

# From Plot to Character to World

Some Aesthetics of Transmedia Storytelling

PICTOPLASMA 2009

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# Four Areas to Cover

I. Transmedia Storytelling 101

II. From Plot to Character to World

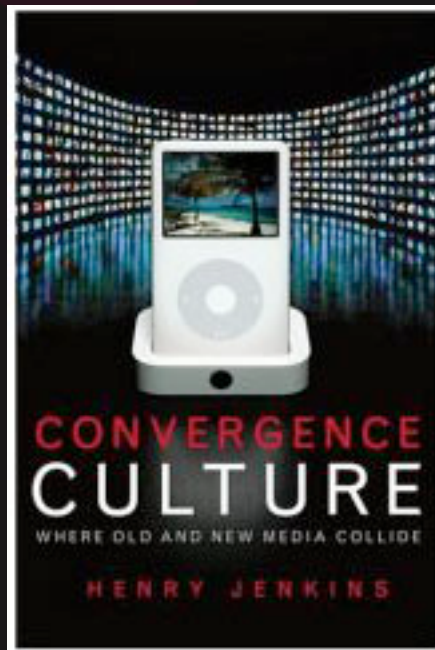
III. Negative Capability

IV. Transmedia Character Design



# I. Transmedia Storytelling 101

# What is Transmedia Storytelling?



“A transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole.”

– Henry Jenkins



# Transmedia Storytelling vs. Adaptation

- Transmedia storytelling continues a narrative arc
- Simply retelling a story in a different type of media isn't transmedia storytelling, it's *adaptation*



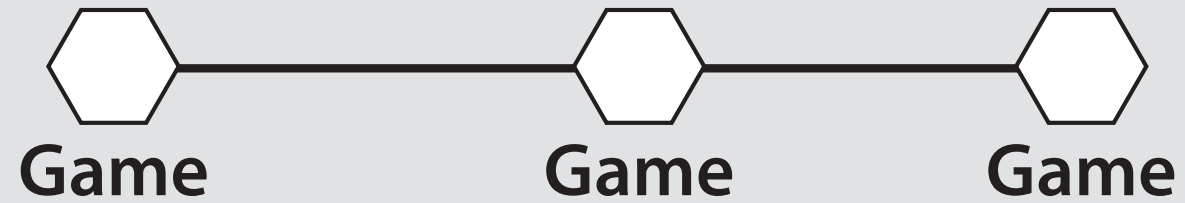
**TRANSMEDIA**



**NOT TRANSMEDIA**

# Adaptation

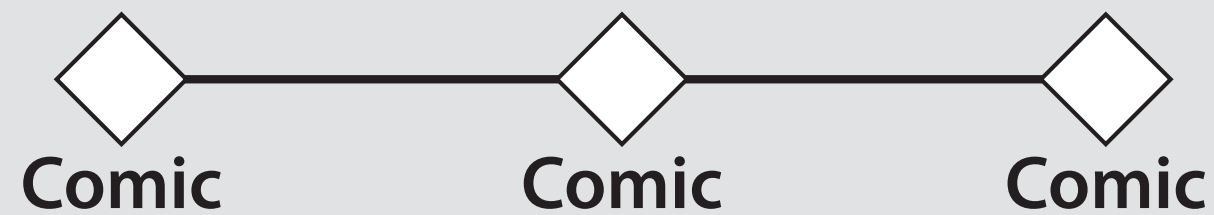
**STORYLINE**



**STORYLINE**

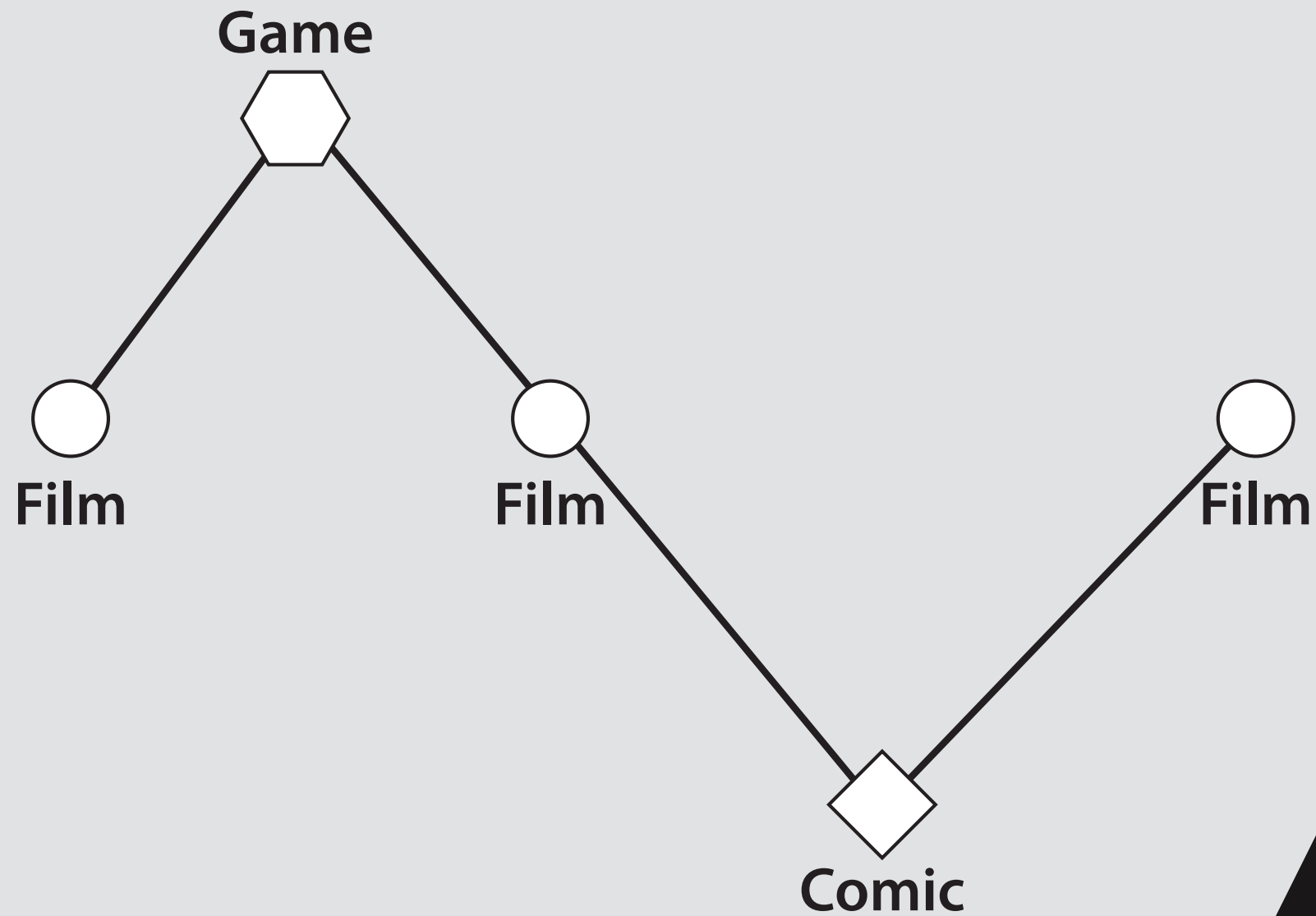


**STORYLINE**



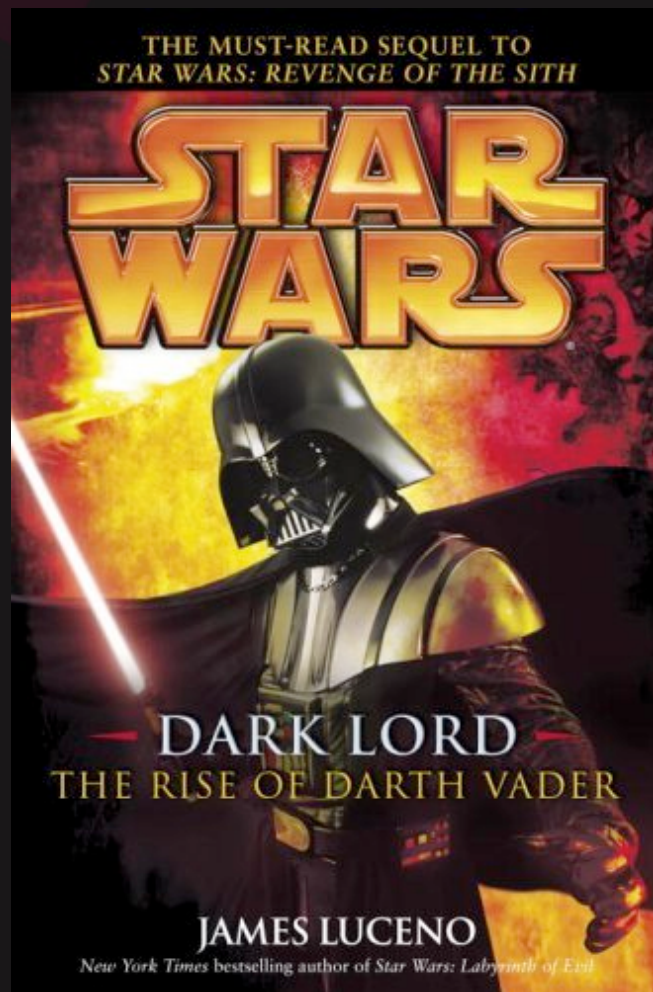
# Transmedia Storytelling

## STORYLINE

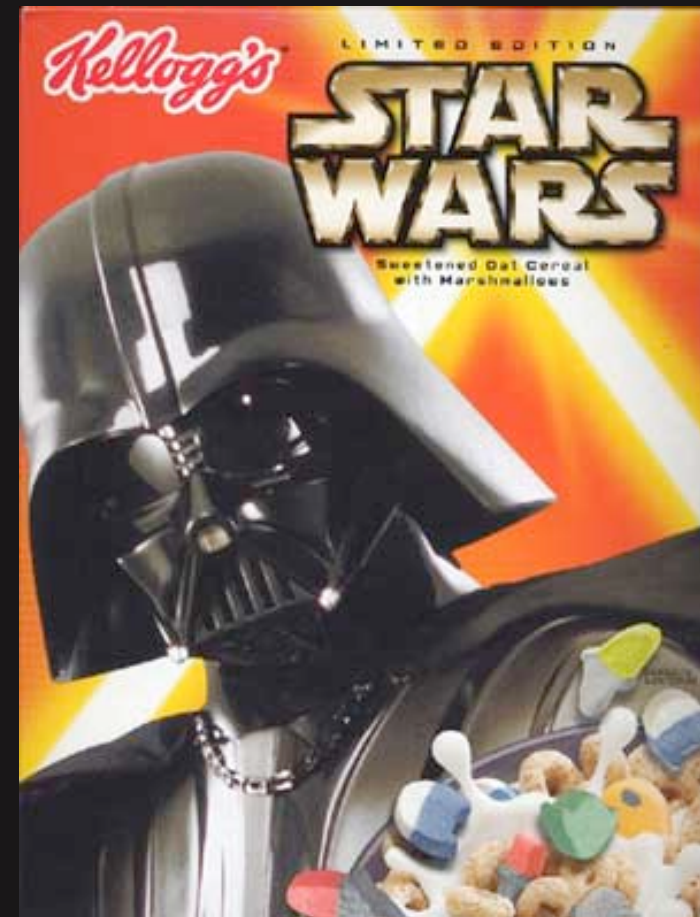


# “Distinctive and Valuable Contribution”?

- Solid addition to the story world
- Not just a cheap grab for additional cash

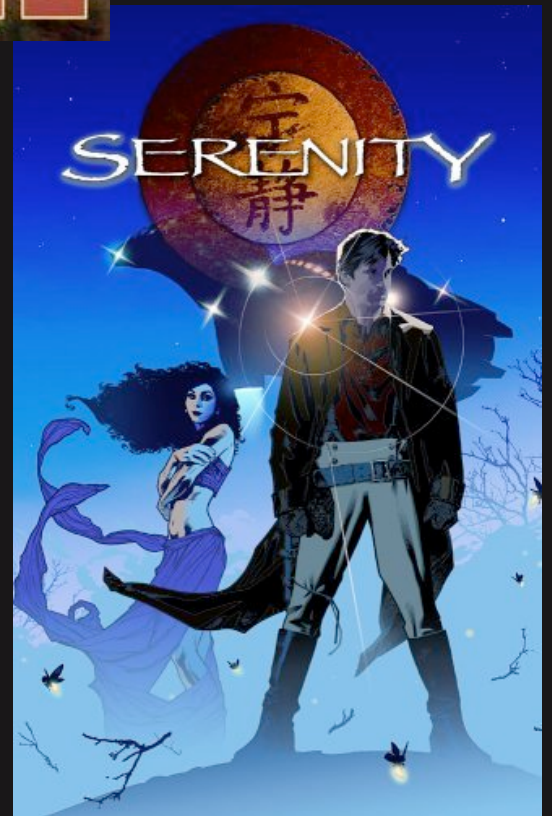
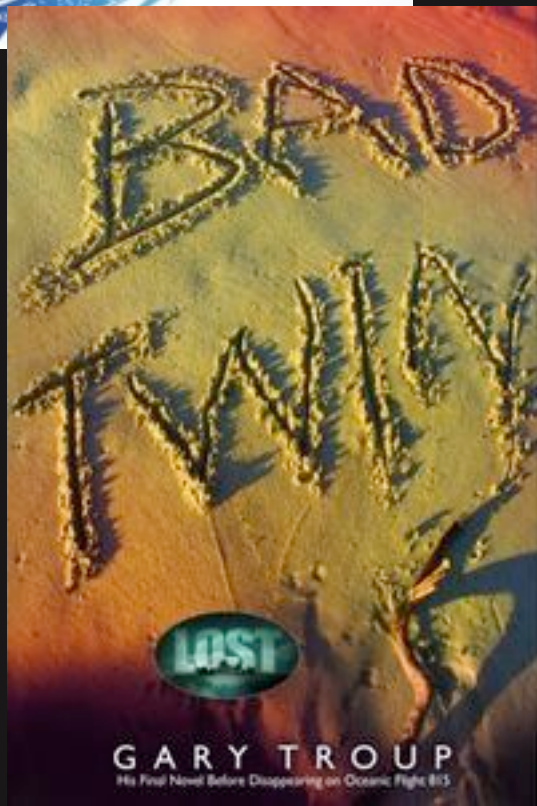
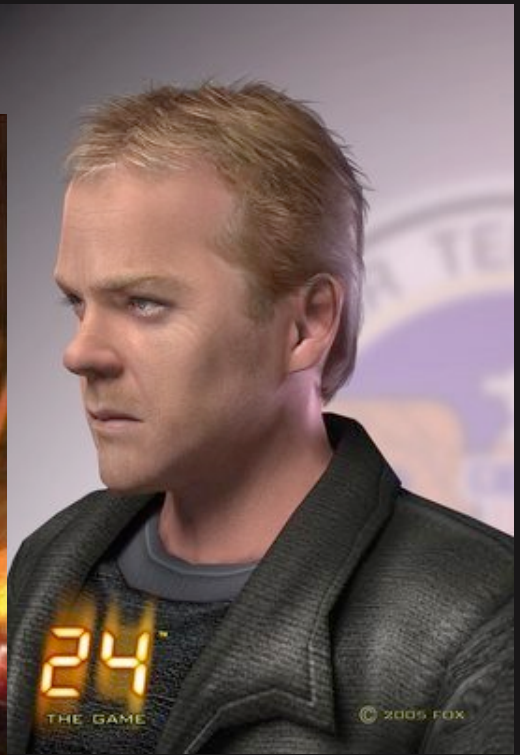
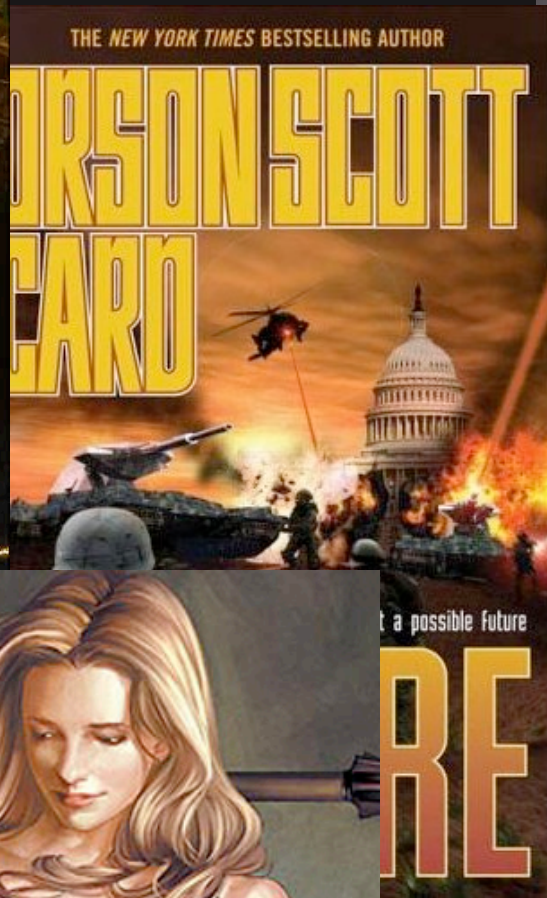
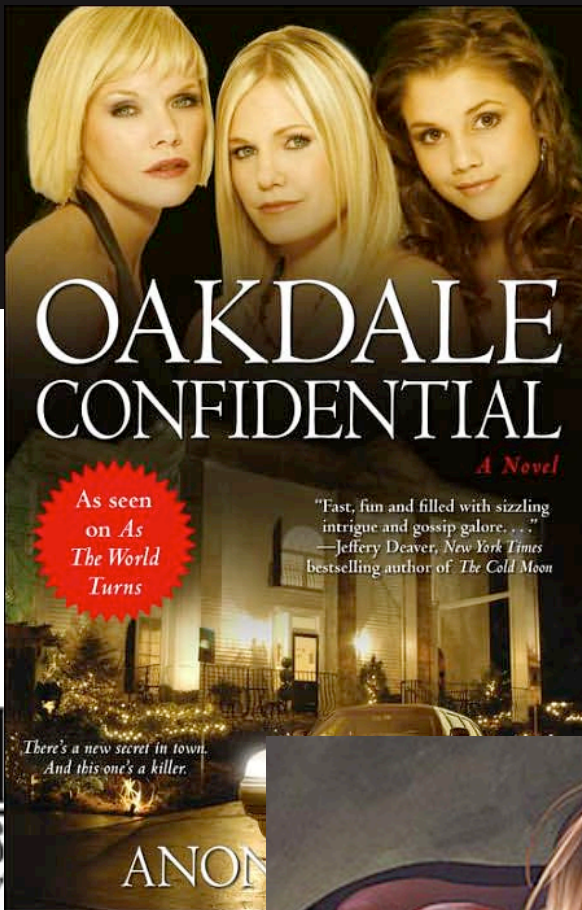


**TRANSMEDIA  
STORYTELLING**

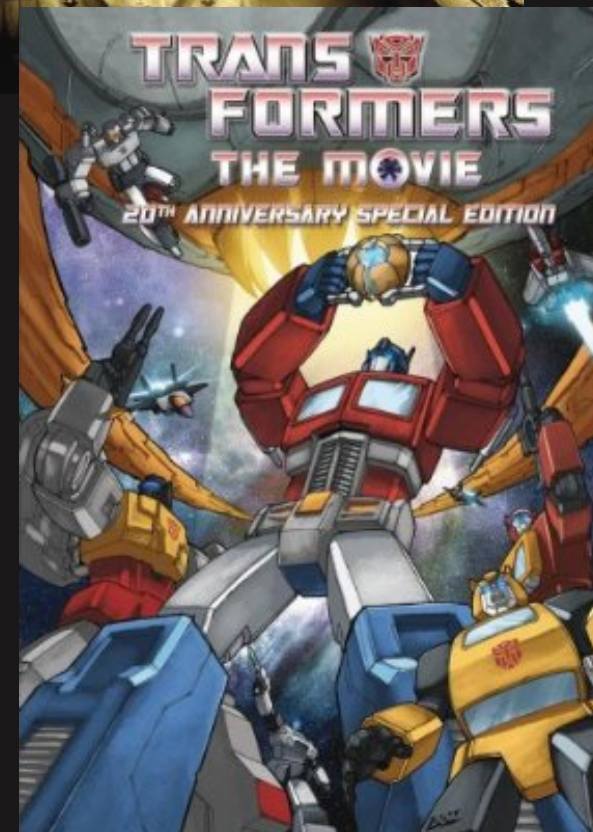
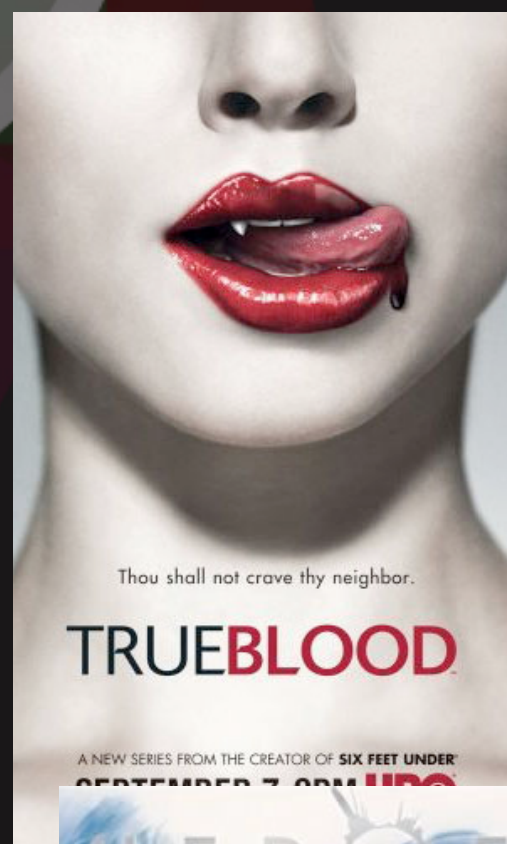


**TRANSMEDIA <sup>8</sup>  
BRANDING**











# Transmedia Storytelling and “Niche Media”

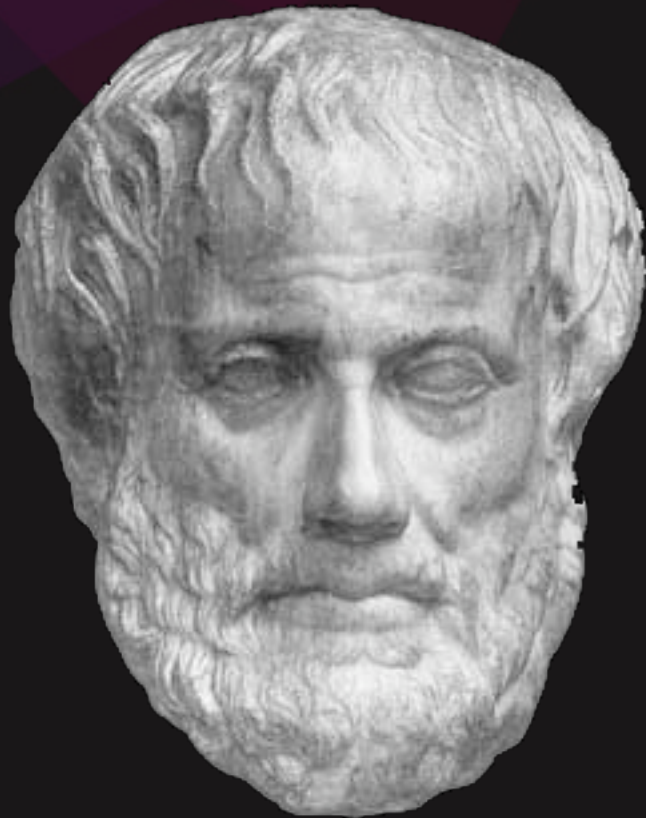
- Transmedia storytelling need not be limited to billion-dollar blockbuster properties
- Transmedia franchises are especially well-suited to properties with an existing dedicated fan base
- Transmedia extensions can be done in more affordable media forms such as television, books or comics
- Characters with large, rabid fan bases but without the budget for a series of multimillion-dollar blockbuster films can be ideal candidates for transmedia storytelling



## II. From Plot to Character to World



# Storytelling According to Aristotle



“Most important of all is [Plot,] the structure of the incidents. For Tragedy is an imitation, not of men, but of an action and of life, and life consists in action, and its end is a mode of action, not a quality... Without action there cannot be a tragedy; there may be without character. ...The plot, then, is the first principle, and, as it were, the soul of a tragedy; Character holds the second place.”

- Aristotle's *Poetics*

# From Plot to Character





# From Character to World





# Worlds Without Plot?

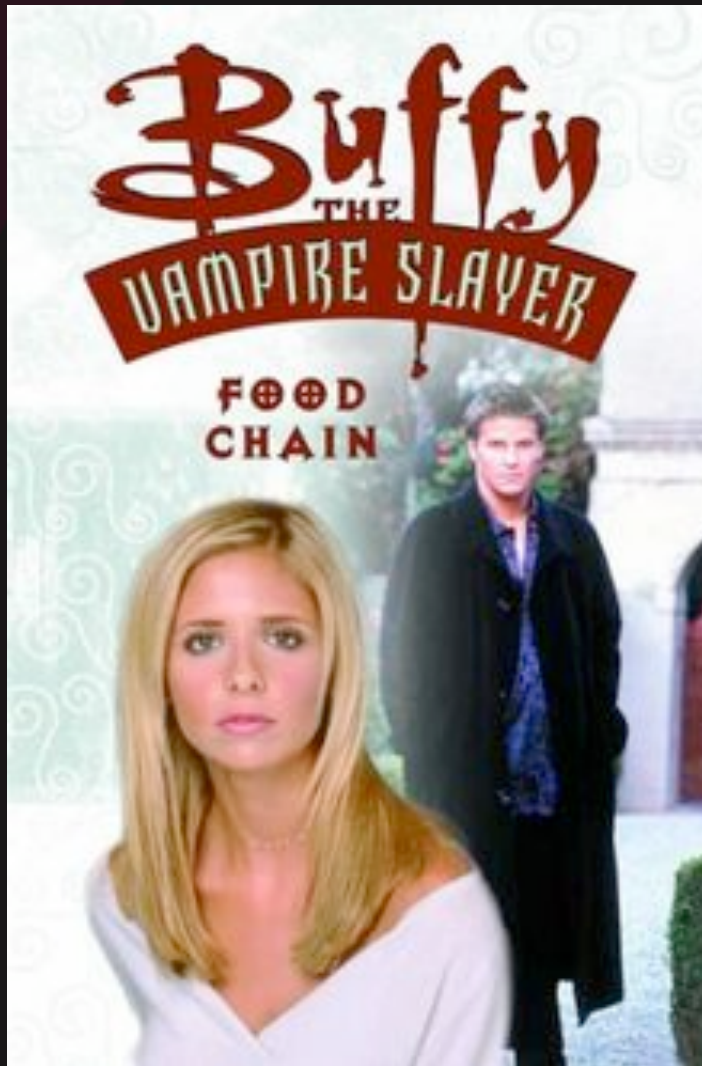


# Transmedia Worldbuilding

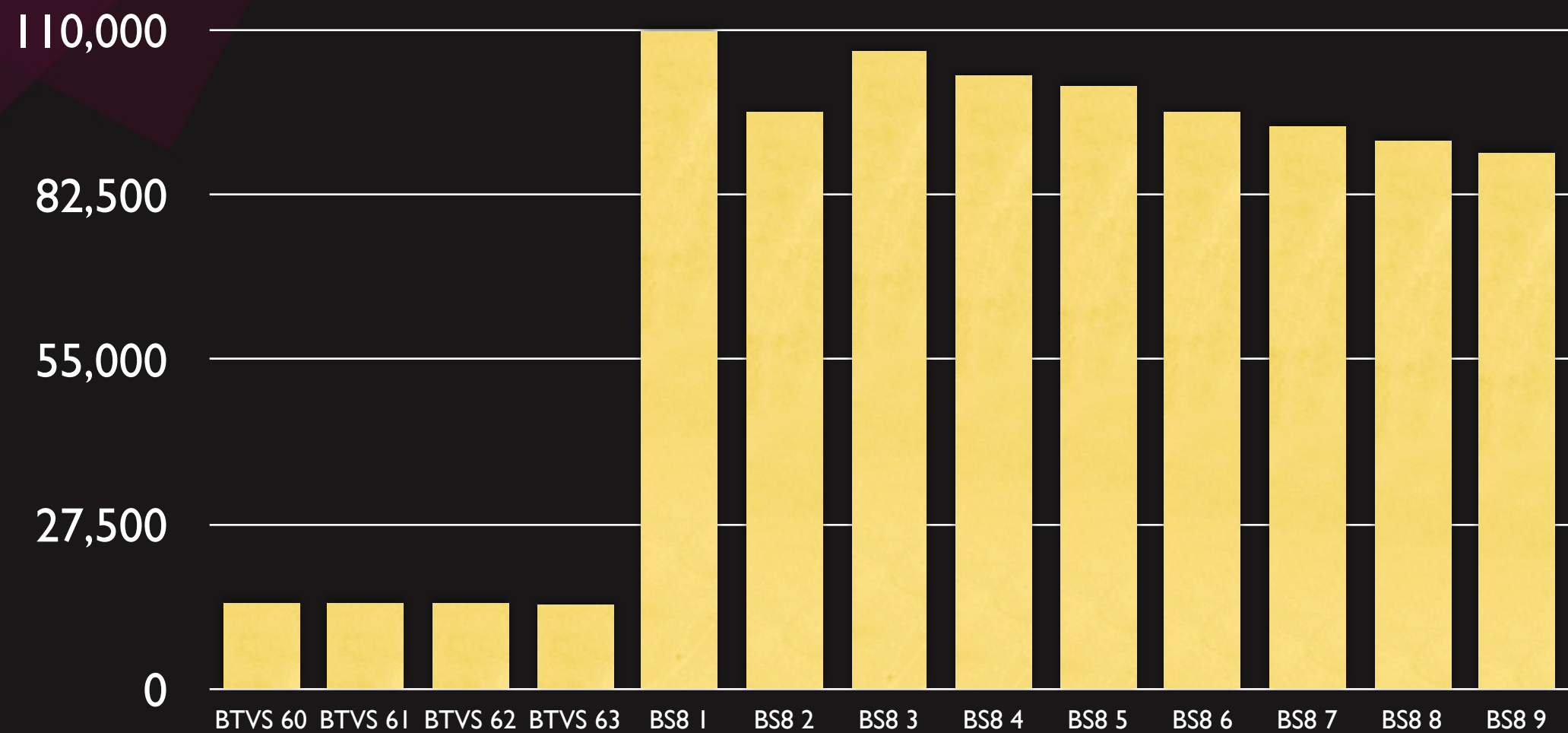
- Good, solid characters and good, solid plots are still critical in authored transmedia story worlds – but the world must be big enough to support *multiple sets* of good, solid characters and plots
- Each component of a transmedia story (comic, movie, game, etc.) need not be written by the same author to be considered one story world
- That said, *authority* is critical
- Canon is key in authored transmedia story worlds



# The Value of Authority



# The Value of Authority



# Fandom Facilitates Transmedia Complexity



“Transmedia storytelling is the art of world making. To fully experience any fictional world, consumers must assume the role of hunters and gatherers, chasing down bits of the story across media channels, comparing notes with each other via online discussion groups, and collaborating to ensure that everyone who invests time and effort will come away with a richer entertainment experience.”

– Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*



# How to Make Hunting and Gathering Easier





## III. Negative Capability



# What is Negative Capability?



"I had not a dispute but a disquisition with Dilke, on various subjects; several things dovetailed in my mind, and at once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in literature and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously - I mean Negative Capability, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after fact and reason..."

– John Keats, 1817

# Negative Capability in Storytelling

- *Negative capability* is the human capacity for filling in strategic gaps built into a narrative to evoke a delicious sense of uncertainty, mystery, or doubt in the audience
- Provides hints to the history of the characters, the depths of their relationships with each other, and their futures
- Enriches the larger world in which their story takes place
- Crucial to transmedia stories because its use emphasizes a large, rich world to explore first in audiences' imaginations and then later in further expansions

# The Best Stories Are The Ones We Tell Ourselves





# Negative Capability -> Migratory Cues





*The Matrix*  
(film)



*Final Flight of the Osiris*  
(*The Animatrix* animation)



*The Matrix Reloaded*  
(film)



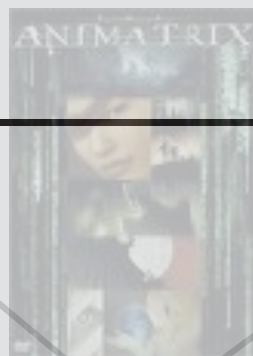
*Enter the Matrix*  
PS2 video game



*The Matrix Revolutions*  
(film)



*The Matrix*  
(film)



*Final Flight of the Osiris*  
(*The Animatrix* animation)



*The Matrix Reloaded*  
(film)



*Enter the Matrix*  
PS2 video game



*The Matrix Revolutions*  
(film)



# Examples of Negative Capability Use

- *Heroes*
  - *What was the story between Hiro's father and Peter's mother?*
  - *What happened to the others at Pinehearst?*
  - *What is the importance of the eclipse?*
- *Sandman*
  - *What caused the departure of Destruction?*
  - *How did Delight turn into Delirium?*
  - *What was the fate of the original Despair?*
- *Star Wars (IV-VI)*
  - *How did the Jedi fall?*
  - *How did Anakin Skywalker become Darth Vader?*
  - *What is the true nature of the Force?*
  - *Who the hell is Boba Fett?*



## IV. Character Design for Transmedia Stories

# Negative Capability Usage = Narrative Reduced Figuration

- Use negative capability to both add instant depth and future avenues of exploration across multiple media forms
- Make references to the character's future to set up sequels
- Make passing references to the character's past to set up prequels
- Build such references into the characters visually (scars, tattoos, trophies, masks)



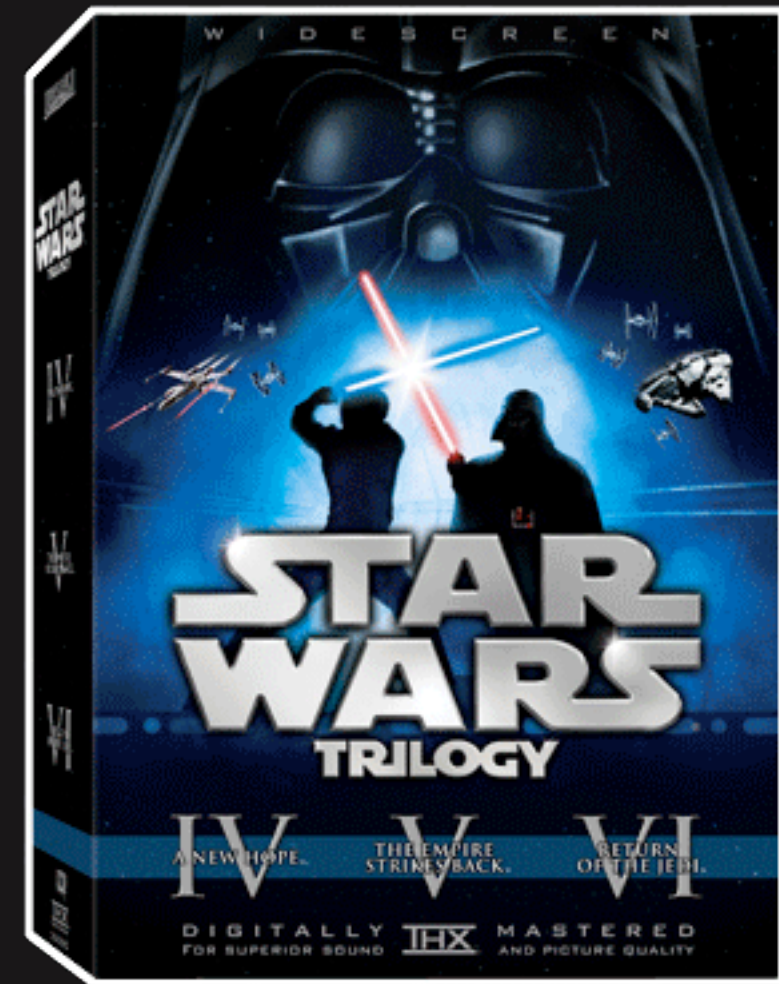
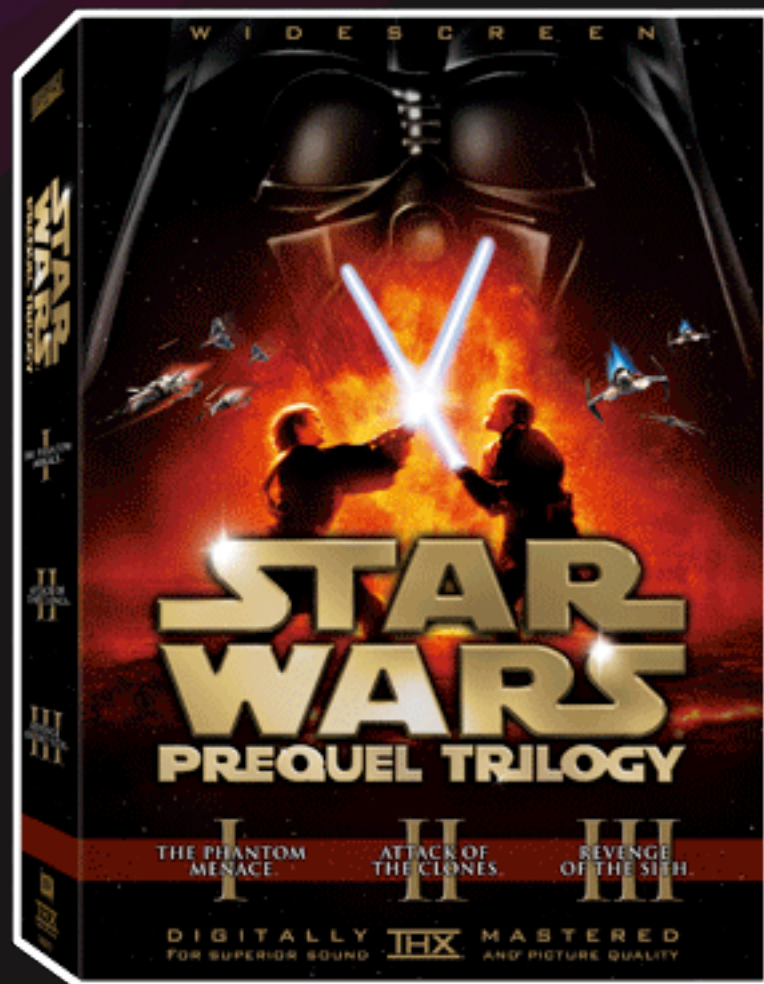




# Negative Capability in Worldbuilding

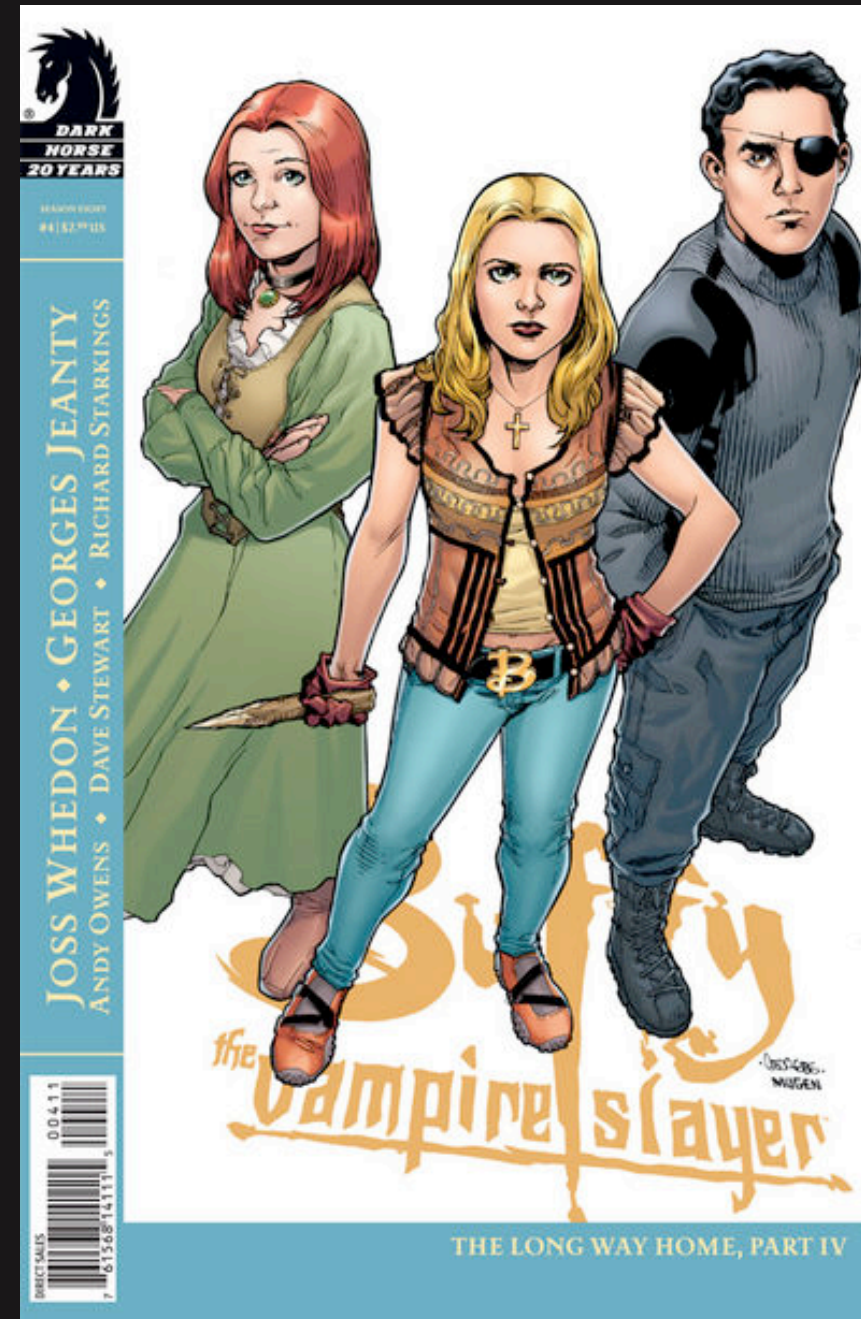
- Make references to the ancient history of your storyworld to set up prequels
- Make references to prophecies and far-flung future events to set up sequels
- Make passing references to distant lands to set up parallel narratives
- Use alien languages, artwork, and culture for audiences to interpret imaginatively

# Answer Questions With New Questions



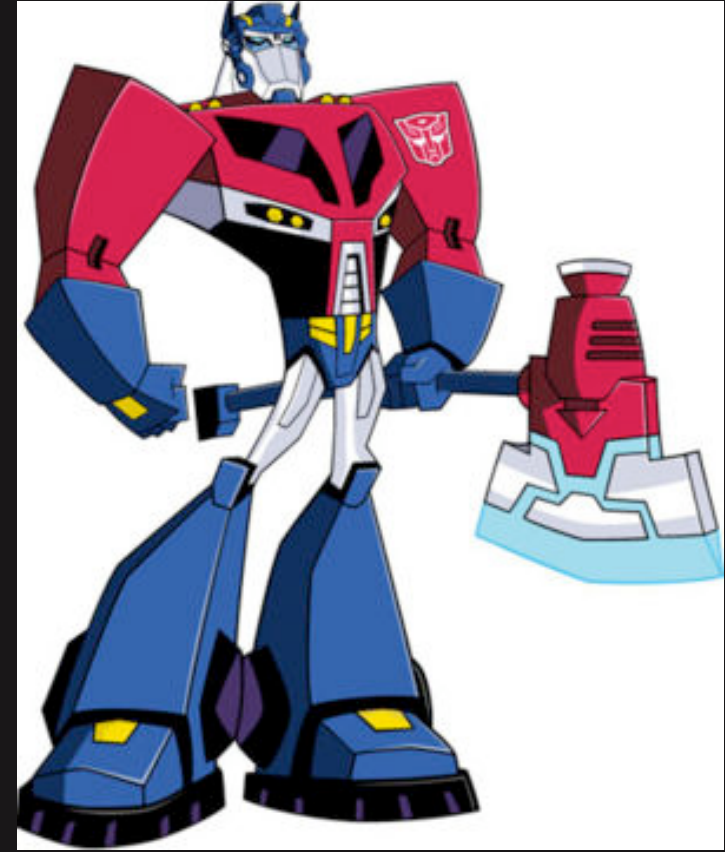


# Further Thought: Directions of Reduced Figuration





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# Further Thought: Unique Affordances of Media Types

- What are the unique characteristics (or *affordances*) of each media form, and how can they best be utilized in a transmedia narrative?
- How do these affordances help determine the best *order* in which to deploy the components of a transmedia franchise?
- How does this differ between a massive corporate franchise and an indie property?







# TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING

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