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International Cross-Media Adaptation: A Case Study of *The Witcher*

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Research Question: What does the cross-media storytelling journey and adaptations of *The Witcher* reveal about the differences between Eastern European and North American audiences and the marketing strategies as a book springs from national to international success?

Introduction

As consumer media habits further diverge with the introduction of new technologies and social spaces, literature has increasingly been adapted in new mediums. Adaptations of written works have the exposure and visual appeal to draw in a larger audience than the pages of the original would.

This research question is extremely relevant to the shift the industry has made with the introduction of new technologies for cross-media storytelling through video games, film and television. Increasingly, publishers, like Level 4 Press, look for stories that will translate well into a TV series or movie, and cross-media stories and adaptations have been some of the most popular stories of the last 50 years. Fantasy and sci-fi sagas especially have had a large audience for adaptations, and most recently, Netflix audiences have descended upon the Polish series, *The Witcher*, which was only introduced to US markets after the influence of the video game market. By taking a closer look at Andrzej Sapkowski's work, this paper will examine cultural barriers, reception and challenges of works in their original and adapted forms, and the marketing choices of international publishers.

Method

This paper uses three methods: a literature review of the history of Sapkowski's works and their adaptations; audience response to the saga via Goodreads, IGN, Metacritic, and social media; and marketing strategies for different global audiences. I have created a timeline from this literature review in order to organize my findings chronologically and by the changing landscape of cross-media adaptation as the timeline progresses. The information

was gathered from *Publishing Perspectives*, *Publishers Weekly*, as well as several scholarly databases. The literature gathered includes reviews from Poland and the surrounding markets during the 1990s as the original series of short stories and novels came out, with comparison to reviews on the translations and adaptations. There are several interviews with Sapkowski himself, as well, throughout the timeline that help to illuminate his changing views on adaptations and his involvement in the cross-media interpretations of his work. Other series of note were referenced in the timeline for an understanding of the US market, and similarly vary across media types. Online research included past postings from the publisher of the original works, and then the translations in the US around the time of launch.

NPD BookScan was used to understand the general trend of sales from 2007-8 when the book was first translated after the first video game release, as well as the 2015-2017 period, and 2019-2021 when the Netflix adaptation was released. While this material is not vital to understanding the marketing, it is beneficial for contextualizing the popularity of the series in the US in relation to the adaptation releases. Lastly I examined the covers of the Polish releases and the US translations to compare and contrast marketing strategies that the publishers had for each audience, especially on the first title that was published in the US.

Definitions

For context, this paper will refer to the written works of Sapkowski as a whole in the Polish language as the "original work." As I intend to focus on the English translation, any reference to the "translated works" will be specific to the English translations published by Orbit Books in the United States. When discussing Orbit UK, it will be specified as such. If discussing a specific short story, novel, or adaptation, a title will be given. Any work that is done by an outside party in collaboration with Sapkowski or produced, created, streamed, or published by another entity will be addressed as an "adaptation." I chose to address these works as "cross-media adaptations" versus "cross media translations" due to the degree with which Sapkowski rejects the "adaptations" as cannon in the Witcher saga.

Findings (in chronological order)

1980-1990s | Sapkowski releases the original short story and Polish editions of the series

What initially drew me to this question was the history of Sapkowski's publications in Poland and the popularity of his works outside the US market, and the lack thereof in the

US market. Even now with the Netflix series and multiple successful video games, there has been a lack of connection between these adaptations and the original for the US audience. When the topic of this paper was broached, for example, most of the responses I had were: "That's a great game!" or "I loved the show." Few, however, said anything or knew about Sapkowski or the rich series he had created. In contrast, his works were so popular in their Polish form that fan writing competitions had been held in collaboration with the author and he became a figurehead for Polish fantasy. An analysis of the Polish fantasy audience and of the general area gave insight into why the content of Sapkowski's works were accepted easily into the Polish literature canon.

Timeline of Sapkowski's *Witcher* content in Poland

- "The Witcher" first short story published by Fantastyka magazine December 1986
- *The Witcher* (1990) short story collection
- *Sword of Destiny* (1992) short story collection
- *The Last Wish* (1993) short story collection
- *Blood of Elves* (1994) novel
- *Time of Contempt* (1995) novel
- *Baptism of Fire* (1996) novel
- *The Tower of the Swallow* (1997) novel
- *The Lady of the Lake* (1999) novel[1]

Sapkowski initially published "The Witcher," a short story, in Fantastyka magazine as part of a writing competition, which focuses on a story well known to Witcher fans now of King Foltest and the striga. This story and placement alone indicates what type of audience Sapkowski aimed to write for: adults all too aware of the world's complexities and horrors who enjoy the fantastical creatures in local folklore and Polish literature. The story of the striga tackles some of the darker realities Geralt faces of opposing authority figures who have created their own monsters, and his character is presented well in this encounter for the first time to his readers. It was due to audience demand after the competition that more short stories were written and then published in collections before SuperNowa published the first full novel, according Sapkowski.[2]

Polish scholars in my research identified "since the beginning of the 21st century a new literary genre, combining the features of historical novel with fantasy literature, Gothic (including Gothic crime story) and horror, has been developing in Poland."[3] This historical fiction influence by another Polish author, Henryk Sienkiewicz, created a national

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[1] Gawroński and Bajorek, "A Real Witcher—Slavic or Universal; from a Book, a Game or a TV Series?"
[2] Purchese, "Meeting Andrzej Sapkowski, the writer who created The Witcher"
[3] Werner, "From Andrzej Kmicic to Witcher. Alternative History and Historical Fantasy in Poland at the Turn of the 20th and 21st Centuries (Wiktor Werner)."

identity for Polish readers to identify with and Sapkowski's works are heavily influenced by his work. Werner writes,

> Sapkowski create[d] the Witcher cycle [...] as a kind of an alternative for historical novel (not to mistake, however, with alternative history), in which he can describe the mechanisms of "happening" of historical events –[...] a situation of a political conspiracy leading to a war; of usage of oppressed ethnic minority as a "5th column", military aggression camouflaged as "fraternal help", postwar relocation and bloody repressions performed on civilians, ethnic and religious cleansing and more and more other phenomena known from real history [...] Geralt from Rivia combines romanticism of goals with positivist means, [which] creates a new quality in the Polish literary tradition of creating "heroic" characters.[4]

Geralt and the world in which he operates is familiar to Sapkowski's audience in Poland, from the standpoint of literary history as well as in reality. The political and social landscape of the series is not unlike that of Poland itself as a land that's been the historical battleground of both local and worldwide conflicts in the recent years before Sapkowski's works. In 1986, at the time of the release of the original short story, Poland was still reeling from WWII and the Cold War and under communist control. Sapkowski's intended reader would then relate to the world that Geralt navigates as war ravages the landscape that's not unlike their own, as Sapkowski challenged nationalism. It could be argued that the series did so well in the Eastern European area as a whole because the audience understands the context of warring kingdoms and empires much better even today than the US audience, who hadn't seen true war on their soil for over a century, versus Poland who is currently accepting Ukrainian refugees. Additionally, Sapkowski's folklore references, like the striga, are part of Polish and Slavic cultures, making them more likely to resonate with people in the area, rather than the audience in the US, who's frame of reference on "fairytale monsters" is rather limited.

Translations and adaptations begin to boom

The popularity of the series in Europe grew at a steady rate, with translations cropping up every few years according to SuperNowa's website.[5] The countries in which the books were translated first can match the culture and audience distinctions made above, with Lithuania, Russia, and the Czech Republic being the first to offer translations. The books would not only have been culturally close but linguistically close to the native languages of

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[4] Gawroński and Bajorek, "A Real Witcher—Slavic or Universal; from a Book, a Game or a TV Series?"
[5] "SuperNOWA::Autorzy::Andrzej Sapkowski."

those countries, with a higher likelihood of editors, agents, and readers from this region being able to read or speak Polish as well. Sapkowski's international book agent, Patricia Pasqualini, recalled her first encounter with the series, writing on Sapkowski's website:

> I was in Krakatit, a bookstore in Prague [...]We were surprised to see a three-foot-long shelf entirely devoted to the books of a single author, Andrzej Sapkowski. It intrigued us, so we asked a few questions. Then we got a reading report about *The Last Wish*, and we were sold on it.[6]
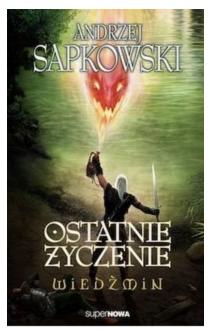
Shortly after, Pasqualini would become the foreign rights agent for Sapkowski and the series would be translated into French. The magnitude of a translated author holding a three-foot shelf of a bookstore is striking, and speaks to the popularity of the series in these areas before the introduction of larger international adaptations, as the first French edition of *The Last Wish* was published in 2003.[7]
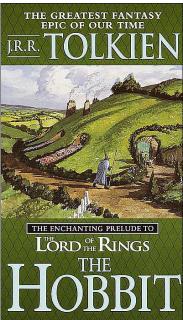
Though the Witcher is now known for its successful Netflix series, Sapkowski's world was adapted quickly in Poland in the 1990s and early 2000s after the short stories and novels were released. Adaptations included comic books with written content by Sapkowski and drawings by Bogusław Polch from 1993-1995, as well as a film (2001) in Poland and corresponding series (2002), and board games. However, these adaptations were unsuccessful. The first film did not appeal to the fans of Sapkowski's prose, nor did it reach a fantasy audience who had no previous experience with "The Witcher". The box office attendance was so low that the revenues from the film covered only half of its production costs. Additionally, the film and series were subject to several controversies. A few days before the premiere, Michał Szczerbic, a screenwriter for the film, withdrew from the project and had his name removed from the credits. Szczerbic claimed that the producers had made too many changes to his original vision. The film did not officially mention a screenwriter's name. During the filming, the production team faced opposition from fans of Sapkowski's work, who founded the "Committee for Defense of the Only Right Image of the Witcher". A protest against the casting of the main roles and for departing from the spirit of the original was posted on their website. For obvious reasons, the 13 episode series also did not appeal to the audience as it was a mere reproduction of the film with multiple errors.[8]
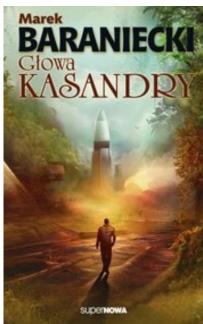
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[6] "ANDRZEJ SAPKOWSKI."

[7] "SuperNOWA::Autorzy::Andrzej Sapkowski."

[8] Gawroński and Bajorek, "A Real Witcher—Slavic or Universal; from a Book, a Game or a TV Series?"

The above left image is the first Polish edition of *The Last Wish*, released in 1993. The cover is not unlike many fantasies of the time, featuring the hero, Geralt capturing the red, evil looking Jin. This cover screams traditional fantasy with the green of the lake looking all too similar to the covers of Tolkein's work, and brings to mind the paperback edition of *The Hobbit* particularly that was released shortly before in the 1980s.[9] While this example is a US edition, another award winning fantasy in Poland, published in 1986 by SuperNowa has a similar cover (see above right), making the cover of *The Last Wish* fit right in with what the Polish fantasy audience expects. It's also important to note that on the first original cover Geralt stands alone in a scene that lacks true violence, which is a tradition that SuperNowa would continue on their covers as they published Sapkowski's series through the 1990s.

2007-2008 | The first video game is released, and the books are translated in the US

CD Projekt Red and the first *Witcher* video game

Into the early 2000s the saga was gaining popularity not only in its home country but was being translated in many European countries including Lithuania, France, the Czech Republic, Spain, Germany, and Portugal. However, while popularity of the saga was growing internationally, the story reached the US market first via one of its adaptations. CD Projekt Red produced the *Witcher* video games in Poland, and made a deal with Atari for translation, with the original PC game releasing in October of 2007 with nearly 2 million

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[9] "Editions of The Hobbit, or There and Back Again by J.R.R. Tolkien | Goodreads."

copies sold by June 2011.[10] In regards to Sapkowski's involvement in the project, he claims no responsibility for any content that CD Red produced, but rather he was given a one time payment for the use of his characters and world.[11]

The game was praised for its storyline, audio-visual setting, and fighting system; however, the game's downfalls were the excessive sexualization of women and glitches that were later patched in 2008.[12] Reviewers on Metacritic shortly after the game's release mentioned that it was the best RPG game they had played in a long time, citing the "adult aspect" of the story, the complexity of the world, and varying decision based quests and resulting storylines. However, few of the reviewers mentioned Sapkowski or his works. Those that do, juxtaposed him to Tolkein's fantasy style, crediting Sapkowski with creating a great world: "fantasy, but not so full of sugar like Tolkeins, it is rather dark and realistic." The game emulated the world of Sapkowski offering the players a customizable version of Geralt and presenting choices that mimic that of the original storylines on civil war and saving other main characters. Reviewers note that the choices were "heavy" and become more intense as the game continues, indicative of Sapkowski's original characterization of Geralt and the world he's subjected to as a Witcher. It's also important to note that the game had to be translated into English from the original Polish developers by Atari. A few reviewers pointed to bits of scenes and dialog that had been cut by Atari that were lost in translation, with one gamer stating that the Polish version had a "richer" storyline that was addressed partially in the 2008 update.[13] The game was released on PC only at the time, limiting the audience to PC gamers but appealing to a defined market in the US with the popularity of online games like Runescape and PC games like Fallout and the Elder Scroll series. However, this meant that the initial market for the book was for those who played PC games, which was still a smaller portion of the larger fantasy market to be had, if Tolkein is in comparison. Additionally, the first game only grabbed the attention of PC gamers, excluding the larger market available in the console game audience.

In a deeper analysis of audiences, it can be concluded that part of the success of the Witcher world in video games has to do with the tolerance to violence and nudity. Those who play RPG games crave for the world to be as detailed as possible, giving them a life-like experience inside of a game, and this extends to nudity and violence in this case. Audiences in the video game sphere are exposed to varying degrees of violence and gore depending on the rating, with many RPGs toting the Mature 17+ rating that is easily worked around by younger audiences. With that in mind, a connection can be made between these game consumers and Sapkowski's original audience in Poland, who connect to the series in the context of the Blood Lands, as previously mentioned. Gamers have been exposed to
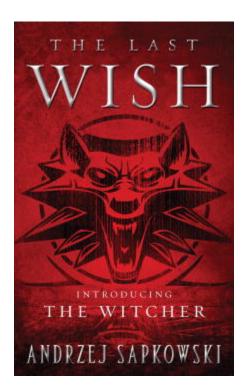
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[10]Gawroński and Bajorek, "A Real Witcher—Slavic or Universal; from a Book, a Game or a TV Series?"
[11]Purchese, "Meeting Andrzej Sapkowski, the writer who created The Witcher"
[12]Gawroński and Bajorek, "A Real Witcher—Slavic or Universal; from a Book, a Game or a TV Series?"
[13] "The Witcher." Metacritic.com

violence, blood, and gore in ways that movies and TV do not, as the player actively participates, and an argument can be made that the reason US gamers were ready for Sapkowski's level of "adult" fantasy was due to this exposure. A video game where you play Geralt, fighting monsters and men alike, appeals to the audience whereas when it's shown on a screen for viewing, an American audience wonders why the violence and nudity is "necessary."

The US-English Translation and Orbit Books

In 2007 Orbit Books opened under Hachette Book Group (HBG) as the US expansion of Orbit Books UK established in 1974.[14] The houses are under the same publisher, Tim Holman, whose goal is to make the imprint the next leader in fantasy and science fiction books by 2027.[15] Orbit focuses on an international model of publishing with more than half of their titles publishing in both countries. Shortly after opening in 2007, Orbit released the first US translation of Sapkowski's books, *The Last Wish*, in 2008 (cover above left). At this time, the video game had been the #6 most shared PC game of 2007 on Metacritic and was #37 on the list of Best PC Games of 2007, though the game only was released in October.[16]

Timeline of US-English Translations at Orbit Books

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[14] Policy and Information, "About Orbit."
[15] Maher, "The Publisher with All of Speculative Fiction in Its Orbit."
[16] See note 14 above

- *The Last Wish* (May 1, 2008) collection of short stories
- *Blood of Elves* (May 1, 2009) novel
- *The Time of Contempt* (August 27, 2013) novel
- *Baptism of Fire* (June 24, 2014) novel
- *The Tower of Swallows* (May 17, 2016) novel
- *The Lady of the Lake* (March 14, 2017) novel
- *Season of Storms* (March 22, 2018) novel[17]

Orbit chose to market the books in a very different way than Sapkowski's own image for his work. Below is text from Orbit's blog post on their Spring and Summer releases of 2008, on the first translation, *The Last Wish.*

> Geralt de Rivia is a witcher. A cunning sorcerer. A merciless assassin. And a cold-blooded killer. His sole purpose: to destroy the monsters that plague the world. But not everything monstrous-looking is evil and not everything fair is good…and in every fairy tale there is a grain of truth. The international hit that inspired the video game: The Witcher is available for the first time in the US from Orbit. / Praise for The Last Wish "It's refreshing to see another take on familiar elements. There's a fairy-tale quality to much of THE LAST WISH." — SFX[18]

The text contrasts how Sapkowski views his own works, especially on the front of Geralt's character. According to Sapkowski's interviews, Geralt is not a "merciless assassin and a cold-blooded killer" as Orbit portrays. While an assassin, he grants mercy to other creatures and individuals throughout his adventures, only killing when paid to. Additionally, he is not a character that has a "sole purpose" to destroy monsters but was sold into it with no personal vendetta against them. It's important to note that this is Orbit's announcement of the title, and it points directly to the video game in the same breath as the original as a key selling point. The praise, while glowing and quality feedback on the editorial qualities of Sapkowski and his worldbuilding skills, also is in opposition to Sapkowski's interviews in which he states he actively had to fight against the "fairy-tale" narrative in Poland to reach publication and a mass audience. In another blog post from the same year, Orbit advertised a giveaway for the upcoming release of the book that had links directing readers toward the Atari game and noted, "Having read the book that inspired the game, we can assure you that yes, he is indeed the Witchest."[19] Sapkowski himself took issue with the US publisher's

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[17] "Edelweiss+."
[18] Policy and Information, "Spring/Summer 2008 from Orbit US."
[19] Lencicki, "The Last Wish."

portrayal of the work, but had no control over the marketing nor the translation of the book.[20]

As Orbit was marketing to the US audience, it's obvious that they attempted to capitalize on the success of the video game adaptation rather than the original. The cover of Orbit's first edition of *The Last Wish* was a carbon copy of CD Red Projekt's original game cover, seen side by side on page 5. While their covers have continued to change, their initial marketing was to direct the game audience to the US translation. However, taking the cover at face value, a non-gamer would still be able to identify this as a "fantasy" mass market paperback on a shelf: a rich red color with a singular graphic in the center, using the mark of Geralt of Rivia as the "White Wolf." This type of cover mimics that of other popular fantasy series that were also being released at the time, including *Game of Thrones*, whose iconographic covers remain today. (Orbit has continued with this style of cover, most recently releasing all new editions of the series with the same iconographic style, the icons in stone-gray on a white background with red typography.)[21]

Orbit faced the distinct challenge of marketing this book to a US market that was still very much in the hangover of "sugar" fantasy as the Metacritic reviewer put it, as *The Lord of the Rings* movies had been released only years before to wide success. As Sapkowski's world view was in direct contrast with Tolkein's, the US fantasy market might not have been ready to make such a large shift from a story where good ultimately prevails to one where the main character is indifferent to his societal obligation to become a savior, and blood, gore, and sex are accepted as a part of their everyday life. An early review of *The Last Wish* that was posted to Goodreads in 2008 by a Polish reader praised Sapkowski for his prose but mentioned reservations on sections of the text if they were to read it again in present day. By contrast, the English reviews and questions immediately reference the video game, with Goodreads users asking "if I like the game will I enjoy this?" and the first written review noting the similarity to the quests Geralt takes within the game. The following reviews note the classic fairy tale spins, as well as Geralt's characterization. One woman noted that in the short stories he's seemingly emotionless, until the audience reaches the realization that this was his training and the spectrum of emotions will evolve as his character does, into as one reviewer put it: "a lover, an observer, a hero, a judge, a suspect, a victim and an executioner. There are exploding passions and complicated intrigues here."[22]

Based on NPD BookScan, the first video game was not enough to skyrocket the series to US market success, with the number of sales dropping shortly after release only to pick up again in 2015.[23] The game had the effect of drawing interest from a US audience to

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[20]Purchese, "Meeting Andrzej Sapkowski, the Writer Who Created the Witcher."
[21] Policy and Information, "Blog."
[22] "The Last Wish — Reader Q&A | Goodreads."
[23] "NPD BookScan."

start publication but ultimately as the game had only quartered off the PC market, there was much greater success to be had in the years to come.

2015-2017 | *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* video game is released and the first US film rights are purchased

By 2015, CD Projekt Red released the third installment of The Witcher video games and expanded upon the open world RPG from previous games. The game was highly anticipated by gamers after their love for the first two games and Geralt. Additionally, the game was revered for its broader historical contexts that were bolstered by not one but two reference archives. One focused on the art of four artists from Germany, Poland, and Czech Republic and the other on the history of the area known as "the Bloodlands." The game "accessed in equal measure the Belarusian, Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Moldavan, Polish, Russian and Ukrainian experiences of the Bloodlands."[24] The result was a richer, more fully realized conceptualization of Sapkowski's world, and may have been one more in line with his perception of the work, as he stated in later interviews that he used various folklore he deemed "necessary" for the story.[25]

In addition to the rise in popularity of the games, the hope was that the popularity of the original work would rise as well. Sapkowski is known to be an outspoken author when it comes to the adaptation of his original, and claims that while the series did lend a hand to sales, it ultimately didn't have the desired effect due to the immediacy with which the US market identified the story with the video game adaptation. Several interviews with the author show the same disdain for the lack of credit he has been given with creating the world. In a 2012 interview with Eurogamer.net, Sapkowski and the studio head of CD Projekt, Adam Badowski, both addressed the adaptations at length. Below is an excerpt with comments from both parties:

> Sapkowski: "The game is not an 'alternative version', nor a sequel [but] a free adaptation containing elements of my work[...] Adaptations - although they can in a way relate to the story told in the books - can never aspire to the role of a follow-up, prologue, [or] sequels. [...] in no way can [the video game] be considered to be an 'alternative version', nor a 'sequel' to the witcher Geralt stories. Because this can only be told by Geralt's creator."

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[24] Redmond, "Chapter 2 The Witcher 3 And The Digital Bloodlands."
[25] Maher, "Toss a Coin to Your Author."

Sapkowski continued to commend the success of the video game and acknowledged that the international and translation success of the series was in part due to the video game audience. However, he noted that the video game had a negative impact on the presentation of his series to book buyers, as many translations used the artwork of the games on the cover, which he claimed may have turned off true fantasy fans as just an extension of the video game for gaming collectors.

> Adam Badowski in response: "Our cooperation has a strict and defined direction. [...]We want to develop The Witcher's universe in other media, not only video games. We have Mr. Sapkowski's blessing and what we create is in line with his vision of the world, no matter how the saga will evolve. We want The Witcher's universe to be a part of pop-culture like Star Wars or The Lord of the Rings, and for our fanbase to expand rapidly. We just have to carefully and diligently do our thing."[26]

Book sales numbers for Sapkowski's books increased with the release of the third game and held weekly sales higher in the span of 2015-2017.[27] This comes as a result of the increased audience exposure of the third game. While the first video game was released on PC alone, the third released games for PC, PlayStation4, Xbox One, and Nintendo Switch, meaning that console gamers were in the mix. Video game use had also risen from 2007 to 2015. According to a 2015 Pew internet study, about half of all American adults played video games: 50% of men and 48% of women play them, and about 10% consider themselves to be gamers. Furthermore, Mary Meeker's highly regarded "Internet Trends 2017" report describes video games as more engaging than popular forms of social media such as Facebook and Instagram, driving an increase in deep engagement in "an era of perceived disengagement."[28]

In 2017, just two years after the game was released, the first sale of the film rights was announced to the Sean Daniel Company, and the director of the proposed project Tomasz Bagiński had been a contributor to the cinematics of the game.

2019-2022 | Netflix adaptation announced and released

Now twenty plus years and three video games removed, Netflix released its adaptation *The Witcher* in December 2019, and it was their second most watched series of the year behind *Stranger Things*. As seen when Dark Horse Comics misattributed the origins of their

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[26]Purchese, "Ever Wondered What the Author of The Witcher Books Thinks about the Games?"
[27] "NPD BookScan"
[28] Greer, "A Case for Multimedia Storytelling."

graphic novel, the video game had taken over the international scene of perception on Sapkowski's world. It's important to note the level of removal and dilution of the original content at this point. Even the Polish embassy in the US on its Facebook profile posted a message claiming that it is an adaptation of a popular computer game, not Andrzej Sapkowski's novels. [29]

Additionally, the influence of the adaptations may not be the only reason that the US market was ready to welcome Geralt into their homes. The number of fantasy adaptations has been on the rise with series like *Outlander* and *Game of Thrones* rising in popularity. Another reason for their success is the production of the show and the release of the books has now started to overlap, creating higher demand for the upcoming book release. All three series have been released by non-cable providers, and HBO, Starz, and Netflix all have the ability to produce a more accurate adaptation of adult content of these fantasies that's unique in the last 50 years of television. As Sapkowski's writing is just as graphic, the US market would not appear ready for that until at least the 2010s. When asked his opinion on the "political/cultural climate of 2020" Sapkowski stated,

> I am a bit puzzled to understand what political climate has to do with my books or their adaptations. I personally abhor politics and try to stay as far as I can from it. I consider my books politically neutral. And if by "cultural climate" you mean growing popularity of fantasy literature and movies, I agree, fantasy is ascendant. It wins more and more fans, even among people who weren't particularly fond of the genre so far. [...] I am Polish, but in my writing I do not give any preference to Slavic mythology. It is in fact very rich and abundant, therefore I use it profusely, that's for sure. But I do not forget other mythologies, folklores nor bestiaries. It all depends on what is needed—or necessary—to the story I am telling. And, mostly, I put aside existing mythologies and invent something myself.

Orbit responded to the Netflix boom by reprinting 500,000 copies of each of Sapkowski's books after the release of season one in December 2019.[30] The video games also experienced a boost. According to the popular PC video game platform Steam, *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* experienced a 107.89% increase in players with as many as 102K playing at once following the release of season 1, and a 62% increase in gamers playing the game with as many as 62,000 players online at one time after the release of the season 2, and an average of 48K was recorded for 30 days. For comparison, one month after the game's

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[29]Gawroński and Bajorek, "A Real Witcher—Slavic or Universal; from a Book, a Game or a TV Series?"
[30] Maher, "Toss a Coin to Your Author."

highly anticipated release in 2015, the peak players was 55K and averaged at 22K for the 30 day period.[31]

What can this study tell us about cross-media publishing and international marketing for the future?

Authors especially can learn from Sapkowski's arc, if only as a warning not to sell the rights to your characters and world as a one off payment. CD Red Projekt has sold 40+ million copies of *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* by year-end 2021, with prices that exceed the cost of an Orbit translation.[32] By accepting the one-time payment, Sapkowski lost a significant level of earnings for royalties on the games and use of his content. He also lost any control he may have had in shaping the game content or partnering with the developer to promote his books in a more active manner. Dark Horse Comics reports that many of its bestselling titles are based on or adapted from video games, including a compendium of Witcher lore and a series of graphic novels that extend the Witcher stories that was done in partnership with CD Projekt Red.[33] These partnerships can be beneficial for a publisher, but make it effectively an adaptation of an adaptation and placing credit upon the game developer rather than the original content creator. Other options for author partnership in the interactive space include Twine: an open-source software tool that allows users without programming expertise to create and publish interactive stories similar to the Choose Your Own Adventure book series.[34] The interactive story returned to the mainstream with Netflix's *Bandersnatch* and these types of platforms would allow authors to have more control on a visual medium that also has that level of engagement.

Publishers must consider the downfalls of attaching an adaptation to their translations, especially if they want to support their authors. While the adaptation will inherently draw its audience to the written works, publishers should aim to champion the original rather than relying solely on the first adaptation to gain attention, as sales didn't increase until the third installment, which had a more accurate representation of Sapkowski's own image of the world.

Orbit's response to the Netflix adaptation announcement and the third video game serves as a model for future expansion in the publisher's regards. In 2017, the number of titles they published per year increased from 60 to 90 and they encouraged their authors to look for

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[31] "Search - Steam Charts."
[32] "CD Projekt Red Reveals Updated Sales Figures for Cyberpunk 2077, Witcher 3."
[33] Greer, "A Case for Multimedia Storytelling."
[34] See note 33 above

publications outside the fantasy and science fiction space. One of their other popular authors, N. K. Jemisin, writes a science fiction and fantasy column for the *Times*, and the targeted book club audiences with her title *The Fifth Season* being the inaugural title for Wired Magazine's book club.[35]

Internationally, the series serves as a model for word of mouth marketing and presenting your writing to the right audience. Sapkowski was able to generate content based on audience demand and his storytelling was compatible with multiple forms of media, leading to a larger than intended secondary audience from the show and video games. Those seeking to reach larger national audiences should lean on cross-media storytelling to overcome the language and culture barriers by creating interactive and visually engaging content.

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[35] Maher, "The Publisher with All of Speculative Fiction in Its Orbit."

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