

## ***Dune*, Failure, and Teaching Adaptation**

Since its publication in 1965, Frank Herbert's *Dune* has not only maintained its position as a bestseller but also paved the way for multiple masterworks of science fiction and fantasy (particularly the *Star Wars* saga). Numerous artists have attempted to capitalize on the success of *Dune*, but nearly every adaptation of this novel has resulted in failure. David Lynch has referred to his infamous 1984 film as a "nightmare," blaming studio executives for a shortage of funds and for not allowing him to control the project's final cut. Likewise, the 2013 documentary *Jodorowsky's Dune* chronicles the eponymous avant-garde director's extravagant approach to creating a film that never made it to the silver screen (in large part because Jodorowsky exceeded budgetary and timing constraints). These and other adaptations of *Dune* are best known within cult followings and demonstrate the difficulty or perhaps even the impossibility of transforming Herbert's work into fresh and approachable narratives.

The repeated failure to turn this complex science fictional tome into a well-regarded adaptation provides a rich pedagogical groundwork for how we can teach students about the demands of particular audiences and genres. Specifically, I will discuss a unit that I developed for one of Georgia Tech's first-year composition classes in which I asked students to critically assess the shortcomings and successes of *Dune* adaptations. We considered if *Dune* is even adaptable or if the difficulty of the source text (which is accompanied by multiple appendices, a map, and a dictionary) might limit the popularity of its multimedia inheritors. At the conclusion of this course, students had to adapt a central scene, concept, or character from *Dune* into a multimodal form of their choice and defend their creative approaches through artists' statements. Within their small groups, students produced a wide variety of forms but notably gravitated towards children's books, board games, and video games.

As students made compromises based on their skill sets and adjusted their source material to meet the needs of audiences that have not read the novel, they gained a greater appreciation for the difficulty involved in popular adaptations. The most successful projects fully embraced multimodal communication, breaking away from the dense text of the novel to produce visually unique forms such as a laser-engraved wooden game and a mashup of *Dune* and *The Oregon Trail*. These amateur approaches to adaptation might help us to understand why *Dune* has not yet experienced popular success beyond the work of Frank Herbert and his son, Brian Herbert. Furthermore, the innovative approaches of first-year students can give us hope for future adaptations, particularly as Denis Villeneuve approaches the mammoth task of once again transforming *Dune* into a film franchise.