Research Article

From Board Games to Video Games and the World of Avatars: *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle*

Melike Doğan[1]* (ID)
Olgahan Bakşi Yalçın[2] (ID)

[1] Acıbadem University, İstanbul,
Türkiye,
melikedgn@gmail.com

[2] Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal University,
Bolu, Türkiye,
olgahanbaksi@gmail.com

*Corresponding Author

Abstract: In the digital age, the relationship between film and literature demonstrates how different forms of art can collaborate to improve the storytelling experience. Rather than competing, these mediums complement one another, each bringing their own strengths to the storytelling process. This mutual relationship not only enhances the audience's experience but also fosters a greater appreciation for both film and literature (Hutcheon, 2006; Sanders, 2016). The various film adaptations of Chris Van Allsburg's picturebook *Jumanji* (1981) are excellent examples of how literature and film can complement and improve one another over time. The first major adaptation of *Jumanji* was released in 1995 starring Robin Williams and directed by Joe Johnston. Decades later, the story of *Jumanji* was revitalized with the releases of *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle* (2017) and *Jumanji: The Next Level* (2019) both directed by Jake Kasdan. These adaptations illustrate the changing nature of storytelling across mediums and how each new iteration introduces new perspectives and engages contemporary audiences in novel ways. Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of heteroglossia and dialogic relationship (1981) are great tools for understanding how different voices and cultural contexts interact within and between texts, thereby revealing the dynamic nature of storytelling and interpretation. Thus, this paper aims to investigate how Bakhtin's concepts of heteroglossia and dialogic relationship function in Jake Kasdan's 2017 sequel, focusing on how the film adaptation evolves in response to its contemporary context.

Keywords: Adaptation Studies, Dialogic Relationship, Heteroglossia, *Jumanji*, Youth Films

1. Introduction

In the digital age, films have ascended to become unparalleled vehicles for storytelling and narrative presentation. Despite their distinct artistic forms, film and literature have become, in fact, not contestants but rather allies with their shared nature of being storytellers and conveyers of narrative forms by constructing a mutual relationship that nourishes each other and incites the reader/audience to revisit each form of art at different times (McFarlane, 1996). Not only do adaptation/film studies provide a wide range of analyses and frameworks for a variety of disciplines, but they also inspire researchers with new perspectives on film and literature. As Yvonne Griggs puts it, "The interdisciplinary nature of adaptation studies ensures a certain inclusivity, offering a dynamic convergence of diverse academic disciplines from film, literature, history, languages, creative writing, media, music, drama, performance art, visual art, and new media" (2016, p. 1). The various film adaptations of Chris Van Allsburg's picturebook *Jumanji* (1981) over different periods serve as one of the finest examples of this phenomenon. While the picturebook is a primary literary work that stimulates children's imaginations and sense of adventure, the film adaptations have reached a larger audience due to their visual and auditory components. Similarly, computer games based on literary works extend the reach and engagement with these stories through interactive experiences. This demonstrates how adapting literary works for film strengthens the power of both art forms, enriching each other and encouraging audiences to rediscover the works over time.

A work of adaptation reflects the historical, sociological, and economic conditions and time in which it is produced; thus, changes are likely to arise not only in content or characters but also in its director(s) and audience (Hutcheon, 2006; Sanders, 2016). The first major film adaptation of Van Allsburg's story, *Jumanji,* was directed by Joe Johnston, starring Robin Williams, and released in 1995. This film introduced a larger audience to the magical and perilous world of the Jumanji game, blending the book's imaginative elements with cinema's visual and auditory capabilities to create a thrilling experience. The success of Johnston's adaptation paved the way for future versions of the story. Two decades later, director Jake Kasdan resurrected the Jumanji franchise with *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle* (2017) and *Jumanji: The Next Level* (2019). These films updated the original concept to make it more appealing to contemporary audiences. Kasdan's adaptations of the board game into a video game preserved the core themes of adventure and transformation while introducing new characters and modernizing the narrative structure. This creative evolution not only paid homage to the original picturebook but also broadened its appeal, demonstrating the enduring relevance and adaptability of Van Allsburg's story. The adaptations of *Jumanji* highlight how the interaction between literature and film can revitalize and reinterpret a story for new generations.

The sequels are clear proof of how the original story stands the test of time, which is reminiscent of what Robert Stam refers to in these words; "we can also see filmic adaptations as 'mutations' that help their source text to 'survive' " (2005, p. 3). Despite the departure from Johnston's narrative focus on the main characters, Judy and Peter, Kasdan's *Jumanji WTTJ* maintains a dialogic with its predecessors, reshaping the story's landscape and characters. In Kasdan's adaptation, the story first takes place in the small town of Brantford, and a group of teenagers from Brantford High School has detention to clear a messy room of the school, where they are drawn into the adventures of the fantasy world of Jumanji. Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of heteroglossia and dialogic relationship are effective instruments for analyzing the versions of an original text in different temporalities. In his work *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (1981), Bakhtin argues that every utterance is imbued with the influence of other voices, whether from social, historical, cultural, or ideological contexts. Heteroglossia, then, refers to the presence of multiple voices and perspectives within a single text: each voice represents a distinct social language or viewpoint, contributing to the richness and complexity of the narrative. The concept of dialogism involves the interaction between different voices and perspectives within a text and between texts (Bakhtin, 1981). This ongoing dialogue shapes meaning and interpretation, emphasizing that no text exists in isolation but rather in conversation with others. Thus, this paper aims to explore how Bakhtin's concepts of heteroglossia and dialogic relationship function in Jake Kasdan's 2017 sequel, examining how the film adaptation evolves according to its contemporary context.

2. Changing Times and Contexts: The Evolution of the Board Game

The magical board game from Johnston's 1995 adaptation is updated for the 21st century in Jake Kasdan's *Jumanji WTTJ* (2017), which opens with Alex Vreeke plugging it into his video game console. The board game evolves into a video console, and players are taken to the magical world of Jumanji via this video game. Like Alan, who gets trapped in the game for 26 years and has to wait for other players to join and free him by rolling a five or an eight in Johnston's 1995 adaptation, Alex gets trapped in the game for 20 years and has to wait for other players in Kasdan's *Jumanji WTTJ*. While players in the 1995 adaptation experience the magical adventures of Jumanji in the real world, the players in Kasdan's adaptation are transformed into the magical world of Jumanji. As Stylianos Mystakidis puts it, the metaverse is an innovative universe and/or a virtual realm of the digital age; "The Metaverse is a post-reality universe, a perpetual and persistent multiuser environment merging physical reality with virtual reality. [...] Its first iteration was a web of virtual worlds where avatars were able to teleport among them" (2022, p. 486). The most extraordinary evolution of the 2017 adaptation is adding an avatar theme with unique abilities and a feeling of virtual reality. The film, thus, evokes a sense of fantasy by transforming real life into a virtual and/or magical world. The games in virtual worlds offer "[...] role-

playing games in fantasy settings where players choose avatars from different classes to develop specific skills or powers, explore or complete quests" (Mystakidis, 2022, p. 490). Blurring the lines between the virtual and physical worlds, *the Jumanji WTTJ* not only adjusts to the technological advances of the day but also updates its concept of heteroglossia to reflect the changing context.

Jake Kasdan's *Jumanji WTTJ* can be regarded as a youth film that targets teens or, interchangeably, adolescents and naturally features young people in leading roles. Katherine Whitehurst points out that scholars have a consensus regarding some specific themes the youth films typically deal with; "youth films engage with narratives of coming-of-age, struggles with authority, sexual development and the institutional management of young people" (2022, p. 32). Similarly, the 2017 adaptation centers around the adventures of a group of high school teens in the fantasy world of Jumanji for a self-quest that results in each character's inevitable growth in different aspects. The high school theme and the issues of problematic teenagers are also related to the concept of heteroglossia since it is timeless and valid for every period. Despite the intense use of advanced computer-generated and visual effects technology in the filmic adaptation, Jerome Chen, the visual effect supervisor, emphasizes the real challenge of the film in these words; "the Jumanji game is magical and made out of more tactile types of visuals, we wanted to it to feel like the colors and the parts of them, of the kids, are being pulled into the game in a very organic way" (Failes, 2017). The Jumanji game, as described by Chen, embodies a magical and tactile visual experience that aims to create an organic immersion for the players. This approach can be seen as a form of ludification, where the boundaries between reality and the game world become indistinguishable, making the experience more engaging and captivating (Larsen, 2019).

In Kasdan's 2017 adaptation, after the four teenagers in the detention room are transformed into Jumanji through the video game console, Nigel Billingsley appears as a significant character who narrates the story's background for both the players and the audience. As Lasse Juel Larsen argues, "computer game elements influence the narrative composition of modern cinema" (2019, p. 457); accordingly, in the film, Nigel is an additional NPC (non-player character) who is only able to give standard instructions to the players and fails to answer any other questions: instead he only parrots his prior sentences or "programmed series of answers" (*Jumanji WWTJ*, 2017). This character addition to the adaptation is indeed a successful attempt to adapt to the computer technology of the 2000s in terms of video games with his cutscenes. Rune Klevyer notes that "cutscenes are effective narrative devices for storytelling in action-based stories" in video games (2002, p. 194). They function as a flashback to provide the background story of the game. When a letter magically appears in Dr. Bravestone's hand, Nigel narrates the historical background of Jumanji through the cutscenes/flashbacks: "The former partner Prof. Russell Van Pelt now nemesis" (*Jumanji WTTJ*, 2017) is after his obsession, the jewel, to acquire dark power. Now, he possesses and dominates all Jumanji creatures, and a curse befalls Jumanji (*Jumanji WTTJ*, 2017). Nigel's pivotal role as both narrator and guide underscores the integration of technology and storytelling, enhancing the immersive experience of the contemporary audience within the game world and thus exemplifying Bakhtin's concepts of heteroglossia and dialogic relationship.

Since Nigel welcomes the players to the magical world and sends them off to the real world, his welcoming and farewell sentences fill the role of prequel, prologue, and epilogue in traditional narratives. He first informs the players and the audience about the game rules; "The goal for you I'll recite in verse; return the jewel and lift the curse. If you want to leave the game, you must save Jumanji and call out its name" (*Jumanji WWTJ*, 2017). Then he relates how to accomplish the primary mission: "to return the jewel to Jaguar's eye and lift the curse" (*Jumanji WTTJ*, 2017). Since "the faith of Jumanji in [their] hands" (*Jumanji WTTJ* 2017), the players will face, overcome, and beat various challenges and/or the villains, which "will give structure and meaning" to the narrative context of the game (Jenkins, 2004). Accordingly, Nigel fulfills this narrative role of the adaptation by leading the players before, after, and during the game through the related cutscenes and by connecting the source text, prior

and present adaptations in terms of narrative similarities, continuities, and alterations. Like movie adaptations, games are shaped by the historical moment of their creation, incorporating elements of current events, technological advancements, and prevailing cultural trends (Larsen, 2019). Hence, with his excellent knowledge of Jumanji as a field guide, Nigel's rhymes also replace the riddles in Van Allsburg's 1981 picture book and Johnston's 1995 adaptation, displaying a dialogic relationship between texts.

Likewise, the players' mission seems to evolve from the source text to its latest adaptation: they seemingly pledge to complete a much greater and more delicate mission in each narrative. Even though their initial goal is to finish the game by calling out its name, Jumanji, in all narratives, the protagonists of the source text merely have the responsibility to finish the game and to restore household order by doing so since the animals of magical board game invade the house in the real world. In the 1995 adaptation, however, the protagonists acquire the mission to save Bantford city both from the villains and creatures of the magical jungle and to restore its peace and order since the magical elements of Jumanji invade and threaten the town and its people. In Kasdan's 2017 adaptation, the mission reaches its highest level with a duty to protect the magical jewel from the villain and save the magical world of Jumanji to reinstate its peaceful order. As the mission gets more arduous in each version and the adaptation captures the features of the time it is produced, the narrative involves more excitement and action and attracts the audience with more thrills.

The evolution of the board game results in significant structural changes across times and texts. Based on the rules of the game, the players roll the dice for the next move and the finish in Van Allsburg's 1981 picturebook, while the player stones move magnetically in Johnston's 1995 adaptation with the appearance of the riddles magically on a crystal ball before another step. Van Allsburg's picturebook conveys a specific cultural context of the early 1980s with its language and illustrations: The 1995 adaptation introduces new characters and expands the narrative, reflecting the concerns and sensibilities of the mid-1990s and the cultural and cinematic development of the time. The 2017 adaptation updates the story to the context of the digital age by inserting levels that are appropriate to the nature of video games as follows; "From the Deep, the Mighty Roar, the Bazaar, the Transportation Shed, The Canyon, the Defenders" (*Jumanji WTTJ*, 2017). In line with this notion, we can remember what Stam posits; "Any text that has "slept with" another text (…) has also slept with all the texts that other text has slept with" (2004, p. 27). Therefore, it is possible to track Bakhtin's idea of the dialogic relationship, which emphasizes the interaction between different voices and perspectives within a text and between texts. Through a magical adventure in a fantasy world, the more levels the protagonists pass, the more they grasp the importance of their mission in completing the game. The shift from the board game to the video game in Kasdan's 2017 adaptation reflects the changing landscape of entertainment and the digital immersion of contemporary society with a focus on issues such as digital identities, social media influence, and modern teenage life.

The theme of life count is another creative alteration in Kasdan's 2017 adaptation since it triggers excitement and fulfills the expectations of an action-adventure movie for modern audiences. The three little stick tattoos on the arms of the players signify the number of lives left after each death. If players consume all their lives one by one, it represents the imminent end of their gameplay experience, posing a genuine threat to their progression and enjoyment (Jenkins, 2004). The film producer Matt Tolmach explicates this narrative function of life and death counts as such; "We wanted to build a classic action-adventure movie with really high stakes. The stakes are very real. You can die in Jumanji. We knew there would be tons of comedy in the movie but we wanted it layered within action that was visceral and exciting" (quoted in Bruce, 2017). Besides, the idea of life counts offers layers of meaning: under the nature of a videogame, the players have multiple but limited lives (Fassone, Giordano, & Girina, 2015). The players eventually realize they are in a real video game since the sudden death of other players enlightens the protagonists and the audience with the loss of a tattoo each time they die. The concept of

life counts in video games is also a reference to the principal, Mr. Bentley's words on the significance of one life when they all end up in his room for detention: "This is what you should be thinking: Who you are … in this moment of time … and who you want to be. You get one life. You decide how you are gonna spend it" (*Jumanji WTTJ,* 2017). Ironically, the fear of losing their three lives in the fantasy world teaches them the value of their "one" life in the real world, as well as the responsibility of deciding who they are, what they live for, and how they live in an era of rapid technological advancements and digital experiences.

3. Adaptation Process of the Characters into Their Avatars

The characters in Kasdan's 2017 adaptation must adapt to the new bodies and accept the circumstances of the fantastical world they are transferred to. This adaptation process may resonate with current discussions about identity formations and self-expression. Individuals in today's society are increasingly navigating complex identities influenced by gender, race, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. The characters' journey in Jumanji, where they inhabit avatars vastly different from their own identities, parallels this exploration of self-discovery and acceptance in a diverse and ever-changing world. The notion of character evolution and transformation is also epitomized through the concept of avatars, symbolizing the profound change experienced by the characters. Their eventual transformation is the physical manifestation of this realization, highlighting the journey of self-discovery and growth. Jake Kasdan clarifies the reason behind the use of avatars in his version of *Jumanji* as follows;

> This is a time for self-discovery for them, but it plays out in this fantastical context. So, as they are figuring out who they are in real life, they suddenly find themselves occupying other people's bodies in this game-people who on the surface are nothing like them. I thought it was really a fun idea, but also really interesting. What would you discover about yourself, if you could spend a day in somebody else's body? (quoted in Bruce, 2017)

Kasdan's comment on his 2017 adaptation reveals his intention for the process of self-discovery within a fantastical context. Therefore, while navigating their own identities in real life, the characters are thrust into a situation where they occupy markedly different avatars. This juxtaposition creates a unique dynamic in which they must reconcile their true selves with the personas they assume in the game.

To grasp the protagonists' journey of maturation, one must scrutinize their perceptions of each other and themselves, as well as their initial responses to the alterations in their physical forms, particularly their avatar manifestations. To illustrate, while Fridge specifically picks his avatar since the name sounds like a "badass" and Bethany selects her avatar because he is a "carto genius," Spencer and Martha choose their avatars rather randomly (*Jumanji WTTJ*, 2017). Even the way their selections of avatars reveal their perspectives of life and their characteristics before the magical game. Bethany and Fridge are too concerned about how they look or what they represent, even if it is a character choice in a video game; however, Spencer and Martha's quick choices prove that they are the opposite. The detention room scene is crucial for the audience to observe their perspectives on each other as well. When Bethany, for instance, utters, "This is probably the lamest thing I have ever done" (*Jumanji WTTJ*, 2017), Martha responds, "I highly doubt that" (*Jumanji WTTJ*, 2017). The athlete Fridge, as a girl magnet, rolls his eyes at his over-confidence and popularity while Spencer awkwardly tries to flirt with Martha. All protagonists belittle and judge each other for the lack of what he/she has in terms of physical appearance/beauty, smartness/dumbness, and (un)manly/(un)womanly attitudes.

Throughout the game, the characters undergo significant personal transformations, which are incredibly relatable to modern young audiences who frequently have to cope with contemporary issues such as digital identities, social media influence, and modern teenage life. The denial and/or refusal period at the beginning of the game refers to the characters' initial reaction when they first encounter

their adult avatars. This phase typically involves a sense of disbelief or rejection as they come to terms with their transformed appearances and identities within the game. To illustrate, when the protagonists are magically dropped in Jumanji, Martha feels uncomfortable with her feminine look in a short and top outfit that makes her think half-naked in their first jungle moments; "I feel like I am wearing a bikini at school" (*Jumanji WTTJ*, 2017). Spencer, comparatively neutral, utters, "What happened to my voice? Where is my hair?" (*Jumanji WTTJ*, 2017) and then touches his big muscles to check if they truly exist. Fridge rebels against his avatar body in his comic and cracked voice, saying: "I do not have the top two feet of my body" (*Jumanji WTTJ,* 2017), and Bethany expresses her surprise in the following words: "Oh my God, I am an overweight, middle-aged man" (*Jumanji WTTJ*, 2017). They find themselves in the bodies of adult avatars who possess the features of a person they have earlier belittled, criticized, judged, or distasted in their real lives. Though inhabiting their adult avatar bodies, the characters are challenged to embody perspectives they have previously criticized or opposed.

In the adult avatar world of the Jumanji video game, the transformations of the characters challenge their perceptions of themselves and each other, reflecting contemporary societal attitudes towards identity, appearance, and privilege. Martha, who previously teased Bethany for her appearance, now embodies a sexy persona. At the same time, Bethany finds herself in the body of a male character, experiencing a reversal of her beauty and privileges. Similarly, in reality, Fridge, once the athletic leading man, becomes a slower, less physically appealing character, while Spencer, previously ridiculed as 'Mouse' for his timid nature, transforms into the courageous and muscular Dr. Bravestone. These transformations mirror the characters' growth and self-discovery as they learn to put aside their egos and embrace the strengths of their fellow players. Initially resistant to taking on a supporting role, Fridge learns the value of cooperation and humility when he aids Dr. Bravestone in evading danger. Through these role reversals, the protagonists gain a deeper understanding of themselves and each other, fostering empathy and challenging their preconceived notions. In youth literature and films, characters learn to see beyond their initial biases and connect on a deeper level with others (Bucher & Hinton, 2010). Ultimately, the magical world of Jumanji catalyzes personal growth and introspection, prompting the four teenagers to reconsider their identities and relationships both in the game and in reality.

Kasdan's adaptation unveils the path to self-discovery and personal growth through accepting one's true identity, understanding others, recognizing their circumstances, and adapting to unfamiliar physical forms and environments. The characters who tend to avoid each other in the real world are now forced to interact for an ultimate goal. As they interact and mature during this magical journey, it finally becomes inevitable for them to regulate their relationship in the real world as well. Bethany is arguably the most resistant character to change as she severely suffers from nomophobia and deprivation of her physical beauty. As the most disgruntled character in the beginning, she repeatedly complains about their present avatar bodies and her phoneless state, which worsens the situation for her. As if a warning since she still keeps thinking about calling, texting, or changing her status to "stuck in a jungle" on her mobile phone, a hippo shows up behind her and swallows her by costing her one life count at the very moment (*Jumanji WTTJ*, 2017). It can be interpreted as one who needs to adapt to whatever situation and/or environment he/she is in case of an irreversible or an improbable change, as it occasionally happens in real life as well. The contrary state with complaints, as in Bethany's case, can lead to losses otherwise. As she keeps crying, "Where is my phone"? (*Jumanji WTTJ*, 2017) The others keep reminding her of their priority: survival in the magical jungle of the game (Jenkins, 2004).

4. Multiple Layers of Identity and Perspectives

Bakhtin's concepts of heteroglossia and dialogic relationship can be linked to the narrative structure and themes of *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle* (2017), which evolves in terms of character development while staying loyal to the source text, particularly regarding the rules of the magical board game. This

loyalty illustrates heteroglossia by showcasing the diverse voices and perspectives inherent in the Jumanji universe through its diverse characters and their avatars. Each character brings a unique background, set of skills, and personality traits to the game, creating a rich tapestry of voices that interact and intersect throughout the narrative. This diversity of perspectives reflects the multiplicity of voices in any society and the varied experiences and viewpoints that shape individual identities. Furthermore, when combined with the characters' real-life skills, the avatars' specialized abilities add to the narrative's dynamic nature. This interplay of identities and perspectives enriches the story, allowing for the exploration of themes such as teamwork, collaboration, and interdependence (Bucher & Hinton, 2010). As the characters work together to overcome the game's challenges and eventually achieve their goal (Jenkins, 2004; Tootell and Freeman, 2014), their voices and experiences combine to form a collective narrative emphasizing unity and cooperation in the face of adversity.

To begin with, Spencer's expertise in video games translates into a valuable real-life skill: his ability to foresee the game's structure. Spencer, or his avatar Dr. Bravestone, anticipates the increasing difficulty of each level, stating, "Levels are gonna get harder as we go along" (*Jumanji WTTJ*, 2017). Similarly, Bethany, as Prof. Shelly, uses her expertise in cartography to interpret the supposedly blank map of Jumanji magically, guiding the group on their next course of action. Their collaboration reaches its climax only when they fully accept their and the others' avatar forms and themselves in full terms. They come to understand that no one is superior to the other and everyone is equally important and precious with his/her peculiar skills and characteristics, particularly in teamwork. In other words, each of the protagonists is indispensable in finishing the game, even if he/she seems less/more potent due to their strengths/weaknesses. Without one's gifted or real-life skills in the magical game, it is impossible to survive, accomplish their mission, and finish the game. Hence, they all use the combination of skills they have attained in real life or a magical jungle if/when necessary. Most importantly, leveling up in the magical video game and overcoming every obstacle becomes possible only when/if a relationship is formed with their avatars and the other avatars' and with interaction with their real selves and each other. The more they interact with each other, the more the characters accept the pros and cons of their avatars, internalize their real selves, and (re)form their subjectivity.

As a teenager keen on texting and taking unnatural photos for her Instagram profile, one of Bethany's real-life skills is flirting. In her avatar as Dr. Shelly, Bethany teaches Martha how to use feminine tactics, such as flipping her hair and walking gracefully, to divert the attention of Van Pelt's guards. This allows them to steal a plane for their mission by leveraging Bethany's expertise in distraction. Martha's clumsiness in flirting and displaying feminine behavior, as well as Bethany's lessons in femininity in her masculine body, provide comic and laugh-out-loud moments for the audience. At this point, Martha and Bethany engage with each other through their real selves but within their avatar bodies. The audience witnesses this interaction as a demonstration of maturation and transformation. Rather than belittling or judging each other, Martha embraces Bethany's teachings on feminine attitudes, while Bethany humbly offers to teach Martha how to flirt: "I can't talk to guys. I'm terrible at it. I can give some pointers" (*Jumanji WTTJ*, 2017). This flirtation scene is crucial as it illustrates the abandonment of mutual judgments, the acceptance of each other's individuality, and the development of mutual empathy. By highlighting the multiplicity of voices and perspectives within the narrative in line with the concept of heteroglossia, the film also emphasizes the richness and complexity of human experience while celebrating the power of collaboration and teamwork in overcoming obstacles.

Fridge/Mouse's journey of self-acceptance as his avatar identity unfolds in a pivotal scene where he encounters a wild elephant. At this moment, he embraces his role as Mouse Finbar, the zoologist, signaling his acknowledgment of and integration into his new persona. This acceptance is exemplified in his introduction to the elephant, where he confidently identifies himself as a zoologist and a backpack carrier. As he fully embraces his avatar identity, Fridge/Mouse begins leveraging his zoologist expertise to navigate the game's final-level challenges. His transformation is particularly evident when he utilizes

his zoological knowledge to communicate with, control, and ride an elephant—a task requiring skill and confidence. By drawing on his real-life profession within the game context, Fridge/Mouse demonstrates the seamless integration of his real-world and magical abilities, highlighting the convergence of his identity across both realms. Furthermore, Fridge/Mouse's acceptance of his avatar identity leads to synthesizing his real-life and game-related skills. In the climactic final level of the game, he employs his experience as a football player to devise a strategic plan known as "The Double Reverse Refrigerator" (*Jumanji WTTJ*, 2017). Drawing upon his role as a playmaker in football, Fridge/Mouse assigns specific defensive and attacking plays to each member. This strategic approach not only showcases his ability to adapt his real-life skills to the challenges of the game but also underscores the importance of teamwork and coordination in achieving their ultimate objective—to return the jewel to the Jaguar's eye and complete the game.

Finally, Spencer/Dr. Bravestone's parallels with Alan's emotional state in the 1995 adaptation are evident as they are both portrayed as the most fearful characters in their respective films. In both narratives, this continuity is further emphasized by the presence of the villain, Van Pelt, serving as a symbol of the complex nature of human morality. According to Bakhtin's concept of the dialogic relationship, characters like Van Pelt disrupt the established moral order, reflecting the conflicting voices and perspectives present within human nature. As Jamey Heit argues, "Evil's purpose is to provide a gauge to upset the established moral order. ... Evil, then, reflects the desires that the narrator knows not to speak" (quoted in Schäfer, 2014, p. 3). Thus, evil characters like Van Pelt create a dialogue between the protagonist's desires and fears, challenging their moral convictions and forcing them to confront their inner conflicts. In the film, Van Pelt's descent into darkness mirrors the internal struggle between good and evil within each character, highlighting the theme of identity formation and individual growth. The defeat of the villain becomes a pivotal moment for the protagonists, leading to their transformation and the realization of courage and self-confidence. This recurring theme of facing one's fears for maturation is essential in youth films (McCallum, 1999) and, thus, underscores the fidelity of the narrative to the core message of the source text.

5. The Profound Impact of Character Interactions on Personal Transformations

The protagonists' interactions catalyze their self-discovery and growth. Each character serves as a reflective mirror, revealing aspects of themselves and exposing suppressed realities. Through this dynamic exchange, they are forced to confront previously avoided or concealed realities. The interaction between Martha/Ruby and Bethany/Dr. Shelly is highly crucial in this sense. In a rare tranquil moment within the jungle, Martha offers a reflection of Bethany's persona, remarking, "I think you just live in, like, the hot popular girl bubble. You know, where everybody treats you like a princess or an object. Maybe it makes you a little self-absorbed or something" (*Jumanji WTTJ*, 2017). Martha succinctly encapsulates Bethany's unawareness of her self-centered tendencies and reliance on physical beauty as a measure of self-worth. In response, Bethany, embodying Dr. Shelly, offers a mirror image of Martha's character, suggesting, "Maybe the reason why you're so judgy is because you're afraid people aren't gonna like you, so you decide not to like them first? You're a babe. Own it" (*Jumanji WTTJ*, 2017). Here, Bethany astutely points out Martha's defensive, judgmental nature as a shield against her insecurities. Through social media, ads, and/or peer judgments via social media, young people are exposed to these norms, which cause them not only to judge their values accordingly but also to have difficulties in accepting or expressing their sexual appearances. Bethany, in this respect, is a perfect example of this exposure. This exchange not only highlights the significance of acceptance and empowerment in embracing one's true identity but also exemplifies Bakhtin's idea of heteroglossia.

The interaction between the four protagonists is significant because it allows the characters to mature and form their identities as a result of their confrontation with one another (McCallum, 1999; Tootell and Freeman, 2014). The interaction between Spencer/Dr. Bravestone and Fridge/Mouse is a more

intense confrontation. Fridge blames Spencer for their predicament despite their joint decision to cheat and their willingness to start the game in the detention room. He accuses Spencer of getting him kicked off the team and trapped in his small avatar body, and Jumanji: "You got me kicked off the team. Then you got me stuck in whatever this is. And you wonder why we are not friends no more" (*Jumanji WTTJ*, 2017). Spencer responds, "We are not friends because I am not cool enough to hang out with you, so you pretended not to know me anymore until you needed me to do your homework" (*Jumanji WTTJ*, 2017). This exchange reveals the suppressed feelings and thoughts of the characters towards each other, addressing issues such as peer bullying that the characters encounter in real life. Bakhtin's idea of heteroglossia is evident in this scene when Fridge challenges Spencer like a bully, pushing him over a cliff and costing him a life count. However, Spencer catches Fridge at the edge, knowing they need all their life counts to finish the game. This moment also underscores the importance of prioritizing the group's success over personal grievances, illustrating that maturity involves setting aside ego and emotions to act responsibly. This confrontation is also highly relatable to contemporary audiences navigating complex personal and professional landscapes.

The magical game tests their courage and collaboration skills in the bazaar scene where the protagonists search for their missing player, Alex. Being a staring star as a real-life skill, Bethany/Dr. Shelly accepts to stare at the black mamba, Fridge/Mouse defangs the poisonous snake as a magical life skill, while Spencer/Dr. Bravestone holds the snake. A crucial lesson emerges as the little boy NPC advises, "Trust each other and never blink" (*Jumanji WTTJ*, 2017), emphasizing that teamwork requires complete trust in each other's skills. The sea pilot Alex also highlights the importance of collaboration, having been trapped in the jungle for 20 years due to his inability to complete the game alone. He rescues the group from Van Pelt's guards. He guides them through a dangerous labyrinth, living in Alan Parrish's old shelter, a direct reference to the 1995 adaptation, which reads, "Alan Parrish was here" (*Jumanji WTTJ*, 2017), creating a sense of continuity, which is in line with Bakhtin's dialogic relationship. Bethany's interaction with Alex is particularly significant. When Alex loses his last life count to a mosquito bite, Bethany sacrifices one of her own lives to save him with CPR, demonstrating her maturation and selflessness. She no longer exhibits selfish behavior, understanding the value of sacrificing for others. Additionally, when the other protagonists mock Martha's awkward flirting, Bethany defends her, recognizing her inexperience and celebrating her success. She embraces Martha, showing empathy and shifting from her previously judgmental attitude. Bethany's evolution into a character who values true friendship and teamwork indicates a transformation in her criteria for judging life and people.

The transformative power of the magical video game is likely to be most efficient on Bethany and Fridge since they have higher egos and are more self-centered beforehand. Once they learn their lessons and mature, they both manage to smooth the rough edges of their egos, changing their relations with themselves and others. In a conversation with Alex close to the end of the film, Bethany, for instance, admits her selfishness; "sometimes it's easy to get so focused on your own stuff that you forget other people have problems too" (*Jumanji WTTJ*, 2017). She also confesses this maturation is related to her distant relationship with her mobile phone throughout the adventure due to her release from her prior nomophobia state; "I feel like ever since I lost my phone, my other senses have heightened" (*Jumanji WTTJ*, 2017). The film narrative highlights the problematic effects of the digital age on teenagers, demonstrating Bakhtin's heteroglossia concept. The more one and/or teenagers are addicted to their phones and social media, the less they get mature and discover their true identities. On the contrary, they are more likely to have problems not only with themselves regarding self-respect, self-love, and self-value but also with their relationships, which lack respect, love, value, or empathy for others. It is clear that Kasdan's 2017 adaptation highlights the importance of real-world experiences and connections in fostering personal growth and authentic relationships is evident.

Fridge/Mouse gradually accepts his inferior position in terms of skills and physical appearance in the jungle, as well as Spencer/Dr. Bravestone's superior role is as the leader of the group. Stripped of his

usual attributes, Fridge learns to manage his ego, step back, and respect the abilities and characteristics of others. By experiencing life in a more petite body with limited skills, he develops empathy for Spencer. For example, Fridge teaches Spencer how to flirt, advising him what to do if a girl tries to kiss him: "What if she tries to kiss me?" "Then you just kiss her back" (*Jumanji WTTJ*, 2017). This reflects Fridge's maturation, as the real-world Fridge would have previously dismissed Spencer on such matters. Alex also transforms, overcoming his fears and lack of self-confidence. When faced with flying the plane in the transportation shed, he hesitates due to his single remaining life count, expressing his fear: "No, I told you guys. I am not a good pilot. I do not want to die. I am freaking out" (*Jumanji WTTJ*, 2017). Bethany and Martha encourage him, reminding him of his special abilities and crucial role in the game. Despite the attacks from Van Pelt's guards, Alex successfully pilots the plane, demonstrating the growth of his self-confidence and mental strength. The narrative once more emphasizes the significance of teamwork and relationships in the process of self-discovery and development within the magical video game universe (Jenkins, 2004).

Spencer also undergoes a crucial transformation in terms of his fears and self-confidence throughout the game. Initially, he is a cowardly, introverted teenager who repeatedly tells himself, "Don't cry, don't cry" (*Jumanji WTTJ*, 2017) when faced with danger. Gamification often aims to foster personal development by providing players with challenges that help them build confidence and skills (Larsen, 2019; Tootell and Freeman, 2014). In line with this notion, as the game progresses, Spencer evolves into a brave leader, solving problems and saving his friends multiple times, such as when he fixes a helicopter. Spencer's avatar, Dr. Bravestone, with his perfect physique and no weaknesses, helps Spencer rebuild his self-confidence and realize his true potential in real life. This transformation allows him to confront his fears, lead the group with his knowledge of video games, and re-evaluate his relationships. A pivotal moment occurs when Spencer doubts Martha's attraction, thinking it is directed towards Bravestone rather than himself. Martha reassures him that her feelings are for Spencer, not his avatar, further boosting his self-esteem. Ultimately, Spencer learns that his courage and decisions come from within, and his avatar merely serves as a vehicle for showcasing these traits in the magical world of Jumanji. This interaction and mutual influence between Marta and Spencer lead to a richer and more dynamic narrative, an example of Bakhtin's dialogic relationship.

The final level of the game, called "The Defenders," is significant both for the relationships between Fridge/Mouse and Spencer/Dr. Bravestone, as well as the fundamental message of the film. Spencer tests his courage by climbing giant trees with the jewel, but he falls after being startled by a small squirrel, which costs him one of his life counts and leaves only one remaining. In this moment of fear and hesitation, Spencer admits to Fridge, "I can't do this. Who am I kidding? I am not an adventurer. I am not brave" (*Jumanji WTTJ*, 2017). Fridge reassures him, saying, "I just saw you hanging out of a helicopter. We can do this. We can do this together" (*Jumanji WTTJ*, 2017). This scene highlights that Fridge/Mouse has matured enough to help his friend rebuild his confidence, emphasizing that collaboration is key to overcoming challenges in teamwork. Moreover, Spencer's fear stems from having only one life left. Fridge echoes the principal's didactic message in this scene: "We always have one life, man. (…) That is how it works. The question is, how are you gonna live it? Which guy are you gonna decide to be? Did I just quote our principal? What the hell is this game doing to me?" (*Jumanji WTTJ*, 2017). These lines underscore the didactic function of the magical video game (Larsen, 2019), reminding players to value their lives and choose the person they want to be. These themes, prevalent in youth literature, encourage protagonists to value their lives and actively shape their identities (Bucher & Hinton, 2010).

Kasdan's 2017 adaptation engages in a dialogic relationship with the source text and Johnston's 1995 adaptation when Bethany is held hostage by the villain Van Pelt to claim the jewel in the game's last level. Bethany is willing to die rather than give the jewel to the villain since it is the most precious element to finish the game. In this scene, the audience witnesses a complete friendship and teamwork

that is built on total trust and sacrifice, as well as the blending of virtual and real-life experiences. These recurring themes in youth literature and films are explored through different lenses in each adaptation, enriching the overall narrative through their layered interpretations. Alex suggests that Van Pelt should take him instead of Bethany, who is surrounded by his jaguars. As Fridge/Mouse accepts his avatar identity as a zoologist and backpackman, he is now able to control an elephant that manages to fling the jaguars. While Bethany and Alex fight the villain back, Martha sacrifices one of her life counts to take the jewel from Venoms, which is her weakness. As Spence rides to the steep hill of Jaguar with a motorbike, Martha gives him the jewel up in the air. With a full collaboration, they finish the game as Spencer replaces the jewel in Jaguar's eye. As they are magically transformed into real life by Nigel's magical handshake, everything is back to normal. Since the magical game spits Alex back to 1996, the freak house is now peaceful with a whole family. Alex shows his appreciation to Bethany by naming his daughter after the girl who saved his life.

6. Conclusion

Throughout the magical game of Jumanji, each protagonist evolves in ways that uniquely align with their individual maturation needs. The final school scene portrays the transformation of each character: Spencer and Fridge greet each other in front of the school as close friends since their relationship has evolved into a true friendship. Unlike her prior social media addiction mood, Bethany now makes summer plans to go backpacking in nature, which shocks Marta and the others. They have now become a real group of friends caring for each other and appreciating their differences. The moment they hear the drumbeats, signifying the call for the following players, they smash the video game to prevent others from playing it but leave it open outside. In terms of fidelity, this scene resembles the scene in Van Allsburg's picturebook in which Judy and Peter abandon the game in the park. At the same time, Alan and Sarah throw the game into the river in Johnston's 1995 adaptation, exemplifying Bakhtin's heteroglossia and dialogic relationship concepts. All protagonists supposedly get rid of the game in the final scene; however, their way of doing it creates the same impression and expectation. Thus, the final scene in Kasdan's *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle* (2017) hints at upcoming sequels in which other players of future generations are likely to find the game and experience magical adventures in their contemporary contexts, reflecting new societal and cultural concerns. The adaptations of Van Allsburg's *Jumanji* (1981) maintain the essence of adventure and the magical game but add new layers of humor, character development, and interactivity.

Discussions in adaptation studies primarily revolve around two issues: the perceived supremacy of literary works over screen adaptations and the question of fidelity. A significant reason behind the discussion of fidelity is the disregard for adaptation as a new art form that employs its artistic devices (Stam, 2005). However, these devices transform the source text into a new form, making it compatible with and appropriate to its new medium (Hutcheon, 2006; Sanders, 2016). In line with this notion, when the Jumanji board game evolves with innovative additions reflecting the technological, cultural, and social contexts of the time of adaptation, it indicates Bakhtin's heteroglossia, as each version of Jumanji incorporates different voices and perspectives from its time, creating a multifaceted and layered narrative. The protagonists' self-discovery and growth are consistent with the narrative principles of youth and children's literature and films. When the magical adventures in Jumanji facilitate real-life lessons, allowing the protagonists to discover their true selves and eventually mature, one can identify Bakhtin's concept of a dialogic relationship involving interaction and mutual influence between diverse voices, leading to a more prosperous and dynamic narrative. Kasdan's adaptation is more than just entertaining; it also provides contemporary audiences with meaningful insights into personal growth, teamwork's value, and empathy and support's significance. By embarking on fantastical adventures, the characters' development mirrors real-life challenges and triumphs, making their journeys engaging and instructive for modern viewers.

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