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I hope I'm not telling you anything you don't know, but successful fictional characters are worth buffo bucks. Harry Potter has made what? Like a zillion dollars. And the Star Trek Federation is still going strong, printing money like it's going out of style after what? Thirty years?

I mean, the list could go on forever: Star Wars, Superman... OK. That's as far as I can get without calling someone up on the phone or thinking about it long and hard, which might hurt my head, so maybe I'm not as big a fanboy as I should be, but I'm sure you could pad out the list some. You're probably sitting there thinking, When's he going to mention Battle Star Galactic, or the Transformers, or whatever.

Look. I don't know all of them, and I'm certainly not going to take the time to list them out. The bottom line is, you and me both know that the list is pretty darn long. And the take, I mean the amount of money these franchises haul in is simply mind boggling.

I haven't actually done the math, research or whatever that fact finding thing is called, but I'm pretty sure if the Harry Potter franchise was a nation, it'd be like the 16th largest economy in the world -- THAT'S IN THE WORLD FOLKS!!!

True. I don't really know why I'm highlighting it like that. I mean, I'm just pulling the stats out of my... um, that is to say, I'm just sort of making the numbers up, but still. Think about it. THE 16th LARGEST ECONOMY IN THE WORLD!!! is a fictional character! And how many folks live in this fictional world? OK. Once again I haven't done the math or the research, or whatever, and when push comes to shove, I admit that I haven't even read the books. But come on, those suckers are huge. What are we talking

about? 2-3lbs for each book in the series? And then there are like seven of them. Give me a break. I don't have time for that. Anyhow, judging by the size and weight and my limited knowledge of the milieu -- isn't Harry trapped in some sort of parallel universe finishing school where they all have weird British accents, or something like that? Whatever the exact details, I'm going to guess that the world of Harry Potter includes something like three odd souls of any importance, but lets be generous, let's call it 300.

And yes, I realize we only really care about a handful of those characters besides Harry -- like that sweet looking chick, and maybe that redheaded dude -- but the other bit characters have to eat -- which is why we see so many of them at meal times -- so we'll include them in our calculations as well.

So let's recap, the 16th Largest Economy in the World -- IN THE WORLD!!! mind you -- has something like 300 participants. Not a lot when you think about it. It sounds sort of like one of those Indian Casino's that is raking in millions and splitting it between fifteen families. I mean, that would be a good deal, wouldn't it? Just sort of sit back and collect the royalties from a casino, or in this case a book, or a series of books, along with the assorted movies, toys, games, plush dolls and whatnot. And, OK. I realize I'm going to get a lot of grief for including plush dolls in the line up, but I really dig those things. Anyway, the thing is, only a handful of folks -- I'm guessing 300, but it might be more and it might be less -- are splitting up this Harry Potter thing. Can you imagine how rich those folks must be?

And then stop and think for a second. Why are they rich? Because of you and me my friend, because of you and me. Well, you mostly, or that dude down the street who's got like every Potter toy ever made, but not me so much, because I've never actually read the books, and I only saw that second movie like once, and that was mostly because the girl I was dating at the time wanted to go. But like conceptually, like metaphorically, like

spiritually and/or metaphysically, or at least rhetorically, it's you and me...

Or maybe I should just leave myself out of it. Quite frankly, I spend most of my time -- well all of it lately -- trapped inside my own head, but that's more because I've somehow forgotten the way out... and basically not important to this endeavor at all, so I don't know why I'm mentioning it in the first place.

Anyway the point is, Harry Potter owes his success to folks just like you. No, don't be looking around trying to figure out who I'm talking about. I'm talking about you... you. Yes, you, fanboy! You know who you are with your Griffindorph sheets and your Slitherin bath mat. You're slaving away at some dead-end job and for what? Well, Griffindorph sheets and Slitherin bath mats, but beyond that, what else?

And quite frankly, if you're going to avoid the entire thing by insisting that your job isn't dead-end and you're not really slaving away all that hard, maybe we don't need you. Maybe you're not hungry enough.

I can always take my idea elsewhere, you know.

And yes, I do have an idea.

Well, I don't suppose you would have read this far if you weren't really interested, so I'll just assume that whole thing about your job not being a dead-end wage-slave catastrophe was just a sad -- but understandable -- bit of denial on your part and so we'll forget about it and just move along.

Look. I said, we'd forget about it and move on, so just drop it. Nobody cares about your high paying job, beautiful wife, or any of the other aspects of your imaginary "success" in the real world. This here is a spiel about fictional franchises. Reality does not play a role in it. Anywhere! So just drop it.

Anyhow, here's the gig. See, fictional character franchises have big money in them. We've been over this. I not repeating myself. I'm just reminding you where we were, because I know how your mind wanders.

The point is, I think we can all agree that if we -- and by we I mean you and me and maybe that guy with the Griffindorph sheets, but if I meet him and he's wearing some stupid wizard hat he's gone. There's just something about grown men dressing like grade-schoolers that I find... um, distracting, disturbing, yet oddly compelling. Sort of like a train wreck, only it seems to take place over a period of 82.13 years -- give or take a few.

So, where was I? Oh, yeah. I think we can all agree that there's big money in a franchise, and it only gets bigger if you actually own the thing. I mean, it's one thing to say, Oh, hey, look there's Harry Potter again driving down the street in his Mach-5, or flying through the air on his Broom Zoom thingy, or some such nonsense.

Look, don't pay attention to what he's driving. You're missing the point. The point is, why should you and me and that Griphondoor dude watch Harry Potter drive -- OK, fine -- fly down the street? Why should we watch him fly by on some supped up broomstick when it could be you or me driving the Bat Mobile right down the main drag as we rev the engine and take on all comers at the next red light. I mean, if a corvette is hot, just think what a Bat Mobile will do for your image. It's got like an onboard computer, GPS, and IN CAR PHONE-RADIO! You don't see that on just any ole' car these days, and if that doesn't impress you, take a look at that the afterburner. The thing must get like 2.3 miles to the gallon. OK. Sarcasm aside, everyone knows the Bat Mobile would be a babe magnet -- just look what it did for Bruce Wayne, after all -- and if a car like that sparks your coil, it's just the type of thing you'll be able to purchase with your share of the proceeds from the Sm©rk™ Open License franchise.

That's right you heard me right. I said, your share of the proceeds. And really, to do this right, you're going to have to read that over again with a echo-box voiceover like in the commercials from your youth. So, ready?

That's right kids. Fame and fortune await, but first all you have to do is...

OK. I admit it, there's a catch. There's always a catch, but in this particular case the catch is pretty catchy. Get it?

Fine. You're right. It wasn't funny. Let's just move on. The thing is, we both know that you're a geek, a fanboy, or whatever you want to call it. Just close the magazine for a second, look at the cover and face facts. You're a geek. Call it whatever you want. Be a connoisseur of classic cult characters for all I care. Whatever label you choose that let's you get out of bed and look yourself in the mirror every morning is fine by me. If it makes you feel better about yourself to tell others you're a genre specialist, go for it. Anyway, both of us know you're going to be at the next Fantasy Con, Comic Con, Movie Con, or Book Con wearing some stupid outfit that makes your girlfriend -- and/or boyfriend -- wince with embarrassment as you talk with others of your ilk in some bizarrely obscure language that probably doesn't even exist. Halg Ku! Te-en-ten! my fellow Klingon talking freaks...

Um. Just in case you're going to look that up on the web, I think it means, greetings oh noble and beneficent friend, long time no see, or something like that. If your translator program doesn't recognize the words or you get a response that is slightly more... um, insulting -- and quite frankly inappropriate -- it's probably because I'm using a lesser known UHF dialect -- pre-cable variant, yada-yada and all that -- or maybe the site you're using sucks. You'll have to forgive me. I was being wishy-washy and apologetic there for a second. Momentary lapse. Won't happen again. I forgot the first rule of the Klingon philosophy: the best defense is a strong offense. So if Halg Ku! Te-en-ten! doesn't make any sense, it's coming from your end buddy, not mine, so suck on it!

But let's not get distracted from our main point. The point is, these franchises rake in the moolah. I mean big time, and why should they get all the dough when it is us -- or at least that Griffendorph dude -- that is making all this money for them?

I suppose that was a question and I should wait for a reply, but quite frankly, these articles work best if we just sort of assume

the type of response you'd make rather than waiting for the mail. It takes too long otherwise, so I'm just going to assume your response is, "Why? You ask, 'Why?' I don't know why? Please tell me, good sir. I simply do not know."

Now, maybe you have a better response, and certainly in a moment let's hope that you will, but just for the sake of argument, let's just assume that was your answer.

Well, if it was, then I am sure the rising feeling of injustice, the swelling pride of newfound freedom... etc. etc..

Really, let's just pause for a moment as we listen to the rising swell of patriotic music that is playing in the background, and as we do, let's assume that I'm giving some fiery, political, self empowerment spiel about throwing off the Harry Potter oppressor and all that, and then at the height of it all, when the crowd is whipped into a maniacal, Potter killing frenzy and that idiot with the wizard hat is wondering if he's going to make it out of the room alive, I'll switch gears and cut to the chase.

We need to start our own franchise -- you, me, and whoever else wants in. Now, just because we need to start somewhere I'll call the character Sm©rk™, and that little © thingy will indicate that I'm going to hold the copyright, while the ™ do-jab just means that the Sm©rk™ name will be administered by me as well... in like a totally kind and caring, super benevolent I'm G©D™ and have absolute control over my world and all of creation type way, but I'd still be like totally accessible and humble. And to prove it, I'm going to let you in on the ground floor. See, I haven't told you much about Sm©rk™. Is he a boy? Is she a girl? Is it a dog? A cat? One of those ponies? Or maybe a talking robot? I don't know. You tell me. But it gets even better than that. You want him to be cute. Go for it. You want her to be cool, edgy, and maybe even borderline evil. I'm game. Just send in your stories -- spell checked, double spaced, and proofread for grammar, unfortunately we are unable to take email submissions at this time -- along with any character sketches, drawings, detailed ship/house/city maps, charts, and diagrams. Basically we'll --

meaning I'll -- take it all. If your talents turn more towards sculpture, perhaps you'd like to contribute by making one of those bobble head things of Sm©rk™, and wouldn't that be a riot if Sm©rk™ turned out not to have a head at all? Anyhow, I think you get the idea. Just send it all to me, and I'll sort through the flack (or the slush as we in the trade like to call it), and then I'll pass the good stuff on to whichever one of you is going to be taking care of that fan based website thing.

Oh. I'm sorry. Did that sound a bit controlling? A little top down? I apologize. Tell you what. I mean, being controlling, rolling up my shirtsleeves, getting my hands dirty, and actually doing any work is the last thing I want. So really, converse amongst yourselves. Form a little community. Do that web forum thing -- whatever that's all about -- and just go wild.

While you're all doing that -- expanding the fan base, sinking your heart, mind, and soul into Sm©rk™ and breathing life into the little? Big? Sort of middling sized? Rat? Rodent? Smiling face thingy? or whatever, I'll be sitting back and just letting you -- the fans -- go crazy. Of course, every once in a while I might step down from my ivory tower and say something like, "I don't know if we really want that Griphendorph guy to be sleeping on, with, or anywhere near Sm©rk™ so maybe sheets are a bad idea," or perhaps when one of the members of our little informal -- legally non-existent and contractually unrecognized -- community gets out of line and wants to publish a Sm©rk™ book on his own, well, that would clearly damage the story line, and/or plot development, not to mention the future marketability of the Sm©rk™ franchise along with bringing up all sorts of nasty copyright issues, so I'll have the lawyers slap down on that little pipsqueak upstart so hard his head will spin. But just to show that it's all done in the spirit of comradeship, I'm sure someone out there will eventually make a bobble head commemorating that event as well. You know those Fanboy Get's Sued bobble heads are always best sellers.

Anyway, I think that about sums it up. Work hard, build the franchise, and in ten years or so when I see you at a book signing,

I'll forgo my customary \$20 signature fee -- and/or if you've really been helpful the \$50 handshake premium, as well. Heck. I might even let you buy me dinner at some fancy upscale place where the heat is turned way up and the female wait-staff is sort of encouraged to shed their clothing and get comfortable with the clientele.

But rest assured, it won't be all fun and games for me. While you're working on the content and developing the fan base, I'll be perfecting the legal rights and working behind the scenes to insure that no one ever writes an inflammatory, blatantly libelous article about our beloved Sm©rks™ -- perhaps an article something like this one -- anytime -- and I mean anytime -- in the future.

Remember, I can't do this without you.

Without your support I'd be nothing but a bitter wannabe hack of a writer, and my relationship with that Grifendorph sheet wearing dude down the street would just seem a little weird and... um, basically inappropriate.

Thank you,
Brett Paufler

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That meaningless aside over, let us continue with the boilerplate. All work whether submitted to Brett Paufler or not; created or not; thought or not; or just discussed at an informal gathering like lunch or dinner, or between two or more people in any manner or method, by any means known now or discovered in

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I've said it before, but I'll say it again.

Halg Ku! Te-en-ten! Baby!

Halg Ku! Te-en-ten!

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