CHARACTERS' ENHANCEMENTS IN THE SERIES ADAPTATION OF *LEAGUE OF LEGENDS*

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Abstract

Arcane is a TV series adaptation from a game named *League of Legends* and was categorized as the best TV series in 2021. When many TV series adaptations take novel as its source, this adaptation becomes interesting to analyse because the source text is from a game. This research aims to find out the changes applied to the characters in the series adaptation using Linda Hutcheon's adaptation theory, in which she mentioned that character is one of aspects often changed when a work is adapted into different form. The *Arcane* is based on Zaun and Piltover's past, there will be so much to compare from the TV series and the game. Using qualitative method and spradley's data analysis steps, this research reveal that changes are applied to the characters Vi, Jinx, and Caitlyn. These changes involve appearance, outfit, and ability, which gives more realistic and grounded effect to *Arcane's* story. This is due to the different mode of engagement that Hutcheon calls from interacting to showing. With some adjustments made to the characters, the series are able to present engaging story and new audience.

INTRODUCTION

In the twenty-first century media production has become increasingly popular (Madeleine, 2018). Mobile gaming has become one of the most prominent forms of entertainment in recent years. This surge in popularity can be attributed to several factors, including accessibility, diversity, and technological advancements. Unlike traditional gaming, which often requires specialized gaming devices such as gaming consoles or high-performance computers, mobile games can be played on smartphones and tablets, devices that most people already have. This accessibility makes mobile gaming more inclusive and convenient, allowing users to play anytime and anywhere.

The variety of game genres - puzzle, strategy, action, role-playing, and casual games - ensures that there is something for everyone. Popular games such as *Candy Crush Saga,*

PUBG Mobile, and *Genshin Impact* demonstrate how mobile gaming can attract both casual and hardcore players, a variety of people with different interests. This popularity also helps the birth of new genres in this century (Ayuningtyas, W., & Achmad, M. 2021). The immense popularity of various game genres, such as post-apocalyptic, action-adventure fantasy, and science fiction, has significantly influenced other entertainment industries, particularly the film and television sector. Video games often feature rich narratives, immersive worlds, and compelling characters which make them interesting to be adapted to film.

Many successful video games have inspired movies and TV series due to their engaging storylines and established fan bases. The film industry recognizes that adapting popular games can attract a pre-existing audience. The advancement of technology also becomes crucial factor that enables filmmaker to produce more modern film using computers to help add more visual effects on the film, which mobile games are rich of. CGI animated films are even said to have more popularity and success in cinema industry compared to those which do not use CGI digital technology (Sun, 2023).

One of the most popular mobile games which is adapted into TV series is *Leagues of Legend: Wildrift.* The game is not only popularly played, it is considered to be a turning point in the gaming environment in which gender stereotyping among gamers can be reduced (Robinson, 2017). The science fiction TV series adaptation of this game is entitled *Arcane*, which is an animated series using CGI technology as the main technique in the film making. This TV series has won 9 awards in Annie Awards 2022. By bringing the game's rich lore and characters to life through high-quality animation, the company aimed to introduce fresh players to its intellectual properties (IPs) while simultaneously reigniting enthusiasm among its long-time fans (Ryu, 2023). The players who already know the hints about the story are widely interested to watch the movie because it showed more detailed narration which they usually play but is somehow presented differently.

Arcane series delve deeper into the backstories of beloved characters like Jinx, Vi, and Jayce, exploring their motivations, struggles, and relationships in ways that the game cannot. Games often prioritize gameplay mechanics and player interaction, which can limit the depth of storytelling due to time constraints or the need to keep the action moving. In the contrary, a series has the advantage of being able to focus entirely on narrative development, using cinematic techniques, dialogue, and visuals to create a richer

experience. This privilege to just enjoy the story without having to do more effort as in the game makes the series version appealing in a way.

The new version of a story yet carries familiar sense is what Hutcheon implies as something that attracts the wide audience of an adaptation work (2013). In addition to the players of the original work, the series also captivates those who might not have played the game. This leads to broader audience and become the strength of an adaptation taken from mobile games. For players, seeing a story they already know being brought to life with added depth and emotional nuance can enhance their connection to the game's world. It encourages them to continue watching the series to the end, as they gain new insights into characters and events that they thought they already understood.

Linda Hutcheon in her book (2013) mentioned that among many aspects that can be transferred across media in adaptation process, themes, characters, and separate units of the story, usually called as *fabula,* are easiest to be adapted. However, many adapters add, delete, or change these elements to make the adaptation more appealing and interesting. The changes appear in *Arcane* series as an adaptation of *Leagues of Legends* mobile game are what this article tries to explore. This has not been done by other researchers. Some previous studies related to MOBA game adaptation into film and series were conducted by Saputra, et al. (2022) and Prayoga, et. al (2023), who observed *Mortal Combat* and *Castlevania* games respectively. Meanwhile, some articles analysing *League of Legends* focused on mental skills of the players (Himmelstein, Liu, Shapiro, 2021), performance of the players (Novak, et.al., 2018), and gift exchanges and transactions among players (Jarret, J., 2021). Therefore, this article is filling the gap left regarding the adaptation of game *League of Legends* to *Arcane* series.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Hutcheon's Adaptation Theory

Hutcheon's explanation in her book about theory of adaptation helps explain how stories evolve through different media. She mentions three common adaptation modes; from telling to showing, which happens when a novel is adapted into performing arts or film, from telling to interacting which comprises adaptation from written stories to games, and from interacting to showing that involves gaming and performing arts or films. Among those different modes of adaptation, aspects like settings, characters, events and situations are commonly changed (Hutcheon, 2013, p.14).

In narrative adaptations, whether from literature to film, video games to television, or any other form, character-driven stories rely heavily on psychological development to engage audiences (Hutcheon, 2013). Therefore, this research focuses the analysis on the changes of the characters from the game *Leagues of Legends* to *Arcane* the series since it is an obvious element presented in both forms of entertainment. The emotional depth of characters and their transformative journeys throughout the story play a crucial role in fostering receiver's empathy—the ability of the audience to connect with and feel for the characters. This is especially true in adaptations where character complexity is emphasized, making the audience more invested in the story's dramatic arc. Sabila El Azkiya (2015) mentioned that the difference between character animation in a game and character animation in a film is usually due to several factors, the first factor lies in the manufacturing process such as changes in designer or director and rendering. The next factor is influenced by the increase in storylines, characters, objects and skills or the movement of these characters so that they require new adaptations.

Hutcheon implied that the changes usually applied in an adaptation is addition, especially when the adaptor change the story's point of view. Additional scenes and narration for certain characters are inevitable when they are made the main focal points of the story. On the other hand, transformation, reduction, or even deletion is needed to make the characters resonate well with the intended audience. In the adaptation from game to series, which mode is from interacting to showing, the modification is inevitable because the story in the series go to a certain fabula, to certain conflict and resolution. Thus, adjusting the characters' appearance, ability, and characterization are often done here and there. This area is what this research tries to explore.

The changes undergone by a character can often be seen directly in the appearance. In film, characters or objects are made to reach the highest possible quality. Quality here is calculated by the number of poly (shape details) which serves to add detail to the coloring of objects. In game, characters or objects are made with a slightly reduced quality to match the game's abilities. Poly is reduced as much as possible which leads to coloring that may be less realistic than the objects in the film. This is intended to allow the game to render multiple animations at once according to in-game commands.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses descriptive qualitative method. Descriptive qualitative approach

is a postpositivist research method for examining the status of natural objects (rather than experiments) where the researcher is the key instrument (Sugiyono 2016, p.9). This research analyzes a TV series *Arcane* that is an adaptation from *League of Legends* game. Martin Picard explained that leaders in the videogame business have achieved enough clout to have complete control over the creation of film adaptations of their games; for example, Microsoft sold the rights to the Halo (2001) video game adaptation to Hollywood studios on their own terms. These instances show the undeniable connection that has arisen between video games and other forms of media, particularly movies and, to a lesser extent, television (2008). The connection between video games and TV series are the main theme in this research.

The data is taken from *League of Legends* game and *Arcane* TV series in the form of visual and textual data. Visual data from the game and TV series are used to show changes clearly and textual data are taken from the explanation in the game information, narration, and also the conversation and narration in the series. In order to examine the scenes, characters design, and characteristics of some of the decided characters, 9 episodes from season 1 are analyzed.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The gaming industry has successfully utilized literary adaptation to create immersive narratives, which are now increasingly being adapted into film. As advancements in technology and storytelling techniques continue to evolve, this trend is expected to gain even more interest, further bridging the gap between literature, gaming, and cinema. A prime example of this phenomenon is seen in *Arcane*, the animated series based on *League of Legends* game. While the series makes significant alterations to character designs—modifying their appearance, attire, and overall aesthetic to better fit the cinematic medium— and abilities of each character, the core idea, like the characters' name, abilities, and general plot remains the same. This consistency ensures that fans of the game, the players, can still recognize and connect with their favourite champions, despite the differences.

Analysing the differences in greater detail is interesting to see what aspects are adjusted and what might be the cause of the adjustments. Linda Hutcheon's statement in her book highlights that character is an important aspect that usually experience changes. This is even necessary especially when the original work and the adaptation are of different

medium, which leads to different mode of engagement. This article tries to reveal the changes and present it descriptively and elaboratively through visual and textual comparison. This comparison highlights changes in appearance, costume, and personality while also acknowledging the elements that remain unchanged, such as their signature abilities and core traits.

Character Design

Table 1.

Vi in the game and series
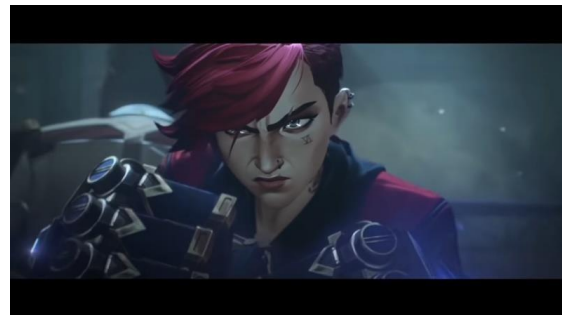
In the game, Vi is depicted as a long-haired, fearless fighter with a strong inclination toward violence. Her expression in the game is always firm and stern. However, in the *Arcane* series, her appearance is altered to a tomboyish style and unarmed sometimes. Her personality is given a softer, more emotionally expressive side. These changes are significant because they allow Vi to showcase a more nuanced and complex character, particularly in her relationship with Caitlyn, where her romantic and protective instincts come into play. Unlike the game, where Vi is mostly portrayed as a brawler with a straightforward personality, *Arcane* gives her moments of vulnerability, making her more relatable and layered. The outfit variations is a hint that this character is presented in a more complex way in the series.

In the game, Vi is already an established enforcer. In Arcane, however, she is still finding herself. This evolution makes her journey compelling, balancing her aggressive nature with tenderness. By softening her character in the series, the writers create space for a meaningful relationship with Caitlyn, allowing for deeper emotional connections beyond just combat and rivalry. These changes help make Vi a more dynamic protagonist, appealing to both existing fans and new audiences who connect with her struggles, relationships, and emotional complexity.

Table 2.

Jinx in 'League of Legends' and 'Arcane'
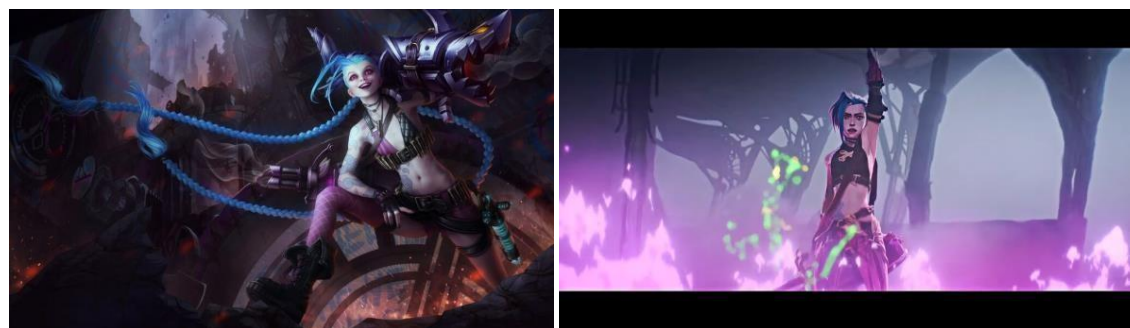
Jinx is one of the most popular characters in the *League of Legends* game (League of Graphs, n.d.), since being released as a Champion in 2013. In the original version, Jinx's character is often compared to Harley Queen or Joker because of his body shape and his characteristic. Jinx is a maniac and impulsive criminal who comes from the city of Zaun. In the game, the character is depicted with high-detail graphics, featuring several accessories such as long hair and an explosive device in hand. However, in the series adaptation, Jinx's design is softened to resemble a more realistic human appearance. Additionally, certain aspects of her physical form, including her hair, weapons, and outfit have been toned down. The hair movement is made more natural. Unlike in game where the long hair often comes up, it often falls to Jinx's back unless she is in the battle. The clothes in *Arcane* covers more parts of the body as the she has many scenes in close up angles. These adjustments are made to make the character more realistic and acceptable in the viewer's world instead of in game, ensuring smoother animation and more natural interactions with other characters.

Table 3.

Caitlyn in game and series.
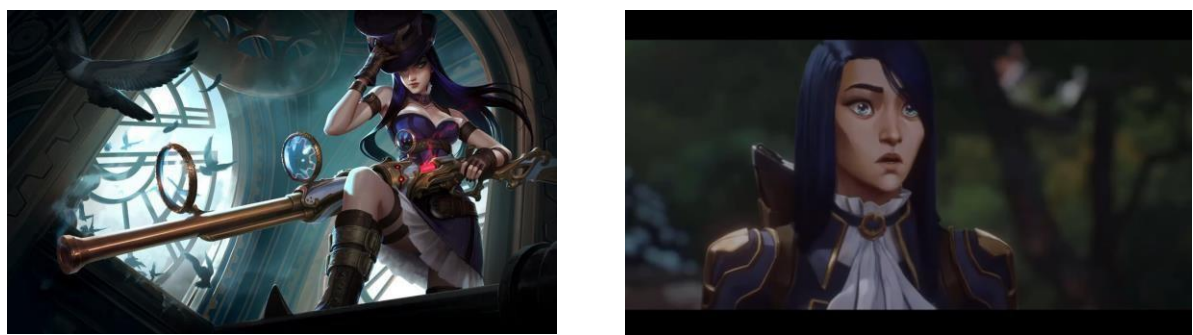
Caitlyn Kiramman is described as a very intelligent, thorough, and agile private investigator. Her ability is to investigate various cases and discover the identity of criminals. In the game, Caitlyn is depicted as an attractive and alluring woman, with a design that gives her a pirate-like appearance, complete with a large firearm. Meanwhile, in the series, However, in the film adaptation, her character undergoes notable changes. She adopts a more androgynous look, with attire that reflects her authoritative role as the Sheriff of Piltover. This shift in design emphasizes her professionalism and leadership rather than her physical appeal. There is different highlight that the adaptor tried to attach to Caitlin as a character in narrative story. Additionally, the film version features a reduction in graphical sharpness compared to the game. This intentional downgrade enhances realism by ensuring that character movements and interactions appear more natural and fluid, aligning with the cinematic style of the adaptation.

Table 4.

Vi's ability, Blast shield, in game and series
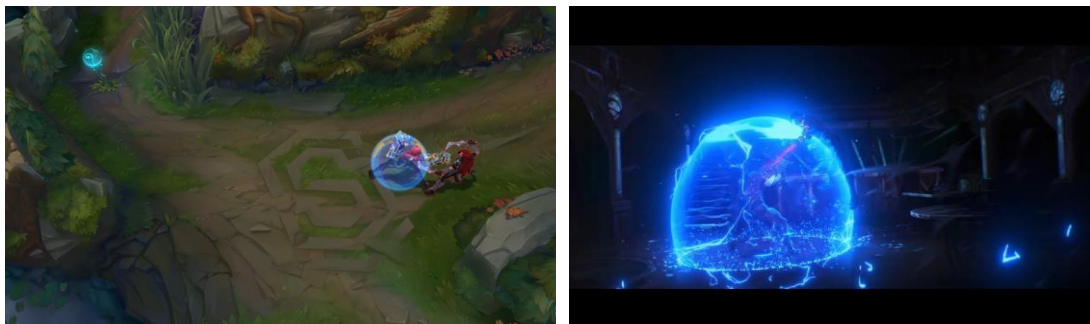
Vi's ability is called Blast Shield. This ability is in the form of a blue transparent sphere, which is pretty much the same in both the game and series. However, visually, these abilities are presented in a more captivating manner, with enhanced colours and effects that make them appear more realistic. In the adaptation, special abilities are not just faithfully recreated but are also visually elevated to enhance the viewing experience. Through the use of advanced animation techniques, lighting effects, and dynamic colour grading, these abilities gain a heightened sense of impact and realism. Explosions, energy bursts, and weapon trails are depicted with greater detail, making them feel more tangible and immersive. These enhancements not only make the action sequences more engaging but also allow the audience to appreciate the power and intensity of each ability in a way that goes beyond the game's original visual presentation.

This ability appears in the *League of Legends* game as a plain light blue transparent circle with no motif that covers Vi when it is utilized. However, in the *Arcane* series, this ability is described as a transparent sphere, but with a darker blue color and with an electric motif on the circle, and the circle looks bigger when compared to the game version. This difference certainly has a fairly high impact. On the circle, the series version which is accompanied by an electric motif adds to the ferocious impression when the ability is used, unlike the game version.

Table 5.

*Jinx's ability, Super Mega Death Rocket, in game and series*

Jinx's ability, Super Mega Death Rocket, is also enhanced visually. This ability is in the form of a giant rocket that can be shot towards the opponent. In the game version, this ability is depicted as a giant rocket that, upon impact, triggers an orange explosion effect. However, in the *Arcane* series, the ability is presented with notable visual differences. When Jinx fires the rocket in the series, the explosion effect is not orange but instead glows with an intense blue hue. Additionally, the explosion itself is significantly larger and more dramatic compared to the game. This dramatic impact effect is not necessary in the game because what the players need is a hint of impact without blocking the overall scene and background. On the other hand, the impact effect as seen in the right image presented in table 5 blocks the whole screen, giving a sense that the power's effect is huge and severe. This is showing visually that Jinx's ability is superb.

This change in visual representation plays a crucial role in shaping the perception of Jinx's power. The use of a blue explosion aligns with the show's unique artistic style and thematic elements, symbolizing her chaotic and unpredictable nature. Furthermore, the increased size and intensity of the explosion create a greater sense of devastation, making the ability feel far more destructive and impactful. By enhancing these visual effects, the

series elevates the ability from a standard game attack to a cinematic spectacle, amplifying the emotional and narrative weight behind Jinx's actions.

Table 6.

Caitlyn's Ace in hole in game and series
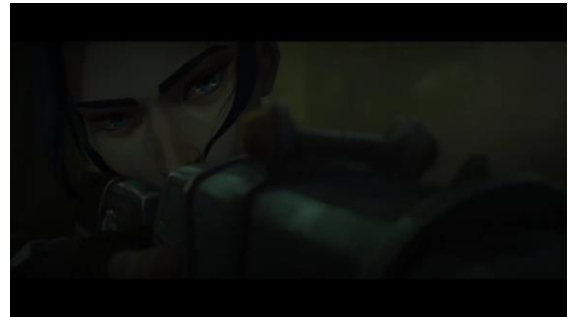
This character's ability is called Ace in Hole. This ability is owned by a character named Caitlyn. This ability is merely a rifle shot. However, if Caitlyn uses it in the game version, it will cause more damage when the bullet hits the target. This ability is defined in the game version as a rifle shot with increased damage and accompanied by a laser as a targeting tool while shooting at the adversary, causing the target to be easily harmed. This ability is described differently in the series version. Caitlyn is described as a dependable shooter, and that is exactly what her ability is; she does not even utilize an aiming tool like the laser in the game version when she aims at the target. This distinction is significant because if an aiming tool is introduced in the series version, Caitlyn's identity as a competent shooter will be weakened.

CONCLUSION

The popularity of the game *League of Legends* and the series brings up remarkable changes in characters' design and ability. Champions in a game is a key element that keeps the player's interest in playing the game. Champions appearance, characteristics in terms of power, outfit or skin, weapon, and ability are what highlighted. In film, however, other aspects need more elaboration. These aspects include the character's trait, which involves emotion and expressions that correspond with their reaction and attitude to different situations presented in the story. Game does not require emotional respond and actions because the aim is usually to win in a battle, but it is an important element to attract audience's attention in film or series, in this case *Arcane.* Thus, changes and elaborations are necessary in the film versions of *League of Legends.* Different outfits are given to the Vi, Jinx, and Caitlyn in *Arcane* because they mingle in various occasion and logically go

through different time frames. The outfit change is also adjusted with the character's personality which is more obviously presented in the film through the plot and story development.

The abilities of the players also change to look more real in the series. In the series adaptation, the abilities of the characters are reimagined to enhance realism while also delivering a more immersive visual experience. Unlike in the game, where abilities like Vi's shield and Jinx's rocket have relatively minimal visual effects, the series amplifies these abilities to create a more dramatic and cinematic impact. Vi's shield, for example, is given a more tangible presence, appearing as a powerful force rather than just a game mechanic. Similarly, Jinx's rocket is depicted with greater intensity, featuring more detailed explosions, smoke trails, and lighting effects that make it feel more destructive and impactful. These enhancements not only add to the spectacle but also make the combat scenes more engaging for the audience, allowing them to feel the weight and power of each character's abilities in a way that is more realistic and grounded.

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