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**NARRATIVE ANALYSIS AND VIDEOGAME: *A SONG OF ICE AND FIRE AND  
DRAGON AGE***

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**NARRATIVE ANALYSIS AND VIDEOGAME: A SONG OF ICE AND FIRE AND  
DRAGON AGE**

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## Abstract

With the advancement of technology, videogames have grown to become one of the largest entertainment industries in the world. Still, their particularities as both an emerging artform and a unique medium for storytelling are quite commonly misunderstood. In this Master's thesis, I contrast the storytelling and narrative elements of a non-interactive medium, in this case a series of books, with that of an interactive one, namely videogames. By analysing the strategies and aspects used in *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Dragon Age*, as well as other scholarly works in the paradigm for game studies, I exemplify the similarities and differences between both forms of storytelling, while bringing attention to the element of interactivity and how it affects the narratives of the selected games. While games have yet to realize their potential fully in incorporating interactivity as a form of shaping narrative and plot, be it because of monetary or time issues, it is clear that videogames have the capability to one day achieve that so-called “perfect” implementation.

**Key-Words:** 1 – Videogames, 2 – Literature, 3 – Narrative, 4 – Narratology, 5 – Interactive Narratology, 6 – *Dragon Age*, 7 – *A Song of Ice and Fire*

## Resumo

Com o avanço da tecnologia, videogames cresceram até se tornarem uma das maiores indústrias de entretenimento do mundo. Ainda assim, suas particularidades tanto como uma forma emergente de arte e como uma mídia única de histórias são comumente mal-interpretadas. Nesta dissertação, eu contrasto os elementos narrativos de uma mídia não-interativa, neste caso uma série de livros, com os de uma mídia interativa, sendo esta videogames. Analisando as estratégias e aspectos usados tanto nas *Crônicas de Gelo e Fogo*, e em *Dragon Age*, assim como outros trabalhos acadêmicos no paradigma de game studies, eu exemplifico semelhanças e diferenças entre ambas as formas de narrativa, enquanto chamo atenção para o elemento de interatividade e como ele afeta as narrativas dos jogos. Enquanto jogos ainda não foram capazes de fazer jus ao seu potencial ao incorporar interatividade como uma forma de moldar tanto narrativas quanto tramas, seja por razões monetárias ou de tempo, fica claro que videogames tem a capacidade de, um dia, alcançar uma implementação “perfeita”.

**Palavras-Chave:** 1 – Videogames, 2 – Literatura, 3 – Narrativa, 4 – Narratologia, 5 – Narratologia Interativa, 6 – *Dragon Age*, 7 – *As Crônicas de Gelo e Fogo*

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# NARRATIVE ANALYSIS AND VIDEOGAME: *A SONG OF ICE AND FIRE* *AND DRAGON AGE*

## 1. Introduction

The initial idea for this Master's thesis came from various mixed interests of my own. I have always had a great interest in the inner workings of storytelling, be they oral, visual, written or of any other type. To this day, I enjoy basically all types of stories and have always been fascinated by narratives alongside their compositional elements.

Growing up mostly alone, I have often turned to videogames in order to occupy myself. As I have come of age, videogames have continuously been a part of my life, especially those that have a greater focus on stories. I was interested in the prospect of interacting with the story directly, something that is only possible thanks to the particular elements present in the very idea of videogames. Through this interactivity, players are able to influence the story they are currently witnessing, shaping the world of that narrative through their own decisions inside the game. Because of that interactive element, videogames achieve a unique relationship with the process of storytelling in general, in addition to becoming a form of art all their own.

Eventually, the idea of contrasting a videogame's story with a written one came easily. Analyzing its narrative elements and discovering how these are then shaped by a player's ability to directly interact with that world seemed like an incredibly fascinating concept. The studies of narrative scholars, who seek to lay out possible morphologies for narrative itself, are a vast field, and in this Master's thesis, I not only incorporate these ideas, but I also add to them through the introduction of videogame studies.

To that end, I will rely upon two main works for my corpus, one representing books and one representing videogames. The first is the series of high fantasy novels written by George R.R. Martin, titled *A Song of Ice and Fire*, while the second is the series of role-playing games *Dragon Age*. Throughout this Master's thesis, I will discuss these works and their storytelling possibilities, devoting especial attention to the concept of interactivity found in videogames. First, however, I will introduce both stories, their plots and the characters involved in each.

George R. R. Martin is an American writer and television producer who focuses on fiction, having gone through several different genres during his writing career. These include science fiction, horror, mystery, and epic fantasy. Some of his best-known works include *Dying of the Light* and other novels, such as *Nightflyers*, *Fevre Dream*, and even the co-authored series *Wild Cards*. Still, his most notorious series and the one discussed in this Master's thesis is the, as of yet incomplete, saga of epic fantasy entitled *A Song of Ice and Fire*, of which there are currently five novels. These are *A Game of Thrones* (1996), *A Clash of Kings* (1998), *A Storm of Swords* (2000), *a Feast for Crows* (2005), and finally *A Dance with Dragons* (2011).

The first installment of *A Song of Ice and Fire* was published in 1996 and the series remains ongoing to this day, with two additional novels planned for the future, which are *Winds of Winter* and *A Dream of Spring*. In these novels, the story is presented through POV characters, or Point of View characters, meaning that each chapter is limited in perspective to the specific person it refers to. To summarize the story of the series and to analyze its narrative elements in a more concise way, I will separate the plot in three different storylines. These will be the dynastic war for the iron throne; the supernatural threat from the north in the form of the White Walkers; and the rise to power of Daenerys Targaryen, a young girl from an exiled royal family.

My second object of study, which will cover the videogame aspect of this study, is the series of games named *Dragon Age*. Just as with the novels, *Dragon Age* remains unfinished. Currently,

the series is comprised of three entries, these being *Dragon Age Origins* (2009), *Dragon Age 2* (2011), and *Dragon Age Inquisition* (2014). While each novel in the *A Song of Ice and Fire* series also has its own internal plots, the novels as a whole are much more connected among themselves than the *Dragon Age* games, but that in no way means that these games' stories are separate. Rather, they each develop their own individual plotlines that contribute to the main arc of the whole series. As of now (2022), this greater arc appears to involve Solas, or Fen'Harel, an elven god who wishes to restore the old empire of his people.

As with *A Song of Ice and Fire*, I will divide the videogame series in three parts, which, in this case, will correspond to the three games. With each game following a different protagonist, these being the player characters, they can have a much clearer arc. I will make use of this more defined division in order to analyze them. These six storylines will be my basis of study, and it is from them that I will draw my conclusions.

Before starting the process of analyzing both series, I must first contextualize each of these plots, so that, when I demonstrate the narrative and, in the case of videogames, ludological elements present in them, the presentation thereof will become clearer. Starting with *A Song of Ice and Fire*, each of the plotlines outlined have a different set of characters that are involved in them. In the first, dealing with the dynastic war for the Iron Throne, I can cite the story of Eddard Stark as he is summoned by his friend and king *Robert Baratheon* to become the main councilor of the Kingdom, named the Hand of the King. Meanwhile, Stark also investigates the supposed murder of the previous man to occupy this position.

As for the second, readers accompany the bastard son of *Eddard Stark*, named *Jon Snow*, as he finds his place within the Night's Watch, an ancient order that guards the realms of men against threats from the north. One such threat is only now being rediscovered as the White Walkers, a supernatural race of ice beings. Finally, in the third narrative, we follow the rise to

power of *Daenerys Targaryen*, an orphan from the now exiled royal family of the Seven Kingdoms, known as the *Targaryens*. They have lost the throne as *Robert Baratheon* usurped the crown in response to several provocations. In *Daenerys*' story, she rises from a scared and insecure princess to a conqueror, leader of armies, liberator of slaves and finally ruler of the city of *Meeren*.

As for *Dragon Age*, I can summarize the story of the first game, *Dragon Age Origins*, as the player character's joining of the ancient order of the *Grey Wardens*, sworn enemies of the corrupted race of *Darkspawn*s. The player<sup>1</sup> faces these creatures as they try to destroy the world in an event called the *Blight*. In the second game, *Dragon Age 2*, the story follows a more personal tale, as the protagonist, called *Hawke*, escapes the *Blight* from the first game. *Hawke* then becomes a refugee in the city of *Kirkwall* and eventually rises to power within the politics of that city. Finally, in the third game, *Dragon Age Inquisition*, the player character revives an old religious order known as the Inquisition and becomes its leader. The organization must stop a mysterious figure called the *Elder One*, who is taking advantage of the chaos left behind after the second game.

This will not be the first project to deal with the world of game studies, far from it. As I carry on with my research, it will become clearer that the study, not only of videogames, but of games in general, has been continuously advancing in the past few years, with more and more works devoting their attention to them. With the ever-evolving cycle of new technologies in our world, it would be irresponsible not to be open to the new possibilities offered to us in terms of narrativity and storytelling. Works such as Adam Ernets's "Resolutions to Some Problems in Interactive Storytelling"; Jesper Jull's "Games Telling Stories?"; Britta Neitzel's "Narrativity of Computer Games"; Farley Eduardo's "Limit of Fiction: comparisons between Literature and Role

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the project, I refer to many participants in stories, such as the player, the character and the archetypes, as "he", but that is only for ease of flow. Any of these roles may be of any gender.

Playing Games<sup>2</sup>”; and books such as Flavia Gasi’s *Videogame and Mythology: Poetics of the Imaginary and of Greek Myth in Eletronic Games*,<sup>3</sup> Lucia Santaella and Mirna Feitoza’s anthology titled *Game’s Map: Games’ Cultural Diversity*,<sup>4</sup> alongside many others discussed in the Theoretical Framework section, will play a major role in furthering my investigation. Unlike these works, however, my Master’s thesis will focus on the case study of the aforementioned series. By relying upon the works of these scholars, I aim to provide a scientific and direct contrast between two media and then an analysis of the raw potential afforded to videogames by the concept of interactivity. While videogames have only recently emerged in a field already vast with possibilities, they are as deserving of having their stories analyzed scientifically as any other media.

Still, what are stories? If my objective is to dissect and analyze stories and narrative in general in a satisfying and scientific manner, I must first understand what I am dealing with when that term is used. In order to do so, I will analyze a number of works and studies that seek not only to define what literature is, but also to analyze it from several different perspectives. In addition, I will also rely upon the concept of the Hero’s Journey, which is an element that seeks to create a “one-for-all” formula for the construction of storytelling. While Joseph Campbell in his *Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) first used the term “Hero’s Journey”, and the idea itself is even older, with Vladimir Propp’s *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928), I will rely more heavily on an updated version of the Hero’s Journey, which was presented by Christopher Vogler in *The Writer’s Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers* (1992). I have chosen to focus on Vogler instead of other similar scholars, for a few reasons. As Vogler’s studies work as a form of updated version of other scholars, such as Campbell or Propp, his work has begun to incorporate elements of more visual

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<sup>2</sup> Free translation of title: *No Limite da Ficção: Comparações entre Literatura e RPG – Role Playing Games*

<sup>3</sup> Free translation of title: *Videogame e Mitologia: A Poética do Imaginário e dos Mitos Gregos nos Jogos Eletrônicos* (As there are many such translations, I was advised to indicate my own translations as footnotes).

<sup>4</sup> Free translation of title: *Mapa do Jogo: A Diversidade Cultural dos Games*



media, especially movies. While he obviously does not analyze videogames directly, his fresh perspective on the topic is more suitable to my Master's thesis. Through all these works and concepts and the differences between story, plot, and narrative, I will exemplify how such definitions can be translated from the study of literature into that of stories, narratives and, more specifically, the stories of games.

In Terry Eagleton's introductory chapter to his book *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, he asks: what, exactly, is literature? As the author states, "If there is such a thing as literary theory, then it would seem obvious that there is something called literature which it is the theory of" (Eagleton, 1). Following that question, Eagleton presents a series of possible distinctions as to what literature entails.

One of the first definitions in Eagleton's work is that of literature as fictional discourse. That notion, however, is almost immediately discarded, for literature has encompassed both fictional and non-fictional works throughout the ages. Following this train of thought, Eagleton then presents a few other ideas that should be understood before continuing.

Turning to the formalist paradigms, Eagleton presents the idea of literature as the ways in which it utilizes language. Moreover, literature goes against ordinary language, creating a language that is all its own. In this sense, literature is thought of as "organized violence committed on ordinary speech" (Eagleton, 2). The formalists, such as Roman Jakobson, Boris Eikhenbaum, Viktor Shklovsky, Vladimir Propp, and Mikhail Bakhtin, among others, applied the use of linguistics to the study of literature. They were far more concerned with the form of the literary work than with its content. To them, literature would be a special kind of language; in contrast to the ordinary language we commonly use (Eagleton, 4).

Once again, however, this definition is faced with a series of problems that stop students from simplifying literature in such a manner. Eagleton presents a problem with this idea of

estrangement by the formalists, which is that, according to him, there is no kind of writing that cannot be read, given sufficient ingenuity, as such (Eagleton, 6). I should also mention that this outlook could be translated into the main topic of this study, since we are slowly arriving at concepts somewhat similar to interactivity. In this case, the agency of the reader in their interpretation of any given text.

Eagleton goes through a few more possible answers to the question that has been posed throughout the ages in literary studies. Among those, there is the idea of literature being, simply put, non-pragmatic discourse or texts that serve no immediate practical purpose (Eagleton, 7). This one may be discarded as well, since, as Eagleton puts it, "... even if treating discourse 'non-pragmatically' is part of what is meant by 'literature', then it follows from this 'definition' that literature cannot in fact be 'objectively' defined." (Eagleton, 7). As I am trying to analyze literature and its narratives scientifically, this vision would quite simply be useless to me.

Finally, there is an idea that may be relied upon in this study, even though it still possesses its problems. Literature could be considered by the ways in which people relate to the works they read (Eagleton, 8). This definition would give rise to a literary canon, where different groups of people could connect with diverse works and, therefore, shape their own idea of what literature is, based on their own tastes and ideals.

This definition of literature presents the notion that the literary text could be forever reinventing itself through the interaction of the people who experience it. As the formalists would have put it, literary evolution would then be an open-ended series of revolutions (Harland 151). Such ideas will serve as a base, as I begin to explore the differences and similarities between written and interactive stories.

Before moving forward, however, it is important to make one thing clear. In this thesis, I will often call novels "non-interactive media", but this does not mean there is no interactivity or

interplay between reader and novel. The difference, however, is on the kind of interactivity discussed. In *Homo Ludens*, John Huizinga discusses the idea that the act of play is deeply rooted both in human culture and in literature. There is also reader-response criticism, which emphasizes the relationship between the reader and their experience of a literary work, connecting back to the definition of literature I have just discussed.

There is a connection between novel and reader. I do not dispute that in any form, but the interactivity I discuss here is of the more direct kind. It is the aspect that allows for direct input into the story of a game, allowing for the player to alter different aspects of a videogame's story, from the plot itself to elements such as the characters and their arcs, the Hero's Journey, the lore of the world and many others.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

The main purpose of this study is to understand how interactivity affects the storytelling devices and narrative aspects of a story. To that end, I need to clarify aspects that deal with the study of the aforementioned elements before beginning my direct analysis. This section, entitled Theoretical Framework, will introduce and examine scholarly works that discuss both form and content of storytelling in general, while leaving the direct analysis of my objects of study for the following section, Analysis of Objects.

Here, I will peruse, through both my own interpretations and the views of more experienced scholars, aspects of general storytelling. Afterwards, I will enter the fields that deal more precisely with videogames. Such aspects include the difference between story, plot, and narrative; the Hero's Journey as presented by Christopher Vogler; introductions to videogame stories and studies; narratology; ludology; immersion; story worlds; and finally, interactivity. After all of these aspects

have been properly introduced and explored, I will be ready to shift completely to my two objects of study, as the basis for this study will already have been presented by then.

## 2.1. Story, Plot, and Narrative

This Master's thesis focuses mostly on the differences between narrative elements as examined in both a book and a videogame. Thus, it must be clear what the precise elements that I will discuss are. The distinction between story, plot, and narrative is one that has been presented many times, such as in Brian Richardson's collection *Narrative Dynamics* or Jessica Manuel's article "The Difference between Narrative, Story, & Plot".

In *Narrative Dynamics*, E. M. Forster's "Story and Plot" defines a story as a sequence of events arranged in their time-sequence (71). He exemplifies story with "The king died and then the queen died". The story is the most simplified version of the overall work, being the base upon which more will be built.

In the same chapter, Forster also presents the idea of plot in a similar way to how he explained story: as a sequence of events. Plot, however, has a stronger emphasis on causality, as "the time sequence is preserved, but the sense of causality overshadows it" (71). The author provides an example of plot with "The king died and then the queen died of grief", or as "The queen died, no one knew why, until it was discovered that it was through grief at the death of the king". In this second example, the plot suspends the time sequence, distancing itself from it as much as it can. In a story, a possible audience would be asking "what then?", while a plot would cause the query of why.

Finally, narrative is something akin to an artistic treatment of the aforementioned elements. As Manuel puts it, "the narrative is the architect's design or how he intends others to interpret the

building” (2021). That refers to the idea that the narrative represents how the story is demonstrated and how it is presented to its audience, be they readers, viewers or players.

In a novel, if the narrative is presented through the lens of an unreliable source, then the reader is experiencing the story in a different way from one with a reliable narrator. In *A Song of Ice and Fire*, for example, where each chapter is told through different POVs or point of view characters, there are several examples of such unreliable narration.

At several points in the story, Daenerys Targaryen and her brother comment on constantly having to flee assassins hired by the usurper Robert Baratheon. Yet, still in the first book, Robert mentions that he regrets never sending assassins after them. While Daenerys has no way to know the truth, being on another continent and relying solely on the word of her brother, the audience knows the truth.

Moreover, the author’s choice of which characters become POV is a tool in the narrative of the story. Especially true for characters that only become POV in later books, such as the twins Jaime and Cersei Lannister. Jaime is one of the greatest examples in this regard, as his character is, in the first books, depicted only through other characters, most of whom see him only for what he is known for, that is, for betraying his oaths and lacking honor. As he finally becomes a POV character, readers see him at his lowest, while also learning of the reasons for his oath breaking. Readers experience his side of the story, which, of course, is not necessarily reliable either, but it affects the way the audience perceives the character, thus making them part of the narrative.

That is narrative for non-interactive stories, but how is narrative presented through videogames? Do games have anything that can be considered narrative? More importantly, how does narrative appear in *Dragon Age*? In addition, I will further exemplify narrative in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, as well as contrast its effects on both media (novels and videogames) and explain

how said media may complement each other in a way that may allow videogames to better utilize certain narrative elements.

## 2.2. Structure of Storytelling and the Hero's Journey

Seeking to analyze the intricate aspects of the two main narratives in this Master's thesis (*A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Dragon Age*), I will rely upon exemplary scholarly works which seek to provide a distinct formula for how narratives have been constructed throughout time. The two main sources are *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, by Joseph Campbell, and *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*, by Christopher Vogler. Vogler's discussion is, to a degree, an update of Campbell's work. These books provide not only a set of possible character archetypes, but also story beats, which are interactions that advance the plot, named in both pieces as The Hero's Journey. According to this journey, every story, regardless of medium, shares fundamental bases.

Concerning characters, The Hero's Journey, as discussed by Vogler, proposes eight key archetypes that would potentially be present in all possible narratives. These archetypes include the Hero; the Shadow; the Mentor; the Ally; the Guardian; the Herald; the Trickster; and finally, the Shapeshifter. Once I fully commit to the analysis of the objects of study, I will return to these and analyze how they appear in both series. I will also explain how interactivity allows the player to shift a character's role based on his or her decisions and choices.

I will also be utilizing these works for the sets of story beats, which are also sometimes called the *Monomyth*. Some aspects of this monomyth include the Ordinary World; the Call to Adventure; the Refusal of the Call; the Meeting with the Mentor; the Crossing of the Threshold; the Tests, Allies, Enemies; the Approach to the Inmost Cave; the Ordeal; the Reward; the Road Back; the Resurrection; and finally, the Return with the Elixir. Just like before, I will return to these concepts once I begin to take a closer look at both *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Dragon Age*. Before

continuing with this section, however, I summarize what each of these beats and archetypes are in Vogler's work.

It is important to note that during the following discussion, I will sometimes use the term "stage" and in other places the term "act". The first is used about the twelve stages of the Hero's Journey, while the second refers to the three-act structure of storytelling that is especially prevalent in the film industry. I do so because Vogler himself relies on that structure in some of his explanations.

### *The 12 Stages of the journey*

- 1 – The Ordinary World:** The everyday life of the Hero.
- 2 – The Call to Adventure:** The initiating incident.
- 3 – Refusal of the Call:** The hero refuses to answer the Call to Adventure, but eventually acquiesces.
- 4 – Meeting with the Mentor:** The hero meets a mentor, who offers a gift that the Hero will use in his/her adventure, be it a magical item, knowledge, wisdom or something else.
- 5 – Crossing of the First Threshold:** The Hero fully commits to the adventure.
- 6 – Tests, Allies, and Enemies:** The Hero faces adversities, but eventually overcomes them.
- 7 – Approach to the Innermost Cave:** The Hero approaches a turning point of the adventure.
- 8 – The Ordeal:** The greatest mortal challenge that the Hero faces to this point.
- 9 – Reward:** The hero receives the reward for overcoming the Ordeal.
- 10 – The Road Back:** The Hero begins his journey back to the Ordinary World.
- 11 – The Resurrection:** The Hero faces a final challenge and overcomes it.
- 12 – Return with the Elixir:** The Hero returns to the Ordinary World with something that will improve it.

In Vogler's version of the Hero's Journey, there are twelve stages for the adventure. Each one has a narrative reason to exist and is usually present in every story. While these stages may shift places concerning the order that they appear in the story, these stages are usually organized

as presented above. The first stage, which serves as an introduction to the tale, is called the Ordinary World.

In his book, Vogler states, “the opening moments are a powerful opportunity to set the tone and create an impression” (84). The author discusses the introductory elements of written and visual stories and how the storyteller, be he a writer, director or producer, may set the tone for a story even before the process of telling it begins. Titles, book covers, publicity, trailers and even prologues all are cited as possibilities for exploring the tone of a story, before the presentation of the actual tale (85). When discussing the story itself and the Ordinary World, Vogler states how “the special world of the story is only special if we can see it in contrast to a mundane world of everyday affairs from which the hero issues forth” (87). In addition to that, Vogler also declares that “it’s a good idea for writers to make the Ordinary World as different as possible from the special world, so audience and hero experience a dramatic change when the threshold is finally crossed” (87). As such, the Ordinary World has many functions in the whole. It serves as the introductory section to the story, its characters and plot; as a tool to set the tone and theme; a presentation of the protagonist; and a suggestion of the dramatic questions that will come later. In videogames, most developers also take advantage of this part to introduce tutorial levels, allowing the player a semi-safe zone in which to learn the gameplay components of the world.

Usually taking place immediately after the Ordinary World is the Call to Adventure. Vogler indicates “the Call to Adventure may come in the form of a message or a messenger” (100). The Call to Adventure may take many forms, ranging from events that forcefully thrust the hero out of his comfort zone in the Ordinary World to friendly invitations delivered by the hero’s close associates. The hero may even deliver his own Call through simple boredom and a last straw event (100). Sometimes named inciting incident or trigger, the Call to Adventure is the beginning of the hero’s journey out of the Ordinary World and into the special one.



In response to the Call to Adventure, most heroes go through the Refusal of the Call. The purpose of this stage is to make clear to the audience that the adventure is not to be taken lightly and symbolizes the hero's unwillingness to take such risks, as it may cost him something of great value (108). Even in such cases, as when the story presents a "searcher" hero, as proposed by Propp, which are heroes either that do not express a reluctance about the adventure or that actively seek adventure, still other characters may give rise to the Refusal stage through worry and fear of losing the hero (110). It is also noteworthy that the Refusal may be something short, such as a negative thought or a slight hesitation in accepting the Call. It may also take place at several different moments or even mixed into other stages, as sometimes several stages may be "condensed" together (113).

The Meeting with the Mentor is the preparation stage. While the hero may not be ready or willing to set off into the special world and onto the adventure prior to this point, the mentor offers some sort of assistance, which is essential to the hero's success. According to Vogler, the mentor may offer many different types of support to the hero. Protection, guidance, teaching, trials, training, gifts, either magical or not, are all examples of the possible role the mentor may play in the story. In summary, in this stage, the hero gets something that either already is or will become necessary for him to overcome his fears and complete his journey.

Considered the last stage of the first act, the Crossing of the First Threshold marks the shift from the ordinary world into the special one. "Crossing the First Threshold is an act of the will in which the hero commits wholeheartedly to the adventure" (127). Vogler cites the similarity between this stage and the "turning point" in the three-act structure and how it is usually brought about not by the hero himself, but by an outside force that compels the hero to such commitment. This is usually where the Threshold Guardian archetype appears; barring the hero's crossing or forcing it.

The Tests, Allies and Enemies stage may encompass many different events within a story. As stated by Vogler, the most important function of this stage is to test the hero (136). It presents the hero with new challenges that will help him prepare for future ones. The challenges of this section, while still creating hardship for the hero, usually are not yet of life and death magnitude. They may even appear as situations created by the mentor to continue his tutelage of the hero. Another aspect of this stage is the introduction of new characters. Allies, enemies, partners, teams and rivals are all examples cited by Vogler as some of the characters that could be introduced in this section (137). Finally, the last aspect of the Tests, Allies and Enemies stage revolves around the hero and the audience becoming more accustomed to the new rules of the special world.

The next stage in Vogler's version of the Hero's Journey is known as the Approach to the Innermost Cave. It marks a change within the hero, as he is about to embark onto the main challenge of the adventure. As Vogler elaborates: "It's time to make final preparations for the central ordeal of the adventure" (143). The hero prepares himself, be it mentally or physically, and is finally ready for the greatest challenge yet. He may have a last moment of rest, engage in a romantic relationship, or he may even have a final conversation that reminds him of his purpose. With renewed energy, the hero is now ready to face the Ordeal.

The greatest mortal challenge of a story is titled the Ordeal. More than anything else, it represents the hero's dramatic death and eventual rebirth. This death is not necessarily physical, or necessarily emotional. As I will demonstrate in the Journeys section, Jon Snow is killed during this stage of his journey. In other stories, this Ordeal may also represent something physical, like a battle or a competition, or it may be presented as an emotional challenge. The end of a relationship, their biggest fear, failure in some aspect of their lives, these are all examples of the Ordeal.

Death is only the first aspect of the Ordeal. The Hero's rebirth is the greatest representative of this supposed change, allowing the Hero to overcome the challenge. Still, Vogler makes a point

to differentiate the Ordeal, which he also calls the crisis, from the climax of the story (156). The Ordeal is presented as the central point of the second act while the climax is still ahead in the story.

The resurrection, or, as Vogler names it, the Reward, is a direct consequence of the Hero overcoming the Ordeal. According to the author, “encountering death is a big event and it will surely have consequences” (176). Vogler cites many possibilities for such consequences, such as celebrations, introspection, love scenes, taking ownership of the wanted treasure or realizing an epiphany.

The Road Back, as the name implies, begins the hero’s journey back to the ordinary world. After overcoming the hardships of the adventure, the hero must now return home, stronger and wiser for it. While some heroes may choose to stay in the special world, few actually do. Even those that sought adventure and excitement usually become wiser by this stage, which also marks the beginning of the third act of the three-act structure.

Vogler points to this as the moment where the tale’s energy starts rising once again. After the calmness of the Reward, the Road Back thrusts the hero back into excitement, even if not the life-or-death situation of the Ordeal. Vogler states that “this stage represents the resolve of the hero to return to the Ordinary World and implement the lessons learned in the Special World” (189). It marks a return to adventure, though of a different kind.

As stated before, the Ordeal is not the climax of the story. Instead, the climax is marked by the Resurrection stage. According to Vogler, this is one of the most challenging passages for both the hero and the writer (197), because it is similar to the Ordeal while also being extremely different. It is a final purging, which may appear as another battle or as a choice that represents the hero’s growth and change throughout the adventure. Before moving on to the last stage, it is good to note that it is usually in the Resurrection stage that the hero faces the Shadow archetype for the last time.

Finally, the last stage of Vogler's version of the Hero's Journey is called the Return with the Elixir. It marks the definitive return of the Hero to the Ordinary World with something that will either heal it or improve it. It completes the circle of the adventure, returning to a place the hero knows, though now it may be perceived differently, given all the lessons learned throughout the adventure.

The key element of this stage is the elixir (220). This element brought by the hero to the ordinary world will improve it. It serves as proof and reminder of the adventure, both for the hero and the audience. The elixir may be a literal magical or beneficial item that will be shared by the community in the ordinary world, or it may be something non-material, such as peace, love, happiness, health or even knowledge. Sometimes the elixir might also be a lesson well learned, even if only the hero himself is affected.

Now that I have summarized the ideas behind each stage of the journey, I can pass on to the eight character archetypes. These represent the possible functions certain characters exercise in the adventure. While they are well defined, it is noteworthy that more than one character could fit into a single archetype, or even that one certain character could fit into multiple archetypes at different points in the story. These are possibilities that I will more thoroughly discuss in the Journeys section of the Analysis of Objects. As a reminder, the archetypes are:

### *The 8 Character Archetypes*

- 1 – The Hero:** The protagonist of the story.
- 2 – The Shadow:** The main antagonist of the story.
- 3 – The Mentor:** Any character who teaches or provides the Hero with useful gifts.
- 4 – The Ally:** Characters that stay by the Hero's side and help him.
- 5 – The Threshold Guardian:** An initial challenge to the Hero.
- 6 – The Herald:** The force that first sends the Hero on the adventure.

**7 – The Trickster:** Characters who usually serve as comic relief, but may also represent a change of perspective within the Hero.

**8 – The Shapeshifter:** Characters that change based on the Hero’s perspective.

One thing to notice, before I continue my analysis of these archetypes, is that there are other possible variations in stories. Vogler mentions some about fairy tales and modern genres (26), but he also states that these are simply refinements of the main eight types. These are the most basic constructs upon which other models may be drawn.

The first of these is the archetype of the Hero. Simply put, the Hero is the protagonist of the story. Vogler states that this archetype represents a search for identity and totality (30). Such wholeness is achieved through the stages of the journey and is usually presented in the form of the Elixir.

One of the most important dramatic functions of the Hero is to serve as a point of reference to the audience, be it about the story itself, to the world where it takes place, or to the other characters and archetypes. The Hero is the audience’s window into that specific story, and his lenses color the public’s perception of events. A similar instance of such, though not quite the same, that I will discuss later on, revolves around the idea of Point of View characters.

In contrast to the Hero, there is the Shadow. Representing the obscure elements of the world or even the Hero himself, the Shadow is usually the main antagonist of the story. Its main purpose in the story is to challenge the Hero and provide a worthy opponent to be fought (Vogler, 66). While the Shadow usually refers to the villain, that does not inherently mean that the Shadow is an objectively evil person or force. As noted, the Hero colors the audience’s perception, and thus these characters forced into their position. Some stories even take steps to humanize or to create empathy with the villain.

The third archetype is that of the Mentor. In general, the Mentor is a character that, in one way or another, helps the Hero through his journey. Usually represented by some type of old sage figure, the Mentor provides some sort of assistance without which the Hero would not be capable of fulfilling the journey. Such assistance may appear in the form of some specific magical or technological item or even through some words of wisdom and advice. It is not the form of the assistance that matters, but its importance to the Hero. Another important aspect of the Mentor is that of helping the Hero overcome any self-doubts or fears that may get in the way of his advancement in the story. Such aids do not need to come from someone that necessarily wants to help the Hero. A lesson may be sharp, difficult and overall unintended, as the Mentor sought not to help, but to hinder.

In every story, there exist characters that are considered partners, friends or companions of the Hero. These are represented by the archetype of the Ally. These characters provide the Hero with constant and loyal aid. They may fight alongside the Hero, complete tasks in his stead, or even remind the Hero of his objectives or morals during a challenging time. These pillars raise the Hero and allow him to keep moving forward.

Next is the Threshold Guardian, an archetype that represents the first challenge of the Hero and the crossing from the ordinary into the special world. The main dramatic function of the Threshold Guardian is to test the Hero. To assert that he is ready for the most challenging difficulties that lay ahead, both mentally and physically.

Usually appearing in the first act of the story, the Herald is represented by either a character or a force that sends the Hero on the adventure. This is the archetype responsible for delivering the Call to Adventure, and thus represents challenge and change, both for the Hero and for the world. Not only do they pose a challenge to the Hero, they may also remind the Hero of the consequences of failure, especially after the Refusal of the Call.

While Trickster characters usually serve as comic relief in many stories, they have another function; to represent a change of perspective within the Hero. According to Vogler, “the Trickster archetype embodies the energies of mischief and desire for change” (77). Unlike the Herald, however, the Trickster’s energies of change are more about the Hero himself and his internal philosophies and struggles.

Finally, the last of these eight archetypes is the Shapeshifter, whose very nature is that of change and instability (59). While the Herald represents change for the world and the adventure, and the Trickster causes changes to the Hero’s perspective of either himself or the world around him, the Shapeshifter changes himself. Its elements of change are limited to his own character and to the Hero’s perspective not of himself but of the Shapeshifter. An ally who betrays the Hero and becomes an enemy; an enemy who reveals himself to be an ally; a lover who cheats; a mentor who is constantly lying; these are all examples of Trickster characters. They continuously change, leaving the Hero and the audience in a state of constant doubt as to their true nature. Their presence in the story is meant to cause drama and uncertainty about the fate of the Hero.

All of these aspects will be of extreme importance once I reach the Analysis of Objects section. I will study the stages of the journey and the character archetypes in regard to both objects of this thesis and discuss them more thoroughly there, where I will be able to provide more concrete examples. Now I will discuss how videogames have begun to rely upon these aspects of storytelling.

### **2.3. Videogames as Storytelling Devices**

The first recorded videogame to incorporate digital technology, *Tennis for Two*, is credited by the *APS News Journal* as having been created in 1958, a little over sixty years ago (2008). It was an extremely simple tennis game, similar to the very famous *Pong* (1970), which is often cited

as the first commercially successful videogame, even though *SpaceWar!* (1962) is eight years older. As games were only then emerging into the world, they were simple and yet impressive, considering the technology available at the time.

As the technology evolved, alongside a deeper understanding of the possibilities for games in an overall sense, games became more and more sophisticated. They have presented memorable characters, such as Mario and Sonic, which are known even to those who have no interest in gaming; they have offered entertainment to people of all ages, and, more importantly to this Master's thesis, they eventually began to explore the concept of storytelling in interactive media.

In "The Evolution of Videogames as a Storytelling Medium, and the Role of Narrative in Modern Games", Chris Stone cites Nintendo's *Donkey Kong* as the first game to have had a story that players could directly experience through the game itself (2019). Being released in 1981, the game told the extremely simple story of a man, this being the player character, having to save his girlfriend from his own pet ape. Travis Fahs, in his "The Secret History of *Donkey Kong*", proclaims that the director of the game wanted the story told completely within the game in a way that any player could easily grasp and understand (2011).





Figure 1 - A Donkey Kong Level.

From what I discussed previously about story, plot, and narrative, it is easily perceptible how *Donkey Kong* conveys the first two elements. The story of the game can be summarized as an ape escapes his cage and captures a woman, while its plot could be excerpted as the man chases the ape to save his kidnapped girlfriend. Still, how could one exemplify the narrative elements of such a game? Stone mentions small animations and text, such as a “HELP” bubble representing the girlfriend calling out for rescue. These could be considered the narrative of the game, as such elements help demonstrate the story of *Donkey Kong* to its audience, but they are still a very early version of what I will discuss in this Master’s thesis.

*Donkey Kong’s* simplistic story would eventually inspire the creation of one of gaming’s best-known characters, Mario. While the story and plot of *Super Mario Bros* remain almost as simple as its predecessor’s does, the developers of the game drew from *Donkey Kong’s* simplistic approach to create new characters and further develop old ones. The player character finally got a name, Mario, while the girlfriend became the princess from a fantasyland. The developers did not

stop there, however. They extended that concept repeatedly, creating new characters such as Luigi (Mario's brother), new princesses beyond the first one, new villains, new kingdoms, and new stories. Mario games remain one of the best-known videogame series today as they continuously reinvent that simple initial concept, be it through new story elements or new forms of gameplay, such as changing the player's perspective from a 2D platformer to a 3D exploration system.

Mario games are not my focus in this thesis, however, but rather a means to exemplify how games have continuously changed with the times. The very first games were far more engaged with enjoyable gameplay and direct entertainment, and while one could easily argue that this remains their focus today, it is undeniable that stories and narratives have become far more important in today's games. *Dragon Age*, in particular, has always been known for its story, characters, and particular player choices, which would influence and shape the lore of Thedas, the world in which *Dragon Age* takes place. I will discuss such choices and elements in the Analysis of Objects section, but for now, I must cite a few scholars' views on the very idea of videogames as storytelling devices.

In *The Ultimate Guide to Video Game Writing and Design* (2007), Flint Dille and John Zuur Platten remind their readers that when playing a game, its audience will have certain expectations, and one greatest of all: to be engaged. Videogames are interactive, thus players expect to interact with the game. That does not mean, however, that every player will want to affect the world of the game. Instead, it means that every player, in spite of his or her interest in the story, or lack thereof, expects at the very least to push some buttons and have the game respond accordingly (21). This is a more technical exemplification of games, but it demonstrates two main aspects of storytelling in gaming. First, that not every player will want to interact with the story, rather skipping most story sections of a game, while searching for more action and gameplay-focused sections. Secondly, that one of the greatest challenges of videogame storytelling is to create compelling and engaging

content that charms the player into interaction. In other words, a game's story must immerse its players in that game's world and narrative, more so even than other media, as games will always have an easily accessible "distraction" built into them: gameplay.

Immersion, then, could be considered the main goal of interactive digital media in general, as stated by Adriana Kei in "From the Real World to the Fictional: Immersion in games"<sup>5</sup>. Kei also claims that beyond the rules of the game, present in gameplay mechanics, immersion is bound to certain symbolic systems found in videogames. Concerning such systems, it is through the identifying, recognizing, and imagination of the player that the experience is considered pleasant or not. That, in turn, defines whether s/he will continue to feel immersed in said game. That develops into a great contradiction for games: is gameplay a distraction or a tool to enhance both the narrative of and the immersion in that game?

Returning to Dille and Platten, they discuss the narrative structure of games and how the process through which these narratives are delivered is of particular importance. In their words:

If it is possible to do so, let the player have control of key narrative moments, either by triggering them through their actions or having the game reveal key story moments (a sidekick character is killed because the player didn't defend him). In other words, when dealing with your narrative, create a priority for telling your story as follows: play it, display it, say it (46).

The authors also present the notion of branching storytelling. Through it, the story of a game would function as the branches of a tree, creating different scenarios depending on the path and choices upon which the player decides.

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<sup>5</sup> Free translation of title: "Do Mundo Real ao Ficcional: a imersão no jogo".

Branching storytelling is an aspect of videogames that I will discuss more thoroughly once I start to analyze interactivity. For now, I can state that interactivity is the most particular element of videogame storytelling, one that is unique to games, as readers or watchers are (with very few exceptions) unable to directly interact with the product in a meaningful way. While many still believe games to be little more than children's toys, I am, hopefully, demonstrating how that is, at the very least, no longer the case. I, however, am not the only one claiming such a thing<sup>6</sup>.

Jim Andrews, in "Videogames as literary devices"<sup>7</sup>, points out the similarity between videogames and other media in the sense that all are capable of delivering varying interpretations to different people, even when aimed at a single work. Be it poems, prose, contemplating a painting or listening to a musical piece, someone could derive from it a vastly different experience than the person next to them. Similarly, players can have equally varied experiences when playing a determined game. This happens not only due to their own interpretations, but also due to their active choices and the concept of replay ability, which involves players starting a new playthrough<sup>8</sup> of a game after finishing it with the goal of purposely making different choices in this playthrough. Furthermore, replay ability is something of particular prevalence in games such as *Dragon Age*.

In "Narrativity of Computer Games," Britta Neitzel argues that, since certain narrative aspects, such as actions, events, characters, and a setting, are all present in videogames, they can also be considered to have a representational level compared to other forms of narrativity. The author mentions the importance that narrativity in videogames has played in the emergent field of game studies (3). Neitzel admits that game studies still have a long way to go. According to her,

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<sup>6</sup> Jim Andrews, Britta Neitzel, Felix Schröter, Gonzalo Frasca, Ernest Adams, Farley Eduardo and Flavia Gasi are but a few of all the game scholars that I will be discussing.

<sup>7</sup> Free translation of title: "Videogames como dispositivos literários"

<sup>8</sup> Playthrough refers to one time that the player has been through the story of the game. If two playthroughs are mentioned, it means said player has finished that game two times, possibly with the goal of choosing different outcomes.

more case studies are not only necessary, but also required for the advancement of the paradigm as a whole, which is one of the many reasons that led me to develop the current thesis.

Although he focuses more on tabletop RPGs, Farley Eduardo, in “Limit of Fiction: Comparisons between Literature and Role Playing Games”, approximates games to literature by comparing and contrasting their narrative elements. According to the author, “the relationship between both (RPG and literature) is present in the use of narrative and negotiation elements between receiver and text, in a fill-in-the-blank sense, and by the recognition of both as means of producing fiction” (13-14). Eduardo elaborates on the topic by describing how, through the contraposition of games and literature, one might realize that both fields establish rules and limits to define themselves.

Finally, before moving on to the next section, I should also mention Felix Schröter’s “The Game of Thrones. George R. R. Martin’s *A Song of Ice and Fire* and its videogame adaptations”, in which the author clarifies notions such as game-like narratives and story worlds, the second of which is presented as “following a top-down game logic in creating settings, characters, and events” (70). Another concept is that of “transmedial” narratology, which presents the term of *story world* as having both a text-oriented approach as well as a recipient-oriented one. As Schröter puts it, “story worlds can, tentatively, be said to be following a game logic when they privilege physical laws, social rules, and values over character psychology or causal event structure” (70). He also presents the idea that, since story worlds can be understood as greater models upon which several different narratives can be drawn, games and story worlds can both be considered rule-based models for new stories.

This article not only provides a direct link between *A Song of Ice and Fire* and videogames, but also explains how stories in and of themselves are not directly dependent on any specific medium. It shows how story worlds could create an intermediate universe, where the differences

between each media would all work together in the building of a single larger story. *Dragon Age* is already an example of that, as the universe of the games, which started in 2009 with *Dragon Age Origins*, has expanded not only through its two sequels, but also through five novels, one anthology of short-stories, eight comic books, one animated movie, and two in-world encyclopedias.

#### **2.4. Narratology vs Ludology**

The field of game studies is not new and has been growing exponentially in the last few decades. This rise in interest, coupled with previous understandings of various fields, such as cultural studies, literary research, and narrative analysis have heavily influenced the emergence of several specific paradigms in game studies. Because of their widespread range of topics and ideas, games can be analyzed in a multitude of ways, such as studies focusing on cognitive benefits, psychological influence, social studies, virtual economies, socialization, depiction of historical events, representation, and, most importantly for the purposes of this Master's thesis, ludology and narratology.

Ludology, as presented in the *Lexicon* dictionary, entails “the study of games and gaming, especially videogames”. This definition follows that of Janet Murray, who states, “The proper study of games is therefore an analysis of this unique formalism and a comparative study of particular games for their formal qualities. The focus of such study should be on the rules of the game, not on the representational or mimetic elements which are only incidental” (1). For the purposes of this Master's thesis, I will define ludology as the study of the formal and particular aspects of games in general, focusing on their specific characteristics rather than on their possible narratives. This definition will aid me not only in contrasting Ludology to its narrative counterpart, but also to contextualize some of the works I will discuss in this section. Narratology, on the other hand, is presented in the *Merriam-Webster* dictionary as “the study of structure in narratives”.

While the study of narratives can be traced to ancient Greece, I cite sources closer to us, such as Vladimir Propp in *Morphology of the Folktale*, from 1928, and Joseph Campbell's *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, from 1949.

Gonzalo Frasca's "Ludologists love stories, too: notes from a debate that never took place" brings up a secondary ramification in narratology. Frasca underlines the differences between narratologists, the traditional narratology scholars, working with non-interactive media, and "narrativists" (Mateas, 2002), who are narratology scholars that work directly with interactive media, either board games, table top games or videogames.

This divide between narratology and ludology is, in certain ways, similar to the divide between different formalist groups and scholars. Likewise, ludologists and "narrativists" have sometimes been at odds as to whether interactive media should even attempt to indulge in complex narrative construction. The introduction of an interactive element, this being the player and the choices offered to him or her, could potentially throw the narrative flow of a story into chaos. In "The Challenge of the Interactive Movie," Ernest Adams mentions a few problems in this regard, such as the reaching of the story's dramatic climax. As Adams puts it: "How do you make sure that when the dramatic climax is ready to take place in your interactive story, your player is there and ready for it?" (1995). This problem is usually discussed as ludo-narrative dissonance, but many within the gaming space and game study fields refer to it as player-character dissonance.

Ludo-narrative dissonance presents such difficulty for interactive storytelling, for in it, interactivity is seen as a negative force, instead of games' greatest characteristic. This paradoxical duality of interactivity entails the lack of control of the story flow on a videogame, as different players can choose to spend varying amounts of time experiencing a number of different events. This can happen even if their character, as a member of the story world they are in, would logically make a specific choice. Such dissonance is present in several games, such as *Fallout 4*, where the

player assumes the role of a parent searching for their kidnaped child, and yet the gameplay allows them to spend several in-game days building houses or following up on other storylines. Alternatively, there is *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*, where the protagonist is now a legendary hero of prophecy, destined to save the world, and yet he can completely ignore this world-ending threat in favor of other secondary quests or content. As this threat never advances on its own but waits for the player to decide when the plot should move forward, the flow of the game can become completely shambled.



Figure 2- Promotional Art of *Fallout 4*'s protagonist searching the wasteland for his son.

This player-character dissonance is also present in the *Dragon Age Series*, and especially in the third game, *Dragon Age Inquisition*. In that game, the player enters the role of the Inquisitor, as they lead an army against the efforts of a villain who seeks to destroy the world. At a certain point, the player learns of the villain's efforts in a certain part of the world, namely the Adamant Fortress, and if he succeeds there, he will gain an army of demons to boost his forces. While the character states several times that he should stop this as soon as possible, the player may choose to



engage in a multitude of secondary content, such as side quests<sup>9</sup>, collectables<sup>10</sup>, and even base building<sup>11</sup>. This can become so egregious that some players eventually lose interest in the game as a whole, leaving the story unfinished and the game un-played.

Usually, narrativists discuss three main solutions to this problem of narrative flow and ludonarrative dissonance. The first of these tells developers simply to reduce player agency or to make the plot linear. The second deals with the idea of real-time plot advancement and of how game stories should advance regardless of the player. Finally, the third of these solutions would allow the plot's advancement to be controlled by the player's actions. In "Resolutions to Some Problems in Interactive Storytelling," Adams provides arguments seeking to prove how all three of these solutions are invariably unsatisfactory.

In regard to the first solution, about either reducing player agency or making the game more linear, Adams mentions how doing so is the same as removing the specificity of videogames, since the whole point of interactive media is to provide choices and player freedom (69). Some examples of this flawed solution are present in games such as *Tomb Raider*, *Uncharted* or *God of War*, linear games that separate between story moments and play moments through cutscenes<sup>12</sup> and cinematics, as well as combat and exploration. In such games, one plays through some sort of challenge, be it a combat encounter or some manner of puzzle. When it is time for the plot to advance, the player loses control of the character, as the story becomes more similar to a movie and the player transforms into a viewer, having no opportunity to weigh in on the outcome of the scene. While this solves the main issue of narrative flow, since these games usually have relatively well-paced

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<sup>9</sup> Optional missions that do not relate to the main story of the game.

<sup>10</sup> Optional hidden objects that are part of collections inside games. In *Dragon Age Inquisition*, players may collect bottles, mosaic pieces, or even certain books.

<sup>11</sup> Some games allow players to customize their headquarters or build entirely new constructions in the world space.

<sup>12</sup> Cinematic videos played in key points of a game's storyline.

plots and complex stories, this also removes the most particular characteristic of videogames, interactivity, from its narrative construction.

Following to the next possible solution, there is the idea of real-time plot advancement, which means that a game's story would advance in spite of the player. In this sense, if the player has not arrived at a specific place in time to be part of that story, he or she would lose the game or at least he or she would not be able to follow the main plot of the narrative anymore. One of the best examples for this is the game *Dead Rising*, where the player must investigate the mystery of a zombie breakout. The game informs the player when and where the next part of the story will happen; however, if the player skips this part, he can continue playing the game, though the remainder of the main story will no longer be available to him. Adams affirms that this is another less than perfect solution, as it might force the player to replay earlier parts of a game continuously when trying to experience its story. Obviously, that is not an ideal way of experiencing a complex narrative or, as Adams puts it, "How many of you, when you sit down to read a book, read page one; and then page one and page two; and then page one, page two, and page three?" (1995). While in the example given the player is able to continue to play the game if he wishes it, the problem presented by Adams becomes even more acute if the player simply receives a Game Over screen and must restart the whole experience from the beginning every time.

In regard to the third and final of these flawed solutions, where a game would allow for players themselves to control completely the pacing of the plot's advancement, Adams states that this is unsatisfactory because it puts all the motive power for the plot in the hands of the player. While this could be considered a good thing, since interactivity is the main characteristic of interactive media and videogames in general, when the player is given total control over the pacing of the narrative, there is a risk of that player taking either too long to decide when to do so or doing it too quickly. Thus, it creates the very problem in question, poor pacing. Good examples of this

have already been mentioned, with games such as *Fallout 4*, *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*, and even *Dragon Age Inquisition*. In these games, it is the player that decides when to advance the plot, having the choice to focus on secondary or optional content, and because of that, the pacing of the story becomes incoherent.

These flawed solutions will be more thoroughly analyzed and studied in the Analysis of Objects section. By dissecting how they appear in the *Dragon Age* Series, I will be able to exemplify in a more specific manner how they can get in the way of proper narrative pacing. While it is difficult to provide active and viable answers to these problems, it is still important to discuss them, as they are some of the key elements in the furthering of videogame stories and narratives.

As mentioned, the two most famous lines of study in game studies, narratology and ludology, comprise a heavily debated division. I lean more heavily towards the side of narratology, as I will discuss how both novels and videogames make use of certain strategies, such as Point of View, worldbuilding, character arcs and others, in order to build complex narratives. To that end, I use Vogler's *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*. I will also be utilizing certain ludologist viewpoints when debating the concept of interactivity. In this Master's thesis, I seek to merge these studies and schools of thought.

Janet Murray, in "The Last Word on Ludology vs Narratology in Game Studies", comments on the seemingly detached way in which ludologists, which she often compares to formalist scholars, study videogames. Murray declares that ludologists have a "mind of winter", meaning that for one to be able to study games in that way they would need to "look at highly emotive, narrative, semiotically charged objects and see only their abstract game function" (2). A ludologist, then, would ignore the more personal and interpretative elements of any game studied, be it the simplistic *Donkey Kong*, or more modern games such as *Dragon Age Origins*.

Murray admits that, as scholars, ludologists have greatly contributed to the advancement of game studies. Through the energizing, focusing, and legitimizing of computer games as valuable and unique objects of study rather than varied forms of film, ludologists have made incredibly useful observations. In addition to that, ludologists, through their focus on form rather than content, have presented intriguing questions regarding the definition of what a game is and of the borders between games and other media.

Murray neither resents nor seeks to diminish ludologists, nor ludology itself for that matter. Rather, she discusses the differences between ludology and narratology; how their respective scholars view and treat the opposite side. She analyses how this divide is only limiting the scope that new researchers have in order to develop further claims. She concurs, “they (new researchers) should no longer be confused by the appearance of an either/or choice between games and stories, or distracted by an unproductively sectarian discourse” (3). Murray claims that the benefits of both paradigms should complement each other in order for researchers to understand and analyze videogames in a more thorough manner.

Marie-Laure Ryan in “Beyond Myth and Metaphor – The Case of Narrative in Digital Media” corroborates this. Ryan expresses that:

The inability of literary narratology to account for the experience of games does not mean that we should throw away the concept of narrative in ludology; it rather means that we need to expand the catalog of narrative modalities beyond the diegetic and the dramatic, by adding a phenomenological category tailor-made for games (2001).

Ryan advocates for the creation of a new vision that would merge both narratology and ludology with a particular focus on videogames. Such a vision as Ryan supports would allow scholars to incorporate ludological aspects and elements into the study of video games’ stories. Through the concept of interactivity, where the player is able to influence the story and the lore of

a world through gameplay directly, ludology and narratology find their common ground. In it, I have found the focus of my Master's thesis.

## 2.5. The Power of Interactivity

Interactivity is the major difference between both media present in this master's thesis. It is also the prime characteristic of videogames, which in turn define them as interactive media. Having one of the greatest possible effects on the story and narrative of a game, interactivity is able to bring about the merging of both ludology and narratology. Once I begin to analyze my examples more thoroughly, the concept of interactivity will play a major role in the examination of the *Dragon Age Series* and its storyline. Because of that, I must first make certain that the concept is well explained and clear, especially concerning what more experienced scholars have already proposed on the matter.

In *Videogames and Mythology*,<sup>13</sup> Flávia Gasi seeks to study the influence of different myths, or sources, present in the development of a game's story. Gasi explains, "Interactivity is one of the aspects that define videogames. And that the game's narrative is not determined solely by the author of that story, but also by the person that plays it, classifying it as an interactive story"<sup>14</sup> (41). With concepts such as imaginary, narratology, ludology, interactivity, myth, and symbolism, Gasi explains how the player can and does influence the mythology of any world with which he interacts.

In *Dragon Age*, the player may not be able to derail the main story completely (he cannot decide to join the *Darkspawn*, or abandon the kingdom of Ferelden to its own devices), but through his or her choices he or she is able to shape how that main story advances. As early as character creation, the player is already affecting the narrative of the game, as the characters in the world

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<sup>13</sup> Free translation of title: "Videogames e Mitologia"

<sup>14</sup> Free translation of passage.

will respond differently depending on which race and class the player decides. A templar will recognize the player character as a mage; an elf will be more trusting of another elf; and a dwarf may have additional information on dwarven culture, causing the player to be better equipped to decide on certain quests. Again, the player may not be able to affect the story in the sense that I discussed in the Story, Plot and Narrative section, but he is easily able to affect the other two aspects.

As in plot, where the focus shifts to the causality of events, the concept of interactivity and the decisions of the player may lead to varying paths for the same story. In *Dragon Age 2*, during the second act of the game, the player must deal with the *Arishok*, leader of the Qunari forces in the city. The *Arishok* eventually attacks the city and kills its leader, all because *Isabela*, one of the player's companions, stole a sacred relic for his people. It is important to note that the resolution of that quest depends on previous decisions of the player.



Figure 3 - The Arishok

During the first two acts of *Dragon Age 2*, *Hawke*, the player character, may end up earning the respect of the *Arishok*, which in turn would open up new possibilities for the resolution of the Qunari conflict. If I rely upon the same structure Forster uses for his examples, as presented in the Story, Plot and Narrative section, I could say, “Hawke earned the respect of the *Arishok*, so he agreed to a duel”. Otherwise, the plot of that particular quest might be exemplified, as “Hawke did

not earn the respect of the *Arishok*, so a large battle occurred”. There are other factors to take into consideration, such as *Isabela* returning or not with the stolen relic, or whether *Fenris*, a different companion who understands more of the Qun<sup>15</sup>, is present during the final conflict, but the respect of the *Arishok* is the clearer example to be taken out of that quest.

Sérgio Nesteriuk, in “Reflections on Videogames: Some of its applications and potentials,”<sup>16</sup> cites three different game study potentialities for videogames currently. The first deals with the social consequences and repercussions that games can have in different people. The second, he says, is the constant technological evolution in the field, allowing for bigger, better, and more advanced experiences in the technical quality of videogames. Finally, Nesteriuk cites a third paradigm, in which “interactivity presents itself, (...) not only as a possibility for immersion, experience or agency, but as possibility of construction of dynamic, open works. The player becomes co-author of a work in progress, which elaborates differently in each play”<sup>17</sup> (29). This references language, culture, narrative, philosophy, and semiotics.

Becoming co-author of a videogame’s story means that the player may not only affect the causality of events in the plot, but also the narrative elements of that story. The idea of the “role playing game” allows the player to shape both his own perception of the events and the world’s perception of his character, even if the basic points of the story remain stationary. *Dragon Age* retains many examples of this notion, such as in the quest *The Arl of Redcliff*, where the player may decide to help a village from undead attacks or simply ignore them, saving his strength to deal with the nearby castle and its lord. Another good example is presented in the expansion<sup>18</sup> *Dragon Age Awakening*, where the player must decide whether to save the city of Amaranthine, or concentrate

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<sup>15</sup> The religious doctrine of the Qunari.

<sup>16</sup> Free translation of title: “Reflexões acerca do Videogame: Algumas de suas aplicações e potencialidades”.

<sup>17</sup> Free translation of passage.

<sup>18</sup> An expansion is regarded as a larger DLC that expands both the story and gameplay elements of a particular game.

his forces on protecting his own castle. The clearest example of the manipulation of perception on the player's part appears in another of *Bioware's* game series, *Mass Effect*.

In *Mass Effect's* original trilogy, players assume direct control of Commander Shepard, a military officer who eventually enlists in the *Spectres*, an intergalactic organization of cross-species agents. Like *Dragon Age's* Hawke, Shepard is always human, but the player may choose whether to play as a male or female Shepard, his or her upbringing, and military background. All of these choices affect how other characters perceive Shepard, but the most profound choice a player can make in this sense is present not in the character creation screen but during actual gameplay.

As the player makes different decisions during the games, Shepard may gain either Paragon or Renegade points. These, in turn, allow for new dialogue choices that continuously shape Shepard into either an idealistic hero (Paragon) or a ruthless soldier who gets the job done no matter what (Renegade). While the overall story of the games remains the same in spite of Paragon or Renegade, Shepard's companions and associates all regard him or her with these points in mind.



Figure 4 - Renegade symbol (in red) and Paragon symbol (in blue).



The non-determined state that games possess may also affect a player's perspective of different characters and events. While one player may relate more strongly to a specific character or quest than another, a different player may find these same aspects to be lacking in their own preferences. Something similar is obviously also present in novels, as different readers may also relate to various characters and events in divergent ways, but while in novels that is mostly due to the reader's own interpretations, in videogames the player's action and choices may present completely different sides of a single character, thus creating very different perspectives.

In "Games telling stories?", Jesper Juul outlines the differences between various media, proposing that readers/watchers have a relation to books/movies that is quite distinct from the relation that players have to games. Juul affirms, "the player inhabits a twilight zone where he is both an empirical subject outside the game and undertakes a role inside the game" (2001). Juul also states that the effect of interactivity cannot be ignored when dealing with videogames, since the non-determined state of the story has many implications for how games are perceived by players.

An aspect of videogame narratives that is often discussed in the gaming community is that of branching storytelling, which is sometimes also called branching narrative. This is the concept around which interactivity presents itself in videogames and their stories. It revolves around the idea of different branching paths that become either available or unavailable to the player based on certain variables. These variables are usually the product of certain choices offered to the player, be they in character creation, dialogue choices, certain abilities or skills, collected resources or many others. In the end, the sum of these variables creates what is called the world state, which is the version of that work for that particular player.

Good examples of this notion are present in a multitude of games, especially RPGs<sup>19</sup>. In *Fallout New Vegas*, players can invest experience points in many different skills, such as Speech, Guns, Science, Survival, Medicine and many others. At some points in the story, the player may be offered additional dialogue options based on his points in a certain skill. These



Figure 5 - Caesar

options would then open up new possibilities for the conclusion of quests and the advancement of the story. To exemplify this, at one point in the story, during the quest “Et Tumor, Brute?”, the leader of one of the game’s factions, *Caesar*, undergoes brain surgery. Usually, the player would need to venture into a dangerous area to recover spare parts for an autodoc<sup>20</sup>. However, if the player has seventy-five points in the medicine skill<sup>21</sup>, he can perform the surgery himself. In addition, if the player recovers the autodoc parts and has fifty points in the medicine skill, he is able to surgically assassinate *Caesar* and blame it on the machine, thus remaining in the good graces of his legion. *Caesar*’s fate drastically changes the outcomes of the game, especially in the epilogue presentation.

Other examples of this notion are also present in the *Dragon Age* series. In *Dragon Age Origins*, the “coercion” skill provides the opportunity for new dialogue choices that would open up such possibilities. In *Dragon Age 2*, during the quest “Enemies among Us”, a blood mage is

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<sup>19</sup> Role Playing Games.

<sup>20</sup> Medical robot capable of performing complicated surgeries by itself.

<sup>21</sup> In RPGs, players may invest points in certain skills. Some examples from *Fallout: New Vegas*: Guns, Medicine, Speech, Sneak and Survival. Each skill represents the character’s level of ability in that particular area.

able to control the mind of the protagonist. If the player has chosen to play either as a mage or as a Templar warrior, he may break the spell himself. Otherwise, the aid of a mage companion is required. Finally, in *Dragon Age Inquisition*, the war table perks (rewards or benefits), *Underworld Knowledge*, *Arcane Knowledge*, *Nobility Knowledge*, and *History Knowledge*, provide new choices for the player. In addition, all games provide differences between chosen races, classes, and gender for the player.

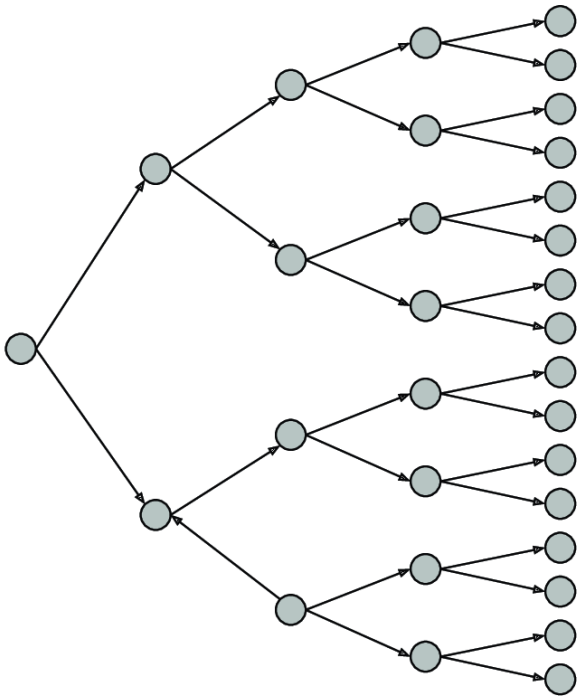


Figure 6 - Erroneous representation of Interactivity in Videogames

The fold-back structure presents a similar image, but in this version, all choices the player makes eventually return to the same point, as is shown in figure 7. This creates the obvious problem of irrelevant choices. If all possibilities lead to a single resolution, why offer choice in any capacity?

The “reality” of most videogames, especially in long franchises that are comprised of more than one entry, such as *Dragon Age*, is that choices affect the “how” instead of the “what”. The game offers many paths to a conclusion that is slightly altered by the journey. A clear example of

This idea could create an inaccurate image of how branching narrative works in videogames. In its most base and perhaps complex form, branching narrative could create an enormous amount of completely different world states, such as presented in figure 6. As Paul Nelson mentions in “Designing Branching Narrative”, to create something like that would be extremely hard for any developer. Instead, many game designers adopt the idea of the fold-back structure (2015).

that is present in *Dragon Age Origins*. In that game, the player will always end his adventure in the capital city of *Denerim* while battling the darkspawn horde and the Archdemon. What changes are the allies that come to his aid. Whether he sided with the werewolves or the elves, *Nature of the Beast* may define what group is available as support in the final mission. Similarly, the player may enlist the aid of either the mages or the templars, based on his choices in *Broken Circle*. Finally, his decision of whether to preserve or destroy the *Anvil of the Void* in *A Paragon of Her Kind* may affect the possibility of his army having stone golems. These choices affect the execution of the final quest, *The Battle of Denerim*, but not the actual events of the battle. The players will always venture into *Fort Drakon* and face off against the Archdemon there.

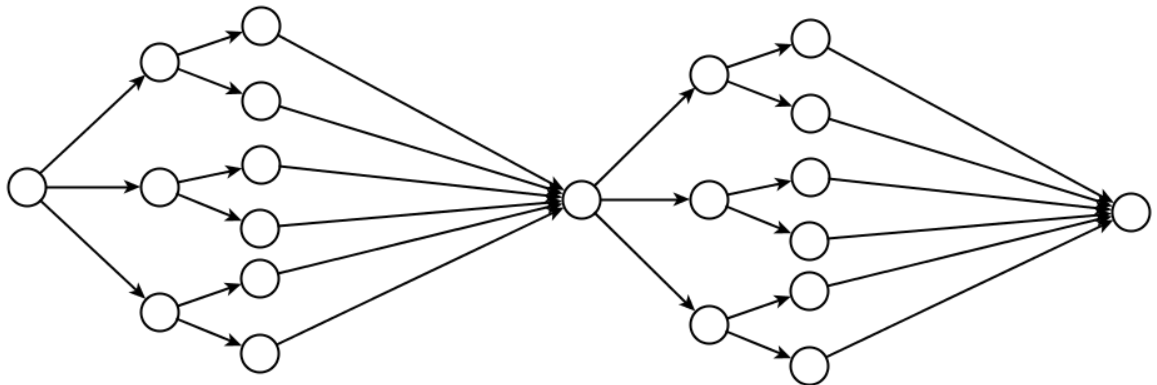


Figure 7 - Fold-back Structure

Returning to the concept of variables, developers may once again make use of this system, while not creating an infinite number of possibilities. If the design scheme present in figure 8 is followed, these variables would then define not two completely different paths moving forward, but whether a future choice will even be available or not. Developers may also use these ideas of choice and consequence on a smaller scale. Instead of defining the whole future of the story, these choices affect little interactions or stages of gameplay. In *Fallout New Vegas*, the player may choose to take the *Terrifying Presence* perk (benefit or advantage). This perk allows for the character, in some pre-defined conversations, to scare his enemies and start combat while his

enemies run away or cower in fear, granting him or her an advantage. In *Dragon Age*, companion approval is another kind of variable that may affect which conversations are available. If approval is too low, companions may react negatively to the protagonist, while if approval is high, they may react positively and develop relationships with the character.

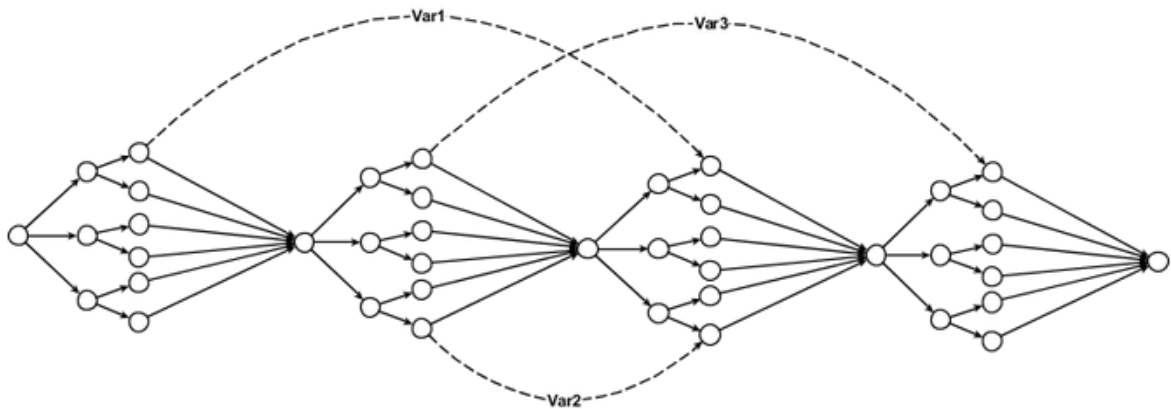


Figure 8 - Variables

Finally, it is also worth mentioning that not all choices must result in the exact same ending, while affecting only how that story unfolds. Many games offer multiple different endings, where the player's actions create lasting results for the world of that game. *Dragon Age*, while usually providing a single final mission possibility, presents the player with epilogue presentations describing the player's influence upon the world. Such choices will be more thoroughly discussed in the Influence of Interactivity section.

Other games, such as *Fallout New Vegas*, *Wasteland 3*, *Dead Rising*, *Detroit: Become Human*, *Divinity: Original Sin 2*, *Catherine*, *Until Dawn*, and many others, offer completely different endings and final confrontations that affect the world in a multitude of ways. *Fallout New Vegas*, for example, offers, in addition to dozens of smaller secondary possibilities regarding minor groups, factions and characters, four main endings regarding who ends up in control of the *Mojave*

Desert. These are the NCR<sup>22</sup>, *Caesar's Legion*, Mr. House, or allowing for an independent *New Vegas*<sup>23</sup>.

As I now begin my direct study of both objects of study, *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Dragon Age*, I will rely upon all the theoretical ideas I have presented and analyzed so far. Literary studies, narratology, ludology, interactivity, branching storytelling will all converge. I will demonstrate how similar elements are present in both types of medium and how videogames are able to use interactivity to become a unique form of storytelling.

### 3. Analysis of Objects

I now fully commit to the direct analysis of both objects of study (*A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Dragon Age*). I will exemplify in which ways they are similar to one another and then I will use these similarities to contrast and depict their differences, especially in regard to how interactivity allows players to shape the world of *Dragon Age*, causing it to become either more or less similar to the novels. Such comparisons will be more apparent when I discuss the character archetypes and steps of the Hero's Journey, as in the case of *Dragon Age*, each game's journey may change depending on player choice.

My aim here is not to compare both works and even their media in a qualitative manner. Neither is inherently superior to the other, but as videogames are far more recent than the written form, it is clear that as storytelling devices, games still have a long way to go before the complexity of their stories and narratives can measure up to novels. That is what I am working towards in this Master's thesis: to analyze how narrative elements are present in videogames; contrast them with

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<sup>22</sup> New California Republic

<sup>23</sup> Setting of the game. Post-nuclear city of Las Vegas.

novels; and show how games could, through interactivity, develop a unique form of narrative storytelling.

As I have already presented and introduced both series in this Master's thesis, I will now provide a quick overview of their worlds and stories. This will serve as a base upon which I will construct my analysis and the differentiation of all the six journeys (three for *A Song of Ice and Fire* and three for *Dragon Age*). Once both series have been properly covered and contrasted, I will then shift my analysis fully to the concept of interactivity and its influence upon narrative.

### **3.1. A Song of Ice and Fire**

*A Song of Ice and Fire* is one of the most famous works of epic fantasy in modern times. Written by George R. R. Martin, the novels tell an enormous story following several different characters and plotlines. The author's decision to follow POV characters allows the reader to experience the story through many different perspectives, while also providing an easy way to explore many far-away areas. Such distance between settings in the world is what creates the many plotlines through their respective characters. While they may often mention or even interact with one another, the characters from each plotline usually remain focused on their own place.

The world of *A Song of Ice and Fire* is cited only as the Known World and is divided into several continents. The most important and famous of these, at least to the readers, is named Westeros and follows a typically Western medieval fantasy setting. Feudalism, kingdoms, lords and ladies, knights and castles are all marks of Westeros, also known as the Seven Kingdoms. Still, other continents, such as Essos and Sothoryos, are also part of this world. Essos seems to be based on more Asian cultures, while Sothoryos appears as a fantasy version of Africa.

While initially almost all plotlines revolved around Westeros and its dynasty, as the series goes on, more and more plotlines appear, including many that take place in the continent of Essos.

In spite of this continuously growing number of plotlines and characters, however, all of them revolve in one way or another around the three ‘main’ ones, as I have described in the introduction. The dynastic war for the Iron Throne; the threat from the North; and the rise to power of *Daenerys Targaryen*.

The dynastic war for the Iron Throne is considered by many to be the main plotline of the first few books, encompassing things such as *Eddard Stark’s* journey in *A Game of Thrones*; the War of the Five Kings; and even the machinations of more shady characters such as *Littlefinger*, *Varys the Spider*, the *High Sparrow* and *Lady Stoneheart*. As the series is still unfinished, there may be more plotlines to be included in this group, such as the Dornish plot; the mysterious plans of *Euron Greyjoy*; and a new Targaryen invasion by *Aegon Targaryen* and *Jon Connington*. While these last ones have already begun to be introduced, both through the fifth book *A Dance with Dragons* and through some preview chapters of the sixth, *Winds of Winter*, it is practically impossible to fully discuss them without having access to their exact words. Because of that, I will try to avoid mentioning them too often, except when it becomes necessary or when I decide to cite predictions for the future.

The second of the ‘main’ plotlines I have named the Threat from the North. In it, readers mainly follow the story of *Jon Snow*, the bastard son of Eddard Stark as he joins the *Night’s Watch* and his eventual efforts to combat the *White Walkers*, a race of magical ice creatures that can raise the dead to serve them. There are many other storylines to be followed in the North, such as the wildling invasion; Craster and his wives; Samwell Tarly’s story; Brandon Stark’s journey toward the Three-eyed Raven; and even Stannis Baratheon’s renewed efforts towards the war for the Iron Throne.



Stannis' story is of particular note, because his plotline starts as part of the Dynastic War for the Iron Throne. Stannis faces off against Renly Baratheon, his own brother, then against the Lannisters, but as he is defeated in the Battle of the Blackwater, Stannis eventually journeys to the Wall to help Jon Snow and the Night's Watch against the Wildlings. While Stannis is aware of the *White Walkers* through the words of *Melisandre*, a shadow binder fire mage, his focus remains on winning the Iron Throne, as a united Westeros is the only chance the world has of fighting the *Others*.



Figure 9 - Stannis Baratheon as played by Stephen Dillane in the TV adaptation "Game of Thrones"

While Stannis turns his attention south, towards Winterfell and the Boltons, his story serves as a bridge between the Dynastic War for the Iron Throne and the Threat from the North. While it is difficult to predict how his tale will unfold, as *Winds of* has not yet been published, we may assume that Stannis will either die facing the Boltons, as is depicted in the TV show *Game of Thrones*, or he will triumph against them, winning the North to his cause. This may happen either by his proceeding south to continue his war, thus returning to the Dynastic War for the Iron Throne, or by his returning north and thus focusing more heavily on the Threat from the North storyline.

Finally, the third of the 'main' plotlines is that of *Daenerys Targaryen*, the exiled princess who is sold to *Khal Drogo* as a token of friendship by her brother *Viserys*. While at first Daenerys is nothing more than a scared little girl, she soon begins to find her confidence after her marriage with Drogo goes from duty to love. Still, the greatest turning point in Daenerys' story appears at

the end of the first book, when she, through magical means, manages to hatch three dragon eggs, which were thought to be extinct from the world.

Daenerys' story is similar to the Threat from the North in the sense that it advances throughout five books, but it differs from the other as it revolves around Daenerys. While Jon Snow is the center figure from the North, there are side stories and plotlines that do not involve him, such as that of Brandon Stark. For Daenerys, however, every plotline follows her character, be it in her time with the Dothraki horde; her stay in Qarth and adventure through the house of the Undying; her conquest of Slaver's Bay; or even her rulership in the city of Meereen. Such focus affects the narrative in that it creates both an overall and specific journeys, each relating to a plotline.

In this thesis, I will analyze Daenerys' overall arch so far, rather than focusing on one of her specific journeys. It is of note, however, that as the books remain unfinished, I may have to either use only the information available or create predictions for the rest of Daenerys' story, perhaps lightly based on the TV show. I will mention when something discussed is a prediction.

### **3.2. Dragon Age**

*Dragon Age* is one of the most beloved and celebrated role-playing videogames in modern times. It stands side by side with series such as *The Elder Scrolls*, *Fallout*, *the Witcher*, *Divinity Original Sin* and other titles developed by *Bioware*, such as *Mass Effect*, *Baldur's Gate*, *Jade Empire*, and *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*. *Dragon Age Origins* was first developed as a continuation of *Bioware's* efforts to create their own intellectual properties. Having only worked with established ones beforehand, such as *Dungeons & Dragons* and *Star Wars*, *Bioware* began branching out with *Jade Empire* and would later find its successes with *Mass Effect* and *Dragon Age*.

Similar to *A Song of Ice and Fire*, *Dragon Age* is a work of epic fantasy, focusing on medieval elements such as knights, castles, and magic. As a counterpart to *Westeros*, however, *Dragon Age's* continent of *Thedas* (The Dragon Age Setting) is far more high magic, meaning it relies more heavily on fantastical elements. Said elements include direct magic, such as is found in mages and spirits; fantastical races such as elves, dwarves, and Qunari (a race of horned giants from the north); and even fantastical creatures, such as dragons, giants, and Hallas.



Figure 10 - Cover art for *Dragon Age Origins*.

Whoever has knowledge of both series, or at least of *A Song of Ice and Fire*, may perceive that almost everything I just cited for *Dragon Age's* supposed high-magic setting is also present in *Westeros*. The prevalence of such themes and elements in the story can cause a setting to become either high or low magic. While in *Westeros* magic is a very important force, which is becoming more and more apparent with each subsequent novel, it is still a very mysterious force. In *Dragon Age*, however, magic is everywhere. Mages are born and feared, with dedicated orders and factions maintaining their population control; Spirits and demons prowl the Fade, a magical realm of dreams and magical energies; Dwarves mine *Lyrium*, a magical mineral that enhances the abilities of both mages and templars (mage hunters); and Dragons prowl the skies of every nation on the continent.

As more news of *Dragon Age 4* are revealed, it is clear that the magical elements of the series will only become more prevalent. While the earlier games focused on southern parts of *Thedas*, such as *Ferelden* and *Orlais*, the next game seems to focus more heavily on the northern areas, such as *Tevinter* and *Antiva*. As they are much older civilizations when compared to the

previous ones, as their religious beliefs do not interfere so heavily with the advancement of magical applications, players might experience a new perspective on *Dragon Age*. One that is still higher in its magical scale.

*Dragon Age Origins*, the first game in the series, has magical elements in abundance. It is in this game that many of these elements are introduced, such as the *Darkspawn*, mages and templars, elves and dwarves, and even the religious faction of the *Chantry*. The most important aspect of the first game is the order of the *Grey Wardens*, of which the player character becomes a part.

The *Grey Wardens* are an order of specialist warriors, rogues and mages who drink the blood of *Darkspawn* to corrupt themselves with the creatures' taint<sup>24</sup> and, through it, to become better equipped to fight their sworn enemies. It is only through said corruption that a Warden can actually kill the Archdemons, the great corrupted dragons that used to be the Old Gods of Tevinter. If a non-corrupted warrior were to slay these Archdemons, the creature would be reborn in the body of a nearby *Darkspawn*. As it is, a Grey Warden must sacrifice his or her life in order to save the world.

The story of the first game follows this notion, as the player character either joins the Grey Wardens or is conscripted into the order to fight against the Fifth Blight. After being betrayed by the Fereldan general *Loghain Mac'Tir*, the player and his allies must gather new allies<sup>25</sup> in order to defeat Loghain, unite Ferelden, and face off against the *Darkspawn*.

Following a rather simplistic notion, *Dragon Age Origins* is more concerned with the introduction of its world and the construction of a cohesive and branching narrative, rather than innovating in its structure. The steps of the journey and the character archetypes are heavily

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<sup>24</sup> A disease present in the *Darkspawn*'s blood.

<sup>25</sup> Including the circle mages, the dwarves from Orzammar, the Dalish elves and the Redcliff knights.

ingrained in the game's story, while managing to take into consideration the player's decisions, thus creating consequences that shape the narrative. These choices and consequences can affect how the Hero's Journey is presented for each player, as one of the steps may appear in one playthrough as a specific event and in another as something else entirely.

While *Origins* was initially announced in 2004 and published in 2009, having at least five years of development, *Dragon Age 2* had only nine months. Bioware never intended for *Origins* to have a sequel, but due to its success, *Electronic Arts*, its publisher, demanded a sequel be released in 2011. Such short notice, added to the fact that it was produced alongside *Dragon Age Awakening*, an expansion to the first game, caused *Dragon Age 2* to be much smaller in scale. Instead of an epic story to save the world, the second game focused on a more personal tale, following the life of *Hawke*, a fereldan refugee who escaped the first game's events and started a new life in the city-state of *Kirkwall*.



Figure 11- Cover art for *Dragon Age 2*.

Alongside the game's more character-focused story, another change from the previous entry was the fact that the protagonist, *Hawke*, could not be as customized as the *Warden* could. While players of the first game could choose between humans, elves or dwarves of either male or female gender, *Dragon Age 2's* *Hawke* is always a human, though players can still choose *Hawke's* gender and playable class (warrior, rogue or mage). To account for such things, developers decided to focus on interpersonal character relationships, as the player builds either friendships or rivalries with their companions in a story that takes place in a much larger span of time: seven in-game years.

The larger internal time of the story, coupled with the freedom from any world threatening plotlines, allowed for the developers of *Dragon Age 2* to expand the world of Thedas in many different ways, helping form a more unique fantasy setting and escaping from some of the archetypes still found in its predecessor. The Qunari and their religious beliefs were more thoroughly explored; the conflict between mages and templars became center staged; faraway places such as Tevinter and Rivain were developed through companions such as *Fenris* and *Isabela*; and even hints for the future of the saga were introduced, such as *Merril's* tale of the *Dread Wolf*.

*Dragon Age 2* was divided into three official acts<sup>26</sup>, though perhaps it is more adequate to mention four, as the introduction remains a story of its own, with beginning middle and end. Each of these four acts have their own storylines and journeys, while still building towards the next. Again, the player's choices may shape the narrative and through it, how each step of these journeys and even the character archetypes are presented.

Finally, *Dragon Age Inquisition* was released in 2014 and became one of the most successful games ever, winning the award of Game of the Year. After many criticisms towards the second game, *Inquisition* once again allowed players to more thoroughly customize their characters. This time, the protagonist (the *Inquisitor*) could be either a human, dwarf, elf, or even a Qunari, though unlike the first game, these changes are only mentioned in dialogue, with only one introduction for every character, regardless of race or class.

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<sup>26</sup> These acts are unrelated to the three acts of the movie industry I've discussed in the Theoretical framework section.

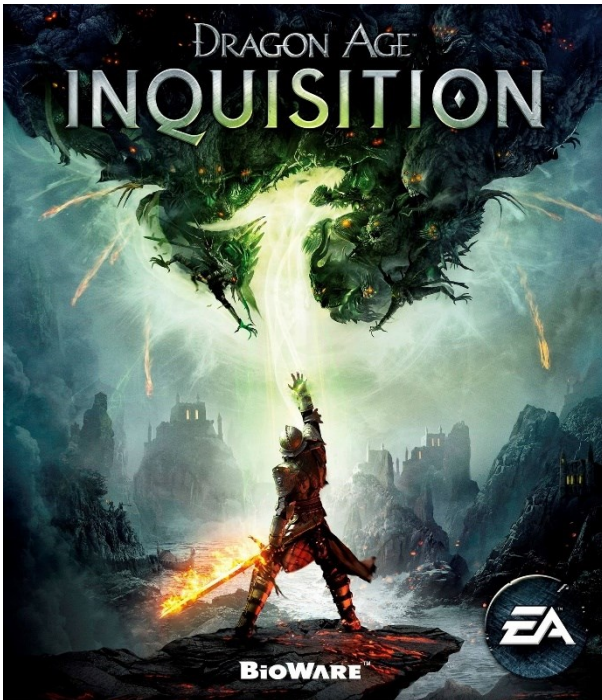


Figure 12 - Cover art for *Dragon Age Inquisition*

That is not the only aspect that *Inquisition* draws from the first game, however. The story also returns to a more ‘save the world’ plotline, as a mysterious figure called the *Elder One* creates the *Breach*, a magical portal through which demons are passing into the material world. In *Inquisition*, players must close the Breach and defeat this *Elder One* before he is capable of achieving his plans. Many players often consider the second game to be no more than a large introduction to *Dragon Age*

*Inquisition*, but the third game serves more heavily as a bridge connecting the previous games to the main plotline of the series and to the next game: the tale of *Fen’harel* or the *Dread Wolf*, elven god of mischief and rebellion.

In *Inquisition*, players discover many things that will affect the future of the series. Players discover that the elven gods were simply very powerful mages who enslaved their own people; that *Solas*, one of the player’s companions, is *Fen’harel*; that his plans to restore the elven empire was through the destruction of our world; and that even elements not directly linked to *Solas*’ story, such as the *Titans* beneath the earth, are there. Other possible player’s discoveries are the truth about the supposed origin of the *Darkspawn* and even the introduction of time magic into the setting.

Perhaps more than the previous games, *Inquisition* offers choices that allow players to shape the world of *Dragon Age* in a more direct manner. In the third game, players may choose who will rule the Empire of Orlais; the future of the *Grey Wardens* in the south; and even who will become

the next Divine, the figurehead of the most prevalent religion in the world. *Inquisition*'s choices seem mostly important to the lore of the series, rather than to the game itself or its narrative.

While most of the main story of the game revolves around *Elder One*'s conflict, it is in the *Trespasser* DLC that the true ending of *Dragon Age Inquisition* appears. It is also in that DLC that players discover the true motives of *Solas* and his plans for the future, connecting the past games with the next one. As *Dragon Age 4* is still unreleased, I focus on the three released games and their narratives.

### **3.3. Similarities and Differences**

By the above summaries alone, it becomes clear that both series share many similarities, especially regarding their settings. The medieval-based environment coupled with fantastical elements involving magic create a similar undertone to the worlds of *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Dragon Age*. Their particularities may also differ greatly, and before I begin my analysis of their respective journeys and stories, I will first demonstrate just how similar or different they can be in terms of four elements: world building, themes, characters, and worlds.



### 3.3.1. World building

For world building, one aspect that is present in *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Dragon Age* is the “otherworldly” threat. In both series, the main threat of the overarching narrative (or, in the case of *Dragon Age*, the first game) appears in the form of a mysterious race of corrupted humanoids that live in remote places, either forgotten or ignored, and are only now returning to the world. In *A Song of Ice and Fire*, this threat is the *Others*, sometimes also called *White Walkers*. They are a race of ice humanoids that lurk in the far north, behind the Wall, where the *Night’s Watch*, an ancient order of warriors, keeps watch against them. Meanwhile, in *Dragon Age*, the

“otherworldly” threat are the *Darkspawn* (see fig.13), a similarly mysterious race of beings that correspond to corrupted versions of the regular races (Humans, elves, dwarves, and Qunari). They live deep underground and only emerge during the cataclysmic events known as the *Blight*s, when an Archdemon rises at their forefront. As with the *Night’s Watch*, the world of *Dragon Age* also counts with an order of specialists to monitor and deal with this threat, the *Grey Wardens*.

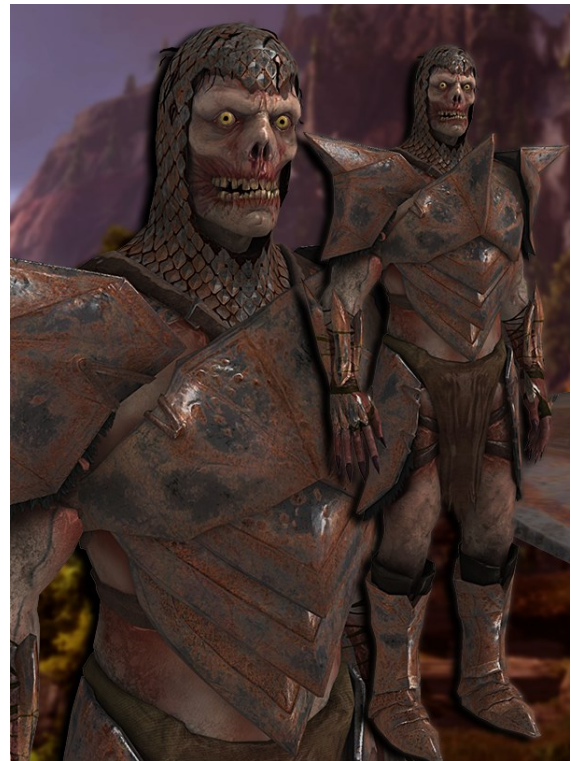


Figure 13 - A Hurlock, the Darkspawn version of a Human.

While both series make use of this “otherworldly” threat element, they differ greatly in their execution. In *A Song of Ice and Fire*, the *Others* are far more otherworldly and mysterious, with many characters not even acknowledging their existence. They have appeared only a handful of times during the actual plot, rather making use of their army of the dead when direct confrontation is necessary. While they may appear in a

more prominent role in the *Winds of Winter* novel, the first five books present them much more as a faraway threat that will eventually come to the fore.

*Dragon Age* treats the *Darkspawn* in a more direct manner not only in the first game, where they are the main enemy force, but also in the other two, where *Darkspawn* are a constant enemy in side quests and secondary content. In addition, while only a handful of characters realize that the *White Walkers* still exist in Westeros, everyone in the world of *Dragon Age* is aware of the existence of the *Darkspawn*. Still, as they are only truly a threat during the Blights, most characters are content with ignoring them until such time.

Another difference, still analyzing elements relating to these “otherworldly” threats, comes in the form of the Order of Warriors that has been formed precisely to fight against these malicious enemies. In *A Song of Ice and Fire*, such order appears as the *Night’s Watch*, while in *Dragon Age*, they are the



Figure 14 - Night's Watch Coat of Arms.

*Grey Wardens*. Both orders share many similarities, such as being formed in times long forgotten, having mysterious origin stories (be them the formation of the *Wall* or the development of the Joining ritual), taking in criminals as recruits and even being associated with flying animals<sup>27</sup>. Yet, these orders differ in just as many aspects.

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<sup>27</sup> The Night’s Watch is related to crows, while the Wardens to Gryphons.

While the *Night's Watch* remains stationary on the *Wall*, receiving their recruits from all over Westeros and protecting the Seven Kingdoms in the North, the *Grey Wardens*, even though they have a main headquarters, are far more mobile in their efforts, since *Darkspawn* may appear anywhere on Thedas. They have Warden Commanders for each nation, leaders that are free to shape the future of the order on their own without much directive from the First Warden on Weisshaupt. In addition, while the Night's Watch only requires an oath from its members, to become a Grey Warden, one must endure the *Joining* ritual, where the recruit must drink a concoction of *Darkspawn* blood, a magical substance called lyrium, and a single drop of an Archdemon's blood. This ritual corrupts the individual, though it does not kill them. Rather, it allows Wardens to locate mentally nearby *Darkspawn* and the ability to slay Archdemons. That corruption is not put off forever, as at one point or another the Warden will begin to hear the call of the Olg Gods. At that point, they go down into the Deep Roads<sup>28</sup> to die fighting before they become ghouls.

Another point to be discussed in this section is the adaptation of real-world elements inside both of these series. The most prevalent and obvious one



Figure 15 - Symbol of the Grey Wardens, representing two Gryphons and the Chalice used in the Joining ritual.

<sup>28</sup> Ancient dwarven ruins infested by *Darkspawn*.

is the introduction of a Christian-like religion in both series. *A Song of Ice and Fire* presents the Faith of the Seven, while in *Dragon Age* such religion comes in the form of the Andrastian Chantry.

While the Faith of the Seven has no practitioners in the rest of the known world, such as in Essos or Sorthoryos, it is the most notorious religion of the Seven Kingdoms, with the exception of the North. It is extremely similar to the real-world catholic church of the medieval times, having churches (called septes), priests (called septons), and even a semi-



Figure 16 - The Seven-pointed Star, symbol of the Faith of the Seven

divine figure at its head, called the High Septon. It is also, like Catholicism, monotheistic. While the Faith of the Seven encompasses seven so-called deities, including the Father, the Mother, the Warrior, the Maid, the Smith, the Crone, and the Stranger, learned individuals in that world realize that this is only a simplification for the masses. These are actually seven aspects of one great deity, in the same vein that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are personifications of the Christian God.

As for *Dragon Age*, the Andrastian Chantry shares many similarities with both of the aforementioned religions, both real and fictional. The belief in one deity, in this case the Maker; the semi-divine figure at its head, now called the Divine; the presence of chapels, priests, and holy warriors called Templars; and a messiah figure that founded the religion as it is presented in the games. Andraste, called bride of the Maker, was a barbarian warrior who led her forces against the Tevinter Imperium and their Old Gods. She claimed to hear the voice of the Maker, and through

her beliefs, the Chantry was eventually formed. It is noteworthy that while both Catholicism and the Faith of the Seven only allow men to achieve the higher ranks of their respective religious orders, in the Andrastian Chantry, it is the opposite: only women are allowed at the higher offices and only women are allowed to become the Divine. This was caused by Maferath, Andraste's mortal husband who was jealous of his wife's power and of her title of Bride of the Maker. He betrayed her to Tevinter forces, resulting in her execution by bonfire.

Maferath as well has obvious connections to Judas, who betrayed Jesus for his fifty silver coins, and it is because of his<sup>29</sup> transgression that men have been considered too emotional to retain higher offices in the Chantry. They may still join the order, but they cannot reach much higher than stewards can, dealing with the day-to-day operations of churches and chapels. Another difference that is worth noting, even though I will discuss it more thoroughly



Figure 17 - Symbol of the Chantry, representing the Sun.

in The Influence of Interactivity

section, is how the future of the Andrastian Chantry may be shaped by player decisions.

In the third game, *Dragon Age Inquisition*, the Chantry finds itself without leadership, as the previous Divine is assassinated during the initial events of the game. Throughout the events of the game, players will make many different choices, most of which have nothing to deal with the

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<sup>29</sup> Maferath's.

Chantry, yet their moral dilemmas may affect who, out of three characters, will end up sitting on the Sunburst Throne and become the new Divine. These characters are *Cassandra Pentaghast*, a Seeker-of-Truth warrior who served for many years as the right hand of the previous Divine; *Leliana*, the spymaster of the player's organization who served as the left hand of the previous Divine; or *Vivienne*, a mage from the Circle of Magi who remained loyal to the Chantry during a mage rebellion. I will discuss how that choice is made and the implications of each possibility once I reach The Influence of Interactivity section, but right now, it is enough to note that each candidate shapes the Chantry in three extremely different ways, which has created one of the most vigorous debates in the *Dragon Age* community of players.

### 3.3.2. Themes

One of the most prevalent themes in both series is the idea of power, and more precisely, political power and intrigue standing in the way of real problems. While this particular theme is more easily perceived in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, with several noble families competing for the symbolic iron throne and the power it represents, it is also present within all three games of *Dragon Age*. Both series present this idea in several different storylines.

In *A Song of Ice and Fire*, the most obvious example of this theme presents itself in the War for the Iron Throne and Martin's antiwar ideals. While the series remains incomplete, it is obvious that the threat of the *White Walkers* is only as great, because either all the armies of the south are occupied in their own meaningless struggles or additionally they do not even believe that the threat is real. No matter how many times they are warned, such as when *Alliser Thorne* is sent to *King's Landing* holding the severed hand of a Wight, the people of the south treat the idea of dead creatures as a tale. Even *Tyrion Lannister*, one of the few willing to entertain the idea, disregards it in order

to retain his own political power as acting Hand of the King during the second book, *A Clash of Kings* (404).

George R. R. Martin has engrained this theme so deeply into his work that it appears not only in the aforementioned plotline, but also in the three main ones. While everyone in the *Night's Watch* is aware of the *Others* and their army of the dead, there are many, such as *Alliser Thorne*, *Bowen Marsh* and *Othell Yarwick* who believe they should let the wildlings<sup>30</sup> die. According to them, that would resolve the issue of the wildlings, for whom they harbor a thousand-year-old prejudice based on conflicts of the past. Even the word used is meant to dehumanize them, making them out to be more savages and wild folk than equals. During the latter half of the released five novels, once *Jon Snow* is elected lord commander of the order, he begins to allow wildlings, known both to themselves and to Jon as the Free Folk, to pass the *Wall* in order to stop the *White Walkers* from killing them and adding them to their army of the dead. What he asks for in return is that the Free Folk fight alongside them when the real enemy comes for them.

The tension created because of such actions, going against what some believe to be thousands of years of tradition in the *Night's Watch*, creates a rift between two sides of the organization: those that support *Jon Snow* and those that do not. Such division is another form of, in the grand scheme of things, meaningless conflict in the face of real danger (the *White Walkers*). *Jon* makes reasonable decisions, seeking to ally the watchmen to the people that know more than any other about their enemies, and yet his own sworn brothers disapprove of this.

Unlike the TV show, which simplified the matter, in the books, it is not this rift that causes the black brothers to betray and kill *Jon Snow*. It is, yet again, something coming from the south. When *Jon Snow* receives a letter, allegedly written by *Ramsay Bolton*, demanding the return of

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<sup>30</sup> Humans who live north of the Wall.

people that are not even with Jon (Jeyne Poole, who is pretending to be Arya Stark; and Theon Greyjoy), he goes against his vows and decides to forsake the Night's Watch in order to march down to Winterfell and join the so-called Battle of Ice. Such an act is not only a betrayal of the Watch's holy vows, for which the penalty is death, but it could also cause the downfall of the whole order if allowed. If Jon lost the battle, whoever killed him could announce it to the world and name the entire Night's Watch traitors, annihilating them all.

I should also mention why I used the word allegedly when mentioning the letter from Ramsay Bolton, which is often called by *A Song of Ice and Fire's* readers as the Pink Letter. While the letter is signed by Ramsay and sealed in pink wax, the colors of the house of Bolton, many readers have speculated that the letter itself was not written by him, but either by *Stannis Baratheon* or by *Mance Rayder*. While both could be considered allies to Jon, at least in the situation at present, any of the two might have good reasons to lie and manipulate the young Lord Commander.

Stannis Baratheon is currently in a losing situation. Both he and his army are freezing and starving in a terrible ice storm close by to Winterfell. Unable to siege the castle, Stannis must win by guile and strategy. One such stratagem could involve tricking Jon Snow into believing Stannis has already lost and march south with whatever forces he has left, therefore increasing his own numbers before it is too late. On the other hand, Mance Rayder may have sent the letter, in which he is mentioned by name (something Ramsay would have no way of knowing) in order to drive Jon into foolhardy actions. This would allow the other Free Folk at the *Wall* to strike against the Night's Watch and seize control of the *Wall*.

Whatever the truth of who the writer is, Stannis, Mance or even Ramsay himself, there is no way for readers to determine the truth until *Winds of Winter* is released. What can be easily determined is that whoever wrote that letter, the theme I am currently discussing is equally present.



The meaningless wars and conflicts humanity wages against itself are only facilitating the possible end of the world.

As for *Dragon Age*, its themes may vary wildly depending on which one of the three entries I choose to analyze. *Dragon Age Origins* is perhaps the one where these anti-war themes appear more heavily, as there are many parallels between its story and the overall plot of *A Song of Ice and Fire*. In the game, the civil war in Ferelden must be resolved in order to unify the kingdom against the *Darkspawn*. *Loghain mac Tir*, a general who fought for many years to free Ferelden of its Orlesian occupation, decides to let his king die in order to secure the fereldan border against Orlais. Loghain is unable to grasp the true threat of the *Darkspawn*, allowing his personal prejudices against Orlais to cloud his judgment and divide his nation's forces, weakening them. Again, meaningless hatred and conflicts are getting in the way of the real problems of the world. Before moving on to the other two games, it is noteworthy that, once I reach The Influence of Interactivity section, I will return to Loghain and the possible outcomes in his storyline.

*Dragon Age 2* is, of the three games, the one where the discussed theme appears less frequently. As the story of the game follows *Hawke's* climb to power in the politics and hierarchy of the city-state of *Kirkwall*, there is not much room for the underlying theme of a bigger threat. Rather, the game advances in its world building, especially concerning *red lyrium*, the *Qunari*, and the conflicts between mages and templars. It is important to remember that *Dragon Age 2's* development was one of the most convoluted and problematic cycles in gaming history. Having had more than five years to develop its predecessor, *Bioware* was given no more than nine months to release a sequel due to the success of *Origins* (Yin-Poole, 2018). Such limited time constraints forced *Bioware* to limit the game's scope in a variety of ways, such as focusing on a single city, limiting the character creation process and even reusing many interior cells for maps. These

limitations caused the game to be heavily criticized once it was launched, leading to the studio being forced to cut a planned expansion, *Exalted March*.

While players may never know what this expansion would entail, the developers have mentioned that its story was eventually repurposed for *Dragon Age Inquisition*. What that means is that players would probably reencounter *Corypheus*, the villain of the third game that was introduced in one of *Dragon Age 2*'s DLCs. This could imply that while *Dragon Age 2* does not rely so heavily on the aforementioned themes, Bioware might have had plans to include such ideas in its story.

The story of *Exalted March* would eventually become the basis for *Dragon Age Inquisition*, where the player must continuously gather power that is more political so that he may convince other factions to join him against the threat of *Corypheus*, an ancient awakened *Darkspawn* who threatens to destroy the world. *Corypheus* makes use of various political conflicts in southern Thedas to advance his plans and increase his armies. Such conflicts include the mage rebellion, where mages and templars war about the existence of the *Circles of Magi*; the Orlesian Civil War; and *Corypheus* even exploits the Grey Wardens' duty to confront *Darkspawn*, seeking to manipulate them through their connection to the *taint*, the disease of the *Darkspawn*.

This theme is even present in the bits and pieces of information released about the next game, yet another number of “meaningless” conflicts stand in the face of the most serious threat. This time, the elven god *Fen'Harel*, who players now know to be Solas, a companion of the third game, wants to restore the world of the elves, using conflicts such as the *Qunari* invasion of *Tevinter* and *Antiva* and the new *Grey Warden* civil war as cover-ups for his own plans. How heavily these anti-war ideals will be in *Dragon Age 4*, however, is something that cannot be decidedly stated, but only speculated.



Figure 18 - Promotional Art for the next *Dragon Age* game, depicting Solas and the Red-Lyrium Idol.

Of course, as each game has a different protagonist and must have a resolution, due to the form of a videogame, the real threats are often resolved by simply uniting whomever needs uniting and then defeating the “big bad”. In the case of *Origins*, that villain is the Archdemon; while for *Dragon Age 2* that could be considered *Meredith*. Finally, in the case of *Dragon Age Inquisition*, the villain is Corypheus. All three are the final bosses of their respective games and are defeated

independently of player choice. I will discuss the manner of how interactivity affects these final fights in The Influence of Interactivity section.

### 3.3.3. Characters

I will now discuss similarities and differences between the characters of *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Dragon Age*. To that end, I will rely heavily on the character archetypes presented by Vogler in his *The Writer's Journey*. While it might have been easier to simply compare and contrast the characters that fulfill each bracket of the eight archetypes, I will draw from these brackets in order to depict those that most resemble each other, while also depicting their differences and, eventually, the possibilities for divergence due to the concept of interactivity.

Another noteworthy aspect of this section is that, for the most part, I will avoid using any of the three game protagonists as examples for comparisons. That limitation is due the fact that each player may, be it through character creation, dialogue choice or even “head canon”<sup>31</sup> alter the personalities and arcs of these characters. I will now begin a series of comparisons between characters from both series. Such comparisons will both contextualize and improve my upcoming discussion of interactivity.

The first pair I will analyze is comprised of *Jon Snow* and *Alistair Theirin*. This is the case where both characters share more similarities than any other. Both are the bastard sons of powerful people. *Jon Snow* being related to *Eddard Stark*, the Warden of the North, while *Alistair* is the illegitimate son of the deceased king *Maric Theirin*, ruler of Ferelden. In addition, both are also junior members of the aforementioned ancient orders (Night's Watch and Grey Wardens respectively) and have similar character arcs in relation to having power thrust upon them. In the

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<sup>31</sup> Refers to ideas introduced into the world by the player, but that have no evidence in the actual game.

third book, *A Storm of Swords*, Jon Snow is elected Lord Commander of the Night's Watch (1097). Even though his choosing was due to the intervention of his friend and sworn brother, *Samwell Tarly*, who manipulated other contenders to vote for Jon, the power is still forced upon him. In a similar fashion, Alistair may be named as the new King of Ferelden after the *Landsmeet* of the first game, *Dragon Age Origins*. As with Jon, Alistair has never demonstrated any interest in the position or the political power that accompanies it. In fact, in more than one occasion, Alistair states that he actively does not want the responsibility, being content with allowing *Anora*, daughter of *Loghain Mac'tir*, to assume the crown. Even so, there are two possibilities for Alistair becoming king. He may either accept out of a sense of duty, and to comply with the plans of both his adoptive father, *Arl Eamon*, and the player character; or he may actively seek the throne, in a world state where the player character decides to let *Loghain* live and join the *Grey Wardens*. In the latter, Alistair becomes king with the sole purpose of hunting *Loghain* down, in which case his similarities to Jon begin to shift. Again, the concept of interactivity shows itself, demonstrating how player interaction with the world may shape not only the world state of the game, but even the personalities and arcs of given characters.

Before moving on to the next pair of characters, I must also cite *Carver Hawke*, brother to the second game's protagonist that survives the tutorial level of the game only when the player has decided upon playing as a mage character. *Carver* is a warrior, and having grown in a household with two mage siblings felt both inadequate due to his lack of magical talents and forlorn. This was caused in no small part because his father, who himself was another apostate<sup>32</sup>, spent all of his time training his mage children and only occasionally glancing at his warrior son. *Carver's* experience as the "black sheep" of his family is similar to Jon Snow's early arc, especially in the first book, in

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<sup>32</sup> Mage who is a fugitive from the Chantry.

which Jon is presented as the outcast of the *Stark* family. When counting the Stark children, Jon does not include himself, as he says, “The direwolf graces the banners of House Stark. I am no Stark...” (20). *Catelyn Stark’s* treatment of the bastard Snow is another determinant that contributes to his feelings of inadequacy, so much so that Jon wishes to join the Night’s Watch at the early age of fourteen. Carver, who by the end of the first act of *Dragon Age 2*, is but nineteen years old, faces a similar situation, which, as expected, is determined by the player.

At the end of the first act, the player, alongside the Tethras brothers, *Varric* and *Bartrand*, organizes an expedition to the Deep Roads where they expect to find many valuable items and relics. Carver, wanting to participate in the adventure, asks to come along, to which the player may allow or decline his request. If allowed, Carver eventually contracts the Taint and may die still in the Deep Roads. If, however, *Anders* is present, he may present Carver with the opportunity to join the *Grey Wardens*, since the Joining ritual is the only known way to stave off corruption.

On the other hand, if Carver is left in *Kirkwall*, he joins the Templar’s Order, seeking a place where he may leave the shadow of his mage sibling. In both options, Carver joins an order dedicated to a single purpose, just like *Jon Snow*, in order to find his place in the world. Should he join the *Grey Wardens*, Carver becomes more easy-going, as he is satisfied with his newfound cause, but if he joins the Templars, he continues to nurture his feelings of ineptitude, as the protagonist soon becomes the Champion of Kirkwall, casting an even larger shadow over his sibling.



Figure 19 - Cersei Lannister as played by Lena Headey in the Tv adaptation "Game of Thrones".

Another character archetype who appears in both stories is that of the manipulative queen. *Cersei Lannister* is in many aspects the Shadow archetype of *Ned Stark's* story in the first book and continues to be a major player in the dynastic war for the Iron Throne long after his death. Being the daughter of *Tywin Lannister*, one of the most renowned and feared lords of the Seven Kingdoms, Cersei marries Robert Baratheon after his usurpation of the Targaryen dynasty. Dreaming of becoming the queen since she was a child, Cersei is manipulative, vindictive, and even cruel in her dealings with opposition, be that lords like Ned Stark, or even her own husband, King Robert Baratheon. She manipulates her cousin, *Lancel Lannister*, who is in love with her, to murder her husband in order to protect her own secret of incest<sup>33</sup>.

While many different characters have made mention of Cersei's love for her children, once she becomes a POV character in the fourth book, *A Feast for Crows*, readers begin to understand that her motivations are more aligned to herself. Cersei resents the patriarchal society in which she lives and which forces her to be married off to different lords, while many incompetent men are accepted as wise or even just acceptable. Cersei resents the fact that Robert Baratheon, who was often described as a drunken fool, occupied the position of King, while she, as Queen, could only command trivialities, such as entertainment or marriage events. Cersei has always wanted to rule for herself, and once she becomes regent for her son *Tommen*, Cersei is completely unwilling to

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<sup>33</sup> Her children are the offspring of her relationship with her own brother, rather than with her husband, the king.

release her hold on that power. She is even somewhat relieved by the death of her father, Tywin, since from there onward, she is no longer bound to his decisions.

*Dragon Age* has two characters that could easily be compared to *Cersei*. The first one appears in the first game and is named *Anora Mac'tir*. Like *Cersei*, Anora is the daughter of a deeply respected and feared commander and lord, in this case, the Hero of the River Dane, *Loghain*. Like *Cersei*, Anora finds herself in a position where her gender is used against her and in favor of

male counterparts, especially her husband, *King Cailan Theirin*, who, like Robert, is an inept ruler. The player meets Anora during the quest, *Rescue the Queen*, as her father's ally, Arl Howe, imprisons her. While it is unclear if *Loghain* is aware of that, the player ventures into Arl's mansion, either fighting or infiltrating its guards, confronting Arl himself, and finally saving the



Queen, only to be ambushed by *Loghain's*

Figure 20 - Anora Mac'Tir.

second in command, *Ser Cautriel*. In order to retain her political power and preserve the goodwill of her lineage, Anora lies and tells Cautriel that the player tried to kidnap her. Like *Cersei*, Anora is manipulative and cold, even to possible allies.

It is in the *Landsmeet* questline that we see the aspects of Anora's character that fall more heavily in line with *Cersei*. She wants the power to rule for herself. While Anora would prefer to be crowned alone, so that the rule need not be shared, she is still willing to marry either *Alistair* or the player character, assuming he is of noble human origin. Once again, the player sees a situation where a male character is favored over a female one, not because of aptitude, but something else.



In the case of Cersei, it is purely her gender. In the case of Anora, who lives in a world with more equality than Cersei's, the Theirin bloodline of Alistair diminishes her own claim. It is noteworthy that, should Anora agree to marry the player character, she would still not share the rule. In that case, Anora is queen of Ferelden, while the player character becomes the Prince Consort.

One important thing to note about these characters is their greatest difference. While both seek power and political influence, Anora is far more suitable for the position than Cersei. While it is made fairly obvious that Cersei would be a better ruler than the likes of Robert Baratheon or even *Mace Tyrell*, she is often cited by other characters as a fool that is too quick to anger and even quicker to act, not always thinking of the consequences.

Then, there is Celene. During the events of *Dragon Age Inquisition*, Celene Valmont I is the acting empress of *Orlais*. Seeking power, Celene had her uncle, *Florian*, assassinated in the year 9:20 Dragon<sup>34</sup> and killed every single one of her servants to ensure the plot would never be discovered. Not only did she murder



Figure 21 - Celene Valmont.

her own family for power, but through political maneuvers, Celene also stole the throne from her cousin, *Gaspard*, which eventually caused the *War of the Lions*, an Orlesian civil war between the two parts. This war is a big part of the events in *Dragon Age Inquisition*, with the victor being whoever the player character supports. More so than Anora, Celene represents the ambition of the political Game of Orlais, a concept extremely similar to the idea of the game of thrones of Westeros.

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<sup>34</sup> Reference to the twentieth year of the 9<sup>th</sup> age in the world of Dragon Age, after which the games are named.

Celene is willing to do anything, from assassinating her uncle to murdering her lover's parents and even decimating an entire elven alienage, simply to appease the nobility and earn more political power. Appropriately, Anora and Cersei are nicknamed the *Lionesses* in their respective worlds. It is also noteworthy to notice the similarity in these characters' appearances, as they are tall, pale, and blonde women considered very beautiful. While none of them has any particular strength of arms, their power comes from what is usually associated with feminine power in medieval times: beauty and manipulation. While *Dragon Age* has altered that perception, with the idea of fighting women being as commonplace as men, *A Song of Ice and Fire* puts more emphasis on that duality of perceived male and female attributes, which leads to many of the aforementioned similarities and differences in these three women.

Another aspect that can be cited for these characters, at least Cersei and Anora, is that they are married to similarly incompetent rulers. *Robert Baratheon* becomes the king of Westeros after succeeding in usurping the throne from the Targaryen family. During the time of the rebellion itself, Robert was known as a fierce warrior and strong military commander with great aptitude for winning the loyalty of those around him. The beginning of the series, however, takes place around fifteen years after that time, with Robert already acting as king of the seven kingdoms. As ruler, Robert is often described as inept, being someone who did not understand the difference between winning the throne versus ruling the kingdom. By the time of *A Game of Thrones*, Robert Baratheon has become an overweight drunk who has no interest in being part of the actual running of his kingdom. So much so, that in almost twenty years, he has only ever attended three small council meetings. While his Hands of the King, Jon Arryn and later Ned Stark, were supposed to take such day-to-day responsibilities onto themselves, Robert spent his days eating, drinking, hunting, and whoring.

Likewise, Anora is married to *Cailan Theirin*, the king of Ferelden who, like Robert, is an astonishingly inept ruler. While Robert's problems derive from heavy drinking and a lack of interest in the more mundane parts of rulership, Cailan, while similar in a way, differs in that being the son of a great hero, namely *Maric Theirin*, Cailan wishes to have songs and legends composed out of his own deeds. During the *Ostagar* section of *Dragon Age Origins*, players see how Cailan diminishes the Darkspawn threat in order to justify his rash actions against the horde, charging in unprepared and at the head of his army, instead of taking measures that are more cautious. This is even more of an acute example of his rashness as Cailan and Anora had not yet produced an heir, which inevitably led to the civil war and to the dilemma of Alistair's character arc.

Both characters, while terrible rulers, are often considered by other characters as genuinely good-natured people. The dichotomy of Robert and Cailan points to not only their own similarities and differences, but it also provides more evidence to the duality of male and female attributes in these worlds. Robert and Cailan were good fighters (even if only Robert was a competent commander) but terrible leaders. In contrast, Cersei and Anora, in spite of being manipulative and cold, are more effective at ruling than their male spouses are. For one reason or another, these grossly incompetent men, both of which end up causing civil wars in their respective kingdoms, overshadow them.

There are more possible connections to be drawn from other pairings, such as Stannis Baratheon and the Arishok; Euron Greyjoy and Morrigan; Varys and Solas; even the Three-eyed Crow and Flemeth. Still, the ones I have already discussed have served the intended purpose: to contextualize how the worlds and characters of *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Dragon Age* relate to themselves. Additionally, they are the best suited to exemplify the studies I will focus on next. Thus, I will carry on the next section. As the aforementioned examples are the ones most directly

related to the parts that I will discuss within the Influence of Interactivity section, they are more than enough for my purposes here.

### **3.3.4. The Journeys**

Returning to the Hero's Journey, I now begin to separate and determine how each aspect of all six storylines (three from *A Song of Ice and Fire* and three from *Dragon Age*) fits into this notion. I start by analyzing the novel storylines. Since they do not possess the aspect of interactivity, I can demonstrate these elements in a more direct and concise manner. Then, once I shift to the discussion of the game's storylines, I begin to examine interactivity more thoroughly, which will in turn easily translate into the next section.

As a reminder, the novel plotlines I have decided upon dissecting are the Dynastic War for the Iron Throne; the Threat from the North; and the rise to power of *Daenerys Targaryen*. Meanwhile for *Dragon Age*, each storyline will correspond to the three different games: *Origins*, *2* and *Inquisition*. Now, I start with the Dynastic War for the Iron Throne and Ned Stark's journey in the first book.

#### **3.3.4.1. The Dynastic War for the Iron Throne**

While present during the entirety of the released series, the sequence of continuous conflicts for the Iron Throne extends from events that happened long before the beginning of the first book, *A Game of Thrones*, and into the fifth, *A Dance with Dragons*. Most likely, it will remain an extremely relevant aspect of the coming novels. *Aegon Targaryen's* conquest that gave rise to his family's dynasty; the endless wars beforehand; the civil war known as the Dance of the Dragons; the *Blackfyre* rebellions; and even Robert Baratheon's rebellion are all examples of such conflicts that happened before the beginning of the first novel. In the story itself, readers watch as the

*Lannisters* seek to consolidate power for themselves; the war of the five kings; *Littlefinger's* schemes; the possible return of *Aegon Targaryen*, who might very well be a *Blackfyre*<sup>35</sup> instead of a true *Targaryen*; and the eventual return of *Daenerys*; all of which could encompass this storyline. *A Song of Ice and Fire* is comprised of so many different plotlines that intertwine into each other that trying to discuss all of them in a significant and detailed manner would need to be a thesis of its own. Instead, my focus in this section will be on the analysis of Ned Stark's journey throughout the first book while also mentioning significant examples present in other plotlines to depict how the steps of the journey and character archetypes appear in *A Song of Ice and Fire*.

Ned Stark's story is perhaps the most complete in the sense of the Hero's Journey-since it



Figure 22 - Eddard Stark as played by Sean Bean in the TV adaptation "Game of Thrones".

takes place completely within one novel. This is in direct contrast to Jon Snow and Daenerys, whose journeys will achieve completion in the next books. As for Ned's path, I will first discuss the stages of the journey and afterwards the character archetypes.

The five first steps are straightforward. The Ordinary World, the Call to Adventure, the Refusal of the Call, the Meeting with the Mentor and the Crossing of the First Threshold happen in the beginning of the story, while Ned is still in Winterfell. His ordinary world is the life he takes as *Warden of the North*. Readers accompany

<sup>35</sup> The Blackfyres are a rival family of the Targaryens comprised of legitimized bastards.

Ned's story at this point through many different perspectives, such as that of his sons and daughters or his wife *Catelyn Stark*. The Call to Adventure is almost literally a call, as King Robert Baratheon offers Ned the position of Hand of the King, the main counselor of the crown, which would make Ned the second most powerful man in Westeros. Ned, however, is reluctant to accept, as he believes his place is in Winterfell with his family. In addition, Ned has never had any patience or practice at the strange politics of the south, which is another reason he dislikes the idea of becoming the Hand. At one point, Ned is dead-set on denying the position (59), but it is in that same chapter that both the Meeting with the Mentor and the Crossing of the First Threshold happen. As Ned and Catelyn discuss the matter, *Maester Luwyn*, who serves in this plotline as the mentor archetype (a fitting place for a maester<sup>36</sup>), appears and reveals the existence of a secret message by Catelyn's sister, who accuses the Lannisters of murdering the previous Hand of the King, *Jon Arryn*. Through this revelation, Ned finally agrees to the position, achieving the Crossing of the First Threshold and fully committing to the adventure.

The next step, Tests, Allies, and Enemies encompasses most of the trials Ned faces while in the south. From the events surrounding his daughter Arya while on the road to the tourney of the hand and even his investigation on Jon Arryn's death, all the while trying to navigate the politics of the court and discover who is friend and who is foe. The section culminates in the Approach to the Innermost Cave, as Ned discovers *Gendry*, a smith apprentice whom Ned recognizes as a royal bastard of the king. The turning point of this discovery is what eventually leads Ned to the truth about Joffrey and his siblings. Another event that could be considered to fulfill this stage happens as Ned refuses to be part of the assassination plot against Daenerys and forfeits his position as Hand of the King. Ned renounces the power of the position and the possibility of uncovering the truth,

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<sup>36</sup> Maesters are learned individuals who serve as advisors and physicians in the courts of nobles throughout the Seven Kingdoms.

all based on his honor. This is immediately followed by the Ordeal stage, where Ned faces off against Jaime Lannister.

This confrontation marks the lowest point for Ned, as he loses some of his most loyal household guards while also being heavily injured by a falling horse. With no power due to his resignation, no one he can truly trust and the fact that he has injured himself, Ned is left defenseless in this part of the story. Seeing his friend in pain, Robert calms down and reinstates Ned into Hand of the King status. After partially recovering, Ned resumes his investigation and eventually learns the truth of why Jon Arryn had been murdered, which also connects back to why Arryn was interested in the king's bastard children. The Reward stage is Ned discovering the true parentage of Joffrey, Tommen, and Myrcella. All three, who are supposed children of the king, are actually the offspring of Cersei Lannister and her twin brother, Jaime, and thus are not electable as heirs to the Iron Throne.

The final three stages, The Road Back, Resurrection, and the Return with the Elixir are next. Here, it is important to note that while all three stages are present in the story, it seems to try to subvert the reader's expectation in relation to them. While Robert is away hunting, Ned plans to reveal what he knows to Cersei and advise her to run away from the capital before the return of the king. He does that in order to save the lives of the three children, Joffrey, Tommen, and Myrcella, who he sees as blameless. In addition, Ned plans to send his daughters back to Winterfell to protect them from any retaliation by Cersei. Ned even imagines how he would soon return to the north, mentalizing The Road Back stage, but his plans go awry when it is revealed that the king was wounded by a boar and is likely to die soon. Instead of revealing the truth, Ned tries to seize the throne from the Lannisters but is betrayed by Littlefinger. The outcome of the Resurrection, however, is not one Ned overcomes, as is described in this version of the Hero's Journey. Instead, he is sent to a black cell and blackmailed into lying about Joffrey's birth to save his daughter's life.

The Return with the Elixir would comprehend his return to the north as a recruit for the Night's Watch, something promised by Cersei as a reward for his lie, but once again, the author subverts this idea. Joffrey, wanting to impress the crowd of townsfolk at Ned's confession, calls for his execution, stopping this stage of the journey and ending Ned's story finally. Here is a more easily perceived visualization of the previous analysis concerning Ned's stages of the journey:

### *Stages of the Journey / Eddard Stark (Ned)*

- 1 – The Ordinary World:** Living in Winterfell.
- 2 – The Call to Adventure:** King Robert Baratheon offers Ned the position of Hand of the King.
- 3 – Refusal of the Call:** Ned does not want the honor; he wishes to stay in Winterfell.
- 4 – Meeting with the Mentor:** Maester Luwin brings Lysa Tully's letter, revealing the truth about former Hand of the King's death and the involvement of the Lannister family.
- 5 – Crossing of the First Threshold:** Ned accepts the position and begins to travel south to King's Landing.
- 6 – Tests, Allies, and Enemies:** Ned begins to deal with the politics of the capital while also investigating the truth about the king's bastard children.
- 7 – Approach to the Innermost Cave:** Ned finds Gendry and realizes that he is in fact the bastard son of the king / Ned refuses Robert's orders and relinquishes his position.
- 8 – The Ordeal:** Jaime Lannister ambushes Ned, killing his men and leaving him injured.
- 9 – Reward:** Ned discovers the truth about Joffrey, Tommen, Mycella, and the incestual relationship of Cersei and Jaime Lannister.
- 10 – The Road Back:** Ned plans to leave the city but is betrayed by his own daughter, Sansa Stark, who reveals his plans to Cersei Lannister.
- 11 – The Resurrection:** Ned is betrayed by Petyr Baelish and imprisoned as a traitor.
- 12 – Return with the Elixir:** Ned accepts terms to return north, but Joffrey decides to have him executed instead.

These were the steps of the journey in Eddard Stark's story. As for the eight character archetypes, some can be easily discerned while others require additional thought. The Hero and the



Shadow are the clearest in the story. Eddard Stark and Cersei Lannister, respectively, fulfill these roles. As for the Mentor, I have already mentioned Maester Luwyn, who offers Ned the knowledge he requires to accept the position of Hand of the King and the adventure as a whole. In addition, the Threshold Guardian is depicted as Jaime Lannister and the Herald as Catelyn Stark. Jaime is the one who presents the most overwhelming challenge Ned has to face during his journey to that point. While the idea of the Threshold Guardian usually involves an initial challenge, prior to that point, most adversities in Ned's way were of an internal nature. Meanwhile, Catelyn fulfills the archetype of the Herald in two different parts. Firstly, she is the one who brings Ned the news of Jon Arryn's death and of Robert coming to the north. She then encourages Ned to take the position of Hand of the King for the sake of their daughters.

While these first five archetypes are easily identified, it is somewhat difficult to pinpoint the other three, the Ally, the Trickster, and the Shapeshifter. In a story such as Ned's, where he must resent and distrust all those around him, the most fitting placement for the Ally would be *Jory Cassel*, the captain of Ned's household guard who helps in Ned's investigation and eventually dies during Jaime Lannister's attack. As for the Trickster and the Shapeshifter, two characters could fulfill both roles. The first is *Varys the Spider*, while the second is *Petyr Baelish*, also known as *Littlefinger*.

As a reminder, the Trickster is a character who represents a change in perspective within the Hero, while the Shapeshifter is a character who changes based on the Hero's perspective. Both characters, Varys and Littlefinger, could easily be said to represent both parameters. Ned initially sees Varys with disdain and distrust, but he eventually learns that Varys is simply doing what he believes necessary to survive and to, as Varys puts it, serve the realm. Varys also reveals to Ned that truth and honor can sometimes be dangerous, as it was because of Ned that Cersei was forced to arrange for Robert's death sooner than she expected. Finally, Varys convinces Ned of the need

to lie about Joffrey's parentage in order to save Sansa Stark's life, showing Ned the need to lie in certain circumstances. Overall, however, it seems most fitting Varys to retain the archetype of the Trickster, as he serves sometimes as both comic relief and represents the greater change within Ned. Littlefinger's change, however, happens mostly in the perspective of Ned. From an uneasy ally, Littlefinger ends the story of the first novel betraying Ned for Cersei's cause, leading to his arrest and eventual execution. While he could also represent the change within Ned as he entrusts Littlefinger with bribing the city watch, the betrayal is a far more important part of Littlefinger's role within Ned's story and so he is more suited to the Shapeshifter. In the end, a more direct representation of the character archetypes in Ned Stark's journey looks something like this:

### ***Character Archetypes / Eddard Stark (Ned)***

- 1 – The Hero:** Eddard Stark.
- 2 – The Shadow:** Cersei Lannister.
- 3 – The Mentor:** Maester Luwin.
- 4 – The Ally:** Jory Cassel.
- 5 – The Threshold Guardian:** Jaime Lannister.
- 6 – The Herald:** Catelyn Stark.
- 7 – The Trickster:** Varys the “Spider”.
- 8 – The Shapeshifter:** Petyr Baelish “Littlefinger”.

#### **3.3.4.2. The Threat from the North**

Unlike the story of his supposed father, the tale of Jon Snow differs in that it takes place during the whole series, not simply in one of the novels. In fact, Jon Snow's journey is most probably not yet complete, as it is heavily implied that he will return in the next novel, even though he has already died at the end of *A Dance with Dragons*. As the last two books have not been released yet, this analysis of Jon Snow's journey might yet be proven incomplete. It is important to include it in my Master's thesis, however, as it might be the most relevant plotline of the entire

saga. In addition, I can make use of the predictive nature of the Hero's Journey to analyze Jon Snow's tale in spite of its current state.

Revolving around the Night's Watch and its surrounding areas, this storyline embodies the



Figure 23 - Jon Snow as played by Kit Harington in the TV adaptation "Game of Thrones".

overarching theme of the entire series.

Many of the characters present in this story are aware of the idea that the meaningless conflicts of humankind are nothing more than a distraction against the real threat of the world. The *White Walkers* are coming, and the Night's Watch are the only force that stands between them and the rest of Westeros.

As *Jeor Mormont* says to Jon in *A*

*Game of Thrones*: "Do you think your brother's war is more important than ours? (...) When dead men come hunting in the night, do you think it matters who sits the Iron Throne?" (784). The characters themselves comprehend the futility of the never-ending conflicts humanity enforces upon itself. They understand the truth, yet they are bound and fooled by the preconceptions that come with their vows. Lord Commander Mormont understands the truest threat in the North, yet, once he leads the watch beyond the Wall, most of his efforts are directed against the Free Folk. Thousands of years of conflict impede any possibility of cooperation between these two groups, even if both are aware of the army of the dead coming for them.

Jon's journey is one not about defeating the threat itself, but about unity and cooperation. He grows from a youth eager to prove himself in battle to a position of command and sacrifice at a very young age. As with most stories, Jon's journey begins with his Ordinary World.

Living in Winterfell as the bastard son of Ned Stark, Jon often feels out of place and unwelcome in the castle. Such feelings are only exacerbated by *Catelyn Stark*, Ned's wife, who sees in Jon a constant reminder of her husband's infidelity. Whether Jon is truly the illegitimate son of Ned is a matter of debate among fans of the series, yet, as it is not the focus of this Master's thesis, I will not discuss such theories. Jon's feelings of inadequacy are first demonstrated to readers in *A Game of Thrones*, as Jon remarks to his uncle *Benjen* that he will "never father a bastard" (55). Again, during *A Storm of Swords*, Jon gives this resentment as answer to *Mance Rayder* as to why he would wish to betray his vows and join the Free Folk (104). While Mance never completely trusts Jon, the answer was satisfactory enough and he accepts the youngster in his forces. It is clear that Jon felt awkward and insecure in his Ordinary World. So much so that Jon first shows interest in the idea of joining the Night's Watch to his uncle, thinking that there even a bastard could rise in the hierarchy. Jon is eager to join and goes willingly to his Call to Adventure of joining the order, even after *Tyrion Lannister* reveals to him the truth of what the Watch is: criminals who serve their sentence there instead of losing limbs or even their lives. Jon accepts this truth (126) and moves forward, even if he now resents the choice and the fact that his own family kept such truth from him.

The Refusal of the Call, however, comes later, after Jon has already accepted the truth of the Night's Watch and has even understood the importance of helping the other recruits. Two events could be considered when discussing this section. The first, which comes sooner, appears when Jon feels betrayed by the Watch for being put into the Stewards rather than the Rangers. Being the best warrior of all the recruits, Jon dreamt of fulfilling his dream of becoming a Ranger like his uncle Benjen and gaining honor and glory on the battlefield. Instead, he is posted as the Lord Commander's personal servant, a position that includes menial day-to-day tasks such as serving food, tending to his quarters, and delivering messages. Jon feels wasted and angry, until

Samwell Tarly explains that he is being groomed for command. Jon's refusal in this case is cut short as he soon realizes his childish behavior and once again becomes fully committed to the adventure and to his new life as a brother of the Watch. In the same chapter, Jon pronounces the vow of the Night's Watch, swearing his life to the order (522).

The second possibility for Jon's refusal comes later, as he hears the news of his father's imprisonment and his brother Robb's march against the south. Jon wishes to join his brother in his war, stating that he cannot forget his old life for his new. He is refusing to serve the watch and fulfill his vows for the sake of his Ordinary World, but his friends and Lord Commander Mormont, who advises him into the matters already discussed in this section about the real threat, stop him. In fact, this scene with Mormont fits nicely with the next stage of the journey, the Meeting with the Mentor. Mormont shares his wisdom with Jon, causing the youngster to see things more clearly, return his attention to his own adventure, and fight against the White Walkers. Incidentally, Jon's attempt at forsaking his vows could also contemplate the Crossing of the First Threshold, as it is after this point, when he returns to the Watch and is advised by Mormont on the importance of the Watch that Jon fully commits to his new life and to the adventure itself.

It is noteworthy to mention that another character could have served as Jon's mentor, giving him the knowledge to defeat the wights that attacked Lord Commander Mormont beforehand. *Bloodraven*, also known as the Three-eyed Crow, is one of the most prevalent characters in Branon Stark's story. Even so, it is heavily implied that through the ravens in the Night's Watch, Bloodraven assisted Jon in telling him of the wights' greatest weakness: fire. As the Meeting with the Mentor is supposed to introduce a character who offers some sort of wisdom/knowledge/weapon to the hero, both of these events could fit into this stage.

The Tests, Allies, and Enemies section encompasses the following: a large part of Jon's adventure, including Jon's fight against the first wights ever to be seen by the Night's Watch; the

Watch's expedition beyond the Wall; his adventures with *Qhorin Halfhand* and his eventual infiltration of the Wildling forces; the battle at the Wall in the third novel; and even future events, like his tough decisions as Lord Commander and death at the hands of his own sworn brothers, which might be followed by a resurrection and more trials. All of these might be considered for this stage of his journey. As with usual, this stage is one of the largest in any story.

The Approach to the Innermost Cave, which usually marks a turning point for the story of the Hero, is seen as Jon is elected the new Lord Commander of the Watch. Jon is considering, at this point, an offer of legitimatization by *King Stannis Baratheon*, who wishes Jon to take the name Stark and inherit Winterfell as his own vassal. Everything Jon ever wanted before the Watch is offered him, at a point where it seems likely that *Janos Slynt* would be elected and call for Jon's execution. Jon feels conflicted because of his vows and his commitment to them. He is about to decide when Samwell Tarly deceives some of the contenders to have Jon elected. His new position reconfirms Jon in his adventure, showing him where his place truly is. Not only that, it completely alters Jon's perspective on the adventure, as he now has the power and influence to take the necessary precautions toward facing the real threat of the Others.

While Jon's election fits much better into the Approach stage, it is noteworthy that Jon's imprisonment as a traitor to the Watch by *Janos Slynt* could also merit this stage, as it is a turning point in Jon's story. That would change the rest of the stages of the journey, to the point where Jon's election would fit better into the Reward stage. If I were to consider Jon's story as concluding with his death in *A Dance with Dragons*, that is how I would divide his story. The Approach as his imprisonment; the Ordeal as his parlay with Mance Rayder; the Reward as Jon's election and The Road Back as Jon trying to lead the Watch before being killed. In this division, however, the Resurrection and Return with the Elixir are left void. While it is not impossible for a journey to be cut short, as I have demonstrated in Ned Stark's case, leaving out two brackets seems extremely

unsatisfactory. Instead, I will do as originally planned and try to predict the final steps of Jon's journey as present in the two unreleased books. I will consider Jon's election as the Approach stage instead of the Reward.

Continuing from there, the Ordeal would be present in *A Dance with Dragons* through the infamous Pink Letter. In spite of who the true author of the letter is, Jon's decision to forsake his vows and march south goes against not only his vows to the Night's Watch but also against the overarching theme of the series and of his character's journey so far. As Jon decides to ignore the looming threat from the north and head south to battle *Ramsay Bolton*, his own sworn brothers kill him in an attempt to preserve themselves and their organization. As this also marks the end of Jon's journey so far, readers must wait for the next book, *Winds of Winter*, before fully realizing what Jon's journey is going to be like from now on. By making use of the foreshadowing present in the novels themselves and the knowledge afforded by the TV show adaptation (which has already been stated as being "similar, but different"), I can continue with my analysis.

The Reward will probably appear as Jon's eventual resurrection, be it through *Bloodraven*, *Melisandre*, or other means. As stated by Martin, returning from the dead should never be easy for a character, and Jon will inevitably change after such experience. The Road Back, then, might involve Jon once more committing to his adventure after wanting to leave it all behind. His oath to the Night's Watch was only for life, after all, and at this point, Jon would have already died. It is clear, however, that Jon will renew his dedication to stopping the White Walkers, as that is the most important thread of the whole series.

As impossible as it is to try to predict what George R. R. Martin has prepared for the resolution of the White Walkers' threat, it is obvious that it will involve, in some way or another, Jon Snow. The Resurrection stage then, being the final challenge of the Hero, will probably involve Jon and the Others. Finally, for the Return with the Elixir, I can say little more than that it will

probably be present not in *Winds of Winter*, but in *A Dream of Spring*. Whether it is simply saving the world from the Others, creating peace between them and humanity, or something else, it is too soon to predict. For now, Jon's two possible journeys look something like this:

### ***Stages of the Journey / Threat from the North – Jon Snow***

- 1 – The Ordinary World:** Jon living in Winterfell.
- 2 – The Call to Adventure:** Jon wants to join the Night's Watch.
- 3 – Refusal of the Call:** Jon feels betrayed at being posted as a mere steward for the Lord Commander / Jon tries to abandon the Night's Watch to join his brother Robb.
- 4 – Meeting with the Mentor:** Maester Aemon advises Jon and Mormont / Bloodraven indirectly helps Jon against the Wights.
- 5 – Crossing of the First Threshold:** Jon returns to the Night's Watch and fully commits to his new life.
- 6 – Tests, Allies, and Enemies:** Jon fights the first wights seen in ages; joins the Watch's expedition; infiltrates the Wildlings; escapes; protects the Wall against Mance Rayder.
- 7 – Approach to the Innermost Cave:** 1 – Jon is imprisoned as a traitor to the Watch / 2 – Jon is elected Lord Commander.
- 8 – The Ordeal:** 1 – Jon is sent to parlay with Mance Rayder but is saved by Stannis / 2 – Leading the Watch and being murdered after the pink letter.
- 9 – Reward:** 1 – Jon is elected the new Lord Commander / 2 – Next book. Possible resurrection.
- 10 – The Road Back:** 1 – Jon has to lead the Watch but is eventually killed by his brothers / 2 – Next book, dealing with the consequences of dying and coming back.
- 11 – The Resurrection:** 1 – Void / 2 – Next book, dealing with the White Walkers.
- 12 – Return with the Elixir:** 1 – Void / 2 – Resolution of the greater conflict.

The character archetypes of Jon's story are, unlike his journey, much more direct. The Hero is, obviously, Jon Snow, while the Shadow is not necessarily a single character, but the threat of the White Walkers as a whole. While the TV show decided upon creating a single White Walker King named the *Night King*, no such character exists in the novels, or, at least, has not yet been introduced.



Two archetypes that are represented by more than a single character are the Mentor and the Trickster. Both *Maester Aemon* and *Lord Commander Jeor Mormont* offer Jon the wisdom to accept his place in the adventure, while *Bloodraven* might be more indirectly guiding Jon throughout his journey. All three could fit the Mentor archetype in this scenario. As for the Trickster, both Pyp and Grenn are well suited, as both often function as comic relief through their unending quarrels and both represent a change in perspective within Jon. At the beginning of Jon's life with the Watch, he humiliates the other recruits during training, thinking himself superior to them, but after *Donal Noye* explains their situation to Jon, they become friends, quickly growing to represent Jon's newfound family in the Night's Watch.

Another character who seemingly fits just as well as Grenn and Pyp into the Trickster archetype would be *Samwell Tarly*, but in his case, the Ally becomes more appropriate. Sam is Jon's best friend and stoutest helper. Sam stands beside Jon in almost every aspect besides fighting. He is smart, loyal, and brave when he needs to be. It is Sam that, through lies and deception, causes the election for Lord Commander to tip in Jon's favor, resulting in Jon's new role and the renewal of his commitment to the adventure.

The final three archetypes, the Threshold Guardian, the Herald, and the Shapeshifter are represented in Jon's story as the two wights Jon faces in the first book, his uncle Benjen Stark, and the King Beyond the Wall Mance Rayder, respectively. The wights and Benjen's roles are easily understood, as the first challenge to the hero and the ones who first introduced the idea of joining the Night's Watch to Jon, but it is in Mance Rayder that Jon's story finds its Shapeshifter. Mance is initially only a name to Jon. The leader of the Wildlings who wants to destroy the Wall and lead an army of raiders south. When Jon infiltrates the Free Folk army, however, he starts to respect Mance and his dedication to saving his people. Although they have not yet become true allies, and perhaps never will, Jon's perspective of Mance changes enormously, to the point where Jon will

go against King Stannis and mercy kill someone if he believes to be Mance burning at the stake. Once it is revealed that Mance is alive, hidden by Melisandre's magic, Jon again distrusts him for his slyness and subterfuge-but is forced to accept his help in order to save someone he believes to be his sister Arya Stark. It is clear that Mance's role is not only that of a figurative Shapeshifter but also a literal one, as he often uses disguises and afterwards Melisandre's glamours to pass for other people. The character archetypes present in Jon's journey would look, thus, something like this:

### ***Character Archetypes / Threat from the North – Jon Snow***

- 1 – The Hero:** Jon Snow.
- 2 – The Shadow:** White Walkers.
- 3 – The Mentor:** Maester Aemon / Jeor Mormont / Bloodraven.
- 4 – The Ally:** Sam Tarly.
- 5 – The Threshold Guardian:** The wights.
- 6 – The Herald:** Benjen Stark.
- 7 – The Trickster:** Grenn / Pyp.
- 8 – The Shapeshifter:** Mance Rayder.

#### **3.3.4.3. The Rise to Power of *Daenerys Targaryen***

Daenerys' journey is set to be completed during the next two novels, *Winds of Winter* and *A Dream of Spring*. As with Jon's, that means that my analysis of the stages of the journey and of the character archetypes present in Dany's tale will, at some point, convert into a more predictive examination of the final elements. While the Threat from the North seems to be the main storyline of the whole series, it is quite possible that Dany will transcend that plotline at some point as well, as I will now demonstrate.

While the Dynastic War for the Iron Throne swaps between several different characters and the Threat from the North, while revolving mostly around Jon Snow, it still approaches a larger topic through different viewpoints; Dany's tale is exclusively about herself. *The Rise to Power of*

*Daenerys Targaryen* is the name I have chosen because the narrative, while always following her character, shifts from several different matters, places, and even themes. Dany's Ordinary World is, strangely, not her actual ordinary world, as her family has been exiled from Westeros since before she was born. Dany has never laid eyes upon her ancestor's realms, and so, at the beginning, she has been living in *Illyrio Mopatis* manse upon the free city of *Pentos*. While not her home, Dany and her brother *Viserys* have been living there for over six months, which at that point could be considered, at least for the purposes of the Hero's Journey, Dany's Ordinary World.

Her Call to Adventure presents itself immediately upon Dany's first POV chapter in *A Game of Thrones*. Her brother, wishing for an army that he could use to retake the Iron Throne, gives Dany as a present to *Khal Drogo*, a Dothraki Warlord, as a bride (37). As the Dothraki are horse lords whose culture differs from anything Dany has ever seen, her initial response to such betrothal is denial and fear (38). One look at the Khal, and Dany, who was only a child at the time, begins to cry and beg her brother not to go through with this marriage, already fulfilling her Refusal of the Call.

The rest of her story in the first book goes with Dany eventually growing from the scared little sister to a strong individual who is proud to among the Dothraki. Dany finds love in her marriage and courage in herself to become more assertive, even allowing the Khal to have Viserys killed during a sacred celebration (500). While many of these events, especially her brother's death, could fit into the Hero's Journey (perhaps



Figure 24 - Daenerys Targaryen as played by Emilia Clarke in the TV adaptation "Game of Thrones".

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as the Crossing of the First Threshold), one must remember that Dany's story goes far beyond just her time with the Dothraki and that there are aspects of her journey which would fit much better in these brackets.

The next stage, the Meeting with the Mentor, is one such instance where two events could be considered. The first, which happens in the first book, is Dany's confrontation with *Mirri Maz Duur*, a godswife<sup>37</sup> of the Lhazareen people. After supposedly saving her from being raped by Dothraki riders, Dany begins to trust Mirri to heal one of Khal Drogo's injuries. Mirri Maz Duur, beyond being a wise woman for her people, studied the dark arts of the world and became a *Maegi*<sup>38</sup>. When Khal Drogo is on the brink of death, it is to her that Dany turns, willing to pay any price to save her husband. Mirri states that only death can pay for life, which Dany assumes means the life of Drogo's horse. In fact, Mirri takes the life of Dany's unborn baby, bringing back a Drogo that is catatonic and unfeeling. At that moment, Mirri Maz Duur teaches Dany many things. Mirri tells Dany to "Look to your khal and see what life is worth, when all the rest is gone" (760). She taught Dany to be wary of trusting anyone; taught Dany about the existence of true magic; and was the first time Dany was betrayed, something that would eventually shape many of the young girl's future dilemmas. In that way, Mirri Maz Duur would serve as both the Threshold Guardian and the Mentor of Dany's story in the first book. She could even be considered the Shadow, though I would not go that far, as the Shadow is supposed to be the main antagonist of the whole journey, and the *maegi* appears only in *A Game of Thrones*.

The second event that could fulfill the Meeting with the Mentor would be Dany's adventure through the *House of the Undying*, which takes place in the second book, *A Clash of Kings* (699).

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<sup>37</sup> A godswife is considered a wise woman in more tribal societies of that world. Someone who can heal, but doesn't necessarily have formal study in a institution.

<sup>38</sup> *Maegi* is a word used for a dark sorceress in the world of *A Song of Ice and Fire*.

In it, Dany goes through many tests, seeing visions of her dead husband and son, a childhood home, and even her long dead brother *Rhaegar*. In her childhood home, Daenerys receives one of the many prophecies that permeate her story. Though the *Undying* are soon revealed to not be allies of Daenerys, just like Mirri Maz Duur, they also reveal many secrets to her, gifting her with knowledge and wisdom such as the Mentor archetype is supposed to do. One of these prophecies follows as such: "... Mother of dragons... child of three (...) three heads has the dragon (...) three fires must you light... one for life and one for death and one to love... three mounts must you ride... one to bed and one to dread and one to love... three treasons will you know... once for blood and once for gold and once for love..." (705, 706). While the wisdom of the *Undying* is not immediately clear to Daenerys, their words go on to become some of the most important to Dany, as she ponders on the meaning of the number three. Three heads of the dragon, which she assumes means she must take two husbands, such as her antecessor *Aegon the Conqueror* has done with his sisters; three fires, three mounts, three betrayals, all of these ideas lead Dany to doubt many of her decisions and counselors, especially in regard to the three betrayals. While both instances affect Daenerys profoundly, the prophecies in the House of the *Undying* are more directly related to Dany's overarching role in the entire series and thus are a better fit for the Meeting with the Mentor stage.

The Crossing of the First Threshold, however, is much more obvious of a choice, as it represents Dany fully committing to her new life as the Mother of Dragons. However, this event could also work as the Approach to the Innermost Cave, since it marks a turning point not only for Dany, but also for the entire world of *A Song of Ice and Fire*. At the end of the first novel, Dany puts into practice her lesson with Mirri Maz Duur, using magic and the life of the Maegi to awaken her dragon eggs and hatch the first dragons to permeate the world ever since the last one died over a hundred and fifty years ago (806). Dany's hatching of these dragons marks a turning point for

her character, as she truly becomes the Mother of Dragons and finally convinces many of her Dothraki followers that she is indeed a worthy leader for them. At this point, Dany begins a sort of metamorphosis, turning from the Khaleesi into the Dragon Queen that readers see in later books. Additionally, with dragons being present once more in the world, magic becomes stronger, as is mentioned by *Alchemist Hallyne* during one of *Tyrion's* POV chapters in *A Clash of Kings*. Hallyne comments, "They (spells), hmmm, seem to be working better than they were. (...) You don't suppose there are any dragons about, do you?" (718). Dany's awakening of her three dragons marks the point where she is intent on becoming her own person, her own ruler, and it also signifies a new era for the world of the series.

Dany's Tests, Allies, and Enemies stage is marked by many of her following adventures but especially her campaign through Slaver's Bay. Dany tricks the masters of *Astapor* and gains an army of Unsullied, the best infantry in the world; sacks the city of *Yunkai* and frees its slaves; and then takes the city of *Meereen*. As she stays in the city, however, Dany realizes that if she is ever to accomplish her dream of returning to Westeros and of ruling her ancestor's kingdoms, then she must learn to be a ruler and not just a conqueror. In the grander scheme of her Hero's Journey, that decision is perhaps the most fitting to be put into the Approach to the Innermost Cave bracket, as it represents one of the greatest turning points both for her character as an individual and for her story.

The Ordeal, which is the last stage of the journey that is present in one of the already released books, is presented in the fifth novel, *A Dance with Dragons*. As Dany is already ruling Meereen, even having married one of the city's nobles, namely *Hizdahr Zo Loraq*, she attends an event in one of the city's fighting pits. After some fights, *Drogon*, the largest and fiercest of her dragons returns and lands in the middle of the arena (763). Chaos ensued and soon many soldiers are sent to kill the beast, but Dany, not wanting to see her child killed, goes to him and tries to calm

the dragon. Drogon will not answer, however, even to her. The Ordeal in this sense is Dany facing off against her own dragon and overpowering him through force alone. After she has done so, Dany climbs upon his back and flies away from the city.

A mysterious masked character named Quaithe during in *A Clash of Kings* delivers one of the many prophecies laid upon Dany. She says that “To go north, you must journey south, to reach the west you must go east. To go forward you must go back and to touch the light you must pass beneath the shadow” (583). Like other prophecies present in the series, it is yet unclear what Quaithe’s words mean, as they are left to the next novels. I mention them here, however, because these words can help me define Dany’s journey going forward. Once Dany flies away from Meereen, many of the secondary characters in her storyline believe her to be dead, but in the last chapter of *A Dance with Dragons*, readers learn that she is alive. Lost in the Dothraki Sea, Daenerys tries to find her way back to Meereen, which she refers to in the chapter as her home (1019). During her journey, she has many dreams and visions of people from her past such as Quaithe, her brother Viseris, and Jorah Mormont. All of them accuse her, in one way or another, of forgetting her place and of forgetting Westeros. They accuse her of forgetting who she really is. There is the possibility that these voices connect to Quaithe’s prophecy of “To go forward you must go back”. Daenerys decided she would learn to be a ruler and to rule Meereen as training for when she took the Seven Kingdoms. Yet, every choice she made seemed to her like she would stay in Meereen forever, which would have halted her journey. The voices, the dreams, the prophecies, they all seem to take Dany into the same direction. Not a place, but an understanding that she must return to the ways of her old self: to be a conqueror and a Khaleesi – the Mother of Dragons who would conquer the seven kingdoms. Only when she accepts the truth that Drogon returns to her side in the Dothraki Sea and at the very end of this last chapter, Khal Jhaqo (1033) finds her.

The realization and acceptance that Dany must relinquish her fantasies of ruling Meereen and return to her more bloodthirsty and vengeful self is the possible Reward stage of her story. Meanwhile, The Road Back would almost literally be a road back, as Dany would reunite her forces, deal with the Meereenese situation, and finally return to Westeros, the place she was always meant to go to. That, however, is not the end of the story or of the Hero's Journey.

The final two stages, The Resurrection and the Return with the Elixir are almost impossible to predict, even with the bits and pieces of information that I could take from the TV adaptation. As many characters and elements are removed from the TV show, Dany's journey in that version differs greatly from what her book counterpart might find. Characters like Quaithe are forgotten, while *Quentyn Martell* and *Young Gryph* are completely removed. The prophecies are also removed, which would change Daenerys' character greatly.

To fulfill this analysis, I will try to predict these two final stages. Since the purpose of the Hero's Journey is to develop a formula to stories, I am well equipped to do so, though her actual journey will only be available with the unreleased novels. The Resurrection, which represents the final challenge of the Hero, could be fulfilled by Dany's joining of the previously mentioned plotlines. The Dynastic War for the Iron Throne, which has always been Dany's goal; and the Threat from the North, as that is possibly the final and main story of the entire series. How Dany's overcoming of these challenges will occur, however, is impossible to predict. As for the final stage, the Return with the Elixir, it all depends on whether or not the author will seek to do something similar to Ned Stark's story and subvert the reader's expectations. Dany might follow the TV adaptation's storyline and become a mentally unstable conqueror or she might give up the throne entirely, seeing the flaws of the Iron Throne system and creating something new. Only time will tell. For the purposes of this thesis, however, Dany's journey looks something like this:



### *Stages of the Journey / Daenerys Targaryen*

- 1 – **The Ordinary World:** Living in Pentos.
- 2 – **The Call to Adventure:** Marriage to Drogo.
- 3 – **Refusal of the Call:** Does not want to marry.
- 4 – **Meeting with the Mentor:** Betrayed by the Maegi / The house of the Undying.
- 5 – **Crossing of the First Threshold:** Resurrecting the Dragons.
- 6 – **Tests, Allies, and Enemies:** Journey through Slaver's Bay.
- 7 – **Approach to the Innermost Cave:** Resurrecting the Dragons / Deciding to rule Meereen.
- 8 – **The Ordeal:** Drogon in the fighting pits.
- 9 – **Reward:** Next book, return to roots?
- 10 – **The Road Back:** Leaving Meereen for Westeros.
- 11 – **The Resurrection:** Joining the war for the Iron Throne and, possibly, the fight against the White Walkers.
- 12 – **Return with the Elixir:** Learning about herself and her destiny.

Dany's journey presents a special case concerning the character archetypes of the Hero's Journey. While the Hero is quite obviously herself, the Shadow is somewhat more problematic to determine. Dany has had many enemies during her journey so far, such as Mirri Maz Duur, the Undying, the masters of Slaver's Bay, the Sons of the Harpy and now perhaps even Khal Jhaqo. Yet, none of these fit the idea of the main antagonist of the overarching story. Perhaps such character will still be introduced, or even revealed as someone already present, but so far, the Shadow remains a mystery.

The Mentor has the opposite problem. As Dany has received many prophecies about her future, a large number of characters could be considered her Mentor archetype. Mirri Maz Duur, the Undying and Quaithe are all examples of such characters. They provide Dany with information and wisdom, even if it is not immediately applicable. Mirri Maz Duur is especially noteworthy as

she can fulfill both the Mentor archetype and the Threshold Guardian, being perhaps the first challenge Dany overcomes.

In her story, Dany meets many different people, but there are only a few she trusts. Those that could be called Allies. Some characters that could fulfill this archetype are *Barristan Selmy*, *Missandei* and even *Grey Worm*, the commander of Dany's Unsullied forces. Looking back, Magister Illyrio Mopatis or even her brother Vyserys Targaryen could serve as the Herald, as both of them work together towards finalizing Dany's marriage to Khal Drogo.

The Trickster poses a problem similar to the Shadow. Sometimes serving as comic relief, the Trickster represents, more importantly, a change of perspective within the Hero. In a way, Quaithe could fulfill this archetype, as she seems to be the one sending Dany the visions that urge her to return to her conqueror ways. As that is not confirmed, however, it may be too soon to describe Quaithe as such. If not her, however, who then? A character that is approaching Dany's storyline is *Tyrion Lannister*, who could serve as that change within Dany. His expertise in westerosi politics and his hatred for his own family could help guide Dany towards the path her visions seem to urge. Alternatively, he could go the opposite way, as it is in the TV show. Quentyn Martell, Young Gryph, and even Jon Snow could also fulfill this archetype, depending on how Dany's story progresses.

Finally, the Shapeshifter suffers from none of these issues. Jorah Mormont begins as one of Dany's most trusted allies and advisors, at least from her perspective. Yet as she is about to take Meereen, Dany discovers that Jorah has been spying on her and begins to consider him a traitor. While her positioning about Jorah might yet change once again, it is clear that the Shapeshifter of Dany's journey is the bear knight. In this way, the character archetypes are presented as such:

### ***Character Archetypes / Daenerys Targaryen***

- 1 – The Hero:** Daenerys Targaryen.
- 2 – The Shadow:** –
- 3 – The Mentor:** Mirri Maz Duur / The Undying / Quaithe.
- 4 – The Ally:** Barristan Selmy / Missandei / Grey Worm.
- 5 – The Threshold Guardian:** Mirri Maz Duur.
- 6 – The Herald:** Illyrio Mopatis / Vyseris Targaryen.
- 7 – The Trickster:** Quaithe / Tyrion Lannister.
- 8 – The Shapeshifter:** Jorah Mormont.

#### **3.3.4.4. Dragon Age Origins**

When discussing the previous three storylines, I have shown how sometimes a single stage of the journey, or even a character archetype, can be presented through more than one single example in the story. Different events may connect to the same stage, while a single portion of the story may also fit different stages. The same is possible with character archetypes. Still, I was able to present the best exemplars for each bracket in the Hero's Journey.

As I now discuss interactive stories, reflecting on the three *Dragon Age* games, something different will appear. In videogames, a similar occurrence is possible, with multiple events or characters filling the same bracket, or even one exemplar being a possibility for several stages or archetypes. The difference, however, is that in videogames where player choices may affect the plot and narrative of the world, these stages and archetypes are also influenced by the player. Looking at *Dragon Age Origins*, this is immediately perceivable through the Ordinary World stage.

During the character creation process of the first game, players may choose between six origin stories for the protagonist. These origins depend on variables such as character race, which includes humans, elves, and dwarves; and character class, of which there are three: warriors, rogues, and mages. The six possible origins are Human Noble, Magi, Dalish Elf, City Elf, Dwarven

Noble, and Dwarven Commoner. In most games, including the third one of this same series, *Dragon Age Inquisition*, such choice might influence some dialogue options and characters' perceptions of the protagonist, but nothing more. In *Origins*, however, this choice changes the entirety of the first section of the game, which equates to the first stage of the journey, the Ordinary World. Each origin begins the game in his or her own Ordinary World, with human nobles living in their family ancestral castle; mages getting ready for their initiation ritual in the Circle of Magi; dalish elves living with their nomadic clan; city elves getting ready for their own wedding ceremony; dwarven nobles having just been promoted to their own military command; and dwarven commoners doing jobs for their criminal boss. All six origins are never present in the same playthrough, as the player must choose only one of them. Even so, when analyzing the narrative of the entire game, all six must be put as the Ordinary World.

The Call to Adventure is another stage present in these origins, but unlike the Ordinary World, it is present in all of them in an almost identical way. Warden Commander *Duncan* appears in all six origins, though the manner of his appearance changes to match the storyline of each origin. In one way or another, Duncan ends up offering the player character a position with the *Grey Wardens*, the order of warriors I have discussed during the World Building section. It is noteworthy that the next stage, the Refusal of the Call, may be directly related to Duncan's invitation, as the player may be reluctant to accept. In such cases, Duncan invokes the *right of conscription*, which allows Wardens to take whatever they deem necessary towards defeating the blights. As such, the player character's life becomes bound to the *Grey Wardens* whether he or she likes it or not.

For characters that may be willing or even eager to join the wardens, there is another choice in the game, which may allude to the Refusal. After the Battle of Ostagar section of the game, at which point the character is at one of his or her lowest points, *Flemeth*, the Witch of the Wilds, saves them and provides the character with the chance and wisdom to continue on their journey.

Not only has Flemeth already provided them with an important item in the form of the *treaties*, ancient documents that bind many groups and factions towards aiding the Grey Wardens, but she also sends her own daughter *Morrigan* with the player as a companion.

Should the player not mention it first, Flemeth presents the idea of using the treaties to gather a new army to replace the one lost at Ostagar and fight the Darkspawn horde. This is the second possible instance of the Refusal of the Call, as the player character might try to leave the problem for someone else. Yet, Flemeth eventually convinces the player anyway, citing the destruction of the world should they refuse. This leads to the next stage, the Crossing of the First Threshold. As the player character, whom I will now refer to as the *Warden*, leaves Flemeth's hut in the company of *Alistair*, *Morrigan*, and possibly a mabari war hound.

Both instances of the Refusal of the Call are good examples of something called *illusion of choice*. While players may choose dialogue options that would, at least in theory, lead the story to end prematurely, in reality, the game forces them back into the path of the adventure, more often than not simply ignoring these choices or not offering them again. This is usually done in regard to the main quest of most videogames, but there are exceptions. *We Happy few* provides a possible ending on its first ever choice, which takes place minutes after the game's opening, where *Arthur Hastings* may choose to pursue the truth about his brother or take a *Joy* pill that eliminates that memory and leads to an early ending of the game. Not a "game over" screen, but an actual ending.

Games are particularly well equipped to depict the Tests, Allies, and Enemies stage, as they often have "quests" in them. Mini adventures serve to bring about the greater storyline of the work. In *Origins*, the many areas and quests relating to the allies mentioned in the treaties comprise this section. As the Warden travels throughout Ferelden, uniting these different factions, he or she faces many different adversities and must make many choices. So much so that the final army the Warden unites may have different groups in it. While the Redcliff knights are always present, the Warden

may choose to recruit either the Mages or the Templars; the Elves or the Werewolves; and the dwarves, though whether they are accompanied by stone golems or not is again dependent on player choice. This changes not only the army itself and the possible allies during the final mission of the game but also some of the characters that become the player's allies.

The turning point of the game's story is achieved after the Warden has already gathered all the possible allies for his or her army and must now shift focus towards defeating *Loghain Mac'tir* and uniting Ferelden. Thus, the Approach to the Innermost Cave is presented as the Warden and *Arl Eamon* arriving together at the capital of *Denerim* and calling for the *Landsmeet*. It is at this point that the story of the game changes from gathering active allies to drawing as much support as possible for the upcoming event. A shift from military focus towards a political one.

The Ordeal comes in this section as well and the Landsmeet itself represents it. While technically the least challenging physical confrontation of the game thus far, it stands out for being extremely different. While most of the other quests in the game revolve around combat itself, the Landsmeet is marked especially by the dialogue options chosen by the player. Depending on such and on previous choices, the Warden might convince the nobles to adopt his or her side, forcing Loghain to accept a one-on-one duel. Otherwise, Loghain attacks with all his forces. So even if this Ordeal is marked by the challenge of political manipulation, the possible duel or battle in the throne room of the capital still mark one of the hardest battles the Warden must face at that point. In one way or another, however, Loghain is defeated and the Warden receives a Reward: a united Ferelden ready to face the Darkspawn horde.

The Road Back begins soon after, as the Warden leads his newly forged alliance against the horde in the *Battle of Denerim*. The final challenge of the adventure awaits, which corresponds well to the last main quest of the game, upon which point the player can no longer return to other areas for secondary content. While there are still optional objectives and other choices to be made

during that final stretch, such as whether or not to hunt the Darkspawn generals or whether or not to comply with Morrigan's ritual, the main quest revolves around finding and killing the *Archdemon*.

At the top of *Fort Drakon*, the Warden finally battles and defeats the Archdemon, leading to the next Stage of the Resurrection. Overcoming the final challenge before ultimately achieving the Return with the Elixir. In *Dragon Age Origins*, however, this Return stage changes based on player choice. While in one way or another the character has indeed saved not only Ferelden, but also the entire world and been named *Hero of Ferelden*, the other possible rewards vary depending on whether or not Morrigan's ritual was completed. If the ritual was accepted, then the Warden may live; if not, then either the Warden or one of his companions, Alistair or Loghain, would have to sacrifice himself or herself.

This is a suitable place to note that during this entire analysis, I have ignored the expansion *Dragon Age Awakening*. I decided on doing that for two reasons. First, the expansion is, as the name implies, a different story and thus a different Journey. Second, since the Warden may die, players might be forced into creating a new protagonist to play as during Awakening, creating another problem for this Hero's Journey structure. I now quickly mention how the Stages of the Journey would be reassembled if I were to consider this secondary adventure.

Up to Tests, Allies, and Enemies nothing would change, except for the fact that the Landsmeet and the dealing with Loghain would also be included in this stage. The Approach to the Innermost Cave, however, would mark the turning point after the Landsmeet, as Ferelden is now united against the Blight. The Ordeal, marking the greatest challenge the Hero has to overcome would then translate into the final battle of the main game, which is even more fitting, as it is the hardest mission in the game. The Reward for finally overcoming it would correspond to what I

presented as the Elixir of my previous analysis: saving Ferelden, ending the Blight, and being named the Hero of Ferelden.

It is in the Road Back that the Awakening expansion finally appears, as the Warden (whether the same one from the main game or not) is on his way to *Vigil's Keep*, where he or she is tasked with rebuilding the order after the events of the main campaign. This return to the Ordinary World is almost immediately interrupted by the events of the game, marked by the Darkspawn civil war led by two entities known as the *Architect* and the *Mother*. The events of the expansion unfold and, in one way or another, the threat is dealt with, opening the way to the Return with the Elixir. Like in the previous analysis, however, such Elixir is based on player choice, as this improvement of the Ordinary World may come from saving the city of *Amaranthine*; reinforcing the Warden's new keep; and whether or not the wardens have a new ally in the form of the Architect.

For better visualization, I have decided upon providing two possible tables for how the Stages of the Journey are present in *Dragon Age Origins*. The first assumes only events from the main game itself. The second, however, takes into consideration the expansion *Dragon Age Awakening*.

### ***Stages of the Journey / Dragon Age Origins***

- 1 – The Ordinary World:** Dependent on chosen Origin (Human Noble / Circle Mage / Dalish Elf / City Elf / Noble Dwarf / Dwarf Commoner).
- 2 – The Call to Adventure:** Duncan either recruits or conscripts the player character into the *Grey Wardens*.
- 3 – Refusal of the Call:** Based on player choice (Character refuses the wardens and Duncan / Character feels defeated and hopeless after Battle of Ostagar).
- 4 – Meeting with the Mentor:** Flemeth provides treaties that will enable the building of a new army after the defeat in Ostagar.
- 5 – Crossing of the First Threshold:** Character leaves Flemeth and prepares to build an army.



- 6 – Tests, Allies, and Enemies:** Character seeks ancient allies of the wardens (Redcliff Knights / Circle Mages / Dalish Elves / Orzammar Dwarves).
- 7 – Approach to the Innermost Cave:** After recruiting the allies, the Warden goes to Denerim to deal with the Civil War.
- 8 – The Ordeal:** The Landsmeet of Ferelden (Council of Nobles).
- 9 – Reward:** Unified Ferelden to face the *Darkspawn* and the *Blight*.
- 10 – The Road Back:** The Battle of Denerim begins between our Army and the *Darkspawn* Horde.
- 11 – The Resurrection:** Character prevails against the Archdemon and may survive or not based on previous choices.
- 12 – Return with the Elixir:** Ferelden is saved / Blight is ended / Character is named the Hero of Ferelden.

### ***Stages of the Journey / Dragon Age Origins + Awakening***

- 1 – The Ordinary World:** Dependent on chosen Origin (Human Noble / Circle Mage / Dalish Elf / City Elf / Noble Dwarf / Dwarf Commoner).
- 2 – The Call to Adventure:** Duncan either recruits or conscripts the player character into the *Grey Wardens*.
- 3 – Refusal of the Call:** Based on player choice (Character refuses the wardens and Duncan / Character feels defeated and hopeless after Battle of Ostagar).
- 4 – Meeting with the Mentor:** Flemeth provides treaties that will enable the building of a new army after the defeat in Ostagar.
- 5 – Crossing of the First Threshold:** Character leaves Flemeth and prepares to build an army.
- 6 – Tests, Allies, and Enemies:** Character seeks ancient allies of the wardens (Redcliff Knights / Circle Mages / Dalish Elves / Orzammar Dwarves) + Landsmeet.
- 7 – Approach to the Innermost Cave:** Ferelden is united against the Blight.
- 8 – The Ordeal:** The Battle of Denerim and final quest of the game.
- 9 – Reward:** Ferelden is saved / Blight is ended / Character is named the Hero of Ferelden.
- 10 – The Road Back:** Beginning of *Dragon Age Awakening*. Travel to Vigil's Keep.
- 11 – The Resurrection:** Darkspawn civil war. Architect vs Mother.

**12 – Return with the Elixir:** Ferelden is truly safe. Wardens begin reconstruction of the order.

As I have just presented, the Stages of the Journey for *Dragon Age Origins* may vary greatly, within not only themselves, but also having two possible variations of the actual journey. The character archetypes will probably remain relatively within the confinements of the main game, with expansion characters appearing only here and there. As with most stories, especially videogame ones, the Hero and the Shadow are quite clear. The Warden, being the player character, is the Hero, while *Urthemiel, the Archdemon*, is the Shadow.

The Mentor is always *Flemeth*, as she provides the Warden with many different boons. From the treaties, to specific wisdom and even the help of her daughter Morrigan, *Flemeth* is perhaps the character who most helps the player on his or her journey, even if she becomes a possible enemy down the line. Unlike the Mentor, the Ally is an archetype filled by many characters. In most *Bioware* games, a team of companions, all of whom could be considered the Allies of the Hero, always accompanies the player. It is important to note that among all of *Origins*' companions, it is Alistair who best fulfills the criteria of the Ally, even though that may change based on player choice; something that I will better discuss in the Influence of Interactivity section.

While the Threshold Guardian could be considered the Ogre at the top of the Tower of Ishal, it is most fitting that this archetype be filled not by any character, but by the Battle of Ostagar itself. The event is the initial challenge. One that, while surpassed by the Hero as the player lights the signal atop the aforementioned tower, remains a defeat because of Loghain's betrayal. It is even during this battle that Duncan, who fulfills the role of the Herald, dies, leaving the characters to look out for themselves.

As always, the final two archetypes, the Trickster and the Shapeshifter are the most difficult to pinpoint. The Trickster, representing a change of perspective within the Hero, might be

considered Morrigan, as she could convince the Warden that her ritual, which would preserve the soul of the Archdemon within a baby produced by their union, is a good thing, as it will save his or her life. Depending on how the player reacts to this idea, Morrigan might also fulfill the role of the Shapeshifter, a role quite ironically fit for her. As many players consider this ritual offer a betrayal of their trust, these players might see Morrigan differently, as she shifts from ally into enemy.

Other possibilities for the Shapeshifter are *Zevran Arainai* and *Loghain Mac'tir*. Zevran, being another companion of the Warden, appears first as an enemy, an assassin hired to kill the Warden and Alistair. Still, he can be recruited and convinced to become an ally, shifting the player's perspective on his character. The same can be said of Loghain. He begins, perhaps even more than the Archdemon himself, as the main antagonist of the campaign. He betrayed his king, hired Zevran to assassinate the Warden, poisoned Arl Eamon, sold elves to slavery, and did many other evil acts, all in the name of keeping Ferelden free of their neighbor nation, Orlais. After the Landsmeet, Loghain can be recruited into the Wardens and consequently talked to, which presents the possibility for both the protagonist and players themselves to understand his reasoning. While it is difficult to agree with him on his decisions, players may still understand them and thus Loghain can become one of the Warden's allies. Given that, *Dragon Age Origins'* character archetypes are:

### ***Character Archetypes / Dragon Age Origins***

- 1 – The Hero:** Grey Warden / Player Created Character.
- 2 – The Shadow:** Archdemon Urthemiel.
- 3 – The Mentor:** Flemeth, the *Witch of the Wilds*.
- 4 – The Ally:** Alistair and other companions.
- 5 – The Threshold Guardian:** The Battle of Ostagar.
- 6 – The Herald:** Warden Commander Duncan.
- 7 – The Trickster:** Morrigan.

## 8 – The Shapeshifter: Morrigan / Loghain Mac'Tir / Zevran.

### 3.3.4.5. Dragon Age 2

Unlike its predecessor, *Dragon Age 2*'s protagonist is a far more defined character, even having a name: *Hawke*. While Hawke can be personalized in both playable class and gender, his or her origin story is always the same. As a human commoner from Ferelden, Hawke leaves the country and becomes a refugee after the blight present in the previous game. Moving to the city-state of *Kirkwall*, Hawke starts a new life there alongside his or her family.

Given this singular origin story, Hawke's journey is more centralized, such as the ones discussed in the three plotlines for *A Song of Ice and Fire*. The Ordinary World, though not shown in the actual game, is nonetheless discussed. Alongside his or her mother, *Leandra*, and two siblings, *Carver* and *Bethany*, Hawke lived in the small village of *Lothering*. There are four possibilities for the Call to Adventure in this game, most of which appear during the first section. Hawke's mother presents the first one, as she suggests they head towards *Kirkwall*, where her family used to be nobility. In this instance, the Refusal of the Call may come from either Hawke or Bethany, because of the high number of templars in that particular city.

The second instance of the Call comes in the form of *Flemeth*, who bargains with Hawke for their safety. She offers a deal: take an amulet to an elf clan near Kirkwall and they will be taken away from the *Darkspawn* horde. The Refusal, though fleeting, relates to the mistrust most of the characters feel towards Flemeth, especially after *Aveline* reveals her to be a *Witch of the Wilds*<sup>39</sup>. This refusal, of course, is merely mentioned, as the player has no option to truly deny Flemeth and find his or her own way north.

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<sup>39</sup> Old legend present in fereldan folklore.

Gamlen, Hawke's uncle, hands out the third instance of the Call to Adventure in *Dragon Age 2*. After Hawke is barred from actually entering Kirkwall due to the large number of refugees coming from the Blight, Gamlen negotiates passage for them with two possible factions: a mercenary band and a group of smugglers. As payment, Hawke and whichever sibling was not killed during the introduction of the game would need to work for these groups for an entire year. Understandably, the Refusal may come not only from Hawke and his or her sibling, but from Leandra as well.

Finally, the fourth and perhaps more fitting example appears right at the very beginning of *Act I*<sup>40</sup>, which is technically the second section of the game, after the introduction. After Hawke and his or her sibling have already paid their debts for being allowed into the city, they are trying to find work with *Bartrand Tethras*, a dwarf explorer who is organizing an expedition into the Deep Roads. After being declined, Hawke is approached by Bartrand's brother, *Varric*, who offers Hawke a proposition: invest fifty gold coins into the expedition and become a fully-fledged partner instead of a simple hireling. While Hawke is initially reluctant due to the large amount of money required in the first place, which already fulfills the Refusal of the Call, he or she eventually agrees.

Flemeth could fulfill the same archetype of the Mentor as she did in the previous game, be it through her aid in the beginning of the game or through her last words of wisdom to the protagonist. Another character could potentially fit into this archetype and could thus create different sections for the Meeting with the Mentor stage. *Anders* is a fugitive Grey Warden who provides *Hawke* with maps of the Deep Roads; maps that provide an entrance to the expedition and without which, they could then become stuck. With the necessary coin and these maps, Hawke is

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<sup>40</sup> *Dragon Age 2* is separated into three acts, each taking place years after the other. This does not relate to the usage of the word "act" in my discussion of Vogler.

able to become a partner in the expedition and head with the Tethras brothers into the Deep Roads, giving rise to the next stage of the journey.

The Crossing of the First Threshold, in the case of *Dragon Age 2*, relates to the final mission of the first act. The Deep Roads expedition is what the entirety of the first act revolves around, and it is in this quest that Hawke finds the *Red Lyrium Idol*. He or she is also betrayed by Bartrand and has to fight demons, rock wraiths, and darkspawn to escape. While the expedition would correspond to the Crossing stage in the overall journey of Hawke, were I to separate different journeys for the three acts of the game, it might even extend from the Ordeal to the Return to the Elixir sections. As I am not doing that, I will carry on to the next stage.

The Tests, Allies, and Enemies stage of the journey encompasses quests both from before and after the Deep Roads expedition. There are many examples in the game, such as meeting the other companions, such as *Fenris*, *Isabela*, and *Merril*. Completing missions such as *Blackpowder Promise*, *Enemies among Us*, *Wayward Son*, and *Shepherding Wolves* from Act 1 and *Blackpowder Courtesy*, *Night Terrors* and *Inside Job* from Act 2 also serve as additional challenges for the hero, which serve to prepare him or her for the greater ones yet to come. Especially noteworthy among them are quests from the second act that revolve around the *Qunari*, such as *Blackpowder Courtesy*, *Offered and Lost*, *Following the Qun*, and potentially *To Catch a Thief*<sup>41</sup>. All such quests provide Hawke with the opportunity to meet new characters, make new allies, fight new enemies, and overcome new challenges.

The Approach to the Innermost Cave is apparent during the *All that Remains* questline. In it, Hawke must investigate a serial killer and apprehend him, but eventually the killer kidnaps and kills *Leandra* (Hawke's mother). This marks a turning point for Hawke because at this point,

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<sup>41</sup> I say "potentially" because this quest is optional.

Leandra remains his or her only family left. While one of the twins might still be alive, Carver or Bethany, they have both joined the Grey Wardens or are at the gallows alongside the templars or mages, respectively. Leandra's death means Hawke is now truly alone. While he or she still has companions, the family with whom he escaped Ferelden at the beginning of the game is forever lost.

Next up, the Ordeal, being the most difficult challenge that the Hero has faced to that point is, once again, the final mission of an act. *Demands of the Qun* marks the end of the second act as the *Arishok*, leader of the Qunari forces stationed in Kirkwall grows tired of the corruption of the city and leads an all-out invasion. Hawke, alongside his or her companions and some new allies, must stand against the Arishok and face him eventually. While there are many different ways to resolve this conflict, from defeating the Arishok in a duel to simply delivering him *Isabela*, which is one of the player's companions, the challenge remains extremely high, leading to the Reward stage.

As a reward for saving the city from the Qunari, *Knight Commander Meredith*, the leader of the city templars, awards Hawke with his or her most known title: the *Champion of Kirkwall*. This title is how Hawke is most known around the Dragon Age community and the world of Thedas. It also affords him or her a great reward for the ordeal, being now influential enough that, even as a known mage, he or she can avoid being persecuted by the templars and remain free. This also leads onto the Road Back stage, as Hawke lives the next three years as Kirkwall's champion, while the tension between mages and templars remains ever rising.

The Resurrection, being the final challenge of the Hero, is the ultimate mission of the game. In *The Last Straw*, the conflict between mages and templars is pushed over the edge by none other than *Anders*, one of the player's companions that also served as the Mentor archetype. Anders, being fused with a spirit of Justice, cannot abide the rough treatment of mages at the hands of

templars, and thus he explodes the nearby Chantry, killing the Grand Cleric and an incredibly high number of innocent bystanders. Meredith, in response, calls for the Right of Annulment, allowing her to execute every single mage in the city's Circle of Magi. While Hawke may take the side of either group, he or she ends up fighting the leaders of both sides.

The Return with the Elixir is perhaps the most complex stage to be discussed concerning *Dragon Age 2*. As I have mentioned back in the Themes section, *Dragon Age 2* was supposed to have an expansion similar in scope to *Dragon Age Awakening: The Exalted March*, as it was called, would continue Hawke's story concerning both the mage templar conflict and the events of the *Legacy* DLC. Instead, the story was cut and repurposed for the third game, *Dragon Age Inquisition*.

As the return with the Elixir marks the Hero's return to the ordinary world with something that will improve it, *Dragon Age 2*'s ending lacks something to be properly introduced in this bracket. Still, something could be appropriately mentioned in this section. During the first act of the game, Flemeth imparts Hawke with some words of wisdom. Flemeth states, "We stand upon the precipice of change. The world fears the inevitable plummet into the abyss. Watch for that moment... And when it comes, do not hesitate to leap. It is only when we fall that we learn whether we can fly." (*Long Way Home* quest). Flemeth's words seem to indicate that Hawke's destiny is to be some sort of herald of change. The elixir that would improve the world, while not being directly the change caused by Hawke's actions, is dependent directly on him, and so this *change* can be considered for the return with the Elixir stage. Thus, the stages of the journey are presented as:

### ***Stages of the Journey / Dragon Age 2***

- 1 – The Ordinary World:** Living in Lothering.
- 2 – The Call to Adventure:** Fleeing the Darkspawn into Kirkwall / Flemeth's bargain / Gamlen's plans.
- 3 – Refusal of the Call:** Kirkwall has many templars / Team does not trust Flemeth / Reluctant to go into servitude.



- 4 – Meeting with the Mentor:** Flemeth’s prophecy / Getting the maps with Anders.
- 5 – Crossing of the First Threshold:** Deep Roads Expedition.
- 6 – Tests, Allies, and Enemies:** Quests from acts 1 and 2.
- 7 – Approach to the Innermost Cave:** All that Remains questline.
- 8 – The Ordeal:** The Qunari Invasion.
- 9 – Reward:** Being named the Champion of Kirkwall.
- 10 – The Road Back:** Living in Kirkwall and dealing with the tension between mages and templars.
- 11 – The Resurrection:** The right of annulment battle. Orsino and Meredith.
- 12 – Return with the Elixir:** Hawke’s actions lead to the mage-templar war, which eventually brings great change to the world.

Looking into the character archetypes for *Dragon Age 2*, the Hero is, as with most other videogames, the protagonist. In this case, the Hero is *Hawke*. Meanwhile, the Shadow would relate to *Meredith*, as she is both the final villain of the game, whether the player has sided with the mages or templars, and she is the cause of most of the conflicts, especially during the third act. Depending on the player’s choices, Meredith might also fulfill the archetype of the Shapeshifter. If the player has agreed with her and worked for her during the third act of the game, her eventual betrayal could transform her from an ally into an enemy.

The mentor, as I have already discussed, could relate to either *Anders* or *Flemeth*. Since both in some way or another provide Hawke with some kind of help, be it the Deep Roads map or the prophecy about the abyss, both characters serve as Mentors to the protagonist, even if Anders’ influence in this role is limited to an item relevant only to the first act. As Anders also fulfills the role of the Shapeshifter in his late game actions, his role as Mentor is somewhat diminished. I should also note that while Anders is a perfect fit for the Shapeshifter, it is only so if the player and therefore Hawke consider his actions a betrayal. As the option to approve of his actions is present in the game, should that choice be made, there would be no change in his

character from the perspective of the Hero. Thus, he would no longer fit into the Shapeshifter archetype, leading to another example of interactivity influencing the Hero's Journey.

As with *Dragon Age Origins*, there are many characters to fulfill the Ally archetype in the game, most of them being Hawke's companions. One character that is often considered Hawke's greatest ally in both this game and the next is *Varric Tethras*, the dwarven storyteller. He is the one who helps Hawke find his or her way out of poverty, always stays by Hawke's side, and during the ending of the game, lies to *Cassandra Pentaghast* about Hawke's whereabouts in order to protect him or her. As with many aspects of an interactive story, this is prone to change based on player's choices and opinions of Varric, but the aforementioned events and actions happen in spite of such interactivity, thus leading Varric to the archetype of the Ally.

There are many different characters and even events that could be considered for the Threshold Guardian, which represents an initial challenge to the Hero. The Deep Roads expedition as a whole could fulfill this archetype, but one character that truly deepened that challenge was *Bartrand*. By betraying both Hawke and Varric and leaving them for dead in the Deep Roads, Bartrand forces the player to journey through most of the toughest challenges in that section, including a hunger demon and the Ancient Rock Wraith.

As for the Herald archetype, three possibilities are present in the game. The first one, which appears almost immediately, is Leandra, who suggests the journey to Kirkwall. The second, who also appears in the first section of the game, is Flemeth, as she bargains with Hawke for her aid in escaping the Blight. The final possibility for the Herald archetype is, once again, Varric, as he is the one to present the idea of Hawke investing in the Deep Roads expedition and becoming a partner. While these Heralds all provide very specific Calls to Adventure, Leandra provides the most comprehensive one. Going to Kirkwall is the catalyst to everything else in the game's story,

from Flemeth's deal to Varric's proposition and even to the events of the second and third act. Thus, the most fitting character for the Herald archetype is Hawke's own mother, Leandra.

Finally, the Trickster archetype once again presents a problem. Defining a character that represents a change in perspective within the Hero figure can be difficult in a game, where such decisions of personality are left for players to explore. A few possibilities for this archetype are present in *Tallis* and *Quentin*. The first is an elven agent of the Qunari present in the *Mark of the Assassin* DLC. Depending on the player's views on the Qunari, especially if the player has already completed the second act and dealt with the Arishok's invasion, Tallis might be able to change Hawke's mind on the *Qun*. Of course, that change is dependent on the player, as Hawke has the choice of either staying and helping Tallis complete her mission or leaving her to her fate.

Quentin, on the other hand, provides a possible change of perspective on the second great dilemma of *Dragon Age 2*. During the whole game and especially during the third act, the game presents different situations where mages and templars are pitted against each other. While the game (and sometimes the whole series) seems to lean more heavily on the mage side, *Dragon Age 2* still provides examples of why mages are considered dangerous in that world. *Orsino*, *Danarius*, *Gascard Dupuis*, *Hadriana*, *Grace*, *Tarohne*, and *Huon* are all examples of mages that make use of blood magic not because of their fights for freedom or some noble purpose but for personal gain or revenge. Another character that affects Hawke more deeply is Quentin, who uses blood magic to create a Frankenstein-monster type of figure, which is supposed to resemble his dead wife. During both the first and second acts of the game, Hawke investigates the disappearance of many women, only to have the same happen to his or her own mother. Arriving too late, Hawke is unable to save her from Quentin, who decapitates Leandra and uses her head as the final piece of his creation.

This act, which affects Hawke directly, can be the catalyst to a change of perspective in a Hawke who, to that point, supported mage freedom. The horrific murder of his or her own mother may take Hawke to accept the idea of the Circle of Magi, especially if Bethany has become one of its residents. As Bethany becomes happier in the Circle, both events combined (or even on their own, given player choice) may trigger off this change of perspective. Thus, Quentin fulfills the trickster archetype in *Dragon Age 2*. In *Dragon Age 2*, the characters that fulfill each of the eight character archetypes of the Hero's Journey are:

### ***Character Archetypes / Dragon Age 2***

- 1 – The Hero:** Hawke
- 2 – The Shadow:** Meredith
- 3 – The Mentor:** Anders/Flemeth
- 4 – The Ally:** Varric/companions
- 5 – The Threshold Guardian:** Bartrand Tethras
- 6 – The Herald:** Leandra
- 7 – The Trickster:** Tallis / Quentin
- 8 – The Shapeshifter:** Anders / Meredith

#### **3.3.4.6. Dragon Age Inquisition**

Returning to the roots of the series, *Dragon Age Inquisition* once more offers players the chance to customize fully its protagonist through the selection of aspects like race, gender, class, appearance, and even voice. Unlike *Dragon Age Origins*, however, *Inquisition* does not offer different playable origin stories that serve as the first section of the game. That means that there is no visual and direct correspondence to the Ordinary World stage of these characters' journey. While such stories and backgrounds are still mentioned during the length of the campaign, they amount to no more than a few dialogue changes here and there. There is no unique storyline,

NPCs<sup>42</sup> or quests related to these backgrounds. While the game skips over them, they still relate to the Ordinary World of the protagonist. Human characters, whether mages or not, are from the *Trevelyan* noble family; elves are part of the *Lavellan* dalish clan; dwarves are smugglers; and Qunari are mercenaries. In spite of which origin is selected, the beginning of the game follows the aspects left open by *Dragon Age 2*, as *Divine Justinia V* calls for a peace conclave between the mages and the templars.

The Call to Adventure appears twice during the first section of the game, both times being presented by the same character. The first time, *Cassandra Pentaghast* presents the player with information about the *Breach*, the giant hole in the sky that serves as a portal to the *Fade*<sup>43</sup> and its connection to a magical mark in the player's hand. According to her, that mark, known as the *anchor*, could be the key to closing the Breach and so they must work together to that end. The second instance of the Call to Adventure comes later, after the Breach has already been stabilized, as Cassandra, alongside *Leliana*, recreates the *Inquisition*, an old religious organization of this world, and invites the player character to join.

The unique aspect of *Inquisition*'s journey revolves around the Refusal of the Call stage. While the other games offer the player the possibility of refusing to accept the Call to Adventure, *Dragon Age Inquisition* provides no such opportunity, as there is simply no dialogue option for that. Even if in the other games the protagonist is either eventually convinced or maybe forced into the adventure, *Inquisition*'s lack of such choice is one of the many examples in which the player is more limited in his or her interactivity than the previous entries. The closest choice the player might make that relates to the Refusal of the Call would be to refuse the title of *Herald of Andraste*, while still working with the Inquisition.

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<sup>42</sup> Non-playable characters

<sup>43</sup> Realm of Dreams and Spirits.

The next stage, the Meeting with the Mentor, appears in the first of *Inquisition's* many open-world maps. In the *Hinterlands*, the protagonist, to whom I will now refer as the *Inquisitor*, meets with *Mother Giselle*, a priest in the andrastian chantry. As the mentor archetype, Giselle offers the Inquisitor advice on how to proceed, suggesting that the Inquisition should go to the capital of *Orlais* and talk with the Chantry, seeking to separate their unified voice against the player's organization. That advice is what eventually leads to the next stage of the game, as the Inquisitor must decide whether to seek the help of the mages or the templars in the matter of closing the breach. While Giselle offers more advice regarding the future, more wisdom about the Chantry, and more faith in general (an important theme of *Inquisition's* story), her initial suggestion falls best under the supernatural help offered by the mentor, even if it is not supernatural. While there are other characters that could fit the Mentor archetype, the actual Meeting with the Mentor is best represented by Giselle's suggestion.

In *Dragon Age Inquisition*, no event better represents the Crossing of the First Threshold than the quest *In Your Heart Shall Burn*. Marking the end of the first act of the game, this main quest presents a shift in the Inquisitor's commitment to the adventure. While the focus of the game was previously on gathering allies and closing the Breach, this quest reveals the identity and plan of the Elder One, an ancient darkspawn mage named *Corypheus*, who was the one responsible for the Breach in the first place. After Corypheus destroys the village of Haven and crushes the Inquisition's forces, the main goal of the game becomes disrupting his plans before finally defeating him. During this quest, Solas guides the player towards *Skyhold*, an old fortress where the Inquisition can rebuild itself. This is noteworthy, because, as discovered in the *Trespasser* DLC, Skyhold used to belong to Solas, which could make him another possibility for the Mentor archetype, even if he is better suited for another position, which I will discuss shortly.

Added to each other, these aspects of *In Your Heart Shall Burn* encompass elements of not only the Crossing of the First Threshold but also of the Approach to the Innermost Cave. As the protagonist is finally awarded the title of Inquisitor, he or she fully commits to the organization and its goals while the event itself also marks a turning point in the game, symbolized by the change of the player's headquarters and status within the Inquisition.

Like its predecessors, *Inquisition's* Tests, Allies, and Enemies stage of the adventure is full of events. Due to the very nature of games, many quests, both central to the story as well as side content, could fit well within this stage. *In Hushed Whispers*, *Champions of the Just*, *Here lies the Abyss*, *Wicked Eyes and Wicked Hearts*, and *What Pride had Wrought* are all examples of main quests that could be considered to be part of this stage, as well as all companion quests and the many side quests present in this game.

I should note here that while in my *Dragon Age Origins* and *Dragon Age 2* analysis I purposely avoided using DLCs and expansions as much as possible, the same could not be done for *Inquisition*. Or, at the very least, it should not be done. While Corypheus is technically the main villain of the game, the final confrontation with the accursed magister is not truly the end of the story or even the greatest challenge in the whole game. In fact, in this analysis, I am placing the final fight against Corypheus as the Ordeal stage, representing the greatest challenge the Hero has faced to that point. I have decided upon doing so because *Inquisition's* story serves both as a separate storyline and as an introduction to the next game's plots and villain. It also involves many of the points Vogler discusses when determining what comprises the Ordeal, like the difference between the Ordeal and the climax; the witness to sacrifice (156); and the taste of death.

Before explaining this decision, I must note the next two Stages of the Journey, the Reward and the Road Back, both of which are still present in *Inquisition's* main campaign. The Reward appears not in some physical form but as the saving of the world of Thedas from Corypheus' plans.

As for the Road Back, *Inquisition* allows the player to continue playing the game and exploring the world even after its final quest, something new in the franchise. While the player is able to continue exploring side content, this stage does not represent a return to the ordinary world, since that stage is only mentioned throughout the game, but never shown. Instead, the Inquisitor's life as the leader of the Inquisition and his or her efforts to improve the setting of Thedas can symbolize this return to regular day-to-day life of the character. Now, I will return to *Inquisition*'s role as an introduction to the next villain of the series.

Solas, the elven specialist on the fade who serves as one of the player's companions during the game's campaign is revealed at the end to be *Fen'Harel*, an ancient elven god of trickery and rebellion. He is the one who gave Corypheus a magical orb, allowing the magister to set his own plans into motion and thus causing all the challenges of the game's plot and the Inquisitor's adventure itself. He is also the focus point of *Dragon Age Inquisition*'s final DLC, named *Trespasser*.

*Trespasser*, however, is different from other DLCs in the series or even the first game's expansion. Unlike these, *Trespasser* is not simply an additional or separate adventure but the natural continuation of *Dragon Age Inquisition* and its storyline. To that point, *Trespasser*, unlike *Jaws of Hakkon* and *The Descent*<sup>44</sup>, can only be played after the player completes the main story. Taking place two years after the events of the main campaign, *Trespasser* explores the consequences of the Inquisitor's actions during the game and provides the player with more opportunities to influence the setting of the series, such as deciding upon the fate of the Inquisition and whether the remaining forces should focus on stopping Solas at any cost or trying to redeem him.

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<sup>44</sup> *Jaws of Hakkon* and *The Descent* are DLCs that might be played before or after the main campaign of *Inquisition*.



In one way or another, *Trespasser* accounts for the Resurrection stage; the final challenge the Hero faces in the adventure. Deciding the fate of the Inquisition during the Exalted Council, dealing with a Qunari assassination plot, and finding Solas are all aspects that could be considered challenges in and of themselves, but the DLC as a whole is a far more suitable placement. Finally, the Return with the Elixir stage differs from the norm in that the Hero is not technically returning with something that will improve the Ordinary World, but with information that could help save it. In the final stretch of the DLC, Solas reveals his plans and reasonings to the Inquisitor, who is now committing to yet another adventure, that of *Dragon Age 4*.

### ***Stages of the Journey / Dragon Age Inquisition***

- 1 – The Ordinary World:** Before the Conclave.
- 2 – The Call to Adventure:** Closing the Breach / Forming the Inquisition.
- 3 – Refusal of the Call:** Refusing title of Herald of Andraste.
- 4 – Meeting with the Mentor:** Meeting with Mother Giselle.
- 5 – Crossing of the First Threshold:** In your Heart shall Burn quest.
- 6 – Tests, Allies, and Enemies:** Many quests.
- 7 – Approach to the Innermost Cave:** Becoming the Inquisitor.
- 8 – The Ordeal:** Final fight with Corypheus.
- 9 – Reward:** World is saved, restoring order.
- 10 – The Road Back:** Continuing to play after the end of the game. Secondary content and DLCs.
- 11 – The Resurrection:** Trespasser DLC. Exalted council, Qunari plot, finding Solas.
- 12 – Return with the Elixir:** Knowledge of Solas' plans, deciding fate of Inquisition.

Shifting attention now to the character archetypes of *Dragon Age Inquisition*, many of the possible brackets can be fulfilled by more than one character. Only three are set in stone, beginning with the more obvious one: the Hero. As per usual when analyzing a game, it is extremely rare to find a story where the protagonist is not fitting for the Hero archetype, and thus the Inquisitor is the obvious choice in this one.

While I have argued that Corypheus is not the final challenge or adversary of *Inquisition's* overarching storyline, he still fulfills the role of the Shadow. Being the primary antagonist of the main campaign of the game, Corypheus remains the most adequate character to fulfill this archetype. Solas, on the other hand, appears as a possible representative of not one but three other archetypes, which I will discuss soon.

The third and final archetype that is fulfilled by one character is the Herald. Being the one responsible for all instances of the Call to Adventure, Cassandra Pentaghast fulfills all the requirements for it. While she could also be considered an Ally, her major role in the story is as the founder of the Inquisition and thus the Herald.

The first archetype to have more than one possible exemplar in the game is the Mentor. As mentioned before, Mother Giselle is one such possibility, as her advice to the Inquisitor is what sets in motion many of the game's plotlines. Solas is another possible candidate to the Mentor, as he is the one to reveal the Anchor's power to seal rifts and the Breach itself and is the character who leads the Inquisition towards Skyhold, providing a place to rebuild the institution after their defeat in *Haven*.

As for the Ally, all of *Inquisition's* companions and even advisors are possible exemplars of this archetype. Cassandra, Solas, Varric, Dorian, Vivienne, and all the others help the Inquisitor in one way or another, while still possibly fulfilling other archetypes. *Blackwall*, *Solas*, and *The Iron Bull* are all examples of possible Shapeshifters, as the Inquisitor's perception of them may change based on player choice. If the player sees Solas as a traitor, then it is highly likely that the Inquisitor will too, thus leading to the remaining forces of the Inquisition to swear to stopping Solas at any cost. Likewise, should the player decide upon siding with the Qunari instead of saving the Bull's Chargers during The Iron Bull's personal questline, Bull will continue following the Qun and will eventually betray the Inquisitor during *Trespasser's* events, leading to his death at the

hands of the player. Another archetype possibly fulfilled by companions is the Trickster, as *Dorian*, *Bull*, and *Solas* are all able to represent a change of perspective within the Hero. Be it about the Tevinter Imperium and its practices, the Qun and its beliefs, or even the representation of spirits as individuals; these characters can change the mind of the Inquisitor. Once again, however, it all depends on player choice. It is possible that, should the player decide, this archetype will simply remain empty during the whole campaign.

Finally, the last archetype to be discussed about *Dragon Age Inquisition* and its storyline is the Threshold Guardian. While this archetype is always fulfilled, even if it is affected by player choice, it is one represented by only one of two characters depending on the campaign. If the player decides upon seeking the help of the mages for closing the breach, the Threshold Guardian is a Tevinter magister named *Gereon Alexius*, while if the player seeks the templars, it is an *Envy Demon*. As the decision to pursue one quest eliminates the other from the game, neither of these characters can ever represent this archetype during the same playthrough. Only in subsequent ones can the player differentiate the world in such a way.

### ***Character Archetypes / Dragon Age Inquisition***

- 1 – The Hero:** Inquisitor
- 2 – The Shadow:** Corypheus.
- 3 – The Mentor:** Solas / Giselle.
- 4 – The Ally:** Cassandra, companions, advisors, Morrigan.
- 5 – The Threshold Guardian:** Gereon Alexius / Envy Demon.
- 6 – The Herald:** Cassandra.
- 7 – The Trickster:** Dorian, Bull, Solas.
- 8 – The Shapeshifter:** Blackwall, Bull, Solas.

### **3.4. The Influence of Interactivity**

Now, I explain and exemplify how the aspect of interactivity affects the construction of a game's plot, narrative, and the Hero's Journey as presented in the previous section. Though I will lean more heavily on the videogame aspect of storytelling here, I will still present possibilities for how the written story of *A Song of Ice and Fire* could have differed had it been told through the medium of videogames. I cite examples of how the player can, through his or her choices, affect both character arcs and the very world of *Dragon Age*.

Throughout my thesis, I have made several mentions to points and examples that I would cite in this section. The future of the Andrastian Chantry; the characters of *Alistair* and *Loghain*; and the final fights of the games are all examples of aforementioned elements I will now discuss. These are but a few in a series where decision-making and role-playing are some of the most important aspects. It is noteworthy, however, that *Dragon Age* is particularly famous (or infamous) for relying heavily on the concept of "illusion of choice". While I advise to keep that in mind during the reading of these next pages, I will return to this aspect in the next section, called Two Media, where I will conclude my analysis and examine the greatest problem that I believe videogames must yet face as a storytelling device.

For now, I will start by deliberating about the influence of interactivity over the characters of the *Dragon Age* series. To start, I will analyze perhaps the greatest example yet. One that involves not one, but two (and perhaps even three) warriors.

#### **3.4.1. Characters**

##### **3.4.1.1. Alistair Theirin and Loghain Mac'Tir**

*Alistair Theirin* is one of the player's companions during the first game of the series, *Dragon Age Origins*. Alistair is the first official companion to take place at the player's side in the entire series, which creates a bigger sense of fellowship between him and the player. Given the fact that he is also the only one of all the main game's companions to be also a Grey Warden, players easily see him as the most trusted ally. Knowing that the player and he are the last wardens left in Ferelden creates a bond both of duty and of vengeance against the person who caused the death of all the other members of the order: General Loghain Mac'Tir.

As the game progresses, Alistair feels more and more comfortable allowing the player to take the reins of the situation. Being a royal bastard, Alistair grew knowing he would never and should never try to take the throne. Even more, Alistair never wanted it. He is far more secure as a follower – first of Duncan, then of the Warden. I mention all this because understanding how Alistair is first presented on the game is key in realizing the potential outcomes of his character depending on choices made by the player.

Throughout the game, there are many opportunities to either gain or lose approval with Alistair. In *Dragon Age Origins*, approval is a resource that measures a companion's predisposition towards the Warden based on his or her choices so far. Acting in a way seen as positive by that character or choosing dialogue options that reflect that character's values can gain approval points, while the contrary loses them. While the game itself provides ways to trivialize this system, in the form of "gifts" that the Warden can give to his or her companions,



Figure 25 - Alistair Theirin

the system is one of the most defining features of *Dragon Age* games and it heavily influences potential outcomes for all characters. With Alistair, however, the greatest and most affecting choices happen in spite of high or low approval.

In *Dragon Age Origins* alone, Alistair has five possible endings based completely on player choice. He can be crowned the new king of Ferelden; he can relinquish the crown and stay as a Grey Warden; he can be banished by *Anora Mac'Tir*, who then becomes queen in his stead; he can be executed on Anora's orders; or he can die at the final battle against the Archdemon, sacrificing himself to end the Blight and save the world. These endings are dependent on two major events that happen during the course of the game.

The first is something often referred to as a “companion quest” in Bioware games. Alistair's companion quest involves finding his long-lost sister and taking him to meet her. While at first Alistair expects something of a warm reunion, it soon becomes clear that *Goldanna* blames him for the hard times she has been through and the death of their mother. While a lord raised Alistair in a castle, Goldanna had to work hard as an orphan and an elf in a human-dominated society. In this quest, the player may comfort Alistair after the confrontation, allowing him to stay in his most passive state of mind, or to mature him, telling him to be more assertive of himself and thus “hardening”<sup>45</sup> him.

The second event appears during the quest *The Landsmeet*, in which the Warden, alongside *Arl Eamon*, have gathered the nobles of Ferelden to try to depose Loghain and unite Ferelden against the Blight. After dealing with Loghain, it is here that the player decides who will rule Ferelden next: Alistair or Anora. Said choice is dependent on previous ones, such as the

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<sup>45</sup> Term used by *Dragon Age* players to refer to Alistair's more assertive nature should that choice be made.

aforementioned one regarding Goldanna. It is also here that Alistair's fate becomes intrinsically intertwined with that of another character: the betrayer Loghain Mac'Tir.

Should the Warden choose to carry forward Loghain's execution, Alistair remains with the player and follows his decision on whether or not he himself should take the crown. However, should the Warden decide upon sparing Loghain and upon subjecting him to the warden's Joining ritual, Alistair would demand the player to do otherwise. In this case, if Alistair has been hardened, he will demand that he be given the crown with the full intent of using its power to hunt and kill Loghain. If he remains his more passive initial self, however, Anora becomes queen and either banishes or executes him.



*Figure 26 - Loghain Mac'Tir.*

Should Loghain be conscripted in such a way, he becomes a grey warden and takes the place of Alistair amongst the Warden's companions. He becomes a follower, which gives the player the chance to interact with him and learn of his past and motivations. Only one of the two may

continue as party members. For Alistair to stay, Loghain must die, and for Loghain to become a companion, Alistair must leave, whether to become king, to be exiled or to be executed.

Their fate also affects the third game of the series, *Dragon Age Inquisition*. During the quest *Here Lies the Abyss*, the protagonist of that game, the Inquisitor, follows Hawke (who returns as an NPC) to a cave where they are supposed to meet a grey warden contact. The identity of this contact depends on the player's choices back in the first game. Should Alistair remain a grey warden, he is this contact. Meanwhile, if Loghain has been recruited, he is the one who appears in Crestwood. It is also worth noting that, should neither of these two be available as grey wardens (Alistair is king and Loghain is executed) a third option becomes available in the form of *Stroud*, a grey warden introduced during *Dragon Age 2*.

While Alistair's, Loghain's, and Stroud's dialogue lines and overall purpose in the story do not greatly deviate from one another, their presence alters not only the state of that particular playthrough but also the perception other characters have of them and even of their character arcs. At the end of that particular mission, the player may even choose to sacrifice one of these characters, leaving them behind to escape the Fade. Should they survive, however, these characters may reappear in *Dragon Age 4*, though that is not yet confirmed.

#### **3.4.1.2. Morrigan and Motherhood**

Another character from *Dragon Age Origins* whose overall character arc is heavily affected by the player and his or her choices is that of *Morrigan*. Daughter of *Flemeth*, Morrigan is a Witch of the Wilds who was raised from a very early age to be mistrustful of others and to value power and survival above all else. At one point in the game, Morrigan even states that anyone's greatest and foremost goal should always be to survive. She is against helping those in need and values acts of force and personal gain above all else.



Her character arc is one that encompasses not only the first game, but also the third, *Dragon Age Inquisition*. In order to examine her character and her changes throughout the series, I must look towards both games at the same time. The greatest aspect that can change Morrigan's personality is first present in *Origins*, though its repercussions are better perceived during the third game.

At the final quest of *Dragon Age Origins*, the Warden discovers that in order to kill the Archdemon permanently he or she must sacrifice his or her life, since only a Grey Warden may truly destroy an Archdemon's soul. Morrigan, however, provides an alternative. She reveals that Flemeth originally sent her with the Warden with the sole purpose of offering this alternative, which is commonly referred to in the Dragon Age community as the *dark ritual*. Such ritual involves the conception of a child the night before the final battle, providing the Archdemon soul an escape into its essence while no grey warden is required to be sacrificed. Even if the Warden is



Figure 27 - Morrigan.

female, Morrigan asks for help convincing the warden companion, which at this point might be either Alistair or Loghain. The player may choose to accept Morrigan's proposal or not.

Should the dark ritual be performed, Morrigan conceives a child, who, at least in the beginning, means little more to her than a means to an end. One of the largest aspects of her character involves the idea of the preservation of magic. In a world where magic is the source of many moral dilemmas regarding its safety and proper management, Morrigan advocates for the preservation of all practices, as she believes that "mankind blunders through the world, crushing what it does not understand; elves, dragons, magic... the list is endless. We must stem the tide, or be left with nothing more than the mundane" (*Inquisition*, What Pride Had Wrought). The child is thus another tool of preservation and a means to purify the Old God soul of the Darkspawn's corruption, thus keeping it safe from destruction. That is, at least, the beginning of Morrigan's relationship to her child.

In *Dragon Age Inquisition*, Morrigan's character development has two possible outcomes: one involving a world state where the dark ritual was not performed and thus, she does not have a son; and one where the dark ritual was completed, leading to the appearance of *Kieran*, Morrigan's son. Whereas Kieran may or may not have the soul of the Old God Urthemiel in him, this is not the center of this particular question, but his very existence is.



Should Morrigan remain by herself, her personality *Figure 28 - Kieran, son of Morrigan.*

remains relatively the same. While she has matured into a more serious, less direct personality, her focus on survival and on the preservation of magic remains her utmost concerns. If Kieran exists,

however, such aspects, while still present in her character, give way to a newer, more important goal, which is to raise and protect Kieran.

The quest *The Final Piece* revolves around Morrigan and, possibly, Kieran. In it, Morrigan's mother, Flemeth, appears and reveals herself to be imbued with the soul of an ancient elven goddess. If Kieran is not present in that specific world state or if he does not have the Old God soul inside him, the quest revolves around this particular revelation. If, in turn, he exists and has the soul of Urthemiel, the quest revolves around the family dynamics of these three characters. Flemeth, who was the one responsible for teaching Morrigan the dark ritual, seeks to obtain the Old God Soul inside Kieran. As Morrigan has long believed Flemeth wished to possess her, she also believes Flemeth is attempting something similar with her son. It is in that moment that her character development is most on display. Morrigan, who once valued survival and power above all else, is now willing to sacrifice her own life to save her son. She offers herself to Flemeth in exchange for letting Kieran go, and that offer alone shows how the player's choices back in *Dragon Age Origins* affect her character.

It should also be noted that, while Morrigan's willingness to sacrifice herself for Kieran is the greatest example of the new direction her character might take if she becomes a mother; it is not the only one. Morrigan's own upbringing was troubled and difficult. Raised to fear and shun society as a whole, Morrigan's childhood was filled with nothing but animals, forests, her mother's abuses, and the occasional murder of templars. As such, Morrigan, while determined not to reproduce the cycle of abuse she herself suffered, still harbors many insecurities about her own capabilities as a mother. In *Inquisition*, she states to the Inquisitor that "If I do anything well by Kieran, it will be to inflict as little damage as possible" (*Inquisition*) and to her own mother that "I am many things, but I will not be the mother you were to me!" (*Inquisition*, *The Final Piece*). Unlike her own upbringing, Morrigan refuses to raise Kieran far away from society, teaching him

about the world in ways she was never taught. Her character growth is thus dependent on player choice, something not possible in other media.

### 3.4.1.3. The Hawke Twins

In *Dragon Age 2*, one of the first instances of choice and consequence present in the game is the product of the player's choice of playable class. At the very beginning of the game, Hawke is fleeing the Blight from the first game with his or her family, which include his or her mother Leandra and the twins *Carver*, who is a warrior, and *Bethany*, who is a mage.

The player's choice of playable class affects which of these two characters survive past the introductory section. If the player has chosen to make Hawke either a warrior or a rogue, Carver dies while Bethany remains alive. On the other hand, if Hawke is made to be a mage, Bethany dies and Carver survives.

Each sibling's relationship to Hawke is quite different from each other. Carver, who only survives if Hawke is a mage, is resentful of his older sibling and family in general. Being the only non-magical child of the family, Carver was often left to his own resources while his father focused on training both Hawke and Bethany, since their magic required special attention. In addition, Carver was never able to work towards something, since he was always expected to call as little attention to himself as possible, again, due to his siblings' magical abilities and the danger posed by the templars. All of this has resulted in Carver resenting Hawke not only for the past but also for the constant praise of Hawke's abilities and overarching fame. Carver wishes to find his place and purpose in the world, yet such things are denied him for the benefit of others.

Bethany, on the other hand, is, at least in the beginning of the game, far more agreeable than Carver is. While Carver resents his mage siblings for the sacrifices he is forced to make, Bethany is thankful to Hawke (who is not a mage in this world state) for these exact same reasons.

In fact, as Bethany is the only mage in the family at that specific world state, she is often distressed about her family needing to make these sacrifices. She feels as though her family needs to worry constantly about her and sometimes wishes she had been born “normal”.

In matters of plot, these characters fill the exact same purpose. They serve as quest givers to a certain mission in the first act and then on the *Deep Roads Expedition*, the final questline of the first act. Hawke’s playable class is the first of the player’s choices that affects the twins but not the last. At the end of the first act, Hawke must decide whether to take his or her sibling along with him. Carver, wishing to prove himself, wants to go, while



Figure 29 - Carver Hawke.

Bethany is content leaving that decision to Hawke.

If Carver is left behind, he becomes even more exasperated, feeling that Hawke is denying him the chance of achieving anything at all. In response to this, once Hawke returns, the player finds out that Carver has joined the templars in an attempt to find his place. Given the high tensions between mages and templars, this creates additional conflict between Carver and Hawke. This choice also leads Carver down a path of cynicism and even greater resentment. While he has made his decisions, the state of Kirkwall’s templars are extremely problematic, with constant abuse of mages and other similar problems.

If Carver is taken to the expedition, however, there exist two possible outcomes. Carver may die, having been infected with the darkspawn corruption or, if Anders is present, he may join the Grey Wardens to save himself. Once again, this choice is put in the hands of the player.

If Carver joins the Grey Wardens, his character grows in quite a distinctive way from the previous incarnation. In the Grey Wardens, Carver finds his place and purpose, far away from the large shadow cast by his older sibling. In the rare instances where the player sees Carver returning as a Grey Warden, such as in the *Demands of the Qun* quest, the final mission of the game or even the DLCs *Legacy* and *Mark of the Assassin*, Carver seems more relaxed and easy-going, feeling fulfilled by his new life.

Bethany follows almost a contrary path in relation to her twin. Like him, Bethany can die in the Deep Roads or be taken into the Grey Wardens. Alternatively, if she is left behind, she is found by the city's templars and forcefully taken into the Circle of Magi. While Carver's more positive path seems to lay with the Grey Wardens, Bethany is the opposite. If she joins the wardens, she develops melancholy tendencies at the harsh realities of her new life. The constant



Figure 30 - Bethany Hawke.

fighting, travelling, and having nightmares coupled with the prospect of an early death<sup>46</sup> have made her gloomy and depressive, as she blames Hawke for making that decision in the first place. During the *Legacy* DLC, Bethany refers to her life as a warden with the following words: "I am dead. It's just... taking its time" (*Dragon Age 2, Legacy*). As a counterpart to that, if she is taken to the Circle of Magi, Bethany becomes happier and more fulfilled, as neither she nor her family need make any more sacrifices to hide her and her magic. She starts teaching apprentices and assures Hawke that she is happy there. Hawke's relationship to his or her sibling is thus dependent not simply on one

<sup>46</sup> Grey Wardens usually only live around thirty years after completing the Joining ritual.

choice but on several choices, adding a number of possible world states just with regard to this one variable.

#### 3.4.1.4. Merrill and her Mirror

Another example displaying the influence of the player in the character arcs of the *Dragon Age* series appears through the character of *Merrill*. Introduced during the *Long Way Home* quest of the second game, Merrill aids Hawke in fulfilling his or her bargain to Flemeth, before leaving her dalish clan behind to move into Kirkwall. During the quest, Hawke discovers that the elves of her clan distrust and resent Merrill, considering that she is abandoning them. As Merrill is the First<sup>47</sup> of her clan, they feel like it should be her duty to stay and eventually lead them. Even her mentor, *Keeper Marethari*, also offers her a chance to stay, but Merrill refuses. At this point, Hawke is unaware of the reason for this departure and continues in the dark until the second act of the game.



Figure 31 - Merrill.

Merrill left her clan because they did not condone her research into ancient elven artifacts. Specifically, they believed Merrill was being irresponsible as she was trying to restore an Eluvian<sup>48</sup>, which they believe is cursed. Merrill, on the other hand, believes the mirror may contain secrets to the history of her people, and that restoring it may help elves at their current struggles. As she and her mentor disagreed on the nature of the Eluvian, Merrill decided to continue her efforts alone.

<sup>47</sup> Second in command and the Keeper's magical apprentice.

<sup>48</sup> Ancient elven mirror.

During the quest *Mirror Image*, Merrill reveals all of this to Hawke, asks for assistance in returning to her clan, and demands the use of a certain magical tool. While Marethari is reluctant to provide it, she eventually gives Hawke this tool. At this point, Hawke must decide if he or she should give Merrill what she wants or not, believing that her intentions, while pure, may have led her to a dark path. This is the main choice that will lead to Hawke and Merrill's relationship into either a path of friendship or rivalry, though it is not the final one.

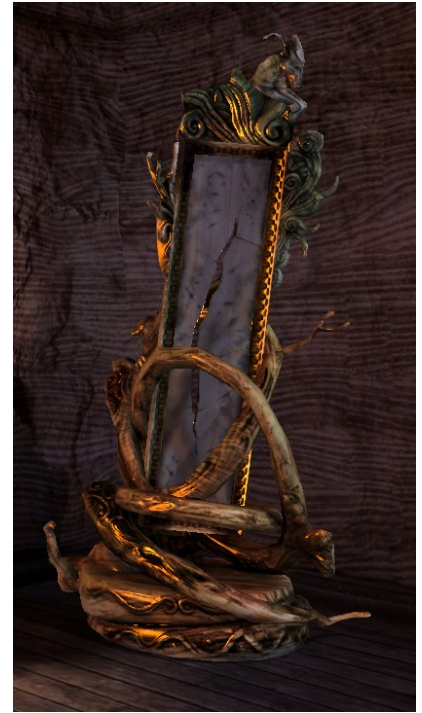


Figure 32 - Merrill's Eluvian.

In spite of Hawke's previous choice, Merrill remains unable to reactivate the Eluvian, and thus she once again turns to Hawke for help. At the end of this quest, the player and his or her previous actions decide Merrill's future. While the mirror will continue inactive, she may or may not abandon her efforts to restore it. In addition, should she abandon her ambition, the player may also offer advice on how she should move on with her life. These choices provide the chance for new consequences in *Dragon Age 4*, as Solas, a center-figure in the next installment, is heavily tied to the past of the elves and to the eluvians. Whether Bioware will choose to explore these possibilities in the future, however, is yet to be seen.

#### 3.4.1.5. The Bull and the Liar

A choice that presents very different consequences in the same game relates to the character of *The Iron Bull*, one of the horned giants of the Qunari race. He chose the name, which includes the article, as he was sent south to be a spy. Having been raised under the religious doctrine of the Qun, his original name was also a description of his role in that society. *Hissrad*, as he is known to



those that follow that belief, which means “keeper of illusions”, though another follower of the Qun simplified that idea to a single word: liar.

The Iron Bull personality was then created as a pretense for his being in the south. A mercenary commander of some renown, The Iron Bull is then free to roam the south of Thedas without raising too much suspicion, even though members of his race are a rare sight in those parts. He later joins the Inquisition at orders from his superiors to infiltrate the organization and send reports on the players’ activities. Unlike how other spies might act, however, The Iron Bull immediately relays this information to the Inquisitor, claiming it might be a beneficial arrangement for both sides. Should the player agree, Bull and his mercenary company, the *Bull’s Chargers*, join the Inquisition.

During his companion quest, *Demands of the Qun*<sup>49</sup>, his people offer an alliance to the Inquisition, which disquiets Bull, as he has not been accustomed to dealing directly with his superiors. During this quest, Bull must decide whether to save the life of his chargers or to sacrifice them to complete the mission. Torn between his two realities, Hissrad and The Iron Bull, he is incapable of taking such decision himself. The Inquisitor then steps in and makes the decision in his stead. Should the chargers be saved, Bull is considered a traitor to the Qun and branded Tal-Vashoth<sup>50</sup>. Meanwhile, if they are sacrificed, Bull reaffirms himself as Hissrad, confirming his loyalty to the Qun.

While there are minor consequences relating to this decision in the main campaign of *Dragon Age Inquisition*, it is in the Trespasser DLC that the most important one appears. During the final section of that adventure, the *Viddasala*, a Qunari agent, calls out to Bull for his aid. His

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<sup>49</sup> While it has the same name of a main quest from *Dragon Age 2*, it is not the same.

<sup>50</sup> The word means “Truly Grey Ones”. Individuals who have abandoned the Qun’s philosophy and are thus considered the worse traitors to that doctrine.

response depends entirely on whether or not he became Tal-Vashoth. If he did, he refuses the Viddasala's request and remains loyal to the Inquisitor, while if he still follows the Qun, he betrays the player, who is forced to kill his or her former companion right then and there.

#### **3.4.1.6. The Fake Warden**

The character first introduced as *Blackwall* is one of the companions present in *Dragon Age Inquisition*. His introduction involves the Inquisitor looking into a possible connection between the murder of the Divine and the disappearance of the Grey Wardens. Blackwall is first presented as a wandering warden recruiter, adventuring by himself and knowing nothing about the other wardens. Something worth noticing is one of his quotes about the wardens and their place in the world of Thedas. Blackwall believes that "Grey Wardens can inspire, make you better than you think you are" (*Dragon Age Inquisition*). This is his vision of the order he has decided to serve, and it becomes the most important theme of his character arc during the game.

As the game progresses, Blackwall's story is eventually revealed. He is not in fact a Grey Warden but has been pretending to be one to avoid the consequences of his past crimes. His real name is *Thom Rainier* and he was once an Orlesian commander who accepted a bribe and sent his men to kill a noble family unknowingly. After his crime, Rainier was to be recruited by the real warden Blackwall, thus leaving behind his crimes as is tradition among the wardens. He never made it, as they were ambushed by darkspawn on the way. Blackwall gave his life to save Rainier, who then took the men's identity as his own.

According to him, it was not fair for the world to lose a man such as Blackwall and retain one such as himself, so he changed his identity and began to live as a Grey Warden ever since. At this point, players realize his quote about the wardens is more something he hopes to be true than something he believes to be a rule. It comes from his own experience with the real Blackwall, who inspired him to become someone better than who he was.



Figure 33 - Thom Rainier posing as the Warden Blackwall.

After the revelation, the Inquisitor may judge Rainier, creating three possible outcomes. Rainier may be pardoned, granting him freedom to atone not through deception, but through his own actions. He may be sent to the Grey Wardens, subjecting him to the Joining ritual and thus transforming him into an actual warden; or he may be forced to keep his ruse a secret, as the revelation of his lies may lead to unintended consequences for the Inquisition. These outcomes affect not only his destiny but also how the themes surrounding his character develop.

During the epilogue sequence of the *Trespasser* DLC, the consequences of this choice are more thoroughly detailed. If Rainier is forced to continue his lie, he remains with the Inquisition, but the wardens eventually learn the truth and request he be released to them. This ending, which could be considered the “bad” ending for Blackwall, exemplifies how the lie was not the ideal situation, especially after Blackwall became more notorious.

If Rainier is sent to the Wardens, he survives the Joining ritual and becomes a fully-fledged Grey Warden. More than that, he excels at the order, rising in its hierarchy and serving with distinction. This ending shows Rainier atoning through his actions and truly serving the order of the man that inspired him. It is noteworthy that, though Rainier's visions of the wardens are related to inspiring others and to making them into something better, that is more akin to his romanticized understanding. In *Dragon Age Origins*, Warden Commander Duncan murders one of his recruits who had second thoughts, all to retain the secrecy of the Joining. In *Dragon Age 2*, wardens are seen during the Qunari invasion of Kirkwall, but they refuse to help due to the Wardens' alleged neutrality in political affairs. Even in *Inquisition*, players see how the one and true objective of the wardens is to stop the blight. There is no cost too great; no sacrifice too hard. While this can vary from warden to warden, the franchise has constantly depicted the wardens as enemies of the blight primarily. The romanticized vision that both Rainier and many players have of the wardens are from personal perspectives. Rainier draws this romanticism from Blackwall and players do so from the Warden, the protagonist of the first game, which a large majority of players customizes to be a noble hero. As such, while this ending is fitting for his story, it ignores Blackwall's nobler themes of redemption through belief and inspiration.

The third ending, which involves pardoning Rainier and granting him freedom, is the one where such themes are more heavily depicted. Rainier started travelling the world; seeking to share the gift of compassion, he himself was given. As is shown in the aforementioned epilogue: "In the deepest prisons and pits of Thedas, he found, if not goodness itself, its potential. By showing faith in those who had none, Rainier lifted them up and made them into something better than they were." (*Dragon Age Inquisition, Epilogue*) Following this ending, Rainier continues his philosophy of inspiration and of goodness not through an order that does not represent it but through himself and through the Inquisitor's compassion and forgiveness. Rainier was then inspired to become

someone better and to pass that inspiration forward. To become someone who inspires others, not as a fake or a real warden, but as the man he is.

#### 3.4.1.7. The Dread Wolf

Solas, who serves as a companion during *Dragon Age Inquisition*, is revealed to be *Fen'Harel*, the elven god of trickery and rebellion. As time passes, it becomes clearer that Solas will be the main antagonist of the next game in the franchise and because of that, choices made regarding his character have the greatest potential to result in lasting consequences for the series. Ever since *Inquisition*, Bioware has started to rely on the website known as *Dragon Age Keep* as a tool to import player choices into their following titles. While these games offer many choices with varying levels of importance, not all of them are taken into the website. This means that only those present in the Keep can truly have the potential to affect directly not only the narrative of the series but also its plot.



Figure 34 - Solas.

Three choices present in the Keep relate directly to Solas. One refers to how his companion quest was completed; the second to whether the Inquisitor has developed a friendship with Solas; and the last to the final promise of the Inquisitor. At the end of the *Trespasser* DLC, after Solas has revealed his plans to the Inquisitor, the player is offered two choices about how the Inquisitor will move forward in his efforts against the Dread Wolf. He or she can attempt to redeem the elf through proving that Solas does not need to destroy the world or he can swear to stop Solas at any cost. In addition to these, Solas also appears in the Keep as one of the possible romance options<sup>51</sup> to the Inquisitor, though his romance storyline is limited to female elven Inquisitors.

All four of these choices affect not only Solas' character but also his relationship to the Inquisitor and his views on the world he is set on destroying. If the Inquisitor develops either a romantic relationship or a friendship with him, Solas has his views of the world challenged. As a background, Solas was one of the ancient elves, being more than two thousand years old. He lived during their ancient empire and knew truths the elven people had long forgotten or misinterpreted. During those times, there was no Veil separating the real world from the Fade, making magic and its manipulation as natural as air and the act of breathing it. The modern separation only came after Solas himself created the veil in order to banish the Evanuris.<sup>52</sup> As many of the marvels and constructions of the elven empire relied heavily on magic, however, the separation of the real world and the Fade destroyed them, alongside the elves' ability to be immortal.

After that event, which took place around two thousand years before the current storyline, Solas began to hibernate in a process called *Uthenera* or the great sleep. The exhaustion of creating the Veil was so great that Solas slept for thousands of years, his spirit wandering the Fade all the

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<sup>51</sup> In most Bioware games, including all three *Dragon Age* ones, the player may choose to romance one of the characters in those games.

<sup>52</sup> Powerful ancient elven mages and slave owners who are considered gods by the current dalish elves.

while and witnessing the world evolve without being able to interfere. Solas wanted to save his people and to free them from the shackles of slavery to the Evanuris, but after he was able to do so, he had to watch as the elves were once again enslaved, this time by the humans of the Tevinter Empire. He watched them fight alongside *Andraste* to win their freedom and form a nation of their own called the *Dales*. Then, he watched as the Chantry, the very followers of Andraste, destroyed the Dales over religious matters and caused his people to split into two. The city elves, who now live as second-class citizens in the outskirts of human society; and the Dalish, who worship the Evanuris as gods and reject any trace of the truth he knows.

By the time Solas is finally able to awaken, he sets off a series of events that culminates in the story of *Dragon Age Inquisition*. Lacking the raw power of his past, Solas is forced to ally with the Inquisition in order to save the world he eventually plans to destroy, since without that world, his plans are finished. To him, the modern world is nothing more than a distortion of his reality – a pale and wicked imitation of the wonderful and magical world of the elves. Even the few who are capable of magic lack the ability and knowledge to freely enter the Fade, while he views the non-mages as something little more than sentient. In a dialogue between Solas and the Inquisitor, he expresses that:

*Inquisitor: We aren't even people to you?*

*Solas: Not at first. You showed me I was wrong, again. This does not make what comes next any easier.*

*(Dragon Age Trespasser)*

His relationship to the Inquisitor has the potential to change that. If they develop a friendship, Solas realizes he was wrong; that the people of this new world and their lives have value, beauty, and uniqueness. The world he initially despised is not simply a distortion of his but something unique in of itself. Its peoples have cultures, beliefs, dreams, and aspirations. Some are good, some are bad, and some remain somewhere in between, just like the ancient elves. The

Inquisitor, though displaying curiosity, thoughtfulness, courage, an open mind, and an innate



Figure 35 - Self portrait of Solas as the Dread Wolf.

propension for good, gains Solas' respect, and if he can respect the Inquisitor, then Solas must admit the same potential is present in every other being in the world. If the Inquisitor romances Solas, Cole, one of the other companions who also happens to be a spirit of compassion and possesses the ability to read minds, quotes one of Solas' thoughts: "You're real, and it means everyone could be real. It changes everything, but it can't" (Inquisition, 2014). Though this line is directed at a romanced Inquisitor, the same idea can be applied to a friendly one.

Through the idea of variables in videogame writing and interactivity, Solas' relationship to the Inquisitor and his new perspective on the world could potentially open the way for the player to redeem Solas in *Dragon Age 4*. This is not confirmed, however, and will only become apparent once the next game is released. After all, if the Inquisitor does not earn Solas' respect or if their relationship is closer to a rivalry, then Solas retains his diminished view of the world, allowing for the possibility of different world states in *Dragon Age 4*.



### 3.4.2. The World

So far, I have discussed how the player may influence the characters of *Dragon Age* and their respective arcs. Through choice and consequence, the player may lead certain characters into different developments. Now I begin to demonstrate the similar effect interactivity provides when directed not at the characters of the series but at its very world.

Unlike with characters, these choices have, or at least should have, more rippling effects upon following games, as a decision that is able to shape the world is, by its very nature, much more intricate than one that affects a single character. While that is not always necessarily true, as I have demonstrated when discussing Solas, it is something to keep in mind, especially when added to the concept of illusion of choice. To begin this analysis, I will examine the quest *A Paragon of Her Kind*, present in *Dragon Age Origins*.

#### 3.4.2.1. A Paragon of Her Kind

During the main storyline for *Dragon Age Origins*, the Warden must travel throughout Ferelden while recruiting allies to form a new army to face the darkspawn. One of the groups visited are the dwarves of the underground city of *Orzammar*. Being the most experienced fighters concerning the darkspawn, the dwarves would be an invaluable addition to the player's alliance. Once the player gets to the city, however, he or she discovers that the dwarves are in a political stalemate. With the previous king dead, debates are being held to decide who the next heir to the throne should be. As the dwarves decide such



Figure 36 - Bhelen Aeducan.

matters through the Assembly, an extremely bureaucratic conjunction of noble houses, an impasse has been reached about the two candidates.

The first candidate is *Bhelen Aeducan*, the younger son of the previous king and possible brother of the Warden if the dwarven noble origin was selected. During that origin, the player learns that Bhelen is an astute and corrupt politician who framed the Warden for the murder of their older brother, *Trian Aeducan*. Even if the player has selected one of the other origins, Bhelen's nature soon becomes clear, as the tasks he requests of the Warden involve lies and manipulation.

In contrast, *Pyral Harrowmont*, who is the second candidate, is everything that Bhelen is not. Honorable, direct, and just are all characteristics that define Harrowmont. He respects dwarven tradition and even asks the Warden to fight in his name during a Proving.<sup>53</sup> As Harrowmont puts it: "I prefer to be known as a just and compassionate king. 'Strong' too often comes to mean 'tyrannical'" (*Dragon Age*



Figure 37 - Pyral Harrowmont.

*Origins, A Paragon of Her Kind*). At first glance, Harrowmont seems like the obvious choice for king, especially given the fact he was the main adviser of the previous one.

While not available during the first playthrough, there is some additional information that may prove the contrary. At the end of the game, an epilogue presentation is shown to the player showing the consequences of his or her choices in *Dragon Age Origins*. These epilogues may have several variations and may encompass, at the very least, every main quest of that game. In the case

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<sup>53</sup> A Proving is a dwarven gladiatorial tournament that honors their predecessors.

of Orzammar, these epilogues shift mainly due to whom the Warden supported as king and whether or not the *Anvil of the Void* was destroyed.

During these epilogues, not only are the personalities of both candidates revealed but also the effects of their policies on dwarven society. Bhelen, although a tyrannical and corrupt manipulator, is also a futurist who tries to improve the situation of his people. Bhelen gives rights to the casteless dwarves, opens more commerce and interaction with the surface, and overall reforms dwarven society, to the point where they are able to push back against the darkspawn for the first time in centuries. In this epilogue, it is said that “The King then ruled alone – some said as a tyrant, others said as a visionary determined to drag Orzammar into the modern world” (*Dragon Age Origins*, Epilogue). Another aspect of Bhelen’s character that may point to him as a superior choice in this matter is that he welcomes aid from the surface when it is offered, which is something that Harrowmont does not.

While Bhelen reforms dwarven society for a new age, Harrowmont does the opposite. His extremely traditionalist views give rise to active decisions that further isolate the dwarves from the surface. In addition, Harrowmont increases the rights of the nobility and diminishes even more the casteless restrictions. After a casteless rebellion occurs, Harrowmont decimates countless of these dwarves, turning the slums of the city into actual ruins. To contrast this situation, Bhelen allows the casteless to fight in the army, which gives the dwarves a much-needed boost to their forces.

Another aspect of Harrowmont’s rulership that is irrevocably negative is his racism towards non-dwarves. While that is not shown during the actual game, the epilogue reveals aspects of this flaw. If *Branka* is supported and the *Anvil of the Void* is preserved, alongside the secret to creating stone golems<sup>54</sup>, Harrowmont works with Branka to resupply Orzammar with these creatures.

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<sup>54</sup> In the world of *Dragon Age*, the dwarves of old learned how to create great golems of stone and steel to protect them from the Darkspawn.

Originally, only dwarven volunteers would be sacrificed for the creation of golems. Eventually, however, Harrowmont supports Branka in kidnapping elven and human commoners from the surface for that purpose. He does that to prevent more dwarven lives from being sacrificed in order to create golems. According to the epilogue, this is eventually discovered and may lead to all-out war between Orzammar and Ferelden.

As I have demonstrated, the player's choice of king in Orzammar affects much more than one character's final development. It affects how dwarven society develops in the coming years and its relationship with other nations. If the idea of variables and world states is taken into consideration, this could have resulted in many interesting changes in the sequel games. The reality, however, is not quite that.

As I have mentioned back in the *Dragon Age* section of the Theoretical Framework, the developers at Bioware had not intended for *Origins* to have a sequel. This, coupled with the fact that EA Games charged Bioware with developing *Dragon Age 2* in a mere nine months, caused many aspects of the first game to be either only slightly mentioned or outright ignored. The only quest in *Dragon Age 2* that directly revolves around the fate of Orzammar is named *Last of His Line*. The quest only appears in that game if the player imports a world state where Bhelen was supported as king. In it, Hawke meets *Renvil Harrowmont*, the last dwarf of the Harrowmont line who is trying to escape assassins hired by Bhelen. In his tyrannical efforts, Bhelen exterminates the entire Harrowmont line so that no rebellions can be raised in the family's name. While the quest itself can be completed in two ways, either by helping or by killing Renvil, there is no variation to this quest. No version where Harrowmont is king and the one being hunted is a Bhelen supporter.

This highlights a problem that is all too common in videogames and especially in videogame franchises, where choices must be imported from one game to the next. Most of the time, the setting of the game changes so that the consequences of previous choices can be told

instead of shown. While *Dragon Age 2* was developed in a very short time, and thus the lack of direct consequences is understandable, the same cannot be said of the third game in the franchise, *Dragon Age Inquisition*. In it, even less is changed by the player's decision of Orzammar's ruler; only a few mentions in *War Table* questlines and even fewer interchangeable dialogue choices. Furthermore, in spite of whether Bhelen or Harrowmont is king, Orzammar goes through the same hardships, like food shortage and discontent among its citizens.

As *Dragon Age 4* appears to be moving its setting towards northern Thedas, away from Orzammar, it does not seem likely that the next game will introduce more consequences for this particular choice. If that turns out to be true, it may very well be that players will never see truly variable consequences based on Orzammar's king. An interesting possibility for this dilemma would have been to increase the dwarven NPC population in later games if the player supports Bhelen as king. As he opens Orzammar up for more trade and gives more rights to both casteless dwarves and surface dwarves, it would make sense that dwarves in general would travel more to the surface. In contrast, if Harrowmont becomes king, these same NPCs could be replaced with human or elven ones. A small rippling effect that could open doors to more intricate changes, such as dialogue and even additional quests. At the very least, it would make sense for the dialogue about Orzammar to change in *Inquisition*, with Harrowmont causing the food shortages and Bhelen preventing them. While this does create an objectively better choice, it would add to the replay ability of the series and the concept of interactivity in general.

#### **3.4.2.2. Nature of the Beast**

Another quest present in the first game that suffers from a similar problem to *A Paragon of Her Kind* is *Nature of the Beast*. In it, the Warden ventures into the Brecillian forest to try to recruit the Dalish Elves to his army. Once he or she gets there, he or she learns that the elves cannot help

until a situation involving werewolves is resolved. As it is with most videogames, the one to solve this problem is then the player character.

After some investigation, the Warden discovers that the person responsible for the werewolf curse that is now being spread among the elves is none other than their leader, *Zathrian*. He cast said curse on a group of humans centuries ago, after these humans murdered his son and violated his daughter. The werewolves now are their descendants, who, in an effort to force Zathrian to release the curse, have begun spreading it amongst his people. Consumed by vengeance, however, Zathrian refuses to do so.

In the game, this quest can be resolved in three ways. The first is to side with Zathrian, killing the werewolves and the *Lady of the Forest*<sup>55</sup> and recruiting the elves for the Warden's army. The second is to side with the werewolves and slaughter the elves, thus gaining the support of the werewolves in the war against the darkspawn. Finally, there is a third choice. In it, the player convinces Zathrian to release the curse of his own free will, which ends his life and frees the werewolves from their suffering. Once again, this decision could have incredibly deep rippling effects on the next two games, especially *Dragon Age Inquisition*. While the third game does not necessarily return to the Brecillian forest, it does return to Ferelden, where there just might be an entire pack of werewolves.

If the player has decided to side with the werewolves, these beings could return as mob enemies in certain parts of Ferelden's maps or even as complex NPCs in certain side quests. A possible way to incorporate these changes into the third game would be to offer two different versions of the quest *Trouble with Wolves*. The one present in the game, which appears regardless of player choice, involves the Inquisitor tracking and defeating a pack of wolves who have been

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<sup>55</sup> Spirit responsible for helping the werewolves.

possessed by a terror demon. In this scenario, this version of the quest would only be available if the player sided with the elves or if he or she managed to end the werewolf curse. If he or she sided with the werewolves, however, the main enemy of this section would not be a Lesser Terror Demon but one of the previous game's werewolf NPCs. It is a minor change that could perhaps be extended through different item rewards, but it already provides the player with tangible consequences for his or her choices in previous games.

### 3.4.2.3. Awakening

A situation that is both similar and different from the previous examples is derived from the expansion *Dragon Age Awakening*, which is a DLC for the first game of the franchise. In the *Dragon Age Keep* website, four major choices may have an effect on the future of the series. Only one I concur is the most important for the next game: the fate of the *Architect*.

The Architect is an awakened darkspawn whose objective is to free his people from the call of the Old Gods and thus end any future blights. While his goal can be considered noble and even aligned with the interests of the Grey Wardens, his methods are somewhat less so. In order to achieve his goal, the Architect has kidnapped grey wardens to remove their blood and has been responsible for the corruption of the Old God Urthemiel, transforming him into an archdemon and giving rise to the fifth blight. The Architect is thus directly responsible for the events of *Dragon Age Origins*.

The choice itself is simple. Did the Warden allow the Architect to live or did he fight and kill the Architect? Based on all these points, players can decide either way. Normally, this could indicate a possible return for this character, but the Architect's situation is a little more complex than that.

First, I should note that the similarity I mentioned is because, so far, this choice has had only a minor effect on the game's sequels. In *Dragon Age 2*, if *Nathaniel Howe* is encountered, he may mention the fate of the Architect, but nothing else is relevant. Unlike the previous decisions, the fate of the Architect may have an incredibly large effect both on the storyline of *Dragon Age 4* and on the world of Thedas.

Another possibility is that the Architect will return in the next game in spite of his possible death. There is the possibility that the Architect may share *Corypheus'* ability of effective immortality<sup>56</sup> and thus the choice of sparing his life will affect not the possibility of his return but the manner of it. If spared, the Architect may be more willing to trust other non-blighted people; while if he was slain, he may be more secretive in his efforts.

#### 3.4.2.4. Mages and Templars

At one point or another, all three games explore the mage and templar dilemma. In the world of *Dragon Age*, mages are extremely powerful beings capable of great feats of power. Their spells are usually separated into four schools of practice, which are The Primal School<sup>57</sup>; The Spirit School<sup>58</sup>; The Creation School<sup>59</sup>; and The Entropy School<sup>60</sup>. Finally, there is a fifth school of magic, which is considered forbidden by the Andrastian Chantry. Blood Magic is presented as the dark and malefic school of magic in the world of *Dragon Age* and relates to the corruption of the self and of others. Blood Magic spells usually revolve around forcefully controlling other's bodies

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<sup>56</sup> Being able to regenerate in the body of blighted creatures nearby.

<sup>57</sup> It relates to elemental spells, such as fire, ice, rock, and lightning. Spells of this type are usually more focused on offense.

<sup>58</sup> It relates to the natural energies of the Fade. These spells are more focused on utility, while still providing different manners of attack and defense.

<sup>59</sup> It manipulates natural forces and is considered the support school of magic. Its spells usually revolve around aiding allies or even healing them.

<sup>60</sup> Directly contrary to Creation, it focuses on weakening enemies.



and minds or even summoning demons from the Fade. Its practitioners are called “Maleficarum” by the Chantry.

I mention these schools to contextualize the following dilemma. As I have noted, mages are immensely powerful individuals who have access to a multitude of spells and thus can easily decimate many innocent people. Not only that, their innate talent for magic attracts the attention and interest of demons, who wish for nothing more than to possess these mages, thus creating even more powerful abominations. An example of the dangers of such possessions is seen during the quest *The Arl of Redcliff* in *Dragon Age Origins*. In that quest, *Connor*, an innocent child who has received no training or advice concerning his magical nature, is tricked by a demon into a deal. The results of this deal lead to Connor being possessed and the unleashing of a horde of undead creatures into the village nearby, thus causing the deaths of many innocents.

For these reasons, mages are obligated to attend the Circles of Magi, where they can learn how to control their natural talents and understand the dangers of demonic possession. In theory, these should be places where mages can learn more about themselves and find a home. A place where they are kept safe from the dangers of demons and the prejudice of the outside world. The game reality however, is not quite so ideal.

Templars are trained from a very young age to be mage hunters and jailers. The Circles of Magi, although they do function like schools, can also be considered prisons, as mages are not allowed to leave without the explicit permission of the templars. This position of power that is given to many templars, coupled with religious beliefs that blame mages for the darkspawn and the evil nature of some people, has led to many mages suffering abuse while within the Circles of Magi. In addition, mages in the Circle are forced to undertake a sort of graduation exam where they prove to be competent enough to ward off demons. This exam is called the Harrowing, and it forces the mage to confront a demon. If they succeed, the mage can continue living in the Circle, learning

new spells, and even taking on apprentices. If they fail, they are possessed and therefore slain by the templars. It is worth noting this exam is usually taken around the time mages reach adulthood.



Figure 38 - Art depicting the Mage-Templar war.

Mages are still teenagers by the time they are forced to face a life-or-death situation. If they do not feel ready for it, they may either opt for, or be forced into, the ritual of tranquility. This ritual eliminates the mage's supernatural abilities and turns them immune from demonic possession. The catch is that they also completely lose their emotions and the capability of dreaming. They are turned into empty husks who obey any orders and continue serving the Circle in their new state.

Between the three released games, the one that explores this dilemma more thoroughly is *Dragon Age 2*. Companions like *Anders* and *Fenris*, in addition to characters like *Cullen*, *Meredith*, *Orsino*, and *Thrask* provide complex viewpoints into the situation. On the one hand, mages are inherently dangerous if their powers are left unchecked. On the other hand, the fear of magic has led many mages to suffer various kinds of abuse while being locked away in the Circles of Magi. There are many more arguments to be made for both sides of this discussion, but as I have already

thoroughly introduced the dilemma, I will focus on the effect of the player's support of either side in *Dragon Age 2*.

The entirety of the third act of *Dragon Age 2* is focused on this exact point. First Enchanter Orsino is speaking up against the aggression and abuse of the templars, led by Knight Commander Meredith. The game aggravates this with the decision to make Kirkwall's Circle of Magi be based in the old gallows of the city, a place that served both as prison and as slave holdings in past times. The circle is then adorned with several statues of slaves being oppressed and chained up, which only aggravates the mage's feelings. Anders, one of the player's companions, is an escaped mage who fused with a spirit of Justice and since then has been fighting to improve the situation of his fellow mages. The anger inside him, however, has begun to morph the spirit of Justice into a demon of Vengeance, which leads him to doubting himself and his mission many times.

In the end, Anders, in an effort to incite a revolution, blows up the city's chantry, killing many innocents and the city's Grand Cleric. Meredith's response to this act of terrorism is to call for the Right of Annulment, which gives her the right to execute every single mage in the Circle of Magi. The player may stand beside her or s/he may help Orsino to try to save the mages. In addition, it falls to the player to decide whether to spare or execute Anders for his actions.

This decision, however, does not present any great variations in the next game, *Dragon Age Inquisition*, even though the beginning of that game deals directly with the consequences of this event. In the game, both mages and templars have extremist rebel groups and the player, now controlling the Inquisitor, must decide which group to approach for aid regarding the Breach. Hawke's decision in *Dragon Age 2* is only mentioned in certain parts of the sequel, but its consequences are interchangeable.

Once again, this could have been solved by presenting smaller variations in the overarching story. If Hawke sides with the mages during the ending of *Dragon Age 2*, in the sequel, there could

have been smaller variations in the *In Hushed Whispers* quest. Or, if he sided with the templars, variations could take place in *Champions of the Just*. Additionally, other dialogue options could have been implemented in these quests to mention said choice, adding another layer, even if small, to the replay ability aspect of the game. Perhaps NPCs present in the second game could return depending on the side chosen. Carver and Bethany, if they are part of one of these groups, could have reappeared during the aforementioned questlines. The decision might even have affected *Cullen's* personality more deeply, with him reexamining his actions if Hawke stood beside the mages or reaffirming himself in his anti-magic beliefs if Hawke sided with the templars. Once again, in the *Dragon Age* games, the notion of interactivity relies more heavily on the illusion of choice, rather than actual interactivity.

#### **3.4.2.5. The Andrastian Chantry**

This next example is unique in the sense that it provides one of the most important choices in the whole series: who should lead the Andrastian Chantry moving forward? In *Dragon Age Inquisition*, the player may, through his or her choices and dialogue options, influence in the election of the next Divine. The three possible candidates have extremely different proposals for how the Chantry should evolve and thus this decision can create three extremely different versions of the world in the coming games.

The three candidates are Cassandra, Leliana, and Vivienne. Each has their own viewpoints and ideals that shape the future of the Chantry as well as the entirety of southern Thedas. One thing to note is that, while the next Divine is always one among these three characters, there are technically four possibilities. Leliana, who serves as the spymaster of the Inquisition, may be in either an inspired state, willing to forgive her enemies and move forward, or she may be steeled;

willing to do whatever it takes to fulfill her vision for the chantry. While there are other minor internal variations in each candidate, their overall ideas remain the same.

If Leliana is chosen, she completely reforms how the chantry works and its structural power in politics. Leliana opens the priesthood to other races, allowing elves, qunari, and dwarves to join the chantry in an official capacity; she abolishes the Circle of Magi, granting freedom to the mages of Thedas; and she repurposes the Chantry to the principle of charity. Not surprisingly, her reforms create pushback from more traditionalist members of the Chantry. If she is inspired, Leliana manages to convince them to support her, at least for now, but if she is steeled, Leliana assassinates those who speak against her, becoming a tyrant in her position.

If Vivienne becomes the next Divine, she is the first mage ever to gain that position. The uproar from religious fanatics is immediate and creates several revolts, but she eventually defeats them. Contrary to popular belief, Vivienne, even being a mage, chooses to reinstate the Circle of Magi and the Templar Order, with the difference that she now directly controls both orders. Still, mages are given new liberties and rights within the Circle of Magi, being able to achieve higher positions and more political influence than ever before.



Figure 39 - The three possible Divines. From left to right: Vivienne, Leliana, and Cassandra.

Many players consider Cassandra as the middle choice. If Leliana represents change and Vivienne represents tradition, Cassandra represents moderation. She creates new versions of both the Circle of Magi and the Templar Order, inviting its former members to be reinstated under her. In some world states, mages and templars might either accept her proposition or deny it. When questioned about the possibility of becoming Divine, Cassandra states, “the Circle of Magi has its place, but needs reform. Let the mages govern themselves, with our help. Let the templars stand not as the jailors of mages, but as protectors of the innocent” (*Dragon Age Inquisition*, 2014). Cassandra tries to change the issues she sees in the world, but as there are compelling reasons for both sides of the mage and templar debate, her reforms are more idealistic than practical.

All these consequences are described in the epilogues of both the main campaign and the Trespasser DLC. In the end, however, these consequences are simply told to the player, with no real impact on the gameplay of the game. *Dragon Age 4* still lacks a release date, but the fate of the chantry might have a great impact in the world of Thedas as presented in the next game. One thing to note, however, is that *Dragon Age 4* seems to be moving away from southern Thedas and the lands where the Andrastian Chantry has more influence. This could indicate that the developers are moving away from incorporating all these different choices in a meaningful way. However, it would not require much to add such consequences to the game.

If Leliana is made Divine, Tevinter could have more mages immigrating from the south, as they are now free to do so. In addition, if Vivienne is the new Divine, these same mage NPCs could still be present, but now being hunted by southern templars. While it may be impossible to incorporate every little possibility due to both time and monetary constraints, adding a few lesser ones is still important so that the player can feel the weight of his or her choices.

### 3.4.2.6. A Song of Ice and Fire

So far, I have discussed the effect of interactivity in the *Dragon Age* series. Before moving on to the next section, however, I now quickly comment on how interactivity could have influenced the novels of *A Song of Ice and Fire*. To that end, I will assume a world where that story was first presented through an interactive medium.

The story of *A Song of Ice and Fire* is, primarily, about consequences. Characters make decisions and they suffer the appropriate consequences for those choices. George R. R. Martin has stated before that he wished to create a world where readers truly fear for their favored characters. Ned Stark decides to tell Queen Cersei that he knows her secret, which leads not only to King Robert's death but also to his own. Samwell Tarly decides to manipulate the Night's Watch election, leading to Jon Snow becoming the next Lord Commander. Arya Stark chooses to save the three bound prisoners, leading to her dealings with Jaqen H'ghar and her eventual journey to Braavos. Rob Stark marries *Jeyne Westerling* instead of one of *Walder Frey's* daughters, leading to the Red Wedding. Daenerys Targaryen chooses to stay in Meereen and rule the city, leading to her eventual marriage with Hizdahr Zo Loraq, to the war in the shadows against the sons of the Harpy, and even to her chaining her own dragons.

In order to organize this discussion, I focus on how a player's input could affect the three main storylines I have decided to use when analyzing the journeys in the novels. As a reminder, these include Ned Stark's tale in the first book; Jon Snow's journey in the Night's Watch; and Daenerys Targaryen's rise to power. Of course, changing even one major choice could and should lead to extremely different world states, but, as I have mentioned before, this is not always the case with videogames. Instead, I will exemplify how some possibilities could create world states where the player's decision could affect how the story develops, while returning to a central point every time.

Starting with Ned Stark, a possible *Game of Thrones* game following his story could allow the player the option to either tell Cersei about his discovery, thus leading to the events seen in the book or not. If Ned did not tell Cersei that he had discovered her secret, then King Robert would have returned and Ned would have told him the truth. In a game that could incorporate an entirely different world moving forward, Robert would have executed Cersei, Jaime, and perhaps even the children, before calling the realm to wage war on Tywin Lannister. In a game where such choices can only lead to slightly different world states, Robert might have imprisoned Cersei and Jaime and then been poisoned by *Grand Maester Pycelle*, perhaps in the service of Cersei, who returns claiming that Ned lied and manipulated Robert. She could then imprison Ned and move on with a similar storyline to the official one. Other possibilities for player choices in Ned's story involve *Renly Baratheon's* offer after it becomes clear that Robert will die, or even Ned's final decision to lie about Joffrey's parentage in order to save his daughter's life.

Concerning Jon Snow, one of the greatest moments that define his character is his time infiltrated in the wildling army. Even though Jon is in love with *Ygritte*, one of the wildling women, he stays loyal to his vows and returns to his brothers in the Night's Watch. Had he stayed with Ygritte and the wildlings, he might have fought in the battle of Castle Black on the other side. In order to preserve the sequence of events, including the victory of the Night's Watch, the game could have sped up Stannis' arrival in the battle and added Jon Snow as one of his prisoners. At this point, many possibilities could open up, depending on a set of variables. If Jon had some sort of Persuasion perk, he could have convinced the Night's Watch that he was only following the Halfhand's orders and thus be reinstated into the order. If not, Stannis might force him to take the name of Stark and ride south with him. In retaliation for being technically rewarded for his betrayal, the Night's Watch could kill Jon, leading to a similar, yet different, world state for that particular set of choices.



Perhaps the easiest storyline to analyze concerning a possible videogame counterpart is that of Daenerys Targaryen. In the third book, *A Storm of Swords*, Daenerys sacks Astapor, forces Yunkai to abolish slavery, and conquers Meereen, becoming the latter city's new queen. Soon it is revealed that the Wise Masters of Yunkai betrayed her, returned to the practice of slavery, and formed a coalition to attack her new city. In the game, the decision of becoming ruler could have appeared in Yunkai, leading to a similar situation with a different city. It would then be Meereen leading the queen's enemies instead of Yunkai. Of course, other possibilities exist, and many more may yet become apparent for both Jon Snow and Daenerys in the following novels, but I argue that these examples are already enough to demonstrate how interactivity could be incorporated into that story without creating entirely new versions of those plots.

### **3.5. Two Media**

After reading this Master's thesis, it could be easily understood that I am criticizing the *Dragon Age* games or even videogames in general for their simplistic use of interactivity concerning incorporating actually meaningful instances of choice and consequence. That is not true. Videogames, due to their unique nature as an interactive medium, have the potential to explore stories in ways no other storytelling form could. Still, videogames have only existed for more or less sixty years, which is a relatively miniscule amount of time when considering storytelling in general.

By analyzing how this concept of interactivity appears in contemporary games, I demonstrate not only the issues pertaining to its implementation but also ways in which it can be incorporated in the future. Studies of this kind are required for the furthering of the artform as a whole. Today there exist thousands of game companies, which have turned gaming into the most lucrative industry in the entertainment business. Millions of people of all ages, genders, ethnicities,

and beliefs play videogames every day. The potential for these stories to connect to players is enormous, as it can introduce the player to the world he or she is experiencing.

It may not happen today, tomorrow or even ten years from now. Still, it is extremely likely that one day, videogames will achieve that ideal incorporation of interactivity. Perhaps one day, games will be able to introduce completely procedural storylines based solely on the player's choices. This idea is both marvelous and terrifying, but as technology continues to advance, it would be completely irresponsible of scholars to ignore videogames both as storytelling devices and as a unique and particular form of art. In truth, the problem of videogames lagging behind will never truly diminish, as books, films, and other more traditional storytelling media will continue to evolve alongside games.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Throughout this Master's thesis, I argued that videogames have a unique perspective on storytelling, compared to other media, because of interactivity. I have shown and explained key elements of narrative studies such as the difference between Story, Plot and Narrative; the studies of Narratology and Ludology, while discussing the internal division among the scholars of these two paradigms. I have also shown and explained the role of videogames as storytelling devices. In addition, I have examined the evolution of storytelling in videogames throughout their existence, from more simplistic examples such as *Donkey Kong* and *Super Mario* all the way to more contemporary entries, such as the *Dragon Age* series and *Fallout: New Vegas*. I have also analyzed one series each from written literature and videogames as a way of contrasting their narrative strategies and the tools used in each one to construct a complex and well-paced story.

Throughout this Master's thesis, I have identified, by relying upon Christopher Vogler's version of the Hero's Journey, the character archetypes and stages of the journey present in both *A*

*Song of Ice and Fire* and *Dragon Age*. Based on this study, I exemplified how players can shape both the story and world of *Dragon Age* through his or her choices. This is possible through the concept of interactivity, which allows players to take an active role in the storytelling process of a game's story, plot, and narrative.

I distilled three main storylines from both series and studied them through Vogler's views and explanations, presenting possible structuring devices for all of them. For *A Song of Ice and Fire*, I chose to study Ned Stark's journey throughout the first book, as well as Jon Snow's fight against the White Walkers and finally Daenerys Targaryen's rise to power. Meanwhile, while discussing the *Dragon Age* series of videogames, I explored each separate game as its own entity, meaning that I inspected the stories of *Dragon Age Origins*, *Dragon Age 2*, and *Dragon Age Inquisition*. In addition, I also drew conclusions from contrasting a variety of elements from both series, as I analyzed their similarities and differences. I connected these worlds through their world building, comparing the Darkspawn to the White Walkers, as well as the Night's Watch to the Grey Wardens, and even the Andrastian Chantry to the Faith of the Seven. Other comparisons include my study of themes in both series, where I discuss the theme of meaningless conflict in the face of a "real" threat. Finally, I contrasted some characters, such as *Jon Snow* with *Alistair Theirin* and *Carver Hawke*; as well as *Cersei Lannister* with *Anora Mac'Tir* and *Celene Valmont*, a comparison that even led to another, between *Robert Baratheon* and *Cailan Theirin*.

These discussions served as pillars of context and connection to facilitate the inspection of their respective narratives. By demonstrating how all six of these plotlines fit into the Hero's Journey, I have demonstrated how interactivity can empower the player to take an active role within that story. By making choices, both inside and outside the gameplay, such as during the process of character creation and of the planning of builds, the player is assuming a role similar to a co-author

in that game and exemplifying the potential of videogames to construct stories that are not only complex but also unique to that player.

I have demonstrated, through a more direct analysis of different choices present in all three *Dragon Age* games, how videogames are sometimes forced to limit the concept of interactivity. This may happen due to a variety of reasons, such as monetary budgets; time constraints or even technology limitations. In response to these issues, developers, including those at *Bioware*, sometimes rely upon illusion of choice.

Illusion of choice, as presented and discussed in this Master's thesis, is a response mechanism used to limit the perspectives of branching storytelling in games. By analyzing how it appears in the *Dragon Age* games, I have demonstrated how illusion of choice is used as a tool to slightly direct the player towards the main story of the game, without removing choice altogether. This, however, was not the only issue I have discussed that relates to interactivity and the influence of the player upon the experience of a game.

The problem of Ludo-narrative dissonance, which is also called player-character dissonance, was discussed through the lens of Ernest Adams' works, called "The Challenge of the Interactive Movie" and "Resolutions to Some Problems in Interactive Storytelling". While narrativists have provided a couple of possible solutions to this matter, Adams argues that they are all, in some way or another, inefficient, for they fail to solve the actual problem or they create new ones. While I have not completely answered these problems, I have provided possible alternatives for how *Dragon Age* could have presented different scenarios and included more interactive consequences throughout its missions and quests.

In addition to that, I have analyzed how these games have already provided chances for meaningful interaction between the player and the world of *Dragon Age*. When studying the influence of the player upon characters and how that influence can shape the character arcs of

certain individuals, I analyzed the fate of *Alistair Theirin* and *Loghain Mac'Tir*, as well as the development of *Morrigan* into a mother and many more examples, such as the Hawke twins; *Merrill*; *The Iron Bull's* double personality dilemma; *Blackwall's* fate and themes; and even the destiny of *Solas*, who will probably return in the next game as its main antagonist. These characters are all examples of how the player's choices can influence the story of the game, creating divergent versions of the same overall plot.

Another aspect I have studied in relation to the player is how he or she can shape, in a similar fashion to specific characters, the very world of *Thedas*. For this purpose, I mentioned a number of quests and choices from all three games, including *A Paragon of Her Kind*, *Nature of the Beast*, the expansion *Awakening*, the conflict between mages and templars, and finally the decision of who the next Divine will be in *Dragon Age Inquisition*.

I have used all this information to discuss how interactivity could have influenced the story and plot of *A Song of Ice and Fire*, while accounting for the varying restrictions videogames must continuously balance when developing narrative. With all of this, I have presented both the raw potential interactivity provides videogames in a narrative sense, while discussing the practical limitations that must be overcome if games are to continuously develop a distinctive form of storytelling that is unique to them. While different games might be cited for different uses of interactivity, both good and bad, it is imperative that both scholars and potential game developers continuously analyze these stories as a way to provide new and immersive experiences in the future. Experiences that assist videogames in the advancement of the use of interactivity.

Videogames have existed for a relatively short amount of time. While oral storytelling and written literature have a much longer existence, games are a more recent form of storytelling. Videogames have developed exponentially fast, especially when considering their storytelling potentials: existent theoretical knowledge and technology used in special effects. This has turned

videogames, in a storytelling sense, into one of the most notorious contemporary art forms. One that is only recently beginning to tap into its full narrative potential and that is continuously evolving alongside the technology available to developers, which allows better graphics, more immersive gameplay, and more possibilities in plot construction and narrative analysis.

Those are the reason scientific works, such as this one, are required for the development of both the paradigm of game studies and the study of interactivity in videogames. As Farley Eduardo puts it: “Fiction changes, and, in contemporary culture, we note an appreciation of the individual’s expression. There is a change of position between reader and author, and the common individual expresses him or herself, creates fictional worlds or, in the case of the RPG, collaborates in the construction of a fictional world” (128). There is no shortage of potential viewpoints and lines of study to be undertaken through the lenses of videogames and game studies, especially when fused to tools and concepts already available through other paradigms of literary studies. For example, when *Dragon Age 4* does come out, a comparison of my overviews here could illuminate how *Bioware* has handled new consequences based on previously present choices. Alternatively, it might prove enthralling to make an additional analysis of its plot and narrative through the lens of the Hero’s Journey, contrasting it to the studies I have provided here. When the series finally reaches its ending, be that with *Dragon Age 4* or a possible fifth game, an analysis of the Hero’s Journey considering not the protagonists, but the player him or herself as the Hero archetype could provide a fresh perspective on the idea of interactivity and decision making in videogame stories. For those that wish to direct their projects towards other games, entries such as the new *Tomb Raider* trilogy, *The Last of Us 2* and even 2018’s *God of War* provide opportunity to study storytelling in games that offer less direct choice to its players, allowing a head-on comparison between such examples and other ones that focus on interactivity. Understanding gaming narrative requires a constant flow of studies and work, so that the complexity and uniqueness of stories in

videogames can develop equally to the technology used to depict them. As I have presented in this Master's thesis, videogames have a unique relationship to storytelling, and as any other art form and technology, they remain and will continue to remain relevant.

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