Unusual Geography: Discworld Board Games and Paratextual L-Space

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Abstract

This paper draws on Jonathan Gray's (2006, 2010, 2013) work on paratexts and Matthew Hills' (2004) work on Discworld geography, to examine the role that the Discworld board games play in affecting fans' meaning-making processes. Existing outside of the 'official' canon of the novels, as well as television and animated adaptations, the games nevertheless utilise information contained within those texts to affect game play. Drawing on user reviews of the Discworld games from the board game website *Board Game Geek*, I suggest that these games fulfil a similar function to Pratchett's textual concept of L-Space; the idea that 'Knowledge = power = energy = matter = mass, and on that simple equation rests the whole of L-space. It is via L-space that all books are connected (quoting the ones before them, and influencing the ones that come after) (1989: 11)'. I argue that although the games are unable to influence the narrative of existing Discworld books, they nevertheless constitute a transmedia relationship with the text, based on Jason Mittell's (2012-13) 'what if' concept.

Keywords: Transmedia, Transmedia Storytelling, Board Games, Discworld, L-Space, Adaptations, Television, Animation, Terry Pratchett, Fandom, Paratexts, Narrative.

Introduction

Terry Pratchett's Discworld is a series of comic fantasy novels set on the Disc, a flat world which stands on the back of four elephants, which in turn stand on the back of a giant turtle. The first book in the series, *The Colour of Magic*, was published in 1983 and the series – as of November 2013 – consists of 40 novels, as well as several short stories. The Discworld has also expanded into other areas, however. Discworld conventions are held regularly across the world, while Discworld figurines, produced by Clarecraft before the company went into administration, are popular collectibles. The Discworld Emporium is a shop dedicated to all things Disc where bags, clothing and Discworld-inspired jewellery are sold. Music inspired by the Discworld can also be found online; folk band Steeleye Stan collaborated with Pratchett to create a record based on his young Discworld novel, *Wintersmith* (2006). At the time of writing the band are touring the UK with the album). Furthermore, the books have been adapted into graphic novel and

script format, animated films, fan-made films, television series, computer games and, crucially for this article, board games. Each of these expansions functions as a 'paratext' to the Discworld, as well as a text in its own right.

Literary theorist Gérard Genette defined paratext as those things in a published work (the author's name, preface, illustrations) that accompany the text. Furthermore, Jonathan Gray (2010) argues that 'official' paratexts such as episode guides, cast and crew interviews, games, trailers and DVD commentaries inform viewers' knowledge of the text and give us ways of looking, and frames for understanding or engaging, with it (2010). Discworld games exist in both 'official' and 'unofficial' capacities and each of these has its own way of providing ways for fans of the Discworld to engage with, and interpret, the novels. Indeed, Pratchett's Discworld has a large fan following, and the board games are popular with many of these. More than simply merchandise or collectibles, however, fans such as those discussed in this article

view these games as additions to the Discworld universe. Many replies to the *Board Game Geek* review of Z-Man's 2011 board game Guards! Guards![1] noted the feel of the game was very Discworldian, and user reviews of Discworld: Ankh-Morpork (Treefrog Games, 2011) on the same site said that the game takes the city of Ankh-Morpork itself to new heights[2]:

> I have read every one of Terry Pratchett's Discworld books and this game takes the city of Ankh-Morpork to new depths. We play as a group. Myself, my fourteen-year-old cynic and my ten-year-old whose Machiavellian instinct caused him to win the first three games outright (O'Neill 2011).

Given this, I suggest that the games function as paratexts to the novels themselves, and provide players with new ways of understanding both the geographical spaces of the Discworld and the characters inhabiting the universe.

While functioning as paratexts, however, the games also work as a form of transmedia storytelling. Henry Jenkins notes that the nature of transmedia storytelling is to expand 'the range of narrative possibility' beyond the typical beginning, middle, and end (2006: 119) and suggests that

> Transmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get *dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels* for the purpose of creating *a unified and coordinated entertainment experience*. Ideally, each medium makes it [sic] own *unique contribution* to the unfolding of the story [emphasis added] (2011).

The Discworld board games do not further the canonical storyworld in the way that Jenkins suggests transmedia stories should. They are not designed to develop new Discworld stories or provide a unique contribution to the unfolding of the story (this is especially the case in Guards! Guards!, where the game could be seen as providing the player with a deeper understanding of characters' motivations, but does not change the pre-existing story already told in the *Guards! Guards!* novel). In Genette's terms they are hypertexts as much as they are paratexts, that is new texts 'written over' old ones, inviting a double reading of the original: 'Hypertextuality refers to any

relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the hypertext) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary [emphasis in original]' (1997: 5). The hypertext derives from the hypotext through a process of transformation which may include modifying, elaborating or extending the hypotext. Given this, it could be argued that the Discworld boardgames are better examined as hypertexts. Rather than functioning (solely or primarily) as such, however, I argue that the games fulfil the function of what Jason Mittell calls 'What If?' transmedia. That is they '[pose] hypothetical possibilities rather than canonical certainties, inviting viewers to imagine alternative stories and approaches to storytelling that are distinctly not to be treated as potential canon' (2011). Genette refers to both James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Virgil's *Aeneid* as hypertexts of the *Odyssey* and uses these to demonstrate that the hypertext remains a 'properly literary' work. The Discworld board games, however, invite players to participate in the story and actively create a non-canonical resolution. I thus approach the games as transmedia extensions rather than hypertexts because of the possibilities they pose through their interactive nature.

In this article I examine the Discworld board games Guards! Guards!, Discworld: Ankh-Morpork, The Witches (Treefrog Games, 2013) and Thud (Pratchett, Truran and Pearson 2001/2005) as paratextual transmedia, providing players who are fans of the Discworld with alternative ways of understanding the novels while fulfilling a different transmedia storytelling element than that usually examined following Jenkins' work. My goals in this article are therefore to (i) trace intertextual connections between the games and their source(s) to illustrate how they function narratively as paratexts; (ii) evaluate fan/player reaction to the games based on their status as paratexts; and (iii) demonstrate how the board games epitomise a concept made famous by Pratchett in the novel *Guards! Guards!* – that of Library-space, or L-space through which all books are connected:

> The truth is that even big collections of ordinary books distort space, as can readily be proved by anyone who has been around a really old-fashioned secondhand bookshop, one that looks as

though they were designed by M. Escher on a bad day and has more stairways than storeys and those rows of shelves which end in little doors that are surely too small for a full-sized human to enter. The relevant equation is: Knowledge = power = energy = matter = mass; a good bookshop is just a genteel Black Hole that knows how to read (Pratchett 1989: 11).

The library at the Unseen University is thus linked to all other libraries across space and time, as the Librarian discovers in *Guards! Guards!* when investigating the theft of the book on the summoning of noble dragons. Pratchett's concept of L-Space is clearly related to the concept of intertextuality: all individual texts are potentially read in relation to every other text. More pertinent to the arguments I make in this paper, L-space makes it possible that there are potentially forms of data storage other than books, as it represents every library anywhere, and that travel within L-space is possible outside of the library itself. In other words, the Discworld board games function as L-space, connecting the books across space and time.

Methodology

This article combines textual analysis of Discworld novels, television adaptations and board game with qualitative audience research. I analysed user comments and reviews to the Discworld board games on the popular board game website *Board Game Geek*. The site is an authoritative resource for board games, containing reviews, articles, images and reports for over 60,000 games, game expansions and designers, and contains a gamer database, marketplace and message board. The quotes used in this article were taken from comments to *Board Game Geek* reviews, user reviews, and comments to user reviews. Using posts made on *Board Game Geek* allowed me to analyse fan, player, and non-fan player responses to the games. Indeed, in some cases there were distinctions between types of user responses, depending on that user's priority for their game playing experience. Some responded primarily as Discworld fans, whose main priority appears to be one of narrative and aesthetic fidelity to the source text. Some responded as fan-players who tempered their affective relationship to the book with broader ludological experiences,

recognising that fidelity may have to be compromised to ensure effective gameplay. Others, meanwhile, responded as players who had never heard of or read the Discworld and were commenting from a ludological point of view. Each of these interpreted the games in different ways, and thus can add to our understanding of the relationship between board game and source text.

Paratexts and Transmediality

The concept of paratexts was first put forward by Genette to describe the various fragments that surround the text, but which don't form part of the text itself. Referring to literary texts, Gennette suggested that they are 'rarely presented in an unadorned state, unreinforced and unaccompanied by [...] productions such as an author's name, a title, a preface, illustrations' (1997: 1) which surround it and extend it. These paratexts are what enable the text to become a book, and affect both its reception and consumption. More than a boundary, however, demarcating the book from the not-book, these paratexts work as thresholds or in-between spaces which function as a form of 'airlock' between the reader and the textual world, an influence that 'is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it' (1997: 2). While Genette wrote specifically about the book and its paratexts, Gray argues that paratexts include everything on the fringes of the text and the world at large: trailers, action figures, movie posters, DVD commentaries, reviews, fan fiction, computer games and board games. He also believes that the paratext 'does not stand between reader and text as much as it infringes upon the text, and invades its meaning-making process' (2006: 36). He argues that industry-created paratexts such as episode guides, cast and crew interviews, games, trailers and DVD commentaries inform viewers' knowledge of the text, and give us ways of looking at it and frames for understanding or engaging with it (2010: 10-11).

In discussing paratexts, Gray notes how many of these come prior to our interactions with a text. For example, advertising for films often constitutes movie posters in cinemas and newspapers and on the sides of buses and billboards, as well as trailers in the cinema and on television, interviews with cast and crew in newspapers, magazines and online, and

official websites; not to mention advertising on social media. Having been exposed to these paratexts, and yet not seen the text itself, the audience nevertheless has a good idea of what the plot is, who the main characters are, what genre the film sits in and what other productions the producer and director have been involved in. In other words, the audience already knows what to expect, and 'textual interpretation and identification have likely already begun' (Gray 2013: 102). Gray refers to these as 'entryway' paratexts, and the Discworld board games may well function as introductions to the Discworld for many players. Indeed, many of the reviews of Ankh-Morpork on the *Board Game Geek* website are from players who are unfamiliar with the Discworld books, but enjoyed the game regardless[3]. But what about those paratexts encountered when an audience is already familiar with the source text? In medias res paratexts come in many formats, including spin off novels, graphic novels, action figures, minisodes and clothing. Will Brooker writes of his own experience of in medias res paratexts, in relation to the BBC series *Attachments*:

> After watching the episode where Soph is punished by her boss for her article "Hell is Other People Shagging," I went to the seethru.co.uk website, which treats Soph and her colleagues as "real" people, with no mention of BBC2 or *Attachments*. On the front page I was able to read the full article, which could only be glimpsed in the actual episode. I then took part in a quiz compiled by Reece, the series' womanizing programmer (2001: 456-57).

The website thus functions as an in medias res paratext, providing the viewer with additional information relevant to the text, but not available in the source text itself. This additional information, moreover, affects the way in which the source text is understood and interpreted by the viewer. Games also function as paratexts in similar ways. As Adam Brown and Deb Waterhouse-Watson note in this issue, the multiplicity of stories created in Star Wars, Lord of the Rings, Game of Thrones, The Hunger Games, Battlestar Galactica, The Walking Dead, and Spartacus board games highlight the strategies that game designers employ to build on the serial narratives which were told in the pre-existing storyworlds.

These official games, created and sold in collaboration with the franchise owner, as opposed to fan created games such as those discussed by Ruth Deller in this issue, 'extend the invitation to play' (Gray 2010: 187). That is, they contribute to the storyworld by suggesting additional meanings, prioritising certain characters or plot lines, and enabling audiences to step into the pre-existing world. Arguably this is more the case with video games than with board games: Gray, examining the 2002 video game *The Thing*, notes that it was presented as a sequel to John Carpenter's 1982 remake and begins three months after the events in the film. Gray suggests that

> More than just continuing the plot, though, it effectively captures the sense of paranoia, horror, and confusion that pervades the film by putting the player's avatar in charge of a group who may or may not become "infected". [...] One soon learns, then, to hate the cold and pervasive darkness, and to trust nobody. The game thereby places the player within the horror of *The Thing* (2010: 189).

The interactive nature of the game, its position in the horror genre and its application of the first person perspective thus create a more affective relationship between the viewer/player and the storyworld. Much more work has been done on video games than board games, but I suggest that similar processes are at work for board game players entering pre-existing worlds. For example, Paul Booth, in this issue, examines The Walking Dead board games and details how players are able to experience the pathos of the source text: in both the television series and the graphic novels the survivors are effective only by being part of and apart from the group. Players of the board game find themselves discovering and, more importantly, experiencing the same thing.

Board games, then, function as paratexts, adding additional elements and means of understanding to the source text and taking the storyworld into another medium. But paratexts are not necessarily transmedia stories, and vice versa. Theorised perhaps most famously by Henry Jenkins (2006), transmedia storytelling is designed to expand the narrative beyond the typical beginning, middle, and end of a text. In transmedia storytelling elements of a story are spread across different media, with each

of these making their own contribution to the over-arching story while simultaneously being able to stand alone. Jenkins refers to the 1999 film *The Matrix* (Dirs. Lana and Andy Wachowski) as a prime example of transmedia storytelling, noting that key information is distributed through the three live action films, a series of animated shorts, two collections of comic book stories, several video games and a massive multiplayer online game. There is thus no one single source from which the viewer can get all of the information needed to fully understand the Matrix universe. Moreover, paratexts and transmedia storytelling can work together to provide the engaged audience with a means of understanding motivations, experiences and plot lines through playing a role in the story itself. Jenkins writes that in the animated short, *Final Flight of the Osiris* (Dir. Andrew R. Jones, 2003), the protagonist Jue gives her life while trying to get a letter to the crew of the Nebuchadnezzar; a letter which is dropped into a mailbox at the end of the anime. At the beginning of the video game *Enter the Matrix* (2003) the player's first task is to retrieve the letter and fulfil Jue's quest by passing it onto the crew, and in the opening scene of *The Matrix Reloaded* (Dirs. Lana and Andy Wachowski, 2003) the audience sees the characters discussing the last transmissions of the Osiris. Thus,

> for people who see only the movie, the sources of the information remain unclear, but someone who has a transmedia experience will have played an active role in delivering the letter and may have traced its trajectory across three different media (Jenkins 2006: 102).

The transmedia relationship between texts is thus a complex one, and drawing paratexts into the mixture can complicate it further. Mittell argues that even when paratextual games are enjoyable as games in and of themselves, 'most television tie-ins fail to provide a transmedia resonance that delivers on the pleasures from the original series' (2012-13). Games may be filled with information that allow die-hard fans to recognise a reference to the show's backstory or ongoing mystery, but these may simultaneously fail to deliver an integrated narrative payoff, tied to a serial canon in a significant rather than superficial way (ibid.). Mittell thus recognises two different

approaches to transmedia storytelling – 'What Is' and 'What If?'. He suggests that the former is exemplified through the *Lost* franchise, and fits with Jenkins' definition of transmedia storytelling as evidenced by *The Matrix*. Mittell argues that the majority of official storytelling extensions are designed to fulfil the goals of 'What Is' transmedia, and critics and fans determine the success of these paratexts through their coordination with canon and how well they integrate with the storyworld's narrative. The latter, however, seeks to extend the fiction canonically, 'explaining the universe with coordinated precision and hopefully expanding viewers' understanding and appreciation of the storyworld' (ibid.). 'What If?' transmedia, thus, poses hypothetical possibilities and invites viewers to imagine alternative stories and approaches to storytelling which are not canonical. The goal for 'What If?' transmedia, then, is to take the storyworld into different dimensions, 'foregrounding tone, mood, character, or style more than continuing with canonical plots and storyworlds' (ibid.).

Embodying L-Space

Towards the end of *Thud!* Death asks Vimes 'HAS IT NEVER STRUCK YOU THAT THE CONCEPT OF A WRITTEN NARRATIVE IS RATHER STRANGE?' (Pratchett 2005: 387). For an author, this statement may be a strange one to make, but Pratchett has often critiqued the idea of books and the written word. Nanny Ogg, true to form given the Discworld witches' penchant for practicality, comments of the bookish Agnes Nitt in *Carpe Jugulum* 'They thought that you could see life through books but you couldn't, the reason being that the words got in the way' (Pratchett 1998: 30). However, Pratchett also notes the power that books can have, epitomised by the concept of L-Space:

> Knowledge = power = energy = matter = mass, and on that simple equation rests the whole of L-space. It is via L-space that all books are connected (quoting the ones before them, and influencing the ones that come after). But there is no time in L-space. Nor is there, strictly speaking, any space. Nevertheless, L-space is infinitely large and connects all libraries, everywhere and everywhen. It's never further than the other side of the

bookshelf, yet only the most senior and respected librarians know the way in (Pratchett, Stewart and Cohen 2002: 38).

The Discworld board games function as paratexts to the Discworld novels and other adaptations, and allow players to experience life on the Disc while existing physically outside of the Disc. The board games thus become physical embodiments of L-space in that they function as 'What If' transmedia stories, embracing a ludic narrative quality, but drawing upon different style of play: '"What Is" transmedia extensions work more like puzzles with proper solutions and final revelations, while "What If?" paratexts feature more of a sense of dress-up or performative role-play, spinning off scenarios with no "real" outcome or canonical narrative function' (Mittell 2012-13).

Discussing the Ankh-Morpork map, Stephen Briggs noted that one of the strengths of the literary city was that it has a bustling civic life that continued independently of the activities in the plot. In this respect, Ankh-Morpork is discussed as a real city; its civic life continues beyond the plot that we read, and this is further evidenced in the television adaptations with extras bustling in the background quite separate from the plot unfolding in the centre. I would suggest that the Discworld board games act as a further extension of this. The activities of the games happen quite literally beyond the pages of the novels: the city comes to life, as it were, in the homes of Discworld fans and gamers. Referring to the map, Matthew Hills suggests that 'narrative space is thus both *extended out* from the fictional narratives composed by Pratchett, and at the same time *cut out* of these narratives: civic life happens apart from the fictional narratives of the series – significantly, it happens *elsewhere* [emphasis in original]' (2004: 220). Extrapolating further, we can also apply this to the board games with Ankh-Morpork civic life happening elsewhere, including on Roundworld.

I would further suggest that the board games as L-space also function as what Mittell refers to as orienting paratexts. These, he suggests, are 'distinct from transmedia paratexts that explicitly strive to continue their storyworlds across platforms [instead] providing a perspective for viewers to help make

sense of a narrative world by looking at it from a distance' (2012-13). This seems to be the case for players who were introduced to the Discworld series through the game. Having first played the board game and then read *Guards! Guards!* for the first time, James Fallows writes: 'I can't get over how true to the spirit of Pratchett's writing this game is. Love it' (2012). Pratchett's awareness of and reference to games in the novels also suggests that he is aware of the ways in which games can affect meanings and actions. In *Wyrd Sisters* he writes:

> No gods anywhere play chess. They haven't got the imagination. Gods prefer simple, vicious games, where you Do Not Achieve Transcendence but Go Straight to Oblivion; A key to the understanding of all religion is that a god's idea of amusement is Snakes and Ladders with greased rungs (1988: 10).

And refers regularly to the way that the gods of the Disc play games with its inhabitants: 'Gods play games with the fates of men. But first they have to get all the pieces on the board, and look all over the place for the dice' (1994: 16). In a similar way, certainly with the three Discworld board games, Discworld fans take the place of gods, playing (literal) games with the citizens of the Disc and attempting to change the course of gameplay, and their understandings of the novels and their characters, through dice, cards and pieces.

The Discworld Board Games

The Discworld board games thus traverse two modes of transmedia storytelling, including elements from canon and drawing directly from specific Discworld novels. The novel *Guards! Guards!* is referenced most directly in the board game of the same name, but characters from *Carpe Jugulum* (1998), *I Shall Wear Midnight* (2010) and *Witches Abroad* (1991) appear in The Witches board game. In addition, *Thud* provides an intriguing example of transmedia storytelling from its evolution as fan-created paratext, to canon, to official paratext, which I discuss in more detail later in this article. Each of the games, however, requires the player to play as a character from the Discworld. Ankh-Morpork offers the option to play as Chrysophrase the Troll, Lord Rust and Commander Vimes, while The Witches takes characters from

the young Discworld series, including Tiffany Aching. Each of these games, then, requires the player to understand the motivation of their characters and their relationships with other players/characters on the board. This fosters a much more 'What If' mode of transmedia storytelling and, I would suggest, is the prime purpose of the games. The additional information about the Discworld assures fans that they are playing within the realm of the Disc, and canonical elements are evident in the games, but the prime purpose is to foreground mood and character, rather than continuing any canonical plot. In this way then the games, as Gray suggests of paratexts at large, 'draw our attention to specific characters and relationships, 'highlighting' their path through a tale and thereby [drawing] attention to their peculiarities' (2010: 154).

At the time of writing there are three board games set on the Disc, with a fourth in production. Each takes place in locations well known on the Discworld, with Guards! Guards! and Discworld: Ankh-Morpork situated in the fictional city of Ankh-Morpork, a city

> as full of life as an old cheese on a hot day, as loud as a curse in a cathedral, as bright as an oil slick, as colourful as a bruise and as full of activity, industry, bustle and sheer exuberant busyness as a dead dog on a termite mound (Pratchett, 1997: 25).

The locales of the Discworld have lalso featured in television adaptations, with Ankh-Morpork appearing in the Sky One series *Hogfather* (2006), *Colour of Magic* (2008) and *Going Postal* (2010), as well as the animated series *Soul Music* (Channel 4, 1997). As in Channel 4's 1997 animated series, The Witches board game covers the Ramtops, the Discworld's mountain range. I will focus on Guards! Guards! and Ankh-Morpork first, as these games are not only located in the same city but feature similar characters and draw from the same novels. There are marked differences between the two games and their reception, however, which is interesting when considering how the games work as paratexts.

Situating the city in Guards! Guards!, Ankh-Morpork and fan/player commentary

I would suggest that the board games

function as paratextual L-Spaces in the sense that they bring the Discworld into the living rooms of players and connect the stories in the games to the novels which have come before. However, they do not change the Discworld canon. Mittell (2012-13) notes that problems with tie-in characters often stem from lack of fidelity and depth when compared to the original, although judging from fans' comments the characters in both Guards! Guards! and Ankh-Morpork are fairly true to their literary counterparts. A problem arises from 'issues of confounded coordination with its serialized source material' (ibid.). Tie-in games typically either retell events from the source material, thus allowing players to participate in the core narrative; or treat the game as a new episode or storyline in the series. Mittell notes of the 24 and Alias games that 'both place our heroes in situations very similar to an arc from the original series, interacting with core characters in familiar locales, but the plots are essentially stand-alone stories amidst highly serialized narratives' (ibid.). The Discworld games appear to function as both of these, with Guards! Guards! adapting the plot of the novel and requiring players to take part in the core narrative, and Ankh-Morpork creating a new storyline while tying in characters from pre-existing books.

The board game Guards! Guards! draws partially on the plot of the novel to facilitate game play. Eight Great Spells are missing from the Unseen University and each player is tasked with collecting and returning a specific number of spells. Players select one of four Guilds (Thieves, Assassins, Alchemists or Fools) to infiltrate, and are granted a unique Guild Ability which can be used to hinder their opponents. Players are able to recruit volunteers to help them, with each volunteer assigned a particular set of skills that can either be used individually to protect the Spells, or combine with those of other volunteers to complete the Wizards Challenges (five tests of strength, brain, and worthiness which players must complete in order to enter the Unseen University with the Spells). Some volunteers carry the Mark of the Brethren, the name of the secret society in the novel, which aimed to summon a dragon to the city in a plan to overthrow the city's ruler Lord Vetinari. If a player holds three of these cards they can call a dragon to a specific part of the city to close it down,

Figure 1. Guards! Guards! demo game in progress. UK Expo 2011 © Gareth Cooper.

which can hinder the player's opponents. The game is won when the first player returns the five Great Spells shown on their Guild Card to the Unseen University.

The board is divided into two halves by the river Ankh, Turnwise and Widdershins, as described in the novels. Each half of the city is then further divided into two sectors referred to in the rules as Guild Quadrants (see Figure 1). The game uses the city to facilitate events, such as enabling players to recruit volunteers at Taverns, claiming a reward for turning in wanted volunteers at the City Watch House and Guild Houses, where players can collect payment. Ankh-Morpork, as the largest city on the Disc, is well known by fans of the series. It appears in almost every Discworld novel and draws inspiration from a multitude of real world cities across different time periods. Kathryn Hume has suggested that some 'fantastic worlds generate the action [as opposed to the] special world [which] is merely a backdrop for formulaic adventures' (1984: 160); in keeping with Hume, in the Discworld series Ankh-Morpork is portrayed as much like a character, as it is a location. Writing about the city, Pratchett says:

A book set in Ankh-Morpork has to have a certain kind of shape to it, because Ankh-Morpork is a place that's known and has the guilds and things like that so it's a great place for writing a complicated plot...because in a sense you don't have to worry too much about description because you know where you are already (1991: 3).

Yet, fans have their own picture of Ankh-Morpork, drawn from the novels, the *Streets of Ankh-Morpork* map (Briggs and Pratchett 1993), the *Compleat Ankh-Morpork City Guide* (Pratchett 2012) and the animated adaptations. Commenting on the game on the *Board Game Geek* website, one player wrote 'The board doesn't match the layout of Ankh-Morpork very well at all', drawing on his fan knowledge of the novels. He further commented, however, 'but I understand it was probably made fairly symetrical [sic] to make all the start points pretty much equal' (Tubb 2012), thus positioning himself as a gamer with knowledge of board game structure and what constitutes effective gameplay. This physical portrayal of the city is one that many fans have commented on. Writing in response to a review on *Board Game Geek*, Derek H wrote:

There is, of course, something seriously wrong with this prototype, which one can only hope will

be, er, 'cleared up' before final release. The Ankh River running through the city has never ever (well, for a very very long time) been blue! (2011).

Robert Cannon commented on the layout of the city, writing 'I'm not sure I like the hexes for this type of map. Any way to get rid of them, so the map could look more like a city with winding streets?' (2011).

In comparison, the Ankh-Morpork board game uses a very different map of the city (see Figure 2). The river Ankh is a muddy brown colour, reflecting the description of the river in the novels, and the winding streets of the city are clearly visible. The different locations in the city (such as the Shades and Dolly Sisters) are mapped out as described in the books, and the crest of Ankh-Morpork city surrounds the board.

Furthermore, each of the locations play their roles as described in the novels: The Shades causes trouble while Pseudopolis Yard (the Watch

Figure 2: Ankh-Morpork board game
© Bethan Jones, 2014.

headquarters on the Isle of Gods) stops it; the football rivalry between Dolly Sisters and Dimwell, as described in *Unseen Academicals* (Pratchett 2009), manifests in the game as the teams' supporters spread across the city. In this respect the game is more in keeping with fans' versions of Ankh-Morpork than Guards! Guards! and functions to place the player inside the city. This is intensified by the game play itself: Lord Vetinari has disappeared and different factions are trying to take control of the city. Each player plays as a character from the Disc and each has specific victory conditions. This means that each player is not sure what the others need to do in order to win, and maintains the sense of paranoia and chaos found in the Ankh-Morpork-based novels. Many of the comments posted on *Board Game Geek* noted that its chaotic nature worked well in reflecting the Discworld, but prevented the game from being a good game[4]. Discworld fans, however, commented on the chaotic nature of the game reflecting the novels, with Pelenor Du Lac noting:

> this game makes so much sense and gives you most of what you would expect. Riots, floods and random monster incursions are the back drop for a setady [sic] stream of creat [sic] characters allowing you to do all kinds of intersting [sic] things to win the game. [...] Just dont [sic] be trying too hard to win as nothing in Discworld goes quite according to plan (2012).

Similarly, Dani Ramirez wrote:

> Great game for fans of Discworld. Everything gets worse turn by turn and it gets crazy at the end of the game. The conquering mechanics is easy and makes sense, the resources need light management and the cards have an awesome mechanic. It can be unfair sometimes, just because some cards at the end can turn everything 180º, but I think that is the spirit of Discworld (2013).

Thus far, narratively the games follow the same format as the novels, but I want to examine the way in which each represents the city of Ankh-Morpork and how this compares to fan understandings of the city as developed from knowledge of the books. Hills argues that 'The authenticity of the Discworld, and
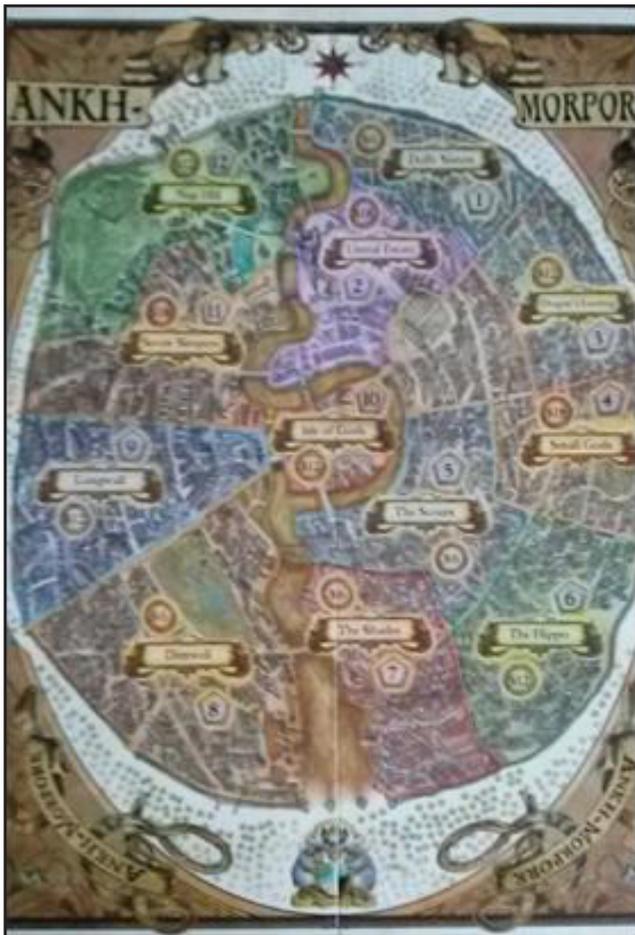
Figure 3: *The Streets of Ankh-Morpork* (Briggs and Pratchett 1993) © Bethan Jones, 2014.

more specifically of its leading city, Ankh-Morpork [...] hinges on its spatial relationships, its internal consistency, and the way in which a generically mappable space is both subverted and maintained' (2004: 218). *The Streets of Ankh-Morpork* map[5] (Briggs and Pratchett 1993) attempts to map the city (see Figure 3) but, as with the Guards! Guards! game there remain internal inconsistencies. The river Ankh is blue, not the muddy coloured silt of the books (or indeed, of the river depicted in the *Compleat Ankh-Morpork City Guide* [Pratchett 2012; see Figure 4]). The different areas of the city are also more clearly delineated in the map, as in the Ankh-Morpork game. In the *Compleat Ankh-Morpork*, however, the city appears larger and more crowded, reflecting the time between the publication of the *Streets of Ankh-Morpork* and the later version. The city, even on a fictional map, still grows.

The city itself also changes as the series progresses: the Ankh-Morpork of *Colour of Magic* is different to the Ankh-Morpork of *Unseen Academicals*, and the Ankh-Morpork portrayed in the television series *Going Postal* is different to that depicted in the animated *Soul Music* (see Figures 5 and 6). The city is thus both maintained and subverted in its literary

and filmic versions, but remains internally consistent: it is divided by a river; contains the Unseen University and the Tower of Art; comprises of different areas such as the Shades and Dolly Sisters; and its buildings are made predominantly of stone, not red brick or limestone. This consistency – to an extent – transfers to the game boards of Guards! Guards! and Ankh-Morpork and allows both games to occupy the space of the city while presenting a game which does not look at all like Ankh-Morpork. The games subvert the mappable space of the city by portraying two distinct and separate iterations when compared to both the book and the map, but the space is simultaneously maintained by the narrative game play; the games feel like Ankh-Morpork even though they may not look like it. It is not where the physical locations are which is important, but what they are and why they are. The games thus link narratively to the *feel* of Ankh-Morpork and maintain the possibility that the city is Ankh and the players moving around the board are its citizens.

There is another way in which this notion of internal consistency is important in positioning the Discworld board games as paratexts: while the city

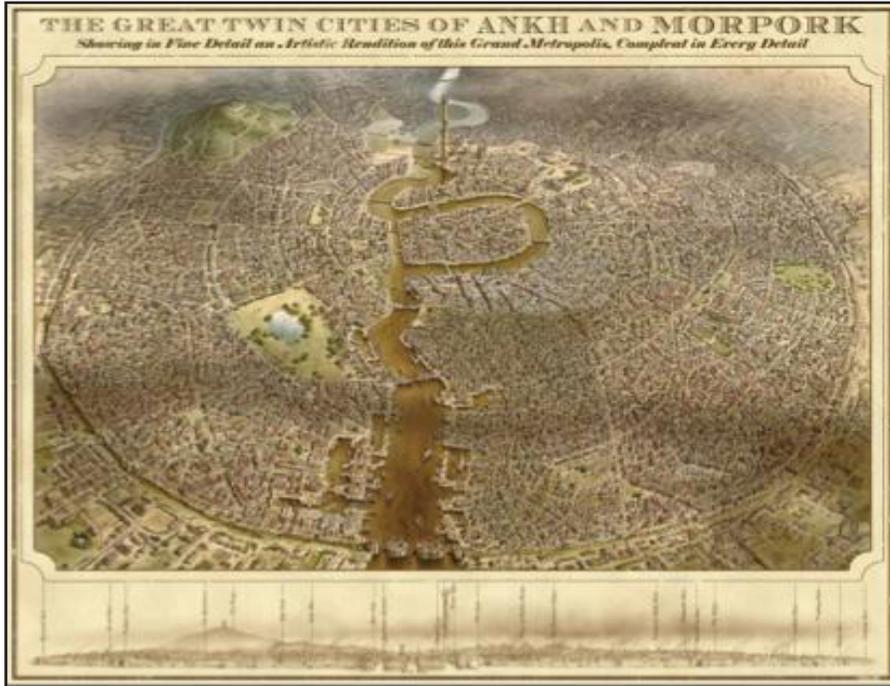Figure 4: The *Compleat Ankh-Morpork* (Pratchett 2012).

Figure 5: Ankh-Morpork as seen in Sky One's *Going Postal* (2010).

Figure 6: Ankh-Morpork as seen in Channel 4's *Soul Music* (1997)

may change geographically and politically over the course of the books, its characters remain broadly the same. The Guilds are heavily involved in civil politics; Watchmen aren't members of any Guilds (with the exception of the Watchmen's Guild briefly in 1999's *The Fifth Elephant*); Vimes hates magic and wizards; the Guilds are generally concerned with internal affairs and maintaining the status quo. Having Watchmen in the game join Guilds and actively try to hinder their opponents does not reflect the internal consistency of the Watch as developed through the Discworld novels, as Aaron Tubb notes:

> If we're watchmen, why aren't we working together, why can we get arrested, and why do we have to charm other watchmen just like other volunteers? Why do we have to buy a watchman's badge at a merchant's shop to avoid getting arrested? (2012)

Here, Tubb demonstrates his knowledge of the Discworld's internal narrative and its importance over the gameplay. In the game, the Watch are required to work independently – the game narrative fails to work otherwise. Both Ankh-Morpork and the Discworld are places as well as literary constructs, and much as I will suggest that the creation of the *Thud* board game affected the development of future Discworld novels, so too does Anne Hiebert Alton suggest that the Discworld maps 'function as hypotrochoidal texts […] in the way that they have been engendered by the details of the novels and yet have also influenced the novels in turn' (2014: 59). The mapping of the world and its significant locations, as well as its adaptation into television, film, and board games serves to make what was once only literary become physical, and to allow fans of the series to encounter the Disc in a more physical way than by simply reading the books. However, for Discworld readers it is the novels' internal narrative which is most important and which should also form part of the game. Hills notes that the city of Ankh-Morpork 'may not always be entirely geographically precise, but it nevertheless has a shape, and a narrative presence, impact and legibility' (2004: 219). However this shape, when transferred literally to the Guards! Guards! board game, affects the narrative impact of the storyline. Ankh-Morpork's legibility comes

partly from its geography, but also partly through the characters that inhabit it. The Ankh-Morpork novels are thus concerned primarily with the Watch and the Unseen University, and feature Vimes, Vetinari, Ridcully, Rincewind, the Bursar, Captain Carrot and other characters who live in the city. Yet Guards! Guards! has among its volunteers Magrat Garlick (a witch from Lancre), Jackrum (a Borogravian sergeant major seen in the 2003 novel *Monstrous Regiment*) and Baron Saturday (the zombie consort of Erzulie Gogol as seen in the 1991 novel *Witches Abroad*), none of whom spend time regularly in the city and in some cases have never been there before. The game thus adopts characters from a variety of Discworld novels, but places them in a context unfamiliar to both themselves and to Discworld fans. James Fung, in his review of the game, writes:

> I do not feel the mechanics of the game evoke a particularly Discworld feel. (I will also say that Ankh-Morpork isn't too strong in that department either.) The most evocative part of the game is the volunteer cards, though they dug pretty deep to find some obscure characters and some that have nothing to do with Ankh-Morpork. The flavor [sic] text on the volunteer cards were my favorite [sic] part of the game, sadly for the game itself. I believe all the spells are made up (there are few named spells in the books to begin with) and, as I said before, the map is abstract and symmetrical and completely fails to resemble Ankh-Morpork (2012).

Guards! Guards! thus works narratively in opposition to the novels, and de-legitimises the game as a Discworld text for many of the fan-players who prioritised the internal consistency of the series over the elements required for effective gameplay. Ankh-Morpork, on the other hand, utilises characters who are found in the city, such as Commander Vimes, Chrysophase the troll, Lord Vetinari and the Dragon King. Each of these has their own unique victory conditions, which reflect their personal characteristics (Vimes, for example, attempts to stop the city from imploding by running the cards out while Lord Rust attempts to control a specific number of areas) and fans of the series noted how this matched their expectations of the characters based on their

knowledge of the books. Lindsay Scholle, for example, wrote 'It's good to be Vimes, but if you've read the books you know that already' (2012), referring to Vimes' depiction in the series as an honourable, loyal and fundamentally good character. As with *Guards! Guards!* however not all of the characters' actions mirrored those of the novels. Discussing Rincewind (Unseen University's Egregious Professor of Cruel and Unusual Geography, and generally unlucky wizard), Scott Dunnington wrote 'thus far Rincewind manages to always to create earthquakes that result in no damage, how unlikely of him!' (2011).

The Witches

The two Discworld games I have examined so far have focussed on the city of Ankh-Morpork, but The Witches takes the mountainous region of the Ramtops as its setting (see Figure 7). Players take on the role of trainee witches introduced in the young Discworld series, such as Tiffany Aching and Petulia Gristle, and learn their craft while dealing with a variety of problems that life in the Ramtops can throw at them.

The Ramtops stretch from the Hub to the Rim and contain hundreds of small countries and kingdoms, including Lancre – the kingdom where The

Witches is set. Life in the Ramtops is markedly different from life in the city, as Ponder Stibbons realises in *Lords and Ladies*:

> Ponder looked around at Lancre. He'd been born and raised in Ankh-Morpork. As far as he was concerned, the countryside was something that happened to other people, and most of them had four legs. As far as he was concerned, the countryside was like raw chaos before the universe, which was to say something with cobbles and walls, something *civilized*, was created [emphasis in original] (Pratchett 1992: 207).

The difference between town and country is further exemplified in the rules of the game, compared to the rules of Guards! Guards! and Ankh-Morpork. The former require players largely to compete with each other, keep secrets, sabotage their opponents and try to win the game. In comparison, The Witches demonstrates a cooperative element which allows (if not requires) players to work together in order to win. Where the city of Ankh-Morpork stands for culture, civilisation, intellect and theory, and is shown throughout the series to be chaotic,

Figure 7: The Witches board game © Bethan Jones, 2014.

treacherous, multi-cultural and often violent, the Ramtops are 'communal, natural, earthy, their subjects practical, their buildings vernacular, embedded and ordinary' (Sayer 2004: 131). Indeed, Pratchett writes:

> Lancre's position and climate bred a hard-headed and straightforward people who often excelled in the world down below. It had supplied the plains with many of their greatest wizards and witches and, once again, the philosopher might have marvelled that such a four-square people could give the world so many successful magical practitioners, being quite unaware that only those with their feet on rock can build castles in the air (1998b: 11).

Further, both witches and wizards from Lancre excel in the city (Magrat Garlick is one of the volunteers who can be enlisted in Guards! Guards!). The pace of life is different, however, which Agnes Nitt notes in *Maskerade* (Pratchett 1995). This is apparent in the game, which requires players to take on the role of one of the witches of the young Discworld series (Tiffany Aching, Anagramma Hawkins, Dimity Hubbub and Petulia Gristle) and resolve a series of problems in the Ramtops towns. Each of these are incidents that offer opportunities for learning – either about the nature of humanity, or the nature of oneself.

The problems players have to solve in the games are drawn directly from the Discworld novels and are ranked by difficultly. The easiest problems are those which crop up on a regular basis in the books – for instance pregnancy, death, sick animals and broken limbs. Pratchett notes in several novels that the role of witches is to 'smooth out life's humps and bumps' (see, for example, *Lords and Ladies*, *Wyrd Sisters* and *Maskerade*) and help people when life is on the edge, and they take this obligation seriously. In the adult Discworld novels, these problems tend to function as background noise; that is, they move the plot along but are not necessarily part of the main storyline. In *Maskerade* for example, Granny Weatherwax plays cards with Death in order to save the life of a young boy, while in *Lords and Ladies* Nanny Ogg is described as midwife and layer-out of the dead. In the young Discworld books, Miss Level, a witch, teaches Tiffany Aching that solving problems

like these is the basis for becoming a good witch:

> "We see to it that lonely old men get a cooked dinner and cut their toenails?" said Tiffany, just a little sarcastically.
> "Well, yes," said Miss Level. "We do what can be done. Mistress Weatherwax said you've got to learn that witchcraft is mostly about doing quite ordinary things" (Pratchett 2004: 103).

Players of The Witches therefore deal with the easier problems before they become a crisis, or before dealing with the more difficult issues like vampires, elves or the Cunning Man. The collaborative nature of witchcraft is also emphasised in the game; for instance, a cup of tea with fellow witches is necessary to prevent 'cackling', a sign in the Discworld that a witch has become evil:

> What stopped [cackling] was the habit of visiting. Witches visited other witches all the time, sometimes travelling quite a long way for a cup of tea and a bun. Partly, this was for gossip, because witches love gossip, especially if it was more exciting than truthful. But mostly it was to keep an eye on one another (Pratchett 2006: 20).

The Witches board game, then, lifts information about witches directly from the Discworld novels and demands that players experience the life of a witch through the game play. The game thus functions as a paratext, and moreover a 'what if' paratext. Similar to both Guards! Guards! and Ankh-Morpork it lifts the plot of various novels, but allows the player to develop the trainee witches' unique abilities and deepen their own understanding of the characters.

Many of the comments on *Board Game Geek* noted that this game was too easy and worked better as a family game. In this way, I suggest that the game actually functions as an excellent paratext for the young adult Discworld books. While still appealing to adults, the books are aimed at introducing younger readers to the Discworld. Although they draw on many of the heavier themes a reader would expect from Pratchett (equality, death, morality), they are less political than the adult novels. Playing The Witches as a trainee witch thus places the player

in the same world as the young Discworld novels. As Tokhuah notes: 'This is a great game if you can keep your brain on an eight year old level. Your little Witch travels around the county side by foot and broom solving minor problems like sick pigs, pregnancy, and death' (2014). As Gray notes of paratexts, The Witches is 'not simply add-ons, spinoffs, and also-rans: they create texts, they manage them, and they fill them with many of the meanings that we associate with them' (2006: 6).

Thud!

So far the Discworld board games have drawn from pre-existing storyworlds, with the games having been created years after the books were written. They are also set on the Discworld, with players taking the role of characters from the books in order to meet a specific goal. The board game Thud, however, has a rather different genesis and purpose. Unlike those already discussed, the game was created by a Discworld fan, Trevor Truran, in 2001. The game was inspired by the Discworld novels rather than originating in them, and bore a strong resemblance to the Norse games of Hnefatafl and Tablut. Truran showed

the game to Pratchett, who subsequently referenced it in the novel *Going Postal* (2004) and made it the central point in the 2005 novel *Thud!* as well as an important part of the plot of 2013's *Raising Steam*. *Thud!* deals with ethnic tensions between Ankh-Morpork's troll and dwarf communities, which are mounting in the build-up to the anniversary of the Battle of Koom Valley, an ancient battle in which trolls and dwarves apparently ambushed each other. In 2005 an official version of the game was released (see Figure 8) which also contained a new version of the game that could be played with the same board and pieces, known as Koom Valley Thud (see Figure 9).

Pratchett also wrote a fictional version of Thud's history for the Thud website (maintained by Truran) which subsequently appeared in a collection of Discworld short stories[6]. Thud thus has a much longer and more complex history and relationship to the Discworld than the previously discussed games do. The 2001 version of the game aligns with what Gray calls fan created paratexts, that is texts created by fans which can 'challenge a text's industry-preferred meanings by posing their own alternate readings and interpretive strategies' (2010: 144). Gray

Figure 8: Traditional set up for the game Thud
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Figure 9: Koom Valley Thud
© Bethan Jones, 2014.

primarily discusses fan created paratexts such as fan fiction, fan art and fan videos, but Truran's game also functions as a paratext of this kind. Moreover, being turned into an official part of Discworld canon through its inclusion in the novels and the release of the board game, the game changes the meaning of the text. Gray notes that paratexts can draw our attention to specific characters and relationships, but Truran's creation of Thud actually functioned to draw Pratchett's attention to these, rather than the reader's. Indeed, many fans seem to be unaware of Thud's existence prior to the novel. Duncan, one of these fans, writes:

> I only ever considered playing Thud because I have read Terry Pratchett's discworld [sic] series includind [sic] 'Thud' which features this game as a key support of the main plot.
> I was suprised [sic] to learn that Thud the game actually preceded the book by a matter of years but this fact supports the view that it is an authentic taste of Disc culture for the Prathett [sic] fan. The fact that a book was written later only popularised it further (2010).

The novel implies that the game is a known quantity and exists in the Discworld prior to its inclusion in *Going Postal* as much as it exists in the 'real' world prior to *Thud!*'s publication: 'A desk was covered in paperwork. Beside it, on a small table, was an octagonal board covered in little playing pieces. Vimes sighed. He hated games. They made the world look too simple' (Pratchett 2005: 72). In the Discworld, 'classic' Thud is the only version of the game, as opposed to the real world in which both Koom Valley Thud and classic Thud exist. As previously noted, however, Koom Valley Thud was created specifically for the novel, while in the Discworld series Koom Valley is referred to in many of the books. In the series then, the Koom Valley story exists prior to the idea of Thud, while in the real world the opposite happens. The hypertextual links between the novel and the board game are thus complicated by additional narrative texts created by Pratchett for the Thud website:

> The role of games in the histories of both dwarfs and trolls has been very important.
> Perhaps the most famous was the dwarfish game

of Hnaflbaflsniflwhifltafl, devised by the cunning inventor Morose Stronginthearm for Hugen, Low King of the Dwarfs. Hugen had asked for a game that would teach young dwarfs the virtues of preparedness, strategy, boldness and quick thinking, and Morose came up with a board game that has some early resemblance to the Thud board (Pratchett 2006b).

The creation of the historical introduction situates Thud in the context of the Discworld universe as well as establishing a way for players to situate themselves within the Discworld. Pratchett writes that

> The game of Thud was devised as an alternative to the fighting. It was considered by some older dwarfs and trolls that a non-fatal means of contest might be a boon to peace in the mountains and, besides, they were running out of people. And, in recognition of the general state of all unsuccessful fighters in the wars, it is a game of two halves. The Thud game seeks to recreate [the battle of Koom Valley] and has been credited with seriously reducing the number of major wars between dwarfs and trolls, replacing them instead with innumerable bar room scuffles in which Thud boards, and sometimes pieces, are used as the weapons. But since this becomes merely a police matter, it counts as peace... (2006).

By playing the game, players become both dwarves and trolls; playing first one side and then the other, developing a greater understanding of both species, as well as experiencing the Battle of Koom Valley themselves. Thud therefore functions as a paratext, but I would suggest it also epitomises the concept of L-space: 'the content of any book ever written *or yet to be written* may, in the right circumstances, be deduced from a sufficiently close study of books already in existence [emphasis in original]' (Pratchett 1998a: 25). Thud, the board game, influenced by previous Discworld novels, thus inspired *Thud!* the novel.

Conclusion

In this article I have examined the role that geography plays both on and beyond the Discworld, analysing Discworld board games as examples of paratextual L-space. Although the games exist outside of the 'official' canon of the Discworld novels,

they nonetheless affect fans' meaning-making processes by enabling them to get inside the world of the novels and engage with characters and situations within that world. In this way, I suggest that they function as 'what if' transmedia texts, and recall the Discworldian concept of L-Space. I argue that, drawing on Hills' work on narrative consistency, the Discworld functions as a quasi-physical space not only through the way the city is described in the books (and thus understood by their readers), but also through the myriad of paratexts that have been created. Maps such as the *Streets of Ankh-Morpork*, the *Compleat Ankh-Morpork*, *Death's Domain* (Pratchett 1999) and a *Tourist Guide to Lancre* (Briggs and Pratchett 1998) work to make the Discworld a more physical entity than simply existing in the books, and the Discworld board games reinforce this, as well as providing players the opportunity to experience the physicality of the Disc.

Pratchett has often noted that mapping Ankh-Morpork was impossible:

> I pointed out that [...] the city which features in many of the Discworld books would have to be unmappable because I'd made it up as I went along [...] I've always been mildly against mapping the Discworld. It's a literary construction, not a place. I like to leave it vague (1993: 1).

In Ankh-Morpork, the game, players experience travelling through the city both physically (moving characters around the board game streets) and narratively (responding to the rules and guidance provided in the game while following a plot derived in part from several novels). Similarly, in The Witches board game, players experience the physicality of the Ramtops through the ability to travel by foot and by broomstick, and experience the journey from inexperienced trainee to fully fledged witch. The geography of the Disc is thus made manifest both in relation to its mappable spaces and its spatial relationships and internal consistency. While the games may not allow players to continue the storyworld in the same way as Jenkins proposed, they nevertheless add to players' understandings and experiences of the Discworld. In allowing players on Roundworld to join the story-making/understanding process through game

play, the Discworld board games thus make L-space physically manifest, the players' own living rooms become a Roundworld paratext through which they can travel to the Disc.

Notes

[1] I have italicised the titles of Discworld novels and television adaptations. The titles of the Discworld board games, however, are not italicised in this instance. This is to prevent confusion amongst readers where the board games share the same title as the novels.

[2] Or depths, as Pratchett would probably say.

[3] See, for example, the following reviews at *Board Game Geek*: http://boardgamegeek.com/collection/user/slogosh?comment=1&subtype=boardgame&ff=1; http://boardgamegeek.com/collection/user/David%20Gardner?comment=1&subtype=boardgame&ff=1; http://boardgamegeek.com/collection/user/LAGHER-J?comment=1&subtype=boardgame&ff=1.

[4] The games are reviewed on *Board Game Geek* by both Discworld fans and players who have never heard of the Discworld. Of the latter, many comments on both the Guards! Guards! and Ankh-Morpork games suggested that if you were a Discworld fan you'd love the games, otherwise you should steer clear. Although the reception of the games by non-fans is outside the scope of this paper, it is still interesting to note non-fan reactions based on their knowledge that the games are tied to a particular media franchise.

[5] The map was turned into an application for Apple's iPad in 2013 and contains both an interactive map and a more traditional 'hand drawn' street map. The app also contains a game in which players must find characters, visit all of the pubs in the city, deliver a letter to the Post Office and so on. As Zina Lee noted in her review of the app, 'I personally found the most entertaining achievements to be trying to deliver the mail from the Blind Letter Office at each post office. Knowing the novels well helps here' (2013), suggesting that like the board games, the app also functions as a paratext.

[6] Pratchett's involvement in gaming and his interest in fan-produced game material is well-known by many Discworld fans. In a 2006 interview with PC Zone magazine he noted that he collaborated on the

first point and click Discworld game with its creators, and the tabletop roleplaying game GURPS Discworld and GURPS Discworld also feature a co-writing credit for Pratchett.

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