The Importance of Ludonarrative Design in Improving Women's Representation in Videogames: A Comparative Ludonarratological Analysis of the Hero's Journey in *Final Fantasy 13* and *Final Fantasy 15*

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Abstract

In 2009, popular game company Square Enix (SE) announced Final Fantasy's (FF) first female-led videogame. The game is Final Fantasy 13 (FF13). Its game director, Motomu Toriyama boasts how FF13's heroine, Lightning, presents a different type of appeal than that of the usual hypersexualised women characters seen in videogames. While we can consider that this is a step forward for better representation in the medium, better representation should not stop at desexualising character designs. Instead, developers must be cognizant of how the game's ludonarrative design can affect the portrayal of female characters. Ludonarrative design combines game/ludic elements with narrative aspects to shape the player's experience. In this paper, we analyse the ludonarrative design of two FF games, one of which is female-led (see: FF13) and the other is male-led (see: Final Fantasy 15). We contend that there is gendered treatment in FF13's ludonarrative design. In order to validate this argument, we analyse the correlation between the game avatar function (ludic feature) with the number of monomyth tropes (narrative feature) present and how they affect our perception of Lightning as the hero.

Keywords: Ludonarrative Design, Ludonarrative Dissonance, Hero's Journey, Gender.

Introduction

Twenty-two years after releasing the first Final Fantasy (FF) game, Square Enix (SE) published

Final Fantasy 13 (FF13). FF13 is different from its predecessors because it is centred around a

female character called Lightning. This marked the first instance of SE centring a mainline FF

game primarily around a female character. For FF13's marketing, Lightning is advertised as a

mysterious skilled heroine, a far cry from the usual innocent and gentle female characters that the franchise is known for. According to FF13's game director Motomu Toriyama, he wanted to subvert the franchise's usual formula of having ultra-feminine female leads and show fans a different type of heroine, someone who is powerful and possesses great inner strength. He added, "…we really wanted to create something, a character that was different, a female character that even guys could look to and think that she was really cool. She's not just beautiful on the outside…" (Blake, 2010). Considering Toriyama's sentiments, FF13 may be seen as a step forward for SE in producing gender inclusive games. Lightning's character design may be considered as mould breaking but we believe that FF13 does not actually challenge the gender status quo in the videogame industry, nor does it provide a fair representation for women in games. Toriyama's understanding of what it means to be gender inclusive in videogames is representative of the industry's sentiment on the topic, which in this case, is evidently limited. We believe that fair representation of women in the medium does not end at desexualising their appearances. Rather, female heroes in video games should be presented, unequivocally, as the central focus on the games. To that end, we will examine ludonarrative design to show how it can affect the portrayal and perception of the female characters in the game.

Firstly, we would like to establish our reason for using the idea of ludonarrative design. We assert that videogames should not be studied as films or texts. It is a medium that has its own unique qualities that cannot be found in the other two mediums – namely, the player's ability to intervene in the narrative through gameplay. Next, we argue that the way female representation in videogames has been discussed, where the primary focus is on character design, is limiting. This is because it ignores a significant characteristic of videogames which affects the portrayal of female characters, which is gameplay. Therefore, in this paper, we use the term ludonarrative design to explain how videogames disseminate story information

through gameplay. The word "ludonarrative" is a portmanteau of the word ludology (study of games) and narrative. This means that it is important for us to study the interaction between ludic (game) and narrative elements in a videogame. We believe that ludic elements can include (although they are not limited to) avatar control, battle system, and game space, while narrative elements refer to (but are not limited to) story tropes, plot structure, and focalization.

By conducting a ludonarratological analysis, we will get to understand how videogames relay story information to the player. This analysis can provide us with an insight into what the videogame deems as important information as well as how its ludonarrative design affects how players comprehend the story. In this paper, we will share our findings from the ludonarrative analysis that we have conducted based on our own gameplay. Due to the limited space in this research paper, we will only be analysing the correlation between the avatar control function (game element) and the number of monomyth tropes (narrative element) across two FF games. Our rationale in analysing these specific ludic and narrative features is as follows: who the player gets to play throughout the major part of the game can influence how they perceive who is the hero in the videogames; and analysing the number of monomyth tropes that are experienced by the perceived hero may reveal gendered treatment in the game's ludonarrative design. In this context, we define gendered treatment as to how videogames default to position women as weaker thus possibly unworthy to carry the hero title in their ludonarratives.

The games studied in this paper are FF13 and Final Fantasy 15 (FF15), with the perceived heroes of the games being Lightning and Noctis, respectively. We have chosen these specific FF games because of their game development history. FF13 was initially packaged to become part of the *Fabula Nova Crystallis: Final Fantasy XIII* series alongside *Final Fantasy Agito 13* and *Final Fantasy 13-Versus* (FF13V). These games were meant to share the same lore, so comparisons between FF13 and FF13V were widespread. The initial idea was that

FF13 and FF13V were designed to mirror each other but due to internal scheduling issues, FF13V was rebranded as FF15 and it became a PlayStation 4 exclusive (Fandom.com). By considering the games' development history and widespread comparisons, we will show that there is a difference in the treatment of gender through the ludonarrative design of the FF games, especially where Lightning's hero journey does not actually paint her in an empowering light. We seek to support this notion by conducting a comparative ludonarrative analysis of the hero's journey in FF13 and FF15.

This paper is divided into four major parts: (1) Women in Videogames, (2) Video games as a Storytelling Medium, (3) Method: Real-Time Hermeneutics, and (4) The Gendered Ludonarrative Design of the Hero's Journey in FF13 and FF15. The first section is meant to provide readers with context about how women have been portrayed in videogames, which lends to the significance of our research. The second section will discuss the nature of storytelling that occurs in the videogame medium; we will discuss the ways in which it is different than other mediums as well as the characteristics that are unique to the videogame medium. The third section explains the approach we have adopted for this research and how we employ this approach in the collection of our findings. The final section features our analysis of the findings from our gameplay of FF13 and FF15 where we will demonstrate the value of ludonarrative design in shaping women's stories.

Women in Videogames

In her paper, *Un/Realistically Embodied: The Gendered Conceptions of Realistic Game Design,* Sara John argues that the game development process must be considered as a social process. This perspective arises from the idea that developers, as social beings, engage in a process of negotiating their perceived social norms (in this context, gender norms) to align with those of their intended audience. Then consciously and subconsciously, the developers will

integrate these social norms into the game that they are developing (John, 2006). For context, the videogame crash in 1983 was the beginning of the shift in society's perceptions from 'videogames are for all', to 'videogames are for boys only'. This paradigm shift was a result of the industry needing to survive the crash by homing in on a single target audience, which in this case was boys. According to Tracy Lien in her article, *No Girls Allowed*, many game companies leveraged the use of pin-up women in order to sell their videogames and manipulate sales data to make it seem that the bestselling games were those largely enjoyed by boys. Due to these tactics, they influenced the public to believe that videogames are meant for boys (2013). Thus, it is possible that developers have integrated gender norms that pander to the interests of het-boys/men. While we do not believe that all developers choose to be sexist, they do operate in a male-dominated industry that champions boys and men. As a result, the developers will almost inevitably lift male experience and masculinity as the universal standard while womanhood and femininity are posited as the Other (Johnson, 101). Thus, it is imperative for us to recognise and explore the ways in which videogames have reinforced gender stereotypes about women.

We find that videogames stereotype women in two major ways: either through their hypersexualised designs (Sarkeesian, 2014; Kennedy, 2002; Mejia & LeSavoy, 2018), or being typecast as secondary characters (Goldberg et al., 2015). The blatant male gaze placed in the hypersexualised design of female characters is a clear indication that developers design videogames for a male audience. So, what happens when developers want to create a main playable female character? In videogames, the main playable characters are usually depicted as assertive and powerful so that they motivate players to play as them. However, the idea of an assertive and powerful female character might deter their male demographic so the developers' solution to this is to create a playable female character that has bi-modal appeal.

Bi-modal appeal refers to a character that was designed to appeal to both male and female audiences. This character is empowering enough that female players find them relatable but is also sexual enough to attract the male players without intimidating them (Kennedy, 2002). An example of this is Lara Croft from *Tomb Raider* (TR). TR has come under question for the overt sexualization of Croft's character despite her success as the first mainstream playable heroine in a videogame. The game's narrative positions Croft as a capable archaeologist-adventurer, but also undermines this by having a ludic feature in the form of a fixed camera angle where the game perpetually sets the player behind Croft. This gives players a clear view of her (exaggeratedly designed) rear throughout their gameplay. From this, it is evident that developers intentionally situate Croft for the viewing pleasure of her male audience. The consequence of this design rationale when it comes to the representation of women as videogame heroines is the further reinforcement of problematic ideas about women, especially when they are supposed to be at their most empowered state. Croft's bimodal appeal sets the precedent that women can be empowered and have agency, as long as they remain attractive to men[7] (Tompkins et al., 239).

Next, we find that there is a trend of typecasting female characters as secondary characters in videogames. For context, we define secondary roles as characters who do not hold the focus of the story and may be either playable or non-playable. The FF franchise has a history of casting female characters as secondary characters in its videogames. When it comes to designing FF ludonarratives, its developers rely on a gender-coded formula, especially in the portrayal of the FF characters. The male characters are generally more assertive than the female characters which largely means that they are playable characters. Female characters in FF are usually portrayed as nurturing and demure. Either the roles they play in relation to the main hero are subordinate roles such as the damsel/mother figure, or their combat skills are

supportive in nature. In older FF titles, for example, female characters are usually defaulted as the healer in the player's party (Filipowich, 120-127). Healers in videogames carry the connotation that they are weak and incapable of winning battles on their own. Healers rely on stronger character classes such as swordsmen, whose attacks typically carry higher damage points. We believe it is no coincidence that female characters are default healers in games, considering most games were developed by men. Further, it is highly unlikely for the player to be able to play a secondary character as their default avatar in videogames. They might be able to control the secondary female character in a turn-based battle system but because they are not playable outside of battle, it further reinforces how the game's narrative does not centralize around her.

When game companies consistently typecast female characters as secondary in videogames, inadvertently they are reinforcing traditional gender hierarchies where women are seen as subordinate to men. The portrayal of these female characters is strongly governed by the male gaze, resulting in the othering and objectification of women. These problematic portrayals communicate two things: first, women will always be the object of the narrative but never the subject, and second, it is their task to support men to become the subject of the narrative (Mulvey, 1973). Female characters are often stereotypically depicted as meek and weak, particularly in contrast to their male counterparts, who are portrayed with traits like strength and confidence. These stereotypes cause men and women to "behave, think, and aspire differently because they have been taught to think of masculinity and femininity in ways which condition difference" (Sultana,10). It normalizes the idea that "men have, or should have, one set of qualities and characteristics, and women another. Such as masculine qualities (strength, bravery, fearlessness, dominance, competitiveness, etc.) and feminine qualities (caring,

nurturing, love, timidity, obedience, etc.)" (Sultana, 10). In the end, these stereotypes further perpetuate the idea that women are inherently Other within the videogame medium.

Videogames as a Storytelling Medium

Since the conception of the first videogame to ever be commercialized in the 1970s[1], the videogame medium has undergone tremendous development over the years. Since the core characteristic of a videogame is to allow the player to interact with the goings-on inside the game, more advanced game mechanics[2] means that developers can increase the breadth of what the player can do within the game space.

In the videogame industry, game developers utilize game mechanics in order to convey a story[3]. The added complexity within the videogame medium that is absent in media such as written text and films is the role that the gamers themselves play in the construction of the story in a videogame. In texts and films, the author, director, or scriptwriter is the sole storyteller, while the reader or viewer is the audience, receiving the story without influencing its course. However, in videogames, this line is blurred due to the medium's interactive nature. As players control in-game actions and technological advancements expand their capabilities, they increasingly influence the game's story, a concept in game studies known as co-authoring. Co-authoring describes the collaborative relationship between game developers and players, where the narrative depends on input from both (Chauvin, Donnart & Levieux, 2014). Hence, we can consider that unplayed videogames are incomplete stories that will become complete once gamers play them. Due to this, there is value in analysing one's gameplay because what every player experiences in the game will be different because everyone's gameplay is different (Arjoranta, 62; Jennings, 2015).

To explain the mindset of how game developers construct stories in videogames, consider this: game developers understand that storytelling in this medium is a collaborative effort so their job is to create structures in the videogame and prepare for several possibilities. This is where the aspect of ludonarrative design comes in. Developers use game mechanics such as battle systems[4] to communicate the play conditions that the player must fulfill in order to progress in the game.

As for the narrative aspect of the game, developers typically decide on a main storyline—this means that there are certain plot points in the game that the player cannot change. These fixed plot points are often locked until certain play conditions have been met. In some cases, players will not be able to finish the game unless they have gained access to all the main plot points. Therefore, developers implement these fixed plot points to outline the game's story, but what happens in between each fixed plot point constitutes the opportunity for the player to craft their own narrative through their gameplay. Depending on the player's decisions while playing the game, they can trigger special cutscenes[5] that reveal extra story information which shapes their understanding of the overall story in the game. Conversely, the player's decision could also cause them to be locked out of accessing other story information[6]. To conclude, how the player chooses to play the game (ref: gameplay) affects the way they experience the game's story, making these unique story events that they experience as canon.

At this point, we have discussed how developers' approach game design and narrative elements respectively, but these elements often intersect during gameplay. Ideally when storytelling is done in videogames, developers should ensure that there is little ludonarrative dissonance (LD) so that it does not break the magic circle. In game studies, the magic circle refers to the "area within which the rules of the game apply, a special space, ideally but not necessarily demarcated by the rules within which play occurs. It need not be a physical space,

but can instead be virtual or a frame of mind" (Brown, 1). The term LD was coined by game designer Clint Hocking in his 2007 blog post titled "Ludonarrative Dissonance in Bioshock: The Problem of What the Game is About". He defines LD as the experience of being conscious of the conflict between the game's fictional and ludic demands. LD can occur in two ways: the first is when the game's narrative (based on the player's interpretation) conflicts with the player's choices during gameplay (Toh, 227). For instance, in Final Fantasy X-2 (FFX-2), players have the option to complete side-quests in any order. However, the game made it clear via its side-quests menu that certain missions should technically be played after main plot events for it to make sense narratively. Despite this, FFX-2 imposes no restrictions, allowing players to complete later side-quests first. LD then occurs when a main story cutscene assumes that the player does not know certain plot information when in fact the player is in the know because of their gameplay choices.

The second way that LD can occur is when logical inconsistencies occur between what is conveyed through the gameplay versus the narrative (Toh, 230). We will once again use FFX-2 to illustrate this second LD phenomenon. For context, FFX-2 emphasizes Yuna's outfits significantly, incorporating them into the game's battle system, with over 20 outfits available. Despite this variety, Yuna's default outfit consists of a tank top, short shorts, boots, and two guns. This look is referred to as her gunner outfit. In FFX-2, players can only play as Yuna, their primary game avatar. When fighting enemies, the game's battle system requires players to change Yuna's outfits in order to access different attack skills. Say a boss battle[7] ends with Yuna in a thief outfit, the cutscene after the battle may show Yuna in her default gunner outfit. Therefore, when LD occurs due to inconsistencies in Yuna's appearance, it can temporarily break the magic circle for the player.

Critics quarrel about whether LD in videogames is a good or bad thing. We are of the opinion that it is an unavoidable by-product of the interactive nature of the medium. We believe that LD is a natural occurrence in gaming and most players do not necessarily stress over broken plot progression as seriously as when they watch a film or read a book. Instead, we believe that LD can be used as a tool for storytelling in videogames. When LD is intentionally leveraged on, it can be used to add richness to the game's storytelling such as portraying characters' complex psychological states like alienation and disassociation (Kuznetsova, 70). Additionally, LD in a game's storytelling can be used as a tool to facilitate the player's reflection on "sociocultural values embedded in game design" (Toh,71) which is useful in analysing gender in videogames. Regarding our analysis of the Final Fantasy (FF) games, our playthrough may reveal instances of LD, particularly if the game's ludic elements conflict with the protagonist Lightning's role, thereby subjecting her to gender norms that undermine her hero status. This is more so if male-led FF titles such as FF15 (that FF13 is compared to) do not display the presence of LD within the same ludic and narrative features that will be studied in this paper—thus further strengthening our theory that game developers have exercised gendered treatment within the design of FF13's ludonarrative.

The Hero's Journey in Videogames

Storytelling in videogames often utilises a familiar narrative framework, namely the hero's journey (HJ)/monomyth[8], popularised by Joseph Campbell. The monomyth is a common narrative archetype, or story template, featuring a hero who embarks on an adventure , learns a lesson, wins a victory with that newfound knowledge, and then returns home transformed (MasterClass, 2021). It can be divided into three major parts: departure, initiation, and return. Campbell suggests that these three parts are rites of passage that a hero must undergo in order to understand himself and his place in the world (Campbell, 33). Within these 3 rites of passage, Campbell identified 17 tropes across the world's heroic myths, although it is not necessary for

the hero to experience all 17 tropes. So how is the monomyth significant to the ludonarrative analysis of FF13 and FF15?

Considering that our objective is to highlight how ludonarrative design can affect the representation of women in videogames, the study of how HJ is incorporated in the two FF games is a viable entry point to see whether there is gendered treatment in the development of Lightning and Noctis' ludonarratives. Since Campbell believes that the monomyth captures shared human experiences and values that are universal (33), the HJ template is a useful narrative element to measure to what extent game developers recognize female characters as heroes and to highlight the importance of ludonarrative design in ensuring a fair and empowering portrayal of women in videogames. After all, Campbell defines the term hero as "someone who has found or achieved or done something beyond the normal range of achievement and experience. A hero properly is someone who has given his life to something bigger than himself or other than himself" (Moyer, 1988). Following this reasoning , female characters who are positioned as heroes in videogames should experience the same HJ tropes as their male counterparts. Therefore, Lightning's HJ in FF13 should not differ significantly from of Noctis in FF15.

To study the HJ in FF13 and FF15, we will then need to define the characteristics of a hero. We believe that a hero should have these characteristics: they embody universal values or needs which make them relatable for the audience (Volger, 30); they believe that they are the central figure in their life—this is important as the HJ is essentially about a person's search of their identity (Volger, 29); they must go through significant growth where they have to overcome challenges and achieve victory, which in turn causes them to gain knowledge and wisdom (Volger, 31); and lastly, they must be an active character that pushes the story forward (Volger, 31). These heroic characteristics must also be supported, in the game, by the playable

avatar experiencing a majority of Campbell's 17 HJ tropes. The significance of experiencing these HJ tropes is that they symbolise the rites of passage that the hero must undergo in order to grow as a person (Campbell, 33). Therefore, it is important for us to see Lightning experience most of these HJ tropes because if she does, we will consider this as the game recognising her as the hero in the ludonarrative. Should a male hero experience more HJ tropes than Lightning, it would suggest gendered treatment by the game developers.

Method: Real-Time Hermeneutics

For this research, we adopt the Real-Time Hermeneutics (RTH) approach for the collection of our findings. RTH is defined as the process of interpretation that occurs during gameplay by the player. The term 'real-time' refers to the time frame where the player derives meaning while engaging in the act of playing the videogame (Arjoranta, 59). This implies that the player's comprehension of the ludonarrative takes place during the act of their gameplay and in the context of our research, our understanding of the portrayal of the heroes is derived from how we play these games. Furthermore, employing this approach can help us identify the HJ tropes that are embedded in the ludonarratives of FF13 and FF15. To reiterate, we acknowledge that these tropes manifest through game mechanics and cutscenes. Therefore, we place utmost importance on playing the games ourselves to avoid overlooking possible instances of HJ tropes in the games.

Our findings will be based on Yang Safia's gameplay since she is the most proficient gamer among us. She has experience in playing previous FF titles which will reduce the learning curve that is required to familiarize oneself with the game mechanics. We provide Safia's profile because we will be referring to her interpretation of the FF games and it is important for us to recognize the perspectives and potential biases that she may bring to her meaning-making of the games. Safia's gamer profile is as follows: she is a 33-year-old woman

with a history of playing RPGs from the late 90s to the 2010s. At the time of writing, she has played six FF titles including FF13. She upholds centre-left views and is a Malay Muslim so her understanding of supposed gender norms and roles may be different from others.

Safia plays FF13 on PC and FF15 on PlayStation 4 because these are the most accessible platforms for these games. The games are played in English dubbing since we are proficient in the language. Next, we want to note that we will not be referring to any YouTube walkthroughs, and our findings are based on Safia's gameplay only. We recognize that this can be seen as a shortcoming in our research but we counter this with the belief that not all playthroughs can ever be the same in videogames, due to the interactive nature of the medium. Finally, we do not strive for 100% completion of both games. Instead, our focus is to complete the main game story since that would be the appropriate avenue to showcase Lightning's and Noctis' HJs to the player. The data collection process encompassed two phases:

Phase 1: In the free play stage, Safia played FF13 and FF15 with the intention of familiarising herself with their ludic features. During this phase, the playthrough time was 96 hours and 140 hours respectively.

Phase 2: In the critical play stage, Safia replayed both FF games in order to collect data. Referring to Figure 1, she pinpointed instances in gameplay and cutscenes where HJ tropes were employed, recording these in a table. She also took note of which character experiences the HJ trope. If Lightning experiences a HJ trope, then it is labelled green. Characters apart from Lightning that experience an HJ trope are labelled in blue, vague references to a HJ trope are labelled yellow, and red is for HJ tropes that are absent in FF13. The same process applies to Noctis in FF15. Finally, it was during this phase that Safia formulated her interpretation of how Lightning and Noctis are positioned as the heroes in their respective games. At this stage, the playthrough time was 81 and 100 hours respectively. It was shorter because Safia was more

familiar with the gameplay and she decided to forgo side-quests that do not add value to the main plot of the game.

The Gendered Ludonarrative Design of the Hero's Journey in FF13 & FF15

From Safia's gameplay analysis, we observed gendered disparities in the ludonarrative design of the HJ within FF13 and FF15. We believe that the ludonarrative design in FF15 consistently positions Noctis as the hero of the game whereas the same cannot be said for Lightning in FF13. Instead, Lightning's ludonarrative design works to submit her into becoming patriarchy's ideal woman rather than an empowering heroic figure. We arrive at this conclusion because there is a direct correlation between the avatar control design (ludic element) and the HJ tropes (narrative element), which affects the position of Lightning and Noctis as heroes in their respective games. The avatar control design refers to the character that is playable for the player. For RPGs, the character that the player will play as is typically the hero of the story. The norm here is that players will consistently control[9] one character (i.e., hero) as they traverse through the game space.

We found that FF13 has a mutable approach to its avatar control design, meaning that the game dictates who Safia can play throughout her gameplay. This means that Lightning is not the only character that Safia controls as she journeys through the game space. On the other hand, FF15 has a fixed approach to its avatar control design because Safia can only play as Noctis from beginning to end. This even applies to in-battle sequences where Safia can only fight as Noctis. While our research does not focus on the games' respective battle systems, we believe it is worth mentioning this fact because it further reinforces Noctis' hero status in the game. Considering the nature of the games' respective ludic feature designs, we find that this affects the number of HJ tropes that can be found in the games; be it the existence of a particular HJ trope and/or the number of HJ tropes experienced by Lightning and Noctis. We posit that

the number of HJ tropes experienced by either Lightning or Noctis bears more weight in this discussion because it reveals to what degree their respective games recognize these characters as the hero of the game. Figures 1 and 2 below show the number of HJ tropes that are experienced by Lightning and Noctis in their respective games.

Figure 1

Key:

Color	Meaning
Green	HJT Experienced by Lightning
Red	HJT Not Present in FF13
Yellow	Vague HJT in FF13
Blue	HJT Experienced by Another FF13 Character (Male)
Pink	HJT Experienced by Another FF13 Character (Female)

Hero's Journey Trope (HJT)	Final Fantasy 13 (FF13)
Call to Adventure	Green
Refusal of the Call	Blue
Supernatural Aid	Green
Crossing the Threshold	Red
Belly of the Whale	Red
Road of Trials	Yellow
Meeting with the Goddess	Yellow
The Temptation with the Goddess	Yellow
The Atonement with the Father	Blue
Apotheosis	Blue
The Ultimate Boon	Red
Refusal of the Return	Red
The Magic Flight	Green
Rescue from Without	Green
The Crossing of the Return Threshold	Yellow
Master of Two Worlds	Pink
Freedom to Live	Green

Key:

Color	Meaning
Green	HJT Experienced by Noctis
Red	HJT Not Present in FF15
Yellow	Vague HJT in FF15
Blue	HJT Experienced by Another FF15 Character (Male)
Pink	HJT Experienced by Another FF15 Character (Female)

Hero's Journey Tropes (HJT)	Final Fantasy 15 (FF15)
Call to Adventure	Green
Refusal of the Call	Green
Supernatural Aid	Green
Crossing the Threshold	Green
Belly of the Whale	Green
Road of Trials	Green
Meeting with the Goddess	Green
The Temptation with the Goddess	Red
The Atonement with the Father	Green
Apotheosis	Green
The Ultimate Boon	Green
Refusal of the Return	Red
The Magic Flight	Yellow
Rescue from Without	Green
The Crossing of the Return Threshold	Green
Master of Two Worlds	Green
Freedom to Live	Green

Figure 2

These figures show that Lightning experiences only 24% of the HJ tropes in FF13 whereas Noctis experiences 82% of the HJ tropes in FF15. There are also more HJ tropes embedded in FF15's ludonarrative compared to FF13's. Safia's gameplay of the two games reveals that the reason why Lightning has fewer HJ tropes is because the mutable game avatar function forces players to stop playing as Lightning in order to play as other characters and experience the story from their perspectives. This explains why the other 24% of the HJ tropes in FF13 are experienced by other characters. This ludonarrative design caused Safia to experience LD because of how FF13 was marketed and the fact that the game opens with her playing as Lightning. Compared to FF15, the ludonarrative in FF13 turns out to be an ensemble piece because it is not primarily about Lightning. For instance, in the first 10 chapters of the game, players will have to play as other characters (who are predominantly men) and play through their respective HJs. There is even a character named Snow who consistently calls himself the hero of the story while Lightning watches on. The ludonarrative design in FF13 has shown us that its developers did not follow through with their claims of subverting the franchise's formula of having male leads after all. Instead, it reaffirms our hypothesis that Toriyama's idea of gender inclusivity in videogames is limited. Just because Lightning's experience is not hypersexualised does not mean that she is fairly represented. We would even go as far as to claim that Lightning's ludonarrative design worked towards the submission of a supposed heroine into becoming a woman that embodies normative gender ideals.

To substantiate our assertion that FF13's ludonarrative design works to submit Lightning into becoming society's ideal woman, we would turn to Safia's interpretation of her gameplay as Lightning. The notable cutscenes that allow players to gain insight into

Lightning's character take place in Chapter 3 and Chapter 5. In Chapter 3, Lightning is presented as a determined and aloof heroine whose personal conflict seems to be about her inability to communicate her feelings to others. Her single-minded determination to rescue her sister, Serah, evolves into a conflict with other cast members . As discussed by Sultana, women are expected to embody qualities that are gentle and nurturing (10). These are the qualities that Lightning does not possess, thus by societal standards she is not a socially acceptable woman. We believe that the game has made Lightning's lack of socially acceptable traits the point of conflict for her character development in FF13. This can be seen in a cutscene where Lightning rejects the opportunity to mother a male character called Hope. Seeing that she rejected the chance to nurture the boy, who just lost his mother, we find that this cutscene depicts Lightning as a cruel woman since she chooses not to adhere to gender norms. As a result, we find that this portrayal undermines Lightning's agency as a woman on a mission.

In Chapter 5, the climax of Lightning's ludonarrative as the presumed hero concludes with her agreement to mentor Hope, depicted in a cutscene. The moment the cutscene is over, the game automatically shifts the avatar control from Lightning to Hope. The significance of shifting the avatar control from Lightning to Hope is that it communicates the importance of women having to uphold their role as nurturers despite their personal goals. Ironically, this ludonarrative design also highlights the erasure of women within any narrative the moment they fulfil society's expectations of them.

The interplay between the game avatar feature and the distribution of HJ tropes across the FF13 cast implies that an empowered woman like Lightning must be taught to depend on others. Since she is a female character, it is not the norm for her to become the central figure, and thus own her HJ in FF13. Therefore, Lightning must "depend" on the male characters in order to tell a compelling story. This explains the even distribution of HJ tropes between her

and other (male) FF13 characters as seen in Figure 1. To further illustrate this gendered treatment, we refer to Safia's gameplay analysis of FF15. Note that Noctis is deemed as perfectly capable of "carrying" his own story, which is doubly reinforced by having the player exclusively play as Noctis, and by having Noctis solely experiencing many of the HJ tropes as seen in Figure 2. Through this ludonarrative design, SE suggests that women need male support in order to achieve their goals; thus, the women must expect to share or provide space for the men in their lives.

A probable explanation as to why Lightning's ludonarrative design seems to work against her status as the hero relates back to the status quo in the videogame industry. It is possible that SE utilises Lightning as a gimmick to draw more sales as well as offering a seemingly novel product to consumers so that it sets the company apart from its competitors. That said, SE should be aware that the gaming industry will always prioritise their male audience. Thus, by ensuring that FF13's ludonarrative design is not unfamiliar to the male gamer, the decision to turn the game into an ensemble ludonarrative structure rather than the archetypal hero's journey could be SE's solution to ensuring that they are able to retain the interest of their male audience. We consider this as another form of bi-modal appeal. Lightning may not be sexualized in the manner of Lara Croft but her portrayal denotes that her embodiment of heroic traits or the fact that she is focused on her adventure is problematic. Essentially the idea of an empowered woman is a cause for concern, which only reflects the deference for patriarchal ideals. Therefore, Lightning would not intimidate the male player because the game recognizes that any factors that are considered threatening to the male ego have been subdued since the game allow players to play as other characters in FF13.

Conclusion

The videogame industry must extend its focus beyond character design to enhance women's representation . As we have discussed, developers must pay more attention to their games' ludonarrative design as it can influence how their female characters are presented to their players. Through our comparative analysis of FF13 and FF15, we have found that there is gendered treatment in how Lightning's HJ is presented via her ludonarrative design compared to Noctis', as his game adheres to the archetypal standards of a hero's journey. Consequently, FF13's ludonarrative design, as evidenced in Lightning's character arc, reinforces gender normative ideals . The game does not specifically empower women, as its design embodies a strong undercurrent of traditional and normative gender ideals, framing any resistance within the confines of these ideologies. On the other hand, Noctis' status as the hero of FF15 is undisputed because of his ludonarrative design is in resonance to ensure that he remains the central figure in the game. This can be seen from the fact that FF15 contains the greatest number of HJ tropes that are experienced solely by Noctis due to the game's fixed avatar control feature.

That said, we recognize that our research is limited in the sense that it is based on a single person's gameplay; thus, we urge other researchers to offer their own readings of their own gameplays so that we can reach a generalized conclusion about how Lightning is positioned as the hero in FF13. Furthermore, we aspire to stimulate further research into the study of ludic features in videogames, particularly regarding how their designs communicate gender-related messages. . We believe that our findings can assist interested game developers and companies that are serious about promoting gender inclusivity in their videogames specifically during their game development process. Through our discussion, we hope

developers will become more conscious of the possible manifestation of their internalised sexism in their game design.

Notes

1. The game in question is Pong, a table-tennis themed videogame that was published by a videogame company called Atari. It was responsible for the production of game consoles and arcade machines that took the public by storm in the seventies.

2. In this context, we use the term game mechanics interchangeably with game elements.

3. To be clear, it is perfectly possible for videogames (even recent ones) to not contain narratives. However, due to the focus of this research paper, we are going to focus on videogames that are created with narratives in mind.

4. For example, *Pokemon Crystal (2000)* utilizes the turn-based battle system for its gameplay. Just as in a game of chess, the player's Pokémon takes turns with the enemy's Pokemon to execute their attacks towards each other. In order to win the battle, the player must deplete the opposing Pokemon's health points to zero.

5. In videogames, cutscenes refer to moments in-game where gameplay is suspended to make way for a story event to occur. The experience of watching a cutscene is similar to watching a short film clip.

6. The game *Dragon Age: Inquisition (2014)* allows players to recruit certain characters to join their party. In order to recruit a character named Dorian, players must side with the Templars during the Champions of the Just arc. If not, they will be locked out from having Dorian play a bigger role in their gameplay.

7. A boss battle refers to the final battle that players must win in order to complete a game level and/or proceed with the game's main story or even complete the game. In role-playing games (RPGs), it is typical for a cutscene to occur after a boss battle.

8. We will use HJ and monomyth interchangeably in our upcoming discussion.

9. Bear in mind that this notion does not include who the player controls during in-battle sequences because this depends on the battle system of the game. Since the focus of this research is not on battle systems, we will not comment further on this ludic element.

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