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3.   From Sequel to Quasi-Novelization

Splinter of the Mind's Eye and the 1970s Culture of
Transmedia Contingency

Matthew Freeman

The transmedia phenomenon is a common and perhaps all-too-familiar strategy in Hollywood's contemporary blockbuster fiction factory, so often tied up with corporate notions of brand-building, "cash nexuses,"[1] and the use of intellectual property as a "marketing assault."[2] Yet, the history of the Star Wars franchise paints a slightly different picture, one that points to a far more independent model of what is now deemed transmedia storytelling. Though the industrial history of transmedia storytelling has been traced to the dawn of the twentieth century,[3] the early construction and expansion of the Star Wars storyworld in the late 1970s encapsulates a number of the developments and—notably—challenges now associated with the telling of stories across multiple media.

This chapter uses Alan Dean Foster's *Splinter of the Mind's Eye*—a rarely discussed novel commissioned by George Lucas as a low-budget, "Plan B" sequel to 1977's *A New Hope* should that film have struggled commercially—as a lens through which to theorize the challenges faced by independent transmedia storytellers working on the New Hollywood scene of the late 1970s. This was a very different period to the conglomerate-fronted transmedia franchises that are so often privileged in transmedia scholarship.[4] The chapter builds on the work of Kristin Fast and Henrik Örnebring by emphasizing "the many disjunctions and contradictions that almost inevitably follow when extending transmedia worlds across/

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1   Jay Lemke, "Critical Analysis across Media: Games, Franchises, and the New Cultural Order." Paper presented at the *First International Conference on Critical Discourse Analysis*, Valencia, University of Valencia, May 12-14 2004.

2   David Alpert and Rick Jacobs, "Videogames and Licensing in the Hollywood Film Market." Paper presented at the *Korea Games Conferences*, Korea, October 16, 2004.

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

4   See Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006); Carlos A. Scolari, "Transmedia Storytelling: Implicit Consumers, Narrative Worlds, and Branding in Contemporary Media Production," *International Journal of Communication* 3 (2009): 586-606; Elizabeth Evans, *Transmedia Television: Audiences, New Media, and Daily Life* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

between media."[5] I argue for a similarly "contingent" understanding of transmedia storytelling by pointing to the unstable culture of contingency that characterized Lucas's transmedia world-building of the era. Establishing *Splinter of the Mind Eye* as a precedent for many of the key questions surrounding transmedia storytelling today, this chapter will delve into the central contextual factors of the 1970s Hollywood film industry, highlighting the importance of seemingly contradictory versions of filmmaking on the development of Star Wars as a transmedia storyworld. I also analyze the narrative and paratextual features of *Splinter of the Mind Eye* as a transmedia Star Wars text, teasing out relationships between levels of profitability and the conflicting transmedia potentials that those levels engendered in the late 1970s.

Characterizing Transmedia Production

Since its cinematic debut in 1977, Star Wars has grown into a vast transmedial franchise, spread out across multiple platforms including novels, magazines, comic books, video games, radio plays, and more. Luke Skywalker's heroic journey may have reached a natural conclusion upon defeating the Empire at the end of *Return of the Jedi*, but the world of Star Wars lived on for a new wave of future adventures. Industrially speaking, the models, strategies, and mechanics by which this storyworld expanded across media have also been diverse. It is therefore important to characterize the general tendencies of transmedia production. Elsewhere I have argued that different industrial configurations have characterized transmedia storytelling practices over time, emphasizing that emerging practices in modern advertising, licensing, and cross-sector industry partnerships amidst times of social change and conflict presented varied ways of building storyworlds across media.[6] Media industries are defined by ever-changing conditions and, as these conditions shifted over time, the models of transmedia storytelling have been reconfigured accordingly. Transmedia storytelling was initially theorized as "a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically

5   Kristin Fast and Henrik Örnebring, "Transmedia World-building: *The Shadow* (1931-present) and *Transformers* (1984-present)," *The International Journal of Cultural Studies* (2015): 2, accessed March 25, 2017, doi: 10.1177/1367877915605887.
6   Freeman, *Historicising Transmedia Storytelling*.

across multiple delivery channels,"[7] and, in turn, understood for the most part as a coordinated system of convergence-driven media production that establishes a "new synergy amongst media companies and industries."[8] It is indeed true that modern convergences have fortified transmedia storytelling to gain greater urgency in the present moment, as media producers now make use of a host of internal corporate interconnections and digital platforms.

However, this urgency has not necessarily resulted in a media landscape wherein stories always unfold fluently as continuities "across multiple platforms, with each medium making distinctive contributions to our understanding of the world."[9] Instead, transmedia storytelling is often a messy system of contingencies, alternatives, and reboots. Fast and Örnebring argue that, rather than limiting conceptions of transmedia storytelling to "*planned, strategic* aspects of creation," it is equally important to "emphasize the many disjunctions and contradictions that almost inevitably follow when extending transmedia worlds across/between media."[10] Here, the focus is on "the *emergent* (as opposed to planned) nature of the narrative aspects of transmediality."[11] The rationale behind Fast and Örnebring's thinking and this push to understanding transmedia storytelling in terms of the accrued characteristics that are more ad hoc/contingent than planned is based on the fact that transmedia storyworlds are often created over many years by multiple parties and with a lack of certainty over future production plans.

Although this chapter emphasizes the media-industrial period of the late 1970s, even today's industrial convergences arguably facilitate narrative expansions of storyworlds that are indeed based on more ad-hoc developments. That is to say: today's industrial convergences often breed a model of transmediality that is based on multiplicity. As Henry Jenkins puts it, a model of transmediality based on multiplicity "routinely uses alternate versions of characters or parallel universe versions of their stories to reward mastery over the source material."[12] While Jenkins is right to

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7   "'We Had So Many Stories to Tell': The Heroes Comics as Transmedia Storytelling," *Confessions of an Aca-Fan*, accessed April 14, 2016, http://henryjenkins.org/2007/12/we_had_so_many_stories_to_tell.html.

8   James Hay and Nick Couldry, "Rethinking Convergence/Culture: An Introduction," *Cultural Studies* 25:4 (2011): 473.

9   Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 336.

10   Fast and Örnebring, "Transmedia World-building," 2.

11   Fast and Örnebring, "Transmedia World-building," 2.

12   Henry Jenkins, "Transmedia 202: Further Reflections," *Confessions of an Aca-Fan*, accessed December 21, 2016, http://henryjenkins.org/2011/08/defining_transmedia_further_re.html.

classify transmedia storytelling as "entertainment for the age of media convergence,"[13] it is also fair to say that under this contemporary system of industrial convergence, transmedia storyworlds are now in the hands of so many different stakeholders, working across multiple subdivisions and subsidiaries (and farmed out to different consultancy companies and marketing agencies) that their transmedial constructions (e.g. their world-building directions, character developments, or use of given platforms) come with a sense of contingency that is dependent on profitability.

Indeed, because of the highly collaborative and hierarchical structures under which today's fast-moving media conglomerates must operate—without guaranteeing substantial profits from expensive productions—industrial convergence does not always work to extend fictional storyworlds across media as systematic story continuities so much as this model sometimes works to start and end various continuities over and over again. Jenkins acknowledges this multiplicity himself, noting that transmedia storytelling's "high level of coordination and creative control [...] is hard enough to achieve [even] across the multiple divisions of the same production team."[14] Even when today's media conglomerates revive a storyworld with great fanfare—as Time Warner did with Superman in *Superman Returns* (2006) and then again in *Man of Steel* (2013)—they are often loose echoes of older iterations.

My point, then, is a simple one. This chapter will show how differences in outlook and strategy for building transmedia worlds—either as planned creations wherein a story is systematically dispersed or as ad-hoc narrative additions based on contingency—were shaped by the industrial logics of late-1970s Hollywood, a situation that has now come full circle.

New Hollywood in the 1970s

Geoff King, in his characterization of the New Hollywood circa the late 1960s and 1970s, identifies two versions of the Hollywood film at that time.[15] The first version, the Hollywood Renaissance film, denotes a time in the American film industry's history best exemplified by the appearance and success of films such as *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), *The Graduate* (1967), and *Easy Rider* (1969). As King explains, "it is remembered as an era in which

13   Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 97.
14   Jenkins, "Transmedia 202."
15   Geoff King, *New Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2002.

Hollywood produced a relatively high number of innovative films that seemed to go beyond the confines of conventional studio fare in terms of their content and style and their existence as products of a purely commercial or corporate system."[16] It was a time when the "exploitation" films of the 1950s (biker films, youth pictures, horror, etc.) crossed over into the Hollywood mainstream as critically and commercially successful "art films, or something very like it."[17] Importantly, these Renaissance films were often characterized by initially short or limited theatrical releases, with a sense of almost uncalculated contingency over how successful such a film could become.

King's second version of the New Hollywood film is the blockbuster, a form of cinema exemplified by *Jaws* (1975) and characterized by pre-sold properties, big-budget productions, and tentpole pictures based on mass appeal.[18] The rise of the blockbuster opened up Hollywood to a "world of corporate cross-media control" and the "intensive multimedia and merchandising exploitation favored by the corporate giants that took shape in the 1980s,"[19] a mediascape from which Star Wars is often understood to have emerged.[20]

Nevertheless, rather than assessing the era of New Hollywood filmmaking as purely polarized extremes, we can understand the history of transmedia storytelling during this time, at least in the case of Star Wars, as being a complex combination of both the Renaissance and the blockbuster models. Fundamentally, both of these seemingly opposite styles transformed what was once deemed lesser or more exploitative genre fare into something else. By this, I mean the transformation of previously "independent" or "underground" genres such as the biker film into *Easy Rider* (1969), a countercultural production for a major studio, or the transformation of low-budget horror works into glossy, high-budget blockbusters such as *The Exorcist* (1973) and *The Omen* (1976). The 1970s also introduced a shift towards directorial authorship as a brand or pronounced mark of quality, as the first generation of film school-educated directors like Francis Ford Coppola, Martin Scorsese, and George Lucas rose to prominence. Both of

16   King, *New Hollywood Cinema*, 13.
17   King, *New Hollywood Cinema*, 13.
18   King, *New Hollywood Cinema*, 49-84.
19   King, *New Hollywood Cinema*, 81.
20   See Will Brooker, *Using the Force: Creativity, Community and Star Wars Fans* (New York: Continuum, 2002); William Proctor and Matthew Freeman, "'The First Step into a *Smaller* World': The Transmedia Economy of Star Wars," in *Revisiting Imaginary Worlds: A Subcreation Studies Anthology*, ed. Mark J. P. Wolf (New York: Routledge, 2016).

these factors became important to Star Wars and its transmedial sprawl in different ways, both in terms of the importance of Lucas's authorship over how the storyworld expanded across media and in terms of the growing mass appetite for science fiction in the mainstream multiplexes. Additionally, nostalgic returns to the past were culturally prominent throughout the New Hollywood era—and, as *Variety* observed in its review, *A New Hope* drew on and revived older forms of Hollywood entertainment, "including Flash Gordon serials, Errol Flynn adventures, and the family-oriented entertainment of Walt Disney."[21]

Moreover, it was the aforementioned trait of producing low-budget, word-of-mouth-driven films with limited releases—that is, a culture of contingency and uncertainty—that was as important to Star Wars's transmedial evolution as the more apparent influence of the rise of the blockbuster and its culture of planned cross-media strategization. Indeed, the early days of the Star Wars universe demonstrate a complex dialectic between these two versions of Hollywood. This understanding of transmedia storytelling as an intricate and murky dialectic between corporate strategy and low-budget contingency is exemplified by the Star Wars novel *Splinter of the Mind's Eye*.

A Product of the Times

Splinter of the Mind's Eye (hereafter *Splinter*), written by Alan Dean Foster, was published in 1978, shortly after the release of *A New Hope* a year prior. The story sees Luke and Leia crash on a swampy, foggy planet and, after a few scrapes with the locals, they end up on a quest to find the crimson Kaiburr crystal, a mysterious artifact that can focus the Force and that is also being hunted by Darth Vader. Chris Taylor asserts that *Splinter* was intended to be adapted as a low-budget sequel if the original film flopped at the box office.[22] The novel thus might be understood as a kind of fallback option if Lucas's plan for a bigger-budget sequel proved impossible to realize. In other words, *Splinter* was something of a world-building contingency, existing neither as an entirely strategic expansion of the storyworld nor as a purely ad-hoc development. Rather, it fell somewhere in between these two models, a combination of the two—either a parallel universe with alternate versions of the characters' stories or a systematic dispersal of the characters

21   Frank James, "Film Review: *Star Wars*." *Variety*, May 29, 1977.
22   Chris Taylor, *How Star Wars Conquered the Universe: The Past, Present, and Future of a Multibillion Dollar Franchise* (New York: Basic Books, 2015).

and their stories across media, depending on the ultimate profitability of the original film. Its conception can be understood as emerging partly from the "practice of generating highly successful big-budget sequels" that ascended during the rise of blockbuster cinema in the late 1970s and, simultaneously, partly out of that same era's low-budget, artful genre storytelling that also characterized publishing.[23]

Consider, for example, the tension between artful genre storytelling and commercial cross-media strategy that pervades *The English Journal*'s review of *Splinter* in 1979. As was discussed in this publication's "Books For Young Adults Book Pool" article, "science fiction books have become popular for the first time in several years," a change that is credited to the New Hollywood: "Due to the stimulation of film, we feel more readers are trying science fiction for the first time to discover that they not only understand the language, they also enjoy the action."[24] Notable in this publication's positive response to *Splinter* is the way in which its readers were said to be "pleased with the film-book continuity" ("because many students had enjoyed *Star Wars*, they were eager to follow further adventures of Luke Skywalker, Artoo Detoo and See Threepio") in a discourse that is highly typical of the logic of transmedia storytelling, but equally of the novel's more artful reflection on social and scientific issues: "Some readers felt that 'sooner or later Earth is going to deteriorate and we'll have to live elsewhere—in that type of world.'"[25] The novel was reviewed and indeed often praised on account of its integration of both the Renaissance and the blockbuster models of New Hollywood cinema, suggesting that the workings of transmedia storytelling at the time revolved around an amalgamation of the New Hollywood's two seemingly opposite faces.

Sequel or Quasi-Novelization?

Of course, the novel's industrial positioning as a product of low-budget contingencies, corporate blockbusters, and cross-media strategy raises problems in terms of how one categorizes and conceptualizes its status as a transmedia extension. In some ways, *Splinter* offers a systematic dispersal of

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23 Peter Krämer, *The New Hollywood: From Bonnie and Clyde to Star Wars* (London: Wallflower Press, 2005), 92.

24 Michael Carlsen, et al., "Books For Young Adults Book Pool," *The English Journal* 3:2 (1979): 77.

25 Carlsen, et al., "Books for Young Adults," 77.

characters, stories, and a world across film and literature. Such an intention was emphasized on the book's cover: "From the further adventures of Luke Skywalker, based on the characters and situations created by George Lucas." As its author Alan Dean Foster also declares, the book's plot—revolving as it does around Luke and Leia heading for a planet that they want to recruit for the Rebel Alliance—"could have been filmed cheaply and then you stick it between Episode IV and V."[26] *Splinter* can therefore be categorized as a transmedia *sequel* in that sense—that is, telling the further adventures of the film's characters via another medium. Foster partly reinforces this intention himself in interview:

> My contract was originally for a novelization of the first film and then a sequel book, because George—being a student of Disney, I'm sure—wanted more material in case the movie was a success. He wanted something out there that the hoped-for fans would be able to enjoy while he was busy making the second film.[27]

However, as much as Foster suggests here that *Splinter* was to work as a kind of transmedia sequel between the first film and the hoped-for second film, he also hints at both the novel's ad-hoc status as a contingency plan and, in other ways, as a kind of *quasi-novelization*. Examined through this particular lens, *Splinter* can be understood as expanding the Star Wars storyworld across media by way of transmedia adaptation. Moving away from Jenkins's, Elizabeth Evans's, and indeed Mark J.P. Wolf's assumptions that adaptation and transmedia storytelling are binaries—with the former being about "translation" and the latter about "growth"[28]—Christy Dena's argument that adaptation is a process that can be transmedial in nature is useful for our purposes. Linda Hutcheon argues that "fans of films enjoy their novelizations because they provide insights into the characters' thought processes and more details about their background."[29] Building on this idea, Dena—in reference to Powell and Pressburger's novelization of *The Red Shoes* (1948)—argues that,

26   Paul Kerr, "Star Wars Author Alan Dean Foster on Splinter of the Mind's Eye, The Sequel That Might Have Been" *Yahoo Movies*, March 16, 2015, accessed January 1, 2017, https://www.yahoo.com/movies/star-wars-splinter-of-the-minds-eye-alan-dean-113794483282.html/.

27   Kerr, "The Sequel That Might Have Been."

28   Mark J. P. Wolf, *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Subcreation* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 245-246.

29   Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 118.

While the novel closely follows the film, it also provided Powell and Press-
burger with the opportunity to add new narrative threads and to expand
upon the film's original themes and characters. They paid particular
attention to the impresario Boris Lermontov, and to the development
of the doomed relationship between Victoria Page and Julian Craster.[30]

Though it is certainly not the case that *Splinter* adds new narrative, world,
or character development to the original film and thus does not work in
the same way as Dena proposes of the relationship between films and their
novelizations here, it is possible to think of Foster's novel as a novelization of
the Star Wars world, if not of the film itself. In doing so, *Splinter* becomes a
novelization that imagines the future of what the Star Wars story could be.

In other words, the creative choices made by Lucas and by Foster when
developing *Splinter* afforded a variety of world-building possibilities. Those
various possibilities were designed according to levels of profitability and
the conflicting transmedia potentials that those levels engendered. For
instance, Foster explains that "the only restriction placed on me was that
the novel had to be filmable on a low budget. That's why I set it on a fog-
shrouded planet. A lot of the action takes place in the fog or underground,
which facilitates shooting with cheap backgrounds."[31] There is the sense of
the "ad-hoc adaptation" about *Splinter*'s creative choices—its narrative focus
driven by its suitability as a low-budget picture for the New Hollywood's
Renaissance era rather than its suitability for the pages of a novel. Similarly,
the character of Han Solo is notably omitted from the story for *Splinter*, a
decision that was enforced upon Foster by Lucas because, as Foster explains
himself, "At the time I was writing *Splinter*, Harrison Ford had not commit-
ted to any further participation in Star Wars. Hence I was specifically told
not to use the Han Solo character. And without Han, it didn't seem logical
to have Chewie in the book, either."[32] It is also noteworthy that *Splinter*
originally opened with a fairly complex space battle that forces Luke and
Leia down onto the planet of Mimban, but this was one of the revisions
made on the basis that such a scene would have been expensive to film.

In some ways, then, *Splinter* was both a transmedia sequel and a quasi-
novelization of a film that had not been made. However, in a narrative
sense, *Splinter* worked to lay the groundwork for the architecture of the

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30   Christy Dena, "Transmedia Practice: Theorising the Practice of Expressing a Fictional World
across Distinct Media and Environments" (PhD diss., University of Sydney, 2009), 153.
31   Kerr, "The Sequel That Might Have Been."
32   Kerr, "The Sequel That Might Have Been."

alternatively imagined blockbuster film sequel. While Foster claims to "have no idea" whether Lucas borrowed from his novel the idea for the iconic, imagined lightsaber confrontation between Luke and Darth Vader on Dagobah in *The Empire Strikes Back*,[33] there is the sense that the way in which Luke fights off Vader and severs his arm in the pages of that novel had a kind of reverse impact on the film that followed it. Indeed, Foster's book also presents Darth Vader leaping up in the air and shooting energy from his hands—abilities that the character and his Sith master, the Emperor, showed in later film sequels. Importantly, too, the novel's swampy, fog-shrouded planet of Mimban might have inspired the production design for Dagobah.

Conclusion

The transmediality of the Star Wars universe paints a particularly complex picture. Of course, by the time *Splinter* hit shelves in March 1978, the first Star Wars film was a phenomenon and Lucas therefore opted to take the story in a different direction for the next film. But Foster's book remains an intriguing hint at where the Star Wars franchise could have gone, had Lucas adapted the book. More to the point, *Splinter* becomes a highly use-ful lens through which to consider the history of transmedia storytelling. Elsewhere, I have shown how transmedia storytelling during the early- to mid-twentieth century occupied the emergent (as opposed to planned) as-pect of transmediality.[34] The reason for this ad-hoc formation of transmedia storytelling between 1900 and 1950 was quite simply because many of the strategies that underpinned how stories were told across media in the past were themselves emergent, with the likes of L. Frank Baum, Edgar Rice Burroughs, and DC Comics constantly reacting to new media-industrial developments.[35] In turn, I have shown in this chapter that the messiness that surrounds understandings of Foster's Star Wars novel as a transmedia product of the late 1970s emerged directly out of the dialectical relationships between two models of New Hollywood filmmaking.

In effect, the equal dominance of both the low-budget genre film with a degree of contingency over its continued success and the emerging block-buster film with its turn towards cross-media strategy worked together

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33   Kerr, "The Sequel That Might Have Been."
34   Freeman, *Historicising Transmedia Storytelling*.
35   Freeman, *Historicising Transmedia Storytelling*.

to inform the making of a Star Wars novel that encapsulated neither of those models entirely but rather parts of both. As part blockbuster strategy, *Splinter* re-engaged the Star Wars audience, strategically telling the next chapter of the story via another medium. As part low-budget contingency, it was a quasi-novelization for the future of a possible franchise, adding new ideas to a story or storyworld based on Renaissance picture budget necessities that, in this case, perhaps even worked to inform Star Wars's world-building alternatives going forward.

That being said, the progression of time did little to uncomplicate the status of Star Wars in terms of its continued transmedial organization. In the years that followed the release of both *Splinter* and the original trilogy, the films were supported by other novels, comic books, and cartoons—trans-medial additions that became part of the EU. Occupying a position within this EU, for example, was Timothy Zahn's Thrawn trilogy, a series of novels set five years after the events of *Return of the Jedi.* But despite working to expand the storyworld and build its core characters, Zahn's Thrawn trilogy was not always promoted as a transmedia story in the planned and strategic sense. A discourse of separation between film and novel was even reinforced by Lucas himself in interviews. For *Cinescape*, Lucas once remarked,

> There are two worlds here. There is my world, which is the movies, and there is this other world that has been created, which I say is the parallel universe—the licensing world of the books, games and comic books. They do not intrude on my world, which is a select period of time [...] I do not get too involved in the parallel universe.[36]

For an interview with *Starlog* magazine in 2005 Lucas reinforced this division of a "parallel world," stating bluntly of the EU stories, "I do not read that stuff. That is a different world than my world [...] They try to make their universe as consistent with mine as possible, but obviously they get enthusiastic and go off in other directions."[37] This later era of Star Wars history was typified by the building of "possible worlds"—telling tales that likely originate from some place of possible truth but ultimately without authorial authentication.[38]

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36   Qtd. in "Canon," *Wookieepedia*, accessed December 19, 2016, http://starwars.wikia.com/wiki/Canon.

37   Ian Spelling, "New Hopes," *Starlog* 337 (August 2005): 46-48.

38   Matthew Freeman, "Re-Building Transmedia Star Wars: Strategies of Branding and Un-Branding a Galaxy Far, Far Away," in *Disney's Star Wars: Forces of Production and Promotion*,

Similarly, the complexity surrounding *Splinter*'s transmedial status suggests that transmedia storytelling is not simply about either forming strategic, coherent expansions or ad-hoc additions, nor is it simply about producing binary models that can be labelled as continuity or as multiplicity. Rather, during the late 1970s at least, transmedia storytelling occurred as a complex interplay between different models of filmmaking and other related contingencies of profitability that afforded a wide range of possibilities for telling many kinds of Star Wars stories.

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