THE BRAND AND THE BOLD: CARTOON NETWORK’S

BATMAN: THE BRAVE AND THE BOLD AS COMICS-LICENSED

CHILDREN’S TELEVISION

A Thesis in

Media Studies

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis critiques the animated children's television program, *Batman: The Brave and the Bold*, debuting in 2008 on Cartoon Network, as a synergistic corporate commodity. In the program, Batman teams up with a guest hero who helps him vanquish the villain. The commodity and commercial functions of this premise is to introduce and promote secondary licensed brands -- the “guest heroes” and “guest villains” -- for synergistic profit based on the current popularity with the program’s anchor brand, Batman. Given Time Warner's ownership of multiple media outlets including Warner Bros. Animation, DC Comics and Cartoon Network, the program serves as a bridge text to usher young consumers of Time Warner content into becoming long-term consumers of more adult iterations of many of these same characters and licenses.

The thesis contextualizes the program in the larger scholarly literature of the nature of media licensing, the history of commercialism on children's television, comic books and children's media licensing. Combining political economy with textual analysis, the thesis focuses on both the first season of the program on Cartoon Network, as well as the commercials and promotion of the program. In addition, subsidiary spin-off licensed properties, such as the companion comic book, websites, and related merchandise, are also critiqued. *Batman: The Brave and The Bold* becomes a lens to examine the current level of commercial and promotional pressures on children's entertainment, and how such pressures may be manifested in branded commodity texts.
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In 1955 DC Comics premiered *The Brave and The Bold*. Although the comic was originally an adventure book featuring knights and Vikings, eventually it focused on superhero team-ups (Daniels 135). As a comics publisher with scores of superhero characters, including Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman and The Flash, DC used the title as a way to showcase some of these characters; it is the title that first offered the superhero team the Justice League of America, for instance. What was at first random assignments of heroes became solely a Batman-based team-up comic in 1966 (comicbookdb.com), featuring stories of Batman paired with another DC superhero, often a "second-tier" character such as The Creeper or Deadman.

In some ways, *The Brave and the Bold* comic, even in the late 1960s, foreshadowed modern media promotion (such as detailed in Meehan, 1991). The switch to a “Batman-centric” comic was influenced by the success of the character in another medium: television, with ABC's *Batman* debuting in 1966. The partnered characters, nearly all treated as equals by Batman, were also designed to increase the appeal of the comic. As Daniels (1999) documents, sales figures of the title were used to determine which secondary superhero would earn a repeat appearances with Batman.

But other elements were not-so-indicative of modern cross-media promotion and coordinated licensing. Showing the comic book medium's still-relative autonomy from other media, in this particular case *The Brave and the Bold* featured a darker, less campy Batman than appeared in the TV program (Daniels 135). In fact, this version of Batman
seemed utterly unaware of the character's presence in other media. DC Comics was at that time a relatively independent company focused almost exclusively on the comic-book medium, not yet being owned by a big media conglomerate\(^1\). And it seems that little if any licensing from the pairings or title of *The Brave and the Bold* came out of the success of the comic book.

This is in stark contrast with how such a format is treated by large-scale media conglomerates today. The format was reintroduced as an animated children's television program titled *Batman: The Brave and the Bold (BB&B)* on November 14, 2008 on cable television's Cartoon Network. As in the later version of the DC comic, each week Batman teams up with a guest hero who helps him vanquish the villain. The episodes are self-contained, with no serialized plot from week to week\(^2\). Just as there is a guest hero, each week features a guest villain for Batman and his companion to fight. Like *the Brave and the Bold* 1960s comic book, the modern animated series was created to exploit the then-current popularity of Batman, the latter version via the grim and violent *The Dark Knight*, the huge box-office hit of 2008. However, in this more recent case it was the spin-off cartoon that was lighter in tone and more targeted to youth than the live-action movie. This difference in tone can be attributed to its marketing purpose, as can be the fact that, in the modern version and unlike the original comic book, Batman is almost always older and more authoritarian than the heroes he teams with. In the Cartoon Network version, multiple episodes "wink" at the audience not so much with the campy style of the old TV

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1 Time Warner acquired DC Comics in a 1989 merger (Schuker, 2009).
2 There have been several two-part episodes, but there is not a complicated narrative continuity. In comic book terms, these episodes could be thought of as “one-shots.”
show, but with an awareness of Batman's role as a valuable multi-media "commodity intertext" (Meehan).

In this modern Cartoon Network version, the animated program is a product of corporate licensing and synergy: DC Comics owns the rights to the Batman license and produces the spin-off comic book to the program; Warner Bros. Animation produces the program, and Cartoon Network distributes it. One of the largest media conglomerates in the world, Time Warner, owns all. And Time Warner is eager to license out BB&B books and action figures for such characters as the Atom, Green Arrow, and Gorilla Grodd to toy companies to manufacture and market.

The main dynamics that will be explored in this thesis are the conceptual and ideological tensions between BB&B as entertainment and fantasy storytelling for children versus its functioning as a vehicle to promote branded commodities and "overflow" licensing based on the ubiquitous Batman brand. The commercial niche of the show is to introduce and promote secondary licensed brands -- the “guest heroes” and “guest villains” -- for synergistic profit based on the current popularity with the program’s anchor brand, Batman.

A profoundly licensed and synergistically embedded television program like Batman: The Brave and the Bold involves both an invasive corporate context and nuanced semiotic elements that frequently are influenced by that context. To capture this dynamic, the thesis will be a mix of political economy and textual analysis. It will combine current scholarship on the nature of media licensing with the current state of comic book and children's media licensing with the specific political economic context of BB&B. The textual analysis will focus on several episodes of the program on Cartoon
Network, as well as the commercials and promotion of the program, companion comic book and websites, and related merchandise. The program is an ideal tool with which to examine a unique combination of an old concept with new corporate models for commodification. This particular example of children’s television offers insights into the current level of commercial and promotional pressures on children's entertainment, and how such pressures may be manifested in branded commodity texts.

**Thesis Organization**

This thesis will be organized into six chapters. After this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 (Theoretical and Historical Orientation), begins by providing a brief history of children’s mediated consumption culture, and licensing. Then I examine the implications for the future of commodity entertainment and promotional media; how the program-length commercial is being repackaged and sold to a new generation, and how these “advertoons” are negatively affecting the children’s television landscape.

I also discuss in this chapter Will Brooker’s theoretical the concept of commodity “overflow” and how it centrally informs the economic logic of BB&B. Also Brooker’s book *Batman Unmasked* will provide a historical and cultural background as to how Batman was initially marketed, and how the iconography and advertisement strategies have evolved. Eileen Meehan’s scholarship, especially her chapter “Holy Commodity Fetish, Batman!” (in Pearson and Uricchio's edited book on Batman), will offer specific ways in which a cultural icon such as Batman has been marketed in the synergistic context of large media conglomerates, and how corporations manipulate and recycle a licensed commodity's aura, image and profitability. Meehan's work will be particularly
salient in thinking about why *The Brave and the Bold* brand was recycled and relaunched and how corporations glean maximum profit from media intertexts.

Next in Chapter 3 (Program Description and Methods) I describe the basic elements of the program itself, as well as provide political economic information about Time Warner and Cartoon Network. Chapter 3 also explains the methodology, including how the texts were collected and reviewed, and the process for identifying motifs and symbolic narratives/themes within the storylines of the cartoon. Scholarship such as McAllister and Giglio’s article, “The Commodity Flow of U.S. Children’s Television,” will aid in illustrating the “embedded” nature of *BB&B*’s commodity flow and intra-channel promotion.

In Chapter 4 (Analyzing Programming as Promotion) explores the marketing characteristics within premises and episodes of the animated series, including trends within plots that may have synergistic implications. I will also be investigating the program for content that may promote Batman as specially tailored for children, specifically the encouragement of young viewers to embody and fantasize about becoming one or all of Batman’s many guest heroes/sidekicks to cement brand/program loyalty and increase consumption. By concentrating on such elements, the program’s hegemonic undercurrents and narratives will be examined.

Chapter 5 (Branded Licenses and Synergy in *Batman: The Brave and the Bold*) demonstrates how many of the program’s license holders participate in a way that is economically beneficial, while at the same time reifying some of *BB&B*’s corporate minded themes and narratives of consumption. I will investigate the Mattel toy line based on the program, the DC Comics spin-off comic book, and other new DC titles featuring
characters (like Black Lightning, Red Tornado, etc.) who have been resurrected by BB&B and who follow the same aesthetic and character modeling that the cartoon has established. The investigation of these products will complement my argument about the program's niche-marketing trope and its use of a guest character dynamic. I will search for trends that run congruent in all of the marketing platforms, and utilize these threads for better understanding embedded advertising strategies in the show, as well as the synergistic implications that the brand equity influences. The other BB&B branded commodities will also support my argument that the show (and possibly other similar children’s animation) is merely acting as the master hub for inter-textual media property perpetuation and consumption.

Chapter 6 (Conclusion) will provide a summary of findings and explore the implications for the future of commodity entertainment and promotional media. I explain the motivation of timing of the series: how Time Warner and BB&B’s producers are using the show to exploit the ideals of youthful expression to create a mediated environment where the young viewer participates in Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic violence. Lastly, I argue the dangers of a multi-national corporation serving as a gatekeeper of children’s mediated storytelling.
CHAPTER 2
Theoretical and Historical Orientation

An episode of *The Simpsons* called “The Front” is a satirical examination of children's television programming. One particularly biting segment parodies many children’s action cartoons and their ties to merchandising. At a children's television award ceremony in which the Simpsons attend, one nominee is a faux cartoon called “Action Figure Man,” with the specifically award-nominated episode titled "The How to Buy Action Figure Man Episode.” The short intra-toon simply depicts a crying boy in a toy store pointing to an Action Figure Man box and whining, “I want it” to his mother. Although especially crass, this depiction captures the logic of media corporate synergy targeted at children with its emphasis on tie-in branded licenses. The "sell toys through cartoons" logic of modern children's culture seems simple, but its historical and modern manifestations are complex and often involve intricate economic and textual strategies. A sizable amount of scholarly work has been developed to understand the significance of these strategies.

This chapter will provide the theoretical and historical framework through which *Batman: The Brave and the Bold* will later be examined. First a brief history of children’s commercialized culture will be given. Secondly themes and trends found in children’s media advertising are explored. Next licensed programming in children’s media (specifically program-length commercials) will be discussed. The movement of licensing in the comic book industry will also be examined. Finally licensing in the age of synergy is examined to aid in the understanding of where *BB&B* fits into that pattern.
Janet Wasko defines synergy as, “the cooperative action of different parts for a greater effect” (Wasko 170). She points to a 1998 *Economist* article that describes synergy among entertainment brands: “Such a strategy is not so much vertical or horizontal integration, but a wheel, with the brand at the hub and each of the spokes a means of exploiting it” (qtd. in Wasko 170). *Batman: The Brave and the Bold* holds true to the synergistic wheel model. The concept/brand of *BB&B* is the hub at the center, and the animated program as well as the accompanying comic books, activity books, website, toys and other properties are the spokes. But the nature of the *BB&B* "branded hub" is complicated. A large part of the allure of the brand is indeed the titular Batman, but I argue that the real purpose of this particular hub is the sidekick that Batman teams up with each week, what I label here as the synergistic sidekick. The revolving sidekick role is the crucial element that allows this mediated wheel of synergy to turn so effectively. This chapter will illustrate how the synergistic sidekick character modifies previous synergy concerns by adding a new spin to a previously successful children’s television marketing technique.

**History of Children’s Commercialized Culture**

Juliet B. Schor points out that “as early as 1870, toys began to serve as status symbols” (15). But this early status conferral was not necessary for the children. Although children were often portrayed in advertising from soap to soft drinks to convey family scenes and the child-like joy of commodity pleasures (Cross, 2004), most early advertisements about toy and other children's goods were targeted to parents rather than the children themselves. However, the advent of radio and comic books increased
marketer's ability to appeal directly to children and redefined the symbolic connotations and selling techniques of children's brands.

Norma Pecora notes that dating back to the early days of radio, children were encouraged to “get mom to buy” (Pecora 99). The sponsorship funding structure of radio programming -- where one sponsoring brand paid for or even produced one entire program -- facilitated the commercialization of children's radio programming. Radio advertising and synergy was famously parodied in 1983’s A Christmas Story. Ralphie (Peter Billingsley) works tirelessly to decode messages contained in the Little Orphan Annie radio program, only to discover that the secret message was, “Be sure to drink your Ovaltine.” Children's radio programming was filled with similar tie-in sponsorship messages. The connection of radio programming to sponsorship messages also combined with Walt Disney's extensive use of his characters' marketing potential to increase the use of media characters in creating merchandising and cross promotions with advertisers (Cross, 2000).

Similarly comic books were “one of the first entertainment products marketed directly to children and adolescents instead of their parents” (Wright XVI). This included advertising appearing in comic books as well. Ads in comic books sold toys, novelty items (i.e. the famous X-Ray specs, Sea-Monkeys, etc.), candy and soft drinks, as well as comic book subscriptions. As will be noted later, comic book characters were also valuable licenses to promote other types of media consumption as well, such as early movie serials, including 1940s adaptations of Superman and Captain Marvel, and radio
programs such as Superman. Comic books were a highly focused medium for advertising because marketers knew that their audience would be nearly 100 percent children³.

Of course the major breakthrough in children’s media advertising came with the arrival of television, a medium which added the visual nature of film and comics with the kinetic and home-based qualities of radio. Pecora highlights the evolution of media marketing (specifically television) in two phases (Pecora 100). The first phase was to market directly to parents by airing children’s programming during evening hours, a characteristic of early television. The second television marketing technique was “kid nudging.” In this second phase children were encouraged to do one of two behaviors. Children viewers were instructed to bring their parents to the television to see a commercial from a personality like Buffalo Bob Smith, the adult host of Howdy Doody, pitching products such as Twinkies, Nabisco Wheat Honeys, etc. A variation on “kid nudging,” and one that may now be the most dominant strategy, was if children did not have their parents present to see the pitch, then advertisers were hopeful that children would make direct requests to their parents to purchase what the host was selling. Early programs featured products advertised during commercial breaks, but there were also licensing connections between programs and commercials. *The Mickey Mouse Club*, as a giant promotion for various Disney characters that also featured ads for Disney merchandising during the program, is a famous example of the "program as advertisement" form of television marketing, and it will be discussed further in the

³ The notion of children as the exclusive readers of comic books was drastically changed after adult-oriented works such as Alan Moore’s *Watchmen* and Frank Miller’s *The Dark Knight Returns*, which debuted in the early 1980s and altered the industry (Wright, 268-271).
licensing and synergy section. But that program also was an important program for establishing television as an effective vehicle for advertising many different types of products, Disney or otherwise.

One of early television’s most fertile grounds for selling was on Saturday morning programming, which became focused nearly exclusively on child audiences by the television broadcasting networks. Toys and breakfast cereals were two of the medium’s biggest advertisers (Schor 39). As with novelties notoriously sold in comic books, early television sales pitches often relied on exaggeration. In a yet-to-be fully regulated environment, children’s advertisers used television's ability to include special effects to enhance the attributes of their products (Schor 40), including showing toys moving by themselves on the TV screen that in reality were designed to be stationary.

Although later regulation limited the scope of product claims and visual portrayals in television commercials targeted at children, marketers also became more sophisticated in molding the commercials to appeal to children. Schor notes that beginning in the 1980s there was a marked trend in maximizing the children's market, both in terms of expanding kids' direct purchasing power and the role as an "influence market" for family purchasing. Marketers became more demonstrative in acquiring children's feedback to make commercials more effective at selling. As a result advertising budgets ballooned, and child specialists were hired as consultants (Schor 42). Today children have a great deal of spending power and are being raised by parents who in turn were raised in a television commercial environment. The new “kid nudging” seems to be less about getting kids to bug mom and dad for kid-targeted commodities, and more about getting kids to either buy directly -- such as by logging onto corporate
websites where strategically engineered games and imagery further sell the product -- or to influence family purchases of more expensive commodities such as entertainment equipment or even cars (Schor).

**Themes in Children’s Media Advertising**

Besides product exaggeration and direct selling messages, television commercials aimed at children often share several characteristics that have endured more or less intact throughout the history of children's television. One of the most ubiquitous tropes seen in children’s advertising is the idea of tween/teen viewer identification with the child actor in the ad. Examples of this can been seen in commercials ranging from famous examples such as finicky Mikey enjoying Life cereal or little girls giggling while they push a Barbie around in a plastic convertible, to more banal examples such as a group of boys riding the latest scooter, or kids enjoying fast food from any number of restaurants.

The device that really cements this viewer identification, though, is the second major theme in children’s ads -- adults vs. kids. Marketers want to create an advertisement environment in which kids are agentive and have all the power. Adults are often depicted as square, bumbling, clueless, mean, and stupid. Schor notes that adults “enforce a repressive and joyless world” (53) in children’s advertising, and that the products being sold can unlock the rambunctious fun of being a kid. At the very least, products marketed to children project the notion that they understand the plight of a 21st century American kid. A recent ad for Subway undergirds this commercial message. A young teen asks his father if he can bungee jump from the second floor of their house down to the ground. “No,” the father says strictly. Then in a series of quickly cut scenes,
the boy then asks his father if he can have a tarantula, and then if he can borrow his father’s drill. A stern “no,” is the answer each time. We then cut to the boy in front of an attractive young Subway employee. “Can I have honey mustard and pickles?” “Sure,” the Subway worker pleasantly replies. Then voice over narration tells us “At Subway there’s no such thing as no. You get exactly what you want.” *Getting exactly what you want* is at once what kids desire and what marketers want kids to think that’s what they are receiving. In commercials, strict parents say no to kids, but fun brands say yes.

Schor describes much of children's television advertising of the 1950s as highly gendered: “Boys’ ads had announcers speaking at high decibels, car crashes, and animation. Girls got bouncy, sweet, pink-washed commercials” (Schor 40). While more regulated and arguably more complex in the use of sound and visual signs, television today still tends to be gender segmented, with commercials aimed at boys and girls differentiated by the above tropes.

Modern boys toy advertisements feature action and promote traditional forms of masculinity such as strength and sometimes violence. Toy guns have always been a staple of the boy toy market -- from cap guns to the sophisticated Nerf artillery of today. Another similarity of early and current television ads aimed at young males is the high audio volume level. Many ads seem to utilize volume as an indicator of how extreme their product is. Voice-overs for male-oriented products tend to feature excited or rough-sounding males to exaggerate a masculine style.

Ads aimed at girls often have limited action, and are more prone to "nurturing" tones/language (Johnson & Young). Visually, they tend to be greatly “pink-washed.” Advertisements featuring Mattel’s Barbie or products being promoted by Hannah
Montana are adorned in pink and purple. Many ads aimed at girls also propagate the hegemonic gender position of domesticity. The Easy-Bake Oven is the classic example of this kind of gendered toy; Hasbro is still selling it today. Even in the 2000s, the website (hasbro.com/easybake) is “pink-washed”, accented by other pastels and bears the following under the Easy Bake logo: “The classic light bulb oven still delights with a girl’s first real baking experience!” Not only does this reify what girls should be doing, it also alerts boys to social areas in which they should not be.

The ubiquitous breakfast cereal ads are one of the few places that marketers will co-mingle gender. Cereal ads are very brightly colored and also frequently animate their eponymous icons like Tony the Tiger, Lucky the Leprechaun, Cap’n Crunch, etc. Many cereals also feature contests with more frequency than their adult counterparts. Often these contests will involve winning prizes involving other licensed products in a form of licensed tie-ins. For example, Post Cereal’s “Sleepover at the Smithsonian Instant Win Game”, which features the chance to have a sleepover in the National Air and Space Museum, was a tie-in promotion for the film, *Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian* (2009). Another example of tie-in cereal advertising is simply to have a themed cereal. Some famous examples include Mr. T Cereal (also featured in 1985’s *Pee Wee’s Big Adventure*), C3PO’s, and the sublimely named Bill and Ted’s Excellent Cereal. More recent movie cereals include Ang Lee’s *Hulk*, *Spider-Man* and *Star Wars Episode 2: Attack of the Clones* (cerealbits.com). There have also been several based on children’s programming: Urkel-O’s (based on *Family Matters*’ famous nerd Steve Urkel), Smurf Magic Berries, and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Cereal, among many others.
A hallmark of children’s programming is its repetition. Multiple reruns, for example, are common in children's television. Mirroring this, children’s television advertising is also extremely repetitious (Calvert 208). Returning to the *Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian* example, a *BB&B* episode that aired May 8, 2009, contained four ads for said film during a single commercial break.

Children’s television advertisements also continue to use the gimmick angle when selling products. Children's products frequently have added flash to grab attention. One of the most salient examples of this is in the marketing of children’s shoes. The highly visible Sketchers shoe company has several shoe novelties for each gender. The girls have “Glitterazzis” which feature rhinestones decorating the toe. Boys have “Airators” which have vented panels, mechanical looking appliqué, and promise, “Give him super powers in the SKECHERS Airators Gravity-Atomination sneaker” (sketchers.com). This is not so far from the kitschy and evocative 1950s selling trick of the magical "toy-that-moves-by-itself." And both genders have several options of shoes that light up or become roller skates. This phenomenon of adding a toy aspect or aura to objects to nontoy products like shoes, toothbrushes, bandages, and foods is what the industry refers to as “trans-toying” (Schor 63). Foods marketed towards children are so rampant with this advertisement strategy (such as bizarrely colored ketchups) that it has been termed by child developmentalist Diane Levin as “eatertainment” (Schor 122). Of course these tactics exist to sell more product, but they also are designed to be exclusively desired by children, and inherently anti-adult. As we’ll see in chapter 5, *BB&B* also utilizes this kid power notion when driving home the fun power of the sidekick.

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4 Commercial spots for Skechers “Airators” appear during *BB&B*, like during the episode, “Night of the Huntress!” for example.
So although much about children's marketing has changed since the early days of television, many of the tropes utilized by early children’s television marketers have remained the same. Advertisers recycle successful products to a new generation and often seemingly just slap a new animation or include a redesigned logo into the ad to sell the product and make it seem new. In the same way, the characters in children's television change frequently, but they still share an important characteristic with early television programs such as *The Mickey Mouse Club*: they are highly licensed and merchandised.

**Licensed Programming in Children’s Media**

The amount of product advertising for toys, breakfast cereals and fast-food companies clearly indicates a high-level of commercialism in children's television. But this is not the whole story, by any means. Children's television is also highly commercialized through its heavy use of character licensing in both the programming and the commercials.

The concept of the licensed character used to advertise to children at least goes as far back as when the Brown Shoe Company bought the rights to the Buster Brown comic strip character for in 1904 (Engelhardt 71). Promotional merchandise that at first was frequently given away by corporations now was commodified, and sold at a price. As discussed above, comic strips, comic books, radio and film all played a role in perpetuating children's culture based upon established characters that could be heavily merchandised. But television has played an especially key role in the use of licensed characters as a form of children's entertainment, as this section explores.
Plastic Driven Programming

The 1980s were a key decade in the commercialization of children's television. Before the 1980s, children's television programming, although still often licensed-based (such as Bugs Bunny), was restricted by existing federal policy norms and the potential for increased regulation. In 1969, for example, ABC aired a children’s cartoon called *Hot Wheels* based on Mattel’s line of toy cars. A Mattel competitor filed a complaint with the FCC, under the claim that the show was essentially a half hour long commercial for Mattel. The FCC cited “public interest” and even noted that the distinct goal of essentially using a television program as a vehicle to sell toy vehicles was a pattern they found “disturbing” and *Hot Wheels* was taken off of the air (Engelhardt 75). However, early in President Reagan’s first term he named Mark Fowler as the head of the FCC. Fowler was a staunch free-marketeer and thought that television should be treated like any other business, famously saying, “Television is just another appliance. It’s a toaster with pictures” (qtd. in Engelhardt 76). In 1984 television stations were again permitted to air as many commercials as they chose to, an FCC decision that Engelhardt characterizes as the birth of the “program-length commercial” (Engelhardt 76). The FCC essentially revoked their own ruling of 19695, and opened the door to toy-based programming.

The networks saw the capitalistic writing on the wall and began to dismantle pro-social children’s programs like *Captain Kangaroo, 30 Minutes, Kids Are People Too, and Project Peacock* to make room for more the more profitable "advertoons" (Englehardt

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5 A perfect example of regulation of television advertisement has crumbled is that Cartoon Network now airs *Hot Wheels Battle Force 5* (August 2009-present). Thus proving that Mattel may have lost the battle, but ultimately won the marketing war.
Changes in local television stations also encouraged this trend. With *He Man and the Masters of the Universe*, for example, a program co-produced by toy-company Mattel and animation-creator Filmation, ABC was originally approached to distribute the program but passed, so the two production companies sold *He Man* in syndication to local, independent stations. They employed “barter syndication” which essentially gave the cartoon to the station for free in exchange for valuable advertising time (Engelhardt 77). Advertoons were aired in after school time slots and replaced adult reruns like *The Beverly Hillbillies* so the competition was not stiff and kids immediately were drawn in. The “program-length commercial” sold merchandise like wildfire. *He Man and the Masters of the Universe* sold 70 million figures in the first four years of the character’s existence (Engelhardt 77).

Reagan’s deregulated FCC helped to spawn a wealth of cartoons from character-driven marketers such as greeting card companies whose main purpose was to create buzz and drive sales of a particular character’s toys. Engelhardt labels the cultivation of advertoons during the 1980s as “The Shortcake Strategy,” based on the girl-targeted Strawberry Shortcake character, which provides a salient roadmap about how these “program-length commercials” came about and also is a potent model for examining the formula and execution of programs like *BB&B*.

“The Shortcake Strategy” is essentially the reverse engineering of how a children’s program was traditionally made, including its relationship to merchandising.

In the past the order of television and merchandising creation went as follows: the

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6 On a personal note, as a child of the 1980s I have no memory of *Captain Kangaroo, 30 Minutes, Kids Are People Too*, etc. I do however, have an extensive memory of most of the advertoons, and the action figures to prove it hidden somewhere in my parents attic.
program is developed and aired first, then after some success a marketing strategy for follow-up licensing would be created, and finally a toy based on the property would be introduced. The process was reversed by the Shortcake Strategy. A large corporation creates a character with strong identification potential, creating toy concepts in this early phase, and finally creating a children’s cartoon with the idea of having formulas and plots designed to promote the characters and toys, all in the interest in selling as much merchandise as possible (Engelhardt 72). Cartoons like *Strawberry Shortcake, He Man and the Masters of the Universe, My Little Pony, G.I. Joe, Care Bears, The Smurfs, ThunderCats, Silver Hawks, and M.A.S.K* were all example of this kind of programming.

As discussed earlier, there were certain early forerunners to the marketing of licenses through programming such as Disney. Also related is an early model for the selling of multiple action figures in order to market a plastic Manichean Armageddon came from film, specifically with *Star Wars* action figures from the mid-1970s. What began with the figures of the primary characters expanded (especially with the sequels) to sales of many variations of storm troopers, obscure rebel fighters, and nearly every character from the cantina scene were available for purchase (Cross 158). But still the idea of having heavily-licensed texts was a relatively new idea in children's marketing. Besides reversing the typical order of program to toy, the Shortcake Strategy also added licensing volume to TV licensing. And Shortcake Strategy advertoons added a pre-planned and integrated layer to the Star Wars model. Typically these programs would involve groups of licensed characters that all worked in teams and each with a special look/function. To be complete, then, a child fan would need to purchase all of the members of the team. *The Smurfs* are more like a colony of ants than a community- all
had a job and all were dependant upon each other. *Voltron* was useless without all of his robotic appendages, and *G.I. Joe* certainly needs an army of specialists to defeat the terroristic Cobra (which had its own specialist villains). When executives may have become apprehensive about the marketing shelf life of the original *Care Bears*, in came a whole new set of characters to sell, the Care Bear Cousins. Engelhardt writes, “No one wants to sell one action figure. The whole point is to get to get the child to buy whole teams of good guys and teams of bad guys” (90). As we will see in a later chapter, a related but "evolved" character-marketing technique is seen in *BB&B*.

A key component of this 1980s strategy was that there was no rule prohibiting the advertising of the programs' licensed merchandise during the programs -- thus, kids were doubly exposed to the merchandise promotions (through the programs and commercials). Many advertisers like Mattel, Kenner, and Hasbro had intra-program advertising because the show itself was the advertisement. Engelhardt also notes how many of the toy companies operate on a “closed loop”: the toys and the television programs that perpetuate their sales don’t create anything new; it is merely repackaged marketing trends that circulated the same integrated icons throughout children's culture. As Engelhardt states, “the business of prefabricating children’s culture may not so much be uncovering archetypes of desire as creating them” (Engelhardt 80).

People of my generation (post-baby boom) who grew up on this kind of programming may have a nostalgic notion of justification for the advertoons. Most of us were far too young to view these cartoons through a critical lens, and therefore what memories remain of these texts are mostly likely that of positive feelings. As Engelhardt notes, apologists for capitalistic cartoons may point to something like *He Man* and link it
to the great myths and fables of the past. But in the advertoons of the 1980s salvation
does not lie in humanity or self-reliance, but on some magical weapon, or other material
thing that becomes imbued with an aura of power within the cartoon, which then can be
packaged as an empowering commodity with the next wave of the action figures. The
only agency humans have in this scenario is the purchasing power to own the toy version
of these fabled weapons. Only the "toyetic" (Wasko, Phillips, and Purdie 285) value
counts in this realm of television programming.

Since the 1980s, several elements have changed with children's television. The
Children's Television Act of 1990 restricted the advertising of licensed characters during
programs that feature the same licensed characters, for example. However, programs
based on licensed characters, including toys, are still permissible, and commercials for
those characters may be placed during other programs. In addition, as the Strawberry
Shortcake strategy of licensed programming and advertisements for licensed
merchandised within this programming was somewhat restricted in 1990, another
promotional strategy has supplanted it, one that involves even more powerful
corporations and that was influenced by the spirit of He-Man and the Care Bears. This
more modern strategy is that of the synergistic media corporation, where concentration of
television network ownership with other elements of the entertainment industry --
including film, comic books, digital/interactive media and amusement parks -- offer other
venues and incentives for licensed promotion (McAllister and Giglio). Coordinated
cross-media promotion affects many aspects of media culture, including sports and
blockbuster movies. Children's culture is also a key domain for modern media
corporations, including comics. The next sections place this synergistic context in the
comic book industry and children's television network that is especially relevant for this project (given that it carries BB&B), Cartoon Network.

**Cartoon Network as Synergistic Kids Outlet**

A few corporations control the majority of children's programming in the U.S., including Disney, Viacom, and of course Time Warner, owner of the cable television distributor, Cartoon Network (BB&B's home network). Originally a creation of Turner Broadcasting (which later merged with Time Warner in 1995 (Banks 469)), the channel first aired in the fall of 1992 and originally served as an outlet for Turner’s library of classic animation, mostly consisting of the Hanna-Barbera catalogue (Banks 469). In 1995, Cartoon Network launched its first original programming that included successful series such as *Dexter’s Laboratory* and *Johnny Bravo*. When *The Powerpuff Girls* proved to be both a programming and merchandising success beginning with the series premiere in 1998, the channel’s migration to original programming was cemented (Banks 469). Genndy Tartakovsky’s critically acclaimed (*Tucker 2002*) and Kurosawa-esque *Samurai Jack* (debuting in 2001) proved that Cartoon Network could excel in the action genre, and *Justice League* (also starting in 2001) demonstrated that they could have success with superheroes.

Cartoon Network is not only a platform for animated entertainment, but it is also a launch pad for many of Time Warner’s synergistic interests. Former president and CEO of Turner Broadcasting Steve Heyer said, “[Cartoon Network is] not just a network, it’s become a brand. And it’s not just a brand, it’s a business with unlimited opportunities for brand extensions” (originally qtd. in Ross 1998, from Sandler 101). This network is
used, then, to promote various licenses and media outlets that Time Warner owns or is partnered with. Given the large-scale ownership of the corporation, this involves multiple properties that are often promoted at once.

A salient example of the synergistic prowess of Cartoon Network is presented in a variation of “kid nudging”: instead of kids bugging their parents, corporations are making a directing pitch for kids to experience direct marketing via newer forms of media. McAllister and Giglio note that in 2002 kids watching Cartoon Network were encouraged via network promos to go a subsidiary Cartoon Network website (toonami.com) to vote for either Superman or Batman in a promotional contest between the two characters, and then have the opportunity to play as the character in an online game (McAllister and Giglio 41). So the electronic nudging exposes children who participate to five Time Warner licenses: Batman and Superman, DC Comics (the owner of the Batman and Superman licenses), Cartoon Network, and the related Toonami website (McAllister and Giglio 41).

Synergy infuses Cartoon Network and properties related to the cable brand. To preview the example of BB&B, the spin off DC comic book (Time Warner owned) of the same name features ads almost exclusively owned by Time Warner. Upon opening issues number two (April 2009) and three (May 2009) one encounters advertisements for Pokemon Platinum trading cards, and the children’s book The Mousehunter respectively. Pokemon television programs air on the Time Warner owned KidsWB, and Warner Bros distributed Pokemon films. The Mousehunter is published by Little, Brown Book Group-also owned by Time Warner. Other ads are for DC Comics child-oriented titles like Tiny Titans, Super Girl, and DC Super Friends. There’s also ad for the Ben 10 Alien Force
spin off comic book (the original series also airing on Cartoon Network), and for DC comic books featuring Scooby-Doo. Kevin Sandler describes Cartoon Network’s particular use of that property as placing Scooby “in a new ironic and self-referential context” (Sandler 99). As we will see, Batman's character in BB&B is placed in a similar textual space where the cartoon shows awareness of its own commodity status.

As Pecora points out, Cartoon Network is not exclusively for children (Pecora 106). Now, much animation on the network seems to be greatly in the zeitgeist of appealing to Generation X and Y through comedy and action. For example when Cartoon Network first aired “Adult Swim” (its adult targeted programming block) in September 2001, it ran twice a week from 10 p.m. to 1 a.m. (Sandler 100). “Adult Swim” now airs nightly from 10 p.m. until 6 a.m. “Adult Swim” staples like Home Movies, Robot Chicken, and Moral Orel are all evidence of its edgy and hip programming.

However, Cartoon Network in fact does still program for children; the bulk of its daytime and primetime schedule is targeted for this group. Kevin Sandler notes that as of 2003 children “aged 6-11 remain the network’s core audience” and that roughly “68 percent of its audience comprises of children and teens (ages 2-17)” (Sandler 97). Furthermore, to use BB&B as an example, it is specifically targeting young children-tweens (ages 10-12) in aesthetic, tone, formula, script, and even ideology (all to be explored later). The channel is especially after boys. Advertisers are anxious to get the attention of the roughly 30 million young males aged 9-15 (Lowry and Glover). In a 2008 article for Variety Sam Thielman writes of increasing success in this area, noting that Ben 10 “is the only original [Cartoon Network] show that consistently makes a strong showing among the 10 most popular programs for boys 9-14, and it’s [audience] is
79% male; its closest competitor at Nick, *iCarly*, is 49% male and thus a less desirable place to sell Batman action figures.” According to *Advertising Age* Cartoon Network: “finished first-quarter 2010 as the No. 2 supported kids’ network (No. 3 after Disney is factored in) reaching an average 740,000 children ages two to 11 during prime time and 584,000 during the day” (Hampp). The channel also banked “$230 million in measured spending during 2009,” down only 1% from the previous year (Hampp).

Cartoon Network's seemingly polarized audiences of kids and adults are not always separate, however. Time Warner’s Warner Bros. Animation and Warner Bros. Television produced *Batman The Animated Series* in the early 1990s, which was a noir take on the character that embraced a Frank Miller/Dark-Knightesque-informed aesthetic and tonal sensibility with nearly no traces of humor or camp. Cartoon Networks' version of *Justice League* also attracted both child and adult audiences (Banks 470). In 2009, a more adult-themed stand-alone animated movie adaptation of *G.I. Joe: A Real American Hero* aired. *G.I. Joe: Resolute* was scripted by venerated comic book writer Warren Ellis, and featured several of the original Joe’s being killed off. This is more evidence of Cartoon Network’s desire to position itself as the hip purveyor of animated entertainment. That the channel resurrected the *G.I. Joe* franchise is seemingly in connection with the release of the live action *G.I. Joe* film, but it also speaks to the fact that the network has chosen to reissue and reshape a property from the early 1980s to appeal to Generation Y viewers in an attempt to please current viewers of that demographic, and also to win over new ones. If the live action film versions of reissued

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7 Paramount Pictures, owned by Viacom, not Time Warner, released the 2009 live-action film *G.I. Joe: The Rise of Cobra*. Still, Cartoon Network might have been trading on the pre-release buzz of the film to market their animated movie version of the *G.I. Joe* property.
properties like *G.I. Joe*, and *Transformers* are successful, more adult themed throwback programming in the vein of Ellis’ *G.I. Joe: Resolute* could follow.

**Comic Book Influence**

Considering that DC’s “The Brave and the Bold” title was the inspiration and impetus for *BB&B*, and also that a spin-off *BB&B* comic exists, it is helpful to consider comic book industry’s economic trends and profitability. This section offers a brief history of comic book changes in its sources of profits in the last quarter century and examines how the current economic climate in the comic book industry influences the creation of a program like *BB&B*.

As noted earlier, the comic book industry has always had an eye toward licensing. Nevertheless, through most of its history, comic books were a relatively autonomous medium with the majority of profits coming though the sales of comic books. In the 1990s, this began to shift radically.

In the mid 1980s, Marvel and DC had markedly improved economic and psychological conditions for writers and artists. They implemented creators’ rights, which offered more ownership of original artwork, creative freedom, as well as significantly improving pay (Wright 262). As a result, many big name creators remained in the industry, and new talent was attracted to the industry. The name recognition of these creators created a “comic book star system” (Wright 262). This tactical lift from Hollywood created a kind of name-above-the-title auteurism for comic book artists and writers. Publishers began to realize that these star creators directly generated revenues.
Creators like Frank Miller, Chris Claremont, Alan Moore, George Perez, and John Byrne sold comic books on name recognition alone.

In the early 1990s comic books were retailing for about $1.75 on average (Wright 278) and sales were holding steady. Around this time publishers ushered in the collector or speculator era. The crux of this 1990s marketing push was to print multiple, or variant, covers for the same comic book issue. Publisher’s ploys included variants with more elaborate artwork, character costume changes, and even metallic foil covers in place of the standard paper covers. The ubiquitous comic book death also was a springboard to printing alternate covers.

The idea was for maximum consumption. Publishers hoped readers would buy one copy to read, and another to save as a collector’s item. Their strategy worked, at least for a brief time. Wall-street types were found in comic shops purchasing large quantities of comic books for their speculative investment value (Wright 279). Comic book collecting was hugely popular, and in 1993 industry sales reached one billion dollars.

However, these record profits did not last for long; in the mid-1990s, there was a "speculator bubble bust.” It became clear that many of these “collector” items would likely never become much of an investment because of the great abundance of stock. Millions of these variants and collector items were produced. Profits fell to $450 million in 1996, and later that year Marvel filed for bankruptcy (Wright 283). Seeking to cease the hemorrhaging, Marvel and DC scaled down, increased quality (both in the physical nature of the books and also in content), and also capped comic book prices (Wright 283).
Bradford W. Wright argues that comic books are “losing their audience not because they have failed to keep up with changes in American culture but because American culture has finally caught up with them” (Wright 284). One such change is that the youth of America today increasingly want to have things that characterize adulthood, and that adults increasingly are looking for the fountain of youth, both physically and psychologically. It might be true that youth today are far more precocious than ever before, thus largely rejecting any comic book readership as kid’s stuff, but it also may be a matter of perception. Perhaps precocious youth is just more visible than ever because of all the forms of communication and media. The revolution has been televised…and video-gamed, emailed, Facebooked and Twittered.

Furthermore, what Wright fails to consider is that comic books today are by in large not aimed at the very young. Most of the current comic content ranges from PG-13ish to what would be a very hard R. A real possibility of danger for the comic book industry stems from that mature content. In the early 1980s comic book creators like Frank Miller and Alan Moore created a sea change in the industry by rejecting many of the comedic and campy elements of previous generations of comics. “For me, Batman was never funny,” Miller famously stated in the introduction of *Batman: Year One*. This almost whole cloth rejection of comedy and camp in the industry may have eliminated inroads with young, new readers. Kid friendly titles like *Archie* are still published, but

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8 Even Marvel Comic’s youth oriented “Marvel Adventures” line, while successful, is treated as something of an afterthought. The majority of comic book sales still occur in comic book shops, and the number of adult oriented comic books exponentially overwhelms these kinds of titles. Moreover, children have historically wanted to read material that seemed like it was mature to them, and many of these “youth oriented” books are overtly kiddie. For example, the cover of *Marvel Adventures: Spider-Man #34* features a baseball playing Spider-Man kicking dirt onto an umpiring Green Goblin.
have a limited readership. The days when zany, campy superheroes had a place are mostly all gone, now replaced with darker, grittier incarnations. So comic books may be losing an audience to other forms of entertainment or readers might be dropping the hobby out of a fear of its geeky stigma, but it is very possible that the comics industry is losing its audience because its cycle of new readers is greatly broken and could be in danger of never again being replenished as the industry has historically become accustomed to (Rhoades 22). This lack of "entry-level" comics fans is one element of the context in which BB&B was created.

Another element has to do with alternative revenue streams for the comic book industry. In an article for cnnmoney.com, Richard Siklos writes that for the past three years, Marvel’s print revenues have yielded profit margins “at close to 40%.” But sales may be inflated by the licensing and publicity brought by film and TV adaptations. Combined with film and other interests, Marvel’s stock “is up nearly 90% over the past five years” and earned $157 million in revenues in 2008. Siklos notes that Time Warner’s DC Comics on the other hand, provides “little mention of its financial performance” inside corporate press releases. The ultra-profitable film The Dark Knight (2008) did provide stability to DC brands, but pure DC Comic profits are still lagging compared to Marvel.

The 2000s have seen an increased integration of comic books into larger media entertain conglomerates. Disney announced its purchase of Marvel in 2009. Around the same time, Time Warner formally changed DC from DC Comics to DC Entertainment --

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BB&B is a rare exception of a comic book property that is specifically targeted to gain young comic book consumers -- the anti-Miller approach. The rise of direct sales and the all but extinct newsstand/spinner rack market has focused on older, established comic book readers.
essentially restructuring it under its film division (Itzkoff). This is a quietly significant shift because it signals a move away from comic books as a home base, toward the development of TV/film development and character licensing interests. The companies insist that creativity is not sacrificed in this transformation. DC Entertainment has promoted many comic book industry stars such as Jim Lee, Geoff Johns, and Dan DiDio into creative executive roles to guide the transition, although whether these positions are legitimate or more symbolic in nature is yet to be seen. As New York Times reporter Dave Itzkoff notes, “Beneath their tights and spandex, these valiant characters are entertainment franchises managed by teams of executives for whom creativity and chance-taking are their own personal form of Kryptonite.” So it is possible that these appointments may be nothing more than a PR move that serves as Time Warner’s gesture of good will toward long time fans, because there is no doubt that this move is a delegitimization of the comics-first mentality of DC.

Both DC and Marvel have big revenue earnings from film adaptations of their comic books. However, once again Batman is really the only unimpeded cash cow for DC. Conversely Marvel has established their own film studio, Marvel Studios, which has creative control over all properties and has so far produced successes such as Iron Man (2008), The Incredible Hulk (2008), Iron Man 2 (2010) with more on the way, especially given Disney's purchase of Marvel. These companies also look to "repurpose" content. Both Marvel and DC have incarnations of online archives, whose success is yet to be seen. The big two also have placed a great deal of emphasis on the marketing of collected volumes of comic books, known as trade paperbacks to fans and more commonly marketed as graphic novels, to the general public. Graphic novels are much
more widely available than monthly issues and are sold in easily accessible online marketplaces like amazon.com and in big box retailers like Barnes & Noble.

Marvel too seems to be appropriating the youth-oriented *Brave and the Bold* cartoon paradigm for brand recognition. Marvel’s editor in chief Joe Quesada: “We’ve already got plans to get Thor’s name out within a younger group of kids. I think the upcoming ‘Super Hero Squad’¹⁰ (see fig 1.) and ‘Avengers Animated’ shows are going to do wonders to get that across (comicbookresources.com).” By the end of 2009 Marvel had more animated properties on the air than DC, which had a significant lead at one time.

It becomes clear how comics can often become fodder or springboards for other media. Whether it’s a comedic, safe version of Batman used to sell other forms of Batman, or an adorable version of Thor to get kids to see a more mythic film version (Kenneth Brannah directing), there exists a growing trend for the big two to co-opt (and somewhat exploit) their own brands in order to grow them.

A very popular current from of entertainment media that superheroes now help sell are video games. Video game advertisements make up a very large portion of ads appearing in comic books. Many of these games feature superhero characters. Batman alone has appeared in over twenty video games (the *BB&B* spin-off video game will be explored further in Chapter 5). This form of entertainment translates especially well from comic book to video game because of their emphasis on action (many times violent), use of color, fanciful aesthetics, magical realism, similar themes, similar narratives, and the same offer of fantasy escapism. Nearly every recent movie based on a comic book has a

¹⁰ *Marvel Super Hero Squad* also airing on Cartoon Network
video game attached to it: *Iron Man, Iron Man 2: The Video Game*, and *The Incredible Hulk* were all video games based on, and released with, their eponymous cinematic counterparts. Even the trailer for the video game based on Marvel Studio’s *Thor* (2011) was released in July of 2010, weeks before the trailer for the actual film debuted, which points to the viability of the medium and its economic potential. Unlike in years past when license holders would create a banal game that might have little to do with the film’s story or action then slap the movie’s logo on the packaging, movie-based video games today are anything but an afterthought, both conceptually and financially.

Obviously the widespread licensing of superheroes has cultural implications. They generally emphasize themes of individualism (at least in the case of the single hero), resolution of conflict through physical confrontation and clearcut delineations of good and evil. Superheroes also can be associated with selling other specific ideologies. For example a product seeking a patriotic branding might look to Captain America whose very name congers up an America-first aura, and whose outfit is red, white, and blue. In Chapter 5, I will illustrate just how highly engineered the *BB&B* video game is, and how the ideology that is being implemented for that game is intertwined with youthful identification with the sidekick.

It becomes clear that a precedent for the program-length commercial and its modern variations has been long established. From the host selling of the 1950s to the unfettered content control by corporations after Reagan’s deregulation (i.e. the Shortcake Strategy), the synergistic wheel has been spinning for some time. With this in mind, I will examine how the program itself presents a new spin on the synergistic wheel, and

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11 Examples include game versions of *Friday the 13th* (1980), *Back to the Future* (1985), *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), and *Ghostbusters* (1984) just to name a few.
also how the narrative supports these underpinnings. But before this, some additional
background may be useful. Next in Chapter 3 I give a brief description of *Batman: The
Brave and the Bold* and then describe my research methods.
CHAPTER 3

Program Description and Method

*Batman: The Brave and the Bold*’s first episode debuted on Friday November 14, 2008 at 7:30 p.m. on Cartoon Network. All of the characters are DC properties, the production company is Warner Bros. Animation, and the distributor is Cartoon Network, all owned by Time Warner. Through July 2010, there have been two seasons of the series, and a third has been greenlit (Crupi). Season one contained 22 episodes, and Season two has yielded 16 episodes, although more may be added\(^{12}\). As will be described, a typical plot involves Batman teamed with a younger, more inexperienced superhero who then battle a villain. Both the sidekick and villain change from week to week. In the U.S., the program is labeled with a TV-Y7 television program rating, intended for children 7 and older. Time Warner considers the show to be a hit, with one executive boasting that the program has "dominated the ratings" (Lisanti).

Time Warner has multiple license holders for the **BB&B** brand. The licensing will be more fully examined in Chapter 5, but a partial list of product categories that bear the **BB&B** brand include toys, books, clothing, and electronic media such as DVD’s, and video games. The program served as an important lead-in to another program with formidable brand power: *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*. In 2008 the series generated $361,000 in advertisement revenue (Steinberg).

To examine how **BB&B** uses the anchor brand of Batman to fuel synergistic profit, I recorded each new episode of the program’s first season as they aired each week on Cartoon Network. The premiere episode aired on November 14, 2008 with the

\(^{12}\) **BB&B** tends to have several hiatuses throughout the season, which makes for a more nebulous definition of what constitutes a season.
episode “Terror on Dinosaur Island!” and ended on June 19, 2009 with the episode “Last Bat on Earth!” Episodes one through fifteen were the most thoroughly analyzed, and became the core group of episodes from which patterns, plots, formulas, and even ideologies were examined. However, later episodes were also viewed, and will be discussed when applicable.

When analyzing each episode I considered the idea of potential licensing motifs and synergistic implications as "sensitized concepts" that guided the analysis (Christians & Carey, 1989), especially the concept of the synergistic sidekick. Will Brooker’s concept of “overflow” (also discussed in Gray 73) -- how television content is no longer bound merely to the medium, how it is online and on our clothes and surrounding other forms of our electronics -- was a major theoretical compass. BB&B fit perfectly upon the hanger of Brooker and Gray’s arguments because of its intertextual, intratextual, and intermedium nature.

Several research questions framed the critical analysis of the television program, the focus of Chapter 4. How was Batman as the reoccurring character being portrayed and promoted? What was the relationship of Batman to the guest heroes/sidekicks (or, how Batman was utilized as a facilitator for the guest heroes?). What seemed to be common characteristics of the guest characters? To what extent, if any, was plot and dialogue promoting consumption or perpetuating a coherent moral, ideology, or viewer identity? In addition, to be in tune with the potential "commodity flow" (McAllister & Giglio, 2005) of the program, I also watched the commercials that aired during the show. The commercials reinforced the target audience of the program (young children) and they
also helped to confirm the embedded marketing strategies of *BB&B* by showcasing adventure-based toys (several made by *BB&B*’s toy manufacturer Mattel) (mattel.com).

For the intermedium, synergistic characteristics of the licensed brand beyond the television program, licensed properties were also examined (as discussed in Chapter 5). A major research question guiding the analysis of these elements was the extent that they complemented the interpretations of the television program.

The first three issues of the spin-off *BB&B* comic book were also collected and examined\(^{13}\). The comic book was especially helpful in confirming the solidifying of DC/Time Warner’s marketing strategy because the comics almost exclusively contained advertisements for other DC kid’s comics (aka the “Johnny DC” line), other Time Warner interests, and most salient and reciprocal of all, ads for the *BB&B* cartoon itself.

The *BB&B* comic book also offered salient iconography. Often times its cover art provided images that not only hinted at the issue’s plot, but also furthered the property’s marketing strategy. For example the cover of the first issue featured a full figure Batman in an action pose surrounded by twenty heads of guest heroes who either have appeared in the cartoon, or will appear in the future. These characters also appear in the comic book, but the true shrewdness of Time Warner’s strategy is that by having characters appear across multiple media while still maintaining a uniform aesthetic and formula, these secondary characters are seamlessly introduced. Hawkman, for example, may

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\(^{13}\)It is worth noting that the *BB&B* spin-off comic book collected for this thesis were purchased at a local comic store. The title was not displayed in regular circulation with the other “adult” comics, but was tucked away on the store’s only spinner rack that contained other similarly youth-oriented comics like *Archie*. 
appear several times in the comic book before moving him to the cartoon or vise versa. The intermedium fluidity of these secondary characters is an aspect that greatly increases their visibility and therefore marketability. If the tactic is done correctly, a young viewer who might not have been familiar with Green Arrow prior to any BB&B material, might come to view him as a mainstream, popular character, therefore making him a more popular commodity as well. Additionally, I researched the original DC “The Brave and The Bold” title to provide a historical framework that aided in the understanding of the original team-up premise as a marketing vehicle. 

Finally, the consideration of overflow is crucial to this research, so I also studied the online components of BB&B. Both Cartoon Network’s website, and its sister site kidswb.com, contain interactive content that promote not only the show, but also an electronic training ground for consumption. I also examined BB&B merchandise as listed on amazon.com as part of the larger marketing and synergistic mix.

Implementing the above discussed method, the next chapter, Chapter 4, will explore several aspects of BB&B’s narratives. Using the above research questions as a guide, I will ultimately explore the program’s orientation on hegemony, economic

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14 DC Comics also currently is publishing a stand alone “The Brave and The Bold” title which features follows the same formula of team-ups, only it is set in the more recognizable adult version of the DC Universe, not the stylized semi-silver age model that BB&B occupies. The other distinction is that this title is a continuation of the original “The Brave and The Bold” comic book, thus Batman does occasionally appear, but he is not always a half of the team as in BB&B. While this title is aimed and marketed more for current comic book readers, the synergistic sidekick scenario is still in place. In this case however, without a weekly Batman presence, the marketing is more about getting comic fans to pick up and start reading other titles.
parables, and treatment of age will be examined in order to highlight the text’s synergistic and corporate motivations. These narratives also are greatly in line with the attitudes and auras that advertisers establish in kids ads. Also in this section, I provide evidence of Batman as a commercial intertext (Meehan), and how the fluidity of the character acts as a perfect centerpiece for introducing new characters/product.
CHAPTER 4

Analyzing Programming as Promotion: *Batman: The Brave and the Bold*

The previous chapters have provided some historical background for media marketing aimed at children, and the nature of corporate media licensing. Chapter 2 developed a theoretical orientation which included Meehan’s concept of a commercial intertext, Brooker’s notion of overflow, and also McAllister & Giglio’s explanation of embedded commercial messages through the commodity flow of children’s television.

This chapter will apply this orientation to a textual analysis of the television text, illustrating how the program’s unique combination of an old concept with new corporate contexts offers insights into the current level of commercial and promotional pressures on children’s entertainment, and how such pressures may be manifested in branded commodity texts. As previously outlined, *BB&B’s* commercial niche is to introduce and promote secondary licensed brands -- the “guest heroes” and “guest villains” -- for synergistic profit based on the current popularity with the program’s anchor brand, Batman. This notion of the synergistic sidekick propels capitalistic and hegemonic narratives while at once appealing to the child viewer.

**Profile of Guest Heroes**

*BB&B’s* licensed-based promotional strategy presents several advantages. The most practical reason is that new characters can be continually introduced into and reconceptualized for the youth market. All of these characters have previously existed in the DC Comics universe before the advent of *BB&B*, but many of these characters are
obscure secondary characters who either were often featured as guest heroes in other character’s comic books, or had their own titles cancelled. Now they are framed as young, new and exciting, and can be marketed as such. Some of the guests are familiar in popular culture, and some have been pulled from deep within the DC vault of obscurity.

Although one guest hero is typically featured in the plot, many of episodes also feature a pre-credits opening "teaser" sequence that presents a different hero only for that short precredit sequence. This way, the number of heroes may be doubled per episode.

As a primer for both the range (and sometimes repetition) of the guest heroes, the following is a table of all of the BB&B Season one guest heroes that are featured in the brief teaser at the beginning of an episode, the episode’s main guest hero as well as the main villain throughout the first season (22 episodes):

**TABLE 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EPISODE TITLE</th>
<th>AIRDATE</th>
<th>TEASER HERO</th>
<th>MAIN HERO</th>
<th>VILLAIN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>6/19/09</td>
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In the first season, Batman interacted with 25 sidekicks in the teaser, and 35 guest heroes in the main episode. There were 26 villains (some in teams like the Terrible Trio) in aggregate. The large list of guest heroes can serve multiple licensing purposes. First it is hoped that some of these heroes will become popular and add to other branded "hubs" for Time Warner to exploit. *BB&B* producer James Tucker even claimed that, “every episode is almost like a pilot for a new show” (Siuntres). But in addition, many of the heroes themselves are multi-commodified. These second-tier characters feature a wide array of impressive powers and gadgets that lend themselves well to the creation of toys and mediated spin-offs. For example, Blue Beetle’s suit can produce anything from a jet
pack to enormous blaster cannons on his arms, and Green Arrow’s specialized arrows can carry everything from boxing gloves to bombs.

Youthfulness of Guest Heroes

A key synergistic characteristic of the guest heroes is that they serve as vehicles for identification for the young (and especially young male) viewer. The show establishes a fantasy in which the guest heroes are almost always less serious, more sarcastic, more funny, and who also are almost always are much younger than Batman. It is also quite telling that the creators have chosen to retrofit, and “youthify” many of the sidekicks who appear in the cartoon. That is to say that the original comic book depiction of many of these sidekicks was that of an adult. Super sidekicks such as Blue Beetle, Green Arrow, Plastic Man, and the Outsiders have all been reworked to both appear and act younger than they did in their previous comic book incarnations. This choice is a conscious one to strengthen the kid identification factor. One of the most salient examples of this dynamic was presented in the pilot episode called, “Rise of the Blue Beetle!”

*BB&B* always begins with a teaser (sometimes referred to as a cold opening) before the title sequence in which Batman and a guest hero (who may or may not be the guest hero for the entire episode) fight a guest villain (who occasionally may be the whole episode’s guest villain, but usually is not). In the premiere episode we find Batman and Green Arrow battling The Clock King. During the action we cut to a bedroom of two teenaged boys who watch the conclusion of the fight on the news. Jamie asks his friend Paco, “Think you could ever see me being a hero, you know like on a
poster in some kid’s bedroom?” Paco laughs and leaves the room. It is then revealed that Jamie Reyes is the new Blue Beetle. We see him touch the enchanted scarab on his back, which activates the Blue Beetle costume. He hops out of the window and begins to fly, but like any teenager awkwardly adjusting to changes, he cannot quite control his body in the suit. It morphs when he does not want it to, and he needs more time to master its controls. Learning to control the suit seems to be a metaphor for learning to be comfortable in a changing pubescent body, or evocative of youngster’s thoughts about driving a car in the years to come. With this opening scene, from the very beginning of the series the program establishes a connection with the combination of youth angst and frustration, and superhero fantasy escapism.

As will be developed later, the image of young male empowerment is not only conveyed in the youthfulness and speech patterns of the guest characters, but also in their relationship to Batman. The debut episode’s main adventure on a distant planet furthers the youth identification with Blue Beetle by highlighting a world of youth/authority role reversals. On this alien planet, other incarnations of Blue Beetle have protected past generations of its inhabitants (amoeba inspired creatures called Gibbles) and so when Jamie arrives, he is the revered hero, and Batman is relegated to sidekick. When he needs to give an inspiring speech to the Gibbles, he fumbles his way through it as he was standing in a high school auditorium explaining why he should be elected class president. This is in stark opposition to how a more adult figure like Batman or Superman would deliver a well crafted, but stuffy oration. Blue Beetle says “dude” many times throughout the episode and references his soccer practice. Near the end of the episode, Blue Beetle has become more comfortable with his outfit, and even protects Batman by blasting an
enemy who approached Batman from behind. “I just saved Batman!,” Jamie says. To which Batman replies, “Way to go kid,” reminiscent of the “Thanks Mean Joe” Coca Cola commercial. That the theme of hip young (and ultimately butt-kicking) sidekicks paired with an adult-aged authority figure is foregrounded in the first episode signals the importance of that message for the series.

**Batman as Guide and Mentor**

Many of the episodes cement the attachment of superhero fantasy and involvement to children. Young viewers can easily relate to the snarky, joke-cracking, youth sidekick Blue Beetle, Green Arrow’s cool sarcasm, and agree with Plastic Man’s love of treasure. Batman is cool, but he’s the parent. The implicit message is that *BB&B* knows and understands the tween-young teen viewer, and that viewers are just like these guest heroes. Marketers in turn hope to parlay that carefully constructed teen hero persona into profit. Mattel wants that aura of adventure and identification to carry into the toy sales. Bat-related commodities have been marketed almost since the character’s inception in 1939 (Brooker 34). The unique marketing angle that *BB&B* creates is to craft the guest hero as someone that children can identify with and fantasize as becoming, then keep the same basic formula but bring in a new character each week with a nifty new set of powers, weapons, and vehicles to serve as the hip sidekick for Batman. Mattel can essentially sell the same idea (albeit in a different costume and with new accessories) many times over for maximum profit. That is the marketing niche of the program. Cartoons with set casts and ongoing storylines have more limited marketing potential. They usually only have one or two hero characters, a few other supporting characters, and
a few reoccurring villains. Each week Batman has a new hero and villain, and each
episode is self-contained so there is no need to retain characters other than Batman if they
fail to sell. Even in the episodes that Robin is absent, in *BB&B*, the duos are always truly
dynamic.

Batman is not only arguably DC's most popular character, but also one of only a
few superheroes who can serve as a kind of mentor and parent figure. This is not solely
because he offers sage crime fighting advice to his sidekick, but also perhaps of the
unique history of the Robin character and Bruce Wayne’s past. Batman’s origin is well
known: after an evening out (an opera, or movie depending on the version of the origin) a
young Bruce Wayne’s parents are mugged and shot to death in an ally. In that instant
Bruce swears to dedicate his life to avenging their deaths by becoming a crime fighter. In
a bit of narratively engineered kismet, Batman’s first sidekick -- introduced in 1940 as a
way to increase the comic book's appeal to young readers -- is an adolescent named Dick
Grayson whose family had just been murdered by the mafia. This relationship would be
one be one of parent/child even if the two had non-traumatic childhoods, but the fact that
both of them experienced horrific loss further ties them together as a family through the
need to create a new one. Robin is also of course a key companion to Batman in many
other versions of the brand, including the 1960s television program. Later in Batman’s
chronology Dick Grayson matures and becomes his own superhero called Nightwing,
leaving Batman with a new Robin named Jason Todd. In *Batman* 426-430 “A Death in
the Family,” the Joker murders the second Robin leaving Batman feeling responsible for
his fallen partner/child. So through a cruel yet cyclical twist of fate, the child of lost
parents now loses a child\textsuperscript{15}. Of course DC did not wait very long before adding another Robin named Tim Drake.

“The Color of Revenge!” is the first episode to feature Batman and Robin teamed up together. The episode feels clearly references the 1960s Adam West\textsuperscript{16} Batman more than any other episode. The opening teaser is essentially a shot-for-shot lift from the earlier live-action program, including a rare appearance of a plain clothes Bruce Wayne taking a call from Commissioner Gordon on the red Batphone, the hidden door triggered by the Shakespeare bust, and of course Bruce Wayne and Dick Grayson sliding down the costume changing pole to that leads to the Batcave. A familiar final montage of seat belts fastening, exhaust pipes flaming, and the Batmobile exiting over a collapsible faux parking diverter all leads into an episode which provides the most fertile material for a father/son dynamics of Batman and Robin.

Immediately after the teaser, we realize that the earlier pre-credit sequence was a flashback and the episode is now set in the present. It opens by showing a spotlight signal similar to the "Bat Signal" that Gotham police use to call for Batman. But in this case, it is not the symbol of a bat that is projected on clouds; rather, we see an “R”

\textsuperscript{15} To complicate this father/son relationship even further, Batman has recently added his actual son, Damien Wayne, to the list of Robins. After Batman’s supposed “death” following the events of DC’s Final Crisis, Talia al Ghul sends her illegitimate son to live with Bruce Wayne’s butler Alfred Pennyworth. Tim Drake has become a solo-hero known as Red Robin, so Damien fills the Robin vacancy while Dick Grayson dons the Batman outfit in Bruce Wayne’s absence. It is yet to be seen if Damien and Bruce will be paired up, but logically DC would seem to be building towards it.

\textsuperscript{16} Appropriately enough West lends his voice acting to the character of Bruce Wayne’s father Thomas Wayne during Season two in an episode called “Chill of the Night!” Julie Newmar (Catwoman from the 1960s series) voices Bruce’s mother, Martha Wayne.
illuminating the sky, followed by a more mature Robin aiding police\textsuperscript{17}. He is solo now. Robin wears a cape and yellow spandex, instead of his boyish green briefs. He banters with the police and the crook, unlike the solemn Batman. The sidekick identification of the character is strong -- we know it's the Robin who grew up with and was trained by Batman -- only now it is even more empowering for young viewers. Robin seems to be communicating that you can be young and carefree, can make jokes and have fun, while still remaining in charge. But he himself also foregrounds his relationship with Batman-as-surrogate-parent. In fact, the issue of personal autonomy is a theme in the episode. Robin monologues, “I may be small but around here, I’m the big man in charge. No boss. No lectures. And best of all, I get to have all have all the fun to myself.” The police thank him, and he adds “\textit{some} people thought I couldn’t make it on my own” which again reinforces the idea of Batman as a symbol of a suppressive parent. He is espousing the ultimate kid power fantasy, with none of the responsibilities that stuffy old Batman worries about. Robin might be the most kid-idealized sidekick yet seen in \textit{BB&B}. He is, after all, the granddaddy of all superhero sidekicks. Later in the episode, Batman arrives to warn Robin about the episode’s villain, Crazy Quilt, and a conversation that might as well be in an episode of \textit{Father Knows Best} follows:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textbf{Batman:} It could be a trap, stay behind me Robin.
  \item \textbf{Robin:} If you’re worried about my well-being maybe I’d be safer back in the cave, rotating tires on the Batmobile. Ya know, like old times.
  \item \textbf{Batman:} Speedy had to sharpen arrows. Aqualad had to scrape barnacles.
\end{itemize}

Everyone earns their stripes.

\textsuperscript{17} Robin is patrolling the city of Bludhaven. This is a reference to the fictitious DC city that Dick Grayson eventually comes to patrol full time as Nightwing.
This is another strong example of the paternal Batman lecturing an impetuous youth. Even though Batman may be right, he still is portrayed as a square and Robin is the hip symbol of the rebellious youngster\(^{18}\). This example is also salient because yet again 
\(BB&B\) is reinforcing the presence of the synergistic sidekick. Batman could have simply told Robin to grow up, and that he only had his best interest in mind. But instead he uses examples of other superhero sidekicks which is makes sense from the perspective of Robin’s role, but it is also using the example in a greater way to reify the idea of the sidekick to viewers. Although in the narrative of the story Batman's role is about taking things slow and warning against the dangers of growing up too fast, from the point of view of a cross-media license, it can be seen as product placement for propagating the importance of the sidekick, and also to plant the seeds of possible guest heroes and sidekicks in future episodes.

Other examples of Robin’s malcontent whining are rife within the episode. For example, after Crazy Quilt destroys Robin’s motorcycle, he has to ride in the sidecar of Batman’s cycle. As it appears he cries “oh no, not the sidecar”; here we are given physical example of Robin’s perceived lack of agency and his despondency over adult symbols of age hierarchy. Robin even takes some solace in sarcastically commiserating with one of Crazy Quilt’s henchmen when the two are found on opposing sides of “lookout duty,” explaining that Batman frequently tasked him with same duty in the past.

The end of the episode is a return to the status quo while still bolstering and preserving the youthful exuberance of Robin. When The Boy Wonder shows up to save

\(^{18}\) At one point Crazy Quilt says, “Batman, always ordering people around.” In this example, even the villain is scoring a few points with kid viewers.
Batman (who has been captured and bound to a gigantic loom), he tells his mentor that he will not begin to untie him until he gets “some things off of his chest.” With his back to Batman, we watch as Robin rants about not wanting to be checked up on, not riding in sidecars anymore, and in general, wanting to be treated as a peer. “Admit it Batman, I’m just as good as you!” On the delivery of that line, the camera whip pans to reveal that Batman has silently freed himself. A look of firm assertion comes over his face and he is framed from a low angle. Batman, the parent figure is still more wily and wise; hegemony has been reset. It is almost as if Time Warner and DC are winking as if to say, “Do you really think we’d let our most prized commodity be overshadowed?”

Now that the status quo has been reestablished, the child viewer can once again be appeased. Crazy Quilt has the Dynamic Duo cornered and Robin asks Batman about the best course of action to take. Batman says, “your villain, your call.” Once the child obeys, the parent softens. In a role reversal we see Batman go after the henchmen and Robin looming over Crazy Quilt. He tells the villain, “Batman was always a father to me. But I never forgot my roots.” He athletically tumbles through the air (a reference to his circus family origin) and punches Quilt out. In one last Ward-Beaver moment Batman tells Robin, “I’ve always had faith in you” to which he sheepishly replies, “Well…I learned from the best.” The two then answer one more call from the commissioner, and the speed away to the scene, with Robin in Batman’s sidecar. This episode also reifies the point that Batman and Robin complement each other. Even though Robin is more autonomous and has matured, he does his best work with Batman. It’s the dynamic duo after all. Despite the fact that Dick Grayson eventually becomes his
own hero, with his own town to protect, he is not thought of in that respect. We may often think of Batman without Robin, but we don’t think about Robin without Batman.

Other incarnations also depict this parent/child relationship including Joel Shumaker’s *Batman Forever* (1995) and *Batman and Robin* (1997), and even the noirish graphic novel *The Dark Knight Returns* that features Robin depicted as a girl (Carrie Kelly). *BB&B* is built on the parent/child notion with many of sidekicks but especially with Robin, including other episodes such as “Color of Revenge!” or “Sidekicks Assemble!” (Season two).

Batman's relationship to the other guest heroes has a similar parent-child dynamic, as we saw with Blue Beetle in the debut episode. In “Terror on Dinosaur Island!,” Plastic Man -- a reformed criminal -- is tempted to take money and treasure that could not be traced to him (although this temptation is framed as childlike exuberance). It’s the parental Batman who is the one speaking out against such practices. Stuffy Batman ruins all the fun. Often in *BB&B*, Batman is framed as the square teacher, or parental figure, while the sidekick is an avatar for kids watching at home. In fact, shortly after the opening credits, we see Batman still upset at Plastic Man for trying to steal the cash. With all the delivery of a lecturing parent Batman says, “I stuck my neck out for you O’Brian: with the judge, the parole board, the league...” to which Plastic Man replies, “How long are you going to hold that over me? Ya know, I didn’t ask you to help me out. What are you my dad or somethin’? You’re not the boss of me. Batman if I wanted to feel guilty I could just call my mom.” Again, the guest hero as surrogate kid with

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19 The choice to make Robin a girl in *The Dark Knight Returns* was probably to lessen the opportunity for a homosexual reading of Batman and Robin (Medhurst in Pearson and Uricchio 163). The choice is fitting for a text with a strong conservative ideology.
Batman as surrogate authority ("dad," "mom," "boss") is an explicit element of the program text.

In this way, Batman's character is shaped to fit the larger textual characteristics of children's commercial television. He becomes the nagging, non-fun, authority-figure adult that is commonly found in children's television commercials, as discussed in Chapter 2. Admittedly, his character is not a pure version of the adult-as-villain found in commercials (Batman is too valuable and liked as a property for this trope to be carried too far: Batman gets to kick plenty of ass himself in the program, after all), but in many individual interactions with his guest heroes an important role he serves is to be the adult contrast to their fun youthfulness.

We also see this dynamic with the team of young heroes called (in again a fairly explicit reference to youth alienation) the Outsiders in “Enter the Outsiders!” or “Duel of the Double Crossers!” It is logical to speculate that young viewers identify with both the Outsiders and their relationship to Batman. When Batman says, “Maybe these Outsiders have the makings of something larger,” he is telling both the Outsiders and the audience that they can be great.

But there is another, more postmodern, potential meaning to that musing, a meaning that links to the synergistic influence of the program. Through BB&B’s televisual power and the symbolic linkages of youth-ified sidekicks with an established license, Batman has the ability to lift the Outsiders out of comic book obscurity, and in doing so increasing profits. So this version could be read as a pseudo Batman-as-Hollywood agent incarnation. He can be used to promote others, but he surely is getting his cut of the profits, insofar that Time Warner uses him as a commercial fulcrum to
increase brand equity, thus increasing overall profits. In the specific case of this particular group of young heroes, there was already a cross-pollination history with Batman. The Outsiders and Batman shared a comic book in 1986 for ten issues (29-38, comictreadmill.com) of *Batman and the Outsiders* before Batman was removed from the book and it became *The Adventures of the Outsiders*. Here again, the last line about “something bigger” seem to point to more combined spin-offs which might be a new incarnation of *Batman and the Outsiders*.

The other main depictions of adults throughout the series are the guest villains. They are not meant to be objects of identification for viewers, but their visual distinctiveness and their sheer number translates well to toy sales, especially the two-figure packs which feature a hero and a villain in one package (not unlike a Program-length-commercial-like grouping). So although Batman has the power of familiarity, and the sidekicks have the power of kid identification, there needs to be someone to fill the foil role when it playtime comes; that’s where the villains step in. It’s not so much that kids truly desire figures of C- and D-list rogues, but that the show is insisting this is part of the play paradigm. That is to say, this version of Batman does not spend much time building his mythology, or exploring his psyche, and it almost never explores anything to do with Bruce Wayne -- it’s all about the dynamic of the team-up, and fighting a fresh villain each week.

**Batman as Commercial Intertext**

As Meehan has pointed out, Batman has a long history of being a commercial intertext, or a license that appears in multiple media and forms, all potentially referencing
each other. Meehan writes, “Repackaging and recycling have the immediate effect of encouraging media conglomerates both to mine their stock of owned materials for spin-offs and to view every project as a multimedia product line” (52). Given that the Cartoon Network has in the past created programming appealing to multiple age groups, the long-history of Batman means that different age groups have experienced different versions of Batman, and all of these versions are potentially in-play for the program to appeal to multiple audiences. As a commercial entity, Batman exists in multiple platforms and media -- consequently these incarnations can be referenced for character familiarity cues, economic reinforcement of successful versions of the past, and also for providing cross-media intertextual winks for consumers of content from other iterations and eras (presumably parents).

The intertextual nature of the program can first be seen in its visual style and basic premises. *BB&B* is a perfect example of a sort of cannibalistic pastiche. That is to say that it borrows greatly from other sources, however all of its borrowing is taken from past incarnations of Batman. Aesthetically the show evokes the Silver Age, Dick Sprang drawn Batman comic books with a hint of the tongue-in-cheek 60's Adam West Batman. Unlike the dark, realistic world of Nolan’s Batman films, or even the mid-1990s cartoon *Batman: The Animated Series*, *BB&B* is full of bright colors, and character models appear as Lichtenstein-ian with a sense of modernity. Here the show is utilizing the campy, live action show from the 1960s. *Batman* was famous for using colorful cutaways to comic bookish words like, “POW!” “KRAK!” and “BOP!” *BB&B* does not use that same device, but the show does frequently break from the normal action during fights to frame an action pose, usually with a highly stylized background framing the scene. This choice
is modern because it is harkens to the hugely successful Manga genre, but the trope also
certainly owes some thanks to the Adam West version of Batman. Batman is also wittier,
or at least lighter in this version than in almost any other, so the humor element is also
attributable to the 1960s show. Batman’s outfit is literally lighter and brightly colored as
well. It is shades of blue, not black. This reaffirms the association with the more
pop/camp Batman, but also establishes that this version is going to be kid friendly –
especially on the heels of the intense and serious *Dark Knight* movie version.

The show will occasionally delve into dark areas, such as the death of Bruce
Wayne’s parents, so thematically it will occasionally feel reminiscent of *Batman: The
Animated Series*, but never as consistently dark as that animated version nor as dark as
the Burton or Nolan films.

However, the biggest recycling done is that the series is merely an updated and
animated version of the eponymous titled DC comic book, The Brave and the Bold,
which soon featured Batman every issue with a guest hero. *BB&B* has its own updated
comic that will be discussed more in the branded spin-off section.

The producers of *BB&B* are probably hoping to capture even a fraction of the
synergistic pay-off that the 1960s television show had. West himself noted some of the
immediate effects of his show on comics sales in his autobiography: “Sales of the comic
book quintupled and potential licensees who had failed to tie in with us earlier were
running to DC or Fox [the program's production company] with pens drawn, checkbooks
open, wanting to do gum cards or soundtrack albums or model kits” (qtd. in Brooker 211-
212). One characteristic of corporate synergy, of course, is to keep things in-house as
much as possible. Now it would not be 20th-Century Fox Television that would produce
a Batman TV program as was the case in the 1960s; it would be a Time Warner owned subsidiary. And although Time Warner certainly would deal with external licensing companies, it also looks to produce licenses internally as much as possible.

A few episodes of *BB&B* overtly point to, and celebrate, Batman's commodified intertextual nature. The episode called “Legend of the Dark Mite!” provides evidence of such reference points. Bat Mite (voiced by Paul “Pee-Wee Herman” Reubens), Batman’s magically imbued biggest fan from another dimension, shows up and decides to wield his nearly omnipotent powers upon his hero. One of the first things that Bat Mite decides to manipulate is Batman’s costume. He tells Batman that his silver age inspired costume is “all wrong” and then proceeds to snap his fingers, each time instantly transforming Batman into previous incarnations of himself. Each incarnation also references a different commodified version of Batman, with each version also highlighting different potential markets.

For example, for graphic novel fans, Bat Mite begins by turning Batman into the demonic-looking vampire Batman from the comic book *Batman & Dracula: Red Rain*, “imposing, but too Dracula,” Mite says. For the comic book collector, Mite snaps his fingers again and Batman appears as the South American-inspired “Bat-Hombre” wearing a red sash and mounted on a cowled thoroughbred to replace the Batmobile. (This costume appeared in *Batman #56*.) “Too dashing,” Mite says. Late baby boomers are rewarded as he snaps again and a comic book-styled onomatopoeia “POW!” transitions Batman’s costume change into the Adam West television version of the 1960s. “Too campy,” Bat Mite muses. Those who grew up with the 1990s movies are referenced with another snap as Batman changes into the costume from Shoemaker’s
*Batman & Robin*, complete with exaggerated nipples popping into place. This humorous reference in particular would resonate with older viewers - particularly fans - and appropriately Bat Mite says that look is “too icky.” Another transition features a zebra striped Bat-suit, which is a costume variation from *Detective Comics* #275. But the piece de resistance, for fanboys, is the last transition: with a lightning bolt, the zebra costume changes into a rendering of Frank Miller’s *The Dark Knight Returns* Batman aesthetic. “Too psycho,” Bat Mite says of Miller’s crypto-fascist interpretation.

“The Color of Revenge!,” the Robin-featured episode discussed earlier, is also a callback to the pop art influence of the 1960s version of the Caped Crusader. It also establishes that Batman is a character with a long cultural tradition for the first time in the series. Up to this point, viewers were given no information as to the existence of Batman and Robin’s long cross-media history. Some older children might have an idea about the 1960s version, or their parents may see it and get a chuckle at the reference, but more likely the creators were once again entertaining themselves by referencing a program that would have been meaningful to *their* childhood. And once again it demonstrates the textual fluidity of the character: a campy 1960s version can be co-opted and recombined with a modern, less campy incarnation, and done so in a seamless fashion. To the creator’s credit, the teaser is a respectful nod to the Adam West series, but it also serves its practical purpose as a temporal foil with which to view Robin’s character later in the episode, so the callback cannot exclusively be given praise for being a reverent homage.

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20 This is a direct jab at the film, which was widely criticized by reviewers and fans. The hyperbolic nipple depiction is a hyper-conscious measure to lampoon the fact that Shoemaker’s Batman costume had exterior nipples molded to it.
All of these are not only examples of cross-medium intertextuality, but also of how the program inserts items for adult viewers from time to time. Of course BB&B’s main motivation is to secure young viewers, but given that Cartoon Network also airs more adult programming, one could additionally argue that BB&B also looks to grab an older viewer who maybe watching the show with their children, or watching because they are completionist Batman fans who consume all things Bat.

Quite possibly the most meta-example of the commodity intertext is found “Menace of the Conqueror Caveman!” The main plot opens with Booster Gold (a publicity seeking superhero from the future) giving a pitch to a toy company about the marketing of his persona. The first thing out of his mouth is, “As you can see, the Booster Gold brand is highly marketable. And, for the right price, I’d be willing to work with you guys on an action figure toy line.” The marketing executive tells Booster that they can’t sell a toy line around such an unknown hero and adds, “You need name recognition. Maybe if you teamed up with an A-list hero, someone like Batman.” This is such a postmodern wink to what the real motive of BB&B is that it almost feels like an old Disney animation gag that animators surreptitiously slipped in to amuse themselves, except this one is an entire episode long -- and in this case the amusement isn’t sophomoric sex imagery, it’s more of a subliminal commentary on how highly strategized and synergized their version of Batman has become.

A few minutes after the meeting with the toy executives, Booster runs into Batman after he has just nabbed two robbers. He lobbies Batman for a partnership saying, “Here’s the pitch, The Brave and the Gold, featuring Booster and Bats!” Here we not only have program acknowledgement of the power of the team-up, but also explicit
promotion of their own brand with the cute play on the show’s title. About midway through the show when Batman agrees to work with Booster in order to capture Kr’ull the Eternal, Booster interrupts him to answer a futuristic cell phone, “Manny my Man, line up a book deal and a movie, and we’ll spin-off the toy line from there – I’m in with Bats!” This again is more meta-commentary on what BB&B’s strategy is all about. After all, Batman is arguably the biggest propagator of comic book-based intertextuality.

Batman's role in highlighting what is wrong with Booster's attitude is telling. Batman tells Booster after first meeting him, “You’re that guy who uses his knowledge of the future to fight crime, and make a quick buck. I’d never team-up with someone in this for the glory.” What is interesting about this scolding is the separation of personal "quick buck" from "glory." Batman, ever the capitalistic crusader (Bruce Wayne is an industrial mogul, of course), clearly has much less of a quibble with the “quick buck” part. During the climactic battle with Kr’ull, Booster acts selflessly and heroically in order to save his robot companion Skeets, but in the end he returns to his normal promotional self. During the denouement Batman tells him, “There’s a lesson to be learned: you were a hero because you ignored the glory and remembered what mattered most was-” Booster interrupts when he gets a call, “Just a sec. Manny! Call the toy company, I teamed up with Batman and guess what, we won! Huh? News crews!? What do you mean there has to be a camera? Stupid 21st century media.” Booster, like the program itself, will always side on profitability before principals.

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21 Batman as a cultural intertext is consistent in this view. In “Terror on Dinosaur Island!” he exhibits this value to Plastic Man. In the comics he has refused to associate with heroes who may have dubious or plain illegal methods (Greenberger 41). And even in other cartoon versions like Batman the Animated Series this is present in episodes like “Night of the Ninja.”
This young hero may have learned his lesson about glory, but his attitude about profit-through-self-licensing is unchanged. Although it is not clearly sanctioned and played for laughs, it is not clearly punished either. His last line about the “stupid media” is also salient considering that a cartoon aimed at children is essentially commenting on the importance and pervasiveness of user-generated content and the 24-hour news cycle; of course Booster, as a part of the cartoon, *is* also a part of the 21st century media. Booster's criticism of 21st century media is that they are not opportunistic enough. Moreover, with so much meta-commentary in this particular episode, it is also evidence that BB&B producers know that their content is all about consumption in a synergistic television landscape.

The Booster Gold episode is the best evidence that BB&B’s creators know exactly what they are doing economically. It is playfully winking at its own corporate strategy. It is also uncanny how all of the boxes are checked in this parody: heightening brand recognition, team-ups with an already successful property for maximum profit, and the economic importance of the toy industry. However, just because the wink might be self-referential, it still does not delegitimize the economic logic of what BB&B is out to accomplish.

**Contradictions of Counter-Hegemony**

Since BB&B is a Time Warner product designed around licensed selling, and Time Warner is a capitalistic juggernaut, themes and messages of celebratory capitalism emerge in the series. Of course the concept of the synergistic sidekick steers the economic motivations, but something that is more implicit is a capitalistic ideal attached
to Batman. Bruce Wayne is a billionaire industrialist who does not appear on the show – but all of his capitalist spoils do appear in the form of Batman's resources, especially the expensive tools and gadgets that surround him.

However, there are a few episodes that contain elements that are potentially counter-hegemonic; episodes that could question capitalism, whiteness or other forms of domination. What this chapter will argue, though, is that these counter-hegemonic elements may exist, they typically are framed in a way to mitigate the bulk of their resistant potential.

For instance, “Terror on Dinosaur Island!” features the guest hero Plastic Man, a character who can stretch and alter his body into many shapes. From the opening teaser, Plastic Man is also revealed as a crass capitalist. The cold opening begins with Batman and Plastic Man pursuing Gentleman Ghost who has just committed a robbery. After a sack of money is sliced open sending thousands of dollars into the air, Batman tells Plastic Man, “Forget the money,” to which Plastic Man comically replies, “Got it -- save the money.” After the action slows down, Batman has to apply force to get Plastic Man to literally cough up the money (his face turns into a cash register and his eyes are filled in with dollar signs). Later in the episode we learn through a flashback of Plastic Man’s origin. He was originally a crook. During a heist with Kite Man’s gang, Batman foiled his escape from a chemical plant--knocking him into a vat of chemicals in the process (all of this very reminiscent of the origin of Jack Nicholson’s Joker in the 1989 Batman film). In court Batman vouches for Plastic Man and tells the judge that he will take responsibility for his rehabilitation.
So throughout the episode we have a character that could almost be an analog for Wall Street CEO’s today: someone who went through a life-altering event (chemical bath i.e. financial crisis) and now still finds themselves struggling (and mostly failing) to restrain their greed. Plastic Man’s inability to let the money go is analogous to some of the great sums of federal bailout money that are largely unaccounted for, or how loopholes are being found to circumnavigate CEO compensation reform.

Later in the episode Plastic Man finds himself in a room full of treasure. He cannot control his greedy urges and gorges himself with jewels and gold bars. Batman is in a fight with Gorilla Grodd and Plastic Man comes to his rescue by shooting the gold and jewels out of his mouth as if it were a machine gun. Even though this is an effective tactic, it pains Plastic Man to give up the loot. He says, “I can’t believe I’m doing this,” before he parts with the expensive ammunition. After Grodd is defeated, Plastic Man tells Batman that he rounded up all of the stolen jewels and asks Batman if he wants to count them. Batman tells him “No,” since he now trusts Plastic Man. As Batman turns his back and walks out of the frame, we see Plastic Man pull a large diamond out of his ear. Here the message seems to be that opportunistic criminal greed is almost impossible to abstain from. It takes “super” inspiration to avoid it.

The moral of this episode is that criminal greed and breaking the rules is wrong, but the model of capital accumulation to follow is Batman himself -- Bruce Wayne is a capitalist, after all. He makes plenty of money, but also gives away some, not all, to charity. Moreover, it is arguable that he performs a public service by fighting crime -- even if the stealthy methods are sometimes questionable (especially in darker versions).

This episode is also a serious reworking of Plastic Man’s origin story, and this
reworking blunts some of the more explicit anti-materialist tendencies of the original character. Creator Jack Cole originally debuted Plastic Man for Quality Comics, a competitor of DC. Cole’s origin story did feature Patrick “Eel” O’Brian falling into a vat of chemicals that altered his DNA, thus allowing his amazing body elasticity. However, in his original telling, O’Brian winds up passing out on the outskirts of town after the accident. There he is rescued and tended to by a group of monks. Upon waking he is moved by the monks compassion and realizes that crime doesn’t pay (Spiegelman and Kidd 33). Impoverished monks placed O’Brian on the path to using his powers for good -- not a billionaire like Batman. The cartoon of course is once again is positing the capitalistic Batman as the parental savior, but the show is also undermining any counter-hegemony because the producers have chosen to bury the more modest and spiritual origin for what is essentially a benefactor bailout from Batman.

One Christmas themed episode offered some intriguing aspects of the political economy and marketing schemes of the toy industry that, again at one level, could be seen as counter-hegemonic. In an episode called “Invasion of the Secret Santas!,” Batman teams up with robotic hero Red Tornado to battle guest villain Fun Haus who has created an army of evil action figures. The “Presto Play Pal” is diaetically advertised within the episode to be the hot toy for Christmas. There are scenes of little boys whining for the toy (just like the boy in The Simpsons parody), and later a montage of many boxes of the figure placed under Christmas trees. On Christmas day, all of the Play Pal’s awaken in synchronicity to begin a wave of thievery throughout the community (which is a nameless place that resembles Capra’s Bedford Falls in It’s a Wonderful Life).
Batman and Red Tornado eventually foil Fun Haus’ micro minions, but the episode’s moral seems to be an ironic one.

On the surface it may appear that this episode is not fueling the hegemonic engine with a moral that that consumer greed can lead to mayhem. But in fact, several elements blunt any true critique. The first irony of this episode’s “moral” is its own licensing: the duo fighting the thieving, evil creator of toys are Batman and Red Tornado, and they are available as actual action figures on sale at that time. But another contradiction is within this program text, and involves a flashback to Batman’s youth. In one of the only scenes where Bruce Wayne is portrayed, young Bruce receives a nutcracker for Christmas. He bristles at the gift, whining that he wanted a swashbuckler action figure instead. He throws the nutcracker against the wall, shattering it. The Wayne’s then attend a pirate-themed movie to appease young Bruce. In a moody incarnation of Thomas and Martha Wayne’s death, they are shot in an alley after leaving the theater. At the end of the episode, Batman jumps into the Batmobile, where Alfred has placed the reconstructed nutcracker on his seat as a Christmas gift. Here BB&B is positing that there are good toys and bad toys. The implicit message is that Batman toys are a known commodity, and unlike the “Presto Play Pal”, Batman toys will not let you down. Fun Haus may even be an avatar for Mattel’s competitors as the evil other, as opposed to their own benign capitalism.

“Enter the Outsiders!” features a team of super powered teenagers (Black Lightning, Metamorpho, and Katana - collectively known as the Outsiders) who are at first on the side of lawlessness and even hostile to capitalism. When we are introduced to them, as they are about to destroy a shopping mall. Here BB&B seemingly offers some
social critique. Just prior to the mall destruction, Black Lightning offers his thoughts to the shoppers: “You flock like mindless drones to the manikins and magazines that tell you how to dress and think, but you shun outsiders who don’t fit your social cliques. This is a culture of garbage, and we’re here to clean it up.” It all sounds very idealistic and radical out of the mouths of teens, but this aggressive culture jamming/terrorism turns out to be the master plan of the episode’s villain.

In Dickensian fashion, the Outsiders are actually orphans who work for the evil sewer dwelling creature named Slug. Slug (who is like an aristocratically speaking, slightly more mobile Jabba the Hutt) treats the group badly and makes them feel as if they should be grateful for his care. He also indoctrinates them to believe that the consumption of the surface world is evil and needs to be eliminated, violently. He has made them tools for his own ideology.

The core of what Black Lightning tells the mall patrons and the ideology that Slug adheres to is subversive and somewhat progressive (minus the violence). However, the villainous nature of the messenger undoes all of the power of the questioning of consumption. When the show reveals that Slug is the purveyor of these beliefs, and not the diverse, young, identifiable members of the Outsiders, it becomes immediately and explicitly clear that this is an evil message. The fact that the cultural critique comes from an ugly, cruel, sewer-dwelling mutant villain carries an enormous amount of currency: only the evil would not advocate and approve of the many splendors of capitalism. So any precocious viewers who may have taken some of the subversive message to heart are made to feel that it is ultimately wrong. The latent economic message of the episode is to
blindly smile at capitalistic hegemony, or at least distrust those who critique it too strongly.

The end of the episode signals the true ideology of *BB&B*. The Outsiders are back at their new mentor Wildcat’s boxing gym. We see Wildcat teaching Black Lightning how to box while Metamorpho and Katana drink a health shake. The camera pans to Batman who muses (as mentioned earlier), “Maybe these Outsiders have the makings of something larger.” One theme of this episode is certainly ‘how I learned to stop worrying and love consumption’, but another moral is one of conformity and mainstreaming of rebellious youth. The program presents subversion, only to pull the rug out and use it as a foil for hegemonic integration. It’s almost as if Batman is saying, “I’ve got some great marketing ideas for when you reappear in later episodes. You all look like you can move merchandise, now that you’re ok with that kind of thing.” They do indeed make their first reappearance in *BB&B* in the teaser of “Duel of the Double Crossers!” (original airdate June 12, 2009) and again in “Inside the Outsiders!” (original airdate November 6, 2009). The Outsiders have not been included in the first few waves of *BB&B* toys, but such a toyetic group of guest heroes have a good chance of ending up for sale. DC and Time Warner’s recontextualizing of a popular (and already heavily

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22 Black Lightning is one of the few African American characters. Unfortunately he falls into the insulting comic book category of superheroes that need to be racially signaled (like Black Panther, Black Racer, and Black Sampson). He can create and manipulate lightning. Also stereotypically coded is Katana, an Asian girl who is proficient with a sword. The third of the Outsiders is Metamorpho who can manipulate the elements and shape shift into anything from oxygen molecules to a giant boulder. As of Season two, Metamorpho is the lone member of the Outsiders who is available in an action figure. However, he is called “Rex Mason The Element Man” on the toy packaging, and is sold as a two-pack with Batman, not as part of the Outsiders. This choice to market him as the Element Man is referring to “Inside the Outsiders!” in which the episode’s villain, Psycho Pirate brainwashes Metamorpho to do his nefarious bidding.
commoditized) figure like Batman and pairing him with less popular guest sidekicks and villains makes for a comfortable and attractive consumption strategy for both marketer and child viewer/consumer.

Ethnicity and even sexuality are also coded in the program, but in ways that are problematic. Non-white characters also occasionally appear as guest heroes on *BB&B*, but similar to the messages about capitalism, their ethnicity is not presented as a serious critique of whiteness. Jamie Reyes, the Blue Beetle, is a Hispanic character (we see his black hair and dark complexion in the premier episode) that advertisers could use as a progressive spin in their promotion of the show, but mostly they are hoping to kill two birds with one stone in the toy department. He is a Latin character so the racial representation opens up that demographic more. But at the same time being a teenager is more central to the character's identity than being Hispanic (and in fact, the character is voiced without a trace of an accent by Caucasian actor Will Friedle). And given that he appears in the ethnically neutral Blue Beetle costume most of the time, all of this seems designed to downplay the ethnicity of the character.

In terms of sexuality, the notable example is Crazy Quilt from “The Color of Revenge!,” an art-based villain, and one who is clearly coded as gay, but as also predatory. “The Color of Revenge” has one of the few teasers in *BB&B* that utilizes the same guest hero and villain as are featured in the main episode. Crazy Quilt is framed as a homosexual character before we ever see him. As they climb a wall to Quilts lair, Batman tells Robin, “Here’s where we’ll find our flamboyant fiend.” When we meet Crazy Quilt (voiced by Jeffrey Tambor) he lives up to his “flamboyant” billing: he wears a rainbow colored mosaic tunic over lavender tights, a raspberry beret (literally), and
sports a pencil thin mustache. His villainous M.O. is also gay-coded. He uses a tricolor laser, has primary colored henchmen, talks about cutting out paper dolls, robs art museums, always is presented and surrounded by bright colors, and his lair is reminiscent of a disco adorned in colorful light. In step with his fussy art world identity, Quilt makes several homosexual art innuendos to Batman and Robin. He refers to them as “masterpieces” and snidely tells them that they will “hang in my private collection” when he has them in a trap. But, significantly, one of the most blatant examples of Crazy Quilt’s homosexuality is the discovery of a veritable shrine to Robin. As Robin enters Quilt’s lair to rescue Batman, he is visibly shaken when he sees several artistic renderings of himself. One is done in a Warhol style in which Robin’s head is sectioned off into four multicolored quadrants, another shows Robin substituted for the figure in Munch’s “The Scream”, another is a Picasso version of Robin, and a fourth is a creepy collage of Robin-centric pictures and newspaper clippings. The most visible and evocative of all of Quilt’s stalker paintings is a Lichtenstein homage that features a distressed Robin crying out, “Help Batman. HELP!” in a comic book style speech balloon.

This association is extremely salient in the episode and can be read several ways. In one sense it could be Crazy Quilt’s homosexual fantasy ascribed onto the figures of Batman and Robin. Another reading is that because the paintings are silent, but still very explicit, it might be an example of one of BB&B’s writers or animators quietly bucking against the otherwise very hegemonic structure of the program as a way of communicating that a queer reading of Batman and Robin’s relationship is valid. The Lichtenstein choice is especially effective and affective when considering Brooker’s observations about an instance from the comics in which Robin was crying: “Even the
perfectly shaped tears on Robin’s cheeks call to mind the weeping girls Roy Lichtenstein picked out from the pages of heterosexual romance titles” (Brooker 135). However, the preferred or dominant interpretations of this character are signaled by Robin, who utters “Now that’s just creepy,” upon the discovery. This flows with Batman's earlier statement that Crazy Quilt “needs to be taught to stay between the lines.” Both lines reify the hegemonic mindset of BB&B. That Crazy Quilt knew Robin when he was younger (established in the opening teaser) reinforces the character as a gay predator.

This particular episode also has an unusual form of intertextuality, in this case the history of Batman with homophobia and camp. Dr. Frederick Wertham was one of the first to publicly point to a homosexual relationship between Batman and Robin in his book Seduction of the Innocent. It infamously portrayed comic books (mostly the explicitly gory horror genre) as a corrupting force that infected America’s youth. While many have concluded that his assertion as homophobic and paranoid, Batman scholar Will Brooker notes that while Wertham’s view may have been somewhat narrow, he was “by no means as absurd as his critics want to suggest” (102) and “at the very least it must be pointed out that Wertham took the trouble to examine the Batman comics of the 1950s himself and attempted to perform, however clumsily, the same kind of textual reading he believed his patients had opened up” (133). Brooker goes on to essentially argue that while Batman and Robin are not intrinsically coded as homosexuals, such a reading is validated through many examples that span comic books, television and film. For example some critics note that the campy Adam West TV Batman was much more subversive for the gay community than other violent, dark versions of the character (Medhurst in Pearson and Uricchio 162). Brooker points out that the comics, especially
pre-Miller epochs, were also chalked full of possible gay interpretations of the characters (141).

*BB&B* does not give as much opportunity to explore alternatives readings of Batman (specifically queer readings). The producers have purposely shut down most of the fertile ground for this type of indexing. There is almost no private Bruce Wayne, only two episodes with Robin (through Season two), and hardly any Wayne Manor. The portrayal is more of a parental and jovial Batman, less mystery. However, in “The Color of Revenge!” the program experiments not with a possible homosexual relationship between Batman and Robin, but how a villain who is very much coded as a homosexual interacts with, and is profoundly condemned by, the duo.

In this way, any hint of a homosexual relationship between Batman and Robin must be closed off. The way to subtly introduce homosexuality is to inject it into a villain (the same way Slug was used as an anti-capitalist icon). This way it’s easy to write off the credibility and humanity of the subject when you ascribe it onto a villain who has “crazy” in his name. Also, in this *To Catch a Predator* world of hyper-suspicion we now live in, Crazy Quilt is a perfect mark to peg as a sexual predator -- further subjugating the queer reading by conflating it with crime. This also creates a more heteronormative rationale for Batman to be protecting Robin.

**Conclusion**

After watching a few episodes of the program, it quickly becomes evident that the *BB&B* producers have created narratives that propagate kid power fantasies and anti-adult frustrations that flow well with both children's television generally and strategic
licensing and marketing specifically. The plots are also perpetually promoting the synergy of Time Warner’s past Bat-properties, while positioning themselves to inject new ones that might very well become popularized through the cartoon. Although the show takes clever turns and offers plots and characters that on one level could offer more critical messages, ultimately these plotlines are resolved in a way that reinforces consumerism and large-scale capitalism and admonish those who would question conformity.

How might these messages appear in the spin-off licenses of *BB&B*? Do these properties continue such textual and ideological tendencies? Chapter 5 examines how Batman, as well as some of his newly revitalized partners can become quickly commodified.
CHAPTER 5

Branded Licenses and Synergy in *Batman: The Brave and the Bold*

“We only exist to keep him [Batman] out in the public until the next movie comes along -- and sell toys. Which is fine, I’m happy with that.”

- *BB&B* producer James Tucker on the *Word Balloon* podcast

As discussed in previous chapters, *BB&B* is a children’s program that is very dependent upon the element of identification. It is also an advertoon, thus possessing a great deal of intrinsic toyetic interests. The selling of branded tie-ins is crucial and inherent to the strategy and success of the program. I argued in the previous chapter that this licensing and merchandising element affects the textual characteristics of the animated series. Arguable, the more important "text" for the corporation is the merchandise.

Eileen Meehan writes of the extensive marketing around the 1989 Tim Burton Batman film. She notes, “American capitalism organizes the creation of cultural artifacts as a process of mass production carried out by profit-oriented businesses operating in an industrial context. Profit, not culture, drives show business: no business means no show” (Meehan in Pearson and Uricchio 48). Tucker’s quote above about his "happiness" over promotional licenses as a main goal for the character illustrate that Time Warner and DC have taken this notion to heart when creating *BB&B*. The following chapter will highlight how the dough comes not just from the show, but from the licensed (and often synergistic) overflow.
The most obvious product that BB&B produces is action figures. This is also part of the brilliance of the strategy. Every toy-purchasing fan of the show will presumably buy a Batman figure, but that’s just the beginning. One of the major impetuses of the sidekick is that marketers can produce a figure for every one of them. Moreover, those characters who are super sidekicks (those guest heroes who make repeat appearances such as Blue Beetle, Aquaman, and Green Arrow) can be sold repeatedly with several different incarnations of figures featuring different outfits, and weapons (fig.5). For example a child could buy the standard Green Arrow figure that includes a proportionally sized crossbow, but what is also available is the “Catapult Green Arrow.” This figure features a futuristic-looking bow that’s approximately two-thirds the sized of the figure itself, and also included are two shields that can be snapped onto the knees or shoulders of the figure. Aquaman comes in standard figure form in which he dons the classic orange-scaled shirt and green pants and also as a “Deluxe figure” called “Power Prop Aquaman.” This figure incarnation features Aquaman in a sleek lime and gold colored wetsuit with a sea propeller backpack that has two large mechanical arms attached to it. Mattel even offers two-packs featuring various guests and their specific nemeses. So the Aquaman two-pack comes paired with the Black Manta. One BB&B-themed "six-pack" features Batman, two other heroes and three villains.

It is no surprise that Batman would have the most variant outfit figures that flow with various looks and devices he has on BB&B. A few of these include his Green Lantern-esque “Skyshot Batman” seen in “The Eyes of Despero!,” the brass knuckles he uses on Gentleman Ghost in “Terror on Dinosaur Island!,” and his fantastical red armor from “Day of the Dark Knight!” (both available in a two pack). There are also many
incarnations that have no episodic connection to the show, but certainly match the overall style of the program and merely exist to sell more figures. Some of these include: “Bladewhip Batman,” Batman with “Star Blade accessory” and “Buzz Saw Batman” (mattel.com).

There are even assumptions about how to play "synergistically" within the action toys themselves. Mattel features a “snap and switch” element that allows certain figures to exchange parts and components due to plug-in points on each figure. For example, part of Blue Beetle’s armor could go on Aquaman, Aquaman could in turn give his propeller accessory to Blue Beetle, Red Tornado’s fans could snap onto Batman’s arms and so forth. This feature even enables the reconfiguring of vehicles as well. It’s a shrewd strategy. For one thing it encourages even more figure purchases because with each new figure comes new gadgets, thus each new figure creates exponentially new combinations with older figures. It also parallels the themes and strategy of the cartoon: the team-up in general and the freshness and fluidity inherent in each team-up. The “snap and switch” feature is just like Batman is as a cultural text -- he can be snapped off and switched into any number of mediums, iterations, and products. So although the guest heroes rarely appear with each other, the ability to combine elements in the toys mirrors the "completionist" incentives of earlier 1980s programs like Care Bears and He-Man that were more group-oriented.

Other factors encourage inter-toy playing (and, therefore, purchasing). Because the program promotes child identification with the guest heroes and their relationship to the authority-figure Batman (if sometimes a tense relationship), Time Warner also might at least be hoping for young fans to purchase a Batman figure, and figure(s) of their
favorite sidekick. This notion can even be pseudo-experienced at one of BB&B’s websites, kidswb.com. At the site, one of the many web activities viewers can participate in is the “Inter-Action Figures” (fig. 6) which the site describes as, “our virtual online action figures let you pose, talk, interact, and more with your favorite Brave and Bold characters!” This feature of the site is an obvious ploy to attract traffic to the website, but it is also a novel way of promoting both the synergistic sidekick notion, and just in promoting Mattel’s action figures themselves. The feature serves as a movie trailer would; it whets the appetite, but will not provide full satisfaction.

Another built-in toyetic marketing strategy is the integration of toy cars and other vehicles used by characters in the show. These are not generic to the character (like any old Batmobile), but rather are branded as BB&B-specific vehicles (Batman: The Brave and the Bold Batmobile). As this example illustrates, then, Batman of course has the Batmobile; the BB&B version is available to purchase for $35 (as of summer 2010). But in the program the Batmobile can transform into different vehicles, including a jet and a submarine in several of the narratives. Mattel offers a “Transforming Batmobile” which morphs from the car version to a jet. But if you want other functions, you have to buy separate bat-vehicles (the BB&B Batsub Blaster Vehicle sells for $19.99). In addition, he has a BB&B "cyber-tank." Other heroes are similarly mobile. We also see Green Arrow’s car, the Joker’s car, and an insect-like vehicle (the "Cosmic Crawler") for Blue Beetle. Nearly each of these is for sale and appear in the series. For example the Batsub mentioned above was featured in “Evil Under the Sea!,” the “Battle Cycle” with sidecar was seen in “The Color of Revenge!” and the most famous Bat-vehicle of all, the Batmobile, can be found in many episodes, and it also appears in the opening credits of
the show. Not surprisingly this kind of action also takes place in the show as when the Batmobile transforms into an airplane in “Death Race to Oblivion!” Vehicles to accompany action figures are not new, but the nearly endless string of possible new additions via sidekicks and new environments is. In this sense, *BB&B* combines the group-selling strategy of He-Man with the toy completionism of Star Wars. And if there was any question about how heavily promoted the vehicles are, look no further than kidswb.com to find a flash video game called “Streets of Gotham: Full Throttle.” In the game players can race through the titular streets of Gotham in a number of vehicles including: Batman’s Batmobile and Batcycle, Green Arrow’s Arrow Plane, Huntress’ motorcycle, the Jokermobile, etc. All of these vehicles have been featured in the show, and many of them are for sale as a toy. Time Warner is offering kids a digital test drive of the toy.

Like any successful 21st century kids property, *BB&B* integrates a brand-specific video game for a major console. In March 2010, Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment, on behalf of DC Comics, announced *Batman the Brave and the Bold the Videogame, available in Fall 2010*. In this case the license was granted to Nintendo for the Nintendo Wii and also the portable Nintendo DS. The aesthetic is exactly matched to the program, and all character models look exactly as they do in the series; it is essentially a playable version of the cartoon. Gameplay is designed to mirror the synergy of the cartoon and of the toys. A passage from the game’s press release undergirds this:

> “Batman: The Brave and the Bold the Videogame fully immerses fans into the vivid animated world of the successful TV series where kids can play as Batman or together with family and friends in two-player co-op mode. Players can choose
from iconic characters Robin, Green Lantern, Blue Beetle, along with drop-in heroes such as Aquaman to help solve puzzles and fight foes. The game provides maximum replay value to those who own both the Wii and Nintendo DS versions by allowing them to connect the two systems to unlock Bat-Mite as a playable character” (*Leisure and Travel Business*, Mar. 2010).

The co-op gameplay style in which the player teams-up with another character and/or player is exactly the synergistic sidekick strategy established in the brand. The videogame also further reifies the idea of the *super*-sidekick, which I described earlier as those superheroes who DC and Time Warner feature the most in the series. These are characters like Blue Beetle, Aquaman, Robin, etc. in a probable attempt to bring them to the forefront as much as possible for future licensing and spin-off possibilities. It was also a natural fit for the video game medium which has featured team-up style co-op play since the early 1980s with games like *Gauntlet* (1985), *Double Dragon* (1987), *Contra* (1988) to name just a few. Moreover, corporations have utilized the video game industry even more explicitly in the past with anthropomorphized corporate video game titles like *M.C. Kids* (McDonalds), *Yo! Noid* (Dominos Pizza), and *Cool Spot* (7UP) (amazon.com).

The guest-as-teen/Batman-as-adult theme of *BB&B* will also be captured. One blogger got an early look at the game and noted, “characters will banter [through] each episode as well, like when Robin makes fun of Batman for liking Cat-woman and so on” (screwattack.com). So not only is the sidekick present and fighting along side Batman, there is constant reaffirming of sidekick-kid consumer identification. The game (like the cartoon) also has intratextual themes of consumption. Players will be able to purchase and upgrade gadgets and weapons in a ludically coded message of consumption.
(screwattack.com). In a video game crazed nation, the potential to engage the **BB&B** fantasy in video game form would seem to be a bull’s-eye for Time Warner.

It is apparent that the series has a number of intratextual ways of promoting itself and its license holders. The video game is no different. An episode during the second season called “Revenge of the Reach!” provides a salient example. Blue Beetle is on a solo mission (unapproved by Batman) when he contacts his friend Paco to ask for information about how to defeat a villain named Evil Star. He does this under the guise that he is currently battling Evil Star in a video game. We then see Paco (unaware of Jamie Reyes’s alter ego as Blue Beetle) ask Jamie if he can call him back, because he is currently playing what appears to be a near copy of the **BB&B** video game. The game in the cartoon features a pixilated Blue Beetle in side scrolling gameplay, and displays him utilizing several Blue Beetle armor-based weapons, like laser cannons, and a shield. Then the following conversation takes place:

**Paco:** “Can I hit you back Jamie? I’m deep into this new Blue Beetle video game.”

**Blue Beetle** “Pretty awesome isn’t it?”

**Paco:** “Eh, it’s not half as cool as the Aquaman game.”

**Blue Beetle:** “Wha – seriously?”

**Paco:** “Aquaman is the king of the sea, the champion of Atlantis. Outrageous! Blue Beetle, he could be any loser.”

After a few more lines of exposition utilizing the joke of Jamie’s secret identity, we get one more telling exchange.
Blue Beetle: “Well do you have any clue how Beetle would take down Evil Star?”

Paco: “Whoa, Evil Star…I’m still stuck on Crazy Quilt. How did you get that level so fast?”

There are several things to consider here. One is the fact that this intratextual gameplay might be one of the most blatant uses of embedded consumption messages throughout the entire series. Producers could at least form a defense for something like the toys from a story standpoint. But in this case, not only is the motivation for this exchange nearly completely unmotivated (even teen superheroes don’t rely on slacker friends to defeat a villain), the cartoon itself is telling viewers how great their video game is. Much like the sponsorship-driven Buffalo Bob Smith might have done, the cartoon is essentially taking a moment to step away from the narrative and have a character sell a product. It is reifying the synergistic sidekick strategy: Blue Beetle (a teen sidekick) and his friend, not Batman, do the selling of the video game, which of course features the character of Blue Beetle, who does virtually the same things that we see in the intratextual game in the actual BB&B video game.

The Spin-Off Comic Book

It’s only appropriate that a DC/Time Warner cartoon based on Batman has a spin-off comic book of the same name. The program’s companion comic book is nearly identical in tone, story, theme, and aesthetic. Paralleling the narrative structure of the television program, the books generally begin with a brief teaser before getting to the main narrative and team-up. As noted in an earlier chapter, advertisements are often
synergistic, mostly for other for-kids comics in DC’s “Johnny DC” line, as well as some video games and cartoons (that all appear on Cartoon Network\textsuperscript{23}).

It is also interesting to note that the \textit{BB&B} spin-off comic book is printed on the old style newsprint paper, as opposed to the glossy pages comic books are usually printed on today. Some of the pages in a brand new copy even arrive faded. While it may be lost on young readers, this choice (most likely to cut printing costs) evokes Batman comics from a bygone era. We see modern iterations of Batman and company, but informed by that classic artist, Dick Sprang-esque sensibility, and reading it on newsprint further reifies that Silver Age aesthetic and aura. The confluence of the classic and the modern perfectly mirrors the program’s essence, which in turn creates a more seamless intertextual experience for the consumer.

Just the cover of the first issue of the \textit{BB&B} comic book speaks volumes about the structure of this comic: Batman is centered and drawn in an action pose that takes up most of the length of the page but surrounding him are the heads of twenty-one sidekicks, ranging from the familiar Green Arrow and Aquaman, to the obscure Adam Strange and Jonah Hex\textsuperscript{24}. The stories that appear in the spin-off comic book are original (of course the paradigm of the team-up is not), but comic creators also use this medium to continue to explore storylines with previously introduced characters, and synergistically cycle consumers of the brand back to the cartoon. For instance, in \textit{BB&B} #11 “Return of the

\textsuperscript{23} For example, the first issue of the \textit{BB&B} comic book (March 2009) there is an advertisement for the \textit{Ben 10 Alien Force} comic book based on the Cartoon Network program of the same name. There is also an ad for the \textit{Cartoon Network Block Party} comic book that showcases stories featuring numerous hit characters from Cartoon Network programs like \textit{Johnny Bravo, The Power Puff Girls,} and \textit{Dexter’s Laboratory.}

\textsuperscript{24} The Jonah Hex character is now less obscure due to the 2010 \textit{Jonah Hex} film. This film was distributed by Warner Bros., in yet another example of intertextuality and creating bridge versions of DC characters.
Terrible Trio!” (released January 2010) Batman and Green Arrow battle the Terrible Trio from stealing a powerful ancient artifact. The Terrible Trio have previously been introduced in the BB&B television episode called “Return of the Fearsome Fangs!,” which aired on February 20, 2009 and featured a similar story.

Given its target group and connection to the television program, the BB&B comic book property does provide young readers with an inroad to superhero comics. However, the altruism of the title is highly questionable. Rather than existing as a comic book alternative for children, the companion comic book is essentially a reciprocal commercial for the cartoon, Cartoon Network, and Time Warner. Not to mention at $2.50, there is not really a kid discount considering that most comic books aimed at adults are now priced around three dollars. If one were to argue one positive aspect of the BB&B comic book, it would be that it is really the only source for children’s Batman comic book stories, and also that (like its cartoon mother) it introduces readers to other characters -- but even in this instance the usage is to create brand equity for long shelved or obscure characters. Moreover, there have been inconsistent sales in the industry\(^\text{25}\), and BB&B could be an attempt to engage a new audience, albeit a very modest engagement. The BB&B overflow deluge could also be a Time Warner tactic to see profits return.

It is also worth noting that the cartoon is sometimes cleverly inspired by the medium of comic books. In Season two, the episode called “Revenge of the Reach!” (original airdate December 11, 2009) features a teaser in which The Challengers of the Unknown (introduced with a very 1960s Johnny Quest-esque evocation) are left in a perilous cliffhanger when starfish-like creatures attack them. The text “to be continued”

\(^{25}\) According to icv2.com, there has been a “19% drop in sales” between May 2008 and May 2009. Graphic novels have dropped 13%.
appears onscreen. The next time we are given more of this narrative is in the teaser of “Clash of the Metal Men!” (original airdate January 22, 2010) in which we see Aquaman and the entire city of Atlantis become taken over by the hive mind inducing starfish. The teaser again ends the with the text “to be continued.” And again in “The Power of Shazam!” (original airdate April 2, 2010) we get more of this storyline. In a voice-over montage, we learn that a cosmic villain named the Star Conqueror (aka Starro) has sent his herald (named the Faceless Hunter, who’s narrating) to place Earth’s superheroes under his hive mind control in preparation for his invasion.

The producers have planted the narrative seed of a two-part episode in Season three called “The Siege of Starro!” This points to not only fan-like behavior on the part of producers (Siuntres), but also a revivalist trope of Silver/Bronze Age comics construction. For example in The Mighty Thor issues 337-348 writer and penciler Walter Simonson foreshadowed the multi-part “Surtur Saga” by providing glimpses of the fire demon Surtur regaining power through short 1-2 page teasers before the issue’s main story had started, or through short coda’s after the issue’s story had finished. So it becomes clear how BB&B maintains its stand-alone story paradigm, while using an ancestral form of the teaser to set up a future two-part episode.

Specific comics stories as well as an overall style and narrative also influence the television series. Stories from the original “Brave and the Bold” comic series have been mined. For example, the aforementioned “The Siege of Starro” is based on The Brave and The Bold #28, “Starro the Conqueror!” Published in 1960, that particular issue of The Brave and The Bold is especially noteworthy because it featured the first appearance of The Justice League of America (comicbookdb.com) – a major DC superhero team
book that features key characters such as Aquaman, Batman, The Flash, Green Lantern, Superman, and Wonder Woman. The *BB&B* episode called “Day of the Dark Knight!” (original airdate January 2, 2009) borrows heavily from *The Brave and the Bold* #144. In the *BB&B* episode, Batman and Green Arrow meet up with Merlin who sends them back to the Middle Ages where they battle Morgan le Fey. In the comic book issue called “The Arrow of Eternity” Batman and Green Arrow wind up in 15th century France due to a magical arrow enchanted by Merlin. There, the pair battle The Gargoyle (comictreadmill.com), who is a visual simile to Etrigan the Demon who Batman and Green Arrow encounter in the cartoon. In both stories the heroes return to the present after the mission is complete.

Other comic titles also seem related to the *BB&B* brand. In continuing to spin the synergistic wheel, DC also introduced two different mini-series (six issues each) targeted to older readers that featured characters who teamed with Batman on the series. One was called “Black Lighting” and the other “Red Tornado.” The fact that both of these obscure characters were featured in their own mini-series, almost at the same time and all while *BB&B* airs, is more than a coincidence. It is an example of DC and Time Warner’s attempt to create brand equity through licensing coordination. Even though these particular titles were not aimed at kids, these adult versions were most likely given the green light because of the success of *BB&B*. These comics may be a kind of bridge text: viewers who are on the older end of the demographic for *BB&B*, but who read comics would readily recognize these characters, and the slightly more adult version of a familiar property might produce new consumers of different kinds of Time Warner/DC content.
Another medium that *BB&B* appears in is paperback novelization form. Here there are explicit examples of storylines from the cartoon directly transferred to another medium. For example there is a “Terror on Dinosaur Island!” novelization as well as one from the episode called “The Eyes of Despero!” There are also other original tales, like “Team Up for Trouble”; nevertheless the novels are the only other medium to directly adapt stories from the cartoon in another medium. The original stories are also discernible from the episode translations because the original stories do not contain the trademark “!” after the title, but the paperbacks that are direct adaptations keep the episode’s title, including the exclamation mark. The paperbacks are published by Grosset & Dunlap (an imprint of Penguin), are about 50 pages in length and are aimed at reading ages 4-8 (amazon.com).

As with every televised text these days, there are also *BB&B* DVDs. They are extremely spartan: each disc only contains four episodes. Moreover the only “extras” are trailers for other DC or Time Warner content such as DC’s direct-to-video superhero films (*Batman/Superman: Public Enemies, Green Lantern: First Flight*, etc.) and the program that *BB&B* precedes on Cartoon Network, *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*.

**Conclusion**

*BB&B* is a heavily licensed property featuring toys, comic books, novels and DVDs that all fit together to create a very DC-centric textual universe. Although often the same characters, gadgets and even stories are shared by different media, the shared themes (teens vs. adults) and even the shared style of the different versions signals a symbolic consistency. The comic book model used by such storylines as the Star
Conqueror reminds consumers that the comic is like the cartoon. The intertextual video game reminds us that the program is like the video game. The video game parallels the cartoon in gameplay and aesthetic. The cartoon creates the toys, and the toys promote synergistic play behavior. And all of it keeps the synergistic wheel spinning which feeds back to the Time Warner hub of consumption.
CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

*Batman: The Brave and the Bold* is a new cartoon spin that is based on an old comic book premise: the team-up. What began as a simple comic book containing stories of high adventure has now evolved into a highly corporatized and coordinated marketing entity for Time Warner content. The cartoon has become a deluge of Gray’s notion of overflow. Not only has Time Warner set up *BB&B* to be a force in the expected commercial outlet of toys, but the show also incorporates web-based content, video games, toys comic books, DVDs and novels all in harmony. The cartoon is the hub, all other licensed products are the spokes; just as within the narrative logic of the program Batman is the hub, and the sidekicks are the spokes that turn the wheel.

It also becomes evident that, because the text is so highly corporatized, the program’s narratives reflect an ideology that flows with this political economic foundation. At its heart, the property encourages consumption: collecting and coordinating all of the different versions of the teen heroes, their gadgets, Batman as parental-figure, and the various villains. To be a true *BB&B* fan would cost literally hundreds (thousands?) of dollars.

There are also more specific messages. Plastic Man’s starter-kit version of Gordon Gekko’s “greed is good” mentality, the undermining of the Outsiders subversive message of anti-capitalism, the framing of homosexuality as fiendish, or even Booster Gold’s meta- (but ultimately good-natured and harmless) self promotion, *BB&B* tows the line of hegemony in order to maintain the corporate notion of what Batman will and will
not symbolize and promote. Many of the narratives (like the advertisements that air during the show) utilize the kids vs. adults paradigm, in which the sidekicks are designed to immediately hook kids as a point of entry.

In an era of post-Reagan deregulation, the “toaster with pictures” is burning up most of the space for children’s television that is not highly commercialized. If the He-Man-esque advertoons of the 1980s were when the flood gates opened, today corporatized television controls the virtually unregulated landscape of children’s television with a deft hand. For Time Warner this scenario is even more potent because of the conglomerated ownership of DC Entertainment and Cartoon Network. Advertoons in this century also afford producers the ability to promote spin-offs within the hub text because of the pervasiveness of other popular media, such as when we see Blue Beetle and Paco discuss the “Blue Beetle video game.”

To most effectively understand the program as a modern-day advertoon, the question of timing must be examined. Why now? Nearly every media text could have this question posed to it. Why is this particular text appearing on our cultural radar screen at this moment? For BB&B, it’s a matter of modern corporate context and mediated social connectivity and representation. The corporate context has been discussed much throughout the thesis: Cartoon Network and DC Comics as licensing media for Time Warner properties. In terms of social connectivity, the millennial generation now uses digital technology for social networking seemingly subconsciously. Post-9/11 youth utilize services like Facebook and MySpace to digitally announce, “I’m here. I exist.” Shared cultural imagery such as the twin towers falling, and suddenly silencing so many voices perhaps is one of the implicit motivations for creating these
digital dossiers. Digitized social networking is an agentive way of telling one’s own narrative. So when marketers created *BB&B* they may have had that exact notion in mind.

Children want to feel that they have a connection with their media figures/heroes. *BB&B*’s sidekick embodies their voice because the sidekick is essentially the avatar of the child viewer. Marketers took that tacit “I’m here and I matter” ideal and anthropomorphized it into the structure of the young sidekick as weekly co-star. It serves as a false sense of user generated content -- something akin to a tween version of Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic violence: the child viewer is subconsciously complicit in their own commercial domination (Bourdieu 20). *BB&B*’s strategy is to persuade young viewers to think that they are influencing or being represented by the show, when in actuality marketers are using a sophisticated method to commercialize this sense of participation. So if a fear from the comic book industry is that it may be losing a young audience (as Wright has proposed), this is one avenue to create new users and consumers of DC/Time Warner content.

In other words it’s a bridge text; the child who consumes the sidekick today will consume Batman tomorrow. Cartoon Network airs *BB&B* aimed at young (but not too young) males who will hopefully become interested in the more adult programming that the channel has to offer. As the young viewer grows, Cartoon Network hopes that same viewer grows with them. It is a perfect demographic transition show, especially considering that it airs on Friday nights at 7:30 p.m.\(^{26}\) Time Warner/DC gets a new

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\(^{26}\) Batman serves as a lead-in to *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*. Cartoon Network is then hopeful that tweens/early teens who tuned into these shows will stay for “Adult Swim.”
generation of consumers for their superhero products and they too hope that viewers of the show will continue to remain loyal customers\textsuperscript{27}. However, if the viewer does not continue in their fandom, that’s ok, as long as Time Warner made sure to get viewers to fully consume all of the overflow products while they had the chance. \textit{BB&B} even gives us an intratexual metaphor as we see young incarnations of Robin who later emerges as the solo superhero known as Nightwing in Season two. For now though, a greater identification with \textit{BB&B}’s characters translates to a greater identification with its merchandise. The sidekick toys are more than just banal action figures, in a sense it’s a toy version of the child itself. All of the interactive content reifies this notion. In fact on Cartoon Network’s \textit{BB&B} site, there is even a function to make one’s AOL Instant Messenger chat icon one of the show’s \textit{super} sidekicks. This feature promotes the idea of choosing and identity though one (or several) of these characters, and then to consume their products.

\textit{Batman: The Brave and The Bold} builds the brand equity of second tier DC Comics characters through the brand equity power of Batman. The program creates long-term consumers and brand identity by using a kid friendly version of these superheroes: almost as Camel cigarettes’ “Joe Camel” was utilized.

\textsuperscript{27} One of the most salient examples of this tactic would be a Blue Beetle live-action television show if the program comes to fruition. On DC’s official blog, \textit{The Source}, Chief Creative Officer Geoff Johns posted test footage of a human actor with CGI costuming (see figs. 3 and 3A) -- all of which directly resembles the first appearance of Blue Beetle in the premiere episode of \textit{BB&B}, “The Rise of the Blue Beetle!” Johns writes, “He’s already appeared in animation, had action figures and right now he’s on my computer in live-action glory. I have an early special effects test that has been floating around of what his armored scarab-suit could look like.” This would be an explicit example of how a select number of DC Comics characters that have been rejuvenated through \textit{BB&B} evolve with the viewer in their incarnations in order to mature with the audience, thus offering more content to consume at each stage of fandom. Even if the show never airs, it remains evidence of Time Warner’s long-term consumer strategy.
In her book *Born to Buy*, Juliet B. Schor notes that communication scholar George Gerbner “warned that corporations were becoming our children’s ‘story-tellers’ and the dominant transmitters of culture” (Schor 178). If the corporations are the ones who get to tell and get to sell simultaneously, what will that mean for the future of children’s media? Creativity will be dwarfed/diminished in a sea of advertoons and other forms of the program length commercial, where the goal is to keep the kids watching (and consuming) above all else. Moreover, the passive, unquestioning attitudes toward corporate television consumption will be even more cemented. In a sense, the symbolic violence is becoming more violent. The deck is implicitly stacked against today’s kid consumer.

In today’s highly mediated marketplace, it truly does require boldness to resist the brand.
Appendix

Figure 1: Cartoon Network’s *Marvel Superhero Squad*

Figure 2: An example of a BB&B Batman figure in its packaging. It illustrates the “snap and switch” feature that mirrors the show’s synergistic strategy.
Figure 3: A still from a costume test for a possible Blue Beetle live-action television show. It closely mirrors the aesthetic and setting of the costume change sequence from *BB&B*’s “Rise of Blue Beetle!” (figure 3A), creating an even more seamless transition into other mediums for this budding intertext.

Figure 3A: A screen capture of Blue Beetle’s costume change from “Rise of Blue Beetle!”
Figure 4: An example from DC’s original *The Brave and The Bold* comic book.

Figure 5: Examples of characters sold as separate figures when given alternate outfits or weaponry.
Figure 6: A page from the KidsWB BB&B website featuring the so-called “Inter-Action Figures
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