

## **Unsuccessful Movie Adaptations**

How great novels were reduced to mediocre movies

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## Abstract

Book to movie adaptations have been heavily popularized over the years of moviemaking. While there are several amazing adaptations out there that were, and arguably still are, widely successful, such as *Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter*. That, however, is not the case for all adaptations. The purpose of this thesis is to explore the reasons for why the book to movie adaptations did not do as well as expected, and therefore see *why they did not achieve the “franchise status” they aspired to*, in addition to considering if TV adaptations has become the new norm. Thomas Leitch’s *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents: From Gone with the Wind to The Passion of the Christ*, presents several reasons why certain adaptations reached their success, and J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* franchise is used as a control group of what a successful franchise is. The adaptation of Christopher Paolini’s *Eragon* of the same name has some issues with fidelity and compression, as well as the directing and the acting. The main issues with Philip Pullman’s *Northern Lights* adaptation, *The Golden Compass*, are within the writing, mainly with narrative, compression and cutting. This is where the TV adaptation, *His Dark Materials*, has been branded as superior. When compared to the production process of *Harry Potter*, there are several flaws that are highlighted in *Eragon* and *The Golden Compass*: author involvement, writing, casting and fan satisfaction. I found that fidelity does have much to do with the success, as fan opinion matters. In addition, the costs versus profits factor in majorly, as both discussed movies did not earn as much as expected. Therefore, it was found that TV-shows may be the future of adaptations, as fidelity is easier to uphold, and the costs are generally much lower.

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## Contents

Abstract .....	ii
Acknowledgements .....	iii
Introduction.....	1
Adaptation theory.....	3
Fidelity.....	3
Franchise.....	5
Narrative .....	7
Analysis.....	8
<i>Eragon</i> .....	8
Author biography .....	9
Reception of the novel, movie and video game.....	10
Narrative and Characters.....	11
Production .....	15
<i>Northern Lights</i> and <i>The Golden Compass</i> .....	17
Author biography .....	18
Reception of the novel and movie.....	19
Narrative and Characters.....	20
Production .....	22
TV-series – <i>His Dark Materials</i> .....	24
Discussion .....	27
Good and bad moviemaking .....	27
Comparison to <i>Harry Potter</i> and its approach to adaptation .....	28
Popularity of the original novels.....	28
Fan and general public opinion importance .....	29
Production differences .....	30
TV-series and the future of adaptation .....	34
What could have been done differently? .....	35
Conclusion .....	37
Works cited.....	40

## Introduction

Books have been adapted into movies for decades, for over a century at this point. These movie adaptations have been used as a medium to give life to the stories we have read about and visualized in our minds' eye, and to reach further audiences beyond the pages of a book. However, there are some book series that intended to make a movie series, but there was only ever made one movie. The reasons for this limitation could be many, for instance, how accurately the movie depicted the story of the original source material, or how the audience received the movie. If the fans of the book-series did not enjoy its adaptation, there could be consequences for its continuation, as profits will affect the production of future films. If there is nothing to gain from adapting a book into a film, there are few that will fund the production. There is also the general storytelling of the film, and the limitations of adapting an entire novel into a two-hour long feature film might not give enough room for the entire story, and it might come out lacking. Another limitation is of course the technology at the time, and what was physically possible, as the visual effects of a movie can either immerse or pull the audience out of the story. These are all aspects of moviemaking that will be taken into account when exploring the making and reception of the movie adaptation of Christopher Paolini's novel *Eragon* and Phillip Pullman's *Northern Lights* film adaptation, *The Golden Compass*.

There has been research about book to film adaptation, though most of it seems to touch upon why and how certain movies obtained their commercial and popular success, and why some adaptations are better than others. For instance, one master's thesis on successful movie adaptations touched upon Stephen King's novel *The Mist* and its adaptations and why they are successful in comparison to other adaptations, mentioning *X-men* and *Deadpool* and other comic book movies. As most research on film adaptations has been done on successful movies and franchises, according to my findings, it would be interesting to also see the opposite. Comic book movie adaptations were taken into consideration in choosing material for this thesis, for instance the notoriously bad *Avatar: The Last Airbender* live-action movie adaptation based on the widely popular Nickelodeon cartoon series of the same name, as it meets all the criteria of the basis of this thesis. Similar movies based on cartoons with the same notoriety were also considered. However, in recent years comic book-based films have seen such popular and commercial success that there was other material that would fit the theme of unsuccessful adaptations better. There is also the added challenge of adapting a

written medium to a visual one that I wished to highlight, and therefore the cartoon-based ones, which already were visual to begin with, did not fit the theme of the thesis. In addition, the books and movies chosen to focus on in this thesis are ones that I have personally wondered how they came to be and how they failed in their aspirations to become popular franchises such as *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings* have become.

Thomas Leitch has studied how such adaptations do not need to aspire to fidelity to be good adaptations and elaborates on this in his book *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents: From "Gone with the Wind" to "The Passion of Christ"*. Fidelity and its importance is one of the points that will be explored in this thesis, as well as other aspects of moviemaking and adaptation. In addition, Leitch has used the *Lord of the Rings* franchise as an example as to how a good adaptation can be made, even if there might be several changes and omissions from the novels. Linda Hutcheon argues in her book *A Theory of Adaptation* that the adaptation of novels one is familiar with brings comfort, because of the repetition. This has held true both when the story has been copied almost to perfection, but also when the story is somewhat altered, all because of the familiarity of something that has been read before. As the *Harry Potter* franchise is one of the most successful, if not the most successful, franchises of all time, it will therefore be used as a control for what a "successful" movie adaptation and franchise is. The focus here will be on fidelity and what part the author of the books played in the making of the films, and what impact that may have had on the reception of them. Since this thesis will only be focusing on two movie adaptations, there will be limits as to how much can be found about said books and movies. In addition, the result will be leaning on the reception of those movies alone, so the findings of this thesis might not be applicable to all film adaptations, as the books and movies chosen to focus on are of a similar genre, namely young adult fantasy.

Researching unsuccessful movies seemed like an interesting topic to write about, especially as an avid consumer of stories in multiple media. In addition, the *Eragon* novel and its corresponding movie, as well as *Northern Lights* and its adaptation *The Golden Compass*, have not been used much as a subject of this particular type of research, even though there have been articles and reviews both praising and criticizing the movies and the way they were adapted. Therefore, the question I would like to find an answer to is:

*Why did some film adaptations which aspired to 'franchise status' not succeed?*

This thesis will aim to find reasons as to why an adaptation is seen as successful or not and see why the adaptations of *Eragon* and *Northern Lights* might have failed as movie franchises, and how that happened. I believe that some of my findings will show that fidelity is one of the most important parts of adaptation, as the fans of the original book series have been waiting to see their favorite books translated into film, however, the consensus of the general public not familiar with the books may also have a say in the success of a movie franchise. In this thesis I aim to explore some ways an adaptation can be done, in addition to looking at how some famous franchises, namely J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* and J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter*, have been adapted, with the help of Leitch. In addition, Hutcheon's theories of repetition for comfort, or the pleasures of adaptation, will be included, as well as Jakob Lothe's statements about narrative. I intend to apply these standards to some book to movie adaptations that did not obtain the franchise status they aspired to have, namely Christopher Paolini's *Eragon* and Phillip Pullman's *Northern Lights* adaptation, *The Golden Compass*, to see how they were adapted, if they focused on fidelity or were altered to fit the movie screen, in addition to looking at the box office reception and the opinions of the general public, as well as the what fans of the original books thought. I will compare these with the success of the *Harry Potter* franchise, and how the first two films, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* and *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, were developed. In addition, as *Northern Lights* has gotten a TV- series adaptation, *His Dark Materials*, I will discuss whether or not book to TV adaptations might be a better solution. Lastly, I will conclude with an answer for the research question posed.

## Adaptation theory

There have been made countless adaptations throughout the years, and with them franchises have been established. However, what is it that makes a good one? Is it the accuracy, or fidelity, to the original work? Or is it the popularity of the original? This part will present different factors of adaptation and franchises, using the first two movies in the *Harry Potter* franchise as a control group for successful adaptation and franchising.

## Fidelity

Fidelity has been one of the most, if not the most, key factors when it comes to book to movie adaptations. When fans of a book or book-series hear that there is an adaptation of their favorite books, there is a certain expectation and anticipation of what it will be like. Most would agree that it is of utmost importance that the movie, or movies, reflect the books

faithfully. Thomas Leitch reaffirms this belief, however, he questions it as well, as he states that an adaptation should be faithful to the source material, however, it must be rewritten as well (16). If not, it would only be a copy of itself. This seemed to be the general opinion of Peter Jackson as well when he undertook the task of adapting *The Lord of the Rings* to the epic trilogy it is today. While the book-series was not hugely popular, nor did it become a best-seller, it was a cult favorite among fantasy fans (Thomas Leitch 131-132). Therefore, he had to be faithful to the source text, however, there were changes that had to be made to adapt it to the big screen. According to Linda Hutcheon, fidelity is important because the story being adapted is already familiar, at least to the ones having read the books. She says in her book *A Theory of Adaptation*: “[t]hink of a child’s delight in hearing the same nursery rhymes or reading the same books over and over. Like ritual, this kind of repetition brings comfort, a fuller understanding, and the confidence that comes with the sense of knowing what is about to happen next” (114). If that familiarity is broken, fans of the original work would be disappointed and possibly confused as to where certain parts of the story went or where a character is. Fidelity discourse, as Gary R. Bortolotti and Linda Hutcheon put it, addresses how an adaptation’s “success” has mostly been measured by how faithful it is to the “original” or “source” text (444). They find that there are several ways to view success, as a series can be adapted into several types of media, such as TV, film and games, and the general awareness of the narrative and rising purchases of the book, movie ticket or game can all be seen as a type of “success” (452). Leitch, however, gives another reason for keeping the fidelity to the source material, namely a financial motive (128). As people read and get to know and love literary works, they expect and demand that an adaptation will be as accurate to the source material as possible. Therefore, directors of movies adapted from popular novels regard the book as a bible for how the movie should look and feel like.

When it comes to fidelity in the *Harry Potter* movies, it is largely kept as is, especially in the first two movies, which are the focus here. In addition, the first two books are the shortest ones in the series, making for an easier time of including most, if not all, of the happenings of the books in the movies. It seems like a lot of care and consideration was put into designing the sets, choosing the actors for the more impactful characters and keeping the story as it was intended. There were of course some scenes from the books omitted, such as one of the rooms designed to protect the Philosopher’s Stone, namely the potion riddle made by Severus Snape, in the first book. The reason is probably the same as it is in most omissions, that there are only so many minutes in a movie, and if one were to include



absolutely everything, the movie would be many hours long. The missing scene in question was not that important to the main plot either, just one more obstacle leading to the conclusion. There were of course some minor changes made in the second movie as well, such as line distributions from one character to another, which littered the movies throughout its runtime (Chloe James), however, the alterations never changed much plot wise. According to Bortolotti and Hutcheon, as the novels were still new and popular as the movies were made, there was no need for a reinterpretation of the story to be made, and a more faithful retelling is what the audience would expect and demand (449). Some of the films' fidelity can be attributed to the involvement of author J.K. Rowling. She had a major part in the choosing of the children playing the main characters Harry Potter, Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger, as she wanted them to be accurate, in addition to them having some chemistry (*Harry Potter 20th Anniversary*). She was also very much available for consultation about certain things during the entire production, as she had not written all the books yet at the start, and therefore the directors and producers would need some inside information along the way. However, she did not have much power in the decision-making, as that was more in the hands of the director and producer, and she was seldom present on the set herself (Joséphine Michèle).

## Franchise

A franchise when it comes to movies is defined as something that is serialized and is about the same cast of characters. Thomas Leitch defines several works as franchises, such as *Sherlock Holmes*, *Alice in Wonderland* and *The Lord of the Rings* (23, 103, 185). *Sherlock Holmes* has several book installations, which makes it a book franchise on its own, in addition to the many movies and TV-series adapted from them. When it comes to the *Alice in Wonderland* franchise, there are the books that established the story, however, it would not be popularized to the extent it is today had it not been for Disney's adaptation, followed by Tim Burton's *Alice* movies. The books have also inspired several independent games in more recent years. Then there is *The Lord of the Rings* franchise, which Leitch has delved deeper into. He describes how the franchise is what it is because of the passion and insistence of director and producer Peter Jackson, how he wanted to stay as faithful to the novels as possible, while also making exciting and dramatic movies (136).

The first franchises that gained much success were horror series, such as *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>*, *A Nightmare on Elm Street* and *Halloween*. However, the first installations of the franchises were often seen as being the superior one of them, and the sequels could not live up to the expectation. In recent years, *Halloween* has seen a resurgence in popularity, as the

newer movies are more in line with what the original one presented. The most popular movie franchise to date, which are also adaptations, is of course the Marvel Cinematic Universe, or the MCU, with its twenty-seven movies and almost just as many TV-series (Sean Aversa). With their recent release of *Spiderman: No Way Home* getting people theorizing whether it will beat the highest grossing movie of all time, it is evident that the success of the franchise is bound to last (Rebecca Rubin). According to Sean Aversa of Hollywood Insider, the recipe for a successful franchise is to learn from past franchises and how they did things and having a vision for where you want the franchise to go, namely a good plan and an overseer that can steer it in the right direction. New Line Cinema had such a plan for *The Lord of the Rings*, as they publicized updates on the films on the official website for the series, [lordoftherings.net](http://lordoftherings.net), where the fans could discuss openly about everything surrounding the films, from the latest technological advances that could help bring the films to life, to how faithful the films could possibly be (Thomas Leitch 145). In addition, Leitch remarks how movie franchises adapted from already existing franchises are even more likely to succeed, such as the *Spiderman* movies as they are based off several already popular comic books. He pinpoints how the *Pokémon* franchise, with its trading card game and nine video games have spawned no less than 36 TV segments, short films and feature films (263). However, he also remarks how films based on video games, while popular, often do not reach beyond the video game community. When researching what franchises failed, there are several movies that come up that are relatively well known, but they did not kickstart series of movies like they had hoped. Some that are mentioned across the board are: *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, *Eragon*, *The Golden Compass* and *Green Lantern*, among many others. All the “failed” movies mentioned above are also adaptations in one way or another. Some are traditional adaptations based on novels, while others are based on comics and cartoons, all of which were very popular in their own regard. Reasons for why these failed could be many, some of which will be explored later in the text, as two of the aspiring franchises, *Eragon* and *The Golden Compass*, are the main research subjects of this thesis.

The *Harry Potter* franchise has become one of the most popular film and book series in recent years, and while some recent controversies around the author may have dampened some people’s love for the series, the hype has not died down completely. It has spawned theme parks, countless amounts of merchandise, mobile games and video games, and there will soon be released a giant game based in the *Harry Potter* universe, *Hogwarts Legacy*, where you as the player can explore Hogwarts of the past. As the novels were already

immensely popular, there was no doubt that the movies would be too. However, at the start of the production of the first movie, not all the books had been published yet. Therefore, several changes had to be made to the sets throughout the years, and the Hogwarts castle was constantly rebuilt throughout the production time. The plan, however, was always to adapt all the novels J.K. Rowling had planned for her series. Much of the success of the *Harry Potter* franchise has been attributed to the studio's willingness to switch it up when needed. The first two films were under the guidance of director Chris Columbus, famous for his involvement in *Home Alone*, and they continued to change directors when needed throughout the series (Sean Aversa). The future of the *Harry Potter* franchise is, however, somewhat uncertain. While there are still movies being made, games being developed and theme parks attracting tourists from the world over, the recent controversies regarding J.K. Rowling and her views on certain topics have caused many to opt out of everything related to the Wizarding World (Charles Trepany). This goes to show that even the biggest, most popular phenomenon can fall, with just a misstep from its creator.

## Narrative

According to Jakob Lothe, narrative is “a chain of events which is situated in time and space” (3), meaning that narrative is the way that a story is intended to be told by the author. However, as some novels span hundreds and thousands of pages, it is nearly impossible to include absolutely everything when adapting it into a movie. James Monaco mentions how watching a movie is a richer experience than reading a novel, as there is so much more going on, while the words on the page are the same every time (51). However, he also points out how it is a poorer experience, as the narrator is much weaker, and there is no omniscient narrator describing everything and anything, nor are the thoughts of every character always displayed. The one attempt at such a movie was apparently a very claustrophobic experience, as the screen only showed what the characters could see, and nothing more. Leitch made a point of this narrative weakness of films in his book:

*Gone with the Wind* and *The Lord of the Rings* are both impossible cases for faithful adaptation, thousand-page novels for which standard tactics of adaptation—selecting some obligatory speeches, characters, scenes, and plotlines and dropping others; compressing or combining several characters or scenes into one; streamlining the narrative by eliminating digressive episodes; reworking dialogue so that it is either more epigrammatic or more severely functional—are clearly inadequate. (129)

To transform a thick novel or, in the case of *The Lord of the Rings*, a trilogy into films is quite difficult, especially if one tries to please everyone and include everything. Therefore, some sacrifices must be made to be able to keep the general narrative intact.

This is of course the case with the *Harry Potter* movies as well, but more noticeably the later ones, where there was a much thicker plot and characters had become more complex as they aged. The first few movies, as mentioned, were adapted from much shorter novels, which meant more time for exploring the entirety of the plot, not just the main narrative. There was, however, the recurring delegation of one character's lines from the novels to another character in the movies (Chloe James). More often than not, it was the character Hermione Granger that gained lines that were originally uttered by other characters in the novels, many of them being taken from the other main support character, Ron Weasley. The reason for this could be many, for instance making Hermione seem even more smart, as that is one of the character's main characteristics. However, it has been rumored that some director or writer liked the character so much and wanted her to utter the cool and important lines. This continued throughout the series, and ended up making some of the other characters, especially Ron, seem more unintelligent and incompetent than intended.

## Analysis

This part will focus on presenting and analyzing the different aspects of the adaptations of the *Eragon* and *Northern Lights* novels. By looking at revenue and reviews, I aim to see how and why the novel was adapted in the first place, in addition to why there was never made a second film. I will also look at the narratives, if it maintains fidelity to the source material, and possible issues the adaptation process might have encountered, for instance in the production process or otherwise. In addition, the adaptation of novel to TV-series will be considered, with the new *His Dark Materials* TV adaptation of Pullman's novels having started airing in recent years, as well as several other popular book series' being adapted to TV rather than to the big screen.

## *Eragon*

*Eragon* is a 15-year-old farmer boy who one day discovers a dragon egg in the forest. It bonds with him, branding him with the mark of a Dragon Rider. *Eragon* and the newly hatched Saphira must be secretive about their existence, as the evil king Galbatorix is on the hunt for Dragon Riders, having already made them close to extinct except for himself, and now *Eragon*. They are forced to flee their village with the local storyteller, Brom, a man who

knows more than he should about both dragons and their riders. He trains Eragon in sword fighting, magic and the history of the Dragon Riders, so that he may be prepared to help the resistance, the Varden, in their efforts to free the land of Alagaësia.

The novel follows Eragon with an omniscient narrator in the third person perspective as he travels the land. His thoughts are still heard as if he were the narrator himself, especially through his connection with Saphira, as they have a mental connection that they cannot escape. As a duo, they follow a trope of one being branded as the wise one, while the other has a lot to learn about the world. And even though Saphira is only a few months old by the end of the first book, she is usually the one with the wise thoughts. However, her inexperience and youth does shine through at times. They are guided by the stereotypical old wise man, Brom, who has a strangely large amount of knowledge about dragons and their riders. It is revealed that he used to have a dragon of his own, who was killed by Galbatorix years ago, and he now wants to help Eragon get away from Galbatorix' clutches. He, however, tragically dies before they arrive at their destination, the Varden. This is where Eragon gains a new travel companion, the mysterious Murtagh, who is not much older than him, but has much experience with hunting Urgals. He is, however, skeptical to Eragon's decision of travelling to the Varden.

The movie, like any other, has no narrator for most of the time, however, it does start like many other fantasy movies of the time, such as *The Lord of the Rings*, with a voice introducing the universe and how it functions. In the case of *Eragon*, this narrator explains the history of the Dragon Riders and how Galbatorix came to power, before it leads into the same introductory scene as the novel where Arya the elf is being chased by Durza the Shade and Urgals who were trying to obtain the dragon egg Arya was carrying at the time. This is where novel and movie start to diverge, and never truly collide again. New narratives are created for important characters such as Eragon's cousin, Roran, while others are cut out completely, namely Orrik and the Twins. In addition, some events and places are merged or cut to limit run time, so the movie seems rushed.

#### Author biography

Christopher Paolini (17.11.1983), was 15 years old when he first started writing his first novel, *Eragon*. It was finally published in 2002, when he was 19 years old, with the help from his parents' publishing company, Paolini International LLC. Later in the year, the author Carl Hiaasen's stepson brought *Eragon* to his stepfather, a book he had enjoyed

immensely, and as a result Hiaasen brought the novel to his publisher Alfred A. Knopf Books for Young Readers. This led to *Eragon*, and a deal for the publishing of its sequels, being published under this name. Subsequently, after more editing and finally publishing in 2003, the book became a bestseller. In 2004, Paolini began writing the sequel, *Eldest*, as a continuation of the story about Eragon and his dragon, Saphira. Then, in 2006, the film adaptation of *Eragon* was released by 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox.

Reception of the novel, movie and video game

The *Eragon* novel was initially well received, and became quite popular among children, teens and young adults, as it directly followed the beginnings of the *Harry Potter* books and is based on the same type of high fantasy as *The Lord of the Rings* (encyclopedia.com). Therefore, the readers were already interested in fantasy, magic and dragons, of which the novel is full of. Some, however, were more critical to Paolini's writing. One such critic is Diana Wynne Jones, who states that his writing was inspired by *The Lord of the Rings*, which in and of itself is not a bad thing, however, it was simply too much of a likeness. However, she also seems to pity him, when she states that "the adulation and publicity heaped on Paolini has done him a grave disservice". What she means by this is that Paolini was very young when he wrote and published this novel, and now he has the pressure of repeating the phenomenon several times for his sequels. She does, however, praise Paolini on his writing as well, as he seems like he himself is captivated by his own writing, and it will do the same to his readers. There are others who would compare the storyline of *Eragon* with the *Star Wars* story with a *Lord of the Rings* mask, such as Matt Berman of Common Sense Media as well as a review from Goodreads. However, other reviews on Goodreads are quite scathing, and believe it to be a direct rip-off of *The Lord of the Rings*, while others believe it ticks off all the boxes of a classic fantasy tale, perfect for fantasy buffs.

The movie was also well received in the beginning, however, later it has been largely forgotten by the general public and ignored by the fans. According to the Hollywood Reporter, *Eragon* grossed \$30 million worldwide in its first week (Segers) and earned \$63.5 million internationally by its second weekend in theatres (Hollinger), however, it ended up with \$250 million worldwide, and as the budget was \$100 million, it only earned \$150 million total ("Eragon", *Box Office Mojo*), and that is not including the promotional costs. In addition, the movie was only rated a 16% on Rotten Tomatoes, with many people being quite critical to the movie over the years. Some critics are very negative to the movie, and Nigel Floyd of Time Out stated that it is a "painful reminder of what fantasy cinema was like before

*The Lord of the Rings* rewrote the rules” and likens the story to a “wounded, flightless dragon”. Other reviews commend the movie for what it tried to do and for what it is. Peter Hartlaub stated in SFGate that “*Eragon* may not be a big Oscar contender, but in a movie season filled with blood diamonds, fascist soldiers and Idi Amin, it provides a much-needed afternoon of PG-rated family-friendly adventure”. He also said that *Eragon* was a good transition movie for people who are getting too old for *Happy Feet* and not old enough for *Black Christmas*.

In addition to the film, there was also made a video game based on the first novel in Paolini’s *Inheritance* cycle. This could have been great for the making of a franchise, as many popular franchises today have several media surrounding them, such as *Pokémon*, *X-men* and *The Witcher* (Thomas Leitch 257, Sara Century). The game was released prior to the movie on a popular console for the time, PlayStation 2, which should have made people familiar with the narrative, and made them aware of the upcoming film. However, the reviews of the *Eragon* game were polarized, just like the ones for the movie. Game critics such as Erik Brudvig of *IGN* generally believe the game is not what it could have been, as it apparently relies on the player having either read the book or seen the movie. It left him confused at the end, as the storytelling of the game was lacking. However, other players of the game have fond memories of playing it, and generally enjoyed the unique mechanics it offered (“*Eragon: PlayStation 2*” *Metacritic*). So even though a video game adaptation can be a great success and kickstart a whole franchise, as seen with *The Witcher* game series, it is not guaranteed.

#### Narrative and Characters

The *Eragon* movie is not *that* different from the novel, as the main plot is the same and has not undergone any major changes, and therefore mostly maintaining fidelity to the source material and the story. However, as the novel is around five hundred pages and the film only about one and a half hour long, it would be impossible to include every single plot point, character and town exactly as it was mentioned in the novel. Therefore, there are some subplots and, in turn, characters that were altered, and in some cases completely cut out, which then altered the narrative from the novel as a whole. Therefore, there are several plot points that could not be explored in the movie. Most likely, this is a result of the directors and producers having to “streamline” the narrative, as Leitch put it (129). Therefore, the journey from Carvahall to the Beor mountains was cut and blended somewhat. In addition, a lot of weeks of exploring Farthen Dûr, the dwarf kingdom in the mountains, interacting with the

people of the Varden, and all the training Eragon would endure, was cut out, and they moved the concluding battle of the novel to the same day he arrived in the mountains. One such character is one of the first ones we are introduced to, Roran, Eragon's older cousin, who had to leave Carvahall to enlist in the army in the film, instead of for work like he did in the novel. This in turn would change the entire character arc of Roran, as his motivation was to earn money to propose to a girl in the village, in addition to his journeys depicted in the later novels.

The main character, Eragon, is majorly altered in the movie. In the novel he is 15 years old and described as being of quite average build with dark features, and still having some baby fat. He became leaner and gained muscle after his travels and training with Brom. In the film, however, he is already quite built from the beginning, blonde, and has been aged up to 17 years old instead. In addition, he was quite cocky and sure in his fighting abilities, of which book Eragon had none. This can of course be attributed to directing or screenwriting. As a Dragon Rider, Eragon becomes more in touch with the magic of the world, like an elf. He experiences this first during battle when he utters an elven word he heard his master, Brom, say to light their campfire a few nights prior. As a result, Eragon produces a large burst of flame, before he passes out from exhaustion. He later learns that he has magic abilities now, but he must be careful and train to control the output, or he could die from the magic sucking out his life force. This is where the novel and film start to differ. Book Eragon starts the long process of training his magic by learning more elven words and using magic to lift a small stone, among other mundane tasks. Movie Eragon, on the other hand, seems to master magic quite easily, making trees bend to his will, lighting fires and seeing through Saphira's eyes almost as soon as he has learned the words to do so, and Brom makes no consequence of his use of magic, even though Eragon just woke up from fainting after using it.

The other main character, Saphira, has her own issues in the transition from book to film. In the beginning, there were not that many discrepancies, as she was blue and about as big as a cat in both instances, though not as blue as one may have imagined in the film. The problems began when she transitioned from being about the size of an average dog to a quite big dragon, big enough for one person to ride her. This took months of living in the forest to remain hidden in the book, however, in the movie it happened in a transition of a few seconds. This is common in movies, as one cannot include months of progress in a short time.



However, the way that the transition was done, there was some confusion as to how long it took for Saphira to grow this big.

Then there is the elf Arya, who in the novel is described as a beautiful woman with green eyes and long black hair, and she is notably “taller than most men” (458). As most elves she is described to be almost perfect. She is often dismissive of Eragon and his attempts to impress her, and is critical of him as a dragon rider, as she feels like it should have been an elf who was more ready and trained for the task. In the movie, however, she is blonde and blue-eyed, and very feminine. In addition, there is no visual clue to tell the viewer that she is an elf, such as the tell-tale pointy ears one would be very familiar with at this point. Her personality is also warmer meeker than the Arya in the novel, and therefore she does not seem like the strong warrior princess from the novel. The reason for this change is not explicitly mentioned anywhere, however, director Stefen Fangmeier did say in his director’s commentary that elves are petite and dainty. In addition, when it comes to her travels with Eragon, in the book she was in a self-induced coma most of the journey to slow the effects of the poison she had been subjected to, while in the movie she walked and talked most of the way until she collapses from the poison.

One important character that was very much overlooked in the film, was Orik the dwarf. He was Eragon’s guide during his stay with the Varden, introducing him to the dwarven king, in addition to becoming his close friend and having an especially important role in the other novels as well. However, Orik was not in the movie whatsoever, and the only dwarf that sort of made an appearance was the dwarf king Hrothgar, who had no significant role at all and was just sort of there. At first glance, there did not even seem to be any dwarves in the movie at all, and before viewing the movie for the first time in a long time, I could not remember seeing them at all, and was therefore under the impression that they were excluded from the movie completely. However, one of the opening lines of the movie describes Alagaësia as a realm of elves, dwarves, and men. That is one of the only reasons for why one would know that there were dwarves and elves in the movies to begin with, apart from characters explicitly saying that someone is a dwarf or an elf.

A character that is only mentioned in the first book is the main antagonist, the mad king Galbatorix. He is described as this big, evil, crazy man who is the one responsible for the slaughter of the dragon riders and dragons, and he is now on the hunt for Eragon and Saphira, as he sees them as the only threat against him, being the only dragon rider left prior

to Eragon finding Saphira's egg. Since Eragon has never seen this man, only hearing about Galbatorix from scared citizens who have lived under his tyranny for years, he can only imagine how ferocious and strong Galbatorix is, which then creates an image in the head of the reader of this frightening villain we must face at some point. The movie destroys this narrative in the first few minutes of the movie, where we see Galbatorix pacing around his throne room, ranting and raving to Durza, the actual antagonist of this movie, about what he expects to be done, like some stereotypical Batman villain monologuing about their evil plans. Suddenly Galbatorix does not seem so scary anymore, he is just some angry man in a room somewhere, sending out his goons to do his dirty work for him. The choice to include Galbatorix, however, does make sense from a movie-making standpoint. It is more exciting to know what is going on behind the enemy line rather than not knowing anything at all. However, as the main antagonist of the first book and the movie is Durza the shade, the addition was perhaps not needed, as Galbatorix could have been a more mysterious overarching villain that gets introduced later, even though he is the reason for everything Eragon must do.

Durza underwent some changes as well, but most noticeably in the magic he was able to use. In the final battle of the movie, he summoned a large, dragon like creature that he flew around and battled Eragon and Saphira with. This is not something even a magical being like shade should be able to do according to the laws of magic established in the novel. Then there are the creatures known as the Ra'zak, who in the books are deformed insect-like creatures who wield swords and a special cursed oil, and they continue to hunt Eragon throughout several of the novels. In the film, however, they are formed by Durza by what looks like insects and dirt, and they are quickly put to an end by Eragon and Brom.

There were several other characters that had roles that differed in importance who had no appearances in the final cut of the movie, however, some of them were briefly shown in deleted scenes. The creepy magicians known as the Twins were two such characters. They were supposed to be some sort of defense mechanism for the Varden, screening the minds of everyone and anyone who entered for any thoughts of treason or for catching spies. They were the reason for why Murtagh was put on house arrest in the Varden, as he refused to be screened by them in fear of them discovering his identity as the son of one of Galbatorix's most trusted knights, Morzan. This was cut from the movie as he was recognized by the leader of the Varden instead. The Twins also had quite a large role in the final battle of the

novel, as they were quite powerful sorcerers, and could easily communicate across large distances.

## Production

The director, Stefen Fangmeier, had several enlightening comments in the Director's Commentary part of the DVD. For instance, there were several screenwriters involved in the making of this movie, Peter Buchman, Lawrence Konnor and Mark Rosenthal, though only Buchman was credited, to the frustration of Fangmeier, and he remarks that he never got to meet Buchman. One frustration many fans had about the movie was how the Urgals looked. They were supposed to be monstrous creatures with horns, but Fangmeier decided that he wanted to do something different. One creative challenge he had was with the hatching of the dragon egg. He debated on doing it a bit like the raptor hatching from *Jurassic Park*, with the dragon peeking out from the shell gradually, creating some form of suspense, but he decided against it and rather made Saphira "pop out" from her shell quite violently. One scene that was discussed by the production, was the scene of Saphira's first flight. It is quite an emotional scene, both in the novel and in the movie, as this is where Eragon realizes that Saphira could just up and leave at any time. However, Fangmeier did something different with this scene, and that was to merge it with the growth she was supposed to have through months and months of living in Carvahall. This resulted in some sort of transformation scene for Saphira, where she suddenly grew from the size of a dog to a dragon large enough for someone to ride her, in addition to being the first time she communicated with Eragon. This was done because, even though Fangmeier knew that Eragon and Saphira spent many months together in Carvahall while she grew, he wanted to keep the momentum going, as the "bad guys" were on the hunt for them. When it came to Eragon learning magic, Fangmeier wanted to set up later scenes for the audience through the different elvish words that Eragon learns from Brom. When it came to the Ra'zak, Fangmeier acknowledged the intelligent beings from the novel, but wanted something more creature-like for his film. Nearing the final battle and the climax of the movie, Fangmeier did not wish to spend too much time on the battle preparations, as it had all been seen before in previous movies. And even though he was aware of the battle between Eragon and Durza being on foot between two people, he felt that an aerial battle would be better. Throughout the commentary one thing that is prevalent is keeping the momentum going, as in several scenes Fangmeier mentions how it was originally longer, however, he decided to cut it to keep to the essentials.

One challenge that came with this movie was that director Stefen Fangmeier was, and still is, largely inexperienced in directing movies, as he originally came from a VFX background. This resulted in lackluster directing that made for stiff and unconvincing acting. This is by no means saying that the actors in the movie were bad actors, just that the directing was not great. The character Brom, played by Jeremy Irons, was one of the movie's saving graces as he was committed to the role of a sarcastic, grumpy teacher and guide, however, the character was killed halfway through the movie, and could therefore not insert his wit into the rest of the film. Another challenge was Saphira, being a character that does not physically speak, and therefore not require an actor to be on set, so the performance became a bit disconnected from the rest of the characters, especially from Eragon whom she was supposed to share all thoughts and emotions with. In addition, it is not easy to make an overgrown lizard emote like a human would, as Saphira is supposed to be an intelligent creature with her own thoughts and feelings about things.

There is not much to be found about what screenwriter Peter Buchman has to say about his process of writing the screenplay for *Eragon*, however, there are some assumptions that can be made about the possible intentions. For one, there were likely made a plethora of changes to what was originally in the novel to make up for the little time there is in a movie. This made for a more rushed story, instead of a descriptive one. In addition, to make a more cohesive and interesting watch, it is common to see what the "bad guys" are up to while the protagonist is out and about. This is often to drive the plot forward and keep the audience themselves updated. One integral part that was changed from the novel to the movie was the villain's intentions with Eragon and Saphira. In the novel Galbatorix wished to recruit them so that he may strengthen his army and power over Alagaësia even more. In the film, however, he orders Durza the Shade to kill Eragon, most likely to stop him from joining the resistance. In the book Arya never meets Brom, but in the movie he is a part of her rescue party. This also changed his death scene, as he was supposed to already be dead at this point in the story. This may have been to shorten the number of scenes, so that there would be time to include more scenes important for the plot.

Two major VFX studios were brought in to give life to the magic in the movie and most importantly Saphira the dragon, namely Industrial Light & Magic (ILM) and Weta Digital. Both of these studios have much experience in the fantasy genre, as ILM just finished making the dragon for *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* and Weta were the main VFX studio for the *Lord of the Rings* movies. The choice to employ two studios to work on one

asset could have been detrimental for the project, however, as ILM focused on the daytime, emotional aspect of Saphira while Weta worked on the battle clad one, it worked out in the end (Bielik, “‘Eragon’: Conjuring A Compelling CG Dragon”). A visual choice that was made to distinguish Saphira from other dragons in the recent media of the time was that they gave her featherlike scales instead of the stereotypical bat wings (Moerk). While this did distinguish her from other dragons, it led to some confusion and disappointment from fans of the series, as they did not appreciate the deviation from the novel. Another challenge the visual effects teams faced was the fact that Saphira was not just any dragon, but a vibrant blue sentient dragon. They had to make her emote without having any dialogue, as she communicated telepathically, in addition to making her “fit in” with the world (Bielik, “‘Eragon’: Conjuring A Compelling CG Dragon”). This repeatedly posed a challenge, as making a vibrant blue dragon not seem unnatural was virtually impossible. The solution came after tweaking the saturation of the color, so that it blended in with the surrounding nature and buildings more. The nighttime scenes posed a completely different problem, as blue turns black in the dark, however, with the help of lighting it worked out in the end.

### *Northern Lights and The Golden Compass*

At Jordan college in Oxford, but not the Oxford we know of, we get to know Lyra Belacqua, and her dæmon, a physical personification of the soul in the shape of an animal, Pantalaimon, or Pan. She is forced to leave Oxford when she witnesses her uncle, Lord Asriel, almost being assassinated by the order of the Magisterium, the authority and church of the land. Lyra is given what looks like a small golden compass that does not point north, which is revealed to be an alethiometer, an instrument that, if you are able to interpret it, will tell the truth with the help of Dust, some sort of space dust that connects the different worlds and dimensions in the multiverse. At the same time, there have been several children disappearing among the gyptians in Oxford, suspected to have been taken by the “Gobblers”. As Lyra must leave, she leaves with a mysterious, beautiful woman known as Mrs. Coulter, who is affiliated with the Magisterium, and can therefore do as she likes. From there Lyra wishes to solve the mystery of the disappearing children, as her best friend, Roger, was one of the children that vanished.

The novel starts with describing Lyra and her dæmon, Pantalaimon, being up to their usual antics of exploring places they are not supposed to be, with the traditional omniscient third person narrator though focused more on Lyra and what she knows. Pan, as Lyra’s opposite and the physical incarnation of her conscience, often weakly protest to her antics,

but goes along with it in the end as they are as one. We see the immaturity physically as well, as children who have not been through puberty yet will have dæmons who are able to shift through a number of different forms. There is also the motherly, yet threatening, character of Mrs. Coulter, who seeks to control Lyra as she has had little control over much else in her life. Then there is the knight in shining armor mixed with the loyal steed, Iorek Byrnison the ice bear, who seeks to guide and help Lyra achieve her goals and get where she needs to be after he realizes her potential. The overarching theme of the novel is decidedly anti-religion, though Philip Pullman might be inclined to disagree, as the Magisterium seeks to keep children innocent by cutting their ties to their dæmon, effectively stopping them from developing into adults, and therefore being easier to control and manipulate.

The movie begins just as many other fantasy type films do, with narration and an explanation of the world's "magic", in this case Dust, as well as a "slideshow" of different characters and species that are otherwise unfamiliar to us in this parallel universe (*The Golden Compass* Director's Commentary). This then fades into what can only be described as a turf war between the kids of the college and the gyptian kids. The scenes at the start are almost the same as the novel, with the addition of Fra Pavel from the second novel. However, there are some artistic choices made to create a different atmosphere, for instance, the introductory dinner of Mrs. Coulter being in public for dramatic flair, which originally was an intimate dinner between her, the Master, Lyra and a handful of other respectable ladies. The presentation of the alethiometer was also altered to being in Lyra's room as opposed to the Master's office to show the urgency of the situation. There are conflation of characters, namely Billy Costa and Tony Makarios becoming one, as well as switching the order of scenes from the novel to the film.

#### Author biography

Philip Pullman (19.10.1946) started his career as an author with more realistic themes, with adult novels and detectives. Around 1993 he started his most popular series, *His Dark Materials*, with the first installment of the trilogy, *Northern Lights*. Pullman has proclaimed his distaste of the fantasy genre and claims that the *His Dark Materials* series is not fantasy, but "stark realism" (*The Great Escape*). He has been acclaimed as an accomplished writer and is often compared to the success of J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis. However, Pullman is an avid atheist, a stark difference from Lewis who included Christian undertones within his novel. Pullman instead criticizes religion harshly within the themes of his novels.

## Reception of the novel and movie

*Northern Lights* has been a highly acclaimed novel, and it has won several awards, such as the Carnegie medal, the Guardian children's fiction prize, as well as topping polls of the best winners of the Carnegie medal (John Ezard). Some critics even compare it to C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and especially draw attention to the contrasts on the representation of religion in the two series (Laura Miller). On the book-keeping web page called Goodreads, where the general public can review books as they please, many people speak warmly of the book. For instance, a person under the username Allyt\_hobart called it "[a] richly imagined alternate universe with incredibly strong and interesting lead characters and a fascinating cast of extras" (18 Aug 2018). Those who seem like they did not enjoy the novel, state that it comes down to either the genre or the demographic, and that it was not their ideal type of book.

The movie, however, is another story. It was greatly popular, and everyone who watched it waited with baited breaths for the second installment of the series, which never came. Talking money, *The Golden Compass* grossed \$370 million in worldwide box office, however, with a production budget of \$180 million, the profits were not as expected ("The Golden Compass", Box Office Mojo). Some critics would say it is a great movie, for instance Roger Ebert who likens it to other great British book to movie adaptations such as *Harry Potter* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*, however, he believes *The Golden Compass* "creates more complex villains and poses more intriguing questions". However, it has gotten a quite mediocre score on Rotten Tomatoes at 41%, which shows how polarized the opinions of this movie are. Stuart Heritage of the Guardian raves on about how the movie was too rushed, with no real introduction to the universe, and wanted to give too much information in a too short amount of time, as well as criticizing the repetitive animations. In addition, Boyd Hilton of Empire likens *The Golden Compass* to "a bland Harry Potter knock-off" in his review of the 2019 TV adaptation *His Dark Materials*. Emma Stefansky of Thrillist states that, as a movie *The Golden Compass* is quite okay, however, that as an adaptation it is not. The same divide in opinion can be seen among the general public. Some are of the opinion that *The Golden Compass* is a great movie and mourn over the fact that there was never made a second one, especially with the open nature of the ending. The ones with opposing opinions are often people who read the books and loved them, and they were therefore somewhat disappointed with the movie, even though the general public loved it, myself included.

## Narrative and Characters

The book and the movie mostly follow the same narrative, however, there are some changes made that alters the plot a bit, such as character omission and conflation. Many have complained that the religious themes and criticisms were removed, which takes away from the point Pullman was trying to make about religion. Pullman himself, however, has stated that he did not intend for the novels to preach a message of atheism, or anything else for that matter (Cynthia Fuchs). The difference is noticeable nonetheless, as the only mentions of something akin to religion in the film was talk of “heresy”, while the novel went on about Dust being a consequence of the original sin of Adam and Eve, and children being cut off from the flow of Dust would make them “pure” again.

The film is, as many other adaptations go, a victim of what Leitch calls “compression”, of which a longer novel has several parts either shortened or simply cut out to keep within the timeframe of a standard movie (99). An example of this is Lyra’s stay with Mrs. Coulter, which in the novel takes place over several weeks, describing many parties and social gatherings they attend or host, as well as Lyra having conversations with different scholars and journalists about the topics she is curious about. In the movie, however, this is compressed into one scene of Lyra and Pan discussing the parties of the past, and Pan theorizing that Mrs. Coulter will never take them to Svalbard as she promised. The very same day in the film is where Lyra and Pan search through a bunch of documents, finding that Mrs. Coulter was the leader of the Gobblers, and then escaping her. There are also several other exciting scenes from the novel, such as Lyra’s meeting with the witch’s consul, the discovery that the Bolvangar nurses have gotten their dæmons cut away, among many others (*Vulture*). One of the biggest changes in narrative by far is the order of how things happen. In the novel, Lyra is first kidnapped by Samoyeds and taken to Bolvangar, from which she escapes to then rescue Lord Asriel from the ice bears of Svalbard, and have Iorek Byrnison fight the false king. In the movie it is done the opposite, with the kidnapping to ice bear fight first, and the travel to Bolvangar to rescue Roger second.

The main character, Lyra Belacqua, is described as a thin girl, short for her age with dark-blond hair. She is rather rebellious, always climbing the roof of the college and picking fights with the other kids. This can also be seen in the movie where the intro depicts the turf war going on between the college kids and the gyptian children, as well as Lyra and Roger’s conversation on the roof. Movie Lyra, however, is very obviously blonde, and not necessarily smaller than the other children. Her dæmon, Pantalaimon, or Pan, is Lyra’s polar opposite,



being more cautious and afraid, warning Lyra to not do things she is not supposed to do. However, because of his cautious nature, he is more prone to be distrustful of people and situations Lyra would otherwise trust or walk right into. One big difference from the novel to the movie is Lyra's clever planning. She is quick to produce a plan, as she often gets herself into sticky situation due to her curious nature. In the film this is more shown through her actions, however, the plans often seem more spur of the moment and panicked rather than carefully planned out. An example of this is the escape from Bolvangar, where in the novel Lyra allies herself with Roger and the other children, hides out in the ventilation system, and planning to use a fire drill to figure out more about the place. In the movie, however, Lyra hastily starts a fire by making the daemon cutting machine explode, before running out with everyone else.

The character of Mrs. Coulter is at first very likable, and that is what she wants as well, for people to like her so that she can manipulate them to do her bidding. Therefore, she quickly becomes controlling of Lyra and her actions and appearance. When Lyra refuses to do as she says, for instance refusing to leave her shoulder bag in her room, she uses her daemon to torture Pan, which in turn hurts Lyra, as daemons are physical incarnations of a person's soul. In the editions of the novel published before the movie aired, Mrs. Coulter was described to have black hair. However, Pullman expressed his wish to have Nicole Kidman play the role of Mrs. Coulter, and later stated that he was "clearly wrong", and that she was obviously blonde (Robert Butler). This is what Leitch would call a "correction", a mistake in the original that had to be altered in the adaptation, even though it was the author himself who requested it (99). Therefore, in editions published after the movie's release, the description of Mrs. Coulter was altered to reflect this. One change, which is not detrimental to the plot, is the way Mrs. Coulter's true identity and relationship to Lyra was revealed. In the novel, it is Lord Faa, the chief of the gyptians, who tells Lyra that Mrs. Coulter is actually her mother, and Lord Asriel is her father (*Northern Lights* 122-125). This all happens on the journey to Svalbard, after Lyra escaped the clutches of Mrs. Coulter. In the film, however, this is not revealed to Lyra until she is captured by Mrs. Coulter a second time, in Bolvangar.

Fra Pavel is originally a character that is not introduced until the second book; however, he is introduced as another antagonist and as the face and will of the Magisterium. One of the most important changes he imposes is that he is the one pouring the poison into Lord Asriel's wine, and not the Master of Jordan college. In addition, he becomes the face of the Magisterium at an early stage, as we do not know much about it at this point. He is also a

better representative of its attitude than perhaps Mrs. Coulter, who is more defiant and acts on her own, rather than purely on the orders of the Magisterium.

Some minor characters that are altered somewhat are Roger Parslow and Billy Costa. Roger Parslow's arc is mostly the same, being kidnapped by Gobblers, helping Lyra escape Bolvangar, before finally heading towards where Lord Asriel is, and this is where the movie ends, with a hopeful balloon ride into the night. However, in the novel they are reunited with Lord Asriel and, for some reason unknown to Lyra and Roger, Mrs. Coulter. This is where Lyra realizes her mistake of bringing Roger with her, as Lord Asriel takes Roger and kills him as a sacrifice to open the portal to the other dimension that can be seen in the Northern Lights. Billy Costa was a gyptian, and the child of Ma Costa. He was taken from the streets of Oxford by the Gobblers and taken to Bolvangar like all the other kidnapped children. This is where his character in the book and movie differs. In the book Billy is reunited with Lyra when she arrives at Bolvangar herself, where he helps her produce an escape plan and he is eventually reunited with his mother and brother. In the movie, however, Billy Costa has become a conflation of his own character and the character called Tony Makarios. Tony of the novel is the child of a drunk woman and is therefore easily taken by the Gobblers. Sadly, he ends up having his *dæmon* cut off during his stay in Bolvangar, but escapes to search for Ratter, his *dæmon*. He was then found by Lyra, after she consults her alethiometer for any clue about the missing children, in a fishing hut far off in the icy tundra that is Svalbard. Lyra brings him back on Iorek Byrnison, where he dies and is cremated. In the movie, the conflation character of Billy and Tony shares mostly the same story, however, at the end Billy was reunited with his mother, being very sickly, and his fate is unknown to the viewer.

## Production

The production of *The Golden Compass* was not as straight forward and simple as most movie productions. After the success of *The Lord of the Rings*, the studio New Line had large ambitions to create another epic trilogy and purchased the rights to Pullman's novels. They first commissioned Tom Stoppard for writing a screenplay, however, later Chris Weitz was hired as the director, and wrote his own screenplay on it (Vulture). However, after announcing that he had to remove or alter some parts that fans felt were integral to the story, he resigned his position as director for the trilogy. They then hired Anand Tucker to continue where Weitz had left off, but Tucker resigned, citing "creative disagreements", and so Weitz was pulled back in to direct once more, though there were changes made to his original screenplay (Vulture). The production faced other challenges as well, as both Christian and

Catholic groups in the US and UK wanted to put a stop to the production of the movie, calling it a ploy to “sell atheism to kids” and even naming Pullman as “the most dangerous author in Britain” (Robert Butler). According to Emma Stefansky, the fault lies with the writers not truly getting that “they're adapting a story about a broken family arguing about which one gets to kill God in order to bring freewill to the multiverse unless they get to the much weirder second and third installments” (Thrillist). They simply omitted too many of the novel’s strange themes, so that it almost is not the same story anymore.

As Chris Weitz was both the screenwriter and director for this film, there were little to no misunderstandings nor changes that needed to be made while shooting the film. In his Director’s Commentary, he elaborates on the different approaches to scenes he did, as well as why he made the changes from book to film that he did. For one is the addition of Fra Pavel, who he added prematurely to have a tangible enemy that the audience could dislike from the very beginning, as well as it “simplifying things”, such as the complication of having the Master poison Lord Asriel. Weitz also mentioned how they experimented with making the dæmons somewhat transparent but dismissed it as a “stupid idea” that was quickly scrapped. A change he did that he claims regretting profusely, is changing the name of the evil ice bear king, originally named Iofur Raknison, to Ragnar Sturlusson, a change done to avoid confusion with the other important ice bear, Iorek Byrnison, as Weitz thought the names sounded too similar. He also talks about the conflation of the characters Billy Costa and Tony Makarios, as well as how the abduction scene was more revealing as to who the culprit was, because in the books there was only mention of a “beautiful woman” being responsible, however, in the film we are explicitly shown Mrs. Coulter’s golden monkey dæmon take a hold of Billy’s dæmon. When it came to showcasing how Lyra read the alethiometer, he chose to make it more subjective, and we see what she interprets from the symbols in scenes flashing by. One scene that was not in the book, but written by Philip Pullman, was a scene where we see Mrs. Coulter being conflicted with her emotions of Lyra, and showcasing this by slapping her own dæmon, something a normal level-headed person would never do. One of the bigger changes Weitz made to the movie is the order of which some things happen. It was his decision to have Lyra taken to Ragnar first and Bolvangar second, as he wanted the fight and escape from Bolvangar to be the conclusion to the film. He also decided to not have Lyra hide out in the vents, as he felt it was too overdone in other movies, and rather had her hide out under a table instead. The concluding scene to the film was also different from the book, which of course sparked controversy among fans, however, the book ending could

leave people that had not read the books confused, and Weitz felt it more appropriate to “conserve the spirit” of the movie. He therefore planned to use the last three chapters of the first novel as an introduction in the second film, however, that obviously never happened.

Since there was so much VFX needed for this movie, it was very much a joint effort done by several studios. There were immediately several challenges to face, one of which was how to get CGI fur to interact well with real humans, as there would be many people who had furry animals as their dæmons. Rhythm and Hues had the task of creating the dæmons, making them as realistic and tangible as possible (Bielik, “Navigating The Golden Compass part 1”). They had the most fun with Lyra’s dæmon, Pantalaimon, as he is the one that changes the most, taking, seven different forms in the movie, however, nine were designed. To make it more realistic and tactile for the actors, they were given green bean bags to hold on to, or small green balls to look at. There were also stuffed animals made of the main dæmons so that the VFX department could have lighting references later. These, however, were only the main dæmons, and a second VFX studio, Cinesite, was employed to animate the background dæmons of the background characters (Bielik, “Navigating The Golden Compass part 2). They were also responsible for designing some of the environment and vehicles, such as Lee Scoresby’s balloon and the gyptian ship Noorderlicht. For some of the actual environment they went to Norway and Svalbard, to get some shots of the icy mountains and plains, as well as helicopter shots of London for cityscapes. Probably one of the most important jobs was given to Framestore CFC, as they had the task of creating and animating Iorek Byrnison, as well as all the other ice bears of Svalbard. They did this by referencing how actual polar bears moved and how they were built. In addition, they had to make these ice bears talk, emote and wear plated armor that could easily clip into one another (Bielik, “Navigating The Golden Compass part 2). The visual effects studios can be applauded for all their hard work, as they were responsible for the only Academy Award the movie was awarded (Emma Stefansky). To say the least, a lot of work went into this movie, on all planes.

#### TV-series – *His Dark Materials*

Recently, the trend has been to adapt novels, especially long series of books, into TV shows instead of movies. Examples of such series are George R. R. Martin’s *Game of Thrones*, *The Witcher*, which was first popularized as a game series, and later in 2022 even *The Lord of the Rings* will get its own TV adaptation as well. There are several reasons to choose the way of the TV-series over movies, and the most obvious one is of course time.

There is a limit to how long a movie can be, the limit being about three hours and that is considered a long one. However, a single episode in the aforementioned shows is often around an hour long, and with, for instance, *Game of Thrones* having eight seasons with around twelve episodes each, that it a lot of time to tell a story, even if it is based upon several thick novels. Another reason to choose to adapt to TV is the way it is paced. Novels have chapters with their highs and lows of action and suspense, while a TV show has episodes that can create the same effect, in addition to give the viewer a pause to breathe, just like a chapter ending would. The flow of a series is more natural this way. In addition, a TV adaptation gives more room to develop the characters, to give backstory and backbone to a character's importance, to create depth. The costs and profits are another aspect to consider, which of course depends on how much something cost to produce and how much it gains in the end. Not all people are willing to spend money to watch just one movie, especially with snacks and drinks added (Dina Zipin).

With how the world of TV works now, most shows are aired on a streaming site, with some being exclusive to one streaming site alone, for instance *Game of Thrones* being exclusive to HBO, as they were responsible for producing it. However, one would think that distribution costs would decrease when there is no need to have a copy of the film sent to countless cinemas all over the world, and that aspect of it is of course cost cutting, however, as a TV-series has a longer run with several episodes, they can be very expensive to produce, a prime example being *Game of Thrones* (Dina Zipin). However, a TV-series continues to earn revenue from advertisements as it runs on TV, and streaming services cost a set amount every month, while a film mainly earns their money from the screenings in the cinema, which is limited. The cost of making one season of a TV-series is also generally cheaper than producing a movie, taking the example of the last season of *Game of Thrones*, which cost \$90 million. There is also the aspect of having different ways to consume a series, either waiting in anticipation and excitement with having to wait for the new episode every week, or the entire series being dropped for a binge (Emily Kubincanek). Both methods bring in countless views, depending on the series, however, it can be argued that an episodic release is both more profitable and engaging, as it makes people wait and therefore keep their subscription for longer, in addition to giving people time to discuss and theorize between episodes. However, the binge model gives the audience a choice of whether they wish to watch the entire series in one go, or one episode a week. Nonetheless, Josef Adalian of Vulture found both strategies to be engaging in their own ways.

As for the TV adaptation of *Northern Lights*, named *His Dark Materials* after Pullman's trilogy, its reception was very positive when the first season aired on BBC One and HBO, with an 81% overall score on Rotten Tomatoes, and the first season on its own got a score of 77% by the critics and 81% by the general public. While the costs have not been publicly declared by BBC One, they have been estimated to be around \$50-60 million (Josh St. Claire). Critic Boyd Hilton praise the series for both following the narrative of Lyra's adventure, while still including the more dark and disturbing storylines from Pullman's novel. Fans of the book series, those who had loved the movie and wanted more, and even people who had never heard of the trilogy before, were instantly invested, and the TV-series soon became very popular worldwide. According to audience reviews from book fans on Rotten Tomatoes, the series was very enjoyable and captured the mystique and depth of the novel, though they still enjoyed the movie adaptation as well. Others found the writing weak and the acting bad, though these types of reviews were the outliers. The series currently has two seasons, adapted from the first and second novel in Pullman's trilogy, with the third and final season airing in the fall of 2022.

The series did stay mostly true to the source material, however, there were of course liberties taken when it came to the writing, as most adaptations do. For one, it included some scenes and characters from the second novel in the first season. One major inclusion was scenes from the "normal world" that take place in our dimension, and not the world or dimension Lyra is. It is not quite clear what this "other" place is at first, just that someone has the ability to enter this dimension at will to accomplish something. It is also where we get to know a character that Lyra gets to know in the later books. I suspect this was to make the second season mesh more naturally with the first, and not just exit one setting and enter another as abruptly as it happens in the novels. The series, however, followed the same order of events that the novel had, as opposed to the movie, with the Bolvangar escape first and ice bear fight second. In addition, there were some characters added to make the transition from one world to another smoother and more grounded in the story. Billy Costa was again merged with Tony Makarios, however, the conclusion to his rescue was revealed, as he died in his mother's arms. The concluding episode of the first season of the series stays true to the novel, as Roger is once more murdered by Lord Asriel to open a portal to the other world, and Lyra steps into the unknown.

## Discussion

This part will focus on comparing and discussing how the different approaches to adaptation affected the films' reception and francization, and what parts of the movies were considered to be good, and what parts were bad or could be improved. In addition, it will be compared to *Harry Potter* and its success, to see how a successful adaptation is compared to an unsuccessful one. The potential future of adaptation through TV-series will also be discussed, to see if one is better than the other or otherwise.

### Good and bad moviemaking

Many good parts of *Eragon* have been credited to the visual effect parts of the movie, such as the look of Saphira the dragon, the magic, and the fighting scenes. It is something to commend, as Weta Digital and ILM, two well-known VFX studios, both worked on the visual effects, and the effects are objectively good for the time. Some of the credit is also owed to director Stefen Fangmeier, as he comes from a visual effects background, and therefore knows how to lay out the best shots for the VFX department to work with later. He was also responsible for the stunning locations and arial shots (*Eragon* Director's Commentary). The movie has also been praised for telling an exciting story in a short amount of time, being compared to both *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* (*Rotten Tomatoes*, "Eragon 2006" Metacritic).

There were, however, some questionable choices made with the writing that has stumped the fans of the book. For instance, there are several plot relevant characters that were not mentioned nor seen in the movie, most notably Orrik the dwarf, and some villains were killed off that would have made it impossible to adapt later books accurately. This can be credited to Fangmeier not consulting the books or the author, and solely relying on the screenplay, and therefore being unaware of said details. In addition, the pacing of the movie has been criticized, as there was an attempt at cramming five hundred pages of story into an hour and a half of movie ("Eragon 2006" Metacritic). One example of this is how Saphira originally took months to grow into a rideable dragon, but Fangmeier decided to make it into some unexplained transformation that took seconds (*Eragon* Director's Commentary).

*The Golden Compass* has several aspects that can be praised. For one, the casting has been praised by both critics and audience (*Rotten Tomatoes*). With Dakota Blue Richards as Lyra Belacqua, Nicole Kidman picked out by Philip Pullman for the role as Mrs. Coulter, and

Daniel Craig, known for his role as the popular British spy, James Bond, as Lord Asriel, among many other household names, the cast bode well for the movie. There was also very good VFX work done for this movie, but that is to be expected when there are more than four VFX studios working on it, all adding their own flair to the scenes.

While it has had a generally better reputation than *Eragon*, *The Golden Compass* is not without its faults. Many fans felt it lacked what the novel had, especially when it came to the themes (Rotten Tomatoes). Emma Stefansky stated that after cutting the more mature scenes, the commentary on religion and the “metaphysical aspects”, the “compression of the story removed any teeth it had”. She lamented that there were 30 minutes that were cut out, and perhaps those could have saved the movie from its downfall. There were also complaints from the audience about the abrupt ending, both from those who were familiar with the books and those who were not. In addition, there were complaints about the repetitiveness of the famed golden compass, as every time Lyra used it, the same animation sequence was repeated, and even though it was well made, it quickly got old (Stuart Heritage).

### [Comparison to \*Harry Potter\* and its approach to adaptation](#)

When comparing the *Harry Potter* adaptations to both *Eragon* and *The Golden Compass*, there are several things to take into consideration, such as the popularity of the books they were adapted from, the opinion of the fans and general public and the production process. This will all be discussed and compared to see what may have influenced the different adaptations into success or failure.

### [Popularity of the original novels](#)

Harry Potter was an incredibly popular book series, with children and adults alike lining up in front of bookstores for the midnight releases of the newest novel. There was not a child in the early 2000s that had not at least *heard* about Harry Potter and his magical adventures, especially when the movies were coming out, and it became such a great phenomenon that it is regarded as one of the greatest successes of any series to date. There are countless theme parks, merchandise, themed parties and shops, just to mention a few ways the series has branched out. The current movie series coming out of the magical universe of *Harry Potter*, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, has also been exceedingly popular. There are even gatherings all over the world on July 31<sup>st</sup> to celebrate Harry Potter’s birthday, most notably in the *Harry Potter* section of Universal Studios (World Class VIP). The game coming out later in 2022, *Hogwarts Legacy*, is another testament to the



immense popularity of the *Harry Potter* Universe. This popularity has of course grown over the years, but it is what gave some free publicity for the movies before they came out, as people all around the world would become aware of the *Harry Potter* books' debut on the big screen.

The same cannot be said about the *Inheritance* cycle and the *His Dark Materials* trilogy, though they were also exceedingly popular in their time. *Eragon* the novel, though not as popular as *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, was popular among kids who loved fantasy, especially as it came out right around the *Harry Potter* and *The Lord of the Rings* movie hype. It had all the "right" ingredients for a fantasy novel of the time; magic, elves, dwarves, dragons and adventure, and children of the time ate it right up. Even though the storyline has been said to be *Star Wars* in a *The Lord of the Rings* costume, the story resonated with many (Matt Berman). *Northern Lights* was applauded by many, being commended for being the atheist companion to *The Chronicles of Narnia* (Laura Miller). The novel came out before any of the fantasy movie hype of the early 2000s, however, children still desired an alternate world to dive into when reading a book. Even though some were critical of the so-called atheist agenda the novels allegedly promoted, the fantasy and "stark realism", as Pullman put it, engaged children for many years. Therefore, while the novels in question were not *as* popular as the *Harry Potter* book series, they did have an audience that at least created some excitement around the adaptations based on a book they liked.

#### Fan and general public opinion importance

The opinions of the fans that loved the original novels are of course particularly important, as well as how the films did with the general public. With *Harry Potter*, the fans were largely satisfied with how the first two novels in the series were adapted, as they kept fidelity to the source material for the most part, in addition to keeping to the original narrative. It did of course help that these were the shorter novels in the series, as the later installments did suffer from compressions and adjustments that fans of the books were not incredibly happy about. However, overall, the fans were happy with how the films turned out, which is why the franchise has grown to what it has become today. In the case of *Eragon*, the fans were largely disappointed with how the film turned out. It is understandable that almost five hundred pages do not fit into one and a half hours of film, just as the case was with the later *Harry Potter* movies, however, the cuts, compressions and adjustments made was too much for many fans. So, while the movie was good enough as far as a fantasy film goes, it

just was not what the fans of the novels wanted out of it. According to people who claim to have liked the books on the reviewing site, Metacritic, the movie was an atrocity, apart from the well-done visual effects (“Eragon 2006”). There were of course some outliers who had read the books and were fine with the movie, but they were largely in the minority. The fan response for *The Golden Compass* was more mixed than anything, as the movie is remembered to be quite good, and people wondering where the sequels went. However, as there was some creative license taken by director Chris Weitz that altered the narrative plot some, as well as toned down themes, there was some backlash from the fans (*Golden Compass Director’s Commentary*).

People not as familiar with the *Harry Potter* books were also very much enraptured by the series, and the novels gained more readers because of the movie being fun. This is how the series continued to grow over time, as people unfamiliar with the series would see that a new movie is coming out, and there is so much excitement going around about it that they become curious. They then watch the movie and want to know what happens next, but the next movie would probably not come for another year or two, so they only have one option, and that is to turn to the books. With *Eragon*, people were intrigued by the fantasy film, as elves, dragons and magic had become a staple in the early 2000s movie scene. Therefore, people who had enjoyed movies like *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* were likely to want to check out *Eragon* as well. Here the response was more mixed, as people unfamiliar with the books rather enjoyed the movie, at least according to the reviews on Metacritic. They enjoyed the plot, the characters and the action, and some even called it “the best movie ever”. This in turn made people unfamiliar with the series want to read the books, and some reviews remarked how they were shocked by how different the two were, having rewatched the movie after reading.

#### Production differences

The directing of a movie has everything to say about how the movie turns out, and bad directing, perhaps combined with bad writing, can be to the detriment of the movie’s success. Throughout the making of the *Harry Potter* movie series, there have been several directors working on the films, each putting their own twists and color on the beloved movies. It was remarked by the recurring actors that the changing directors over the years was helpful, as they were treated differently by each of them as they grew up with the movies (*Harry Potter 20th Anniversary: Return to Hogwarts*). In the case of the first two movies, the

same director, Chris Columbus, oversaw both. He was credited for making the filming process fun for the children in the main cast, as well as being able to direct them into their roles (*Harry Potter 20th Anniversary: Return to Hogwarts*). In addition, J.K. Rowling was always available for consultation during filming. Stefen Fangmeier, the director of *Eragon*, perhaps had the most creative power when it came to the filming process, as he decided to not consult the source material, and rather wanted to stay faithful to the screenplay he was handed. However, as he never actually spoke to the screenwriter, there was much room for interpretation on Fangmeier's part (*Eragon Director's Commentary*). The directing of *The Golden Compass* was much more of a collaborative process, as director Chris Weitz communicated with Philip Pullman the whole time, and consulted the novel as well. In addition, it was Weitz who wrote the screenplay for the movie, which made for a much easier time when directing everything to be exactly as imagined (*The Golden Compass Director's Commentary*).

Directing a movie is not an easy task to undertake, especially when tasked with making everything as perfect as possible for the hundreds and thousands of fans waiting for their favorite novel to be shown on the big screen. Chris Columbus stated that he would have continued directing the *Harry Potter* movies, had it not been for his health problems at the time (*Harry Potter 20th Anniversary: Return to Hogwarts*). He also lamented on how he wished he were completely healthy for the movies he did direct. Stefen Fangmeier was completely green when it came to movie directing, so he may not have made the best decisions along the filming process, though his VFX experience made for some amazing visual effects. In addition, Fangmeier wished to tell the story in a timely manner and keep all the exciting scenes intact to a large degree (*Eragon Director's Commentary*). Therefore, there were several cuts made from the original novel that some might deem excessive, and other scenes were heavily compressed to drive the plot to a faster conclusion. Chris Weitz, on the other hand, was not necessarily new in the role as director, however, as he gained so much backlash for his original screenplay, he perhaps played it a bit too safe in the second draft. This then resulted in a bland movie script, which became a generic movie, without all the interesting and confusing parts of the novel.

Authors are involved in the process of their adaptations in different ways, very close follow-ups, some guidance, or just through the source material. The *Harry Potter* movies had some mixed involvement from J.K. Rowling throughout the making, especially early on as

the novels were not all published yet, and the directors and writers needed some help with details that would be important for later. This would create a greater cohesive narrative, even as the directors changed. Christopher Paolini was not very much involved in the process of the *Eragon* movie, as director Stefen Fangmeier wanted to be as loyal to Peter Buchmann's screenplay as possible, so Fangmeier did not consult the novel much either. Paolini did have an opportunity to star in the movie himself but was unable to because of his schedule not lining up with the filming. Phillip Pullman, however, was very much involved in the production of the adaptation of his novel, even writing some original scenes himself (*Golden Compass* Director's Commentary). In addition, Pullman made changes to the novel after he chose Nicole Kidman to star as Mrs. Coulter, stating that he was wrong about his description of her.

The involvement of the author in the adaptation of their work is almost always helpful, especially if there are some details that are unclear to the average reader. Both Rowling and Pullman having some influence in the production process was therefore no doubt a major help for the directors and other staff involved. In addition, if there is collaboration going on between author and director, things can easily be changed to be accurate to what the author imagined and maintain fidelity to the source material. It can of course go the other way as well, with the director coming with ideas and suggestions that the author may not have thought of. It is therefore a great shame that Fangmeier did not take the opportunity to have Paolini weigh in on some of the movie making process, as there may have been some changes made that could have made the movie more enjoyable for the fans of the books.

The choice of actors can have a lot to say with the tone of the movie and how the characters are portrayed. In the case of *Harry Potter*, the author had a hand in choosing the actors playing the main characters of the movies, as there were plans to have them play in seven or more movies throughout the years, so they had to be perfect for the roles, in addition to having chemistry with each other. At this point the actors, namely Daniel Radcliffe, Emma Watson and Rupert Grint, are almost synonymous with the characters they played in the *Harry Potter* movie series, and most would agree that they did a great job. With the casting of *Eragon*, director Stefen Fangmeier had more power, and said that his choice for the character Eragon, Ed Speelers, was "perfect" from the moment he walked in. He also remarked how Jeremy Irons in the role of the weathered mentor figure, Brom, was an

excellent choice for the movie, as his sarcastic demeanor makes for a great master for both Eragon and the new actor in Speelers (*Eragon* Director's Commentary). In the casting process of *The Golden Compass*, director Chris Weitz got one request from Pullman, and that was to convince Nicole Kidman to play Mrs. Coulter, as she was perfect for the role of a classy but dangerous woman. Kidman was reprehensive to begin with, as she imagined she would have to dress in heavy Victorian style gowns the entire time, however, she was eventually convinced and played her character beautifully. The main character of Lyra was to be played by Dakota Blue Richards, whom Weitz deemed perfect for the role, even though she was a new actor who had never been on a set before, and Daniel Craig, most known as the super-spy James Bond, was to star in the role as Lord Asriel, which was a role that was very unfamiliar for people to see him in (*The Golden Compass* Director's Commentary).

It could be argued that it is not particularly important if the actor looks much like the description of the character, as looks do not equate to personality. However, people do have certain expectations that their mental images of the characters will be upheld, at least to some extent. For instance, there have been discussions around Daniel Radcliffe's inability to wear colored contacts for his role as Harry Potter, as the green eyes was one of the most referenced features in the books. It did, however, not take away from his performance in the slightest, and Rowling made the decision that it did not matter, if they cast Harry Potter's mother to match (Hypeable). On the other hand, in *Eragon*, when both the looks and performance from Sienna Guillory in the role of Arya the elf did not match with how the character was portrayed in the novels, fans were understandably irate. In addition, as *The Lord of the Rings* had set the standard of what an elf's main characteristic should be, namely pointy ears, it became difficult to pinpoint Arya, as she looked no different than the other presumed humans in the movie. With *The Golden Compass* there were not many reprehensions to the casting choices, the only one being Nicole Kidman's hair color, however, that was retroactively changed in the novels to match her blonde hair, as Philip Pullman deemed it more accurate for the character (Robert Butler). A complaint made by Olly Richards of Empire is that many actors went to waste in "what amounts to a film wholly made of cameos", mainly referencing Daniel Craig, however, it can also be applied to other great actors such as Christopher Lee and Ian McKellen.

## TV-series and the future of adaptation

As mentioned before, in recent years books have started getting TV adaptations as opposed to movie adaptations. The reasons are many, one of the main ones being time available. When it comes to one of the most popular book to TV series in recent years, *Game of Thrones*, it came down to filming rights. The creators, David Benioff and Dan Weiss, suggested to end the series with three movies, however, as HBO owned the rights, the movies would not have been shown in the cinemas, only on HBO's streaming service. Therefore, the creators opted to end the series with two final seasons instead, which were deemed the fall of the series (Brandon Katz). The series is continuing on HBO still, with its spin-off series *House of the Dragon*, so any movies cannot be anticipated in the near future. With *The Witcher*, which became popularized through its several video game adaptations of the novels, there is actually a movie, though it is a prequel to the TV series, and it is animated as well. As to why the series itself did not spawn a movie series, the length of them would be a major reason. The games, for instance, take many hours to get through, even if one ignores all the side quests that are unnecessary to the main story. In addition, with the first season being told the way it was, following two characters in different timelines until they finally meet up, a movie would be confusing, especially as it would most likely have been split into two or more movies. This is where time becomes such a crucial factor in the choice between making a film and a TV-series, as there is just so much more time to explore character arcs, to get sidetracked, get to know the world and simply tell a story. With a movie it must get right in onto the action, or the run time would go on forever. There are also some quite successful film series' that are getting their own TV-shows, such as *The Lord of The Rings*. It is, however, not a direct adaptation of the trilogy, but rather a spin-off prequel series where known characters' past gets explored.

When it comes to the *His Dark Materials* TV-series, it was seen as a reboot and redemption for the attempted movie franchise that never came to fruition. It re-introduced everyone, novel fans, movie fans and those unfamiliar, to the world of Lyra, Pantalaimon and, of course, Dust. As there is more time allowed in a TV-series, it kept more fidelity to the novels than the film did, keeping more of the so-called anti-religion themes intact, as well as exploring the world more in depth. However, the series, or at least the first season, was not completely faithful to the novel, much like the movie adaptation. Both adaptations had some of the same alterations, for instance the same conflated characters of Billy Costa and Tony Makarios. In addition, both the series and the novel introduce a character from the second

novel in the adaptation of the first. The film introduces a villain in Fra Pavel, while in the TV adaptation it is the second main character, Will, that is introduced. This made for a smoother transition into the second season of the series, based on the second novel in the trilogy. With this TV adaptation, as more detail was included, as well as the darker themes, it was regarded by the book fans as a more faithful adaptation (Rotten Tomatoes). As every episode of the series ended on a cliffhanger, it kept the audience engaged, especially when it was still airing, using the episodic strategy. It made for a more interactive and social experience for the viewers, as they had to wait for a week for a new episode to drop, leaving people to discuss the episode and what may happen next.

### What could have been done differently?

One can always wonder and argue about how an adaptation *should* have been made, however, in the case of *Eragon* and *The Golden Compass* there are some aspects that could have made the adaptations do better, especially among the fans of the novels.

The transformation from book to movie has not treated *Eragon* well. Bad writing coupled with inexperienced directing made the entire movie slightly disconnected, in addition to removing a lot of the suspense. It should have created wonder, Other than that, it is a very by the book 2000s fantasy movie. What was supposed to become another big fantasy epic to go along with *Harry Potter* and *The Lord of the Rings*, instead became a disappointment to the fans of the books before being largely forgotten. In addition, people are quick to criticize the acting, calling it stiff and emotionless (“Eragon 2006” Metacritic). Perhaps a director with more experience in directing could have helped, or actors with more acting experience. Both director Stefen Fangmeier and lead actor Ed Speeler were both very new in their respective jobs, which could have influenced the performance. Then there is the case of the screenplay by Peter Buchman, of which Fangmeier was very faithful to, perhaps to his downfall, as he opted to not read the original novel to not taint his experience of Buchman’s screenplay. If Stefen Fangmeier had consulted the novel and the author more, there would perhaps not have been so many discrepancies.

One aspect that could not be helped, is the compression of some scenes from the book. A movie has a limited runtime, especially in the early 2000’s when the normal runtime of a movie was around one hour and a half to two hours, and therefore not all aspects of a long novel can realistically be included. Thomas Leitch did mention how this was a problem that Peter Jackson had to face with the production of *The Lord of the Rings*, however, Jackson

was determined to keep fidelity to the novels as much as he possibly could (129). While it was impossible to keep everything, such as the scenes with Tom Bombadil, as well as several songs Tolkien wrote, Jackson also made the decision to inflate and extend certain scenes to create suspense (Thomas Leitch 138). The decision to cut important characters from *Eragon*, whether it be the screenwriter's or director's decision, may have been one of the bigger mistakes, as there were more movies planned, and these cuts would have altered the narrative from the novels majorly. In addition, the alterations of some characters' storyline would also change the plot somewhat. The solution could have been to simply make a longer movie, perhaps not as long as *The Lord of the Rings*, but at least two hours like most of the *Harry Potter* movies would have made room to include more important plot points and characters, as the movie as a whole does seem slightly rushed, especially if compared to the novel. It would also prepare better for a possible sequel if all the important characters were already introduced and accounted for.

With *The Golden Compass*, the movie was not criticized as harshly, however, there are still part people were not happy with that sealed the fate of the film. For instance, thematic story could have been focused on more, as the removal of the religious criticism made for a blander theme. There are some that believe that Chris Weitz' original screenplay would have been better, though much longer, but he sadly felt obligated to change it after the backlash from the religious groups (*Vulture*). There are several other scenes that were cut due to time constraints, and, according to *Vulture* magazine, they were what could have saved the adaptation and made the movie a success. If time was what held Weitz back from keeping many of the scenes in the film, why not simply expand the run time? There was already \$180 million used on the existing scenes, and the remaining ones would not need much more, especially as the more expensive scenes such as the ice bear fight on Svalbard and the great battle of Bolvangar were already finished. New Line Cinema had just had a three-hour long fantasy epic done, namely *The Lord of the Rings*, where the CEO insisted on expanding Peter Jackson's original plan of two movies into one for each book, so why not simply do the same once more, as they already knew it could be done (Thomas Leitch 136). In addition, the choice to flip around the narrative plot somewhat by moving around some scenes, while it did make for a more exciting conclusion, it did not make much sense. As Lyra was kidnapped by allies of the Magisterium, it would make more sense for them to take her to Bolvangar where all the kids are taken, and not to the ice bear king of Svalbard, as the people of the Magisterium generally looked down on him. There is also the question of the ending, as



Weitz decided to cut the last three chapters of the book to put them in the opening of the second movie, even though the scenes were in both his and Tom Stoppard's scripts (Vulture). While it did make for a hopeful ending where people could anticipate the continuation in the next movie, it once again removed the jarring yet exciting themes from the novel.

According to Thomas Leitch, there are several ways a franchise could be kickstarted. He remarks how fidelity does not always guarantee popularity, however, it has a big part in how big an adapted franchise can become (199). There was always a plan to make more movies, according to the directors of *Eragon* and *The Golden Compass*, Stefan Fangmeier and Chris Weitz. However, with the adaptations not keeping fidelity to the novels, at least to the book readers' standards, franchising became increasingly impossible, as the resulting funds were not sufficient for a continuation. In addition, there has been a rising trend of making movies based off everything but novels, such as the numerous *Pokémon* movies being based on trading card game and video games, and the *X-men* movies being based on comics (Thomas Leitch 257). There is especially an increase in movies being adapted from video games, and novels accounted for less than 15% of the movie pitches in 2004 (258). As said video games and comic books often have a whole franchise already established, with several publications and transmedia, selling collectibles and TV-series as well, the franchise was already there before the movies were even planned. This advantage was not there for the making of *Eragon* and *The Golden Compass*, as the only ones who knew of the narrative of the novels were those who had read them. There was the video game made for *Eragon*, however, the reception of that was equally as lackluster as the response to the movie, and it did not aid in the same way that *The Witcher* and *Pokémon* games did for their adaptations and franchises.

## Conclusion

Both *Eragon* and *The Golden Compass* technically had everything laid out for them to become great movie franchises; a popular novel series to adapt from, a fantasy aspect that had already been popularized by *Harry Potter* and *The Lord of the Rings*, great staff and visual effects studios. With all that, why did the adaptations fail to become franchises in the end?

For one, the writing did not resonate with the original fanbase of the novels, so that comes down to fidelity. Here author influence could help greatly, as the author is the expert on their work. The screenwriter and director of *Eragon* failed to take this into account, which

made for a weak script, fidelity wise. As the screenwriter and director of *The Golden Compass*, Chris Weitz, had the author working closely with the production, there should not have been any problems, however, criticism and backlash from the public on the first draft of the screenplay intimidated him, and so this movie became weak in plot as well. Taking inspiration from how *Harry Potter* or *The Lord of the Rings* were written could have been beneficial, as their writing has been applauded for their fidelity to the source material. Especially from *The Lord of the Rings* in the case of *The Golden Compass*, as they came from the same production studio, and should have the knowledge to include as much as possible to keep the fans happy. This was at least the goal Peter Jackson had for his adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* (Thomas Leitch 130).

The casting is another aspect, as a great, well-known actor can create both publicity and make for a good character, however, if said actors are not used well or are inexperienced, the acting itself can seem stiff or bland. This was more of a problem in *Eragon*, however, *The Golden Compass* had its problems with the cast as well, using too many household names for the names alone. Both movies had much visual effects work done, being of the fantasy genre and having dragons and talking animals that the actors had to interact with. For this to work, some of the best VFX studios were hired on both ends, and they did some stunning work. However, this also cost money, especially in the case of New Line Cinema, as the visual effects cost of *The Golden Compass* effectively killed the studio (Emma Stefansky). As the fans became aware of the movies not doing their beloved series justice, the movies failed to make enough money to continue the franchise, even though scripts for both were already in the works. There was just too much money going out, and not enough to keep the franchises going coming in.

One of the main reasons for these movies not taking off and becoming franchises could be credited to TV-series taking over the fantasy realm of adaptation. *The Golden Compass* cost \$180 million for about an hour and a half of film, while the first season of *His Dark Materials* is estimated at around \$50-60 million for eight episodes of an hour each, making the cost a significant factor in why TV adaptations may be favored in the future. The ease of which novels can be adapted to TV-series makes it an even more lucrative option, as the chapter set-up of a book is perfect for making several episodes in a TV-show (Emily Kubincanek). There is more time for world building and character exploration, and the plot does not have to resolve within the span of an hour and a half to three hours. In addition, the

TV-show set-up makes for a more engaging experience for the audience, whether the episodes are released all at once or one at a time each week. The first option makes room for those who enjoy binging entire seasons in one sitting, as well as leaving those who enjoy watching one episode now and again. With one episode a week, however, the buzz lasts longer, as the seasons are being stretched out to last for weeks or even months (Josef Adalian). Either way, the audience spends more time watching a TV-series than a movie, and therefore must keep a subscription to a streaming service longer. In addition, there is the aspect of novels not being as popular for adaptation as they once were, with comics, video games and board games taking over (Thomas Leitch 258).

For both *Eragon* and *The Golden Compass* the movie franchises never happened for a combination of several reasons. Had there been more time or been written a different script, both films might have spawned the promised series. Though Bortolotti and Hutcheon labeled awareness and transmedia as a type of success for an adaptation, and Leitch remarked how video game-based movies are usually quite popular, it is not a guarantee, as *Eragon* had both a video game and a movie come out within a brief time span. Both got a lukewarm response, but they sparked awareness of the narrative, and made some decide to explore what the novels had to offer. Fidelity discourse pinpoints that newly popularized novels should not be altered too much, as fans expect and demand an accurate retelling of their beloved story (Bortolotti and Hutcheon 449). It is perhaps therefore the new TV-series based on the *His Dark Materials* trilogy had great success, as the final season is still in production and likely made even more people read the novels as well. Perhaps a TV adaptation of *Eragon* is what is needed for it to come back up from the ground, as well as kickstarting the franchise it intended to be many years ago. With other recent book to TV adaptations seeing remarkable success, it is likely that the future of adaptation lies with the TV-series, especially when it comes to long fantasy series like the *Inheritance* cycle and the *His Dark Materials* trilogy.

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