

SUPERHERO TV– ANALYZING THE NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES OF THE CW’S *THE
FLASH* (2014 - present) & THE NETFLIX ORIGINAL PROGRAM *DAREDEVIL* (2015 - 2018)

by

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ABSTRACT

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Shaped by contemporary television industry distribution practices and the phenomenon of binge-viewing culture, Netflix introduced its version of narrative storytelling via original drama series that rival traditional linear broadcast network series narratives. This thesis project is a textual analysis that evaluates the separate narrative strategies of two different, but very similar, superhero television drama series that appear on two different distribution platforms. In this thesis, I analyze and compare the Netflix original series *Daredevil* (2015 – 2018) to The CW series *The Flash* (2014 – present) to find out if they share any narrative similarities or differences with linear TV series using narrative strategies like recapping, cliffhangers, and connected franchise tie-ins. I posit that the *Daredevil* and *The Flash* series both use franchise crossovers as a way to serve comic book fans and comic book movie fans. I argue that *Daredevil* uses recaps through dialogue as a narrative strategy while *The Flash* focuses a lot on recap sequences. Lastly, cliffhangers are used as a narrative strategy at the end of *both series*. *The Flash* includes situational cliffhangers and many informational cliffhangers. *Daredevil* relies on situational cliffhangers.

To
Ermias “Nipsey” Asghedom,
The Marathon Continues.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- MCU – Marvel Cinematic Universe
- SVOD - Subscriber Video-on-Demand

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

It was dark outside and inside the house was very still. It was late and the air smelled of smoke, incense, and fresh coffee. As if cuddled up with a good book, I laid under 2 comforters on the couch while holding my iPad, watching episode after episode, feeling like I was flipping through book pages. I couldn't put it down. I was glued to the screen and following every twist and turn the new series hurled my way. I had enjoyed watching superhero TV shows before, but never in this capacity. I was hooked and entered my final hour in a 13-hour binge of the premiere season of the Netflix original series, *Daredevil* (2015 – 2018).

Television has been in constant change since the introduction of the TV set in the mid- 20th century. In the 21st century, television programming is still evolving, along with the practices of the television industry and the behavior of viewers. According to scholars, television has been in constant flux and its changing technologies and modes of viewing have become complicated, so much so that it may be challenging for television industry scholars to keep up with contemporary themes and practices before they are replaced by something new.¹ At the time of this writing, subscriber-funded video-on-demand (SVOD) services, online-streaming original series, and binge-viewing culture are the new phenomena that interest scholars and viewers like myself. I am especially interested in how these changes in program distribution and reception are affecting the process of narrative storytelling with continuing series, such as the original programming distributed by streaming portals like Netflix. Netflix has become a significant object of inquiry because the streaming platform began creating its own content and making its own distribution rules that seem to encourage the recent phenomenon of binge-viewing that allows subscribers to watch an entire series whenever, wherever, and however they see fit. This

¹ Amanda D. Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*. (New York: NYU Press, 2014) 2.

viewer autonomy can include, but is not limited to, viewing an entire season of a television series in three, two, or even one sitting.

Shaped by contemporary television industry distribution practices and the phenomenon of binge-viewing culture, Netflix introduced its version of narrative storytelling via original drama series that rival traditional linear broadcast network series narratives. This thesis project is a textual analysis that evaluates the separate narrative strategies of two different, but very similar, superhero television drama series that appear on two different distribution platforms. In this thesis, I analyze and compare the Netflix original series *Daredevil* (2015 – 2018) to The CW series *The Flash* (2014 – present) to find out if SVOD television series share any narrative similarities or differences with linear TV series. Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime are all examples of SVOD platforms. Viewers have to pay a subscriber fee to gain access to a mass library of full TV series. Linear television refers to the traditional form of viewing where audiences must watch one episode of a scheduled series at time on a broadcast or cable network channel. My goal is to better understand how narrative strategies like recapping, cliffhangers, and connected franchise tie-ins are used to keep viewers engaged.

I posit that *Daredevil* and *The Flash* use franchise crossovers as a way to serve comic book fans and comic book movie fans in hopes of bringing them together to create a larger audience. I argue that *Daredevil* uses recaps through dialogue as a narrative strategy while *The Flash* focuses a lot on recap sequences to keep the viewer informed. Lastly, cliffhangers are also used as a narrative strategy at the end of *Daredevil* and *The Flash*. *The Flash* includes situational cliffhangers and many informational cliffhangers that give the audience insight on past characters and/or past scenes from the season. *Daredevil* relies on situational cliffhangers that include a shocking climax for the episode but flows directly into the next episode without any

breaks. I theorize that Netflix uses narrative strategies the same way that they have been traditionally used in superhero comic books and TV series storytelling. However, Netflix scales back on the use of recapping and episodic cliffhangers to form a more epic-viewing experience for viewers that binge-watch multiple episodes at a time.

According to Newman, “Television assumes that we don’t watch everything and can always use a bit of reminding when it comes to the most important things to know.”² Perhaps SVOD television assumes that not only do viewers watch everything, but they also watch more than one episode at a time. According to Baker, Netflix organizes its program structure and distribution practices as well as prioritizes a particular form of viewing based on the assumption that a high percentage of its customers are going to continuously watch multiple episodes.³ I believe Netflix original drama series use a new arrangement of narrative techniques that help viewers follow along with the story under the assumption that they will watch another episode right away or binge-view the series.

In the following analysis, I contend that the use of the above narrative devices differs moderately between superhero series that are created and distributed for different television platforms. I find that both *Daredevil* and *The Flash* use strategies related to their comic book origins as much as possible. The series are invested in creating a universe where TV fans, movie fans, and comic book fans can join together to experience new narratives that are connected to others. *Daredevil* also encourages viewers to watch episodes consecutively without breaks. The season does this by creating a narrative that allows episodes to continuously flow into one another without breaks or unnecessary recaps of the story to resemble a cohesive and epic

² Ibid, 18. [citation is wrong as previous is Lotz, not Newman)

³ Djoyimi Baker, “Terms of Excess: Binge-Viewing as Epic Viewing in the Netflix Era,” in *The Age of Netflix: Critical Essays on Streaming Media, Digital Delivery and Instant Access*, edited by Cory Barker and Mya Wiatrowski. (North Carolina: McFarland & Co., 2017), 56.

viewing experience. On the other hand, *The Flash* hooks and excites the viewer, which encourages them to return to the next episode whenever it airs. This analysis provides detail on the narrative strategies that Netflix content creators use and compares it to the techniques that broadcast networks use to hook and keep viewers watching. The analysis highlights the varying narrative techniques used throughout the first seasons of the TV series used in the study. The project tries to understand how the distinctive methods like cliffhangers, recapping, and franchise crossovers and tie-ins are used and if they are used as hooks to keep the attention of audience members. The analysis also focuses on the comparative reliance on franchising and connections to other accompanying TV shows and/or movies. The goal of the analysis is to create a general list of similarities and differences between the two different types of series showcased on two different distribution platforms.

This study is important because the average viewer and readers of this analysis can use it to gain insight on how TV series are structured and how diverse series which are distributed in various ways are alike and different. This topic is also important because it gives additional support to the binge-viewing phenomenon and offers insight on why people are behaving the way they behave while viewing TV series, perhaps unbeknownst to them. Finally, the analysis supports my argument that Netflix's distribution decision and use of particular narrative techniques to generate an appeal to contemporary audiences fuels the binge-viewing phenomena and adds credibility to what Djoymi Baker calls an "epic-viewing" experience.⁴

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to understand the current phase of television, I have reviewed scholarly literature on key developments in the history of television, on the workings of the television industry and

⁴ Ibid, 48.

audience practices, and on practices of series distribution and television series narrative structures. The following literature review is divided into 4 important themes. The first theme focuses on television industry history and modern practices of broadcast networks, cable TV, and online streaming platforms. The second theme touches on the evolution of binge-watching and how the popular audience practice developed into an epic-viewing experience. The third theme of the analysis focuses on research done on storytelling and narrative structure of past television series. The last theme includes insights from authors Charles Joseph and Jana Radošinská that focus on superhero TV series franchising.

TV Industry Practices

The following is an overview and analysis of literature that I found to be relevant on emerging TV industry practices. The theme in the following sources provides insight on the development of contemporary television industry practices and online streaming platforms' new distribution systems compared to old practices of network and cable television. A huge contributor to the early stages of the research study is media scholar Amanda D. Lotz. Lotz's 2014 book *The Television Will Be Revolutionized* provides a detailed view of the changes that television has endured since the 1990s leading up to the current wave of subscriber video-on-demand (SVOD).⁵ Lotz takes a look at various television industry practices, technological advances, and audience uses and reactions to television. Lotz writes from the perspective of a participant observer that takes pleasure in watching television but is able to keep a critical distance while researching. One of the author's main arguments is that television has gone through many revolutionary changes and today the term "television" refers to a few different

⁵ Amanda D. Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*. (New York: NYU Press, 2014).

media distribution forms. This section is important because Lotz lays out a detailed history of the industry in order to better understand contemporary practices of the ever-evolving industry.

Binge-Watching as Epic-Viewing

The following is a review of various readings about the binge-viewing phenomenon that has been popular since Netflix began distributing its own original content as entire seasons. The readings cover the development of binge-viewing and its ties to SVOD platforms. The readings provide insights on the origin of the term and practice of binge-viewing as it relates to TV series. It was important to find existing research on the phenomenon as binge-viewing fuels my theory that Netflix uses a different recipe of narrative devices and techniques in its television series to encourage the practice. However, some of the research that I covered contains gaps that my research project will attempt to fill.

The act of bingeing implies a negative connotation. However, the contemporary culture of binge-viewing via SVOD platforms resemble more of an epic-viewing experience. Djoymi Baker's "Terms of Excess: Binge-Viewing as Epic-Viewing in the Netflix Era," from the book *The Age of Netflix: Critical Essays on Streaming Media, Digital Delivery and Instant Access*, redefines binge-viewing as epic-viewing rather than just television marathoning. Baker argues that the new series' promotional, narrative, and release strategies are affirmed by audience viewing techniques that should be called "epic-viewing" rather than "binge-viewing." Baker connects Netflix's promotional, narrative, and distribution strategies and argues that Netflix has cultivated a brand-new viewing culture that no longer needs linear television techniques like episode cliffhangers or long introduction title sequences to get viewers to continuously participate. Bingeing implies a negative guilty pleasure that perhaps wastes time. Epic-viewing, however, is centered on viewer endurance of an "extensive text, one that frequently foregrounds its

construction as a site of pleasure posited as worthy of that endurance.”⁶ Baker continues on to offer insight on how new narrative structures are being adapted to encourage viewers to keep watching with a focused attention. Netflix’s methods encourage viewers to view its original series as epic texts so that they can develop their personal epic-viewing habits. Baker identifies end credit sequences and cliffhangers as modern narrative techniques. She goes on to note that with things like end-credits, viewers can either shut off the program or skip to the next episode. Baker also points out that while cliffhangers were used in the past to make the viewer return the following week for the next episode or season, cliffhangers can now be used to prompt a viewer to keep watching an episode immediately.⁷ I am drawing from the claim that Baker makes about Netflix and how the platform and media company encourages customers to think of their originals as best experienced in an overall epic duration. This is important for my research because it helps answer why Netflix is incorporating different techniques in their original TV series.

Emil Steiner’s “Binge-watching in Practice: The Rituals, Motives and Feelings of Streaming Video Viewers” attempts to give an understanding of audience behavior and viewer practices of SVOD binge-viewers.⁸ Through a participant study, Steiner sought to find out if viewers preferred traditional viewing habits over new binge-viewing practices. His results focused on the contemporary culture and discourse surrounding bingeing and how viewers are more agentic consumers of the culture surrounding TV shows and not just the TV show. Steiner

⁶ Djoyi Baker, “Terms of Excess: Binge-Viewing as Epic Viewing in the Netflix Era,” 48.

⁷ Ibid, 55-56.

⁸ Emil Steiner, “Binge-watching in Practice: The Rituals, Motives and Feelings of Streaming Video Viewers.” In *The Age of Netflix: Critical Essays on Streaming Media, Digital Delivery and Instant Access* edited by Cory Barker and Myc Wiatrowski, (North Carolina: McFarland & Co., 2017) 141-161.

finds that viewers began to notice a change in narrative style with new SVOD TV series. Steiner attempts to bridge a gap between the series narrative structure and the act of binge-watching. However, Steiner doesn't define what the narrative differences are, nor does he conduct a study on any TV series to verify the claims of the participants. My project seeks to find out what and how specific narrative techniques are used between SVOD and broadcast TV series that may encourage the bingeing behavior that the authors of this section discuss.

The readings above have provided insight on the origin and use of the term and practice of binge-viewing but do not fully answer my research questions about differing narrative techniques. Are the narratives of the original series that Netflix provides any different from linear programs that still premiere on broadcast network and cable channels? What are the traditional narrative structures of original broadcast network or cable television series? My project will attempt to fill in a gap in existing research that may create a connection between binge-viewing and specific narrative techniques used to promote it.

Narrative Structure & Storytelling

The following is a review of research studies on television series, narrative structure, and the art of storytelling. The studies cover the complexity of narratives and stories that are told through popular television series. Some comparisons are made between narrative structures of past broadcast network, cable, and online streaming series. The main point is that new narrative structures of online original scripted series use a different form of storytelling that may cater to the phenomenon of binge-viewing.

Michael Z. Newman breaks down three different levels or elements of storytelling involved in television shows in his article "From Beats to Arcs: Toward a Poetics of Television Narrative." Newman first defines some episodic television series as prime time serials (PTS) or

“hybrid of episodic dramas and serials like soaps and mini-series from the 1980s.”⁹ Focusing on the television industry’s constant goal of getting “millions of people to tune in and keep tuning in,” Newman gives the reader a detailed process of how storytelling in the new hybrid dramas function to keep the viewer attached to the screen.¹⁰ Smaller beats happen throughout the episode to keep the viewer engaged, but episodes and an overall story arc or arcs occur on screen to constantly keep the viewer engaged with the twists and turns of the story. Newman points out that many shows like *The X-Files* do a great a job of balancing stories and keeping people engaged with particular episodes that resolve issues in one 30-60-minute sitting while still telling an overarching story that may be summed up at the end of the season if there isn’t a massive cliffhanger that will guarantee your return to view the next season. Newman argues that while some people believe that writers and creators have a hard time keeping up with the demands of viewers, primetime serial creators flourish within the current industry practice. Newman also argues that while traditionally television shows were used for advertising and selling ads, this does not negate the art of storytelling. In fact, creators have grown to work around this and flourish with their storytelling.

In addition, Jason Mittell discusses the complexity of contemporary narratives as opposed to conventional and traditional ways of viewing television shows in his article titled “Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television.” Mittell defines narrative complexity as a shifting balance of episodic television shows with the influence of serial narration. He compares the complexity of television to films and states that television perhaps has more value because the writers are able to stretch the stories out and allow time for character and story development

⁹ Michael Z. Newman, “From Beats to Arcs,” 17.

¹⁰ Ibid, 17.

within seasons. Later in the reading, Mittell mentions binge-viewing after changes in television technology introduced the DVD box set that allowed viewers to marathon their favorite programs in one sitting.¹¹

Both previously mentioned authors give important insights. Newman's article detailed the storytelling mechanics and strategies of hybrid primetime serials. Mittell really touched on something that is important in contemporary television show viewing habits. Mittell discusses the impact the internet has on television narratives. He states that the internet has "enabled fans to embrace a 'collective intelligence' for information, interpretations, and discussions of complex narratives that invite participatory engagement."¹² This means that people aren't just getting together to discuss actions and revelations from previous episodes, but that viewers are actively online searching for meanings, theories, and more to expand their knowledge of the program and its characters. Newman talks about how television creators' narrative goal is to "pull 'em back from the refrigerator."¹³ It makes me wonder what Netflix's narrative goal is, and this thesis attempts to answer that question.

Maira Bianchini and Maria Carmem Jacob de Souza's "Netflix and Innovation in *Arrested Development*'s Narrative Construction" discusses the popular television series *Arrested Development* (2003 – 2019), a show that was created for network television then moved to Netflix for a second run after three seasons. Season 4 of *Arrested Development* had a new narrative style that seems to fit the Netflix television model. *Arrested Development* was an experiment to find out if a series with a narrative structure designed for broadcast network television can be converted and re-designed to fit the developing Netflix streaming model.

¹¹ Jason Mittell. "Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television." *The Velvet Light Trap* 58 (Fall 2006): 31.

¹² *Ibid*, 31.

¹³ Michael Z. Newman, "From Beats to Arcs," 21.

Bianchini and Jacob de Souza examine the relationship between *Arrested Development*'s creators and Netflix's executives in an attempt to understand how Season 4 was developed to resemble the current dynamic of SVOD television series production. As stated before, the *Arrested Development* series' first three seasons were developed and distributed for Fox on broadcast network television. However, the program's creators developed a new narrative style and their efforts combined with Netflix distribution model were an opportunity to introduce a circular narrative structure. The creator's idea was that viewers would be able to follow along from the story no matter what episode of the season that they began watching. Subscribers had the opportunity to watch any one of the episodes in any order as well as pause and rewind or fast forward the show and still be able to keep up with the ongoing narrative. Bianchini and Jacob de Souza also mention the idea creators had about a 13-hour long movie that didn't have recaps or cliffhangers. Creators could have the opportunity to write differently knowing that the viewer is probably going to watch the next episode right away in one sitting. The narrative of the fourth season of *Arrested Development* was structured differently because there was this idea that conventional modes of storytelling are no longer needed, and creators could do what they want because subscribers are going to view it right away, one episode after another.¹⁴ This interesting case focuses on the creators' strategies and synergetic relationships and how new modes of storytelling are being introduced through online streaming. It is important for my study because it addresses series creators' narrative practices that are switching up modes of narrative structure that may cater to binge-viewers especially with SVOD platforms.

¹⁴ Maira Bianchini, and Maria Carmem Jacob de Souza, "Netflix and Innovation in *Arrested Development*'s Narrative Construction." In *The Age of Netflix: Critical Essays on Streaming Media, Digital Delivery and Instant Access* edited by Cory Barker and Myc Wiatrowski, (North Carolina, McFarland & Co., 2017) 98-119.

Lotz recognizes three eras in the history of television; network era, the multi-channel era and the post network era. The post network era, which deals with contemporary television practices and SVOD platforms, is discussed in more detail in her more recent *book Portals: A Treatise on Internet-Distributed Television*.¹⁵ In addition to a TV industry overview, Lotz explores the introduction of internet-distributed content and offers a way of understanding the growth of the SVOD model and the implications for subscribers and content creators. Portals is the term Lotz uses for the technological innovations that allow viewers to watch television via the internet through SVOD platforms and portable devices. The book attempts to give readers an understanding of today's industry practices and how they are still evolving with portals. They allow viewers to watch their favorite series anytime, anywhere. Lotz also attempts to recognize how SVOD platforms introduced a new form of television series distribution and cultural practices that encourage binge-viewing. This piece of literature helps establish a foundation of the industry practices that have led to my following study.

In the second chapter, Lotz mentions that in addition to the various revenue models of the ever-changing television industry, SVOD platforms structures narratives differently because they do not need to allow for things like regular commercial breaks. Lotz goes on to discuss how narrative structures and narrative strategies may have a different pattern of viewer consumption and habits. However, there isn't much work at the time that evaluates this aspect of internet content distribution.¹⁶ This is important because it addresses the need for more information on narrative structures and techniques of newer shows distributed by SVOD platforms. This section

¹⁵ Amanda D. Lotz, *Portals: A Treatise on Internet-Distributed Television*. (Michigan: Michigan Publishing, University of Michigan Library, 2017).

¹⁶ Amanda D. Lotz, *Portals: A Treatise on Internet-Distributed Television*. (Michigan: Michigan Publishing, University of Michigan Library, 2017) chapter 2. <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/maize/mpub9699689/1:5/--portals-a-treatise-on-internet-distributed-television?rgn=div1;view=fulltext>

raises questions about new narrative structures and strategies in SVOD television series but there aren't many answers to them yet. With further investigation, I offer a start at finding the answer to the questions concerning contemporary narrative strategies of television series appearing on opposing distribution platforms.

Superhero TV Franchising

Jana Radosinska's article "New Trends in Production and Distribution of Episodic Television Drama: Brand Marvel-Netflix in the Post-Television Era"¹⁷ gives insight into branding, transmedia, and connected TV. The author does an analysis of the relationship between Marvel Television and Netflix. The study discusses how the success of TV shows like *Daredevil* (2015) can be attributed to the use of cross branding and the creative cooperation between the two emerging brands. The article discusses how the superhero story connects to the larger Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU). The reliance on the MCU connection helps draw in viewers that have hopes of getting a storyline reference.

The next article does something similar by discussing the CW's universe of superheroes that include *The Flash* (2014). Charles Joseph's article "The CW Arrow-verse and Myth-making of the Commodification of Transmedia Franchising."¹⁸ is a very similar article that discusses DC Comics' relationship with The CW brand and the interconnectedness and cross branding of its slate of TV series. These articles are very important because they address cross-promotional storytelling which is an aspect of superhero TV series that I analyze. *The Flash* (2014) and *Daredevil* (2015) exist in a bigger universe that include other shows and characters. The series

¹⁷ Jana Radošinská, "New Trends in Production and Distribution of Episodic Television Drama: Brand Marvel-Netflix in the Post-television Era." *Communication Today* 8, no. 1 (2017): 4-29.

¹⁸ Charles Joseph. "The CW Arrow-verse and myth-making, or the commodification of transmedia franchising." *Series-International Journal of TV Serial Narratives* 4, no. 2 (2018): 27-45.

are used to cross-promote other shows or movies that exist within the bigger universe. This aspect could possibly be used as a narrative technique that keeps viewers tuning into the TV series. Viewers pay very close attention to detail when watching superhero TV series that connect to accompanying series and movies. What are the major outcomes that all of the techniques have on the way the narrative is being presented to the viewer? Perhaps the narrative technique assumes that viewers will keep watching the program with hopes of getting an Easter egg or a scene with dialogue that directly connects to the bigger story being told via numerous media forms that include TV series and big budget movies.

This literature review serves as a background for my following textual analysis on television narrative techniques. At this time, there is not much data or research on the new forms of narrative storytelling that Netflix exhibits in its original programming. There is also no data or research that compares Netflix original scripted series narrative structure to a broadcast network or cable television original scripted series. More insight on the new forms of storytelling that Netflix showcases in the media company's original programming can help scholars better understand the epic-viewing phenomenon. The information can also give future content creators a better understanding of the phenomenon so that it can help with future story development that caters to epic-viewers. One thing to point out is that Netflix and other SVOD platforms haven't completely taken over as broadcast network and cable channels still produce popular linear content. How different are the narrative techniques between the distributions systems and what do the differences accomplish?

RESEARCH METHODS & QUESTIONS

In this thesis, I conduct a textual analysis that breaks down and evaluates the Netflix original series *Daredevil* and the CW series *The Flash*. The CW network distributes *The Flash*,

but the program also has a secondary run through Netflix. The analysis critiques the two superhero TV series and their separate uses of narrative techniques in relation to their distribution practices. I analyze the first seasons of the series to determine their use of narrative techniques and how they may affect or be affected by the way viewers watch the series.

I chose to evaluate *Daredevil* and *The Flash* for the analysis because the two series are similar in many ways. This decision was made because the series premiered around the same time. Both are based on popular comic book superhero figures that I grew up reading about. Both heroes wear red and obtained their super powers through freak accidents. In addition, both TV series told innovative and compelling stories about their titular characters and were praised for their amazing first seasons. Also, both series belong to a bigger franchise and universe of accompanying TV series and/or movies. By focusing on examples from one genre, superhero drama series, I can analyze the use of narrative techniques that may or may not be different between the distribution platforms of SVOD and broadcast network TV. If there are many differences in one genre of TV series storytelling between series distributed through various platforms and methods, then there may be a new trend in all of the SVOD TV drama series that use similar techniques as opposed to the ones used by broadcast networks in their TV drama series. The analysis attempts to answer the following research questions: How do the narrative techniques of SVOD TV drama series differ from broadcast network TV drama series use of techniques? What narrative techniques are used by the other distribution/production platforms? Does Netflix's narrative style and use of narrative devices cater to their audience members who actively engage in binge-viewing culture? Do traditional and linear forms of narratives used by broadcast networks like the CW cater to audience members who still engage and view the TV drama series via weekly episodes?

CHAPTER BREAKDOWN

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 provides the general and background information for the first subject of the research study. I give a brief analysis of the TV show *The Flash* (2014) and its production and before diving into the textual analysis of the first season. The analysis breaks down and critiques the season by focusing on three specific episodes that showcase the use of three storytelling strategies commonly used in popular contemporary television series. The narrative strategies that I focus on are a) connected franchise crossovers, b) recapping, and c) cliffhangers. The analysis is aimed at exploring these narrative strategies used in the first season of the series to understand how the strategies potentially attract new viewers, help viewers follow along with the story, and keep viewers interested in coming back to the story after the short-term and/or long-term breaks that are associated with broadcast network drama television series.

I argue that the show's use of franchise crossovers serves both original comic book fans as well as television fans in hopes of bringing them together to create a bigger audience. I also argue that recapping in episodes helps viewers as they follow along with the various story arcs of the season because of the large amount of information presented within each story arc of each episode and because of the weekly distribution format. Cliffhangers are also used as a narrative strategy at the end of every episode of *The Flash* to keep viewers interested and coming back to view the following episode. I posit that The CW uses the previously mentioned narrative strategies the same way that they have been traditionally used in past TV storytelling as well as in superhero comic books. The CW uses the past strategies in order to resemble the original content and position itself as a network that understands how superhero stories are conveyed.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 provides the general and background information for the second subject of the research study. The chapter gives a brief analysis of the *Daredevil* TV series. This analysis also breaks down and critiques the use of connected franchise tie-ins, recapping, and cliffhangers. This analysis is aimed at exploring and comparing the narrative strategies used in the first season of the Netflix *Daredevil* series to the narrative strategies used in The CW's *The Flash* as discussed in chapter two. Chapter three critiques the narrative strategies of the two programs to find out how they are similar or different from each other. This chapter also attempts to explain how the strategies, if applicable, potentially attract new viewers, help viewers follow along with the story, and keep viewers interested in watching back-to-back episodes in one-sitting via the SVOD platform known as Netflix.

I argue that the series' use of franchise crossovers serves both original comic book fans as well as comic book-movie fans in hopes of bringing them together to create a bigger audience. I argue that *Daredevil* uses recaps through dialogue as a narrative strategy while *The Flash* focuses a lot on recap sequences to keep the viewer informed. Lastly, cliffhangers are also used as a narrative strategy at the end of *Daredevil* and *The Flash*. *The Flash* includes situational cliffhangers and many informational cliffhangers that give the audience insight on past scenes from the series. On the other hand, *Daredevil* relies on some situational cliffhangers that include a shocking climax for the episode but flows directly into the next episode without any breaks. I theorize that Netflix uses narrative strategies the same way that they have been traditionally used in superhero comic books and TV series storytelling. However, Netflix scales back on the use of recapping and episodic cliffhangers to form a more epic-viewing experience for viewers that binge-watch multiple episodes at a time.

Chapter 4

The final chapter begins with a summary of the study. In the overall analysis, I argue that the use of the above narrative devices differs between superhero series that are written, produced, and distributed for different media forms. After analyzing both superhero TV series, I have concluded that the narratives are more similar than they are different. Both series include a variation of each narrative technique that was analyzed in this study. Both *The Flash* and *Daredevil* portray compelling stories during their first seasons and do so using different audience assumptions and narrative techniques to recruit, and cater to, intended audience members. The similarities between the two series include their media franchise connections and tie-ins with other superhero narratives, and the use of recapping and cliffhangers. The rest of the chapter includes a discussion of the conclusion and implications of the research study. The section also outlines the limitations of the study and things that could be different in the future.

CHAPTER 2: FROM COMIC BOOKS TO TELEVISION: THE CW'S NARRATIVE STRATEGIES ON *THE FLASH* (2014 – PRESENT)

The following is a textual analysis of Season 1 of the CW series *The Flash* (2014 – present) which aired from October 7, 2014 to May 19, 2015. The analysis breaks down and critiques the season by focusing on four specific episodes that showcase the use of three storytelling strategies commonly used in popular contemporary television series. The narrative strategies that I focus on are a) connected franchise crossovers, b) recapping, and c) cliffhangers. The analysis is aimed at exploring these narrative strategies used in the first season of the series to understand how the strategies potentially attract new viewers, help viewers follow along with the story, and keep viewers interested in coming back to the story after the short-term and/or long-term breaks that are associated with broadcast network drama television series. I argue that the show's use of franchise crossovers serves both original comic book fans as well as television fans in hopes of bringing them together to create a bigger audience. The franchise crossovers are used to create more expansive narratives that are shared with more characters and story arcs to cross-promote and extend stories., much like how connected superhero narratives in comic books are showcased.

I also argue that recapping in episodes helps viewers as they follow along with the various story arcs of the season because of the large amount of information presented within each story arc of each episode and because of the weekly distribution format. Show creators assume that because of the many breaks during or between episodes, viewers don't watch or remember everything, so recap sequences or dialogue recaps are added to keep the viewer informed. Cliffhangers are also used as a narrative strategy at the end of every episode of *The Flash*. It is important to note that the cliffhangers I discuss appear in two forms. The first form is the situational cliffhanger when a main character is caught in the middle of a suspenseful event

before the episode ends. The second form is the informational cliffhanger when the audience is presented with new information related to a past or present plot point of the story. Both forms of cliffhangers are used to keep viewers interested and coming back to view the following episode. The use of cliffhangers this way also closely resembles the use of cliffhangers in comic books to encourage readers to read the following issue upon its release. Some of the narrative strategies that are used, like cliffhangers or franchise crossovers, are taken right from comic book industry practices of the past. I posit that The CW uses the previously mentioned narrative strategies the same way that they have been traditionally used in past TV storytelling as well as in superhero comic books. The CW uses the past strategies in order to resemble the original content and position itself as a network that understands how superhero stories are conveyed.

The aforementioned narrative strategies for the broadcast distribution of the superhero series *The Flash* are closely aligned with how superhero stories were showcased and promoted through comic books and it is what I believe makes the series as popular as it is to viewers. However, while still including many of the narrative strategies listed above, the secondary distribution of the series via Netflix has altered the strategies a bit to foster a viewing experience that differs from traditional superhero story consumption through comic books or linear-distributed TV series. In this chapter, I argue that the original linear release of the first season of *The Flash* on The CW uses franchise crossovers, recapping, and cliffhangers as narrative strategies to bring together viewers, update them on story developments, and encourage them to return for the following episode. This provides an experience similar to that of reading comic books, but that differs from the experience gained by viewing the season in secondary distribution on Netflix.



Figure 1.1 *The Flash Season 1 DVD Cover*
Photo Credit: The CW & Warner Bros. Television Distribution

Brief Series Overview

To analyze these narrative strategies, in this chapter I closely examine key episodes of season 1 of *The Flash*, as aired on the CW. The CW is an American broadcast television network that operates as a joint venture between CBS and Warner Bros. The CW network premiered *The Flash*, Season 1 Episode 1, “Pilot” on Tuesday, October 7, 2014. *The Flash* is the spinoff show to the CW’s *Arrow* (2012 – present). *The Flash* helps kick off the “Arrow-verse” (DC Comics interconnected TV shows that appear on The CW) that operates as a shared and connected universe of super-powered individuals that would go on to appear in their own CW TV series like *Supergirl* (2015 – present) and *DC’s Legends of Tomorrow* (2016 – present). Season 1 of *The Flash* has a total of 23 episodes and begins as a continuation of Barry Allen’s origin story which was highlighted in *Arrow* Season 2 Episode 8 through Episode 10 when the character

appeared as a guest. The superhero TV series follows Barry, who is given the power of super speed, which transforms him into the fastest man alive.”¹⁹

Throughout Season 1, Barry spends time adjusting to his new superpowers while working as a police investigator, fighting meta-humans with super powers, falling in love with his foster sister, and trying to find out who really murdered his mother.²⁰ The key episodes that this analysis will examine are Episode 1, “Pilot,” Episode 8, “Flash vs Arrow,” Episode 9, “The Man in the Yellow Suit,” and Episode 23, “Fast Enough.” These four episodes were chosen because they focus on the lead overarching plot of the series and contain great examples of how narrative strategies are used to illustrate how the leading plot is conveyed to viewers. The chosen episodes highlight one or more of the narrative strategies mentioned above. Season 1 of *The Flash* uses a variety of narrative strategies to attract viewers as well as keep viewers’ attention while they follow along with the superhero antics of the story.

Connected Franchise Crossovers

The first narrative strategy discussed and studied in this analysis focuses on the connected franchise crossovers of the season and how the crossovers play a role in the overall narrative to attract more viewership. As stated before, *The Flash* is a spin-off series that exists in the larger CW superhero universe. This is significant for understanding how the series communicates its story because it continues an already established plot and makes several references and callbacks to the program that gave it its start. A strategy that The CW uses to develop, brand, and promote its programs involves transmedia franchising and developing a

¹⁹ Philiana Ng, “‘The Flash’: Meet the Main Players on CW’s ‘Arrow’ Spinoff,” *The Hollywood Reporter*. October 7, 2014, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/flash-meet-characters-arrow-spinoff-738456>. (accessed March 1, 2019).

²⁰ Philiana Ng, “‘The Flash’: Every Major DC Character on The CW Series,” *The Hollywood Reporter*. October 7, 2014, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/gallery/flash-dc-character-cw-series-738570/1-barry-allenthe-flash>. (accessed March 1, 2019).

large connected universe of superhero television series that frequently crossover with each other. The CW figured out a way to take characters from DC Comics, develop its own version of the characters, and integrate them within The CW brand all at once. After a successful introduction of the show *Arrow*, The CW expanded “on a shared narrative universe while encouraging intersectionality, franchising its own DC-TV universe.”²¹ Transmedia storytelling has been “the most efficient way to activate the circulation of these shared narratives” within The CW network.²² Cross-promotions with connected franchise characters and TV series that share a narrative universe are used to entice original comic book fans as well as new television fans.

The shared narrative space between series and characters is nothing new, as it has been done with many TV series in the past. It has also been done with many comic book series in the past from major American comic book companies like Marvel and DC Comics. According to the article, “Superhero Fan Service: Audience Strategies in the Contemporary Interlinked Hollywood Blockbuster,” written by Bart Beaty, shared spaces and continuity within superhero comic books developed over time. After World War II, Marvel comics began to introduce overlapping characters and storylines with their “heightened continuity within a shared narrative universe.”²³ The Marvel Universe was established as early as the 1960s with DC Comics following suit by using large crossover events like *Crisis on Infinite Earths* in the mid-1980s that included many, if not all, of the main superheroes that were under the DC Comics brand.²⁴ Characters like Superman, The Flash, and Batman were able to coexist in universe-wide stories where they could be included in featured roles or as supporting characters. The crossover events

²¹ Charles Joseph. "The CW Arrow-verse and myth-making, or the commodification of transmedia franchising." *Series-International Journal of TV Serial Narratives* 4, no. 2 (2018): 37.

²² *Ibid.*, 36.

²³ Bart Beaty, “Superhero Fan Service: Audience Strategies in the Contemporary Interlinked Hollywood Blockbuster.” *The Information Society*, 32:5, (2016): 319 and 320.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 320.

and complicated overarching narratives gave creators the opportunity to cross-promote, expand their stories, and include fan favorite characters from other popular titles of the same brand. Comic book writers did this as a means to grow their number of consumers and audience members. However, due to several reasons, including the intense over-complication of narratives that stretched between characters and comic book titles, superhero comic book sales declined. The over-complication of storytelling in companies like DC Comics narrowed the audience to only committed readers who were actively engaged in the entire story instead of casual readers who, in the past, could just pick up a comic and follow along with ease.²⁵

Years later, superheroes continue to share universes via movies and popular television series. The strategy adopted by Marvel Studios with their Marvel Cinematic Universe follows suit with the comic books' connected continuity and draws from it for inspiration. Much like in Marvel comic books, movies with characters like The Hulk, Iron Man, and Thor are all closely interlinked but can also be understood as distinct and individual entities.²⁶ This can also be applied to the Arrow-verse shows like *Arrow* and *The Flash*. In the early stages of development for The CW's Arrow-verse, producers partnered with comic book writers and creators for the development of the connected television series. According to Charles Joseph in "The CW Arrow-verse and Myth-making or the Commodification of Transmedia Franchising," the CW network collaborates with comic book writers to make sure that the series has support and popularity across the television and comic book culture consumers. The collaboration also occurs to ensure that series story arcs are similar to the original material with a goal to successfully

²⁵ Ibid., 319.

²⁶ Ibid., 321.

create an interconnected narrative universe with the franchising system that resembles past comic book industry practices.²⁷

It makes sense for The CW rather than any other network to tackle the challenge of creating a shared superhero universe because The CW is already well-versed with the notion of interconnectivity and cross-media partnerships. While rebranding the TV network, Warner Bros. Entertainment Group began “tapping into the power of fandoms, influencers, ecommerce and social media of viewers who were watching” CW programs in order to turn “fan energy and interest into sales revenue.”²⁸ The network began partnering with different online communities and programs to enhance viewer engagement. The CW’s goal was to create “the ultimate online gathering place where The CW Network could partner with and empower influencers” with a home to share and view content in a robust fan community related to CW programs. This shows that the network already understands and strives for the benefits of interconnected forms of media. The network has even joined forces with online streaming portals like Hulu and Netflix to put their series on the online platforms once the regular linear broadcast season has ended in order to increase exposure.²⁹ The CW has positioned itself as a hybrid network and has introduced superhero stories that are just as interconnected as the comic books that they come from, as well as the network itself.

There is no doubt that *The Flash* is part of the shared Arrow-verse. *The Flash* series is a spin-off of the *Arrow* series, but not in the traditional sense. *The Flash*’s main character Barry Allen wasn’t a secondary character that was “spun-off” from the already existing series. Many TV series that were spun-off into other TV series were successful in the past because of a

²⁷ Charles Joseph. "The CW Arrow-verse," 31.

²⁸ Ibid., 28.

²⁹ Ibid., 28.

secondary character's following and potential for longevity on their own even after the original series they were a part of was finished. A few examples of TV series spin-offs from the NBC network are *A Different World* (1987-1993) which spun-off from *The Cosby Show* (1984-1992) and *Frasier* (1993-2004) which spun-off from *Cheers* (1982-1993). Spin-offs of the past sprung up because of the potential to build on characters that viewers loved and would continue to accept into their homes. The spin-off was another lucrative way for producers and networks to get more money through syndication. Networks and producers knew that if people loved and became attached to certain characters, they would watch anything that included them. This was an opportunity to create more shows surrounding those characters with the goal of getting more money from advertisers, especially if the program made it to 100 episodes, which qualified it for syndication.³⁰

The Flash, on the other hand, was not spun off because fans grew attached to the character, causing networks to want to cash in on the opportunity. The character introduction via the series *Arrow* and eventual pilot order for *The Flash* was planned ahead as the backdoor to the bigger Arrow-verse. The CW network planned to introduce the character and his origin story during Season 2 of *Arrow*. The goal right away was to expand on the DC superhero universe and producers wanted to do it in an organic way.³¹ The CW would go on to introduce many other characters this way including Captain Cold, Heatwave, and Firestorm, who would later star together in their own series spun-off from *The Flash*, *DC's Legends of Tomorrow* (2016 – present). This is very different from how TV series were spun-off traditionally but very similar to how some comic book series were spun-off. The franchise relates to traditional spin-off

³⁰ Todd Gitlin. *Inside Prime Time*, (New York, Pantheon Books; 1983), 64-69.

³¹ Lesley Goldberg, "Flash' Series From 'Arrow' Producers in the Works at CW," *The Hollywood Reporter*. July 30, 2013, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/flash-series-arrow-producers-works-595486> (Accessed June 24, 2019).

practices as it uses a series that has already been successful to launch a new series by using one of its secondary characters and creating a narrative surrounding that character. However, it differs from the traditional TV use and is more representative of comic book spin-offs as it continuously introduces new secondary characters to jumpstart spin-offs of their own with the intention to expand the narrative and cross the characters over.

Throughout the first season, *The Flash* makes references to characters and events that occur in other CW television series like its catalyst *Arrow*. Barry Allen's character was first introduced in Season 2, Episode 8 of *Arrow*, which acted as a backdoor pilot for the series. Season 1 picks up where the character leaves off in *Arrow*, then goes on to have guest appearances from the series like the main character, Oliver Queen/*Arrow* with his brief cameo in the pilot episode, and supporting character Felicity, who has a cameo in *The Flash* Season 1, episode 4.³²

The Flash's story has overlapped with other series in the Arrow-verse at least once or twice per season since its start in 2014. Sometimes, an episode will have a guest appearance from someone like Oliver from *Arrow*, like in *The Flash*'s pilot episode. Other times, cross-appearances and plots are shared and presented through multiple episodes spread across each series of the franchise. The episodes would appear daily back-to-back. This means that if *The Flash* episode comes on Tuesday evenings, *Arrow* comes on Wednesday, and *Supergirl* comes on Thursday, then each of those episodes will follow each other and pick up where the narrative left off at the end of the preceding series' episode. *The Flash* would be part 1, *Arrow* would be

³² *The Flash*, Episode 1, "Pilot," written by Greg Berlanti, Andrew Kreisberg and Geoff Johns, aired October 7, 2014, on The CW Network, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80057443?trackId=200257859>. *The Flash*, Episode 4, "Going Rouge," written by Geoff Johns and Kai Yu, aired October 28, 2014, on The CW Network, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80057446?trackId=200257859>.

part 2, and so on until that crossover narrative ends. A crossover event like this happened on television in 2018. The “Elseworlds” crossover event included Part 1 being aired during season 5 of *The Flash* on December 9, 2018. Part 2 was aired during *Arrow* on December 10, 2018, and the finale, Part 3, was aired during *Supergirl* on December 11, 2018.³³

Next, I offer an analysis of the very first big Arrow-verse crossover event that began with *The Flash*, Season 1, Episode 8 to illustrate how the franchise-connected characters and storylines are used to tell an expansive story. The episode was titled “Flash vs Arrow,” was written by Greg Berlanti and Andrew Kreisberg, and involved the main characters of *The Flash*, Barry Allen, and *Arrow*, Oliver Queen, as their story arcs collided. The episode premiered on Tuesday, December 2, 2014 with the plot concluding in a follow-up episode of *Arrow* that premiered the next evening on Wednesday, December 3, 2014. *Arrow* Season 3, Episode 8, “The Brave and the Bold” was part 2 of the crossover, which gave fans of both series the opportunity to tune in on both premiere dates in order to watch the full story. This strategy helps bring audience members across shows. Viewers would normally have to wait seven days for an update to the show’s narrative. During the crossover, viewers only had to wait 24 hours. Fans of one show may not have ever watched the other. The franchise-connected crossover event gave viewers the chance to test out the opposite show and encouraged viewers to continue watching two episodes of the shared narrative and universe per week. As I will discuss in detail below, both episodes encompassed their own self-contained story arcs but ended up merging together because the plots relied heavily on the mythos and characters used in both series to showcase the

³³ Sydney Bucksbaum, “The CW’s DC Crossover: All the Details About Batwoman’s Debut,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, August 28, 2018, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/cws-dc-crossover-all-details-far-batwomans-debut-1136861> (accessed June 24, 2019).

overarching narrative of heroes coming together to fight. This demonstrated to new viewers of one or the other program that the series were different enough to exist on their own but special enough to share a narrative universe that could bring them together more often in the future.

The “Flash vs Arrow” episode featured three guests that are important main characters from *Arrow* that serve as the hero’s teammates. The guests were Oliver Queen/Arrow, John Diggle, Oliver’s bodyguard and close friend, as well as Felicity Smoak, the team’s smart and “techy” teammate. The episode’s plot takes a break from the overarching storyline of *The Flash* that has been covered throughout the preceding episodes, which involves finding the killer of Barry’s mother. This episode instead focuses on an arc unrelated to Barry’s mom’s death. Oliver shows up in the episode due to a common threat and Barry and Oliver decide to team-up against him. The episode begins with a recap sequence that features meetings between Oliver and Barry from *The Flash*’s pilot episode. The pilot episode premiered seven weeks prior to Episode 8, so it was important to recap the characters’ last meeting because of the long time-lapse between the two episodes. The pilot episode was the first time Arrow made an appearance on the show. The recap reminds viewers that Arrow helped introduce Barry’s character, but the cross-over episode as a whole works to solidify the fact that the *Arrow* characters are involved in the same overarching, connected plot as *The Flash*’s characters. This is important because it motivates viewers to cross-view the network’s multiple superhero series, which in turn boosts viewership for each. It is also important because it gives the viewer more content to consume instead of having to wait between weekly episodes. Instead of waiting seven days for new content, viewers have five days with five series that they can watch while waiting for new episodes. This gives viewers the opportunity to examine and make connections to each episode or series in order to fully understand the shared universe and backgrounds of each series.

The episode begins much like the other episodes by establishing a plot that involves the villain of the week and finding out who he/she is along with their motive before devising a plan with the team to stop the villain. The guest character, Oliver Queen/Arrow, makes an appearance during a scuffle with the villain of the episode. After hitting one of the bad guys with arrows, the scene switches to a shot of Arrow in his suit with his bow and arrow. Arrow says to The Flash, “Nice mask.” This is a reference to his appearance in Episode 1 when he encourages Barry to wear a mask and become a hero. The viewers see The Flash smiling before cutting to the title card. The title card usually just reads “The Flash” with lightning bolts. However, during the crossover event, the title card includes an arrow flying then piercing the title. Immediately after the title card, the viewer is introduced to Diggle and Felicity from *Arrow*, who are also guest stars. Barry and Oliver soon meet up with Diggle and Felicity and we, the viewers, find out what they are doing in Barry’s city.

Throughout the episode, references are made about past interactions between the two sets of characters from each show to do two things: a) remind the viewer of the relationship between the two sets of characters as dictated by past episodes and b) inform new *The Flash* viewers who didn’t watch *Arrow* of the relationship between the two sets of characters. In a scene in Star Labs, Felicity and Barry are confronted by the characters Cisco and Caitlin after Felicity’s shirt catches fire. When asked about her return to Central City, Caitlin asks Felicity if she is in the city for Barry or not. Felicity then goes on a rant about how, at one point, they tried or at least were going to try dating but ultimately decided not to. This is in reference to Barry’s brief appearance on *Arrow* before he got his own series.

We get more references to past occurrences on *Arrow* and other broad references to characters in the Arrow-verse through Easter eggs in the episode. Easter eggs are semi-hidden

visual clues to potential plot directions that strategically appear in scenes.³⁴ Sometimes, Easter eggs serve as just nods and references to something popular from the comics or from an earlier episode of the season. An example of one of the Easter eggs includes the shot of a Palmer Technologies sign in the scene where The Flash helps a group of painters paint a yellow building. The Palmer Technologies sign is a reference to a business that is owned by a popular DC Comics character named Ray Palmer/The Atom. The Easter egg was significant because Ray Palmer had already made an appearance on *Arrow* and the clue implied that viewers may get more screen time for the character in the shared narrative, another way of enticing them to watch *The Flash*.³⁵

Narrative strategies like using a crossover episode, references, and Easter eggs to other characters or series in the shared and connected universe help convey the bigger and overarching story in the franchise. The crossover is used to directly target and titillate fans of both the series and the comic book source material. The episode's many callbacks, Easter eggs, and guest appearances help support what Beaty defines as narrative rewards that fulfill fans' desires or give fans story elements that they have wanted to see for a long time.³⁶ For instance, the title cards of the crossover episodes in both *The Flash* and *Arrow* can be considered fan service rewards because the titles pay homage to the many team-ups between The Flash and Green Arrow in the comic books. Before the CW series, the Flash and Green Arrow had never appeared together in a live action performance. The notion of the two characters even having their own series to cross over is a big deal to fans of the show and the comics. Series creators likely know this and utilize the strategy to bring in new and old consumers of the aforementioned superheroes. The episodes'

³⁴ Bart Beaty, "Superhero Fan Service," 322.

³⁵ *The Flash*, Episode 8, "Flash vs Arrow," written by Greg Berlanti and Andrew Kreisberg, aired December 2, 2014, on The CW Network, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80057450?trackId=200257859>.

³⁶ Bart Beaty, "Superhero Fan Service," 324.

involvement with each other also gives fans from both series, old and new, the opportunity to experience a separate set of characters that are directly related to the characters that they already know and love. The event was also used to get fans excited about shared and future connected universe possibilities with other CW superhero television series like *Legends of Tomorrow* and *Supergirl*.

The CW crossover events allow the narrative room to fully develop as well as be able to include all of the main characters. The crossover events can also be seen as huge payoffs to fans that wrap up plot threads or clues that were hidden in past episodes through references and Easter eggs. This gives an opportunity for fans of each individual show to backtrack and re-watch episodes from each series to look for connections they might have missed before the crossover. The franchise connections and crossovers work to draw audiences in a few ways. One way is by resembling big crossover events from the comic books that were also used to bring together characters as well as their fans in an attempt to increase viewership and sales. Another way involves introducing fans from one show to new characters and narratives related to the story and list of characters that they are already familiar with. Here, the franchise crossover presents an opportunity for fans to expand their search for more storylines involving their favorite superheroes and the world around them. This notion allows every series within the franchise to gain more audience members.

The crossover event acted as a cross-marketing event that was also used to showcase relationships and ordeals between crossover characters on screen and how they are similar to their comic book counterparts. This is why the effort of the series showrunners to partner with comic book creators in order to imitate comic book industry practices with developing stories and characters in a franchise-connected universe, as well as to ensure that series story-arcs would

be similar to the original material, was a key means of gaining support from viewers for all of series in the Arrow-verse.³⁷ The CW continues to tell these large stories that include crossover events. The franchise-connected narrative now stretches across all of the CW superhero series including *Supergirl* (2015 – present), *DC's Legend of Tomorrow* (2016 – present), and *Black Lightning* (2018 – present) with hopes that fans will watch all of them for their fan service and narrative rewards, as well as opening up possibilities for future plots and characters.

Recapping

While franchising is a key strategy the broadcast series uses to engage viewers, *The Flash* also uses other devices more typical of TV storytelling to similar ends. Season 1 of *The Flash* incorporates another narrative strategy, recapping, in every episode. I argue that recaps are included in each episode to assist the viewer with following along and keeping up with the story because of the large amount of information presented with each story arc of each episode and because creators assume viewers don't watch everything or remember everything in between weekly episodes. Different forms of recapping occur throughout *The Flash* because of the frequent breaks in time associated with the broadcast television series. The breaks I am referring to include commercial breaks, episodic breaks, and mid-season breaks. Commercial breaks interrupt the story by appearing frequently throughout the episodes between scenes. Episodic breaks occur because each episode appears within seven days of each other during its 7:00pm Tuesday primetime timeslot. There is also a mid-season finale episode, Episode 9, that premieres before the series takes a 4-week hiatus. I viewed *The Flash* for this research study via its secondary run on Netflix, so there were no interruptions during the season unless I decided to

³⁷ Charles Joseph. "The CW Arrow-verse," 31.

take a break in the middle of an episode or after an episode. I will talk more about viewing the series via Netflix and how that shapes the viewing experience later on in this section.

During the original run of the first season on The CW, *The Flash* was constantly interrupted by one of the aforementioned breaks. I believe this is the why the show's creators felt the need to include so many recaps during an episode. Passive viewers and hardcore fans are constantly reminded about the plot. According to Newman, "Television assumes that we don't watch everything and can always use a bit of reminding when it comes to the most important things to know."³⁸ Traditional television consumption with its many interruptions can lead to a viewer missing something. The viewer can forget to watch another episode. The viewer can tune in to the episode later than expected. An emergency can come up causing the viewer to miss an episode. There are many reasons why fans don't watch everything. The show caters to this notion by recapping throughout an entire episode.

According to Newman, dialogue is used to recap recent events.³⁹ Characters recapping through dialogue occurs frequently throughout the season as it has been done traditionally in past TV series. An instance of this occurs in Episode 8 when Barry describes the fight he just had with a villain in the previous scene to two other characters.⁴⁰ This happens again in Episode 9 when Barry returns to his laboratory to tell his team about him getting beat up then lectured by a villain (the Reverse-Flash) in the preceding scene. The occurrence happens often, especially after a scene in the story that includes a character discovering something that is paranormal in nature or high-tech. The next scene almost always includes an explanation of the paranormal or high-

³⁸ Michael Z. Newman, "From Beats to Arcs: Toward a Poetics of Television Narrative," *The Velvet Light Trap* 58 (Fall 2006): 18.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴⁰ *The Flash*, Episode 8, "Flash vs Arrow," written by Greg Berlanti and Andrew Kreisberg, aired December 2, 2014, on The CW Network, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80057450?trackId=200257859>.

tech encounter that just happened in the previous scene. For example, in Episode 1, the villain of the episode uses his powers to control the weather. After the characters Barry and Iris escape getting hurt from this attempt, the two tell another character, Detective West, about what just occurred. In this explanation, the characters discuss everything that has happened and piece together the mystery through dialogue. Barry tells Detective West who the villain is, what the villain can do, and connects him to all of the crime scenes from earlier in the episode. This recap serves as a tool that gives the viewer a reminder of what has happened while giving it meaning before continuing on with the story. The recap is especially important to help translate supernatural occurrences that might not be understandable to someone unfamiliar with how this world works.

Another example of this method of dialogue recapping occurs further into Episode 9 when Cisco and Caitlin are discussing the possible reappearance of another character named Ronnie. Caitlin tells Cisco that she thinks she saw Ronnie, which occurred in the previous episode. Afterwards, Cisco reminds both Caitlin and the audience that Ronnie was killed and how he was killed a few episodes back. Immediately afterwards, in the next scene, the viewers get yet another recapping through a shot of Barry's investigation board that includes images and names that remind us of the death of Barry's mother.⁴¹ These redundant dialogue recaps are perfect examples of what Newman describes as a series of revelations from one character to the next.⁴²

The series helps reinforce the idea presented by Newman that recapping is important to serialized narratives because of the massive amount of information that forms the background of

⁴¹ *The Flash*, Episode 9, "The Man in the Yellow Suit," written by Todd Helbing and Aaron Helbing, aired December 9, 2014, on The CW Network, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80057451?trackId=200257859>.

⁴² Michael Z. Newman, "From Beats to Arcs," 19.

the story through new developments. This means that as the story progresses, a ton of information is processed by the viewer and recapping serves to assist with helping the viewer retain that information. Recapping helps viewers by taking many different forms.⁴³ The forms include perpetual naming of characters in every beat and characters addressing each other by name several times.⁴⁴ This is what I call dialogue recapping. Dialogue recapping is interesting because it usually involves characters constantly referring to the other characters by their full names as well as making references to previous episodes. An extreme example of this occurs in the beginning of Episode 9. Within ten seconds of dialogue between the characters Barry, Iris, and Eddie, Barry's name is mentioned three times.⁴⁵ Other examples include mentioning the primary story arc of finding the killer of Barry's mom in each episode. This occurrence happens in every episode, as in Episode 9's conversation between Barry and his father about finding the real killer to get him out of jail (Barry's father has been wrongfully imprisoned for this crime).⁴⁶ Another example is the beginning of Episode 23, during the conversation between Barry and Harrison.⁴⁷

Recapping in *The Flash* also takes a form that is perhaps specific to superhero series by explaining the basic premise of the show through voice-over narration by the main character during flashback scenes throughout the introduction sequence at the beginning of each episode followed by a "previously on *The Flash*" sequence that recaps specific details about plot

⁴³ Ibid., 18.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 18.

⁴⁵ *The Flash*, Episode 9, "The Man in the Yellow Suit," written by Todd Helbing and Aaron Helbing, aired December 9, 2014, on The CW Network, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80057451?trackId=200257859>.

⁴⁶ *The Flash*, Episode 9, "The Man in the Yellow Suit," written by Todd Helbing and Aaron Helbing, aired December 9, 2014, on The CW Network, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80057451?trackId=200257859>.

⁴⁷ *The Flash*, Episode 23, "Fast Enough," written by Greg Berlanti and Andrew Kreisberg aired on May 19, 2015, on The CW Network, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80057465?trackId=200257859>.

developments in previous episodes. The first episode of the season includes a lengthy voice-over narration as Barry Allen explains who he is, as well as his backstory about his parents and obtaining super powers. This is done to introduce the character to new viewers of the series who may not have viewed the brief origin story in the *Arrow* series. It also works as a way to remind *Arrow* viewers about the character's introduction in *Arrow* Season 2, Episode 8. The introduction uses this time to expand on the origin story of the main character through voice-over narration and providing a visual to the death of Barry's mother fifteen years before the current events of the episode. After this introduction, the rest of the episode focuses on Barry's transformation into the titular superhero by playing the scene from *Arrow* Season 2, Episode 9 where Barry is shown getting his powers before showcasing how he learned to use his powers and receiving his costume.

Subsequently, at the start of each episode the information is repeated in narration by the main character. Beginning with Episode 2, Barry's voice-over narration speaks over flashback scenes about the adversities that he has faced in the past and recaps everything that happened in the first episode. Barry also pledges to use his new powers to fight crime and to find others like himself.⁴⁸ The introduction sequence with the voice-over narration in subsequent episodes after Episode 1 are very brief so that they may quickly update the audience members about the character, especially if the viewer is tuning in for the first time, before jumping into the main story. The sequence and voice-over narration are very reminiscent of superhero and comic book stories because they allow the viewer to learn about the story from the perspective of the main character. Comic books usually tell a story from the perspective of the main character not only

⁴⁸ *The Flash*, Episode 8, "Flash vs Arrow," written by Greg Berlanti and Andrew Kreisberg, aired December 2, 2014, on The CW Network, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80057450?trackId=200257859>.

through dialogue, but through thought bubbles and narrative boxes that contain information or inner monologues that give readers information about the hero's origin and motives.

During the introduction sequence with voice-over narration, the viewer sees a flashback of Barry's mom being killed while Barry is heard saying, "My name is Barry Allen, and I am the fastest man alive. When I was a child, I saw my mother killed by something impossible." Later in the introduction, Barry is dressed as the superhero Flash as the voice-over of Barry says, "Now, I use my speed to fight crime and find others like me."⁴⁹ These lines are repeated throughout the series because they explain the basic premise of the show as told by the main character, which is usually done frequently in comic book narratives. Much like how readers are able to pick up any issue of a comic book and be filled in about the main character through narrative boxes, a viewer can tune in to any episode of the TV series and be filled in about the main character through a voice-over narration.

The Flash was designed to be distributed weekly on The CW. The series uses the introduction and "previously on *The Flash*" sequences in the beginning of the episodes to remind the viewers of the story. Every single episode features the narration, which suggests that show creators believe that viewers tend to forget basic things like who the main character is and what he does during the week in between episodes, or that they may attract new viewers at any point in the season. Along with the narration are clips from preceding episodes that appear across the screen to reinforce the statements Barry makes in his weekly opening statements. The first few minutes of most episodes remind the viewer of what has happened in previous episodes before actually getting to the new material. The show is invested in making sure the viewer can follow

⁴⁹ *The Flash*, Episode 9, "The Man in the Yellow Suit," written by Todd Helbing and Aaron Helbing, aired December 9, 2014, on The CW Network, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80057451?trackId=200257859>.

along with the weekly program with hopes of the viewer not forgetting a particular plot point that will play out in the coming episode.

In the first season finale, Episode 23, “Fast Enough,” recapping in the beginning of the episode is used slightly differently. This time, as opposed to earlier episodes, the introduction sequence has a more serious tone to highlight the seriousness of the episode. Barry speaks with more conviction and anger in his voice than he does in previous episodes. By this point in the season, the viewer and the main characters have discovered the mystery and finally know who the antagonist is for the primary story arc. The episode offers the aftermath to the discovery. During the intro, Barry’s narration says, “And one day, I’ll find who killed my mother and get justice for my father.” During that phrase, a holding cell door opens up to reveal the culprit, Harrison Wells. This is important because immediately afterward the episode begins with the holding cell scene and Harrison is confronted by Barry. Usually, a season finale would include a recap of the main plot points for the viewer. Instead, “Fast Enough” jumps right into the story’s ending after the build-up between the few episodes preceding the finale. Perhaps the creators forwent the recap and assumed if viewers made it all the way to the finale episode, then they were already well aware of what had happened. On the other hand, the recap could have been left out because it usually covers points and instances from many of the subplots of the season. The intro always talks about the primary story arc and it is possible that the recap was simply not needed to connect this episode with the previous one.⁵⁰

Unfortunately, I did not watch the series during the original run on The CW for this project. I viewed the series via Netflix, and it is interesting to note that Netflix gives viewers access to all of the episodes of all of the series. In 2017, viewers discovered that a new option

⁵⁰ *The Flash*, Episode 23, "Fast Enough," written by Greg Berlanti and Andrew Kreisberg aired on May 19, 2015, on The CW Network, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80057465?trackId=200257859>.

was being tested by Netflix. Viewers could now skip the introduction sequence of each episode. Reddit users realized that the “skip the intro” function gave viewers the option as a pop up right as the title sequence begins.⁵¹ Netflix added the “skip the intro” function to its acquired and original series to give viewers the option to watch or not watch the intro. Netflix didn’t comment on the decision to add the function, but the creator of the Netflix Original series *GLOW* (2017 – present), Richard Kenworthy, has mentioned that Netflix knows that viewers will skip the intro because it is “an annoyance for most people and there’s really nothing to gain from putting it on every show...”⁵²

When watching *The Flash*, the viewer can click the skip the intro button and upon doing so, the episode will jump to the one-minute mark, skipping both the introduction sequence as well as the “Previously on *The Flash*” recap sequence. I noticed that I only got the skip the intro prompt when I began my viewing session from the beginning of an episode. For example, if I took a break after finishing Episode 7 and began Episode 8 the following day, I would get the skip the intro prompt. However, if I continue to watch episodes back-to-back during a viewing session, the beginning of each following episode will automatically jump to the one-minute mark without the skip the intro option. For instance, when I continued on from Episode 8, Episode 9 automatically skipped the introduction sequence and the “Previously on *The Flash*” recap sequence without my selecting this. This supports the claim by Baker that Netflix organizes its program structure and distribution practices based on the assumption that viewers are going to

⁵¹ Ruth Kinane, “Netflix introduces button to skip opening credits,” *Entertainment Weekly*, March 17, 2017, https://ew.com/tv/2017/03/17/netflix-opening-sequence-skip-button/?xid=entertainment-weekly_socialflow_twitter (accessed June 25, 2019).

⁵² Myles McNutt, “‘Skip intro’: Netflix could’ve saved TV title sequences, but now it’s killing them,” *AV Club*, September 14, 2017, <https://www.avclub.com/skip-intro-netflix-could-ve-saved-tv-title-sequences-1802926420> (accessed June 25, 2019).

continuously watch multiple episodes.⁵³ While watching multiple episodes, there are no breaks and viewers do not need the updates and reminders that occur during the two sequences at the beginning. Skipping the introduction sequence and the “Previously on *The Flash*” recap sequence also assumes that viewers do, in fact, watch everything, which contradicts Newman’s claim.⁵⁴ With Netflix, the two introduction recap sequences are used to remind the viewer of plot points and previous scenes just like with the broadcast network the CW, but this has become a rare occurrence, for someone who is binge-viewing the series does not need reminders. I believe there is something to gain from not showing the intro sequence on every show or episode. It allows for the story to keep going without the interruption of an intro song or intro recap. This, in turn, allows for a more enhanced viewing experience that flows consistently.

All in all, the recaps in Season 1’s original run serve to remind the viewer of important points in the season. The show constantly recaps scenes to the viewer because of the growing shared universe it has with other shows in the franchise. There is always so much going on with the villains of the week, the love triangles, the Easter eggs and connections to other series. It can be a lot for a viewer to pay attention to or remember details in between episodes. However, it seems that it is only needed when viewing the series linearly, as Netflix skips the introductory recap sequences with the assumption that viewers don’t need them because they are paying close attention to the form of recapping through dialogue that is present in every episode.

Cliffhangers

The next narrative strategy discussed and studied in this analysis focuses on the use of cliffhangers that occur during an ending scene/post-credit scene and is designed to leave the

⁵³ Djoymi Baker, “Terms of Excess: Binge-Viewing as Epic Viewing in the Netflix Era,” in *The Age of Netflix: Critical Essays on Streaming Media, Digital Delivery and Instant Access*, edited by Cory Barker and Mya Wiatrowski. (North Carolina: McFarland & Co., 2017), 56.

⁵⁴ Michael Z. Newman, “From Beats to Arcs,” 18.

viewer shocked and excited to return for another episode. The cliffhanger can be placed at the end of the season or at the end of an episode. The cliffhangers appear as either a situational cliffhanger that includes a main character that is caught in the middle of a suspenseful event before the episode ends or an informational cliffhanger when the audience is presented with new information related to a past or present plot point of the story. All of the episodes of *The Flash* end with a cliffhanger during a post-credit scene. The post-credit scene appears after the ending title card and right before the final credits of an episode. I argue that the post-credit scenes that incorporate episodic cliffhangers at the end of every episode of *The Flash* are used to hook the viewer into coming back for the following episode to find out what happens next. The post-credit scene involves a character or story arc reveal that would interest the viewer into returning the following week to finish the story when the next episode appears on the broadcast network. If the viewer is watching the secondary run on Netflix, the cliffhanger encourages the viewer to continue with the next episode right away. Netflix benefits from the secondary run of the series by keeping viewers so engaged that they want to continue after they've completed the full season. Once the viewer has finished the season or entire series, they will be more inclined to continue on to watch another series that pops up in the Netflix queue, and continue their Netflix subscription. The secondary run on Netflix also gives viewers the opportunity to re-watch the series in order to enjoy the experience all over again as well as to answer any open questions that they may have had while watching during the first run on The CW and perhaps leading them to continue watching the new episodes as they premiere on The CW the following season. The secondary run on Netflix also increases exposure for the series which would draw in more audience members for the series on both distribution platforms.

Shocking post-credit reveals, and cliffhangers are a key component to the series. The scene is designed to leave the viewer shocked and anxious to see what happens next. In most cases with *The Flash*, an episode will wrap up with an emotionally-driven moment between characters, such as in Episode 8 when Iris tells The Flash not to contact her anymore or the end of Episode 1 when Barry visits his father in prison, and they tell one another that they love each other. Immediately after the shared moment between characters, the end title card appears followed up by the post-credit scene that uncovers something significant and shocking about the primary story arc of the season right before the credits. Take, for example, the “Flash vs Arrow” episode’s post-credit cliffhanger. Right after an emotionally-driven conversation between the main character and another character named Iris as well as the ending title card, we see a mysterious figure in pain under a bridge, about to be harassed by some lower-level street thugs. During the post-credit scene, the viewer discovers that the mysterious figure is a past character named Robbie who, up until this point, the other characters and the viewer thought was dead, and he has new explosive powers. Afterward, the episode ends, and the credits roll while leaving audience members stunned.

Another example of a shocking post-credit scene comes from Episode 9, “The Man in the Yellow Suit.” During the entire episode, the main characters of the show are trying to figure out who the new villain is that seems to have the same powers as The Flash. The villain is Reverse-Flash and it is disclosed that he is connected to the murder of Barry’s mother. Throughout the episode, the villain teases that Barry (and the audience) unwittingly knows the secret identity of the Reverse-Flash but he does not figure it out yet. It is not until the post-credit cliffhanger that the audience (not Barry) actually figures out that Reverse-Flash is actually Barry’s friend and teammate, Harrison Wells. Harrison, who has always been presented as wheelchair-bound, is

shown walking in a room. Inside the room, Harrison puts on a ring that opens a secret door, then he puts his Reverse-Flash costume on a mannequin and speaks in his villainous voice.⁵⁵

The cliffhanger has massive implications and was important not only to the story that was being shared, but to helping encourage fans to come back to finish the story. The episode operated as the mid-season finale on December 9, 2014. The next episode did not premiere until January 20, 2015, leaving more than a month between episodes. This cliffhanger was designed to bring viewers back after that long hiatus. The questions that left the viewer “hanging” were especially big because Harrison Wells and the Reverse-Flash appeared face-to-face in the mid-season finale, making it unclear how Wells could actually be the Reverse-Flash. How were Harrison Wells and the villain in the same place at the same time? How long has Harrison been the Reverse-Flash? Have we gotten hints about his true identity in previous episodes? It is later revealed that Harrison, now identified as Eobard Thawne, used a hologram and created a speed mirage/time remnant of himself to sneak past defenses and trick the team of protagonists in that mysterious scene.

While the cliffhanger was designed to keep viewers interested over the broadcast network series mid-season hiatus, it also works for SVOD distribution, where the post-credit scene inspires viewers to let the next episode play without any interruptions. Both instances encourage viewers to come back for the next episode, regardless of the time difference between them. Retaining viewers and keeping them engaged keeps the subscriber numbers up for Netflix as well as viewer and rating numbers up for The CW. A good cliffhanger will almost ensure that the viewer will return to watch what happens next regardless of how long the viewer has to wait whether it be thirty days or thirty seconds. It is with SVOD viewing that the viewer feels really

⁵⁵ *The Flash*, Episode 9, “The Man in the Yellow Suit,” written by Todd Helbing and Aaron Helbing, aired December 9, 2014, on The CW Network, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80057451?trackId=200257859>.

embedded in the story as if they are simply turning pages of a good book or graphic novel rather than waiting for another comic book issue to release. The series uses cliffhangers like these throughout the season. The reveals may not be as big as the ones used in the mid-season finale or even the season finale, but the post-credit cliffhangers are always present to continue pulling the viewer in. What is interesting to note is that the secondary distribution deal between The CW and Netflix gives viewers the chance to revisit the season another time via Netflix before the next season debuts on The CW. This is quite possibly a chance for the viewer to restart the story right before it begins again so as to experience the narrative with no relatively long breaks in-between. Revisiting the previous season, especially the season finale and its cliffhanger, via Netflix prior to the new season debut helps cultivate viewers for The CW.

The endings to most episodes give a brief glimpse into the truth behind Barry's mother's death by either introducing a character or connecting a dot that may lead to answers for Barry. No matter what the problem is in each episode, the viewer is reminded that the most important thing to pay attention to are clues that lead to the reveal of the murderer of Barry's mother. The combination of recapping and cliffhangers work together to push the primary narrative along and bookend each episode. Most episodes open with the primary narrative of who killed Barry's mom that is portrayed via recapping in the introduction sequence and the "Previously on *The Flash*" sequence. Subsequently, each episode ends with a connection and surprise reveal to that primary narrative. Much like "Man in the Yellow Suit" and "Fast Enough," the episodes begin with the usual introduction and recap of Barry's parents and end with a shocking post-credit scene that is connected and will lead into the next part of the story. But not all of the cliffhangers in the series deal with Barry's mother. For instance, the post-credit scene in Episode 8, "Flash vs Arrow," showcases the return of the character Ronnie as Firestorm instead of tying in something

or someone related to the primary story arc.⁵⁶ The recaps and first-person narration are perhaps there because the creators don't trust the viewer with remembering details. However, it is as though the recaps are there because the creators want the viewer to be actively searching for clues during the episode and they will be rewarded at the end with a teaser for the next point in the story. This correlates with the narrative reward system I discussed earlier with Beaty's article. *The Flash* comes from a comic book industry universe where hidden clues and foreshadowing are commonplace. To get fans excited about the series, The CW incorporates references and nods to popular DC Comics characters and connections that longtime comic book and superhero fans with keen eyes catch while watching episodes. Perhaps the episodes want to constantly remind the viewer about what is going on so that they can pay close attention to the hidden clues throughout the season. Then the huge payoffs occur in the cliffhangers as big reveals. This is something that fans look forward to and highlights what Beaty says about fulfilling fans' desires or giving fans story elements that they have been wanting to see for a long time.⁵⁷

The use of cliffhangers also connects to comic book fans because of the familiarity of the use of cliffhangers in comic books. A common stylistic choice in comic books is to end with "to be continued." Single issues of comic books often use cliffhangers at the end of the last page. According to Eric Haverkamp, "Cliffhangers not only occur at the end of comic books but also most every second page to keep readers turning the page to find out what will happen. This originates in the serial nature of comics."⁵⁸ "Serial nature" refers to the episodes or chapters of a

⁵⁶ *The Flash*, Episode 8, "Flash vs Arrow," written by Greg Berlanti and Andrew Kreisberg, aired December 2, 2014, on The CW Network, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80057450?trackId=200257859>.

⁵⁷ Bart Beaty, "Superhero Fan Service," 324.

⁵⁸ Eric Haverkamp. "Bother Graphic and Memoir: The Interaction of Image and Narrative in Fun Home," *URJ-UCCS: Undergraduate Research Journal at UCCS* 11, no. 2 (2018): 5-11.

story that unfold weekly. McCallister discusses how the comic book serials played a significant role in the development of Hollywood action movies. The author states that comic books were key materials for developing movie serials in the 1930s and 1940s. Audience members “would see a chapter each week of an unfolding action narrative, usually drawn back by chapter-ending cliffhangers.”⁵⁹ What this means is that the use of cliffhangers has always been influenced by comic books. *The Flash*'s use of cliffhangers does not only serve as an opportunity for a big story reveal at the end of an episode to attract viewers to watch the next episode, but also serves as a nod to the fans who understand that the series has comic book origins.

The mid-season and season finale cliffhangers of the first season of *The Flash* are jaw-dropping and exciting. The cliffhangers make the viewer want to continue on with the story no matter if they watch multiple episodes at once or weekly. The cliffhangers are also used as big reveals for the primary story arc. The post-credit cliffhangers that occur in all of the episodes work to constantly keep the viewer interested in the show but also add depth to an already complex story. Even the episodes that do not directly connect to the primary arc of Barry finding his mother's killer include a post-credit cliffhanger that connects to the next episode. All in all, *The Flash* uses cliffhangers in multiple, effective ways that allow the viewer to remain interested and invested in the narrative. The post-credit scene also assists in creating a viewing experience similar to reading a comic book, which also attracts viewers that are original comic book fans who are familiar with their serial nature.

Conclusion

⁵⁹ Matthew McCallister, Ian Gordon, and Mark Jancovich. "Block Buster Art House: Meets Superhero Comic, or Meets Graphic Novel?: The contradictory relationship between film and comic art," *Journal of popular film and television* 34, no. 3 (2006): 108-115.

The Flash doesn't follow traditional norms for TV spin-offs and instead uses narrative strategies heavily influenced by the comic book industry. Every TV series' goal is to reach a broader audience to gain more viewers. I believe *The Flash* is not only invested in gaining more viewers, but also wants to assist viewers and their understanding of the story, keeping them interested so that they will continue watching that series as well as all of the other series in its shared TV universe. I argue that *The Flash*'s use of franchise crossovers is an attempt to recruit superhero fans, comic book fans, and TV series fans to create a bigger audience. I also posit that the use of narrative strategies like recapping are present to continuously update the viewer on the many aspects of a story that exists in a larger shared narrative. Cliffhangers are used at the end of every episode in the post-credit scene to encourage viewers to return for more story. All in all, The CW uses the aforementioned strategies the same way that they have been traditionally used in comic books in order to resemble the original content and to position the network as a place that understands how superhero stories are conveyed. The CW is the perfect network to do so because it is familiar with transmedia franchising because of the previous joint venture with DC Comics following the finale of the Superman series *Smallville* (2001- 2011). The CW worked with DC Comics to create a transmedia comic book title that would work as a sequel to the *Smallville* series.⁶⁰ The CW network wanted to create an expansive shared narrative universe among characters and believed that bringing characters from comic books over to the small screen and using traditional comic book narrative strategies combined with traditional TV strategies would be the most efficient way to “activate the circulation of these shared narratives.”⁶¹

⁶⁰ Charles Joseph. "The CW Arrow-verse," 38.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

The use of narrative strategies for the broadcast distribution of the superhero series *The Flash* on The CW network is closely aligned with how superhero stories were showcased and promoted through comic books and help to make the series popular with viewers. However, the re-distribution of the series via Netflix has altered the strategies a bit to foster a viewing experience that differs from traditional superhero story consumption through comic books or linear-distributed TV series. In this chapter, I maintain that the original linear release of the first season of *The Flash* on The CW and its use of franchise crossovers, recapping, and cliffhangers provides an experience similar to reading comic books, and that this experience differs from that of viewing the re-distributed version of the season on Netflix.

In the SVOD space, the narrative no longer resembles the experience that consumers gain from reading issue after issue of a comic book. Netflix works to create a more epic-viewing experience where you don't have to stop the story unless you want to or absolutely have to. The viewer can sit and watch every episode of every series in the franchise whenever and wherever they want. Viewers of *The Flash* still have the option to experience the series linearly, but the secondary distribution via Netflix follows the new epic format for consumption while still feeling like a comic book series. This is done by viewers being granted access to all of the series that are connected on Netflix one week after the finale of the respective seasons have premiered on The CW to increase exposure.⁶² The shared universe aspect does not change once the series transfers distribution outlets.

The only aspects that change for the viewer begin with the choice to skip the intro of the series that includes recap sequences. Enough recapping occurs within the series for viewers to keep up and follow along. Recap sequences have been generally used in the past to assist viewers

⁶² Ibid., 31.

who watch the program weekly. The use does not make sense if viewers are assumed to watch multiple episodes back-to-back. If viewing on The CW network, cliffhangers are used to get viewers excited to come back the following week. But with Netflix, it would seem that the cliffhanger encourages users to continue watching the next episode right away! In a way, this opposes what Newman touched on about writers using surprises to pull viewers back from the refrigerator after a break or interruption.⁶³ Instead, the cliffhanger keeps the viewer glued to the screen or makes them take their portal with them to the refrigerator so that they can continue watching.

In the overall thesis, I argue that the use of the above narrative devices differs between superhero series that are written, produced, and distributed for different media forms. Throughout the analysis, I found that for *The Flash* uses strategies related to its comic book origins as much as possible. The series is invested in creating a universe where TV fans and comic book fans can join together to experience super-heroism in a form that is similar to the original run in the comic books, with small chunks of a story that connect over time. However, when it is transferred to an online portal, the viewing experience alters. I argue that the series would be different if produced solely for Netflix distribution. Narrative strategies like recapping and cliffhangers would be present, as they are used in most TV series, but need not be as consistent, since it is assumed that viewers are going to watch more than one episode consecutively. This analysis of *The Flash* helps with the understanding of how and why its production practices are perfect for a broadcast network like The CW but also work for SVOD services like Netflix in secondary distribution. Would a similar superhero show that is produced using the same narrative techniques for Netflix transfer over to a broadcast network?

⁶³ Michael Z. Newman, "From Beats to Arcs," 21.

CHAPTER 3: FROM COMIC BOOKS TO ONLINE VIDEO-ON-DEMAND: NETFLIX'S NARRATIVE STRATEGIES ON *DAREDEVIL* (2015 – 2018)

The following is a textual analysis of Season 1 of the Netflix Original series *Daredevil* (2015 – 2018) which premiered on Netflix on April 10, 2015. The analysis breaks down and critiques the season by focusing on four specific episodes that either reinforce or diminish the use of three storytelling strategies commonly used in popular contemporary television series. The narrative strategies that I focus on are a) connected franchise tie-ins, b) recapping, and c) cliffhangers. This analysis is aimed at exploring and comparing the narrative strategies used in the first season of the Netflix *Daredevil* series to the narrative strategies used in The CW's *The Flash* as discussed in chapter two. This chapter critiques the narrative strategies of the two programs to find out how they are similar or different from each other. This chapter will also attempt to explain how the strategies, if applicable, potentially attract new viewers, help viewers follow along with the story, and keep viewers interested in watching back-to-back episodes in one-sitting via the subscriber-funded video-on-demand platform known as Netflix.

I argue that the show's use of franchise crossovers serves both original comic book fans and movie fans of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) in hopes of bringing them together to create a bigger audience. The franchise tie-ins are used to create more expansive narratives that are loosely shared with characters from the MCU films and Netflix Marvel series to cross-promote and extend stories. This is very reminiscent of how connected superhero narratives in comic books are showcased through tie-ins that are connected to overarching narratives that involve multiple heroes/characters. Because of Netflix's distribution strategy of releasing every episode of a season all at once rather than weekly, show creators assume that viewers are going to watch more than one episode at a time. Thus, I also argue that *Daredevil* uses recaps through dialogue as a narrative strategy and not recap sequences to keep the viewer informed because

viewers are more than likely going to watch more than one episode in one sitting and have no need for a recap sequence at the beginning of each episode. Cliffhangers are also used as a narrative strategy at the end of most episodes of *Daredevil*. The cliffhangers in *Daredevil* are used to keep viewers interested in watching the following episode right away during the viewing session. I theorize that Netflix uses narrative strategies the same way that they have been traditionally used in superhero comic books and TV series storytelling. However, Netflix scales back on the use of recapping and episodic cliffhangers to form a more epic-viewing experience for viewers that binge-watch multiple episodes at a time.

The above-mentioned narrative strategies for the Netflix distribution of the superhero series *Daredevil* are aligned with how superhero stories were showcased and promoted through comic books and it is what I believe helped the series become popular. However, some aspects of the strategies listed above aren't as prevalent in the series as they are in other superhero series from traditional television broadcast distributors like The CW. Netflix's superhero narrative strategy fosters a more enhanced viewing experience that differs from traditional superhero story consumption through comic books or linear-distributed TV series. In this chapter, I argue that the first season of the Netflix Original program *Daredevil* uses franchise tie-ins to expand the already established superhero world made popular by the MCU and to bring together viewers from the MCU films as well as fans of the Marvel comic books. I also argue that the season's use of cliffhangers encourages viewers to watch the following episodes right away. Conversely, I argue that the lack of traditional recap sequences and the reliance on recapping through dialogue to remind the viewer of recent narrative developments in the series helps create a viewing experience that resembles reading multiple comic books back-to-back or graphic novels as opposed to reading weekly comic issues.



Figure 2.1 Daredevil Season One
Photo Credit: Netflix

Brief Series Overview

To analyze these narrative strategies, in this chapter I closely examine key episodes of Season 1 of *Daredevil*, as released on Netflix. Netflix is a media-services provider and content creator that introduced its own slate of original TV series in 2013 with the titular series *House of Cards* (2013-2018). In 2013, it was announced that two media companies, Disney and Marvel Studios, had plans to create and release a new set of live-action superhero TV series on Netflix. Netflix released all 13 episodes of *Daredevil* Season 1 on Friday, April 10, 2015. *Daredevil* was the first series under the deal with Disney/Marvel and Netflix to be released and was followed by *Jessica Jones* (2015 - 2019), *Luke Cage* (2016 - 2019), and *Iron Fist* (2017 - 2018). All four

series led up to the team-up of each of their main characters in *The Defenders* (2017).⁶⁴ Each series under the Disney/Marvel deal with Netflix is loosely connected to popular films from the Marvel Cinematic Universe like *Marvel's The Avengers*.⁶⁵ *Daredevil* begins as an origin story for the street-level superhero whose secret identity is Matt Murdock, a lawyer in Hell's Kitchen who was blinded as a boy.⁶⁶

In Season 1, Murdock and his partner, Foggy Nelson, launch a new law firm and take on a case involving a character named Karen Page. While defending Karen, Murdock and Foggy cross paths with corporate corruption and a mysterious crime ring lead by Wilson Fisk.⁶⁷ Using his powers of heightened senses that he developed after his childhood accident, Murdock becomes Daredevil to fight and take down Wilson Fisk and his associates. The key episodes that this analysis will examine are Episode 1, "Into the Ring," Episode 5, "World on Fire," Episode 12, "The Ones We Leave Behind," and Episode 13, "Daredevil." These four episodes were chosen because each contain good examples of the narrative strategies listed above. Season 1 of *Daredevil* uses a variety of narrative strategies to attract and keep viewers watching but the show also has minimized the use of recapping and cliffhangers that have been traditionally used in broadcast network TV series.

Connected Franchise Tie-Ins

The first narrative strategy discussed in this analysis of *Daredevil* focuses on the connected franchise crossover and tie-ins of the season and how they play a role in the overall

⁶⁴ Todd Spangler, "Watch Marvel's 'Daredevil' Teaser for Netflix," *Variety*. February 4, 2015, <https://variety.com/2015/digital/news/netflix-releases-marvels-daredevil-teaser-trailer-1201423452/> (accessed March 4, 2019)

⁶⁵ James Hibberd, "Daredevil: 7 Things We Learned About Netflix's New Series," Entertainment Weekly. December 29, 2014, <https://ew.com/article/2014/12/29/daredevil-6/> (accessed July 18, 2019)

⁶⁶ Todd Spangler, "Watch Marvel's Daredevil."

⁶⁷ Brian Lowry, "TV Review: 'Marvel's Daredevil,'" *Variety*. April 1, 2015, <https://variety.com/2015/tv/reviews/tv-review-marvels-daredevil-1201460066/> (accessed March 4, 2019)

narrative of the MCU to attract more viewership. As stated before, *Daredevil* is the leading series in a group of Netflix-only superhero TV series narratives that are linked to the films of the MCU. This is significant for understanding how the series presents its narrative because it exists in a cinematic world that has already been established and makes various references to events that have taken place in past MCU films. Additionally, *Daredevil* also serves as the catalyst for Netflix's Marvel superhero TV series that all exist in the broader MCU, but also connect to each other, leading up the crossover mini-series *The Defenders*. In general, the crossovers are happening to build up to the aforementioned culminating mini-series that includes all of the characters from each individual TV series in order to resemble what the MCU did with its movie characters. The crossovers are also happening to expand the universe of the MCU. Other Marvel TV series that tie-in with the films of the MCU include ABC's *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D* (2013 – Present) and *Peggy Carter* (2015 – 2016). The ABC Marvel TV series are also connected but are not related to the Netflix Marvel series. The ABC Marvel series star characters that have already been established and introduced in the MCU films. The ABC and Netflix Marvel series each exist in their own pocket of the MCU and make references to the overall MCU, but do not in any way reference each other.

Much like The CW, Netflix has begun to develop, brand, and promote its original programs by using transmedia franchising to expand upon an already large and connected universe of superhero characters. As mentioned in Chapter 2, transmedia practices and storytelling have been successful with circulating shared narratives that entice two different types of fans and consumers. The CW figured out a way to bring together comic book superhero fans as well as television fans.⁶⁸ Netflix took it a step further by integrating a connected franchise

⁶⁸ Charles Joseph. "The CW Arrow-verse and myth-making, or the commodification of transmedia franchising." *Series-International Journal of TV Serial Narratives* 4, no. 2 (2018): 37.

narrative that enticed comic book, television, and movie fans to grow the popularity of Marvel superheroes. According to Walt Disney Co. chief Bob Iger, Disney realized that they could use the Netflix streaming service as a way to grow the popularity of characters that most TV audiences aren't familiar with.⁶⁹ The characters audiences aren't familiar with all exist in Marvel comic books. Netflix was a great opportunity to promote the lesser-known comic book heroes while generating more brand and character value for Marvel's slate of heroes. At the same time, Netflix benefits from the additional programming during a time when the media company began producing its own original content.⁷⁰ It is also an opportunity to expand the MCU fanbase. According to chief content officer Ted Sarandos, MCU films like *Marvel's The Avengers* (2012) "are very popular on Netflix today, and the new series will draft off that fan base."⁷¹ Subscribers are key to Netflix business model and building original programs off of the MCU films is one way for Netflix to grow and maintain its subscriber numbers as much as possible.

As I stated in the previous chapter, shared narrative space between series and characters is nothing new, as it has been done with many TV series and comic book series in the past from major American comic book companies like Marvel Comics. According to Bart Beaty, shared spaces and continuity within superhero comic books developed over time. In the 1950s and 1960s, Marvel Comics began to introduce overlapping characters and storylines with their "heightened continuity within a shared narrative universe."⁷² The Marvel Universe was

⁶⁹ Marc Graser, "Why Disney Chose to Put Marvel's New TV Shows on Netflix," *Variety*. November 7, 2013, <https://variety.com/2013/digital/news/why-disney-chose-to-put-marvels-new-tv-shows-on-netflix-1200805867/> (accessed on July 18, 2019)

⁷⁰ Ibid, <https://variety.com/2013/digital/news/why-disney-chose-to-put-marvels-new-tv-shows-on-netflix-1200805867/>.

⁷¹ Todd Spangler, "Netflix Orders Four Marvel Live-Action Series," *Variety*, November 7, 2013, <https://variety.com/2013/digital/news/netflix-orders-four-marvel-live-action-series-1200804887/> (accessed on August 1, 2019).

⁷² Bart Beaty, "Superhero Fan Service: Audience Strategies in the Contemporary Interlinked Hollywood Blockbuster." *The Information Society*, 32:5, (2016): 319 and 320.

established as early as the 1960s and featured many titles and characters that crossed over with each other.⁷³ Characters like the Captain America, The Hulk, and Spider-man were able to coexist in universe-wide stories where they could be included in featured roles or as supporting characters. Crossover events and tie-in comics create complicated overarching narratives that gave creators the opportunity to cross-promote, expand their stories, and include fan favorite characters from other popular titles of the same brand. Comic book writers did this as a means to grow their number of consumers and audience members. Years later, superheroes continue to share universes via movies and popular television series. The strategy adopted by Marvel Studios with the MCU movies follows suit with the comic books' connected continuity and draws from it for inspiration. Much like in Marvel comic books, movies like *The Incredible Hulk* (2008), *Iron Man* (2008), and *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014) are all closely interlinked but can also be understood as distinct and individual entities.⁷⁴ The individual entities all tied together in some way and are later brought together during a major crossover event, such as in the movies *Captain America: Civil War* (2016) and *Avengers: Endgame* (2019).

Captain America: Civil War is based on the popular Marvel comic book crossover event and 2006 book *Civil War*.⁷⁵ In 2006, \$6.4 million of the total \$16.1 million increase in Marvel Comics publishing revenues, compared to 2005, was primarily associated with the Civil War comic book crossover event and its many tie-ins.⁷⁶ The crossover event spanned many major character titles that included *Captain America* and *Iron Man* as well as other, minor titles like

⁷³ Ibid., 320.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 321.

⁷⁵ Graeme McMillan, "Captain America Civil War: The Comic vs. The Movie," *The Hollywood Reporter*. March 9, 2016, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/heat-vision/captain-america-civil-war-comic-873970> (accessed July 18, 2019).

⁷⁶ IVC2. March 7, 2007, <https://icv2.com/articles/comics/view/10190/marvel-details-publishing-increases> (accessed July 17, 2019).

Thunderbolts, *Blade*, and *She-Hulk*. Marvel Comic book writer Brian Michael Bendis once said that within the *Civil War* event, “Every single major player in the Marvel Universe has either had a life-altering thing that has changed their perspective or they're a different person completely.”⁷⁷ The *Civil War* crossover event included many tie-in comic books that were either directly related to the event, dealt with the aftermath of the event, or made passive references to it in order to expand the narrative.

Comic book crossover events relate to what Disney/Marvel and Netflix are doing with their slate of Marvel TV series. Not only do the Netflix Marvel series tie in with each other for their self-contained crossover event, the series also serve as tie-ins to the main overarching MCU narrative that has already been established in film beginning with *Iron Man* (2008). The Netflix series makes small references to the crossover events and characters that have already taken place in the MCU. But the events of the Netflix series are localized and contained within themselves. The series exists in the broader movie universe and perhaps explores the aftermath of events that take place in the movies, but *Daredevil* tells its own story without the help of the popular movie characters. Viewers don't get a chance to see the movie characters on the Netflix series (and vice versa) but the tie-ins do “take place in the Marvel Cinematic Universe.” As Marvel's TV head Jeph Loeb has explained of the Netflix series in relation to the MCU, “It's all connected. But that doesn't necessarily mean that we would look up in the sky and see Iron Man. It's just a different part of New York that we have not yet seen in the Marvel movies”⁷⁸ This is important because it confirms that the TV series are in fact connected to the MCU movies. It also establishes a setting and gives Netflix the opportunity to expand the superhero narrative and

⁷⁷ John Castele, “Why Marvel's Civil War II Event is Different Than the Original,” *Screen Rant*. March 29, 2016, <https://screenrant.com/marvel-civil-war-2-comics-differences/> (accessed on July 18, 2019).

⁷⁸ James Hibberd, “Daredevil: 7 Things We Learned.”

aftermath of events that took place in the movies, but with new characters. Netflix wants to do this because at the time of the Disney/Marvel Netflix deal, Netflix was transitioning from being a content distributor to a content creator and were looking for more original programs. Netflix could benefit from the additional programming especially because the new series would already have a fanbase from the movies and overall MCU narrative and could bring over already existing MCU fans to Netflix. The Netflix series were also planned to be more cost effective than the feature films and the ABC series, with smaller budgets for visual and special effects.⁷⁹

Throughout the Netflix Marvel series, references are made about MCU events and the future *Defender* crossover series in order to do two things: a) remind the viewer of the relationship between the series and the movies and b) inform series viewers of the relationships between the multiple Netflix Marvel series and eventual team-up between the series' main characters. In the first season, *Daredevil* makes subtle hints and references to characters and events that occurred in past MCU movies. The references are never direct, and the series doesn't mention characters like Captain America or The Hulk by name. Instead, viewers have to pay attention and look for clues and Easter eggs in each episode to make connections. Viewers know to look for clues and Easter eggs that tie the series back to the MCU because showrunners and actors have confirmed that the plot actually takes place after the events that took place in *Marvel's The Avengers* (2012). In 2015, Marvel Television's Emma Fleisher confirmed the plot of *Daredevil* by saying, "We are still part of the Marvel Universe, but we are not explicitly in that *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* world. We're in our own corner. So, the aliens came down and ruined the city, and this is the story of Hell's Kitchen's rebuild."⁸⁰ The story directly follows the events

⁷⁹ Marc Graser, "Why Disney Chose to Put Marvel's New TV Shows on Netflix."

⁸⁰ Joseph Baxter, "Will Captain America 3 Include Daredevil," *Cinema Blend*, Spring 2015, <https://www.cinemablend.com/new/Captain-America-3-Include-Daredevil-70024.html>, (accessed on July 18, 2019).

of the movies, much like the ABC Marvel TV series *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* (2013 – Present). Beaty refers to this notion as “Linked Repercussions,” noting that since these characters share a universe, “events in one work have an impact on characters in the others. Notably, the invasion of New York in *The Avengers* is referred to in subsequent *Thor* and *Captain America* movies, is the source of much of the drama in Marvel’s *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* and has a significant psychological impact on *Iron Man* in the third film in that franchise.”⁸¹

In *Daredevil* and the other Netflix Marvel series, the invasion of New York has devastated the city and a power struggle between heroes and villains has emerged. However, a big difference that separates the Netflix Marvel TV series from the other ABC Marvel TV series like *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* is the fact that the invasion of New York is not directly discussed or detailed. Instead, the invasion is simply referred to as “The Incident.”⁸² It is very important to understand “The Incident” to be invested in *Daredevil* because much like the other Marvel TV series and subsequent movies after *Marvel’s The Avengers* (2012), it serves as the catalyst and starting point for the narrative. The Incident has left the city of New York in destruction and peril, prompting criminal figures and organizations to attempt a street-level takeover. Criminal plans are challenged, however, when new, street-level super heroes show up to stop the rise of the criminal organizations.

Another difference between the Marvel TV series is that *Agents* focuses on a few main characters from the MCU that have already been introduced in the movies. *Daredevil*, on the other hand, does not focus on any previously introduced characters and rarely mentions anything from the movies. As mentioned before, viewers have to look for the connections within the

⁸¹ Bart Beaty, “Superhero Fan Service,” 323.

⁸² *Daredevil*, Episode 1, “Into the Ring,” written by Drew Goddard, aired April 10, 2015, on Netflix, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80018191?trackId=200257859>.

episodes. Looking for connections is part of the appeal of the shared series and invites deeply invested fans to be rewarded for their keen eyes and knowledge, despite the loose ties between stories. For example, in *Daredevil* Season 1, Episode 3, “Rabbit in a Storm,” viewers can spot two printed news articles in character Ben Urich’s office that reference the fight between Abomination and The Hulk from *The Incredible Hulk* (2008) as well as “The Incident” from *Marvel’s The Avengers* (2012).⁸³ These references are important for a couple of reasons. First, they work as a narrative reminder that the story is connected to the larger MCU universe and takes place after “The Incident.” The references also add to the narrative by illustrating how the big fights from the MCU movies affect street-level characters and stories.

One last difference between the Netflix Marvel series and the other Marvel series that appear on ABC is the graphic content. ABC’s Marvel series are compatible with the films of the MCU and their usual PG-13 content. On the other hand, Netflix’s Marvel series contains content that is a bit more mature. Very reminiscent of the comic books, violence is present within all of the Marvel series and films. However, with *Daredevil*, the violence is a bit more gruesome, and the language is more vulgar. Overall, the content is “a little grittier and edgier than Marvel has gone before.”⁸⁴ The Netflix series are aimed at being “very grounded, very gritty, very real.”⁸⁵ In order to offer something extra and different from the MCU films and other series to gain and maintain subscribers, Netflix perhaps needed to make the series more mature. The mature content could also be a reflection of the comic books as they have also produced edgier stories. The mature content is more prevalent with the Netflix slate of shows, but it does not overdo it and the show is still family friendly. Not as family friendly as *The Flash*, though. *Daredevil* is

⁸³ *Daredevil*, Episode 3, “Rabbit in a Snowstorm,” written by Marco Ramirez, aired April 10, 2015, on Netflix, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80018193?trackId=155573558>.

⁸⁴ James Hibberd, “Daredevil: 7 Things We Learned.”

⁸⁵ Ibid.

more mature than *The Flash* despite the fact that both program narratives raises the stakes with deaths and killings within the show, *Daredevil* is certainly more bloody and violent throughout its season compared to *The Flash*. However, *Daredevil* is not so violent or gratuitous that it discourages MCU film viewers or families from watching.

In 2013, Netflix ordered four live-action Marvel TV series that would unfold over several years and lead up to the mini-series programming event *The Defenders*.⁸⁶ This strategy right away informs viewer-subscribers and possible viewer-subscribers alike that all of the Netflix-produced Marvel series will be connected. And if they are anything like the MCU films that connect to each other with franchise tie-ins, then the narratives of each Netflix Marvel series should all leave clues and tie-ins that connects to each other and lead up to the mini-series finale. Next, I offer an analysis of the franchise tie-ins within the *Daredevil* season that led up to the planned *Defenders* crossover series. I posit that unlike the superhero TV series *The Flash*, that only uses tie-ins and Easter eggs as nods, characters, and references to other existing series, *Daredevil* integrates the Easter eggs into the narrative in order to make a clear connection to the planned series crossovers. Viewers and Netflix subscribers are more likely to keep their subscription longer if they know the story from *Daredevil* will connect to *Jessica Jones* then eventually *The Defenders* later on down the line. Viewers discover clues and tie-ins to plot directions that will continue with each series in the line-up and conclude with the final mini-series.

The tie-ins and Easter eggs are also used to keep comic book fans intrigued by using symbols and references that they are familiar with from comic books related to future characters

⁸⁶ Todd Spangler, "Netflix Orders Four Marvel Live-Action Series."

or plots of the upcoming crossover. In Season 1 of *Daredevil*, tie-ins are used to set up the future franchise connections within each series. For example, during a scene in Episode 9, a “Steel Serpent” symbol is seen on a drug packet.⁸⁷ The Steel Serpent is a main adversary of Iron Fist. Iron Fist is one of the main characters that would be introduced later with his own series and appear in the crossover *Defenders* series. The Steel Serpent himself later appears during Season 1 and Season 2 of *Iron Fist*. The Easter egg is also important because it is part of the developing narrative that will later lead into the crossover series after Iron Fist as a character is introduced.

Another example of an Easter egg that appears in the show that alludes to future plots in *The Defenders* is Daredevil’s encounter with The Black Sky.⁸⁸ The mysterious superhuman figure later becomes a major plot point in the culminating crossover series. The *Daredevil* series uses Easter eggs to set up the planned-out narratives with future franchise connections. The series also introduces characters that would later become reoccurring characters in the other Netflix Marvel series. Characters like Claire Temple and Turk both appear in multiple episodes of each series of Netflix’s Marvel line-up, beginning with *Daredevil* Season 1. Madam Gao is also a reoccurring character that appears throughout the first season of *Daredevil* then resurfaces later in *Iron Fist* before also playing a major role in the culminating event during *The Defenders* series. The reoccurring characters act as constant reminders that the series all take place in the same shared narrative. This encourages viewers to watch all of the series.

Creating a narrative involving a group of heroes coming together in a combined series benefits both Disney/Marvel and Netflix as there is already a huge fanbase of the Avengers

⁸⁷ *Daredevil*, Episode 9, "Speak of the Devil," written by Christos Gage & Ruth Fletcher Gage, aired April 10, 2015, on Netflix, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80018199?trackId=200257858>.

⁸⁸ *Daredevil*, Episode 7, "Stick," written by Douglas Petrie, aired April 10, 2015, on Netflix, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80018197?trackId=200257859>.

MCU movies that will be brought over to the streaming service. Fans are eager to view another epic superhero crossover event, especially if it involves new characters that they already know but haven't been portrayed within the MCU. New fans would also be gained by existing subscribers who are looking for series to binge-view as Netflix builds up its original content library. Connecting the franchise through the narrative would guarantee viewers across each series under the Netflix Marvel umbrella who are invested in completing the entire story. The series' many MCU tie ins, *Defenders* Easter eggs, and reoccurring characters help support what Beaty defines as narrative rewards that fulfill fans' desires or give fans story elements that they have wanted to see for a long time.⁸⁹ The notion of creating a group of series surrounding different heroes that will eventually lead to a crossover series of its own is a big deal to fans who enjoyed the MCU movies as well as comic book fans, as it is very familiar to them. *Daredevil's* use of connected franchise tie-ins is also very similar in comparison to *The Flash*. Both of the series exist in larger TV universes that connects the series to other TV series and encompasses many different superheroes and storylines. Both *The Flash* and *Daredevil* use their connections to other TV series by using references, narrative plot points, and Easter eggs to draw in viewers who are invested in the overarching universe of characters. The two series operate under the assumption that the audience members of accompanying TV series or comic books will also become audience members to the new series. Unlike in *The Flash*, however, *Daredevil* is connected to a movie universe as well as a TV one. This aspect gives *Daredevil* an extra edge over series like *The Flash* because it also attracts viewers from the already-established movies.

I argue that *Daredevil's* use of franchise crossovers and tie-ins are an attempt to recruit viewers from the MCU movies as well as fans of the Marvel comic books and television series

⁸⁹ Bart Beaty, "Superhero Fan Service," 324.

alike. I argue that *The Flash*'s use of franchise crossovers is an attempt to recruit comic book fans and TV series fans to create a bigger audience within its own shared umbrella of series as well. Both series work as catalysts to huge team-ups that happen later on down the line within the series and/or franchise. More differences between the two series in terms of franchise connections are the way things like tie-ins and Easter eggs are included within the narrative of the shows. With *The Flash*, hints and ties to the other series or characters in its shared universe are mostly used as background items for viewers to look for. *Daredevil* instead integrates the hints and ties into the story in order to intentionally set up the inclusion or appearance of a Netflix Marvel character in the overarching narrative that connects the series. Another difference is how the franchise crossovers appear within the series. *The Flash* has an episode of the season dedicated to the crossover to showcase the shared narrative. The entire first season of *Daredevil* serves as the catalyst to a crossover series that would be distributed down the line after other characters have been introduced with their own series.

Recapping

In this portion of the chapter, I offer an analysis of another narrative strategy commonly used with TV series: recapping. As stated in the previous chapter, recapping can take on many forms. Unfortunately, it does not take many forms with the first season of *Daredevil*. The series lacks recap sequences at the beginning of each episode. There are no mid-season breaks or weekly breaks between episodes that would cause the need for a recap sequence. As stated above, because of Netflix's distribution strategy of releasing every episode of a season all at once rather than weekly, viewers are more than likely going to watch more than one episode at a time. I argue that *Daredevil* uses only subtle recaps through dialogue and not through recap sequences

to keep the viewer informed because viewers are more than likely going to watch more than one episode at a time and have no need for a recap sequence. Recap sequences are abundant throughout Season 1 of *The Flash*, as mentioned in the last chapter, but are missing in *Daredevil*.

Traditional, ad-supported TV that airs on a weekly schedule assumes that viewers do not watch everything. TV consumption with its many interruptions can lead to a viewer missing something. But with *Daredevil*, this is not the case. The Netflix original series operates under the assumption that contemporary viewers do watch everything and do not need as many reminders about past narrative plot points. Viewers are already paying very close attention to detail when they are searching for clues and Easter eggs that connect the series to another. On top of that, viewers are more than likely and encouraged to watch subsequent episodes back-to-back. Because of this dynamic, viewers do not need to be constantly reminded about the plot. Some episodes of the season flow right into each other and literally pick up right after the final scene of a previous episode. For example, at the end of Episode 11, Karen Page shoots and kills one of the villains.⁹⁰ The following episode, Episode 12, begins with Karen Page tossing her gun into the river during the night of the murder.⁹¹ If the viewer is assumed to continue watching, and the episode picks up right after the last scene, there is no need for a recap sequence. Another example happens at the end of Episode 5. The main character is caught in the act of his vigilantism by the police. The police draw their guns on Daredevil and the episode ends.⁹² The following episode begins at the same moment with the police drawing their guns on Daredevil.⁹³

⁹⁰ *Daredevil*, Episode 11, "The Path of the Righteous," written by Steven S. DeKnight and Douglas Petrie, aired April 10, 2015, on Netflix <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80018501?trackId=200257859>.

⁹¹ *Daredevil*, Episode 12, "The Ones We Leave Behind," written by Douglas Petrie, aired April 10, 2015, on Netflix, <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80018502?trackId=200257859>.

⁹² *Daredevil*, Episode 5, "World on Fire," written by Joe Pokaski and Marco Ramirez, aired April 10, 2015, on Netflix <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80018195?trackId=200257859>.

⁹³ *Daredevil*, Episode 6, "Condemned," written by Luke Kalteux, aired April 10, 2015, on Netflix <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80018196?trackId=200257858>.

The narrative is set up to encourage viewers to keep watching and pays it off by continuing the story immediately with the subsequent episodes.

While not through sequences that directly recap previous scenes of the season, recapping still occurs throughout the season. Newman states that dialogue is used to recap recent events.⁹⁴ This notion occurs frequently throughout the first season of *Daredevil*. Through dialogue, viewers are reminded of conversations that happened in previous episodes. A perfect example of this occurs in a conversation between the main character and Claire Temple from Episode 11. Claire says, “You told me you were the man this city needs. I think that was only half true.”⁹⁵ This is in reference to the conversation that the two characters had in Episode 5 when Daredevil tells Claire that he needs “to be the man this city needs.”⁹⁶ Another example also occurs in Episode 5. When asked about the whereabouts of two associates, Wilson Fisk explains that they are no longer part of their organization because he removed one of their heads with his car door.⁹⁷ This is in direct reference to the final scene in Episode 4 where Fisk smashes the head of one of his associates with his car door until he is beheaded.⁹⁸ These recaps are used as tools to give viewers a reminder of important moments in past episodes. This is important because if viewers are binge-viewing the entire season in one sitting, it may be easy to forget a scene due to so many things going on in the season. It is also important for viewers who may take a break of their own in between episodes and may need a brief reminder.

Recapping by characters referring to each other by name or reiterating relationships between characters also occurs. However, this form of recapping isn't as widespread as it is in

⁹⁴ Michael Z. Newman, “From Beats to Arcs,” 19.

⁹⁵ *Daredevil*, Episode 11, “The Path of the Righteous.”

⁹⁶ *Daredevil*, Episode 5, “World on Fire.”

⁹⁷ *Daredevil*, Episode 5, “World on Fire.”

⁹⁸ *Daredevil*, Episode 4, “In the Blood,” written by Joe Pokaski, aired April 10, 2015, on Netflix <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80018194?trackId=200257859>.

The Flash. From time to time, a main character will refer to other main characters in the same scene by name in *Daredevil*. Conversely, oftentimes conversations between characters lack the mention of each other's names almost entirely. Sometimes one character will refer to the other character in the scene by name only one time, like in Episode 5 during an intense conversation between Claire and Matt. At the end of the scene, Matt mentions Claire's name one time.⁹⁹ But, the very next scene features a dinner date between Wilson Fisk and his love interest, Vanessa. Not one of the characters mentions the other by name. The scene operates as if the viewer should already know the characters and their intentions by this point in the program. Conversely, the same exact scene does mention another character and the relationship that character has to Wilson Fisk. Vanessa asks Wilson about another character named James Wesley and Wilson responds with, "Wesley's more than an assistant, he's my friend."¹⁰⁰ These examples illustrate how sporadic the use of recapping with names and relationships are throughout an episode of *Daredevil*. Recapping with names and relationships doesn't occur frequently throughout every scene like in *The Flash*. Unlike the example I used in Chapter 2 with Episode 9 of *The Flash* where Barry's name is mentioned three times within 10 seconds, the use of recapping names and relationships just does not occur as often.

All in all, recapping through dialogue may not be prevalent throughout the entire season but it does occur. The recaps do not happen as much because viewers do not need them as much. There are no breaks between episodes or between scenes within the episodes unless the viewer decides to take a break. Viewers are assumed to be watching multiple episodes back-to-back due to how Netflix organizes its program structure and distribution practices of releasing all the episodes of a season at once. Netflix also begins an episode right away after the other to entice

⁹⁹ *Daredevil*, Episode 5, "World on Fire."

¹⁰⁰ *Daredevil*, Episode 5, "World on Fire."

viewers into watching without stopping. Viewers are also assumed to be paying very close attention to the narrative with hopes of finding connections to future occurrences throughout the season and Netflix Marvel franchise. This allows for an enhanced and consistent viewing experience that makes comprehension easier for the narrative points in earlier episodes.

Daredevil only use recaps through dialogue to casually remind viewers about plot points. The other forms of recapping, like recap sequences or extended introduction scenes, are not needed because viewers are already paying close attention to the narrative as they search for franchise connections in addition to fans viewing multiple episodes continuously. This differs in comparison to *The Flash* because during its original linear run on The CW it was assumed that viewers would not remember everything in between episodes and need constant reminders about characters and past occurrences in the series.

Cliffhangers

The next narrative strategy discussed and studied in this analysis focuses on the use of cliffhangers that occur during the second part of the first season of *Daredevil*. Viewers are expected to keep watching so the scenes at the end of each episode don't conclude. Instead, the scene ends right at the climax and before the series end credits. Then most subsequent episodes continue the same scene when it begins. Cliffhangers are frequently placed at the end of each episode of a season, much like with *The Flash*. In *Daredevil*, viewers are not subjected to end-of-episode cliffhangers until Episode 4. The first three episodes are spent setting up the background of the series and each main character. Throughout the first three episodes, the series spends time building up to the conflict and main antagonist that does not reveal himself until the end of Episode 3. Once the world is established and the main villain is revealed in the narrative, the real plot of the series begins to unfold and heat up thus causing each episode to end with a significant

and thrilling cliffhanger that flows into the next episode. The last cliffhanger of the season occurs at the end with Episode 12. Episode 13, the season finale, does not close out the story with a cliffhanger. Instead, the final episode closes out the localized narrative and the viewer is left with an open-ended scene with the main character jumping into action again. I argue that the cliffhangers that are used from Episode 5 through Episode 12 are designed to hook the viewer into watching each episode back-to-back instead of taking a break. The cliffhanger is meant to spark an extra interest in continuing to the next episode right away, especially when most of the following episodes literally pick up right after the cliffhanger of the previous episode. The story continues right away with the first scene of the next episode, much like how comic book issues handle their cliffhangers and how traditional soap opera episodes begin. All in all, I posit that episodic cliffhangers are used to add excitement and thrill to the season as to keep the viewer interested and glued to the screen. However, no cliffhanger is used with the final episode and viewers are instead left off with an open-ended scene that leaves the series wide open for a sequel. This differs from *The Flash*, as its cliffhangers were designed to entice the viewer into returning the following week for the next episode.

The cliffhangers of *The Flash* also did not lead and flow into the subsequent episode like some of *Daredevil*'s cliffhangers. Instead, *The Flash* uses cliffhangers as big reveals for a primary story arc that is later revealed further into the season. Cliffhangers that occur in all of the episodes in *The Flash* work to constantly keep the viewer interested in the show as well as add depth to its complex story. *Daredevil* just ends the episode once the stakes are raised and continues the scene in the following episode. For instance, I will use the same example from Episode 5 and Episode 6 that I mentioned above. Daredevil is caught in the act of beating up a group of villains and the police show up and draw their guns on Daredevil right before episode

ends.¹⁰¹ In that moment, the viewer is left wondering what will happen next? Will the police find out the true identity of Daredevil? Will Daredevil go to jail? Will the police hurt the vigilante during the stand-off? The scene attempts to encourage viewers to continue to the subsequent episode without taking a break. The subsequent episode picks up at the same moment with the police drawing their guns on Daredevil before he fights them as well and escapes. This would keep the viewers excited to tune in with hopes of them finishing the narrative and remaining subscribers long enough to watch the accompanying Netflix Marvel TV series later down the line.

The episodes do not just end. The episodes flow into each other to tell one big cohesive story instead of smaller stories that come together at the end. Just like reading a book, each episode works as a chapter with one cohesive story that flows through the ending credits and picks right back up when Netflix automatically continues to the next episode. With traditional broadcast network TV series like *The Flash*, a good cliffhanger will encourage viewers to return and watch what happens next regardless of how long the viewer has to wait between episodes. A great example of this from *The Flash* is the mid-season finale cliffhanger where it is revealed to the audience the villain of the story is really Harrison Wells; a close friend to the main character. However, with the Netflix series, the viewer is made to feel embedded in the story, as if they are simply turning pages of a good book or graphic novel rather than waiting for another comic book issue to release like a linear episode. The cliffhangers are used to get viewers to turn the next page!

Another example of a cliffhanger in *Daredevil* that differs a bit from the previous example occurs at the end of Episode 12. During the final scene, the series' main antagonist,

¹⁰¹ *Daredevil*, Episode 5, "World on Fire," written by Joe Pokaski and Marco Ramirez, aired April 10, 2015, on Netflix <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80018195?trackId=200257859>.

Wilson Fisk, violently murders Ben Urich. Ben Urich was a newspaper editor that decided to create his own blog to report on Fisk after he found out that his boss was paid off to be quiet about the antagonist. Wilson Fisk breaks into Urich's apartment, then kills him.¹⁰² The episode ends and the following episode begins with the main characters paying their respects to Ben at his funeral.¹⁰³ Previously, I stated that cliffhangers tend to lead right into the next episode that picks up immediately where the previous episode left off. In this example, the narrative does technically pick up where the previous episode leaves off, the difference is that it's not the same exact scene. Instead, the next scene showcases the effects from the events that previously took place in the form of a funeral for the man who was just killed. This is important to note because the story is always flowing, and this example informs me that the series creators are invested in keeping each episode as connected as possible to keep the viewer engaged. This is also significant because it is the first real shocking event that takes place as a cliffhanger. The scene does not necessarily flow into the next episode like other cliffhangers. Those scenes were split into an ending cliffhanger for one episode and the first scene for its following episode. Instead, the cliffhanger from the Episode 12 example shocks the viewer, which still encourage them to continue watching the next episode. But the subsequent Episode 13 intro scene is not a split scene or direct continuation of the scene used in the previous episode's cliffhanger.

As stated earlier in Chapter 2, the use of cliffhangers also connects to comic book fans because of the familiarity of the use of cliffhangers in comic books. A common stylistic choice in comic books is to end with "to be continued." Single issues of comic books often use cliffhangers at the end of the last page that showcase a huge reveal. Sometimes, the cliffhangers

¹⁰² *Daredevil*, Episode 12, "The Ones We Leave Behind."

¹⁰³ *Daredevil*, Episode 13, "Daredevil," written by Steven S. DeKnight, aired April 10, 2015, on Netflix <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80018503?trackId=200257858>.

present the main character with a new dilemma to face or during a fight where it seems like the main hero is about to lose at the end of a story. According to Eric Haverkamp, “Cliffhangers not only occur at the end of comic books but also most every second page to keep readers turning the page to find out what will happen.”¹⁰⁴ The *Daredevil* series resembles the latter. Watching the season, it feels like you are just turning a page in a comic book with each cliffhanger because the next page or episode continues the narrative right away. Cliffhangers are a staple with comic book and television superheroes. The cliffhangers present the reader with something exciting to look forward to with the following or subsequent episodes. Thus, there is no significant difference between the cliffhangers used in *The Flash* and *Daredevil*. One minor difference with *Daredevil* is that viewers get instant gratification by having the opportunity to immediately view the next episode after the cliffhanger since the entire season was released at once. But this no longer matters as viewers of *The Flash* can receive instant gratification as well because of the show’s presence on Netflix in secondary distribution. Something to also take into consideration are the number of episodes for both series. With *The Flash*, there are many standalone episodes within the 23-episode season that do not directly address the primary narrative. Cliffhanger reveals at the ends of these episodes are often used to remind viewers about the developing plot surrounding the primary narrative. None of *Daredevil*’s 13 episodes were standalone episodes and the primary narrative was always present in each episode thus negating the need for a cliffhanger reveal to remind viewers of past occurrences.

Conclusion

Netflix uses narrative strategies the same way that they have been traditionally used in comic books in order to resemble the original content and attract more viewers to the new set of

¹⁰⁴ Eric Haverkamp. “Bother Graphic and Memoir: The Interaction of Image and Narrative in Fun Home.” *URJ-UCCS: Undergraduate Research Journal at UCCS* 11, no. 2 (2018): 5-11.

superhero TV series. Additionally, Netflix's superhero narrative strategy promotes a more enhanced viewing experience that differs from traditional superhero story consumption through comic books or linear-distributed TV series. The first season of the Netflix Original program *Daredevil* uses franchise tie-ins to expand the already established superhero world made popular by the MCU. The series also uses franchise tie-ins to set up the future crossover series, *The Defenders*, which features other superhero series under the Netflix Marvel umbrella. I argue that *Daredevil's* use of franchise crossovers and tie-ins are an attempt to recruit viewers from the MCU movies as well as fans of the Marvel comic books and television fans. I also argue that the season's use of cliffhangers encourages viewers to watch subsequent episodes right away. Each cliffhanger that is used in the season works as a shocking climax for the episode but flows directly into the next episode without any breaks. Conversely, I argue that the lack of traditional recap sequences and the reliance on recapping through dialogue is there to remind the viewer of recent narrative developments in the series. It also helps create a viewing experience that resembles reading a book or watching a very long movie.

The use of narrative strategies for the Netflix distribution of *Daredevil* is closely aligned with how superhero stories were showcased and promoted through comic books, especially with establishing a shared continuity that would attract fans from each franchise to another to build viewership. However, with the distribution strategy of releasing every episode of a season all at one time, the viewing experience flows differently. On Netflix, the narrative does not resemble the serialized experience that consumers gain from reading issue after issue of a comic book or watching weekly episodes of a TV series. Netflix works to create a more epic-viewing experience where you don't have to stop the story unless you want to or absolutely have to. It assumes that you are going to continue watching episode after episode as well as pay attention to

every detail. In a way, the use of narrative strategies within *Daredevil* Season 1 opposes Newman's argument in two ways. Newman touched on writers using surprises and cliffhangers to pull viewers back from the refrigerator after a break or interruption.¹⁰⁵ Instead, in a Netflix series like *Daredevil* the cliffhanger keeps the viewer tuned in for the subsequent episode as it encourages viewers to *avoid* taking breaks. Newman also states that television assumes viewers do not watch everything.¹⁰⁶ With *Daredevil*, the lack of many recaps that include things like repeating names or restating relationships through dialogue supports the notion that viewers probably *do* watch everything and do not need as many reminders as they might with *The Flash*.

In comparison to *The Flash*, *Daredevil*'s use of narrative strategies differs in many ways but also contains many similarities. In chapter 2, I argued that *The Flash*'s use of franchise crossovers is an attempt to recruit superhero fans, comic book fans, and TV series fans to create a bigger audience. *Daredevil*'s use of franchise connections is similar as it works to accomplish a similar goal but also includes movie fans, as the series connects to the larger cinematic universe. I also suggest that the use of narrative strategies like recapping are heavily present in *The Flash* to continuously update the viewer on the many aspects of the story. *Daredevil* shares the same recapping narrative strategy but on a lesser scale. *The Flash* incorporates many different recap sequences at the beginning of each episode. Recapping through dialogue and restating names and relationships are also heavily present in *The Flash*. *Daredevil*, on the other hand, does not showcase any recap sequences. *Daredevil* does use its dialogue to recap, although the constant restating of character names and relationships is not as widespread as it is with *The Flash*. Lastly, I argued that *The Flash* uses cliffhanger scenes throughout Season 1 at the end of each episode in

¹⁰⁵ Michael Z. Newman, "From Beats to Arcs," 21.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 18.

order to encourage viewers to return. I argue that *Daredevil* uses cliffhangers scenes, as well, however the frequency of their use as well as their flow and style highly differ from that of *The Flash*. Both series use narrative strategies similar to traditional TV practices as well as comic book practices. However, watching *The Flash* resembles reading linear comic book issues one by one whereas watching *Daredevil* resembles reading a single book.

In the overall thesis, I argue that the use of the above narrative devices differs between superhero series that are written, produced, and distributed for different media platforms. Throughout the analysis, I found that *Daredevil* uses strategies related to its comic book origins a lot but watching the series flows like reading a chapter book. The series is invested in creating a universe where TV fans and comic book fans can join together with movie fans to experience team-ups and cross-overs that are similar to those from the comics. *Daredevil* also encourages viewers to watch episodes consecutively without breaks. The season does this by creating a narrative that allows episodes to continuously flow into one another without breaks or unnecessary recaps of the story to resemble a cohesive and epic viewing experience. *Daredevil* merges together aspects of past comic books, TV, and movie strategies to build a subscriber-audience and has become a catalyst for a new way of telling cohesive stories within a broader shared universe on a non-linear distribution platform.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

Summary

After analyzing both *The Flash* and *Daredevil*, I have concluded that the narratives are more similar than they are different. Both series include a variation of each narrative technique that was analyzed in this study. Both *The Flash* and *Daredevil* portray compelling stories during their first seasons and do so using different audience assumptions and narrative techniques to recruit, and cater to, intended audience members. The similarities between the two series include their media franchise connections and tie-ins with other superhero narratives, and the use of recapping and two forms of cliffhangers. However, because the entirety of Season 1 was released at one time via Netflix, *Daredevil* does not use recapping within the story as much as does season one of *The Flash*. Due to *The Flash*'s weekly release of episodes, the series integrates many forms of recapping including a voice-over narration within the introduction and title sequence, a recap sequence included in the beginning of an episode and recapping through dialogue. *Daredevil*, on the other hand, operates under the assumption that each viewer does not need a direct recapping because they are going to watch multiple episodes at a time without breaks.

There are two important points to distinguish between the two TV series. First, the two series are connected through franchising and tie-ins to a shared narrative of multiple related TV series. Both of the series exist in larger TV universes that encompass many different superheroes and storylines. Both *The Flash* and *Daredevil* use their connections to other TV series by using references, narrative plot points, and Easter eggs to draw in viewers who are invested in the overarching universe of characters. Both TV series and its main characters have crossover with other series in their franchises for superhero team-ups like *The Flash* and *Green Arrow* duo or

the Justice League within *The Flash* or the Defenders team in the culminating Netflix mini-series *The Defenders*.

One interesting thing to reiterate is that in addition to being connected to other series in the shared universe, *Daredevil* is also connected to the Marvel Cinematic Universe. The first season of the Netflix Original program *Daredevil* uses franchise tie-ins to expand the already established superhero world made popular by MCU movies. This aspect gives *Daredevil* an extra edge over series like *The Flash* because it attracts viewers from the already-established movies, which is something that is rarely, if ever, done. I argue that *Daredevil's* use of franchise crossovers and tie-ins are an attempt to recruit viewers from the MCU movies as well as fans of the Marvel comic books and television series alike. On the other hand, I also argue that *The Flash's* use of franchise crossovers is an attempt to recruit comic book fans and TV series fans to create a bigger audience within its own shared umbrella of series as well. Both series work as catalysts to huge team-ups that happen later on down the line within the series and/or franchise.

The two series are used to expand the universes and operate under the assumption that the audience members of accompanying TV series, comic books, and movies will also become audience members to the new series. *The Flash* and *Daredevil* series each work hard to resemble and use traditional TV and comic book narrative strategies to attract and retain fans of the popular superhero media forms. *Daredevil* reaches a bit further by incorporating popular MCU film references and strategies to appeal to and grow the Netflix subscriber-audience. These transmedia properties are important because they allow for both series to operate as hybrid media forms that have taken bits and pieces from already established practices to create a more epic superhero viewing experience.

More differences between the two series in terms of franchise connections are the way things like tie-ins and Easter eggs are included within the narrative of the shows. With *The Flash*, hints and ties to the other series or characters in its shared universe are mostly used as background items for viewers to look for. *Daredevil* instead integrates the hints and ties into the story in order to intentionally set up the inclusion or appearance of a Netflix Marvel character in the overarching narrative that connects the various Netflix series. Another difference is how the franchise crossovers appear within the series. *The Flash* has an episode of the season dedicated to the crossover to showcase the shared narrative. The entire first season of *Daredevil* serves as the catalyst to a crossover series that was distributed later on, after other characters had been introduced with their own series. These cases inform us that superhero TV series are always invested in expanding their narrative and shared universe. The superhero TV series are not series that stand alone. The characters and series do have the capacity to remain their own entities but much like their successful comic book counterparts, the series connect to others.

The cases also point out differences between the way Marvel TV and DC TV handle their franchises and shared narratives. Netflix/Marvel plans ahead and uses individual heroes and series as components of a larger overarching narrative that eventually culminated in a crossover team-up mini-series comprised of characters from each individual series. The CW/DC TV programs instead use crossover team-up episodes within their individual series to cross-promote each series as the shared narrative expands. Despite the differences in how the different companies use and connect their characters, the cases inform us that TV-specific superhero franchises focus on introducing new characters and team-ups that resemble the popular superhero teams from the comic books. Each superhero character that has been introduced via The CW/DC TV or Netflix/Marvel TV is attached to a superhero group from the comic books like the Justice

League or The Defenders. With the recent success of the Marvel Cinematic Universe and the build-up of its movie/character slate and eventual team-up in *Marvel's The Avengers* (2012), it seems as though TV series are following suit with using different characters in their own series to build-up to a team-up. We can expect more individual character series and eventual team-ups from both Marvel and DC TV.

Another similarity between the series is the use of cliffhangers. The two forms of cliffhangers are the situational cliffhanger and the informational cliffhanger. The Situational cliffhanger occurs when a main character is caught in the middle of a suspenseful event before the episode ends. The informational cliffhanger occurs when the audience is presented with new information related to a past or present plot point of the story. Both series often use both forms at the end of their episodes throughout their respective seasons in order to excite and encourage viewers to watch subsequent episodes. However, the series use the the cliffhangers in different ways. For instance, each cliffhanger used at the end of a *Daredevil* episode is more of a situational cliffhanger with a shocking climax for the episode but flows directly into the next episode without any breaks and usually picks up in the exact scene where the previous episode left off. Other times, the following episode will involve an effect from the actions of the cliffhanger at the end of the prior episode. *The Flash* includes situational cliffhangers towards the end of its season. However, majority of the cliffhangers used throughout the season are informational cliffhangers that give the viewer insight on past scenes from the season. In *The Flash*, cliffhangers are used to get viewers excited to view the following episode and *Daredevil* does this as well. However, *Daredevil* presents a smoother transition between episodes with its use of cliffhangers because the subsequent episodes pick up literally where the last episode

leaves off. *The Flash*'s cliffhangers do not lead into the first scene of its subsequent episodes and viewers may not get a scene or reference to the cliffhanger until later on in the episode.

A major difference between the two series is in the use of recapping. Both series use recapping in some capacity. However, recapping through dialogue and introduction sequences are more prevalent throughout *The Flash*. Each episode of the season begins with the narration of events during the introduction and title sequence and is immediately followed by the "previously on *The Flash*" portion of the show that highlights the past plot points that will be addressed in the episode. The only time the series doesn't rely on the recap sequence is during the season finale. A recap sequence could have worked in the beginning of the season finale episode as a way to recap and bring everything together before the exciting conclusion. *Daredevil* completely avoids the recap sequence altogether. Instead, it relies only on recapping through dialogue, which reinforces the idea that contemporary TV series now assume that viewers watch everything and do not need to be constantly reminded about important details from previous episodes. Netflix only provides a recap sequence of all the events from *Daredevil*'s first season directly before the start of the second season, which was released a year after the first season. It is clear that *Daredevil* uses the recap sequence to remind viewers of the events from the previous season, whereas every episode of *The Flash* relies heavily on the introduction's recap sequence to keep the viewer updated on the main plot points. This is done because of the weekly gaps between episodes and the show creators want the viewers to make sure they know everything before entering another episode. Although it seems like a tremendous amount of information to be reminded of, the process seems to be effective, especially with most episodes being filled with a lot of information, callbacks, and universe Easter eggs.

Limitations and Future Research

I conducted my research analysis through binge-viewing the two separate texts one at a time. However, only one of the series was designed for the episodes to be viewed back-to-back instead of weekly. One limitation of the study is the intended form of viewing suggested by the distribution platform. I binge-watched *The Flash* instead of watching it once a week. If I would have watched it once a week, the study would have taken longer to complete and document. For time's sake, I had to binge-view the season the same way I did for *Daredevil*. By me not viewing the series in its intended distribution form, I may not have understood the full experience of each episode. I began to feel like the introductory first-person narrations and recap sequences were becoming redundant and overwhelming. Perhaps had I watched week-to-week I would have felt differently and maybe appreciated the numerous recaps and reminders as I might have forgotten important plot points. Due to me watching most episodes back-to-back in one sitting, I felt the recaps were unnecessary to constantly remind me of the storyline. In hindsight, I can see how the recaps would be considered important between weekly breaks and especially when the show returns after a mid-season break that usually lasts a few weeks.

In addition to this limitation, the study could have also used more people other than me to evaluate the use of narrative techniques. It would be interesting to find out how another viewer perceives the intended use of narrative techniques to push the story forward while keeping the viewer engaged. I am a highly active TV series viewer who consumes several hours of SVOD and broadcast network TV series per week. My viewing habits are very different from the average viewer and I believe that someone who doesn't view as much TV or someone who has yet to watch *The Flash* or *Daredevil* would be great subjects to use in analyzing intended narrative techniques and their effects on viewers. It would have also been beneficial to have an

avid comic book reader also watch the TV series to point out similarities between the series' narrative strategies and those of comic books.

Another limitation would be the time allotted for the analysis. Each episode of each season could be studied in greater detail. This research analysis attempts to provide a broad and general view of how narrative techniques are used to attract and engage viewers. The study would need more time if I were to break down more narrative techniques and the effects on more viewers. The study would also need more time if I were to break down each episode's individual use of the narrative techniques instead of a general season overview.

I also believe a research study could be developed to focus on two superhero TV series that are separate but are distributed on the same platform and exist within the same shared narrative universe. The study could focus on *The Flash* and *Supergirl* from The CW/DC TV shared narrative universe or on *Daredevil* and *Luke Cage* of the Netflix/Marvel TV shared narrative universe. Perhaps a study would be more interesting and accurate if I compared the Netflix Marvel series *Daredevil* to a weekly Marvel series like *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* Or maybe the study could give more insight if it compared *The Flash* to one of the new superhero TV series that appear on DC's new SVOD platform like *Titans* (2018 - present). Maybe both the DC and Marvel brands believe in using various narrative techniques to convey their various stories. A limitation of this study would be not recognizing those techniques across the various distribution outlets within one media franchise like the MCU's use of film, SVOD platforms, and linear broadcast TV networks. Perhaps a future study can analyze different TV series distribution forms and techniques within both the DC and Marvel TV series franchises then compare them to each other.

This textual analysis was designed to be broad and general when describing the many narrative techniques used. Future studies should elaborate on my work to point out other narrative cues from the rest of the Netflix Marvel series that were distributed after *Daredevil* to find out if the same narrative strategies work across the board.

Conclusion

Since the introduction of the TV set in the mid- 20th century, television programming has continuously evolved and has served many different purposes with viewers. At the time of this analysis, SVOD services, online-streaming original series, and binge-viewing culture are the new and innovative phenomena that interest scholars and viewers like myself. Netflix has become a significant object of analysis because the streaming platform began creating its own content and making its own distribution rules that seem to encourage the recent phenomenon of binge-viewing that allows subscribers to watch an entire series whenever, wherever, and however they see fit. This viewer autonomy can include viewing an entire season of a TV series in three, two, or even one sitting.

Molded by contemporary television industry distribution practices and the phenomenon of binge-viewing culture, Netflix currently has its own slate of original programs with narrative storytelling that rivals traditional linear broadcast network series. This project was designed to analyze two different texts with the intent to evaluate the separate uses of narrative techniques within the two texts. In this thesis, I have analyzed and compared the Netflix Original series *Daredevil* and The CW series *The Flash* to find out if SVOD TV series share any similarities or differences with linear TV series and to help understand how narrative devices and techniques may be used to keep viewers watching and coming back for more.

In the overall analysis, I argue that the use of the above narrative devices differs between superhero series that are written, produced, and distributed for different media forms. I found that both *Daredevil* and *The Flash* use strategies related to their comic book origins as much as possible. The series are invested in creating a universe where TV fans, movie fans, and comic book fans can join together to experience new narratives that are connected to others. *Daredevil* also encourages viewers to watch episodes consecutively without breaks. The season does this by creating a narrative that allows episodes to continuously flow into one another without breaks or unnecessary recaps of the story to resemble a cohesive and epic viewing experience. On the other hand, *The Flash* hooks and excites the viewer, which encourages them to return to the next episode whenever it airs.

This analysis provides some detail on the narrative style that Netflix content creators use and compares it to the narrative techniques that broadcast networks use to hook and keep viewers watching. The analysis highlights the varying narrative techniques used throughout the first seasons of the TV series used in the study. The project attempts to understand how the distinctive methods like cliffhangers, recapping, and franchise crossovers and tie-ins are used and if they are used as hooks to keep the attention of audience members. The analysis also focuses on the comparative reliance on franchising and connections to other accompanying TV shows and/or movies. The goal of the analysis was to create a general list of similarities and differences between the two different types of series showcased on two different distribution platforms.

With this analysis, I found that Netflix original drama series continue to cater to the phenomenon of binge-viewing by using a new arrangement of narrative devices and techniques to keep the audience watching episodes back-to-back as if they were turning the pages of a book instead of techniques used to remind the viewers of the plot. This study is important because the

average viewer and readers of this analysis can use it to gain insight on how TV series are structured and how diverse series which are distributed in various ways are alike and different. This topic is also important because it gives additional support of the binge-viewing phenomena and offers insight on why people are behaving the way they behave while viewing TV series, perhaps unbeknownst to them.

Finally, the analysis further supports my claim that that Netflix's distribution decision and use of particular narrative techniques to generate an appeal to contemporary audiences fuels the binge-viewing phenomena and adds credibility to what should now be called an "epic-viewing" experience. The experience is epic for many reasons, the main reason being that viewers can view an entire 13-episode series in one sitting without interruptions, much like they would with reading a book or watching a very long movie in their home. The experiences are even more epic when a viewer like myself gets to witness an exciting conclusion to a great series that I began just 13-hours prior. Cuddling up on the couch at 3:30am with fresh coffee and my iPad to finish the series only makes the experience sweeter.

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