

# The changes made to comic book story arcs for television adaptations

## Analysis of the difference in comics and the television series' based on them

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## **Abstract**

This study compares the animated television series which started in 2003 titled Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles to the source material, the comic book series also titled Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles which started in 1984. This study is based on a collection of major story arcs which the comic book series and the television series have in common for the purpose of being as extensive as possible. The purpose of this study is to understand how the changes made in the adaptation process changes the nature of the story arcs and to understand why some of the changes were made. This has been accomplished by building on the theories of remediation, thematic transformation, fidelity, story structure and mass appeal. The methods used were comparative analysis, story analysis and thematic analysis. The concluding statements are that the changes were primarily made for the purpose of appealing to a younger audience, improve the structure of the story arcs and to accommodate for time constraints.

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## **Foreword**

Adaptation is a subject matter that I show a great amount of interest in and I am quite grateful to have gotten the chance to write about it in academia, it has been quite an opportunity for me. I would like to thank my supervisor for his help during the process of writing this thesis.

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## **Introduction**

When a piece of media is adapted for a broader audience than originally intended, for example if an independently published comic book is turned into a television series, there are usually changes that come with the change in approach to appeal to the broader audience. Notably, there is a lack of research into the specific topic of adapting a piece of media which had an older audience in mind than the adaptation is intended for. In the American comic book market, there is relatively little restraint in what is typically published in comparison to television. This would naturally mean the content will contain certain changes beyond simply just translating what is on the page to the screen.

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles is a comic book series created by American artists Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird, first published in 1984 by Mirage Studios and was distributed through conventions and the direct market. Television adaptations of the series have been made since 1987 and while the 2003 adaptation is not the only one made for a much broader audience, it does contain more direct adaptations of comic book issues than others, thus making it relatively ideal for comparison. This study has selected five core story arcs from the comic book series with direct adaptations in the television series and has compared them through the analysis of the changes that have been made. In general, the television series can be thought of as having primarily made the changes for three major purposes, changing the values presented, improving the story structure and accounting for the change in mediums.

This study will only focus on episodes directly adapted from comic book issues, rather than analyzing episodes that may have similarities but do not have a clear connection to existing stories. In order to qualify as a direct adaptation, the episode must have the same premise and showcase similar events. However, episodes which are not direct adaptations will still be acknowledged due to connected storylines.

## **Purpose and Questions**

The primary purpose of this study is to determine what changes are made when comic books are adapted into a television series, through the lens of remediation, thematic transformation, fidelity and story structure. A problem with much existing research on the subject which has been obtained in preparation of this study, is that there is primarily a concern with just the nature of making changes in a general sense, rather than observation and analysis of why specific changes are made. As an example Bortolotti and Hutcheon are primarily concerned with the nature of adaptation as representing a natural change in how stories evolve (Bortolotti and Hutcheon, 2007, p.452), similarly Sanders considers changes to be a way keeping the stories relevant (Sanders, 2016, p.23), another example is how Furlong considers different interpretation between reader and author to be an explanation for perceived differences (Anne Furlong, 2012). While these partially explain the nature of changes in adaptation, they do not explain anything in particular but rather just the general reasons for why changes may be made without using concrete examples.

In hopes to rectify this problem, this study directly compares an adaptation to the source material and analyzes the specific changes made in order to determine the purpose in a particular case. A major desire by the researcher in this study is to determine how the changes alter the themes and content of the story and if these make for particularly important changes. While research into the topic of why adaptations may contain deliberate changes and what effect they may have on the story do in fact exist (Cattrysse, 1992; Bolter and Grusin, 1999, pp.55–56; Sanders, 2016, p.23;

Hermansson, 2020, p.17) but may not be about comic books and their television adaptations specifically. A very notable factor, as well as an example used in this study as how elements of the story can change in an adaptation, in this particular case is that the target audience of the television series is not the same as the comic book series and this is a factor worth considering, as the target audience for the television series is much younger than the target audience for the comic book series. Previous research has been done into the topic of mass appeal, theme variation and thematic transformation (Asheim, 1951, p.334; Propp, 2009, pp.113–115; Pearson, Uricchio and Brooker, 2015, p.6; Hermansson, 2020, p.17), though the change age group is a dimension not really addressed in the previous research.

The question in regards to change in target audience is what if anything can be attributed to the difference between the two different target audiences? This is just one of many questions posed in this study regarding the changes, others include the change from smaller stories to bigger ones and the necessity of filler. The methods used for this study are primarily comparative analysis and story analysis, these two methods when used in combination will allow for the researcher to understand the two versions of the story individually and determine what possible outcome this has for the themes and structure of the adaptation. This may alternatively be phrased as which changes have been made in the transition from the medium of comic books to the medium of a television series and why have these changes occurred? What purpose do they serve in this particular adaptation? What this study does indicate is the alterations of the story structure from smaller stories to a larger narrative have been made to better suit the medium of television. Questions such as these are why there is a need for a comparative analysis, as the differences need to be observed in order to make concrete statements about them.

In short, the purpose of this study can be summarized as an attempt to understand the changes made from the medium of comic books to the medium of television, both changes made for pure necessity and additional factors beyond necessity, and how these changes have an impact on the story.

### **Previous Research and literature on the subject of Comic books, Stories and Adaptation**

Research and literature into the subject of comic books into other media has been written before from multiple different angles, not to mention how much research has also been made about the concept of adaptation and how to approach it in general regardless what the mediums in question are. This forms a concrete understanding of what an adaptation does in terms of changing the material when placed into the new context of a different medium. A problem with much of the existing research and other literature on the subject of comic books and their adaptations is that while it is somewhat useful for this study, much of it fails to analyze the actual stories and their changes. An example of existing literature which does not contribute much to the study is Barker's writing on the subject of comic books which is primarily focused on ideology and cultural influence (Barker, 1990, pp.1–16), and while it is useful in the minor way of speculating on the reasons why certain details may have been altered in the adaptation, it is however not very useful as the primary concern with this study is the adaptation process and the stories themselves, rather than the cultural influence or what can be said about the social values presented.

Additionally, much of the research and literature on the subject of adaptation and comic books are focused on the is also very much focused on the audience reception and cultural impact rather than the adaptation process itself (Anne Furlong, 2012; Pearson, Uricchio and Brooker, 2015, pp.171– 178), thus literature which is focused more on story structure and the reasoning behind the adaptation process is more useful and are thus the primary references.

In regards to comic book characters within their native medium of comic books, a very long history of publication can often lead to changes to continuity and what does and does not qualify as canonical. In the particular case of Batman, the character has been in new continuities, one such instance is “New 52” in which Batman alongside other characters in the DC universe were placed into a new continuity but the generally understood elements of the previous continuity were seemingly kept as references to previous continuity and the new continuity did not re-establish many older elements which were still present, which implies some level of interconnectivity (Pearson, Uricchio and Brooker, 2015, pp.53–54, 63). This is something which does apply to Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles as well, as there is something of a general connectivity between the stories, even if they do not connect directly. As an example, the story “Terror by transmat!” does not have any direct connections to the main story of the series and the placement in continuity is not entirely obvious, however the story is written under the assumption that the reader is already familiar with the characters and concepts of the main storyline, as there is no attempt to introduce any specific details to new readers (Eastman, 2015, pp.70–80). As a reader you may sometimes just be expected to already be familiar with the series, even if there is no clear connection between the stories.

A particularly interesting approach is into the interpretation difference between the audience and the creator of the adaptation. As not everything in the source material is inherently unambiguous in regards to the meaning, the audience will have to interpret the meaning, which will also apply to the author of the adaptation. Because the author of the adaptation may not interpret the source material in the same way as the audience, the result can be an inadvertent difference in opinion as to what the meaning is and this may result in incongruence between what was expected by the audience and what the adaptation depicted (Anne Furlong, 2012). This is not necessarily any objective measure, as anyone in the audience could have interpreted the source material in a different way, which could have easily resulted in a variety of differing adaptations even in faithful or accurate adaptations.

It may thus be prudent to remember that even if one could consider the adaptation unfaithful by their own understanding of the source material, it may not actually have been the intention to create something that deviates greatly from the source material and thus it should not be taken as the intention. It is of course possible that the author of the adaptation intended to deviate a great deal from the source material but that would not necessarily be the intention. If there is a great deal of deviation involved, then it may be noted and given an explanation as for why this is the case without assuming it was the intention.

A possible way of viewing adaptation of fiction and in media is in the way in which parallels can be drawn to the biological definition of adaptation, which is to say that there is something of an “evolutionary” component to it (Bortolotti and Hutcheon, 2007, p.452). Changes made to a story can in some ways be considered a natural part of storytelling itself, as the story may change to become better suited as a story, much in the same way one could consider biological evolution as an “improvement” of a life-form. As a result, it is possible to judge the changes made in an adaptation as a deliberate attempt to improve the story simply beyond just what the remediation requires for the story to work in the new medium.

While this can be a somewhat unusual approach to the concept of adaptation in media studies, it does however explain why some changes may have been made in order to improve on the story or make it more suitable to the new medium. Thus this “evolutionary” approach has been considered a useful tool in trying to understand how or why some changes to the story structure have been made.

One possible way of approaching the idea of adaptation is to consider it as “commentary” on the original work, which would be in the case of deviating from it in very noticeable ways or if there is something of a desire to keep it “relevant” (Sanders, 2016, p.23). This may be important to keep in mind for further studies, as the changes made to a story may in fact be intentional beyond simply the author ignoring the existing material or losing focus on attempting to keep fidelity. If the story changes direction or has new material not included in the source material, considering the potential motive behind this could be worth considering.

Similar to the “evolutionary” approach this “commentary” concept is another approach which does help explain the differences beyond simply having the story fit the constraints of a new medium. Thus it has been used in this study to in part understand why the adaptation differs from the source material along with the other research to improve the understanding of the adaptation process.

In terms of adaptations into new forms of media it is worth noting that conventions may not translate well and some changes may be expected. Even for simple similarities, such as the mere fact that both film and comic books both rely on visuals to convey the story, are challenged in the adaptation process due to the very fundamental aspect of still images not quite being the same as moving images (Cartmell, 2012, p.145). A perspective in regards to bringing the story of the source material to the adaptation completely faithfully may not actually function properly and it may be a better idea to approach the material with trying to bring the “essence” of the story to the writing process, as any attempt to tell the story through a different medium will change the text (Cartmell, 2012, p.409). Known approaches to study the adaptation process include the Source oriented approach which focuses on how well the adaptation did in recreating the source material (Cattrysse, 1992). This approach may be the most natural approach in trying to determine the similarities and what the intentions may have been.

As this study is closely tied to the method of comparative analysis, it has proven to be quite useful to take inspiration and understanding from research using source based approaches, considering the comic book was published before the animated series. The comic book series is therefore the material which first needed to be considered here and the television series needed to be thought of in the sense that either changed or didn’t change any details, as opposed to simply being treated as an independent creation.

Significant changes to both the plot and message of a comic book can be lost in the adaptation process, be it due to deliberate changes from the director or just a general result of the writing process (McAllister, Gordon and Jancovich, 2006, p.112). The stylistic choices of a comic book series may not always translate well into the new medium and may thus be ignored, which is a rather important notion to keep in mind when judging the changes made. A point which may be made in regards to changes, is that some comic books targeted towards younger readers have been criticized for amoral or morally questionable content and may thus be considered “damaging” by the critics (Barker, 1990, pp.140–142). Changes made in the adaptation process may have been done to avoid these sorts of criticisms.

Primarily, for this study, this has been used for the purpose of explaining the dimension of time in television which does not exist in the medium of comic book, a medium which does not feature the dimension of time due to being made entirely of still images which do not move by their very nature. This is a concept which is naturally lost in the adaptation and has been very useful in understanding the concept of filler.

For the subject of animated television adaptation of comics it may be prudent to understand the concept of filler. This term is most commonly used in discussions regarding Japanese animation and how additional scenes or episodes not directly based on existing material may exist, usually for the purpose of extending the amount of episodes due to a lack in existing material (Camp and Davis, 2007, p.237). Not a term commonly used outside of Japanese animation but may be useful for just about any adaptation which requires more content than the source material provides for a minimum episode quota.

As is noted later in this study, the television series does in fact contain material not directly based on the content found in the comic book series and has thus been classified as filler. The purpose of filler has been explored in this study and can generally be understood here as a necessary aspect of time constraints and the need to fill the time given.

## **Theory**

### **Remediation**

As described by Bolter and Grusin, remediation can be understood as the mediation of mediation, in which media needs other media to function, or as a reform of other media (Bolter and Grusin, 1999, pp.55–56). Alternatively phrased, remediation refers to the theory of how one medium represents another one, in essence this can be said to be the way in which the techniques and language carry over from one form to another (Morton, 2012, p.22). In regards to adaptation and remediation, it is worth noting that according to Bolter and Grusin, adaptations generally do not contain acknowledgement that they are adapted from something else like containing overt references to the material which they are adapted from, as this would disrupt the immediacy of the story (Bolter and Grusin, 1999, p.44).

An important challenge a medium such as film and television faces in the task of remediating the medium of comic books is the pace at reading the text, as the still frames presented on the pages of comic books can be carefully read by the reader either quickly or solely depending on the need for absorbing the information, while film and television requires the reader to instead receive the text in a constrained time frame (Morton, 2012, p.145). This may be a useful concept to keep in mind when seemingly unnecessary changes, such as when “filler” is added, the medium of television requires the dimension of time. The television series does not have the same exact ability to remain on certain moments in the same way as a comic book series can. The mere dimension of time in a television series means that a moment of a character performing an action which is naturally fast when put into motion, cannot receive the same level of focus in a comic book due to the moment taking as long as the author deems it necessary.

A term not used in academia but is ultimately very useful in understanding how remediation can affect television adaptations of comic book series’ is “filler”. “Filler” can be thought of as scenes, episodes and even entire story arcs which have been created for the purpose of filling out a quota of runtime or episode count (Camp and Davis, 2007, p.237). While entire episodes created for this purpose are not used for this study, several episodes still feature scenes of this nature, as it may be necessary to fill time when moments which use static images cannot be given the same amount of focus when in motion. The reason for why this phenomenon is worth addressing in this study is because the difference between a medium which features a set runtime and a medium which does not will require certain changes to account for this difference, one of which is the possible need to add more material to the story.



Because changes may occur in the adaptation process, understanding how the story is thematically transformed in the process of remediation may be worth consideration.

### Thematic Transformation

In adaptations, the characters and themes in the original story may change for the new medium (Hermansson, 2020, p.1). An important distinction to make is that even if the source material is the basis for the adaptation, the source material itself does not create the adaptation, rather the people behind it do and it ought to be remembered that adaptive purism may not be possible (Hermansson, 2020, p.17). This is a highly important concept to keep in mind for this study, as the concept of purism does not actually apply to the subject matter in this study, as may be observed in the form of filler and other direct alterations to the story. There are several instances in which the adaptation contains major changes in thematic meaning, either through the change in the target audience or general restructuring of the series story. There are also instances in which the characters themselves have been noticeably altered in the adaptation. In this study it is worth noting that because of the changes made in the transition from comic book series to television series, much of the thematic meaning of the stories has been altered, possibly due to the change in target audience or because of other changes made to the story itself.

While it may not be possible to remain perfectly faithful in the adaptation process, the fidelity of the adaptation may still be considered as a factor to analyze. Adaptations have a basis in previous source material and for the purposes of this study it is important to understand how close the adaptation may be.

### Fidelity

Fidelity is the idea of how faithfully an object is adapted, or exactly how accurate the reading of the object has been represented in an adaptation (Johnson, 2017, p.1). It is important to note that this concept of fidelity can be misused for the purpose of critique, such as critics using words like “butchered” to describe poor adaptation in an easily dismissible way without much proper analysis being used to determine the actual quality of the work itself (Johnson, 2017, p.3). Thus it may be more prudent to not attempt to use the concept of fidelity for the purpose of trying to understand the adaptation in terms of quality, as the adaptation as a work of fiction may be perfectly acceptable in terms of quality, but rather in what becomes different in the presentation. Examples of how to consider fidelity would be if the adaptation “betrays”, “departs”, “recreates” or “ascends” from the source material, due to a lack in fidelity as opposed to the adherence to fidelity (Leitch, 2008, pp.66–67). According to Propp, there may be a question as to whether the changes to a story results in new themes or if the change merely creates a variant of the original theme (Propp, 2009, pp.113–115), which bears some semblance to the notion of adaptations makes changes to the original story and how true they may remain to the original material.

What is important to note for this study itself is that neither the comic book series nor the television adaptation has been judged in terms of quality or preference, an attempt has been made here to instead simply determine what differences do exist in the adaptation and to determine the purpose of these changes to the material. It is not the purpose to determine if one is “better” than the other, as this is a question of quality and preference rather than an honest examination of the material. Thus it is merely the intention to acknowledge the changes made to the stories and analyze how they may impact the thematic purpose of the stories, as well as the general structure that may see some noticeable changes.

Because changes to the story are made, this may also change the story structure in some sense. How a story is constructed can differ depending on the choices made in the adaptation process.

### Story Structure

There are many ways in which a story can be structured. A common approach in film is to use a three-act structure, a beginning in which all the set-up is established, a middle in which the majority of the events occur and an ending which concludes said story (Dudbridge, 2017, pp.4–5). This form of storytelling is quite a common way of approaching writing though it may not be the sole way of approaching how to write stories, though for the purposes of this study the basic concept of this three-act structure is assumed as the baseline. As the change from a comic book series to a television series, it may be noted that story structures may differ somewhat for the medium. The different mediums in this study are comic books and television, which come with different expectations and pacing, thus some different approaches may be encountered which resulted simply from the change in mediums.

Beyond the changes that may occur just due to the change in mediums, it is also worth remembering that not all differences can be explained simply due to the difference in mediums. Some changes may also be because of other factors, such as expectations of the target audience or creative liberties taken by the writers. A fabula can be considered the chronological cause and effect component of a story, while the syuzhet is the arrangement of the fabula and is not dependent on the medium (Bordwell, 1985, pp.49–50). Alternatively, the syuzhet is the way in the reader gains information, the actual piece of media they are reading, of the fabula which is what the reader reconstructs from this information (Gripsrud, 2011, p.251). This concept of fabula and syuzhet may be considered for the purposes of analyzing the logic behind the changes and static elements of the stories. According to Propp, even if certain perceived large differences in various stories occur, some general structural elements to a story remain constant (Propp, 2009, p.78). An earlier yet similar concept is mythos which is the structure of pragmata into a plot, a necessary beginning, middle and end similar to the three act structure (Aristoteles, 1994, pp.16–17, 35–36).

As may be noted later on in this thesis, there is a difference present in the adaptation, as it tends to follow a structure which presents the stories more as one large story as opposed to several smaller ones, which is to accomplish restructuring the order of events. This represents a huge difference in story structure and is something which is worth consideration.

### Mass Appeal

An important part to note about when it comes to the changes in medium, is the concept of mass appeal. Because there is a target audience for any given piece of media, the interest of said audience will dictate much of the content (Asheim, 1951, p.334). Going from an independently published comic book to a mass distributed television series, the needs for the target audience must be addressed. As an example, Batman may be a very popular character but the audience of Batman comics is much smaller than the audience of the adaptations (Pearson, Uricchio and Brooker, 2015, p.6).

Due to cultural perception of animation as a children's medium, it is very likely that an animated television series will be made primarily for children (Dobson et al., 2019, pp.191–192). As a result, it is a logical expectation that an animated series will be created with children in mind and changes in development may then occur to reflect this. Because the change in target audience can result in

very different expectations put on the work, it is a fair assumption that some of the changes made in the adaptation process may be due to this factor.

### Story arc definition

A story arc can be defined as an individual story which can fit into a series of interconnected stories or a part of a larger story which has enough elements to be considered a story itself and is key to the canonicity of the series (Pearson, Uricchio and Brooker, 2015, pp.57–59). As an example for the case of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles itself, all the stories analyzed in this study are interconnected, yet have a clear beginning, middle and end without relying on the other stories. The origin features a mutagenic ooze which turns the main characters into mutants and this element is not explained until Turtles in Space, however the origin itself still has a clear beginning, middle and end which does not rely on the mutagenic ooze being explained. Likewise, while the Space arc does connect back to the origin, it has enough basic story structure to be considered a story itself without relying on what was established in the origin. Interconnectivity is an important part of understanding the canon of a series (Pearson, Uricchio and Brooker, 2015, pp.53–54, 63). These two stories may indeed have very important connections and complement each other in such a way that they may be considered parts of a larger story, yet they are not necessarily the same story.

Story arcs are often longer in serialized storytelling and may include multiple parts to be told though this may not always be the case. The most important aspect for this study at least is the canonical relevance to the complex of stories. The origin as told in the comic book series may only be one issue but has profound impact on the whole series and is undeniably important for series canon, as it is the foundation for the rest of the story arcs. The story arcs selected for this study were chosen in part because they are present in both the comic book series and the television series, though also because of the relatively large portion of issues and episodes they encompass as well as their relevance for the canonicity. Then you can define story arcs as smaller pieces of a larger narrative which contain elements of being complete stories themselves. If a beginning and end can be used to describe a story (Dudbridge, 2017, pp.4–5), this can also be used to define story arcs.

It is also important to note that in adaptations, a single arc can either be presented as one or multiple parts due to difference in medium (Camp and Davis, 2007, p.324). This can be observed in the adaptation of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles as the origin was originally a single issue story, while the television series tells the story in multiple episodes.

## **Methodology and Material**

### Comparative analysis

A comparative analysis is a method of analysis in which two subjects are determined to have sufficient details in common to be compared, and in turn have said subjects linked through the comparison (Walk, 1998). Alternatively, a comparative analysis can be described as a systematic comparison between two subjects to determine their point of similarity (Dovetail Editorial Team, 2023). This is a useful tool for a study such as this, as the adaptation process naturally gives a reasonable connection between two subjects, which is to say the original work and the derivative work. The differences are noted and explored upon in an attempt to better understand why they happened and what it means overall, as well as note why some other aspects may have been left unaltered. The frame of reference in a comparative analysis is the context of the two compared objects as placed by the researcher, so they can be properly compared and contrasted with each other, which can be referred to with the metaphor of an “umbrella” under which the material all fits

under (Walk, 1998). In this particular case that context or frame of reference would indeed be the process of adaptation, how these two pieces of media, comic book series and television series, are linked together by their attempt to tell the same stories but within different mediums for the audience to take part in.

The main problem with the comparative analysis method is that the researcher may be prone to make errors, as it is their judgment which defines the point of comparison (Bolbakov, Sinitsyn and Tsvetkov, 2020). Thus the researcher may need to be sure of the validity for comparison. For The grounds for comparison, which is the rationale by which these two pieces of media are given a reason to be compared in the first place, is something which must also be established for the purposes of a comparative analysis (Walk, 1998). The purposes of this study, this is indeed a very simple aspect to justify, as there are plenty of shared stories within these two different pieces of media that can indeed be compared. Though in this case there may be some necessity to justify the specific stories to compare, as opposed to any of the other episodes which were determined to have sufficient similarities with the existing comic book series' material. The justification for why these specific story arcs have been chosen is the fact that they are quite extensive in both the form of a comic book series and television series, as in both situations they were not self-contained stories but rather larger stories which were told in multiple parts.

Many of the stories which were adapted in the television series did not actually require multiple parts and are thus quite numerous and would require multiple stand-alone analyses which would not be considered an acceptable amount of content for this study's time frame and had to be disregarded for their lack of relevance to the larger story. Episodes which did not directly adapt stories from the existing comic book material or issues of the comic book series which were not adapted into episodes of the television series were disregarded for the simple purpose of them lacking sufficient amount of detail in common with any other stories, thus making them inappropriate to analyze.

### Story analysis

A story may be analyzed as a linear sequence in which elements are placed in a chronological order, this type of analysis may be called a syntagmatic structural analysis (Propp, 2009, p.XI). According to Propp, characters within a story have a stable and constant role in the story which applies to many stories, which in his particular field of fairy tales is limited and always identical (Propp, 2009, pp.21–24). When analyzing a story, a summary of the story is the starting point in order to ensure some base level of familiarity with the material (Anon., 2024). Furthermore, when the researcher understands the story, it is possible to analyze the plot, characters and themes, to eventually form a thesis on the work in question. If the story can be understood on its own, then the changes made with the adaptation can be understood in terms of how the adaptation process has impacted the meaning of the story. A story may be considered a combined set of elements which form the full picture, rather than simply being individual pieces acting on their own (Aristoteles, 1994, pp.36–37). When analyzing the context of the story, this can be accomplished by simply analyzing the story itself to gain some level of insight, by for example examining what the characters within the story are doing, what function they serve and what their personalities are (Anon., 2024). This has been accomplished within this study by examining what roles the characters have in the comic book series' stories and how this affects the plot, in part by their actions and what their motivating factors are, which is compared and contrasted with how they presented in the television series to better understand how these changes makes any significant changes to the story itself by the presence of changes in character. The setting of the story from a narrative purpose is important to give the audience a sense of what is happening and why, as it is the basis for them being able to understand the events presented to them (Bordwell, 1985, p.34).

The setting of the story may also be an important aspect to understand about the story for the purposes of analysis, as the change in setting may in fact result in some quite drastic alterations to the story's meaning and interpretation, as this could very well be impossible to tell the same story in a different setting (Anon., 2024). The aspect of changes in setting may not seem to be too much of an issue at first for the purposes of understanding these particular stories, when one might consider the fact that the settings generally do not change much in the adaptations. Most of the stories told in both are primarily set in New York for both and when a change of setting does occur, such as the main characters being placed on entirely different planets, so the literal setting does not actually change. However, the order of events are however altered and thus the instances of change in setting change as well, which has quite an important change to the story structure. A literary device that can be quite useful for stories and that can be analyzed with this particular method is foreshadowing, which is a literary device used for the purpose of hinting towards what will occur in the story at a later point (Anon., 2024). Foreshadowing is useful to let the audience anticipate what may occur in the story (Bordwell, 1985, pp.111, 130, 146, 165).

It was already known before this study was being made that the television series did have several noteworthy changes which involved the concept of foreshadowing in order to make certain changes in the structure of the stories of the adaptation more integrated to the over all story, in particular a very important change to the Shredder was foreshadowed. For this particular study, understanding the concept of foreshadowing is recommended as there is a lot of analysis of the story structure, which partially relies on foreshadowing. Finally, there is the concept of "themes", which should be noted are not the same type of themes that are a part of the thematic analysis and it is important to keep these two different definitions of the word theme separate. In story analysis, the concept of themes can be considered as the "big ideas" which the author of the work is trying to convey to the reader (Anon., 2024). Many such themes can for example be Good vs Evil or coming of age, and many works of fiction may very well actually be about multiple different themes on various levels of obviousness (Anon., 2024). According to Propp, themes are interwoven with the story and the analyst of the story may need to start their work familiar with various types of themes in order to not simply judge the material on personal preference and there is the possibility that one researcher may identify a new theme when a different researcher would identify a variant of a theme (Propp, 2009, pp.9–10) In order to properly identify the theme, it must be noted that this requires the level of familiarity which the method of story analysis requires of the researcher. Numerous themes of the comic book series and the television series have been established and while they are important in their own right, not to mention how further research into the themes of the series could be made in the future, this is primarily used for the purpose of understanding how the themes are transformed in the adaptation and are thus not used as the primary focus in this study.

### Thematic Analysis

A thematic analysis is the process by which the researcher familiarizes themselves with the collected data and defines it in special categories which are referred to as themes (Caulfield, 2019). The researcher can with the help of thematic analysis draw meaning from observable patterns (Clarke and Braun, 2017, p.1). The steps taken in thematic analysis are to familiarize yourself with the available data, code the content of the data, generate the themes from the data, review the validity of the themes, define/name the themes and write down the results (Caulfield, 2019). This form of categorisation breaks down the results into easily understood sections and gives them structure. A noted advantage of the methods is that it is flexible enough to be used for both small and large data sets and identify a large variety of patterns (Clarke and Braun, 2017, pp.1–2). In order to do a thematic analysis, some level of responsibility about the method must be taken by the

researcher in order for them to present the results accurately. Because of this, the researcher must determine that the theme is supported by the data collected, that the themes do not overlap to the point of arguably being the same theme or if the theme is too broadly defined (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). Thus the themes must be clearly defined for the reader of the research.

Note that themes in this case does not necessarily mean the same as themes of the subject matter, but rather the way in which the results of the study are categorized, which is an important distinction to make when the subject matter is storytelling. The themes which are used in the method of story analysis and thematic analysis are two different concepts and should not be conflated. Within this study, three themes have been determined to permeate the adaptation process, which relate to story structure, audience and the change in mediums.

### Theoretical model

Through the use of story analysis, it is possible to determine an understanding of the story and its themes, thus determining the important aspects of the story. Combined with comparative analysis it will be possible to come to an understanding of both versions of the story, then notice where the most important differences between the two versions are manifested. These differences may then be divided up by thematic analysis to determine the reasons behind why these changes may have been made.

### The Subject matter

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles is an American comic book series which debuted in 1984 and was initially written by Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird. The core premise of the series is that four pet store turtles were mutated in a sewer and found by Splinter, the pet rat of the deceased ninja Hamato Yoshi, who trained them to avenge Hamato Yoshi's death at the hands of the Shredder. Several other characters, such as April O'Neil, Baxter Stockman, Casey Jones and Karai are also relevant to the progression of the plots in these stories. The series then follows a couple of smaller stories built on the general premise which can be considered to be about the consequences of the Turtles avenging Hamato Yoshi, as the Foot Clan whom the Shredder was the local leader of retaliate. Certain issues used for this study were also co-written by Steve Bissette, Michael Dooney and Jim Lawson, so it is important to note that the series was not simply a two-man collaborative effort but had multiple people working on the material from the beginning.

The initial series ended in 1993 and had secondary series in parallel during this time frame, Tales of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and the Micro-Series issues, these issues are indeed considered to be part of the main series canon, which means they are part of the official storyline despite being published as different comic book series'. Several issues of the main series were not written by or in direct collaboration with Kevin Eastman and/or Peter Laird and are not considered part of series canon, which means they are not considered part of the main storyline and are thus without any story impact on the rest of the series. The canonical issues of the series and the secondary series were primarily used as the basis for the 2003 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles television series, albeit with some additions which did not directly adapt any of the comic book material. The edition used for the analysis is IDW's "Ultimate Collection" release of the series as well as additional released by IDW, a publisher which as of this study holds an official license to print Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles comics. This is because IDW has compiled all relevant issues of the series for the analysis and contains several annotations from Peter Laird and Kevin Eastman, which can be used for the purpose of understanding the intentions of the series' writers. For the sake of clarity, IDW holds the license to make new material and not all Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles comics published by them are in continuity with or part of Eastman and Laird's series, which is what is being analyzed in this

study. Any Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles issues which are not part of the continuity of the original comic book series does not factor into this study.

The 2003 television series ended in 2009 after a total of seven seasons and 155 episodes (Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, 2003), though direct basis on the comic book series ended in 2006 at episode number 100, with the remaining episodes being largely unrelated to the comic book series plots due to either being completely original stories or the basis being too loose to determine any direct parallels. The 2003 Television series was chosen for this thesis project due to a relatively high number of episodes directly based on comic book stories in comparison to other adaptations of the same comic book series, which is why this particular adaptation of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles is deemed ideal for making direct comparison. About 40 episodes out of the first 100 episodes in the series are directly based on existing material which allows for a selection to be made, this study does not in fact cover all of these 40 episodes and merely the ones forming larger story arcs, this is because the sheer quantity of episodes may not be suited for the time frame in which this study was expected to be completed. Additionally, Peter Laird, one of the co-creators and writers of the original comic book series, was also the creative director of the series, providing a direct link between the comics and the television series in terms of the authorial intent. Peter Laird is of course not the sole author of the original comic book series or the television series but it is still worth noting that the common creative input from one person may prove to be a valuable factor, as not all adaptations have this type of link.

The 2003 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles television series is referred to by the year it started in to differentiate it from the other adaptations. This is necessary as several of the other adaptations simply use the title “Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles” and by clarifying that this is a study which only revolves around this particular adaptation in relation to the source material it will hopefully avoid confusion over which television series is used for this study.

While none of the direct adaptations in the television series were based on ongoing storylines, as the last released issue adapted was published about ten years before the show started airing, the show still contains what may be considered filler despite never reaching the ongoing storylines and eventually ceasing direct adaptations entirely after the fourth season. The exact purpose of the filler is not entirely clear, as the show did not adapt storylines which were ongoing at the time, it is worth noting many of the direct adaptations being merely one episode per issue and only one instance adapting one issue into more than three episodes, which still have filler scenes and may have been much shorter without them. From this it may be suggested that the adapted issues might not have enough content to justify a sufficient amount of episodes.

A comic book, alternatively called a graphic novel, is a literary medium which makes heavy use of still imagery in a sequential series. The typical structure of a comic book is to place multiple images in a single page, which are referred to as panels, and these pages are combined with several others to form one large narrative which can be followed as sequential art. In addition to the still images, a comic book typically comes with text in order to help clarify the plot as well as the dialogue or inner thoughts of the characters. This is typically done with speech bubbles, a rounded shape with a narrow point directed towards the characters, this is used to show dialogue and to clarify which character is talking. There are also thought bubbles, which convey the thoughts of the characters and resemble speech bubbles in form, with the exception being a trail of smaller circles instead of a point. Text can also be shown in rectangular spaces called text boxes, which are used to emphasize narration as opposed to the characters talking and can sometimes be used instead of thought bubbles.

A television series is a medium which is shown on television and breaks up the content into individual episodes. The individual episodes often come in a production set called a season which is the case for the 2003 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles television series, as opposed to receiving a steady stream of episodes. The first four seasons of the 2003 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles television series is 26 episodes each, though for the purposes of this study this is largely irrelevant as the emphasis is on whether or not the episodes are direct adaptations of existing comic book stories, rather than whether or not they are considered part of the same season. The episodes of different television series may vary in length but for the 2003 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles television series is about 20 minutes each.

## **Analysis**

### **Important stories**

To begin with, if this study is to involve valid story analysis, it will have to contain some level of summary of the existing story arcs for familiarization and to give context to the material (Anon., 2024). Thus it is important the selected story arcs for this study are summarized. Explaining the plot of these stories is also a very crucial step in order to properly analyze the stories, as it is what the story is indeed built upon.

The following are considered the key story arcs chosen for this study:

- The Origin
- Turtles in Space
- The Escape
- The Return to New York
- City at War

These stories are the major parts of the initial comic book series and were all adapted into the television series. While numerous shorter stories do in fact exist, not all of them can be analyzed here and it may be important to simplify this study.

It is worth noting that while these are the important story arcs for both the comic book series and the television series, the television series does in fact adapt more stories than these. These have been selected for being more extensive than the other story arcs and for being the most important to understand the general storyline, as the majority of the major characters are introduced in these and events which cannot be ignored occur during these story arcs.

The television series does not present these arcs in the same order as the comic book series either. The origin is split into multiple different episodes and spread out over the course of the series, while Turtles in Space is moved from being the second arc of these to being the fourth. The exact reason for this may be for the purpose of keeping new plot twists and altering the pacing.

There is also a significant amount of filler episodes, which as defined by this study are episodes which are not directly based on the existing material. It does not mean these episodes are not unrelated to the stories from the comic book series or lack narrative function of their own, they are however not sufficiently similar to any of the existing comic book stories to warrant a direct comparison.

### **The Origin**



The origin story is told in the first issue of the comic series (Eastman and Laird, 2011, pp.4–47). Splinter tells the Turtles how he lived in Japan as the pet of Hamato Yoshi and learned martial arts by mimicking his movements. The Shredder murdered Yoshi after he fled to America and Splinter raised the turtles to avenge Yoshi after they mutated, which they successfully did by killing Shredder. Generally this story can be considered the depiction of a revenge cycle which is what leads into the remaining story arcs and serves as a driving force for the comic book series.

### Turtles in Space

While this story does not start with the second issue (Eastman and Laird, 2011, pp.48–87), it is the start of the ongoing storyline and the event are important to understand the rest of the series, as it introduced April O’Neil, Baxter Stockman and the disappearance of Splinter. Another issue which isn’t part of the Turtles in Space arc but is still important to understand the rest of the series is Raphael issue 1 (Eastman and Laird, 2011, pp.128–155), which is the introduction of Casey Jones. The Turtles in Space story proper begins at issue 4 and ends at issue 7 (Eastman and Laird, 2011, pp.156–315) and part of the story is covered in Fugitoid issue 1 (Allor, 2014, pp.72–109) . It details the Turtles infiltration of TCRI, the company which caused their mutations, teleportation into space, the introduction of the Triceratons and eventual explanation by the Utroms in regards to the mutation of the Turtles. This story does in part continue the plot from where The Origin left certain concepts uncertain, such as how the mutation occurred. It is however mostly a different story which does not have many clear connections to previous events.

### The Escape

The Escape storyline is covered in Leonardo issue 1 (Eastman et al., 2012, pp.154–187) and issue 10 (Eastman et al., 2012, pp.188–229). This storyline details the apparent return of the Shredder and the main characters’ escape to Casey Jones’ farm. This does continue the story from the origin but it is worth noting that Shredder was intended to be dead at the end of The Origin, which would mean this is not the same story but rather a new story featuring the character.

### The Return to New York

The Return to New York is covered in issue 19 to 21 (Eastman and Laird, 2012, pp.157–287). It is about the Turtles returning to New York after they escaped and how they once again seem to kill the Shredder. This can be considered the same story arc as the Escape due to the lack of conclusion in the Escape and the answers are indeed given here. However, it is broken up by there being several smaller stories in between, which means the continuation is not direct.

### City at War

The City at War storyline starts at issue 50 and ends at issue 62 (Laird, 2013a, pp.63–251) (Laird, 2013b, pp.4–179). The Storyline is about how the death of the Shredder resulted in the Foot Clan splitting into numerous warring factions and how the character Karai helps the Turtles get them under her control. In the comic book series there are four sides of this storyline about Casey, April, Splinter and Buscheyev which are not used in the television series, which feature various adult themes which may not have been considered suitable for children’ s television. This story is another continuation of the Foot Clan stories and seems to be intended as a final conclusion to their involvement in the comic book series.

### Character differences

There are several series spanning differences that may be worth noting as they have major implications for the stories, in particular when it comes to certain characters who had various levels of prominence in the comic book series but their exact roles and prominence have been altered. It may thus be important to note which characters have received the most amount of alteration in this regard and what exactly this does to their role in the story arcs. As characters are a driving force of a plot, it is important to know who they are and what exactly it is they accomplish in the plot (Anon., 2024).

Shredder was a human character in the comic book series, with direct ties to the main characters, as he killed Splinter's owner (Eastman and Laird, 2011, p.18). He led the Foot Clan in America and he was killed by the Turtles at the start of the series and further appearances are of a clone (Eastman and Laird, 2012, pp.258–259). Shredder in the Television drastically differs from his depiction in the comic book series. There he is an alien called an Utrom and only pretends to be human (Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, 2003, pt.34). His primary interest is to get revenge on the other Utroms for imprisoning him and to conquer other planets. While his actions are the same, his personal ties to the main characters are not part of his backstory. These changes may have been made to appeal to children, as to avoid death and ambiguous morals. The television series also accounts for these changes with hints towards his true nature. Despite these changes, since he appears to be a human early on, much of the thematic meaning does not change before the revelation. In many ways he still embodies the same themes that define his character up until that point (Hermansson, 2020, p.47).

Another character with significant changes is Baxter Stockman, who only made one appearance and is disconnected from most other events (Eastman and Laird, 2011, pp.48–87). The television series gives him a much larger role and connects him to the Shredder (Eastman and Laird, 2011, pt.2). This may have been done to avoid the character being disconnected from the main storyline, despite his introductory story being important to the rest of the series.

The Purple Dragons are a minor set of villains who only appear in the first issue and are not given more appearances for any of the adapted stories. In the television show, they are shown to be taking orders from the Foot Clan through their leader Hun, who is in turn one of Shredder's servants. In addition they are also altered to be personal enemies of Casey Jones, in turn making him more personally connected to the Foot Clan as well. Thus they serve as a link between Casey Jones and the Foot Clan.

All of these changes may have been made to make sure these characters all fit into a larger narrative and to make the narrative more coherent, a problem with comic book adaptations (Cattrysse, 1992, p.146). Thus it is understandable why connections between characters and concepts which were not present in the comic book series have been made, as it reduced the amount of unrelated elements all being present in the same story.

#### Noteworthy changes in the television series

Due to these two pieces of media being interlinked through the process of adaptation, it has been deemed a suitable method to use comparative analysis, by which they are compared on a narrative level. In order for a comparative analysis to be made, it must be determined that they share sufficient details in common (Walk, 1998), which they of course do due to sharing many of the same story arcs.

The origin is notable for having been split across a variety of different episodes (Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, 2003, pts1, 3, 10, 11, 100). The set-up for various important characters and concepts are put into focus very early on in the first season, such as the main characters being established and the origin of how four mutant turtles and a rat came to be, while the motivating part of the backstory is placed near the middle of the first season along with the initial battle with the Shredder. The part of the backstory involving characters who had already died is in fact the final episode to be directly based on a comic book story. This effectively means the origin story is told in a reverse order to what the comic book series presented. Additionally, various moral ambiguities are removed in the origin story, such as the Shredder having a reasonable motive to get revenge.

The exact purpose of splitting this story into five fairly distant episodes is not clear, though it may be done to build mystery and intrigue. Because Shredder's evil is not established before episode 10 to the turtles, Leonardo is shown potentially considering his offer for an alliance, which is what forces Splinter to tell the truth. Generally a notable change over all is that heroic characters, such as Splinter and Hamato Yoshi, are rendered less morally gray here and seem more driven to act by circumstance or are at least given less selfish reasons to make their decisions. April O'Neil, Baxter Stockman and Casey Jones' backstories and general purpose in the series have also been altered to be more connected to the Foot Clan conflict.

The Turtles in Space story arc was moved to the end of season 1 and continues into season 2 (Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, 2003, pts25–34). The story is mostly the same except for some filler. The filler in question involves a prison and an extended version of the Utroms revealing their past. Said filler is also where Shredder's true nature as an Utrom is revealed, setting up further stories not part of the comic book series.

The escape is arguably the least altered story arc in the television series. The one element worth noting, outside of some filler created due to the still images not allowing for more time by themselves, is that most of the stories following were moved to take place after they returned to New York.

In the television series' version of Return to New York there is no argument about going back, and so they return in unison (Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, 2003, pt.21). Shredder survives here instead and is used for later filler scenes and filler arcs, even though this was his final role in the comic book series. Splinter's disappearance is moved here to set-up the Turtles in Space arc. For the television series, the Zog segments were moved to a later point and presented as a different story (Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, 2003, pts45–46), due to his introduction having been moved forward.

Most of these changes were most likely made to present all of these story arcs as belonging to a single large story as opposed to being smaller connected stories. In a sense, it can give the series a three act structure on a series wide scale (Dudbridge, 2017, pp.4–5). Major characters and concepts are set up at the start, the major events build up and the conclusion results in the various pieces of the story being resolved. Many arcs in the comic book series were shorter and did not appear to have been written with the intention of receiving multiple continuations.

### Thematic analysis of content

There are numerous different types of changes made in the television series and some possible explanations for why they were made include these are story structure, changes to adult content and changes made for the simple sake of the medium being different. Through the use of thematic

analysis, which is based on the idea that it is possible to use the collected data in order to organize it by certain patterns called themes (Caulfield, 2019), it has been determined that three distinct themes are present in the adaptation process, attempts to improve the story structure, removal of adult content and changes necessary for the medium. Note that the themes according to this definition is a separate concept of themes in a narrative sense, as these merely refer to patterns related to the research.

### Improvement of story structure

For the sake of clarification and to note the purpose of this study, improvement in this instance does not actually refer to the quality of the story itself, nor is it an attempt to declare one version of the stories were better in some other sense. In this instance, improvement simply means that the structure was changed to better fit the medium of television with interconnected episodes. What has been noted throughout this study is the fact that events are moved to create a larger story rather than present the material as a series of smaller stories. This is what improvement refers to in this study.

As previously stated in the methodology segment, a common form of story structure is to use a three act structure in which there is a clear beginning, middle and end (Dudbridge, 2017, pp.4–5). Additionally, the idea of the mythos being presented in a proper way (Aristoteles, 1994, pp.16–17, 35–36), has seemingly been accounted for in the more extensive format of television. A general observation is that much of the television series is presented more as a larger story rather than several smaller stories that connect. Thus it may be possible to explain why many of the central characters are introduced as early as possible in season 1 and everything important that happened to them was placed before the Turtles in Space arc, which is altered to function more as an ending to the season 1 storyline, or its third act. As the City at War story arc can mainly function as an outgrowth of the Shredder's apparent death, this is as a result given a similar position as it was in the comic book series. Thus one might argue that the story is not "betrayed" but rather "transcend" the comic book (Leitch, 2008, p.66) . This is because there appears to be an attempt to change the material to fit a broader narrative. A common expectation of comic books can be the expectation that you are already familiar with the characters and concepts of the series to the point at which you can be presented with a brand new story featuring them, without needing a clear explanation in the story (Pearson, Uricchio and Brooker, 2015, pp.53–54, 63). This does not appear to be the case for the television series as connectivity is much more obvious beyond just a general assumption of familiarity.

On a broad scale, it would seem that the fabula and syuzhet are different in the television series, as both the cause-and-effect and the presentation is different from the comic book series, though individual episodes may reflect the individual issues much more closely. The exact purpose of all the changes is not known but a possible explanation for the most pervasive change, the restructuring of the scenes and individual stories, may be explained through the need to simply keep a more comprehensive order of set-up and payoff. In the comic book series, the origin story was told in full and the Shredder was seemingly defeated in the very first issue, which was then followed by stories largely disconnected from the Foot Clan, such as the Turtles going to space. Only after they return from space does the Foot Clan and the Shredder come back into focus and remain the main antagonistic force throughout the rest of the major story arcs. A problem with adaptations of long running works, such as comic books, is that the content can be quite varied through time and thus finding consistency may be difficult (Cattrysse, 1992, p.146). Therefore, it may have been for the best to attempt to make everything as connected as possible for the sake of coherency.

By first establishing all the major characters and their origins before the Shredder is defeated and concluding most of the major storylines featuring them as villains, the story can shift focus to other elements without appearing inconclusive. It is also worth noting that many seemingly unrelated elements in the comic book series were connected in the television series. In the comic book series, the Foot Clan, the Utroms, Baxter Stockman, Casey Jones and the Purple Dragons had no stated connections beyond ultimately meeting the Turtles. In the television series, the Foot Clan is connected to the Utroms through the Shredder, Baxter Stockman is performing services for the Foot Clan and Casey Jones is an enemy of the Purple Dragons who are a subgroup of the Foot Clan. In some sense this can be thought of as “evolving” the story in order to make it work better, much as in the biological definition of “adaptation” (Bortolotti and Hutcheon, 2007, p.452).

### Removal of adult content and complexities

Because the television series can be considered children’s entertainment due to how media is shaped around the interests of the largest possible audience (Asheim, 1951, p.334) in conjunction with the expectation of animation being for children (Dobson et al., 2019, pp.191–192), changes to accommodate the series for children is a natural consequence. The result is that several parts of the story arcs are omitted or altered to not feature certain complexities and moral gray zones. A not too uncommon change in adaptations of comic books is to simplify the moral actions of the characters to fit into categories of “good” or “evil” (Anne Furlong, 2012, p.184). In the comic book series the Turtles treated Zog as merely a tool for their own purposes and did not seem to consider his well being despite obviously being sick (Eastman and Laird, 2012, pp.157–237), while in the television series Donatello decide to give him a breathing apparatus in order to make sure he doesn’t keep being poisoned by earth’s atmosphere and they appear more remorseful at his death (Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, 2003, pts45–46), which is a change which would put the turtles in the “moral right”.

A notable difference between the comic book series and the television series is the level of adult content. Numerous references to drugs and the depiction of violence were often altered or removed entirely. A minor example is Lonae’s bribe from the Triceratons (Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, 2003, pt.27; Allor, 2014, pp.72–109), which in the comic was some sort of addictive drug while in the television series this was altered to instead be valuables, presumably because of the change in target audience. A major example is the fact that the Shredder never actually dies in the television series and only ever seems to be dead, while in the comic book series both the real Shredder and his clone were explicitly killed. The reason for him being an alien in the television could be explained as an attempt to keep him relevant in the story while keeping his apparent deaths intact, which may constitute a change necessary to keep the story itself relevant in light of the audience changes (Sanders, 2016, p.23). This does not however mean that all instances of death are removed in the adaptation, Hamato Yoshi and Tang Shen clearly die in the television series (Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, 2003, pts10, 100), though there is some level of ambiguous language used, such as them being “taken away” rather than dead.

The reason for these changes are not difficult to understand, the television show had a lower target audience than the comic book series. The Comic Book series was independently published and sold at conventions or through direct market (Laird et al., 2023, p.5), with IDW publishing giving some editions of their printings and age recommendation of 13 years and older along with a disclaimer regarding the values presented (Eastman, Laird and Lawson, 2012, p.cover, table of contents). The television series received an age rating of TV-Y7, suitable for ages 7 and up (Anon., 2019), in the United States (Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (TV Series 2003–2010) - IMDb, n.d.). The adult content had to be removed or altered to receive this age rating. So changes such as changing Karai’s

role from someone who brings the Foot Clan under control for the sake of just keeping them in line, while also upholding her promise to not pursue the Turtles, to someone who lies about the better intention and allows the Foot Clan to continue their criminal activities due to loyalty may have been done to keep a clear distinction between good and evil. While there is a distinction between good and evil in the comic book series, as characters like the Shredder and Baxter Stockman are ultimately depicted as committing clearly villainous acts, it is depicted with more nuance. In the comic book series, the Foot Clan may be an enemy but this is primarily due to the Turtles killing the Shredder and the conflict ending merely because of a deal, which involves trickery and assassination, may result in an unclear distinction between good and evil that children would not be able to understand. Some elements which a larger target audience might find concerning tend to be removed for broader appeal and may thus be considered necessary (Cartmell, 2012, p.155).

An example of a major alteration in the television series' version of City at War was to give Karai a personal connection to the Shredder as his adopted daughter and is thus loyal to him rather than her being a character with her own interests. This does transform the character in the adaptation process. In this particular case her purpose in the story is changed in terms of the thematic purpose (Hermansson, 2020, pp.49–50), in this particular instance from being a function to end the narrative to an exploration of what it means to be loyal. Shredder is also revealed to be alive, which removes the conclusive nature of the story, thus allowing for further exploration of Karai. The television series rendition contains major omissions from the comic book series, most notably side stories featuring Casey, Splinter, Buscheyev and April. The result is that compared to the majority of the other stories adapted, City at War was far shorter in the television series than in the comic book series. These side stories are heavy on themes of death, depression, moral compromising and unease, which is likely why they were removed. As the television series was intended to be children's media, it does not seem as if it would have been considered appropriate to depict such themes for a younger audience.

Because the themes and actions of the comic book series may not be considered suitable for children, keeping them intact may have invited criticism when presented to a larger audience similar to the criticisms Connie Alderson gave various romance comics for being "amoral" (Barker, 1990, pp.140–142). This may be an example where key scenes are kept intact but only the basic level plot is kept, as much of the complexity in the story has been lost by these omissions (Anne Furlong, 2012, p.177). However, since the purpose of this study is not to make any quality judgements, it is not noted as being a quality issue, as the story may still be perfectly suitable for the target audience of children. Whether the television series or the comic book series depicted the "better" story is not actually relevant to this study.

Propp's concept of static roles do however still apply, as the role which the main characters serve in a general sense have not changed (Propp, 2009, pp.21–24). While some characters do have a more gray role in the comic book series, it is still possible to consider the majority of heroic characters as heroic in both, and likewise the same may be said about the villainous characters. Even if the roles were to change drastically in the adaptation, if there are characters who fill roles such as hero and villain, then Propp's concept does still apply. Even if certain elements are removed or altered to be child friendly, certain structural elements will remain. According to Propp if the hero is given a righteous, benign or morally questionable task to complete, it does not make much difference as the hero is still set on track to fill his role (Propp, 2009, p.78).

#### Filler and necessary changes for the new medium

This is where the concept of remediation comes into the picture, as the television show attempts to represent the existing story in a new medium, some additional changes need to be made in order to accommodate the new medium. The most notable way in which the medium necessitated changes is what is here called filler scenes. The dimension of time is the primary reason for this and is considered one of the major problems with adaptation of comic books to film (Morton, 2012, p.145). Because the medium of a television series is even longer than the medium film when serialized storytelling is involved, this will result in attempting to fill the time with what were still images with no perceivable sense of time, an even larger problem. Individual episodes of a television series are of course much shorter in length than most films and the instances of using a story which fits into one single issue of a comic book for one single episode of a television series may not have been particularly difficult, though this does not apply to the majority of episodes used in this particular study, as this study is much more focused on the instances of longer stories being adapted into several episodes.

In remediation, there may be a desire to “reform” in the new medium or to “improve” it by correcting certain perceived flaws (Bolter and Grusin, 1999, pp.59–62). Whether or not this is even a valid concern can be debated in this instance. In practice, most of the changes made in the adaptation process of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* have either been to change the story structure, which is not necessarily a product of the difference in media as possible remake of the series in comic book form could make very similar changes to the story, or to simply account for the differences in the mediums for technical reasons such as runtime.

Finally, it is important to note that not all changes are made purely for the purpose of trying to improve the story or appeal to a different target audience, some changes must be made simply because the medium requires it. Each episode of the television series is about 20 minutes long and the first four seasons are 26 episodes each. On average, when taking into account all direct adaptations in the television series, whether used in this study or not, amount to about 1.68 issues per episode with the obvious exception being *City at War* which is much shorter due to major omissions. A total of 41 episodes are adaptations, which means that with the filler ratio that exists within the directly adapted episodes, it would not be enough for two seasons. Had these episodes had no filler scenes in them at all, it would be even lower than 41 episodes. Thus, filler likely exists for both the purpose of extending the episode length to the necessary time frame the episode count per season. As an example, the scene in which Baxter Stockman attempts to take revenge during the *Return to New York* is about seven minutes long (*Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, 2003, pts22–23), while it serves no narrative function, it does extend the time of the episode to the typical 20 minutes. If seven minutes of filler is assumed to be common for directly adapted episodes and if it were to be removed, it would make the average adaptation about 35% shorter than would be necessary to reach 20 minutes and thus the episodes may require to be combined, which would bring the amount of adapted episodes down even lower.

A commonly stated reason for filler is the need to ensure the adaptation does not include too much material for future production (Camp and Davis, 2007, p.237), which may have proven to be challenging if the television series kept being renewed. A reason for why each issue may not provide enough material may be that a page may depict something that, when put into motion, can take a very short time. This may very well be an instance of when the original stylistic choices made in the original material cannot be translated correctly into the new medium and must thus be changed or disregarded to make the adaptation work within the new medium (McAllister, Gordon and Jancovich, 2006). For example, Leonardo fighting the Foot Clan alone until he arrives at April’s apartment is around 30 pages long (Eastman et al., 2012, pp.154–184), with plenty of panels depicting his actions in great detail with focus on key moments which may be read at a pace which

the reader may be comfortable with. While this may appear to be a large amount of pages, it is mostly a long fight sequence with a few panels connecting to the other characters actions elsewhere which do not directly connect to Leonardo's action within this fight scene. The concept of the syuzhet as exemplified by Bordwell as a description of the events independent of the medium, and the fabula as the cause and effect presentation (Bordwell, 1985, pp.49–50) does show some relevance here, as the medium does require a difference in presentation even when the changes to the actual story are minimal. When put into motion these 30 pages are roughly 12 minutes long (Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, 2003, pt.17), not nearly enough to fill an entire episode, which means some changes needed to be made. In particular there is more focus on what the other characters are doing while he is engaged in this fight, which as a result is a far greater portion of the episode than in the comic book issue. This is an example of where the fabula and syuzhet differ relatively little between the mediums, as while the placement of the episode is different from the comic book issue, direct comparison only reveals an attempt to make the page count fit the time frame, rather than restructure the story. While it is still undeniably different in this case there are no major differences in terms of changes to the events or characters, this an example of an episode primarily containing changes for the change in mediums rather than additional factors.

## **Conclusion**

What this research ultimately brings to the wealth of existing knowledge, is a precise look into a specific instance of adaptation and a direct comparison between various story elements, which is somewhat lacking in the existing research. While the majority of research focuses on general differences (Anne Furlong, 2012; Pearson, Uricchio and Brooker, 2015, pp.171–178), this study analyzes specific differences. A demonstration of the difference in medium has been observed, the difference between a still image medium and motion based medium (Morton, 2012, p.145) has for example been explained thoroughly with distinct examples. The nature of adaptation as an attempt to improve the story (Bortolotti and Hutcheon, 2007, p.452; Sanders, 2016, p.23), does seem to apply to this particular adaptation.

Many of the changes in the adaptation from comic book to television can thought of as having been made for the purposes of either pragmatism or concerns about how the audience might react, alternatively phrased the television series appears to have been created with consideration of the function of the events of the story and the way in which the audience of younger children may perceive the story or the message embedded within. Here we do see a certain alignment with the notion of making changes for the purpose of mass appeal (Asheim, 1951), as the television series has demonstrable examples of making alterations for the purpose of appealing to a younger audience, which also aligns with Barker (Barker, 1990, pp.1–16). This study does bring the additional dimension of what happens when an adaptation specifically does make changes for a younger audience, with the particular conclusion here being that they were made to avoid depicting questionable morality. As paced out in the comic book series, the specific story arcs analyzed here have an order that may be considered strange for a connected narrative. The origin story includes several parts that do not focus on the main characters, the main villain dies at the very start, the story shifts focus to the characters traveling through space and the main villain is brought back to life through cloning in order to continue the story. By breaking these stories up, placing them in a different order, having the villain survive his encounters with the main characters and not having the narrative shift focus towards space until after most of these arcs were concluded, it arguably results in a more even narrative. This may be an example of the adaptation attempting to improve the fabula and syuzhet, in accordance with Gripsrud's definition (Gripsrud, 2011, p.251) and shows the importance of interconnectivity (Pearson, Uricchio and Brooker, 2015, pp.53–54, 63). Due to the possible concerns in relation to how children may react to the characters acting in often morally gray ways, it may also be understandable why these stories were often changed to have a more clear distinction between good and evil characters although the role they play in the story remains similar.



This can be thought of as affirming the idea that can fill a similar role in the story despite changes (Propp, 2009, pp.9–10, 21–24, 78; Hermansson, 2020, p.47). What this study shows is that while the specific changes may be quite noticeable and do alter the tone, the purpose of the characters within the story can still remain similar. Finally, some changes were necessary purely because of the medium, as a series of static images and animation can't quite convey an identical sequence of events, in particular if an episode needs to fit a certain time frame. Previous research does acknowledge this phenomenon (Cartmell, 2012, p.145; Morton, 2012, p.145), which has been demonstrated with a clear example in this study. How many changes can be explained as the result of interpretation however (Anne Furlong, 2012), is not entirely clear as the changes tend to be more easily explained as deliberate attempts to accommodate the medium or appeal to a new audience.

It may also be worth to note that the changes made in this adaptation primarily apply to this particular adaptation and does not imply anything about other instances of adaptation from comic book series to television series by default. Further studies may prove necessary for a more general understanding of adaptations between these particular mediums. What this may however prove to be useful for further studies, are the conclusions made in regards to how adaptations may contain multiple different stories presented as one cohesive whole, and the subject matter of attempting to change the target demographic. Such studies do not necessarily need to be about comic book to television adaptations like this study, they may instead analyze any other adaptation.

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## Appendix

### Terminology

Adaptation: The process of taking existing media, for this purpose fiction comic books, and using it as a basis for new media of a different medium, in this case fiction television series.

Source Material: The original piece of media serving as the basis for the adaptation. In this study, this would refer to the comic books adapted into the television series.

Comic Book: A literary medium which uses sequential art, often in combination with text within the artwork, to express a narrative. Typically published in magazine form before collections in larger volumes, though may simply be released in a larger format immediately. Distinct from comic strips in that multiple pages of material released at once is the intended experience, rather than one page or a segment of a page.

Animation: The illusion of movement on film which makes of artwork in the form of drawings and/or computer models, as opposed to live-action which uses photography. Traditionally accomplished through use of hand-painted cels though use of computers instead was common by 2003.

Filler: A term commonly used for adaptations, common in discussion of Japanese animation, which refers to scenes and plots added to the adaptation and most commonly for the purpose of extending the running time (Camp and Davis, 2007, p.237) . Definition can be somewhat subjective as additional scenes may no lack thematic or narrative purpose, for this study, it may be easier to define filler as being any scene or story not found in the source material and not an alteration.

Alteration: The a direct change from the source material resulting in irresolvable incongruence. An example in this study would be the decision to make the character of Shredder, a human character, an alien character instead. Certain alterations, such as the decision to add colour, does not count as an alteration due to being interpretation.

Interpretation: Distinct from alteration due to ambiguities in the source material. Some aspects, such as what a character may feel or what occurred within the gaps between the panels, are not always clearly conveyed to the reader in an obvious and may need a depiction in the adaptation despite. Thus the adaptation will need to depict something which could easily have been shown in a different way.

Omission: The removal of characters, storylines or other elements from the source material. For the purposes of this study, this term will not include entirely omitted stories and will only refer to elements omitted from adapted stories.

Splitting: When the existing source material is split between multiple episodes. This may simply refer to when direct serialisation is employed, which is when one episode is directly continued to the next. However, the same story may be split into two or more episodes which do not directly continue from each other, an example of this is how the sequences featuring the character Zog was removed from the story in which the main characters return from New Hampshire and presented as a different story in later episodes (issue #20-21, episodes 21-23 and episodes 46-46).

Combination: When existing material is combined into one episode. For example the decision to combine Fugitoid #1 with TMNT #5 in episodes 27 and 28.

Work Notes:

Exact relation between issues and episodes:

Issue #1 of TMNT is split between episodes 1, 3, 10, 11 and 100

Issue #2 of TMNT is split between episodes 2 and 3

Issue #4 of TMNT is split between episodes 25 and 26

Issue #5 of TMNT and Issue #1 of The Fugitoid are split between episodes 27 and

28 Issue #6 of TMNT is split between episodes 29, 30 and 31

Issue #7 of TMNT is split between episodes 32, 33 and

34 Issue #8 of TMNT is adapted into episode 69

Issue #10 and Leonardo #1 is split into episodes 17 and 18

Issue #12 is adapted into episode 61

Issue #13 is adapted into episode 80

Issue #15 is adapted into episode 48

Issue #19 is split into episodes 21, 45 and 46

Issue #20 is split into episodes 21, 45 and 46

Issue #21 is split into episodes 22 and 23

Issue #28 adapted into episode 81

Issues #50-62 are adapted into episodes 40, 41 and 42 (with major omissions)

Issue #1 of Tales of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles is adapted into episode 79

Issue #2 of Tales of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles is adapted into episode 62

Issue #3 of Tales of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles is adapted into episode 90

Issue #4 of Tales of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles is adapted into episode 83

Issue #6 of Tales of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles is split between episodes 38 and 60

Issue #7 of Tales of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles is split between episodes 98 and 99

Raphel #1 is adapted into episode 4

Donatello #1 is adapted into episode 16

Michelangelo #1 is adapted into episode 64

Pure Filler Episodes:

5 – 9, 12 – 15, 19, 24, 36, 37, 39, 43, 49 – 52, 59, 63 – 64, 66 – 68, 70, 73, 75 – 78, 82, 84, 86-88, 91 – 97. Episodes 101-155 all lack sufficient similarities to be relevant for the study.

Noteworthy changes:

Shredder is an Utrom in the show rather than

human Hamato Yoshi is not a member of the Foot

Clan References to drugs have been removed

Baxter Stockman and the Purple Dragons are affiliated with the Foot

Clan Several stories are told in a different order The heroes never explicitly kill human beings

Connections to filler episodes are in episodes which are direct adaptations

Extra details:

Many issues between 28 and 50 seem to be excluded for non-canonicity or royalty reasons, this may also be the reason for the exclusion of a character from the issue #8 adaptation Baxter Stockman's cybernetics are from issues too loosely adapted for this study  
IDW's age recommendation is thirteen and up, while the show has an American age rating of TV-Y7, which implies a difference in target audience