Literature and Contemporary Media: Campbell's Monomyth in video game trilogies "Dragon Age" and "Mass Effect"

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Abstract

Storytelling is one of basic human activities and it has multiple purposes in human life: educational, socializational, therapeutic, and entertaining. In his work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces,* Joseph Campbell claims that the path of the hero develops according to a similar pattern in mythology and literature worldwide and throughout human history because it reenacts in various historical and cultural contexts the same basic story of a kind of a rite of passage. People identify and sympathize with the hero and through his or her adventures and trials learn about themselves and cope with their problems, just as heroes manage to overcome monsters or complete various quests. Today, the advancement of technology and the emergence of contemporary media enables storytelling to assume new forms and achieve new levels of interactivity. Video games are such an example where the player can achieve a previously unattainable level of immersion by projecting their identity onto the character should they wish so, and influencing the narrative directly via their actions and decisions. This essay analyzes the main similarities between Campbell's Monomyth model and video game trilogies *Mass Effect* and *Dragon Age* and suggests that even the new digital media continue to observe the hero's pattern as outlined in Campbell's Monomyth.

Key words: Campbell, Monomyth, video games, *Mass Effect*, *Dragon Age*

Contents

Introduction

This paper aims to illustrate, by analyzing two popular video game titles, *Mass Effect* and *Dragon Age*, how the monomythic pattern today is present in stories told via contemporary media. Chapter one briefly explains the monomyth and discusses its role in the past and its role today, as well as its presence in contemporary media. The most adaptable form of contemporary media are video games, and the chapter illustrates this by analyzing the role of, and freedom given to, the player. The player is able to customize the character, as well as directly influence the narrative, which makes immersive storytelling possible on a level unattainable by a literary text. Chapter two deals with *Mass Effect* and analyzes its hero as the monomythic hero, stages of the game as they correspond to the model of Hero's Journey, and corresponding character archetypes as they appear in the game, the Mother Goddess, Trickster, and Tyrant as key characters amongst them. Chapter three similarly analyzes *Dragon Age*, discussing its heroes, character archetypes, and points of similarities between the narrative of the game and the Monomyth model. Emphasis is placed upon the dream world as the unconscious, and the character archetypes of Goddess, Trickster, and Tyrant. This chapter discusses monomythic pattern of the narrative, as well as the relatively minor similarities regarding symbolism. In the final chapter, the analyses, which prove the similarities between the storylines of these video games and the structure of the monomyth, are summarized as the argument as to why video games as a form of contemporary media deserve attention and inclusion.

1. Literature and Contemporary Media

In his famous work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell states the following: "For when scrutinized in terms not of what it is but of how it functions, of how it has served mankind in the past, of how it may serve today, mythology shows itself to be as amenable as life itself to the obsessions and requirements of the individual, the race, the age" (354). In other words, mythology changes and adapts in order to remain relevant and be able to address the issues of a particular time. Today, the rapid advancement of science and technology brings about fundamental changes in society. This advancement, however, does not make mythology obsolete; on the contrary, new forms of communication and contemporary media give the age-old stories new life, one fit to fulfill the needs of society and the individual today. It has also opened new vistas of possibility when it comes to bringing the story to life and presenting it to the reader. Today we see an ancient story retold countless times, but it is no longer confined to the pages of a book or the memory of the storyteller. Contemporary media include TV shows, movies, comic books, and many other storytelling forms. This paper attempts to focus on perhaps the most adaptable form of media today, the one most fitting to bring to life the story of Everyman hero: video games. Video games are a medium for storytelling that opens possibilities which are not present even in other forms of contemporary media (Plyler 22). Video games, and any digital game in general "offers the benefit of players gaining actual agency and likely having a stronger feeling of identification with both story and hero," and can, via the implementation of optional side quests and branching storylines, make possible "that players from the same group can experience different versions of a story" (Busch et al. 8). Different options and choices presented to the player may also increase the replay value of a game, as they can "build curiosity as to what would have happened had the player, for example, sided with a different faction" (Horak 9). This is another quality that traditional storytelling media and even other forms of contemporary media tend to lack.

Today, there are countless titles belonging to every genre, tailored to various demands and various tastes: action, romance, horror, and many others. The two trilogies which are the focus of this paper, *Mass Effect* and *Dragon Age*, both belong to the category of role playing games. Both titles serve as ample proof of why BioWare is "one of the dominating RPG creators in the market" (Horak 12). *Mass Effect* also belongs to the genre of science-fiction, and *Dragon Age* to fantasy, but the content is more closely discussed in subsequent chapters. Both these trilogies, just as many other titles, bring the player into an epic story. They portray the struggle, put in general terms, of good against evil, and they ask of the player to take on the role of the hero. Instead of being merely a spectator powerless to influence the plot, like the reader of a literary text would be, the player

makes choices which directly influence the plot and may completely change the outcome of the narrative (Ostenson 76).

Throughout human history, literature has had an invaluable role in shaping not only society as a whole, but individuals as well. From ancient mythologies and legends, fairytales and folklore, to contemporary novels, fiction in general and fantasy in particular have served to preserve and carry forward the stories which may be called universally human. Such stories are found all across the globe, in every age, society, and civilization. Today, these stories take on a life of their own on the screen, and their creators are granted various new ways to bring the reader into the story itself, ways that were not possible before the advancement of technology. Video games "represent some of the most important storytelling in the 21st century" (Ostenson 71).

Both of the games discussed in the paper offer the player a freedom of choice which the traditional forms of media were not able to offer. They offer an immersive, interactive experience, where the player not only witnesses the story but takes part in it, influencing the direction of the narrative. "Interactivity" as such has many different definitions (Horak 4), but it is taken here in a broad sense of a player influencing the game world via decision-making, and the game world adjusting accordingly. While the "core" of the hero character remains more or less unchanged, the player is free to project themselves as the hero, or create a character entirely different from themselves and experience the consequences of actions different from those they would ordinarily undertake. Character creation, something available only in contemporary forms of media such as games, enables the player to tailor the looks and personality of the hero. Face or body shape, gender, name, hair and eye color, physical as well as psychological traits – all of these are chosen by the player and help create an immersive experience of the kind impossible for the stories which remain confined to paper. This can be seen as "an idealised self (the projective identity)" of the player (Knopf 3). This fits Campbell's interpretation of the hero as "each of us" (337) while also expanding upon the definition. While the outward appearance, according to Campbell, is ultimately unimportant compared to the ever-present humanity of the hero, this advancement of contemporary media can certainly help the player identify with the hero better, and it creates a much more immersive experience. However, this is merely an introduction to how well Campbell's monomyth corresponds with the themes, characterization, and story of these games. This paper is an attempt to list and explore some of the more obvious similarities, which point to the similarity between traditional and contemporary (digital) storytelling.

Delmas et al. seem to suggest that Campbell's model of hero's journey may be applied to the players themselves approaching a game; in the case of games used as learning tools, the player (student), "leaves" the common world to immerse themselves into the game world, overcoming

challenges and then returning to the "common" world to apply newfound knowledge and skills (III). Similarly, the monomyth may be brought into connection with spirituality, "with works of fantastic fiction serving as a site for the spiritual transformation of the modern consumer" (Knopf 14).

2. The *Mass Effect* trilogy

There are many similarities between the narrative of the *Mass Effect* trilogy and the monomyth, so many, in fact, that this paper can only be an attempt to outline the most important ones: the fundamental symbols which the trilogy obviously draws from the monomyth. The first of these is the character of the hero. Throughout the *Mass Effect* trilogy, unlike the *Dragon Age* trilogy, the main character is the same person. The players assume the role of Commander Shepard – gender, first name, appearance, past, and personality are chosen by the player.[1] The available list of traits, both physical and otherwise, allows for the creation of various characters and gives the player a great deal of freedom. Much like in Campbell's theory of the Monomyth, the hero can wear many different faces, and whatever their gender, race, or appearance, the hero is ultimately the embodiment of humanity.

The setting of this science-fiction trilogy is the future, after humanity had achieved space-flight and made contact with several alien cultures. The ultimate enemy, as is later revealed, is a sentient race of machines named "the Reapers," who cyclically destroy advanced civilizations in the galaxy at the apex of progress. Commander Shepard is the hero that must face and defeat this embodiment of evil lest they manage to "harvest" and destroy humanity and its allies. The idea of great "cycles" of history appears in several world mythologies, and is also discussed by Campbell. Notable instances are Mayan and Hindu mythologies, as they predict distinct, alternating cycles of progress and diminishing in history. Campbell's idea of the Cosmogonic Cycle, more specifically the "universal round" (242) is realized in the *Mass Effect* trilogy as the rise and fall of civilizations repeatedly destroyed by the Reapers. These machines systematically wipe out any civilization advanced enough, leaving those yet advancing to be destroyed in the next cycle. Such a cycle of destruction that forbids any progress past a certain point must be broken in order to attain freedom. To break away from this enforced "destiny" by the power of own determination, will, and the help of allies, is the task of the hero. Shepard, the protagonist of the trilogy, confronts these inhuman, merciless cosmic forces, "armed" with their humanity and their connection to others as primary strengths. During their travels, Shepard gathers a crew with whom they develop a deep connection, and each supporting character has their own story, morals, and insight to offer. In Campbell's words, "The national idea, with the flag as totem, is today an aggrandizer of the nursery ego, not the annihilator of an infantile situation" (359). This is precisely what Shepard, the hero of the trilogy, must overcome. The allies Shepard gathers are not solely human, they belong to several alien races with very different beliefs, and only through overcoming their differences

[1] The paper will therefore use the gender-neutral pronoun "they" to refer to Shepard.

and ultimately working together can they overcome the cycle of destruction. The introduction of so many alien species may also be understood as "the replacing of the fairy by the alien, of one Other by another" (Knopf 68).

The Reapers wait in the "dark space" outside the galaxy, perhaps as a symbol of the unconscious which needs to be understood and overcome. The "supernatural aid" comes in the form of visions which Shepard receives upon accidentally activating an artifact of a bygone civilization. These "beacons" are left over from the previous cycle, and they are the last remnant of a powerful civilization which failed to defeat the Reapers, and was thus entirely annihilated. Meant as a cautionary tale, the beacons project the truth about the impending doom and oncoming end of civilization directly into Shepard's mind. This is Shepard's "call to adventure" (Knopf 42). However, given that untold ages separate the hero from that bygone civilization, the message can be understood only gradually, as Shepard overcomes different challenges and reaches more of the beacons. The trials that Shepard faces bear many similarities to the trials faced by the mythical hero, however the similarities do not end with the trials alone.

In the second instalment of the trilogy, *Mass Effect 2*, Shepard begins their story by literally experiencing death. Their ship is attacked, and Shepard dies whilst saving the crew. Their remains are found by an organization, and they are literally rebuilt. Aside from asserting both Shepard's humanity (mortality) and their role as a "chosen one" (overcoming mortality), this fits the idea of the monomyth. Much like Inanna (Campbell 200) and many other mythological figures, Shepard experiences death and overcomes it. In Campbells words: "The hero, who in his life represented the dual perspective, after his death is still a synthesizing image: like Charlemagne, he sleeps only and will arise in the hour of destiny, or he is among us under another form" (330). One of the organization's reasons for "rebuilding" Shepard and tearing them away from the clutches of death is that Shepard is more than a soldier; they are a hero, a symbol. Much like the mythic hero, Shepard has overcome mere mortality while at the same time remaining fundamentally human. Immediately upon their reawakening, Shepard is tasked with discovering why human colonies throughout the galaxy have been disappearing. The answer is once again the Reapers, who have been abducting human colonists with the help of a conquered alien species, the Collectors. Shepard at long last discovers the motive behind the abductions: the Reapers have been building another of their kind. Abducting and "integrating" thousands of people into the newly-built sentient machine is the way they increase their numbers. Each "Reaper" is a repository of sorts, advanced technology combined with biological material of an entire species; individuals are literally deconstructed and absorbed into the collective consciousness of the machine. In Campbell's terms, this can be understood as the all-encompassing darkness of the collective unconscious into which

the hero must descend in order to secure a victory of their humanity over the inhuman. Shepard indeed literally travels into the center of the dark, the base of the Collectors, who had been kidnapping humans under the control of the Reapers. The Collectors are an example of what happens should the hero fail. They are no more but empty husks, serving as tools for the Reapers who are in this way understood as the darkness of the unrealized unconscious. The hero, Shepard, is faced with trials (the "road of trials", in Campbell's terms) throughout the game, whether these trials take the shape of combat with an enemy, environmental hazards, or quests which must be completed via diplomacy (Knopf 44).

The figure of the Mother Goddess is possibly realized in the characters of asari. Asari are an all-female race capable of living for as long as a millennium. They are the most powerful race of the *Mass Effect* universe, and they have three distinct life stages; maiden, matron, and matriarch. The help of an asari crew member, dr. Liara T'Soni, is essential in Shepard's struggle against the Reapers. The character of dr. T'Soni is also a possible romantic interest for Commander Shepard of any gender, should the player choose this option. The asari embody the matriarchal, life-giving figure of myth; they are able to create offspring with any race or gender via a process of joining their minds and memories with a chosen person, urging them to embrace the unity of all life. This bears obvious similarities with the ideas of the monomyth, specifically the life-giving figure of the Mother Goddess.

The other side of the Goddess, namely that of the destroyer, is most likely realized in the character of Matriarch Benezia, the asari matriarch who sided with the enemy, though she had chosen that path out of the intention to do good. Benezia is also Liara T'Soni's mother, Shepard's friend and possible lover. The confrontation with Benezia can be understood as a kind of rebirth, where the old aspect of the Mother Goddess is giving way to the new, a renewal of sorts where the protagonist dismantles the old order to make way for the new stage of the cycle. Should the player choose Liara as Shepard's love interest, this confrontation becomes the aspect of the mother facing against the aspect of the lover. This, too, can be understood within the concepts of the monomyth.

Woman as the Temptress is the most prominent in the character of Morinth, in the second instalment of the theory. She is an asari, the daughter of one of Shepard's crew members, and suffers from a rare genetic condition which causes her to destroy the partner's mind during intimacy. All asari are able to connect to the minds of their partner (thus enabling them to create offspring with any race or gender in the game), but those suffering from the aforementioned condition kill their partner during the attempt. Morinth is aware of this, and actively seeks to commit murder. Shepard is tasked by their crewmember Samara, Morinth's parent, to aid in the

capture of the murderer. This is achieved via Shepard's seduction of Morinth, during which Shepard must resist the actual temptation until Samara arrives, and only pretend to be affected enough to distract Morinth. Should they give in to temptation at any point and agree to be intimate with Morinth, Shepard risks their life and the success of their entire mission.

The "mystagogue" of the trilogy is Captain Anderson (Knopf 46). He assumes the role of Shepard's guide and mentor, and where he has failed (as a candidate for the "Spectres," elite forces of the Citadel) because of Saren's betrayal, Shepard ultimately succeeds, with Anderson's advice and guidance. Within the Citadel, now taken by enemy forces, Anderson – having fought and having been mortally wounded – expresses approval and pride at Shepard's actions before succumbing to his wounds. In light of this, he can also be seen as the father archetype; having taught and guided Shepard, he dies so that Shepard could assume the role of the sole savior and hero to humanity. This may be understood as "Atonement with the Father" (Campbell 120), with Anderson not as a representation of individual power, as much as power of the system, or society as a whole. He may be understood, especially considering his rank and age, as a representation of the Alliance (human representative in galactic society) and thus society in general.

The Trickster, in the first instalment of the trilogy, is arguably represented in the character of Saren. Saren is an agent-turned-traitor, under the influence of the enemy (the Reapers, as Shepard later learns), and for a time uses his influence to further the enemy plans while simultaneously denying his involvement and undermining Shepard's reputation. At the very beginning of the game, he greets a fellow agent than proceeds to shoot him in the back, killing him. The Trickster in the second part of the trilogy, as well as (arguably), supernatural aid, is the character of the Illusive Man. The enigmatic leader of the organization who funded Shepard's "resurrection," he uses and often misleads Shepard by withholding information to further his own ends. He appears as an enemy in the third part of the trilogy, by then fully under the insidious influence of the Reapers. Shepard infiltrates the headquarters of the Illusive Man's organization (Cerberus), in order to obtain everything needed for the final confrontation.

The "belly of the whale" (Campbell 84) and alternatively, descent into the underworld, in the second part of the trilogy is passing through the "Omega 4 relay," a dangerous portal leading to the perilous core of the galaxy, in search for the Collectors' base. Shepard and their team embark on this mission with little hope of survival, and thus face death; there is also a possibility that team members should perish if Shepard is not sufficiently prepared for this encounter. Even seemingly minor decisions are of utmost importance, and player choice drastically influences the outcome of the game as well as decides the fate of other game characters (Horak 13). Thus, the player literally

takes part in events that shape the hero's destiny and that, to a certain extent, shape the player themselves and may contribute to their sense of success, ability, or self-worth.

The final part and the culmination of the trilogy is Shepard's battle for Earth, which is under siege by the Reaper forces and has thus become a battlefield for the last hope of humanity's survival. Similar to what occurs in the second part and the Collectors' base, Shepard journeys to the very heart of enemy operations, the taken space station which proves to be the key to the battle. There, Shepard encounters an ancient artificial intelligence, which explains the origin and purpose of the Reapers. Thus, the hero gains knowledge surpassing every common insight, and with it, a god-like power. Shepard is presented with a choice to use the station, which is tied to the Reapers, to either attempt to control them, destroy them, or fuse organic and synthetic life together throughout the entire galaxy (Shepard may even refuse the choice altogether). This may be understood as a "boon" (Campbell 160) of a kind; any of the three choices will end the war, and two of them (controlling the Reapers or joining synthetic and organic life together) enable Shepard to transcend mortality, sacrificing their mortal body in the process and existing in a different form. This may be understood, in Campbell's terms, as Apotheosis of the Hero (139). The refusal of any choice can subsequently be understood in Campbell's terms as "refusal of return" (179); making the choice, for Shepard, means the end of the war and the loss of heroic role. Making the choice, however, means the dissolution of ego – the final sacrifice of the hero for the continued existence of society. Ultimately, unity in general is the overarching theme: "Commander Shepard must rally the forces of both Council and non-Council species to counter the Reapers and stave off total annihilation" (Knopf 41).

Another important similarity is how well the Mass Effect trilogy corresponds with the circular, or cyclical, representation of the monomyth; the starting point being also the point of the return of the changed hero. The Citadel, a massive space station which is the heart of galactic politics and trade, is the familiar world into which Shepard enters early in the first game, and to which they often return. This "starting point" is also the final battleground and the "stage" of the final resolution; taken by the enemy and revealed to have a sinister purpose, it is quite literally the key to tremendous power which Shepard must ultimately choose how to utilize. Shepard returns to this previously familiar and ordinary place, now in possession of knowledge about the hidden nature of the universe and with the power to change it. All the knowledge and skills gathered throughout the trilogy, everything Shepard gained on their "road of trials," is utilized here. The starting point is quite literally the point of return to the transformed hero, who had descended into the underworld and underwent Apotheosis (Shepard literally dies and is revived in *Mass Effect 2*,

with a considerable amount of technology integrated into their body, as well as having gained the insight from beacons of a bygone civilization, the Protheans, in *Mass Effect 1*).

Besides being present on a large scale throughout the narrative of the trilogy, the monomyth may be recognized on a smaller scale in each of the three games, as "the game itself is parcelled up into a series of miniature monomythic cycles in the form of player exploration" (Knopf 47). Thus, each of the missions (or quests) that Shepard completes are a "crossing of the threshold" (Campbell 71) and the descent into the "belly of the whale" (83) on their own, representing a trial which the hero must overcome. Both the overarching story and minor story elements thus correspond to the structure of the monomyth.

3. The *Dragon Age* trilogy

The *Dragon Age* trilogy can be described as medieval fantasy. It takes place in the world of Thedas, where there are several fantasy races. Two main themes throughout the entire trilogy are magic (and the persecution of mages), and the terrible affliction known as the Blight, which turns the infected into mindless monsters and ruins the land it touches. Magic, in *Dragon Age*, is the ability to manipulate energies, and is tied to the realm of dreams known as the Fade. The Fade is perhaps the most obvious connection to the monomyth. Campbell says on this subject: "The cosmogonic cycle is to be understood as the passage of universal consciousness from the deep sleep zone of the unmanifest, through dream, to the full day of waking; then back again through dream to the timeless dark" (247).

In the *Dragon Age* trilogy, mages draw their power from the Fade, the realm of dreams that all (except the dwarven race and those ritually cut off from the Fade) visit nightly in dreams. The Fade is inhabited by demons taking the names and personalities defined by human vice, such as Sloth, Rage, Desire, and so on. Mages are the only "awake" sleepers; meaning that only those with magical power are conscious while in the Fade. They are constantly at risk of possession, should they fail to resist the temptations of the demons. Campbell, describing the powers of a certain mythological emperor, says: "His distinguishing endowment was his power to dream: in sleep he could visit the remotest regions and consort with immortals in the supernatural realm" (293). As a place from which literal transformative magical power is drawn, this magical realm of embodied human urges made manifest in dream, is undeniably similar to the magical realm of the monomyth as well as the human unconscious. Should the mage hero fail to resist the temptation, should they fail to master themselves, they will be possessed by a demon, the embodiment of human vice and base urges, and they will become what is known in the game world as an "abomination." Abominations are such (mostly) monstrous results of the mage hero's failure, bodies controlled by the manifestation of the basest nature. It is, in Campbell's terms, the degradation of the hero who failed to master their ego, into the tyrant (Campbell 326). The fade is not inhabited only with these manifestations of the negative in human nature, it is also a home to "spirits," (as opposed to "demons"): valor, faith, justice, wisdom, and so on. However, as the players learn in the second instalment of the trilogy, Dragon Age 2, these spirits may become "corrupted" upon contact with the human world, and turn into their demonic counterparts. A spirit of Justice, whom the protagonist's friend and potential love interest Anders willingly allows into his body (possession), over the course of the narrative becomes twisted into Vengeance by witnessing injustice and suffering in the world and out of the desire to change it. Anders, possessed by Justice/Vengeance, commits an act that was the center of debate amongst the game's fans; he

causes the explosion of one of the main buildings of the Chantry, the religious institution responsible for the ongoing imprisonment, torture, and deaths of countless mages. For obvious reasons, this is still the cause of debate and disagreement among the fans of the trilogy. The Justice/Vengeance duality, or rather spirit/demon duality in general, bears similarity to the monomythic duality of Hero/Tyrant, as well as emphasizes the demand for mastery of self and the abandonment of ego which the monomythic structure places upon the hero.

Similar to the Hero becoming a Tyrant unless they discard their ego and embrace the good of the community, the mages of the Dragon Age trilogy have gone from the oppressed to the oppressors in the nation of Tevinter. While mages are the ones enduring injustice and oppression almost everywhere else under the "Andrastian Chantry" (the *Dragon Age* universe's dominant religion), in Tevinter they have established a magocracy. They commit horrendous acts, such as blood sacrifices, and practice slavery, all with the sole intention of gaining and keeping power and knowledge. They have also separated from the mage-oppressing remainder of the Chantry, which is under the guidance of a female religious figure (the Divine), and established a Chantry of their own, led by a male, Imperial Divine. This is similar to the monomythic concept of a tyrant king, and the Mother Goddess figure opposed by a patriarchal figure of the King/Tyrant.

Unlike the *Mass Effect* Trilogy, each instalment of *Dragon Age* has a separate protagonist. The hero of the first part of the trilogy, *Dragon Age: Origins*, is the Warden. The player is free to choose from several fantasy races, such as elves or dwarves, and several backgrounds (such as an imprisoned mage, an outcast dwarf, and so on,); ultimately, the player character joins the order of the Grey Wardens, people who sacrifice personal attachments to fight against the Blight which ravages the land and twists people into monsters. Already, several common themes with the monomyth are apparent: "The values and distinctions that in normal life seem important disappear with the terrifying assimilation of the self into what formerly was only otherness" (Campbell 202). Each prospective member of the Grey Wardens, including the player character, must go through a ritual known as the Joining. This includes consuming a mixture containing tainted blood of the creatures infected by the Blight; the hero effectively infects themselves with the taint, thus joining a kind of a "hive-mind" of the infected. They accept the taint will spread, quickening their death, so that they are able to "sense" and combat the enemy. This is, using Campbell's terminology, the "assimilation into otherness" (Campbell 202).

The "call to adventure" is the appearance of Duncan, a recruiter for the order of the Grey Wardens. This character will appear regardless of the character origin chosen by the player, and he will recruit the character despite the possible refusal of the call. The player is free to have their

character decline the call, but ultimately "fate" conspires and takes them forward regardless of their rejection of the call. This is clearly similar to how the monomyth is structured.

Delmas et al. define supernatural aid as "a character that comes to bring tools, councils, protections for the player in his future quest" (IV). In Dragon Age, supernatural aid appears in the form of what is later the Mother Goddess archetype. She appears as Flemeth, "Witch of the Wilds," and is a very powerful, magic-wielding woman mentioned in legends. Later in the trilogy, the player learns that Flemeth shares her body with an elven goddess of motherhood and justice, Mythal (known as the Protector). She prolongs her life by taking over the bodies of her daughters, and clearly corresponds to the Goddess of the Monomyth. Which is more, Flemeth may take the form of a dragon, which corresponds further to the archetypes found in the idea of the monomyth. Quoting Campbell: "the hero-soul goes boldly in—and discovers the hags converted into goddesses and the dragons into the watchdogs of the gods" (202). Flemeth appears as "supernatural aid" in every part of the *Dragon Age* trilogy. In *Dragon Age: Origins*, she saves the Wardens (including the protagonist) from certain death after a betrayal by assuming her dragon form and removing them from danger. In *Dragon Age II*, she saves the Hawke family, whose member is the protagonist, from death by, once again, assuming her dragon form and flying them out of danger. In *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, the third part of the trilogy, she provides crucial information that enables the hero/protagonist, the Inquisitor, to defeat the ultimate adversary. In Campbell's words: "The universal goddess makes her appearance to men under a multitude of guises; for the effects of creation are multitudinous, complex, and of mutually contradictory kind when experienced from the viewpoint of the created world. The mother of life is at the same time the mother of death; she is masked in the ugly demonesses of famine and disease" (280). Flemeth/Mythal certainly fulfills the criteria. She is both revered and feared, and both with good reason. She saves the lives of the characters because fate demands so, and ends lives for the same reason (there are many hints and stories within the game that the character of Flemeth is ruthless, even aside from the fact that she possesses her daughters to prolong her existence).

The "renewal" of the Mother Goddess aspect is the character of Morrigan. She is the daughter of Flemeth and a possible love interest for the male Warden. Morrigan accompanies the Warden on their travels, aiding them in the struggle against evil. Once the Warden earns her trust, Morrigan asks the Warden to face and slay Flemeth to prevent her from taking over Morrigan's body to prolong her life. Much like in *Mass Effect*, should the player choose Morrigan as the protagonist's love interest, this confronts the Mother aspect of the Goddess against the aspect of the lover, and possibly enables the renewal of the goddess archetype in the story. Given that Morrigan is the one who presents the hero with the option of a ritual, the purpose of which is for

her to conceive a child with either the male hero or a male Warden companion, so that the soul of the enemy (the Archdemon/Old God whom the Warden must slay) may be reborn and purified, the character of Morrigan may also serve to fulfill the role of "Woman as a Temptress," in Campbell's terms.

Every part of the trilogy contains the descent into the underworld as well. For the Warden, the protagonist of the first part, that is the literal descent into the Deep Roads, a network of ancient dwarven pathways beneath the surface. There, the hero learns dark secrets about the origin of the enemy, and the ways the enemy twists people into monsters. The hero learns of the "Broodmothers," women who were kidnapped by darkspawn (the legion of Blight-carrying creatures), and forcibly turned into monstrous creatures who create more of the darkspawn. In *Dragon Age II*, the hero, Hawke, also descends into the underworld in a literal sense. Seeking riches to enable them to support their family and win back the family estate, Hawke ventures into the Deep Roads, but finds an idol which drives its owner insane and corrupts them. This can be understood as a sort of an "inversion" of the flight with fire, because the boon which the hero brings forth into the light of day not merely bestows power, but irreversibly corrupts. The corrupted idol finds its way into the hands of Knight-Commander Meredith, head of the city's templars – the fighters whose role is to guard mages, but who instead jail and oppress them. Knight-Commander Meredith, both driven to madness and given extraordinary powers by having the idol in her possession, is the final enemy that the hero must overcome. In a way, she is the tyrant king of the monomyth, placing her own gain above the wellbeing of her subjects. Instead of guarding and protecting, she shackles and oppresses. In Campbell's words, "The hero of yesterday becomes the tyrant of tomorrow, unless he crucifies himself today" (326). Meredith is, arguably, just such a hero-turned-tyrant, one who fails to controls themselves and turns their newfound powers against the people. For the freedom of the city and the safety of many, it is the task of the hero, Hawke, to end Meredith's reign of injustice and fear.

In *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, the descent into the Underworld is both more and less literal. The hero, the Inquisitor, is able to physically walk the Fade, the world of demons and magic, the "beyond." Marked by fate in a literal sense – the Inquisitor bears a mark upon their hand, gained as the only survivor of a powerful magical explosion involving an ancient artifact – they are capable of tearing open or closing the "Veil" between the two worlds at will. As a consequence of the explosion which bestowed the mark upon their hand, the Rift opened in the sky – a massive, physical tear into the world of demons and dream. The Inquisitor's task is to close this tear and return the world into balance, which can obviously be understood in terms of the monomyth.

The archetype of the Trickster is realized in the character of Solas. Solas is an elven mage that poses as a friend and advisor to the Inquisitor, the hero of the third part of the trilogy. He is also a potential love interest for a female elven character. However, the player discovers at the end of the game that Solas is actually an ancient elven trickster god of betrayal, Fen'Harel, known as the Dread Wolf. The in-game story claims that he had once betrayed the elven gods, sealing them away from the world. He is depicted as a wolf (a motif present in many real world stories), and regarded generally as a non-benevolent deity. Ultimately, the player discovers that Solas is in a way the one to blame for the conflict in the game, as it is revealed that he was the one to give a powerful artifact to the main antagonist of the game, which subsequently caused the Rift and resulted in chaos as demons and spirits began pouring into the mortal world. The Dread Wolf is mentioned in previous two games, and generally portrayed in in-game stories as cunning and deceitful. In the third game he, under the name of Solas, helps and advises the hero, but ultimately turns out to be the cause of their struggle in the first place.

Aside from the plot faithfully following the pattern set by the monomyth, perhaps faithfully enough to be criticized for predictability in case of *Dragon Age: Origins* (Horak 5), there are other similarities, namely the symbols and motifs. The Tree as the World Axis can be seen on the example of the "vhenandahl" the "tree of the people," which can be found in the centre of the "alienages" of the city elves, the walled-off parts of the city where the elves are forced to live in poverty. The tree is a symbol of their once great culture and city, Arlathan, the heart of their now-lost civilization. It serves as a central symbol and represents the entirety of the bygone age of power and prosperity of the elven people, thus bearing similarity to the tree as the world axis of the monomyth. With the elven civilization in decline, and the elves forced to either live in poverty in human cities or wander the world in nomadic clans, the vhenandahl tree is often neglected or destroyed in many of the elven alienages.

Another of the minor similarities is the symbol of the mirror: "The mirror, reflecting the goddess and drawing her forth from the august repose of her divine nonmanifestation, is symbolic of the world, the field of the reflected image" (Campbell 198). In the world of Dragon Age, the symbolism of the mirror is found in the "eluvians," ancient, magical elven mirrors that were used for communication and via which it was possible to travel great distances. They play an important role in each part of the trilogy, even more so if the player chosees the "Dalish elf" origin in the first instalment; the magical mirrors have, since the ancient days of their use, become either nonfunctional or even corrupted and able to spread the taint of the Blight.

The ultimate antagonists of the series, much like those of Mass effect, have common traits. While the antagonists of Mass Effect are all ultimately connected to the Reapers (as the

embodiment of destruction and tyranny), the antagonists of Dragon Age are all ultimately connected to the Blight. In the game world, the Blight is said to have originated from the attempts of ancient Tevinter mages to usurp heavens and take the divine powers for themselves. This attempt at ultimate power and immortality resulted in the corruption of the Golden City (the equivalent of heaven and the seat of the divine Maker); the Tevinter mages had brought sin to the divine realm and had subsequently tainted it, turning it dark and twisted. The game-world lore states that they had been punished for their crimes by being expelled from heaven and turned into the first "darkspawn" - corrupted, Blight-carrying creatures. The ultimate antagonist of the first part of the series is an "Old God" corrupted by the blight, in the shape of a dragon (obvious similarity with the monomyth). Named the "Archdemon," this monstrous dragon commands legions of Blight-tainted creatures and its goal is the corruption and destruction of the world. In the second part of the trilogy, templar commander Meredith is the one corrupted, taking on the role of the Tyrant whom the hero must conquer.

The role of the Tyrant in the final part of the trilogy, *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, belongs to Corypheus, one of the original mages who assaulted the heavens, now immortal and monstrously corrupted by the Blight. He is the embodiment of corruption and hubris, and quite literally the manifestation of the monomythic Tyrant. His ultimate goal is to achieve Apotheosis by returning to the tainted heavenly realm, now known as the Black City, and claim the divine throne for himself. Corypheus in one of the original mages who, in ancient times, assaulted and supposedly tainted the heavens. He however claims that the city had already been tainted at the time of the mages' arrival there, and that the divine throne was empty. The hubris he demonstrates by his denial of a higher power corresponds to the monomythic pattern, his role becoming that of the tyrant king whose rule must end for the cosmic order to be reasserted. This is the role of the monomythic hero, the Inquisitor, the situation similar to Campbell's recounting of the tale of king Minos: "King Minos retained the divine bull, when the sacrifice would have signified submission to the will of the god of his society" (Campbell 55), and similarly, Corypheus in his role as the Tyrant goes against the direct wishes of a deity, striving to attain something meant to remain out mortals' reach. Much like Minos, Corypheus reaps the consequences of his actions, though he himself becomes the monster whom the Hero's task is to slay. The mages had penetrated into the realm of dream and the divine (the unconscious) whilst awake, breaking the rules and limitations imposed by the cosmos itself (embodied in the deity). A possible understanding of this is that because the mages, as they refused to follow the proper path had thus arrived spiritually unprepared – in Campbell's terms, refused to relinquish their weapons as in the story of Sticky-hair – all they had found was monstrous to their unprepared spirit (Campbell 80). Corypheus and

his followers had entered the Fade, the realm of the unconscious, physically; which is to say, they literally did not relinquish their five senses (Campbell 81).

4. Conclusion

While it would take a work much larger in volume to fully explore and exemplify all the numerous instances of Campbell's Monomyth model as it appears in video game trilogies *Dragon Age* and *Mass Effect*, this paper is merely an attempt to point out some of the major similarities between the Monomyth and the aforementioned trilogies. Such similarities include the general structure of the adventure (the call, the refusal, crossing of the threshold(s), belly of the whale, meeting with the Goddess, apotheosis, and so on), and the archetypal characters (such as The Goddess, Woman as the Temptress, the Trickster, Tyrant, and ultimately, the Hero). This suggests that video games rely on the same principles than traditional storytelling does, and also that they have the same purpose, which they achieve through a higher level of the player's immersion into the storyline than may be the case in literature. The listeners of oral literature, readers of traditional literature and players of video games all attempt to understand the world around them, speculate about the world's history and its meaning, as well as seek for their own purpose in the universe around them.

The video game industry today is fast-developing, and although video-games are often not viewed as a serious artistic and literary medium, they are and have the potential to be. While video game genres differ from one another greatly (just like the literary ones), and not all of the games have the same narrative potential, some are well worth the attention and analysis for their artistic and literary value. *Mass Effect* and *Dragon Age* trilogies both belong to the genre of role-playing games, as well as those of science-fiction and fantasy, respectively. The player assumes the role of the (highly individualized) hero, embarking on a series of adventures and trials that bear distinct similarities to those found in the Monomyth model. As presented in this paper, major character archetypes are present throughout both trilogies, and the adventures of the hero(es) are recognizable as the stages of the Monomyth. Video games are too often unjustly ignored as a serious storytelling medium, given that they belong to contemporary media and have been present for a relatively short amount of time. However, as this paper attempts to point out, similarities with a traditional storytelling model are present, and even improved upon, giving the reader/player a greater chance to interact with the story world as well as significantly influence it. Given their relatively recent appearance as a storytelling medium, as well as the growing attention of academic circles, hope remains that video games will eventually receive the recognition they rightfully deserve as the next bold step in the retelling of an age-old hero's story.

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