14 Creating Lara Croft

The meaning of the comic books for the *Tomb Raider* franchise

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Since the creation of Lara Croft in 1996, it seems impossible to imagine the game industry without her. Her pop-cultural impact certainly affected the gaming industry, but the expansion of her character into a whole franchise has also immortalized her through action figures, cosplay, music videos, and appearances in many other media. If you take a closer look at the franchise, you will find a number of different videogames for different gaming platforms as well as three action films, six novels, and many comic books. Shortly after the release of the very first *Tomb Raider* game in 1996, the comic book publisher Top Cow released a crossover with their own heroine Sara Pezzini aka Witchblade and Lara Croft: *Tomb Raider/Witchblade* (Turner 1997, 1998). The *Witchblade* comic books were one of Top Cow's most prominent series. As a result, something very interesting happened: Lara Croft was introduced into a new universe beyond her own games, and thus into a new storyworld. She became part of the Top Cow universe as both franchises collided. Two years later, the *Tomb Raider* received her own stand-alone comic book series. It not only focused on her adventures, but also on her personal thoughts and approach, introducing different characters and friends of hers. Later on, this would be used to create new crossovers with different Top Cow characters (e.g., *Dark Crossing* [Holland and Turner 2000a, 2000b]; *Endgame* [Rieber and Green 2003a, 2003b, 2003c; Silvestri and Tan 2003; Turner 2002c]; the Magdalena crossover [Bonny and Basaldua 2004a, 2004b, 2004c]; the Fathom/Witchblade/Tomb Raider crossover [Turner 2000, 2002a, 2002b]). And since one stand-alone comic book series apparently is not enough, another *Tomb Raider* comics series was introduced: *Tomb Raider: Journeys* (2001–2003), a series of different *Tomb Raider* stories.

This begs the question why the comic book series, of all things, is so important to this big universe with all its ongoing stories that can be played on different gaming platforms. There are different ways to approach the significance of the comic books, but there is a major difference between the comics released before and after the reboot of the *Tomb Raider* franchise in 2013. Before the reboot, the comic books served as another entry point (Jenkins 2006, 95–99) to the *Tomb Raider* franchise, which was commercially successful but also gathered its own fan base. Followers of the comic

book series were so fascinated with it that they even started their own small comic book series about all things Lara Croft. I will explore this series below, but before I do so, I will first provide an overview of the different *Tomb Raider* games and the attempt of the *Tomb Raider* creators to change the storytelling of the games to create a transmedia event within the franchise. Second, I will compare comic book and game, and the transition of the comic books within the franchise, following different perspectives on the performance of Lara Croft. An additional perspective on the franchise, especially on learning and educational potentials of the current game series, follows. Finally, I will take a closer look at the essential functions that the comic book fulfills and then end with concluding remarks. Overall, this chapter seeks to show the significance of different media and the role of fans and the appropriation of original content (see Deterding 2009). Furthermore, it aims to demonstrate how different aspects of storytelling work in a more mixed style in early *Tomb Raider* games and adaptations in comparison to the comic books of the 2013 reboot, in which the storyworld is closer to the used media. I will argue that the reboot invests the story and background of Lara Croft with a more credible character and a deeper storytelling.

Overview

After six stand-alone games and the commercial failure of *Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness* in 2003, a “small” reboot of the series was in order: *Tomb Raider: Legend* (2006), *Tomb Raider: Anniversary* (2007) (a remake of the very first *Tomb Raider* game), and the concluding part of the trilogy, *Tomb Raider: Underworld* (2008) were produced by a new developer. These reboots signified a new direction for the franchise by placing greater emphasis on the storytelling and the main character. Lara Croft was no longer just a badass adventurous grave robber but also someone who lost her parents at a young age (the death of her parents is an established, unalterable event within the *Tomb Raider* franchise, maybe comparable to the death of Uncle Ben in the Spider-Man universe and the murder of Bruce Wayne’s parents). The focus on her mother’s death ultimately amounted to trite conversations, dramatic actions, and forced facial expressions. Something similar was attempted with the sixth game of the series, *Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness*. A new look, a new way to tell a story, even a male counterpart. Also, *Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness* marked the first attempt at creating a transmedia event with books (and in some way with a comic book arc) that bridged the game story after her apparent death in *Tomb Raider IV: The Last Revelation* (1999).

None of this really contributed to the storytelling in the games. Kennedy points out for the first-generation games: “The creation and maintenance of a fairly complex backstory for Lara is an attempt to secure control of her virtual identity—she is a commercial product after all. Providing Lara with a (fairly) plausible history gives her some ontological coherence and

helps to enhance the immersion of the player in the *Tomb Raider* world, and abets the identification with Lara” (2002, n.p.). The comic books, however, were quite literally a different story. The medium offers enough time to tell a story, to develop reasonable characters and stage credible character developments. The storytelling in the comic books offers not just a stage for Lara Croft and the different authors and artists with a vision for this strong female character; it also offers something for the fans, who can enjoy new stories told in a different medium. Of course, it is also important for videogames to tell a story, and it matters just as much how the story is told. But there are many more mechanisms and approaches in videogames that have to succeed, especially on a ludological level (Juul 2005). There are, for instance, the gameplay, the expectations of the publisher, and the audience’s expectations of the games, as well as a bug-free environment. In short: It is quite a task to entertain consumers in such a complex medium. The comic books offer an opportunity to shape a flat character that originally lacked in personality but has extraordinary physical abilities into a rounded character with a credible and believable life (while also living through exciting adventures besides representing a hero’s saga; Campbell 1990). Moreover, every medium has a different role and use of mechanics, as Thon points out in regard of subjective representation: “Despite differences with regard to the mediality of conventionally distinct media and the idiosyncrasies of individual narrative representations, however, the subjective representation of consciousness can be considered a genuinely transmedial phenomenon in that it is realized across wide range of media, each with its own specific limitations and affordances” (2014, 67). Thus, it is no surprise that there is a different approach for the videogames and the comic books.

What worked well for the first and second series of *Tomb Raider* games also worked for the 2013 *Tomb Raider* reboot. The comic books are no longer published by Top Cow Comics, but by Dark Horse Comics. Now, Lara’s adventures take place in her own universe, not in two different universes. This time, the comic books also fulfill a different role: They tell the story between the games.

Learning and educational potentials

Over the past few years, Lara Croft and *Tomb Raider* have often been the focus of academic research, for example in gender studies (Deuber-Mankowsky 2005; Kennedy 2002). But there are other aspects of the franchise worth looking at. From a broader perspective, it is fair to say that videogames can create learning and educational potentials (Fromme and Könitz 2014). The same holds true for comic books. A strong indicator for this can be what Fromme describes as irritations: the creation of an alienating distance that disrupts the immersion. In videogames, such irritations allow for the use of world-references and self-references, such as references to other media worlds (Fromme 2006, 193). The *Tomb Raider* franchise

includes not only videogames, but also three films and a multitude of comics, in all of which Lara Croft is interpreted and contextualized over and over. This happens either through different actresses or, in the case of the comics, through different artists who interpret Lara Croft in their respective art style (and also through the stories told by the authors). Indeed, there are some memorable characteristics and items that seem to be an integral part of Lara Croft across all the different representations: the iconic dual pistols, the holsters, the brown hot pants with a greenish top, and the long brown ponytail.¹ Other media references can be found even beyond the videogames. For example, in *Shadow of the Tomb Raider* (2018), it is possible to play the avatar with skins from the old *Tomb Raider* videogames (*Tomb Raider* [1996]; *Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness*). Alicia Vikander's Lara Croft makes a reference to Angelina Jolie's Lara Croft as she is interested in two of the iconic pistols from the first film (and wears the same braid as Jolie's Lara), and newspaper articles in *Rise of the Tomb Raider* (2015) describe events from the comic book series. Here, it becomes obvious how compressed the storyworld truly is. The game can serve as a starting point, but every now and then there are references to franchise spin-offs. These irritations enable the consumers to constantly scrutinize the character of Lara Croft and her personal development, and they also allow them to examine how realistically and authentically she is portrayed. In addition, there are many Easter eggs, such as Lara quoting her other iterations, for example, "I think I am not strong enough," a statement from Lara Croft in *Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness*. These ironic, sometimes self-ironic, references can, in turn, be taken up again and cause more irritations (Fromme 2006, 199).² But we see references beyond Lara's own universe: Every now and then you can find a dead Indiana Jones (in *Tomb Raider IV: The Last Revelation*) or Nathan Drake from the *Uncharted* series (2007–2017) (in *Lara Croft and the Guardian of Light* [2010]). These characters share the same game genre.³

If you take a formal look at the videogames and comic books, it becomes clear that these media often reflect on their own genres and forms. Hereafter, I will focus on the latest reboot of the series, both the videogame and the comic books, in order to explore the complexity of the transmedia franchise.

Jörissen and Marotzki have worked out four dimensions to analyze educational potentials, referring to questions raised by Immanuel Kant: What can I know? What should I do? What may I hope? What is the human being? The first dimension, the dimension of knowledge (What can I know?), refers to a critical contemplation of the limits and conditions of knowledge (Jörissen and Marotzki 2009, 31), but also to factual knowledge and orienting knowledge as well as intermedia and self-references (Fromme and Könitz 2014). The second dimension, the dimension of action (What should I do?), exposes us to ethical and moral questions concerning our own or someone else's actions (Jörissen and Marotzki 2009, 31). The third dimension, the dimension of limits, refers to things that cannot be explained reasonably, for example, the loss of control or the breaking of the fourth wall

in media (Fromme and Könitz 2014). In the final dimension, everything comes together: the dimension of biography or identity (What is the human being?) and reflecting on one's identity (Jörissen and Marotzki 2009, 31). It is the most complex dimension because all previous questions lead to this question.

A closer look at these dimensions indicates their applicability to the latest reboot of *Tomb Raider* and foregrounds interesting connections to the comic books. Over the course of the game, Lara Croft finds different everyday objects (Fromme and Könitz 2014, 254). When she enters a village, she stumbles over artifacts left behind by the former inhabitants, such as toys or photographs. She may also find antique boxes, old swords, or jewelry, like old jade necklaces. Not all of these objects stem from the same time period, but the game menu reveals more details about them. In the inventory, Lara comments on all the objects. She names and identifies them and sorts them into different time periods. Thus, you can reimage who lived there, identify enemies, and gain factual knowledge about the different time periods. All of this relates to the dimension of knowledge (Jörissen and Marotzki 2009, 31). It also shows a difference compared to the other *Tomb Raider* eras because the artifacts never took such a big role as describing the object within the games.

The dimension of action is present throughout the game and the whole game series because Lara gets into dangerous, life-threatening situations and has to make decisions to survive. At certain points, the gamer can take action, mostly in the form of quick-time events in which the player has a short moment to decide how to proceed in a given situation. Likewise, the decision to save her friends and colleagues is a complex task. Throughout the whole series, Lara has to make challenging decisions, and these decisions build upon each other. For example, in every game of the series, an apocalypse has to be stopped to save the world. In *Tomb Raider* (2013), set on an island, the world is threatened by an ancient weather goddess named Himiko; in *Rise of the Tomb Raider*, Lara has to prevent someone from finding the promise of immortality; and in the final part of the new *Tomb Raider* trilogy, *Shadow of the Tomb Raider*, Lara herself accidentally starts the countdown to the apocalypse by stealing a precious Maya artifact. The dimension of limits is tied strongly to the dimension of action because the main themes revolve around issues like survival or the loss of control and how to deal with it. The portrayal of these limits is often very emotional and brutal, but also crucial to the staging—one of the reasons the game has been rated PG18.⁴ At the very beginning of *Tomb Raider* (2013), Lara encounters a mystical Oni-Warrior who will kill her if the player does not react fast enough. Every possible cause of death has its own special cutscene. But if Lara finds a way out of the encounter, she has to crawl through a cave filled with blood and bones—a rather well-made illustration of the dimension of limits.

All of these dimensions lead to the dimension of biography, for which they form the basis. Throughout the series, Lara Croft is established as a

young adult, traumatized by all of her life-threatening experiences. The omnipresent antagonist of the videogame series is an organization named Trinity, which she has to face in every game. Another focus of the series is the research into her father's death and heritage, which she has to reprocess time and again. This topic is explored through flashback scenes, but also through a level in *Shadow of the Tomb Raider*. A playable flashback scene designed as a whole game level is experienced from the perspective of a very young Lara Croft. At the end of the *Rise of the Tomb Raider* game, the player can decide the fate of the main antagonist (after the final battle). At this point, the antagonist reveals that he is the reason for her father's death. After that, the player can decide to leave the antagonist for dead or to kill him. On the one hand, her father's biography is in the focus of the protagonist because Lara Croft wants to reveal the truth behind her father's death. On the other hand, she also wants to know more because she is constantly comparing herself to him. This leads to a narrative construction of biography throughout the series (Marotzki 2004, 368). These four dimensions are not only present in the videogames; they can appear in the comic books, albeit not in an interactive form.

Furthermore, the revelation of biographical aspects in the comics happens from a different point of view than in the videogame series. One could almost consider the comic books a kind of diary or log book (Krüger 1999, 14–18; Marotzki 1999, 114–120). They offer a glimpse into the reasons behind certain actions of a character because the comic books themselves contain references to the videogames. References to oneself and the world can be transferred into videogames (Fromme and Könitz 2014). Comic books can enhance these references or serve as separate starting points. In the latter case, they would also serve as independent entry points into the story (Jenkins 2006, 111).

Significance of the comic books

After this overview of the franchise and the different connections between the individual elements and media, I turn to the significance of the comic books (see Figure 14.1). Altogether there are three essential functions that the comic books fulfill: extension of the storyworld, fan-generated content, and closure of gaps in the videogames/storyworld (Jenkins 2006; Ryan 2013).

Extension of the storyworld

As already mentioned, the franchise extends to many different levels of storytelling in different media, including the first run of the comic book series from 1999 to 2005, with 50 issues, a 12-issue comic book miniseries called *Tomb Raider: Journeys*, and miscellaneous specials and crossovers. The first comic book series ended two years after the commercial disaster of *Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness*.⁵ Interestingly, the series addresses events

Figure 14.1 Overview of the *Tomb Raider* franchise.

from the videogame storyline for the first time. Many of the characters, locations, and concepts are transferred to the comic books. In contrast to *Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness*, the comic book series does not end at this point but continues to tell the story beyond the videogame's end until the last issue two years later. This represents the biggest extension of the *Tomb Raider* franchise because *Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness* is an open-ended story and writers can simply go on and keep following the tale of Lara Croft.

As of yet, there are no signs that the comic book series is running out of material. Little signs and cues in the videogame series and tutorial levels as well as certain objects hint at even more adventures Lara might have experienced. All around Lara Croft's virtual house, we find a multitude of exhibited artifacts one might conclude are souvenirs from still unknown travels. For example, you can find the Ark of the Covenant in the first *Tomb Raider* game (maybe also an Indiana Jones Easter egg), located in the main hall, and there is also a trophy room with figures of Egyptian cats or human figures. In *Tomb Raider: Anniversary*, there is also a trophy room with Greek flagstones behind glass and relics from different cultures and different areas of the world. In the hidden trophy room in *Tomb Raider III: Adventures of Lara Croft* (1998), you can find floating objects, also from her past adventures (e.g., the Dagger of Xiang from *Tomb Raider II* [1997]) and still unknown objects.

The comic book series offers the reader an intimate insight into the character by telling the stories from a first-person perspective. In a way, they document and explore the biography and identity of Lara Croft—a kind of illustrated, accompanying diary. In the videogames, the player can merely guess at her emotions through physical or verbal cues designed to help the player (nods, “I can’t do this,” “aahh”). The sound design also grants the player some insights (Fromme and Könitz 2014, 267). Special sounds indicate an unlocked secret, such as finding additional hidden objects, like the jade dragons in *Tomb Raider II*, or the discovery of hidden medi-packs. Furthermore, the relationships between characters are only explained through cutscenes or flashbacks. In *Tomb Raider* (2013), Lara reflects on herself and her own actions at campfires/saving points and after special game stages. In the comic book series, she interacts directly with other characters. Thus, the other characters receive more reasonable background stories and can introduce themselves. Alternatively, a narrator introduces the characters or Lara Croft herself comments on characters or actions in text panels, speech bubbles, or thought bubbles (McCloud 2005). This form of speech that has been converted into text (Dittmar 2011, 97–98) shows how Lara thinks about the characters. Through this form it is also possible to make conclusions about the content.⁶ The text panels and bubbles also offer more room to interpret and analyze, and they can be seen as a cross-cutting to the comic books. As mentioned above, the comic book series follows its own storyline with hints to or parables from the videogame series, as exemplified

by *Tomb Raider* #26 to #28 (Rieber and Green 2003a, 2003b, 2003c). After the events of *Tomb Raider IV: The Last Revelation*, the story finishes with an open ending, regardless of whether the protagonist survived her destiny in Egypt or not. Lara also dies in the comic book series, but her resurrection differs from the one in the videogame series.

The comic book series starts the way it ends: as a complementary story to the videogames or a collection of stories of Lara Croft as the Tomb Raider. The ongoing series was published two months after the release of *Tomb Raider IV: The Last Revelation*. The fourth videogame marks the temporary end of the heroine, but only in her digital incarnation. The ongoing comic book series has its own point of view, its own story, and a lot more background information. It also introduces old and new characters. The role of a “storyteller” was also introduced in the game *Tomb Raider V: Chronicles* (2000), following *Tomb Raider IV: The Last Revelation*. Some friends of Lara Croft’s come together after her funeral and share stories about her adventures. The two recurring devices of the videogame/narrative style are: the death of Lara Croft and the retrospective narrative of the life of Lara Croft.⁷

In the Top Cow universe, Lara Croft’s death is staged as a big crossover event. It had such a big impact that three comic book series were affected by it, most notably the *Witchblade* series, in which the main protagonist Sara Pezzini has to deal with the loss of a friend and her own feelings of guilt, remembering shared experiences and reflecting on their friendship. The two devices mentioned above are processed and concluded in the *Tomb Raider* series. Lara Croft’s death is staged in an Egyptian twilight zone where she has to justify her grave robbery (see parallel to *Tomb Raider IV: The Last Revelation*). This is another way of explaining how Lara Croft survived her own death and how she was resurrected from the dead.

The second start of the series in 2006, when Crystal Dynamics published *Tomb Raider: Legend*, *Tomb Raider: Anniversary*, and *Tomb Raider: Underworld*, was not accompanied by a second run of the comic book series, even though it had been planned by Crystal Dynamics.⁸ With the reboot of the *Tomb Raider* franchise and Lara Croft’s origin story, a new comic book series, this time published by Dark Horse Comics, emerged. In this series, Lara Croft has just started her archaeological career, and the player accompanies her on her first big expedition. In the videogames before the reboot, Lara Croft already had an origin story, but now we can accompany her on her way to becoming the Tomb Raider—a development mirrored in the videogame titles: *Tomb Raider*, *Rise of the Tomb Raider*, and *Shadow of the Tomb Raider*. The comic books are now tied more closely to the videogames than in the previous run before the reboot, but they also fulfill the role of a first-person narrative focusing on Lara Croft’s point of view and on how the characters relate to each other. In addition, there is more room to discuss and reflect on the grief about a lost or dead character.

Fan-generated content

Successful major videogame franchises with strong and recognizable characters often go hand in hand with fan-generated content. There are, for example, many *Tomb Raider* fansites around the world, complete with huge fan communities that are often interconnected. The official *Tomb Raider* website also offers a community board to exchange with other fans and community managers. In addition, it is possible to register your own fansite. These communities offer the possibility to share fan art and fan content, but there is also fan art beyond the “official” boards.

Notably, many big *Tomb Raider* fan communities do not exist anymore or have officially been closed by the admins (e.g., *PlanetLara.com*). Reasons for the closure of the sites differ, but most of the time it is due to other projects or other commitments.⁹ Nevertheless, there is a large amount of fan art on the world wide web. The artist community DeviantArt lists 78,007 entries with the tag “Tomb Raider,” 77,554 entries with the tag “Lara Croft,” and roundabout 3,100 entries tagged as “tomb raider comic.” A vast number of entries can also be found on *Tumblr* (also the official *Tomb Raider Blog*, which awards an annual community prize), and the Google image search reveals a multitude of search results on thematic fan art and community art. There is not only much art for the videogame series, but also fan art relating to the comic book series: fan-generated art for story arcs, new colorizations of sketches, copies and imitations of a certain art style or a certain artist in the comic book series, but also cosplays of the different interpretations of Lara Croft from the comic book series. If you also consider fan fiction, the world’s largest database for fan fiction, fanfiction.net, lists 500 entries on Lara Croft, among them some ongoing comics stories. But within the *Tomb Raider* community, something very extraordinary happened: the creation of an original, fan-generated comic book series called *Tales of Lara Croft* (2003–2007). This artistic, participatory project arose in collaboration with fans, artists, and the publisher of the *Tomb Raider* videogames.

To take a closer look at this phenomenon, one can apply one of the seven “principles of transmedia storytelling,” namely the principle of performance: “The ability of transmedia extensions to lead to fan produced performances that can become part of the transmedia narrative itself. Some performances are invited by the creator while others are not; fans actively search for sites of potential performance” (Jenkins 2010, n.p.). *Tales of Lara Croft* was a non-profit project that distributed copies of the comics through a now closed fan site (*PlanetLara.com*). Fans created their own little stories around Lara Croft. These were not just tales about and with the action heroine, but also stories about how fans discovered the fandom, what they thought about the strong female lead character, and what *Tomb Raider* and Lara Croft meant to them. It is a reflection on being a fan, packed into fan fiction stories paired with fan art (and thus, first attempts at professionalization).

Closure of gaps in the videogames/storyworld

The fan-generated content (not only in *Tales of Lara Croft*) tries to close some gaps in the storyworld, but it does so from a fan perspective. The most recent comics series is closer to the videogames than ever before. The storyworld is more open, offers many entry points, and, thus, lots of room for interpretation, thanks to the multitude of different authors who generate stories. After the reboot of the game series, this was planned differently. The start of the reboot did not coincide with the first videogame *Tomb Raider* (2013); the first published medium was actually the comic book *Tomb Raider: The Beginning* (Pratchett and Mutti 2013). This is the first entry point after the new start of the franchise, and it is set immediately before the beginning of the videogame's story. All the crew members and new characters are introduced, and Lara Croft ponders the current events. Lara now stays in her very own universe, and the comic books thus serve a different purpose: They show what happens in-between the games and therefore serve as new entry points. They are not just fillers to bridge the time between publications but fulfill an important role in the franchise in regard to development of the characters (if you want to get a clue what happens in between and around the game). The game does work for itself, and in most aspects, this also works for the comic books if you are familiar with Lara Croft and *Tomb Raider*.

In *Tomb Raider* (2013), Lara and a group of friends and scientists are stranded on a forgotten island, which is also the focus of the videogame. In the two subsequent games, of all her island friends, only Jonah is left to accompany Lara and support her on her adventures. If you want to know what happened between the 2013 game and the 2015 follow-up, you have to read the comic books. They explore every character's background in greater detail and deal with the aftermath of the events in the videogames. Another hint at the more straightforward storytelling can be found via the authors of the comic book stories. One of them is Rhianna Pratchett, who also wrote the story for *Tomb Raider* (2013). The same authors who contribute to the videogame series also write stories for the comic book series and therefore have a better overview over the entire series/franchise and narrative. How well everything comes together becomes apparent at the end of the reboot trilogy: One month after the publication of the final videogame *Shadow of the Tomb Raider*, the associated comic book run was also finalized and the last issue published (see Figure 14.2).

Conclusion

This chapter sought to provide a better overview of and insight into the *Tomb Raider* franchise, detailing how the comic books fit into this franchise and determining what constitutes their significance for transmedia storytelling. It offers but a glimpse of this phenomenon because I left out some comic

Figure 14.2 Overview of the *Tomb Raider* reboot franchise.

book series focusing on Lara Croft, among them *Tomb Raider: Journeys* and the *Tomb Raider* spin-off *Lara Croft and the Frozen Omen* (Bechko and Carnero 2015)—the comic book series based on *Lara Croft and the Guardian of Light* and *Lara Croft and the Temple of Osiris* (2014). In addition, we have to consider the significance of other spin-offs such as *Lara Croft Go* (2015), the handheld series (*Tomb Raider: Curse of the Sword* [2001] and *Tomb Raider: The Prophecy* [2002]), and the *Tomb Raider* films (*Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* [2001], *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider: The Cradle of Life* [2003], and *Tomb Raider* [2018]) as well as their position within the franchise. The comic books establish many connections to the films and videogames—in many cases, it is the storyline (the story arc of the *Angel of Darkness* comics [Bonny and Daniel 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2003d] or the *Tomb Raider* reboot arc)—and they impact the franchise, for example, with the death of Lara Croft and its adaptation in different media (the “Endgame” story arc in the *Tomb Raider* comics). The importance of the character Lara Croft and the series shapes the “Endgame” story arc (Turner 2002c) because the events in this arc impact a whole comics universe. Furthermore, out of this story arc arises a whole new comic book series in the Top Cow universe (Silvestri and Tan 2003).

During the first run of the comic book series set in the Top Cow universe, the storyworld Lara Croft inhabits is very open and rather loosely defined, but it marks a very remarkable entry point for the franchise. Every story is relevant for the storyworld (Ryan 2013, 92). Lara Croft is a strong female lead character who experiences adventures all around the world. The authors of the stories have much creative space to tell these stories, even though the first main volume (1999–2005) follows a straightforward storyline. They are supported by one-shots (e.g., Avery and Tan 2004; Bonny and Daniel 2004; Jurgens and Jusko 2005) or by the more independent storytelling in *Tomb Raider: Journeys*. Within the stories, one can find references to the videogames and the films; this happens most notably through the visual representation of Lara Croft (clothes, hairstyle, choice of weapons). At a second glance, even more can be discovered: Easter eggs, hints at events in the videogames, or artifacts.

After the reboot of *Tomb Raider*, the *Tomb Raider* universe reinvented itself, and all of the stories are interwoven and connected to each other. The new *Tomb Raider* universe “starts” with the comic book *Tomb Raider: The Beginning*, an introduction to the main game. All other media are interconnected and tell a chronological story if read and/or played in the right order. At the end of the comic books, the videogame picks up the story almost gapless, and the same goes for the novels that were published (Abnett and Vincent 2014; Perry 2018). This continuous narrative style is paralleled by the producers and writers of the videogames series, such as Rhianna Pratchett, who are also working on different media within the franchise. As a result, the storyworld is more tightly woven together. There are fewer possibilities for plot holes than in the pre-reboot storyworld.

However, the diversity of the characters and the storytelling is, to an extent, lost. On the other hand, there is a gain in the credibility of the franchise and the events that happen in this world. Most significantly, the comic books are the glue of the franchise. They present new stories, fill in the gaps, and create a space for fan desires as well as new entry points to the transmedia world(-building).

Notes

- 1 This not only holds true for the different media in the franchise but is also acknowledged by the fan community. A look at the cosplayers reveals a range of different representations of Lara Croft. Cosplays of this character receive so much positive reception that the publisher even released instructions on how to do a proper Lara Croft cosplay (with information on the fabric, color, materials, etc., for instance at <https://cdn.sqexeu.com/files/tombraider/files/GearGuide.pdf>; accessed 31 January 2020).
- 2 Other irritations named by Fromme are references to different media worlds, ironic play with meanings, breaking the fourth wall, performance of gameworld and interface-elements, and paradoxical expressions of NPCs (Fromme 2006, 193–199).
- 3 Indiana Jones also served as model for the creation of Lara Croft, while the game adapts elements of the Indiana Jones movies: “As we already know, Lara Croft was modeled after a Hollywood figure. Listening to the way Jeremy Heath-Smith tells it, the transformation of Indiana Jones into Lara Croft was simply due to concerns that similarities between a male protagonist and his Hollywood prototype ‘could cause trouble with George Lucas’” (Deuber-Mankowsky 2005, 23). As Rauscher (2012, 167) points out, she does not only adapt elements of Indiana Jones but also of James Bond.
- 4 According to most computer game rating systems: PEGI 18 Years (European Union), USK 18 (Germany), ESRB: Mature 17+ (USA)—except *Rise of the Tomb Raider* and *Shadow of the Tomb Raider* with a USK 16 (Germany).
- 5 The long-awaited game after the apparent death of Lara Croft tried to explain everything through transmedia events, including three books (Gardner 2004; Knight 2004; Resnick 2003) to bridge the story between *Tomb Raider IV: The Last Revelation* and *Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness* (and in some way the comic book series). They tried to create a more serious and darker version of *Tomb Raider* but failed because most of the audience ignored the additional story material (Rauscher 2011, 175). Another reason was a very buggy game with confusing gameplay.
- 6 As Thon points out: “Contemporary graphic novels may be considered a multi-modal medium with strong visual emphasis. Comparable to both feature films and computer games, however, they use not only pictorial but also various verbal elements representing characters’ speech and thought in speech or thought bubbles as part of the verbal-pictorial mode of representation that prototypically defines their mediality as well as representing narratorial voices or the ‘inner voice’ of characters through the use of narration boxes or thought boxes typically located above or below the verbal pictorial representation in the panel body” (Thon 2014, 78).

- 7 Or, in other words, the narrative style as flashback, as Bordwell and Thompson write: “An alteration of *story* order in which the *plot* moves back to show events that have taken place earlier than ones already shown” (2017, 515, original emphases; see also Bordwell and Thompson 2017, 79).
- 8 In 2007, it was planned to publish a new *Tomb Raider* comics series about the second *Tomb Raider* videogame reboot (*Tomb Raider: Legend*, *Tomb Raider: Anniversary*, *Tomb Raider: Underworld*), but it was canceled due to licensing problems.
- 9 This was one of many reasons for the closure of *PlanetLara.com*. If you follow the thread on the *Tomb Raider* forums you can also see the significance of this special Lara Croft fanpage. They delivered a lot of fan-generated content like fan art but also official *Tomb Raider* game materials such as game music, soundtracks, official wallpapers, or interviews with the developers of the *Tomb Raider* games (www.tombraiderforums.com/showthread.php?t=171288; accessed 31 January 2020).

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