

Ready Player One or Ready Player None?

by Rachael Harbourne

For many avid readers, the idea of their favorite books being projected on the big screen is a dream come true – to be able to physically see the characters and places they fell in love with is thrilling. A euphoric atmosphere fills the theatre as life is breathed into these characters, and readers can finally get swept away to a place they had been longing to see. Yet, there's always a fear that the movie adaptation won't do its written account any justice; that actors won't portray the characters with the same fervor and tenacity that made them so inspiring in the first place; that places will be insufficiently portrayed and their details lacking; or that the best pieces of the storyline will be left out entirely, leaving hardcore fans to sit there in shock and wish that they had been content enough to see solely through their imagination rather than reality. While there are quite a few movies that have done their book counterparts justice (for example, *The Outsider*, *A Clockwork Orange*, and *1984*), there are also quite a few movies that have deviated so far from the plotline of the original book that it seems as though an entirely new story has been written. Whether this approach is done purposefully in regards to creating a more exciting story and engaging cinematic elements, or whether it is done to eliminate the more mundane, slow-moving aspects of the book in question, the major changes that are made to movies brings up the question of just how important the decisions made in book-to-movie adaptations really are and how they can affect the overall outcome of the movie itself.

A particular movie that really deviates from its original inspiration is “Ready Player One”. The book, written by Ernest Cline in 2011, was adapted into a movie by Stephan Spielberg in 2018. With the same characters and the same kind of premise, “Ready Player One” is a futuristic science fiction genre that follows the life of Wade Watts, a poor kid living in the slums of Oklahoma City, Ohio (Columbus, Ohio in the movie). Readers and audience members

are taken through an action adventure plotline set in a virtual reality world by the name of Oasis, created by James Halliday, an 80's loving nerd and enthusiast. We learn early on in the storyline that Halliday has died, and in accordance to his extremely popular virtual reality game, he has created a virtual will, so to speak, and has shared it with the entirety of the world. In his will, he has decided to leave all of his fortunes, about half a trillion dollars, and absolute control of all of the Oasis to one lucky person on a seemingly simple condition: play his final game within the world of the Oasis, win, and become the sole proprietor of everything Halliday ever worked for.

In the book, Cline outlines this game with the task of obtaining three keys, each of which will hold the clue to find the gate to which that key opens, and eventually find Halliday's golden Easter egg – once all of these things have been obtained, the game will end and the fortunes will be awarded to the winner. While these games and various tasks are intricate within Cline's book, each "key" game that Parzival must play is essential to the development of his character. He must go through them alone and fight to earn his place on the scoreboard, all the while learning how to deal with his newfound fame, maintaining his relationship with his best friend Aech, and awkwardly stumbling through a strictly online relationship with Art3mis, a girl whom he has only learned of through her various blogs and has only met a couple of times through the Oasis. Unfortunately, these "key" games that make Parzival into the independent, tenacious character he is in the book are not accurately portrayed within the movie; in fact, the games are entirely different altogether, removing all traces of Cline's original quest tasks.

Most movies are confined to a two-hour time restriction, as many people can't sit through longer than a 2-2 ½ hour movie; aside from that fact, movies are also quite expensive, and anything past this mark would skyrocket the cost of production. It is entirely understandable and quite acceptable then for the directors and screenwriters to have had to shorten the book in order

to stay within these guidelines – however, the choices they made in their process of cutting down and holding onto to the most important parts of the film didn't quite add up.

Those that had read the book and had become big fans of Cline's story were waiting in anticipation for the games they remembered so clearly in their minds, but they would never actually come. The games portrayed in the film are nothing alike to the games described in the book – Spielberg changed every single one of the settings and rules of each game, and in doing so he practically created an entirely new premise. It is understandable that Spielberg and his screenwriters had to cut down a lot of the book. In regards to the game, it made the most sense, both practically and cinematically to cut out the “gate quests”, as there was a lot of detail embedded in each one, and added quite a lot of time to the game as a whole; however, it comes into question why it was necessary to change so much of the original plot of the games.

Each game that Parzival goes through in the book allows readers to learn more about who he is and just how dedicated he has been to learning everything he can about Halliday; through each game, he proves himself through the intricate tasks he must complete. His first quest in both the book and the movie are the same: figure out the first clue and find the copper key. In Cline's book, Parzival deciphers a poem that leads him to the hiding place for the first key, which ends up being the Tomb of Horrors, from the famous video game Dungeons and Dragons. Once he has successfully navigated the tomb, he is faced with AI Acererak and must defeat him at a game of “Joust” – from there, he follows the clue on the copper key to Halliday's childhood home, where he find the copper gate and is then thrust into the War Games simulation.

In the movie, this entire game is erased entirely, replaced by a colossal racing game. The clue has already been discovered for Parzival and all he has to do is win the race – but it's impossible as the track is littered with giant monsters, fiery explosions and missing pieces of the

road. However, Parzival visits Halliday's Journal, a live-action journal where people can go to see various points of Halliday's life. He finds a clue here that allows him to figure out how to win the game and successively win the copper key. Rather than go to find the next gate, Parzival then begins his quest for the Jade Key.

The quest for the Jade Key takes Parzival on a quest to a "dwelling long neglected" (Cline) where he finds that he must complete another simulation type game, this time a game of Zork. He must collect 19 trophies and blow the plastic whistle found inside a box of Cap'n Crunch cereal, which turns into the Jade Key. From there, Parzival must use the Jade Key to unlock the second gate, which is in the form of a Voight-Kampff machine from the movie "Blade Runner" and play a game "Black Tiger".

The movie, once again, changes up the game. Parzival must instead find the entrance to the Jade Key using a riddle that is also entirely different from the book. This particular clue leads Parzival, and the rest of the "High Five" (consisting of Aech, Art3mis, Daito, and Sho) into a virtual simulation of one of Stanley Kubrick's most well-known films, "The Shining". The group must explore the haunted horror-filled hotel to find the key before the timer runs out. While they run into a variety of monsters and terrifying aspects from the film itself, the key is eventually obtained by Art3mis, who must find and dance with Halliday's one-true love, Kira. Once this is accomplished for the rest of the High Five, they are then allowed to move on to the third and final challenge.

The book depicts quite an intricate challenge for the Crystal Key. Parzival is given a glowing red star after completing "Black Tiger" – this star leads him to the planet Syrinx on which he finds a 1974 Gibson Les Paul guitar. Parzival must play the entire song of Rush's 2112: Discovery on this guitar in order to obtain the clue to open the third and final gate – he then

acquires the Crystal Key by placing the guitar on an altar in the middle of the temple of Syrinx. Once this is completed, Parzival travels to Anorak's Castle (who is the Oasis alter ego of Halliday himself), and must unlock the gate by uttering the phrase "3 is a magic number". From there, Parzival must play "Tempest" and compete in another virtual simulation task in which he plays King Arthur from "Monty Python and the Holy Grail". Once these tasks are completed, Parzival is able to play the game "Adventure", where he eventually finds, and wins, the golden Easter egg.

In the movie, the final location has already been figured out for him by the evil corporation IOI, who is trying to win the egg so they can control everyone in the Oasis. While the "Tempest" and "Monty Python" games are removed from the final task in the movie, Spielberg was able to keep the final game in the movie Adventure as well, in which Parzival is the only one who is unable to unlock the golden egg. He is then taken by Anorak to a chamber to sign a contract, which he refuses to do because he knows that this was Halliday's biggest mistake – not signing the papers eventually allows Parzival to win the golden egg, which is given to him by a version of Halliday himself.

It is unclear why exactly Spielberg decided to change each of these games entirely – taking out the steps to unlocking a physical gate but leaving the original plots of the games would have made fans a lot happier than the actual outcome of the movie. While the various games created in the film were exciting and riveting to watch, it seems unnecessary to start with a clean slate for a plot that had already been written out. While the movie still holds true to the Oasis, the game Halliday created for everyone, and the final outcome, the vast differences in each game don't allow Parzival to become the person he was in the book. As he was consistently playing the games with each of his friends, he wasn't able to earn his independency

and drive in the movie. Parzival seems like more of a static character in the movies who is content to go along with the ride and follow in the footsteps of other – he doesn't get the chance to prove himself and deem his knowledge of Halliday, the Oasis, and everything 80's as worthy as it truly was. While both the movie and the books held exciting incidents that kept readers and audience members alike intrigued the entire time, it should be known ahead of time that the correlation between the movie and the book are very slim, and that both audience members can enjoy both versions as long as they are open minded to the changes differences outline in both works.

Works Cited:

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