

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the research background, research problem, research purpose significance, conceptual framework, and previous studies.

1.1 Research Background

Video games were originally intended as entertainment, the role of narrative has had varying significance and importance since their inception. Although games did not originally feature stories as a focus, technological advances have given game developers the freedom to make narrative a central element. The idea of a narrative is connected to a story, but it is not the same thing as the story itself. Think of it as the plot—which is just a fancy word for how the story is told. It's important to know that the plot and the story are two different things. The plot is made up of only a few important event scenes that are connected to each other. The person telling the story (the narrator) chooses these scenes on purpose to show to the audience. On the other hand, the narrative is what we call the simple order of events from beginning to end, meaning the sequence in which things actually happen in the story. The process of narrating is based on interpretation according to Dictionary's (2006) primary definition. For example, One of the games that researchers will examine is Red Dead Redemption 2 (RDR2), in that video games there are storytelling techniques that prioritize player engagement in a video game and allow players to explore a vast, non-linear universe while interacting with the plot in various ways are known as “open world narratives”. Instead of following a predetermined or linear plot, open-world narratives usually feature a vast game setting that can be explored freely and without rules. In addition to participating in the main plot, players have the option to explore new areas, interact with non-playable characters (NPCs), and complete side missions, all of which can affect the experience and the progression of the plot. A unique ending or multiple endings

that depend on the player's choices and actions are often the result of this narrative design method, which gives the player a sense of immersion, freedom and personal connection to the game universe.

In recent years 2006 until 2024 video games have gained extraordinary popularity among the public. Video games have also become an important part of the entertainment industry. This can be seen from the increasing number of game development companies competing with each other to create games that are popular and can be enjoyed by the general public. The popularity of these video games is not only felt by children and teenagers. But it also attracts interest from adults. Because at this time, apart from focusing on game mechanics, video games are also starting to focus on the stories built in the game. Viewed from a literary perspective, especially from popular literature, the current video games seem to build a story that becomes an interesting subject in research. By using popular literature studies, the storylines in video games can be analyzed and seen whether the stories in video games are the same as those in films or novels.

Video games have their own genres. Starting from adventure, fantasy, action, romance, horror, sports and so on. However, the video games that most often have stories in them are video games that have adventure and fantasy themes. This is because these two themes cover a very wide area that are good for developing the story in the game. Therefore, stories in adventure-themed games are interesting objects to discuss in literary studies. One way to see whether this game has an adventure theme is through the formula. Formula fiction is a genre of fiction in which a number of novels or literary works share numerous aspects, making it possible to predict the outcome by creating a pattern or formula. The utilization of plots and storylines that support the predictable narrative of any given story is one of the primary traits of this genre of fiction. Although critics and scholars have frequently undervalued this genre of fiction, it is precisely some of these works that draw sizable readerships. A series of literary works that employ a formulaic fiction writing strategy may ultimately provide entertaining reading for many over the years, partly because some audiences enjoy the predictable nature of this type of

work. Where a formula is a series of narrative or dramatic conventions used in a large number of individual works, according to what Cawelti said (1997:15).

A formula is both a product of culture and an influence on culture, as it serves as a conventional framework that connects certain images, symbols, themes, and myths. The process through which a formula develops, transforms, and diverges from other formulas represents a form of cultural change that often goes unnoticed by the audience. This transformation occurs as part of cultural evolution, where a formula persists or fades depending on audience reception and selection. A formula can be understood as a narrative pattern. When readers or viewers are able to identify a formula, they essentially uncover the underlying basis of popularity shared by multiple works. When a formula functions effectively, its narrative structure carries particular meaning and appeal for many people within a culture. Generally, conventional definitions of formula are based on the elements of fictional texts, such as themes and settings. However, fiction can also introduce originality in terms of plot, storytelling techniques, and other narrative components. This is possible because fictional works are often rich in innovation and creative invention."All cultural products contain a mixture of two types of elements: conventions and inventions" According to Cawelti (1976, p. 384).

In popular literature, the term hero generally refers to the main character of a literary work, but it can also have a more specific meaning when used to describe figures celebrated in ancient legends or early heroic epics, such as Gilgamesh, The Iliad, Beowulf, or La Chanson de Roland. Unlike historically gender-specific terms, the word hero is now commonly used for individuals of any gender, while heroine specifically refers to women. In classical epics, early heroes were often portrayed as individuals who performed extraordinary deeds to achieve honor and glory. Etymologically, the term originates from the Greek word *hērōēs*, meaning "demigod," which later gave rise to the concept of heroism (Franco et al., 2018). In adventure narratives, a hero is typically depicted as a strong character, either an individual or a group, who strives to accomplish specific goals or overcome significant challenges. Even in novels and films, the hero who has found or done

something beyond the normal range of achievement and experience. “The hero overcomes these opponents according to Hourihan (2010:9) because he is strong, brave, resourceful, rational and determined to succeed. He may receive assistance from wise and benevolent beings who recognize him for what he is”. The quotation explains that when a hero fights the enemy, he must be strong and brave to face every test he faces. In addition, heroes can receive help from others.

According to Campbell (2004, pp. 51–52), the hero’s journey consists of three main stages, each comprising several sub-stages that provide a more detailed explanation of the overall process. The first stage is Departure, which includes four sub-stages: the call to adventure, refusal of the call, supernatural aid, and crossing the first threshold. The second stage is Initiation, which involves two sub-stages: the road of trials and the meeting with the Goddess. The final stage is Return, which includes three sub-stages: refusal of the return, rescue from without, and freedom to live. In this journey, the hero undergoes several phases of transformation. During the departure stage, the hero leaves their place of origin to pursue a specific goal. In the initiation stage, the hero faces various challenges, obstacles, and trials that test their strength and character. Finally, in the return stage, after completing their mission—often involving saving others or preventing destruction—the hero returns to their place of origin, having gained new wisdom or power. Heroes in such narratives are typically portrayed as embodiments of virtue and morality. They are designed to represent the “good” within the story—benevolent, honest, honorable, and driven by a strong sense of justice. They fight against evil forces and are often involved in dangerous adventures, wars, or other life-threatening challenges. Moreover, they demonstrate exceptional courage, bravery, mental acuity, and physical strength, making them central figures in constructing the formula of adventure stories.

In popular literature, not only heroes are presented in the game but also the presence of Anti-Heroes. Anti-Hero still has the same traits as heroes, but uses more cruel and brutal methods, using any means to save a person or a day even by killing blindly. According to Karen Bernando (2018:2) Anti-hero is a major character,

“usually the protagonist” who lacks conventional nobility of mind, and who struggles for values not deemed universally admirable. Duddy, in Mordecai Richler’s *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, is a classic anti-hero. He’s vulgar, manipulative and self-centered. Nevertheless, Duddy is the center of the story, and we are drawn to the challenges he must overcome and the goals he seeks to achieve (Karen Bernardo, 2018:2).

In this case, Arthur Morgan is taken as evidence of Hero and Anti-hero in popular literature. It can be seen that he was the right-hand man of Dutch Van Der Linde Arthur taking part in robberies and murders without questioning its moral implications. He sees this action as part of a "business" that supports the group's sustainability making him a snapper-class criminal. However, everything begins to change, Arthur is sick and questions his life. In this phase, two choices are given, namely the High Honor and Low Honor paths as a form of hero and anti-hero concepts.

For more example, in this study, Arthur Morgan is seen as a hero and an anti-hero. In the hero of his adventure in *Red Dead Redemption 2* using Campbell's theory, it can be seen that Arthur lives as a member of the Van Der Linde gang, then is called for the gang's survival mission by showing loyalty to Dutch. He has heroic traits such as sacrifice to his gang members, always providing inspiration when Van Der Lind's gang members are on the verge of splitting.

While on the other hand we can be seen as an Anti-hero with a criminal who does not hesitate to use violence, but on the one hand helps helpless people and saves them even for his own gang.

In this case, the moral choices given to players (high honor or low honor path) show Arthur's versatility as an anti-hero. In the high honor path, he displayed an evolution into a figure closer to a hero, whereas in the low honor path, he was completely immersed in his dark side.

One formula that is often and popular in video games with an adventure theme is the western formula. This is because westerns are a historical adventure

genre that is suitable for all ages, so westerns are very popular among the public. In short, western itself is a genre that tells the story of people's lives in the American west or better known as the wild west. The protagonist featured in the western genre is usually a sheriff, cowboy, gunslinger or even outlaw. The hero figure in western stories according to Petrie & Boggs (2018:423), is someone who has advanced riding and fighting skills. Apart from that, he is also a clever figure and is skilled at using weapons. In video games, these western characters are really liked by many people because they are considered cool and tough. Based on the discussion above, the researchers choose one of the most famous western-themed adventure games for the object of the research titled Red Dead Redemption 2.

In short, Red Dead Redemption 2 is western-adventure type game that was developed and published by the Rockstar company. This game is set in America in 1899 which is several years after the great civil war ended. This game focuses on the story of Arthur Morgan. A member of an outlaws group named Von Der Linde gang who tried to survive in the midst of the fall of the wild west era. As the Pinkertons increasingly pursue them, Arthur must choose between his idealism and his loyalty to the gang which eventually lead to the ending of this game. In this game, the players can explore a vast open world with various activities such as hunting, fishing and Interacting with other characters by riding horses to robbing cars with weapon duels and battles in each game. In the game, border life, harsh small towns and vast deserts, then the changing times of the traditional valentine city and the modern Saint Denis. The game also features moral elements that affect the storyline based on the player's decisions. Red Dead Redemption 2 was very well received by critics and players for its strong narrative, deep characters, and immersive world and is considered as one of the best story games ever created.

1.2 Statement of Problem

The problem lies in the characteristics of the western genre that people are familiar with. Western genre is usually found in a novel or movie, but this time the western genre is found in a game. This causes a different impression of the

perspective of the western genre and also curiosity. The questions posed in this research include:

1. What elements of western described in the *Red Dead Redemption 2* game?
2. How does the main character Arthur Morgan build hero and anti-hero in the *Red Dead Redemption 2* game?

1.3 Research Purpose

To describe and examine the problems above, the author set out several goals to help readers of this research. The research objectives based on the problem formulation are:

1. To know the elements of western described in *Red Dead Redemption 2* game.
2. To find out the main character Arthur Morgan builds a hero and anti-hero in the *Red Dead Redemption 2* game.

1.4 Research Significances

This study will examine how western elements and common hero and anti-hero characters and offer a more complex understanding of the main character Athur Morgan and the Red Dead Redemption Two game, this research aims to explore the western elements that have been preserved to show the characteristics of a culture that existed in the 19th century. In addition, knowing the traits of the main character Arthur Morgan who has 2 traits in the game that are formed due to one cause from one event that will change the main character. Finally, this analysis aims to investigate the stored elements that contain certain meanings and the impact of an event that changes the nature of the main character in the game.

1.5 Previous Study

As a basic reference, some previous studies researchers found such as the article titled *The Educational Value of Virtue Ecologies in Red Dead Redemption 2* by Crowley, Silk, & Crowley (2021) which the research seeks to prove that video games can also be designed as a method of ecological education for the wider community. The reason they did this research was because they saw that Red Dead Redemption 2 is an open-world simulation game that has good details about the North American ecosystem in the 19th century, which can be utilized for players to learn more about the wildlife in the real world.

Next, is the research by Hanna (2022) entitled *Representation of nature in Red Dead Redemption 2* which explains that by using narratives about nature, red dead redemption 2 can present and describe changes in nature and civilization that occur as separate entities. As evidence in his research about nature is hunting and survival in the wild and the amazing natural scenery of the United States in the late 19th century that can be seen in the game. Civilization that can be found is the industrial revolution that occurred in the United States where in the game Red Dead Redemption 2 there are factories and horses starting to be replaced by carriages in the city as well as the presence of steamships and diesel engines.

The next is the research entitled *Rockstar Games, Red Dead Redemption, and Narratives of "Progress"* by Esther Wright (2021) this research aims to find out the historiography using the narrative of "progress" the conclusion of this research is that the narrative of "progress" and civilization" can be explored such as the colonialism of Native American land and white supremacy in the 19th century.

There is also an article titled *The Wild West: Accuracy, Authenticity and Gameplay in Red Dead Redemption 2* by Donald and & Reid (2020) which This article discusses ways to approach and use video games as texts, not unlike the use of film and literature, and their validity in the classroom. The aim is to inspire and encourage teachers to use popular video games among students to explore and better understand how they shape and influence players' perspectives on historical

narratives. This article will explore Red Dead Redemption 2 as an example of a video game that can be viewed through the lens of historical rigor and applied in a history-based classroom exercise. Specifically, this article will analyze the content of Red Dead Redemption 2 under three main themes: record, accuracy, and authenticity. From the previous research above, it can be concluded that this research shows novelty and has never been studied before by other researchers, where researchers explore the hero and adventure through the narrative formula in Red Dead Redemption 2.

The next article is "*The Melancholy of Red Dead Redemption 2: A Study of Loss and Nostalgia in the American Frontier*" by Sarah Stang (2021). This article uses qualitative analysis with a close reading method of narrative, world design, and game mechanics. The results found that RDR2 destroys the romance of the "Wild West" by showing violence, world design, and game mechanics. Using the concepts of nostalgia (Svetlana Boym) and melancholia (Freud) to discuss the theme of loss in RDR2. The results of the study found that RDR2 destroys the romance of the "Wild West" by showing violence, exploitation of nature, and the failure of the protagonist (Arthur Morgan) to fight the system. The game uses nostalgia not only as a theme, but also mechanics (for example: photos, letters, and character memories) to create emotional depth and the theme of loss (death, disease, extinction of nature) reflects modern anxiety about social and ecological change.

Next, is the research by Brendan Keogh (2020) entitled "*Cowboys and Contradictions: The Ambivalent Politics of Red Dead Redemption 2*". The method uses close textual analysis, narrative, mechanics, and player interactions, framed through critical theory. The conclusion in Red Dead Redemption 2 (RDR2) embodies a tension between critiquing and romanticizing the American frontier myth. The game simultaneously exposes the violence of capitalism, colonialism, and industrialization while reveling in the aesthetic and emotional appeal of cowboy individualism.

The next article is "*'I Just Love to Explore': Player Agency and Environmental Storytelling in Red Dead Redemption 2*" by Espen Aarseth (2019).

Using a qualitative method with a close reading approach to the design of the RDR2 game world and analysis of game mechanics (for example: the honor system, NPC interactions, and environmental dynamics) that influence player decisions, the researcher analyzes how Red Dead Redemption 2 (RDR2) uses environmental storytelling (environmental narrative) to increase player agency (player freedom in exploring and interacting with the game world). In conclusion, "Aarseth (2019) in his research emphasizes that the strength of RDR2's narrative lies in its dynamic environment, where players are given the freedom to create unique stories through exploration. However, this study does not touch on the aspect of players' emotional involvement in the context of game morality."

Next, is the research by Rachel Kowert (2020) entitled "*The Impact of Hyper-Realism on Player Empathy in Red Dead Redemption 2*" using mixed quantitative and qualitative methods, with participants filling more than 500 players with a minimum playing experience of 20 hours. The results in his study researchers found an increase in Empathy: 68% of participants reported increased empathy towards characters (specifically Arthur Morgan) due to:

Hyper-realistic design of facial expressions and gestures in the game. Narratives that force players to make difficult moral choices (e.g. helping NPCs or ignoring NPCs). The world details (dynamic weather, NPC reactions to player actions) deepen emotional engagement, and the "awareness of consequences" effect makes players more reflective. Female participants tended to be more emotionally affected by side quests involving family.

The next article is "*Honor Systems in RDR2: Player Choice and Ethical Dilemmas*" by Jose P. Zagal (2021). The researcher used a qualitative approach with textual analysis of the "Honor" system mechanic in Red Dead Redemption 2 (RDR2), as well as case studies of player behavior through discussion forums (Reddit, Steam) and interviews with 15 participants. The researcher found that the moral dynamics in the Honor system in RDR2 are not black-and-white - players often face dilemmas where "good" choices (e.g. helping NPCs) can be unfavorable in gameplay then, there is tension between the player's freedom and Arthur

Morgan's predetermined narrative (as a problematic character). Psychological Impact when playing RDR2 as a "role-play" tends to be more emotionally affected by the Honor system than those who play strategically. However, this study was limited to Western players, so it is worth further examining how local cultures influence the interpretation of the value of 'honor' in games."

Next, is the research by Marx Silcox (2021) entitled *"Arthur Morgan's Redemption Arc: A Nietzschean Perspective"* using philosophical analysis with a Nietzschean approach (the concept of Übermensch, master-slave morality, and amor fati) and narrative study through the exploration of Arthur Morgan's character in Red Dead Redemption 2 (RDR2), including dialog, missions, and honor system dynamics. The conclusions found in this journal are Arthur Morgan as Anti-Übermensch, Arthur represents the conflict between the values of "blind loyalty" (to Dutch) and the quest for self-redemption, which contradicts Nietzsche's idea of the Übermensch who creates his own moral values and Arthur's transformation in Chapter 6 reflects amor fati (accepting fate) as he seeks to make amends for past mistakes. Dutch van der Linde as a Parody of Nietzschean Leader, Dutch is portrayed as a leader who claims to be "above common morals", but instead is trapped in nihilism (the destruction of the alley due to his ambition).

The next article is *"The Hero's Journey: A Study of Western Narrative Structure"* by Smith, J (2015). uses a qualitative analysis of the narrative structure of Western myths using Joseph Campbell's (1949) monomyth framework. Studies in the film *The Searchers* (1956) and the novel *Blood Meridian* (1985). His research confirms that modern Western stories follow a 12-stage Hero's Journey pattern (Call to Adventure, Trials, Return, etc.). Protagonists in the Western genre often experience moral ambiguity as part of the transformation. However, this study does not discuss in depth the dynamics of interactivity of the narrative structure.

Next, is the research by Nelson, A (2018) entitled *"From Odysseus to Superman: The Evolution of the Western Hero"* using textual and comparative analysis of the representation of heroes in Western literature, ranging from the Homeric epic (Odysseus) to the modern figure (Superman). The conclusion is that

the classical hero (e.g. Odysseus) represents ingenuity and loyalty to family, while the modern hero (e.g. Superman) focuses on moral absolutes and saving society.

The next is the research entitled *"Gender and the Hero: Representation in RPGs"* by Kafai (2020), in which the researcher used qualitative analysis and survey studies, resulting in a gender imbalance between men and women. Only 30% of RPG protagonists are female, and most have hyper-sexualized designs (example impractical armor, unrealistic body proportions). Female characters are more often sidekicks or victims in the main narrative, while male characters tend to have heroic arcs (example world-saving, revenge).

The next is the research entitled *Use of Narrative in Video Games as Educational Media World Issue: Case Study Detroit Become Human* by Tony Wibowo and Kelifa Limanda (2020), in their research they prove the potential of video games as educational media about current world issues by taking the game Detroit Become Human. The method used is to compare our views as a society on world issues and codify our views into games. Their research proves that video games in the form of narratives can be a potential educational medium on world issues.

Finally, is *"Moral Choices in Video Games: The Illusion of Heroism"* by Miguel Sicart (2013). This research uses philosophical analysis of moral systems in games and qualitative analysis. Sicart's research highlights the limitations of moral systems in games, games often offer binary moral choices (e.g. "good vs. evil"), but their design limits players to a predetermined narrative. Sicart argues that games need to encourage more nuanced ethical thinking, not just "moral points".

Furthermore, this study specifically focuses on the exploration of Western elements in the game Red Dead Redemption 2 by Rockstar Games, as well as how the construction of hero and anti-hero characters is shaped through both narrative and gameplay. The study also highlights the influence of the main character on the overall game mechanics (gameplay). To date, no research has been found that thoroughly examines this topic with the same object of study, and therefore, this study aims to fill the existing gap in academic discourse.

Based on this background, the researcher considers it important to analyze the Western elements in the game that influence the behavior of both the main character and supporting characters. These elements are presented in the form of narrative and symbolic cues conveyed through dialogue and the characters' actions. Additionally, the researcher seeks to delve deeper into how the protagonist is represented as both a hero and an anti-hero, and to understand this concept within the narrative context of video games.

Although many studies have discussed Western elements and the representation of heroes and anti-heroes in literary works, research on Red Dead Redemption 2 remains very limited. Therefore, this study will present an analysis of the representation of Western elements through the verbal interactions and behaviors of the characters in the game. The researcher will also examine how the heroic and anti-heroic traits of the protagonist impact the perception and reactions of other characters in the game.

1.6 Definition of Key Term

There are the clarifications of the key terms used in this research. The researcher clarify the key point, as follow:

Narrative is a narrative that refers to a structured account of connected events, experiences, or stories, typically presented in a sequence and conveyed through a specific perspective or voice. It is the way in which a story is told, encompassing the plot, characters, setting, and themes. According to Dictionary's (2006) primary definition Narrative, is considered as the chronological sequence of stories or the order in which the events occur. The process of narrating is based on interpretation. Narratives can be fictional or non-fictional and are a fundamental element of storytelling across genres, including novels, short stories, epics, memoirs, and more.

Hero is a central character who typically embodies admirable qualities such as courage, morality, and resilience. The hero often faces significant challenges, conflicts, or adversaries, and their journey usually involves personal growth, self-discovery, or the pursuit of a noble goal. The concept of a hero can vary across genres and cultures, but they generally serve as a symbol of hope, virtue, or the triumph of good over evil. The hero overcomes these opponents according to Hourihan (2010:9) because he is strong, brave, resourceful, rational and determined to succeed. He may receive assistance from wise and benevolent beings who recognize him for what he is.

Anti-Hero is a central character who lacks traditional heroic qualities such as idealism, courage, or morality. still has the same traits as heroes, but uses more cruel and brutal methods, using any means to save a person or a day even by killing blindly. According to Karen Bernando (2018:2) Anti-hero is a major character, “usually the protagonist” who lacks conventional nobility of mind, and who struggles for values not deemed universally admirable.

Western is refers to a set of conventional themes, character archetypes, and plot structures commonly found in Western genre fiction. This genre, often associated with the American frontier and the Old West, emerged in the 19th and early 20th centuries and has since become a staple of American popular culture. In short, western itself is a genre that tells the story of people's lives in the American west or better known as the wild west.