

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[31] The popularity of the series as been reflected in its various award nominations, including the Writers Guild of America (WGA) award for Best Series in 2010 (Neuman, 2010).

Over the years, zombies have proven to be durable and persistent as both horror icons and adversaries against the social order, and as long as their economic value can be relied upon, they will "continue to both fascinate and terrify" (ibid: 207) in one form or another, and find new ways to evolve and change to reflect the development of mainstream society.

This chapter expands upon Bishop's (ibid: 16) observation that, while *Resident Evil* "takes its central premise directly from Romero's movies, requiring players to explore an isolated country manor while shooting reanimated corpses and trying to avoid being eaten […] the game understandably features a lot more "fight" than "flight". Nevertheless, the terror and action of zombie movies translates quite logically from the big screen to the video screen" (ibid), yet the videogames have never tackled a worldwide zombie apocalypse as depicted in Romero's films, nor have they used zombies as metaphors for consumerism, the loss of identity, oppression, or any of Romero's interchangeable themes. In the *Resident Evil* videogames, there is a definite threat of a zombie apocalypse, but this is only realised in its cinematic adaptations where it is wholly appropriated from Romero's zombie films.

These appropriations have been explained to include a science-fiction edict that adapts *Resident Evil*'s general themes, gameplay mechanics, and characterisations into an action-orientated genre piece that, ironically, makes "Anderson's *Resident Evil* […] more video game than narrative" (ibid). Yet, the appropriation of popular action heroines like Ripley and Sarah Connor into Alice's character emphasises Anderson's desire to make atmospheric horror subordinate to action by explicitly evoking thematic links to *Aliens*.

By encompassing traits of her videogame predecessors alongside the aforementioned action heroines and superhuman skills akin to *The Matrix*, Alice is clearly designed to appeal to audiences already closely associated with recognisable action genres, and as such is capable of feats comparable to her cinematic predecessors but well beyond the source material. Opposing her are a series of interpersonal physical challenges that take narrative precedence over the immediate zombie threat, presenting Alice with multiple thematic opposites in an attempt to humanise her and increase the audience's investment in her welfare. Unlike the vulnerable videogame avatar, Alice is practically invincible, and thus her challenges are ones concerning her humanity, her superhuman abilities, and her maternal desires.

I have also analysed how Anderson's action sequences have come to showcase the horrifying potential of zombie infection; whereas *Resident Evil* players would encounter various enemies alongside zombies quite commonly, with bigger, more powerful bosses appearing along the way, zombies act as the primary enemy of Anderson's other, less superhuman protagonists. While zombies overwhelm other characters, Alice's thematic opposites emphasise her physical and mental abilities, and sometimes even her intelligence, indicating that such creatures are largely beyond the ability of other, comparatively-normal protagonists. In Anderson's franchise, this comes at the detriment of traditional *Resident Evil* characters that exist onscreen purely for their popularity and name value and to bestow upon Alice an air of authenticity, as though associating with them makes Alice equal in relevance.

As a result, Anderson's franchise has conditioned audiences to expect even well-trained individuals to fail where Alice would succeed. These expectations are, in actuality, also present in the videogames; players expect recurring characters to be effective against subsequent B.O.W.s. This is explicit in *Degeneration* and

Damnation, where Leon is a specialist whose familiarity with B.O.W.s gives him the edge that others fatally lack. Additionally, when introducing Claire in *Degeneration*, Leon remarks that she is a "rare survivor of Raccoon City", as though this bestows authority over others. Subsequently, when these characters combat new outbreaks, initiated audiences know that they are best suited to the task.[32]

Fundamentally, I have demonstrated that, despite overwhelmingly mixed and largely negative critical reviews, Anderson's *Resident Evil* franchise has nevertheless garnered both substantial financial revenue and a recognisable audience that clamours for Anderson's fast-paced, action-packed visuals rather than the videogame's more methodical, atmospheric horror. While a ready-made audience existed in the form of *Resident Evil* videogame fans back in 2001, by now, with the sixth filmic entry looming, Anderson has amassed an audience all his own as reflected in the popularity of his *Resident Evil* franchise both at the cinema and on DVD despite the series lacking "the prestige and mainstream crossover potential of [*Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*]" (Russell, 2012: 232).

In Leitch's (2007: 266) view, the greatest contributor to *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*'s mainstream appeal, and its success, was its ability to "flesh out its adventures by invoking a series or narrative contexts outside its original". Just as Anderson appropriated from *Aliens* and *The Terminator* to turn *Resident Evil* into a sci-fi action franchise, Lara (Angelina Jolie) "is clearly a combination of James Bond and Indiana Jones" in that her training sequences openly mirror those seen in Bond movies and "her occupation and the film's handling of enclosed spaces recalls *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984)" (ibid). Similarly, just as Anderson forgoes the tedious exploration and back-tracking that is a staple of early *Resident Evil* videogames, *Lara*

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[32] Indeed, in *Degeneration*, both Leon and Claire are initially treated with the same scepticism and disbelief levelled at Ripley in *Aliens*.

Croft: Tomb Raider substitutes the videogame's "endless series of explorations of interchangeable tombs in search of valuable artifacts [for] a planetary alignment […] that will allow some intrepid quester to unite both halves of a triangular talisman and control time" (ibid).

Unlike *Tomb Raider*, which Russell (2012: 232) believed to have raised the hope that "videogames could produce movies that reached beyond a niche audience, the *Resident Evil* movies seemed determined to stick them back in the ghetto" by embracing the action-sci-fi genre and incorporating elements of classic, and modern, zombie horror. Yet, despite the B-movie origins of his franchise, Anderson dresses up his presentation with a sci-fi aesthetic that mirrors that seen in the *Alien* franchise and downplays graphic representations of gore and horror in order to appeal to a wider mainstream audience. Contrary to the videogames, where tension mounts constantly and horror is always lurking around the next corner or in the next room, Anderson's franchise makes horror subordinate to action. Anderson uses horror elements sparingly as, according to Sconce (1993: 110), horror is a genre indicative of examinations of "identification and spectatorship in the cinema. This is perhaps because no other genre so explicitly foregrounds the issues of vision and power inherent in the cinema as a whole. Nowhere are the politics of seeing and not being seen more palpable and even downright bloody than in the horror film".

Ultimately, *Resident Evil* proves to be a prolific videogame franchise; through its ability to weather critical backlash, its continued financial success, the accumulation of a devoted audience, and its appropriation of various cinematic and videogame genres, the franchise is easily the most successful live-action cinematic videogame adaptation ever produced. While Romero purists may take issue with Anderson's depiction of zombies, film critics may deride his emphasis of style over

substance, and videogame devotees may lament Anderson's lack of fidelity, his franchise nevertheless constitutes an unprecedented level of financial success, especially for a videogame adaptation.

Finally, I have illustrated the complex ways Anderson's franchise has adapted and appropriated from other genres and sources in an effort to achieve and maintain this box office success. Examining Anderson's franchise, which amalgamates all the key points of my earlier chapters, definitively illustrates *Interplay*'s true conclusion: the success of videogame adaptations is as much about what *cinematic* modes they appropriate as it is about which elements – whether gameplay mechanics, narratives, or otherwise – they incorporate from their source material.

Conclusion

This final section summarises my principal aims and closing evaluation by emphasising the key themes I have demonstrated throughout *Interplay*, including the intertextual and synergistic links between Hollywood and the videogame industry, how they have adapted and appropriated from each other, and the complex methods of both adaptation and franchising at work in videogame adaptations. My conclusion analyses how videogames and films have become more similar in their presentation and consumption and offers a brief analysis of the potential future of videogame adaptations.

Thomas Leitch (2008: 76) once described adaptation theory as being at a crossroads, urging the need for texts that are focused on specific issues "in the production and reception of adaptations and the relations between adaptation and other intertextual modes" rather than continuing to produce the same discussions of book-to-film analysis. Leitch believed that adaptation theorists would be far better served "looking more closely at the ways adaptations play with their sourcetexts instead of merely aping or analyzing them" (ibid). Certainly, I have fulfilled these criteria with *Interplay*, which does not repeat the same discussions of the past; instead, by incorporating a blended methodology, I hope to bring academic legitimacy to videogame adaptations and contributed to the shifting of the evaluative problems adaptation theory "has inherited from literary studies — fidelity, hierarchy, canonicity — from the praxis of adaptation studies to part of its subject" (ibid).

One of my principal aims has been to evaluate the influences and motivations behind the production of videogame adaptations beyond simple financial gain. While Linda Hutcheon (2006: 30) argued that general "economic issues, such as the

financing and distribution of different media and art forms, must be considered in any general theorizing of adaptation", adaptations represent a significant investment in extending both a popular franchise's revenue and their market (ibid). Another key theme has been the importance of how gameplay mechanics have been subdued, transmuted, or otherwise altered through the adaptation process to fit their new cinematic genre forms. In order to recreate the excitement of gameplay, videogame adaptations will often embrace and exaggerate financially viable genres such as action, adventure, horror, or animation.

In Chapter Four, I assessed how appropriating from popular cinematic modes aids multimedia transition; as videogames are "incompatible with traditional concepts of narrative" due to the conflict between story, which involves "time passing and narrative progression", and challenge, "which frustrates the passing of time and impedes narrative progression" (Bissell, 2010: 93), the adaptation of videogames into passive media forms inevitably turns to recognisable cinematic genres and modes to compensate for the lack of audience interactivity (Hutcheon, 2006: 25).

Influenced by the work of Robert Allen Brookey (2010: 4), I have principally emphasised that technological advances have allowed videogames to "to offer cinematic visuals and complex narratives" and "have become more like movies" while simultaneously demonstrating how movies have become more like videogames. I have analysed this intrinsic link prominently throughout the preceding chapters in order to emphasise how the two industries have influenced each other in various ways, from storytelling to audience consumption. Notably, *Avatar* (Cameron, 2009) emphasised the levels of interaction attained through external avatars, essentially viewing as a live-action RPG through its depiction of Jake Scully's (Sam

Worthington) close emotional attachment not just to his avatar but to the alien Na'vi (essentially non-playable characters) he interacts with.

Furthermore, *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World* (Wright, 2010), *Wreck-It Ralph* (Moore, 2012), the French animated short *Pixels* (Jean, 2010), and Chris Columbus's 2015 feature length American counterpart all feature prominent allusions, cameos, and homages to the bygone arcade era, which has been rediscovered by new generations through modern re-releases. Finally, *Edge of Tomorrow* (Liman, 2014), already an adaptation of the Japanese light novel *All You Need is Kill* (Sakurazaka, 2004), emphasises videogames' influence on the original text to view like a live-action adaptation of modern first-person sci-fi shooters (Sakurazaka, 2004: 199-200).

William Cage's (Tom Cruise) continual re-spawning from death allows him to better craft his skills, which explicitly adapts both the process that FPS gamers must undergo and the RPG's levelling-up system: Ryan Leas, reviewing the film for news and entertainment website Salon (2014), believed that Cage's deaths echo "the exact kind of stupid [mistakes] you make in games […] The movie makes you feel the whole slow process of character development: of building Cage into a hero". This repetition makes *Edge of Tomorrow* easily the closest adaptation of typical gameplay mechanics; Wired's Angela Watercutter (2014) called it "the best videogame movie not actually based on videogame" due to it emphasising "videogames' narrative *structure*—the ability to continue after "Game Over" and discover something new".

Edge of Tomorrow also emphasised Stephen Keane's (2007: 102) observation that the "most refined comparisons between films and videogames arise out of films where the videogame elements are in effect invisible, thoroughly integrated as they are into their overall form and construction". Indeed, these aspects were notably downplayed in the videogame adaptations I have explored throughout this thesis;

Edge of Tomorrow's intricate appropriation of the natural repetition of videogames (King, 2002: 53) also contrasts with the abandonment of key gameplay mechanics by Paul W.S. Anderson in favour of appropriating from popular cinematic genres for his videogame adaptations.

Crucial to my research has been Thomas Austin's (2002: 3) view that any film or television show is "framed by a constellation of institutions, texts and practices" during its "marketing and reception". This fundamentally dictated that *Sonic*'s more fantastical gameplay elements be disregarded in favour of more "screen-friendly" concepts, appropriated from other media sources, and that *Sonic*'s environmentalist themes displaced Ring collecting and Badnik smashing. I have likewise emphasised that contemporary Hollywood's commercial logic "dictates the solicitation of multiple audiences for any single film", both domestically and worldwide (ibid). The numerous examples of localisation best demonstrate this, as Japanese products like anime and videogames are both culturally and socially separate from their international audiences.

Furthermore, it is often the case that a film or television show's success is commercially linked to their ability to illicit "a range of possible pleasures and meanings and advertise their presence to different audience fractions" (ibid). Star power and special effects are commonly emphasised in "newspapers, magazines and television shows that trade in star images, background stories, gossip and controversy" (ibid). These prove the preferred methods for marketing videogame adaptations, especially with *Street Fighter*, which heavily relied on Jean-Claude Van Damme's star power and its action film status.

In Chapter Two, I assessed how narrative and character are as important to gameplay mechanics and iconography in establishing fantasy videogame worlds.

Indeed, *Sonic*'s narrative was developed almost exclusively through ancillary media in the franchise's early days, and these elements came to be adopted as the best starting point for adaptation. *Sonic*'s resultant adaptations elaborated upon their ancillary media to make the generally-simplistic plots of videogames more suitable for the screen.

As I initially demonstrated through a parallel with the *Pac-Man* and *Mario* cartoons, enhancing *Sonic*'s fictional world through ancillary media imbued a level of depth and characterisation that was unachievable in videogames at the time. These alterations were adapted into *Sonic*'s ancillary media, such as novelisations and comic books, to reach far wider and more diverse audiences, and also came to be appropriated into *Sonic*'s videogames, proving that, occasionally, adaptations can forever influence the legacy of their source material.

Despite videogame adaptations generating criticism and controversy, their production continues unabated; Martin Picard (2008: 296) demonstrated that even box office failures like *In the Name of the King* spawn sequels. Although many videogame adaptations have been box office failures, questioning their continued production, Kamilla Elliott (2014: 192) observed that corporate franchise intertextuality is just as likely to foster conservatism and corporate capitalism in its pursuit of worldwide dominance.

Similarly important, both to the reception of videogame adaptations and to my blended methodology, has been the role of fan communities towards the genre since, as Clare Parody (2011: 216) identified, franchise fans often debate "Issues of anteriority, authenticity, and fidelity, whether to specific textual and worldbuilding details, or to the 'core concepts' or 'essence' of [a] franchise brand". However, I have furthered the notion that these debates are not entirely without merit; when applied

alongside my blended methodology, Chapter Two demonstrated they have a far more meaningful purpose as an additional pressure on the creators of videogame franchises and adaptations.

Additionally, I have emphasised the complex procedures that fans must go through in order to fully engage with multimedia franchises; while ancillary merchandise is readily available, each product faces the same harsh scrutiny from a highly-devoted fanbase who, though largely concerned with fidelity, delight in demonstrating their expertise regarding a particular franchise text. Yet I have also illustrated that film adaptations of videogames demonstrate highly complex methods of adaptation in their attempts to translate interactive media into an exciting, yet passive, experience. They can allow videogame characters and their worlds to grow and be represented in new and exciting ways and allow a developing, but still somewhat niche, videogame market to reach a far wider and diverse audience. Finally, they can also be discussed on par with other adaptations rather than being discounted simply for being videogame adaptations.

Following the assessments I made in Chapter Two, SEGA's hopes for the *Sonic Boom* spin-off franchise may have yielded promising results from the television series. Nintendo Life's Tim Latshaw (2014) noted that the cartoon produced "double- and triple-digit gains with key demographics since it began airing" and claimed "the #1 spot in its time slot for […] boys 6-11, boys 9-14, and kids 9-14 [on Saturday's]", but the accompanying videogames failed to garner quite the same results. Indeed, ScrewAttack blogger Luminouswolf2013 (2015) heavily criticised the Wii U's *Rise of Lyric* (Big Red Button Entertainment, 2014) for its rushed presentation and glitches, and the Sonic Stadium's Brad (2015) reported that the title's crippling sales led to "the loss of 300 jobs at SEGA, closure of their San Francisco office, and shifting their

focus to digital titles". Additionally, despite the relative competence of the cartoon and the Nintendo 3DS title, *Shattered Crystal* (Sanzaru Games, 2014), the *Boom* sub-franchise's stability has been left unclear.[33]

Some within Sonic's fan community would call this simply another part of the so-called "Sonic Cycle", where *Sonic* videogames reach an apex of popularity and quality that quickly leads to oversaturation and poorly-produced titles. Julian Hazeldine, (2014: 81) noted that, while *Sonic Heroes* proved moderately successful, "its long-term impact damaged the Sonic series". A slew of critically unsuccessful titles from Sonic Team USA sought only to "maximise sales at almost any price" by capitalising on the success of FPS's and racers (ibid: 82), which coincided with "the inferiority of [SEGA's] development tools and techniques" compared to their competitors (ibid: 85).

While Mario's videogame formula has changed very little from his NES days, SEGA constantly strives to reinvent Sonic in an effort to appeal to new generations of gamers. Mario has suffered far less dips in quality and is under less pressure to produce reinvigorating titles, while *Sonic* titles are often considered very hit-and-miss: "Thanks to the more recent games being too mellow and not leaving much of an impression […] kids today don't see the action-packed and heroic freedom-fighter Sonic that we grew up playing" (Luminouswolf2013, 2015).

Significantly, Sonic has continually strived for multimedia success, while Mario is content to stay in videogames and other ancillary merchandise, and Nintendo seem satisfied to allow *Pokémon* to represent them in passive entertainment. Multimedia exposure is a natural business inclination, especially as interactivity and social networking become more important than ever, and SEGA's tentative plans for

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[33] "Both versions of the game […] managed to shift 490,000 copies […] To compare, Sonic Lost World [sold] 640,000 copies by December 2013 [and] 710,000 copies [by] March 2014" (Brad, 2015).

live-action/CGI hybrid *Sonic* films indicate an almost desperate need for their once-seemingly-unstoppable mascot to have a consistent presence in popular culture, not just a niche segment like videogames.

Predominantly, I have demonstrated the impact of videogames on popular culture since their humble beginnings. The fact that videogames have permeated into cinematic forms and onto television screens, and continue to do so, speaks volumes of their adaptability, appeal, and marketability. Media synergy, like adaptations, only helps to further cement their legacy in popular culture and the lexicon of modern society. Indeed, noted film director Guillermo Del Toro (quoted by Russell, 2012: 282) argued that videogames have emerged into genuine narrative forms that have altered perceptions of "art direction, soundscapes and immersive environments".

Accentuating the previous chapters has been the various ways videogames have emphasised their intertextual links with cinema through remediation; Bob Rehak Rehak (2003: 104) explained that videogames "demonstrate the propensity of emerging media forms to pattern themselves on the cinematic behaviors and tendencies of their predecessors". Additionally, Mark J. P. Wolf (2001: 3) observed that videogames rely relying on "a knowledge of cinematic conventions (for example, in the construction of space and narrative action, continuity editing, the use of off-screen space, and concepts of point of view", which allows videogames to "resemble movies more than they do "real life" [and] rework the formulas of cinema—and spectatorship" (Rehak, 2003: 104). Whereas films often emphasise the central protagonist, many videogames allow players to interact with and affect their diagetic worlds directly through their avatar, which essentially means that, while "films or TV may influence behaviour, in the video game, the player is called upon not just to

watch but to act; simulation becomes emulation, and sympathy becomes empathy" (Wolf, 2001: 3).

Jamie Russell (2012: 282) related how the movie industry was forced to notice videogames back in 1982 but in today's economic climate Hollywood's competitor "has evolved into a mature industry that's established itself as both a credible business and a standalone entertainment medium for more than three decades". Accordingly, filmmakers are keen to reach audiences that grew up interacting with their media and are "comfortable sliding between the real and the virtual, both visually and conceptually" (ibid). The movie industry's need to capitalise on this generation has only increased the ancillary products tied to successful franchises, including cinematic adaptations. Certainly, as Brookey (2010: 5) noted, the production of videogames as ancillary products to Hollywood releases is a common marketing strategy that carries a significant revenue stream.

However, as I have demonstrated in each chapter, the success ratio of videogame adaptations does not necessarily relate to the success of their source material and is also the subject of debate. *Super Mario Bros.* and *Double Dragon* (Yukich, 1994), for example, were significant box office failures but *Street Fighter* out-performed its total gross by three times through foreign earnings – Randy Nichols (2008: 135) noted that the film's 45.3 million gross even tops *Resident Evil*'s $17.7 million, though the age demographics of both films is wildly contrasting.

A significant factor in the marketing of videogame adaptations is their appropriation of cinematically viable genre modes; "many action/adventure films and many films marketed to children and families include a video game component" and this genre is noticeably lucrative "at the box office; they are referred to as "tent-pole" pictures because their revenue is used to support the rest of the films on a studio's

production roster" (Brookey, 2010: 5). In Chapter Three, I explored how *Mortal*

Kombat capitalised on the franchise's popularity, and controversy (Egenfeldt-Nielsen,

et al, 2008: 82), and producer Lawrence Kasanoff's desire to adapt the source

material's story into an action/adventure genre mould and craft a multimedia franchise

(Russell, quoting Kasanoff, 2012: 147/148). Hutcheon (2006: 10) explains that, in

adaptation theory, it is largely agreed that "the story is the common denominator, the

core of what is transposed across different media and genres".

Wolf (2001: 93), however, describes that, in videogames, story is generally

facilitated and advanced by gameplay, making it mostly secondary even in titles with

a heavy story-based emphasis. Videogame narrative, however, involves the audience

"in a uniquely direct manner, making the *viewer* into a participant or *player*, by

allowing the player to control (to some degree) a character in the game's diegetic

world". This control is naturally lost when viewing a film, meaning videogame

adaptations will focus on their source material's narrative and adapt it to fit the mould

of conventional cinematic genres.

Although an ongoing debate has been identified between "whether

interactivity and storytelling are at odds with one another […] what is more relevant

in a game adaptation is the fact that players can inhabit a known fictional, often

striking, visual world of digital animation" (Hutcheon, 2006: 13). While RPGs are

more commonly known for their "rich, complicated, and broadly populated worlds

and scenarios" (ibid: 14), Chapter Three related how Kasanoff emphasised *Mortal*

Kombat's characters and story and the film's heavy appropriations from martial arts

cinema, specifically *Enter the Dragon*, and *Street Fighter*'s debt to more to traditional

action movies of the mid-eighties to early-nineties than it did its source material.

A principal intertextual link between cinema, television, and videogames is the presentation of diagetic worlds – the fictional setting "where the characters exist and where the story's events occur" (Wolf, 2001: 94). Videogames again turned to the "visual grammar" well established by film and television to build, and expand, these worlds. While players are generally allowed far more freedom to explore their diagetic worlds, even expansive "sandbox" titles place navigation and interactive limitations similar to those shared by film and television audiences, who can only experience as much of the diagetic world as those onscreen (ibid).

In Chapter Three, I also emphasised the importance of these appropriations to adapting a videogame's diagetic world, which can range from *Sonic*'s fantasy environments to *Resident Evil*'s more realistic settings, into "a particular kind of "truth-of-coherence"—not to any "real world" but to the universe of a particular adapted text" (Hutcheon, 2006: 14). I have consistently documented the difficulty in adapting a videogame's diagetic world throughout this thesis, which has often been deemed incompatible with passive media. In Chapter Two, I demonstrated how this difficulty was bypassed or significantly altered altogether, which generated mixed audience reactions, indicating that the ways each adaptation deals with the story of its source material is inherently different and involves several modes of audience engagement (ibid: 10).

I have also illustrated that this engagement has strong intertextual links with the audience's familiarity with the source material, to the extent where a videogame adaptation's fidelity becomes one of the first and oft-touted criticisms, even when adaptation theory teaches that "there are many and varied motives behind adaptation and few involve faithfulness" (ibid: xiii). As I demonstrated in Chapter One by referencing the work of Russell (2012: 137), *Super Mario Bros.*' scriptwriting issues

and executive meddling only worked against its wild deviations from its source

material. These same issues later plagued *Mortal Kombat*, as long-time former New

Line CEO Bob Shaye almost immediately disliked the initial screenplay and the

general consensus was that the film would fail based on the poor performance of

previous videogame adaptations, especially *Super Mario Bros.* (ibid, quoting

Kasanoff: 128).

Generally, however, the poor performance of videogame adaptations has little

impact on a franchise's parent companies, who offer little support to such projects:

Shigeru Miyamoto politely distanced himself from *Super Mario Bros.* because his

business was to "make videogames" and he "wanted someone who makes movies to

create the *Mario Bros.* movie" (ibid, quoting Miyamoto: 144). Miyamoto also firmly

believed Mario's success came from the gameplay more than anything else, and, as

far as producer Roland Joffé was concerned (quoted by ibid), Nintendo were

completely protected because "They didn't think it was going to damage their

franchise in any way whatsoever". In fact, the only fallout from the movie's failure

was that Nintendo "called a moratorium on further dalliances with Hollywood

studios" (ibid).[34]

Given the numerous videogame adaptations that followed *Super Mario Bros.*,

and the multitude still to come, this restraint is refreshingly candid: Nintendo prefer

the long-term investment of their videogames, which they retain full control of, over

the short-term payout of big-screen adaptations, which are inherently unwieldy due to

the conflicting desires of the various producers, writers, and directors involved. More

specifically, especially in the early nineties, Nintendo had no need for Hollywood's

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[34] Nintendo passed on Imagi Studios' 2007 CGI *Zelda* movie pitch (Perry, 2013) and online rumours of a Netflix-produced series have been stated to be "not based on correct information" (Dornbush, quoting Iwata, 2015).

financial support as, by 1992, "Nintendo were profiting more than all of the Hollywood studios and the three main US televisions combined" (ibid: 132).

Videogames have evolved to the point where their worlds and characters are as rich, detailed, and varied as Hollywood productions; their narratives have become cinematic and deeply complex, their characters equally deep and layered, and yet videogame adaptations are still burdened by lacklustre results. One of my primary conclusions is the inevitability that videogame adaptations could potentially achieve true critical and financial success. Harold Goldberg (2011: 214) believed that, should just one "became a blockbuster, the lemminglike producers in Hollywood would fall over themselves to imitate that success [and] try to do better than make money". Yet, to achieve this lofty goal, videogame adaptations must negotiate how to present gameplay mechanics, the tangible difference between videogames and movies (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, *et al*, 2008: 121/178).

Based on the many productions still slated for future release listed in Appendix One, videogame adaptations show no signs of declining; *Pokémon* continues to produce new anime seasons and movies to coincide with videogame releases, and videogame adaptations are getting bigger, more expensive, and arguably are being taken more seriously as financially viable intellectual properties.

Just as videogame storytelling mechanics influenced films, videogame franchises are being mined for their potential as multimedia franchises to align with Hollywood's ever-increasing need for new world-building intellectual properties to develop. Henry Jenkins (quoted by Bourdaa, 2013: 206) described franchises the "site where new forms of narrative practice and cultural collaboration have emerged" and as being "positioned and understood in relation to the larger patterns of convergence culture and transmedia storytelling". In Chapter Two, I incorporated

aspects of transmedia storytelling into my blended methodology while, in Chapter Four, I examined, in-depth, the financial benefits of videogame adaptations; both points contribute to the deeper understanding of videogame adaptations as being not just films or television shows, but a part of a much larger multimedia venture.

At the same time, videogame adaptations have found significant prominence through online streaming sites, like YouTube, with both *Mortal Kombat* and *Street Fighter* benefitting from this medium. Finally, Goldberg (2011: 214) believes that television's episodic format could yield significant success for videogame adaptations: "If executives kept the budgets and expectations low, hired an up-and-coming director with heart and knowledge of the industry […] then a success might well come seemingly out of nowhere". Unfortunately, while some benefits have been observed from episodic formats, either on television or online, these are often hampered by reduced budgets compared to feature-films, making them simply a cheaper ancillary substitute to a cinema release.

To facilitate videogames as ancillary merchandise, the cross-media synergy of the cinema and videogame industries has increased in the last ten years. What was once a "solid boundary between games and movies has become a permeable membrane" as gamers no longer use home consoles simply to play videogames, they use them to play music, stream and download movies and television shows, purchase digital videogame titles, and even "create their own […] videos out of the latest first-person shooters" (Russell, 2012: 4).

Digital television boxes often boast similar capabilities, while portable touch-screen devices and handheld consoles allow users to browse the internet, download content, and stream videos. Furthermore, numerous "toys to life" franchises are available that actively encourage the purchase of not just videogames but also

numerous figurines to be digitally scanned as playable avatars. In this manner, all media is presented as being the same – toys, videogames, films, and television are equally available through one central hub to suggest a continuity of media that allows audiences to control not only their videogame avatars, but *all* their multimedia content from the comfort of their homes (Goldberg, 2011: xi).

As I related in the opening chapter, "the movie industry regained interest (and economic interest) in video games" following the 1984 videogame crash "Because of the enormous popularity of [Nintendo and Sega consoles] in households" (Picard, 2008: 294). Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska (2002: 2) observed that the movie industry now works in tandem with the videogame industry and "Synergies between film and game production are regular occurrences". Videogame theorists particularly emphasise this, which is principally evident in the numerous assertions that videogames are threatening to eclipse cinema, or have previously done so (Donovan, 2010: 183; Goldberg, 2011: xi; Newman, 2004: 3; Nichols, quoting Bloom, 2008: 132; Russell, 2012: 281-282; Wolf, 2001: 5).

Regardless, Trevor Elkington (2009: 213) observed that videogames are now closely tied to a movie's marketing strategy: "The parent companies that own film and television studios are also increasingly invested in video game development, making synergistic collaborations between film, television, and video game developers commonplace". Notably, "Most, if not all, Hollywood studies have at some point diversified into the games market" (King and Krzywinska, 2002: 2), like Sony, whose "$3.4 billion purchase of Columbia and TriStar Pictures in 1989" allowed them to distribute ancillary products "across various products under Sony ownership. While Columbia Pictures [make] the film, Sony Imagesoft" may release the videogame and Columbia Records the soundtrack album (Austin, 2002: 126).

In Chapter One, I emphasised that the "interface between cinema and games extends well beyond the direct spin-off of industrial convergence" as videogames have increasingly adopted cinematic techniques to present and progress their narratives (King and Krzywinska, 2002: 2). Furthermore, while films have used videogames as "a point of reference" on numerous occasions and a very obvious "overlap exists between the worlds of cinema and games", videogames – even those adapted from films – remain videogames "rather than films; they have to be understood in their own right, according to their own logics, as well as in relation to other media" (ibid).

Videogames are clearly altering "the visual aesthetics of Hollywood filmmakers" as movies increasingly seek to appeal to broader audiences accustomed to deeper levels of interaction in their real and virtual lives (Russell, 2012: 282). Intertextual links between the cinema and videogame industries have existed for over thirty years and I have emphasised, through the work of Nichols (2008: 132), the videogame industry's attempts to model itself on, and emulate the structures and controls of, the film industry. Furthermore, Chapter One related how the videogame industry came to be seen "as a technology that could expand all that was great in film – immersive storytelling, emotional response from an audience, and, of course, profit" (ibid).

Nowadays, the two industries are practically synonymous as the videogame industry continually emulates and parallels the manufacturing techniques of mainstream Hollywood. No longer are videogames largely the work of one person, or a small team; instead, videogame companies are made up of many teams all working towards a unified goal (Russell, 2012: 211). This lends credibility to Tom Bissell's (2010: 74) view that the increased financing available to the development of "AAA

retail titles is part of the reason why the EAs of the world are bleeding profits" and that the work of independent programmers could be "the best and most sustainable model for the industry: small games, developed by a small group of people, that have a lot of replay value, and, above all, are *fun*".

Even this parallels the movie industry, where Hollywood studios regularly compete not just with independent filmmakers but also the international film industry. Yet, although the two industries have yet to truly produce a blockbuster videogame adaptation, my examination into the efforts made to franchise *Mortal Kombat* and *Resident Evil* into multimedia explicitly demonstrates that the adaptation of videogames "can still be a source of substantial licensing revenue for games producers [...] as well as providing an opportunity to give games for higher-profile and higher-prestige coverage usually gained by cinema releases" (King and Krzywinska, 2002: 9).

Just as Frans Mäyrä (2008: 3) observed that players are attracted to videogames "because of their challenges, and playing involves creating, testing and revising strategies as well as the skills necessary for progressing in the game", videogame theory has expanded to "become established both as a field of scientific inquiry and as a branch of knowledge that is formally taught at universities" (ibid: 4). Consequently, while "it seems unlikely that video games will supplant Hollywood anytime soon" (Nichols, 2008: 133), the academic and artistic credibility of the videogame industry continues to gain significant momentum from published works that "show an appreciation of the video game as a new medium, a new art form, and a new popular cultural force [and] apply existing terms, ideas, concepts, and methods to the video game in a useful and interesting manner, while pointing out that new theoretical tools are needed" (Perron and Wolf, 2009: 4).

This momentum is mirrored by the increase of independent critics in traditional publications, e-books, online blogs, and videos. While many online critics adopt a comedic, often sarcastic slant, James Newman (2008: 15) believed that their views arguably reflect that "videogames provide a complex and varied suite of materials for gamers that encourage flexible and creative play, talk, discussion and the production of supporting texts that are exchanged and valued within the myriad fan communities that exist, especially online".

However, these opinions parallel many key works in adaptation theory in that they are, inevitably (and, often, unavoidably) framed by a desire for absolute fidelity to the source material (Hutcheon, 2006: 4). Christine Geraghty (2008: 1) observed that, consequently, such opinions are quick "to lead to methods of analysis that rely on comparisons between original source and film and make judgements that are rooted implicitly or explicitly in the concept of fidelity". By contrast, published works habitually demonstrate a preference towards discussing either the continued influence of videogames or films adapted as videogames. To counteract this, I have exclusively approached films based on videogames with the same critical, analytical perspectives that Geraghty noted is afforded towards film adaptations of books (ibid: 5).

Undeniably, modern-day videogames have become extremely artistic: CG sequences and in-game graphics are quickly becoming synonymous as the visual depth and variety of modern videogame worlds expands ever further. Arguably, however, modern consoles currently heavily rely on this artistic beauty, as gameplay and engagement have become secondary concerns next to making a visual impact on gamers. *Alien: Isolation* (The Creative Assembly, 2014) perhaps signalled that developers are becoming accustomed to fully utilising the hardware of modern

consoles by merging high-quality visuals with stealth-based, survival-horror gameplay and selling over 1,760,000 copies by 2015 (Brad, 2015).

As Keane (2007: 99) related that videogame publishing measures videogame success by, "first and foremost, their success as games", a videogame's graphics and sound are "important review categories in terms of the look and feel of given games – in themselves and in their likeness to source films". *Isolation*'s near-perfect adaptation of *Alien*'s set design and the likenesses of its actors correlates to this; yet, as *Isolation* was not a direct *Alien* adaptation, it is spared the usual disregard shown to videogame adaptations, which are generally "regarded as primarily commercial enterprises and remain too faithful to cinema to expand the horizons of gaming" (ibid).

Even with titles like *Assassin's Creed Unity* (Ubisoft Montreal, 2014) and *Destiny* (Bungie, 2014) struggling to fully live up to their marketing due to programming bugs or lacklustre narrative elements in favour of attempting to enhance the online multiplayer experience, it is inevitable that modern videogames will improve upon these aspects as developers come to grips with the technology now available to them, just as developers have done in the past (Poole, 2000: 18).

Naturally, this could suggest that modern gamers have exceedingly high expectations and that, if videogames are ever to be considered "high art", videogame programmers and developers must meet these expectations. Rather than deliver stripped down, underwhelming experiences like *WWE 2K15* (Visual Concepts/Yuke's, 2014), the power of modern consoles must enhance both the gameplay experience and the narrative, as illustrated by *The Evil Within* (Tango Gameworks, 2014).

As Hollywood seeks to capitalise on the intricate, interconnected films released by Marvel Studios and find viable properties to be developed into multimedia ventures, the adaptation of videogames can be regarded as an attractive prospect despite their lacklustre track record. While videogame theorists strive to present an intellectual account of the meanings and contexts behind gameplay mechanics, I have ultimately been more concerned with the correlations between the film and videogame industries, specifically by analysing videogame adaptations not just as films but as *adaptations*.

Film criticism has offered a deeper understanding behind Hollywood's need for ancillary products, and new intellectual properties to develop into franchises. Producing films to sell across multiple market segments and to diverse audiences is far from a recent strategy; Austin (2002: 28) argued that every film has a combination of similar "overlapping textual elements – narrative, music, sound, performance, spectacle and display", commonly seen in the repetition of conventional plot devices and genres, such as romance and action.

This process has recently become particularly aggressive, "driven by developments in economic organisation and procedures, including the shift to saturation release patterns, the growth in merchandising and cross-marketing, and the [selling of] film 'brands' across multimedia product lines" (ibid). Significantly, such media synergy affords both the film and videogame industries the opportunity to maximise "the commercial exploitation of any single intellectual property across multiple outlets, and keeping overheads down by enabling the sharing of resources […] across different divisions" (ibid).

Accordingly, videogame adaptations are increasingly related by their status as ongoing, continually evolving multimedia franchises. Videogames have proven

particularly adept at transitioning into multimedia franchises and this process has allowed videogame adaptations to largely survive the constant critical backlash they face. A by-product of this, as I introduced in Chapter One and explicitly demonstrated in Chapter Four, has been the distinction between those familiar with the source material and those who are not, resulting in videogame adaptations that excel in their filmic genres spawning fans that are decidedly removed from fans of the videogames. Finally, I have emphasised the significance of DVD and Blu-ray to the success of videogame franchises, which offers another point of entry into "the labyrinthine vastness of their textual networks and the imagined world they map, such that consumer knowledge of a franchise source is better conceptualized in terms of a spectrum than a binary" (Parody (2011, 213).

While a degree of personal opinion has unavoidably influenced my research, especially inevitable when relating box office returns and critical feedback, my aim was never to conclude if videogame adaptations were "good" or "bad". Wolf (2009: 218) related that the difficulty, or impossibility, of this task is due to "the difference between the media [being] too vast; the parameters of video games are too vastly different from film to make good adaptations" despite the presence of "critical and financial successes".

However, my personal recognition that videogame adaptations have a less-than-favourable reputation is hardly a negative, and this also applies to criticising said adaptations. I attribute this largely to Tom Chatfield's (2010: xii) observation that "It does no damage to literature or to cinema to say that most books and films are flawed, limited, or trivial. The same is true of games. This is the nature of any medium, and of excellence". In addressing these differences and acknowledging the flaws of these adaptations, I have sought to identify how the adaptation process has seen the

appropriation of cinematic genres in favour of gameplay mechanics and emphasised that videogame adaptations have relied on narrative and spectacle, rather than fidelity over their source material's abstract concepts.

Thus, my guiding focus has been more towards analysing how these adaptations use their new passive media forms to construct original narratives and characters in order to become multimedia franchises. While videogame companies have been demonstrated as having little influence over these adaptations, and with little to lose, I have examined how these adaptations have appropriated the most popular elements from not only their source material but also financially-lucrative cinematic genres.

Arguably, each franchise achieved a measure of success at broadening their appeal; audiences now exist that favour the adaptations rather than the source material and who will gladly purchase a cinema ticket, DVD, comic book, or other ancillary product. The same is true of popular film franchises, like *Star Wars*, which – as reported by Wired's Chris Baker (2008) – while grossing "in excess of $4 billion worldwide", has seen "retail sales of merchandise stand at $15 billion", with "20 percent of that" earned after 2006. Although Jonathan Rosenbaum (2004: xiv) argued that publications and academics no longer acknowledge of consciously promote canonicity in an active way, a key component in maintaining *Star Wars*' popularity and revenue has been the "Careful nurture of [its] canon—thousands of years of story time, running through all the bits and pieces of merchandise—[that] has kept the franchise popular for decades" (Baker, 2008).

From *Sonic*'s continued inclusion of (and references to) the adaptations of the nineties regardless of SEGA's competency in regulating the franchise's canon, to *Mortal Kombat*'s success at emphasising the videogame's narrative and embracing

episodic narratives and *Street Fighter*'s ability to produce high-quality anime despite

lacklustre live-action counterparts, to *Resident Evil*'s ability to appropriate freely and

consistently from the action, horror, and sci-fi genres to reinvigorate and perpetuate

the zombie horror genre, the videogame adaptations I have examined have

significantly influenced audiences, culture, and society for over two decades.

Their ability to be repurposed from wholly interactive, simplistic interactive

adventures into complex passive multimedia forms supports Chatfield's (2010: xi)

view that "the visual and intellectual language of gaming" is freely adaptable "Across

all media, from literature to film [and] gaining ground as an integral part of global

culture". Just as their source material has evolved to incorporate new technologies

and expand both their audience and narrative, often by appropriating from cinema, so

too have videogame adaptations adapted to recognisable cinematic forms and

achieved a measure of success at becoming multimedia franchises.

Videogames, "like music, cinema and the theatre, are experiences we can

share. This sharing – the handing back and forth of ideas, some of which come from

the energy of youth and some of which arise through age and experience – is

important to society" (King, 2002: 17). Consequently, videogames have always been

similar to adaptations, cinema, and television; each is largely defined by repetition,

variety, and their ability to present familiar concepts in new contexts (Geraghty, 2008:

5). While adaptations encourage audiences to take pleasure in experiencing this, it

carries a risk in that it is inevitably accompanied by change; audiences will recognise

and remember familiar concepts but will also be keenly aware of any deviations from

the source material (Hutcheon, 2006: 4).

This is the principle reason why a blended methodology is the most useful

method of approaching videogame adaptations; it is only by incorporating elements of

adaptation, film, and videogame studies that I have been able to exemplify how they have negotiated the inevitable changes videogames must undergo in service of becoming multimedia franchises. Additionally, the tools of appropriation, canonicity, fandom, fidelity, intertextuality, reception (both critical and financial), among others, are just as necessary to examining how videogame adaptations become multimedia franchises by appropriating from suitable, and popular, genres in order to be successful *adaptations*, rather than simply successfully faithful to their source material.

Interplay is not the final word on the study of videogame adaptations; even now, journal articles and publications are surely being produced and independent critics are taking to their webcams to comment on the complex, ever-changing landscape of the videogame adaptation. However, I have proposed a language by which others can approach videogame adaptations not merely as product of corporate Hollywood or as a critically stagnant, detrimental genre. Instead, by analysing their adaptive contexts and charging them with the same analytical insight afforded to literary adaptations, I hope to bring further academic legitimacy to videogame adaptations. I have demonstrated how videogame adaptations are not only incredibly complex and layered multimedia products and franchises, but also an exciting area of study that can teach new lessons about adaptation theory and, consequently, deserve to be taken seriously.

Appendix One:
Videogame Adaptations

Year	Title	Category	Episodes	Ended
1982	*Pac-Man*	Animated	42	1983
1983	*Saturday Supercade*	Animated	97	1985
1984	*Dragon's Lair*	Animated	13	1985
1984	*Pole Position*	Animated	13	1984
1986	*Super Mario Bros.: Peach-Hime Kyushutsu Dai Sakusen!*[35]	Anime		
1988	*Salamander*	Anime		
1989	*Amada Anime Series: Super Mario Bros.*	Anime	3	1989
1989	*Captain N: The Game Master*	Animated	34	1991
1989	*Dragon Warrior: Legend of the Hero Abel*	Anime	32	1990
1989	*King Koopa's Kool Kartoons*	Kid's Show	N/A	1990
1989	*The Legend of Zelda*	Animated	13	1989
1989	*The Super Mario Bros. Super Show!*	Animated	65	1989
1989	*Ys*	Anime		
1990	*The Adventures of Super Mario Bros. 3*	Animated	26	1990
1990	*Maniac Mansion*	Sit-Com	66	1993
1990	*The Power Team*	Animated	55	1992
1990	*Video Power*	Game Show	65	1992
1991	*Super Mario World*	Animated	13	1991
1991	*Where on Earth is Carman Sandiego?*	Game Show	40	1996
1992	*Battletoads*	Animated	1	1993
1992	*Fatal Fury: Legend of the Hungry Wolf*	Anime		
1992	*Ys II: Castle in the Heavens*	Anime		
1993	*Adventures of Sonic the Hedgehog*	Animated	65	1993
1993	*Art of Fighting*	Anime		
1993	*Bubsy*	Animated	1	1993
1993	*Double Dragon*	Animated	26	1994
1993	*Fatal Fury 2: The New Battle*	Anime		
1993	*Ganbare Goemon: Jigen Jō no Akumu*[36]	Anime		
1993	*Mega Man: Upon a Star*	Anime		
1993	*Samurai Shodown: The Motion Picture*	Anime		
1993	*Sonic the Hedgehog*	Animated	26	1994
1993	*Super Mario Bros.*	Live Action		
1994	*Double Dragon*	Live Action		
1994	*Fatal Fury: The Motion Picture*	Anime		
1994	*Final Fantasy: Legend of the Crystals*	Anime		
1994	*Mega Man*	Animated	27	1995
1994	*Mutant League*	Animated	40	1996
1994	*Street Fighter*	Live Action		
1994	*Street Fighter II: The Animated Movie*	Anime		
1995	*Earthworm Jim*	Animated	23	1996
1995	*Gulliver Boy*	Anime	50	1995
1995	*Mortal Kombat*	Live Action		
1995	*Mortal Kombat: The Journey Begins*	Animation		
1995	*Street Fighter*	Animated	26	1997

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[35] *Super Mario Bros.: The Great Mission to Rescue Princess Peach!*
[36] *Ganbare Goemon: The Nightmare of the Dimensional Castle*

Year	Title	Category	Episodes	Ended
1995	*Virtua Fighter*	Anime	35	1996
1995	*Street Fighter II V*	Anime	29	1995
1996	*Battle Arena Toshinden*	Anime		
1996	*Dimensional Adventure Numa Monjar*	Anime		
1996	*Fire Emblem: Mystery of the Fire Emblem*	Anime		
1996	*Sonic the Hedgehog: The Movie*	Anime		
1996	*Variable Geo*	Anime		
1997	*Mortal Kombat: Annihilation*	Live Action		
1996	*Mortal Kombat: Defenders of the Realm*	Animated	13	1996
1996	*Where in Time is Carmen Sandiego?*	Game Show	100	1998
1996	*Wing Commander Academy*	Animated	13	1996
1997	*Isaku*	Anime	3	1997
1997	*Legend of the Mystical Ninja*	Anime	23	1998
1997	*Nightmare Ned*	Animated	25	1997
1997	*Nirvana*	Live Action		
1997	*Pokémon (Indigo League)*[37]	Anime	82	1999
1997	*Sonic: Man of the Year*	Anime		
1997	*Tekken: The Motion Picture*	Anime		
1997	*Tournament of the Gods*	Anime		
1997	*Voltage Fighters: Gowcaizer the Movie*	Anime		
1997	*Welcome to Pia Carrot*	Anime		
1998	*Donkey Kong Country*	CGI	40	2000
1998	*Mortal Kombat: Conquest*	Live Action	22	1999
1998	*Nightwalker: The Midnight Detective*	Anime	12	1998
1998	*Pokémon: The First Movie: Mewtwo Strikes Back*	Anime		
1998	*Sentimental Journey*	Anime	12	1998
1998	*Welcome to Pia Carrot 2*	Anime		
1999	*Arc the Lad*	Anime	26	1999
1999	*Legend of Himiko*	Anime	12	1999
1999	*Medabots*	Anime	52	2000
1999	*Monster Rancher*	Anime	73	2000
1999	*Pokémon (Adventures in the Orange Islands)*	Anime	36	1999
1999	*Pokémon: The Johto Journeys*	Anime	41	2000
1999	*Pokémon: The Movie 2000: The Power of One*	Anime		
1999	*Rayman: The Animated Series*	CGI	5	2000
1999	*Samurai Spirits 2: Asura Zanmaden*	Anime		
1999	*Sonic Underground*	Animated	40	2000
1999	*Street Fighter Alpha: The Movie*	Anime		
1999	*Welcome to Pia Carrot 2 DX*	Anime		
1999	*Wild Arms: Twilight Venom*	Anime	22	2000
1999	*Wing Commander*	Live Action		
2000	*Biohazard 4D-Executer*	CGI		
2000	*Gate Keepers*	Anime	24	2000
2000	*Harukanaru Toki no Naka de Hachiyō Shō*[38]	Anime	26	2005
2000	*Medarot Damashii*	Anime	39	2001
2000	*Pokémon: Johto League Champions*	Anime	52	2001

[37] *Pokémon* broadcast dates based on original Japanese broadcast.
[38] *Haruka: Beyond the Stream of Time*

Year	Title	Category	Episodes	Ended
2000	*Pokémon The Movie: Mewtwo Returns*	Anime		
2000	*Pokémon The Movie 3: Spell of the Unown*	Anime		
2000	*Sin: The Movie*	Anime		
2001	*Sakura Wars: The Movie*	Anime		
2001	*Bible Black: The Night of Walpurgis*	Anime	6	2003
2001	*Comic Party*	Anime	13	2001
2001	*Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within*	CGI		
2001	*Final Fantasy: Unlimited*	Anime	25	2005
2001	*Kanon*	Anime	13	2002
2001	*Kirby: Right Back at Ya!*	Anime	100	2003
2001	*Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*	Live Action		
2001	*One: Kagayaku Kisetsu e*[39]	Anime		
2001	*PaRappa the Rapper: The Animated Series*	Anime	30	2001
2001	*Pokémon 4Ever: Celebi – Voice of the Forest*	Anime		
2001	*Pokémon: Master Quest*	Anime	65	2002
2001	*Sister Princess*	Anime	26	2001
2001	*Star Ocean EX*	Anime	26	2001
2001	*Tales of Eternia: The Animation*	Anime	13	2001
2001	*You Don't Know Jack*	Game Show	6	2001
2001	*ZOE: 2167 IDOLO*	Anime		
2001	*Z.O.E. Dolores,i*	Anime	26	2001
2002	*Bible Black: Origins*	Anime	2	2002
2002	*Bomberman Jetters*	Anime	52	2003
2002	*Mega Man: NT Warrior*	Anime	56	2003
2002	*Nakoruru: Ano Hito kara no Okurimono*[40]	Anime		
2002	*Pokémon: Advanced*	Anime	40	2003
2002	*Pokémon Heroes: The Movie: Latios & Latias*	Anime		
2002	*Resident Evil*	Live Action	2002	
2002	*Sister Princess: Re Pure*	Anime	13	2002
2002	*Welcome to Pia Carrot: Sayaka's Love Story*	Anime		
2003	*Da Capo*	Anime	26	2003
2003	*Green Green*	Anime	12	2003
2003	*Game Over*	Live Action		
2003	*Gungrave*	Anime	26	2004
2003	*House of the Dead*	Live Action		
2003	*Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Cradle of Life*	Live Action		
2003	*One: True Stories*	Anime		
2003	*Pokémon: Advanced Challenge*	Anime	52	2004
2003	*Pokémon: Jirachi Wish Maker*	Anime		
2003	*Popotan*	Anime	12	2003
2003	*Rumbling Hearts: Kiminozo*	Anime	14	2004
2003	*Shingetsutan Tsukihime*	Anime	12	2003
2003	*Sonic X*	Anime	78	2004
2003	*Yami to Bōshi to Hon no Tabibito*[41]	Anime	13	2003
2004	*Bible Black: New Testament*	Anime	6	2008
2004	*Galerians: Rion*	CGI		

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[39] *One ~To the Radiant Season~*
[40] Spin-off off *Samurai Shodown*.
[41] *Darkness, the Hat, and the Travelers of the Books*

Year	Title	Category	Episodes	Ended
2004	*Kita e: Diamond Daydreams*	Anime	12	2004
2004	*Kishin Hōkō Demonbein*[42]	Anime		
2004	*Magical Girl Lyrical Nanoha*	Anime	13	2004
2004	*Pokémon: Advanced Battle*	Anime	53	2005
2004	*Pokémon The Movie: Destiny Deoxys*	Anime		
2004	*Ragnarok the Animation*	Anime	26	2004
2004	*Resident Evil: Apocalypse*	Live Action		
2004	*Tales of Phantasia: THE ANIMATION*	Anime		
2004	*Variable Geo Neo*	Anime		
2004	*Viewtiful Joe*	Anime	51	2005
2004	*Wind: A Breath of Heart*	Anime	17	2004
2004	*Yumeria*	Anime	12	2004
2005	*Air*	Anime		
2005	*Alone in the Dark*	Live Action		
2005	*Bible Black: Only*	Anime	3	2006
2005	*BloodRayne*	Live Action		
2005	*Comic Party: Revolution*	Anime	13	2005
2005	*Doom*	Live Action		
2005	*Da Capo: Second Season*	Anime	26	2005
2005	*Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children*	CGI		
2005	*House of the Dead II*	Live Action		
2005	*Kirby: Fright to the Finish!!*	Anime		
2005	*Last Order: Final Fantasy VII*	Anime		
2005	*Pokémon: Battle Frontier*	Anime	47	2006
2005	*Pokémon: Lucario and the Mystery of Mew*	Anime		
2005	*Street Fighter Alpha: Generations*	Anime		
2005	*Sukisho*	Anime	13	2005
2005	*The King of Fighters: Another Day*	Anime	4	2006
2006	*Angel's Feather*	Anime	2	2006
2006	*Demonbane*	Anime	12	2006
2006	*DOA: Dead or Alive*	Live Action		
2006	*Dōbutsu no Mori*[43]	Anime		
2006	*Fate/stay night*	Anime	24	2006
2006	*Forbidden Siren*	Live Action		
2006	*Gakuen Heaven*	Anime	13	2006
2006	*Gift*	Anime	12	2006
2006	*Happiness!*	Anime	12	2006
2006	*La Corda d'Oro: Primo Passo*	Anime	25	2007
2006	*Lovely Idol*	Anime	12	2006
2006	*Makai Senki Disgaea*	Anime	12	2006
2006	*Mega Man: Star Force*	Anime	55	2007
2006	*Like a Dragon: Prologue*	Live Action		
2006	*Otome wa Boku ni Koishiteru*[44]	Anime	12	2006
2006	*Pokémon Chronicles*	Anime	22	2006
2006	*Pokémon: Diamond & Pearl*	Anime	52	2007
2006	*Pokémon: The Mastermind of Mirage Pokémon*	Anime		

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[42] *Roar Of The Machine God Demonbane*

[43] *Animal Forest: The Movie/Animal Crossing*

[44] *The Maidens Are Falling in Love with Me*

Year	Title	Category	Episodes	Ended
2006	*Pokémon Ranger and the Temple of the Sea*	Anime		
2006	*Saru Get You -On Air-*	Anime	26	2006
2006	*Silent Hill*	Live Action		
2006	*Sora no Iro, Mizu no Iro[45]*	Anime		
2006	*Soul Link*	Anime	12	2006
2006	*_Summer: Is There Anyone You Like?*	Anime		
2006	*Tokimeki Memorial Only Love*	Anime	27	2007
2006	*Utawarerumono*	Anime	26	2006
2006	*Viva Piñata*	Animated	52	2009
2006	*When They Cry*	Anime	26	2006
2006	*Yoake Mae yori Ruriiro na: Crescent Love[46]*	Anime	12	2006
2007	*BloodRayne II: Deliverance*	Live Action		
2007	*Blue Dragon*	Anime	51	2009
2007	*Clannad*	Anime	23	2008
2007	*Clannad*	Anime		
2007	*Devil May Cry: The Animated Series*	Anime	12	2007
2007	*Dinosaur King*	Anime	49	2008
2007	*Ef: A Tale of Memories*	Anime	12	2007
2007	*Forza Motorsport Showdown*	Racing	4	2007
2007	*Halo: Landfall*	CGI		
2007	*Heavenly Sword*	Anime		
2007	*Higurashi no Naku Koro ni Kai*	Anime	24	2007
2007	*Hitman*	Live Action		
2007	*Kimi ga Nozomu Eien ~Next Season~*	Anime	4	2008
2007	*Kono Aozora ni Yakusoku o: Yōkoso Tsugumi Ryō e[47]*	Anime	13	2007
2007	*Lovely Idol*	Anime		
2007	*Otome wa Boku ni Koishiteru: Tsunderella[48]*	Anime		
2007	*Magical Girl Lyrical Nanoha Strikers*	Anime	26	2007
2007	*MapleStory*	Anime	25	2008
2007	*Myself; Yourself*	Anime	13	2007
2007	*Nanatsuiro Drops*	Anime	12	2007
2007	*Pokémon: Diamond & Pearl: Battle Dimension*	Anime	52	2008
2007	*Pokémon: The Rise of Darkrai*	Anime		
2007	*Postal*	Live Action		
2007	*Resident Evil: Extinction*	Live Action		
2007	*Revisioned: Tomb Raider Animated Series*	Animated	10	2007
2007	*Saru Get You -On Air- 2nd*	Anime	51	2007
2007	*School Days*	Anime	12	2007
2007	*Shining Tears X Wind*	Anime	13	2007
2007	*Shinkyoku Sōkai Polyphonica*	Anime	12	2007
2007	*Shooting Star Rockman: Tribe*	Anime	21	2008
2007	*_Summer: I Wish Everyone Could Stay Like This Forever*	Anime		
2007	*Tak and the Power of Juju*	CGI	26	2008
2007	*Tōka Gettan*	Anime	26	2007
2007	*Tokyo Majin*	Anime	14	2007

[45] *Color of the Sky, Color of the Water*
[46] *A Brighter Blue than that Before the Dawn: Crescent Love*
[47] *The Promise I made over this Blue Sky: Welcome to the Tsugumi Dorm*
[48] *The Maidens Are Falling in Love with Me: Tsunderella*

Year	Title	Category	Episodes	Ended
2007	*Tokyo Majin: 2nd Act*	Anime	12	2007
2008	*Alone in the Dark II*	Live Action		
2008	*Blue Dragon: Trial of the Seven Shadows*	Anime	51	2009
2008	*Clannad After Story*	Anime	24	2009
2008	*Da Capo: If*	Anime	2	2009
2008	*Dead Space: Downfall*	Animated		
2008	*Ef: A Tale of Melodies*	Anime	12	2008
2008	*Far Cry*	Live Action		
2008	*H2O: Footprints in the Sand*	Anime	12	2008
2008	*Hammerin' Harry*	Anime	24	2008
2008	*Harukoi Otome: Otome no Sono de Aimashō*	Anime	2	2008
2008	*Inazuma Eleven*	Anime	127	2011
2008	*In the Name of the King: A Dungeon Siege Tale*	Live Action		
2008	*Koihime Musō*	Anime	12	2008
2008	*Max Payne*	Live Action		
2008	*OneChanbara*	Live Action		2008
2008	*Persona: Trinity Soul*	Anime	26	2008
2008	*Pokémon: Diamond & Pearl: Galactic Battles*	Anime	53	2009
2008	*Pokémon: Giratina and the Sky Warrior*	Anime		
2008	*Resident Evil: Degeneration*	CGI		
2008	*Sands of Destruction*	Anime	13	2008
2008	*School Days: Magical Heart Kokoro-chan*	Anime		
2008	*School Days: Valentine Days*	Anime		
2008	*Shrill Cries of the Summer*	Live Action		
2008	*Sonic: Night of the Werehog*	CGI		
2008	*The Tower of Druaga: The Aegis of Uruk*	Anime	12	2008
2008	*Yakuza: Like a Dragon*	Live Action		
2009	*Ape Escape*	Animated	38	2009
2009	*Assassin's Creed: Lineage*	CGI		
2009	*Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children Complete*	CGI		
2009	*Half-Life: Escape from City 17*	CGI		
2009	*Higurashi no Naku Koro ni Rei*	Anime	5	2009
2009	*The King of Fighters*	Live Action		
2009	*OneChanbara: The Movie - vorteX*	Live Action		
2009	*On the Way to a Smile: Episode Denzel*	Anime		
2009	*Professor Layton and the Eternal Diva*	Anime		
2009	*Pokémon: Arceus and the Jewel of Life*	Anime		
2009	*Princess Lover!*	Anime	12	2009
2009	*Sengoku Basara: Samurai Kings*	Anime	13	2009
2009	*Shin Koihime Musō*	Anime	12	2009
2009	*Shinkyoku Sōkai Polyphonica Crimson S*	Anime	12	2009
2009	*Shrill Cries: Reshuffle*	Live Action		
2009	*Street Fighter: The Legend of Chun-Li*	Live Action		
2009	*Street Fighter IV: The Ties That Bind*	Animated		
2009	*Tayutama: Kiss on my Deity*	Anime	12	2009
2009	*The Tower of Druaga: The Sword of Uruk*	Anime	12	2009
2009	*Umineko no Naku Koro ni*[49]	Anime	26	2009

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[49] *When the Seagulls Cry*

Year	Title	Category	Episodes	Ended
2009	*Valkyria Chronicles*	Anime	26	2009
2010	*Assassin's Creed: Ascendance*	Animated		
2010	*BloodReign: The Third Reich*	Live Action		
2010	*Bright Falls*	Live Action	6	2010
2010	*Dante's Inferno: An Animated Epic*	Animated		
2010	*Fate/stay night Unlimited Blade Works*	Anime		
2010	*Hakuoki: Shinsengumi Kitan*	Anime	12	2010
2010	*Hakuouki: Hekketsuroku*	Anime	10	2010
2010	*Halo Legends*	Animated		
2010	*Magical Girl Lyrical Nanoha The Movie 1st*	Anime		
2010	*Mortal Kombat: Rebirth*	Live Action	2010	
2010	*Pokémon Apokélypse*	Live Action		
2010	*Pokémon Black & White*	Anime	48	2011
2010	*Pokémon: Diamond and Pearl: Sinnoh League Victors*	Anime	34	2010
2010	*Pokémon: Zoroark: Master of Illusions*	Anime		
2010	*Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time*	Live Action		
2010	*Resident Evil: Afterlife*	Live Action		
2010	*Sengoku Basara: Samurai Kings II*	Anime	12	2010
2010	*Shin Koihime Musō: Otome Tairan*	Anime	12	2010
2010	*Street Fighter: Legacy*	Live Action		
2010	*Tekken*	Live Action		
2010	*The King of Fighters*	Live Action		
2010	*Zombrex: Dead Rising Sun*	Live Action	8	2010
2011	*Assassin's Creed: Embers*	Animated		
2011	*Dead Space: Aftermath*	Animated		
2008	*Inazuma Eleven GO*	Anime	47	2012
2011	*In the Name of the King 2: Two Worlds*	Live Action		
2011	*Pokémon: Black & White: Rival Destinies*	Anime	49	2012
2011	*Pokémon the Movie: Black - Victini and Reshiram*	Anime		
2011	*Pokémon the Movie: White - Victini and Zekrom*	Anime		
2011	*Red Faction: Origins*	Live Action		
2011	*Mortal Kombat: Legacy*	Live Action	10	2011
2011	*Tekken: Blood Venegance*	CGI		
2011	*Sengoku Basara: Samurai Kings*	Anime		
2011	*S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Monolith's Whisper*	Live Action		
2012	*Dragon Age: Dawn of the Seeker*	CGI		
2012	*Ace Attorney*	Live Action		
2012	*Mass Effect: Paragon Lost*	Animated		
2012	*Pokémon: Black & White: Adventures in Unova*	Anime	25	2013
2012	*Pokémon the Movie: Kyurem vs. the Sword of Justice*	Anime		
2012	*Resident Evil: Damnation*	CGI		
2012	*Resident Evil: Retribution*	Live Action		
2012	*Silent Hill: Revelation 3D*	Live Action		
2012	*Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Alpha*	Live Action		
2013	*Angry Birds Toons*	Animated	52	2015
2013	*Apocalypse Z*	Live Action		
2013	*Bayonetta: Bloody Fate*	Anime		
2013	*Company of Heroes*	Live Action		
2013	*Halo 4: Forward Unto Dawn*	Live Action	5	2012

Year	Title	Category	Episodes	Ended
2013	*Mortal Kombat: Legacy II*	Live Action	10	2013
2013	*Pac-Man and the Ghostly Adventures*	Animated	Ongoing	
2013	*Persona 3 The Movie: No. 1, Spring of Birth*	Anime		
2013	*Pokémon: Black & White: Adventures in Unova and Beyond*	Anime	22	2013
2013	*Pokémon the Movie: Genesect and the Legend Awakened*	Anime		
2013	*Pokémon The Series: XY*	Anime	Ongoing	
2013	*Street Fighter: Assassin's Fist*	Live Action	12	2014
2014	*Ao Oni*	Live Action		
2014	*Batman: Assault on Arkham*	Animated		
2014	*Fatal Frame*	Live Action		
2014	*Heavenly Sword*	CGI		
2014	*In The Name of the King III: The Last Mission*	Live Action		
2014	*Need For Speed*	Live Action		
2014	*Persona 3 The Movie: No. 2, Midsummer Knight's Dream*	Anime		
2014	*Pikmin*	CGI		
2014	*Piggy Tales*	Animated	31	2015
2014	*Pokémon the Movie: Diancie and the Cocoon of Destruction*	Anime		
2014	*Sonic Boom*	CGI	Ongoing	
2014	*Tekken 2: Kazuya's Revenge*	Live Action		
2014	*The Idolmaster Movie: Beyond the Brilliant Future!*	Anime		
2015	*Ao Oni Ver. 2.0*	Live Action		
2015	*Corpse Party*	Live Action		
2015	*Dead Rising: Watchtower*	Live Action		
2015	*Halo: Nightfall*	Live Action		
2015	*Hitman: Agent 47*	Live Action		
2015	*Persona 3 The Movie: No. 3, Falling Down*	Anime		
2015	*Piggy Tales: Pigs at Work*	Animated	Ongoing	
2015	*Pokémon the Movie: Hoopa and the Clash of Ages*	Anime		
2016	*Ratchet & Clank*	CGI		
2016	*Angry Birds*	CGI		
2016	*Assassin's Creed*	Live Action		
2016	*Dead Rising: Watchtower Sequel*	Live Action		
2016	*Metal Gear Solid*	CGI		
2016	*Om Nom The Movie*	CGI		
2016	*Sly Cooper*	Live Action		
2016	*Uncharted*	Live Action		
2016	*Warcraft*	Live Action		
TBA	*Asteroids*	TBA		
TBA	*Broken Sword*	TBA		
TBA	*Castlevania*	Live Action		
TBA	*Dante's Inferno*	Live Action		
TBA	*Dead Space*	TBA		
TBA	*Deus Ex: Human Revolution*	Live Action		
TBA	*Devil May Cry*	Live Action		
TBA	*Driver*	Live Action		
TBA	*Far Cry*	Live Action		
TBA	*Five Nights at Freddy's*	TBA		
TBA	*God of War*	Live Action		
TBA	*Gran Turismo*	Live Action		

Year	Title	Category	Episodes	Ended
TBA	*Half-Life*	TBA		
TBA	*Heavy Rain*	TBA		
TBA	*Just Cause: Scorpion Rising*	Live Action		
TBA	*Kane & Lynch*	Live Action		
TBA	*Lost Planet*	Live Action		
TBA	*Mass Effect*	TBA		
TBA	*Metro 2033*	TBA		
TBA	*Minecraft*	Live Action		
TBA	*Mortal Kombat*	Live Action		
TBA	*Need For Speed 2*	Live Action		
TBA	*Plants vs. Zombies*	TBA		
TBA	*Portal*	TBA		
TBA	*Rabbids*	TBA		
TBA	*Rampage*	Live Action		
TBA	*Resident Evil: The Final Chapter*	Live Action		
TBA	*Shadow of the Colossus*	Live Action		
TBA	*Sonic the Hedgehog*	TBA		
TBA	*Space Invaders*	TBA		
TBA	*Splinter Cell*	Live Action		
TBA	*Tekken: Rise of the Tournament*	TBA		
TBA	*Temple Run*	Live Action		
TBA	*Tetris*	TBA		
TBA	*The Last of Us*	Live Action		
TBA	*The Sims*	Live Action		
TBA	*Tomb Raider*	Live Action		
TBA	*Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon*	Live Action		
TBA	*Twisted Metal*	Live Action		
TBA	*Watch Dogs*	Live Action		
TBA	*Where In the World Is Carmen Sandiego?*	Live Action		

Appendix Two: Sonic Timeline

1991
Sonic Eraser
Sonic The Hedgehog (16-Bit)
Sonic The Hedgehog (8-Bit)
Waku Waku Sonic Patrol Car
Sonic The Hedgehog Yearbook (Grandreams)
Sonic The Hedgehog Story Comic (*Mega Drive Fan*)[50]
Sonic The Hedgehog (US Promotional Comic)   [51]

1992
Sonic The Hedgehog 2 (16-Bit)
Sonic The Hedgehog 2 (8-Bit)
Sonic The Hedgehog (*Shogaku Yonensei*)[52]
Sonic The Hedgehog Yearbook (Grandreams)
Sonic The Hedgehog (Original Archie Miniseries)

1993
Dr. Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine
SEGASonic Cosmo Fighter
SEGASonic The Hedgehog
Sonic The Hedgehog CD
Sonic The Hedgehog Chaos/Sonic & Tails
Sonic The Hedgehog Spinball
Sonic The Hedgehog (Troll Associates)[53]
Stay Sonic (Fantail Books)[54]
Sonic The Hedgehog Adventure Gamebook 1: Metal City Mayhem; *2: Zone Rangers* (Fantail Books)[55]
Sonic The Hedgehog: Sonic's Shoes Blues (Golden Books Entertainment)[56]
Sonic The Hedgehog and the Silicon Warriors; *in Castle Robotnik*; *in Robotnik's Laboratory*; *in the Fourth Dimension* (Virgin Publishing)[57]
Sonic The Hedgehog (Archie Comics)
Sonic The Comic: Free Preview Special; *Sonic The Comic*; *Sonic The Poster Mag* (Fleetway Editions)
Adventures of Sonic The Hedgehog;
Sonic The Hedgehog (DiC Entertainment)

1994
Sonic & Knuckles
Sonic Drift

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[50] A Japan-exclusive manga that incorporates the original rock star backstory.

[51] A US comic book that introduced, and popularised, the Westernised version of Sonic's canon.

[52] A Japan-exclusive manga where Sonic is a superhero alter-ego.

[53] A series of children's books loosely set in the world of *SatAM*.

[54] The principal tome for the basis of UK *Sonic* comics and literature (Kitching, 2004).

[55] A UK-produced "series of 'choose-your-own-adventure' books" comprised of six titles between 1993 and 1996 (Hazeldine, 2014: 25).

[56] Another series of children's books loosely set in the world of *SatAM*.

[57] A UK series of "young adult books" by three writers "under the pseudonym Martin Adams" that "are the most faithful adaptation of the Mega Drive games imaginable" (ibid: 24).

Sonic Gameworld
Sonic The Hedgehog: Triple Trouble/ Sonic & Tails2
Sonic The Hedgehog 3
Tails and the Music Maker
Sonic The Hedgehog Adventure Gamebook 3: Sonic V. Zonik; *4: The Zone Zapper*
(Fantail Books)
Sonic The Hedgehog: Robotnik's Revenge (Troll Associates)
Sonic The Hedgehog: Robotnik's Oil; *The Invisible Robotnik*; *Sonic The Story*
(Ladybird)
Sonic Adventures: Dans Les Griffes De Robotnik; *Sonic & Knuckles: Le Guide Ultime*
(Sirène)[58]
Sonic Special (Archie Comics)

1995
Knuckles' Chaotix
Sonic Drift 2
Sonic Labyrinth
Tails Adventure
Tails' Skypatrol
Sonic & Knuckles (Troll Associates)
Sonic The Hedgehog Adventure Gamebook 5: Theme Park Panic (Puffin Books)
Sonic The Hedgehog: Fortress of Fear; *Friend or Foe?* (Troll Associates)
Sonic The Hedgehog (Watermill Press)
Sonic The Hedgehog 3: Up Against the Wall (Golden Books)

1996
Sonic 3D Blast/Flickies' Island
Sonic Blast
Sonic's Schoolhouse
Sonic The Fighters/Sonic Championship
Sonic The Hedgehog Adventure Gamebook 6: Stormin' Sonic (Puffin Books)
Sonic X-Treme (Troll Associates)
Sonic The Hedgehog: Double Trouble (Big Golden Book)
Sonic's Friendly Nemesis: Knuckles the Echidna (Original Archie Miniseries)
Sonikku za Hejjihoggu: Eggumanrando e Mukae; *Sonikku tai Metaru Sonikku!!*
(General Entertainment)
Sonic Christmas Blast (DiC Entertainment)

1997
Sonic Jam
Sonic R
Sonic The Hedgehog 2: The Secret Admirer (Golden Books Entertainment)
Knuckles the Echidna; *Sonic Super Specials* (Archie Comics)
Sonic: Man of the Year (TMS Entertainment)

1998
Sonic Adventure

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[58] A two volume French comic promoting *Sonic 3 & Knuckles* that incorporates Mobius/Kintobor canon (Smoldo and Mister B., 1991).

1999
Sonic Adventure: International
Sonic The Hedgehog: Pocket Adventure
Sonic Underground (DiC Entertainment)
Sonic The Hedgehog: The Movie (ADV Films)

2000
Sonic Shuffle

2001
Sonic Advance
Sonic Adventure 2
Sonic Adventure 2: Battle
Sonic Café Series[59]

2002
Sonic Advance
Sonic Advance 2

2003
Sonic Advance 2
Sonic Adventure DX: Director's Cut
Sonic Battle
Sonic Heroes
Sonic N
Sonic Pinball Party
Dash & Spin: Super Fast Sonic (*CoroCoro Comic*)[60]
Sonic X (TMS Entertainment)

2004
Sonic Advance 3

2005
Shadow the Hedgehog
Sonic Rush
Sonic X: Meteor Shower Messenger; *Spaceship Blue Typhoon* (Grosset & Dunlap)[61]
Sonic X (Archie Comics)

2006
Sonic Riders
Sonic Rivals
Sonic The Hedgehog
Sonic X: Aqua Planet; *Battle at Ice Palace*; *Dr. Eggman Goes to War* (Grosset & Dunlap)

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[59] A series of Japan-only mobile games released between 2001 and 2007 consisting of "about 40 titles [that] would later be sold separately in the West" (Pétronille and Audureau, 2012: 178).
[60] A Japan-exclusive manga series.
[61] A series of children's books set in the world of *Sonic X*.

2007
Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games (Wii)
Sonic and the Secret Rings
Sonic Rivals 2
Sonic Rush Adventure
Sonic X: Desperately Seeking Sonic (Grosset & Dunlap)

2008
Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games (NDS)
SEGA Superstars Tennis
Sonic at the Olympic Games
Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood
Sonic Riders: Zero Gravity
Sonic Unleashed
Sonic World Adventure (*Dengeki Nintendo DS*)[62]
Sonic: Night of the Werehog (SEGA VE Animation Studio)

2009
Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Winter Games
Sonic and the Black Knight
Sonic and the Black Knight (*Dengeki Nintendo DS*)
Sonic Chronicles: Invaders from the Dark Dimension (*Dengeki Nintendo DS*)
Sonic Universe (Archie Comics)

2010
Sonic & SEGA All-Stars Racing
Sonic at the Olympic Winter Games
Sonic Colors/Sonic Colours
Sonic Free Riders
Sonic The Hedgehog 4: Episode I
Sonic Colors (*Dengeki Nintendo DS*)

2011
Mario & Sonic at the London Olympic Games (Wii)
Sonic Generations

2012
Mario & Sonic at the London Olympic Games (3DS)
Sonic & All-Stars Racing: Transformed
Sonic Generations (*Dengeki Nintendo DS*)
Sonic Jump
Sonic The Hedgehog 4: Episode II

2013
Mario & Sonic at the Sochi 2014 Olympic Winter Games
Sonic Athletics
Sonic Boom: Rise of Lyric

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[62] Japan-exclusive manga promoting their respective videogames.

Sonic Boom: Shattered Crystal
Sonic Dash
Sonic: Lost World

2014
Sonic Jump Fever
Sonic Boom (OuiDo! Productions)

2015
Sonic Boom: Fire & Ice
Sonic Runners
2016
Mario & Sonic at the Rio 2016 Olympic Games

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