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Transfictionality, Thetic Space, and Doctrinal Transtexts:

The Procedural Expansion of Gor in *Second Life*'s Gorean Role-playing Games

Christophe Duret

Imaginary worlds created through a multitude of works in different media have become a mainstay in contemporary popular culture.¹ Those works are linked together by a relation called “transfictionality,” a phenomenon “by which two or more texts, whether from the same author or not, jointly relate to the same fiction, either by repetition of characters, extension of a prior plot or sharing of a fictional universe.”² The *Assassin's Creed* franchise, for example, represents a transfiction based on several media, which, in their combination, make up a transmedia story (a transfictional story told through many texts belonging to many media). In this franchise, twenty-two games contribute to a shared universe, along with twenty-eight comics, three animated short films, a movie, eight novels, and an encyclopedia.³ Aside from these canonical texts, a vast body of fan fictions contributes to the transmedia story.⁴ However, *Assassin's Creed* is merely one example of transfictionality with video games at their core. On the other hand, there are numerous cases where video games occupy a more marginal place within transmedia stories: those that complement the universes of *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *The Matrix*, *Conan the Barbarian*, *Batman*, and so on. If we add the crossovers and fanfictions to

these universes, the transfictionalization cases involving video games are practically endless.

Transmedia works tend to emerge around emblematic characters, from Lara Croft and Conan the Barbarian to the hundreds of superheroes from the DC and Marvel Universes. But in some cases, the fictional world matters more than its heroes. Think, for instance, of Vice City, Liberty City, San Andreas, and Los Santos in the *Grand Theft Auto* franchise (Rockstar, 1997–2013), of Silent Hill from the eponymous games (Konami, 1999–2014), and of the Azeroth of *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard, 2004).

Finally, there are fictional worlds where what matters the most is the ethos—the social organization, mores, customs, etc.—which ensures these worlds' success and motivates their transfictional expansion. This is the case of Gor, the fictive planet depicted in the 34 planetary romance novels from John Norman's *The Chronicles of Gor* series (1966–2016).⁵

In this chapter, I will examine the expansion of Gor's diegesis through *Second Life*'s Gorean role-playing games. I will show that this process mobilizes the procedural qualities of the video game medium in order to translate the ethos of Gor. Next to the mythos and topos, ethos is one of the key ingredients to a convincing transmedia world, Lisbeth Klastrup and Susana Tosca have argued.⁶ Using the concept of procedural expansion, I will describe how Gorean role-playing games' creators proceduralize this world, its customs, and its social organization, but also a more abstract and structuring principle, namely the "law of natural order."

My theoretical propositions are based on ongoing ethnographic research conducted since June 2012. In this project, I have analyzed documents produced by members of the *Second Life* Gorean community which reflect their gaming practices. I have predominantly worked from a corpus of nearly 5,000 posts taken from seventy topics published on *The Gorean Forums* (<http://www.goreanforums.net/>) and the *Gor-SL* forums (<http://www.gor-sl.com/>) in order to reconstruct the formal structure and the Gorean diegesis of the Gorean games. I have also consulted player blogs, screenshots, video captures of game sessions, online encyclopedias, amateur journals devoted to Gorean games, and the first eight novels of the *Chronicles of Gor* series.

World-making, spatiality, and procedurality

According to Henry Jenkins, numerous contemporary narratives—in fantasy and science fiction in particular—are neither based on an individual character nor a specific plot, but rather on a world.⁷ These narratives (e.g. *The Matrix*,

Harry Potter, *Star Wars*) constitute an *art of world-making*. Indeed, Jenkins points out, the artists create environments that cannot be completely explored in a single work or by a single medium; the world exceeds the work in which it is depicted, calling for a transfictional or transmedial way of telling stories.

More generally, numerous fantasy, horror, science fiction, and adventure works fall into the category of “spatial stories” and “world-making,” as they focus on detailed, autonomous imaginary worlds.⁸ According to Michael Saler, imaginary worlds of fiction of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries constitute the first virtual worlds as they are “persistently available . . . , collectively inhabited and obsessively elaborated by readers.”⁹ These past imaginary worlds shared some important characteristics with the worlds of contemporary transmedia narratives. Both imagine realistic and coherent worlds accompanied by scholarly apparatuses such as footnotes, glossaries, appendices, maps, and tables. Already these precursors of contemporary transmedia storytelling had their readers participate in a collective exercise of world-building. Indeed, readers and viewers still “inhabit” a number of these worlds (e.g. *Conan’s* Hyborian Age, Middle-Earth in *The Lord of the Rings*, and *Sherlock Holmes’* Victorian London) today.

Most game studies scholars agree on the fact that spatiality constitutes the main feature of video games. As Stephan Günzel has pointed out, “space is the one category that has come to be accepted as the central issue of game studies.”¹⁰ Likewise, Jenkins has stressed that “[g]ame designers don’t simply tell stories; they design worlds and sculpt spaces.”¹¹ In such a context, video games allow for “environmental storytelling” and appear as “storyworlds.”¹² Accordingly, video games constitute a particularly well-suited medium to serve transmedia projects where world-making takes a central role.

In processes of adaptation, video games recreate the heterocosm—“an ‘other world’ or cosmos, complete, of course, with the stuff of a story—settings, characters, events, and situations”—of the adapted work(s) in question, Linda Hutcheon has argued.¹³ However, she restricts this adaptation to the physical and material dimensions of the adapted heterocosm. To illustrate that point, Hutcheon borrows the Cartesian opposition between *res extensa* (the extended thing, or corporeal substance) and *res cogitans* (the space of the mind, the non-physical substance of ideas). Thus, according to her, the strength of video games is the simulation of what belongs to the *res extensa*, unlike the novel, for instance, which is an effective medium in the art of depicting the *res cogitans* (e.g. the thoughts of the characters).

In opposition to Hutcheon, I would like to suggest that many video games allegorically project the space of the mind onto the physical space. For example, in *Max Payne 3* (Rockstar, 2012), Hoboken’s (New Jersey) and São

Paulo's urban landscapes are composed of decrepit, sinister, miserable, and abandoned places and represented through image-processing techniques which accentuate these qualities (underexposure, shades). These aesthetic qualities dramatize the mental space of Max Payne, a depressed former cop who is mournful and suffers from alcoholism and a painkiller addiction.

Not only are video games competent in the art of expressing mental states, but they are also effective in the exposition of abstract principles, as Gonzalo Frasca and Ian Bogost have demonstrated. According to Bogost, procedurality is a "set of constraints that create possibility spaces, which can be explored through play."¹⁴ The term "procedural rhetoric" therefore refers to the expression of persuasive messages and abstract ideas articulated in a procedural form, the demonstration being made through the use of simulation. If "each medium does what it does best" in the context of transmedia storytelling, the principal contribution of video games resides both in the *res extensa* and the *res cogitans*—in the simulation of a concrete world and the expression of immaterial components, such as mental states and ideas.¹⁵ Therefore, video games might reach their full potential in the simulation of a world ruled by organizing principles governed by an apparent thesis. Their function would remain to expand transmedia worlds by translating their political, economic, philosophical, social, religious, and/or ethical principles procedurally, like *Star Wars* does with Ralph Waldo Emerson's transcendentalism, *BioShock* (Irrational Games, 2007) with Ayn Rand's objectivism, and the *Left Behind* tetralogy (2006–11) with dispensationalist doctrine.¹⁶

Transfictionality and procedural expansion

To highlight the convergence between world simulation and the proceduralization of those structuring principles that give the world its internal coherence, I will propose the concept of procedural expansion, which is a modality of transfictionality. I will retain the concept of expansion from the typology of transfictions developed by Richard Saint-Gelais (expansion, version, crossover/annexation, and capture).¹⁷ Expansion develops the fiction of a work on the diegetic level or, in the words of Marie-Laure Ryan,

extends the scope of the original storyworld by adding more existents to it, by turning secondary characters into the heroes of the story they experience, by having characters visit new regions of the storyworld, and by prolonging the time covered by the original story through prequels and sequels.¹⁸

Time, characters, and space in a storyworld (or a diegesis, a heterocosm, etc.) thus constitute the components to which new diegetic elements are added. However, as the Gorean role-playing games demonstrate, in the videoludic context, there are many examples where the characters and stories of the original storyworld do not constitute relevant objects of the expansion process, or where those characters and stories represent epiphenomena with respect to the new spaces and diegetic events generated by this process. During the processes of transfictionalization, videoludic expansions generally focus on the spatial rather than temporal dimension. Thus, these expansions offer a setting in which new characters will evolve and from where new diegetic events will emerge. The role of the game's formal structure is to enable and frame these events. The formal structure is a set of procedures (rules and game mechanics) and parameters that govern the actions of the players and simulate the diegesis, giving it consistency and playability. In other words, the diegetic expansion of a fictional world works through the mediation of a formal structure (its procedures and rules), turning it into what I propose to label "procedural expansion."

Procedural expansion involves at least two texts: a chronologically earlier text and a later text, which share a storyworld. There is therefore a hypertextual relationship between these texts, to the extent where one grafted onto the other constitutes the transformation: "hypertextuality refers to any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the *hypertext*) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary."¹⁹ For example, the video game *Salammbô* (Cryo, 2003) is a hypertext of the graphic novel by Philippe Druillet and the novel by Gustave Flaubert, both of which constitute the video game's hypotext. I adopt the hypotext/hypertext pair in order to identify the position of anteriority the first term maintains with respect to the second as part of the process of procedural expansion. This position implies no dissymmetrical, but rather a reciprocal relationship. Therefore, if the hypertext implicates diegetic data from the hypotext, in a transfictional context, the hypotext implicates, reciprocally (and retrospectively), those from the hypertext.

A definition of the procedural expansion concept might thus read: Procedural expansion is the extension of the diegesis of a hypotext by means of its video game hypertext. This extension requires proceduralization, a process by which the laws and characteristics ensuring consistency and originality of the hypotext's diegesis are transposed into the formal structure of the hypertext in the form of rules, parameters, and technical devices that make this diegesis playable. In this context, the ludic interaction of the players, which is governed by the formal structure, generates events which contribute to the expansion of the diegesis. This expansion belongs neither to the

hypotext nor the hypertext; it exists in the transfictional relationship that binds one to the other in their common diegesis. In other words, the diegesis represents the sum of the hypertext and hypotext's diegetic data (to which other hypertexts may add diegetic data).

Procedural expansion overcomes the duality put forward by Hutcheon between *res extensa* and *res cogitans*, since the proceduralization rules are physical, social, economic, political, ethical, and philosophical phenomena at the same time. The concept of procedural expansion should not be confused with its neighbor—procedural adaptation, defined as “the concept of taking a text from another medium and modeling it as a computer simulation.”²⁰ As defined previously, procedural adaptation intersects with procedural expansion—as long as “adaptation” is taken in a sense close to Hutcheon, which includes both diegetic equivalence and diegetic augmentation. However, the way Matthew Weise uses this concept is a matter of proceduralizing generic conventions. In this narrower definition, procedural adaptation does not account for the relationship of transfictionalization which connects two works, but rather an architextual relationship. In other words, “the entire set of general or transcendental categories—types of discourse, modes of enunciation, literary genres—from which emerges a singular text.”²¹ Indeed, in this particular case, “archiprocedurality” might be the more appropriate term.

Following the concept of procedural rhetoric, the formal structure of video games supports a particular point of view and thus a thesis. In this sense, a game's formal structure is accompanied by an abstract space that I refer to as “thetic space.” This space maps the field of possibilities opened up by the formal structure of the game (e.g., relations, behaviors, or gratifications allowed by this structure in accordance with a given thesis). However, a thetic space does not exist in a vacuum, because every thesis works along with a doctrinal intertext, as Susan Rubin Suleiman has demonstrated.²² In this context, one may, for instance, think of James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis's Gaia hypothesis and of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's concept of the noosphere as doctrinal intertexts to Isaac Asimov's *Foundation's Edge* (1982) and *Foundation and Earth* (1986) novels. We may also think of Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981) as an intertext to the Wachowski brothers' *Matrix* franchise. Consequently, according to the procedural expansion concept, we should not exclusively focus on the diegetic augmentation generated by the actualization of the rules, but also consider the configuration of the game's thetic space with the help of the doctrinal intertext to which it refers. Therefore, the thesis and its doctrinal intertext are indirectly inscribed in the diegesis through diegetic events emerging from the encounter between the players and the formal structure.

Procedural expansion and Gorean role-playing games

To highlight the convergence between world simulation and proceduralization, I will now turn to the case of *Second Life*'s Gorean role-playing games. The aim of this section is to examine how the games extend the Gorean diegesis procedurally in the context of transfictionality, using the concept of thetic space. *Second Life*'s Gorean role-playing games share a transfictional relationship with John Norman's *Chronicles of Gor*. These games are participatory role-playing games in a virtual environment (PRPG-VEs). These PRPG-VEs are multiplayer games in which players take on roles through avatars in multi-user virtual environments (MUVES), such as *Second Life*. PRPG-VEs are examples of participatory culture insofar as the players contribute to the development of the scripts, the accessories, the formal structure, the virtual architecture, and the diegesis.²³ The Gorean PRPG-VEs are made up of a myriad of interconnected sims, each of which simulates a part of the planet Gor—sometimes a city or a village, sometimes a region.²⁴

The setting for the Gorean PRPG-VEs is the planet Gor, which has been summed up by Tjarda Sixma as a "barbaric planet . . . where men are bold masters and women are either frigid mistresses or sexual slaves."²⁵ The inhabitants of the planet Gor are artificially maintained in a pre-modern state of civilization through religious prohibition preventing technological development, as decreed by the Priest-Kings, their gods. The result is a pseudo-medieval society in which the mechanisms of evolution are unrestrained. This society relies on a doctrine called the "law of natural order" inspired by a Darwinian doctrinal intertext. The law of natural order promotes the emergence of a race of warriors and justifies the prevalence of slavery in Gorean society. It also promotes a kind of secular complementarianism where women find fulfillment in being submissive to men. In John Norman's words, slavery is depicted in his novels as "a celebration of the glory of nature and the reality of dimorphic sexuality . . . Ultimately, of course, the male is the master, and the female is the slave."²⁶ In the framework of Gorean PRPG-VEs, the law of natural order both structures the gaming experience and divides the community of players and sims into two camps.

On the one hand, there are players who want to remain faithful to the novels of Norman in their role-play. They call themselves "By the Books" or "BtB." On the other hand, there are players who distance themselves from the content of the novels and introduce additional elements. These are the "Gor Evolved" or "GE." As outlined in *A Brief Guide to Gorean Roleplay in Second Life* (2010), the conflict between the two groups mainly concerns the

role of women in Gorean PRPG-VEs according to the law of natural order.²⁷ The BtB claim that in the context of the planet Gor, women are not equal to men and cannot be permitted to carry weapons. The GE, on the other hand, maintain that the Goreans may have evolved socially to the point where women are considered equal to men and are thus capable of fighting alongside them. Therefore, the BtB defend the law of natural order, whereas GE contest it.

The Gorean PRPG-VEs (hypertext) appear as a procedural expansion of the *Chronicles* (hypotext). Following Christy Dena, this expansion might be considered an *intercompositional* rather than *intracompositional* process, since the expansion is not orchestrated by John Norman himself but rather by other authors and outside of a unified project.²⁸ While the *Chronicles* places great emphasis on the adventures of Tarl Cabot (the novels' protagonist and narrator), equal attention is also paid to Gor itself, which is described in great detail. Moreover, Gor partially distances itself from its hero when the *Chronicles* propose stories told by new characters; stories from which he is absent or where he plays only a peripheral role.

During the expansion, the autonomy of Gor increases with respect to the stories and characters. I explored the background of thirty Gorean sims published in the "Gorean SIMs in Second Life" section of the *Gor-SL* forum.²⁹ Of these, only three (*The Empire of Ar*, *Imperial Ar*, and *Village of Rorus*) explicitly tie their chronologies into the plots of the *Chronicles*. The remaining sims have their own histories and geographies, independent of the events told in the novels. Furthermore, only two of the novels' protagonists are mentioned (Marlenus and Pa-Kur) in the thirty backgrounds of the sims, both of which are anchored in the diegetic events of the novels.

Accordingly, a question emerges: What components do the Gorean PRPG-VEs retain from the *Chronicles*? While the backgrounds are minimal in terms of the temporal information they provide, they are rather detailed when it comes to describing their landscapes and geographical locations. For example, Hochburg is described as "a mountain fortress city nestled in the southern ranges of the Voltai Mountains. Landlocked except for small river tributaries used for trade and transportation," while Angrfjord is "a village located in the Northern Region of Gor, some 50 or so pasangs [a Gorean unit measurement] from Axe Fjord on the coast." Interestingly, the geographical locations of the sims refer to places mentioned and described in the *Chronicles*.

The economic, political, demographic, and cultural conditions of Gorean places are also part of the characteristics highlighted in the background. For example, the village of Eteocles has "a strong militaristic culture backed by a strong agricultural base [culture and economy]." The mentality of the people is also taken into consideration. For instance, Hochburg "is characterized by

fierce, dominant men; cunning, silver-tongued free women; and slaves, eager to serve in the most pleasing ways.”

In addition to the backgrounds, I investigated three websites devoted to the *Chronicles* which serve as reference points for players during their role-play: *The Gorean Cave (TGC)*, *Luther’s Gorean Educational Scrolls (LGES)*, and *Gorean Online Dictionary (GOD)*.³⁰ *TGC* offers citations retrieved from the *Chronicles* and arranged by subject (264 entries), *LGES* features essays on various topics (76 essays), and *GOD* defines common terms, supported by quotations from the *Chronicles* (220 entries). Similar to the sims’ backgrounds, these websites and the categories they use provide an insight into the elements of the *Chronicles* relevant to players during the process of procedural expansion.

Using thematic analysis, I classified the various entries of these sites into seven categories: artifacts, culture, geography, history, social organization, characters, and measurement systems (see Table 12.1). I discarded entries that did not relate to the stories of the *Chronicles* or to the planet Gor. In the *artifacts* category, I included fauna and flora, everyday objects, and food. The *culture* category includes Gorean philosophy, etiquette, customs, traditions, entertainment, language, rituals, myths, and legends. The *geography* category includes the neighborhoods, villages, towns, cities, regions, and peoples of Gor, as well as the planet’s topography. *History* refers to the chronology of Gor and *social organization*—the caste system, laws, and the political organization of Gorean society. The *characters* category includes entries devoted to the characters represented in the novels. Finally, *measurement systems* includes information about distances, currencies, and units of time.

TABLE 12.1 Results of the thematic analysis of three Gorean websites

Category	Number of entries	Percentage (n = 560)
Social organization	221	39.5
Culture	155	27.7
Artifacts	108	19.3
Geography	35	6.3
Measurement systems	11	2
Characters	6	1.1
History	1	0.2

Again, the history of Gor and Gorean society is barely discussed. The entries devoted to the geography of Gor, on the other hand, are more numerous: 16 entries from 76 on *LGES*, 17 entries from 220 on *GoD* and 2 entries from 264 on *TGC*, totaling 6.3 percent of the entries across all three sites. The two largest categories are *social organization* and *culture*. Nine out of 76 entries on *LGES* relate to *social organization* category, 31 of 220 on *GoD*, and 181 of 264 on *TGC* (where 66 concern Gorean laws), thus making up 39.5 percent of the entries in total. Thirty-two out of 76 entries are devoted to the *culture* category on *LGES*, 52 entries out of 220 on *GoD* and 71 entries out of 264 on *TGC*, which means 27.7 percent of all entries belong to this category. The *artifacts* category adds another 19.3%, while *measurement systems* account for 2 percent of the entries, and *characters* just a tad above 1 percent.

Apparently, the stories are not the main attraction of the *Chronicles*. Instead, the Gorean PRPG-VEs focus on the qualities that make Gor a habitable world—its geography, the concrete dimensions of Gorean daily life (i.e., artifacts) and, above all, its culture and social organization. In so doing, Gorean PRPG-VEs practice the art of world-making. The references on *LGES*, *TGC*, and *GoD* emphasize the planet's geography (its towns and villages, its regions, its river networks, its topographical details, etc.) and its population, which comes with ethnological, sociological, legal, economic, philosophical, political, and psychological questions. The planet's fauna and flora are of interest, too (4.8 percent of the entries), as they serve as resources for food, transportation, clothing, and medicine. Accordingly, the concrete methods employed by Goreans to relate to their environment and to each other take center stage on the websites, which serve as kinds of user guides for the role players. The characters in the novels thus do not function as gateways to the narratives of the *Chronicles*, but rather to the world of Gor. Arguably, an incongruence between the story as a sequence of events which develops in time and the world as a space emerges here.³¹

As a result, procedural expansion exposes blind spots in Saint-Gelais's typology of expansions. His typology distinguishes between proleptic, analeptic, elliptic, and paraleptic expansions, depending on whether the diegesis expands the events forward or backwards, in the gaps left between events or parallel to events. In contrast, new diegetic events generated by the Gorean games occur without regard to a clear chronology, as the Gorean diegesis grows exactly in the moment when the Gorean PRPG-VEs' procedures are actualized.

The proceduralization of Gor is consistent with the findings above. The prohibition of technology in combination with the ancient/medieval setting stresses artifacts and devices which make fights between avatars possible. Ranged and mêlée weapons are allowed, for instance, whereas firearms are

forbidden. Devices such as the *Gorean Kraft Meter* and *G&S Role Play System* proceduralize a premodern economy by simulating and regulating barter trade, manual craft (from blacksmithing to weaving through cooking and carpentry), hunting, breeding, and farming. Formal structures simulate the behavior of various Gorean artifacts, materials, fauna, and flora (for example, how a sword is handled, the injuries it inflicts, the materials and manipulations necessary to forge it, etc.). Here, descriptions taken from the novels function as main references. They are supplemented by ancient and medieval history, which also served as inspiration for John Norman.

The games also proceduralize Gorean social organization and customs. There are rules which manage dress code, characters' behaviors according to their caste (e.g. warriors, initiates, scribes, craftsmen, farmers, and merchants), status (free or slave), and sex. For example, a warrior code is described in the *Chronicles* that gives rise to various kinds of proceduralizations, among which are the five maxims and one hundred aphorisms adopted by the *City of Jasmine* sim in order to steer its warriors' behaviors. Devices and accessories also enhance the avatars' range of actions in view of their respective caste, status, and sex. For example, scripts and accessories allow slaves to adopt different submissive positions and permit their masters to lock them in a cage or to bind, brand, and collar (enslave) them.

In sum, the transfictional relationship between the diegesis of the novels and the PRPG-VEs takes the form of a space consisting of procedures (rules, laws, codes, and traditions). These procedures govern the elements of the Gorean world (individuals, non-human beings, objects, landscape or architectural elements, etc.) and their interactions. In other words, the laws and spatial aspects of Gor players deem relevant are formalized in the transfictionalization of the *Chronicles*. Integrated into the formal structure and translated into the form of procedures, these laws and spatial characteristics give the Gorean diegesis its consistency and playability. They also frame the players' ludic interactions and allow them to extend the diegesis beyond the temporal limits of the novels. This is why the Gorean PRPG-VEs are a form of procedural expansion that each sim contributes to.

The law of natural order and the PRPG-VEs' thetic space

A considerable amount of Gor's proceduralizations are directly influenced by the doctrinal intertext (or, rather, transtext, per Genette) of natural order and draw up a thetic space in agreement (BtB) or in disagreement (GE) with it.³² I will limit my following discussion to the influence of the *Chronicles* on the

Gorean PRPG-VEs and their thetic space, in particular. Due to the differences between procedures depending on whether they are created by BtB or GE players, I will, for reasons of space, focus exclusively on the BtB thetic space.

As indicated above, the law of natural order is a fundamental aspect of Gor. For instance, in *Tarnsman of Gor* (1996), Tarl Cabot comments on the Gorean fauna:

For whatever reason, the larl [Gorean tiger] will always prefer ruining a hunt, even one involving a quarry of several animals, to allowing a given animal to move past it to freedom. Though I suppose this is purely instinctive on the larl's part, it does have the effect, over a series of generations, of weeding out animals which, if they survived, might transmit their intelligence, or perhaps their erratic running patterns, to their offspring.³³

This passage demonstrates that a Darwinian undercurrent is pervasive throughout the *Chronicles*. In addition, the law of natural order informs Gorean society. Only the strongest warriors survive, while the prohibition of technology removes the key cultural factor which could undermine the mechanisms of evolution from the equation. Tarl Cabot explains the ban on wearing armor in the following manner:

A possible hypothesis to explain this is that the Priest-Kings may have wished war to be a biologically selective process in which the weaker and slower perish and fail to reproduce themselves. This might account for the relatively primitive weapons allowed to the Men Below the Mountains. On Gor it was not the case that a cavern-chested toothpick could close a switch and devastate an army.³⁴

Moreover, the dominant/submissive relationships linking Gorean men and women are seen as a biological fact. Women who accept this “natural” order will find satisfaction and fulfillment in their life, while those who reject it will experience frustration. Notably, the *Chronicles* communicate this thesis by proposing a euphoric narrative where proud and rebellious women are enslaved and find happiness in the hands of a beloved master.³⁵

In the context of the games, the law of natural order has ludic dimensions, as well. Indeed, regarding this doctrine, women are deemed too physically weak to handle weapons and occupy the role of warriors. BtB players follow this interpretation, but GE argues that since the *Chronicles* depict female warrior clans, such as Panthers and Talunas, female characters may be warriors in Gorean PRPG-VEs. John Norman has repeatedly supported the idea of natural order in interviews and open letters, stating:

There are no “female warriors” on Gor. Gor is on the whole an honest, male-dominated realistic world . . . There are panther girls, and talunas [tribes consisting of female warriors living in the forest], on Gor. They are unhappy, frustrated, disturbed women, half[-]alienated from their sex. They tend to run in dangerous feline packs. Once captured and subdued[,] it is said they make excellent slaves. “Bring me into the collar if you can!” . . . Ms. Conan the Barbarian does not belong in the Gorean world.³⁶

In short, the natural order assigns clear social positions to women and men: the strongest men enslave or eliminate the weakest men; women, naturally weaker, have a biological drive toward submission, which is compatible with men’s dominance, with the latter acting as their protectors. As slaves, women are men’s properties. As free women, they are placed under men’s tutelage and live under the constant threat of being enslaved during enemies’ raids or as a result of inappropriate behaviors.

The BtB part of the Gorean thetic space is structured around three main sets of procedures concerning fighting, bodies, and behaviors, which all have large-scale effects on female characters. Indeed, the female body is framed by a series of rules and scripts that vary according to the character’s status (free woman or slave). Even free, women cannot freely dispose of their bodies. Thus, warriors of a sim such as *City of Treve* reserve the right to capture and enslave by force any foreign woman within the boundaries of their territory: “The City of Treve is a Gorean Sim: It is a Force Collar, Kill, and Capture Zone . . . We are raiders, mercenaries and only survive by what we take and steal. THAT includes Free Women not of Treve.” The rules remain the same for free women who venture outdoors without a male escort. Slaves, on the other hand, are explicitly considered commodities, such as in the *Ivar’s Landfall* sim, where “bondmaids can be purchased, given as prize or traded as private bonds.”

A strict dress code distinguishes free women from slaves. In the *Ironhall* sim, female slaves may only wear simple (and skimpy) kirtles or tunics (see Figure 12.1). In addition, they must wear a collar at all times. Corsets, dancing silks, jewelry other than earrings, shoes, furs, and cloaks are forbidden. Any violation of these rules results in corporal punishment, possibly even death. Free women are not allowed to show cleavage or wear transparent undershirts; they are not allowed to have their arms exposed and their hair down; they may not wear skirts above the ankle and no slinky tight gowns. In BtB sims, it is customary to dress free women with robes of concealment and to cover their faces with veils (see Figure 12.2). In certain sims, this custom is formalized in an explicit rule, as in the *Tem-Wood* sim, where “Free Woman [sic] have to dress concealed. A woman showing naked legs or belly may be taken into

FIGURE 12.1 *Slave dressed in a tunic. Screenshot from Second Life (Linden Lab, 2003). Source: Elenni Llewellyn, <http://www.wishpot.com/item.aspx?wid=13974209>.*

custody, it's a punishable offense. If repeated she may be enslaved . . . The veil is a legal requirement in Tem-Wood."

Slaves' bodies are also ruled by scripts and scripted accessories. The latter define the actions of which they are the subject or object. They allow the slave to adopt a multitude of submissive positions, in accordance with the *Chronicles*, or to devote themselves to her bonds (e.g. cleaning, cooking, bar tending, table service). Other scripts allow the master to punish his slave or to have sexual intercourse with her. Numerous accessories are dedicated to punishment, coercion, branding, and binding, from whips to chains through medieval stocks, cells, and branding irons. Indeed, various skins (graphical customizations) simulate marks of physical violence on the avatar's body.

FIGURE 12.2 Free woman dressed in a robe of concealment. Screenshot from Second Life (Lindon Lab). Source: ViGo Creations, <http://www.gor-sl.com/index.php?topic=1157.msg9769>.

Female characters' behaviors are governed by many sets of rules that limit their range of actions and reinforce the unbalanced power relationship between men and women. Thus, the *Landa* sim commands any free woman obedience to her father, her free companion (husband), or her protector. The men are responsible for her public behavior. Free women of *Landa* "are expected to conduct themselves with a level of decorum in public, worthy of their position as free women." Quite a few inappropriate behaviors may result in collaring, such as public displays of lust, vagrancy, prostitution, dressing or dancing like a slave in public, gestures of submission before a free man, public nudity, and repeated public drunkenness. This code of conduct clearly distinguishes between free women and slaves' respective statuses. It

demonstrates the ease with which the former may fall in the latter category, moving from obedience to male authority to a condition of mere object without any rights.

The slaves' code of conduct primarily concerns interactions with free people, as in the *Ironhall* sim, where "[s]laves are not allowed to strike, or make appearance or threat of striking, a Free." In the *Landa* sim, an "[a]bsolute obedience [is required,] without any argument or displeasing attitude." On the level of language, slaves of the *Ironhall* sim "are to address all men as 'Jarl,' all woman as 'Mistress,' or by their other approved title or position . . . [and they] do not have the right to argue, disagree or contradict a Free." In the *Landa* sim, a "slave is to speak in third person." Disobedience to these codes of conduct does not, strictly speaking, contravene the games' rules. In other words, disobeying these rules is not a matter of cheating, but a matter of diegetic rules.³⁷ However, disobedience may result in ludic consequences, such as a change in status (from free woman to slave) or state (from life to death) of a character, or the application of new procedures (punishment, binding, collaring, etc.).

Concerning the procedures governing fights, women are limited to the role of patients, whereas men are assigned to the role of agents. Capturing women from the opposite sim takes place in a system of gratification managed by the formal structure. The disempowerment of women is supported by rules prohibiting or restricting the use of weapons (e.g., daggers, hairpins, as in the *Ivar's Landfall* sim). The ban on weapons minimizes women's agency during fights, making them potential battle prizes instead of opponents. Numerous BtB sims' rules function in this way. For instance, *The Great Tahari* sim's rules stipulate that women cannot carry weapons except for a short dagger, which must remain hidden, and also that raids by the Panthers girls are prohibited, as are female outlaws, mercenaries, and pirates. Actions perpetrated by female warriors are therefore invalidated (as in the *Ivar's Landfall* and *City of Treve* sims) or, in some cases, unruly female characters are simply regarded as slaves and collared (as in the *Port Cos* sim).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the diegetic expansion of Gor in the context of fannish videoludic transfictionalization, the Gorean PRPG-VEs. I have demonstrated that the essential characteristics of Gor retained during the process are not only its geographical features, but also laws, customs, and social organization. In the Gorean PRPG-VEs, the structuring principle of thetic space is translated into procedures, which make possible player interactions and diegetic expansion. Accordingly, procedural expansion and thetic space

allow for transfictionality in terms of procedural rhetoric, highlighting the role the thesis plays in the creation of a transmedial world.

These concepts also open the way to the study of doctrinal transtexts as well as to the role they play in the procedural expansion process, namely the influence of non-fictional texts like the Darwinian intertexts which dot the *Chronicles* and (through the mediation of the formal structure) the Gorean PRPG-VEs. Whereas the Gorean PRPG-VEs discussed in this chapter largely embrace the ideology perpetuated in the *Chronicles*, transtexts and cultures enrich the Gorean diegesis and formal structure, as alternative theses (e.g. social constructivism and feminist discourses) and cultures (e.g. gay/lesbian Gor, BDSM, and griefing) infiltrate and possibly even subvert Gor, transforming it into a new world beyond the control of its creator.

Notes

- 1 The research on which this chapter is based received financial support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) and the *Fonds québécois de recherche Société et culture* (FQRSC).
- 2 Richard Saint-Gelais, *Fictions transfuges: La Transfictionnalité et ses enjeux* (Paris: Seuil, 2011), 7; my translation.
- 3 The comics include a series in six volumes, a three-issue mini-series, a sixteen-issue ongoing series, a graphic novel, and two one-shots.
- 4 The franchise's *Fanfiction* website (<https://www.fanfiction.net/game/Assassin-s-Creed>), for instance, features over 5,200 *Assassin's Creed* fanfictions.
- 5 According to John Clute and David Langford, "[a]ny sf tale whose primary venue (excluding contemporary or Near-Future versions of Earth) is a planet, and whose plot turns to a significant degree upon the nature of that venue, can be described as a planetary romance".
- 6 Lisbeth Klastrup and Susana Tosca, "Transmedial Worlds: Rethinking Cyberworld Design," in *Proceedings of the 2004 International Conference on Cyberworlds*.
- 7 Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).
- 8 Henry Jenkins, "Game Design as Narrative Architecture," in *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game*, ed. Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigan (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).
- 9 Michael Saler, *As If: Modern Enchantment and the Literary Prehistory of Virtual Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 6.
- 10 Stephan Günzel, "The Spatial Turn in Computer Game Studies," in *Exploring the Edges of Gaming: Proceedings of the Vienna Games Conference 2008–2009. Future and Reality of Gaming*, ed. Konstantin Mitgutsch, Christoph Klimmt, and Herbert Rosenstingl (Vienna: Braumüller, 2010), 171.

- 11 Jenkins, "Game Design," 121.
- 12 Ibid.; Marie-Laure Ryan, "Transmedial Storytelling and Transfictionality," *Poetics Today* 34, no. 3 (2013).
- 13 Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 14.
- 14 Ian Bogost, "The Rhetoric of Video Games," in *The Ecology of Games: Connecting Youth, Games, and Learning*, ed. Katie Salen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 122.
- 15 Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 96.
- 16 Anne M. Boyd, "The Over-Soul of the Force: Emersonian Transcendentalism in the *Star Wars* Saga," in *Sex, Politics, and Religion in Star Wars*, ed. Douglas Brode and Leah Deyneka (Lanham: Scarecrow, 2012); Joseph Packer, "The Battle for Galt's Gulch: *Bioshock* as Critique of Objectivism," *Journal of Gaming and Virtual Worlds* 2, no. 3 (2010); Stephen Jacobs, "Simulating the Apocalypse: Theology and Structure of the *Left Behind* Games," *Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 7 (2014).
- 17 Saint-Gelais, *Fictions transfuges*.
- 18 Ryan, "Transmedial Storytelling," 366.
- 19 Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 5; italics in original.
- 20 Matthew Weise, "The Rules of Horror: Procedural Adaptation in *Clock Tower*, *Resident Evil* and *Dead Rising*," in *Horror Video Games: Essays on the Fusion of Fear and Play*, ed. Bernard Perron (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009), 238.
- 21 Genette, *Palimpsests*, 1.
- 22 Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Authoritarian Fictions: The Ideological Novel as a Literary Genre* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).
- 23 In *Second Life*, scripts are lines of programming that achieve certain effects: changing the appearance of an object, how it moves, its interaction, and exchanges with avatars, etc.
- 24 A "sim" or "simulator" in *Second Life* is a three-dimensional virtual space hosted on a server. The "sims" are leased to users who may develop and manage them.
- 25 Tjarda Sixma, "The Gorean Community in Second Life: Rules of Sexual Inspired Role-Play," *Journal of Virtual Worlds Research* 1, no. 3 (2009).
- 26 Qtd. in David Alexander Smith, "No More Gor: A Conversation with John Norman," *The New York Review of Science Fiction* 8, no. 8 (1996).
- 27 Targaryen Ghiardie, *A Brief Guide to Gorean Roleplay in Second Life*, February 3, 2010, <http://web.archive.org/web/20100213111038/http://targaryen.eu/blog/2010/02/a-brief-guide-to-gorean-role-play-in-second-life>.
- 28 Christy Dena, *Transmedia Fictions: Theorizing the Practice of Expressing a Fictional World Across Distinct Media and Environments* (PhD diss, University of Sydney, 2009).

- 29 "Background" refers to the description and history of the universe in which the role play takes place. See <http://www.gor-sl.com/index.php?action=forum> (accessed June 3, 2015). The sims in question are: *Axe Fjord*, *Camerius Gorge*, *City of Thentis*, *City of Treve*, *City of Vonda*, *Fort Laurius*, *Fortress of Maelstorm*, *Hochburg*, *Imperial Ar*, *Ironhall*, *Island of Katoteros*, *Isle of Jasna*, *Ivar's Landfall*, *Oak Haven*, *Port de Nadira*, *Port Haifa*, *Port Kar Market*, *Port of Nisyros*, *Port Olni*, *Sarona Village*, *Tancred's Landing*, *City of Jasmine*, *The Empire of Ar*, *Village of Angrfjord*, *Village of Eteocles*, *Village of Rorus*, *Village of Skjern*, *Village of Troth*, *Voltai Viktel*, and *Woodhaven*.
- 30 These websites are available at <http://www.thegoreancave.com>, <http://www.gor-now.net/delphiuss2002/index.htm>, and <http://gorean-online-dictionary.wikia.com/wiki>, respectively (accessed June 3, 2015).
- 31 Ryan, "Transmedial Storytelling."
- 32 See Christophe Duret, "Écosystème transtextuel et jeux de rôle participatifs en environnement virtuel: Le Sociogramme de 'l'ordre naturel' dans les jeux de rôle goréens," in *Jeu vidéo et livre*, ed. Fanny Barnabé and Björn-Olaf Dozo (Liège: Bebooks, 2015).
- 33 John Norman, *Tarnsman of Gor* (New York: Ballantine, 1966), 149.
- 34 Ibid., 48.
- 35 See Christophe Duret, "ἦθος, éthè intrinsèque et extrinsèque, éthos transformatif: L'Éthogramme de l'ordre naturel dans les jeux de rôle goréens de *Second Life*," *Itinéraires: Littérature, textes, cultures* 3 (2015/2016).
- 36 John Norman, "The Gorean World Is What It Is," *The Complete John Norman*, 2001, <http://work.tcjn.info/world.htm>.
- 37 Markus Montola, "The Invisible Rules of Role-Playing: The Social Framework of Role-Playing Process," *International Journal of Role-Playing* 1 (2009).

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