8. The Digitizing Force of Decipher's *Star Wars Customizable Card Game*

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What kind of thread can hold together several millennia of galactic history? In Star Wars, the only thread expansive enough is the Force, which unifies the numerous depicted characters, governments, and worlds into a single history, a galactic saga of lightsabers and levitation. But is this thread strong enough also to hold together a transmedia universe spanning hundreds of texts in different media? It certainly does its best to promote continuity by tying together even overtly contradictory stories—for instance, allowing *The Force Awakens* to reboot the Star Wars EU while remaining distinctively and canonically Star Wars. Yet, even the fabric of a fictional universe can promote such continuity only by the grace of its fans, who ultimately determine to what extent a transmedia story is perceived as a whole. The wisdom of the Jedi suggests that “many of the truths we cling to depend greatly on our own point of view” (*Return of the Jedi*) and that “your focus determines your reality” (*The Phantom Menace*). Similarly, one might say that storyworlds depend greatly on how they are mediated; in other words, mediation determines fictional realities. While this is characteristic of transmedia storytelling more generally, this chapter focuses on a single case: how the digital game mechanics of Decipher's *Star Wars Customizable Card Game* (hereafter the *SWCCG*) struggle to adapt four notions of the Force. In focusing on this popular yet doubly marginalized medium—CCGs are typically overlooked within both Star Wars canon formation¹ and transmedia storytelling scholarship—this chapter also sheds some light on how medium-specific tensions introduce continuity and discontinuity in transmedia storytelling.

¹ Games have an especially ambiguous place within the hierarchical Star Wars canon, partially because they do not relate a consistent storyline and partially because game mechanics are not considered ‘story,’ as described anecdotally on *Wookieepedia*. See “Canon,” *Wookieepedia*, accessed March 28, 2017, <http://starwars.wikia.com/wiki/Canon>.

CCGs as Digital Media

Although CCGs are not generally considered digital media, their medium-specific contribution to transmedia storytelling is fundamentally digital. This disjunction is due to the relatively recent colloquial definition of “digital” as “computational,” which associates digitality exclusively with computer technology rather than the broader conceptual paradigms—such as counting—that give digitality its name. Thus, many contemporary theorists attempt to move beyond the technological definition² and show how digitality underlies aspects of modern culture as varied as the functioning of control societies³ and the nature of philosophical thought.⁴ In this broader sense, drawing upon the etymology of “digital” as pertaining to digits, one can consider a medium to be digital insofar as it represents via sets of discrete, countable symbols.⁵ While understanding digitality in this way may not lead to clean definitional divisions, it does shed light on how media function as interpretive paradigms that alternately represent the world as assemblage or flow, particle or wave.

Digitality, then, is a lens for perceiving and representing the world discontinuously, quantitatively, combinatorically. While not all games are digital in this way, games tend towards digitality because many common game mechanics are systematically organized as discrete or countable. Discreteness is found, for example, in the boundary lines in sports and board games and the sorting of game elements into hands, decks, and pools. Similarly, countability is found in all scoring systems and game economies and most randomization systems like cards and dice. And, above all, games deploy the above to perpetuate the binarization inherent in assigning winners and losers.⁶ Given that “Collectible card games are at their root combinatorial

2 Ted Friedman, *Electric Dreams: Computers in American Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2005); Benjamin Peters, “Digital,” in *Digital Keywords: A Vocabulary of Information Society and Culture*, ed. Benjamin Peters (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 93–108.

3 Seb Franklin, *Control: Digitality as Cultural Logic* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2015).

4 Alexander R. Galloway, *Laruelle: Against the Digital* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

5 According to Florian Cramer, “‘Digital’ simply means that something is divided into discrete, countable units—countable using whatever system one chooses, whether zeroes and ones, decimal numbers, tally marks on a scrap of paper or the fingers (digits) of one’s hand—which is where the word ‘digital’ comes from in the first place.” See Florian Cramer, “What is ‘Post-Digital’?,” in *New Media, Old Media: A History and Theory Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Wendy Hui Kyong Chun and Anna Watkins Fisher (New York: Routledge, 2016), 694.

6 This is true even of cooperative and single-player games, the only difference being that in such games all players either win or lose together.

exercises,”⁷ CCGs abound in these kinds of digital elements, carving up the play surface into discrete areas, employing game economies that structure the circulation of discrete cards, and using numerical stats to arithmetically determine game actions. More fundamentally, CCGs are defined by two deeply digital logics which alternately give the CCG its name: collection and customization.

Reading a CCG as a *collectible* card game places the emphasis on the CCG as a branded media object defined by its unique method of distribution of being sold in randomized packs. This is no small issue when one considers that the most basic unit of media production or analysis is the *text*—both the material object that is designed, marketed, and sold as well as the immaterial object that is received, engaged, and loved. Yet, the collectability of the CCG is completely anathema to the idea that a singular object could be the repository for something like a story. Instead, the CCG restructures its textuality within a digital logic. Cards are not primarily conceived in isolation, but rather in relationships with other cards in a particular set—the randomized *pack* that constitutes the most basic CCG commodity, the collection that functions as an expandable fan archive, or the deck that is used in gameplay.

This set logic reconstrues rather than replaces textual logic by encouraging combinatoric readings of the textual elements on different cards in the set. The design of the SWCCG cards includes visual and verbal signifiers that have strong dialogic relationships both with other cards and with the broader transmedia universe. The most prominent such signifier is a screenshot that occupies the central space on each card. Arresting the flow of time by turning a single frame into a collectible still, the card highlights visual details of the film. Above this central image is the card's title and “flavor text,” both of which connect the image to the broader narrative. These verbal descriptions generally situate the card within the storyworld (such as by indicating relevant characteristics or relationships) or fill in details of the storyworld (such as by naming unnamed characters or describing untold backstories). The card thus has value not only within a trading card economy, but also within a knowledge economy, providing cultural capital to fan communities. These encyclopedic⁸ visual and verbal signifiers

7 Eric Lang, “Design Decisions and Concepts in Licensed Collectible Card Games,” *Electronic Book Review*, January 27, 2008, accessed May 15, 2017, <http://electronicbookreview.com/thread/firstperson/adaptable>.

8 Whereas narratives like Timothy Zahn's *Thrawn Trilogy* (probably the key EU text) expand Star Wars primarily by continuing the story, the SWCCG does so by filling in the universe's details. It finds an unusual kinship, therefore, in various illustrated guides, encyclopedias,

combine to produce a digital archive of images and facts that break up the transmedia storyworld into bits of information meant to be individually assimilated and collectively reassembled.

To collect, then, is to assemble an archive at once digital and material. Reading a CCG as a *customizable* card game, by contrast, emphasizes the transition from set collection to set creation as players assemble cards from their collection into 60-card *decks* that are used to play the game. Deck-building, therefore, is a metagame: a form of curation that intertwines affective and strategic considerations. From a strategic perspective, deck-building consists in authoring the possibility space of the gameplay by selecting the cards that will be available during the game. From a thematic perspective, deck-building is an experiment in counterfactual world-building that determines what elements of the world—and, thereby, what version of the Star Wars EU—will come into play. While individual players may care more about one perspective than the other, gameplay and theme are integrated into cards that function simultaneously as game items and as fan collectibles. Relying on both aspects, the process of deck-building is essentially staging, establishing props for emergent narrative gameplay; this staging is fundamentally digital in that the stage is constituted by a curated set of discrete cards.

Following the dual curations of collection and customization, these decks are put into play through a kind of strategic assemblage in which players make decisions about which cards and combinations of cards to use within the game. Consequently, each playthrough produces a unique counterfactual unfolding of how the core struggle of Star Wars might play out. While this is not storytelling exactly, the narratives that emerge from these assemblages can be considered a kind of emergent fan fiction—a strangely collaborative form of story-making driven by a contested interplay of cards and game actions. To play a transmedia CCG is therefore paradoxically akin both to authoring a fan response to the source text and performing a goal-directed simulation of the source text's world. Acting upon the stage set by the digital deck-building, CCG gameplay constitutes a kind of improvised dialogue in which the discrete signifiers of the cards are circulated through a storyworld that is at once extrapolated from the

several short story anthologies (such as *Tales from Mos Eisley Cantina*, *Tales from Jabba's Palace*, and *Tales of the Bounty Hunters*) that provide narratives for background characters who became iconic despite playing minor roles in the films.

cards and referenced by the cards.⁹ In other words, this collision of decks neither retells nor eschews the Star Wars universe—instead, it collects and customizes that universe in a playful reassembly of digital elements.

Digitizing the Force

While all CCGs share this intersection of digital collection and customization, unique card designs and rule structures sharply differentiate CCGs to the point where it might be plausible to claim that individual CCGs are distinct media. Consequently, different CCGs generate different storyworlds—not just in their thematic content, but also at the fundamental metaphysical level of determining what kinds of things can exist, what kind of actions can take place, and what kind of relationships can emerge within that universe. Thus, this section takes a closer look at the specific design of the SWCCG and how it digitizes four aspects of the Force that organize the storyworld.

The SWCCG was released two years after *Magic: The Gathering* inaugurated the CCG as a game genre with its wildly popular 1993 release. At times second only to *Magic* in popularity,¹⁰ the SWCCG included eleven expansions that mostly followed the events of the original trilogy films, only briefly venturing into *The Phantom Menace*¹¹ before being discontinued in 2001. The game, therefore, is situated solidly within the EU era and maintains many intertextual connections with the novels and other transmedia texts of the period. The game itself refracts the material storyworld of Star Wars into several card classes: Characters, Locations, and four types of objects: Starships, Vehicles, Devices, and Weapons.¹² These are relatively

9 For further details on how CCGs play out fan response through a “haptic-panoptic” interface, see Kurt Lancaster, *Interacting with Babylon 5: Fan Performances in a Media Universe* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2001).

10 According to the SWCCG Players Committee.

11 I will not refer specifically to *The Phantom Menace* cards, but it should be noted that those cards perpetuated a persistent anachronism that both problematizes and extends the adaptive potential of the game. By mixing two distinct eras in the pool of available cards, the game became a much more fantastic representation of the Star Wars universe, moving from the logic of the alternate reality narrative—which allows fan/players to reconfigure elements of the narrative universe in ways that are not canonical but are at least plausible—to the logic of the action figure, in which the representation of decontextualized characters encourages mash-ups based on physical simultaneity that can transcend narrative time and even media license.

12 Other card types, like Objectives, emerged later in the game's development and are not discussed here.

straightforward adaptations: Characters move between and battle over Locations using various objects that enhance their capacity to do so. Materially distinct entities are easily represented as distinct cards—the digital logics commonly used to differentiate people, places, and things are adapted intuitively. The adaptation of events, actions, and utterances from the films is more complex, unhinging elements of the source plot from their contextual and temporal frames. Interrupts, which allow players to interject some immediate change into the gameplay, reflect the surprises, decisions, causes, and consequences that make up the film plot. Similarly, Effects represent ongoing conditions that take place in the storyworld and modify basic game mechanics. Interrupts and Effects have a peculiarly linguistic bent, with many of the card names drawing on quotations from the films. In so doing, these cards transform a variety of utterances (many of them descriptive) into performative utterances that enact change in the storyworld as they are played. Darth Vader's implied order "I want that ship" in *The Empire Strikes Back*, for example, becomes an Effect that can be played on an opponent's starship to make it easier and more beneficial to capture, altering the digital values of cards in the game world to better reflect the thematic weight of the storyworld wherein certain ships are more valuable to the plot. This is indicative of how the SWCCG routinely generalizes specific events, actions, and utterances, transforming the happenings that constitute the filmic experience into the general potential for certain kinds of actions.

As the material storyworld and the transmedia story are translated into these card types, they are digitized in the process. A character with dynamic skills becomes a Character card with rigid statistics. A location with substantive terrain becomes an abstract conceptual frame signifying the (binary) presence or absence of any number of characters. An event with contextual significance becomes a quantifiable game action. This digitization presents a peculiar problem for transmedia storytelling in general and for adapting the Force in particular. While themes of digitality run throughout the Star Wars storyworld,¹³ the prevailing logic of the Force is hyper-continuous. In most canonical texts, the Force is presented as supernatural, mystical, and holistic. Even though the pseudoscientific explanation of the Force as due to quantifiable midi-chlorians suggests that the Force has a digital component, the Jedi in the prequel trilogy still maintain a quasi-religious iconography

13 Digitality can be found in the binary logic of the battle of good and evil, in the themes of technology and data collection that run throughout the series, in the biological quantification of Force ability as the presence of symbiotic midi-chlorians, etc.

and meditative practices that suggests a more mystical paradigm. In fact, the Force suspends, transcends, and sometimes transforms material reality, most commonly as something that transcends quantifiable physical laws. While this logic is not incompatible with CCG design, the tension between the digital structure of the CCG and its holistic subject matter certainly problematizes the continuity of transmedia storytelling. Thus, the following four case studies demonstrate not a wholesale rejection of holism in favor of digitality, but the medium-specific challenges of striving to represent holism through digital game mechanics.

The Force as Power

There is no question that the powers of the Jedi have captured viewers' attentions over the decades. Indeed, Obi-Wan Kenobi opens his explanation of the Force by emphasizing that "The Force is what gives a Jedi his power" (*A New Hope*). Echoing this sentiment, Dan Rubey argues that thematically, "If *Star Wars* is 'about' anything, it is about power—and the source of ultimate power in the film is the Force."¹⁴ The mystical nature of the Force, however, prevents its power from being simplistically reduced to everyday notions of power, such as physical power, technological power, or political power, which are all ways of mediating an individual's ability to act in and upon the world. Instead, the supernatural power of the Force problematizes the notion of power as an expression of agency. As Obi-Wan indicates in response to Luke's queries in *A New Hope*, the Force partially "controls your actions" and partially "obeys your commands." On the surface, games are not particularly amenable to adapting this kind of mystical synergy of spiritual forces. Thus, *Star Wars* games typically digitize Force powers as quantifiable game actions. While this instrumentalizes the Force by turning it into a tool for player agency, the complicated relationship between the player and the game system reflects how the Force simultaneously localizes and delocalizes agency.

The SWCCG implements Force powers through a multilayered process—firstly by quantifying the Force attunement of characters and secondly by having activated abilities that often target this stat. Ability quantifies

14 Dan Rubey, "Not So Long Ago nor Far Away: New Variations on Old Themes and Questioning *Star Wars*' Revival of Heroic Archetypes," in *Myth, Media, and Culture Star Wars: An Anthology*, ed. Douglas Brode and Leah Deyneka (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2012), 57.

Force attunement¹⁵ as a passive stat, a numerical value from zero to seven assigned to all Characters.

Fig. 8.1: Character card – Darth Vader

Fig. 8.2: Interrupt card – Move along

This digitization thus turns Force attunement into a numerical value that represents ability not as agential, but as a reservoir or a standing reserve. Like the midi-chlorians, this digitizes the power of the Force as a potential rather than kinetic energy—the precondition for action rather than action itself. The most direct adaptation of Force powers is therefore found not in the rule system, but in game actions provided by the text of various cards. A notable example is the Character card “Darth Vader, Dark Lord of the Sith” (Fig. 8.1), whose ability allows him to “choke” an opposing character. While examples like this are relatively rare, Force abilities are more commonly represented as Interrupts or Effects. For example, the “Move Along ...” Interrupt (Fig. 8.2) refers to a scene when Obi-Wan Kenobi uses the Force to pass unchallenged through a security checkpoint. As a single card tied to a single action, such

15 The ability numbers make sense in the case of the Jedi, with Yoda and the Emperor receiving the highest scores and Luke slowly gaining in ability as he becomes a Jedi himself. Yet, for the other characters, who do not exhibit any Force-sensitivity whatsoever, the values seem rather arbitrary or, rather, tied to other non-Force measures of ability (e.g. Han has an Ability of 3 whereas a generic Rebel Trooper has an Ability of 1).

Interrupts more clearly reflect Force abilities as interventions into the natural order wielded by active agents (characters and players). These representations, however, completely decontextualize the represented abilities from the scenes that feature them. "Move Along...", for instance, allows a player to move opposing Characters away from an ongoing battle. This simultaneously digitizes and instrumentalizes the Force by turning a scene that initially had significance within its filmic context into a discrete, isolated ability.

At the same time, this ability is designed to be redeployed in the strategic assemblage of gameplay through a multilayered representation of agency that is akin to the filmic representation of the Force. First, while these abilities are isolated from their narrative context, they are not fundamentally insular. Force powers are enacted through the intersection of the player, the card, and the game system itself, suggesting a distributed agency that partially reflects the mystical universalism of the Force. Second, the game as a whole blends strategy and chance in ways that reflect how games simultaneously play out fantasies of control and fatalism.¹⁶ In the end, Force powers are abstracted away from their narrative context only to be re-embedded in a gameplay context.

The Force as Morality

Drawing as much upon cowboy movies and the chivalric and samurai codes as science fiction, Star Wars depicts a famously binary moral universe. The age-old narrative trope of good versus evil is woven into the fabric of the universe itself as the tangible presence of the Force lends concreteness to the moral categories of Light and Dark. Yet, the intrinsically moral nature of this binarism becomes complicated when adapted into competitive gameplay, which presumes a kind of amoral antagonism. In this context, a tension emerges between the imperatives for games to offer equal subject positions and for adaptations to reflect hierarchies between subject positions present in the source text. As a game adaptation and a participatory fan production, the SWCCG reconciles this contradiction between narrative and gameplay to create a play experience that is paradoxically both morally binarized and amoral. Using the uniquely two-layered play experience of the CCG, it maintains this paradox primarily by framing an amoral strategy play within an aesthetically binarized deck-building play.

¹⁶ See the discussions of *agon* and *alea* in Roger Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1961).

To bridge the gap between the moral binary of Star Wars and the presumed amorality of competitive gameplay, Decipher chose a radical design option: a thoroughly asymmetrical game in which the Light Side and Dark Side play with decks constructed from completely independent pools of cards. In addition to complicating competitive balance, there are several thematic consequences to maintaining an absolute distinction between the Light and Dark Sides. As moral allegiance is built into the card itself, goodness becomes less a behavioral notion than a reflection of inherent character—what makes Luke “good” and Vader “bad” in the game is nothing more than that they are Light and Dark side cards respectively. While this certainly differs from the moral implications of the films, this difference may be less stark than it initially appears given that the films tend to aestheticize morality in similar ways. Thus, Rubey argues that “All we really have are two similar groups competing for power and dichotomized into ‘good’ and ‘evil.’ There is no complex understanding of what either good or evil could really mean.”¹⁷ While there are certainly moral distinctions to be found in the Star Wars films, it is also the case that the films consistently differentiate Light and Dark aesthetically. Similarly, the dual design of the cards—which have different design templates for Light and Dark—becomes a frame that indelibly inks morality into the physical manifestation of characters and other card categories within the game world.

Through this aestheticization of morality, the SWCCG builds the morally binarized universe of Star Wars into the competitively binarized and physically divided universe of the game itself without implying any moral differentiation between the players. Translating this non-hierarchical aesthetic into gameplay, both sides share fundamental rules of engagement such that the simple separation of the cards into Light and Dark bears most of the thematic burden of reflecting the moral binary of Star Wars, allowing the play itself to take on a somewhat amoral (or at least reciprocal) character. Consequently, the SWCCG transforms the films’ strict separation of Light and Dark from a moral distinction into a perpetual opposition more like that between yin and yang in Taoist philosophy. Ironically, however, this amoral presentation distances players from participating in the moral binarization of the films while at the same time rendering that very binarization more absolute. The digital logic of the binary, that is, becomes starker when the distinction is linked with aesthetic design rather than moral behavior. In

17 Dan Rubey, “Not So Long Ago nor Far Away: New Variations on Old Themes and Questioning Star Wars’ Revival of Heroic Archetypes,” in *Myth, Media, and Culture in Star Wars: An Anthology*, ed. Douglas Brode and Leah Deyneka (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2012), 59.

other words, the SWCCG replaces a narrative logic of good and evil with a gameplay logic in which all actions merely reflect self-interested strategic maneuvers within a competitive arena.

The Force as Destiny

By deemphasizing the morality of the Light and Dark binary in Star Wars, the SWCCG also transforms a third notion of the Force—the Force as destiny—from fatalistic¹⁸ to probabilistic, sacrifices some of its holism in favor of a more digital logic. Although film audiences often leave satisfied when the narrative tension resolves into the expected outcome of good triumphing over evil, no competitive game has a built-in, completely inevitable outcome. To be inevitable, in many ways, is to not be a game.¹⁹ Interestingly, the SWCCG does not abandon the concept of destiny, but reconfigures it from a fatalistic notion to a probabilistic one by using the cards as a semi-random element for determining the outcome of certain actions.

Just as the Force as morality weaves the thematic opposition of good and evil into the fabric of the fictional universe itself, the Force as destiny also weaves an inherent optimism into the outcome of this struggle. Thus, while the Emperor and Darth Vader are both depicted as wielding greater power than Luke, neither of them benefit from the kind of serendipity that Luke does. It is implied that the Force itself, sometimes anthropomorphized through the specters of Luke's former masters, guides Luke toward victory. This theme also runs throughout EU texts: in the Thrawn Trilogy, for example, the Empire looks to be on the path to victory behind the superior strategic genius of its new commander, but the New Republic manages to defeat him, because goodness itself tips the scales in its own favor.

Adapting this notion of destiny in a game form that cannot tolerate such inevitability requires privileging the dramatic tension in the narrative over

18 For a more detailed account of whether the future is fixed in Star Wars, see Jason T. Eberl, "‘You Cannot Escape Your Destiny’ (Or Can You?): Freedom and Predestination in the Skywalker Family," in *Star Wars and Philosophy: More Powerful Than You Can Possibly Imagine*, ed. Kevin S. Decker and Jason T. Eberl (Chicago: Open Court, 2005).

19 This is complicated in various ways. For example, some video games do have a completely determined sequence of events, but generally balance this by the tension of whether a player will succeed or fail to unravel this sequence. Similarly, most highly skill-dependent games will have inevitable outcomes in situations in which one player is much more skilled, but this inevitability is itself probabilistic—there is always some slight chance of an upset.

its inevitable resolution, which means, paradoxically, depicting destiny in a fundamentally self-contradictory way—as random rather than actually predestined. In the *SWCCG*, Destiny is the only attribute that is shared by every card of every type. Destiny is a numerical value, generally between zero and six, that is used instead of rolling a die to determine a random outcome. Unlike the total randomization of a die roll or coin toss, this probabilistic mechanic synthesizes both luck and skill by allowing the “random” draw to be influenced by both deck-building (which changes the probability distribution) and card counting. Thus, although this adaptation of the Force as destiny eliminates the agency of the universe, it builds in a degree of player agency that prevents the world from becoming a truly random space. Players themselves embody divergent destinies that create uncertainty by virtue of being opposed to one another, suggesting that digitality and holism may not be as exclusive as they may seem. It is possible to say, therefore, that the game pits the cosmic struggle of Light and Dark not as random events, but as the uncertain clash of two destinies that attempt to bend events towards their own desired outcomes.

The Force as Life

After presenting his instrumental explanation of the Force as “what gives a Jedi his power,” Obi-Wan Kenobi turns towards the metaphysical to explain that the Force is “an energy field created by all living things” (*A New Hope*). While this notion of the Force as life is perhaps the most holistic of the four notions explored in this chapter, it is ironically the one best represented in the digital logic of the *SWCCG*, demonstrating that, while holism and digitality create a constant tension for this game adaptation, they are by no means mutually exclusive. In fact, digitality is precisely what enables an organic flow of cards to reflect the ecological²⁰ and relational unifying field that is the Force.

In the *SWCCG*, the deck itself becomes a physical representation of the Force in what is perhaps the most elegant feature of the game’s design. The 60-card Light and Dark decks that oppose each other unify and collectively represent the life of one “side” of the Force—a player loses not when their

20 For a more detailed analysis of environmental ethics in Star Wars, see Elizabeth F. Cooke, “‘Be Mindful of the Living Force’: Environmental Ethics in *Star Wars*,” in *Star Wars and Philosophy: More Powerful Than You Can Possibly Imagine*, ed. Kevin S. Decker and Jason T. Eberl (Chicago: Open Court, 2005).

characters die, but when the deck is depleted. The metaphor of the deck as life is made explicit through rules for “losing life,” which require players to discard cards, and “gaining life,” which bring previously discarded cards back into the deck. This is further extended by rules for “Force Drains,” which state that when a player controls a location, the opposing player loses life equal to the number of their Force Icons—symbols that reflect the strength of the Light or Dark side of the Force—on that location. Thus, the game connects the physical universe of Locations to the metaphysical universe of the Force as life, using the circulation of cards to reflect the waxing and waning of power within the eternal struggle between Light and Dark.

This circulation of cards complicates the Force-as-life metaphor, creating a digital ecology in which individual cards perform different functions as they circulate. The Force Pile mediates the Force as power by quantifying the amount of Force available for use, allowing the player to spend Force (by moving a number of cards to the Used Pile) to deploy cards or perform certain game actions. And, in a strangely counterproductive act of incarnation, it is this Force Pile from which cards are drawn, leaving the holistic reservoir of the deck and becoming agents that draw upon this same Force pile to affect the represented gameworld. Similarly, the Reserve Deck mediates the use of Destiny, which is drawn from the Reserve Deck, checked, and placed in the Used Pile. Finally, this cycle is completed when the Used Pile is placed under the Reserve Deck each turn. As cards cycle and recycle through the deck, discrete cards become elements in an organic flow that parallels the holism of a life Force that is generated by and yet interconnects discrete living entities.

Conclusion

The *SWCCG* game adaptation, as with any ludic remediation, is designed to synthesize a narrative play experience from narrative and play conventions that are often in tension. As the *SWCCG* engages the tension between the holism of the Force and the digitality of the CCG, it does manage to adapt the aforementioned aspects—power, morality, destiny, and life—as implementable relations between digital cards. In so doing, the game digitizes the narrative.

However, for all the ways in which this game adaptation disrupts the underlying narrative structure of the films and other EU texts, the *SWCCG* is not really a subversive text. Instead, the game diverges from the narrative

in order to adapt the underlying fabric of the universe itself—the physical laws and narrative conventions that make Star Wars distinctive. The consequence of this imperfect translation is that the game offers a unique angle on the Star Wars universe, one particularly suited to providing fans with resources for constructing their own version of Star Wars from its deconstructed elements. In this adaptive paradigm, the idea of Star Wars as a fixed canon gives way to the idea of Star Wars as an imaginative storyworld that invites fan engagement. The digitality of the game medium, moreover, scaffolds such engagement by providing both an immersive structure (the rules) and narrative elements (the cards) for assembling emergent narrative play. This digital game, therefore, blends media reception and production into a ludic experience that plays out rather than retells Star Wars.