

Transmedia Storytelling

Hyperdiegesis, Narrative Braiding and Memory in Star Wars Comics

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Since at least the turn of the twentieth century, the comic book medium has grown in dialogue alongside other media forms, both old and new, underscored by what is commonly described as adaptation. In basic terms, adaptation refers to a process whereby stories are lifted from one medium and replanted in another. Of course, the process is more complicated than that as different media each bring different creative requirements and, as a result, adaptation is never simply about reproducing a story in exactly the same way—although it *is* about reproduction, to some degree. Put simply, adaptation refers to the retelling of a story in a new media location. For example, each installment of Warner Bros.’ Harry Potter film series—from *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* to *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*—are adaptations of novels written by J.K. Rowling, each ‘retelling’ the same story in the process from book-to-film. The caveat here is that such a retelling also involves revising narrative elements, and even editing or reframing scenes from the ‘source’ text to better-fit the ‘target’ medium. Variations *as well as* repetition are key factors to consider, as adaptation theorist Linda Hutcheon notes (2006).

The contemporary landscape is brimming with adaptations of all sorts, but perhaps the most common example in the twenty-first century are the bevy of film and TV series based on comic books, many of them produced by the ‘big two’ superhero publishers, Marvel and DC, as film scholar Terence McSweeney argues: “We are living in the age of the superhero and we cannot deny it” (2018, 1). This is complicated further by the fact that superhero adaptations rarely pluck stories in their entirety from comics but, rather, borrow from a broader expanse of material, remixing elements from popular series—often fan favorites, such as Marvel’s *Civil War*, the film of which only bears a cursory resemblance to the comic book original by Mark Millar and Steve McNiven (2007)—while simultaneously creating new stories, arcs and narrative trajectories. In this light, processes of adaptation should not be viewed so reductively as ‘reproduction’ or ‘recycling,’ or with more pejorative terms like ‘cannibalization’ or ‘rip-off.’ Adaptation is not a new phenomenon, but has been a key driver in the production—and indeed reproduction—of cultural forms and texts for centuries.

The principle of adaptation becomes even more complex, manifold and conceptually slippery once we look at the multifarious ways in which stories evolve across platforms not through reproduction or retelling, but through extension. How, then, might we best describe a story that begins in one medium and travels across platforms in order to *continue*, as with a traditional serial, rather than *retell* a story? Media scholar Henry Jenkins inaugurated the concept of ‘transmedia storytelling’ to address what he saw, rightly or wrongly, as a series of shifts unfolding across contemporary media. For Jenkins, transmedia storytelling can be differentiated from adaptation in the following way:

Transmedia Storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience...Basically, an adaptation takes the same story from one medium and retells it in another. An extension seeks to add something to the existing story as it moves from one medium to another (2011).

In *Convergence Culture* (2006), Jenkins uses the Wachowski's popular film series *The Matrix* as a case study to develop this idea of transmedia storytelling. The imaginary world of *The Matrix* includes a massively successful film trilogy, beginning with the eponymous 1999 film; continuing with second installment *The Matrix Reloaded*; and concluding with *The Matrix Revolutions* (both released in 2003). More than this, however, is the way in which the Wachowski's designed an expansive narrative that spanned multiple media, each entry furnishing dedicated audiences with additional information that could potentially enhance the entertainment experience by suturing multiple stories into a transmedia storytelling "hyperdiegesis," a term coined by fan and media scholar Matt Hills to describe "the creation of a vast and detailed space...which...appears to operate according to principles of internal logic and extension (2002, 137). Each installment, episode or "micro-narrative", as narratologist Marie Laure-Ryan (1992, 373) calls them, can be woven together into "narrative braids" (Wolf 2012, 199) that 'thicken' the hyperdiegesis with content.

Aside from the three films, there is also an animated anthology film, *The Animatrix*, which provided viewers with nine short-films, each crafted by leading animators from Asia and the United States, each providing new backstories and narrative augmentations that collaboratively built the architecture of the hyperdiegesis with depth, structure and mythological underpinnings. In the two-part short, 'The Second Renaissance,' for instance, viewers learn about the origins and back-story of *The Matrix* program itself. Likewise, in the comic book story, 'Bits and Pieces of Information,' written by the Wachochowski siblings with art by Geof Darrow (2003), the robot B116ER is introduced and provides important links with 'The Second Renaissance,' portraying the technologized character prior to narrative events that transpire in the short. Here, B116ER functions as a 'continuity anchor,' extending the hyperdiegesis further via associations and braids between texts and across media.

Unlike classic linear storytelling, then, each micro-narrative may be produced 'out-of-sync,' thus asking audiences to cognitively re-arrange the bits and pieces into a logical order. *The Matrix* demands that comprehension can only be fully obtained if audiences restructure the 'bits and pieces' from a non-linear sprawl into linear, hyperdiegetic memory and "have it all add up to one compelling whole" (Jenkins 2006, 103).

The same can be said of the video game *Enter The Matrix*, wherein players become participatory agents in the narrative, hence providing an immersive environment in which events in the game are intrinsically connected to the films so that the game becomes, in essence, "another *Matrix* movie" (Jenkins 2006, 104). The Wachowskis also wrote and directed an hour of new footage that could not be accessed if one did not play the game, which also signifies the way in which these augmented narratives are always also industrialized components. In other words, in order to fully experience the hyperdiegesis as the sum total of multiple moving parts, one is encouraged to purchase

each of the disparate elements and spin a whirlpool of profit potential for the Warner Bros. studio. Drawing upon Wolf's concept of narrative braiding (2012), Matthew Freeman (2014) terms this process "commodity braiding," which provides an industrialized perspective on the commercial mechanisms that interlink various sub-story elements.

In many ways, *The Matrix* hyperdiegesis functions like a puzzle, with fans engaged as puzzle-solvers and code-breakers. Jenkins refers to consumers such as these as "informational hunters and gatherers, taking pleasure in tracking down character backgrounds and plot points and making connections between different texts within the same franchise" (Jenkins 2006, 133). From this perspective, then, transmedia storytelling becomes not only an expansive story-telling model spread across and within a transmedia hyperdiegesis, but also as a ludic narrative—a game. And with the widespread domestication of internet technologies, fans can now pool their resources and, as hunters and gatherers, conduct collaborative labor so that they can form a "collective intelligence" (Jenkins 2006, 97) in online territories by working together, cracking the codes spread across various transmedia locations in order to answer the riddle: what is *The Matrix*?

The filmmakers plant clues that won't make sense until we play the computer game. They draw on the back story revealed through a series of animated shorts, which need to be downloaded off the Web or watched off a separate DVD. Fans raced, dazed and confused, from the theatres to plug into Internet discussion lists, where every detail would be dissected and every possible interpretation debated (Jenkins 2006, 96).

The problem with such a lavishly designed imaginary world, with the puzzles, codes and transmedia expressions all coalescing hyperdiegetically is that more casual viewers may be deterred from buying theatre tickets if the cinematic experience requires additional labor to fully comprehend the narrative. "For the casual consumer," argues Jenkins, "*The Matrix* asked too much. For the hard-core fan, it provided too little." (2006, 131). The balance that media producers need to aim for to address different levels of consumptive activity is more difficult to manage than traditional story-telling techniques, and critics often complained that *The Matrix* expected far too much of general audiences (themselves included). The Wachowskis might well have tapped into fan audiences' desire for participatory engagement, but that desire might not trigger a participatory impulse in audiences that simply want to attend the theatre and watch an entertaining film, without having to perform extra-curricular explorations. So, then, the Wachowski's grand world-building was not so much a triumph for transmedia entertainment in the digital age as, rather, a spectacular experiment that was hit-and-miss, depending upon the activities and proclivities of different types of audiences.

UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS

Perhaps the most fundamental assumption to consider relating to the concept of transmedia storytelling is that each micro-narrative is developed to form part of a cohesive hyperdiegetic structure. What this means is that the various narratives spread across media platforms should contribute to the broader story canvas and that they have

been designed with consistency in mind. That said, with longer-running serial worlds, such as *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* for example, new micro-narratives are produced on a frequent basis, often by multiple authors (writers, artists, directors, editors etc.), which means ultimately that this idea of internal coherence being designed from inception is largely erroneous, *contra* Jenkins. In this sense, Jenkins' transmedia storytelling has been criticized as utopian and overtly prescriptive by Matt Hills (2017), who counter-argued that imaginary worlds are, more often than not, discontinuous and dissonant creations.

Creators working on these vast serial worlds are often supplied with what is known as a "story bible," which provides key information regarding character, story, genre and environment, so that authors can follow such a narrative blueprint to maintain consistency between micro-narratives. Yet the more information that is added to a world over time is more likely than not to lead to 'continuity snarls,' meaning that inconsistencies may arise between stories that supposedly co-exist within the same narrative system. As Wolf explains (2011, 378), the "likelihood of inconsistencies occurring increases as a world grows in complexity." A study of transmedia storytelling should not only fixate on narrative coherence but also moments of rupture and incoherence.

A second related assumption of transmedia storytelling is that which fans and media producers understand as "continuity" and "canon." Continuity refers to texts that co-exist within the same narrative universe and the way in which connections are established between texts hyperdiegetically. As we have already seen from Jenkins' study of *The Matrix*, connections are substantiated through the relationship between different texts and different media via narrative braiding, whereby threads begin in one medium and are continued in another.

'Canonicity,' or 'canon,' is closely related to the principle of continuity. Canon is one of the ways that imaginary worlds are organized in relation to what constitutes 'fact' within such worlds. That is, canon dictates and governs which texts are 'in continuity'—or, as the case may be, 'out-of-continuity'—at any given time. If we think of this in terms of 'memory,' as Colin B. Harvey emphasizes (2015), then a transmedia storytelling hyperdiegesis should coherently 'remember' other texts within the structure, with non-canonical narratives being reduced to a state of 'non-memory.' This concept of remembering is key to transmedia storytelling strategies in much the same way as it is in traditional serialization that unfolds intramedially.

Although fans might construct their own particular version of what constitutes canon, the concept usually refers to a set of guidelines and reading protocols orchestrated by media producers to organize and structure hyperdiegetic memory. However, continuity and canon are often fluid concepts. Simply put, what is canonical today may not be so tomorrow. As film and media scholar Will Brooker puts it (2012, 158): "canon is not absolute gospel...Metaphorically its ideal medium is not stone tablets but Wikipedia." Researchers should understand that continuity and canon are massively important for fans and one of the central pleasures of exploring imaginary worlds. It may therefore be important to also examine the activities of fan audiences.

A third assumption is that transmedia storytelling is about multiple platforms rather than a single medium. Although this book focuses on comics, any study of transmedia storytelling would necessarily include analysis of a range of media in order to demonstrate the key concepts of narrative braiding, memory and the hyperdiegetic mechanics of transmedia storytelling.

APPROPRIATE ARTIFACTS

Choosing a representative sample from the pantheon of *Star Wars* comics published over four decades might certainly seem to be a daunting task, complicated even further by a hierarchical canon that was comprised of ‘levels’ of legitimacy and importance. This was initially designed as a set of reading protocols for fan readers to fully understand the principles of canonicity in the *Star Wars* universe; or in other words, what constituted storyworld ‘fact.’ Thus, G-canon—the ‘G’ standing for ‘George,’ as in George Lucas—was marked as the apotheosis of *Star Wars* canon, the highest tier that was understood as continuity ‘gospel’—literally “the immovable objects of the *Star Wars* universe.” There has been plenty of debate among *Star Wars* fans over the years regarding what comics (and other transmedia expressions) should be permitted into G-Canon (see Brooker 2002 for an analysis of these debates). However, Lucas maintained that *Star Wars* Expanded Universe comics were not a part of G-Canon but occupied a lower tier in the hierarchy, and thus not as legitimate or authentic. The several levels of canonicity were as follows:

George or G-Canon: the most recent versions of films Episode I-VI, the scripts, movie novelizations, radio plays, and Lucas’s statements

TV or T-Canon: the *Star Wars: Clone Wars* animated TV series

Continuity or C-Canon: the Expanded Universe of comics, novels and so forth.

Secondary or S-Canon: RPGs such as *Star Wars: Galaxies*

Non or N-Canon: ‘What if?’ stories such as *Star Wars Infinities*

This system, however, demonstrated that the *Star Wars* universe was not canonically unified but chaotic, a site of contention for many fans that insisted that the money that they spent on purchasing EU material shouldn’t mean that the stories shouldn’t ‘count’ as legitimate *Star Wars*. For our purposes, the *Star Wars* hyperdiegesis would not easily fit in with Jenkins’ concept of transmedia storytelling. For if Lucas ended up creating a new story that contradicted the EU, then the latter would be superseded, and thus rendered illegitimate.

This would all change following the sale of Lucasfilm to Disney. On April 24 2015, it was announced that the old canon system would no longer function as a guiding principle but would be replaced by a new, non-hierarchical order. As announced on starwars.com, “all aspects of *Star Wars* storytelling moving forward will be connected.” In doing so the EU was mostly relegated to the non-canonical “Legends” banner, while new transmedia satellites, especially novels and comics, would be coherently unified in the new Disney canon. This represented a “shift in the transmedia economy of *Star Wars*” (Proctor and Freeman 2017), that is, from a hierarchical tiered-system of quasi-canoncity to an authentic, and official, transmedia storytelling model. Put differently, transmedia storytelling should be viewed as *canonical storytelling* told across media.

For researchers, then, selecting appropriate artifacts for analysis is less daunting than it used to be, although it needs to be recognized that there are several comic series being published on a weekly basis. As with many vast narratives, the *Star Wars* hyperdiegesis is not complete but, rather, is underpinned by new, regular augmentations. The most appropriate strategy for selecting materials for analysis would usually include a representative sample that cuts across multiple series and mini-series. However, it is more important for our purposes to focus on a complete chapter or arc, beginning with the eponymous *Star Wars* comic, which functions as the central spine or ‘mothership.’ Like the majority of mainstream comics, *Star Wars* comics are compiled into what are

known as ‘trade paperbacks,’ which collect single issues, or ‘floppies,’ into a chronological compendium. The mini-series, *Darth Vader*, which we shall analyze below, is told in parallel with the first volume of the mothership series, so rather than cast one’s net far and wide with a representative sample, it would be more useful to read in order of publication, especially when the narratives are situated in the same time period. A good rule of thumb is to start at the beginning (which may or may not be ‘the beginning’ in narrative terms).

It is important that researchers understand that one should not hunt for ‘proof’ of transmedia storytelling, but to *discover* and fully explore the various narrative mechanics at work, some of which might very well contradict transmedia storytelling concepts. It could very well be that canonical transmedia storytelling has as many fissures and continuity snarls as illegitimate, non-canonical texts, and these would also need to be considered in a final analysis.

It may be tempting to think one should analyze every single comic in the hyperdiegesis—and in principle that would certainly be a worthy endeavor—but it is largely dependent upon whether this is possible and/ or even necessary. Researchers should be cautious about drawing in too many examples as this can easily lead one to write descriptively rather than with analytic depth and rigor. It is better to fully immerse oneself in an arc or two, and then build on top of that gradually. Indeed, it would be quite easy to become lost within a transmedia sprawl, especially if one is not expert enough in the parameters of the storyworld. However, it is arguably less likely that researchers would engage with a subject that has no meaning for them outside scholarship. Many academics are fans, or ‘aca-fans,’ of the subjects that they study.

Finally, analyzing *Star Wars* comics as they work in conjunction with other media would require the researcher to possess a good, working knowledge of the hyperdiegesis both in transmedia terms and, more pointedly, the film series. Although this may seem paradoxical for a book centred on critical approaches to comics, one cannot study transmedia storytelling through the comic book medium on its own.

PROCEDURES

The principles of hyperdiegesis, narrative braiding and memory are key concepts for an analysis of transmedia storytelling. Rather than discrete concepts, however, each of these intermingle and overlap with each another like a Venn diagram, with the central conceit of serial memory being instrumental. Thus, hyperdiegesis refers to the world itself and the internal, narrative processes that provide the illusion of coherence. Narrative braiding is the way in which ‘micro-narratives’ provide connective tissue across the hyperdiegesis through the use of ‘continuity anchors’; that is, intertextual references that function to connect—to braid—different media satellites into a hyperdiegetic unity. Using these concepts as a methodological framework means that researchers need to pay particular attention to the way that memory operates between, and across, various media platforms. It is crucial that an analysis also contains those elements that contravene notions of coherence and stability, such as continuity snarls and narrative paradoxes. Remember: it is better to *discover* through analysis than to look for ways to prove what one already thinks they know. As with serialization in general, examples of transmedia storytelling will almost certainly involve moments of rupture and contradiction between media expressions. As difficult as it is, one should aim to remain as objective as possible, especially if they’re fans of that which they study.

ARTIFACT SELECTED FOR SAMPLE ANALYSIS

In the sample analysis that follows, I center on the *Darth Vader* mini-series, written by Kieron Gillan with art by Salvador Larrocca, looking at the way in which the comic establishes narrative braids between various *Star Wars* films through the use of continuity anchors, thus further expanding and developing hyperdiegetic memory. The comic also provides new perspectives and background information that is not contained in the film series for avid fans to explore, but these elements may also introduce unstable factors into the hyperdiegesis, as we shall see.

SAMPLE ANALYSIS

The first step is to determine precisely where the *Darth Vader* mini-series fits within hyperdiegetic memory (traditionally called a ‘timeline’). How can we obtain this information? Luckily for researchers, each of the *Star Wars* comics produced during the new Disney-era include, like the films themselves, an opening crawl that precedes the story, setting the scene by providing readers with a *temporal anchor*, which functions to acclimate readers as to where precisely in the timeline the story is situated. In *Darth Vader #1*, the crawl begins by providing such an anchor attached to the denouement of the first *Star Wars* film—retitled *Episode IV: A New Hope* in 1981—where the Empire’s intergalactic space station, the Death Star, was destroyed by “Rebel spaceships, striking from a hidden base on the moon of Yavin” (see figure I.1). As we can see, even before the narrative told in the comic begins proper, this opening gambit not only provides essential information for readers to know precisely where they are in the timeline, but also establishes narrative braids with multiple films.

Book I

VADER

It is a period of insurgence. Rebel spaceships, striking from a hidden base on a moon of Yavin, have won a shocking surprise victory against the rightful reign of the Galactic Empire.

The Empire's ultimate peacekeeping force, THE DEATH STAR, was destroyed due to an unforeseen design flaw. Without this deterrent, the rule of law is in danger. Chaos looms!

For the nineteen years after the vanquishing of the Jedi and his painful rebirth on volcanic Mustafar, Sith Lord DARTH VADER has faithfully served his master. But now, he has failed the Emperor and must pay the price....

Figure I.1 The opening crawl in *Darth Vader* #1.

Firstly, the crawl emphasizes that the *Vader* comic is situated after the destruction of the Death Star in *Episode IV: A New Hope* (ANH) and prior to events in *Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back* (ESB) thus functioning as an intraquel, “a narrative sequence element which fills in a narrative gap within an already existing narrative sequence” (Wolf 2012, 378). More than this, however, is the way that texts produced many years *after* both ANH and ESB were created establishes continuity through various narrative braiding strategies, thus demonstrating that canon is often built retroactively rather than designed with foresight and purpose as per Jenkins’ model. It is only in the anthology film *Rogue*

One: A Star Wars Story that we learn about the “unforeseen design flaw” that led to the Death Star’s ruin, a flaw that was inserted deliberately by Galen Erso, the father of *Rogue One*’s protagonist, Jyn Erso. Further, referencing Vader’s “painful volcanic rebirth on volcanic Mustafar” activates the third installment of the much-maligned prequel trilogy, *Episode III: Revenge of the Sith*, notably the climatic lightsaber duel between Anakin Skywalker and Obi-Wan Kenobi. Thus, the opening crawl in *Darth Vader #1* manages to braid the comic mini-series with multiple canonical films, beginning to ultimately contribute to the construction of hyperdiegetic memory in transmedia storytelling terms. And that’s just the first page!

As the comic title implies, Darth Vader is the protagonist of the story, which centers on what transpires after the destruction of the Death Star, providing new insights and perspectives into Vader’s relationship with his dark mentor, Emperor Palpatine. As the comic exploits a temporal gap between ANH and ESB, readers gain knowledge not provided in the primary cinematic text: ANH concludes with Vader’s ship spinning out-of-control before he stabilizes his vessel and flees the scene of destruction, roundly defeated by the rebel assault but still alive to fight another day. As the next installment (ESB) opens with Vader searching the galaxy for the rebel’s new secret base—which he eventually locates on the ice planet, Hoth—whatever occurred between events told in the films becomes the focal point of the comic series.

The imagery depicted in *Vader*’s introductory pages will be immediately familiar to Star Wars fans, opening as it does in Jabba the Hutt’s palace on the desert planet of Tatooine (which is, also, where much of the first act of ANH takes place). In fact, this would be so intimately familiar that the creators do not think to provide a text-caption to instruct readers where they are located in the hyperdiegesis. Moreover, the scene also acts as a kind of mirroring device by reflecting the opening of RotJ when Luke Skywalker calmly saunters into Jabba’s palace and uses a ‘Jedi Mind Trick’ to control Bib Fortuna so he can be guided into the central chamber. While Luke discovers that the same trick does not work on Jabba—“your mind powers will not work on me, boy”—comic readers may be surprised to learn that the same cannot be said of Vader. “Do not even think to try to perform a mind trick,” mocks the slug-like creature. “They do not work on the great Jabba.”¹ But the mistake that Jabba makes in the comic is in believing Vader is much like a Jedi. As Vader uses the Force to choke a surprised Jabba, he explains: “You called me a Jedi. You know nothing. Mind tricks are not of the Dark Side. We prefer Force.”²

This notion of mirroring is a narrative device employed in the film series by George Lucas. For example, the scene where Anakin Skywalker loses his hand in a lightsaber duel with Count Dooku in *Episode II: Attack of the Clones* mirrors the scene in ESB wherein Vader does the same to Luke. By the same token, establishing imagery via comic book *mise-en-scène* by closely knitting it with the film series works to imbue the comic with a degree of authenticity, a relationship that constructs narrative braids between texts across media platforms. At the same time, this also allows the creators to thread associations across media while simultaneously upending readers’ expectations by showing that Jabba is not immune to Vader’s power, thus establishing a distinction between Jedi and Sith.

After the Jabba scene, we flashback to ‘one day earlier’ to The Imperial Palace on Coruscant, and it is here that readers learn about the central premise of the *Vader* comic series which, in a nutshell, focuses on Emperor Palpatine blaming his apprentice for the destruction of the Death Star by rebel forces. The first panel shows Vader on his knees with Emperor Palpatine asking him to explain ‘what has happened **now**,’ and Vader begins to recount events that occurred on the planet Cymoon, the location of a rebel raid lead by the recognizable Han Solo, Leia Organa and Luke Skywalker.³ A panel shows the three characters confronting an Imperial officer, but this does not provide a narrative

braid with the film series—instead, the events on Cymoon are depicted in the mainline ‘sister’ comic, simply titled *Star Wars*, which sutures different comic series into the broader hyperdiegesis and, by extension, the multiple narrative relationships established between comic and film series.⁴ This leads to a kind of transmedia braiding that enacts canonical memory. That said, although both the *Star Wars* and *Darth Vader* comics each ‘remember’ these transmedia events, such as the rebel raid on Cymoon, the same cannot be said of the film series. Considering that the original trilogy was completed in 1983—while taking into account Lucas’ various digital tinkering in recent years—the new canonical comics may introduce back-story elements within available gaps but these elements cannot be sutured *back* into the film series. Palpatine’s use of the word ‘**now**,’ displayed as it is in bold type, introduces the notion that Vader is being squarely blamed not only for the ruin of the Death Star, but for other hitherto unknown events that fans can only learn about should they consult the comics to complete the hyperdiegesis. The construction of the Death Star had taken twenty years, Palpatine explains, but now “all that planning is now a layer of dust orbiting around Yavin.” The Emperor agrees that, “Tarkin, Motti and the others share the blame,” but Vader, as Palpatine points his finger with indignation, “is the only one still living to suffer my anger. You, an isolated survivor of the greatest military disaster in all my Empire’s history? Oh, you are truly the chosen one, Vader. Chosen to be the one **responsible**.”⁵ In doing so, the Vader comic re-focalizes what audiences have learned from the original trilogy by demonstrating that the relationship between Sith Master and Apprentice is much more fraught than represented in the film series, and foreshadows the climactic battle between Vader, Luke and Palpatine in *RoTJ*.

As we can see from this brief analysis, the way in which the Vader comic series aims to establish links with the film series, as well as introducing new back-story elements and information, operates to construct a grand transmedia storytelling hyperdiegesis. As stated, the fact that the comics have been created retroactively means that *Star Wars* canon, as organized and dictated by the Lucasfilm Story Group, is not quite as cohesive as mandated; nor that the relationship between film, comic, TV and so on is as hyperdiegetically egalitarian as the producers would have fans believe. The film installments remain resolutely primary, with the various comic series exploiting gaps and threads left dangling. It is also worth noting that gaps of this kind quite often become the source for fannish production, such as fan fiction and the like. In doing so, producerly models of gap-filling potentially steal away fan-generated explorations.

FINAL THOUGHTS

In many ways, the Disney-era of *Star Wars* comics is focused on plugging gaps between cinematic installments by extending and augmenting hyperdiegesis through what I have termed elsewhere as “ontological thickening” (Proctor 2018), whereby repetitive associations between texts enforce the image of an imaginary world as vastly populated. In short, the more repetitive associations thrown out between texts, especially associations that establish narrative braids with the primary cinematic text, helps concretize the world. More than this, however, is the way that substantial gaps in the hyperdiegesis provide creators with an opportunity to explore the interstices between film instalments to produce transmedia storytelling expressions. It is as if Disney-Lucasfilm-Marvel is answering the question: *what happened between ANH and ESB?*

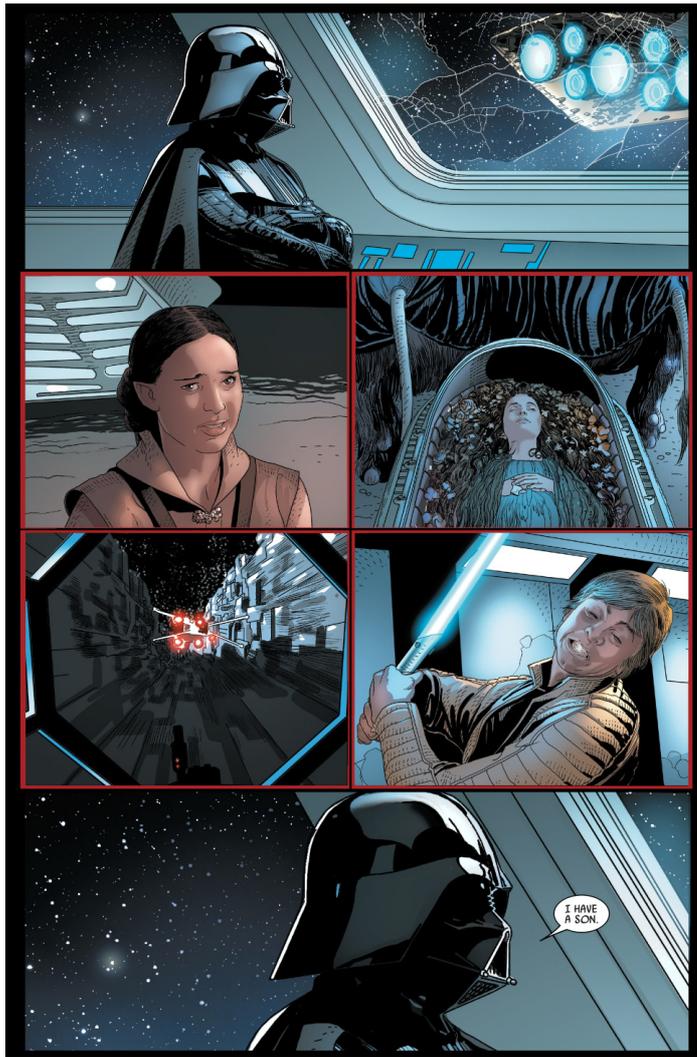


Figure I.2: Vader learns that Luke Skywalker is his son.

For researchers, it may be worth creating an intramedial cartography, or transmedia storytelling map, to more fully illustrate the way in which the hyperdiegesis is being officially designed and deployed. As more and more canonical Star Wars micro-narratives are produced each month, the situation is intensely complicated and complex, demanding that researchers stay attuned to how the hyperdiegesis progresses and is maintained on a regular basis. In *Vader*, for example, new character Doctor Aphra has been introduced, spawning a separate but interconnected eponymous comic series. But Aphra is not—cannot—be remembered in the film series unless the Disney-era of Star Wars involves further revising the primary cinematic text to populate the already existing hyperdiegesis with characters or events inaugurated in other media locations. This is, however, very unlikely. Hence, it becomes essential to understand that transmedia memory may flow in one direction—the comics ‘remembering’ the films—but not the other way around—that is, the films ‘remembering’ the comics. In *Vader* #6, for instance, readers can witness the character struggling with repressed memories emerging centred on events in the prequel film, *RoTS*. In a mostly ‘silent’ sequence of images, we see Vader standing alone on the bridge of an imperial starship, remembering Padmé Amidala, Anakin Skywalker’s betrothed, her corpse lying in a funeral pod; Vader pursuing Luke’s X-Wing in the Death Star trenches from *ANH*; Luke wielding Anakin’s lightsaber in *Star Wars* #1; and the final panel of Vader coming to realize that Luke is not only a rebel with Force-powers, but his son (see figure I.2). Thus, the *Darth Vader* comic

series purports to augment the primary cinematic text for ardent fans—Jenkins “hunter and gatherers”—to learn how the prequel and original trilogies come to be enjoined more cohesively through new memory engrams. It is not in ESB that Vader learns that Skywalker is his offspring, but, instead, in the comic series, a fact that he hides from the Emperor. Whether or not *Star Wars* fans accept the comic book extension as truly canonical is another thing entirely.

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