



FEMALE CHARACTERS IN VIDEO GAMES

Representation and Character Types

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ABSTRACT

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In the recent years there has been a large social movement to indicate different problems in society and culture, whether it is unequal representation, sexism, racism or prejudices, aiming at a more broad, open culture with improved equality on all fronts. Inspired by this movement, the purpose of this thesis is to take a critical look at how women are represented in modern Western video games, and give a summary of the problems.

The thesis looks at the most prominent subjects, such as numerical representation and how video games represent female characters, using concepts and terms such as the male gaze and male as norm. The aim is to give a broad look at the overall situation. The focus is also put on different female character types, representation of sexuality and gender traits, with numerous character examples. The main method of evaluating the current state is data collecting, comprising of numerous articles, books, studies and lectures, as well as the thesis author's work history as a reviewer of video games and video game industry.

After evaluating the current situation, the thesis also includes a game project called Roar, designed to showcase a game concept with a variety of different female characters. The story, themes and game mechanics are designed to supplement the character arc of the female hero. The project also attempts to be an example of how the representational problems can be averted.

Key words: video games, female characters, representation of women.

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ABBREVIATIONS

TAMK	Tampere University of Applied Sciences
cr	credit
EEDAR	Electronic Entertainment Design and Research
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
COO	Chief Operating Officer
DLC	downloadable content, extra gameplay for additional cost
co-op	co-operative; a mode where many humans play against the AI
FPS	first person shooter
CGI	computer generated imagery

1 INTRODUCTION

The topic of gender equality and the treatment of female gamers and female game characters have been a current topic in the industry for years. As women as gamers has also grown as a demographic through the years, there has been a wide social movement hoping for a more broad and diverse representation.

The thesis aims at evaluating and providing a broad overview of the current situation, focusing on studying possible representational issues and how they manifest themselves. An overview is also made of how varied and different female character types video games portray – focusing on AAA-games with large budgets and development teams or in some special cases smaller productions, if they are culturally significant.

The theoretical part of the thesis focuses on three points. The first is the representation of women in video games, meaning numerical representation, diversity and possible problems. The second is gender based expectations. What gender means, what are gender based traits and expectations and how are they expressed. The third focus is the depiction of sexuality in videogames and sexual objectification. The scope is intentionally broad, since as Julianne Wood – a professor focusing on gender, culture and communication – describes, “gender, culture and communication are interlinked – – we cannot study any of them without understanding a good deal about the other two” (Wood, 2009, 20).

The practical part of the thesis will be a concept for a videogame, which will showcase how stereotypes and other problems in storytelling can be averted, while maintaining a diverse cast of empowering characters. The concept will include the story, a variety of characters, themes, story structure and preliminary game and level design.

2 REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN VIDEO GAMES

Video games and the topic of gender equality are both topical, and fast evolving in current western society. Although game designers have started to improve the overall situation, female representation is still unsatisfactory and lacking on many fronts. Society as a whole sees technological fields as masculine, female game developers experience unequal treatment, female gamers are harassed and their hobby questioned, and female characters in video games rely heavily on gender based stereotypes and characteristics. These problems persist, even though numerous studies suggest that roughly half of all gamers are women. (Chalk, 2014; Burrows, 2013; Kelleher, 2015; Bertozzi & Lee, 25)

To understand where the problems of the modern Western video game culture – of which the female video game characters are a part of – stem from, one has to understand the social constructs in which the culture is created and to which it is presented. Video games – and the characters within them – are a clear continuation of the culture which surrounds and influences them, and like other fields in culture, they are a direct continuum of the current values of the society in which they are created. In this part, I will focus on two things. The first is how women are represented in video games. The second is explaining the effect of society on how women and femininity is viewed and portrayed in the Western culture.

Modern laws have given genders equal rights and authority on paper, but it is important to understand that established culture and preconceptions may still be upheld. This means, that even if people have, for example, the same rights regardless of their race, sexual orientation or gender, there can still be bias and prejudice. Some countries also vary on their legislation on different matters (Verloo, 2007, 282-285). The next parts detail the most important factors from our current culture, which influence how female characters are portrayed the most.

2.1 Numerical Representation and Possible Reasons for It

Representation of female characters can be viewed from many perspectives, such as the numerical representation compared to male characters, numerical representation between male and female heroes and how female characters are designed, marketed and presented.

According to studies, the numerical representation of female characters in video games does not reflect the balance between sexes in real world. According to a study in 2007, out of 49 analysed games there were 282 male characters, and only 53 female characters, meaning that there were only one female characters per 5.3 male characters (Miller & Summers, 2007). According to another study done two years later, the amount of female characters was 14.77% of all of the video game characters (Williams et al., 2009). On top of representation issues in numerical sense, this also enforces another problem concerning the characterisation of women. Because there is usually a limited amount of female characters, their characteristics may become the representation of all women as a whole.

Women as heroes are also wholly under-represented. According to a 2012 study by EEDAR, Electronic Entertainment Design and Research, only 24 video games, or 4%, of 669 video games had an exclusively female hero, while 300 video games, or 45%, gave the option for either gender. The 669 games used for the study were from roleplaying games, shooters and action games. Inequality is also apparent in marketing: video games with female heroes had less than 40% of the marketing budget of games with male heroes. (Kuchera, 2012) It is also notable that when the hero is a woman, in many cases the character can still be, for example, sexually objectified or portrayed in stereotypical fashion. Lara Croft, the hero of Tomb Raider can be seen as such a character; in her original design – the character has since been rebooted – the marketing of the game relied on the sex appeal of the character. (Wu, 2015) Sexual objectification is further studied in the next chapter.

Experts, journalists and employees in the game industry have shared varying opinions and hypothesis for the reason why male and female characters are treated unequally, whether it concerns playable characters or characters overall. There does not seem to be any undisputable, single cause. Jennifer Mendez also notes that there seems to be a lack of studies on the reasons why the situation has established and why it has not improved (Mendez, 2016).

Feminist media critic Anita Sarkeesian details the unequal representation in her Tropes vs. Women -video series. Originally coined by Katha Pollitt, the principle known as The Smurfette Principle is “the tendency for works in fiction to have exactly one female amongst an ensemble of male characters, in spite of the fact that roughly half of the human race is female.” The principle states, that since being a woman is in itself a character trait, there is no need to for many female characters. (Sarkeesian, 2011)

A feminist theory titled male as norm explores the same principle on a larger scale in society. The central idea of the concept “male as a norm” is the effect of seeing male as the norm in society, which directly translates into how we view deviations to the norm. Male as norm, in general terms, means that male or man is seen as the default, or the normal, in society and culture, to which female is a non-default deviation. (Sharp, 2013) Similar defaults are assigned to race, sexual orientation, social class and disability (Fox et al., 2009, 8). Straight is a norm, while homosexuality is a deviation, something out of the norm, for example. The Smurfette Principle, or the broader concept male as norm can be seen as one of the reasons on how female characters are created and why there are so few of them: their gender, as a deviation, becomes one of the defining characteristics or a character trait in itself, eliminating the need for numerous characters with the same trait. Jennifer Mendez from video game publishing and marketing firm Black Shell Media concurs the idea of male as norm, stating that male characters are the norm and what is expected in the industry. David Gaider, one of Bioware’s lead writers and Professor Jeffrey Brand also share the thought, noting that the industry sees men as the default. (Mendez, 2016; Starr, 2014)

According to Tracy Lien, the inequality is a continuation of decades of marketing and branding video games for men, which has created a situation where women are discouraged from taking a part in video game culture. This has helped verify the main player base as male, which in turn has influenced game developers to design video games primarily for men, including emphasis on male characters. (Lien, 2013) Patrick Söderlund, the executive vice president of EA Studios believes the current problem is because of male-dominated business with men in lead creative roles, who focus on designing games for men. Yves Guillemot, the CEO of Ubisoft believes that the amount of female protagonists will grow in correlation with the amount of female players. (Makuch, 2014). In addition to male as norm -theory, David Gaider believes that the industry as a whole believes that the player character should reflect the largest player

base. Game marketer Chris Wright believes that the main reason may be the lack of awareness of the problem. (Starr, 2014)

Many also constitute varying degrees of monetary costs and financial risks as reasons. Video game companies like Ubisoft and Splash Damage have argued that having female protagonists would increase the budget and resources in animation and visual departments (Makuch, 2014; Hillier, 2014). Professor Jeffrey Brand and the COO of EEDAR, David Zatkan also state that many companies may avoid commercial risk by having a female character, fearing that the male players may not buy a game featuring a female hero. David Gaider similarly believes that companies may avoid all kinds of deviations out of the norm, i.e. having something else besides a neutral male as the hero to minimize financial risks (Starr, 2014; Kuchera, 2012). Stories from game developers seem to support this statement: Jean-Maxime Morris, creative director of Remember Me, has stated that numerous publishers refused to publish a game with a female hero, especially since the female protagonist Nilin has a relationship with a male character, believing this will alienate male players (Phillips, 2013). Neil Druckmann, the creative director of The Last of Us was asked to downplay the presence of Ellie, the second main character, in the cover of the game to minimize risks (Cook, 2012).

There is some evidence to support that female characters affect the sales negatively. EEDAR's COO Geoffrey Zatkan has stated that games with a male hero sold 25% better than games with an option for either male or a female hero, and 75% better than games with a female hero. This is inconclusive, however, since the marketing for games with female hero was less than 40% of games with male leads, which makes comparing problematic. In addition, there were only 24 games with female leads to be used in the study, which does not give enough data to draw conclusive results. (Kuchera, 2012) In addition to stated reasons, it should also be noted that the games may have sold badly for other reasons, having no relation to the female lead.

2.2 Sexual Objectification

Sexual objectification in its essence means the reduction of a human being to an item or a thing to be desired, while stripping the target of objectification of its autonomy. Objectification can be deconstructed into 7 features, identified by Martha Nussbaum in

1995. Objectification features instrumentality, in which the target is treated as a tool for a purpose; denial of autonomy, the target being treated as if he or she lacks autonomy and self-determination; inertness, treating the target as if he or she lacks agency; fungibility, in which the target is treated as if he or she is interchangeable with other objects; violability, the target being treated as if he or she lacks boundary-integrity; ownership, in which the target is treated as something which can be owned, and denial of subjectivity, which translates to how the target's personal feelings and experiences do not need to be taken into account. The list was expanded with three features by Rae Langton in 2009: reduction to body, which means identifying the target with their body; reduction to appearance, in which the target is treated based on their appearance, and silencing, which means treating the target as if they were silent. (Feminist Perspectives on Objectification, 2010). In video games, objectification can be seen when a female characters are presented as passive, non-autonomous characters who are designed and presented to please a hypothetical male player. They are defined by their appearance and sex appeal, but there is minimal to no personality or motivations behind them.

Objectifying connects to the desire of men wanting to see women in sexual attire and behaviour, but presented mainly for their entertainment and from their perspective without agency. When it comes to culture and different mediums in media, such as movies and videogames, the act can be connected to the male gaze, a term and concept created by Laura Mulvey. Originally created to critique cinema, the core concept refers to how women are traditionally depicted from a masculine perspective, created to entertain and to be desired by heterosexual men by objectifying women. (Korsmeyer, 2012) Handling female characters, and especially their sexuality, from a hypothetical male perspective robs the characters from their autonomy and power; their actions are dictated by the needs and desires of hypothetical men, instead of their own. Thus they become a fantasy – represented on the terms and tastes of men – instead of an empowering role model for women. Male gaze as a concept is debatable, since it makes many assumptions – e.g. gender, sexual orientation and inhabiting culture – about the creator of the content, but even if it is not used in its literal sense as a way of deconstructing cinematography of movies, the underlying idea of objectifying female characters because of – and for – the predominately male audience still stands valid.

Anita Sarkeesian also talks about male gaze as a part of the Body Language & The Male Gaze -video in her Tropes vs. Women in Video Games -series. Sarkeesian shares the

problematic nature of the male gaze concept, i.e. making assumptions about the creator of the content, but emphasizes that the concept still helps to understand the depiction of women in media, and the gender dynamics in our culture. Sarkeesian also notes that the male gaze should not – and can not – be countered by an inversed “female gaze”. Equal objectification does not improve the situation for anyone, and the dynamics are too different: the male gaze reinforces pre-existing oppression, whereas the hypothetical “female gaze” does not reinforce anything. Sarkeesian also notes the difference in cultural depiction of genders: when male characters are depicted, for example, shirtless, it demonstrates their strength and power, whereas similar depiction for female characters implies something else. (Petit & Sarkeesian, 2016) Culture critic Jim Sterling also emphasizes that men are not objectified in the same sense as women in video games. The fundamental difference rises from the audience being the same: whilst men are depicted overtly muscular, heroic and powerful, they are targeted for the male audience and as such are not objectified, but presented as goals, as idealized personifications. Because female characters are also designed and presented for the same male audience, they are represented above all as targets of sexual desire. As Sterling argues, the female characters do not initiate sexual contact, nor are they playable characters – thus lacking sexual agency and becoming targets of objectification. Sterling summarises his point as male characters being what the hypothetical player wants to be, whereas female characters are what the player wants. (Sterling, 2013)

It should also be mentioned that ethnic women in games may be subjected to orientalism, where their character’s main trait is being an exotic alternative to Caucasians, mostly depicted in erotic, objectifying sense. Ethnic, religious and sexual minorities may also be reduced to tokenism, especially if the character is represented in stereotypical fashion. An example of the opposite is Faith in *Mirror’s Edge*, made by DICE. Faith is Asian American, but her ethnicity is executed respectfully: she doesn’t have a stereotypical accent, her personality is not constrained to Asian stereotypes and her ethnicity is not a major part of her as a character, nor does it have anything to do with the story.

As stated in the previous paragraphs, it is important to note the difference between sexual objectification and imagery, and the characters sexuality – or expression of it. Sexual objectification and the male gaze mean how the player perceives the content, and how the content is designed to please the hypothetical audience, whereas the characters sexuality means the sexual orientation, preference, sexual activity and agency. Lara Croft in *Tomb*

Raider –series, for example, rarely has any romances, nor does she express her sexuality by any other means, but the design and the marketing of the character relies heavily on sexual imagery and objectification of the character. Other examples can be found, for example, in numerous fighting games: Chun-Li in Street Fighter videogames, Jade in Mortal Kombat videogames and Christie Monteiro in Tekken videogames, to name a few, are all hypersexualized characters designed to aesthetically please the hypothetical male, but their sexual identity and expression are non-existent.

When the character does have her own sexual agency, the design choices and the content may still be problematic. This is best shown by comparing the traditional damsel in distress and the seducer –archetypes, details of which can be found in the chapter detailing character types. Both the seducer and the traditional damsel in distress are characterized by their sexuality. The damsel is a pure, innocent character – in essence non-sexual – whereas the seducer is the counterpart; openly sexual, immoral or morally ambiguous, seducing men to do her bidding. These archetypes, and the way they portray sexuality either in positive or negative light, is fundamentally problematic. In broader terms, women can be seen depicted either as pure and innocent – not tainted by sexuality – or openly enjoying and expressing their sexuality. Men wish to have sex with the latter group while simultaneously disrespecting them for their promiscuity, and at the same time want to start a family with the former group. This is commonly known as the Madonna-Whore complex. (Hartman, 2009)

The Madonna-Whore complex can be seen many times in video games and storytelling in general. As previously exemplified, open sexuality stemming from a woman herself, for example, can be viewed as condemnable in modern Western storytelling. Purely evil, or morally ambiguous female characters can usually be seen wearing little to no clothing, whereas characters who are morally sound, have a more conservative attire; in *Vampire: The Masquerade - Bloodlines*, the most sexually active and open character is Jeanette Voerman, a character who first uses the player character for her own personal gain many times, and later on tries to kill the player. As another example, three characters from Bioware's *Mass Effect* videogames can be compared: Matriarch Benezia, one of the main villains of the first game wears a suggestively low neckline, revealing most of her breasts. Her corset-like clothes also highlight her breasts, waist, and groin area. In *Mass Effect 2*, the morally ambiguous Miranda Lawson wears a skin-tight cat suit with a revealing neckline, and the cut-scene camera emphasizes her breasts and behind. One of the morally

good and virtuous characters, Liara T'Soni, on the other hand, wears non-suggestive clothing throughout the game series. An example of Cate Archer, a well written, openly sexual character can be found in the next chapter, after a pretext concerning gender roles and traits.

When two characters have sex, it can be depicted in an exploitative sense, especially in visual aesthetics, instead of focusing on the effect to their relationship. Intercourse may also be the prize for either completing or advancing the game, such as in the case in *Mafia* by Illusion Softworks. Maria, the love interest of the main character is introduced early in the game. Afterwards she can be seen in the background numerous times, and she is the supportive character in one of the levels of the game. After completing the level with her, the main character Tommy and Maria have sex, after which Maria is not seen again throughout the rest of the game. In-game explanation is given so that the player knows Tommy and Maria have married later on, but she is given no dialogue or even in-game presence after the sex scene.

2.3 Gender-Based Expectations

Gender roles are the expected characteristics of individuals, based on the associated expectations and beliefs of the society with the individual's sex. Gender stereotypes are the simplified versions – such as hypersexualized body – of these roles. It is also important to understand the difference between gender and sex: sex is a biological concept, whereas gender means characteristics defined as masculine or feminine. Gender stereotypes affect both women and men in storytelling. Typically male stereotypes, however, are shown as more desirable, e.g. dominance and physical strength versus sexual objectification of women. (Behm-Morawitz, 2014; Blackstone, 2003)

As stated in the previous section, being a male is not a character in itself, so male characters get numerous different traits or archetypes, such as the hero, the coward, the friend or the foe. Female characters' expectations, however, are more tied to love life, domestic life, aesthetics and sexual objectification (Smith & Cook, 2008). The difference is important to understand, because it highlights another problem in female representation: even when female characters are presented, they may still be problematic.

Their character may reinforce stereotypes, be limited to pre-existing gender roles or give a limited range of character arcs.

Femininity and things considered feminine are portrayed extensively either as negative, or weak. Tone of voice, mannerisms, visual signifiers, traits, and tropes are usually showcased in a negative way, despite of the gender of the character with said characteristics. Masculinity, i.e. bravery, heroism, competitiveness is shown in positive light. Robert Chipman calls this color-coding in cultural programming, while analysing the distinction in his video *Pink is Not the Problem*. To explain the concept, Chipman briefly deconstructs the hero and villain of the movie *300*. “[Hero] Leonidas is so macho, he’s basically gelatin testosterone squeezed into a man-shaped sausage casing. But the bad guy, Xerxes? Xerxes is preening and leering and mincing. He’s syrupy and saccharin. He’s into jewellery and finery and pageantry. He’s touchy and feely, and from the looks of his private pleasure tent, he is not straight, to say the least.” Chipman continues his analysis into another movie, *The Hunger Games*, and its hero Katniss Everdeen. “Think about how the bad guys are characterized in *The Hunger Games*. Yup, more mincing, more preening. They gorge on wine and chocolate. They wear make-up and spray tans and frilly costumes. Despite being the female lead, Katniss is coded masculine to be the good guy, while mostly the male villains of the capitol are color-coded female.” (Chipman, 2013) Although it is important, in my opinion, to detach female characters from the pre-ordained roles defined by their gender when suiting, it is also important not to showcase feminine traits themselves overtly in negative light. Female heroes can and should include masculine traits, if the character itself or the world supports or demands it, but this is problematic if it’s done on the expense of feminine traits.

A positive example of portrayal of a female character with both open sexuality and feminine character traits is Cate Archer in *Monolith’s No One Lives Forever*, and the sequel *A Spy In H.A.R.M.’s Way*. Archer is a British spy working for a secret organisation in the 60’s. Cate Archer is presented fore and foremost as a woman. Her femininity can be seen in her attire, body language, demeanour, and choice of gadgets and weapons; she is designed as a fashionable, sexy and attractive woman, but these attributes are not shown in negative, but in positive and empowering way. She also shows compassion and openly displays emotions, which is not presented as vain or unintelligent. Instead, Archer proves to be intelligent and skilful, shattering the stereotype of a vain and beautiful bimbo; she understands that her beauty is an asset in her job, but she does not

rely on it. She is also the agent and the initiator; she uses her sexual charm in her job – but not for nefarious reasons – and she flirts with another agent, Tom Goodman. When other characters make unwanted sexual advances, Archer quickly diminishes them, proving her agency. Archer is not only openly sexual, but she also proves her capabilities as a spy to anyone who doubts her because of her gender, enforcing the empowering qualities of the character, while also showing feminine traits and femininity in positive light. This emphasizes that a character can be sexual and aesthetically pleasing, while staying as an empowering character instead of a fantasy.

2.4 Modern Character Types and Character Examples

This part of the thesis looks at the common character types and archetypes seen in modern video games. The examples are further illustrated using examples from well-known video games. The characters are divided into two parts for an easier read; the commonly feminine characters, whose role is always or at least regularly defined by their gender, and neutral characters, which are mostly defined by their actions and roles, instead of their gender.

Although the concept of an archetype was originally thought by Plato, archetype as a term is credited to Carl Jung, who used the term to describe patterns, situations, images, characters and stories which are universal throughout history, which according to Jung are representations of human experiences in one's psyche. As literary devices, archetypes are reoccurring elements. Archetypes may be for example story elements, themes, symbolism and characters, which are repeated from story to story. (Guerin et al., 1992, 148-160) Character archetypes are basically the defining basis or an essence of a character. There are also small variations between the mediums through which the story is told, and between genres. One can find many lists with different variations, but these are the archetypes and character types I have personally established throughout years of studying, playing and writing about modern, Western video games. It is worth mentioning that many modern games try to consciously mix things up and experiment by either blending character types together, or by subverting the types onto themselves. Most of the listed character types are mostly seen as secondary characters.

2.4.1 Commonly Feminine Character Types

In modern Western video games mothers and maternal figures are surprisingly rare. When mothers or maternal figures can be found, their defining characteristics are the nurturing and protecting qualities. One of the most interesting maternal characters is Brigid Tenenbaum in Bioshock -series. Bioshock is a game featuring Rapture, a fictional city which values intellect and reason, and disregards morality and emotional responses in favour of pure scientific research. As a scientist Tenenbaum alters young girls genetically to harvest and reproduce Adam – a substance which grants special powers – and she is initially shown as an evil character, who agrees with the ideals of Rapture. At that time, Tenenbaum is already a mother figure, but her defining characteristic is that of a scientist instead of motherhood, and she has very little disregard toward her human subjects. As time goes by, Tenenbaum's maternal instincts wake up, which she describes as “beautiful and natural, but in me an abomination”. Tenenbaum's shift in priorities is shown as an inevitable, gradual development, which ultimately forces her to create a safe haven for the little girls: she becomes the caretaker and surrogate mother, while working simultaneously on a cure to revert the effects of her scientific experiments. Tenenbaum's character arc is problematic at best. As a woman, she is redeemed through her maternal instinct instead of her own actions; the maternal instinct wakes up regardless of her own opinion or reasoning, simply because of her sex. Despite this, Tenenbaum is a complex and interesting mother figure, especially because she embodies both maternal types mostly seen in modern games: the caring mother and the twisted, evil version; sadistic instead of nurturing, hurtful and disregarding instead of comforting.

Damsel in distress is a character type used numerous times throughout history, and which can still be seen in modern stories. Virtuous, passive and morally pure – almost childlike in their behaviour – damsels are characters whom the active male hero must save from peril. She represents purity and all good, and works as an objective and a prize for the player. (Curtis, 2015, 15-18) In video games, damsels vary on their personalities but the main conceit of the character is still to motivate the player while acting as a prize. The most well-known example is Princess Peach in Nintendo's different Super Mario -games. Peach is kidnapped numerous times by Bowser, which works as the motivation for Mario in Super Mario -games. Peach is a passive character who has very little to do besides working as the ultimate prize, and she is given very little personality besides her name and occupation.

The lover is the main character's love interest. At times overlaps with the damsel in distress: in Visceral Games' *Dante's Inferno*, Dante returns from a crusade to find his wife, Beatrice killed. Guided by the spirit of Beatrice, Dante descends into Hell to save her soul. In Konami's *Metal Gear Solid*, the hero Solid Snake has to save Meryl Silverburgh, who is taken captive twice half-way through the game. Meryl Silverburgh is not a lover in the traditional sense that the two do not end up together, but she is still presented as the lover; she and Snake flirt extensively, their scenes have sexual tension and the ending of game hints at a possible romance. Although the lover usually has some character development, such as personal agendas and motivations in the case of Meryl Silverburgh – who wants to prove her capabilities as a soldier – many times the lover's defining quality within the story is to be a romantic companion to the hero. Since the technology has advanced enough to create sex scenes, the lover is often both depicted sexually, and shown nude in sex scenes as a reward for either advancing, or completing the game. In addition to Maria in *Mafia*, whose depiction is detailed previously in thesis, *Wolfenstein: The New Order* by MachineGames features Anya Oliwa, a nurse who initially takes care of the hero B.J. Blazkowicz and later on joins a resistance movement with him. Anya has her own character arc, told mainly through her journal; she has actually been an active member of resistance for years, killing occupying German soldiers through varying means. During the timespan of the game, however, Anya works mostly as a guide and a love interest; the cut-scenes between B.J. and Anya are sexually tense or depict them having sex, while Anya's personality and character is not given much room in the scenes – besides her relationship with the hero.

Sex object is a character who has very little justification, excluding her appearance. This is mostly masked nowadays by giving her some dialogue, which is targeted to humanize the character. Most of the sex object -characters are not protagonists or secondary characters, but normal NPC's in the world, like strippers, sex workers, models or otherwise scantily-clad women. At most times they can be viewed as set pieces instead of characters, as they mainly offer sexual imaginary and world building. (McIntosh & Sarkeesian, 2014) Examples include prostitutes in *Assassin's Creed* –series, which can be used to lure guards from their posts; sex workers in *Grand Theft Auto* –series which can increase health of the player and prostitutes in *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*, where the player may help the sex workers of a brothel and thus gain new side missions.

Seducer is an attractive character, who tries to control the hero or otherwise steer him or her in certain direction, usually by seducing or manipulating. Morally ambiguous or evil. She is basically the video game equivalent of the femme fatale character, and the historical seductress, such as the Biblical Lilith or Salome. (Šafrancová, 2015, 63) The usage of seducer can be problematic given the nature of how open sexuality is depicted negatively in this archetype. A recent example can be found in Elizabeth Comstock of Bioshock: Infinite's DLC Burial at Sea. In the alternative universe of Burial at Sea, Elizabeth is presented as the traditional femme fatale of the film noir genre. She is attractive, independent, fierce and motivated, and her sexual appearance reinforces the film noir style. Elizabeth manipulates the main character Booker DeWitt to find a missing girl, and after he has completed various tasks for her, she has him killed by a third party, smiling menacingly as he dies.

2.4.2 Commonly Neutral Character Types

Victim is a character whose demise or suffering is a catalyst for the plot. These characters depict something good which has been lost or tarnished, and their victimhood is the most important aspect of them to the story. (Coles, n.d.) Dontnod Entertainment's *Life is Strange* focuses on the disappearance of Rachel Amber. When Rachel's friend, Chloe Price and the protagonist, Max Caulfield investigate her disappearance, the player is introduced to Rachel as a character, and the two eventually expose her killer. Rachel is depicted as a grade-A student and as an overall sweet person, who is loved by many. Her personality is however secondary to her death, which drives the plot forward.

The mentor archetype is one of the oldest, named after a character in *The Odyssey*. The mentor is a wise helper of the hero; usually old, former hero him- or herself, who grants wisdom and knowledge, possibly gifts. (Vogler, 2007, 39-40) The Boss is a character in *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater*, and a mentor to Naked Snake, the main character of *Snake Eater*. The Boss is called as "The Legendary Soldier" and overall addressed as the greatest warrior of all times: she is a warrior who has developed her own fighting styles, fought in the Second World War and been to space as the first American. As such, she can be called a hero, who as a mentor passes his knowledge by training and teaching Naked Snake. During the events of *Snake Eater*, The Boss seemingly defects to another country, and his protégé Snake is tasked to assassinate her. Unbeknownst to Snake, The

Boss is actually carrying out her own mission, and behind shadows, she continues to act as his mentor, slipping vital information as they confront each other throughout the story. In the end, as they combat for the last time, The Boss teaches the quintessential philosophy of war and warriors to Snake, and by sacrificing herself she passes the mantle of hero to the protégé.

Sidekick is the hero's companion in the story. The sidekick is usually shown as independent and skilful, and loyal to the hero. (Weiland, 2013) Female sidekicks are usually indistinguishable from their male counterparts, and work as the empowering, cool characters. Although there may be some flirtatious scenes, sidekick's relationship to the hero is platonic. Some sidekicks are used in the character type's most common modern design: light-hearted comic relief, who complements the protagonist's nature and brings levity to scenes (Sheldon, 2004, 80-82). Ellie in Naughty Dog's *The Last of Us* is an interesting example, because she transcends many character types: in her essence she is a sidekick, but in one portion of the game the perspective switches, and she becomes the playable character. She also embodies the child archetype, and her personal character arc is a child's transition from childhood to adulthood; despite this, at her core she is both story- and gameplaywise a sidekick. Ellie is a young girl, whom the main hero Joel must escort through the remains of the post-apocalyptic United States of America. Ellie is shown as an independent person from the beginning, capable of taking care of herself. She is also loyal to Joel to the end; they both commit desperate, violent acts to protect one another throughout their journey. Although *The Last of Us*' tone is quite melancholic, drab and grim, Ellie works as the light-hearted counterpart to the brooding, pessimistic Joel who suffers from survivor's guilt. As the game story progresses, Joel becomes a brighter personality, whereas Ellie – as a counterpoint – becomes more depressed, shedding her childlike optimism and naiveté. Ellie is an example of a great sidekick: although Joel is the primary protagonist, Ellie has her own independent character arc and her personality is multidimensional.

Badass is the most masculine of all female characters. Badasses fight ferociously and are active, strong, confident and capable. (Wadsworth, 2015) The badassness of their personality doesn't exclude them from sexual imagery; the titular hero of Platinum Games' *Bayonetta* is a clear cut example of a badass which is marketed solely on the hypersexuality of the character. Badasses are seen both as evil and good characters. Anya Stroud is one of the four playable characters in Epic Games' *Gears of War 3*, and can be

heard as a communication officer in the first two games of the series. Anya is a Gear, a part of an elite group of soldiers fitted with heavy armour. She has grown up on different military stations and is the daughter of a legendary soldier, which works as a justification for her masculine traits. Anya is presented just as strong, capable and macho as her teammates; as a playable character in co-op mode, she is indistinguishable from her male counterparts gameplaywise.

Child is an archetype which represents purity and the future, and the act of maturing from childhood to adulthood (Segal, 1999, 84). The child characters' purity is shown many times as optimism and/or naiveté. Especially in the recent years, many video games depicting the transition from childhood to adulthood have garnered a lot of attention. *Brothers: A Tale of Two Sons*, *The Last of Us*, *Child of Light* and *The Walking Dead* have all been praised for their story and characters. Clementine is a character in Telltale's *The Walking Dead: Season 1* and *Season 2*; in the first season she is a supporting character to the hero Lee Everett, but she becomes the playable character and protagonist in the second season. In the world of *The Walking Dead*, a zombie apocalypse has wiped out most of the human species, and the rest of the population tries to survive with diminishing resources, while fighting both the undead and other hostile survivors. The first season is perceived through Lee Everett; a convict who decides to take care of Clementine, an 8-year-old whom he finds in an abandoned house. At the beginning of the story, Clementine is presented purely as a child: she is unaware of what's going on, she's naïve and trusting of other survivors, and she believes that nothing bad happens to people who do good deeds. Clementine tries to repeatedly strive for the best possible outcome with no moral flexibility, which ultimately ends in her being kidnapped and the band of survivor's killed trying to save her. The player can also influence Clementine by giving her different life lessons, either by valuing her childlike personality or by forcing her to grow up. While the first season shows Clementine's growth from an optimistic child to a realist and a pragmatic survivor who understands how the new world works, the second season changes the player's perspective from Lee to Clementine. Because *The Walking Dead* is an interactive story where the player can influence character's relationships and dialogue, Clementine's personality in the second season is left to the player: Clementine can either strive for teamwork and solidarity, neutrality and objectivism or cold exploitation of others. Although Clementine has grown up as a person, the player can still choose some idealized dialogue options. They are rarely rewarded, however, enforcing the idea of maturing as a necessary act to survive.

Hero is a traditional, thousands of years old archetype. Hero's definition comes from his or her will to protect and sacrifice his- or herself for others. The hero traditionally goes through a journey, and through the process of overcoming obstacles, the hero finds his or her identity and becomes whole, or complete. Heroes are usually written for the audience – or the player – to identify with, and to see the story through their eyes; as such, they are usually the protagonist of the story. Ideally, a hero has different universal, identifiable emotions and qualities – even conflicting ones – which help to humanize the character, and make identifying easier. (Vogler, 2007, 29-32) Faith is the hero of *Mirror's Edge*, developed by DICE; a first person adventure game focusing on parkour movement. Faith works as a runner – a courier of information packages – in a seemingly utopian world, in which digital communication is heavily monitored. Early in the story Faith's sister is framed for murder, and Faith must go on a journey during which she meets different enemies, informants and allies, who help her uncover the conspiracy behind the murder. The main character's heroism is shown throughout the game: Faith is adamant in saving her sister, and her resolute does not waver when faced with numerous enemies, grand conspiracies or even when her mentor is killed halfway through the game. She can be seen as an idealized hero, who incorporates desirable and respectable traits, such as courage, athleticism and self-sacrificing. Eventually Faith defeats the authorities behind the conspiracy and is able to save her sister, fulfilling her premise as the hero. As an FPS game, *Mirror's Edge* is designed to make players identify with Faith in numerous ways. The first person camera helps the player become Faith, as Nick Channon, the producer of the game describes: “the fact that you're playing the game through the eyes of Faith; as soon as you get to third person, you would be watching Faith, whereas we want you to be connected to her” (Remo, 2008). Faith's dialogue is also written to forward the plot instead of her as a character, leaving room for the players to imagine and create their own Faith.

3 GAME CONCEPT ROAR

Whereas the previous chapters detail the state of female characters and problems with them, and the common female character types used in video games, the practical part of the thesis is a detailed description of a game concept. Game concept Roar is designed to include multiple, different female characters, and a story which focuses on the hero's journey, both thematically and gameplaywise. Descriptions of preliminary level design is also included to help emphasize their thematic significance. This chapter details the game concept's creation, starting from the general game concept, to different characters and themes, archetypes and design choices which help illustrate how to create a game concept with multidimensional, different female characters. As the story and main character's character arc is heavily influenced by Joseph Campbell's Hero's journey, a summary of Campbell's story structure is also provided.

3.1 Basic Details

Roar focuses on three things: to create a detailed design of a game which could realistically be made; to create a story with inspiring characters whom could be enjoyed by the whole family, and to create a world and a story with no major opponents or villains.

The first part is self-explanatory: Roar is designed as a game which can be created with either a big or a smaller budget. The story is compressed into vital scenes and characters to decrease the possible costs, and the mechanics and levels are designed in a way that the game could be theoretically created with different styles – even as a 2D-platformer, if necessary. The story is universal enough in its themes and presentation, that it is realistically marketable as an action-adventure game, with the focus group of older children and young teens. This also means that design choices on the setting, tone, story and game mechanics have been made to make the game accessible for younger audiences as well. The story is constructed in a way that there is minimal need for cut-scenes. The few instances where using them is preferable, they can easily be created in-game with a few new animations for the characters, instead of a need for a cut-scene made entirely by CGI. The game concept and the game story are consciously designed to work as a possible starting point for a franchise.

The second part means that the story and the characters are designed so that Roar could be played and enjoyed regardless of the age of the player, focus being on ages 10 to 15. This means diminishing some adult themes, like sexuality and violence, and choosing themes appropriate to said age bracket. The characters are also designed to be empowering and to give different, identifiable role models to the players.

The third part, having no villains or opponents, comes from my admiration of the Japanese film maker Hayao Miyazaki, who famously avoids using clear villains in his stories, dealing more with inner struggles of his characters. There is some flexibility with the last part, however, since Roar includes some segments with arguably opponent-like characters, but the design choice that the player never has to fight anyone is still kept. The market already has numerous violent, action-packed games, and Roar is intended to be an alternative to the norm.

Design choices also reflect the subject of the thesis. The intention has been to design varied female characters as multidimensional and for them to have an actual function to the story. Sexual objectification is avoided and themes chosen to have a universal appeal.

3.1.1 Story, World and Basic Mechanics

Roar is 3rd person adventure game, with heavy focus on atmosphere, characters, platforming and puzzles. The mechanics encourage players to play around and analyse each area in order to figure out the correct way – or one of the correct ways – to advance to the next part of the level. Most of the time the player needs to use the main game mechanic, transforming into an animal, in order to solve the puzzle. After each level, the player gains a new animal – a new power – which the next level tests. The player gains four animals in the course of the game, which either boosts or gives the player the power of jumping, flying, running and climbing. The main character Saan can also push small obstacles, work levers, climb ladders and do other basic, movement-based skills in her human form.

Roar is set in a fantasy world, with technology resembling the medieval period. Although there are myths and stories of people with mystic powers, magic or strange beasts like

dragons are not an everyday occurrence. Living in a small village, a teenager named Saan lives a normal life, until she finds an old, mysterious object which transforms her into an astral projection of a bear. As a few villagers witness Saan's transformation, her parents fear that the villagers may see her as a threat, and harm her. The parents take Saan to a wise woman, who supposedly knows what to do in such situations, and beg her to take care of his daughter. The woman in question, Nevva, agrees, and teaches Saan about her powers and trains her to master them, becoming her mentor. The tone of the game is quite similar to adventure movies; at times a bit scary, with heavy focus on light-hearted action and comedy.

3.1.2 Themes and Characters

The main theme of the game is growing up, which is directly tied to Saan's powers, character arc, story and level design. Although not the most original theme, I felt the theme was important and universal, and as a writer, I could easily get into the mind set of the game and the themes behind it. The game also talks about individuality, facing fears and coming in terms with one's self.

The main character is Saan, a 16-year old girl who lives in a small village. She is an active girl who lives an ordinary life, and who loves stories about her grandfather, an adventurer. After her initial transformation, she wants to just forget it ever happened, and go back to her normal life. Through her training she starts to accept her powers as an integral part of herself. Although she is generally shown as a positive character and an idealized hero with no major flaws, she is fearful of her powers, and refuses to train at first.

There are two important secondary characters. Nevva is a 30-40 years old mentor to Saan, who lives in a cabin near a mountain. She is kept as a mysterious character for most of the story, and the story only gives glimpses and hints to her past. Although she may seem indifferent initially, this is not to be confused with harsh or cold. She also shows her gentler side towards Saan quite early, and sees herself in Saan. The other important secondary character is Fei, a talking cat. Fei was like Saan, a powerful human who couldn't master her powers, thus turning into an animal permanently. He's the guide for the player throughout the game, giving hints and expository dialogue when needed. He is also the sidekick character who becomes friends with Saan.

3.2 The Story of Roar

Roar is ultimately a story about a hero who overcomes obstacles in her way, and as such follows the traditional hero's journey, which will be detailed later on. This was a design choice early on, as I wanted a clear, easily understandable story anyone can quickly follow, regardless of the player's age. Throughout her journey, Saan gains more and more powers, and starts to accept herself. The test of her powers comes in the latter part of the game: Fei, being stuck in an animal form, starts to lose sight of his humanity, and is in danger of turning completely into an animal. Saan learns of a temple which might help Fei turn back into a human, but the path to the temple is said to be dangerous, and only those who are worthy are granted access.

The story can be divided into three segments, detailed below. I will focus on the pure plot of Roar in this part, and talk only briefly about game levels, themes, symbolism and character relationships, since they are detailed further on in this chapter.

3.2.1 The First Third of the Story

Saan is a 16-year old girl living in a small, peaceful village in a forest. She is presented as a young, bright and happy kid who enjoys her life. The first level of the game is the backyard of her home, where the player can learn how to move, jump and interact with objects. After getting her toy out of a nearby tree, Saan goes into the cellar of the house, and starts to flick through her favourite book – her grandfather's journal about his adventures – until she hears screams and weird noises coming from the house. Saan walks up a staircase leading to the house from the cellar, and sees her parents threatened by a burglar. She startles and loses her balance, tumbles down the staircase and hits a drawer on her way down. The impact shakes the drawer, and a small pendant with an archaic symbol, made of stone, drops to the floor. The burglar comes to investigate the noises, and Saan starts to get up from the floor, slightly touching the pendant at the same time. The touch transforms Saan into an astral form of a bear; seemingly losing her will and roaring like an animal. The burglar escapes horrified with Saan on his heels, until the astral animal around her starts to slowly vaporize. Completely back in human form, Saan

collapses and passes out. The villagers witness her transformation, and her parents quickly take her and the pendant back to their house.

The villagers can be clearly heard murmuring outside about what to do with Saan, when she wakes up. Her parents decide that she is not safe in the village anymore, and that the only person who might know how to handle the situation is a mysterious sage, living in far-away woods. Hoping the stories about the sage are true, they pack their bags and travel there. After finding the sage, named Nevva, the parents pay her to help and take care of their daughter. Nevva agrees, and tells the parents to come back in one year's time, speculating that in that time their daughter has either learned how to control her gift, or succumbed to it. The parents leave, and Saan starts her training at the cottage. The start of the training-segment also works as a tutorial to the hub area, where the player can replay older levels, do side- and challenge missions and interact with other characters, like Fei and Nevva, learning more about them between missions. Nevva also gives Saan and the player an introduction to the powers, explaining there were many like her before, but as times have passed, their numbers have diminished and stories turned into myths. She also explains that not much is known about the powers or why they manifest. Instead, Nevva is the youngest of a long list of sages who have passed the information from one person to the next.

Saan is rebellious and hesitant to train; she misses her family and wants to go back to her old life. She also fears her powers, although she never admits this. Nevva, seemingly nonchalant, gives advice and gives hints on how to proceed, but there is a warmth to her voice from the start; a mix of knowing how she needs to be trained and empathy for her situation. Although Nevva doesn't raise her voice, she is adamant through and through: this is how the training must be done, or bad things might happen. Saan slowly agrees to train, mainly because she is stuck in the woods for a year anyways and training is the only possibility of getting out faster. She doesn't, however, internalize the need for training yet, she merely accustoms to the situation. Although she accepts the training, she is begrudging towards the tasks she is given. During a few minor tasks in the hub – tutorials for mechanics – Saan sees a few glimpses of Fei, wandering in and around the cottage. Saan is then given her first mission: Nevva explains that Saan needs a way of channeling her powers into different forms, but in order to do, she needs to acquire mystical items. Pendants, incorporating the essence of different animals are located throughout different places, and acquiring them gives Saan the means to control and channel her powers.

Although there are still risks, the pendants and training diminish them. Thematically Nevva's journey to the cave is the initiation to her new self: she needs to begin transforming into her new self, and thus accept the change as an inevitable outcome. Nevva introduces Fei to Saan, and tells her that Fei is her guide throughout her journey. Saan is indifferent towards Fei, and thinks she doesn't need him, but agrees to take him begrudgingly. Saan travels to the cave, Fei walking alongside her.

During her first mission, Saan has no powers. She has to go through a dark, cold and damp cave filled with tunnels, solving small puzzles and platforming to complete it. Fei accompanies Saan to the cave, but she quickly grows tired of his lectures about the history of the cave and other remarks, and demands Fei to leave her alone. The level is not especially hard from game mechanics perspective, but the atmosphere is claustrophobic, dark and scary, expressing Saan's loneliness fears. She is presented as a kid, lost in a cave; cautious, scared and nervous. Saan accomplishes the puzzles, but after almost getting to the end, she walks down a bridge which collapses, and she falls into a pitch black hole, with a small tunnel leading away from it. Fei, checking on her progress from afar, sees the accident and comes to a rescue. Saan can't see really anything, but she finds her way out of the cave by Fei's instructions; as a cat, he can see in the dark and instruct Saan on how to move. After surviving the darkness, Saan agrees to take Fei with her, and they accomplish the rest of the area together, Fei giving instructions when Saan can't figure out what to do. At the end of the level, Saan finds a small shrine, with a familiar pendant made of stone on top of the shrine. By touching it she turns into an astral projection of a deer, and is able to leap long distances. By jumping over a small canyon, Saan gets out of the cave and travels back to the cottage, and Fei starts to talk about his life at the cottage. Fei says he has lived there for years, and that he helps Nevva when he can. Saan gets the idea that Fei isn't really a cat, but doesn't understand the full picture yet.

3.2.2 The Second Third of the Story

The first part familiarizes the player and Saan to the world, the central characters and game mechanics. The second parts expands upon these things and starts to show change in Saans nature, as she starts to accept her powers and matures accordingly.

After coming back from the cave, Saan seems more relieved and happier than before. Although she is already friendly with Fei, she is still guarded around Nevva. She does, however, agree to train. Nevva is visibly relieved. Nevva informs Saan, that she should train her newly acquired power – which gameplaywise translates to completing side missions and challenges – before taking the next step in her training. Nevva also explains, that all powered individuals are different; some may sense animals before learning how to become one, others may be able to communicate with them. Because Saan transformed into an animal right away, Nevva isn't sure whether or not Saan has the means to manifest all of her powers yet, and that the power may consume her still. Nevva believes that the best way to be sure – and to help Saan understand her powers better – she should retrieve a second pendant.

Saan also discovers that there's a new person living in the cottage: Lind, a woman with a hoarse voice who seems to know Nevva personally. A woman with lots of tales of her travels, Lind introduces herself briefly as a merchant who wanders from one village to another selling different goods and wares. From this point onwards, when the player is exploring the hub between missions, Lind is mostly seen making inventory of her carriage, and doing other tasks around the cottage, whereas Nevva is mainly at her study or relaxing on the porch. Nevva's and Lind's relationship is left ambiguous. From Saan's perspective they could be relatives, friends or lovers. Some hints of intimacy, or at least closeness, is given through their body language; they have only minimal personal space around each other, and they have no problem with physical contact with each other. At this point Saan can either do challenges or side missions to different people in the cottage, gaining money which can be used to buy different outfits – with small bonuses to different skills – from Lind. If Saan accomplishes the side mission given by Lind, she tells Saan a story from her past; growing up as a daughter of a great doctor – who was revered and respected as one of the best there ever were – Lind had to stay close to home her whole youth, in case her father ever needed assistance. She also remarks that she was groomed to continue in her father's footsteps, but she always felt like her future was somewhere else. Side mission for Fei works as a red herring and a comic relief; Fei asks Saan to do a mysterious, dangerous task for him which may be the key to her training. The task however is to get the cellar door opened, where Nevva stores her food.

Ultimately Saan takes on the next mission from Nevva: Saan needs to go to a nearby mountain and into another cave, which can be found inside the mountain. With Fei in the

hood of Saan's hoodie, Saan travels to the mountain and starts her mission. Unlike the first cave, the mountain ridge Saan needs to climb is filled with multiple paths with varying degrees of difficulty. The objective at all times is to get higher to the cave, and the path Saan takes is completely up to the player. At all times she can see the surrounding emptiness, and feel the powerful wind. A lonely eagle surrounds the mountain, whose screech echoes throughout the area. Along the way, Fei talks about the mountain and how he hated climbing it. As Saan inquires whether Fei guided Nevva through the mountain too, Fei chuckles and says that it happened a bit differently.

After climbing the outside of the mountain, Saan finds a small opening and gets inside to find a huge cave with a tall, towering pillar at the center of it. Fei remarks that Saan's goal is on top of it, and she starts to climb it. At times jumping from the pillar to the wall of the surrounding cave and back, at others trying to carefully climb the surface using small cracks. There are many ways of climbing the pillar, some requiring huge leaps using the astral deer, others requiring precision and timing. Right before the end of the area Saan needs to make another leap using the astral deer, but just as she is getting ready to jump, Fei remarks that Saan should be careful of her powers. When Saan asks why Fei says so, he reveals that in reality he's a human, trapped in the form of an animal. He was also the previous trainee of Nevva. As a trainee, his transformations were rapid, unstable and varying in their degrees. Despite this, Fei refused to wait and train slowly with Nevva, rushing into things confidently instead. As a result, he couldn't control his powers anymore, and was unable to transform back to human form. Saan is frightened and tries to console Fei, who shrugs and admits that it was his own fault. Fei explains he still has his own life and mind, and Saan nods. Saan gets up and is seen as hesitant and fearful at first, but she takes a deep breath and smiles, before making the jump. Fei smiles, when Saan lands on the other side – the landing, however, makes a crack into the pillar, which starts to slowly grow in size. Saan sees a bird nest with a cracked egg inside; inside the cracked eggshell Saan finds another pendant, which transforms her into an eagle. The pillar starts to violently shake and is beginning to crumble, when Saan spreads her wings and glides down from the pillar, flying away from the mountain with Fei riding on top of her.

Returning to the cottage, Saan is troubled. She is determined to go through with her training, but Fei's story has made her vary of her powers. She also talks to Nevva about her role; is she free to do whatever she wants after the training, or will she be forced to

some kind of a specific life which comes with the powers. Whether she takes on the third mission right away, or do side missions and challenges around the cottage first, is again up to the player.

If Saan accomplishes side missions, different background information is again given to the characters: Lind narrates another story from her past, about how she ran off from home to rebel against her father, who didn't give her the freedom to choose her own profession and life. After running off, Lind partnered with an old, travelling merchant who taught her the principles of how to make money; all you need is a good sales pitch, which will turn the customer's head around. Lind remarks that for her sales pitches weren't even necessary, since many customers seemed to be infatuated with her instantly. After her story, Lind walks to the kitchen to cook dinner. By doing Nevva's side mission, Saan learns more about how Nevva trained Fei. Fei trained as quickly as possible and with no patience for advanced training, Nevva tried to match Fei's impatience and powerful and unstable transformations with numerous, powerful spirits, believing that Fei needed a powerful conduit to unleash his powers. Because of this, Nevva emphasizes the need for a patient, focused approach with Saan. Nevva also hints that she blames herself for failing as Fei's mentor, believing it was her duty to keep him in check and anticipate for problems. After her story, Nevva walks from her study to the kitchen to prepare food. If the player does side missions for both Lind and Nevva, the player can see how both of them cook dinner in the kitchen and share an intimate moment, hugging and kissing each other. Completing Fei's side mission gives some backstory of his life before he found out that he had powers; his life as a street urchin in the capitol, who could always ambiguously sense what animals, like rats, birds and cats, were feeling and thinking, which helped him survive as an orphan. Fei's story is abruptly interrupted, when he suddenly starts to meow like a cat in mid-sentence, until he starts to talk like a human being again. Visibly shaken but dismissing any problems, Fei sends Saan to other things.

When the player decides to complete the next mission, Nevva sends Saan to a nearby forest, which is dangerous and inhabited by wolves. Nevva remarks, that this might be the final mission Saan needs to do, since she has had no problems since she has arrived. Saan and Fei leave, and Fei acts normal and if nothing is wrong. Fei works again as a guide and gives hints to Saan. Unlike the claustrophobic first area or the second one with huge open areas, the atmosphere of the third mission is threatening and menacing. Arriving at dusk, the sun quickly disappears and darkness overtakes the forest. Saan uses

her different astral animals to move through the labyrinth-life forest, until Fei stops her abruptly. He tells Saan that she needs to journey this part alone. Saan protests Fei's decision, as they have become close and she feels secure with him on her side, but reassurance by Fei calms her down. Saan agrees to continue forward by herself.

Fei travels back to the cottage and Saan continues on through the dark forest, first time without a guide or a friend since the very beginning. The surrounding forest is filled with howling and bright eyes, peeking from the darkness. Saan finally reaches the end of the area, a groove on the side of a boulder. She sees another pendant, dangling from the groove and takes it, turning into an astral wolf. She is quickly surrounded by real wolves, but she narrowly escapes the place in wolf-form, running away with wolves on her heels. Saan returns to the cottage, but Fei is nowhere to be found. Saan and Nevva are frightened something has happened, until Lind arrives, holding Fei in her arms. Fei meows and acts completely like a cat for a longer time than previously, until he comes back to his senses. Shocked, everyone reacts to the problem in their own ways. Nevva locks herself in her study, Lind tries different potions and medications – which she learned as a child – to heal Fei, and Fei himself becomes low-spirited and introverted. Saan promises to find out what's happening to Fei.

Saan can again do side missions for other people, or continue directly to her next mission. Saan can find herbs for Lind, who talks about how the merchant she partnered with in her past ultimately cheated her off of her money, and left her alone in the woods where she had to survive by eating plants and roots. Lind laughs at the irony, having ended up in the situation because of her father, but whose teachings also kept her alive. Lind also openly wonders whether or not the musty books and parchments will give any real answers to Fei's condition, especially when they are, in her mind, a part of the problem. Nevva's side mission is to find books for Nevva around the hub. Nevva is completely withdrawn and asks Saan to leave after completing the mission. Nevva's actions are a continuation of her fears, believing that she could have prevented all of this if she had been more careful. Saan can also talk to Fei, who demands Saan to train and do tough exercises and drills with her powers, such as combining different powers to make huge leaps. If Saan can accomplish all the exercises, Fei is happier and rests peacefully, reassured that Saan will master her powers unlike he did. Fei also goes back and forth between talking like cat and a human throughout his dialogue. The normal challenges are also available for the player.

3.2.3 The Last Third of the Story

The last part of the story is Saan finishing her training while helping Fei. When Saan leaves on the last mission, Fei insists on coming with her, since they have been together from the start, and Fei feels like he can still help her. Surprisingly to Saan, Nevva agrees, demanding that Fei is with her. Nevva sends Fei and Saan to a rocky hill with steep drops, believing the place holds some answers to Fei's condition. Nevva asks Saan to investigate the place, hoping she can find some information to explain things. Lind can be seen in the background, packing his carriage and looking agitated. Unlike in previous missions, Fei doesn't travel around the area freely, but instead stays in Saan's hood the whole time. The weather is cold and relentless, as Saan journeys through canyons, boulders and cliffs. Fei's condition seems to worsen at a rapid speed, and the two share a small moment after climbing a steep cliff. Fei admits he's afraid and makes Saan promise that she won't give up and turn up like him. Saan promises, and while she is consoling him, Fei loses his humanity completely and turns permanently into an animal. Saan grieves and puts her inside her hood, determined to make things right.

After continuing a while, Saan sees the place she's looking for. A small, dilapidated shack which seems like it hasn't been lived in for decades. The shack is far away however, and can't be accessed by any visible means. Saan has to combine all of her astral powers – the deer, the wolf and the eagle – to get there. By running like a wolf, turning into a deer on the edge of the cliff to jump, and changing into an eagle mid-air to glide, Saan succeeds. Inside Saan finds papers with weird writings, text mixed with incoherent ramblings and scientific research. Saan collects them for Nevva, and begins to leave, until she sees a pendant on the floor. Reminding her of how she found the first pendant at her parent's house, Saan takes a deep breath and grabs the pendant. Surprisingly, nothing happens. Believing that the pendant is broken, Saan puts the pendant in her pocket and leaves. As she is sprinting as a wolf to get speed for her jump back, Fei starts to growl in her hood. Saan jumps as a deer and transforms midair into an eagle like before, but Fei jumps out of her hoodie and scratches her face, ending Saan's transformation mid-air. They both start to free fall, and at the same time all of the papers fly away with the wind. Saan manages to grab onto three pieces of paper which she tucks safely inside her hoodie, until both she and Fei splash into a river below them.

Saan drifts in the flowing water, fighting to swim ashore. After getting on land, Saan starts to walk towards Nevva's cabin, nearly passing out. Keeping Fei warm inside her hoodie, she finally stumbles back, nearly 12 hours later, and passes out on the lawn, holding the few saved papers in her hand. The last glimpse she sees is Lind and Nevva running towards her. Saan wakes up after an undisclosed amount of time, Nevva by her bedside, stroking Saan's head. Nevva is visibly sad and tired, but Saan demands to know if she's made any progress. Nevva tells Saan that the papers had just enough information between the gibberish, that she believes she knows how to cure Fei. Saan gets up and starts to put her hoodie back on, but Nevva forbids her from leaving, and explains what she has found out. Fei may be cured at an ancient altar, which is found on top of the mountain, next to Nevva's cabin. The altar is deep within a temple, which is an old sanctuary of powered individuals. However, getting to the altar is extremely dangerous, as the path is both rough, and filled with different traps to keep outsiders away. There are also some mentions of any traveller having to prove themselves, if they wish to visit the altar, and some mentions of a sacrifice; Nevva believes that in order to get Fei back, someone else has to sacrifice her- or himself, although she is not sure what the sacrifice means; someone's life, powers, part of life-span or something else. Believing for the worst, Nevva forbids Saan from leaving, as she intends to go to the altar herself. Saan seemingly agrees, but in reality she's hesitant and feels as if she is the one that should go; Saan's heroic nature and friendship with Fei are her main motivators, and her commitment to risking her own life for others becomes one of her defining qualities.

There are no new side missions at this point, but Saan can walk around the cottage and talk to Lind and Nevva for a few times. Lind is anxious and feels that nothing good can come from the temple; in Fei's condition she has seen what the powers can do to a person, and she's not convinced that there is any reason to believe that a few pages filled with rambling thoughts can be trusted. Above all else, she doesn't want to lose Nevva, thinking that the sacrifice might be unnecessary; Lind wants to take Fei to his father, believing that he might know how to reverse the effects. Lind also remarks that if one has to go to the temple, it should be her: Lind continues the story from her past, and reveals that when she was lost in the woods, she was saved by a young woman. It is heavily implied that the woman in question was Nevva. Nevva took Lind in, fed and took care of her and made sure she'll survive. Lind ends her tale lamenting about the fact that she never had to learn great sales pitches, as this would be a time for one. If the player talks to Nevva, she can be found in her study dead tired. Nevva tells Saan how she is proud of

her, and that Nevva believes Saan's training is complete; Saan has been able to stay in control with no problems, and her spirit is unwavering. Nevva also thanks Saan for trusting her initially, and giving Nevva the chance to train her. By exploring, Saan can also see Lind packing up her things, intending to leave the cottage soon, possibly with Fei.

When the player decides to take on the last mission, Saan hears fighting inside the cottage. Lind and Nevva are arguing about what they should do with Fei: Lind demands to take him to her father, while Nevva is adamant about the journey to the temple. As they argue, Saan grabs Fei silently, puts him into her hood and leaves in the middle of the night, taking the saved pages with her. The last mission starts at the beginning of the mountain, at dawn. A large door leads into a grandiose, but musty hallway with carvings of people turning into monsters and animals, disfigured and mutated into half-men, half-animals. The hallway feels ancient, but forgotten. Whereas previous missions have mainly tested skills and powers gained in previous missions, the last one tests all of them in equal fashion, and requires combining different skills numerous times. The temple also has weird visual effects and surreal changes, like rapidly-changing weather effects, distortions to sound and weird colour schemes. Saan can also hear distant echoes of people talking.

Saan goes through the temple and into a huge staircase, built onto the side of the mountain itself. Walking alongside the staircase, she triggers a trap which pushes her off the staircase violently, and all of her pendants fly off her neck in mid-flight, landing where she just stood. Falling for a few meters, she lands on a small overhang. With no way of climbing back up without her powers, she gets desperate and angry, kicking rocks and screaming, hating herself for being trapped and letting Fei down. When she punches the wall of mountain, the pendant she took from the shack previously, falls to the ground. In her outburst of anger, she gets down to grab and throw the broken pendant, but as she grabs it, she feels a small, faint power coming out of it, with a familiar feeling. She holds on to the pendant, composes herself and relaxes her mind, and the faint power starts to slowly grow more intense and fierce, until she roars violently, and brings forth the astral bear she transformed into in her home village. As a bear, she starts to climb up the mountain side, and gets a hold of her other pendants again.

Saan makes it back to the mountain, and figuring out the rest of the puzzles she gets into the temple, which is in the heart of the mountain. There lies her last ordeal; she needs to sacrifice herself to save Fei. Looking at instructions from the pages she took with her, Saan places Fei on the altar and sits in a position next to it, ready to be taken by the higher powers, eyes closed. She soon starts to hear small voices and humming around her, and she is starting to get more and more scared. She can still compose herself enough to stay completely still. Nothing happens to her though, and finally she opens her eyelids enough to peek. Saan can see small, astral-like colors radiating from Fei. As the colors start to get bigger and bigger, they start to take shapes and forms of different animals; tigers, deers, dragons and owls, and they all leave his body one after another, filling the room with light and colors. As the animals start to disappear, Fei starts to change back into a human. Saan is perplexed and unsure of what's happening, but she understands soon enough that they have misunderstood the sacrifice; the sacrifice comes from Fei himself, gaining his human form but losing all others. Fei wakes up and hugs Saan, who helps him up. Saan starts to walk Fei back to the cottage, explaining what has happened on the way.

When Fei and Saan get back to the cottage, Nevva runs to meet them. Hugging them both hard, Nevva holds back tears, while Lind is seen in the background sneezing and wiping her eyes. Time passes on an undisclosed time, and we see Fei living in the cottage with Nevva, carrying books into her study. Saan asks Nevva if everything is all-right with her and Lind, since Lind has gone away. Nevva jokingly answers that Lind comes back if she feels like it, and that she knows that Lind will always feel like it. Nevva also jokes that it's up to herself if she'll actually feel like opening the door for Lind, when the time comes. Nevva and Saan sigh and smile, and Saan is seen looking at the setting sun. Nevva tells her that her parents are going to come back in a few weeks, and asks if Saan has decided what she will become. Saan shrugs, smiles confidently, and says that she has some ideas. Nevva answers that it's good enough of an answer, and they both walk back inside the cottage, as the screen fades to black.

After completing the game, the player can spend time in the cottage – the hub area of the game – completing challenges, buying more stuff and replaying old missions. The player can also start the game again in a new game plus –mode, where the timing and precision needed to complete the puzzles is harder, but the player has all the powers right from the beginning.

3.3 A Summary of The Hero's Journey and its Influence on Roar

The Hero's Journey – also known as the monomyth – is a structure, or a pattern described by the scholar Joseph Campbell in his book *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. In his book, Campbell details repeating structures with similar archetypal characters, which can be found in numerous stories and myths throughout history. The Hero's Journey itself is the typical adventure of the hero character; a journey of great accomplishments which is divided into three parts – departure, initiation and return – which in turn are separated into 17 stages. (Campbell, 2004, 3-4, 8-10, 28, 34-35) *Roar* uses the monomyth as a basis of its structure: at times sticking to it religiously, at others taking liberties when it suits the purpose and restrictions of the story. When detailing the structure of the monomyth – and how it can be seen in *Roar* - I will also use Christopher Vogler's interpretation of The Hero's Journey, detailed in *The Writer's Journey*, to illustrate some of Campbell's principles when they align or complement each other, such as how the different parts of the journey correlate with the hero's character arc; how the separation translates as limited awareness of the problem for the hero, and how the hero gradually gains awareness, refuses to change but ultimately overcomes his initial reluctance and commit's to the necessary change (Vogler, 2007, 205-206).

3.3.1 The Departure

The first part, departure is divided into five stages: the call to adventure, refusal of the call, supernatural aid, crossing the threshold and belly of the whale. *Roar* utilises the departure quite straightforward. The departure is the hero's separation from the old world and life; he or she lives a normal life, but gains a calling to an adventure. The calling may be information about a threat looming, or perhaps a treasure. The old world and life usually gives some backstory, introduces the main character and his or hers problems, themes and for example sets the tone and setting. (Campbell, 2004, 53; Vogler, 2004, 10-11, 86, 90, 94-95) In *Roar*, Saan's hometown symbolises the old world and life of the character, which she has to leave behind. The first scene in her home village establishes her character as well as the world. Her calling comes in the form of her powers, which she needs to master in order to survive. In refusal of the call, the hero does not often immediately accept the task at hand, but refuses it at first. After the initial reason has been

dealt with – whether it's insecurity, fear of the unknown, obligations in the old life or any other – the character sets on the journey. (Campbell, 2004, 54-55)

The hero gains help early on from a supernatural being, usually a mentor of sorts, whom grants the hero wisdom and artifacts which will help the hero later. The relationship between the hero and the mentor usually symbolises one between a teacher and a student or a parent and a child. The mentor can also be viewed as a guardian. (Campbell, 2004, 63, 66; Vogler, 2007, 12, 117) After acquiring wisdom and/or artifacts, the hero crosses the threshold: from the known to the unknown, and from safety to danger. The threshold may also be guarded by a threshold guardian; one who tries to block or discourage the hero from continuing. The last stage of the first part, the belly of the whale symbolises the hero's determination: it is the conscious decision to take the final step as the old self, and the first of the characters rebirth as a hero. (Campbell, 2004, 71, 76, 83-85; Vogler, 2007, 12-13, 129) In *Roar*, after leaving her home and arriving in the cabin, Saan begrudgingly accepts Nevva's teachings – who is the mentor archetype, granting wisdom about her powers and knowledge of the pendants – and sets out to accomplish her first mission, the cave, symbolising her determination about training. Fei can also be seen as another kind of mentor, in this case a guide; whereas Nevva has knowledge of the world and the powers, Fei is the guiding spirit, helping Saan one obstacle at a time.

3.3.2 The Initiation

The second part of the journey is called the initiation, and it comprises of six stages: the road of trials, the meeting with the goddess, woman as temptress, atonement with the father, apotheosis and the ultimate boon. The initiation is the main part of the story, comprising of most of the deeds and defining events of the journey. It's a stark contrast to the familiar old world, whether the contrast is emotional or physical. The road of trials, as the name suggests, is a stage where the hero must survive different trials and obstacles, such as adversaries: the hero may fail some of these tests, but he or she also passes many, either through the hero's own power, hero's companions or with the help he's been given by the mentor previously. (Campbell, 2004, 89, 100; Vogler, 2007, 136) In *Roar*, the trials are Saan's missions; she proves her worth and masters her powers one trial at a time, gaining both physical embodiments of her powers as well as insight into them. Other

people living in the cottage can also be seen as companions of Saan; they are there to help and guide Saan throughout her journey, from one trial to another.

In the meeting with the goddess, the hero meets – or otherwise experiences – love and usually finds the love of his or her life; if it's a person, he or she usually accompanies the hero from here on out (Campbell, 2004, 100, 109-110). The next stage, woman as temptress, presents the hero with temptation to something besides the adventure; typically riches or sexual pleasures. The temptation is to something that the soul of the hero yearns. (Campbell, 2004, 111-112) In *Roar*, these two parts are left out, mainly because of three reasons. As a game targeted at a younger audience, sexual themes are diminished. The focus of the story also demands a tight form and presents a somewhat idealized hero, and as such the temptation would not only make the story cluttered, but also conflict with the tight and straightforward plot. Although Fei and Saan are only friends, Saan's closeness to Fei has echoes of the meeting of the goddess –stage, since their friendship deepens during the second mission Saan is given.

In atonement of the father, the hero has to face the ultimate power or authority in his or her life, in myths this is typically some sort of father figure. The atonement of the father is one of the most important stages, and the one to which all stages have lead to. When succeeding, the hero is able to transcend – even if only for a moment – and understand the world. (Campbell, 2004, 119-120, 135) Apotheosis is the stage where the hero rests and experiences love and wisdom on a more profound, divine level, because he or she has shed all fear and doubt. The hero also feels love and dedication towards his or her entire society. (Campbell, 2004, 139, 144, 154) The ultimate boon marks the end of the second part. The boon is a divine reward, such as a special weapon, a princess or perhaps a potion filled with magical substance. The hero may even seek the essence which grants the gods and goddesses their power, sometimes having to trick them of their boon. (Campbell, 2004, 159-160, 168) For Saan, the atonement of the father is her sacrificial journey through the last mission, and the act of sacrifice itself for Fei. Her determination to face the consequences of asking for a favour from the spirits marks the completion of her journey; through her actions she becomes the hero. The boon in *Roar* is Fei's transformation to human form. The transformation does not come without a cost, however, but Fei must sacrifice his powers.

3.3.3 The Return

The third part, the return includes six stages: refusal of the return, the magic flight, rescue from without, the crossing of the return threshold, master of two worlds and freedom to live. In the return, the hero begins his or her journey back home. Refusal of the return happens, if the hero does not want to return, having found peace or even enlightenment (Campbell, 2004, 179). If the hero must escape with the boon, the stage known as the magic flight happens; this is a dangerous and swift escape from the guardians of the boon (Campbell, 2004, 182; Vogler, 2007, 17). Rescue from without on the other hand occurs, if or when the hero needs outside help – whether it means the hero’s companions, or something or someone from the old world – to help in getting back safely. Sometimes, the hero is reluctant to come back and must be forced by an outside party. (Campbell, 2004, 192, 195, 200-201)

The crossing of the return threshold depicts the hero returning to the old world. The hero must retain the knowledge and possible enlightenment, and learn how to combine it with the old world, eventually learning how he can spread the knowledge. If the hero is also reluctant or otherwise has doubts, he or she may also be tempted to return to the other world; instead of wanting to share his knowledge, the hero may be tempted to return to the bliss gained by enlightenment, which the hero has been torn from. (Campbell, 2004, 201-204) The master of two worlds is the stage where the enlightened hero is able to form a balance between the old and the new, and fuse the wisdom gained with the real world; the balance can also be viewed as one of physical and spiritual world (Campbell, 2004, 212-213, 220). The last stage of the last part is the freedom to live. The hero has gained peace within the old world, and he or she has mastered the balance. As a reward, the inner peace leads to spiritual freedom from fear and death. (Campbell, 2004, 221, 225)

Roar adapts very little from the third part of the hero’s journey; after confronting her fears and becoming a hero, Saan takes Fei back home, and the story wraps itself. The act of self-sacrificial and becoming a hero parallels the master of two worlds -stage of the monomyth, since at that time Saan can be seen as mastering her own fate and being at peace spiritually, even when faced with sacrificing herself. The ending also reminds of freedom to live, since at the end of the story, Saan is relaxed, having found inner peace.

Saan is not only the hero of the story, but the archetype of the shadow – the villain, antagonist or inner darkness – is also included in her. Saan's fear of her powers and future, and the inner conflict which arises from it has its roots in the archetypal shadow. (Vogler, 2007, 65-66)

3.4 The Characters of Roar

On top of Saan, the main character, Roar has three secondary characters: Nevva, the mentor; Fei, the sidekick, guide and friend; and Lind, the merchant. There are some smaller characters, like Saan's parents and the burglar in the beginning, but they are so minor to the overall story, that they do not need their own explanations, as their role is mainly to start the story. The characters and Saan as a hero are heavily influenced by Joseph Campbell's deconstruction and analysis of the monomyth, also known as The Hero's Journey.

When creating characters for Roar, the aim was to design a balanced roster of characters from varying backgrounds and with different personalities. Roar also attempts to either surpass, subvert or just play around with the most common character types, taking the starting points of the characters from basic archetypes; for example, Nevva's character is a mentor-archetype, she is an adult woman with a complex personality and her own small subplots which are told or hinted at in many occasions. Her capabilities aren't questioned, nor does her profession reflect gendered stereotypes.

The general audience and marketing possibilities have also been kept in mind, which can be seen in varying character designs and identifiable characters for different personalities, who are all empowering characters shown in a positive light. Some women may identify with the more traditional feminine qualities which Nevva's character also expresses, while others may find themselves in Saan, who is a balanced mix of both traditionally feminine and masculine character traits. In this segment the ideas, themes, character arcs and roles of the characters are detailed.

3.4.1 Saan

Saan is the main character of the game. She is a 16-year old girl, who lives in a small village, and who finds out that she has the power to transform into astral projections of animals. She is the main character. Saan's role is to work both as a vessel to the world, as well as the protagonist of the story. She is a hero, whose arc follows the traditional hero's journey.

Saan represents the transition from childhood and adolescence to adulthood, and maturity. At the very beginning she is presented with childlike qualities to emphasize her starting point; she showcases bright optimism and naivety, which in the first mission changes into sadness, loneliness, conflicting emotions and fear of herself, including changes she's going through. At first she is also rebellious towards her mentor and people trying to help her. I wanted the theme of puberty to be easily understood even for younger audiences, which is why Saan's personality evolves the traditional way of how puberty is depicted in modern Western stories. She slowly accepts herself and the powers as a part of her identity, and by cherishing and internalizing these changes, she is able to overcome challenges. She understands the impossibility of going back to her old life – to her childhood – and embraces the necessary change. She also represents heroism; her attitude towards helping others, her selflessness and courage to stand up for what is right all aim to make her an empowering character and a role model for younger players. She is an active character, who isn't passive on any fronts.

Saan works as an idealized hero; she has her smaller flaws like foolhardiness and rebelliousness, but overall she is a capable, courageous hero who accomplishes everything she sets out to do, and in the end, saves the day. Her personality is a mix of both traditionally male and female characteristics. Bravery, strength and foolhardiness is usually associated with male characters, whereas her sweeter, caring side is traditionally feminine. She also quickly takes a leadership position when doing missions with Fei, showing her initiative. Her sense of humour is neutral.

Saan's physicality is quite neutral. As a 16-year old, her facial and physical features have matured but her face still has some childlike features. She is of mixed ethnicity, with a black mother and an Asian father. Her ethnicity is not a factor to the story, but I believed it is vital to creating progressive, empowering characters for people of all ethnicities. The

majority of the already existing, powerful female characters in video games are Caucasian, creating a problematic situation for people of different ethnicities. I wanted to balance this by making the hero, instead of the sidekick or the mentor, with an ethnic background. Her attire is neutral from gender perspective: she has a brown hoodie vest, stone pendants around her neck and dark pants. Her attire is not sexualized – she doesn't show cleavage or wear tight clothing which would emphasize her curves - as this would directly contradict with the nature of her character. Her body language conforms to the same idea too; her movement is intended to indicate activity and strength. Because Roar is targeted at a younger audience, the theme of sexuality is deliberately diminished; Saan's sexuality is also left out of the story because of this reason. Artist Juha Janttonen has done some preliminary concept art of Saan.



PICTURE 1. Preliminary concept art of Saan (Picture: Juha Janttonen 2016)

One of the most important design choices was that Saan's capabilities and skills – like Nevva's – are never questioned because of their gender. In the world of Roar, there are no assumptions for either gender when it comes to personality, profession or capabilities. I believe there are two ways of showcasing the capability of female characters in stories: either others challenge and question female characters abilities – after which the female

character proves them wrong – or that the subject isn't addressed in any shape or form. The first way works best in stories targeted for more mature audiences, who are familiar with cultural constructs and prejudices, whereas the second works better when writing empowering characters and showing an idealized world for young people to look up to. As *Roar* is targeted for younger audiences, I believed that the themes and tone of the story demand for the latter approach.

The inner need and the outer goal for Saan is intertwined in mastering her powers. Her need is to feel back in power, so to speak, of herself, and accepting herself as a whole, as well as growing up – while her goal is to become accustomed and mastering her transformation power. In addition to her being the hero, her role is also to be a vessel to the world; she knows just as little of her powers as the player, and is introduced to new concepts and things simultaneously with the player. The character arc is fuelled by two contradictions: at first she needs to train and master her powers to survive, although she is young, inexperienced and afraid. The second half is almost the opposite; she is capable and courageous, but the circumstances are against her, and the same powers she is mastering are what led to Fei's downfall.

An important turning point happens when Saan needs to travel to a nearby shack to find information, which might be vital to saving Fei. This is when Saan is tested, and she needs to do something for someone else. She succeeds, although Fei completes his transformation into an animal. Fei's change is important for Saan's character, however, as the change works as a catalyst for summoning her will – meaning that saving Fei becomes her most prominent driving force. This also fundamentally depicts her personality and values, and shows the player that Saan is, above all else, a hero.

Saan has a different relationship with each character. Fei starts off as her guide to the world, and after the first mission he is the first person Saan connects with on an emotional level. They quickly become friends, almost adventuring partners, while Fei continues to be her guide at the same time. Saan also sees herself in Fei, since they are both powered people; Fei's story of staying permanently as a cat scares Saan on a fundamental level because she identifies with him on a personal level. After Fei loses his humanity, Saan not only wants to help her friend, but her saving him would also indicate to herself, that she can and will master her powers. Saving Fei saves herself, too, in her mind. Nevva starts out as a mysterious, wise authority for Saan, whom she needs to obey because of

necessity. A bit by bit Saan learns more about Nevva and sees other sides, like warmth, maternal qualities and her intelligence, and with it her respect towards her mentor grows. Nevva retains her authoritative position throughout, but towards the end Nevva grows more intimate with Saan and displays platonic, maternal affection. At the end of the story they stand on the same pedestal; Nevva obviously has more knowledge, intelligence and strength because of her age and experience, but they acknowledge each other as equal individuals. Saan and Lind stay friendly, mirroring the relationship between a child and a family friend or a distant relative, who comes back with great and wild stories every now and then. Lind indulges Saan with stories from her past, giving exposition to both her and Nevva, and the world. There is little to no progression in Saan's and Lind's relationship, apart from them growing friendlier.

Saan's personality and values are represented in her spirit animals. The deer is known as a symbol of protectiveness, heroism and family; an eagle represents her growing powers, the possibilities and dangers which come with it; the wolf is her self worth and the power to stand on her own feet, instead of being dependant of others; and finally the bear, whom represents pure power and love. The bear is the essence of Saan, as she is above all else a good person – not saint-like or pure, but morally sound and just – who is given enormous power, and the responsibility which comes with it.

3.4.2 Fei

Fei is another powered individual, who was trained by Nevva before Saan. Fei couldn't control his powers, and his hastiness in training leads to him transforming permanently to a cat. As a cat, Fei lives with Nevva, and helps Saan by guiding her through her training. The two also quickly form a deep friendship with each other. Unlike Saan, Fei's powers manifested early on, without a pendant working as a catalyst.

The role of Fei is to work as a guide to the player, hinting at correct ways to solve puzzles and how to proceed through the platforming sections. Tone and story-wise his role is to be the sidekick who brings warmth, humour and levity to scenes, up until the mid-point, from where on out saving him becomes the major goal for all characters, especially Saan. While Lind is there for world building in a bigger scale, Fei's character gives the same

kind of exposition to the levels and powers. He also adds mystical and magical elements to the world by being, essentially, a talking cat.

Fei is a light-hearted character, who seems positive at all times during the first half. When Saan gets to know him better, she understands that his character is inherently tragic. That being said, Fei is content in his new form, and he has accepted his fate, believing there is no alternative anymore. He also works as a counterpart to Saan in many situations: at first, when Saan is distant and sad, Fei is happy and encouraging. As Saan starts to build up her self-esteem, Fei reveals his true nature. As Saan gets more and more powerful, Fei gets weaker and starts to lose his identity. In essence, Fei is the other side of the coin to Saan; he is the failure and its consequences, while she is the alternative version of everything working out fine.

Fei is also close to Nevva. Having lived together for years after Fei failed his training, they have bonded and become close friends, helping each other out in their daily lives. There is no grudge between them, as Fei sees that it was his own, not Nevva's fault, that he's stuck in the form of a cat. Nevva blames herself, but keeps it close to her heart. When Fei starts to lose his humanity, Nevva works tirelessly to find a cure to Fei's condition.

3.4.3 Nevva

Nevva is the mentor and teacher of Saan. She has knowledge about powered individuals, which has been passed on to her by previous sages. She is in her mid- to late thirties, and Caucasian. Before Saan, Nevva taught Fei, which is why he still lives in her cottage. Her appearance and body type are intended to reflect the video game equivalent of an average appearance: attractive, but not overtly beautiful.

Nevva displays herself as a confident person, with a nonchalant demeanor. She doesn't fuss too much, and takes her time when teaching Saan or studying her artefacts and writings. Despite her seeming confidence, Nevva sees her failures as a teacher in Fei, and tries her best to forgive herself by making sure that Saan succeeds in her own training, redeeming herself through Saan. Her nonchalant way of living starts to change fundamentally when Fei's condition worsens. She locks herself up in her study to find a cure, and when she believes a sacrifice is needed to bring Fei back, she volunteers

immediately; she sees the sacrifice both as her obligation as his mentor, and as a way of redeeming herself.

As a maternal figure to Saan, she also doesn't want to see her hurt. Although she is initially unable to go through this because of Saan's heroism, she gets her peace and resolution when Fei and Saan come back to the cottage. She succeeds as a mentor for Saan, and Fei's tragedy no longer haunts her. Nevva displays her maternal side at many times. She has basically adopted Fei, and she cares for Saan more than a plain teacher would. She also shields her regret from Fei and Saan because of the same maternal instincts. At the end of the story, Nevva sees Saan as her equal; Saan is powerful enough not to be commanded by her anymore.



PICTURE 1. Preliminary concept art of Nevva (Picture: Juha Janttonen 2016)

Nevva is a mix of the mentor and maternal archetypes. Despite this, her personality varies from the traditional way of how characters with these archetypes are portrayed. She is young, her easygoing and seemingly indifferent attitude is youthful, and way of openly showing her emotions in the second part is far from the calm, detached demeanor of traditional mentors. Her intelligence is also a big part of her character and how she is viewed as an authority: Nevva has information passed on from previous sages and as such is in an elevated position compared to the others. On top of this, she has also studied numerous books and gained wisdom over the years to the point, where she is confident in her knowledge of the powered ones.

Nevva is the one of the two characters who exhibits sexuality and romance in any way. Nevva's relationship to Lind is only hinted at a few occasions, and shown in small fashion if the player completes particular side missions. Their relationship is left vague consciously, since I wanted to give the players room for their imagination, and to fill the gaps themselves, only giving a slight confirmation in one scene. Romance isn't a central theme of the game, so this kind of representation felt most fitting to the tone, especially since their intimate moment happens in a bleak scene. I also wanted to break norms by having Lind continue her travels in the end, suggesting a free, open relationship without bounds. These types of relationships – and women enjoying them – are rarely represented in games, I felt it was important to give the players the confirmation that these types of relationships are also acceptable, especially in the modern world where relationships norms are shifting and changing. Nevva's sexual orientation is not disclosed in the story.

3.4.4 Lind

Lind is the fourth character. She is a travelling merchant in her early forties, who goes from town to town selling different goods. She is a supporting character, helping establish the setting and the world, as well as giving background information on other characters. She also brings conflict to the later scenes, planning to take Fei to his father to be healed. Her looks can be described as traditionally beautiful, and her body language is traditionally female.

As a child, Lind was forced to assist her father who was the local doctor. Although this helped Lind understand lots about medicine, she also felt it wasn't a life she wanted. Lind ran off from home and started a business with another travelling merchant, who taught her business tactics. Later on, the merchant betrayed her and left her for dead in the woods. After surviving on her own for some time, Nevva found Lind and took her in. This made an everlasting impression in Lind, and after regrouping herself, she has periodically visited Nevva while working as a travelling merchant. The relationship between the two is left vague, but they share an intimate moment, and are very familiar with each other. In her spare time at the cottage, Lind does busywork: she goes through her inventory, cooks food and does other day-to-day –tasks for Nevva.

The character of Lind is a mix between somewhat masculine profession and life style, and a traditionally feminine personality. Lind is shown openly emotional, she enjoys talking, and is friendly and caring. Like others, she is an active character: she does not sit around or do nothing, but instead works in different ways around the cottage. Her past also indicates that she rarely stays put for long. Lind's childhood, travels around the world and her survival in the woods have also given her great insight into plants, roots and herbs, which symbolises her understanding of the world as a whole. At the end of the story, Lind continues her travels around the world; it is left vague whether or not she will come back, although the light-hearted banter gives an understanding that she will. Nevva seems alright, enforcing the feeling that Lind will indeed come back.

Game mechanics-wise Lind works as the shop for the player: if one gains enough money from doing missions and challenges, there are different outfits in Lind's merchant carriage to buy. For the overall story she works as a supporting player: she helps establish the world they inhabit, and gives an insider's perspective into Nevva. Her easy personality also gives levity and comfort in some of the more distressing scenes later on in the game, while in others she creates conflict and gives an outsider's perspective into things.

3.5 Themes and Allegories of Roar

Roar's main theme is growing up, with its different sides such as finding and coming into terms with one's self, and accepting change as an eventuality. Secondary themes are heroism, family and self-forgiveness. The story also tackles very subtly racism and sexism by averting tropes, clichés and stereotypes.

3.5.1 Growing Up and Heroism

The main theme of Roar is growing up. Saan is the embodiment of this theme, and her growth as a person is paralleled within the game mechanics and level design. I chose this theme mainly because of its universal appeal and my own experiences and fears, while growing up from childhood to adolescence and finally adulthood. Although there have been some similar, popular stories in recent years, such as Clementine's growth in Telltale's *The Walking Dead* and Ellie in *The Last of Us*, most of them have been written for adults, and are seen from the perspective of the figurative parent, instead of the child. I wanted the perspective to stay with the growing character to help identify with Saan, and to create the tone and setting to go hand in hand with the changes within her. The theme of growing up is most directly seen when Saan gets new powers, getting more powerful and at ease with herself one new animal at a time. As previously detailed, *The Hero's Journey* by Joseph Campbell has also influenced the structure and the nature of Saan's heroism greatly. Also, as previously stated, the sexual aspects of puberty and maturity are left out of Roar; although they are an important part of growing up, the exclusion is done so that the game can be targeted for a younger audience. Similar exclusion is also done to other adult themes.

The levels are created to mirror Saan's evolution as a character, and what each levels' spirit animal represents. The tutorial level at her home village represents her childhood and innocence, and her state as a pure human. As a huge contrast, the first mission – at which point Saan is fearful, lonely, thrown into a weird world and afraid of change – is a claustrophobic cave with little to no lighting and many tunnels. Saan finishes the area by letting others close to her, and by cherishing her ties to other people, being thematically linked to the deer. The second mission is spacious, with huge open areas, towering heights and deep drops, representing the freedom that her newfound powers bring, but also the

dangers and risks of having enormous possibilities. The story Fei tells in this level – about him being a human trapped in the body of a cat – mirrors the theme and Saan's fears, and the eagle represents her embracing the power and the possibilities that come with it. The third mission is about independence, her own self worth and the internalization of her capabilities. Because of this, she also has to complete this level alone, while Fei travels back to the cottage. The fourth one is tied directly with the fifth one, and as a whole they create a situation where Saan's personality of a bear is shown directly. Saan is already a powerful individual who protects and helps others, and who endures vicious circumstances for her loved ones. The power to wake up the bear comes from her desperate need to help Fei. The last mission is also to showcase her personality in entirety, having elements from all the previous levels.

The themes listed are also all part of Saan's transition from childhood into maturity. I wanted the themes to correlate with finding one's self; not literally depicting growing up from childhood into maturity, but more as a thematical guide to some of the issues normally associated with maturing in modern story telling. Saan's maturity is focused on three themes: the importance and support from others, the freedom which comes with growing up and the courage to be yourself. The deer, as a symbol of family, symbolises the importance and support one gains from others. I wanted the story to first establish other characters as Saan's family and the strength which comes from those ties. The eagle represents the freedom which comes from getting more rights and age: the world is filled with different paths and opportunities, from which to choose your own. This openness of the future can be seen in the open area design and multiple paths one can go through, and in the eagle itself. Saan is able to face the openness and paths because of the support she gets from others. The wolf symbolises the need for individualism in maturing and the courage to stand for oneself and one's values. After acquiring the wolf, Saan is more adamant and wants to help Fei herself. The bear represents the grown-up version of Saan; she has grown up, and she has internalized all the values and things the previous animals symbolised.

Saan's personality and characteristics are also designed to somewhat represent the main stages of growing up, being influenced by the basics of development psychology. The early stage – from ages 13 to 16 – comprises of biological puberty, protesting against authorities such as parents and creating new relationships with people of the same age. The second stage – from ages 16 to 19 – includes identity crisis, identifying and

infatuation, testing boundaries and deeper relationships, while the third stage, the end of adolescence – from ages 19 to 25 – consist of ideological crisis, calming down, pondering about one's place in the world and independence. (Dunderfelt, 1997, 57-58, 92-97, 100) Although Saan is 16-years-old in the game, she's designed to include all stages in some ways. In the beginning of the game she protests against Nevva, and agrees to train begrudgingly, while forming a friendship with Fei. In the middle part of the game, Saan questions Nevva about her future, and whether or not she has a say in it. She also starts to get more confident and her relationship with Fei deepens, while she also begins to open up to Nevva and Lind. In the last part of the story, Saan commits to her ideology and identity as the hero, she becomes independent as well as powerful, and finally in the end she is relaxed and at peace. Roar is by no means a game which heavily focuses on different stages of development psychology, but designing the character's arc to somewhat correlate with the main points of adolescence hopefully helps the players identify with Saan better.

3.5.2 Secondary Themes

The biggest secondary theme of Roar is family. All of the characters fill a different place in a family dynamic; Saan as a child, Fei as a sibling and Nevva as the parent. Lind's friendliness is reminiscent of a close family friend or an aunt, who parts real-life wisdom, unlike sheltering parents who try to give simplistic moral ground work with black and white conception of a world. Nevva's maternal qualities come in to play numerous times in the story, and her actions – such as deciding to sacrifice herself – can be seen as ones of a parent. Fei and Saan grow close, entertaining and adventuring together. The story also shows them working together for a common goal, and consoling each other. They are a surrogate family.

Accepting one's self is part of Saan's growth as a person, but the same is also seen in Nevva, who blames herself for what happened to Fei. Although she does not gain peace through her own actions – but instead because of Saan – she is still able to come into terms with herself, when Fei returns to the cottage in human form. Nevva's regrets are seen in her actions leading to the final mission of the game, and in her preparedness to sacrifice herself, if needed. The act of sacrificing is vital to two of Nevva's character

traits; her failings as a teacher and her maternal spirit. Fei has also adapted to – and as such, accepted – his life in cat form, before he started to lose his humanity.

Roar can be considered to have themes about racism and sexism, although neither are addressed directly in the story. The design choice to create a story without sexism or racism is a conscious one: it is vital to give especially young people stories and empowering characters which present an alternative to reality. However, since a work of fiction is always connected and experienced through the cultural lens it inhabits, the subject matter can't be complete dissociated from reality.

3.6 Game Design

Roar is a 3rd person adventure game, with puzzles and platforming sections. The player completes missions which give Saan different powers. The player can complete optional side missions and challenges in the hub area, if one wishes to. The player can also buy different outfits from a merchant, which give a small boost to different stats, like jumping height, duration of being in an animal form et cetera.

Different levels are designed to show different mechanics; Saan's first mission, for example, is puzzle based, since she doesn't have any of her astral animals yet. In human form, Saan's advantage is her human logic, which translates to how she can use levers and push small boxes to create pathways throughout the level. The next mission focuses more on platforming and using the deer's jumping capability, and so on. Each mission always focuses on the powers gained at the end of the previous mission. If the player chooses to, he or she can also train the newly acquired power at the hub area, by completing side missions and challenges before the next mission.

I wanted the growth of Saan be directly tied into how the player uses the game controller. By unlocking new skills, the player literally gets a new button to use in the controller; every main button used to activate a different astral animal, while bumpers and triggers – found in pretty much every modern controller – are used for different actions, such as using activated animals skills, jumping and holding on to ledges. This way, I believe that Saan's growth is shown in a fundamental and interesting way to the player.

4 SUMMARY

My thesis started with a detailed summary of how female characters are represented in modern, Western video games. I began with an introduction, which outlined the problematic nature of the current situation: the industry and games are improving, but female representation is still unsatisfactory on many fronts, despite the fact that roughly half of all players are women; female players are harassed, society sees the field as masculine and female characters rely on stereotypes.

In chapters 2.1 and 2.2 I aimed at identifying the main problems. 2.1 focuses on how women are represented. Numerically the representation of women as characters is unsatisfactory and does not in any way mirror the gender balance of world population. The same unequal representation can also be seen in male and female heroes, and in marketing when a game has a female hero. The industry lacks a consensus as to why the situation persists, and numerous reasons are given: marketing and branding video games for men, male-dominated industry, low female player base, lack of awareness and monetary costs. The concept known as male as a norm is also introduced as a possible answer to the problem. Male as norm translates to how society and culture sees male as the norm. The outcome of this can be seen in how female characters are represented; women are a deviation to the norm, thus being a female is a trait in itself for female characters.

Chapter 2.2 details how female characters are objectified sexually, how their sexuality is depicted and how femininity and gender can be seen in characters. Sexual objectification and the male gaze are introduced, explained and given examples of. Sexual objectification means reducing and treating a human being into a target of desire with no autonomy, whereas male gaze as a concept explains how women - and female characters - are depicted in modern Western culture; they are created to entertain men aesthetically, which dictates their actions.

Difference between character's sexuality and sexual objectification is explained; the first is the character's sexual orientation, activity and agency, whereas the latter means how the character is created to perceive the content. Depiction of open sexuality is also talked about, as well as Madonna-Whore complex – dividing women between condemnable objects of lust and morally pure beings in need of protecting – can be seen in how female

characters are portrayed. Feminine traits and femininity in general is explained, and the most commonly seen character types in modern videogames are detailed, with examples.

For the practical part of the thesis I created a concept for a game, named Roar. Roar is an adventure game targeted to young teens, and designed to feature a diverse female cast, representing different personalities and character types. Roar's story, themes and basic game mechanics are also designed to work in conjunction with Saan, the main character and hero of the story. I use Joseph Campbell's monomyth's structure as a basis for Roar's story, and use the archetypal characters as an influence. Themes include growing up and finding one's self, heroism, family and self-forgiveness. Because of the focus being on young players, Roar has diminished sex and sexuality and violence to an appropriate level.

Roar is designed to either avert, subvert or play around the problems in the representation of women. The characters vary by their personalities, traits, sexuality and occupations to give a variety of different empowering characters, while intended to avoid the most common problems, such as sexual objectification or character types tied strictly to their gender. The character arcs are also constructed to either serve the story, game world or the main character's arc, instead of being diminished to serve the player aesthetically. The themes are designed to appeal universally, with an emphasis to a younger audience.

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