

The Transmedial Connection of Tabletop Role-Playing Games and Cosplay in *The Wayward Wanderers* Campaign

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ABSTRACT:

The present paper focuses on the transmedial relationship between cosplay and tabletop role-playing games (TTRPGs) in a specific case study: the analysis of *The Wayward Wanderers* campaign played online by an international tabletop role-playing team. The purpose of the research is to point out the diversity of cosplay storytelling in social media as well as to study its transmedial characteristics. To achieve this, it is first necessary to clarify the concept and definition of cosplay, tabletop role-playing and transmedia storytelling, and then to introduce the role-playing team as the subject of the analysis, which was founded by cosplayers. The central question of the research is how the narrative of *The Wayward Wanderers* campaign is retold or modified through the character portrayal and cosplay storytelling content created and published by the players on their TikTok accounts. For this research we use content and profile analysing methods: we examine in detail how much cosplay content the cosplayers created with the characters they played in the role-playing campaign, over what period the content was published, what different methods were used to create content (individual or group videos, etc.) and how they relate to the canon role-playing narrative.

KEY WORDS:

cosplay, cultural studies, fan studies, game studies, social media, tabletop role-playing games, transmediality.

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Introduction

Somewhere Bound is an international tabletop role-playing group of eleven people (however in the chosen campaign there are only six players present). Our research focuses on the team's very first campaign, *The Wayward Wanderers* (hereinafter referred to as TWW), and within that the first episode of the campaign, titled "A sea of trouble" (see Somewhere Bound, 2020a). The team plays by the rules of fifth edition of *Dungeons & Dragons* (hereinafter referred to as D&D) in a fictional world created by the dungeon master. The group plays online, and they use Twitch to live stream the game sessions, recording them at the same time so that they can upload them later to their YouTube channel. It is important to note that the first live stream episode of the campaign was preceded by a few private sessions (the contents of which we will refer to as the 'prologue'), during which members of the team who were new to tabletop role-playing games (hereinafter referred to as TTRPGs) had the chance to learn the rules of D&D, creating their characters and a basic storyline.

It is also worth mentioning that the members of the team playing this campaign also happen to be cosplay content creators, who are actively cosplaying their characters of the TWW campaign on TikTok.

In this analysis, we study the short video sharing application TikTok from the aspect of transmedia expansion/modification of the TWW campaign. During the research, the main focus is on how the content created with the players' characters relates to the canon narrative

of the campaign, and in what way the events of the prologue appear in them. By canon role-playing narrative, we mean the plots and storylines that game participants have constructed during play sessions. We consider this narrative to be the source text for TWW campaign, which can undergo various changes in players' cosplay storytelling content. We also examine in detail how much cosplay content the players/cosplayers created on an individual level with the characters they played in the campaign (for this task the TikTok playlists were especially useful), over what time period the content was published, what different methods were used to create content and how they relate to the canon role-playing narrative.

In the case of the TWW campaign, we examine the cosplay content related to the role-playing narrative of the five players and the dungeon master, and grouped them according to different categories. We will also partly discuss how the (visual) language used in tabletop role-playing sessions and the language used on TikTok relate to each other. Before proceeding to the actual analysis, it is essential to first clarify how this research defines the terms TTRPGs, cosplaying and transmedia storytelling.

Defining Tabletop Role-Playing Games

A role-playing game (hereinafter referred to as RPG) is a rather complex concept that contains a lot of possibilities for association. Its definition has been continuously developed and shaped in the academic discourse of the last few decades, among others, by sociologist Fine (1983) and ludologist Juul (2003). The umbrella term, as Zagal and Deterding (2018) point out, includes "TRPGs, computer RPGs (CRPGs), (massively) multiplayer online RPGs (MMORPGs), live-action RPGs (LARPs), and more" (p. 19). Although the authors capture the various versions of role-playing from the perspective of the media that convey them, if role-playing is defined as a genre, the listed practices can even be categorized as subgenres. Although there are many types of role-playing through different media, the phenomenon is based on the same principle: „any game which allows a number of players to assume the roles of imaginary characters and operate with some degree of freedom in an imaginary environment" (Lortz, 1979, p. 36). Since role-playing naturally generates some kind of story in almost every case, it is clear from a narrative approach that the player is not a passive recipient of the story but plays an active role in shaping it by controlling a specific character, and even pretending to be them (Bokody, 2002).

TTRPG is a role-playing genre or medium in which, as the name suggests, the players engage in a game while sitting around a table, similar to traditional board games. White et al. (2018) consider TTRPGs to be the common ancestor of all RPG forms. The players create a character that they individually control during the game in a specific (fictional) world, the foundations and rules of which are provided either by a module created by the producer or publisher of the game or designed by the dungeon master or game master. These worlds are usually inspired by sources or genres originating from fiction, fantasy, medieval history, or mythological stories from different cultures (Zagal & Deterding, 2018). TTRPGs are also commonly referred to as pen-and-paper RPGs (see Kabát et al., 2022), as players keep the most important information regarding their characters (such as health, special abilities, equipment, etc.) on a character sheet. Since the abilities of the characters usually have a quantified value (e.g. damage, defence, magic level), and since different actions that directly affect the adventure are carried out by rolling a die, serious calculations are sometimes necessary during the game, for which the character sheet is essential.

In the age of new media, the TTRPG has also been transformed: in many cases, it is the online space that represents the 'table'. It is important to consider the possibility that instead of a transformation, we are actually witnessing the birth of a new role-playing form, medium or subgenre, considering that Zagal and Deterding say that one of the main characteristics of traditional TTRPGs is that „players sit face-to-face around a table to play together (co-located and synchronous)” (Zagal & Deterding, 2018, p. 31). Today, there are many online platforms (websites, applications)¹ which, in terms of their function, are responsible for the virtual extension, development and expansion of TTRPG tools. These online platforms, in addition to instant image and sound transmission, can have dice-rolling and map-making programs, virtual rulebooks and character sheets, with an offer of background music and sound effects, so the complex system of the presence-based RPG is adapted to the online space, thereby providing the opportunity for players who live far away from each other to play together. The virtual space sometimes also fulfils the function of recording or immediate sharing, so the game session can become available to anyone in the form of a live stream or as a recording that can be played back, for example on YouTube.

The members of the role-playing group Somewhere Bound discussed in the study also use a similar technique during their gaming sessions: the group plays in the online space, and instead of specific role-playing platforms, they use Twitch to live stream the game, recording it at the same time so that they can upload it later to their YouTube channel.

Cosplay as a Form of Participatory Culture

Cosplay is a practice where an individual dresses up as a fictional character using a costume and other accessories (e.g. wigs, contact lenses, armour etc.) The character is usually tied to popular culture: films, series, books, comics, and digital games can all be sources of cosplay. However, it is not uncommon for the cosplayer to dress up as an original character: a character they have created themselves, who is not officially included in an already existing media text or canon (Winge, 2006). The subjects of the research invariably cosplay such original characters, since their playing characters in TWW campaign are not parts of any already existing D&D module.

In the international academic sphere, researchers have mostly studied cosplay in relation to the issue of identity, i.e. how the personality of the cosplayer and the character relate to each other (Lamerichs, 2011; Rahman et al., 2012; Bainbridge & Norris, 2013; Scott, 2015). In this study, however, we interpret cosplay as an active component of participatory culture, and as an important tool for content creation.

The concept of participatory culture is associated with Henry Jenkins, who introduced and studied the phenomenon through case studies that were relevant and colourful in the given era (see Jenkins, 1992, 2008; Jenkins et al., 2013). The basic assumption is that the audience and specifically the fans of media texts, while consuming the text, break away from the receptive standards towards which the media industry would direct them, and interpret the texts in a specific and unique way. They also have the capability to extend, correct or rewrite the narratives entirely, depending on their interpretation.

¹ Remark by the author: For example, see roll20.net or trpgline.com.

As interpreted by Jenkins (2008), the traditional, passive audience transforms into an active, content-creating agent, and such content can include fanfiction, fanart and cosplay as well.

Conroy (2015) describes the relationship of fans to the original media text by presenting two different kinds of fan communities, called *fandoms*. One is the curative fandom, which typically assumes fans and fan practices that are aimed at preserving the original canon. Fans in this category are usually satisfied with the original narratives of media texts, and their activities do not aim to change them, but rather reinforce them. In contrast, the creative or transformative fandom assumes fans and fan practices that are aimed at rewriting and changing the original canon (Conroy, 2015). Thus, the typical text-rewriting practices of participatory culture, such as fanfiction or fanart, fall into the latter category.

The practice of cosplay is special as it can be a tool for both the curative and the transformative fandom. In the former case, cosplay could be interpreted as an extension of canon media texts, since it primarily strives for fidelity and recognizability at the level of appearance. Creative cosplay content production – photoshoots, skits, cosplay music videos – however, does not always involve changing the canon, as in many cases it is precisely the means of replaying canonical narratives. Cosplay becomes a practice of transformative fandom when the cosplayer introduces some kind of change compared to the original media text or character, for example, changing their appearance or gender (e.g. gender-bend cosplay), and the creative content makes some decisive change in the narrative (e.g. introducing an alternative universe or a non-canonical love story, etc.).

It is important to note that in the present study, the cosplayers themselves are the authors of the original narrative, as in the case of TTRPGs, the players create the story together through conversation. At the same time, their cosplay videos shared on TikTok on the one hand confirm and expand the canon role-playing narrative into another medium, on the other hand, they sometimes rewrite the original text. This type of content creation shows a great resemblance to fan activities that are characteristic of both curative and transformative fandoms. An important aspect of the research was whether the cosplay content aimed to preserve or rewrite the canon role-playing narrative. As these types of narrative extensions and modifications happen in another medium, it also follows the logic of transmedia storytelling.

Transmedia Storytelling

According to Jenkins' (2007) classic definition, "transmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels to create a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story" (Jenkins, 2007, para. 2). Many 20th and 21st century franchises use this strategy, providing certain information and details of a complex story or an expansive fictional world through various mediums. As Ryan (2013) suggests, these franchises are based upon a hypernarrative that cannot be covered by a single medium. It is also common that an extensive world or universe has the potential to generate an infinite number of potential stories, which also contribute to the production of newer (sub)narratives. For example, a minor character of a story can turn out to be the main character of the next one; or a fictional geographical area, which was considered a peripheral region in the case of one story, can become the centre of another one; but it is not uncommon for authors/producers to play with the

dimension of time either: prequels and sequels are born, empty time periods, that may have been skipped during the creation of a previous story, are filled with new plots so the new story can be based upon a (formal) lack of information.

In summary, the sub-narratives belonging to a larger narrative are told on different channels, so the information is systematically distributed between media. That is why it can be claimed that one of the most important effects of transmedia storytelling is that it generates consumption (Jenkins, 2003). Since the information of the fictional world is constructed in the form of an ordered network – or as an illusion of it – in various media, as a result, being familiar with a single media text never answers all the questions, and in fact, usually raises even more that can only be answered by analysing additional media texts. As a result, a new type of audience has appeared, which finds pleasure in gathering information about media products from various sources like a treasure hunter, and they sometimes fill in the missing information in the form of independent works, for example, fanfictions, or as in this case, cosplay content on TikTok.

Not entirely related to transmedia storytelling, but most definitely related to trans-media logic is the question of transferring medium-specific language and user techniques across multiple media platforms. During the episode “A sea of trouble”, it can be observed that certain slang and poses typically used on TikTok and also references to popular TikTok trends appear at the level of both the verbal and non-verbal communication of the players. At the level of visual language, it is important to note that the players use lighting techniques and colours similar to their cosplay videos published on TikTok. During the live stream, the application of colourful backlighting or the transformation of the background using a screen or curtain are also characteristics of cosplay content creating on TikTok (see Petrovic, 2023). The mixing of and transferring of medium-specific language naturally affects how the audience receives and interprets the story. Although the vast majority of TikTok-specific slang and poses are not used in-character, these expressions still reflect on canon role-playing events: the players themselves use these techniques to interpret and translate information regarding the narrative.

Since the players are cosplay content creators on TikTok, and have also met each other on the app, the use of TikTok-specific language during game sessions does not cause tension within the role-playing team. Likewise, in the case of members of the audience who are familiar with TikTok and may follow the players on the app, transferring language and medium-specific techniques should not interfere with the interpretation process, but for those who are not familiar with TikTok-specific language and user techniques, properly understanding story-related information may be more difficult.

The Research Subject: Somewhere Bound

Somewhere Bound is an international tabletop role-playing group of eleven people, most of whom happen to be cosplayers as well. They officially started live streaming their game sessions on Twitch in November 2020, and later they also uploaded the content to YouTube. In *The Wayward Wanderers* campaign, which is the first campaign of the team, there are one game master and five players present. The campaign currently has twenty-four episodes. While the adventure is not over yet, the team has not been live streaming since June 2022, so the campaign is currently on hiatus. The game is set in a fictional world created by the dungeon master (for its map, see Somewhere Bound, 2020b). Our

research focuses on the first episode of *The Wayward Wanderers* campaign, as well as the cosplay content related to the episode and the prologue of the campaign. Since during the episodes the players' nicknames, their TikTok usernames and the names and classes of the characters are all on display under the players' camera screen, we identify the members of the campaign based on these variables as well:

- Hulda (@ahobbitstale), dungeon master;
- Kai (@vampirethembo), Valakas, bard;
- Blue (@leftmybabyblue), Coraline, bard;
- Stevie (@stevie.bones), Cadaver, rouge;
- Rhi (@rhilentless), Gwendolyne, paladin;
- Vain (@vain.virgo), Saint, bloodhunter.

Since the first live stream episode of the campaign was preceded by a few private sessions, the world and narrative built during the first game sessions remained hidden from the audience. For this reason, during the live stream of the first episode, a solution was needed, something that summarized the missing information so that the audience could also interpret the plot of the actual game session and get to know the world and the characters. In the end, the solution was a written prologue that summarizes the team's previous adventures at the beginning of the first episode. The prologue reveals that during the early games, the team formed an alliance with a magic-using princess, Liliana, whom they helped overthrow her father's rule, which was necessary due to his anti-magic measures. Eventually, the team resorted to regicide, which forced them to flee the kingdom. The first episode is set a few weeks after their runaway (see *Somewhere Bound*, 2020a).

Since the players are primarily cosplay content creators and not professional role-players, it was obvious that the characters would also appear on their individual, cosplay-focused social media platforms, like TikTok and Instagram. However, since the pilot episode of the campaign was preceded by many more private game sessions (which included worldbuilding, character and cosplay creation), by the time "A sea of trouble" was aired, the characters had already been introduced via cosplay music videos on the players' TikTok accounts. That is why the focus of this analysis is on the cosplay content that appeared on the players' individual social media platforms, which also helps fill the narrative void caused by the private sessions and expand the canon story of the campaign with some kind of additional information.

Findings and Discussion

While the written prologue of the TWW campaign at the beginning of "A sea of trouble" attempts to fill the narrative void and serve as an introduction to the campaign, it still leaves many questions unanswered and possibilities unexplored. On the one hand, this gives freedom to the audience as they can reconstruct the events of the prologue using their own imagination, but on the other hand, it gives the option to the players – in this context also the creators/producers – to use transmedia storytelling.

In this analysis, we studied the short video-sharing application TikTok from the aspect of transmedia expansion/modification of the TWW campaign. During the research, the main focus was on how the content created with the players' characters relate to the canon narrative of the campaign, and in what way the events of the prologue appear in them. We also examined in detail how much cosplay content the players/cosplayers created on an individual level with the characters they played in the campaign (for this task the

TikTok playlists were especially useful), over what time period the content was published, what different methods were used to create content (individual or group videos; fan art; posts, etc.) and how they relate to the canon role-playing narrative.

In the case of the TWW campaign, we examined the cosplay content related to the role-playing narrative of the five players and the dungeon master, and grouped them according to different categories. It is important to note that the description (caption) of the videos played a significant role in establishing certain categories, and in some cases the comments section as well. Although there were still cases for which the classification could not be clearly decided, the context-creating descriptions and comments proved to be a great help. The categories created for the players' and the dungeon master's TikTok profiles are as follows:

a) Cosplay showcase/transitions

In the case of the videos in this category (Table 1), the intention is clearly not to create or initiate a story, as their main function is to present the costume and the character's appearance in detail, using different camera angles, lights and effects. The audio used for these types of videos is usually some piece of music, the lyrics or style of which relate to the character in some way, but there is not necessarily a narrative intent behind its use. For instance, Stevie is presenting the complete outfit of their character, Cadaver (see Stevie Bones, 2020d).

Table 1: Cosplay showcase/transitions

	Rhi	Blue	Vain	Kai	Stevie	Hulda
<i>Cosplay showcase/transitions</i>	13	1	0	1	9	3
<i>All TWW content</i>	45	31	3	26	100	22

Source: own processing

One of the most popular ways of introducing a newly created cosplay or character is using the transition technique. The term 'transition' refers to the practice, when at one moment of the recording, one can see the person out of cosplay and then dressed as the character when the tempo changes. Due to the precise editing, the clips create the illusion that the movement is continuous, and in fact the transformation takes place in one clip (see rhilentless, 2022). The purpose of the transition videos is on the one hand to present the costume in greater detail, and on the other hand, to indicate that the content uploaded in the near future will revolve around the character in question.

Compared to Rhi, the fellow players uploaded only a few videos in this category, at the time when they were finished with the costume. In their cases, once they introduced their new character, the focus shifted from the detailed presentation of the costume to the storytelling. Since Hulda has an anthropomorphic form as the dungeon master during the live streams, and she has created some videos cosplaying as the dungeon master, her videos were also included in this category.

b) Character-focused content

In this category, ranked videos provided additional information on the characters, such as explaining their background story in greater detail. Although the audience learns some information about the characters' backstory during the episodes, so far, no arc or quest has been built around the detailed past or family background of any of the characters, so the players use TikTok as a tool to introduce their characters in more detail (Table 2).

Table 2: Character-focused content

	Rhi	Blue	Vain	Kai	Stevie	Hulda
<i>Cosplay showcase/transitions</i>	12	13	1	4	45	0
<i>All TWW content</i>	45	31	3	26	100	22

Source: own processing

Blue, Rhi and Stevie were especially eager to use this transmedia solution, sometimes answering questions that may have been raised by the audience during certain scenes of the episodes, but which were never explained or answered during the live stream. For instance, Stevie teased the audience with Cadaver’s backstory (Stevie Bones, 2020c).

It also includes videos in which the cosplayers use a monologue or a dialogue, a recording from an existing media product (movie, TV show, etc.) instead of a piece of music to portray the character in this category. The videos created with this type of technique are suitable for exploring how the character would behave in a fictional situation, with fictional characters or NPCs (non-player characters), so with characters who are not part of the canon narrative of the campaign. But there are times when the players – especially Rhi – use their own voices for their characters in the cosplay videos, further deepening the relationship between the character and the audience (see rhilentless, 2021).

Looking at the numbers, it can be said that the players are enthusiastic to create content in this category. Above all, this can be traced back to the fact that in the medium of TTRPGs, it is the players themselves who possess the most information about their own characters, but sometimes it happens that it is not possible to transfer all information into the gameplay. The player may have created a detailed backstory for their character, but no quest during the campaign reflects more on the character’s past. Since the player does not always have the opportunity to fulfil a character arc or reveal a complicated past during the role-playing session, they choose another channel or medium for this purpose.

From the perspective of participatory culture and fan activities, character-focused cosplay content both reinforces the canon and expands it with further information and detail. The characters’ personalities and backstories remain unchanged, but the audience has more opportunities to learn about their motivations, values and personalities. Therefore, this kind of transmedia expansion helps to bring individual characters into the spotlight, and shifts the narrative focus, but does not change the narrative itself.

c) Replaying (and telling) canon events

This category describes the videos in which the players are replaying, reenacting a canon, finalised scene of the campaign with their characters in cosplay. It is important to point out that this category includes content that adapted the canon events in their original narrative style and atmosphere, as well as funny, meme-like creations, since the narrative and information-transmitting properties are not impaired in case of a parody (see Stevie Bones, 2020a). We also established a subcategory for duets, because, unlike in the case of the previous two categories, replaying canon events can happen with the contribution of fellow players. It can be seen from Table 3 that the players uploaded content in this category in quite different proportions: almost a third of Stevie and Vain’s TWW related content deals with canon scenes, while only a quarter of Hulda and Kai’s content focuses on replaying canon events.

One of the advantages of replaying canon scenes – beyond the fact that the audience can now consume the story on an audiovisual level – is the change of perspective: the viewer experiences the scene from a specific character’s point of view.

One of the most important questions of the research was that in the case of replaying canon events, how much and what kind of content appeared on the players' profiles, which are adapting the events of the very first, private game sessions, i.e. the prologue at the beginning of the first live stream episode.

Table 3: *Replaying (and telling) canon events*

	Rhi	Blue	Vain	Kai	Stevie	Hulda
Replaying canon events	6	6	1	8	31	6
Events of the prologue	1	6	1	8	26	2
Memes	3	3	1	6	13	1
Duets	0	3	0	0	1	0
All TWW content	45	31	3	26	100	22

Source: own processing

Replaying the prologue is particularly important for the analysis. It can be seen that for all other players in the category, except for Rhi, most of the replayed canon scenes present the events from the prologue. This result leaves room for several interpretations and conclusions. On the one hand, it can be interpreted as a tension between the private nature of the first gaming sessions and the enthusiasm of the players: although before November 2020 the team was not able to broadcast the gaming sessions, the players definitely wanted to share not only the appearance of their characters and their main characteristics, but also the adventures they had encountered during the private games with their TikTok followers. However, since after November 2020, one can only come across content reflecting the time and narrative of the prologue in the form of flashbacks or throwbacks, it is also clear that the players did not use the strategy of transmedia storytelling consciously.

Since the events of the very first gaming sessions were only known to us at the level of the prologue, in addition to comparing the plot of the prologue with the story of the videos, we also paid special attention to the time and date the videos were uploaded. According to our understanding, the content uploaded before November 2020 always relates to the events and narrative of the private gaming sessions played before the first live stream. In the case of the videos uploaded after November 2020, we compared the content with the information learned from the live streams, and in addition, we also studied the description and the comment section, which also helped to distinguish the events of the prologue and the later-on narrative.

During the analysis, the frequency of the TikTok duets in the case of replaying canon scenes was also taken into account. It can be seen from Table 3 that there were only a few examples when the players are replaying the given scenes together (either recorded in the same physical space or by reacting to each other's videos with their own footage); this value is the most significant in the case of Blue. The main reason for this lies in the fact that the players quite often used the solution of replaying the given scenes by including characters that were not originally their own. For example, in one video, Blue clearly wanted to play this dialogue with Kai's character, Valakas. They indicated this intention by using subtitles, highlighting Valakas' name and using colour codes, but Kai did not respond with their own visual material (see leftmybabyblue, 2020).

Finally, we also classified in this category videos of the game master, in which they specifically thematise the construction of the narrative of the TWW campaign, as well as

those short clips that were cut from the live stream to promote the campaign by highlighting some humorous scenes (see *A Hobbits Tale*, 2020).

The videos in the “Replaying (and telling) canon events” category – as the name suggests – remain faithful to the original text, do not distort the plot, do not change it, modifying at most their tone style in the case of parody videos. Cosplay videos that process canon scenes outside of the prologue could also be interpreted as adaptations, since the narrative migrates from one medium to another. In the case of the prologue, however, there is no existing media text that is adapted on TikTok in cosplay form, since the first game sessions were not recorded. Thus, cosplay content that processes the prologue serves as transmedia extensions that also function as the prequel to the TWW campaign. In this category, cosplay content is therefore responsible for introducing and presenting the canon.

d) Alternative scenes

This category includes videos in which the characters of the players are placed in some alternative situation compared to the canon narrative of the role-playing campaign (Table 4). Within the category we also distinguished two subcategories according to the various functions the videos may take. In the first subcategory, it is clear that the main goal of the content was the implication of romance between the characters, and we labelled these as ‘ship-contents’. In fan studies,

‘shipping’, is a term in fandom that is derived from the word ‘relationship’. A ship refers to a romantic relationship between two or more characters. An individual can ship characters whose relationship is canon compliant, or in many cases the ship can be not represented or only marginally represented within the canon. (Bothe, 2014, p. 5)

Table 4: *Alternative scenes*

	Rhi	Blue	Vain	Kai	Stevie	Hulda
Alternative scenes	1	6	1	6	5	0
Ship-contents	0	0	0	4	3	0
Death of characters	0	0	1	1	0	0
Duets	1	2	0	0	3	0
All TWW content	45	31	3	26	100	22

Source: *own processing*

Although in later episodes of the TWW campaign, certain characters do romantically fall for each other and get together as a couple, in the canon narrative, at the beginning of the campaign it is quite uncertain which characters are going to end up together. Ship-contents were particularly common during this time period with Kai and Stevie. It can be interpreted that the players were trying to live out their own fantasies, playing with the idea of certain characters forming a couple. Still, it is also possible that these types of videos provided a kind of fanservice for the audience of the role-playing campaign.

The other subcategory consists of videos that tell a specific alternative story, the possible death of the given characters. It is important to emphasize that on the level of the canon narrative of the campaign, each player’s character is alive and well even in the twenty-fourth episode, which is the most recent, so these scenes are clearly not retellings of an incident that actually happened during one of the game sessions. A total of two videos were created in this category by Vain and Kai (see *Vain Virgo*, 2020; *Trashmouth King*, 2020). Considering that both of them created such a video, moreover during the

same time period, at the end of 2020, and they also used the same audio for the video, it can be assumed that they joined a heartbreaking trend that was popular at the time among tabletop role-players and cosplayers on TikTok.

Another important aspect was how common duets were in this category. Similar to the replaying canon events segment, this form of interactive cosplay storytelling was not common here either. Although while in the former category this was due to the fact that the players sometimes replayed scenes by including characters that were not originally their own, in the latter category it is more about the fact that players mainly initiated duets, but rarely responded to each other's 'invitations' with actual duets. The videos were created with the specific goal of the targeted player responding with their character, but this only rarely happened later on, thus there are only potential duet videos left. For instance, in one video, Stevie clearly wanted to act out this dialogue with Kai's character, Valakas – the player outlines the context of the dialogue between the characters in the video description – but Kai did not respond with their own visual material (see Stevie Bones, 2020b).

It is also important to highlight the phenomenon of self-duetting, the practice in which the user duets their own previously published video. This technique was used by Stevie, who in one of their videos envisioned a conversation between Cadaver and his younger self, (cos)playing both characters (see Stevie Bones, 2020e).

The lack of duets and the appearance of self-duets indicates that while during the tabletop role-playing sessions – due to its genre – it is evident that creating the story happens through collaboration, the players prefer to tell the story on TikTok mainly on their own, cosplaying only their own player character. While the construction of the narrative is done by a team, on TikTok, the originally shared storytelling is reduced to individual, character-focused narratives, even when acting out alternative scenes.

The number of videos representing alternative scenes in all the players' cases is low compared to the total number of videos related to the campaign. This result suggests that players are not particularly motivated in creating cosplay content that makes excessive changes compared to the canonized role-playing narrative. However, they are motivated in creating content that further introduces the character and shows in detail how they would react in a fictional situation, to the approach of fictional characters (i.e. characters that are non-existent in the canonized role-playing narrative), as we established in the category of "Character-focused content". But these short, dialogue-oriented alternative scenes do not particularly disturb the flow of the canonized role-playing narrative. All of this suggests that the players are basically satisfied with the stories created in the medium of the TTRPG, and their goal is not to change the story in another medium, but to further explain, supplement, and tell it from a different perspective.

Cosplay videos classified in this category make radical changes to the original narrative through ships and character deaths, which clearly evokes the content production techniques of creative or transformative fandoms. Although the subjects do play with alternative possibilities, with monologues or actions that differ from their characters' personalities, as Table 4 shows, only a few such contents were created, and mostly without collaboration as duets. Although cosplay videos could be efficient tools for rewriting the canon text, in this case study the subjects used it more to reinforce and supplement the canon narrative.

e) Unidentified content

As mentioned earlier, it was not possible to decide to which category some videos in the examined corpus belonged, even if the date of the upload, the description of the video and the comments were taken into account. As can be seen in the table below, only three of the two hundred and twenty-seven analysed videos fall into this category. Two of these occurred with Blue: it was not clear whether it was a scene showing the character's

backstory (character-focused content) or whether it adapted an event of the canonized role-playing narrative (replaying canon events) since the content of the video in question could be matched to both categories. In the case of Rhi, it was a live duet, during which it was not clear whether the rogue character appearing together with Gwen belonged to another role-playing campaign or personified an NPC from the TWW campaign.

Table 5: Unidentified content

	Rhi	Blue	Vain	Kai	Stevie	Hulda
<i>Cosplay showcase/transitions</i>	1	2	0	0	0	0
<i>All TWW content</i>	45	31	3	26	100	22

Source: own processing

Conclusion

The cosplay content shared on TikTok clearly supports the fact that players are particularly motivated to share narratives related to their characters outside of the RPG sessions as well. They proved to be especially active in sharing the events of the prologue, the very first private game sessions. However, during the research it also became clear that the systematic distribution of information in different media was not necessarily consciously applied.

Examining the phenomenon from the viewer's side, the cosplay content shared on TikTok perfectly fits the definition of transmedia storytelling/expansion: the viewer is invited to look for and interpret additional content available on several different media platforms to reconstruct and fully understand the entire narrative. Of course, the source text, i.e. the narrative of the TWW campaign was understandable to begin with, but since the events of the prologue are only represented via a written summary at the beginning of the first episode of the campaign, it is clear that the cosplay content shared on TikTok telling the story of the prologue can be seen as a prequel to the TWW campaign, or the prequel to "A sea of trouble".

At the same time, it is also clear that the primary function of the cosplay content is not replaying or retelling canon role-playing narratives, but to present the characters in more detail and depth, and to share more information about them and their relationships, as was seen in the category of "Character-focused content". Of course, this can also be traced back to the technical aspects of TikTok and its offered options. While Twitch, which is the main medium of role-playing sessions, allows players to appear in the same online space at the same time, TikTok is not able to do this, only by the duet function, but in this case, the production of the cosplay content does not take place at the same time. In comparison, advancing the narrative of TTRPGs (execution of missions, inclusion of NPCs that have a great impact on the story, etc.) requires the joint presence of the members. In the absence of this, the cosplay content uploaded on TikTok mainly represents the easily replayable narratives of the campaign: a dialogue between characters, a short scene presented from the point of view of a specific character, etc.

As the data suggests, although the subjects of the case study used content production strategies typical of transformative fandoms (alternative storylines, ship-contents, character death AUs), their cosplay videos mainly reinforce and complement the canon role-playing narrative and communicate it in a medium outside of the recorded play

sessions. Therefore, their cosplay content in this case can be interpreted as an activity typical of curative fandoms. However, it is also important to see that cosplay content uploaded on TikTok also provides an opportunity to transfer these characters into different role-playing campaigns, to create alternative/parallel universes and crossovers (as when interacting with characters present in other campaigns), thus not only enabling transmedia storytelling, but also expanding already existing narratives, creating crossovers, therefore, it is potentially suitable for content production typical of transformative fandoms.

All of this confirms the storytelling role of cosplay in social media and points out that with sufficient planning and coordination, cosplay content can even function as part of an extensive transmedia universe in the future.

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