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Understanding Transmedia Storytelling in the Digital Age: A Deeper Look into Rooster Teeth's RWBY Textual Adaptations

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Understanding Transmedia Storytelling in the Digital Age:
A Deeper Look into Rooster Teeth's *RWBY* Textual Adaptations



Figure 1: Banner for Season 6 of *RWBY*, from left to right: Ruby, Weiss, Blake and Yang.

Property of Rooster Teeth

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Abstract

This thesis explores the role of transmedia storytelling in the context of digital media, with a particular focus on Rooster Teeth's *RWBY* animated series and its printed adaptations. Rooster Teeth, a pioneer in online content creation, gained widespread recognition with its machinima series *Red vs. Blue* and later expanded into original animation with *RWBY*. *RWBY* serves as a case study that offers a perceptive look at the application of transmedia storytelling, a narrative technique that disperses tale elements over several platforms to engage audiences in more meaningful and participatory ways.

The success of *RWBY* in using a variety of media formats, such as manga, comics, novels, and animation, to broaden its story universe and establish a connection with viewers throughout the world – especially in Japan – is critically examined in this thesis. Although *RWBY*'s anime-style graphics and partnerships with Japanese manga publishers helped it gain significant success in Japan, its printed adaptations – created in association with VIZ Media and DC Comics – were beset by a number of difficulties. These problems highlight crucial questions about the adaption of animated shows into printed formats, notably with preserving narrative coherence and audience engagement across platforms.

The thesis explores the idea of filtering, framing and amplification in the digital age, as presented in *The Content Machine* by Michael Bhaskar. Using Bhaskar's framework Rooster Teeth's *RWBY* franchise management is examined. Rooster Teeth exhibits an attempt to create value by amplifying information across multiple mediums through their creative use of digital channels for content distribution, first through web series and then through partnerships with DC Comics and Japanese manga publishers. This study contends that *RWBY*'s print adaptations, much as they preserved (retained) viewer engagement, fell short of realizing the full potential of transmedia storytelling since they essentially repeated the animation series' stories without broadening the narrative universe.

The thesis concludes by discussing the wider ramifications of transmedia storytelling in the digital era and how fan involvement, global audience dynamics, and changing publishing environments may affect these stories in the future. Rooster Teeth and their show *RWBY* highlights the benefits and challenges of transmedia storytelling as digital media continues to develop, underscoring the necessity of meticulous coordination across platforms to produce a genuinely immersive and long-lasting narrative experience.

Introduction

Rooster Teeth's remarkable journey from a grassroots startup to a multimedia empire is a testament to the power of innovation and the internet, and how a multimedia company not always makes the best decisions in publishing. Founded in 2003 in Austin, Texas, by Burnie Burns, Matt Hullum, Geoff Ramsey, Gus Sorola, Joel Heyman, and Jason Saldana, Rooster Teeth initially gained fame with the machinima series *Red vs. Blue* (2003), set in the universe of the video game *Halo*. Burnie Burns, with his passion for filmmaking and background in computer technology, spearheaded this venture, leveraging the flexibility of the *Halo* game engine to create comedic, cinematic content.

The success of *Red vs. Blue* propelled Rooster Teeth to new heights, allowing them to establish a robust online presence and diversify into various content forms, including other web series, podcasts, livestreams, and merchandise. Their innovative approach to using the internet as a primary distribution channel helped them build a loyal fanbase and achieve early success. Significant milestones included their 2008 acquisition by Fullscreen and the launch of their subscription service, FIRST, in 2016. Rooster Teeth also ventured into animation with animated web series like *RWBY* and *gen:Lock*, earning international acclaim for their storytelling and visual style. However, despite these successes, Rooster Teeth faced numerous challenges, including shifting consumer behaviors, controversies, and declining subscriber numbers. In March 2024, the company announced their closure, citing financial difficulties and changes in the digital media landscape.

Rooster Teeth had expanded their content creation beyond video and digital media into the realm of textual media, offering a variety of publications that appeal to their diverse fanbase. This includes comic books, graphic novels, and official guides based on their popular series and original properties. Particularly Rooster Teeth's web animated web series *RWBY* became popular and so the company tried to increase its engagement by systematically distributing its narrative across different media channels. This thesis explores the role of transmedia storytelling in the context of digital media, with a particular focus on Rooster Teeth's *RWBY* web series and their textual adaptations.

RWBY is a perfect subject to take a closer look at since it crafts a deep, engaging story that spans several platforms, captivates a devoted audience, and upholds a cogent yet expansive story universe. This makes it a shining example of how a narrative may successfully combine several mediums to produce a cohesive and captivating entertainment experience. But what is *RWBY* exactly? *RWBY* is an innovative animated television series produced by Rooster Teeth Productions. *RWBY* has enthralled audiences all over the world since its 2013 premiere because of its captivating characters, gorgeous animation, and intricate plot. It takes place on the planet of Remnant. In the realm of Remnant, there exist monsters called Grimm, evil spirits who lurk in the shadows and prey on people. Huntsmen

and Huntresses are trained to use Dust, a strong material with magical qualities, and their Semblance, special skills that emerge from their souls, to counter the Grimm threat. *RWBY* tells the tale of four teenage huntresses-in-training as they overcome obstacles and face evil forces that want to destroy their world. The show follows Ruby Rose, Weiss Schnee, Blake Belladonna, and Yang Xiao Long (all voiced by Rooster Teeth staff), who make up Team 'RWBY', as they train at Beacon Academy to become better fighters and realize their full potential as huntresses. Team RWBY meets both friends and enemies while navigating Beacon Academy's training program. They also form alliances, learn secrets, and go through tough personal challenges that put their fortitude to the test. They get entangled in a wider struggle along the road that involves mysterious groups, antiquated artifacts, and the fate of the entire globe.

The late Monty Oum, a creative writer and animator best known for his work on online series like *Red vs. Blue* and *Haloid*, was the creator of *RWBY*. *RWBY* was Oum's passion project, fusing mythology, anime (Japanese animation), and fairy tales to create a distinct and engrossing world. Oum brought his idea for *RWBY* to reality by working with other writers and animators at Rooster Teeth, such as Miles Luna and Kerry Shawcross, and infused the series with his signature flair and limitless inventiveness. Sadly, Oum passed away in 2015, but his influence on the animation business and the ongoing production of *RWBY* continued to carry on his legacy. *RWBY* delves into a multitude of topics that strike a chord with viewers of all ages, ranging from the significance of self-discovery and the strength of friendship to the eternal conflict between good and evil. The series was a tribute to the never-ending creative potential of its creators and the timeless power of storytelling as it developed and grew.

After *RWBY* became popular, Rooster Teeth worked with Japanese manga publishers such as VIZ Media to create a manga adaptation. They have also published comic book series with publishers such as DC Comics, delving deeper into the universe and characters of *RWBY*. The legacy of Rooster Teeth, particularly through groundbreaking series like *RWBY*, highlights the dynamic nature of digital media and the importance of understanding and adapting to one's audience. Rooster Teeth's early success was largely attributed to their use of the internet as a distribution channel. When the entertainment industry was controlled by traditional media, Rooster Teeth saw that online platforms could be a powerful tool for directly addressing viewers.¹ Utilizing the viral nature of the internet, they disseminated *Red vs. Blue* episodes via their website and online video-sharing services like YouTube. The company released four different manga adaptations as well as several

¹ Francisco, 'How "Red Vs. Blue" built an empire and invented a whole genre', *Inverse*, 11 April, 2017. <<https://www.inverse.com/article/29928-red-vs-blue-rooster-teeth-season-15-interview>> (20 April 2024).

comic adaptations. As the company evolved, their missteps, especially in navigating their fanbase and expanding into printed materials, underscore the complexities of maintaining relevance in a rapidly changing industry.

To develop a better understanding of this rapidly changing industry and how Rooster Teeth and particularly their animated show *RWBY* evolved with this, I will discuss the importance of stigma management by Takeshi Matsui in this thesis. Stigma management points out the process of developing certain expectation with consumers: when their “local” counterparts have been on the market for a long time and have developed a stereotype, foreign cultural items have a challenge when they try to enter that market. I posit that Rooster Teeth, next to these ownership changes and controversies, might not have understood the stigma management of *RWBY*. The company released four different manga adaptations as well as several comic adaptations. More importantly, this thesis will discuss the beforementioned term transmedia storytelling: a concept popularized by media scholar Henry Jenkins, an innovative narrative technique that expands a single story or storyline across multiple platforms and formats. In short, to use transmedia storytelling is to broaden the narrative universe so that every medium can contribute in a different way to the main plot. Comic books can explore side tales, television shows can go deeper into character backstories and subplots, movies can introduce characters and a main plot, and video games can let viewers directly engage with the fictional world. Because fans may explore many aspects of the story world and frequently influence its growth through their interactions and contributions, this multi-platform strategy not only increases audience engagement but also promotes active involvement and co-creation. This thesis will connect the term transmedia storytelling to Rooster Teeth's series *RWBY* and will discuss its printed works. We will take a look at its printed publications of this series and how the company used this for their transmedia narrative. I will analyze how the company Rooster Teeth is situated and how this influences certain problems or successes as an actor in print publishing. To answer this, we have to look at the difference in publishing comics and manga (Japanese comics) and take a closer look at comic publishing companies like VIZ Media and DC, which are the publishing houses for *RWBY* and its printed material. Other animated series that got adapted into a comic book are discussed as well. I will take a closer look at *Avatar: The Last Airbender* and *Adventure Time* both got a successful and long comic book runs with their publishers.

In this thesis, I investigate how Rooster Teeth's *RWBY* series spread its narrative across many media platforms using transmedia storytelling as the main lens. For instance, *RWBY*'s animated web series functions as the main media, and its video games, manga, and comics provide more world-building and character backstories. This approach enables a more complex, immersive narrative that increases audience involvement by utilizing

numerous platforms. The research delves deeper into the adaptation of the animated series for print media, examining the ways in which the shift between media platforms impacts the coherence of the story and the level of audience engagement. This method also takes into account the difficulties in managing stigma in the publishing sector, especially when it comes to printing that has its roots in the online world, as well as the wider cultural ramifications of cross-cultural manga and comic book adaptations. This thesis attempts to comprehend the dynamic interplay between narrative textual extension, media convergence, and audience engagement in a digital age by examining the use of transmedia storytelling in RWBY.

However, I have to point out that since Rooster Teeth shut down, all its internet sites, blogposts, etc. got deleted. This means several sources will come from sites such as The Wayback Machine, or other archival websites. Thankfully a lot of information is archived on such sites, but it's important to note that not all information is the most reliable, since the direct source is closed down. Another important sidenote to make, is the fact that at the time of writing this thesis (October 2024) not every detail of the future of the company and the web series *RWBY* is clear.

Chapter one: Rooster Teeth's legacy

The tale of Rooster Teeth, a multimedia empire born out of grassroots innovation, is worth explaining. Established in Austin, Texas, Rooster Teeth started out as a tiny production firm in 2003, with Burnie Burns, Matt Hullum, Geoff Ramsey, Gus Sorola, Joel Heyman, and Jason Saldana among them. Their first big break came from making the hilarious machinima series *Red vs. Blue*, which took place in the world of the computer game *Halo*.²

The beginning of Rooster Teeth

Burnie Burns, who loved to make movies and had a degree in computer technology, is where the tale of Rooster Teeth begins. For a while, he had been working with the art of machinima, which is an animated cinematic style made with video game engines. During this time, he connected with fellow video game and film aficionado Geoff Ramsey through an online forum for the game *Dr. Sbaitso*.³ Burns and Ramsey started working together on a project in 2002 that made use of the recently launched video game *Halo: Combat Evolved*.⁴ They found that the camera movement options in the game's multiplayer mode were remarkably flexible, which allowed them to craft cinematic scenes within the game. They chose to use voiceovers and gameplay from *Halo* to create a humorous series that was inspired by their experiments. *Red vs. Blue* debuted on YouTube on April 1, 2003, with "Why Are We Here?" serving as the title of the first episode.⁵ The show chronicled the ludicrous talks and slapstick hilarity between two opposing squads of troops in a barren canyon. What began as a lighthearted side project soon gained momentum, drawing a devoted following and receiving praise from critics for its clever prose and inventive usage of video game technology.⁶

Burns, Ramsey, and their associates gained momentum when *Red vs. Blue* began to acquire popularity. In 2003, they formally established Rooster Teeth Productions, calling the business after Burns' father's euphemism for not using profanity.⁷ The group first worked out of Burns' spare bedroom and dedicated all their efforts to producing additional *Red vs. Blue* episodes while also experimenting with other artistic endeavors.

² Francisco, 'How "Red Vs. Blue" built an empire and invented a whole genre'.

³ J. Gross, 'Red Vs. Blue = Green', *Austin American-Statesman*, 6 July 2004. <https://web.archive.org/web/20071016070016/http://www.austin360.com/movies/content/movies/aas_stories/2004_july/redvsblue_07-06-04.html> (16 April 2024).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Francisco, 'How "Red Vs. Blue" built an empire and invented a whole genre'.

⁶ T. Spangler, 'After Machinima Shutdown, Rooster Teeth Revives "Inside Gaming" and Rescues Other Machinima Shows', *Variety*, 14 February 2019. <<https://variety.com/2019/digital/news/machinima-rooster-teeth-inside-gaming-1203136988>> (21 April 2024).

⁷ A.M.M. Fortin, '(re)Making Worlds Together: Rooster Teeth, Community, and Sites of Engagement', *USF Tampa Graduate Theses and Dissertations*, (2019).

As the company expanded, Rooster Teeth offered more than just *Red vs. Blue*. *The Strangerhood*, a humorous reality show featuring characters from *The Sims*, and *Panics*, a science fiction series set in a post-apocalyptic environment, were among the other web series the business started to produce. Through these initiatives, Rooster Teeth was able to expand the audience for their platform by experimenting with various genres and storytelling forms.⁸

A significant turning point for Rooster Teeth was reached in 2008 when it was purchased by Fullscreen, a digital media firm that specializes in the production and delivery of online content.⁹ Through the acquisition, Rooster Teeth gained access to more resources and knowledge, allowing it to expand and diversify its content portfolio even further. While being owned by Fullscreen, Rooster Teeth kept creating unique and captivating material and investigated new business opportunities.

Rooster Teeth had diversified its revenue streams over the years, utilizing a variety of monetization strategies to sustain and grow its business. Through advertising, Rooster Teeth makes money from its programming on YouTube. The business incorporates sponsored content into its films and teams up with brands for sponsorships. The company offers a large selection of products, such as clothing, home goods, accessories, and collectibles. In order to appeal to the devoted fan base of popular series like *Red vs. Blue*, these products frequently contain branding from such shows. Crowdfunding platforms have been effectively utilized by Rooster Teeth to finance more ambitious projects, including the card game *A Million Dollars, But...*¹⁰ These projects create pre-release buzz and encourage community involvement in addition to raising substantial sums of money. Thousands of fans attend RTX, an annual gathering. Ticket sales, exclusive goods, and sponsorships are the sources of income. The occasion also raises business awareness and fortifies ties within the community.

The introduction of Rooster Teeth's subscription service, FIRST (previously known as Rooster Teeth FIRST), in 2016 was one of the most important events that occurred during this time.¹¹ By giving subscribers early access to material, special merchandising, and ad-free viewing, FIRST was able to increase revenue streams and foster closer ties with its

⁸ Digiday, 'How Rooster Teeth Gets 135,000 People To Pay For Gaming and Comedy Content', *Digiday*, 28 June 2016. <<https://digiday.com/media/rooster-teeth-gets-135000-people-pay-gaming-comedy-content/>> (16 April 2024).

⁹ J. Cohen, 'Rooster Teeth: Insights From A Very Successful Entertainment Company', *Tubefilter*, 7 March 2016. <<https://www.tubefilter.com/2014/03/07/rooster-teeth-interview-insights-entertainment-company/>> (20 April 2024).

¹⁰ 'A Million Dollars, But... The Game', Kickstarter, 8 November 2016 <<https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/roosterteeth/million-dollars-but-the-game>> (1 August 2024).

¹¹ Rooster Teeth Support, 'FIRST Patronage', <<https://support.roosterteeth.com/hc/en-us/sections/360009298132-FIRST-Patronage>> (26 May 2024).

most devoted followers. Rooster Teeth began incorporating livestreaming into its content strategy and had regularly hosted broadcasts on Twitch and other platforms.¹² These livestreams allowed fans to communicate with Rooster Teeth's developers in real time and included gameplay, Q&A sessions, and special events.

From screen to print

Following AT&T's acquisition of Fullscreen in 2014, Rooster Teeth saw a major reorganization that altered its corporate structure and leadership group.¹³ Rooster Teeth was dedicated to its goal of producing creative and enjoyable content for viewers all over the world, even considering these adjustments.¹⁴ Especially online and on the platform YouTube they were recognized by millions and millions of people. As of its peak periods, Rooster Teeth's main YouTube channel had garnered millions of subscribers. With over 9 million members, the main Rooster Teeth channel had demonstrated both its wide appeal and the popularity of its varied content offerings. Achievement Hunter, a sister channel that specializes in humorous 'Let's Plays' and gaming material, had also achieved significant popularity, reaching a peak subscriber count of about 5 million. Before it was eventually rebranded and incorporated into other Rooster Teeth material, The Know, another well-liked channel within the company, boasted hundreds of thousands of subscribers and focused on news and information about gaming and geek culture.

The same numbers were seen in the first season of *RWBY* on YouTube. A single episode of *RWBY Volume 1* received millions of views at its height and in the years that followed.¹⁵ Particularly soon after its broadcast, the first episode garnered a substantial number of views – often reported to be around several million – in a comparatively short amount of time. Many of the latter episodes garnered millions of views each, demonstrating the great viewership that they continued to have.

¹² Fortin, '(re)Making Worlds Together'.

¹³ T. Spangler, 'Jordan Levin Takes Reins at Rooster Teeth, Co-Founder Matt Hullum Shifts To New Role', *Variety*, 24 September 2019. <<https://variety.com/2019/digital/news/rooster-teeth-jordan-levin-matt-hullum-1203347749/>> (18 April 2024); T. Spangler, 'YouTube Network Fullscreen Acquires Digital Studio Rooster Teeth', *Variety*, 10 November 2014. <<https://variety.com/2014/digital/news/youtube-network-fullscreen-acquires-digital-studio-rooster-teeth-1201352394/>> (18 April 2024).

¹⁴ S. Clarke, "'Red Vs. Blue' Producer Rooster Teeth Opens Up in London', *Variety*, 23 April 2018. <<https://variety.com/2018/digital/news/red-vs-blue-rooster-teeth-london-1202780342/>> (18 April 2024).

¹⁵ Rooster Teeth, 'RWBY "Red" Trailer', *YouTube*, 7 November 2012. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pYW2GmHB5xs>> (1 Mei 2024).

The Warner Bros.'s acquisition of Rooster Teeth was a momentous occasion in the history of the business.¹⁶ In 2019, Warner Bros. Home Entertainment Group (WBHEG) paid around \$100 million for the majority of Rooster Teeth while making the acquisition.¹⁷ This action was a component of Warner Bros.'s strategy to increase its market share in the digital entertainment industry and capitalize on Rooster Teeth's devoted following and wide range of content offerings. As per the agreement, Rooster Teeth maintained creative authority over its material and business practices while obtaining access to Warner Bros.'s assets, knowledge, and distribution system. Through the agreement, Rooster Teeth tried to seek new prospects in content creation, distribution, and licensing while also trying to accelerate its growth.¹⁸ The capacity of Warner Bros. to assist Rooster Teeth in broadening their audience and distribution network was one of the acquisition's main advantages, or so it was promised. What it did create was new avenues for cooperation between Warner Bros.'s extensive creative talent and intellectual property network and Rooster Teeth. With Warner Bros.'s well-known titles, including *Harry Potter*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and most of the DC Comics, Rooster Teeth started looking for joint ventures to produce fresh and engaging content for their fan base.¹⁹

Rooster Teeth Productions' animated series *RWBY*, which is produced in the West, had also received a great deal of praise and popularity in Japan, a nation well-known for its extensive history of anime. *RWBY* is a beloved animation series that, despite its non-Japanese origin, had managed to win over the hearts of Japanese viewers. A prominent aspect of *RWBY* that appeals to Japanese viewers is its visually arresting style, which draws extensively from manga and anime. *RWBY* embodies many of the stylistic qualities that characterize Japanese animation, from its explosive combat scenes and imaginative world-building to its bright character designs. Fans of conventional anime will find the series intriguing due to its use of vivid colors, emotive character movements, and elaborate clothing designs, which pay homage to the skill and beauty of Japanese animation.²⁰ To strengthen *RWBY*'s ties to the anime community, Rooster Teeth had actively promoted alliances and

¹⁶ S. Moritz, et al. 'AT&T Explores Sale of Rooster Teeth Online Media Unit', 23 April 2021. <<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-04-23/at-t-is-said-to-explore-sale-of-rooster-teeth-online-media-unit>> (17 April 2024).

¹⁷ T. Spangler, 'WarnerMedia's Rooster Teeth Cuts Off 13% of Staff, Laying Off About 50', *Variety*, 12 September 2019. <<https://variety.com/2019/digital/news/rooster-teeth-layoffs-13-percent-warnermedia-1203333556/>> (18 April 2024).

¹⁸ S. Dredge, 'Rooster Teeth Plays The Video Game: "We're Competing With Netflix and HBO"', *The Guardian*, 16 April 2015. <<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/apr/16/rooster-teeth-netflix-hbo-youtube-lazer-team-gamergate>> (20 April 2024).

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ J. Wyndow, 'Is *RWBY* an anime?', *Medium*, 14 December 2015. <<https://medium.com/@Jwyndow/is-rwby-an-anime-b25b1d874129>> (27 October 2024).

team-ups with well-known individuals and studios in the Japanese animation business.²¹ *RWBY* has been localized for the Japanese market in order to appeal to Japanese audiences.²² Those who would rather watch the series in their own language can choose between dubbed and subtitled versions. Japanese viewers can now fully immerse themselves in the world of Remnant and develop a deeper connection with the characters and storylines thanks to this localization work, which has also made *RWBY* more accessible to them. In Japan's weekly article on MyAnimeList, *RWBY* Volume 1 was in first place of the blu-ray sales. It sold more than 5000 copies in its first week of release.²³ Fundamentally, *RWBY* delves into issues and patterns that are universally relatable to audiences across the globe, especially those in Japan. The show explores topics that are frequently covered in Japanese manga and anime, like friendship, bravery, redemption, the conflict between good and evil, but most importantly its setting: high school.²⁴ The protagonists of Team *RWBY* and their allies experience intense personal growth and development, overcome adversity, and come to represent virtues like hope, tenacity, and persistence. In addition, *RWBY* has a complex mythology and world-building that is influenced by fairy tales, folklore, and classic literature. The show creates a compelling world that feels both real and fantastical by fusing together a complex tapestry of mythology, tradition, and mystical aspects. Japanese viewers, who value the complex storylines and fantastical settings seen in their favorite anime and manga series, found this depth of storytelling appealing.²⁵ Furthermore, another animated series adaptation was made by Shaft, called *RWBY: Ice Queendom*.²⁶ The 2D-animation series started in July of 2022 and was also printed in *Dengeki Daioh's* (a monthly Japanese manga magazine, primarily focused on a young male audience) *Monthly Comic* as a manga adaptation that same month. The animated series ran for only 12 episodes and the manga adaptation was canceled in November 2023.²⁷ The fact that *RWBY* is so well-liked in Japan is evidence of both its cross-cultural appeal and the ability of animation to do so.

²¹ R. Whittaker, 'Rooster Teeth's *RWBY* Goes to Japan', *The Austin Chronicle*, 1 July 2022. <<https://www.austinchronicle.com/screens/2022-07-01/rooster-teeths-rwby-goes-to-japan/>> (20 April 2024).

²² Ibid.

²³ MyAnimeList, 'Japan's Weekly Blu-Ray and DVD Rankings for Dec 7-13', <<https://myanimelist.net/news/43713232>> (18 April 2024).

²⁴ T.B. Donohoo, 'Why Are So Many Anime Set In High School?', *Comic Book Resources*, 5 January 2023. <<https://www.cbr.com/why-anime-manga-series-high-school-setting/>> (18 April 2024).

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ *RWBY: Ice Queendom*, 'News', <<https://anime.team-rwby-project.jp/en/news/>> (26 May 2024); D. Harding, 'RWBY Gets TV Anime From Studio Shaft, Crunchyroll to Stream Both Sub and Dub', *Crunchyroll*, 25 March 2022. <<https://www.crunchyroll.com/news/deep-dives/2022/3/25/rwby-gets-tv-anime-from-studio-shaft-crunchyroll-to-stream-both-dub-and-sub>> (20 April 2024).

²⁷ I. Andita, 'RWBY: Ice Queendom and God Bless the Mistaken Will End Their Manga!', *Dunia Games*, 3 November 2023. <<https://duniagames.co.id/discover/article/rwby-ice-queendom-and-god-bless-the-mistaken-will-end-their-manga/en>> (22 May 2024); *RWBY: Ice Queendom*, 'News'.

RWBY had won over Japanese viewers' hearts and cemented its status as one of the most cherished anime series because of its gorgeous animation, captivating storyline, and close connections to the anime community.

The world of *RWBY* was further developed through textual media, including books, comics, manga adaptations, in addition to the animated series. Fans were then able to delve deeper into the storylines of their favorite characters and better explore the world of Remnant thanks to these new mediums. Let us examine some of the *RWBY*-related printed materials: In order to bring readers fresh experiences and new perspectives into the lives of their beloved characters, Rooster Teeth teamed up with well-known writers to produce a series of novels set in the *RWBY* universe. The books cover previously unrecorded tales and background lore while building upon the events of the animated series. The novel *RWBY: After the Fall*, authored by E.C. Myers, is among the noteworthy ones. *After the Fall* is a novel series that picks up after the events of Volume 3 and follows four different members of another team as they set out on a dangerous mission beyond Beacon Academy's walls.

Additionally, *RWBY* had been turned into a manga series with unique tales and illustrations that draw inspiration from the animated series. The exploits of Team *RWBY* and other characters are expanded upon in the comics, which also explore new plotlines and give further insight to the show's events. *RWBY: The Official Manga*, one of the comic series, is an accurate adaptation for aficionados of the manga format and has manga-style artwork that closely follows the events of the animated series. The manga depicts Team *RWBY*'s struggles as they negotiate Beacon Academy's obstacles and deal with the evil forces that are endangering Remnant. Next to this manga-series, the *RWBY: Ice Queendom* manga adaptation ran for three volumes of 12 chapters, called *RWBY: Ice Queendom THE COMIC*. This series was never translated into English though, which means that this printed series was aimed at a Japanese audience. Interesting to note is that this series is the only one to mention 'comic' on the cover, while being published in manga format.



Figures 1-4:

Covers of the four *RWBY* manga adaptations, from left to right: *RWBY Vol. 1* by Shorow Miwa (2018), *RWBY: The Official Anthology Vol. 1* by different manga artists (2017), *RWBY: The Official Manga Vol. 1* by Bunta Kinami (2018) and *RWBY: Ice Queendom THE COMIC* by Suekane Kimiko (2022).

Furthermore, several printed books with artwork and short tales by a variety of writers and artists had been issued by Rooster Teeth. These anthologies give readers access to a wide variety of viewpoints and narrative tenors, offering an exploration of several facets of the *RWBY* universe. For instance, *RWBY: Fairy Tales of Remnant* tells traditional fairy tales in the setting of Remnant but with a *RWBY* twist. By combining aspects of the animated series and highlighting the ingenuity of the contributing authors, each story presents a novel interpretation of well-known stories. This printed book, however, seems more aimed toward younger children, as a way to read to them. With its hardcover and large images and printed text *RWBY: Fairy Tales of Remnant* feels like a picture book like *The Gruffalo* or *The Hungry Caterpillar*. The original seasons and narrative have been age rated as 13+, with later seasons even setting the rate to 15+.

Certain elements of the *RWBY* printed material have drawn criticism from some fans and critics, who point to things like erratic writing, awkward pacing, and departures from the canon.²⁸ These objections could be the result of editorial choices, disparities in creative vision, or the difficulties involved in translating a multimedia franchise into other formats. A multi-media brand such as *RWBY* poses special difficulties when it comes to printed material adaptation; the visual and narrative components of the animated series have to be translated into prose fiction, comics, or manga. While some adaptations might be able to successfully convey the spirit and essence of the original work, others might find it difficult to deliver the

²⁸ A. Gramuglia, 'RWBY: The Official Manga, Vol. 1 Fails To Surpass Its Source Material', *Comic Book Resources*, 29 June 2020. <<https://www.cbr.com/rwby-the-official-manga-vol-1-review/>> (16 April 2024).

same amount of action, emotion, and excitement that viewers have come to expect from the animated series.

Writers are forced to use descriptive language in novelizations or prose formats in order to convey the ferocity of fights or the finer points of visual world-building.²⁹ Even though good writers can conjure up vivid images, readers may not get the same immediate, fully immersed thrill that comes from watching animated action scenes unfold. This is where the *show, don't tell* rule becomes more difficult because minute visual features need to be clarified rather than assumed. Although the visual element of comic or manga adaptations is retained, they are frequently forced to shorten sequences for pacing and are restricted by static pictures. While emotive facial expressions can be more difficult to accurately capture in a fully animated medium where small movements in mouths, eyes, and body language convey emotions, quick-cut, high-speed action sequences may lose their fluidity.³⁰ The pace of prose is determined by how fast or slowly the reader reads the material. Maintaining momentum is something that writers must be careful of, particularly in stories with a lot of action. For example, excessive detail or too much action happening at once could drag down fight sequences.³¹ Comics and manga are nonetheless constrained by the quantity of panels and pages, even though they are better at controlling pace than prose. The series' dependence on fast motion and transitions is difficult to achieve in a still format, but the deliberate use of larger, more impactful panels (or splash pages) aids in visually spectacular times. Although there have been some complaints and difficulties with the *RWBY* printed material, it is vital to remember that these initiatives have also drawn devoted followers and added to the general development and enhancement of the *RWBY* universe.³²

Closing Rooster Teeth

Last autumn (2023), Rooster Teeth moved their material from YouTube to their own website in an attempt to increase income by getting users to switch to a sponsorship arrangement.³³ Here is part of the official statement:

²⁹ F.L. Aldama, *The Oxford Handbook of Comic Book Studies*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press Inc., 2019) pp. 624.

³⁰ Aldama, *The Oxford Handbook of Comic Book Studies*, pp. 625.

³¹ 'Visual Storytelling: How to Convey Emotion and Action in Comics?', *Twelvepoint*. <<https://www.twelvept.com/blog/en/comics/BLG006-visual-storytelling-how-to-convey-emotion-and-action-in-comics.html>> (27 October 2024).

³² E. DiCesare, 'Review: RWBY: The Official Manga, Vol. 1', *Literary Lizard*, 23 March 2020. <<https://literarylizard.com/2020/03/23/review-rwby-the-official-manga-vol-1/>> (16 April 2024).

³³ M. Milligan, 'Rooster Teeth Pulls Most Popular Content Off YouTube', *Animation Magazine*, 5 October 2023. <<https://www.animationmagazine.net/2023/10/rooster-teeth-pulls-most-popular-content-from-youtube>> (16 April 2023).

“Got a quick piece of news to share with you all. With our new living room apps coming soon (hint hint, REAL SOON) you’ll finally be able to stream RWBY from your couch on your big screen. In preparation, starting today we’re removing all of RWBY from the Animation YouTube channel and we will not be posting Volume 7 there. All of the episodes and the movie-length completes remain available FOR FREE here on Rooster Teeth. We’re leaving Volume 1 Episode 1 up on the YouTube channel, as well as the trailers and other fun promotional videos we’ve made over the years.”

On January 24th 2023 Geoff posted a statement following the release of *RWBY* Volume 9 on Rooster Teeth.³⁴ The statement included a Q&A about the exclusive release of the season on just Crunchyroll (a streaming website with mostly animated series) and not their own site. On the question about why the season was exclusively released on Crunchyroll, Geoff stated the following:

“RWBY has grown so much from the day Monty dreamed this great big beautiful world of Remnant over. What started as a home grown web-series has grown into a hit international franchise. With that growth, we want to give RWBY a long-term home where it can continue to thrive and expand. We were given this huge opportunity to partner exclusively with Crunchyroll, ultimately empowering V9 to make a bigger splash with a wider audience. Partnerships like this ultimately help pave the way for the future of RWBY, enabling us to realize our goal of continuing to grow the franchise, expand the universe, and tell new stories.”

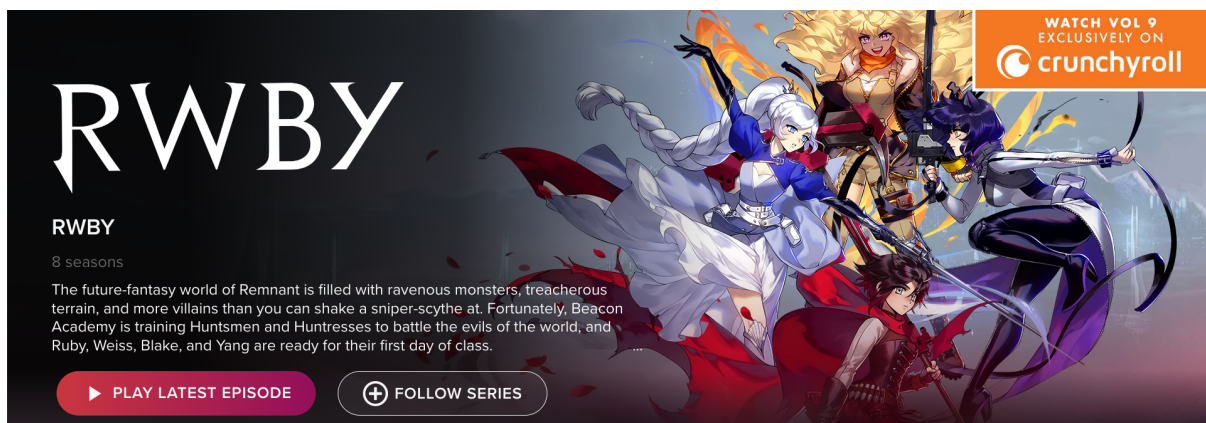


Figure 5: On the website of Rooster Teeth only the first eight seasons are available, with a link to Crunchyroll.com to watch the latest season. Screenshot taken from Roosterteeth.com

³⁴ Nerdigans, ‘Rooster Teeth Begg “RWBY” Fans To Avoid Piracy Following Announcement That New Season Will Be A Crunchyroll Exclusive’, *Bounding Into Comics*, 1 February 2023. <<https://boundingintocomics.com/2023/02/01/rooster-teeth-begs-rwby-fans-to-avoid-piracy-following-announcement-that-new-season-will-be-a-crunchyroll-exclusive/>> (16 April 2023).

Only after 12 months after the release date of Volume 9 would the season also appear on Rooster Teeth's platforms. Geoff's statement confirmed this: "If you wanna watch V9, your choices are either subscribe to Crunchyroll or wait a year and watch it on either CR or RT platforms." Many fans were displeased since most had bought a subscription with Rooster Teeth (FIRST) to watch *RWBY* ad-free and earlier than the regular/free releases. A whole section of Geoff's statement was about how the fans could harm the show if they decided to pirate *RWBY* in any way. In this part of his statement he also talks about being owned by Warner Bros.: "Many folks assume that, given that RT is wholly owned by Warner Bros Discovery (WBD), that we have an endless pool of cash just laying around (...) Contrary to popular belief, we do not receive an annual bucket of money to fund the show." Geoff ended his statement by saying all (future) content will be available on Crunchyroll and all content on YouTube were deleted on the platform. The decision to expand the *RWBY* universe to printed material as well was to broaden their fan base and introduce new fans to their FIRST subscription. Geoff's statement also includes the following

"[...] But again, fan support is ultimately what we need to continue to prove *RWBY*'s viability to current and potential partners. Bringing in new fans and introducing them to the world of *RWBY* is critical to breathe new life into the franchise and allow us the opportunity to open up this universe even further."

To bring in new fans is crucial according to Geoff, however, the series was pulled from the most watched (and free) platform, YouTube. So, this statement seems to be contradictory to Rooster Teeth's goal.

At the same time in Japan there seemed to be the first cracks in the wall; The Japanese dub of *RWBY* was canceled in July 2021. This decision was made due to unspecified circumstances, and no specific details were provided regarding the reasons behind the cancellation. Some fans who were excited to see *RWBY* in Japanese were unhappy by the cancellation of the Japanese version, but Rooster Teeth did not offer any further details regarding any possible future plans for a Japanese dub or if there were any plans to review the decision in the future. Some fans speculated that the reason of cancellation was that viewership went down after Volume 2 and Blu-ray and DVD sales were dropping.³⁵

A drop in sales and viewership was also noticed after several scandals and allegations were published. The main focus of the Rooster Teeth affair was around claims of employee harassment and a poisonous work environment. Several former workers openly

³⁵ A. Fuchsia, 'IMDb is being mobbed by angry RWBY fans', *Bumbleby*, 4 May 2023. <<https://bumbleby.com/imdb-is-being-mobbed-by-angry-rwby-fans/>> (1 August 2024).

accused Rooster Teeth of creating a toxic workplace in June 2020.³⁶ They claimed to have witnessed instances of favoritism, harsh behavior from superiors, inadequate HR support, and disregard for employee concerns. Rooster Teeth responded to the accusations by releasing a public statement in which it acknowledged the gravity of the claims and vowed to look into and resolve the concerns brought up.³⁷ In response to the accusations, Rooster Teeth launched an internal inquiry with the goal of evaluating the work environment and pinpointing areas that needed change.³⁸ To acquire information for this internal inquiry, both current and past employees were consulted. In an effort to address the scandal, Rooster Teeth changed their leadership.³⁹ This involved the hiring of new leaders to manage employee relations and human resources, as well as the departure of a few executives. The claims spurred conversations about workplace culture, employee treatment, and accountability within the Rooster Teeth community and the larger entertainment business. While some supporters showed support for the company's efforts to resolve the issues, others expressed concern and disappointment with the allegations. Rooster Teeth declared that they were dedicated to implementing improvements to their working environment and addressing the issues brought up by staff members. In order to promote a more upbeat and welcoming workplace culture, they promised to put new policies, practices, and training initiatives into place.

Jordan Levin (Rooster Teeth's general manager) announced on the 6th of March 2024 that Rooster Teeth was to be shut down after 21 years: "It's with a heavy heart I announce that Rooster Teeth is shutting down due to challenges facing digital media resulting from fundamental shifts in consumer behavior and monetization across platforms, advertising, and patronage."⁴⁰ Numbers of subscribers were given as one of the main reasons of shutting down as well: when *RWBY* and *Gen:Lock* were at their most popular,

³⁶ G. Vaynshteyn, 'Here Is Why Some Think "Rooster Teeth" Co-Founder Joel Heyman Was Fired', *Distractify*, 16 October 2020. <<https://www.distractify.com/p/why-was-joel-heyman-fired>> (19 April 2024).

³⁷ X, 'Rooster Teeth Update', <<https://x.com/roosterteeth/status/158255839229575776>> (19 April 2024); C. Aguilar, 'Rooster Teeth CEO Apologizes For Poor Work Conditions At Austin Animation Studio', *Cartoon Brew*, 20 June 2019. <<https://www.cartoonbrew.com/artist-rights/rooster-teeth-ceo-apologizes-for-poor-work-conditions-at-dallas-animation-studio-175948.html>> (19 April 2024).

³⁸ L. J. Williams, 'Adam Kovic, Ryan Haywood Leave Rooster Teeth Amid Allegations Of Grooming Fans', *Kotaku*, 9 October 2020. <<https://www.kotaku.com.au/2020/10/adam-kovic-ryan-haywood-rooster-teeth-scandal/>> (19 April 2024); Frank, A., 'Rooster Teeth Cuts Ties With Anime Voice Actor Vic Mignogna Amid Harassment Reports', *Polygon*, 5 February 2019. <<https://www.polygon.com/2019/2/5/18212141/vic-mignogna-fired-rooster-teeth-rwby-sexual-harassment>> (19 April 2024).

³⁹ R. Whittaker, 'Division Head Steps Down at Rooster Teeth Animation', *The Austin Chronicle*, 17 June 2019. <<https://www.austinchronicle.com/daily/screens/2019-06-17/division-head-steps-down-at-rooster-teeth-animation/>> (19 April 2024).

⁴⁰ Spangler, 'Rooster Teeth Is Shutting Down After 21 Years', *Variety*, 6 March 2024. <<https://variety.com/2024/digital/news/rooster-teeth-shutting-down-warner-bros-discovery-1235931953/>> (26 May 2024).

Rooster Teeth's First had over 225,000 paying members at their peak; however, that number had since dropped to roughly 60,000.⁴¹ This also means that *RWBY*'s last season (which was supposed to be Volume 10) will not be produced under Rooster Teeth's name.

A possible sale of the firm was also investigated, but due to the extraordinary upheaval in the digital entertainment sector, many of the companies that had expressed interest in the brand have now closed.⁴² However, in July 2024 VIZ Media announced that *RWBY* "is joining the VIZ roster of global anime and manga hits".⁴³ Together with an announcement made by *RWBY*'s co-creator Kerry Shawcross and voice actress Barbara Dunkelman VIZ Media answered some questions surrounding the new acquisition. A statement about the new season and/or new manga or comic has not yet been made.

Rooster Teeth began as a machinima-focused content developer in the early 2000s and rose to fame with series such as *Red vs. Blue*. Particularly around their RTX gatherings and subscription-based "FIRST" membership service, which provided fans with access to exclusive content, they developed a robust and devoted following over time. Through collaborations like the one with VIZ Media, Rooster Teeth expanded into print with comic book and manga adaptations as a result of the success of *RWBY*, an anime-inspired series. This trajectory allowed Rooster Teeth to transform into a full-fledged multi-channel franchise, incorporating animated series, video games, comics, podcasts, and a merchandise ecosystem. However, even though *RWBY*'s print adaptations managed to maintain viewer attention, they were unable to fully utilize transmedia storytelling because they only replicated the animated series' plots without expanding the narrative universe.

⁴¹ Spangler, 'WarnerMedia's Rooster Teeth Cuts Off 13% of Staff, Laying Off About 50'.

⁴² Spangler, 'Rooster Teeth Is Shutting Down After 21 Years'.

⁴³ Viz Media, 'RWBY Finds a New Home', *Viz*, 5 July 2024. <<https://www.viz.com/blog/posts/rwby-finds-a-new-home>> (21 September 2024).

Chapter two: The complex world of publishing manga and comics

Before delving deeper into both the *RWBY* manga publications and the comic publications, it should be made clear what exactly manga is. Manga, a quintessential component of Japanese popular culture, is a unique and versatile medium of storytelling that has captured the hearts of millions worldwide. This graphic art form, known for its distinct style and narrative diversity, has a rich history and a thriving contemporary presence that continues to shape the global entertainment landscape.

Publishing manga

The roots of manga can be traced back to ancient Japan, with early examples of illustrated narratives found in handscrolls and picture books from the 12th century.⁴⁴ These visual stories, often combining art with written text, served as a precursor to the modern manga we know today. However, it was during the Edo period (1603-1868) that the term "manga" was first coined, referring to playful, informal sketches. The Edo period's artistic traditions laid the foundation for manga's evolution, which would later become an integral part of Japanese culture. However, the modern form of manga began to take shape during the 20th century, particularly during and after World War II. Manga artists, or "mangaka", like Osamu Tezuka, often referred to as the "God of Manga", played a pivotal role in its evolution.⁴⁵ Tezuka's work, which includes *Astro Boy*, introduced a more sophisticated and narrative-driven style, emphasizing character development and intricate plotlines. His influence remains significant in the manga industry to this day.⁴⁶

Manga's appeal transcends age, gender, and culture, and this universal appeal is reflected in its soaring popularity. While initially confined to Japan, manga rapidly gained international recognition and a dedicated fan base. The globalization of manga was facilitated by the rise of anime, which are animated adaptations of manga, and the advent of the internet, making manga accessible to a global audience.⁴⁷ Manga's influence extends beyond the printed page, impacting other creative industries such as film, television, and video games.⁴⁸ Many blockbuster movies, such as *Ghost in the Shell* and *Akira*, draw

⁴⁴ A. Michalak, 'Book Review: Manga: A Critical Guide', *Journal of Manga and Anime Studies*, 4 (2023), pp. 244-247.

<https://iopen.library.illinois.edu/journals/jams/article/view/1242>

⁴⁵ M. Herson, 'Spotlight: Osamu Tezuka – The God of Manga', *Tokyo Weekender*, 27 January 2022. <https://www.tokyoweekender.com/art_and_culture/spotlight-osamu-tezuka-manga/> (27 October 2024).

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ 'Manga Industry in Japan', *Facts and Details*, januari 2017, z. pag., <<https://factsanddetails.com/japan/cat20/sub135/item2891.html#:~:text=About%20%20billion%20manga%20are,the%20United%20States%20and%20Europe>>

⁴⁸ A. Horbinski, 'Book Review: Manga from the Floating World'.

inspiration from manga, while games like *Final Fantasy* incorporate manga-style art.⁴⁹ This cross-pollination between media further enhances manga's global presence. Furthermore, manga conventions and fan communities have sprung up around the world, fostering a sense of camaraderie among fans and providing a platform for artists and writers to showcase their talents. The cosplay subculture, where fans dress up as their favorite manga characters, has also gained traction, enhancing the sense of community and shared passion. In recent years, initiatives to promote manga have included official translations, digital distribution platforms, and adaptations by international publishers.⁵⁰ This has made manga more accessible to a broader audience, breaking down language barriers and allowing readers around the world to enjoy stories from Japan.

There are several well-known Japanese manga publishers on the market. Among Japan's biggest publishers, Shueisha is well-known for *Weekly Shonen Jump*, its flagship manga magazine that includes well-known series including *Naruto* and *One Piece*. Another significant publisher, Kodansha, publishes manga in periodicals like *Weekly Morning*, *Weekly Shonen Magazine*, and *Bessatsu Friend*. Although best known for their video gaming franchise, Square Enix is a third major player in the manga publishing industry. They publish manga with titles like *Fullmetal Alchemist*, *Kingdom Hearts*, and *Soul Eater*.

On the other end, several businesses stand out when it comes to manga publishers who translate and distribute comics for audiences who speak English. One of the biggest manga publishers in English-speaking nations is VIZ Media, as was previously mentioned. Among the many manga series they have translated are well-known ones like *Naruto*, *One Piece* and *Death Note*. Another large manga company who focuses on audiences who speak English is Kodansha. Kodansha has an English-language publishing label called Kodansha Comics. Many manga series are translated and published by them, like as popular titles as *Fairy Tail*, *Attack on Titan* and *Sailor Moon*. Next to VIZ Media and Kodansha there is also Seven Seas Entertainment: Seven Seas Entertainment specializes in fantasy, action, romance, and LGBTQ+ topics among other manga genres. They release series like *Citrus*, *My Lesbian Experience with Loneliness* and *Toradora!*.

Publishing comics

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Rooster Teeth made the decision to publish most of *RWBY*'s expanded narrative in manga format. However, comics are just (if not more)

⁴⁹ T. Donohoo, 'Beyond Shonen Jump: where to read other manga hits', *CBR* (25-08-2021) <<https://www.cbr.com/shonen-jump-kodansha-shojo-beat-english-manga-publishers/>>

⁵⁰ Donohoo, 'Beyond Shonen Jump', *CBR*; G. G. Gustines, 'A Faster Delivery for Fans of Manga', *The New York Times*, 9 May 2023. <<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/09/business/viz-media-manga.html>> (23 April 2024).

popular and less niche than manga. Comics have a long and varied history that dates back hundreds of years; they began as ancient graphic storytelling and developed into the colorful, energetic medium we know today.⁵¹ Across nations and years, audiences have been enthralled with this narrative art form, which provides a forum for artistic expression, social commentary, and amusement. We explore the beginnings of comics in this investigation, following their development over time and looking at the state of comic publication now.

Caricature and political cartoons became more popular in newspapers and magazines during the 19th century, and this is when the modern idea of comics started to take shape.⁵² The comic strip format originated from the satirical use of sequential imagery by artists such as Thomas Nast and James Gillray on politicians, social concerns, and current events. Newspaper comic strips with recurring characters and lengthy narratives first appeared in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.⁵³ The 1895 comic strip *The Yellow Kid*, drawn by Richard F. Outcault, is recognized as one of the earliest to gain broad acclaim. Other classic strips like Winsor McCay's *Little Nemo in Slumberland* and George Herriman's *Krazy Kat* served to further cement the popularity of the format. The 1930s saw the rise in popularity of comic books, which were initially made possible by comic strips.⁵⁴ Considered to be the first authentic comic book, *Famous Funnies* debuted in 1934, sparking the start of a business that would transform popular culture. The superhero comics era began in 1938 with the appearance of Superman in *Action Comics #1*, which established the foundation for a subgenre that still rules the medium today.⁵⁵ During the late 1930s and early 1950s, comic books experienced a golden age that gave rise to characters such as Captain America, Wonder Woman, and Batman. Comic books emerged as a mainstay of American popular culture, offering solace and amusement among the turbulent eras of the Great Depression and World War II.⁵⁶

The Silver Age of Comics, marked by a revival of superhero series and the introduction of new characters and concepts, began in the 1950s and 1960s. Under Stan Lee's direction, Marvel Comics transformed the comic book industry by introducing legendary characters such as Spider-Man, the X-Men, and the Fantastic Four. DC Comics kept adding superheroes to its roster, bringing back beloved characters and venturing into uncharted storytelling territory. Underground comix, a subversive and countercultural

⁵¹ S. McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), pp. 3-8.

⁵² McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, pp. 11.

⁵³ 'Comics History: Dr. Fredric Wertham', *Lambiek* <https://www.lambiek.net/comics/wertham_fredric.htm> (19 April 2024).

⁵⁴ McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, pp. 11.

⁵⁵ 'Comics History: Dr. Fredric Wertham', *Lambiek*.

⁵⁶ McCloud, *Understanding Comics*.

movement that questioned the dominant traditions of the medium, rose to prominence in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Artists that explored forbidden subjects and societal issues in their provocative and experimental comics, such as Gilbert Shelton, Art Spiegelman, and Robert Crumb, expanded the possibilities of storytelling. The 1980s saw the rise of the graphic novel as a recognized literary genre, with titles like Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' *Watchmen* and Art Spiegelman's *Maus* winning both critical and popular praise.⁵⁷ A wide range of readers were drawn to graphic novels, which raised the bar for artistic excellence in the genre and provided a new degree of sophistication and complexity.

Today's comics appeal to a wide range of age groups and interests with their wide variety of genres, styles, and forms. The emergence of digital technology has revolutionized the production, consumption, and distribution of comics. Webcomics, digital platforms, and social media have given creators new ways to interact with readers.⁵⁸ Superhero epics and independent darlings alike are among the many volumes that major comic book companies like Marvel Comics, DC Comics, Image Comics, and Dark Horse Comics continue to print. With publishers like VIZ Media and Kodansha Comics leading the way, the manga industry has grown significantly in Western markets thanks to the appeal of Japanese comics.

Over the years, independent creators and small press publishers are becoming more and more significant in the comic book industry, bringing fresh perspectives and inventiveness to the table as they push the boundaries of the medium and question conventional narratives. By eschewing established publishing routes, crowdfunding platforms such as Kickstarter and Indiegogo have enabled creators to independently finance and disseminate their ideas.⁵⁹ Examples of successful independent comic creators funded through platforms like Kickstarter and Indiegogo include Billy Tucci, who raised over \$100,000 for his graphic novel *Shi: Sakura*, and Brian Pulido's *Lady Death* series, which saw a revival with significant crowdfunding support. Additionally, comics like *Bone* by Jeff Smith and *Strangers in Paradise* by Terry Moore showcase the impact of small press and self-published comics, which have drawn significant readership and reshaped the indie comic landscape over time.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ I. Brunetti, *An Anthology of Graphic Fiction, Cartoons and True Stories* (Yale University Press, 2006), pp 7.

⁵⁸ S. McCloud, *Reinventing Comics: How Imagination and Technology Are Revolutionizing an Art Form* (New York: Perennial, 2000).

⁵⁹ A. Neuenkirchen, 'Kickstarter's Comic Campaigns Shattered Records in 2022', *Comic Book Resources*, 26 January 2023. <<https://www.cbr.com/kickstarter-comic-campaigns-2022-records/?ref=section-comics-illustration-promo-kickstarters-comic-campaigns-shattered-records-in-2022>> (20 April 2024).

⁶⁰ K. Calamia, 'The most successful comics Kickstarter projects of all time', *Gamesradar*, 8 June 2021. <<https://www.gamesradar.com/comics-kickstarter/>> (27 October 2024).

Are comics books?

Before I discuss the decision made by Rooster Teeth to publish *RWBY*'s narrative in manga format, it is important to ask the question whether comic books are books? There is a big difference in how we perceive books and comic books. The provocative article "What is a Book?" by Kovač et al. examines how the idea of a book is changing in the digital era.⁶¹ Suggesting that technological advancements compel us to reevaluate the essence of books as cultural artifacts and conveyors of knowledge. Their argument underscores a shift from valuing material qualities to appreciating the function and impact of a book in society. This model is particularly useful when considering comic books, as comics have always blurred the line between literary and visual art forms, challenging conventional definitions of a book.

Kovač et al. point out how the traditional definition of a book is centered on its physical attributes, such as its pages, binding, and covers.⁶² Printed comics share this material basis and also build unique associations through glossy paper, vibrant colors, and serialized formats that contribute to their distinct identity. However, as comics transition to digital formats, they exemplify the challenges Kovač et al. raise about what constitutes a "book." Digital comics, or e-comics, lack the tangible characteristics that have traditionally shaped readers' engagement and attachment, creating a dissonance in their perceived value and collectibility. This shift mirrors Kovač et al.'s exploration of the "loss of materiality" in digital books, where the physical absence of a book does not necessarily negate its value or function as a knowledge vessel.⁶³ This concept makes it possible for digital materials to be classified as books even when they lack the conventional physical attributes. Comic books have always challenged the conventional definition of a book. Their narrative and artistic fusion subverts the notion that a book is only a text-based medium. This hybrid form is consistent with Kovač's more expansive interpretation of books as means of communication, even though comics combine text and visual elements to great effect.⁶⁴

Kovač et al. also address the cultural implications of digital transformation, particularly its effects on reading, publishing, and the authority of texts. In digital comics, this transition is starkly evident: while print comics have long existed as collectible artifacts, digital comics operate in a more fluid, sometimes impermanent state. Webcomics, for example, democratize the production and dissemination of comics, allowing independent creators to reach large audiences without traditional publishing structures. This aligns with Kovač et al.'s discussion on digital media democratizing access to creation and publication, fundamentally altering the relationship between readers and the cultural status of a "book".⁶⁵

⁶¹ M. Kovač, et al., 'What is a Book?', *Publishing Research Quarterly*, vol. 35 (2019), pp. 9.

⁶² Kovač, et al., 'What is a Book?', pp. 9.

⁶³ Kovač, et al., 'What is a Book?', pp. 12.

⁶⁴ Kovač, et al., 'What is a Book?', pp. 13.

⁶⁵ Kovač, et al., 'What is a Book?', pp. 4.

This is one notable distinction. Comic books are thus impacted by their digital transition in both their visual presentation and physical structure. Unlike text, which is more consistently experienced in print and digital formats, a comic's visual effect can be changed by the screen's capacity to portray colors, brightness, and detail.

The visual nature of comics, however, adds complexity to their classification within Kovač's framework. While Kovač et al. focus primarily on textual media, comics' reliance on images introduces unique challenges in the digital format. Unlike text, visual content in digital comics is subject to variations in screen resolution, color accuracy, and user interaction. These elements shape the reading experience differently than a print comic, altering how readers engage with the narrative and perceive the work as an artistic artifact. This aligns with Kovač et al.'s notion that while digital forms may offer new accessibility, they also reframe the reading experience in ways that challenge traditional cultural values associated with physical books. Finally, comic books' collectible nature underscores a divergence from traditional books within Kovač's framework. While traditional books are valued primarily for content over form, printed comics often carry intrinsic collectible value, with editions and rare issues contributing to their cultural significance. In digital format, this collectibility diminishes, suggesting a shift in the cultural value comics hold in digital spaces compared to their print counterparts. This unique relationship with materiality further complicates comics' identity in the digital era, reflecting the broader challenges Kovač et al. explore regarding how digital forms transform cultural practices and reader engagement.

From this perspective, I argue that comic books, often overlooked in scholarly discussions about the definition of a book, fit comfortably within the framework that Kovač et al. propose. While comics traditionally combine textual and visual elements, they retain the book's core functions – communicating ideas, telling stories, and contributing to cultural and intellectual discourse. If a book is defined by its ability to deliver meaning through text, then the presence of illustrations in comic books does not negate their status as books but rather expands the medium's expressive possibilities. Moreover, the argument that a book's content, rather than its form, defines it directly aligns with the acceptance of comic books as a valid form of literature. This inclusion recognizes the evolution of narrative media and the diverse ways in which stories are consumed. Therefore, Kovač et al.'s broader, more inclusive definition of what constitutes a book can and should encompass comic books, challenging any lingering biases that might undervalue the literary or cultural significance of this medium.

Comic books can benefit from Kovač's examination of the changing character of books in the digital age, but there are particular issues and concerns because of the variations in format, reading experience, and cultural significance. Comic books provide a

unique viewpoint on the definition of a "book," especially in light of how they are evolving in response to digital technologies. This is because comic books combine text with visual art.

Cultural and structural differences

As stated, books and comic books are perceived as two different (and differently valued) concepts. Manga and comics are also perceived as two especially notable sequential art styles in the vast field of visual storytelling. Although telling stories using a combination of text and images is the basic objective of both media, their approaches to publication differ greatly. Comprehending the subtleties of manga and comic book production illuminates the unique environments that have developed around these artistic mediums. To do this this thesis will discuss Jacqueline Berndts and Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer's book *Manga's Cultural Crossroads*, which gives a comprehensive analysis of the cultural, social, and industrial aspects of manga. It investigates how manga transcends its Japanese beginnings, influencing and being influenced by worldwide cultures. Berndt and Kümmerling-Meibauer, bring together diverse perspectives to analyze manga's impact and its place at the intersection of various cultural forces.

Western comics are often issued in single issues or short series of 20-30 pages per issue, which may later be collected into larger trade-paperback volumes.⁶⁶ Stories can be episodic with overarching plots that span numerous issues or volumes. Superhero comics, in particular, are known for their long-running series with multiple reboots and crossovers. Japanese manga on the other hand are usually published in serial form, with chapters of 20-40 pages, in weekly or monthly periodicals. Afterwards, these chapters are collected into "tankobon" volumes.⁶⁷ Manga series tend to have more of a linear, finished plot than many Western comics, which are usually more open-ended.

Western comics are usually produced by a group of artists that includes a writer, illustrator, colorist, and letterer. Within the same series, a variety of styles and interpretations may result from this collaborative approach.⁶⁸ Japanese manga is typically written and drawn by a lone mangaka (artist/writer), with the assistance of a few helpers for backgrounds and inking. A more cohesive style and voice are produced when the mangaka retains creative control over the story and artistic vision. An important feature of the manga publishing model is the editorial oversight function.⁶⁹ Manga editors collaborate closely with mangaka to offer suggestions, direction, and encouragement all along the way. In addition to guaranteeing

⁶⁶ J. Berndt and B. Kümmerling-Meibauer., *Manga's Cultural Crossroads*, (New York/London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 110.

⁶⁷ T. Matsui, 'The Diffusion of Foreign Cultural Products: The Case Analysis of Japanese Comics (Manga) Market in the US', *Princeton University Working Paper Series*, 37 (2009).

⁶⁸ Berndt and Kümmerling-Meibauer, *Manga's Cultural Crossroads*, pp. 110.

⁶⁹ Matsui, 'The Diffusion of Foreign Cultural Products'.

adherence to publication dates, this cooperative partnership between editors and creators helps preserve quality and consistency in serialized manga chapters.

With this, the term “stigma management” is fairly important. Within the publishing industry, stigma management refers to methods and approaches used to confront and lessen stigma associated with the authors they represent, the content they publish, and their internal regulations. As gatekeepers of public discourse, publishing firms shape society views and opinions and are frequently subjected to various forms of stigma.⁷⁰ This is especially the case with English manga publishers. Here is what Matsui states in his article:

“In a society in which people view comics as stigmatized media, early manga publishers were forced to choose titles carefully and sometimes modify the contents. This kind of modification was unthinkable for Japanese creators/publishers, as due to the fact that Japanese manga is owned by creators.”⁷¹

Comics were traditionally viewed as a lowbrow type of entertainment, particularly in Western countries, and were frequently connected to minors or young people on the verge of delinquency.⁷² This belief was especially strong in the middle of the 20th century – especially during its rise in popularity – when comics were seen as transient, inexpensive, and even ethically dubious, rather than as significant literature or art. Fears that comic books, especially those with graphic or sexual material, could corrupt young readers contributed to this stigma. For instance, the emergence of comic books in the 1940s and 1950s in the United States caused moral panic and public uproar, which resulted in the creation of the *Comics Code Authority* in 1954 and severe content censorship of American comics.

The censorship that these US manga publishers got, meant that US manga publishers were forced to create systematic age rating systems, which Japanese publishers never had. US Manga publishers confront a complex task when it comes to stigma management, one that calls for careful consideration of audiences, authors, content, and business standards. Like Matsui stated in his article: “[...] preexisting stigma in the US led manga publishers to face the view of manga as boys’ entertainment, decreasing chances of a broader demographic market.”⁷³ Manga sales to adults and females, who historically have accounted for a sizable portion of the Japanese manga market, are hampered by this preconception. Publishers may effectively manage and alleviate stigma by putting tactics like content warnings, sensitivity reading, public relations support, mental health resources, expanding audience appeal, educational campaigns, community building, ethical practices

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² ‘Comics History: Dr. Fredric Wertham’, *Lambiek*

⁷³ Matsui, ‘The Diffusion of Foreign Cultural Products’.

and transparency into practice. In addition to safeguarding the welfare of authors and readers, these initiatives support manga's general development and recognition as a significant and well-respected cultural form. The Western comic book industry, on the other hand, has always focused on standalone issues that are published on a regular basis, usually once a month. These standalone issues, which offer standalone tales or individual chapters within longer story arcs, are frequently offered for sale in comic book specialty stores.

Story development, continuity, and series' continued financial viability are all greatly influenced by editors in Western comics. Based on what the market requires, they could enforce particular directions or make suggestions for revisions.⁷⁴ While they frequently collaborate more closely in a supportive capacity with the mangaka, editors can have an impact on the plot and tempo of Japanese manga. Although they usually respect the mangaka's original vision, they assist in developing the tale. Western Comics are mostly available online, at comic book stores, and through bookshops. The industry is dominated by big publishers like Marvel and DC, but indie publishers are equally important.⁷⁵ Japanese manga are serialized in publications that are readily accessible through subscription services, bookstores, and convenience stores. Chapters are compiled into tankobon volumes following serialization. The industry is led by major publishers such as Kodansha and Shueisha.

Because of the growth of digital platforms and online distribution, publication paradigms for both manga and comics have undergone considerable changes.⁷⁶ Japan's manga publishers have embraced digital serialization, releasing their works simultaneously with print equivalents and more effectively reaching readers around the world thanks to sites like Shonen Jump Plus and Manga Plus. In a similar vein, webcomics have democratized the comics industry by enabling independent artists to distribute their works directly to the internet and build devoted fan communities. Digital comics are becoming more and more common in the West, where publishers are releasing digital editions in addition to print ones. Large comic book collections are easily accessible to readers through digital platforms, which also offer features like guided view technology for the best possible reading experiences on mobile devices. Concerns about how digital piracy affects the livelihoods of creators and the industry's viability in the digital era, however, still exist. Sales of individual issues, trade paperbacks, digital editions, and merchandise bring in money for Western comics. Another important source of revenue is the licensing of films, TV series, and other media adaptations. In the Japanese manga industry digital versions, merchandising, and

⁷⁴ Berndt and Kümmerling-Meibauer, *Manga's Cultural Crossroads*, pp. 113.

⁷⁵ Berndt and Kümmerling-Meibauer, *Manga's Cultural Crossroads*, pp. 115.

⁷⁶ Berndt and Kümmerling-Meibauer, *Manga's Cultural Crossroads*, pp. 115.

tankobon sales all provide comparable revenue streams. Anime adaptations and associated merchandise also make a substantial contribution to the economy.

The "Manga's Cultural Crossroads" comparison between Western comics and Japanese manga by Berndt and Kümmerling-Meibauer draws attention to the particular features as well as the commonalities between these two different but related genres of graphic storytelling. They argue that manga is a dynamic medium that changes as a result of exchanges and influences from other cultures, not solely a byproduct of Japanese culture. Manga and Western comics both reflect and shape the cultures from which they arise, and this book offers a detailed understanding of this by analyzing their story structures, production processes, cultural settings, industry dynamics, and worldwide influences. The comparative analysis emphasizes how important it is to acknowledge the unique contributions that each media has made to the world of comics and graphic novels, as well as the manner in which they have influenced and enhanced one another.

Rooster Teeth's *RWBY* manga

With knowledge of both media and their publication processes, the following section will analyze Rooster Teeth's *RWBY* manga. There are three English manga series created in the *RWBY* universe. The manga written by Shirow Miwa is a single volume, just called *RWBY, Vol. 1*. However, *RWBY: The Official Manga* is three volumes and written by Bunta Kinami. *RWBY: Official Manga Anthology* is currently 5 volumes, with each volume written by a different manga artist. As discussed in the previous chapter there is also an Ice Queendom manga (*RWBY: Ice Queendom THE COMIC* by Suekane Kimiko), but currently it's only in Japanese. The three English manga series are published by VIZ Media.

One of the top publishers of manga, graphic novels, and similar entertainment in North America is VIZ Media. Since its founding as VIZ LLC in 1986, the business has grown to become a dominant force in the sector, providing English-speaking audiences with a wide range of Japanese pop culture⁷⁷. VIZ Media has solidified its place as a major player in the global manga publishing scene with a variety of labels that appeal to various genres, demographics, and content kinds. The goal of VIZ Media's founding was to provide Western audiences with access to Japanese comics and animation.⁷⁸ VIZ Media obtained the rights to translate, localize, and distribute well-known manga titles in English by forming strategic alliances with Japanese publishers like as Shueisha, Shogakukan, and Kadokawa. The groundwork for the business's future expansion and success was established by this innovative endeavor. VIZ Media has added a vast array of genres to its collection over the

⁷⁷ A. Brock, 'Patterns of incongruous media/mode configurations in *VIZ Magazine*', *Journal of Pragmatics*, 171 (2021), pp. 147-157.

⁷⁸ VIZ, 'Browse our imprints', <<https://www.viz.com/any/home/section/96422/more>> (27 April 2024).

years, including action, adventure, romance, fantasy, science fiction, horror, and more. Because of the company's commitment to high standards for localization, translation, and publishing, English-speaking readers were guaranteed to obtain accurate and engaging translations of their beloved manga series.⁷⁹ VIZ Media runs multiple imprints, each with a distinct editorial approach, target audience, and concentration.⁸⁰

Let us examine VIZ Media Signature, VIZ Media Shonen Jump, and VIZ Media Shonen Jump Advanced – three of the most well-known imprints. A label called VIZ Media Signature is devoted to releasing manga books for adult and older teen readers. The imprint focuses on providing English-speaking fans with critically acclaimed manga series that span a wide variety of genres and themes. VIZ Media Signature products are designed for readers who are interested in deeper tales and thought-provoking information. They frequently have excellent artwork, mature subjects, and complicated storytelling. VIZ Media Signature has a strong focus on artistic worth and literary quality, which is one of its defining characteristics. The imprint raises the status and respect of manga to new heights by showcasing it as a valid literary and visual storytelling medium. With collaborations with well-known Japanese authors and judicious selection of titles, VIZ Media Signature has established a reputation for publishing some of the most intriguing and highly regarded English-language manga series. *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, a sprawling fantasy epic set in a post-apocalyptic world; *20th Century Boys*, an epic saga of friendship, conspiracy, and destiny; and *Naoki Urasawa's Monster*, a psychological thriller exploring themes of morality and redemption, are a few noteworthy titles published under the VIZ Media Signature imprint.

Shonen Jump, published by VIZ Media, is an expansion of the renowned Japanese manga anthology magazine *Weekly Shonen Jump*. Manga books aimed at younger teen audiences – especially those in the shōnen (young male) demographic – are the main focus of this imprint.⁸¹ With a wide selection of action-packed series and compelling characters, VIZ Media Shonen Jump offers English-speaking readers the thrill and vigor of Japanese shōnen manga. The dedication of VIZ Media Shonen Jump to serialized narrative is one of its distinguishing features. The imprint gives readers the excitement of following their favorite series as the plot develops by regularly releasing new chapters of ongoing manga series. English-speaking readers may keep up with the latest happenings in their favorite manga series as new chapters are released concurrently with the Japanese publication. Popular books released under the VIZ Media Shonen Jump imprint include *Dragon Ball*, a legendary martial arts saga with superpowers and legendary characters; *One Piece*, an epic adventure following a group of pirates on their quest for treasure and freedom; and *Naruto*, a coming-

⁷⁹ Brock, 'Patterns of incongruous media/mode configurations in VIZ Magazine'.

⁸⁰ VIZ, 'Browse our imprints'.

⁸¹ Ibid.

of-age tale of a young ninja with dreams of becoming the strongest ninja and leader of his village. Within the shōnen demographic, VIZ Media Shōnen Jump Advanced targets somewhat older teen and young adult viewers.⁸² Compared to books intended for younger readers, this imprint focuses on releasing manga volumes with more mature subjects, intricate storyline, and exquisite artwork. Character development, thematic complexity, and deeper plots may all be explored in VIZ Media Shonen Jump Advanced titles, all while maintaining the action-packed, high-energy storytelling of classic shōnen manga. These manga series provide a more complex and engaging reading experience, making them popular with readers who want a mix of exciting action and thought-provoking material. Among the well-known works released under the VIZ Media Shonen Jump Advanced imprint are *Bleach*, a supernatural thriller about a teenage soul reaper who sets out to defend the living world from evil spirits; *Death Note*, a psychological suspense novel about a high school student who can kill anyone by writing their name in a paranormal notebook; and *My Hero Academia*, a superhero epic that takes place in a world where practically everyone has superpowers known as "Quirks." VIZ Media's commitment to provide English-speaking consumers a vast choice of manga volumes catered to various tastes, preferences, and demographics is thus reflected in its eclectic array of imprints.⁸³ Readers looking for sophisticated storytelling, action-packed adventures, or provocative stories will find plenty of options from VIZ Media to satiate their need for engrossing and immersive manga experiences. VIZ Media continues to play a crucial role in bridging the gap between Japanese and Western consumers and cultivating a global awareness for the art form of manga through its rigorous translation, localization, and publication efforts.

The first three English translated mangas from the different series, were all mangas published under the VIZ Media Signature imprint. Like stated above, the Signature imprint is aimed at an adult or older teen audience. However, at the back covers all three mangas are rated T (for Teens), not T+ (older teens). Shirow Miwa's manga ran for only one volume and does not tell the story from the animated series, but the one from the four video trailers who were released just a short year before the first season aired.⁸⁴ The manga was first published in Japan in 2015 by SHUEISHA Inc. and then translated in English and published in 2018 by VIZ Media. This one volume is more expensive than all the other series. The anthology series *RWBY: Official Manga Anthology* consists of five volumes and is made up of short stories that are assembled by different manga artists and follow the storyline of the show. These stories are not canon, however. Both the first volume in English and the

⁸² VIZ, 'Browse our imprints'.

⁸³ Brock, 'Patterns of incongruous media/mode configurations in *VIZ Magazine*'.

⁸⁴ Rooster Teeth, 'RWBY "Red" Trailer', *YouTube*, 7 November 2012. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pYW2GmHB5xs>> (1 Mei 2024).

Japanese version were published in 2017. *RWBY: The Official Manga* ran for three volumes and is a direct adaptation of the first two seasons of the animated series. The first volume was released in 2018, both in Japan by SHUEISHA Inc. and as the translated English manga by Viz Media. Both volume 2 and 3 were released at the same time with the Japanese version. Online readers can easily obtain and enjoy *RWBY* manga on a number of official and fan-driven platforms. On Shueisha's Shonen Jump+ platform, Bunta Kinami's *RWBY* manga *RWBY: The Official Manga* was serialized in its most current edition. This portal releases new chapters first in Japanese and offers both paid and free chapters. Manga may be accessed on several devices by readers thanks to Shonen Jump+, which is available through web browsers and mobile apps. The most recent chapters are frequently available for free on the site for a brief period of time after which they can be bought separately or as part of a subscription. Be aware that this software is largely local to Japan.

The *RWBY* manga is available from VIZ Media, the official English distributor for numerous Shonen Jump publications. Readers can access the manga in English on VIZ's website and mobile app by subscribing to a subscription service or buying individual volumes. With VIZ's certified, top-notch translation, readers can be sure they are reading an exact, appropriately localized edition of the *RWBY* manga. It is simple to read on the go with the VIZ Manga app, which is accessible on iOS and Android. Users may buy every officially released volume, and some might be available with a Shonen Jump membership. Purchasing digital volumes from sites such as VIZ Media grants you access to the manga for all time. For a monthly charge, you may access a variety of manga, including *RWBY*, through services like Shonen Jump+ and VIZ's Shonen Jump subscription; but access is lost if you cancel your membership.

Within this larger context, the *RWBY* manga series from Rooster Teeth demonstrates the dynamic relationship between these two artistic mediums and draws attention to the increasing impact of globalized media on storytelling techniques. Manga is serialized, meaning that it is frequently published in magazines before being collected into "tankobon" volumes. This allows for ongoing reader engagement and the creation of intricate, well-developed tales. This paradigm creates a unique creative atmosphere where audience satisfaction and artistic integrity are given equal priority, especially when combined with the strong collaboration relationship between mangaka and editors.

On the other hand, the Western comic book business has grown into its own unique creature, drawing inspiration from political and caricature cartoons. The transition from newspaper comic strips to stand-alone comic books and, ultimately, graphic novels, illustrates the flexibility and tenacity of the medium. Thanks to the legendary characters from Marvel and DC Comics, the superhero genre has gained widespread popularity and influenced entertainment and culture worldwide. Western comics are typically produced

collaboratively by writers, illustrators, colorists, and letterers, which results in a wide range of styles and interpretations within a single series. This strategy might make it difficult to keep the narrative coherent and unified even while it encourages creativity. Manga and comics have distinct contributions as well as common influences. The diverse cultural settings in which various art forms flourish are highlighted by the variations in publication formats, serialization techniques, and distribution strategies. Whereas the monthly chapters of manga provide a feeling of continuity and suspense, Western comics' episodic format frequently prioritizes stand-alone stories that appeal to a wide range of consumers. Manga and comics are now more widely accessible thanks to the development of digital platforms and online distribution, which removes the need for conventional gatekeepers and enables independent authors to reach a global audience. This change has given artists the freedom to try out new tales and styles, bringing a variety of viewpoints and voices to the medium. It does, however, also come with drawbacks, such as the requirement for sustainable revenue models that safeguard the rights and livelihoods of authors and digital piracy.

Chapter three: The trials of textual adaptations

Now, *RWBY* is definitely not the first animated series to get adapted into a comic series. However, the fact that all production finished quite quickly after its first date of release, cannot be overlooked. Does that mean that animated series by definition face challenges when adapted into book form? To answer this question, this chapter will apply Michael Bhaskar's and Henry Jenkins' insights the shifting publishing landscape in the digital age to the Rooster Teeth's print publishing venture. As counterexamples, two very successful adapted series will be discussed as well.

***RWBY*'s transmedia storytelling**

The storytelling landscape has changed significantly in the digital age. Transmedia storytelling is a method where essential aspects of a narrative are systematically distributed across different media channels to create a cohesive and well-coordinated entertainment experience.⁸⁵ As a concept it was first developed by renowned media expert Henry Jenkins. This technique makes use of the distinctive qualities of many media to create a complex, immersive world that draws viewers in on several levels. Understanding the evolution of narrative structures, audience involvement and participation, cultural and economic effects, and the technological advancements driving these changes are just a few of the reasons why transmedia storytelling analysis is so important.

Transmedia storytelling is a major development in the telling and experiencing of stories. Narratives used to be linear and limited to one media, such a book, movie, or television show. However, transmedia storytelling transcends these limitations by distributing the story over multiple platforms, each of which adds distinctively to the overall narrative. For example, a comic book might explore the past of a supporting character, an interactive website might present more world-building information, and a movie might present the primary plot. More intricate and multi-layered storytelling is encouraged by this evolution of narrative frameworks.⁸⁶ A diverse experience is produced by the various views and depths that each medium offers. Scholars and artists can investigate how various media can enhance one another and how stories might be improved via this interaction by looking at transmedia storytelling. It also makes it possible to investigate how audiences engage with and understand these stories, offering insights on their inclinations and actions. Transmedia storytelling is known for emphasizing audience participation and interaction. Audiences in conventional storytelling are viewed as passive recipients of information. However, transmedia tales frequently call for participation. It might be necessary for audiences to

⁸⁵ H. Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2008) pp. 107.

⁸⁶ Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, pp. 98.

follow a story on several platforms, take part in online forums, or even add to the story through user-generated content.⁸⁷

Transmedia storytelling has important cultural and economic ramifications. From an economic standpoint, it makes use of several media outlets to provide diverse revenue streams. A transmedia narrative that is successful, for instance, can make money through movies, novels, video games, merchandise, and other mediums. For producers and artists, this diversification minimizes risk and increases profit potential.⁸⁸ Transmedia storytelling is a cultural phenomenon that both mirrors and shapes modern society. It responds to the increasing desire for more interactive and engaging kinds of entertainment while reflecting the linked, media-saturated environment in which we live. We can learn about societal norms, cultural trends, and audience collective psyche by researching transmedia storytelling. It also emphasizes how the convergence of media is changing the cultural terrain and presenting new chances and difficulties for writers. The development of transmedia storytelling is intimately related to advances in technology. The internet, social media, and digital media have proliferated, making it simpler to share material across channels and interact creatively with consumers.⁸⁹ Immersion storytelling can take on new forms thanks to technologies like virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), which open up whole new narrative experiences. We may investigate how technology is changing the craft of storytelling by looking at transmedia storytelling. It offers a framework for comprehending the capabilities and restrictions of various technologies in the telling of stories. It also provides insights into how audience experiences and narrative techniques may be further evolved by future technological advancements.

Let us examine how *RWBY* upholds Jenkins' transmedia storytelling tenets by extending its story across several media, involving fans in participatory culture, and preserving the coherence and consistency of the narrative. Firstly, *RWBY*'s web series serves as its main media outlet. The online series, which debuted on Rooster Teeth's website and then on YouTube, presents the primary plot, characters, and world-building components. The show centers on the exploits of the four main protagonists, Ruby, Weiss, Blake, and Yang, as they train to become Huntresses in a world where horrific beings known as Grimm exist. The story of *RWBY* is carried over into video games like *RWBY: Grimm Eclipse*. The game gives players a hands-on experience with the fights and tasks the characters go through, strengthening their bond with the narrative. The *RWBY* universe is further expanded through comics and manga adaptations. For example, the *RWBY* manga

⁸⁷ Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, pp. 133.

⁸⁸ H. Jenkins, 'Transmedia Storytelling: Moving characters from books to films to video games can make them stronger and more compelling', *MIT Technology Review*, 15 January 2003.

<<https://www.technologyreview.com/2003/01/15/234540/transmedia-storytelling/>> (28 July 2024).

⁸⁹ Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, pp. 116.

serialized in Japan offers additional stories and character backgrounds, enriching the main narrative. These adaptations provide new perspectives and details about the characters and events, appealing to both existing fans and new audiences. Novels in *RWBY* also explore the pasts of the characters and the Remnant universe. In-depth narrative in these volumes enhances the main series and gives readers a better grasp of the motivations of the characters and the nuances of the *RWBY* universe. Printed adaptation frequently go into off-screen activities, character backstories, and side stories from the original series. For example, a manga may go into a character's past in order to shed light on motivations and prior experiences that are not fully addressed in the web series. The addition of this material enhances the story in general and gives readers a deeper comprehension of the characters and the setting in which they live. However, Rooster Teeth decided to not enhance (and thus preserve the coherence and consistency of the narrative) the series by exploring other lore and side stories. Instead, they told the same story from the animated series in three different manga series, which meant less engagement with the story and its world for the fans.

RWBY, like discussed in the previous chapter, had seen a wide range of adaptations, ranging from Western comic styles to manga formats, demonstrating its adaptability and the imaginative possibilities of its story. Rooster Teeth Productions and DC Comics' cooperation on the *RWBY/Justice League* crossover serves as another evidence of the developing trend of fusing animated realms with well-known comic book properties to provide fans with exclusive crossover experiences and broaden the horizons of cherished characters. After the manga publications (and Rooster Teeth's merge with Warner Bros. Entertainment) DC Comics and Rooster Teeth Productions announced a crossover in 2019 between *RWBY* and the *Justice League* in a digital-first comic series titled *RWBY/Justice League*. Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, and other well-known superheroes from the DC Universe were joined by characters from *RWBY* in these crossovers.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ J. Arvendon. 'DC Unites the Justice League and RWBY in New Miniseries this April', *Comic Book Resources*, 15 January 2021. <<https://www.cbr.com/dc-rwby-justice-league-april/>> (30 April 2024).



Figure 6-7: Covers of the first volumes for the DC and *RWBY* crossover comics, from left to right: *DC/RWBY #1* by Marguerite Bennet and *RWBY/Justice League #1* also by Marguerite Bennet.

Every issue of the *RWBY/Justice League* comic book series was made available for download and purchase on a variety of digital platforms upon its release. Although the crossover was first mainly available digitally, it attracted interest from both franchise fans and gave readers an interesting crossover experience, which resulted in several physical publications. Of course, DC Comics oversaw its publications. Rooster Teeth Productions and DC Comics have collaborated on several projects besides the *RWBY/Justice League* crossover comic series. These consist of advertising campaigns, product crossovers, and *RWBY* characters making cameos in DC-themed media. For instance, characters from *RWBY* and the *Justice League* also starred in two animated crossover movies as well.⁹¹

However, while these crossovers generated curiosity and attracted both *RWBY* and DC fans, they ultimately faced challenges in sustaining success and engagement. One core issue was that the crossover struggled to faithfully capture the unique qualities of *RWBY*, especially its distinct blend of anime-inspired storytelling, character depth, and action choreography that initially resonated with its fanbase. This mismatch meant that fans who connected with *RWBY* on an emotional level found these crossover stories lacking the series' original nuance and character-driven focus. The crossover format often diluted *RWBY*'s characters to fit within the broader DC universe framework, sacrificing their unique backstories and motivations. The result was that fans felt the *RWBY* characters didn't

⁹¹ J. Carter, 'RWBY's First Movie Is A Crossover With The Justice League', 2 July 2022. <<https://gizmodo.com/rwby-justice-league-movie-rooster-teeth-dc-comics-1849137046>> (30 April 2024).

translate well in the DC context, with their personalities and relationships simplified for accessibility rather than remaining true to the series' core dynamics.⁹²

Filtering, framing and amplifying *RWBY*

The changing publishing landscape in the digital age is examined in Michael Bhaskar's book *The Content Machine: Towards a Theory of Publishing from the Printing Press to the Digital Network*. Bhaskar explores the production, distribution, and consumption of material and offers a thorough framework for comprehending these activities.⁹³ Rooster Teeth and Monty Oum's animated series *RWBY* is a prime example of how Bhaskar's theories may be put to use. This chapter examines how *RWBY*, with its creative methods for interacting with viewers and utilizing digital platforms, epitomizes Bhaskar's views on contemporary content generation and delivery.

According to Bhaskar's definition in *The Content Machine*, publishing is a process that involves three fundamental tasks: amplification, framing, and filtering. These elements cover the path of material from production to consumption in a variety of mediums. The core of these stages is still essential to the publishing industry, according to Bhaskar's model, even though the precise techniques of each step have changed with the digital revolution. According to Bhaskar, filtering is the first step that content producers – including authors and artists – take to make their work stand out. Filtering is visible in *RWBY*'s beginnings as a stand-alone, avant-garde production that made use of state-of-the-art animation technology. Monty Oum's use of animation software for complex action scenes and his blending of anime, Western animation, and video game elements allowed *RWBY* to emerge as a distinctive narrative. This process of filtering – of crafting and selecting content to fit a unique vision – aligns closely with Bhaskar's idea of publishers curating content to stand out in a crowded media landscape.⁹⁴

For Bhaskar, framing entails arranging information in a form that can be consumed, formerly through printed books but more recently through digital files and other media. *RWBY* exemplifies this framing stage by streamlining production with digital technologies, allowing for high-quality animation on a small budget. Because episodes can be streamed online, the show's digital format further broadens its audience by attracting viewers with convenient, episodic releases. Because of its distinctive visual style and reliable quality, *RWBY* is a prime example of Bhaskar's framing approach, which also incorporates subjective components like branding and design. This improves viewer engagement and

⁹² M. Newson, 'RWBY/Justice League #1 review', *Batman News*, 27 April 2021. <<https://batman-news.com/2021/04/27/rwby-justice-league-1-review/>> (27 October 2024).

⁹³ M. Bhaskar, *The Content Machine: Towards a Theory of Publishing from the Printing Press to the Digital Network* (New York: Anthem Press, 2013).

⁹⁴ Bhaskar, *The Content Machine*.

positions the show as a valued digital media product.⁹⁵ Bhaskar highlights amplification as essential in making content known and accessible to broader audiences. Rooster Teeth's distribution strategy for *RWBY* aligns with this concept through its use of multiple online platforms – initially Rooster Teeth's own website and later on platforms like YouTube and Crunchyroll. This approach bypasses traditional broadcast constraints, enabling global accessibility. Further, *RWBY* leverages fan interaction on social media, with Rooster Teeth cultivated a community around the series, mirroring Bhaskar's emphasis on audience loyalty and engagement as forms of modern amplification. The expansion of *RWBY* into books, comics, video games, and merchandise reflects Bhaskar's advocacy for varied audience touchpoints, reinforcing the brand and allowing fans deeper connections with the *RWBY* universe.

By engaging audiences at each stage – through unique filtering of content, accessible framing, and extensive amplification – *RWBY* exemplifies Bhaskar's model of publishing as a multifaceted process that adapts to the digital age, transforming traditional publishing boundaries and redefining how audiences experience and interact with content.

Successful textual adaptations

To showcase that (in theory) *RWBY* possesses all the features to create a successful transmedia storytelling narrative, this part of the chapter will discuss other animated series, who got adapted into several media, like comics. This section will analyze another fairly popular animated series called *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. Like *RWBY*, *Avatar: The Last Airbender* lends multiple elements from Asian culture and looks quite like Japanese animation as well. *Avatar: The Last Airbender* has enthralled viewers all over the world with its complex storyline, intriguing characters, and deep mythology since its Nickelodeon debut in 2005. After the highly successful cartoon series ended, viewers were itching to discover more about the colorful world of bending and Avatar Aang's adventures.⁹⁶ The Dark Horse books' *Avatar: The Last Airbender* books have become an essential continuation of the cherished series. Let's look into the complex process of releasing these comics, emphasizing the publisher's role of Dark Horse Comics and the complexities involved in publishing.

In the comic book business, Dark Horse Comics is a titan known for its dedication to varied and high-caliber narrative. Since its founding in 1986, Dark Horse has built a solid reputation for supporting artistic autonomy and recognizing distinctive voices within the

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ 'Avatar: The Last Airbender – A Masterclass in Transmedia Storytelling', *Horimiya*. <<https://horimiya.store/avatar-the-last-airbender-a-masterclass-in-transmedia-storytelling/>> (27 October 2024).

industry.⁹⁷ The publisher's decision to take on the task of adapting *Avatar: The Last Airbender* for comic book format made sense. In order to keep the comics faithful to the original series' essence, Dark Horse Comics, Nickelodeon, and the *Avatar: The Last Airbender* creators collaborated closely.⁹⁸ The show's creators, Michael Dante DiMartino and Bryan Konietzko, provided feedback on the direction of the comics in an effort to preserve authenticity and artistic continuity. The success of the comic book adaptations was made possible by the publisher and creators working together. The *Avatar: The Last Airbender* comics are produced and published through a painstaking process that brings together gifted writers, artists, and editors. The award-winning graphic novelist Gene Luen Yang, who is renowned for his subtle storytelling and cultural insights, is in charge of the creative project. Yang works with artists from Studio Gurihiru, whose colorful and dynamic artwork adds a new angle to the images while capturing the spirit of the animated series. Comics are usually published in multiple-part storylines, frequently segmented into trilogies, offering fans integrated storylines that delve further into the universe of *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. Strict editing and production procedures are applied to every volume to guarantee the highest caliber standards. To accommodate the varied tastes of comic book fans, the comics are published in a variety of forms, such as single issues, trade paperbacks, and deluxe hardback versions.⁹⁹

In order to interact with fans, Dark Horse books uses a variety of marketing techniques to promote the *Avatar: The Last Airbender* books. These techniques include convention appearances, social media platforms, and tie-ins with the animated series.¹⁰⁰ Comic book series sales figures are difficult to come by because publishers are reluctant to share specific numbers; nevertheless, metrics like reviews, appearances on bestseller lists, and fan interaction can provide light on how successful the *Avatar: The Last Airbender* comics were commercially. The comics have been highly praised by both critics and fans for their accurate portrayal of the world-building, character development, and storyline of the original series.¹⁰¹ The comics' sustained popularity and commercial viability are

⁹⁷ Dark Horse, 'History', <<https://www.darkhorse.com/Company/History>> (28 April 2023).

⁹⁸ D. Broadway, 'The Avatar Series: From Animation to Comic Book Creation', *Black Girl Nerds*. <<https://blackgirlnerds.com/the-avatar-series-from-animation-to-comic-book-creation-at-comic-conhome/>> (30 April 2024).

⁹⁹ C. Holub, 'Dark Horse Announces New Avatar: The Last Airbender Comics', *Entertainment Weekly*, 26 February 2018. <<https://ew.com/books/2018/02/26/dark-horse-announces-new-avatar-the-last-airbender-comics/>> (26 April 2024).

¹⁰⁰ J. Lovett, 'Avatar: The Last Airbender Creators Clarify Whether Comics and Novels Are Canon', 11 July 2022. <<https://comicbook.com/anime/news/avatar-the-last-airbender-are-comics-novels-canon/>> (28 April 2024).

¹⁰¹ Comicbookwire, 'Review: Avatar: The Last Airbender: The Promise', *Comic Book Wire*, 7 July 2020. <<https://www.comicbookwire.com/review-avatar-the-last-airbender-the-promise/>> (26 April 2024).

demonstrated by their placement on bestseller lists and ongoing publication of new volumes. Although exact sales figures are still difficult to come by, the cultural influence and positive reception that the *Avatar: The Last Airbender* comics have received show how successful the series has been. What we do know is that several of these trilogies titles have made it to the New York bestseller list.¹⁰² Some even made this list in its first week of being on the shelves.¹⁰³ Dark Horse Comics' release of *Avatar: The Last Airbender* comics is evidence of the beloved franchise's ongoing appeal and creative energy. These comics have given new life to the world of bending and Avatar Aang's pursuit of harmony and balance thanks to the cooperation of publishers, creators, and fans.

How does this series connect to Henry Jenkins' Transmedia storytelling? The world, characters, and main story arc are all introduced in the first animated series, which acts as the basis. Although it gives the main plot, it offers room for more world exploration. Numerous comic books and graphic novels continued the plot after the series ended. These works fill in narrative gaps and give characters more nuance by examining events that take place between the original series and its sequel, *The Legend of Korra*. For example, the "Search" series delves into the mystery surrounding Zuko's mother, a topic that the original show did not address. Novels and short stories that explore new facets of the world or go further into the backstories of particular characters have been influenced by the series. The "Kyoshi" novels, for example, explore the life of one of Aang's previous incarnations and offer a detailed backstory that enhances the world's complexity. Transmedia storytelling frequently include attempts to retell the story in a different medium, as evidenced by the live-action film adaptation, despite its lack of popularity. Another illustration of this is anticipated to be the soon-to-come Netflix live-action series. Transmedia storytelling, according to Jenkins, entails "a story being told through different media where each medium contributes in its own unique way to the unfolding of the story."¹⁰⁴ This is exactly how *Avatar: The Last Airbender* fits the bill. A rich universe and story are established by the TV show, and these are subsequently developed through a variety of other mediums, each of which adds new levels of complexity and insight. Through their interaction with the narrative on various platforms, fans create a deeper and more comprehensive experience that goes beyond the original television series. The universe of Avatar is maintained through its multi-platform

¹⁰² Dark Horse, 'Avatar: The Last Airbender - The Rift Part One Hits #1 On NY Bestseller List!', 20 March 2014. <<https://www.darkhorse.com/Blog/1638/avatar-last-airbender-rift-part-one-hits-1-new-yor>> (24 April 2024); Dark Horse, 'Avatar: The Last Airbender - The Search Part 2 Hits #1 On NY Bestseller List!', 30 July 2013. <<https://www.darkhorse.com/Blog/1447/avatar-last-airbender-search-part-2-hits-1-ny-time>> (24 April 2024).

¹⁰³ CBR Staff, 'Dark Horse's "Avatar: The Last Airbender" Tops "New York Times" Bestsellers', *Comic Book Resources*, 18 June 2012. <<https://www.cbr.com/dark-horses-avatar-the-last-air-bender-tops-new-york-times-bestsellers/>> (17 April 2024).

¹⁰⁴ Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, pp. 134.

strategy, which makes it a successful example of transmedia narrative even years after the conclusion of the original series.

Launched in February 2012, the *Adventure Time* comic book capitalized on the success of the Cartoon Network television show. The comics, which are written by Ryan North and illustrated by Shelli Paroline and Braden Lamb, have the same bright, vivid graphic style, inventive storyline, and offbeat humor as the television show. The adventures of Finn the Human and Jake the Dog as they travel across the Land of Ooo are chronicled in this ongoing series. From 2012 until 2018, the main series ran for 75 issues, giving fans fresh adventures that were very much in keeping with the tone and spirit of the show.¹⁰⁵ While the success and popularity of this main comic book series continued to grow, five mini-series and spin-offs were introduced as well. In addition to these monthly issued mini-series four more graphic novels were published as well. These offered longer, self-contained stories within the universe of *Adventure Time*. The *Adventure Time* comic book series has won multiple accolades and been praised by critics; in 2013, it was honored with an Eisner Award for Best Publication for Children.¹⁰⁶

The main *Adventure Time* shows and all mini-series, spin-offs and graphic novels were all published by BOOM! Studios.¹⁰⁷ Prominent American comic book and graphic novel publisher BOOM! Studios is well-known for a wide variety of both licensed and original works. Since Ross Richie founded the business in 2005, it has expanded rapidly and gained a reputation for producing creative and compelling narratives. The studio soon branched out into a wide range of genres and styles, but its initial focus was on science fiction and horror.¹⁰⁸ BOOM! Studios has four imprints, all of which cater to distinct target demographics and content genres. BOOM! Studios: The company's flagship brand, offering a wide selection of licensed and original series targeted at adults and teens. KaBOOM!: The *Adventure Time* comics are released under the KaBOOM! banner, which focuses on comics for all ages. It has family-friendly tales and topics appropriate for younger readers. BOOM! Box is another one of its imprints, known for its experimental and creator-driven comics, which frequently have quirky, independent content. Young adults are among the varied readership segments it is intended for. Archaia: After being purchased by BOOM! Studios in 2013, Archaia is a premier publisher of graphic novels and is renowned for its exquisitely designed volumes and unique content. BOOM! Studios and 20th Century Fox inked a first-look agreement in 2017, granting the studio the first move in developing BOOM! properties

¹⁰⁵ BOOM! Studios, 'About', <<https://www.boom-studios.com/about/>> (27 April 2024).

¹⁰⁶ G. McMillan, 'An Exclusive Peek at *Adventure Time*'s First Graphic Novel', *Wired*, 9 May 2013. <<https://www.wired.com/2013/05/adventure-time-comics/>> (24 April 2024).

¹⁰⁷ BOOM! Studios, 'About'.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

for the big screen and television. The possibility for BOOM! Studios' material to reach larger audiences through other media was enhanced with Disney's acquisition of 20th Century Fox, which resulted in an extension of this cooperation. This means that BOOM! Studios adapts both animated series into comics as well as comics into (animated) films/series.

Again, *Adventure Time* has effectively utilized transmedia storytelling as well. The *Adventure Time* universe is expanded through multiple graphic novels and comic book series. These include tales that go into parallel universes, follow secondary characters, or carry on Finn and Jake's adventures after the show's episodes conclude. In addition, the *Adventure Time* franchise has developed mini-episodes, short films, and specials that focus on particular characters or events. Deep dives into facets of the world that the main series may not have covered in detail are possible with these specials. Because *Adventure Time*'s tale is spread over a variety of media platforms, each of which adds something special to the larger plot, it fits in well with Jenkins' concept of transmedia storytelling. The main storyline is supplied by the TV show, and new storylines, characters, and ideas are explored in comics, games, and specials that build upon it. *Adventure Time* is a prime example of Jenkins' transmedia storytelling in action because of its transmedia approach, which not only keeps the show's world lively and alive long after the original series ended but also makes it possible to explore its universe in greater and more varied ways. All comic book adaptations have things in common (especially with transmedia storytelling) with the printed material of *RWBY*, but were way more successful and even got awarded several prizes. The main difference is that these above-mentioned adaptations are comic books, and the *RWBY* printed material studied in this thesis are printed in a manga format.

Conclusion

The rise of Rooster Teeth from small beginnings to prominence in the digital media space was a credit to the inventiveness, civic involvement, and pioneering spirit of their founders. The business, which made its debut with the innovative machinima series *Red vs. Blue*, rose to prominence in the rapidly expanding online entertainment industry as a creative lighthouse. Rooster Teeth began as a small group of friends creating material in their own time and grew into a multi-dimensional entertainment enterprise that delighted millions of fans worldwide and impacted countless other producers.

Rooster Teeth's dedication to the community was fundamental to their success. The company built a devoted following early on by interacting with their audience directly at conventions, forums, and eventually social media. This relationship was about more than just increasing the number of viewers; it was also about encouraging fan participation and a sense of community. The Rooster Teeth community was involved in the process, offering suggestions, criticism, and sometimes taking part in projects. They were not just content consumers. The foundation of Rooster Teeth's identity was this mutually beneficial interaction between the company's creators and fans.

RWBY's release was a major turning point for Rooster Teeth, demonstrating their capacity to produce unique, excellent animated entertainment. *RWBY* was a whole transmedia product, encompassing video games, merchandise, comics, and more, rather than just an anime-inspired television series. A wide range of viewers from around the world were enthralled with the show because of its distinctive fusion of Eastern and Western animation techniques, gripping narrative, and intricately detailed setting. *RWBY* solidified Rooster Teeth's position in the larger entertainment sector by demonstrating that the company could flourish and develop outside of the machinima genre.

The triumph of *RWBY* can be ascribed to multiple crucial elements. The first is the vision and enthusiasm of the series' creator, Monty Oum, whose commitment to pushing the limits of animation technology and his artistic direction set a high bar for the production. Although Monty's sudden passing in 2015 devastated the business and the community, it also demonstrated the Rooster Teeth team's resiliency and camaraderie. After Monty passed away, *RWBY* continued, paying homage to his legacy and demonstrating the team's dedication to both their audience and their profession. Furthermore, *RWBY* succeeded due to its complex plotlines and compelling, relatable characters. The heroines of the show — Ruby, Weiss, Blake, and Yang — brought distinct qualities and weaknesses that allowed viewers to identify with them in a relatable way. The story's examination of issues like friendship, grief, and the conflict between good and evil struck a profound chord with viewers, creating a devoted and enthusiastic community that excitedly awaited the release of each new season. The creative way that Rooster Teeth distributed its content was also a

major factor in its success. Rooster Teeth was able to break free from the limitations of conventional media outlets and reach a worldwide audience by utilizing websites like YouTube and eventually its own streaming service. In addition to democratizing content availability, this strategy gave the business the freedom to try new things and take artistic chances that it might not have been able to in a more conventional context.

Examining manga and comics as separate but related visual narrative media offers a fascinating look at how cultural settings influence artistic expression. Through distinct historical trajectories, technology developments, and audience interactions, manga and comics have both developed, offering rich and varied environments for both readers and creators.

The idea of stigma management provides insight into the sociocultural factors that affect how manga is viewed and accepted in various markets, especially when it comes to US manga publishers. Due to the historical stigma attached to comics as a medium for males or youngsters, US publishers have had to carefully choose and alter their content in order to appeal to a wider market. The use of tactics like content warnings, educational initiatives, and community development can aid in reducing these stigmas and advancing manga as a worthy and appreciated cultural form. Furthermore, the examination of manga and comics uncovers a diverse array of creative ingenuity, cross-cultural interaction, and developing storytelling techniques. VIZ Media's publication of Rooster Teeth's *RWBY* manga serves as a testament to the possibilities for cross-cultural cooperation to enhance the medium and broaden its appeal. However, it is also a prime example as how to not read your fanbase correctly. Bhaskar's theories are enhanced by Henry Jenkins' transmedia storytelling notion, which emphasizes how stories may be developed and expanded across many media platforms. *RWBY*, which expands into video games, comics, and books while keeping its web series as the central story. Every medium gives a fresh perspective to the storyline, enhancing the whole reading experience and capturing the interest of various viewer demographics. Jenkins' theories regarding how narrative structures have changed in the digital age are supported by this transmedia method, which makes for a more engaging and participatory storytelling experience. The way the show has been adapted for print and video games among other media shows how transmedia storytelling can build an immersive and cogent environment. Through the exploration of character backstories and supplementary history in comic books and novels, *RWBY* enhances the storyline and offers readers fresh viewpoints and insights. This approach not only improves the main series but also embodies Jenkins' idea of utilizing a variety of mediums to provide a more intricate and captivating narrative. To sum up, *RWBY* successfully reflects the ideas put forth by Henry Jenkins and Michael Bhaskar. The series epitomizes how content generation and consumption have changed in the digital age with its creative use of digital tools, smart

distribution strategies, and transmedia storytelling. *RWBY* offers as a useful case study for understanding how contemporary content can be created, shared, and consumed in ways that are consistent with current publishing and storytelling ideas as the media landscape continues to change. Through the integration of Bhaskar's perspectives on content value creation and Jenkins' theories of transmedia narrative, *RWBY* underscores the possibility for digital platforms to transform conventional publication paradigms and provide more intricate and interactive storytelling opportunities.

The way Rooster Teeth handled the textual translations of *RWBY* highlights a basic mismatch between the show's primary demographic and their publishing practices. Their attempts to break into more conventional genres, such as novels and themanga that is central in this thesis have fallen flat, even though they are experts in digital media. For example, despite *RWBY*'s TV show having a 15+ rating, the decision to publish a novel with extended lore geared at young children alienated a sizable chunk of their current following and caused a tonal dissonance within the brand. Rooster Teeth missed the opportunity to capitalize on the more sophisticated and nuanced storytelling that had drawn their original fan base by marketing to a somewhat younger audience than their core readership. Further contradiction was produced by their decision to only publish a sizable amount of new material in Japanese manga style. Rooster Teeth's decision to localize new canon content exclusively in Japanese, with no English translation available for a considerable amount of time, angered non-Japanese speaking fans, even though the manga format is a natural fit for *RWBY* given its anime-inspired style. This prevented a large segment of their global viewership, particularly in English-speaking areas, from accessing fresh plots and character arcs. Additionally, the Japanese manga cover's false designation as "comic" – a term usually associated with publications in the Western style – made matters even more confusing and made it harder to distinguish between their domestic and foreign publishing methods.

The inconsistent textual publishing decisions made by Rooster Teeth are a reflection of more serious problems with their transmedia storytelling strategy. Rather than offering fans a cohesive experience across many platforms, these choices led to the dispersion of content distribution, making important aspects of the *RWBY* universe harder to find or catering to a whole different audience. These decisions demonstrate the company's inability to close the gap between production, distribution, and consumption. They made an attempt to blur the boundaries between other mediums, but in doing so, they alienated their core following and made it more difficult for non-core fans to interact with the wider *RWBY* universe. These publishing blunders highlight a larger problem: there was no clear, well-thought-out plan in place to balance *RWBY*'s multiplatform storytelling with its target demographic. Rooster Teeth hampered the possibility of *RWBY*'s transmedia expansion by failing to take into account the consequences of mismatching target demographics, regional

accessibility, and the disparate consumption habits of their worldwide fandom. Because of this, their literary translations did not only fail to add value to the franchise but also illustrated the difficulties and dangers associated with striking a balance between artistic ambition and viewer expectations in a global media environment.

In the future, Rooster Teeth and *RWBY* will likely continue to influence the evolution of digital content creation, especially as new platforms and technologies emerge. Rooster Teeth's approach – grounded in creativity, community engagement, and innovation – offers valuable lessons for content creators navigating the digital age. This trajectory also suggests that successful digital media relies heavily on building relationships with audiences, fostering community, and staying true to an artistic vision. However, *RWBY*'s mixed experiences with print media, such as its use of niche manga formats over more accessible comic forms, point to significant takeaways for transmedia strategies.

Academically speaking, these revelations need a reexamination of the transmedia narrative models that are now in use, especially Jenkins' theories regarding the smooth integration of media platforms. The *RWBY* scenario emphasizes the need of comprehending how each medium naturally affects the audience's experience and reaction, implying that in transmedia projects, choosing the "right" medium could be just as important as the content itself. This example also calls into question Bhaskar's publishing strategy, which prioritizes amplification, framing, and filtering. By emphasizing community input and collaborative production, digital-first platforms such as Rooster Teeth challenged conventional notions of filtering and framing, making the publisher's job more difficult and promoting models where content is both community-driven and flexible. Further, this analysis impacts our understanding of the "book" itself, as Kovač et al. argue. In a digital landscape, the boundaries of what constitutes a book expand to accommodate new hybrid forms that bridge the gap between text, image, and interactive media. *RWBY*'s crossover into print materials illuminates the challenges digital-native content faces when translated into physical formats, emphasizing that a book in the digital age may need to be more adaptable, multifaceted, and integrative of various media than ever before. Consequently, readers might reconsider not only how books are defined but also how they are crafted and consumed in an increasingly digital and interconnected world.

In summary, the history of Rooster Teeth is one of outstanding accomplishments and lasting influence. The company's history, which includes groundbreaking digital media with *Red vs. Blue* and building a cherished franchise like *RWBY*, is proof of the strength of imagination, ingenuity, and camaraderie. Even though Rooster Teeth is not making new material anymore, people will still be affected by the stories they told, the characters they created, and the community they established. Though Rooster Teeth is ending an era, their influence is not going away; rather, it marks the beginning of a new chapter in the ongoing

saga of how digital media is evolving, one that will continue to inspire and educate for years to come.

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