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Final Fantasy X and Video Game Narrative: Re-Imagining the Quest Story

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RE-IMAGINING THE QUEST STORY

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May, 2001

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May, 2003

submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH

at the

CLEVELAND STATE UNIVERSITY

April, 2009

This thesis has been approved

for the Department of English

and the College of Graduate Studies by

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ABSTRACT

Traditional models used in examining narrative were built from the use of printed texts, the content of which is nothing more and nothing less than what appears on the page. Studying the narrative of video role-playing games such as *Final Fantasy X* with these models is problematic because of the interactive nature of the story. The element of choice in *Final Fantasy X* results in a narrative experience that differs with each playing. The game contains many recognizable elements of the myth as outlined by Joseph Campbell, but the model this model is inadequate for examining a narrative of this type. To overcome the hurdles that interactivity creates, as well as the way in which this modern myth re-defines Campbell's model, an adaptation of Deleuze and Guatteri's rhizome theory is used to examine *Final Fantasy X*. The rhizome provides a framework suitable for re-thinking the quest in the modern myth, as well as dealing with the way in which interactive narrative creates repetition with difference.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It is well known that the telling of stories pre-dates the written word. Yet in the relatively short several thousand years since the earliest known writing, we have never stopped coming up with new stories. Northrop Frye observes that, "the resources of verbal expression are limited, if that is the word, by the literary equivalents of rhythm and key, though that does not mean, any more than it means in music, that its resources are artistically exhaustible" (133). To the casual observer, many stories appear to simply be re-told time and again, with only some minor details changed. Sometimes these changes are great enough to create a new identity altogether, a repetition with difference. To Deleuze and Guattari, the twists in each new telling are lines of flight from the territory of the previous, along which the story reterritorializes a new boundary, and creates a new cartography. Repetition of stories with difference provides opportunities for whole new lines of thought, and the connections that spring from the differences result is a new experience that is unique unto itself. It is no longer a tracing of another story, because these differences affect the shape of the whole in profound ways. This approach to examining narrative is no less appropriate to one of the most overlooked story mediums: the video game.

Video games are quickly becoming a new medium for narrative. One need not

look hard or far to realize how thoroughly they have pervaded our culture. From being

sold in a large variety of stores, to game magazines found on the racks of every grocery

store, and from the six o' clock news to clothing. There are even game-inspired movies

and action figures. Video games have crept into many aspects of our culture. Games

have become the new narrative designed for the digital age, for people raised in the

Nintendo generation. It comes as no surprise then, that the largest demographic of

gamers today is not children, but younger adults. According to a 2006 study by the

Entertainment Software Association, the average age of the video game player was 33

years old, and 25% of game players were over 50 years of age (2). This hasn't escaped

the notice of game designers, who write games to appeal to this age group, with more

mature themes, and more in-depth stories. More importantly, what this tells us is that

games are now a significant entertainment medium, and for this reason, they warrant

serious study.

At times, the task of analyzing video games can be very difficult, because they are

as different from each other as any novel, movie, play, or poem. Many games resemble

narratives, yet the introduction of choice challenges the fundamental concept of what a

narrative is, since games don't just tell stories, they allow players to affect the outcome.

Yet, the idea of an audience-influenced narrative is not new, nor is it unique to video

games.

Medievalists have applied the oral literary theories presented in *The Singer of

Tales* to written literature, positing that medieval European written literature such as

Beowulf might have developed along similar lines. We know only one version of

Beowulf, yet because we assume that its origins are oral, it stands to reason that the surviving copy was not the only version. Similarly, developmental versions of stories are alive and well in modern media. Movies released on DVD routinely include deleted scenes, alternate endings, and re-mastered footage. These things challenge our assumptions about narratives. Narratives today are no longer the polished, finished works of art that we once perceived them to be. They are no longer kept pristine between the leather bindings of a book. They are alive with context and external information, all making the narrative experience one that is very personal and dynamic.

Traditionally, games have been analyzed using a field of applied mathematics called game theory, but this approach is not well suited for analysis of modern video games. They are far different from the traditional definition of games, such as checkers, chess, and card games. This essay specifically examines characteristics of adventure, action, and role-playing video games, or in other words, those games that tell stories. While the mathematics of probability and strategy may have some application in these games, they have no mechanics with which to deal with a game's story. This is not to say that the field is inappropriate; rather that it is limited to the analysis of a modern game's artificial intelligence and the player's response to it. In order to analyze the story, a different approach must be utilized.

There is no consensus among scholars about the appropriateness of the literary paradigm to interpret games. One way to examine the issue is in terms of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, and their theory of the rhizome. We generally attempt to examine stories in terms of some genre model that defines an ideal structure for that genre. We seek to plot points within the story that will identify such organization, and discuss

departures from this map in terms of creative license. This is an arboresque structure to Deleuze and Guattari, in which a hierarchy is achieved by following ordered paths branching from a single point of origin. There is another way to think about literature that is not so rigid, where an endless series of connections allow for multiple possible paths to any point. This approach is likened to a rhizome, for a rhizome grows ever outward in a network that that not only connects to itself but also continues to expand into new territory. If it is severed at any single point, the rhizome continues to grow for, "A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*" (25). This is what *Final Fantasy X* does with the quest story. While many of the quest elements are present, they are not laid out in an arboresque fashion. The game does not get its value from being a new story; it gets it from being a different approach to an old story. We generally have an idea how a game will play out when we begin playing it. This is especially true of the role-playing game, in which many familiar conventions are used. We are the unlikely hero, we go on a quest, we attain our special artifacts that give us the power we need, and we save the world. It is the journey that intrigues us, not the game's end. We attain satisfaction from the journey, from the ways in which we will get to achieve these things.

The rhizome is a way of thinking outside of a philosophy of identity. It consists of six traits. First, it makes random connections. It does not plot and produce hierarchies as on the plane of organization. Second, it is heterogeneous. Third, it creates multiple alliances. This is related to its heterogeneity, because to create unity on a plane of organization would result in a homogeneous structure. Fourth, the rhizome is an asignifying rupture. It keeps attaching and re-attaching, and never ends. It does this by

diverging along lines of flight, from which it deterritorializes a boundary, and then reterritorializes it, though it does not necessary restore the original boundary. Fifth, it always maps a new cartography, never traces over an existing one. Finally, the rhizome rejects "decalcomania," which is the transference of one thing to another. The concept of the rhizome is not an attempt to replace existing philosophical models, but rather transform how we view existing ones. It exists between the lines of the hierarchies to which we are accustomed, and passes through them, exploding the boundaries they create.

Final Fantasy X is a role-playing game that follows the adventures of Tidus, Yuna, Auron, Kimahri, Wakka, Lulu, and Rikku as they seek to end the ongoing cycle of destruction wrought upon the world of Spira by Sin. The player can control only three party characters at a time, while the rest wait outside of the action, but can be swapped in as desired. The initial stages of the game follow a sequence, Yuna's pilgrimage to each Cloister of Trials, as she gains the power she needs to face Sin. Later however, the game opens up and allows for choices in the path of the game's progression. While the game has only one possible ending, it still represents a freer architecture than some of the early installments in the series, which have very linear – and restricted – progression. *Final Fantasy XI* is a massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG), and represents the other end of the spectrum. It is completely non-linear, offering many disparate quests, but no ending, and for this reason is narratively unsatisfying. It is for this reason that I chose to analyze *Final Fantasy X*, because despite being more restrictive than games in the MMORPG class, it is open-ended enough to allow the player to choose the depth of the narrative. While the game may appear to be linear in nature,

because it has a starting and ending point, the path the player uses to arrive at the end is not fixed.

Taken to its ultimate logical conclusion, the rhizome seems a poor approach to narrative. After all, a true rhizome never ends, while a narrative must. In an MMORPG, the player controls a character on a series of disparate quests, which are not narratively unified. If, however, one were to argue that the narrative in such a game is the story of the character's life, even this must eventually end. Either the character reaches the maximum level allowed by the game, the player stops playing the game, the character dies, or the player dies. Yet the rhizome can offer some useful frameworks if one allows for such limitations. The one obvious approach is to examine how the choices available in the game create a rhizome-like structure. That is, that the choices allow the player to take a variety of paths through the game. Another is to examine the game in terms of repetition with difference. There are two ways to see this in *Final Fantasy X*. The first is the ways in which the game is like a quest narrative, but uses different approaches to de-territorialize the quest template with which we are so familiar. The second is related to the choices in the game, and the ways in which this creates re-playability that does not necessarily result in the same narrative experience. In spite of the apparent usefulness that this approach offers, it is by no means a standard in the field, which has thus far not found a clear voice.

CHAPTER II

PART I

In the earliest years of video games, they were seen as a child's toy, and their earliest studies reflected this attitude. Such views have not entirely disappeared, and they may never. Video games are slowly beginning to gain acceptance, as evidenced by the gradual increase in game scholarship, and it is likely because games have increasingly become the medium of choice for younger generations. The earliest academic examinations of video games were largely social and psychological in nature, and presumed an undesirable effect on children who played them; in the intervening time, such studies have expanded greatly. These studies have taken two distinct branches. The first examines games from a literary perspective, with the majority of literary approaches represented. These include much of the standard fare of critical schools, such as feminist and structuralist critiques. The second branch concerns itself with the suitability of the literary paradigm for game studies at all.

Early scholarship on video games was largely interested in the psychological effects on the players that played them, and are of little interest to the aim of this study. It was not long however, before other routes began to be explored, such as literary avenues. Sharon Sherman examines the presence of folk motifs in games, and she thinks

that many games fit the monomyth theme seen by Campbell and other archetypal critics.

As an example, she cites that in *Super Mario Brothers*, Mario must pass tests, and

experience rebirth by going through the underworld and then re-emerging. She points out

that video games make use of folk motifs that Campbell and Jung identified. Sherman

treats the game as a narrative, but this methodology can be problematic. Archetypal

theories can be applied to many subjects that lack a narrative, such as art, dream

interpretation, and religion. Certainly an examination of video games relies on a certain

interdisciplinary slant – since games contain not only stories, but also visual and aural

elements – so to the extent that archetypal criticism crosses media boundaries it is a

useful tool.

        Sherman is not the only critic to spot archetypal connections in video games.

These ideas caught the attention of Nick Montfort as well, in an article he wrote about the

early text adventure game, entitled *Zork*. In addition to discussing the archetypal

connections in the game, Montfort also points out that the game contains many allusions

to literary works, such as *The Inferno*, *The Odyssey*, and *Alice in Wonderland*. Montfort

considers the game to be an interactive story, although he does recognize the game

element. *Zork*, being an old-style text adventure game, is very different from modern

games with graphics, and as such this relationship is easier to recognize. A text

adventure game is much closer in appearance and reception to the novel upon which

Montfort's comparison is made. Also of note, the article identifies the constancy of

meaning in *Zork*. In the earliest game of this type, *Adventure*, Montfort points out that

you must kill a dragon that is not violent towards the character. In *Zork*, such things do

not happen. The game is more consistent in that effects directly follow from causes, and therefore the meaning does not get confused.

Another strain of game study has taken a distinctly structuralist route. This path deals with semiotics and signification in games. Ragnhild Tronstad discusses semiotics in MUDs (a body of text-based games referred to interchangeably as a multi-user dimension, multi-user dungeon, or multi-user dialogue), and argues for two ways of looking at MUD performance. These ways are the theatrical and performative aspects. The theatrical plays with meaning and signification in the game. The performative, however, serves a semiotic function in the game. Performative speeches in the games enact "real" changes to the MUD environment. In other words, these are acts that have some effect on the virtual reality of the game, such as creating, destroying, and other such acts. Notable of this article is that Tronstad cites the ideas of J.L. Austin specifically as inspiring these ideas. In a MUD, the typing or "speaking" of the action is its performance. Tronstad believes that the concept of performative utterance takes on a whole new meaning in a virtual world. While the topic is not explored by Tronstad, in creating and destroying of aspects of the virtual world by the player, the endless connections created by the rhizome take on new meaning. Clearly this applies to a specific type of game. Modern games with graphics are not as applicable to this analysis. However, there is a modern equivalent in role-playing games. They usually make use of text menus for the player to interact in the game world. A common example would be commands such as "fight" and "run", which function in a very similar way. While the characters do not speak these commands, (although in some cases menu options in games are dialogue options), they result in actual effects on the virtual world.

Tronstad is not the only scholar interested in signification in games. Jan Van Looy states that signification plays a role in the reception and appreciation of interactive media objects, and her examination is focused on a game with two protagonists, and the effects that the changing perspectives have on signification. Yet perhaps what is more interesting is that Van Looy feels that meaning in video games is generated by the oscillation between immersion and interactivity. This approach is far more relevant in terms of bridging the critical gap between novels and games, as it can be applied to both, and looks at the mechanisms that are employed in each to achieve a similar end.

One critic that is not convinced of the relevance of narrative theory to the study of games is Jesper Juul. He lays out the basis of the arguments for both sides. There are several arguments in favor of looking at games as narratives. The first of these is that we use narratives to describe everything. If language is the only means we have of communicating, then every product of humankind is a text, and can be analyzed in terms of that language.

Juul's next point is that most games feature narrative introductions and back-stories. This is true on a few levels. For instance, the instruction manuals of many games – especially older games – often featured a short story that framed the game within a larger story. This was even more common a number of years ago, when technologically it made more sense to print these on paper than to waste expensive memory space on a cartridge to tell this back story. In addition, many games feature an introductory screen with at least a few sentences bringing the player into the frame of the game's narrative time. Such introductions narrate the circumstances in which the player will find himself immersed when the game begins. Extending Juul's point in terms of the rhizome, such

narrative backgrounds create additional story connections, and in the case of those printed in a manual, connect the narrative beyond the virtual world itself. After all, the rhizome is not a two-dimensional concept, and while these manuals are not contained within the game, they are nonetheless part of the narrative to which the game belongs.

There are also arguments, Juul writes, against this view. For example, he argues that time works differently in games than in narrative. In the narrative, time is fluid. It slows when the audience needs to be focused on a particular event or series of events. It then speeds up to accommodate the needs of the story. A generation may come and go in a sentence, so that the audience can again focus on the central story. In games, Juul argues that time flows at a constant pace. Time always moves in accordance with real time, as the player controls the actions of the character, and the action progresses at the pace at which the player plays the game. Although there is a certain merit in this argument, it omits a large segment of games. While the time argument could be valid in some "platformers" (games characterized by the prevalence of jumping between platforms), where progress is very much player driven, it does not apply to many games, including role-playing games. Although platformers are the genre most likely to correlate game time to real time, even many of these games have narrative segments between play levels. Rather, in many games time is disjunct, so game play can focus on the central story.

The typical RPG is story-driven, and as such, in the places at which the story intercedes the action, complex time constructs can be introduced. As a counter-argument to this, Mark J.P. Wolf recognizes that to the extent that a game is interactive, game play sequences correspond to real-time. However, the passing of time in a game does not

always take place during game play sequences. Cinematic scenes, text introductions, and even the move from one game area to another (or levels in some cases) often involve an ellipsis of time in the game world. In fact, in games which tell stories, game play is rarely, if ever, continuous throughout.

Juul is not the only scholar who is concerned with issues of interactivity, and its relationship to narrative. An article written by Richard Bartle, co-author of the first MUD, studies the types of players who play MUDs. The key interest of this article for literary studies is Bartle's interest in the inter-dependent nature of the game and the player. Such an examination is comparable to studies of the relationship between text and reader. The meaning of a text can only come from its reading. Text and reading are often examined independently when, "What exists first and foremost is the text itself, and nothing but the text. Only by subjecting the text to a particular type of reading do we construct, from our reading, an imaginary universe" (Todorov, 67).

The field of game studies is very concerned with forming and defining itself as a discipline. Critics are interested in what paradigms should be used in discussing games. Christopher Douglas has an interesting approach to this issue. While he concedes that games are not literature, he argues that they can be productively approached with conceptual categories that are borrowed from the study of literature. Douglas sees games as performing the same task as religion. That is, games offer a world of meaning, in which we not only have a task to perform, but also a world that was made for us. That is, opposed to a world in which we simply exist. This passage from his article rather succinctly sums up this point:

I might play a game for 80 hours and arrive at a place where a broken box hides a passage that has been prepared--just for me. Or I might find at the beginning of a game a key, and pocket it with the certainty that after tens of hours of play (sometimes years in game time) the key will be absolutely necessary to open a door I've just found. Of course, I might find and pocket a key in this bug-ridden piece of software we call "reality" as well, but it almost certainly will not end up opening a door for me. Such keys represent sheer potentiality. In my life, many millions of such potentialities are never realized--I'll never know what door this key opens--whereas in the game, most of them are. They come to me by design, not by chance; they are oriented toward my success and enjoyment. Computer games, particularly those with worlds prepared for our exploration like shooters, adventure, and role-playing games, thus existentially soothe us amid the terror that we otherwise feel. (9)

Like Jung, Douglas sees the key as significant, and states that it represents potentiality. It is essentially an archetypal analysis, and relies on the universality of the key image; an idea that relies on a collective subconscious.

While Douglas's analysis is thought provoking, it relies on certain assumptions. For example, it could be possible that the key does not open a door. What would be the effect on an analysis such as this if the player never found the key and could not open the door, or found it and chose not to open the door? This is where the framework of the rhizome can be very useful, for it can provide a means to analyze unrealized potentialities even in the game. It allows for the different paths that can be taken, rather than assuming that the narrative must travel along one path.

Not all critics see a problem with viewing games as texts. Julian Kücklich argues that the program code is a text. This code, as a text, is the set of rules that define the fictional world. The game itself is an individual reading. In other words, the player of the game is parsing the text. Textual scholar Jerome McGann also argues this when he asserts that no text is self-identical. All texts require a parser. Todorov's assertion that meaning is only constructed from the reading of a text is valid here as well. Kücklich also points out, however, that it is a mistake to assume that text is equal to narrative. However, as Kücklich points out, the analysis of all cultural phenomena is still dominated by the paradigms of the printed text. Furthermore, the idea that the reader parses the text into a reading further strengthens the idea of the game as a rhizome. By parsing the text of the game during the experience of playing, the player creates the world and thereby rejects any notion that the game can be mapped. The connections the game makes are dependent on the specific play experience and what the player takes from it. The program code behind the game has a mappable logic flow, but results in unmappable results. Just one example would be a loop in a program that depends on variable input provided by the player, and this input cannot be precisely predicted.

One critic in particular has spent much time focused on narrative theory and video games. Espen Aarseth reiterates that the primary view in academia thus far has been that games are stories, and therefore can be analyzed with narratology. Aarseth believes that games should be analyzed under an alternate theory that is native to the field of study. Current views of video game narrative are based on architectural narrative theory, which he argues is the weakest of narrative theories. Aarseth sets up two views of game progression. One he terms a "string of pearls," in which the game progresses in a more

or less straight line, and there is only one route from the beginning to the end. The other

is the open-ended type of game, in which the game progresses in a bent-path type of

progression, and there are many routes from the beginning to the end of the game. Even

in the "string-of-pearls" progression, Aarseth argues, there is some small amount of

choice within each pearl before the story progresses, and any such choice negates

narrative. Conversely, if there is no choice, he believes that it is not a game.

This idea of a string-of-pearls narrative is interesting, but I think that it views the

question in a very black-and-white way. It seems that the same can be said of a hypertext

novel. The number of permutations in hypertext may be fixed, but "While the number of

narrative versions may be fixed in theory – since content, links, and linking conditions

are set by the author – the experience of reading it may, however, feel dynamic, as few

readers return to any hypertext sufficiently persistently to exhaust all its possible

iterations" (Douglas, J., 5). This same idea can be applied to the video game. While

there may only be one possible outcome or ending, the way in which the game is played –

the characters which a player chooses to use and when, the items the player chooses to

obtain or not, and optional side-quests that the player chooses to complete – offer enough

possible permutations that it is unlikely that any one player could exhaust them all.

Aarseth also cites other reasons why games should not be considered narratives.

For one, he claims that adventure games have poor characterization. Aarseth does not

address the fact that some narrative texts have poor characterization as well. For

example, in epic and myth, characters may not be developed as fully as in a novel, but

rather they often represent an ideal, or an absolute characteristic: an archetype, in many

cases. Aarseth also argues that games do have a goal of storytelling, but that in order to

remain playable a game can never achieve this goal. In other words, he argues that the

element of choice negates narration. I disagree strongly with Aarseth on this point, as I

would not only argue that many games certainly tell stories, but as Lord's study of oral

literature found, many folk stories also allowed the audience to choose the direction of

the narrative to a point. As a final note, Aarseth takes the first step towards setting up a

paradigm for looking at games. He states that games that have specific goals should be

looked at as "quest games." This may mean that some of the language of literary study

may be adopted by the field, in particular the language of archetypal criticism.

Aarseth has also published a book entitled *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic

Literature*, in which he attempts to move toward a theory of ergodic literature. He

defines this as literature in which, "nontrivial effort is required to allow the reader to

traverse the text" (*Cybertext* 1). The reader of a true narrative is powerless, in Aarseth's

view. The reader of a cybertext gets to intervene in the text. Cybertext is a perspective

on all forms of literature. The term is intended as a way to include those phenomena

which are today outside of the scope of mainstream literary study. Hypertext, a term

sometimes used to describe video games, is simply a subset of ergodic literature in the

scheme of this view. Such texts are examples of multicursal topologies, in which there

are multiple paths that can be taken through the text. An example of a multicursal text is

Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire*. Just as in a multicursal text, the rhizome offers many

paths, which by their nature reject mapping in the way that an arboresque structure can be

mapped. The opposite of this would be a unicursal topology, which is when there is only

one path through the text. Cybertext, Aarseth argues, it not a new form of text made

possible only through the advent of computers, but is again a perspective on all literature. Cybertexts can take a printed form.

There are three types of cybertexts in Aarseth's framework. The first is the novel, in which there is a level of interaction, but the progression is more or less linear. The second is anamorphic literature, which Aarseth describes as a "solvable enigma" (*Cybertext* 181). These are works in which something is hidden, and the beholder must adopt a nonstandard perspective in order to see what is being presented. The final type is metamorphic literature. This is the literature of "change and unpredictability" (*Cybertext* 180-1). This is the hardest to describe with current literary theory, as it requires a meeting of the artist and the beholder. This can range from simply the abstract, to that which contains so much noise that the beholder must be given a push in the right direction in order to appreciate the work for what it is. Adventure games, while not narratives in Aarseth's view, are a form of cybertext. They can take the form of any of the three categories, even metamorphic literature. Open-ended games (such as online role-playing games and MUDs) have no final and repeatable state, and are therefore metamorphic.

In the absence of a critical framework designed specifically for the discussion of games, a narrative approach seems perfectly appropriate. Certainly, games exhibit a number of narrative traits. It is likely that as with film, some adaptation of narrative theories with allowances for game-specific traits will eventually emerge. Therefore, I will devote the remainder of this paper to a narrative application of Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome theory to *Final Fantasy X*.

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CHAPTER III

PART II

The rhizome provides a framework that is very useful for examining video game narrative. Not only does it provide the tools for examining works outside of the constraints of traditional hierarchical models; but, in the case of games that do not have a fixed narrative path such as *Final Fantasy X*, the rhizome allows for the uniqueness which is created through repetition with difference. *Final Fantasy X*, like many role-playing games, is ostensibly a quest narrative. At a high level, Joseph Campbell outlines the structure of the quest as Departure, Initiation, and Return. Within these are a bevy of sub-stages that may or may not be included in some mythic quests. In a general sense, we can find many of these stages in *Final Fantasy X*, but it does not simply transfer Campbell's image to itself, instead making use of it in a relative way, breaking out of the categories at will and redefining them.

In Campbells' analysis, the Departure stage begins with the Call to Adventure. In *Final Fantasy X* this occurs when Auron shows up while Zanarkand is attacked and guides Tidus through the First Threshold. Auron is also Tidus's supernatural aid, as I shall discuss later. The combat that Tidus and Auron engage in with the Sinspawn is the First Threshold. It is after this battle that reality divides and Tidus finds himself in the

strange world of Spira. Campbell discusses a stage he calls the Belly of the Whale. This is where the hero's passage of the boundary created by the First Threshold results in the hero entering into a sphere of rebirth. After Tidus battles the Sinspawn, he finds himself adrift amidst some partially submerged ruins. In addition to the obvious comparison that can be made to an actual belly of a whale from submerged buildings, this is also the sphere of rebirth, for these ruins are in Spira, a new world for Tidus.

Now that Tidus has entered this new world, he is set to begin his journey. In Campbell's analysis this next stage is Initiation. The hero must survive a series of trials, where the advice and amulets of the supernatural power aid him. Auron does not just provide advice in the game; he literally helps in the quest by accompanying Tidus. The amulets are present as well, in many forms, such as the sword given to Tidus by Wakka. Additionally, as Tidus accompanies Yuna on her quest, they pass several Cloisters of Trials, after which the powers of the aeons (a summoned entity, which I will discuss in more detail later) are added to their own. Once all the trials are passed, they proceed to the ruins of Zanarkand. Here they have their meeting with the goddess, when they face Yunalesca. Yunalesca is the first summoner to defeat Sin, who then became the final guardian of Sin. In defeating her, all barriers are removed for Yuna, who can now achieve her destiny. In essence, Yuna has become the mother goddess, to whom Tidus is partnered. The final conflict is within Sin itself, who turns out to be Tidus's father. The previous summoner sacrificed Tidus' father in order to create the Final Aeon. Yu Yevon then possessed the spirit of this aeon to create a new Sin. The ogre aspect of the father is clearly seen here. In previous incarnations of Sin, the summoner and her guardian defeat Sin, only to take their place. This time the cycle is broken, and when Tidus takes the

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place of his father, he restores peace to the world of Spira, because he has not only defeated the physical entity of Sin, but also the ogre within himself. In choosing not to sacrifice Tidus to create a Final Aeon, the party chooses integrity over power.

After Sin is defeated, peace is returned to Spira. The Return phase incorporates the hero returning from his quest with the spoils of his conquests, to restore order to the world. In *Final Fantasy X*, this is accomplished through the breaking of the cycle of the rebirth of Sin. After this is accomplished, Tidus returns from whence he came, which is to say he disappears from Spira altogether. Tidus is a remnant of the ancient Zanarkand, defeated in an ancient war, and is in Spira only as the dream of the fayth, who have lent their powers to the party to defeat Yu Yevon. After the cycle is broken, Tidus is whisked away into the nothingness from which he came.

The use of certain elements of the quest narrative in *Final Fantasy X* is obvious, and so Campbell's outline of quest structure is useful for framing the form of the story. However, Campbell was studying ancient myths and their similarities, for which he used psychoanalysis and theories of a collective unconscious to connect the seemingly unrelated stories. While his structure applies here, we need not speculate on such origins, because we know that *Final Fantasy X* was created at a time when there was knowledge of all these other stories. It can be reasonably deduced that these ancient myths were a conscious source for many aspects of the game. Instead, we can focus on how the game makes use of repetition with difference, and explore the connections the game makes through deliberate use of these mythic sources.

The adventure opens with Sin attacking Spira while the hero, Tidus is starring in a blitzball match. The game makes use of the motif of the unsuspecting hero. Some things

are plucked right from precedence for a quest. For instance, he is of unique progeny, though at this point in the story, he only knows that his father disappeared. Still, there are noticeable lines of flight from the traditional quest outline. For one, he is a star sports player, something that the game's audience would recognize as a real world, modern day hero. He starts the story as a hero of a different sort. Additionally, there is a temporal difference. While the hero typically fights for the renewal of his immediate world and its future, Tidus is well in the past from where he will have his adventure. The world he saves is a future in which his home of Zanarkand lies in ruins, a civilization long dead. Furthermore, Zanarkand is a civilization that is technologically more advanced than that of Spira, something that contradicts our chronological assumptions. Zanarkand and Tidus (although at this point, the player does not know this) are summoned entities just as the aeons whose power they will later obtain. Long ago, the surviving people of Zanarkand were turned into fayth, a statue that contains the soul of the person, whose power can be called on in the form of aeons. The summoner who did this to the people, Yevon, also created Sin as a physical armor for himself and the fayth. In the process of continually summoning Dream Zanarkand to attempt to re-create a city in its image, Yevon lost his humanity and became Yu Yevon, existing only to summon Dream Zanarkand. Sin, as the protector of these fayth, began to continually attack the people of Spira to prevent the discovery of Dream Zanarkand's existence.

Tidus's supernatural aid and protective figure is Auron, who appears suddenly when Zanarkand is attacked, to aid Tidus in his defense. Again here, we see traces of the common motif, but the game again uses repetition with difference to challenge our assumptions. The hero's aid often comes in the form of a supernatural figure. While

Auron is no exception, such figures do not generally become constant companions. While it is not yet revealed at this stage in the story, Auron is already dead. Normally, this results in brief encounters with the hero, to bestow advice or items of power. One well-known example is when Aeneas descends to the underworld to speak to his father Anchises, who shows him the vision of Rome. Another example that would be very familiar to contemporary audiences is that of the ghost of Obi-Wan Kenobi appearing to Luke Skywalker in the *Star Wars* films to provide direction and advice. Yet here, Auron will become Tidus's companion through most of his quest. He can also directly interact with the corporeal world, unlike ghosts who can only be seen.

The game even in this opening sequence challenges our assumptions, and defies adherence to any map of the quest. That Tidus (or the audience) does not know that Auron is dead until he reveals this himself later is evidence not only that the game will plot its course in it own way, but also that the game's creators are aware of the audience's assumptions based on previous experience. We assume that Auron is a living being, because he walks, talks, fights, and is constantly present. Our previous experience conditions us to expect the dead to appear as ghosts, or that if they do have a corporeal existence, that it is as a ghoul or some other creature of frightening and definitive appearance. Yet in the world of Spira, the dead stay amongst the living until they are "sent" to the otherworld. In the game world, the realms of the living and the dead deterritorialize at any point at which a summoner sends the dead to the other realm. The specific space becomes a path to the realm of the dead, momentarily, before it is closed again and the boundaries are reterritorialized. The Zanarkand from which Tidus comes is similarly deterritorialized when Sin appears, and Tidus is pulled into the world of Spira.

If somewhere we see the game does not de-territorialize the quest norms, it is in what Campbell refers to as the Belly of the Whale. The specifics of this stage are unique, but then so are all of Campbell's subjects. The outline though is largely the same. Tidus wakes up in a new world, amidst partially submerged ruins. This is his rebirth into the world of Spira, and after emerging from this region; he will begin his real journey.

After escaping the submerged ruins, Tidus washes up unconscious onto a beach. Thus begins his Road of Trials. This Road of Trials encompasses the bulk of the game story, and also contains many lines of departure from the quest model. Tidus is not a lone hero. While he is clearly singled out as the focus of our attention, and the tale begins with him, he is joined by many companions, and the succession of trials becomes a group effort. Each member of the group has his or her own abilities, which when combined as they are in this group effort, constitute adeptness with all the tools necessary to overcome obstacles. While some heroes suffer a tragic flaw, here any such flaw is compensated for through another member of the group. The abilities of the members of the party are also tested in turn with the growth of each member resulting from their overcoming the tests.

The types of tests encountered by the group on their road of trials are varied. Some are literal impediments to their path. Others are for the growth of the characters. Many are trials within trials, as when the party enters each Cloister of Trials, from which Yuna must take the power of the aeons, which are the spirits of Dream Zanarkand. Within each cloister is a series of logic puzzles. To traverse the cloister to face the aeon, the party must solve these puzzles. At the end, they must face the aeon and defeat it to

gain its power. Here we also see that the trials are not of a singular nature. They are not all physical trials, or spiritual ones. Many skills must be used to accomplish the task.

The amulets of power that the party obtains are as varied as the characters and the trials. In part, this is by design. Part of the allure of this or any role-playing game is the attainment of more and better items. The player has the opportunity to upgrade to stronger weapons and armor at shops along the way and it keeps the player engaged. The party does this at many points along their journey, although they also find hidden items of power as well. Just as each member of the party has different abilities, they all use different types of weapons as well. So the game contains not just one or two amulets, but many.

With this much variety in the trials, it is easy to see how the game deterritorializes the model of the quest narrative. While many of the elements are there, they are not fixed, and therefore the game cannot be traced from the image of the quest story. The possible permutations for utilizing combinations of party members, items, abilities, and do forth are incalculable. The prominence of any secondary characters in the passage of the trials is completely up to the player as well. This aspect of the story has no definite boundaries. The story could be one of the triumph of magic, or the triumph of the sword. Subsequent playings of the game can result in very different approaches to success. Nor is the narrative fixed, because completing side-quests adds elements to the story that are otherwise omitted, such as the whole story of Tidus's father during his quest with Braska and Auron.

The final guardian of Sin is Yunalesca. She is a goddess figure, the transformed essence of the first summoner to defeat Sin, and the daughter of Yevon. It is from her

that the party learns that the Final Aeon, which they came to the ruins of Zanarkand to obtain, is created from the spirit of one close to the summoner. After defeating Sin, the spirit of Yu Yevon possesses this aeon to create the new Sin. This is how Tidus' father became Sin. In Campbell's analysis, such a mystical marriage of the hero with the goddess figure is what leads to the triumph from which the hero gains the means to renew society. Yet here, it is just such a mystical marriage that continues the cycle of destruction. The party decides to face Sin without sacrificing anyone to create a Final Aeon. The game plays with the mythic norms to suggest that what we expect the hero to do is exactly what he should not do. It is also likely a commentary on the nature of power, and the error of humans aspiring to divinity. In the ancient world that was the source of Campbell's myths, humans aspired to great power and dominion, but in the post-World War II era many of these ideas have changed as we have experienced the suffering wrought on the world by ideological dictators and divine emperors, and the responses to them.

The ogre aspect of the father figure, as described by Campbell, is very obvious when we learn that Sin is Tidus's father. However, from the point at which the party decided not to sacrifice to create a Final Aeon, the divergence from the finals stages of the quest story became a permanent one. Campbell identifies the hero as taking the father's place, but in this case that would mean becoming Sin and continuing the cycle. Instead, the party faces the ogre-father without a Final Aeon, and without an entity for Yu Yevon to possess, the party then faces Yu Yevon itself.

The defeat of Yu Yevon results in a very swift Return stage for our hero Tidus. His presence in Spira was the result of Yu Yevon's constant summoning of Dream

Zanarkand. Without Yu Yevon to keep the dream alive, Tidus disperses along with

Dream Zanarakand, his essence no longer held together. However, the defeat of Yu

Yevon still results in the renewing of Spira, as they are no longer subject to the repeated

attacks of Sin. For Tidus, the peace of victory comes in his soul finally being put to rest.

Espen Aarseth would argue that because of the more-or-less linear path of the

game, that it is narrative, but no longer a game. I use the term "more-or-less" linear,

because it is not completely linear. While it is true that the starting and ending points are

static, how the player arrives at that end point is not. The above synopsis covers story

elements that are static, but it is not a complete picture of the game. This deterritorializes

Campbell's outline of the quest not only in the ways in which it diverges from the

traditional map of the quest story, but also in that the story itself is made up of many

pieces that can connect – or not connect – together. The game's main quest is made up

not only of many smaller quests, but also optional side quests. One particular example is

that a player has the option to attain an additional aeon, the Magus Sisters. To choose

this is to embark on a separate quest within the game. The quest is not required to

complete the game, and the player can choose to completely bypass it, however

completing this optional side-quest provides the player with an additional tool that can be

used during the rest of the game, as well as additional story material. This choice impacts

the overall story told by the game by the equivalent of a chapter in a novel. That is to say

that playing through a side quest adds to the story in the same way that adding a chapter

would to a novel, and yet eliminating this chapter still allows the work to function as a

whole.

The game is divided into stages, not unlike chapters of a book. A good way to analogize the stages of the game would be to think of a molecular model that uses toothpicks and peas. This is the case with most role-playing games, especially MMORPGs, but in such an extreme case the game segments are not tied to a unified narrative, as *Final Fantasy X* is. In the case of *Final Fantasy X*, the options are restrictive enough to maintain a narrative, but these options are not really quantifiable to the point where they could be mapped. One option does not necessary lead to the compulsory completion of a subsequent stage, but rather another choice. At some point, the player can choose to go to complete the game by going to the final location and defeating Yu Yevon, thereby concluding the narrative. Yet the player can also choose to continue to wander the world of Spira and continue play until the mathematical limit of the characters' abilities has been reached. Between legs of the journey across Spira are resting stages, where for example the party of characters might be in a town. They are able to accumulate resources and prepare, the extent to which is up to the player. Then, a leg of journey is undertaken, which can culminate in a number of ways. One such way that this can happen is for the party to arrive at another safe zone, and yet another is for the intercession of a non-player character to move the story along. Each of these stages comes with its own sense of satisfaction and accomplishment. This is also true of the many side-quests in the game. Each carries a sense of accomplishment. These side-quests are optional, but each is as rewarding – if not more rewarding – than to actually complete the game. They function in the same ways as the multiple paths in a rhizome. Each side-quest stands on its own, and while they are all part of the game, there is no order imposed on them. The player can choose to do them, how many to do, and in

which order, and these choices do not affect the individual experience of each. It is a story within the larger story, in which the player is rewarded with a sense of accomplishment. The primary story may appear to be similar to a string-of-pearls narrative, but these side-quests are a departure from the string, allowing a different path to be taken altogether. At this point, the story becomes more similar to an array of pearls.

One key example is the attainment of the spheres. While finding of all the spheres does result in the attainment of Auron's ultimate weapon, the Masamune, this part of the game is in no way required. Yet they are also a rich addition to the story. As I have previously mentioned, not all of a story's events take place in the narrative time of the story itself. The spheres are an example of just this idea. Each sphere is a record – much like a film recording – of events. In this case, the spheres are a chronicle of various events that befell the previous summoner, Braska (who is Yuna's father), and his guardians Auron and Jecht. Should a player fail to obtain all of the spheres – or choose not to obtain them all – the full story of Tidus's father is not revealed. Each of these spheres is bridge, connecting the events of another story to this one. The player will ultimately still know that Jecht has become the next Sin, but without the spheres, Jecht remains a distant figure of which little is known. The majority of his character development is revealed through the stories contained in the spheres.

That this portion of the story is open-ended challenges Aarseth's argument, which essentially claims that while games can offer some choice, they ultimately lead the player along a fixed path. In *Final Fantasy X* the starting and ending points of the narrative are fixed, but there are many ways to traverse the space in between. In fact, the experience of playing *Final Fantasy X* appears to be somewhat like

being in an early medieval mead hall listening to a bard tell the tale of *Beowulf*, whose

formulaic nature, "has been proved beyond any doubt" (Lord, 198). As with the

Yugoslav subjects of *The Singer of Tales*, the basic plot points are more or less fixed, but

the details change with the telling, though taken from a stock of available options. Given

the formulaic and thematic studies done on *Beowulf*, this would almost certainly prove

true if we had more than a single surviving copy of the story. It is a similar characteristic

that differentiates hypertext from cybertext. Cybertext is dynamic while hypertext is

static; both the content and potential permutations of a hypertext are fixed (Douglas, 4).

Considering the metaphors of the rhizome and the tree, it becomes apparent how

the story in *Final Fantasy X* functions as a rhizome. In the tree model, story progression

would be dependent upon the action of specific characters at specific points in the story.

That one thing must follow from another is the limitation of the arboresque structure, and

is the reason why it is largely inadequate for examining a narrative of this type. In *Final

Fantasy X*, progression is not dependent upon the actions of specific characters, and the

player can choose to use any available character combination at any time. This choice

does not affect the game's progression, and the only change that character choice has is

that certain actions and obtainable items can change depending on which characters are in

play. This is where the relevance of the rhizome model is apparent. The story will

advance regardless of the choice of character. Additionally, the story develops in a

rhizomatic way, with character choices affecting item acquisition and allowing the player

to create different paths that ultimately lead him to the same conclusion.

The game's structure itself is like a rhizome. It is impossible to map, because it

keeps attaching and re-attaching. The story, its many side-quests, and the possibility for

virtually limitless play combinations reject any organizational structure. It would be impossible to map the game to another similar story, because the game does not result in the same story every time. That there are variables present means that repetition of the game will create difference. One can only draw similarities along the connections the story makes to others, but the many lines of departure prevent any singular image of a story from being applied to the game.

Much literature relies on the stories of the past as a launching point for their own stories. Such is also true of *Final Fantasy X*. The plot is an aggregate of the stories produced by the cultures of humankind over the centuries. As with the rhizome, each of these stories is another connecting point, from which these stories attach their own to the game world. A character from eastern mythology is connected to its own story as well as to the story of this game, and its very presence brings the motifs of the mother story into this one. A survey of the literary allusions in the game will illustrate how *Final Fantasy X* leverages the narrative tradition to enhance its own narrative value.

After Tidus – who I will discuss in greater detail later – the first character we meet is Auron. Auron is the mentor, or wise old man, and he functions as a guide to Tidus and the rest of the party. He traveled with Tidus's father, and is a seasoned veteran of the summoner's pilgrimage. He oversees Tidus's development, guiding him through his trials. Not surprisingly, he holds his share of secrets, such as the knowledge of who Tidus really is, and of the true fate of his father, Jecht. This story would be familiar to many of the audience of this game, who would likely have seen this theme in many other places. One such example is in *Star Wars*. Luke Skywalker and Obi-wan Kenobi have much the same relationship. Obi-wan is aware at the outset of Luke's heritage, but does

not reveal this to him. Lending further to Auron's knowledge as a wise old man is that it is revealed later in the story that Auron has been dead since the start of the story. This is an adaptation of numerous other stories where the dead lend their aid or advice to the living.

Wakka, a guardian of the summoner, bears many resemblances to the Puer Aeternus. Though not eternally youthful in a literal sense, he acts in a manner much like a child. Furthermore, as a secondary hero, he develops little throughout the game. He is headstrong and eager to embark on adventure. He is extremely confident in himself, at the expense of prudence. His name even evokes a sense of frivolity, in that the word "wakka" is often a colloquial onomatopoeia for laughter. His escape into fantasy takes the form of his playing blitzball, the sport of the world of Spira, in which he is the leader of a team called the Besaid Aurochs. Seemingly frivolous on the surface, this character is important in that his escapes into fantasy help give definition to the game world. Through Wakka, the game creates a random connection to something that has no place in the story, which is blitzball. The sport has no functional relevance to the narrative aside from loose connections (that characters are players of the sport). It does not advance or detract from the story, and is a random connection that defies hierarchical classification. Yet, blitzball creates a connection that is important in another way. In creating this connection, the world ceases to exist purely for the benefit of the characters and their adventure, and becomes a world more real, one in which not all that happens is for the sake of the quest. This defies scholar Christopher Douglas in that he claims that if he finds a key in a game, he knows it will eventually open a door. For Douglas, blitzball is a key that opens no doors.

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Yuna, the summoner, is a mother figure. She is a spiritual mother, in a sense similar to Mary. Her role is to pilgrimage to all the Summoner's Temples, where she must pass the Cloister of Trials. At the conclusion of each, she gains the strength of the temple's aeon, and when she has all of them at her disposal, she is destined to fight Sin, a battle that is required for the sustaining of the world of Spira. Curiously enough, the battle has no definitive victory. The outcome of this battle (up until the events of this game, of course) has so far been that the defeat of Sin results in one of the summoner's guardians becoming Sin himself. So in a sense, the summoner oversees the impregnation of the new generation of Sin, so that the cycle may continue.

Curiously, it is upon Yuna to which the whole story relies. She is the bridge through which multiple worlds connect. She can send souls on to their next world, thereby connecting Spira to the world of the afterlife. Until the souls are sent, they wander in Spira, neither fully a part of nor separate from the world.   Furthermore, Tidus cannot complete his purpose without her, and yet he is the protagonist. Yuna is inevitably tied to Spira and its fate. She is connected to the past through her father, connected to the present through the aeons whose powers she commands, and connected to the future through her destined encounter with Sin. What breaks the endless cycle of Sin's rebirth, though, is her connection to something not of Spira at all, that is Tidus. Through Tidus, she can create a connection to another world, which allows her to alter the destiny of Spira.

Rikku is a character worth examining for the interesting role she plays in the story. She is an Al Bhed, a race of people who use technology rather than mysticism to accomplish tasks. The majority of the people of Spira generally despise Rikku's race, as

machines are viewed unfavorably. In the war that destroyed Zanarkand, it was the

machines that destroyed the city. There is an obvious correlation to Arabs here, invoked

mainly by the race's moniker and their nomadic nature, and they are clearly used to play

off of our sympathies for the people of Spira by providing an irrational fear and racism

from which to view the people in a more human way. Rikku is something like the Other,

and yet not. She defies classification on a number of counts. Obviously, she is like the

other in the sense that she comes from a race that is little understood and foreign to most

of the people of Spira. Unlike the Other though, she is a very likeable character.

Precisely because she is likable, she functions to connect the game to a dialogue of race

relations that resembles our own world. That is, should a culture assimilate another, or

embrace the diversity? Such a cultural clash is an asignifying rupture. It is the common

mistake to view this in a very static way, which is that there are the Al Bhed, and the rest

of the human population of Spira. The cultures are not static, and the relationship

between them is alive. At one moment, Rikku could be seen as being assimilated, but to

do this would assume that Rikku and her culture are one, when in fact Rikku is an

individual. To ascribe to her the concept of assimilation would strip away her value as an

individual. Yet as an individual, if she exhibits traits that might be attributed to the Al

Bhed, then the party embraces diversity. Further still in the bigger picture, as both

cultures evolve and change, these issues compound themselves in more complex ways. It

is a dance that never ends. Rikku, the Al Bhed, the party, and the people of Spira attach,

detach, and re-attach to each other in a way which cannot be defined, because there is no

singularity from which one can impose any ordering.

Seymour is interesting in that he is the antithesis of Tidus, and more than a mere obstacle to the party. Although Sin, and by extension Yu Yevon, is the ultimate enemy which the party must overcome to renew Spira, Seymour is another enemy which the party must defeat. Seymour is a priest and summoner himself. However, through a number of life events, his philosophy on the matter of Sin has become warped. He believes that Spira suffers because of Sin, and that the cycle of destroying Sin just so that Sin can be reborn with the spirit of the final aeon simply perpetuates the suffering of the people. Seymour instead wants to himself be reborn as the next Sin, so that he can destroy all the population of Spira, and thus end their suffering. He offers an alternate path, one that ends the cycle of Sin, not because he will destroy Sin once and for all, but because he will destroy the people for whom Sin causes problems. He is the antithesis of the rhizome, for in him lies the potential to break all connections, and to reduce everything to a singularity. He is the opposite of Tidus, for Tidus – like the triumphant hero of Campbell's analysis in the Apotheosis stage – looks upon the suffering of the people of Spira and wishes to bring an end to the source of their suffering, Seymour would prefer to become the source of their suffering to bring an end to the people.

Of course, one of the most interesting characters is the primary protagonist, Tidus. Near the end of the game, it is revealed that Tidus is a dream. Tidus is part of Dream Zanarkand, made corporeal. Like the other fayth, he is imprisoned in this state, unable to truly rest.

That Tidus is a dream is significant on a much deeper level. Recall that in Spira, there is a cycle that plays out over and over again. Sin is defeated by a summoner, only to be at peace for a short while, and then be reborn and terrorize the land again. It is a

cycle that is very much tied to the ritual of the summoner's pilgrimage, and is accepted

by the people as the way the world of Spira works. George Orwell explores a similar

topic in *1984*. In *1984*, the government develops Newspeak, a language that is simplified

to the minimal number of words required to communicate the most basic thoughts. The

idea is that the government, by limiting the numbers of words that people have at their

disposal, can limit their capacity to think. Some examples are the terms "good" and

"bad". If these are the only two words that we have to describe the moral state of things,

and had no shades of meaning in between, then it follows that anything that can be

classified as "not bad" must be "good", and vice versa. Similarly, the people of Spira are

constrained by this cycle of the death and rebirth of Sin. To them it is simply a reality

that is defined by the rules of their world. They can conceive of no other way of life, as

there is none other to be considered. However, Tidus is not of Spira. He is a dream. Just

as in dreams, language does not constrain our thoughts (remember that one never sees

actual words on pages in dreams), and we have what is the closest to a pure thought,

uninhibited by the limitations that language imposes on our ability to think. Tidus is also

free of the constraints of Spira. Since he is a dream he represents the purest of

potentiality, unbound by the rules of the world, he is free to act. This is why he can break

the cycle of Sin's rebirth. Similarly, Luke Skywalker in the *Star Wars* movies is able to

defeat his father without falling victim to the same fate as his father, because he was

brought up in a world outside of the influence of that which corrupted his father. So, too

was Tidus's father, but he fell to the corruption of power. He was potential unrealized.

Tidus is the exact opposite of Seymour. He represents the potential of Spira to exist

without constraints, so that it – like the rhizome – can continue to branch infinitely.

Tidus is the pure potential of all that is, was, and will be; an infinite branching that cannot be reduced to simple component parts.

Tidus is connected to other mythic heroes who were outsiders, such as Beowulf and Siegfried. Each came from another land, and possessed a unique ability to carry out his quest. Beowulf had his strength, and Siegfried his invincibility. Tidus shares similar uniqueness within his world. His adversary, Seymour, also resembles a familiar epic character. Seymour was an outcast from his own society, who spent a long period in exile for killing his father. This bears a striking resemblance to Beowulf's adversary Grendel, who was described as an outcast himself:

That murderous spirit	was named Grendel,
huge moor-stalker	who held the wasteland,
fens, and marshes;	unblessed, unhappy,
he dwelt for a time	in the lair of the monsters
after the Creator	had outlawed, condemned them
as kinsmen of Cain	−for that murder God
the Eternal took vengeance,	when Cain killed Abel.
No joy that kin-slaughter:	the Lord drive him out,
far from mankind,	for that unclean killing. (102-110)

Just like Grendel in *Beowulf*, Seymour murdered a member of his own family and was exiled for it, but the resemblance to epic characters does not end there. Tidus is a young, blond-haired white male, just like Beowulf. His clothes expose certain elements of his physique, so we are able to see that he is a fairly toned person. His hair is bunched in what amounts to many little spikes, calling to mind the modern idealized image of a

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stereotypical Viking helmet. The image on the cover of the game's box shows him in the foreground, standing in the water with the world of Spira in the background. Tidus is in a personal struggle against an enemy, the outcome of which decides the destiny of Spira. So, this image depicts Tidus, whose destiny will be that of the world behind him. Tidus is also standing in the water on the shoreline, which is where we first see Beowulf, and in fact after being thrust into the world of Spira, he awakens on a beach. The comparisons to western epic literature are many, and almost certainly not unknown to the game's designers, who are Japanese and would have been making these design decisions consciously. The rhizome grows three-dimensionally, and so such visual elements are as much a part of the work as the story itself.

Figure 1. Picture of Tidus on the *Final Fantasy X* box cover.

Understandably enough, some of the borrowings in the game come from the Japanese mythos. One such case that is common in many *Final Fantasy* games is Masamune, a famed sword smith that has appeared in the persona of the most – or, one of the most – powerful swords in the game. Masamune was a real person, but his legend far outshined the reality, as so often happens. The legend goes that Masamune made the greatest swords. He had a counterpart, Murasame, and his swords were evil. It was said that if you stuck a sword from each into a river, the passing leaves would be cut in half by Murasame's sword, but would go around the Masamune sword altogether (Addison, 368-9).

The use of cultural references is not limited to Japan and western civilization. This modern myth, after all, was created in a global society, not in cultural isolation. Shiva, the destroyer goddess of Indian mythology, makes her appearance in the game in the form of an aeon. The aeons are a pool of otherworldly creatures that can be summoned to aid the party in battle during their quest, but whose stories are an integral part of the events of the game, as I have previously mentioned. Shiva, when called by the party, enters the battle to combat on behalf of the party. A curious trait of Shiva both in this and in previous *Final Fantasy* games is that she is associated with the element of ice. This is not a trait of the actual Indian deity, however this modification can be understood in terms of the game world's structure. Many of the aeons have elemental associations because of the strategic aspects that are introduced when opposing elements must be taken into account. Shiva is often depicted in art as blue or gray, and it is said that the Ganges River flows from Shiva's hair. Add to this the phonetic similarity between the

words "Shiva" and "shiver", and it makes sense that the game's designers chose this as the attribute assigned to Shiva.

Final Fantasy X is not without its nods to more modern sources, either. The character Yojimbo is a reference to a well-known eponymous film by Akira Kurasawa. The aeon Yojimbo is a samurai that requires payment when called, and then executes an attack in return for this payment. In the film, a ronin samurai enters a town with warring crime lords. He convinces each to hire him as protection from the other. There is a clear connection in this theme of paying for protective service. Furthermore, "yojimbo" is a Japanese word that translates roughly to "bodyguard", an appropriate name for this aeon who acts as a paid thug on behalf of the party.

The story and characters are not the only elements of the game. I have already discussed to some degree the visual elements of significance to our reception of Tidus. This is a complete experience though, and the music should also be considered. After all, the rhizome is not a flat, two-dimensional concept. It traverses three-dimensional space, and so the musical elements of the game warrant examining as well.

The game's music is an accompaniment to the game, and so the soundtrack is for the most part a symphonic one. The influence of Romantic music on the compositions is pretty clear, as one might expect to find in the soundtrack to an epic film. This influence is seen in the expressive, songlike melodies pervade the music, and the ways in which particular pieces match the emotive tone of the game sequences they accompany. Battles are fought to more dramatic musical pieces with a faster time signature. Moments of heightened drama in the story are accompanied by music of deeper tones. In some cases, such as the music used for the Macalania forest, the music is very lyrical in tone, inviting

us to take in the beauty of the scenery in spite of the urgency of the characters' mission. The music is clearly intended to invoke an emotional response in the player, and deepen our investment in the virtual world.

It will be interesting to see in the coming years if a canon develops for games. Whereas the printed text can be read by anyone, games require a meeting of the software with hardware. A library can hold a book for a century, and it is still readable by someone who wishes to explore its pages. When a video game's hardware has obsolesced and been replaced with new hardware, the software that ran on it becomes useless unless the new hardware is backwards compatible. This situation will ultimately complicate the long-term relevance of any game studies, though it does not mean that such studies should not be conducted.

The study of games is relevant and important, because people are playing them. *Final Fantasy X* leverages the literary heritages of many cultures now opened up to each other thanks to information exchange to create a narrative with appeal that stretches beyond cultural boundaries. The medium for our literary absorption has changed, and will continue to change, but:

> What will not change are the things that have always engaged us: the strings of cause and effect; generalizations about character and motivation we assume from our study of outward dress, manneritics; the dense weave of micro- and macroplots; and always, underlying all of it, words, words, words. (Douglas, 171)

The story of *Final Fantasy X* – in a different medium, such as an epic poem – would still appeal to our sense of what makes a good story. Had it been found in a manuscript and dated to the Middle Ages, students might read it in high school English classes alongside

Beowulf. It was not found in a manuscript though, and so we cannot treat it as if it were. The story is not fixed on a page like a manuscript. The story changes with each playing, and the differences between each playing create something unique. The uniqueness of each playing does not allow us to create a single image of the story.

While repetition with difference makes it impossible to define a singular image of the game, in a more general sense any given playing of *Final Fantasy X* challenges our concept of the quest narrative. It deterritorializes the conventional outline of the quest, using elements we can recognize in a way that does not adhere to the models to which we are accustomed. What *Final Fantasy X* and other games like it tell us most is that we still need our myths, but our myths must be different. We no longer need ways to explain the thunder and the rain, for science has explained these things. We do still need hope, and heroes. We need the inspiration to achieve beyond the perception of our capabilities. In a society without monarchs, where we have seen the corruption that comes with power, we no longer need to believe that we can achieve a certain level of divinity. *Final Fantasy X* gives us just such as myth. It re-imagines the quest narrative as something more suitable to the needs of the modern audience, appropriating the conventions of the past when fitting, and creating new ones when needed.

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