

**A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF ASSASSIN'S CREED GAMING  
SERIES**

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Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
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**ABSTRACT**

<b>Title of Thesis</b>	A Narrative Analysis of Assassin's Creed Gaming Series
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Narrative analysis, in the field of media studies, is aim to analyze the underlying narrative structure of folktales, news, or movies, which are all considered media text. Folktales and movies are media text containing strong narrative in order to attract audiences' attention. Similarly, computer games nowadays also contain strong narrative structure in order to attract gamers' attention, and are also attracting researcher to investigate its narrative structure. The concepts of The Hero's Journey and Archetypes proposed by Vogler (2007) were used as analytical framework; while, the texts selected in this analysis are 6 games of Assassin's Creed franchised.

After the analysis, it can be concluded that the narrative structure of all 6 games used in this research follow the concepts of the Hero's Journey proposed by Vogler (2007). Each game has its own unique narrative structure; therefore, the similarities and differences of narrative structure among each game can be spotted in terms of the occurring of Stages, the omitted Stages, the Stages ordering, the existence of archetypes, and the omitted archetypes. When compared with other game narrative research, it is noted that the games in the same series, developed by the same company, may have some advantages in terms of designing the game narrative.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	III
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	IV
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>	V
<b>LIST OF TABLE</b>	VII
<b>CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION</b>	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Scope and Purposes of the Study	2
<b>CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	4
2.1 Theories of Narrative	4
2.1.1 Propp’s Morphology of the folk tale	4
2.1.2 Campbell’s The Monomyth	6
2.1.3 Vogler’s The Writer’s Journey	7
2.2 Previous Research Using the Concept of <i>The Hero’s Journey</i>	11
2.3 Assassin’s Creed Gaming Series	13
<b>CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY</b>	15
3.1 Introduction	15
3.2 Research Question	15
3.3 Research Design	15
3.4 Data Collection	16
3.5 Data Analysis	16
3.6 Analytical Framework	17
<b>CHAPTER 4 FINDING AND DISCUSSION</b>	18
4.1 Introduction	18
4.2 Narrative Structure	18
4.3 Archetypes	24

<b>CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION</b>	27
5.1 Introduction	27
5.2 Limitations of the study	29
5.3 Recommendations for further study	30
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	31

**LIST OF TABLES**

<b>Tables</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>2.1 Name and Descriptions of Each Archetype</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>4.1 Narrative Structure of Each Game</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>4.2 Archetypes Observed in Each Game</b>	<b>24</b>

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

Narrative analysis, a research methodology used to analyze narratives, is commonly used as a tool to analyze human experiences and stories or narratives in social science. In terms of media studies, narrative analysis is used to analyze the underlying narrative structure of folktales, news, or movies, which are all considered media text. The narrative analysis used in this research focuses on exploring the structure of media text. Folktales and movies are media text containing strong narrative in order to attract audiences' attention. Similarly, computer games nowadays also contain strong narrative structure in order to attract gamers' attention, and are interesting to investigate. The *Assassin's Creed* series of games are one of those games containing strong narratives. There have been six main episodes of games released on PC, Microsoft XBOX, and Sony PlayStation platforms from 2007 through 2013, with a variety of mini-series released on other game platforms. Thus, it is interesting to understand the games' narrative structures developed through time.

There are many theories used to analyze the narrative structure of text: for instance, *Morphology of The Folk Tale of Propp*, *Structural Analysis of Narrative of Todorov*, *The Monomyth of Campbell*, and *The Writer's Journey of Vogler*. The *Writer's Journey*, used as an analytical tool in this study, is the most updated narrative analysis theory and it has been widely used by many researchers from different fields of study. As Vogler (2007: XV) insisted, "The Writer's Journey" has been put to work in many ways, not only by writers in many forms and genres, but also by teachers, psychologists, advertising executives, prison counselors, video game designers, and scholars of myth and pop culture".

There have been several recent research projects regarding the narrative structure of computer games. IP (2010) investigated the narrative structure of nine computer games, released from 1986 through 2007 to understand how structures were developed through time. Emmerich (2010) explored the role of narrative analysis theories in the process of designing computer games. Likewise, Cassar (2013) conducted a research to investigate the plot development of three episodes of the *God of War* gaming series. Although narrative analysis of computer games has already been conducted in this research, some gaps in the previous research still exist and will therefore be filled for this research.

As stated before, IP (2010) investigated the narrative structure of nine different games which were developed by different developers over time. The question emerging here is: if the games are developed in the same series by the same developer over different periods of time, what are the narrative structure of those games? This question might have been answered when Cassar (2013) conducted a research on the *God of War* gaming series, which were all developed by the same developer over different periods of time; however, another gap has been spotted. Cassar conducted a narrative analysis by using the close-reading method as the main research methodology. Even though the research involved the *Hero's Journey* concepts of Vogler (2012), it did not emphasize the narrative structure; instead, it emphasized the dramatic functions of the game, the emotion, and the player's experiences from the game. In Emmerich's research, the aim was to find another solution for game developers to develop competitive games for the market by using the Monomyth of Joseph Campbell as an analytical framework.

For these reasons, in this paper, the study will investigate the narrative structure of the six main episodes of *Assassin's Creed series*, developed by Ubisoft company. These episodes are 1) *Assassin's Creed* (2007), 2) *Assassin's Creed II* (2009), 3) *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood* (2010), 4) *Assassin's Creed: Revelations* (2011), 5) *Assassin's Creed III* (2012), and 6) *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag* (2013). The concepts of the *Writer's Journey* developed by Vogler (2007) will be used to

analyze the narrative structure of the game. The aim of this study is to explore the narrative structures of six different episodes of the series.

## **1.2 Scope and purposes of the study**

Since *Assassin's Creed* is a famous game, there are have been many games developed in several different platforms; for example, iOS, Android, PlayStation, Xbox, and PC. Only six main games of the Assassin's Creed series, developed for Xbox, PlayStation, and PC, are selected as media texts to be analyzed. The narrative analysis in this study will be based on Vogler's (2007) *The Writer's Journey*. The main purposes of this study are 1) to investigate the narrative structures of each game and 2) to explore the similarities and differences of narrative structures of each game. As a result, these purposes have led to the research questions, which are: 1) What are the characteristics of narrative structure of each game? and 2) What are the similarities and differences in narrative structures of each game?

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The aims of this chapter are to review and discuss the theories used in narrative analysis. The discussion is allocated into three parts. The first part of this chapter is the discussion of concepts and theories used in narrative analysis. The second part is the revision of the concepts of *The Hero's Journey* used in previous research. The last part is the discussion of the *Assassin's Creed* gaming series.

#### 2.1 Theories of narrative

##### 2.1.1 Propp's Morphology of the folk tale

There are two main approaches used to investigate the narrative structure. The first one is called *The Paradigmatic Approach* which is derived from the work of Claude Levi-Strauss (1977). This type of approach aims to examine the pattern of opposition occurring in the story. The second main approach is called *The Syntagmatic Approach* derived from the work of Vladimir Propp (1968). The aim of this approach is to deeply investigate the narrative structure and map out its recurring pattern in the narrative. (Hansen, Cottle, Negrine, and Newbold, 1998: 142)

Vladimir Propp, a Russian narrative structuralist, explored the narrative structure of hundreds of folk tales and discovered the patterns of these stories (Branston and Stafford, 2006: 42). Propp's aim of this study was to map the narrative structure of this corpus of Russian folktales. As Andonovska-Trajkovska (2012) wrote, Propp's aim was to grasp the tale as a structure consisting of indivisible narrative units which, depending on the specific combination and context, function as a whole (p. 1696). Propp (1968) showed that there are thirty-one common functions

that each story followed: 1) Absence, 2) Interdiction, 3) Violation of interdiction, 4) Reconnaissance, 5) Delivery, 6) Trickery, 7) Complicity, 8) Villainy, 9) Mediation, 10) Counteraction, 11) Departure, 12) Testing, 13) Reaction, 14) Acquisition, 15) Guidance, 16) Struggle, 17) Branding, 18) Victory, 19) Resolution, 20) Return, 21) Pursuit, 22) Rescue, 23) Arrival, 24) Claim, 25) Task, 26) Solution, 27) Recognition, 28) Exposure, 29) Transfiguration, 30) Punishment, and 31) Wedding (quoted in Andonovska-Trajkovska, 2012: 1696-1697).

Anyhow, the occurrences of these thirty-one functions are flexible, as Spierling, Grasbon, Braun, and Iurgel (2002: 38) asserted, “Stories differentiate themselves in regard to which functions have been left out”. The aforementioned statement conforms to other scholars, as Lindley (2005: 6) stated, “not all of the functions are necessary in any given story”.

Furthermore, Propp (1968) also noticed that there are only eight types of characters in story, which are: Villain, Hero, Donor, Helper, Princess, Father, Dispatcher, and False Hero (Branston and Stafford, 2006: 43). Each character has their own functions and are all important to the story in which it works as an engine driving the story forward, as Propp stated, “They constitute the fundamental components of a tale” (quoted in Berger, 2005: 50). This concept of certain types of character influenced Campbell and Vogler, which will be emphasized later in this paper.

To conclude, the concepts of Propp act as a scaffolding for Campbell and Vogler to climb, but the concept, itself, is not the most suitable theory to use in this research. The main issue that makes this concept inappropriate for this research is the fact that the concept is interminable. With thirty-one stages, the analyzing process of six video games’ narratives would take too much time to complete. It can also be noted that Campbell has merged some stages of Propp’s concepts to make them more concise; for instance, stages one to nine of Propp’s concept can be replaced by stage one of Campbell.

### **2.1.2 Campbell’s The Monomyth**

Joseph Campbell, an American anthropologist, is the author of the book called *"Hero with thousand faces"* published in 1949. Campbell's idea is influenced by famous psychologists, who have investigated the relationship between dream and myth, and found that this knowledge of myth is preoccupied in humans in an unconscious level of mind (Berger, 2012). As Campbell (2004: 2) stated, "Freud, Jung, and their followers have demonstrated irrefutably that the logic, the heroes, and the deeds of myth survive into modern times. In the absence of an effective general mythology, each of us has his private, unrecognized, rudimentary, yet secretly potent pantheon of dreams." Carl G. Jung, a Swiss psychologist whose idea influenced both Campbell and, later, Vogler, coined the term archetypes which is used by Campbell to refer to the certain types of character existing in story. The archetype is a vital part of the story which attracts the audience to the story. The reason why audiences are attracted is that audiences are all familiar with this type of character archetype in story. According to Berger (2012), these universal themes all exist in the human mind, in an unconscious level of mind; therefore, people are all familiar with these themes in folktales and movies. Campbell, then, coined the term "Monomyth" as he noticed that every folk tale or fairy tale worldwide contain the same narrative structure. As Campbell (2004: 20-21) mentioned,

It is remarkable that in this dream the basic outline of the universal mythological formula of the adventure of the hero is reproduced, to the detail. These deeply significant motifs of the perils, obstacles, and good fortunes of the way, we shall find inflected through the following pages in a hundred forms. The crossing first of the open sewer, then of the perfectly clear river flowing over grass, the appearance of the willing helper at the critical moment, and the high, firm ground beyond the final stream (the Earthly Paradise, the Land over Jordan): these are the everlastingly recurrent themes of the wonderful song of the soul's high adventure.

The metaphor of the hero's journey is used to represent the story structure, as Campbell compared the lead role of each story to a hero. The concept of Campbell's Hero's Journey is divided into 17 stages (Campbell, 2004), which are: 1) The Call to Adventure, 2) Refusal of the Call, 3) Supernatural Aid, 4) The Crossing of the First Threshold, 5) The Belly of the Whale, 6) Road of Trials, 7) Meeting with the Goddess, 8) Woman as Temptress, 9) Atonement with the Father, 10) Apotheosis, 11) The Ultimate Boon, 12) Refusal of the Return, 13) The Magic Flight, 14) Rescue from Without, 15) The Crossing of the Return Threshold, 16) Master of the Two Worlds, and 17) Freedom to Live.

These ideas of Campbell are developed and modified from the ideas of Propp. It can be noted that Campbell does not modify the concept of certain types of character that Propp has stated; instead, Campbell agrees with these ideas and also emphasizes and explains its attractive functions by using Carl G. Jung's ideas, and uses the term archetypes, coined by Jung, to refer to those occurring characters. However, in terms of stages of the journey, Campbell has modified some stages. As seen in Propp's concept, there are thirty-one stages, but Campbell modifies this into seventeen stages, which makes this version of the hero's journey more concise. Yet, Campbell's concept is not the most appropriate concept to use as an analytical framework for this research, as Vogler has modified these ideas of the journey into a new version which is more concise than Campbell's version and other existing ideas.

### **2.1.3 Vogler's The Writer's Journey**

Vogler's concepts of Hero's Journey in the book "The Writer's Journey" are adapted from the concepts of Joseph Campbell called the monomyth, and the concepts of Carl G. Jung called the archetypes. Vogler (2007: X) wrote in his book that the set of concepts known as "The Hero's Journey" are drawn from the depth psychology of Carl G. Jung and the mythic studies of Joseph Campbell (p. xii). Vogler further claimed, "My concepts of storytelling, are shaped by the patterns of mythology and the thinking of Joseph Campbell and Carl Jung, ...".

The concepts of the writer's journey function as a tool for writer's to draw audiences into the story and drive the story forward coherently. As Ip (201: 111)

asserted, “The Hero’s Journey details twelve key stages,...., which play significant and powerful roles in the evolution of interesting or compelling stories and hence contribute toward a better understanding of how such stories might be constructed.”. Vogler described that there are certain patterns governing the narrative structure of stories; those patterns are called the *Hero’s Journey*, which are divided into twelve stages below (Vogler, 2007):

#### 1) Ordinary world

This stage is a foundation of the whole story which shows the context of the hero and the context of the ordinary world where the hero lives. Vogler (2007) stated that this first stage contains certain elements called backstory, which is served as a foundation for the whole theme of the story. In terms of video games’ narrative, Ip (2011: 112) described that this is a stage where the player first meets the hero and is introduced to the hero’s background, typically via the backstory.

#### 2) Call to adventure

The second stage of the journey functions as an indicator that the story is rolling after introducing the backstory in the first stage. As Ip (2011: 112) stated, “This stage acts as a catalyst that triggers the main storyline”

#### 3) Refusal of the call

Most heroes tend to refuse to the call at this stage because they fear or feel uncomfortable of the road ahead. This stage’s aim is to show that the hero is in a difficult situation and signals to the audiences that the unknown road ahead is full of danger and risk.

#### 4) Meeting with mentor

This is a stage where the hero receives necessary equipment, wisdom, and courage before taking on the adventurous road ahead. The main function of the mentor is to advocate and take the hero through the barrier of fear inside his mind.

#### 5) Crossing the first threshold

This is the last stage in act one. Vogler (2007: 128) explained that this stage is a turning point for the story narrative structure. It signals to audiences that the real action is about to begin

#### 6) Tests, Allies, Enemies

In common, the hero would confront groups of low rank enemies as well as establish a team with allies at this stage. In computer games, Ip (2011: 112) explained that this phase is usually the largest part of the game story, as the player is introduced to all the major characters.

#### 7) Approach to the inmost cave

After the hero completed his first action in the previous stages, he is now in a rest area before jumping into the next action. Dickey (2006: 256) stated that the inmost cave is the site for the central challenge for the hero; it is the situation all other challenges have been leading toward. While, on the subject of games, Ip (2011: 112) claimed, “typically, this is situated toward the end of the game. The main objective of this part of the story is to prepare the hero for the final battle.”

#### 8) Ordeal

An ordeal is a significant scene in every story. It is a scene where a large battle emerges. However, the form of the ordeal is not only war, but may also be betrayal, abandonment, disappointment, facing the greatest fear, challenging a rival, roughing out a storm, and a political crisis (Vogler, 2007: 168-169). As a computer game’s narrative, this is a boss fight stage. (Ip, 2011: 112).

#### 9) Reward

After the hero finished the battle, it is time for him to claim his reward. In most fairy tales, this stage is not the end of the story; however, computer a game’s narrative is different. As Ip (2011: 112) said, “Many games end at this point, when the enemy is defeated and the reward is usually an ending cut scene detailing what happens to the hero after her triumph”.

#### 10) The road back

The road back, the first stage in act three, works as a second threshold in the stories, as the hero steps over it to return to an ordinary world. Vogler (2007: 193) summarized that heroes gather what they have learned, gained, stolen, or been granted in the *Special World*. They set themselves a new goal, to escape, find further adventure, or return home. However, in video games, Ip (2011: 112) asserted that

some games will allow the player to return to the ordinary world. As a result, this stage does not usually exist in video games.

#### 11) Resurrection

Vogler (2007) insisted that the climax of the story takes place in this stage. The climax is a situation where the last fight, the second ordeal, between the hero and his rival begins. In addition, the twist of plot can also emerge in this stage (Ip, 2011: 112).

#### 12) Return with the Elixir

The final stage of the *Hero's Journey* concept is, indeed, to show the end of the story. There are many ways to end the story, for instance, a surprise return showing the twist of plot in the end, a reward and punishment return showing that the villain is punished and the hero is rewarded, or a sharing return showing that the hero shares the elixir gathered from his journey with his fellows and followers.

In addition, Vogler also noted that there are certain types of characters existing in the stories. As influenced by the concepts of Jung, Vogler (2007) calls those certain types of character *archetypes*, similar to Jung's term Volger (2007) divides eight types of archetypes as shown in the table below:

**Table 2.1** Name and Descriptions of Each Archetype

<b>Archetypes</b>	<b>Descriptions</b>
Hero	The main character in every story; works as a connector connecting and drawing audiences into the story.
Mentor	The main function of this archetype is to support the hero by teaching or giving some mysterious artifacts to overcome obstacles along the way ahead.
Threshold Guardians	The main function is to interrupt, block, and test the hero. Its form can be a concrete character; a prop, architectural feature, animal, or force of nature.
Herald	A deliverer delivering a call to adventure to the hero. It drives the story forward by signifying the need for change by the hero.
Shapeshifter	To mislead the hero and the audiences.
Shadow	To challenge the hero to make him learn life lessons; villains, monsters, and bad dreams are all considered shadow archetypes.
Ally	A supporter supporting the hero along the way of the journey. The ally may not be only human but also animals, spirits, angels, or robots.
Trickster	Brings humour to the story. The trickster is usually an ally, but a hero, mentor, or villain can also be a trickster particularly in a comedic story.

These eight archetypes drive the narrative of the story. With these characters, the story will logically move forward and attract audiences' attention. These characters have their own features to attract audiences, but there is one main goal that these characters similarly aim to achieve: to make the audiences feel that they can feel and touch the characters or understand what and why the characters act or think in a certain way. This main goal is to draw the audiences to the characters.

## 2.2 Previous research using the concept of *The Hero's Journey*

*The Hero's Journey* concepts have been adapted and used in various research in many different fields of study. For example, Follo (2002) conducted a research on the relationship among gender and recruitment opportunities. Robbins (2006) conducted research about law. Busch, Conrad, and Steinicke (2013) conducted research on human resource management and team building.

However, there have been some research exploring the narrative structure of video games by using the concept of *The Hero's Journey* as an analytical tool. Those studies have their own advantages and disadvantages, as well as research gaps to fill.

Ip (2011) conducted research on the narrative structure of video games by using various types of theories including Vogler's *The hero's Journey*. The research aim was to explore narrative structure used in old games and modern games. Ten games, namely *The Legend of Zelda*, *The Secret of Monkey Island*, *Flashback*, *Shenmue 2*, *Resident Evil Code Veronica X*, *Final Fantasy X*, *Half-Life 2*, *Fable*, *The Godfather*, and *Halo 3*, were selected. These games were developed by different developers in different years. The results after the analysis of narrative structures of these games showed that the ordering of stages observed from the games mostly follow the ordering of *The Hero's Journey*, and only some stages were reordered. Ip (2011: 32-33) also notes that the most frequently omitted stages were Stages 3, 10, and 12; while, Stage 7 occurred the most frequently. In terms of archetypes, threshold guardians and allies are the most common archetypes, which are generally observed in Stage 7; while the trickster archetype is the least occurring archetype. The research gap here is that all ten games used in this research were all created from different developers. Thus, the emerging question is what the outcome would be if the games were created by the same company and same developing team.

Recently, Cassar (2013) conducted research of narrative analysis of computer games by aiming to better understand the nature of narrative in computer games. The three episodes of the game "God Of War" were selected. The results of the analysis did not emphasize the results from analyzing the narrative structure via *The Hero's*

*Journey* concept; therefore, the research only stated that the games followed *The Hero's Journey* concept with no further explanation and no clear picture of the game's narrative structures. This might be because the methodology applied in this research was close-reading, emphasising the cognitive aspect of narratives and focusing on the player experiences received from the games.

### **2.3 Assassin's Creed gaming series**

*Assassin's Creed* (AC) is a famous franchise of computer games. It has six main games available for Sony PlayStation, Microsoft XBOX, and other computers with the Microsoft operating system, along with various versions of mini games on other platforms. The first episode of the main game was launched in 2007 and the latest episode of the game was launched in 2014. The characteristic of the game is a semi-open world game, which allows players to freely roam in an artificial world. It is categorized as an action-adventure game, as players' control the lead role of the story to journey through the game. Vanord (2008) asserted that it is an enjoyable and exciting action game with many activities and places to explore, rounded out with a complex story that will increasingly draw the player's attention. The 6 main games of the series, namely *Assassin's Creed*, *Assassin's Creed 2*, *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood*, *Assassin's Creed: Revelation*, *Assassin's Creed 3*, and *Assassin's Creed 4: Black Flag*, all have different narratives. However, all of them cohere to one another. The main theme of the game is about conflict and battle between two secret organizations, called The Templar and The Assassins, established since ancient times. Both organizations share the same objective in which they race to find an ancient artifact called the Apple of Eden, which is believed to be a powerful weapon. In the present time, Desmond Miles, an ordinary man, was kidnapped by the Templar since the Templar realized that Desmond was a descendant of an ancient assassin who knows the location of the Apple of Eden. After Desmond was captured, Desmond was put into a machine called the Animus, which is operated as a time machine used to show the memory of Desmond's ancestors in order to track the location of the Apple

of Eden. The player, then, takes control the character, Desmond's ancestor, along the game's plot.

As stated before, each gaming episode exhibits a different story plot and different setting. The first episode, *Assassin's Creed*, is the story of an assassin named Altair in the Third Crusade War located in Masyaf, Jerusalem, Acre, and Damascus. Then, *Assassin's Creed 2*, launched in 2009, is the story of an assassin named Ezio in the age of renaissance located in Venice, Florence, and a few smaller cities. The next episode of the series launched in 2010 is called *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood*. The player controls the same lead role of the last episode, Ezio, but an adult version of him. The setting of the game is generally in Rome, but the players can also roam in Naples and Navarre, a city in Spain. The last episode of Ezio is *Assassin's Creed 2: Revelation* launched in 2011. It narrates the story of an older version of Ezio roaming in Constantinople and Masyaf. The fifth episode of the series, *Assassin's Creed 3*, is a story of a half-blood of an American and Native-American assassin named Connor. The setting of the story is in Boston and New York during the Revolutionary War. Finally, the latest episode of the series called *Assassin's Creed 4: Black Flag* is the story of a pirate assassin named Edward. The setting of the story moves south from the last episode to various islands in the Caribbean Sea.

In addition, as Vanord (2008) said, "*Assassin's Creed* features one of the most unique game worlds ever created: beautiful, memorable, and alive", the game not only provides an exciting narrative, but the games also provides renowned buildings and terrific environments of the artificial world, including real historical buildings, and real historical people into the game to attract players attention and draw them into the story; for instance, the appearances of the Borgia family, Niccolo Machiavelli, and Leonardo Da Vinci, and the existence of the Colosseum and the Sistine Chapel.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The purposes of this study are to investigate the narrative structure of the selected texts, the Assassin's Creed gaming series, and to explore the differences and similarities of structure used in each text. The concepts of *The Hero's Journey* and *Archetypes* by Vogler (2007) are used to analyze the texts. The following chapter deals with research questions, research design, data collection, and data analysis.

#### **3.2 Research Question**

This research aims to answer these questions:

- 1) What are the characteristics of narrative structure of each game?
- 2) What are the similarities and differences of stages and archetypes occurring in each episode of the series?

#### **3.3 Research Design**

This research is a qualitative study of narrative in computer games. The narrative structures of six main episodes of the Assassin's Creed gaming series are selected to be analyzed. The aim of this research is not only to explore the narrative structure of each episode, but also to examine the similarities and the different elements existing in each episode's narrative structure.

### **3.4 Data Collection**

The Assassin's Creed series' texts were chosen to be analyzed for the following reasons.

Firstly, with the six episodes of the game so far, the series has not completely ended. The ending of the last episode of the series is open-ended, which means that there might be new episodes released by the company in the future. It signifies that the series' narratives are long enough to be investigated.

Secondly, the series is categorized as an action-adventure genre which contains a sufficient amount of narrative. As Ip and Jacob (2006 quoted in Ip, 2010: 115) assert,

The most populated genre by some margin is action, which incorporates numerous other subgenres such as action–adventure, first-person shooters, role-playing, and strategic action titles, all of which usually contain sizable narrative elements within their gameplay.

Action game narratives are in contrast from other game genres such as sport games, racing games, multiplayer online role-playing games, and puzzle games, which contain only a slight amount of narrative, which is not suitable to analyze (Branston and Stafford, 2006: 61).

Lastly, the series received high accolades from audiences, as seen from the sales figures of the latest series. The estimated copies sold of the latest episode of the series are 6.87 million copies worldwide. The previous episode, Assassin's Creed 3, sold 11 million copies (Dave, 2014).

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

In order to map the narrative's structure, all six episodes of the series were played and the essential elements of the narrative were recorded. Every cut scene,

main mission, and main character driving the story were interpreted according to the concepts of *The Writer's Journey* (Vogler, 2007); then, the narrative structure of each episode was constructed following these concepts. Later, the comparison of the structures was presented to answer the second research question

### **3.6 Analytical Framework**

The concepts of Vogler's (2007) *The Writer's Journey*, as shown in chapter 2, are applied in this study. The concepts are the most suitable theory to identify the narrative structure in narrative analysis because the concepts represent the most updated theory influenced by the concept of the structural narrativist (Campbell, 1949) and the psychologist (Jung, 1968).

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDING AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the concept of Vogler's (2007), *The Writer's Journey*, is used as an analytical framework to explore the narrative structures of six games, as mentioned in chapter 3. To answer the research questions posed in the previous chapter, this chapter is divided into two parts: the first part is the exploration of narrative structure; the second part is the exploration of archetypes.

#### 4.2 Narrative structures

The first part of this chapter shows a process of analyzing and categorizing the games' stories into different stages. All key sequences categorized as stages are emphasized in this section.

The first episode of the series is *Assassin's Creed* (AC). The game starts by showing a cut scene of Damascus, one of the main game's locations, where Altair, the hero of the story, is trying to assassinate his target. This scene is considered as Stage 1 (Ordinary world). While Stage 2 (Call to adventure) comes shortly after that, as the game shows a cut scene of the enemies' armies approaching the hero's stronghold, due to his failure to assassinate his target mentioned above. The reason behind this invasion is his failure, thus, the hero is asked, by his mentor, to assassinate nine enemies, in order to redeem himself. This is the point where it is categorized as Stage 4 (Meeting with mentor). Before beginning his task, he goes to investigate the traitor who led his enemies to attack his stronghold, and eliminates him. This is considered as Stage 5 (Crossing the first threshold). Then, the game storyline is an interchange among the scenes of confronting tests and enemies and meeting allies, Stage 6 (Tests,

Allies, Enemies). The hero arrives at Stage 7 (Approaching the inmost cave), when he realizes that his mentor is a true culprit; not all of the nine targets, so he goes back to the stronghold to fight with his mentor. The final confrontation with his mentor and boss is Stage 8 (Ordeal). Afterward, the game ends at Stage 9 (Reward) where the cut scene shows that the hero claims a powerful artifact from his mentor.

Further, the second game investigated in this research is Assassin's Creed 2 (AC2). As with the previous game, it begins with Stage 1 by demonstrating the peaceful life of a young boy called Ezio, the hero. The hero's life is changed when his father and brothers are framed, as traitors of the city, and are all executed; thus this scene is considered as Stage 2. The hero, soon, meets with his uncle who teaches him fighting skills and helps him find the culprit who caused the death of his family: this is the point where Stage 4 begins. This game consists of a unique version of Stage 3 (Refusal to the call)., It is a cut scene that shows at first, Ezio refusing to fight back and wishing to flee; but, he changes his mind because he feels responsible for his family. Ezio, then, starts his journey by eliminating his first opponent, Stage 5. The hero arrives at Stage 6, where he meets his allies; most of them are considered as both mentor and ally archetypes, and fights with various types of enemies which are also considered as tests to the hero. Surprisingly, the next Stage is not Stage 7; instead, Stage 11 (Resurrection) takes place. This is the scene where the hero is admitted as one of the creed members. The reason why this scene is considered as Stage 11 is that the hero has learnt something from his journey, and has changed into a new person. The hero arrives at Stage 7 after he slew an enemy and prepared himself before facing the ordeal. Indeed, later, the hero confronts the chief villain, eliminates him, and claims his prizes; consequently, these scenes are considered as Stages 8 and 9 respectively.

In the same way, Assassin's Creed 2: Brotherhood (AC2: Brotherhood) draws audiences into the story by showing the ordinary life of Ezio, the same hero of last episode, Stage 1. The call to adventure, Stage 2, occurs when a group of enemies invade his village. Ezio meets his old friends after fleeing his village injured, Stage 6. The hero then crosses the first threshold, Stage 5, when he kills his first prey. After

that, he confronts some low ranked enemies. Before arriving at the climax of the game, Stage 9 occurs when the hero is ranked as a mentor of the creed. The hero prepares the troops, confronts the chief villain, and hides the powerful artifact in the secret room under the Coliseum. The scenes mentioned above are considered as Stages 7, 8 and 12 (Return with the elixir) respectively.

Assassin's Creed 2: Revelation (AC2: Revelation) is the final episode of the hero, Ezio. The first scene of the game begins with Stage 2, as it depicts the hero reading his father's mail. Then Ezio goes to Constantinople to complete what his father had started, before bringing audiences to the ordinary world: Stage 1. The hero slays an enemy right after the audiences have been oriented to the context of the game, which is considered as Stage 5. After that, the hero meets with his allies who also teach him how to use new weapons. So, these acts are considered as Stage 4. Then, Stage 6 is observed when enemies test the hero. The game moves on to Stage 7 when the hero finds out that his ally has been eliminated and prepares his students for the last war. He rallies his army to the last battleground and the fight with his boss begins: Stage 8. The game ends at Stage 9, where the hero finds a secret chamber which his father sought.

Assassin's Creed 3 (AC3) brings on a new hero. The game introduces a new hero named Connor, a Native American, who lives in a rural area of North America in the period of the American War of Independence. The first stage of this game is lengthy as the game narrates the story of his father's life in America before Connor was born. Connor, as a boy, accidentally meets Charles Lee, the chief villain, who is trying to claim the Native Americans land. Lee burns down the village resulting in the death of Connor's mother. Many years pass when a wise old woman tells Connor that something bad is going to happen to the tribe. Then she sends Connor to find a mysterious man who is believed can help the tribe. These acts are considered Stage 2. Connor finds a mysterious old man, a former assassin, and asks him for help, and then the old man decides to teach Connor the assassin's skills, Stage 4. After that, Stage 6, a mixture of introducing allies' and fighting with enemies' sequences occur. The story then arrives at Stage 7 when the hero realizes that his mentor is dead and prepares for

the last fight. He fights with his father, who turns to be an enemy, before he fights with Lee, the chief villain. This first fight is considered as Stage 8, where the second fight with Lee, the second ordeal, is considered as Stage 11, as Vogler (2007) said that the second ordeal can possibly occur in this stage. The hero takes a mysterious amulet from Lee, and buries it in his mentor's grave. These last two acts are considered as Stages 9 and 12 respectively.

Finally, *Assassin's Creed 4: Black flag* (AC4: Black flag) is the last game analyzed in this research. As always, the game begins with Stage 1 by providing a context of the hero's world and introducing the hero to audiences. The sequence regarding the call to adventure, Stage 2, occurs when the hero, Edward, accidentally kills an assassin and disguises himself as an assassin to claim the rewards. The hero then meets with allies before Stage 5, when he kills his first enemy. After that, there are many sequences from Stage 6 in which tests and allies are spotted. Similar to the other games, Stage 7 is demonstrated as a scene where the hero gives an impressive speech and prepares for the last battle. The hero finally reaches Stages 8 and 9 by eliminating the enemies and claiming his rewards.



context of the main character, and also reorders the occurrences of Stages 5, 6, and 4. Then, AC3 slightly modifies the order by swapping the places of Stages 9 and 11. Finally, AC4: Black Flag inserts Stage 5 in between a set of Stage 6.

In terms of omission, it can be seen that every episode of AC omits some stages from the stories. Stage 3, refusal of the call, is the most omitted stage. This might be because, in terms of action-adventure games, it is a time-wasting stage. The players of this type of game may expect to experience some action rather than some dramatic cut scenes where they know that, in a short time, the hero still has to fight. Moreover, Stages 10, 11, and 12 are unsurprisingly omitted frequently. As Ip (2011: 112) claimed, many games end at Stage 9. The main reason why these stages are frequently omitted might be the characteristics of the game. Most action-adventure games reveal every secret in the narrative after the antagonist is defeated. There is no need to include more cut scenes informing players what happened to the villain, because the villain has already been defeated. Except for some game that aim to launch another episode with the same hero, these stages might be observed and act as a teaser for the next episode by showing that the villain's followers are not defeated and are preparing for revenge.

Furthermore, Stage 6 is the most frequently occurring stage in every game. This stage might be the most important stage for the story because it drives the story forward. Introducing allies and confronting low-ranked enemies are the main functions of this stage. Action-packed sequences, puzzle solving, and mini-games are all introduced, and can be observed in this stage. As a result, when all of these features are combined, Stage 6 is the most frequently occurring stage.

### 4.3 Archetypes

**Table 4.2** Archetypes Observed in Each Game

Game	Hero	Mentor	Threshold guardian	Herald	Shapeshifter	Shadow	Allies	Trickster
Assassin's Creed	1	1	10	1	1	1	2	-
Assassin's Creed 2	1	7	17	1	1	6	11	1
Assassin's Creed 2: Brotherhood	1	4	7	3	-	3	10	1
Assassin's Creed 2: Revelation	1	2	4	1	1	3	4	-
Assassin's Creed 3	1	2	6	2	3	4	10	-
Assassin's Creed 4: Black flag	1	-	9	1	4	5	10	1

The table above summarizes the occurring archetypes observed in the games. The analysis of character archetypes used in this research is influenced by the concept of Vogler (2007). As can be seen from the table, the most frequently occurring archetypes, occurring in almost every episode, are the threshold guardian and the allies. On the other hand, shapeshifter and trickster archetypes can rarely be seen in the game.

A mentor is usually observed in Stage 4 and functions as the mentor for both the hero and the player. In the narrative, the role of the mentor is to encourage, teach, or provide new equipment for the hero in order to drive the story forward; besides, it teaches the player how to perform new advance moves or how to use new weapons. For example, in AC, after Altair, the hero, completes a mission, he is always given a new weapon from Al Mualim, the mentor, before going into another mission.

Another compelling archetype is the threshold guardian in which a mask of the threshold guardian is worn by the enemy. The threshold guardian usually appears in Stage 6 and functions as a test for the hero before confronting the boss in Stage 8. In this same stage, the archetype of allies can be found. The appearances of allies may vary in quantity, but are still an important role for the game's narrative. Its main function, sometimes, intersects with the function of mentor as it consistently performs the same task. A character wearing a mask of allies sometimes gives the hero a new weapon or teaches the player a new move like a mentor, but still functions as an ally in which it behaves as a subordinate of the hero. For example, in AC2: Revelations, a character named Tarik was a student of Ezio, the hero; still, Tarik gives the hero a new weapon and also teaches a new move.

A mask of shapeshifter is another important variable for a story. Although it does not appear frequently, it is an important archetype. The main function of this archetype is to trigger the turning point in the story. As in AC, Al Mualim orders his student, the hero, to kill nine enemies as these enemies are the threat of all humans and his creed. Altair, the hero, finally realizes, after those nine enemies were assassinated, that Al Mualim is a true villain.

In sum, The main purpose of this chapter is to answer the two research questions posed in the previous chapter; to do so, this chapter provides the process of analyzing stages and archetypes as well as displaying the summary tables of stages and archetypes spotted in the games. It can be concluded that Stages 1 (Ordinary world), 2 (Call to adventure), 5 (Crossing the first threshold), 6 (Tests, Allies, Enemies), 7 (Approach the inmost cave), 8 (Ordeal), and 9 (Reward) are the backbone of the Assassin's Creed gaming franchise, since all of these stages occurred in every game; while, Stages 3 (Refusal of the call), 4 (Meeting with mentor), 10 (The road back), 11 (Resurrection), and 12 (Return with the elixir) are optional. In terms of archetypes, an important factor driving the story forward, the most frequent occurring archetype is the threshold guardian. This result brings no surprise at all. As the games are action-adventure games, fighting situations against enemies are expected. Conversely, a trickster archetype is the least occurring archetype. Since its function is

to provide a joke or a small break from stress for the audience, it would not be a necessary archetype to this game genre.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

#### 5.1 Introduction

The aim of narrative analysis of moving images is to uncover the underlying universal patterns of narrative. This type of study can be traced back to Vladimir Propp who analyzed the narrative structure of Russian folktales. Propp's work provides scaffolding for other scholars in recent times, mainly Joseph Campbell and Christopher Vogler. The *Writer's Journey* concepts proposed by Vogler (2007) are used as an analytical framework in this research. The purposes of this research are to map the narrative structure and explore similarities and differences of narrative structure among 6 video games; Assassin's Creed, Assassin's Creed 2, Assassin's Creed 2: Brotherhood, Assassin's Creed 2: Revelation, Assassin's Creed 3, and Assassin's Creed 4: Black Flag.

After the analysis, it can be concluded that the narrative structure of all six games used in this research follow the concepts of the *Hero's Journey* proposed by Vogler (2007). Although not all of the stages are spotted in the narrative, most of the stages occurred. Stage 1 (Ordinary world), 2 (Call to adventure), 5 (Crossing the first threshold), 6 (Tests, Allies, Enemies), 7 (Approach the inmost cave), 8 (Ordeal), and 9 (Reward) are spotted in every game. For this reason, it can be concluded that these stages are the backbone for this game series. The omitted stages are different in every game, since some stages are omitted in the first game, but can be spotted in another game. The ordering of stages is another different issue among the six games, as seen in the summary table in chapter 4.

In terms of archetype, the similarities and differences among these games have been spotted. The archetypes are important factors working parallel with the occurrences of the stages; in other words, the archetypes drive the story forward and

control the occurrences of stages. For example, in AC4: Black Flag, there is no mentor archetypal in the game; hence, Stage 4 has been omitted from the narrative structure. The two most occurring archetypes are threshold guardians and allies. These two archetypes directly affected the occurrences of Stage 6 (Tests, Allies, Enemies). Thus, it might be concluded that the more threshold guardians and allies archetypes appeared, the more Stage 6 occurred. In terms of similarities, the Hero, Threshold guardian, Herald, Shadow, and Allies existed in every game; even though they varied in quantity. On the contrary, the existence of the Trickster, Shapeshifter, and Mentor archetypes are different.

Compared with the previous research of Ip (2010), the results of this research show that there are some differences and similarities. Ip found that the most frequently occurring stage is Stage 7; on the contrary, the most frequently omitted stages are Stages 3, 10, and 12. Ip also found that, in terms of archetype, the most frequently observed are threshold guardians and allies. In addition, Ip (2010) claimed that the Herald is the main supporting role for most games. Similarly, the results from this research show that Stages 3, 10, and 12 are the most frequently omitted stages. This research also found that Stage 11 is a frequently omitted stage. Also, threshold guardians and allies archetypes are the most frequently occurring archetypes. However, many differences between these two researches have been found. In this research, the most frequently occurring stage is Stage 6, while Ip asserted that Stage 7 is the most frequently occurring one. The reason behind this difference might be derived from the different interpretation of the stage's concept of the researchers. Ip classifies the act of fighting between the hero and threshold guardians as Stage 7, while the researcher of this research classified the aforementioned act as Stage 6. Because Stage 6 is about tests, allies, and enemies, all sequences that aim to introduce an ally and enemy and the threshold guardian, to the players are considered Stage 6. In addition, the hero fighting villains sequences are all considered to be Stage 6. Stage 7, in the interpretation of the researcher, is the sequence that the hero prepares for an ordeal (Stage 8). The act of preparing might be in the form of the death of the hero's friend or the hero giving an epic speech. Another difference regards the archetype. Ip

claimed that the herald archetype is the main supporting role for the game which encourages the players through the hero to fight and provides a unique taste in the monotonous story plot. On the contrary, the main supporting role in this research are allies. The role of the herald in six AC games has little impact on the story since the herald in every episode is not purely a herald. Most of the heralds spotted in the stories mainly functioned as a threshold guardian, ally, or mentor, but the mask of the herald is temporarily worn at some point of time in the story to bring the story forward. It is also noticed that the archetype that provides a unique taste in the story is not the herald; instead, it is the trickster archetype. The trickster archetype is not the main characteristic of the character observed in the game. This mask is worn by some characters to provide laughter to the players. For example, in AC2 and AC2: Brotherhood, the mask of trickster is usually worn by the character named Leonardo Da Vinci, who generally functions as an ally archetype.

After comparing these two researches, it appears that the games in the same series may have some advantages in terms of designing the game narrative because the developer can put the players right into the fight after the game begins, before orienting the players to the context of the hero, as the players already know about the hero from the previous episode. This kind of plot may not be suitable for the stand-alone games analyzed by Ip. The ordering of the stages in IP's research is quite straightforward as not many stages have been reordered. But in this research analysis of games in the same series, some unique ordering of the stages can be spotted. As seen in AC2: Revelation, Stage 2 is the first stage being spotted instead of Stage 1 because AC2: Revelation is the continuous phase of AC2: Brotherhood.

## **5.2 Limitations of the study**

Every research paper has its own advantages, disadvantages, and limitations. The two main limitations are the research focus and the theory used in this research. Since this research only focuses on the analysis of media text, and provides only one theory to analyze, the results from this research surely cannot cover all dimensions of

narrative analysis. Furthermore, the issue of reliability is a worthwhile issue to consider. As this type of research relies on the interpretation of the researcher, the interpretation of stages or archetypes might be different depending on the researcher. For this reason, the result of the analysis from other researchers may differ. The last limitation of this research also concerns the results of the study. Because there are only six games used in the analysis, the results from this research cannot be generalized to every existing game

### **5.3 Recommendations for further study**

Narrative analysis of computer games, as well as narrative analysis of other media text, can be done by using other theories of narrative analysis. The paradigmatic approach of narrative analysis proposed by Levi-Strauss (1972) and Todorov (1977) might elaborate another dimension of narrative. Apart from that, since the games studied in this research are all action-adventure games, it would be interesting to analyze the narrative structure of another game genre. Although it is said that games containing narrative are action-adventure, narrative can also be observed in other types of games. Sport games, for example, consist of a story mode which allows players to simulate their own characters and simulate their own stories.

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