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BREAKING NARRATIVE BOUNDARIES: CONVERTING IMAGINATION AND STORIES
TO REALITY
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ABSTRACT

BREAKING NARRATIVE BOUNDARIES: CONVERTING IMAGINATION AND STORIES
TO REALITY

BY ALLISON CASTIEL

This essay explores how Disneyland Park functions as a dynamic narrative landscape, allowing guests to engage in a participatory storytelling experience akin to a “choose your own adventure” book. By redefining narrative beyond conventional definitions, the essay argues that Disneyland’s storytelling transcends traditional structures through its combination of scripted elements, immersive environments, and sensory details. The analysis highlights the evolution of guest experiences from the park’s inception, noting how early confusion over narrative inclusion prompted changes that integrated beloved characters, thereby inviting guests to actively partake in the unfolding story rather than merely observe it. The discussion emphasizes the significance of escapism within theme parks, positing that this immersive narrative form challenges the limits of the willing suspension of disbelief and fosters a deeper connection to the stories being told. Through a detailed examination of each themed land within Disneyland, the paper aims to illuminate the multifaceted strategies employed to create rich experiences, ultimately asserting that theme parks not only facilitate escapism but also reshape visitors’ understandings of narrative in contemporary culture. By examining the interplay between structured narratives and organic guest interactions, this work seeks to redefine participatory storytelling’s role in the modern landscape of entertainment and cultural identity.

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CHAPTER I: THE MOST UNCONVENTIONAL NARRATIVE ON EARTH

“How many in this party?” a cast member fittingly attired in a pirate costume asks a family of four that just arrived at the top of the queue for the ride. A young boy of about seven or eight timidly holds up four small fingers.

“Row two,” the cast member says with a smile, and the family steps on a gold-plated number two that appears as if it has been stepped on by millions of families just like this one, but it somehow still shines so brightly and pristinely. The gate that kept the family from going into the fully capacitated boat that just left the boarding zone finally opens to a vacant boat that has just come to a halt, replacing the one that just embarked and row two, along with the other five rows steps down into a boat with bench-style seats, the floor made up of a stucco-esque material flooded sporadically with small puddles of water that smell heavily chlorinated. Before anyone has a chance to consider how the water got into the boat, it starts moving, quickly in its embark but slows as it saunters through what seems to be a swamp of sorts. The light from the outside portion of the queue can no longer be seen, not only because the boat’s occupants have now turned away from it, but because they have now found themselves in this uncanny, yet inviting space where it looks murky and dark giving the illusion that the sunny landscape of Anaheim, California is an irrelevant afterthought. The ambiance of voices speaking quietly is a sort of comfort on this journey into the unknown as it is a reminder of the fact that the previously mentioned landscape is still within reach. Or, is it? The boat passes by some old cabins as the sound of fireflies grows fainter and the sound of an ominous banjo playing an unfamiliar familiar tune grows louder. The boy in the second row turns to his father, ignoring his younger brother’s bewilderment, and proceeds to ask where they are. His father, either more focused on trying to figure out why that banjo tune sounds so familiar, or unwilling to admit that he is unsure how to

answer his son's question, doesn't respond. The boat approaches what appears to be the last of the cabins but this time there is an old man in a rocking chair on the porch slowly rocking back and forth with vacantly expressive eyes. The lady in the first row looks over her shoulder and past her husband's arms to see the second row.

"Do you wanna know a secret about this ride?" she asks in the second row. The boy in the second row and his brother nod in unison.

"Some people say that this ride is this old man's recollection of his time as a pirate" she subtly gestures to the passing scene.

"Really?" the boy in the second row asks with more confidence and less reluctance. The lady smiles and turns back. The brothers in the second row look at each other with a shared excited perplexity in their processing of the information they've just received. Before they can work through it, the only thing they can see in the vast darkness is now a singular light with the focal point of a speaking set of a skull and crossbones that adorns the entrance to a tunnel without light. Their contemplation is interrupted.

"Psst! Avast there! It be too late to alter course, mateys—and there be plunderin' pirates lurkin' in every cove, waitin' to board. Sit closer together, and keep your ruddy hands inboard—that be the best way to repel boarders. And mark well me words, mateys: 'Dead men tell no tales!'"

These words linger as the boat plunges into the darkness and drops into a new source of ironic light from what seems to be an entrance to a cave, and the puddles of water make sense now.

This is the story. However, it is not clear if this is a beginning, a middle, or an end. Where does the story begin? Is it the drop? Is it the cabin set amidst the ominous banjo playing? Or could it be the last glimpse of natural light emitting from the outside portion of the queue to the ride? The answer is that they are all simultaneously their own beginning, middle, and end—this is

because they are all a fraction of a much larger story. This story is not traditional by any means, there are no visible, tangible pages, no succinct progress being signaled by the approach of the back of the book— because there is none. This story is a space- a narrative landscape.

The narrative landscape of the Disneyland Park allows guests to participate in a way that is equivalent to a “choose your own adventure” book, in the sense that there is one overarching narrative that has a flexible variability to it, in that no two guests are going to experience or interact in the same exact way. This active participation on the guests’ behalf is incredibly engaging, and presents a unique take on what narrative is and what it means, therefore, redefining the term narrative in the process. We are all familiar with the standard form of narrative. The term narrative is most conventionally defined by the relaying of either a fictitious or non-fictitious event as told by a narrator to a narratee.¹ What more than likely comes to mind when defining narrative is text. While it is undeniable and essential to recognize the profound impact that literary texts have made in the ways that we express and preserve stories, it must also be noted that the idea of narrative has expanded far beyond its foundation in texts. That being said, it is just as essential to recognize the ways in which this experience can be read textually, which includes but is not limited to: the scripting of rides, queues, and shows, signage that contributes to world-building in different areas of the park, and also the unwritten— ambiance, details that invigorate the senses, that must be read by the guests to really obtain a complete experience. Through this, the theme park of Disneyland in particular can then be extrapolated and examined through the ways in which this innovative storytelling method immerses guests

¹ Baldick, Chris. *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Oxford University Press, 2008, *Oxford Reference*, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780199208272.001.0001/acref-9780199208272-e-760>.

while telling a cohesive and compelling story despite the constraints of time and resources with a particular focus on the interpretation and immersion of narrativizing physical spaces.

When circling back to the commencing anecdote, it is clear that the family's experience could have been entirely different had they not been assigned to the second row, and likewise, the couple in the first row, and myself in the third, witnessing the interaction. Had the boys not been given a solid framework for the ride that they were experiencing, it is likely that they would have had a completely different perspective on the ride and its story. Instead, moving forward, they ran with this proposed narrative and sought out different aspects of the attraction in order to support it. If this interaction had not taken place, it is possible on the contrary, that their perception of the ride either could have been more creative, unbound to any sort of predetermined narrative, or even more confusing, with their main takeaway being they just went on a fun water ride with a bunch of fighting, singing, drunk pirates. Regardless, this is how a theme park functions as a three-dimensional build-your-own-adventure story with limitless factors and variables, making every single attendant's experience unique and ever-changing. As stated by Bethanee Bemis in the article: "Disney theme parks and America's national narratives : mirror, mirror, for us all,": "This established the brand as deeply connected with American identity from its very inception, setting the stage for the Disney Parks' place as shapers of and locations for the national narrative before they even existed" (Bemis 14). In this respect and many others, Disney as a whole has played a fundamental role in their mastery of narrative. The theme park is the process of bringing those narratives to life, and creating new ones for this particular medium of storytelling.

However, this was not always the case. On opening day, guests were confused— there was no Snow White in the ride Snow White's Scary Adventures, no Peter Pan in Peter Pan's Flight,

and no Mr. Toad in Mr. Toad's Wild Ride. This confusion, which eventually turned into complaints, made its way to Walt Disney Imagineering, and as a result, these rides were reimagined to include the characters. What this situation suggests is that not only do guests want a narrative experience, but they also want to play a part in the narrative. The guests didn't want to take on the perspective of the title characters, they wanted to experience their respective worlds alongside them, becoming fully immersed in their stories. Despite the concept being initially met with confusion, the reimagining of attractions to include beloved characters underscores the desire of guests to not just be spectators but active participants in these narratives which they cherish. This shift not only aligns with the desire for immersive storytelling but also speaks to the broader appeal of escapism offered by theme parks. This begs the question: how does this, like other narrative mediums such as movies, books, and television, function as a form of escapism? Unlike other mediums, the theme park experience is a form of escapism in which individuals essentially voluntarily enter and engage with an environment that is entirely artificial and simulated. To what extent does the theme park experience and environment test or challenge the elasticity of the willing suspension of disbelief? What is demonstrated within these questions is a specific focus on how escapism plays a role in becoming more familiar with the theme park narrative. How have theme parks gained such an impressive following through their ability to significantly contribute to narrativization?

In exploring the narrative landscape of Disneyland, this paper aims to answer those questions, and argues that the theme park serves as an innovative platform for storytelling that transcends traditional narrative structures by fostering a unique, immersive, and participatory experience for its guests, and furthermore, parallels the structure of a choose-your-own adventure book. By examining the interplay between scripted elements and the unwritten ambiance that

encapsulates the Disneyland experience, the paper posits that this multifaceted storytelling approach challenges conventional definitions of narrative, presenting it as a dynamic process rather than a linear progression. Additionally, it asserts that Disneyland's ability to evoke a sense of escapism amplifies its narrative effectiveness, positioning the park as a vital cultural space where visitors can immerse themselves in beloved stories while actively participating in the creation of new, shared adventures. Through this extrapolation, the paper aims to redefine the understanding of narrative in contemporary contexts and illuminate the significance of participatory storytelling within theme parks.



Figure 1: Photo Credit [Parks & Destination | Disneyland Resort](#)

In order to do so, it is necessary to outline the organization in which this will be done. Figure 1 includes a map of the entire Disneyland Park as it stands today. It includes each of the lands of the park, which consist of: Main Street, U.S.A., Frontierland, Adventureland, New

Orleans Square, Tomorrowland, Fantasyland, ToonTown, Star Wars Galaxy's Edge, and Bayou Country. In that order, each land will be extrapolated and broken down into its essence, which includes, but is certainly not limited to: theming and immersion, attractions, and overarching narrative value. It must be noted that these categories overlap within each other, as well as within its individual contents which are not particularly unique to that category nor land which it accompanies.

CHAPTER II: MAIN STREET U.S.A.



Photo courtesy of Disneyland Park

Main Street, U.S.A. is the guest's first tangible impression of the theme park. It is the first destination before the first destination within the park. Upon entering through the turnstiles at the main gate, Main Street is essentially the entryway into the rest of the theme park, and what is significant about this land that's not really a land, is the fact that no guest can get to any other portion of the park without first going through Main Street in its entirety. Once guests are admitted into the park, they can go either one of two ways, but both ultimately lead to the same place: Main Street, U.S.A. Both passageways to Main Street are adorned with the sign that reads: "Here you leave Today and enter the world of Yesterday, Tomorrow And Fantasy". Figure 2 puts these entrance ways into perspective with the map featured in Figure 1 and are indicated by the

red circles. As pictured, these tunnels lead to more or less the same destination on either side of Main Street, and to the Town Square area.



Figure 2: Photo Credit [Parks & Destination | Disneyland Resort](#)

When guests make their ways through either tunnel they pass by attraction posters that anticipate what is yet to come. Once guests arrive at the other end of the tunnel, they have, in fact, left today in the past. The Disneyland Town Center welcome's guests into the first fully immersive theme park experience of the day. Main Street U.S.A. is captivating as it exists as a contradiction. It is both dated and timeless, and specific but also open enough to be based off of any real life Main Street U.S.A. In *Walt Disney's Disneyland*, authors Chris and Charlene Nichols define Main Street U.S.A. in the following: "Clear visual storytelling is key in designing

an authentic and idealized environment: one that is calming, emotionally directive, and effectively creates the feeling of stepping into another world” (Nichols 65). This experience is a completely unique sensation that does not exist outside of the theme park realm. It is the primary transition from reality into a new one— one that is seemingly not possible, or at least, shouldn’t be. The above quote precisely explains this otherwise unexplainable experience. It is ironic that it is described as “calming,” as one might consider this transition to be rather stark and overstimulating. However, that is what makes Main Street U.S.A. so intriguing and inviting. It is a seamless transition that is extremely detailed and themed, yet in a way that is distinct from all of the other areas in the park. It is a gradual transition from reality to fantasy that miraculously makes the focal point of the castle somehow natural, as if it belongs there.²

This is due to one of the many ways in which Disney “tricks” its guests. Disney uses forced perspective to make the castle seem further away, as well as larger than it actually is. This is done in a number of different ways. The first is that the road leading through Main Street actually narrows as guests make their way down. Additionally, the buildings lining either side of Main Street are constructed so where the first floor is much larger than the second (usually non-functional or non-existent second floor), and therefore, disproportionate. Be that as it may, this use of forced perspective is not generally noticeable by the average theme park guest. This is because there is so much precision and attention to detail to the point that there is an artificial continuity that makes visual harmony possible, and indistinguishable from its non-reality. However, Disney doesn’t stop there— they have employed scent machines, fittingly called “Smellitizers,” that take the immersion one step further. Not only is Disney tricking its guest’s eyes, but their nose as well. Smell is an undeniably powerful sense that has the ability to trigger

² Allen, David. “Disneyland: Another Kind of Reality.” *European Journal of American Culture*, vol. 33, no. 1, Mar. 2014, pp. 33–47. *EBSCOhost*, https://doi.org/10.1386/ejac.33.1.33_1.

emotions and memories, which is what Disneyland targets. These smells, typically artificial, contribute to the facade of Main Street U.S.A. by marketing to the consumer through their senses, which is incredibly subliminal, yet masterful in the creation of an immersive experience. When guests walk down Main Street their sense of hearing is also targeted as the ambience of old-timey music becomes nostalgic to a largely contemporary audience. As noted in that same source: “‘Main Street, U.S.A., sets the tone and pace of Disneyland: It is a place for strolling. People stop to peer into the windows of the apothecary shop and the old-time general store, and to look over the shoulder of a sidewalk artist as he sketches a portrait’ - National Geographic, 1963” (Nichols 67). This quote underscores Main Street, U.S.A.’s pivotal role as both a geographic and thematic foundation for Disneyland, establishing a welcoming atmosphere that prioritizes connection, nostalgia, and leisurely exploration. It sets up a contrast to the more thrilling and fantastical elements found in the parks, reinforcing the notion that Disneyland is as much about the journey and experience as it is about the attractions themselves.

Ultimately, Main Street, U.S.A. serves as more than just a gateway; it is a carefully orchestrated portal that invites guests to transcend the mundane realities of their lives and immerse themselves in a curated experience of nostalgia and wonder. This transitional space is a masterclass in design and sensory engagement, expertly blending visual storytelling, scent, and sound to create a fully realized environment that captures the essence of an idealized American past. The intricate details—ranging from the narrowing streets to the whimsical façades—are not mere embellishments but essential components of the narrative that invite guests to contemplate their own connections to history and imagination. By intentionally crafting this space to elicit emotions and memories, Disney enhances the overall experience, ensuring that every step down Main Street, U.S.A. is steeped in anticipation and excitement. In this way, the street becomes a

living canvas where history, fantasy, and human connection converge, catalyzing a sense of belonging that resonates long after guests leave the park. Therefore, as visitors stroll through this enchanting corridor, they are not only participants in the magic of Disneyland; they are also unwitting authors of their own stories, exploring the delicate interplay between past and present, reality and fantasy that defines the heart of this beloved theme park experience.

CHAPTER III: FRONTIERLAND



Photo Credit: Keystone / Getty

Frontierland, as a key area of Disneyland, and the first spoke to the left of the castle, is a prime exemplification of the park's innovative storytelling approach that parallels a choose-your-own-adventure narrative.³ Visitors step into a meticulously crafted world that evokes the essence of the American West, complete with rustic architecture, lively characters, and interactive attractions. Rather than merely following a linear storyline, guests are invited to wander through the immersive setting, choosing their own paths through various experiences like riverboat cruises, Big Thunder Mountain, or interactions with frontier characters. This interplay

³ Schiller, Melanie. "Transmedia Storytelling: New Practices and Audiences." *Stories*, edited by Ian Christie and Annie van den Oever, Amsterdam University Press, 2018, pp. 97–108. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv5rf6vf.10>.

between scripted elements, such as the entertaining shows and rides, and the unwritten ambiance of the land creates a fluid and engaging narrative environment. As guests engage with the surroundings, they contribute to the unfolding story, making each visit unique. Through this active participation, Frontierland becomes not just a backdrop, but a vital cultural space where personal narratives intertwine with the park's overarching themes of exploration and adventure, highlighting how themed environments can foster a shared sense of escapism and creativity among visitors.

What is interesting about this land is the lack of reliance on Disney intellectual property. While themed merchandise and character experiences can be found in this area of the park, this is perhaps the most distanced from Disney IP. This is not to insinuate, however, that the narrative is any less effective. In fact, it has quite the opposite effect. Additionally, it raises a question of whether or not IP is necessary at all in creating an environment that is immersive and engaging with guests. I would argue that while IP is not essential to successfully creating an immersive space for guests to experience, it does make that process easier. When a land has basically no direct driving connection to IP, it must take a more active role in creating an extensive yet digestible narrative.

When guests enter the Frontierland spoke, they are greeted with background music and ambient sounds that are carefully selected to match the theme, thus enhancing the overall atmosphere. Sounds of nature, traditional western music, and the hustle and bustle of a frontier town help transport visitors to another time and place— a place that has not been created through the use of already familiar Disney intellectual property. This can be traced back to the roots of the park, as Disney IP has expanded so vastly since its opening in 1955. In that way, Disney seems to have mastered creating this immersion without depending on IP to guide the narrative.

As one of the opening day lands, it was solely inspired by the American frontier, influenced by the excitement and adventure of the West, featuring attractions that captured the spirit of exploration. For this reason, Frontierland is a solid starting point for further extrapolation of the role that narrative plays in this theme park experience.

Frontierland not only showcases the value of original storytelling but also serves as a canvas for innovative attractions that reflect the spirit of the American West. Visitors can embark on the thrilling Big Thunder Mountain Railroad, where the narrative unfolds through twists and turns of a runaway mine train, or conversely, explore the peaceful trails of the Mark Twain Riverboat, which evoke the serene beauty of river travel from a bygone era. These experiences are meticulously designed to foster a sense of adventure and nostalgia, inviting guests to engage with the landscape in a way that feels both personal and immersive. As we delve deeper into the significance of narrative beyond intellectual property, it becomes clear that Frontierland exemplifies how rich storytelling can thrive in a realm where imagination and history intertwine, paving the way for new stories that resonate with every generation of visitors.

As guests step through the stockade into Frontierland, they immediately experience a striking transformation in their surroundings that immerses them in the essence of the Wild West. The paved pathways yield to dusty dirt roads, while clusters of cacti and rugged rock formations evoke the untamed spirit of frontier towns from this era. Scattered throughout this landscape are nods to the rich cultural tapestry of the region, such as El Zocalo Park, which features a charming Spanish theme, adorned with lush olive trees and vibrant bougainvillea that infuse the area with color and life. As visitors journey further along the frontier trail, the scenery shifts once again, revealing a more mountainous terrain that captures the rugged beauty and adventure inherent to the frontier experience. Central to this iconic landscape stands the petrified tree, a

remarkable natural monument that serves as a focal point and conversation starter, gifted to Disneyland by Lillian Disney herself. This thoughtful addition not only enhances the aesthetic appeal of Frontierland but also pays homage to the significance of nature in the storytelling fabric of the park, allowing guests to not only see but also feel the connection to the American West.



Photo Credit: Disneyland Resort

The Pioneer Mercantile, pictured above is not the obvious physical place that comes to mind as the hallmark of narrative in Frontierland, but it remarkably contributes to the land's narrative. On the surface level, it appears to be nothing more than a Frontierland gift shop, but as seen in the photo, it blends seamlessly into the landscape and offers a sense of intrigue to guests passing by. The land's theming is maintained into the gift shop as it contains a rustic log cabin-esque feel with a wooden ceiling and supporting lumber beams. The back of the store even contains a marionette of the character Woody from *Toy Story* that can be operated by guests for

25 cents. In addition to this, there is also a rotation of clips from Disney movies that fit into the Frontierland theme that are projected throughout the day. This is accompanied by music from these movies such as *Pocahontas*, that can be heard through the store. This is the location within Frontierland that features the most IP that guests will encounter. This is what makes the land marketable and memorable— it is still effective even if these IPs are not represented in the land beyond the store. While the Pioneer Mercantile may not be the first location that comes to mind when thinking of Frontierland’s immersive narrative, it plays a vital role in bridging the traditional themes of the American frontier with the broader Disney storytelling. Beyond its primary function as a gift shop, the establishment invites visitors to engage with its rustic charm that mirrors the environment outside. This seamless integration of intellectual property elements, though minimal, ensures that the Pioneer Mercantile remains a memorable stop, offering a unique blend of nostalgia that enhances guests’ adventures while keeping the magic of Disney alive in an unexpected yet harmonious way.

Frontierland stands as a testament to Disneyland’s ability to weave complex narratives that transcend the reliance on established intellectual properties. It offers guests experiences that celebrate the spirit of the American West while inviting personal interpretation and interaction. The careful attention to environmental detail, soundscapes, and immersive attractions work in concert to create an atmosphere that feels alive and engaging. Even with the subtle incorporation of Disney characters and themes in places like the Pioneer Mercantile, Frontierland manages to maintain its identity as a distinct, original experience that encourages exploration and adventure. This unique blend of storytelling without overt dependence on IP challenges the conventions of theme park design, revealing that creativity and imagination can thrive within a well-devised thematic framework. This may not be remarked as the most exciting or eventful land in the park,

but it is incredibly themed and thoughtfully crafted in a way that maintains its history as an opening day land without the overwhelming presence and oversaturation of Disney's identifiable intellectual properties. As the park evolves and expands, Frontierland remains a cornerstone of artistry and narrative innovation, proving that sometimes the most powerful stories dwell in the untamed landscapes of our imagination and shared histories.

CHAPTER IV: ADVENTURELAND



Photo Credit: Disneyland Resort

Adventureland also plays a significant role in world-building and narrative development by immersing guests in a rich, thematic environment that evokes the spirit of exploration and discovery. This land is designed to transport visitors into a world reminiscent of exotic locales and ancient cultures, encouraging a sense of adventure. Adventureland incorporates diverse cultural elements, drawing inspiration from various global traditions and myths. This not only enriches the storytelling but also sparks curiosity about the cultures represented. By doing so, Disneyland encourages guests to appreciate the world's diversity, albeit through a fantastical lens. This area of the park is carefully curated with elements like lush vegetation, intricate architecture, and immersive attractions. These features work together to create a cohesive narrative that reflects the allure of uncharted territories. From the moment guests enter, they are enveloped in a narrative that suggests they are embarking on an exploration of distant lands. The main attractions of the land: The Enchanted Tiki Room, Jungle Cruise, Indiana Jones Adventure, and the Swiss Family Robinson Treehouse, are not just amusement attractions; they serve as storytelling vehicles that engage guests. Each ride is designed with a storyline that encourages

visitors to use their imaginations as they become part of the adventure, whether it's navigating through a jungle filled with animatronic animals or uncovering ancient artifacts. The narratives have a beginning, middle, and end, which enhances the overall experience of narrated adventure.

All of the attractions of Adventureland are distinct in the sense that they each take a different approach to the term "attraction". The first attraction that guests have the opportunity to experience is Walt Disney's Enchanted Tiki Room. This attraction is in the form of a show where guests are invited to an open room with seating around the perimeter, and the main attraction front and center. The Enchanted Tiki Room plays a pivotal role in the Adventureland narrative by serving as a whimsical, musical celebration of tropical culture and island life. This attraction immerses guests in a lively world where colorful animatronic birds, flowers, and tiki statues come to life, harmonizing in songs that reflect themes of nature and camaraderie. The enchanting atmosphere combines vibrant visuals with catchy melodies, allowing visitors to experience a sense of wonder and delight. By showcasing a joyful, fantastical interpretation of Polynesian culture, the Tiki Room adds depth to Adventureland's overarching narrative of exploration and discovery, offering guests a moment of respite while further enhancing the enchanting, adventurous spirit that defines the land.

The next attraction that guests encounter as they move further into Adventureland is the Jungle Cruise. This attraction resembles aspects of both ride attractions and show attractions as it is essentially both.⁴ Guests board a departing "tour" on a boat with around five other parties and a "Skipper". Similar to the character interaction experiences, the Skippers have a loose script that they follow while also adding their own improv when appropriate. In this way, no two rides on

⁴ King, Margaret J. "THE THEME PARK: Aspects of Experience in a Four-Dimensional Landscape." *Material Culture*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2002, pp. 1–15. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29764155>.

the Jungle Cruise are identical. The Skipper is a central part of the ride that constantly changes. Not only are guests expected to have a different Skipper with each ride, but even if they were to receive the same Skipper it is safe to say that their ride will still contain at least some extent of variety.

As the boat glides along the winding waterways, guests are treated to a series of whimsical scenes featuring animatronic animals and humorous dioramas that depict the rich tapestry of jungle life. From playful monkeys swinging through the trees to majestic elephants bathing by the shore, each scene is designed to elicit laughter and wonder. The Skippers, well-versed in jungle lore, often embellish these moments with puns and clever anecdotes, transforming a simple boat ride into a lively storytelling session. The experience is further enhanced by the lush scenery that surrounds the waterway, immersing guests in the sights and sounds of the jungle. With each tour, the combination of the Skipper's unique personality and the dynamic scenes creates an inviting and unpredictable adventure that keeps guests coming back for more.

The attraction immediately following the Jungle Cruise is Indiana Jones Adventure which is the standard ride through attraction that is the primary form of attraction seen throughout the park. This attraction contributes to the Adventureland narrative through its immersive storytelling and richly detailed environment, which draws guests into the world of the famed archaeologist, Indiana Jones. As riders embark on their adventure, they are immediately introduced to a compelling backstory that sets the stage for their journey. The pre-show experience provides context, narrating the legend of the Temple of the Forbidden Eye and the search for the mystical powers contained within. Once aboard the rugged vehicles, guests find themselves navigating through various scenes that portray the temple's dangers and wonders.

Each element, from the intricately designed sets to the audio-animatronics, enhances the storyline, creating a sense of urgency and excitement. The narrative unfolds through various obstacles, such as escaping the cursed mummies or avoiding the wrath of the giant stone idol, which mirrors the classic adventure films that inspired the ride.

This brings up the idea of theme park attractions as adaptations of Disney intellectual property. The rides we have encountered thus far have not been based on IPs, so this is an opportunity to discuss how these attractions are essentially adaptations of pre-existing narratives. Disney's approach to creating rides based on beloved films and characters allows guests to step directly into the stories they know and love. For instance, attractions like Indiana Jones Adventure based on the iconic film franchise, offer not just thrilling experiences but also serve as a continuation of the narrative, expanding upon the lore and characters that fans are already familiar with. These adaptations breathe new life into classic narratives by transforming them into multi-sensory experiences. Through cutting-edge technology, detailed theming, and storytelling, Disney attractions enable guests to engage with these stories in an interactive way, immersing them in environments that evoke the emotions and themes of the original works. Furthermore, the incorporation of familiar characters and plotlines fosters a sense of nostalgia and emotional connection among guests, enriching their experience and deepening their appreciation for the original source material. Ultimately, these IP-based attractions exemplify how theme parks can serve as extensions of cinematic storytelling, offering new interpretations and allowing guests to actively participate in their favorite narratives, thereby reinforcing Disney's legacy of creativity and imagination⁵. As we explore more attractions rooted in

⁵ Gunn, Meghan. "Immersive Theme Parks Where You're the Main Character." *Newsweek Global*, vol. 179, no. 1, July 2022, pp. 44–47. *EBSCOhost*, research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=f266d5a8-0863-3f14-a31b-70c0764b3213.

Disney's vast catalog, it becomes clear that these experiences are more than mere rides; they are gateways into fantastical worlds where storytelling comes alive.

Another aspect of this ride is the ride vehicle itself: the interaction between the vehicle and the environment is pivotal in building the narrative. The dynamic movements, sudden drops, and unexpected twists keep guests engaged and emphasize the thrill of Indiana Jones' escapades. This combination of storytelling, detailed design, and interactive elements makes the attraction not just a ride but an adventure that allows guests to feel like they are part of an unfolding story, embodying the spirit of exploration and excitement that is central to not only the Indiana Jones franchise, but Adventureland as well.

The final Adventureland attraction is The Swiss Family Robinson Treehouse. This attraction takes the form of an actual treehouse that is located right before the transition from Adventureland to New Orleans Square. The treehouse contributes to the world building of the land as well as its IP's narrative by immersing guests in the story of the Robinson family and their adventures on a deserted island, as depicted in Johann David Wyss's classic novel, and the 1960 Disney film that followed. The attraction serves as a physical manifestation of the family's journey, showcasing their resourcefulness and ingenuity in overcoming the challenges they face upon becoming shipwrecked. As guests ascend the treehouse, they are surrounded by meticulously crafted details that reflect the family's life in their makeshift home. Each room and area of the treehouse tells a part of their story, from the living quarters to the kitchen, highlighting how they adapted to their new environment. The design features various artifacts and elements that suggest the family's daily activities, such as tools, makeshift furniture, and even remnants of their shipwreck, reinforcing the narrative of survival and creativity.

Additionally, the treehouse offers an experiential narrative that encourages exploration. As guests navigate through the different levels and viewpoints, they can imagine themselves in the Robinsons' shoes, experiencing the wonder of their newfound surroundings and the beauty of nature. The elevated perspective provides panoramic views of Adventureland, inviting guests to appreciate the lush landscape while reflecting on the Robinson family's connection to their environment.



Furthermore, the attraction subtly emphasizes themes of family, adventure, and resilience, resonating with visitors of all ages. By inviting guests to explore the treehouse at their own pace, it encourages a sense of curiosity and discovery, mirroring the spirit of adventure that defines the original story. Ultimately, the Swiss Family Robinson Treehouse not only serves as an engaging

walkthrough experience but also enriches the narrative by allowing guests to step into the world of the Robinson family, connecting them to the themes of exploration and ingenuity that are central to their tale and the surrounding land.

Adventureland stands as a testament to Disney's mastery of narrative and world-building within theme parks.⁶ Through its thoughtfully designed attractions: The Enchanted Tiki Room, Jungle Cruise, Indiana Jones Adventure, and the Swiss Family Robinson Treehouse, the land offers rich stories that invite guests to engage with diverse themes of exploration, adventure, and cultural appreciation. Each attraction not only serves to entertain but also fosters a deeper understanding of the narratives they represent, encouraging guests to immerse themselves in fantastical interpretations of real-world cultures and timeless tales. By creating spaces where visitors can experience the joys of discovery and the thrill of adventure, Adventureland reinforces the enduring allure of storytelling that lies at the heart of the Disney experience. As guests journey through this vibrant land, they are not merely passive observers; they become active participants in the unfolding narratives, forming lasting memories and connections that reflect the magic of imagination and the spirit of adventure that Disney embodies.

⁶ Baker, Carissa. "The Prevalence of Storyworlds and Thematic Landscapes in Global Theme Parks." *Annals of Tourism Research Empirical Insights*, vol. 4, no. 1, May 2023. EBSCOhost, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annale.2022.100080>.

CHAPTER V: NEW ORLEANS SQUARE



Photo Credit: Disney Experiences

Narrative in New Orleans Square is explored through its rich architectural design, themed attractions, live entertainment, and culinary experiences, all of which evoke the culture and history of New Orleans. The attention to detail in the vibrant facades and wrought-iron balconies transports guests to the charm of the French Quarter, while attractions like Pirates of the Caribbean and The Haunted Mansion provide engaging storylines that captivate visitors. Live jazz and blues performances enhance the immersive atmosphere, allowing guests to experience the lively spirit of the city firsthand. Together, these elements create a cohesive narrative that invites exploration and engagement, allowing guests to step into a world infused with the essence of New Orleans and its storytelling traditions.

There is no surprise that New Orleans Square is perhaps the most popular and favored land in the park. Despite there only being two attractions in the entire land, it remains a guest favorite. The square is home to the two arguably most iconic attractions: Pirates of the Caribbean and The Haunted Mansion, both of which are beloved by visitors and contribute to the area's charm. These attractions are highly regarded for several reasons. First, they feature immersive storytelling and rich thematic elements that transport guests into unique and captivating worlds. For instance, Pirates of the Caribbean combines adventure, humor, and a well-crafted narrative, while The Haunted Mansion offers a blend of spooky charm and intricate detail that sparks the imagination. Both attractions utilize cutting-edge technology that can be seen in many attractions in the park and extraordinary effects, from animatronics to elaborate set designs, creating an engaging experience that feels alive and dynamic. The attention to detail, including authentic décor and atmospheric music, enhances the overall experience, making each ride memorable. Additionally, these attractions often incorporate elements of nostalgia and whimsy, appealing to a wide range of audiences, from children to adults. They also reflect the cultural influences of New Orleans, introducing guests to its rich history, music, and culinary delights.

The Pirates of the Caribbean ride at Disneyland is a classic attraction that has captivated visitors since its opening in 1967. This dark ride takes guests on a journey through a series of immersive scenes depicting pirate life in the Caribbean. The ride is notable for its richly detailed sets, animatronic characters, and engaging storytelling, all of which combine to create a narrative experience that transports riders to a world of adventure and danger. One of the standout features of the ride is its impressive use of technology and design elements. The scenes are meticulously crafted, featuring vibrant colors, intricate set designs, and a variety of audio-animatronic pirates who bring the story to life. The ride begins with a serene boat ride through a dark bayou,

transitioning into more dynamic scenes filled with pirates singing, pillaging, and celebrating. The use of sound effects and music, especially the famous “Yo Ho (A Pirate’s Life for Me)” song, enhances the overall atmosphere, drawing riders deeper into the narrative.

Over the years, the attraction has evolved and expanded, especially following the resurgence of the Pirates of the Caribbean film franchise. Elements from the films were incorporated into the ride, such as the character of Captain Jack Sparrow, who, while not originally part of the ride, now plays a prominent role in various scenes. This integration has helped to keep the ride fresh and relevant for newer generations of guests while still honoring the original spirit of the attraction. Overall, the Pirates of the Caribbean ride remains a beloved cornerstone of Disneyland, exemplifying Disney’s commitment to storytelling and immersive experiences. Its blend of adventure, humor, and charm continues to attract guests of all ages, making it a must-see attraction for anyone visiting the park, take for example, the commencing anecdote.

The Haunted Mansion ride at Disneyland is an iconic dark ride that combines elements of humor, sophistication, and spooky storytelling. Since its opening in 1969, it has become a beloved attraction much like the Pirates of the Caribbean. The ride takes visitors through a seemingly haunted estate filled with whimsical ghosts and ghoulish figures, creating an experience that walks the fine line between eerie and entertaining. One of the most remarkable features of the Haunted Mansion is its atmospheric design. From the moment guests enter the queue, they are enveloped in a gothic ambiance, featuring intricate architecture, haunting audio, and clever visual effects. The ride begins with a narrated tour through a series of dimly lit rooms, each filled with detail that invites exploration. The use of “stretching rooms,” which is really a seamlessly disguised elevator, where the ceilings appear to rise and reveal ghostly portraits, is a

clever illusion that sets the tone for the rest of the ride. This attention to detail immerses riders in the storyline, effectively building anticipation as they progress deeper into the mansion.

The ride itself is a masterclass in storytelling through animatronics and special effects. Guests board “doom buggies,” which glide smoothly through a sequence of rooms where they encounter a variety of ghostly characters, each with their own narrative. The integration of innovative technology, such as the iconic “Pepper’s Ghost” effect, creates mesmerizing illusions that bring the spirits to life. The blend of humor and spookiness, embodied by characters like the singing ghosts in the ballroom scene, ensures a lighthearted experience that makes the ride enjoyable rather than terrifying. As a cultural touchstone, the Haunted Mansion has inspired countless spin-offs, merchandise, and even two feature films, further cementing its significance within the Disney legacy. Its unique ability to blend themes of mortality, whimsy, and charming spookiness has left an indelible mark on popular culture. This brings into conversation, the converse to previous rides we have encountered thus far, as both The Haunted Mansion and The Pirates of the Caribbean are original IPs that have then gone on to be adapted into film, texts, and more. This is an attestation to Disney’s story-telling ability as these rides have gained enough traction to spark interest in major film franchises and have secured their places in pop culture. For that reason, the Haunted Mansion remains not just a ride but an experience that reflects Disney’s commitment to intricate storytelling and imaginative design, making it a perennial favorite among Disneyland visitors.

In addition to the rides, the food is almost just as remarkable as a part of the New Orleans Square. The food offerings in this land are intricately woven into the overarching narrative of the park, particularly through their connection to the themes of New Orleans culture, history, and the allure of its respective setting. New Orleans Square embodies the vibrant spirit of the historic

French Quarter, and the culinary selection reflects the city's rich heritage, blending Creole and Cajun influences that enhance the immersive experience of the area. Restaurants like the Blue Bayou, which is situated literally within the Pirates of the Caribbean ride, provide not only a unique dining experience but also contribute to the storytelling. Diners find themselves surrounded by a picturesque bayou, complete with flickering lanterns and the sounds of crickets and water, making it feel as though they are part of the adventure. The menu often features classic New Orleans dishes, such as jambalaya and gumbo, inviting guests to savor the flavors of the region while being part of the narrative of the pirates just at the end of the waterfall drop and hidden treasures.

Additionally, even quick service locations like the Royal Street Veranda and the Mint Julep Bar serve items inspired by the region's culinary traditions, such as beignets or gumbo. These dishes evoke the spirit of Mardi Gras both in and out of season, reflecting the festive and lively nature of New Orleans. The food offerings not only cater to the taste buds but also enhance guests' engagement with the theme of the area, allowing them to experience the culture in a tangible way. Overall, the food in New Orleans Square serves as a vital element of the ambiance, enriching the overall narrative of the park by inviting guests to partake in the essence of New Orleans. Through its culinary experiences, Disneyland effectively transports visitors to a place where they can indulge in the flavors, sights, and sounds of this enchanting city, all while enjoying the whimsical and immersive storytelling that defines the Disneyland experience.

New Orleans Square stands out as a vibrant and immersive representation of the cultural tapestry that defines New Orleans, seamlessly integrating architectural design, themed attractions, and culinary experiences. Each element is carefully curated to enhance storytelling, inviting guests to fully engage with the rich history and lively traditions of this iconic city. The

attractions, Pirates of the Caribbean and The Haunted Mansion, not only entertain but also create lasting emotional connections through their innovative storytelling techniques and evocative settings. These experiences resonate with visitors, drawing them into narratives that are both fantastical and reflective of New Orleans' unique charm. Additionally, the culinary offerings in New Orleans Square play a crucial role in deepening the immersive experience, providing guests with a taste of the local cuisine that compliments the thematic elements of the area. Dining in establishments like the Blue Bayou allows guests to savor authentic flavors while being enveloped in the atmosphere of adventure and intrigue.⁷ This culinary connection, combined with the attractions and live performances, enriches the overall narrative, ensuring that New Orleans Square remains a multifaceted destination within Disneyland. Ultimately, this land exemplifies Disney's commitment to creating richly woven experiences that engage all the senses and celebrate the spirit of storytelling, making it a cherished destination for park visitors.

⁷ Kokai, J. A., & Robson, T. (Thomas M.) (Eds.). (2019). *Performance and the Disney theme park experience : the tourist as actor* / Jennifer A. Kokai, Tom Robson, editors. Palgrave Macmillan.

CHAPTER VI: TOMORROWLAND

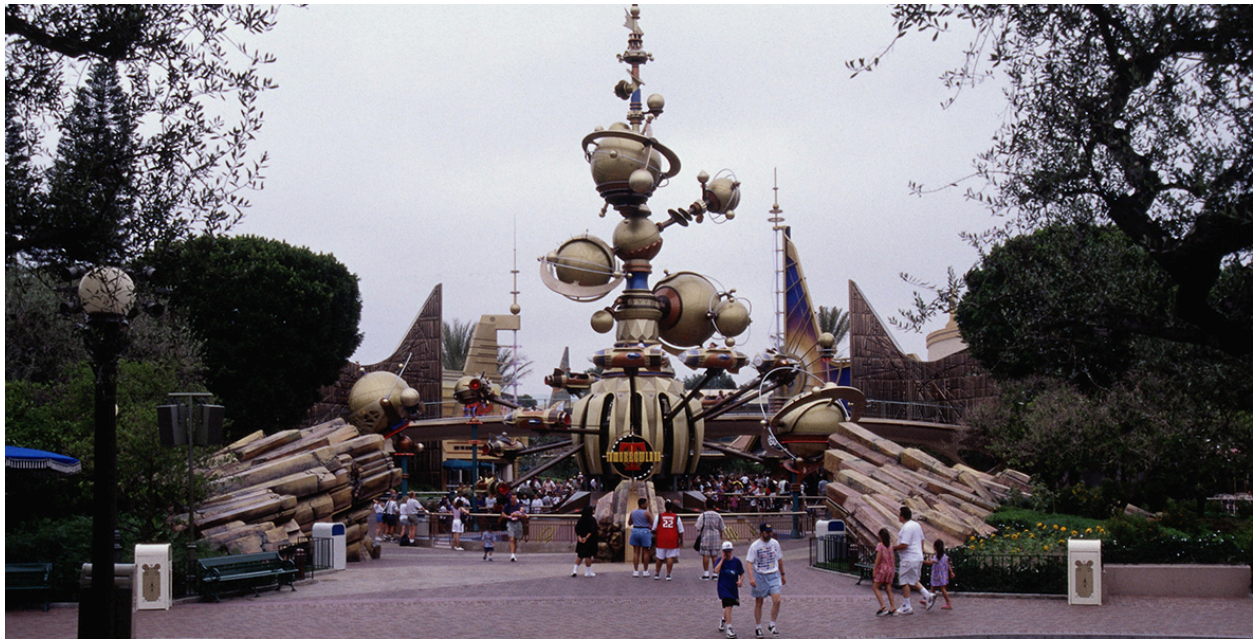


Photo Credit: D23

Tomorrowland creates world-building through its visionary design and thematic focus on innovation, futurism, and exploration of possibilities. The land is structured around the idea of a brighter future and serves as a canvas for imaginations to run wild with the potential of technology and space. Tomorrowland is designed to evoke a sense of optimism about the future. Elements such as sleek architecture, modern materials, and vibrant colors contribute to an atmosphere that is distinctly futuristic. This aesthetic creates a cohesive environment that transports guests into a world where innovation is celebrated. Each attraction in Tomorrowland offers a unique perspective on the future, from Space Mountain's thrilling space exploration to the more relaxed yet informative experience of the Disneyland Monorail. Rides like Star Tours give guests the chance to participate in intergalactic travel, while attractions like Buzz Lightyear Astro Blasters allow visitors to engage in interactive challenges. Together, these experiences illustrate different facets of what the future might hold, enriching the land's narrative.

The land also draws inspiration from beyond intellectual properties- various concepts of futurism, including space travel, robotics, transportation, and environmental sustainability. By incorporating references to both classic and contemporary visions of the future— such as the retro-futurism of the 1960s and the aspirations of modern science— Tomorrowland bridges the gap between past imaginations and current innovations. Be that as it may, Tomorrowland poses a unique problem that is not apparent in any other land in the park. While it is still rooted in fantasy and imagination, there will be a point where tomorrow becomes today and then consequently, yesterday.

This temporal dilemma challenges the narrative of Tomorrowland, as the very visions of the future it seeks to portray can quickly become outdated. As technological advancements continue to evolve at an unprecedented rate, aspects of the land may feel less futuristic and more reflective of the present day. This creates a need for constant renewal and adaptation within Tomorrowland to maintain its relevance and excitement. The land must continually redefine itself, incorporating new technologies and ideologies to stay ahead of the curve and ensure that it remains a vibrant representation of what the future could hold. This ongoing transformation calls for a delicate balance—honoring the imaginative roots of Tomorrowland while pushing the boundaries of innovation and creativity. Ultimately, Tomorrowland serves as a reminder that the future is not a static endpoint but a dynamic landscape that we are all involved in shaping, making it a living testament to the endless possibilities that lie ahead.

Moreover, Tomorrowland's role in the Disneyland experience extends beyond mere attractions; it serves as a platform for exploration and conversation about our collective future. By showcasing concepts like environmental sustainability and advancements in technology, the land encourages guests to reflect on their responsibilities and opportunities in this ever-evolving

world. Interactive experiences and educational elements invite visitors to engage with contemporary issues, inspiring them to think critically about how they can contribute to positive change in society. In this way, Tomorrowland transforms from a simple thematic area into a forward-thinking hub of innovation and creativity, where dreams of the future can spark real discussions about progress and responsibility.⁸ For example, the attraction Autopia which currently features gas go-kart-esque vehicles that are driven by guests on a tracked course, is expected to be electric by 2026. This simple, yet significant change is just one of the many ways in which Tomorrowland requires more maintenance in comparison to the other lands. It wouldn't make sense for a land based on the future to be behind, especially in a way that is so resolvable. Take into consideration guests that arrived at the park via electric car, why would it be exciting or interesting to take a gas powered car through a tracked ride system? It is this weird in-between as it's not new enough for Tomorrowland, but also not old enough to have the charm that is present in a land such as Frontierland. It empowers guests to envision what tomorrow can hold, blending enjoyment with a sense of purpose and awareness that resonates far beyond their visit to the park. Ultimately, Tomorrowland not only captivates the imagination but also cultivates a hopeful vision for the future, making it a vital part of Disneyland's overarching narrative.

An attraction that encapsulates all of these ideas is the Monorail. The Monorail holds significant importance within Disneyland, particularly in the context of Tomorrowland and its overall vision for the future. As one of the park's iconic attractions, it serves multiple roles that enhance the themes of innovation, transportation, and the interconnectedness of the various lands. The Monorail represents a forward-thinking approach to transportation. Introduced in the 1950s, it was revolutionary for its time, showcasing the potential of elevated train systems as a

⁸ Jackson, K. M., & West, M. I. (2011). *Disneyland and culture essays on the parks and their influence* / edited by Kathy Merlock Jackson and Mark I. West. McFarland & Co.

clean, efficient mode of travel. This aligns perfectly with Tomorrowland's emphasis on futuristic ideas and technological advancements, embodying the dream of a more advanced, interconnected world. For guests, riding the Monorail offers a unique perspective of Disneyland, providing sweeping views of the park and its various themed lands. This elevated experience enhances the sense of immersion, allowing visitors to appreciate the artistic and architectural details of Disneyland from above. It reinforces the land's narrative of exploration and discovery, inviting guests to see the park from a new angle as they journey seamlessly from Tomorrowland to other areas.

Believe it or not, transportation is actually a very important aspect of Disneyland's theme park design. As a mode of transportation connecting different parts of the park and even extending to Disneyland Resort hotels, the Monorail serves as a practical example of efficient transit systems. It illustrates the importance of innovation in everyday life and contributes to the park's overall theme of envisioning a better future. By showcasing how modern transit can enhance the guest experience, the Monorail emphasizes Tomorrowland's focus on human ingenuity in addressing real-world challenges. However, the Monorail is not just a means of transportation; it encapsulates the spirit of Tomorrowland and its commitment to exploring the possibilities of the future. By blending function, innovation, and imagination, the Monorail reinforces the overarching themes of progress and exploration that define Disneyland, making it a significant component of the park's narrative. The Monorail has become an enduring symbol of Disneyland itself, representing the essence of Walt Disney's vision for a utopian future. Its sleek design and smooth operation have made it recognizable and beloved by guests. This cultural significance ensures that the Monorail remains a vital piece of Disneyland's identity, evoking nostalgia while stimulating curiosity about what the future might hold.

Tomorrowland represents a unique and ever-evolving landscape within Disneyland, where the interplay of imagination, innovation, and futurism creates a distinctive narrative that captivates guests. The land's design and attractions work synergistically to inspire visitors to dream about what the future holds, while also provoking thoughtful discussions about contemporary issues such as sustainability and technology. Its requirement for constant renewal reflects the underlying message that the future is not a fixed destination but an ongoing journey requiring active engagement and adaptation. Tomorrowland thus becomes not only a place of amusement but a reflective space where dreams of tomorrow meet the realities of today.

This dynamic nature emphasizes the importance of community involvement and personal responsibility in shaping a better future. As guests navigate through Tomorrowland, they are encouraged to participate not only in the imaginative experiences presented to them but also in the broader conversation about progress and their role in it. By harnessing elements like interactive attractions and educational exhibits, Tomorrowland fosters a culture of curiosity and innovation, inspiring visitors to envision themselves as part of the solution to global challenges. Ultimately, Tomorrowland serves as a beacon of hope, encouraging everyone who enters to embrace the possibilities that lie ahead and take action in their own lives, illustrating that the future is in our hands and within our reach.

CHAPTER VII: FANTASYLAND



Photo Credit: Disney Wiki

As guests walk through the main icon of the park, they are greeted with the world of fantasy that would otherwise be impossible to experience if not brought to life in this medium. Fantasyland has a particularly strong sense of narrative for a variety of reasons. The first, and potentially most important reason, is its nostalgia factor. Fantasyland is rooted in classic fairy tales and childhood stories, which resonate with many visitors. These familiar narratives evoke a sense of nostalgia, transporting guests back to their own childhoods in a way that is extremely immersive, and makes the distance between fantasy and reality not so far from one another. With that being said, it is important to note how Fantasyland is truly a timeless land. In other words, Fantasyland will continue to age well, unlike Tomorrowland for reference. In the (not so distant)

future, Tommorowland will become Todayland, but Fantasyland is unique in that it is timeless, and in a setting that will always be inviting and classic regardless of its age.

Another reason for this phenomenon is its close ties to what is iconic and representative of the Disney company as a whole. This gives Fantasyland a sort of unfair advantage in comparison to the other lands, in that some of the most remarkable IPs that Disney owns fits within Fantasyland, especially those that are particularly nostalgic. For that reason, this land calls for intricate design and attention to detail in order to create a fully immersive environment. From the quaint architecture to the beautifully crafted attractions, guests have the ability to feel as if they have stepped into the pages of a storybook. The land is very craftful in that everything is unified in a way that makes such an artificially constructed environment feel natural.

However, it is important to keep in mind that the theme park experience and appeal does not function quite so independently. Matthew Freeman speaks to the multi-media nature of Disney's storytelling, noting that: "The spread of licensed intellectual property across multiple media was followed by a continued broadening of the fictional storyworlds created in those media, with Disney one of the most prominent of the era" (Freeman 96). Freeman's quote highlights the significant impact of transmedia storytelling in shaping expansive fictional universes, particularly through the lens of Disney's success. Freeman suggests that the versatility of characters and narratives allows for a deeper engagement with audiences across different platforms. This is what makes these stories so effective— they are marketed in a way that makes them easily nostalgic and timeless, as is Fantasyland. Disney exemplifies this phenomenon by not only using film but also integrating television, merchandise, and theme parks to create a rich tapestry of interconnected stories. This multifaceted approach has not only solidified Disney's dominance in the entertainment industry but has also redefined how stories are shared and

experienced, inviting fans to immerse themselves in a continuous, interwoven universe that enhances their emotional connection to the characters and their adventures. Ultimately, this expansion reflects a shift in storytelling dynamics, where the interplay among various media creates a more complex and inviting narrative landscape for audiences to explore.

Within these narratives of the stories featured in Fantasyland is the centering around classic themes of good triumphing over evil, which adds a layer of excitement and drama to the experience, making it compelling for guests of all ages. Take, for example, all of the dark rides in Fantasyland⁹: Snow White and Her Adventures, Pinocchio's Daring Journey, Peter Pan's Flight, Mr. Toad's Wild Ride, and Alice in Wonderland— all of these rides share that common contrast in theme. This classic narrative arc provides not only a clear moral framework but also a sense of optimism and hope, allowing guests to root for beloved characters as they face formidable villains. In the attractions named above, visitors are transported into worlds where heroes and heroines embark on epic quests to overcome darkness. This dynamic fuels excitement and anticipation, as the audience becomes emotionally invested in the characters' journeys and their ultimate, and almost inevitable triumphs. Perhaps that is what makes these experiences and stories so enthralling: even though we as the audience are aware of the fact that the triumph is inevitable, we are engaged with the narrative enough to participate in that willing suspension of disbelief where we convince ourselves that we are uncertain of that eventual outcome. Moreover, the dramatic tension created by the battle between good and evil adds layers of depth to the overall experience. This brings an element of suspense that keeps visitors on the edge of their seats, celebrating the moments of victory while also experiencing the thrill of danger encountered by their favorite characters.

⁹ Thevenin, Benjamin. "Dark Ride: Disneyland. Using Educational Games for Critical Media Literacy Education." *Journal of Media Literacy Education*, vol. 12, no. 1, Jan. 2020, pp. 100–22. EBSCOhost,

The Alice in Wonderland ride in Fantasy confronts this theme of good versus evil through its whimsical yet often surreal portrayal of Lewis Carroll's classic narrative. As guests journey through the attraction, they are swept into Alice's fantastical world, where characters embody various moral dichotomies and challenges. The ride presents Alice as the quintessential heroine, exploring the chaotic landscape with curiosity and bravery in her quest to find her way. Contrasting her innocence and curiosity, are characters like the Queen of Hearts, who represents tyranny and malevolence with her arbitrary rule and temperamental nature. This juxtaposition encapsulates the struggle between good and evil as Alice navigates the absurdities of this world, reflecting her resilience against the challenges posed by the Queen and other antagonistic figures¹⁰.

Further enriching this theme is the manifestation of absurdity and irrationality, characteristic of Carroll's work, which serves to heighten the conflict between order and chaos. The characters Alice encounters—such as the Cheshire Cat, who embodies cunning and unpredictability, and the Mad Hatter, who represents madness—provide complex layers to the theme of good versus evil, often blurring the lines between right and wrong in their whimsical, nonsensical interactions. This ambiguity invites riders to reflect on the nature of morality in a world where logic is inverted and expectations are subverted. Ultimately, the Alice in Wonderland ride encapsulates the timeless battle between good and evil, encouraging guests to embrace curiosity, navigate their fears, and ultimately seek out personal agency in the face of overwhelming and chaotic circumstances.

¹⁰ Bumstead, Andrew. "Alice in Disneyland: Power and Subversion in Two Theme Park Rides." *South Atlantic Review*, vol. 88, no. 4, Dec. 2023, pp. 48–64. *EBSCOhost*, research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=2720b404-8eb6-3913-b5ec-1adec61c928e.

While this may seem like an over-analysis of a ride that only lasts four minutes, it is significant to note these aspects as, once again, it is a narrative and therefore possesses the qualities of traditional narratives. All of the Fantasyland dark rides essentially follow this outline more or less. This is due to the fact that it is extremely effective, especially considering the constraints of time and resources. While it appears that Disney has no apparent lack of resources, it is important to note that, regardless of the financial flexibility that they have, they can not ultimately transport guests into a 1:1 ratio of a given movie. That being said, they have difficult choices to make when presenting a much longer narrative in a short yet captivating experience. While they can't retell the narrative in its entirety, it still needs to be told in a way that makes sense— even to a guest who isn't familiar with the franchise. In that way, theme park attractions also function as a form of narrative in translation. However, instead of language, the premise is time.

This necessity to convey a narrative within a constrained time frame also leads to a careful selection of key moments that resonate with guests, drawing on visual storytelling and emotional engagement. Each element— whether it's a particular scene, character, or piece of music— is picked for its ability to evoke a specific feeling or memory associated with the original story. This curatorial approach enables the ride to serve as both a homage to the source material and an accessible introduction for newcomers. Just as a movie trailer highlights the most compelling aspects of a larger film, these attractions distill the essence of beloved tales into an experience that captivates and engages, despite the abbreviated format. In essence, they transform intricate narratives into vivid snapshots that invite guests to immerse themselves in fantastical worlds, even if just for a fleeting moment. The challenge lies not only in what to

include but also in how to ensure that the essence of the story is preserved, ultimately serving as a bridge between the cinematic experience and the theme park adventure.

Another critical aspect of the Fantasyland experience is the ability for guests to interact with characters outside of the ride. This is an experience that is available park-wide, but it is the most present in this area of the park. Additionally, it adds to the overall atmosphere and world-building that goes into creating a land that is a greatest hits story book compilation brought to life. Disney has a tedious process to cast these performers, which can be divided between costume and face characters. Costumed characters include characters such as: Mickey and friends, Winnie the Pooh, Toy Story Characters, Pinocchio characters, the Seven Dwarves, and Captain Hook. These characters are completely costumed so as not to expose the individual playing them. They do not have the ability to talk and must rely solely on their gestures and body language in order to interact with guests. Face characters include: Disney Princesses, Peter Pan, Wendy, Tinker Bell, Alice, and select villains, such as the Evil Queen and Lady Tremaine. These performers are essentially professional cosplayers of these characters and therefore must embody their given character so as not to break the immersion that Disney relies on them to contribute to. There is an unpredictability to these roles as these performers encounter a variety of different kinds of guests. Children can ask unexpected questions, and many are experts themselves on these films, and the respective performers must be able to reply quickly and accurately. Adults can be just as unpredictable as children, as they may attempt to get them to break character, which is certainly not acceptable in this carefully curated environment.

This dynamic between the performers and the guests enhances the immersive experience in a way that traditional storytelling cannot achieve alone. The interactions often lead to spontaneous moments of joy and laughter, further deepening the emotional connection guests

feel to the characters and, by extension, the stories they represent. For many children, meeting their favorite character in person can be a magical moment that feels like stepping into the storybook itself. The ability of performers to stay in character while navigating these unpredictable encounters is crucial; it ensures that the magic is maintained and that guests leave with cherished memories. Moreover, the training that performers undergo prepares them not only to embody their characters but also to read the room and engage with guests in a meaningful, age-appropriate manner. This creates a safe and enchanting environment that fosters imagination and wonder, effectively extending the narrative beyond the confines of the rides and into the lively interactions that define the Fantasyland experience. It's a dance of character and creativity that reinforces Disney's commitment to storytelling, making every moment within the park a part of the larger narrative.

Fantasyland stands as a testament to the power of immersive storytelling, seamlessly blending nostalgia, iconic narratives, and interactive experiences. This enchanting land not only appeals visually through its meticulously crafted attractions but also emotionally connects with guests of all ages by inviting them into a world where childhood fantasies come alive. By capturing the essence of beloved tales and transforming them into engaging experiences, Fantasyland successfully transcends the limitations of time and technology, allowing guests to savor both familiar stories and the thrill of adventure. The careful casting and training of performers elevates this experience further, as they embody the spirit of the characters and facilitate spontaneous moments of joy and connection with the audience. Ultimately, Fantasyland enhances the Disney legacy of storytelling by creating a vibrant landscape where the universal themes of good versus evil resonate deeply. As guests wander through this timeless realm, they not only relive cherished memories but also create new ones, solidifying Fantasyland's role as an

enduring cornerstone of the Disney experience. Through its intricate tapestry of narratives, interactive engagements, and the magic of childhood dreams, Fantasyland proves that the spirit of storytelling is not only alive but thriving, making each visit a cherished chapter in the ongoing tale of imagination and wonder.

CHAPTER VIII: TOONTOWN



Photo Credit: Wikipedia

ToonTown is a unique land in the park, as it transports guests to the world of cartoons, the world of the park, and the company's icon. This land relies less on attractions and more on experiences in order to relay its narrative. For example, Mickey's house, Minnie's house, and Donald's boat can all be found in this land, open for guests to explore open-endedly. Mickey's house is the most immersive, as guests can meet Mickey Mouse at his house throughout the entirety of the park's operational hours. This is the only guaranteed character meet and greet, as the others are sporadic and guests can not rely on seeing any given character on any given day, with the exception being Mickey. This is, of course, because he is the icon of the park and the Walt Disney Company as a whole. The remainder of the Mickey and Friends gang is most likely to be seen on a given day in the park, but obviously varies, unlike Mickey. These ToonTown house experiences are extremely immersive as the detail included in these sets is unmatched.

The immersive quality of ToonTown not only lies in the intricate detail of the sets but also in the way it fosters a sense of playfulness and exploration that resonates with both children and adults alike. Each house embodies the whimsical, exaggerated design characteristic of classic cartoons, inviting guests to step into a vibrant world where the normal rules of reality are joyfully distorted. The layouts and colors create an engaging atmosphere that encourages visitors to interact with their environment, whether it's by taking silly photos in Mickey's oversized furniture or discovering hidden elements that spark that sense of nostalgia or laughter. Additionally, the experience of meeting Mickey Mouse in such a setting elevates the connection between guests and the character, making it feel like a warm visit rather than a mere photo opportunity. These encounters often become highlights of a trip to Disneyland, where the laughter and excitement resonate with families, creating lasting memories. Moreover, the open-ended exploration of ToonTown aligns with the imaginative spirit embodied by the cartoons themselves, reinforcing the idea that storytelling can be a two-way street; guests aren't just passive observers, but active participants in the narrative, engaging with the playful spirit of the land in ways that go far beyond traditional attractions.

The star ride-through attraction of this land opened recently in 2023— Mickey and Minnie's Runaway Railway. As guests step into the vibrant and whimsical world of Mickey & Minnie's Runaway Railway, they are immediately greeted by a colorful backdrop that resembles a classic cartoon. The pre-show area sets the stage with fun props and interactive elements that immerse visitors in the lively atmosphere of a cartoon movie theater. This is really where the attraction begins, as the queue doesn't feel like, well, a queue. There are so many elements that contribute to this atmosphere, and there is so much for guests to take in while waiting in a line

that, quite honestly, moves too fast for guests to see everything on their first time around. There are multiple easter eggs and nods to Disney's cartoon foundations and subsequent history.



Photo Credit: Orange County Register.

In this way, the queue functions more as a walk-through attraction, akin to a museum, but obviously less self-guided. The picture on the left displays an interactive recreation of the iconic “Steamboat Willie” wheel, which was the cartoon in which Mickey Mouse made his preliminary appearance. The queue is filled with tons of cartoon “artifacts” brought to life through practical sets and informative accompanying signage. The picture on the right includes the concession stand portion of the pre-show attraction, which has popcorn pieces that resemble various Mickey and Friends characters as well as significant numbers permanently displayed on the cash registers. The cash registers read 11.18 and 19.28: Mickey’s birthday, which is November 18th, and the year “Steamboat Willie” premiered.

It is these details that take the guest experience to the next level. This extends to the ride itself as well. Once onboard, the ride begins with an upbeat musical number featuring Mickey, Minnie, and their friends, setting a joyful tone for the adventure. As the train departs, it travels through a series of dynamic and stunning scenes that replicate the energetic feel of an animated cartoon. The technology behind the ride is groundbreaking, utilizing trackless systems that allow for a smooth and fluid ride experience, as well as impressive projections and animatronics that

bring the characters to life. Guests quickly find themselves in a vibrant and chaotic cartoon landscape, where Goofy, as the train conductor, suddenly loses control, leading to a series of unforeseen antics. Riders zoom through various scenes, each filled with delightful surprises, from a bustling backyard picnic to a scenic landscape with moving elements that react to the train's presence. The visuals are stunning, with bright colors and exaggerated cartoon physics adding to the playful chaos. Throughout the journey, guests encounter beloved characters such as Goofy, Donald, and Pluto, all while experiencing the delightful unpredictability of a cartoon escapade. The ride features thrilling twists, unexpected turns, and immersive sound effects that enhance the feeling of being inside a cartoon world. As the adventure unfolds, guests are treated to charming moments of humor and whimsy that perfectly capture the spirit of Mickey and Minnie's escapades. As the ride approaches its conclusion, the train makes a final dash through a whimsical finale featuring elaborate set pieces and a catchy tune that invites everyone to join in the fun. Riders ultimately arrive back at the station, stepping off the train with big smiles, having experienced a lively journey that embodies the joy and excitement of classic Disney animation. The overall experience celebrates the magic of Mickey and Minnie, leaving guests feeling as if they've truly participated in a cartoon adventure.

Despite it being one of the smallest and more hidden away lands of the park, ToonTown emerges as a vibrant and distinctive area within Disneyland, expertly merging the whimsical essence of classic animation with hands-on experiences that engage guests on multiple levels. It is a land where the physical environment is as integral to the narrative as the characters themselves, with meticulously designed elements reflecting the playful aesthetics¹¹ of animated cartoons. The introduction of Mickey & Minnie's Runaway Railway elevates this experience

¹¹ Berleant, Arnold. "The Critical Aesthetics of Disney World." *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, vol. 11, no. 2, 1994, pp. 171–80. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24353978>.

further, inviting guests to embark on an exhilarating journey through a cartoon landscape that feels both fresh and nostalgically familiar. The ride's groundbreaking technology, which employs a trackless system, offers a sense of spontaneity and immersion that allows guests to truly feel like they're part of an animated adventure alongside their beloved characters. Moreover, the pre-show queue is a narrative experience in itself, brimming with Easter eggs and historic nods that span Disney's rich cartoon legacy; from interactive props to playful details like the cleverly themed concession stands, each element is an invitation to explore and discover. This thoughtful layering of experiences reinforces the idea that ToonTown is not just a backdrop for character interactions, but an engaging world that encourages playfulness and curiosity. The dynamic encounters with fan-favorite characters throughout the land foster a personal connection for guests, making each meeting a cherished memory rather than a mere photo opportunity. As guests wander through ToonTown, they engage with a unique narrative that evolves with each visit, demonstrating Disney's commitment to creating spaces that captivate and inspire. The whimsical chaos of the land, encapsulated in both its design and its attractions, invites guests to abandon their inhibitions and immerse themselves in the joyous spirit of animation, ultimately reinforcing the magical experience that has become quintessential to Disneyland. By blending nostalgia with innovation, ToonTown not only celebrates the legacy of Disney animation but also cultivates a sense of community and shared imagination among guests of all ages, ensuring its place as a beloved destination within the park.

CHAPTER IX: GALAXY'S EDGE



Photo Credit: Orange County Register

The newest addition to the Disneyland Resort is Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge. Galaxy's Edge plays a pivotal role in shaping the narrative through its immersive environment, attention to detail, and interactive experiences that transport guests into the heart of the Star Wars universe. From the moment visitors step into this land, they are enveloped in a meticulously crafted atmosphere that feels like stepping onto a distant planet—Batuu—complete with its own unique culture, characters, and stories. The architecture, inspired by the look and feel of various Star Wars films, invites and encourages exploration and storytelling. For that reason, this is undeniably the most physically impressive and advanced land that Disney has created yet. One of the most significant aspects of Galaxy's Edge is how it incorporates a narrative thread

throughout the entire experience. Guests become part of the story, taking on the role of travelers in a galaxy where they can encounter characters from the Star Wars saga while also meeting new characters exclusive to the land. This blurring of lines between guests and narrative is enhanced by elements such as character interactions, where guests might come across Rey, Kylo Ren, or a Galaxy's Edge cast member who further immerses them in the unfolding story, providing context for the surroundings and enhancing the dramatic stakes. The cast members at Galaxy's Edge are almost characters themselves, as they adapt to fit into the land and act accordingly when interacting with guests. For example, they integrate the land's lingo when assisting guests, taking that extra step to contribute to the continuity of immersion.

In addition to attractions, subtle details throughout Galaxy's Edge help create a cohesive narrative. Ambient sounds, such as the distant whirring of droids and the chatter of alien species, combined with immersive landscaping and props, help create a believable world where visitors feel they are truly part of the Star Wars universe. Furthermore, the land employs a "data pad" experience through the Play Disney Parks app, allowing guests to interact with various aspects of the environment, such as translating Holographic messages or scanning objects, deepening their engagement and role in the story unfolding around them. The food and merchandise in Galaxy's Edge are thoughtfully designed to be thematically appropriate, reinforcing the narrative and enhancing guests' immersive experience. Items like blue milk or themed lightsabers serve to further anchor guests in this world, offering tastes and treasures that tell their own stories connected to the Star Wars saga. A main selling point of this land is exclusivity. There are many unique experiences that this land has to offer that are not available to all guests¹².

¹² Moulton, Carter. "Pay (to Pay) to Play: Drillable Immersion at Transmedia Theme Parks." *Communication, Culture & Critique*, vol. 15, no. 4, Dec. 2022, pp. 479–88. *EBSCOhost*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ccc/tcac023>.

Perhaps the most exclusive experiences in this land are the droid and lightsaber building experiences. Not only do guests have to book reservations for these experiences sometimes months leading up to their visit, but they are also incredibly expensive on top of the already expensive nature of theme park visits. The droid building experience can range from \$120 to \$200 while the lightsaber building experience starts at \$219. These experiences cost more than admission to the park which is necessary to get access to them. However, guests make these investments to enhance their experience and have a tangible souvenir of their exclusivity. This raises the question of the monetization of narrative— as a guest that doesn't have access to these exclusive experiences are going to have a much different experience than those who do.

This disparity in access to exclusive experiences like the droid and lightsaber building sessions inevitably shapes the overall narrative for guests within Galaxy's Edge, creating a divide between those who can afford to immerse themselves fully and those who cannot. For those who partake in these premium experiences, the sense of achievement and personal connection to the Star Wars universe is not only profound but also singular, as they leave with handcrafted droids or custom lightsabers that serve as lasting mementos of their adventures. This crafted exclusivity fosters a deeper engagement with the narrative, allowing those guests to feel like true contributors to the lore of the galaxy. Conversely, visitors who opt out of these experiences may find their journey through Galaxy's Edge to feel less personalized, potentially missing out on opportunities for meaningful interaction and storytelling that are heavily marketed as integral components of the land's allure. The question of narrative monetization further complicates the enjoyment of Galaxy's Edge, as it suggests that access to certain layers of storytelling is a privilege reserved for those willing to pay a premium. This imbalance could provoke feelings of exclusion among guests who are left to navigate the land's rich scenery and atmosphere without

the same level of engagement. Hence, while Galaxy's Edge is designed to be an immersive experience for all, the division created by these exclusive offerings raises important discussions about equity in themed environments and the true cost of storytelling in a commercialized space.

The rides in Galaxy's Edge, which are available to all guests with admission into the theme park significantly contribute to the overall narrative experience by immersing guests in the Star Wars universe through interactive storytelling, innovative technology, and thematic consistency. The two attractions in this land, Millennium Falcon: Smugglers Run and Star Wars: Rise of the Resistance, are intricately tied to the larger Star Wars narrative. In Smuggler's Run, guests take on roles as pilots, engineers, or gunners aboard the Millennium Falcon, directly influencing the outcome of their mission. This role-playing aspect allows visitors to actively participate in a storyline that feels authentic to the Star Wars saga, deepening their connection to the characters and settings. Both of these rides are set within meticulously designed environments that reflect the history and culture of Batuu, the fictional planet in Galaxy's Edge. Guests are surrounded by intricately detailed set pieces, sounds, and visuals that create a fully immersive atmosphere. This attention to detail enhances the world-building, making guests feel like they've truly entered a living, breathing part of the Star Wars galaxy. These attractions also serve to expand the Star Wars narrative beyond the films. For instance, "Rise of the Resistance" allows guests to experience an epic battle between the First Order and the Resistance, introducing new characters and settings that have not been explored in films or other media. This adds depth to the overall storyline of Star Wars, inviting guests to become part of a larger saga. This alludes to the niche of narratives that are a product of theme parks.

The narrative structure of both rides is designed to evoke emotions— from the thrill of piloting a beloved ship like the Millennium Falcon to the tension and stakes involved in resisting

the oppressive First Order. These emotional connections further enhance the immersive experience, allowing guests to invest in the story personally. In summary, the rides in Galaxy's Edge are pivotal in shaping the overall narrative experience, as they create a seamless integration of storytelling, guest interaction, and immersive environments. By allowing visitors to not only observe but actively participate in the unfolding narrative, these attractions redefine what it means to experience a story, positioning Galaxy's Edge as a significant cultural and experiential achievement within the realm of themed entertainment.

Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge stands as a groundbreaking fusion of storytelling and immersive experience within the realm of theme parks. The intricate detail and thoughtful design of both attractions Millennium Falcon: Smugglers Run and Star Wars: Rise of the Resistance, not only draw guests into the fabric of the Star Wars narrative but also invite them to actively participate in shaping it. While these rides offer universal engagement, the exclusion created by premium experiences like building droids and lightsabers highlights the complexities of narrative accessibility in a commercialized environment. Ultimately, Galaxy's Edge demonstrates that effective storytelling extends beyond traditional mediums; it thrives in environments that offer guests the opportunity to inhabit and influence the shared narrative. Through the confluence of innovative technology, thematic elegance, and emotional resonance, this land challenges our understanding of narrative while reinforcing the idea that storytelling in a theme park can be just as profound and multilayered as in any film or novel. As guests traverse Batuu, they are not merely observers; they are integral parts of an evolving saga, reaffirming Disneyland's commitment to creating immersive worlds where storytelling knows no bounds.

CHAPTER X: BAYOU COUNTRY



Photo Credit: Disneyland Resort

Bayou Country, formerly known as Bear Country, and then Critter Country, is the last area of the park that is brought into this argument, as it doesn't quite measure up to the previously detailed lands. That being said, this is not to suggest that it is entirely devoid of any immersion or narrative experience, but rather to identify the ways in which this craft must be carefully constructed and executed in order to be effective. Originally opened in 1972 as a woodland area themed around the beloved characters from Disney's animated films, Bear Country initially focused on the adventures of Davy Crockett and featured attractions like the Davy Crockett's Explorer Canoes. However, with the introduction of The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh in 1993, the area embraced a broader narrative framework, allowing guests to interact with iconic characters from A.A. Milne's stories, thereby inviting them to step into a whimsical, shared experience. This shift not only aligned with guests' desires for immersive storytelling but also reflected growing public interest in the gentle and relatable narratives of friendship and adventure found within Disney's animated films. As visitors explore the lush surroundings of what would then be known as Critter Country, they are drawn into a narrative

tapestry woven from nostalgia, playfulness, and natural beauty, demonstrating Disneyland's ability to adapt its spaces and stories. The same can not quite be applied to another attraction in Critter Country, which predated *The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh*, as it opened in 1989- which was Splash Mountain.

Splash Mountain's history at Disneyland is complex, reflecting the broader cultural conversations surrounding representation and storytelling in theme parks. Originally opening in 1989, the attraction was inspired by the 1946 film *Song of the South*, a movie that has since been criticized for its problematic portrayal of race and historical context. While Splash Mountain captivated audiences with its charming animatronics and thrilling flume ride, it also inadvertently perpetuated narratives that many deemed outdated and insensitive, prompting a growing call for change from both guests and advocates for racial equity. This tension between the nostalgic appeal of the attraction and its contentious origins highlighted the necessity for Disneyland to critically evaluate the stories it chooses to tell. In 2020, Disney announced plans to reimagine Splash Mountain, repurposing the attraction to celebrate the tales of *The Princess and the Frog* and its groundbreaking representation of Black characters and culture. This decision not only demonstrates Disneyland's responsiveness to evolving societal values but also embodies a commitment to fostering a more inclusive narrative landscape that speaks to contemporary audiences. Through this transformative process, the park aims to redefine its storytelling framework, creating a space where guests can engage with stories that are not only entertaining but also culturally relevant and reflective of a shared journey toward understanding and inclusivity.

While the intent was fortuitous, the reception of this ride was not met with its anticipated praise. However, this is not due to the previous counterarguments to Splash Mountain's

complicated history, but rather the way that Disney ultimately failed to produce an attraction of the same quality. While the internal remnants of Splash Mountain were gutted and replaced, the track and layout of the ride remain unchanged. This creates a new issue in theme park studies, which is the fact that a theme park can never be “finished”. The same concept goes for parks outside of Disney— they are always changing and evolving as technology and cultural landscapes constantly change and evolve. This problem lies in the fact that this must be reflected in theme parks in a way that does not feel “cheap” or “recycled”. Of course, this is a near inevitability with such theme park cult classic attractions— but it must be considered that Disney is also working against myriad factors in addition to that matter. First, finances and time go hand in hand in the problems that they cause for Disney. Fans expect the best of both worlds when it comes to a place that is seemingly fueled by magic. Disney is aware of this but can only truly meet one to guest’s dissatisfaction. As for the retheme of Splash Mountain, it was done in a pretty impressive time, but with that, at a lesser quality.

For that reason, it is worth referencing the comments that guests had under the official POV ride-through video¹³ that was posted to the Disney Parks YouTube channel. One user wrote: “Without a villain or clear story pointing towards the climactic drop, this ride is basically a New Orleans jazz easy listening station on a long flume” (@SilasMiller-y1m). This comment is reflective of that lack of a structured narrative that is necessary in order for the fullest extent of immersion. Along the same lines, another user commented: “Except for the finale, it just seems so empty. There seems to just be a lot of dead space that they really had no idea what to do with. The one thing I liked about Splash was that almost every scene had a different character doing something. The story is all over the place. It just seems so lifeless” (@brothkins). This user is

¹³ Disney Parks. *FULL Ride POV: Tiana’s Bayou Adventure* | *Walt Disney World. YouTube*, 1 June 2024, <https://youtu.be/RLmhNWq5kT0?feature=shared>.

making note of the fact that again, unlike its predecessor, the retheme did not have narrative structure. Subsequently, we see terms being used such as “lifeless” to describe that void of emotional connectivity between the guests and the story. The next user claims: “Here are my thoughts: Pro: the animatronics are beautiful and well done. I love Tiana and think it’s awesome that she’s getting some love. That last scene is beautiful and impressive. Cons: this feels like one of those movies where they blew the whole budget on a big-name actor, so there was no money left for anything else. Other than those dazzling animatronics, this ride seems like it’s filled with cheap plastic flowers and grass and feels... empty. Disney also totally missed it with the storyline. The best part of Splash Mountain was the clear story with a big build up in tension that led to the famous drop into the briar patch. The story line for this ride completely lacks a fun, cohesive story...” (@sarastubblefield2191). This comment obviously exceeds the rather short-natured comments that are typically seen under YouTube videos- instead, it is, in essence, a preliminary argument to this very concept. There is what seems to be an urgent plea for Disney to understand the devaluing of attractions when the storyline is put on the chopping block due to budget and time constraints. The final comment that is worth addressing for the purposes of this argument, but certainly not the last of many that are pertinent, is: “It is with a heavy heart that I say that I think this is the worst ride in all of Disney. We were so excited for this ride to immerse you in the world of the movie and take you through that emotional journey once more of ups and downs, good and evil and to come out richer for the experience. Disney please reconsider the way you use your minds, hearts and money” (@vincentleon7696). This comment circles back to one of the previously mentioned themes, particularly present in Fantasyland, which is the contrast between good and evil, which is subsequently a common yet effective theme that is represented through narrative. What all of these comments have in common is the complaint

regarding its overall lack of narrative, and how this is an essential aspect to the overarching theme park experience.

The evolution of Bayou Country, alongside its historical counterparts, underscores the critical importance of narrative structure in crafting immersive experiences within Disneyland. While the transformation from Bear Country to Critter Country and now to the reimagined attraction and Bayou Country reflects an effort to adapt to contemporary values and audience expectations, it also highlights the challenges of maintaining narrative cohesion amidst technological and cultural change. The lack of a clear storyline in the reworked Splash Mountain not only disappointed guests but also served as a poignant reminder that effective storytelling is key to emotional engagement and overall enjoyment in theme parks. As evidenced by guest feedback, a compelling narrative acts as the connective tissue that enriches the visitor experience, allowing individuals to forge personal connections with the attractions and the stories they inhabit. As Disneyland continues to navigate the delicate balance between innovation and nostalgia, it remains essential for the park to prioritize the construction of meaningful, engaging narratives that resonate with guests, thereby ensuring that their experiences are not merely enjoyable but transformative and memorable. The ongoing dialogue surrounding these attractions emphasizes that, in the realm of theme parks, narrative is not just an embellishment – it is a foundational element that defines the very magic of the Disney Parks experience.

CHAPTER XI: CONCLUSION

The experience described within the Disneyland Park transcends traditional notions of narrative by immersing guests in a living, breathing story. Each moment—from the initial entrance into the park at the beginning of the day to the end of the night when before you once again pass through the turnstiles, take one last look over your shoulder to catch one more glimpse of the castle clouded by the smog of the aftermath of the fireworks show—contributes to an overarching narrative that is uniquely shaped by individual perspectives and interactions. This fluidity of experience fosters a deeper connection between guests and the stories being told, blurring the lines between observer and participant. Rather than a linear progression, visitors navigate a rich tapestry of tales, creating their own narrative threads that intertwine with those of others.

Moreover, this innovative approach to storytelling challenges conventional narratives by redefining engagement. No longer passive recipients of a predefined story with a predetermined outcome, guests are active co-creators, crafting their own adventures within the same shared universe. This helps highlight the importance of personal interpretation and emotional investment in any narrative structure. In essence, Disneyland Park serves not only as a backdrop for entertainment but also as a dynamic space where stories evolve and adapt, reflecting the diversity of its audiences.

Ultimately, the notion of narrative within Disneyland Park invites us to reconsider our understanding of storytelling itself. It prompts us to question what constitutes a story, encouraging us to see beyond the confines of traditional media and recognize the power of experiential narratives. As guests emerge from the rides and attractions, they carry with them not only memories of fun and excitement but also a deeper appreciation for the intricate,

participatory nature of modern storytelling. Thus, Disneyland Park stands as a testament to the idea that narrative is not merely constructed but rather experienced, felt, and lived in a myriad of ways.

This transformative approach to narrative extends beyond Disneyland Park and invites broader implications for storytelling in other realms of culture and entertainment. As technology advances, the lines between creator and audience continue to blur, promising more interactive and immersive experiences across various platforms. From virtual reality to video games and even social media, the traditional model of consumption is rapidly evolving. The Disneyland experience serves as a poignant reminder of the growing importance of agency within stories, suggesting that audiences crave not just to witness tales unfold but to influence and partake in them. Additionally, this narrative landscape nurtures a sense of community among visitors. As diverse groups come together to share the same ride, they create a collective experience that transcends individual stories. Conversations sparked by these shared encounters can lead to friendships and connections, highlighting how narratives can foster relationships. This communal aspect of storytelling reinforces the idea that narratives are not only personal but also social, capable of bridging gaps between strangers and creating a sense of belonging, even in fleeting moments. Despite the argument confronted by William's work: "...theme parks and their fans are worthy of attention and understanding and that those who visit theme parks are not the consumption-driven cultural dupes that is often assumed in academic work and mainstream culture" (Williams, *Theme Park Fandom: Spatial Transmedia, Materiality and Participatory Culture*, 11). This again, can be proven by the provided anecdotal evidence.

Furthermore, the lessons from Disneyland's narrative design can provoke valuable discussions on the future of storytelling in educational contexts. By actively engaging individuals

in various forms of participation, educators might instill a love for storytelling and critical thinking among students. Imagine classrooms designed similarly to immersive theme park environments, where learners step into different roles or perspectives, thereby gaining deeper understanding and empathy through experiential learning. This reinforces the idea that narrative can be a powerful tool for exploration and understanding, both within and beyond the walls of a classroom.

In contemplating the future, we must acknowledge that the evolution of narrative will continue to unfold, driven by creativity and technology. As audience expectations shift towards co-creation and deeper engagement, traditional storytelling methods will need to innovate to capture this new paradigm. Disneyland Park stands as an exemplar of this future, where narrative is not a static tale but a lively ecosystem, constantly growing and adapting. In this space, every guest contributes a unique thread, creating a richer, more intricate tapestry of human experience that reflects the complexity and diversity of our collective narrative. Ultimately, the park encapsulates the enduring relevance of the story, affirming that it is not merely about the arcs and characters, but about the connections we forge and the journeys we undertake together.

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