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Adaptation and High Fantasy in Long Form Television

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We find ourselves in interesting times filled with dungeons, dragons, the highs of Lord of the Rings and the lows of Game of Thrones. The realm of high fantasy is expansive, and for that reason we will stick to it as an umbrella term for anything that includes magic folk and mythological creatures, and generally takes place in a medieval world state. Adaptation, though, is just as expansive, if not harder to pinpoint. We surely don't mean any of the scientific definitions, we are not dealing with adaptation for survival. What do we mean by 'adaptation'? Well, I will be specifically talking about Adaptation in very simple terms, the transmigration of a story from a written work, into a visual medium. The most well recognized instance of this is none other than Lord of the Rings, an epic trilogy directed by Peter Jackson based on the well loved, cult classic trilogy of novels by J.R.R Tolkien. Author Leigha Blickley notes on LOTR's cinema success, "The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring" debuted in 2001 to rave reviews, from critics and fans alike. It earned over $47 million domestically during its opening weekend and over $313 million in total. All in all, it was a megahit, and the future installments, "The Two Towers" (2002) and "The Return of the King," (2003) were equally as successful, with all three titles earning a combined $3 billion worldwide in box-office sales and the final nabbing an Oscar for Best Picture. (Not to mention, at this point, the trilogy has earned billions in DVD and digital sales.)" Tolkien's immortalized works are the gold standard of high fantasy adaptation, and many would agree, but there is something crucial about the choice to adapt to the silver screen. In 2001, when

The Fellowship of the Ring premiered, the concept of long form television was in its infancy. Filled with courtroom dramas, sitcoms and soap operas, with some notable outliers like The Sopranos, which began airing in 1999. Things meant to have a broader topic but individual, self-contained episodes where the average viewer could ‘pop’ in and out of the story without missing a beat across the broader narrative, because, well there wasn’t really one. You can’t have a broader narrative spanning across every episode, that means the viewer has to watch them all, right? Certainly nothing with that kind of budget, scope, or scale could suit another other medium besides film. But as time passed, the sheer capability and acceptance of what was able to be produced for TV has increased exponentially. There was a time when a ‘direct to video’ release was a dirty term, something to be ashamed of, something that signaled a faulty product. Hell, even the macmillan dictionary definition states it straight up connotes something “not considered good enough to be shown in cinemas but sold as a video or DVD” In a post-Game of Thrones world though, the term hardly holds the same connotation. Why is that? What was so special about Game of Thrones that it became a popular culture icon, but also changed the game for high fantasy and long-form television as a medium? Firstly, the sheer idea television would even try to lock a viewer in to a one hour time slot per week wasn’t completely new, we had seen it before with the likes of shows like Lost, or Breaking Bad. But neither of those were nerdy, niche genres that dealt with subculture interests. The genre of High Fantasy is, by design, complex. The worlds are sprawling, with their own lore, cultures, peoples, and problems. It is also a genre that I believe has the most vocal, staunch fans. Where a pure sense of

community is fostered and built upon a singular love for an IP (intellectual property). There is something to be said of the escapism that is possible with high fantasy, mostly relegated to a children's genre and the fans of it. Fans that will dismantle a property shamelessly if they believe an adaptation wasn't 'true' to the original, or true enough. It's undoubtedly that these stories take inspiration from our own world, but just like our own world, it would be near impossible to accurately replicate the sheer vast quantity of intricacies. This, however, is rarely a problem when your fantasy story sprawls across three to seven 500 page books. The moment, though, you must find a way to transform that to the screen is where you run into a whole number of problems. The most important being simply, how do you turn thousands of pages of character building, plot, setting, and minutiae into one cohesive viewing experience. Well, you get to chopping. You chop anything and everything that isn't important to the one thread of the story you decide will be the definitive plot. But, when you have 70 hours of screen time available, across a number of years, options begin to open up to you. You do not need to concede as much as you would have for 2.5 hours of cinema time, not in the slightest. The idea of using television as the home for high fantasy is one that is currently sweeping across Hollywood and your streaming services, and for good reason. It is in this paper that we will discuss those reasons and why they are critical to the perfect storm right now of high fantasy on your television.

A good place to start is why are we seeing so much high fantasy right now? There is something very novel about the escapism present in high fantasy. It is very grounded in

mundane trappings, but elevated with incredible stakes, magical imbuement, natural beauty not unlike the most picturesque postcard you can find, and probably the most notable aspect; the fact one individual can make an impact upon their world. Orcs and wizards are a far flung concept that is easy to write off, but the essence of individual freedom, empowerment, and ability to initiate lasting change should not be written off. The same way we do not write off John Wick or Jason Bourne-types, the super cool action hero power fantasy. The protagonist embarking on their quest is also a power fantasy, just of a different sort and maybe not even a power fantasy at all at first. The quintessential Hero's Journey that many high fantasy stories expand on is a journey to a power fantasy. But as opposed to that fantasy being egoistic driven, it comes from a savior complex. A place that wants to help people, and a place that wants to see the world changed for the better. Perhaps dismissing fantasy as a children’s genre says more about us, about society, than about the genre itself. That only a child could imagine their individual actions could make any impact. It is this very essence of fantasy that I believe makes its fans so possessive over it. It is this possession, or belief of it, that makes fantasy fans the hardest to crack. Fantasy fans identify so much with their IP of choice that whole conventions and festivals are created and hosted each year, that people dress up like these characters, that people engage in online forum culture and even roleplay and LARP. It is this pure enthusiasm, love, and dedication that can make or break adaptational works of these franchises. We have to look no further than Game of Thrones itself for a curious case of high highs in fan reception, and low lows. At the beginning, existing fans came to the show with some qualms (namely the sheer number

of cut content and consolidated characters) but nevertheless the show received stellar reviews from the new fans that had flocked to see HBO's newest hit. Little did either side know how big of a television phenomena Game of Thrones was set to become. Towards the end though, we see an equally as impressive phenomena as it's rise; It's decline. How quickly, and easily, fans new and old turned on the show. Was it simply the way the story ended up going? Or was it adaptation choices that left much to be desired. Well, considering the choice to cut so many story elements was prevalent in the GoT writers room, they eventually just caught up to the source material. I do not believe this is an inherent fault of adapting the IP, but rather the manner in which it was done. Regardless though, it's meteoric decline into the proverbial wastebin isn't to be ignored, and shows the sheer power of an audience who you have invested in your adaptation. Though I could speak on niche eccectrictites forever, I believe it is important to recognize how we got here. Both in terms of the technical aspect of television as well as the evolution of the fantasy genre in an age of mass media.

During the early years of televisions history, from inception nearly, it was thought to be the primary source of entertainment for the masses. Truly low art at it's finest, As Horace Newcomb wrote in Television: The Critical View in 1979, "Excellence in television has been written off as the exception with continuous surprise." But television has been experiencing a creative explosion over the last fifteen years that has been truly incredible. If anything, 'explosive' does not begin to cover it. The most significant of the factors contributing to this change might be the radical change in storytelling

techniques. We trace here the development of television from a low-quality medium to one that is now considered an art form in its own right, that is perhaps long overdue.

As stated in “Television. The World Book Encyclopedia” there were less than 10,000 televisions in households in the United States in 1945. Broadcast television was still in its infancy. With their own variety shows, Milton Berle and Jack Benny made the transition from radio to television. The Lone Ranger, Dragnet, The Roy Rogers Show, and Martin Kane: Private Eye were all successful television shows. Besides the premiere of I Love On top of that, it also marked the beginning of a 35-year run for the soap opera Lucy and Search for Tomorrow.

There was a time when television broadcasts were dominated by anthology showcases, from the 1960s until the 1970s. A time where,as noted in Winthrop’s The Americans, a staggering 52 million television sets were in American households. Which means 9 out of 10 homes had a television. As a matter of fact, the first golden age of television drama was when the famous Chayefsky, among others, showcased interesting stories whenever they were. Though, in many cases, they were also famous on their own, as they were pioneers of peak television drama. Also, non-prerecorded wasn't common, and the idea of commercials began to take off. There are long-form dramas that consist of a series of episodes (known as serials; most common in soap operas) and episodic stories that are composed of a variety of situations and are resolved in each episode. Thus creating the ‘popping’ factor we discussed early, the ability to ‘pop’ in and out of a

story was crucial for an experience that could be molded by your daily routine as opposed to forcing you to adapt around a show's timeslot. Formerly celebrated anthology writers have virtually disappeared from the literary landscape.

The episodic storytelling style is used in several classic TV shows, including The Andy Griffith Show, Bonanza and Leave it to Beaver, all incredibly well-known household shows. The purpose of presenting multiple plot lines and intricate characters was to maximize audience viewing while reducing confusion that might result from the presentation. At this point there has been another major change in television storytelling over the years, and probably the most significant one is the way in which the episodic and serial forms of storytelling have become increasingly fluid. The central plot unfolds, character relationships emerge as their strengths and weaknesses are explored across episodes and through the adaptation of the central plot. As you can see the story arcs in multi-episode series provide longer and more elaborate stories with characters who are entangled in more complex and intricate relationships.

There was an event that served as a precursor to the eventual evolution of television - The Mary Tyler Moore Show. Despite remaining in the tried and true episodic format, the show was special in that its characters changed throughout the series, despite it being a show that followed an episodic format. Through this, their relationship was depicted more realistically and comprehensively, a large step in humanizing characters on screen. M*A*S*H provided an important period of character enrichment by

constructing interpersonal relationships, as well as incisive social commentary as a result of its show-building strategies. Rather than simply depicting situations and relationships using humor as a way to express themselves, these writers developed intricate stories between complex characters.

However, television series and episodic shows were the most popular primetime shows, with the exception of these outliers. Network television is evident to have inherent weaknesses, which contribute to the hesitant infusion of narratives with more complexity within the channels. This was largely due to commercial interruptions that interjected themselves unwanted into the narrative. The time limit made it difficult to tell a linear story in thirty to forty-five minutes without compromising the importance of beginning, middle, and end. It was also important for episodic shows to provide enough information to the viewers in order for a single misc episode to still track with a "poppers". On Top of that, networks that required viewing episodes in any order, which further restricted the creative powers of a writer regrettably.

The lack of genuine, good quality content caused outspoken broadcaster Horace Newcomb to say “realized that the regular and repeated appearance of a continuing group of characters [could be] one of its strongest techniques for the development of rich and textured dramatic presentations.” Going on to claim that "episodic television that until then had required a dramatic conclusion at the end of each self-contained episode both limited the ability of the audience to bond to characters and inhibited

artistic expression", both notions I cannot help but agree with. As a consequence, television missed the opportunity to fully engage a viewer by not maintaining a sense of continuity. Over time, experimentation began to challenge the existing modes of television storytelling, which resulted in a shift in how we eventually viewed television as a whole. Hopefully, audiences will be able to gain a greater understanding of its characters, and examine certain parts of the plot in greater depth, with increasingly complex narratives.

Interestingly, this evolution has been enabled by changes in the industry. In the 1970s when independent stations began to grow in power and challenge the budding monopoly of the very few major networks. Norman Lear was a stalwart bastion to this monopoly. There were multiple storylines in Lear's own show, Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman (with the iconic Louise Lasser in the titular role), but the show was also satirical in nature. Furthermore, it dealt with politics and social issues in addition to being partly comedic, but at times it was not funny at all. On a very simple level, the show failed to meet the elementary genre requirements that would have made it appealing to the major networks. When the networks ceased to exist after a long period of decline, Lear sought out untainted networks purposefully and two seasons were aired overall the series enjoyed a long run in syndication. All in all, 325 episodes were produced for the show. This has the kernels of the modern showrunners constant battle between network executive who only see numbers as opposed to artistic value.

In the later part of the 1970s, soap operas became very popular on prime time television. Dallas (1978), Knot's Landing (1979) and Dynasty (1981) were all critically successful examples of story structure adaptation to a prime time set pace. As a direct result of them, televised dramas began to connect, weave, and spin different plotlines within different episodes of their programs. Historically, Hill Street Blues (1981) was the first to do so, but St. Elsewhere (1982) followed very closely behind. In addition, the timeless Twin Peaks (1990) provided dramatic characterizations throughout multiple storylines of soap opera and mystery, all while maintaining an art house sensibility. Much is credited to the show even in the modern day, with a cult following. Several television shows, including The X-Files (1993), ER (1994), Buffy the Vampire Slayer (1997) and The West Wing (1999), were able to continue this trend easily. As we can see there is no shortage of outstanding ideas in the television setting, we even see fantastical elements in Twin Peaks and the likes of Buffy, but no full-blown commitment to a fantasy story AND medieval setting.

The West Wing uncovered a previously untapped audience for advertisers, which made it appealing to networks. In the words of one author, these viewers are referred to as a "boutique audience," i.e. they are people who are educated and informed, but do not watch television very often. According to them, a network's importance comes from the relationship it has with its clients. An advertisement can only be played to them if the audience tunes in to see it, and this is what the goal of programming has been. The landscape once again changed dramatically with the success of The Sopranos (1999)

by HBO, credited by the Writer's Guild of America as the "best written TV series of all time." And, well, who could blame them. The show still receives extremely high accolades from society at large, even when polled now, a whopping 16 years after the final episode aired. When interesting, experimental shows like 24 (2001) succeeded for a while, changes in the networks' advertising revenue fated the networks in 2001. That's why when the networks rearranged their schedules in 2002 to reflect what they called "more audience-friendly programming", or "episodic television", there was understandable concern from the public as well as current fans and concurrent viewers.

There was no doubt in my mind that when you trust your viewers to be intelligent and capable of critical thinking, you are rewarded when you choose to air more complex and morally gray stories with depth. It was evident that internet discussion forums offered audiences a place to interact with one another. It is important to note that the complexity of these issues can be discussed online through forums, blogs, chat rooms, and fan websites, not only with other viewers, but also with the creators of the show. Twitter discussions during a show's airing provide creators with up-close, interactive and personal feedback. In some ways it is the modern successor to the DvD commentary sections with the great minds behind the film you had watched. In addition to generating benefits for the creators, the show also benefits from the attention and influence that it gets. By adding active audience participation to a show, it increases the audience's understanding of the creator's objectives as well as solidifies and expands the fan base of the show. We all remember the phenomena of talking about the last episode of Game

of Thrones the day after it aired with our peers. Or, the fear of speaking too loud about it at the water cooler in fear you will spoil it for some poor soul who DVR'd it. A vocal audience who actively seeks out participation in media shows that there is a veritable wellspring of an untapped market, and with that the ability to influence the creation of more like-minded shows. Though it is a wonder how the concept of treating viewers like grown adults with brains and the ability to think critically was such a scary thing. When business' are created solely to make money, they become risk-adverse to their own detriment. Although, the question that many of these shows have to answer is whether the payoff is worth it at the end of the day, because studios do need to make money. How I Met Your Mother, as well as other shows like Lost, and even Seinfeld to an extent, have faced some backlash when they haven't quite lived up to the audience's expectations in terms of the show's payoff, leaving viewers uncertain about whether the series' extended and passionate loyalty has been worth it. Not to forget challenging endings, like the one chosen for the Sopranos, which split the fanbase in terms of interpretation.

HBO has poised itself to be, arguably, the most successful TV production company in this new era of modern television we find ourselves in, and other networks began to take notice. Though, how could they not? But what does this competition mean for these networks? In the future of television, it is becoming more and more difficult to predict what is going to happen. In addition to the ground-breaking shows like Game of Thrones, the critically acclaimed Boardwalk Empire, and comedic giants like Veep

produced by HBO, one could wonder where the competition even is. A strong opposition is that from Showtime. Known for its original programs such as Dexter and Weeds, Homeland, has also added forbittable stories to it’s roster, namely Orange Is The New Black and Nurse Jackie.

Compared with network television, cable has an advantage when it comes to original programming since it isn't limited by network censorship or the necessity of intershow cliffhangers. It used to be that budget constraints made gratuitous displays of special effects and CGI a pipe dream, but now that has changed. The creative freedom that today's outlets can afford regardless of their price range seems to have no limit as they push the limits of original programming to once unimaginable heights. Television storytelling has been stigmatized for a long time, but this has all changed in recent years. As TV has become an increasingly desirable platform where artists can hone their craft and where they are encouraged, rewarded even, for excellent storytelling and creativity, it is quickly becoming one of the most sought after platforms in entertainment.

I think there is no way that one could have missed the fact that the way television viewing has evolved over the last thirty years is increasingly audience-centered. Viewers now have the chance to choose from a wide range of television channels, as well as the ability to watch videos on-demand and record shows, not to mention the sheer number of streaming platforms, putting them in total control of their television viewing experience. It has long been a given that the networks dictate the schedules,

and in their place are "bingers" who consume years worth of media in weeks, even days. Author Allie May says in her article, "No longer constrained by previous storytelling mores, both writers and series creators have responded in kind with the production of high quality material. The trend seems to be here to stay, as viewers seem to be fully enjoying the rewards of this long coming evolution. " But what is all this to say of the medium in regards to high fantasy as a genre? Can the television be called the new home for it?

As far as entertainment genres are concerned, fantasy represents the only genre that is so unique compared to science fiction and many of its subgenres. It is important to mention that there are stories from the fantasy era that have remained relevant and popular even in the present day. There is an extensive body of fantasy literature, even when just considering the books that have incredible influence, like LOTR, The Wheel of Time and Gormenghast, as well as the likes of HP Lovecraft.

Proactive Writers reports that ‘’ fantasy continues to be one of the most popular genres of fiction, with sales of closer to 13 percent of total worldwide sales, exceeding mystery fiction (11%), historical fiction (3%), and even classic literary fiction (13%).’’ This has meant that, over time, the genre has expanded to include a broader range of narratives, all that which enjoy the familiar trappings of the medieval europe setting tropes as well as the many other plethora of tropes across the genre as a whole, ensuring its relevance for today as well. It is always hailed that the father of fantasy is J.R.R.

Tolkien, but he is actually more accurately referred to as the father of modern fantasy, since his works have had such an immense influence on our current, modern culture. The human experience has been shaped by folklore, myths, and fantastical creatures for hundreds of years, spanning from cultural tales to religious concepts. It has been said that fantasy has been seen as an extension of mythology since its tales have been set in far off lands, yet still have an identifiable plot.

Specifically, MasterClass cites two nineteenth-century works as being the forerunners saying that "George MacDonald's 1858 novel Phantastes and William Morris' 1896 masterpiece The Well at the World's End. Throughout the 20th century, authors such as Kipling, H.G. Wells, Robert E. Howard, Tolkien, and C.S. Lewis advanced fantasy as a popular genre, setting the stage for George R.R. Martin, Rowling, Sapkowki, and Leigh Bardugo, to continue to develop it further."

During this transitional period from fantasy novels to the big screen, books and myths also became a part of this great transformation. They brought to life the impossibly abstract yet familiar worlds, beasts, and tales of novels quite amazingly so. For instance, on the famous review site Rotten Tomatoes' list of the most favorite fantasy films of all time, Oz, Jungle Book, The Lord of the Rings, and Pan's Labyrinth are just a few that manage to top the list. It has been a while since a number of highly rated fantasy series have made their way from the page to the screen, but in recent years, the Hollywood budgets have allowed them to do justice to the source material.

The Umbrella Academy, Game of Thrones, and Supernatural are just three of many fantasy series that have been successful on television over the last few decades. Each taps into various different subgenre while remaining in the fantasy umbrella. The genre of Fantasy has a wide range of possibilities due to its adaptability and breadth of offerings. Not to mention, modern technology has led to new ways of exploring such shows, as well as a continued appeal to entertainment seekers due to its escapism component. Even though we are so accustomed to thinking that science fiction is inextricably linked with evolution, technology has had a great impact on fantasy. Providing CGI is properly applied, it can be a powerful agent of making fantasy content more compelling to viewers, reducing barriers to engagement and increasing the likelihood of them watching fantasy content when otherwise they might not.

In terms of how far we have advanced in this direction, The Lord of the Rings marks the biggest step forward. Although the film was made with masterful aesthetics, even using Lux Aeterna for its score, the effects department added a great deal of dimension to the world in which it was set. Men, orcs, Urukhais, dwarves, goblins, elves, and many other creatures of Tolkien's Middle-Earth battled one another on screen. As part of Weta Digital's work on world-renowned projects such as Avatar, the MCU, and The Planet of the Apes, they also worked on a number of other films.

It is quite common these days for Screen Rant to reveal quite a few CGI effects, such

as the severed legs of one of Pan's Labyrinth's fauns. In addition to the similar advancements in hardware and graphic design that have been applied to the world of books, movies, and TV shows, video games have also benefited. It was recently announced that the most popular games available are open-world fantasy titles such as The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim, and The Witcher series with the explosive success of the Witcher III: Wild Hunt. Such success that leads the creators of Skyrim, Bethesda Softworks, to release the very same game every few years. Skyrim has just celebrated its 10th anniversary and still touts an impressive 24,000 players daily. Which ordinarily does not sound too impressive until you realize the sheer age of the game in technological terms, as well as the fact it is a single-player experience. The success of Wild Hunt is what allowed the television adaptation of the Witcher to be green lit at all.When you can create realistic-looking fantasy worlds and creatures, it makes everything come to life the effect is undeniable. Notable videogame and all-around nrd culture publisher IGN goes on to pose a reason for the love of single player RPGs (roleplaying games), " Games let players assume the role of the hero and make their own choices, so it's easy to see how it blends so well with the ultimate escapism entertainment genre, especially nowadays thats invaluable" In the modern age, fantasy has impacted all storytelling modes of media: it has crept into movies, television shows, books and famously, videogames. In addition, fantasy has been influenced by a variety of other media. Due to the enduring popularity of fantasy themes, Slot developers at Betway online casino have opted to use it in their games. Fantasy themes can be found in some of the most popular slots, as well as in a few newer creations. Other fantasy

media properties that inspired the development of Elven Gold and War of Gods are also highly regarded. Tolkien's works were also frequently referred to in the lyrics of Led Zeppelin. Several songs, including Ramble On and Misty Mountain Hop, directly reference the fantasy world of Middle Earth with their use of the words "Mordor" and "Gollum.". Fantasy on the theatre stage is also it's own phenomena, examples including Harry Potter and the Cursed Child and Wicked (which has made a home on Broadway since 2003!) amongst those reaching the $1 billion mark on Broadway.

Throughout the course of the past century, fantasy has evolved into several subgenres and in the way it is presented to audiences. Fantasy has endured, above and beyond anything else, because of its amazing ability to grant access to escapism.

Talented, insanely brave directors gladly accepted and, on several occasions, met this challenge brilliantly. Nevertheless, as audience tastes in 'epic fantasy' evolve, so does our appetite for larger format releases. We desire more, even if we get it in an episode-per-week ratio. Give us ten seasons of this marvelously detailed worldbuilding It’s all wrapped up in suspense-inducing intrigue, and we’re yours forever. As a result, screenwriters and showrunners have been forced to adapt as the demand for televised 'epic fantasy' has increased. In my opinion, it's not a bad thing, but I do think the genre of 'epic fantasy' on television is underrepresented. The fantasy genre has plenty of options to choose from - 'Charmed' (1998) and 'Buffy the Vampire Slayer' (1997) certainly qualify as decent starter kits. There are plenty of genuine goose bumps and

squeals to be had in the American Horror Story (2011) anthology. If you are an anime fan, you are likely familiar with the cult classic ‘Avatar: The Last Airbender’ (2005) despite the movie adaptations infamous 'trainwreck' status, not to mention Brian Fuller's earlier masterpieces, ‘Dead Like Me' (2003) and 'Pushing Daisies' (2007), both of which are fantastic and well ahead of their time. Despite this, we haven't gotten to the aforementioned "epics"!

When it comes down to it, what makes a story epic? Is it the setting? As for this, I think the immensely more successful spin-off of Hercules: The Legendary Journeys (1995), Xena: Warrior Princess (1995), qualifies as a worthwhile contender. It was a great idea to combine Lucy Lawless and Greek mythology in the early 1990s. What made her do this? Was it her willingness to break social boundaries and embrace the new and modern? Or was it something else? Can it be the fan community that raises a tale to such high-sounding standards? The cult darling ‘Supernatural’ (2005), boasting a spectacular fifteen-year run, would be a great fit for the task. Otherwise, I would consider 'Once Upon A Time' (2011).

But no. Let's go somewhere else with this. There is now a market for 'televised epic fantasy' greater than ever before, largely because of the sheer size of oeuvres being adapted and repackaged for a wider and more patient audience. To produce such projects requires massive investment of time, money, and human resources. Anything less will inadvertently lead to bland, uninspired content.

However you feel about the final season, David Benioff and D.B. Weiss' adaptation of George R.R. Martin's remarkable 'A Song of Ice and Fire' novel series is a masterwork of both television and fantasy. Many, if any, will never be able to equal it due to its outstanding standards. Because the show was based on such an ambitious source material and HBO had such deep pockets, a big part of what made it work was the fearless casting. With the exception of several titular roles, the actors were young and fresh-faced when production began, with hardly any credits under their belts. None of the Stark kids had any credits to their names either.

The first five seasons brought the incredible story of Westeros and the seven kingdoms to life with exceptional detail and an overwhelming love of the cinematic craft—from filming locations to costume and set design, ‘Game of Thrones’ excelled and then some. Given the complex story and multiple main character arcs, the mere fact that D&D pulled it off with barely a hitch was an incredible accomplishment. The first five seasons, however, had the published books to rely on. With extensive assistance from the author himself, the showrunners pushed through seasons six and seven mostly on their own, with an idea of how Martin saw the story evolving across the upcoming novels, ‘Winds of Winter’ and ‘A Dream of Spring’. Alas, with a fandom accustomed to nothing beneath exceptional writing, Benioff and Weiss self-sabotaged their grand conclusion by rushing toward the finish line. There would have been some kinks to smooth over and several important loose ends tied up if there had been a few more episodes. In spite of the

twilight flaws in the series, to this day I have not witnessed anything even remotely comparable to 'Game of Thrones' production quality. Despite its turbulent ending, it stands as a beacon to all that fantasy could be on TV, how big of a cultural touchstone and immaculate story. Amazon Studios decided to try their hand at a prequel after the unquestionable success of "The Lord of the Rings" trilogy. Over the past couple of years, castings have taken place around the world, and extensive negotiations have taken place with the government of New Zealand, the original home of the Jackson-Tolkien cinematic universe.

It is a thrilling time. There is plenty of room for ‘epic fantasy’ in the land of TV. As we can see the stage has been set. Knowing all that we now know, it is a logical conclusion to state that high fantasy’s new home should be on television as opposed to the cinema. Not only is there a laundry list of successes under the belt of high fantasy, but the budgets and production value for television are only ever increasing (though the need for some sort of salary cap is a discussion that needs to be had across the board) Despite the overblown budgets being their own impending disaster, they could be good for fantasy. A genre that requires massive amounts of work, both practical and CGI, to sell to an audience in a realistic and believable way.

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