Chapter 7

A Young Girl and Her Vampire Stories

How a Teenager Competes with a Best-Selling Author

Fan Fiction

Fan fiction—fiction written by fans of a game, movie, television show, or book and based on the characters—is a massive enterprise today. For example, there are hundreds of thousands of stories written by fans of the *Harry Potter* series on a variety of Web sites (see, for example, http://www.harrypotterfanfiction.com/ and http://www.fanfiction.net/book/Harry_Potter/). There are a myriad more on other topics written by fans of nearly any media product one could think of, including some long disappeared from mainstream attention. On fan-fiction writing sites, writers gain instruction, mentoring, feedback, and an audience (Black, 2008; Hel- lekson & Busse, 2006; Jenkins, 2008).

The large amount of fan writing today is coupled with a great deal of other types of writing on the Internet. This other writing is composed, in part, of technical writing such as strategy guides and modding instructions for games and the sorts of design-based discussions we saw in Chapter 5, as well as a great many other technical matters fueled by the massive amount of production carried out by professional amateurs (pro-ams) today. There are also forums on the Internet devoted to an endless array of
topics, technical and otherwise, where people share information, seek help, and mentor others.

All this writing is interesting from a historical perspective on literacy. Throughout the history of literacy, including modern times, reading was much more common than writing. In fact, many people could read well but not write well, either because they had never really learned to write or because they rarely practiced it. This is still, in fact, true today, even in developed countries like the United States (Gee, 1990).

Historically, writing was often feared by political leaders, religious leaders, and elites because it was thought that writing might lead people to agitate publicly for their own views against the powers that be (Gee, 1990; Graff, 1979, 1987). Indeed, this has been one effect of communication on the Internet as people have been able to share information about political and military matters—in countries like China and Iran and a great many others, including, of course, the United States—that were easily hidden and denied in earlier times (see, for example, Grossman, 2009; Kennedy, 2007).

Fan-fiction writing and many other types of writing on the Internet have effects other than political agitation. Such writing is a crucial part of the blurring today between “professionals” and “amateurs” (Leadbeater & Miller, 2004). Today, people in every profession—law, medicine, computer science, news, photography, film, games, among others—compete with amateurs who create and share their own knowledge, advice, and products on the Internet, often collaboratively. For example, in the field of fiction, for decades we have thought of fiction writers as professional writers associated with professional editors in official publishing firms. While some decades ago most fiction writers worked in some other job or tried to make their living through their writing, today a great many professional writers work as faculty members teaching writing in colleges and universities.

We will see in this chapter that amateur writers today compete with professional ones for audience and adulation. We will see, as well, that today even some professional writers show deep similarities to the very writers who write fan fiction based on their work.

Fans writing stories based on The Sims is a big enterprise. Such Sims stories are part of the larger universe of fan fiction. But Sims stories are different. They involve pictures and words. In fact, they are a bit like storyboards for a movie or game. In their most basic form, Sims stories are created by taking screenshots during Sims game play. Within The Sims 2, the