



# Breaking the *Ice*: Using a Sword to Slay Patrons' Fears in Special Collections

**Jeremy Brett**  
Texas A&M University

**Jennifer Reibenspies**  
Texas A&M University

**Pilar Baskett**  
Texas A&M University

## Abstract

This paper describes the demonstrated success by one special collections library in reducing among its patrons feelings of anxiety and reluctance endemic to people encountering a special collections library for the first time. Reading Room staff use a collection of replica weapons with origins in the immensely popular fantasy universe of George R.R. Martin to create an open and welcoming atmosphere. Artifacts of popular culture become gateways through which patrons more readily engage with special collections materials. This process provides a useful example to institutions looking for outreach efforts that work.

**Keywords:** outreach, popular culture, library anxiety, special collections, archives

*Lord Eddard Stark dismounted and his ward Theon Greyjoy brought forth the sword. "Ice", that sword was called. It was as wide across as a man's hand, and taller even than Robb. The blade was Valyrian steel, spell-forged and dark as smoke. Nothing held an edge like Valyrian steel* (Martin, 1996, p. 12).

## Introduction

Library anxiety was famously defined in 1986 by East Carolina University (ECU) library science professor Constance Mellon as the cluster of fear and insecurities that many university students report when visiting an academic research library for the first time to do research. Mellon collected data from several beginning composition courses over two years at ECU and determined that 75-85% of students responded to these initial visits using words such as scary, overpowering, lost, helpless, confused, and fear of the unknown (Mellon, 1986, p. 162). She developed a theory that "when confronted with the need to gather information in the library for their first research paper, many students become so anxious that they are unable to approach the problem logically or effectively" (Mellon, 1986, p. 163). Mellon's anxiety model has endured over the last few decades, and researchers have looked at finding ways of counteracting such anxiety, including formal instruction, personal interaction with librarians, acknowledgment of the emotion itself, the modification of behavior by librarians towards their patrons, making the library more user-friendly, and in general providing students with an overall positive library experience (Carlile, 2007).

This article makes two main points. First, we argue that the anxiety to which library patrons are often prone can be particularly endemic to special collections libraries. Second, we propose that items in a collection with particular pop culture relevance or that are immediately recognizable can go far in providing such a positive experience to the point, hopefully, where hitherto reluctant students will become more interested and engaged with other primary historical materials. They will also leave the library feeling more enthusiastic, confident, and likely to return. In the case of the Cushing Memorial Library & Archives at Texas A&M University, the existence and display of a particular collection of artifacts (described below) has enjoyed notable success in raising our institutional profile among students and visitors and in engaging students with the idea that a special collections library might be accessible, exciting, and relevant to their own personal cultural interests.

Cushing Library is noted for, among other things, its Science Fiction and Fantasy (SF-F) Research Collection, one of the largest of its kind in the world. As stewards of tens of thousands of books and other monographs, serials, objects, and fanworks, librarians curate over one hundred archival collections from SF-Fi creators and collectors. The largest of these collections is that of George R.R. Martin. Martin is a well-known and best-selling American author, best known for *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996-ongoing), an epic fantasy series chronicling the massive political and social upheavals surrounding the struggle for the throne of the Seven Kingdoms of Westeros. These upheavals take place alongside an increasingly dark and menacing magical conflict in the North that threatens to engulf the continent. Martin's popularity has grown immensely with the 2011 debut of *A Game of Thrones*, the HBO television series based on the novels, which has captured a wide audience and much critical acclaim.

### **The George R.R. Martin Collection at Cushing**



**Figure 1: Selected weapons from the George R.R. Martin Collection.**

*She could see the rippling deep within the steel, where the metal had been folded back on itself a hundred times in the forging. Catelyn had no love for swords, but she could not deny that Ice had its own beauty. It had been forged in Valyria, before the Doom had come to the old Freehold, when the ironsmiths had worked their metal with spells as well as hammers. Four hundred years old it was, and as sharp as the day it was forged. The name it bore was older still, a legacy from the age of heroes, when the Starks were Kings in the North* (Martin, 1996, p. 20).

A sword can be a powerful thing. On the continent of Westeros, the greatsword *Ice* has been wielded for some four hundred years by the patriarchs of House Stark, Lords of Winterfell and Wardens of the North. *Ice* has been used to fight in wars and rebellions, to mete out capital justice, and to defend the people of the North. Most famously, it has been used—with tragic irony—to execute its last owner, Eddard (Ned) Stark, before being melted down and reformed by his enemies into two new weapons.

Of course, *Ice* is a completely fictional object—it does its dramatic work strictly within the sprawling, colorful, and often bloody universe of the *A Song of Ice and Fire* cycle of fantasy literature by Martin (and its televised adaptation *Game of Thrones*). But, again, a sword can be a powerful thing; even a fictional sword physically represented by a carbon-steel replica has what Paul Moser called “sacro-power,” the power to attract which emanates from the very being of primary materials” (Allen, 1999, p. 111). Cushing Library is privileged to have in its holdings not one but two versions of *Ice* as well as a number of other weapon replicas from the same media universe, and both our user statistics and our anecdotal information prove that this arsenal is absolutely electric with sacro-power.

We find that many of our patrons, especially students, are familiar with the books and the television series and are lured into the library by word of mouth about the George R.R. Martin Collection or through outreach events. Whether patrons come to Cushing specifically to see the weapons or are introduced to them proactively by Reading Room staff (and both instances happen not infrequently), they are invariably entranced by seeing, handling, and taking photos of *Ice* and its fellow replicas. By being able to touch and interact with these items—which we stress are part of a larger archival collection—new and anxious patrons learn how approachable a special collections library can be.

With this particular group of materials as a gateway, Cushing is using the inherent attractive power of both Martin’s books and the *Game of Thrones* television series as a method of instilling a greater sense of comfort among its patrons. Indeed, it might be said that *Ice* and

its fellows have been called into service to wage yet another war, this one against the powerful adversary commonly known as library anxiety.

The Martin Collection at the time of writing is composed of nearly 300 boxes holding the manuscripts, correspondence, and other materials of Martin. Included among the last are a number of replica weapons from the *Song of Ice and Fire* books and the *Game of Thrones* television show that are part of the Valyrian Steel Collection issued by Jalic, Inc. (Martin receives complimentary copies of some of Valyrian Steel's weapons, which he then passes on to Cushing Library for inclusion in his archives). Amongst these weapons are two versions of *Ice*. The complete contents of the Martin arsenal, as of this writing, include the following:

- *Ice*, modeled on the weapon described in the *A Song of Ice and Fire* novels;
- *Ice*, modeled on the weapon seen in the *Game of Thrones* television series;
- a Stark Infantry Shield, modeled on the item seen in *Game of Thrones*;
- a Lannister Shield, modeled on the item seen in *Game of Thrones*;
- King Robert's *Warhammer*, the weapon wielded by King Robert Baratheon and modeled on that described in the novels;
- *Longclaw*, the sword of Jon Snow and modeled on the item seen in *Game of Thrones*;
- Jaime Lannister's Sword, modeled on the item seen in *Game of Thrones*;
- *Oathkeeper*, the sword of Brienne of Tarth and modeled on that seen in *Game of Thrones*;
- *Needle*, the sword of Arya Stark and modeled on that seen in *Game of Thrones*;
- Khal Drogo's *Arakh*, modeled on that seen in *Game of Thrones*;
- the Night's Watch Dragonglass Dagger Set, modeled on the weapon described in the novels.



**Figure 2: Cushing Library patron wielding the book version of *Ice*.**



**Figure 3: Cushing staff members Pilar Baskett (at left, wielding Jaime Lannister’s Sword) and Jenny Reibenspies (wielding the sword ‘Oathkeeper’), waging battle in the Reading Room.**

## Literature Review

Valerie Harris of the University of Illinois at Chicago has written several pieces explaining the possibilities for academic special collections departments to make their holdings more accessible to users and to use those holdings as platforms for increased and more focused outreach opportunities. Harris’s 2012 article, coauthored with Ann Weller, notes, in particular, that

while the academic library’s mission is primarily to support the research needs of its students and faculty, special collections departments welcome and serve a broader community of scholars and researchers, giving special collections librarians a unique opportunity to serve as ambassadors for their institutions...Special collections departments generally have dual, almost conflicting, roles with the collections that they own, process, and house—to both preserve the collections and make them accessible to users (Harris & Weller, 2012, p. 295).

This observation from Harris applies perfectly to *Ice* and its fellows; we believe that these objects hit the sweet spot of being legitimate special collections artifacts within an institution

and part of an archival collection of scholarly merit while at the same time being objects that can be approached, handled, and wielded by any user.

Articles by Greg Johnson (2006) and Magia G. Krause (2010) have sought to improve the ways in which archives and special collections might be more welcoming to intimidated students. Susan Allen (1999) describes a survey she conducted in 1996 among special collections in liberal arts college libraries that concluded, among other points, “[a]ppropriate texts and manuscripts may...be put on view for the participants....The glimpse of a beautiful page, an intriguing manuscript hand, a gripping photo, or an important name may be all that is necessary to bring at least a few participants back on another day” (p. 115). At Cushing we frequently encounter this kind of emotional resonance between students and our collections, and few such encounters are more immediate and visceral than those with the weapons, especially because we allow physical contact and interaction with the items.

Daniel Traister (2000) has written several pieces that put the special collections library and its outreach components into perspective. He writes in a self-titled polemical essay that such libraries need to rethink the ideologies of the past and begin practicing more proactive and aggressive forms of outreach. In his article “Public Services and Outreach in Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Libraries,” Traister (2003) continues to argue for serious attitudinal changes in the ways in which librarians interact with users and allow those users to interact with collection items, notably that “readers must feel invited and welcome to, and comfortable in, the rare book department” (p. 89). The Cushing experience, we believe, reinforces the effectiveness of such a change in attitude.

## **The Situation**

Mellon and subsequent researchers studying library anxiety note the frequency of the phenomenon among students although it needs to be kept in mind that they describe a situation in a typical academic library. These libraries in form and function are not unlike those of public libraries with which we assume most students are familiar. Circulation, reference, media services, reserves—these are features common to both public and academic libraries. Therefore, if students are feeling anxious in an institutional setting that at least has something to do with a known quantity, imagine their insecurities when entering a special collections library with its own peculiar practices and requirements. Archivists and special collections librarians take for granted the processes by which archives function because of their formal training and work. We

know why we have guidelines on closed stacks, temperature control, safety, and maintaining the order of materials, but patrons may not. Traister ably summarized this state of affairs in 2003, noting that

the closed- or limited-access stacks and storage facilities inherent in the nature of rare book collections (my shorthand for “rare book, manuscript, and special collections”)...prohibit would-be readers from browsing shelves to locate materials of interest....Second, the generally persistent formidability characteristic of rare book collections and their staffs does not make them seem any easier to use than their closed stacks suggest (p. 87).

Traister’s point is that special collections can come across as difficult and unwelcoming to many user groups. This is especially evident in light of recent trends in academic libraries to create a more informal and welcoming atmosphere—coffee shops, more dedicated study rooms, more comfortable furniture, and so on. In contrast, special collections have all kinds of specialized user procedures that may require explanation, ranging from stern warnings against the presence of food and drink, the requirement that patrons check their bags in lockers and then sign in (often multiple times), to the forbidding prospect of closed stacks that deny patrons immediate access to materials and the chance to browse (Johnson, 2006). Cushing Reading Room staff frequently observe patrons becoming intimidated by these requirements.

Furthermore, patrons often bring preconceptions to a special collections library. They imagine the universal need for white gloves, are reluctant to touch anything, and feel vulnerable asking questions. People who are new to the library may feel that archivists do not trust them or are hiding the “cool items.” They are scared to even hold the material or question why the stacks appear secretive and closed. It is imperative that all faculty, staff, and archivists explain in an open and welcoming way and without a negative or patronizing attitude to all patrons why particular procedures exist. However, the problem is that patrons can become terrified into a fight or flight response during interactions with special collections staff. Patrons in this high-stress mode are less likely to listen or become engaged with the archivist/librarian who is trying to assist them in their research.

At Cushing we have been breaking the “*Ice*,” so to speak, between archivists and new patrons through a proactive approach to customer service by providing supervised access to the Martin arsenal. Our formula is wonderfully simple:

- Many people are fascinated with weapons.
- Many people are fascinated with popular culture.

- Many people are fans of Martin's novels and of *Game of Thrones*, and many come into the Reading Room already aware of the existence of the George R.R. Martin Collection in Cushing's holdings.
- Cushing Library's main user population consists of Texas A&M University students, young people who form the perfect intersection of the three points given above.

With these considerations in mind, it has become clear to Cushing staff that *Ice* and its fellows are natural candidates as gateway artifacts, that is, collection materials that help a patron become more comfortable in a special collections space. At Cushing we let patrons interact with the material by holding and/or wielding the weapons under staff supervision. The range of patron engagement is wide—some simply look at the weapons in awe and delight whereas others like to hold them and wield them like the real weapons they imitate. Still others love to pose with them in particular tableaux—as *Ice* was used to behead Ned Stark, for example, so do many students pose in the act of beheading their fellow patrons. Another popular pose is that of the student sitting in a chair while grasping *Ice*'s hilt, imitating the iconic image of Ned (as played by Sean Bean in the TV series) sitting pensively upon the Iron Throne. And many, many pictures have been taken of these interactions, either by the patrons themselves or by Cushing staff who often offer to take such souvenir photographs for patrons.

Some may see this behavior as strange or even frivolous in a traditional scholarly environment. We think it unlikely that researchers will use the weapons as major sources of research into, for example, the life and career of George R.R. Martin, the history and development of fantasy literature, or the study of popular culture. However, we have observed through multiple patron encounters that these objects have true psychological power, and, though that might be hard to quantify, that power has a demonstrable effect on making patrons more willing to engage with special collections. David B. Gracy (1989) pointed out the importance of “a personal connection with history... What draws genealogists into archives in such numbers that they constitute the largest single body of archives users if not a personal connection with the past? The concept of the importance of a personal connection with history should not take us by surprise” (p. 78). This intimate connection, we repeatedly find with the weapons, is not restricted to items drawn from history—indeed, it extends to create an emotional bond that people have with literary works and with media products derived from those works. Modern popular literature and pop culture can be as cherished and as emotionally resonant with people as can more traditional historical and literary works and artifacts. By publicly and freely

welcoming patrons to see and interact with the weapons and by explicitly linking them to the rest of the Martin Collection and the Science Fiction & Fantasy Collection as a whole, Cushing is fulfilling Gracy's contention that "archivists, you are what people think you keep" (Gracy, 1989, p. 78).

Since arriving as part of the Martin Collection, the arsenal's existence at Cushing Library has brought a noticeably increased number of patrons into the Reading Room. (It first came to the attention of the general public in March 2013 when the "book" version (that is, the version based on descriptions in the novel) of *Ice* and of King Robert's *Warhammer* was on display for Cushing's exhibit devoted to Martin.) Cushing Reading Room staff have been systematically maintaining user statistics for all collecting areas, including science fiction, university archives, military history, rare books, and colonial Mexico, to name a few, since at least 1993 and specifically on the Martin Collection and the weapons since May 2013.

## Methodology

This is a preliminary observational case study, relying on monthly pull slip circulation data combined with anecdotal observations from Cushing faculty and staff. Reading room pull slip statistics are used to manage collections and track trends in our collections. The data are broken down into number of items used in the collections. The pull slips are tallied monthly and compiled yearly.

Texas A&M University (TAMU) Archives is a conglomerate of university-related material, of which Cushing is the sole repository. The TAMU Archives—which are the largest and best-known group of archives in the library—are the ones most used, which is fitting considering our nature and mission as the repository for the institution's history. The Science Fiction and Fantasy Collection is the second largest collection and is also well-known due to its size, the intrinsic interest of the subject matter, and various outreach efforts. The pull slip data include requests from e-mail, telephone, and in-person visits. (The Martin weapons are only considered as in-person visits.) The time period of the study was from January 2014 to December 2015. The weapons arrived at Cushing in early 2013 and were part of an exhibit from spring 2013 through January 2014. Therefore, we gathered pull slip data from January 2014 forward when patrons could request the material on their own rather than being able to view them on display.

## Analysis

The total circulation (pull slip) statistics gathered from January 2014 to June 2015 reflect the usage of the Martin weapons. For January-December 2014, the Sci-Fi Collection had 539 total patron requests, of which the Martin weapons alone comprised 19 (3.5% of the total). For January-December 2015, the total number of items circulated (that is to say, items requested by patrons and pulled for use in the Reading Room) increased considerably for the Martin weapons. There were 387 requests for Sci-Fi materials, of which 250 (an astounding 65%) were for the weapons. One variable to consider in this study is an increase in overall student population at Texas A&M from around 35,000 to over 40,000 students between the 2013/2014 and 2014/2015 school years. We believe the popularity of the Science Fiction & Fantasy Collection, and the George R.R. Martin Collection more specifically, is also due in large part to a sharp increase in public awareness of the Martin Collection. Two large-scale public events, *Deeper Than Swords* (2013-2014) and *5 Millionth Volume* (February 2015)—both of which included Martin's presence on campus — were coordinated with the TAMU Libraries Marketing and Communications staff, which created and distributed fliers, e-mail announcements, pins, and exhibit catalogs, as well as promotional banners for Cushing. The publicity resulting from these events shined a bright light on the Martin Collection. Another factor contributing to the increase in usage, we believe, is the widespread amount of public attention that Martin, his image, and his works have generated since the 2011 debut of *Game of Thrones*.

We grant that more research is needed to determine beyond a doubt whether there is a direct association between the use of the Martin weapons and a positive association with new users. We hope to conduct a quadratic or in-person survey with individual researchers who come in to view the materials and ask them about library customer service and the materials they use. Such a survey would also ask patrons how they became aware of the weapons so that we can gauge the efficacy of our publicity and outreach efforts. In this case, however, we can at least establish an increase in usage and therefore an increase in popularity. From the data, along with staff observations, we also infer an increase in potential satisfied users.

When the data is taken overall, it may appear that the Martin weapons rarely circulate. However, that observation fails to take into account the size of the collection. Bearing in mind that they are only one segment of one series of one larger collection within a very large collecting area, it is clear from available user statistics that the Martin weapons are popular quite out of proportion to their numbers in the Cushing stacks.

Cold numbers—cold as “*Ice*”, as it were—of course, can only tell so much of a story. Reading Room staff members, who receive the vast majority of the responses from patrons, can supply numerous anecdotes about individual and group patron encounters with the Martin weapons. A few are given below. Together with statistics, the emotional responses, as shown here, demonstrate a clear and ongoing fascination and enthusiasm for these objects.

## **Selected Patron Observations by the Authors**

Upon hearing of our 2013 Deeper than Swords exhibit, a patron came to view the weapons with a small group of friends. The group arrived, nervous and excited. They asked in a whisper whether we still had “*Ice*”, because they had heard about our collection of *Game of Thrones* items. I confirmed that we did. They then nervously told us that they’d never been in an archive and did not know what to do or if they were allowed to see the weapons. We explained the policies and had them fill out new patron forms. At first they were hesitant until we reentered the Reading Room carrying *Ice*. Immediately the students opened up, sharing their interests in Sci-Fi and the works of George R.R. Martin. Other students came over to share their interest in the material. We received positive feedback and were called the “cool library” because of our interesting material, friendly staff, and awesome building.

An EMS responder and his colleague visited Cushing on their break. They heard about the *Game of Thrones* exhibit and were curious to see what we had available. I retrieved the weapon replicas “*Ice*” and the Warhammer for them. The responders had never been to a special collections library before and held preconceived notions that this type of library was restricted and off limits. However, after viewing the replicas, they immediately asked if we had any rare medical books. Confirming that we did have related material, I brought out a few of our 19th century medical books. A month later the same EMS responder returned with new friends to show them the same material from his previous visit. He also requested more books to view so we showed the group the cuneiform tablets and the Second Folio of Shakespeare. Huge grins appeared on the patrons’ faces when the materials were brought out, and the patrons were amazed they were allowed to physically handle as well as examine the materials up close. The EMS responder mentioned that medical books brought to life his work, and the swords brought out his imagination. It was good to see that members of the community outside of the university were able to feel welcomed and were engaged in the wonder of the archives.

A patron who visited the reading room came up to the desk and quietly asked if he might be allowed to see the Martin materials. I confirmed that he could and I pulled out *Ice* along with the manuscript of the first book in the *Song of Fire and Ice* series, *A Game of Thrones*. He was impressed and seemed more at ease than when he walked in. I explained what we do at Cushing, what special collections involved, and how to ask for materials. He returned a month later with a friend to look at our *Don Quixote* materials. He was excited to look at some early *Don Quixote* books since Cervantes was one of his favorite authors. We made a huge impression on him and sparked his interest in learning more about the authors and materials held in the special collections that might be used for his class projects.

One patron came in with her friend who was visiting from out of state. They came to view the weapons (*Ice* and the *Warhammer*) after having heard about the George R.R. Martin material. After realizing they could view additional material, the patrons inquired about other material housed at Cushing but admitted they were nervous about handling rare items. I told them if they ever wanted to look at material, we would help them find what they need. We must have made an impression as the same patrons returned the next afternoon and asked for our rare material in the early Spanish language. We pulled early editions of *Don Quixote* and Mexican colonial documents that inspired the patrons to do more research on early Spanish translations. A replica of a fictional weapon can encourage and engage patrons to find their interests in both *Game of Thrones* and early Spanish language.

A patron dressed in full cap and gown came in a few hours before his graduation ceremony. He informed us he was taking his own informal Elephant Walk. (The Elephant Walk is one of many A&M traditions. In particular, the Elephant Walk is an event where Aggie Seniors join hands and walk around visiting campus landmarks for the symbolic last time.) Cushing was one of the landmarks as he wanted his picture taken in his graduation attire with a sword from our George R.R. Martin collection. We decided the book version of Ned Stark's *Ice* sword would be the best choice for his photograph.

Two visiting patrons entered the Reading Room while we were showing the swords to other patrons. They were drawn to our display and were informed about *Game of Thrones*, George R.R. Martin, and his collection here at Cushing. The two patrons took photos of the swords as they wanted to show them to their grandchildren. They were very excited to be the cool grandparents and stated they would make plans to bring their grandchildren to Cushing in the future.

A woman came in with her son, touring various colleges to decide which one he wanted to attend. He had never been in a special collections library before, but was a fan of Martin and

had heard that we had Martin's papers. He was incredibly enthusiastic when we brought out the weapons for him to look at and handle. Between the weapons and examples from Martin's *A Game of Thrones* manuscripts (which we also brought out as a kind of a Martin introductory package), he clearly had a very enjoyable experience in a place where he was not expecting anything of the kind. As they left, his mother said to me she thought this might have swayed him in the direction of attending Texas A&M.

## Conclusion

In 1989 Randall Jimerson quoted a 1969 article on the marketing of museums that stated "for many people, museums are cold marble mausoleums that house miles of relics that soon give way to yawns and tired feet. To counteract this, museums should pay closer attention to their users' concerns and needs....Archivists face similar challenges" (Jimerson, 1989, p. 336). Those challenges threaten special collections librarians and archivists alike. They include patrons' fear of an unfamiliar learning environment, their nervousness at interacting with rare and potentially fragile materials, their perception of a seeming formal and standoffish library staff, and their lack of emotional and psychological engagement with materials. Free and open display and use by patrons of the George R.R. Martin weapons at Cushing Memorial Library have proven to be an immense boon to us and, we believe, effective methods for overcoming some of these challenges. The weapons, drawn from a literary and televised universe of incredible popularity, bear that sacro-power so crucial to the formation of psychological links between patron and object. And the marketing is self-perpetuating: as more patrons become aware of the existence of the weapons, the word naturally spreads. Many of the patrons who view the weapons mention that they were informed by friends or fellow students.

We believe that our experiences with the Martin weapons offer examples for our sister institutions. Many collections hold items that carry intrinsic interest to patrons and would not suffer unduly from repeated viewing or handling. If the institutions holding such items—such gateway artifacts—are willing to engage a general public as well as specific researchers, our experience demonstrates that an atmosphere of lively interactions may be fostered.

As Susan M. Allen notes, a "book or any other object in special collections is nothing until a human being interacts with it....When students, alongside their teacher, gain access to original material, then a conversation of mythical proportions becomes possible. Students and their teacher can converse over these materials. When the sacro-power of books takes hold,

they themselves will begin to converse with human beings of every other age without regard for the normal restrictions of time, culture, or language” (Allen, 1999, p. 111). It may seem presumptuous to place replica weapons on the same emotional level of Shakespeare’s First Folio, a medieval book of hours, or a Sumerian clay tablet. However, the psychological power at work is very much the same—patrons who know the *Song of Ice & Fire* books or the *Game of Thrones* TV show can grasp the hilt of a sword, and we can see their imaginations fire. Inside the confines of the Reading Room they see themselves as noble-therefore-doomed Ned Stark, as Jaime Lannister, deeply flawed yet working towards redemption, or as intensely honorable and duty-conscious Brienne of Tarth.

In holding these objects, patrons are interacting not with the object creators (as in Allen’s example) but with the characters who wield them, which is an equally valid relationship. The strong emotions, those that relics of popular culture can generate, open doors—patrons learn that the special collections and archives in which these materials reside contain an air of familiarity, and their anxiety is significantly reduced.

As we mentioned above, further analysis is required to prove definitively our contention that this reduction in stress and discomfort produces repeated visits. However, on a visceral and observational level, at Cushing Library we have found that *Ice* and its brethren can serve ably as weapons of a different sort to combat fear and to carve out in a manner sharp as Valyrian steel new avenues of approachability and openness in special collections.

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