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Transmedia Storyworld as Narrative Engine. The Case of Vampire: The Masquerade

Mundo Narrativo Transmídia como Mecanismo Narrativo. O caso do Vampiro: A Máscara

Ciancia, M.

Polimi - Politecnico di Milano

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ABSTRACT: The vampire has become a fascinating character whose distribution and consumption have been reinvigorated over the past two decades thanks to series and sagas such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Twilight* and *True Blood*. Conceived from the same myth, these three cross-platform products develop transmedia narratives in which well-designed storyworlds, distributed across digital and analogue channels, allow the engagement of the viewer, user and player. This chapter proposes a case study of *Vampire: The Masquerade* as a transmedia narrative. A product that combines a tabletop role-playing game (RPG), live-action role-playing game (LARP), card game, television series and two computer games. The chapter aims to highlight the role of the narrative world as narrative engine. The chapter provides reflections on how the cross-platform distribution of storyworlds, characterised by performative aspects, can foster audience participation and exploit the commercial success of a product.

KEYWORDS: storyworld, transmedia storyworld, narrative system, audience engagement, LARP

RESUMO: A personagem do vampiro tornou-se num ícone fascinante devido à distribuição e consumo de conteúdos que foram fortalecidos nas últimas duas décadas, através de séries e sagas tais como *Buffy*, *a Caça-Vampiros*, *Crepúsculo* e *Sangue Fresco*. Concebidos com base no mesmo mito, estes três produtos multi-plataforma criam narrativas transmídia, nas quais contextos da história bem desenhados, cuja distribuição é feita através de canais digitais e analógicos, permitem o desenvolvimento do espetador, utilizador e jogador. Este capítulo propõe o estudo de caso do *Vampiro: A Máscara* como narrativa transmídia. Um produto que combina um jogo de mesa de interpretação de papéis (RPG), um jogo de ação ao vivo de interpretação de papéis (LARP), um jogo de cartas, uma série de televisão e dois jogos de computador. O capítulo tem como objetivo destacar o papel do mundo narrativo como mecanismo narrativo. O capítulo permite refletir de que forma a distribuição do contexto da história entre plataformas caracterizada por aspetos performativos, pode promover a participação do público e explorar o sucesso comercial de um produto.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: mundo narrativo, mundo narrativo transmídia, mecanismo narrativo, participação do público, LARP.

1. Introduction

‘But how much tape do you have with you?’ asked the vampire, turning now so the boy could see his profile. ‘Enough for the story of a life?’ (Rice, 1976, p. 3).

The vampire myth can be traced as far back as the dawn of humanity, haunting the folklore and literature of almost all cultures, all with all their own representation of vampires. Since the biblical character of Lilith—Adam’s first wife, depicted as queen and mother of the vampire race in Jewish mythology—stories of vampirism that have been created and renewed throughout the centuries, to finally arrive in our contemporary mediascape (Appadurai, 1990).

In its journey throughout cultures and history, the vampire has become a fascinating and mysterious character whose consumption has recently been reinvigorated thanks to the contemporary media scenario, in which cross-platform distribution, in the form of crossmedia and transmedia systems, have exploited the dissemination of the ‘transmedia vampire’, allowing audiences to immerse themselves in the vampire’s ‘underworld’ (Bacon, 2014).

This chapter begins from the assumption that transmedia design is a discipline at the intersection of media studies and design culture: a phenomenon that allows the audience to enter the storyworld created, thanks to modern technological developments and changes in media habits (Ciancia, 2018). Following this assumption, this chapter presents a description of *Vampire: The Masquerade* as a transmedia narrative, considering the following core points: first, how the vampire myth has been reinvigorated through cross-platform distribution according to the new forms of consumption, and second, a well-designed storyworld can foster the audience engagement.

The first part of the chapter describes the processes that have brought the vampire myth its great literary and cultural success, as a result of literature review

and desktop research in the fields of media studies. The section titled 'Folklore vs Fiction' focuses on the way vampire stories have shaped our imagination. The section begins by considering the root of the vampire myth and traces this myth through adaptations and translations across different types of media. The principal cause was the transformation of *Dracula* into a transnarrative character (Wolf, 2012). That is, *Dracula* himself in *Bram Stoker's Dracula* by Francis Ford Coppola (1992) stated, 'I have crossed oceans of time to find you'. The section titled 'The Dark Screen: From Literary Cycle to Television Series' focuses on the adaptation of the vampire myth to the small screen (television and online distribution), and analyses how two cross-platform products—*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Whedon, 1997–2003) and *True Blood* (Ball, 2008–2014)—develop transmedia narratives in which storyworlds distributed across digital and analogue channels allow the engagement of the viewer, user and player (TEDx Talks, 2010).

The second part of the chapter argues the importance of a well-designed storyworld in fostering audience participation, and consequently enabling commercial exploitation of a product. This second part attempts to establish a deep analysis of the world-making process through the literature review, desktop research and the case-study method. In consideration of this argument, the section titled 'I Want to Be a Vampire!' proposes the case study of *Vampire: The Masquerade* as a transmedia narrative in which the performative aspects of the role-playing game (RPG) enhance audience engagement through a product that is characterised by cross-platform distribution, combining RPG, live-action role-playing (LARP) game, card game, television series and two computer games (*Vampire: The Masquerade—Redemption*, 2000 and *Vampire: The Masquerade—Bloodlines*, 2004).

2. Folklore vs Fiction

Given that legends of vampires have existed for millennia, this section does not aim to focus on the vampire of folklore, but describes the evolution of the vampire character from the nineteenth century. The focus is on the reinvention of the undead character in the modern era, supported by the dissemination of content across several channels.

In the book *Vampires, Burial, and Death: Folklore and Reality* (1988), Barber explains that if a 'typical vampire of folklore, not fiction, were to come to your house this Halloween, you might open the door to encounter a plump Slavic fellow with long fingernails and a stubby beard, his mouth and left eye open, his face ruddy and swollen. He wears informal attire—in fact, a linen shroud—and he looks for all the world like a dishevelled peasant. If you did not recognise him, it is because you expected—as would most people today—a tall, elegant gentleman in a black cloak. But that would be the vampire of fiction, a figure derived from the vampires of folklore but now bearing precious little resemblance to them' (Barber, 1988, p. 2).

This short excerpt underlines how the figure of the vampire in the popular imagination is very different from the collective image of the undead character created throughout the mediascape. The vampire's representation to which we are now accustomed is derived from the nineteenth century: in fact, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, doctors, philosophers and theologians were the most active participants and disseminators of the vampire myth; it was only from the nineteenth century that poets, movie directors, and people in the world of the entertainment began to deal with the vampire (Rauch, 2012, p. 33), shaping the representations of the undead until coming to the contemporary character we have found distributed across different media over the past two decades.

The presence of the vampire character within the collective image and media scenario is persistent, and deeply embedded (Evangelisti, p. 8). Over the centuries, the vampire has become a widespread and feared presence thanks to folklore and superstition, but it is through the character of *Dracula*, born from Bram Stoker's pen, that the vampire becomes a true icon (Beresford, 2008).

To examine media representation and cross-platform distribution in relation to the vampire myth, it is necessary to describe the principal channels involved in the process of adapting the vampire's mythology, that is, literature and cinematic media.

There are four written works that have contributed to transforming vampire literature into a genre that has inspired many theatrical and filmmaking adaptations. The first is *The Vampyre* written in 1819 by John William Polidori. This is a short work of fiction that was able to bring the character of the vampire—the noble Lord Ruthven—to the modern world (Pezzini & Tintori, 2008, p. 49). The second is *Varney the Vampire* (also known as *Feast of Blood*), a serialised novel published between 1845 and 1847 as a series of pamphlets (known as 'penny dreadfuls') written by James Malcom Rymen and Thomas Peckett Prest. This second text is an important literary work in relation to narrative structure and distribution (a series of weekly chapters), and its depiction of a main character who despises his condition (Beresford, 2008). This depiction demonstrates an evolution of the representation of the undead that moves away from the evil stereotype coming from folklore, and moves towards evoking the sympathy of the audience for the monster. This creation of the 'sympathetic vampire' (Kane, 2006) reappears in the second half of the twentieth century with Louis de Pointe du Lac in Anne Rice's novel *Interview with the Vampire* (1976), and later with Angel in the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003), or with Bill Compton in *The Southern Vampire Mysteries* (2001–2013) written by Charlaine Harris. The third text is *Carmilla*, written by Sheridan Le Fanu in 1872. This is a novel that introduces the theme of sexuality in relation to the vampire (Beresford, 2008, p. 125). This theme is later adopted in many films of the 1970s related to the exploitation genre such as *Count Dracula* (1969) or *Vampyros Lesbos* (1970) by the Spanish filmmaker Jesús Franco (Pezzini & Tintori, 2008, pp. 459–480). The fourth pivotal work in the field of vampire literature is *Dracula* written in 1897 by Bram Stoker. *Dracula* is a renowned novel, in which Bram Stoker depicts the East from Western perspective (Rauch, 2012). For this reason, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* novel can 'be viewed as the crossover between historical vampirism and modern vampirism' (Beresford, 2008, p. 135). Moreover, given that Bram Stoker was the manager of Sir Henry Irving's theatre venue (the *Lyceum Theatre*), *Dracula* was destined to have many representations and adaptations on the stage, beginning from the first dramatic reading proposed by Bram Stoker himself even before the arrival of his masterpiece in the bookshelves (Pezzini & Tintori). Since this time, the cross-platform distribution of the vampire character has not ceased.

While many vampire adaptations have been achieved through intermedia translation (Clastellardi & De Kerckove, 2018), this chapter focuses on productions for the big and the small screens (i.e. cinema, television and online platforms). The analysis begins by examining the organisation of the media productions proposed by Pezzini and Tintori (2008) who were aiming to better understand two questions: first, how the myth of the vampire was proliferated throughout the decades, and second, how the many different adaptations affected the evolution of the representation of the undead within the collective image. Pezzini and Tintori's analysis identified four periods in the modern evolution of the vampire: the Origin Era, the Lugosi Era, the Lee Era and the Gothic Era.

The Origin Era begins in 1922 with *Nosferatu* by Friedrich W. Murnau, which is the first film adaptation of the vampire character that has been passed down to us. It was a masterpiece of German expressionism (a style of silent cinema) that proposes a representation of the vampire that deviates greatly from representations proposed in later eras. The Lugosi Era begins in 1931 with the distribution in the film theatres of Tod Browning's *Dracula* produced by *Universal Studios*, and lasts until approximately the 1950s. This was a period in which Victorian-era monsters were reinterpreted for American audiences. In the 1950s, the horror genre moved back again to Europe—the American *Universal Studios* had transferred the rights to feature the character of *Dracula* to the British film company *Hammer Film Productions*. The Lee Era begins in 1958, where the themes of mystery and horror are mixed with sexual tones, and are in colour for the first time. After a period in which audiences had begun to lose interest in the vampire genre (Beresford, 2008), the undead came back into the spotlight in 1976 with Anne Rice's novel *Interview with the Vampire*, and later in 1992 with the film *Bram Stoker's Dracula* by Francis Ford Coppola. This period leads to the Gothic Era (that begins in 1992) in which a renewed popularity of the vampire character, and the development of communication technologies that allow audience participation, contribute to the dissemination of the gothic subculture. The same years (the 1990s) in which the famous RPG *Vampire: The Masquerade* became popular. This RPG is the case study that will be examined in this chapter to discover how the undead, beginning as a transnarrative character, has become the cornerstone of transmedia narratives.

Fig. 1 — *Vampire: The Masquerade Rulebook*.

Source: Aeterna Nax, a cultural, playful, theatrical association based in Italy, aiming at promoting RPG and LARP [www.aeternanax.it]

3. The Dark Screen: From Literary Cycle to Television Series

Pezzini and Tintori's four periods of the vampire represent the evolution of the vampire character to which modern audiences have become accustomed. This character is derived from literature and cinema, and not from folklore. This transformation was enabled by authors' portrayal of the undead character who is no longer a hideous monster, but has become a fascinating hero. Löffler and Bast state that while 'vampire literature has always been considered a part of popular culture, its most recent boom, perhaps most powerfully exemplified in both its popularity and its heterogeneity by the *True Blood* franchise and the *Twilight* franchise, has proven especially productive' (Löffler & Bast, 2011, p. 2). These are projects in which cross-platform distribution allowed the flow of narrative worlds across different channels, thus increasing audience participation. As a consequence of such projects, the vampire myth was reinvigorated.

Translating stories related to the undead to television allowed the vampire myth to move from being in the cycle of literature to populating television series. Pezzini and Tintori [23] argue that while the cycle can lead the storyline to greatly deviate from the proto-film storyline, the series is a formula that—well expressed in the field of genre fiction (also referred to as 'popular fiction')—reaches its best in the television series. Pezzini and Tintori (2008) present two examples of vampire cycles: the Universal Cycle (with films distributed in the 1930s and 1940s) and the Hammer Cycle (with feature-length films distributed between the late 1950s and the 1970s). These can be considered cycles because of the presence of a transnarrative character: the vampire. Although the narratives are very different from each other, audiences can make a connection among these narratives because of the 'character's presence in multiple stories suggesting that there is more to the character than what any single story reveals' (Wolf, 2012, p. 66). The cycle formula allows the audience to identify a series of disconnected elements, such as characters with their own aims, objects and locations, as part of a consistent storyworld. That is, as part of a narrative world that does not necessarily need every detail to be explained or portrayed in each version of the story given that understanding of the story and character can be based on previous knowledge acquired by the audience in their consumption of other content. A scenario in which the audience begins to act as poachers (Jenkins, 1992), establishing a more lasting bond with the storyworlds created in the forms of the simple understanding and sharing of the narrative universe with the authors (Ryan, 2004; Ryan & Thon, 2014), up to engagement and co-creation. Wolf states that to 'some extent, literary cycles can be seen as precursors of media franchises, wherein a series of works, sometimes produced by multiple authors, features the same characters, objects, and locations' (Wolf, 2012, p. 67). Wolf's statement here refers to the literary cycle, but can be also apply to filmmaking, which is a field that plays its own important role in disseminating the vampire myth.

Analysing the transition from cycle to series allows witnessing how media production related to the vampire genre moves from the distribution of self-enclosed content (based on a transnarrative character) to the development of transmedia narratives. The following subsection focuses on two adaptations of vampire stories to television (the first from cinema and the second from literature) that have come to create large-scale and highly popular franchises: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) and *True Blood* (Ball, 2008–2014).

3.1 *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and Its Possible World: The Buffyverse

Buffy the Vampire Slayer is an American television series written by Joss Whedon and broadcast from 1997 to 2003. The television series, born from the moderate success of the 1992 comedy-horror film *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (directed by Fran Rubel Kuzui, starring Kristy Swanson, Luke Perry, Donald Sutherland and Rutger Hauer) takes up the exploits of the main character and makes it a successful television product.

The television series is set in Sunnydale, and tells the story of Buffy Summers (played by Sarah Michelle Gellar), who is a vampire hunter guided by Rupert Giles (her watcher) and helped by a group of friends, the most important of these being Willow Rosenberg and Xander Harris, to fight evil forces, represented by vampires and demons.

In its structure, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is a television series that falls somewhere between a procedural and serialised television programme. Each episode is self-contained, but contributes to the overall season-long narrative braid. In fact, the season's storyline is marked by the rise of a villain and the consequent battle to defeat him.

The innovative aspect of this television product is the distribution of official tie-in products (e.g. spin-offs, books, comics, merchandise, games and podcasts), as well as the development of content originating from fandom communities (fan fiction and fan films), leading to the creation of the so-called 'Buffyverse', the storyworld in which all the stories take place. Thus, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is an example of a transmedia narrative in which fans are engaged in the possible world (outlined by Joss Whedon), and contribute to the shaping of the storyworld itself. That is, the fans or the audience contributed to the mental construction of the narrative world that is shared between recipients and authors, and in which new storylines can be developed not only by the official authors but also by the audience. Created by fans for fans, the *Buffyverse* led to the creation and distribution of official content, and became an online Wiki

page, which is defined by its allowance of ‘any registered user to create or edit any article, so we can all work together to create a comprehensive database for Buffyverse fans’ (“Buffyverse Wiki”, 2005). It should also be noted that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* attracted significant academic attention in different fields (e.g. popular culture, media studies, sociology and women studies).

3.2 Commercial Intertextuality in *True Blood*

True Blood is an American television series created by Alan Ball and distributed from 2008 to 2014 by the cable-television channel HBO. Based on the novels by Charlaine Harris, *The Southern Vampire Mysteries*, published between 2001 and 2013, the television show describes a world in which humans and vampires have lived together since a Japanese pharmaceutical company invented a synthetic blood (the Tru Blood—which gives television series its name) that was able to meet vampires’ nutritional needs, allowing them to cohabitate with humankind after the Great Revelation.

The series is set in Bon Temps, a fictitious small town located in the north-eastern part of Louisiana. The main character is Sookie Stackhouse, a telepathic young woman who comes into contact with the supernatural world populated not only by vampires, but also by werewolves, shapeshifters, witches and fairies.

While *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* exemplifies the process of building storyworlds as the starting point of transmedia narratives, *True Blood* exemplifies how the application of a transmedia perspective can affect cross-platform distribution, empowering the promotion of the product (Hardy, 2011). The marketing campaign of *True Blood: Revelation* was developed by the Campfire advertising agency between April and September 2008 for the *True Blood* premiere of the first season on HBO (7 September 2008). For the campaign, Campfire designed an alternate-reality game, an interactive narrative experience that by merging together fiction and reality across digital and analogue channels aimed to involve hardcore fans and prospective new audiences. The immersive campaign was a great success, reaching 6.6 million viewers for its television premiere (Campfire website, n.d.).

4. I Want to Be a Vampire!

This chapter has so far described how the vampire myth and the representation of the undead have evolved through time. The discussion has demonstrated two important points. First, over the past century, cross-platform distribution has fostered the transformation of the vampire into a transnarrative character, and over the past two decades, such distribution has transformed the vampire figure into the unquestioned key player of transmedia narratives. Second, the process of building storyworld is a practice at the foundation of the transmedia phenomenon, and a practice in which complex narrative artefacts require multichannel distribution that allows the exploitation of the success of a product in relation to level of consumption and return on investment. To explore this two points in greater depth, this section aims to understand how a transmedia narrative faces the complex yet fascinating challenge of reaching a fragmented audience in the contemporary media landscape.

In some periods of its existence, the vampire myth has been strictly connected to a character actor, for example, to Bela Lugosi in the Lugosi Era and to Christopher Lee in the Lee Era. Two periods that cover a time span from the 1930s to the 1970s, and in which the themes usually associated with the vampire—mystery, horror and sensuality—are still present but are combined with the archetypal topic of the challenge between good and evil forces, remaining separated from reality. According to Coleridge’s concept of ‘willing suspension of disbelief’ (Coleridge, 1817), representations can captivate the audience, but they still remain straiten to the screen or the pages of a book. The scenario evolves, following changes in the contemporary media landscape. Although they have never been passive (de Certeau, 1984; Jenkins, 1992), in the era of digitisation and digitalisation, audiences are able to reach and manipulate a higher quantity of content. The result is an increase in the circulation of user-generated content, and an exploitation of the affordances of networks, digital channels and the organisation of audiences in real communities. The 1990s marked the beginning of the Gothic Era of the vampire myth, the period in which the breaking of the ‘fourth wall’, the invisible filter that kept reality and fiction separate, occurred. There were two principal consequences of this rupture: the stories became interactive, participatory and immersive, and the concept of the audience was usurped by the concept of the participant (Rose, 2010).

Within this media context, the RPG *Vampire: The Masquerade*, designed by Mark Rein-Hagen and distributed in 1991 by White Wolf Publishing, became popular.

The storyworld of *Vampire: The Masquerade* is referred to in RPG as a ‘World of Darkness’, which is a dark and devious version of our own world. Vampire: The Masquerade’s World of Darkness is a world of contrasts inhabited by supernatural creatures—including vampires (referred to as the ‘Kindred’) and humans. This is a gothic–punk world in which the undead are not solitary predators to be hunted, but are numerous, smart and organised into Clans and Sects. The Clan (or Bloodline) represents the vampiric ‘family’ into which the Damned was ‘embraced’: the process through which the undead are generated. There are 13 Clans, each of which is characterised by an Antediluvian founder (who are biblical monsters that descended directly from Cain’s children), mystical abilities (called ‘Disciplines’) and a weak point. The 13 Clans are *Assamites*, *Brujah*, *Followers of Set*, *Gangrel*, *Giovanni*, *Lasombra*, *Malkavians*, *Nosferatu*, *Ravnos*, *Toreador*, *Tremere*, *Tzimisce* and *Ventrue*. Moreover, to the 13 Clans are added the *Caitiffs*: vampires that are considered orphans without any support of specific characteristics because they are not part of a Clan. The second kind of organisations are the Sects, political entities to which a vampire can affiliate themselves after the Embrace, and which are characterised by a dogma and a specific aim. There are two principal Sects, and these are based on opposite attitudes: *Camarilla* and *Sabbat*. The *Camarilla* Sect maintains the Tradition (a set of customs to be respected by the Damned), and is the protector of *The Masquerade* (the First Tradition), which is ‘Thou shall not reveal thy true nature to those not of the Blood’ (White Wolf Publishing, 2011, p. 23). The *Sabbat* Sect does not respect the Tradition (particularly not *The Masquerade*), and believes that vampires must impose their rule over the world, and drive out humans (White Wolf Publishing, 2011).

In this case study, the outstanding aspect is the building of a narrative world that appears to be fantastical but reflects the real world. The particular nature of the storyworld in which *Vampire: The Masquerade* is set is that the *World of Darkness* does not appear as an alternative universe, but as an overconstruction of the real world. The game is fictional, but our ‘primary world’ (Wolf, 2012) acts as the backdrop for the stories developed by the players.

Fig. 2 — *Aeterna Nox* - First Prequel live Camarilla at Vaprio d’Adda, Italy 2014.



Source: Photo by Roberta Gialotti; Post Production by Serena Lotto

Moreover, although *Vampire: The Masquerade* began in 1991 as a tabletop RPG, over the past 28 years, it has been characterised by cross-platform distribution, fostered by a thriving community of players. In addition to the LARP game, there are several other intermedia translations: the trading-card game *Vampire: The Eternal Struggle* (1994–1995), set in the World of Darkness; the television show *Kindred: The Embraced* (1996), also based on the RPG; and two computer games released in 2000 and 2004. The first (*Vampire: The Masquerade—Redemption*) was the first game for computer to be set in the World of Darkness; the second (*Vampire: The Masquerade—Bloodlines*) allowed the player to choose between the first-person and third-person game perspective. To the two computer games is added the single-player game *Vampire: The Masquerade—Bloodlines 2* by *Paradox Interactive*, whose release date will be announced (“Paradox Interactive”, n.d.). However, the real success of *Vampire: The Masquerade* is represented by the LARP game that is configured as the interpretative experience par excellence (Giovannucci & Trenti, 2015), in which the players dress up and act as their characters. An immersive experience that allows players to completely break down the fourth wall separating them from the storyworld, and thus allowing them to become a subcreator for it (Flieger & Anderson, 2008). This process drives players not only to rely on the official material released by White Wolf over the years, but also to customise their own game sessions and run their own scenarios, beginning from the published resources. The presence of thousands of players around the world has led to the creation of official worldwide fan organisations whose main objective is to provide an increasingly immersive experience, connecting troupes located through the world, troupes such as *Mind’s Eye Society* (“Mind’s Eye Society”, n.d.) in the United States, *Worldwide Theatre Games* (“Worldwide Theatre Games”, n.d.) in the United Kingdom and *Camarilla Italia* in Italy (“Camarilla Italia”, n.d.).

Fig. 3 — First shooting session *Aeterna Nox* ‘In the Dark...Arrive’, Italy.



Source: Photo and Post Production by Stefano Panza [@stefano_opal]

5. Conclusion(s)

The human being is a ‘storytelling animal’ (Gottschal, 2012) that uses stories to shape its surroundings, stories that recount and are based on beliefs, behaviours and ethics. Gottschal states that humans are ‘creatures of story, so story touches nearly every aspect of our lives’ (Gottschal, 2012, p. 48). This understanding of the human condition explains how fiction affects change in our culture. Narrative has dominated human life throughout human history, and now more than ever, in the contemporary highly mediated world, audiences are surrounded by compelling imaginary worlds in which they can spend the time they choose exploring the narrative space. Thus, technological developments have not led to the death of stories. Narrative has in fact evolved and adapted to channel and utilise new abilities and audience media habits, empowering the social experience of consumption. People can now choose how to consume a story: alone or through a communal experience. In this context, the LARP game is an extremely immersive experience, a transmedia system in which performative aspects and audience engagement are led by the creation of a well-design storyworld. According to Gottschal (2012), LARP games are experiences of improvisation theatre in which the player acts as a character, contributing to the stories contained in the overall narration. From this perspective, LARP can be defined as an immersive narrative experience that is able to engage the audience because of the presence of a storyworld (that can contain several storylines). Wolf states that world-based franchises ‘could be extended beyond the lifespan and the experience of any individual characters, which gave them an advantage over character-based franchises’ (Wolf, 2012, p. 134). Given that imaginary worlds are by their nature transnarrative and transmedial, LARP game can be fully immersive through a well-designed narrative world (Wolf, 2012). Before the twentieth century, narrative worlds were primarily the domain of literature; however, since the 1990s, the location or space of the narrative world has evolved. Audiences have become more accustomed to filling in the gaps, and connecting distant pieces of the storyworld that are dispersed throughout several types of media representation. Thus, contemporary authors face the challenge of designing full and rich narrative spaces, leading them to the extension and expansion of a secondary world across different media because a single channel is no longer sufficient to contain them entirely.

The idea of narrative world has always entailed the active participation of audiences. This chapter highlighted how audiences were able to establish connections among disconnected products (e.g. the Universal Cycle and the Hammer Cycle), and that the principal consequence of making such connections is allowing the vampire to be a transnarrative character. Although audiences to narratives have never been passive, nor have they traditionally been able to modify represented events; rather, they have been allowed only to experience the stories vicariously through the characters. Moving to a cross-platform distribution of the imaginary world, audiences must apply a conscious effort in understanding the features and rules of the story, that is, they must go beyond the narrative gestalt (Wolf, 2012) and seek exposure to a world that lasts over time, which results in greater audience engagement and investment.

This chapter has demonstrated the figure of the vampire as a transnarrative character throughout the ages that has created transmedia narratives. The case study of *Vampire: The Masquerade* exemplifies the principle characteristics of the LARP experience, which demands that a narrative be immersive and participatory, and must be based on two elements: first, there must be a world-making process, and second, there must be cross-platform distribution. *Vampire: The Masquerade* fully respects these two elements. The secondary world (created by the authors) becomes a narrative engine for the stories created by the players, allowing players to feel a connection with the world itself. An experience that takes advantage of the world-making process, and allows for a storyworld creation (not a merely narrative) is crucial in activating the viewers', users' and players' speculative and explorative processes. However, there is a paradox inherent in the world-building process: while LARP attempts to create an increasingly immersive experience, the experience the audiences have of their primary world is increasingly mediated. Whose main consequence is the dissemination of the narrative world across multiple channels (to allow the narrative to become a transmedia storyworld) given that a single platform is no longer able to contain the complexity of the content. The intermedia translations exploited by *Vampire: The Masquerade* and the actions performed by the international fan clubs and local groups throughout the world keep the narrative space of *Vampire: The Masquerade* alive through personalisation of the content.

Commentators often decree the death of the narrative form. However, the analysis of the evolution of the forms of narrative in this chapter demonstrates that the narrative form is more alive than ever. Throughout time, narrative forms evolve and adopt other forms in response to new opportunities and audience needs. Far from removing the audience from the stories, LARP, and by extension all forms of narration based on world-building processes, immerses the audience in imaginary worlds where people can participate in meaning-making processes, and become subcreators of the narrative.

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