THE MONOMYTH OF A SEED: A LITERARY ANALYSIS OF A JRPG CHARACTER'S HERO JOURNEY

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Abstract

Purpose: Japanese role-playing games (JRPGs) such as the famous Final Fantasy series usually carry imaginary wonders and magical elements. They show exceptional tales that express an extraordinary journey of their characters. This study aimed to analyze the hero quest of JRPG character named Squall, the main protagonist in Final Fantasy VIII. He is a student in a military academy called Balamb Garden who strives to be a SeeD mercenary. Starting as a lone wolf in his story, Squall's adventure has him gradually change and open up to people more as he and his found friends get involved in a mission of saving the world from sorceresses. This paper also sought to show that video games like JRPGs has hero stories that follow the narrative framework of the Hero's Journey.

Design/Methodology/Approach: This research used literary criticism, which applied the monomyth to address the research questions. The data was taken from the scripted narrative content of Final Fantasy VIII. In other words, these were the cutscenes, dialogue and other predetermined narratives that were watched and read rather than played with. I, the researcher, collected the data by identifying and classifying relevant citations from the game. I also analyzed the data by explaining or describing game scenes based on Caserta's version of the Hero's Journey.

Findings: The conclusion of the study found Squall to be a complex hero. From a teenager who broodily expressed inner angst, he gradually had his persona of aloofness and indifference slowly crumble beneath the burden of problems that piled up on and around him, as well as the personal feelings that started to form within him. The gradual changes had him progress and complete the twelve stages of Caserta's monomyth model and overcome his obstacles.

Originality/Value: To the author's knowledge this is the only study to explore the Hero's Journey of Squall in Final Fantasy VIII. The study also implies the potential use of JRPGs like Final Fantasy as objects of study in English and literature classrooms. This invites a discussion and provokes a conversation about the role of video games in educational settings. Also, the findings add to the literature on literary, narrative, and instructional value of video games.

Keywords: Role-Playing Game, Video Games, Hero Journey, Literary Criticism.

Introduction

There are many Final Fantasy games and a wide variety of different stories throughout the series. Since 1987, the Final Fantasy franchise has relished its enormous success for every title it released. The once unassuming JRPG series that can only be played in the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) now has a game that can be enjoyed in virtually any game system in this day and age. Each entry in the franchise has an independent story involving new set of characters, settings, and theme. This fashion rendered fans an opportunity to have their own personal introduction and entry into the Final Fantasy world (Miller, 2023). This also generated differing degrees of appreciation for each Final Fantasy game. Fans of a specific entry would argue for their favorite, thus, sparking numerous online and offline discussions and debates. Despite the contrasting arguments about which the best Final Fantasy installment is, most of these fans, if not all, of the franchise would agree that what makes the series beloved and successful is its consistently superb storytelling, especially of its tales of its heroes. (Byrd, 2021).

Hero stories usually follow a common heroic narrative structure in which a story's protagonist sets out on a quest, has transformative adventures, then returns home changed and transformed (Vogler, 2007). This particular concept is called the Hero's Journey or the monomyth (Campbell, 1950). From

this monomyth concept, we can explore the pattern of life of heroes from short stories, novels, and films. It can also be used to examine another heroic character's storyline in a certain video game like those in the Final Fantasy series.

Final Fantasy VIII is one of the Final Fantasy games that can be analyzed using the Hero's Journey. The game's story follows Squall Leonhart, a cadet in a military academy called Balamb Garden. Squall endeavors to be a SeeD, a mercenary who can use magic with the help of magical beasts called Guardian Forces (GF). Though starting out as a loner in the game's narrative, Squall's hero journey has him meet many people and friends. He also learns to depend on them as the SeeDs get sucked into a quest of protecting the world and its people from the formidable and dreaded sorceresses.

Final Fantasy VIII has several stages which lead the hero to follow a quest along its story. Each stage brings the hero closer to psychological wholeness that will transform him or her from an innocent character into a changed person aware of his heroic responsibilities and abilities. While trekking the journey, the hero meets various characters, allies and enemies alike, who will be his obstacles to achieve his mission or his aid to support him completing it (Vogler, 2007). Campbell, the originator of the monomyth, assumes that lines of heroes in all kinds of stories have their own journey which is covered

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by the plot of the narrative. Campbell (1950) continues that the journey pulls the hero, whether forcefully or not, out of his or her ordinary world to receive and accept the quest from his or her society then embark on an adventure to fulfill it. It is proposed that the journey is a development of something new within the hero. Simply put, it is a road to his or her evolution. Such a journey can be analyzed using Campbell's monomyth. The monomyth cycle is commonly applied to the analysis of films and written texts; however, it is rarely used in video game narratives. Thus, by looking at the possibility of using the Hero's Journey in the Final Fantasy game, this paper aimed to reveal the monomyth cycle of Squall Leonhart within Final Fantasy VIII.

Background of the Study

A story or myth of a hero holds an important function in society. It is to depict a progressing awareness of an individual's strengths and limitations, resulting to the realization of the person's full potential (Jung, 2012). There are a number of theories surrounding the hero myth. Influenced by Carl Jung, James Joyce, and other authors, Campbell (1950) provided the life essence to the concept of Hero's Journey or otherwise known as the monomyth. The monomyth cycle comprises three main phases: the Departure, Initiation, and Return. Each phase has its stages. The whole cycle totals 17 different stages. Vogler (2007) altered it into a twelve-stage journey that focused on screenwriting and film-making. He also put in more details to other archetypes apart from the hero to support the Hero's Journey. A more current variation comes from Caserta's (2021) monomyth model wherein the author individualized Campbell's narrative structure by including society's influence and impact to the hero through an added threshold for facing and conquering prejudice and discrimination. Despite the variations of the Hero's Journey, the basic nature is the same. The hero crosses a point of no return, overcomes transformative challenges, and then returns home changed and self-actualized. Figure 1 presents the differences between Caserta's, Vogler's, and Campbell's Hero's Journey structure labels.

Act	Campbell (1949)	Vogler (2007)	Caserta (2021)
I. Departure	1. The Call to Adventure 2. Refusal of the Call 3. Supernatural Aid 4. Crossing the Threshold 5. Belly of the Whale	1. The Ordinary World 2. The Call to Adventure 3. Refusal of the Call 4. Meeting with the Mentor 5. Crossing the Threshold to the Special World	1. Call to Action 2.Refusing the Call 3. Meeting Thementor 4. Crossing the First Threshold 5. The Call is Tested
II. Initiation	6. The Road of Trials 7. The Meeting with the Goddess 8. Woman as Temptress 9. Atonement with the Father 10. Apotheosis 11. The Ultimate Boon	6. Tests, Allies and Enemies 7. Approach to the Innermost Cave 8. The Ordeal 9. Reward	6. Road of Trials and Quests 7. Face and Conquer Discrimination and Prejudice 8. Apotheosis 9. The Reward
III. Return	12. Refusal of the Return 13. The Magic Flight 14. Rescue from Without 15. The Crossing of the Return Threshold 16. Master of Two Worlds 17. Freedom to Live	10. The Road Back 11. The Resurrection 12. Return with the Elixir	10. The Road Back 11. The Resurrection 12. The Freedom to Live

Figure 1: Campbell's, Vogler's, and Caserta's Hero Journey

According to Caserta (2021) by following some acknowledged structures and partnering it with real-life issues when analyzing a narrative, it is possible to reach a broader public. Adapting the narrative analysis to examine unique cultural, societal, and psychological qualities can result in a fascinating and engaging examination of a story. The hero stories can be interpreted as a metaphor to acknowledge human life and its stages: growing up, learning, adapting, maturing, and death (Campbell, 2011).

The monomythical investigation has a significant position in exploring how the main protagonist, Squall Leonhart, overcomes his conflicts and challenges that enables him to transform his innocent and mundane character to a heroic one. That is why this study purposed itself to reveal Squall's transformation within the story to explore the manner in which the Hero's Journey concept was established within the Final Fantasy VIII narrative.

Statement of the Problem

In this study, Square's Final Fantasy VIII was analyzed. The researcher used the Hero's Journey theory of Campbell to fill the gap after discovering in previous studies (Host, 2009; Fakhruddin & Retnaningdyah, 2019; Puruhito, 2021; Hulings, 2021; Faquih, 2022) that no other researcher has conducted this kind of research in analyzing the eighth installment of the Final Fantasy series. The aim of this paper was to explore the way the monomyth concept was brought into being within the hero plot of Final Fantasy VIII in order to bare Squall's character development into a hero he was meant to be. That is why this paper sought to answer the following questions:

1. What stages of the Hero's Journey does Squall experience to become a hero in Final Fantasy VIII?
2. How does Squall overcome the obstacles he faces in Final Fantasy VIII?

Scope and Delimitation

In relation to the research questions, this study focused on the Hero's Journey, particularly, the journey undergone by Squall as the main protagonist in the 2019 remastered version of Square's Final Fantasy VIII. The research also focused on how Squall overcome the difficulties he faced in his heroic adventure in the game narrative. The monomyth theory used in this study is Caserta's updated model of Campbell's the Hero's Journey where it provides an inclusive lens that enables readers to critically analyze society's impact on the studied hero. In Caserta's Hero's Journey, a hero must undergo twelve stages in his life to become a hero.

Methodology

This paper employed literary criticism as the method in analyzing the Final Fantasy game. It is a research approach that focuses on examining and critically interpreting literary works. This paper also used Caserta's (2021) model of Campbell's monomyth concept as the manner in which to analyze Squall's hero journey. The author wanted to reveal the stages of the Hero's Journey experienced by Squall as the main character in Square's 2019 remastered Final Fantasy VIII. The emphasis of this research was put on the application of the monomyth theory to the object of the study. The main instrument of this paper was the writer himself through playing the game, watching the video play throughs several times, collecting, classifying, and analyzing all data collected using Caserta's version of the Hero's Journey.

The main data for this study was taken from Squall's journey as the lead character in the 2019 remastered game of Final Fantasy VIII. The primary source of the data came from the scripted narrative content of the JRPG game. In other words, these were the cut scenes, dialogue and other predetermined narratives that were watched and read rather than played with. In order to gather the data, the research's writer, followed certain steps. The first step is playing the game while closely watching and reading the video game story to gain an in-depth understanding of Final Fantasy VIII. Watching YouTube videos with game play footage from the channel Magemasher22 (2019), collecting data and taking notes that was related to the monomyth in the game was the second step. The next step was analyzing what stages of the Hero's Journey Squall faced in Final Fantasy VIII.

In analyzing the data, specific steps were also followed. The first one was the analysis of the stages of the Hero's Journey treaded by Squall in the game's plot. The second step was the examination of how Squall overcome difficulties he faced in the Final Fantasy VIII game. Lastly, the proponent of the study, concluded the analysis to answer the research questions.

Findings and Discussion

This section discusses two points from the problem of the study. First, the discussion explains the stages of the monomyth traversed by Final Fantasy VIII's main character, Squall Leonhart according to Caserta's 2021 model of Campbell's the Hero's Journey. Second, it talks about how Squall, as the main protagonist, overcame difficulties he faced in the game's narrative.

I. **Monomyth Cycle in Final Fantasy VIII**
Squall as the hero in the game story is going through twelve stages based on Caserta's (2021) variation (see figure 2) of Campbell's the Hero's Journey which can be classified into three distinct phases, namely, the Departure, the Initiation, and the Return. The Departure has the first five stages of the journey: Call to Action, Refusing the Call, Meeting the Mentor, Crossing the First Threshold, and The Call is Tested, then the Initiation follows this with the next four stages which are Road of Trials and Quests, Face and Conquer Discrimination and Prejudice, Apotheosis and The Reward. Lastly, the Return ends the journey with the last three stages. They are The Road Back, The Resurrection, and The Freedom to Live.
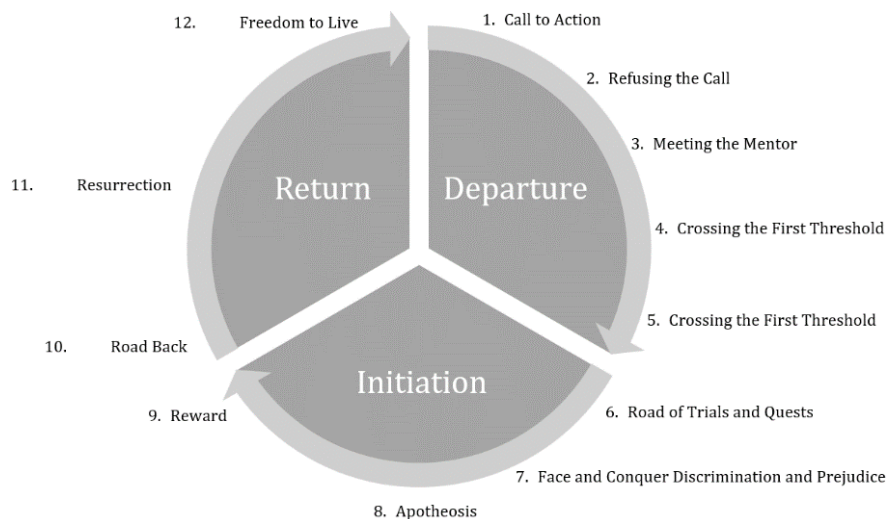
Figure 2: Caserta's Monomyth Model

The figure shows a circular diagram divided into three sections: Return, Departure, and Initiation, with the following numbered stages around the circle:

1. Call to Action
2. Refusing the Call
3. Meeting the Mentor
4. Crossing the First Threshold
5. Crossing the First Threshold
6. Road of Trials and Quests
7. Face and Conquer Discrimination and Prejudice
8. Apotheosis
9. Reward
10. Road Back
11. Resurrection
12. Freedom to Live

1. Departure

a. Call to Action

A Call to Action is the first stage of the Departure phase where the hero gains his or her turning point of his or her normal life. Campbell (1950) calls this stage, the Call to Adventure. This is the first main gate of the Hero's Journey. The destiny of the hero forces him or her out of his or her Ordinary World and pushes him or her into an unknown territory called the Special World. This particular event is best demonstrated when Squall and his team whose members also include Selphie and Zell accepts their first SeeD mission. This mission is given by the game's herald of the call to adventure and action and later on the mentor of the hero, Headmaster Cid. Accepting the SeeD mission pulls Squall out of his safer school life and into the more dangerous unordinary world of being a SeeD. He has also been given his first leadership role as the squad litter of his smaller team of first time SeeDs. This assignment and acceptance are Squall's way of accepting the Call to Action. I argue that this moment is the first Call to Action in Final Fantasy VIII as there will be other calls later in the game.

b. Refusal of the Call

Refusal of the Call is the stage in which the hero hesitates then rejects the invitation to the heroic adventure or an offer to venture out into the unknown. There is no ignorance from Squall' first Call to Action since he willingly takes on the mission as a SeeD rookie and the leader of his group. Therefore, Squall does not walk on this particular Refusal of the Call stage during the Departure phase of the journey. There are other Calls to Action in the game, however, where Squall is called out of his comfortable place and therein refuses the invitation to act.

These happen during the later phases of the monomyth that will be tackled in the ensuing pages.

c. Meeting the Mentor

In the Meeting the Mentor stage, the hero may not wish to rush into a Special World blindly and, therefore, seeks experience and wisdom of someone who has been there before. Though the type of mentorship people is most accustomed to is one on one, the definition of mentorship can actually be quite broad. The hero could be in a mentorship of different masters. Campbell (1950) mentions the mentors not need be an old wise man or woman. They do not even need to be a person at all. Vogler (2007) says the mentor is the source of clarity and determination the hero needs in order to push through in his journey. This clarity and determination can come from a child, an experience, a memory, or an object (Haskell, 2018). In the game, Squall meets many mentors in one shape or form, but in this part of the story, his mentor is Headmaster Cid who instructs him of what to do in his first SeeD mission. Being a SeeD is all new to Squall and he needs the wisdom of the headmaster on how to take the first steps and move forward since he has the breadth and depth of knowledge of being one.

After Squall accepts the mission, his group pass out on their train ride to Timber. Squall dreams of being Laguna Loire, who is arguably another of Squall's mentors. He is projected in the dream and is with his two friends, Kiros Seagill and Ward Zabac. The dream is set during the time of Galbadia's invasion of Timber many years ago. Laguna and his friends fought their way out of the blazing Timber Forest, then went straight for Deling City where Laguna met a pianist, Julia Heartilly, whom he was smittened

by. Laguna confessed his feelings to her, but was eventually called away from Julia's hotel room for another mission. In a way, Laguna, in this sequence, shows Squall the opposite of his personality and indirectly teaches him of the actions of a more social character. Squall and his team wake up from that dream and find themselves having arrived at Timber. The disturbing shared dream the SeeDs had is brashly put aside as they meet up with the Forest Owls.

The girl who danced with Squall at the graduation ball, Rinoa Heartilly, is the leader of the Forest Owls, and had been at the party to request the SeeDs'aid. Rinoa's rebel group plans to abduct Vinzer Deling, Galbadia's president, to force him to pull out his military force from Timber, but once they seized the president's train, they confront only a fake Deling who becomes hostile to them. After dealing with the imposter, they learn the real Galbadian president is headed to the Timber TV Station to make a broadcast. This explains Galbadia's need of the Dollet radio tower. President Deling announces Sorceress Edea as Galbadia's new ambassador. Soon after, Seifer charges in the studio and takes the president hostage. Quistis follows suit to confront the scamp Seifer. She then requests Squall's party for help. Squall's team hurries to the TV studio, but the sorceress herself appears and spirits him away. This saves the president.

Following this incident, Squall and his friends escape to Galbadia Garden, one of the three Gardens around the game world. Unlike Balamb Garden being a Seed Academy, Galbadia Garden trains mercenaries for the Galbadian army, although it is not affiliated with the regime. Rinoa follows the company as the Forest Owls' base has been destroyed and the group spilt up. Squall dreams again of his dream mentor, Laguna. Laguna and his friends ran into Esthar soldiers excavating a colossal crystal edifice at an excavation site in a place called Centra. Squall, as Laguna, in the dreams so far teaches him about the past and its events. The dream sequence is a lesson to Squall of what is happening at the present for it mirrors the reality of today's events. These events are unknown to Squall at this point of the game story but soon become a foreshadow of future incidents. A coming affair is the switch of roles between the former Sorceress-loving Esthar and the revolutionary Galbadian army.

d. **Crossing the First Threshold**
Crossing the first threshold is often because of an outside power that changes the course of the

story (Vogler, 2007). Here, the story begins to intensify. This stage of the journey puts the hero in a situation where the hero has not felt or been before. Caserta (2021) points out terrifying and dangerous events will take place from hereon. As Campbell (1950) said in his book, the first danger at this stage is the Threshold Guardian. The guardian is an archetypal figure that tests the hero's resolve as he or she pursues his or her heroic mission. In the case of Squall, this is Sorceress Edea.

In Galbadia Garden, Squall and his fellow SeeDs are assigned to assassinate the sorceress with the help of Galbadia's General Caraway, who turns out to be Rinoa's father, and Galbadia Garden's own elite sniper, Irvine Kinneas. Squall has a suspicion they are being used by Galbadia Garden's Master Martine who has is own agenda against the Sorceress Edea to protect his school. The assassination is to take place at Deling City where Edea is to be inaugurated. Rinoa comes up with a plan to deal with the sorceress without using violence by surpressing her power with an Odine brand talisman. This is, however, is dismissed by Quistis. Despite this, Rinoa still carries out her plan, but failed. Sorceress Edea, then, kills President Deling and sets Rinoa up as a sacrifice to lizard-like creatures she summoned called the Iguions, but these beasts were defeated by Squall and Irvine as they rush to save Rinoa.

Zell, Selphie and Quistis trap the sorceress inside a gated cloister, as Squall, Irvine and Rinoa ready themselves to assassinate Edea. Irvine hesitates, but with an uncharacteristical encouragement from Squall, he fires at the sorceress. She deflects the shot with her magic, forcing Squall to attack her head on. Squall staggers in his charge when he sees Seifer at the sorceress's side, defending her. Squall manages to defeat Seifer, but is suddenly pierced by an ice javelin thrown to him by Edea. This renders Squall unconscious. The hero, Squall, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowed into the unknown and would appear to have died.

e. **The Call is Tested**
Caserta (2021) describes the Call is Tested stage as the part of the hero story wherein the hero gains self-doubt. He or she questions himself or herself about whether he or she made the right decision to pursue the quest and leave the world he or she was safe in and comfortable with. This happens in Final Fantasy VIII when Squall momentarily dies after being struck by an ice bolt. During his momentary death, Squall dreams of Laguna's stay in the countryside of

Winhill where Laguna lived with a woman named Raine and her adopted daughter Ellone. Ellone was orphaned when the Esthar nation raided the town to kidnap girls and have one of them be Sorceress Adel's successor, Esthar's ruler. Ellone's parents died protecting her. It was Laguna's vow to protect Ellone, Raine and the village. In the dream, Laguna learned Julia has married General Caraway after hopelessly waiting for the one she truly loved.

Squall wakes up in Galbadia's D-District Prison where he is being tortured by Seifer who is demanding to know why SeeD persecutes sorceresses. This confuses Squall who only knows SeeD as a hired sword for those who can pay. At this instance, one can call this as the Call is Tested stage of the Journey. The torture puts Squall in a state of confusion where he does not know where he stands – both as a SeeD and as a hero he does not know yet he is meant to be. Squall is then knocked unconscious by an electrocution, but a Moomba, a red furred animal that usually work as laborers for both Esthar and Galbadia, frees him, whilst calling him 'Laguna'. These puzzles Squall further.

Together with his friends, Squall breaks out of prison and learns of Edea ordering her Galbadian troops to fire missiles on Balamb and Trabia garden as a response to SeeDs' retaliation to her. Squall and his group hurries to stop the launch, but once out in the desert, they witness missiles fired from the Galbadian Missile Base. Rinoa reveals that Trabia Garden was to be targeted first. The revelation gives everyone hope of saving their very own Balamb Garden from the next attack. The group splits. Selphie heads the first team that tries to stop the next missile launch where they eventually fail while Squall leads the other to warn Balamb Garden of the impending missile strike.

Squall arrives to find Balamb Garden in turmoil and disarray with students and faculty fighting each other from different sides. One group sides with Headmaster Cid while the other group allies with the Garden Master Norg. Norg is the financial backer of the Garden and sees the military academy as a source of profit. He declared himself as the school's true baron and master and abandoned the beliefs behind the Garden's foundation. During the commotion Squall learns the Garden can be flown and made mobile and moves the school away from the site the Galbadian missiles were programmed to target. Balamb Garden's navigation system have broken down afterwards though due to neglect and lack of upkeep. Balamb Garden is thus left adrift in the ocean.\Squall is then called

to the Garden's basement level to meet with Garden Master Norg. The Garden Master attempts to kill Squall and his crew to appease the sorceress in the hopes of sparing his school from further Galbadian assaults. However, Squall defeats him. In his conversation with Norg, Squall learned of the marriage of Headmaster Cid to Sorceress Edea. This fact shakes Squall's resolve of continuing his mission of defeating the Sorceress and later on confronts the headmaster of this truth. Cid, without hesitation, admits to it. Headmaster Cid later explains SeeD's true purpose which is to defend the world against sorceresses. This fact conflicts the headmaster as well as Squall, as he and his friends are to battle against his wife. The events here are series of tests given to Squall. Will Squall pursue the quest of defeating Edea and possibly kill her or will he cease his adventure and let fate decide the future?

Following the event, a white SeeD ship steered by white clothed men calling themselves Edea's SeeD intercepts the drifting Balamb Garden and takes Ellone away. Squall recognizes Ellone's name from his dreams and confronts her. He demands from Ellone the reason behind his dreams. Ellone seems saddened by Squall's unfamiliarity of her and tells him that she indeed is responsible for sending him to the dream world, but does not reveal to him her reasons. Ellone leaves with the white SeeDs leaving a puzzled Squall behind. This is another test for Squall along with Cid's hidden truth about his relationship with Sorceress Edea and his quest to vanquish the sorceress, the headmaster's wife. The sudden truths puts Squall in a circle of confusion and challenges him to make a choice of whether to continue his SeeD mission or leave the journey. This, however, remains to be seen as Balamb Garden crashes into Fisherman's Horizon, a pacifist peaceful town built around a disused train station on a bridge across a horizon. There, he is reunited with Selphie's missile base team. Galbadia forces arrive to occupy the town, but is driven out by Squall and his companions. As thanks, the local mechanics and technicians restore Balamb Garden to full operation.

Cid gives Squall command of Balamb Garden. This is one of Squall's calls to action. Contrary to the first call, Squall reluctantly accepts this. The headmaster claims this is his destiny, but a confused Squall rejects the assumption. When the Garden returns to Balamb, Squall finds the town occupied by Galbadia. The foreign occupants are supervised by Seifer's posses - Fujin and Raijin. Galbadia, under Edea's orders, is in the search for Ellone. They are

defeated by Squall's team who after the town's liberation heads for Trabia Garden, Selphie's former school, which was blown out by Galbadian missiles. Selphie mourns at its wreckage and the deaths of her friends and people she knew.

Squall gathers his team to talk about their next course of action, another test in his journey. Irvine reveals that everyone, save Rinoa, used to live together under the orphanage care by a woman named Edea, but he is the only one who remembers it. As everyone recalls their forgotten memories, they realize that the lapse of recollection of their shared past is because of the side-effects using GFs, and Irvine was the only one unaffected as he never used the magical beasts. They later decide to revisit the old orphanage to find out why Edea has turned evil, only to meet Galbadia Garden and its charge at their school.

Squall and the rest of the garden prepares for the assault headed by Edea and Seifer, and the Battle of Gardens begins. This may be one of the biggest tests for Squall in his journey. While the others defend the school, Squall and his group infiltrate Galbadia Garden where they face Seifer and Edea, who calls Squall as the legendary SeeD fated to face her. The SeeDs successfully defeat them, but are left transiently unconscious from the battle. While the others are briefly down, Rinoa walks over to Seifer in a tranced state and revives him before falling still. The rest subsequently wakes up from their fatigue. Edea calls out to Squall and his friends in a mother-like tone, standing in awe at the grown children she used to care for. She explains she had been possessed by a sorceress from the distant future who calls herself Ultimecia. Ultimecia plans to compress time to gain all of the sorceresses' power across generations to become a deity of the past, present, and future. To enact her plan, she sends her mind back in time to possesses other sorceresses and look for Ellone, whose occult powers she needs to achieve time compression.

2. **Initiation**
f. **The Road of Trials and Quests**
The Road of Trials and Quests is the stage where the hero must undergo a series of tests to begin his transformation (Caserta, 2021; Campbell & Moyers, 2011). Squall's first immense trial is how to deal with the comatose state of Rinoa. The trial shows his visible character development as he realizes his love and care for Rinoa which is opposite to how Squall's character was introduced in the game - him being an indifferent person who seems to

not care about anyone. Another changing aspect in his personality at this part of the story is his lack of hesitance to take charge in solving the problem at hand. He wants to find Ellone and send him back to the past and prevent Rinoa's coma. So, they go on a quest and seek out the White Seed Ship Ellone was on and finds out she is no longer there but is in Esthar. Squall takes the Garden to Fisherman's Horizon and visits Rinoa in the infirmary. He falls asleep and dreams of Laguna playing a part in a movie set on the Vienne Mountains during his travel to Esthar to save Ellone, who had been kidnapped on Sorceress Adel's orders. Laguna caught sight of a mysterious floating edifice on the horizon, and as Squall wakes up, he hears Ellone's voice apologizing for unintentionally sending him back in time again. Squall cries out for her but lost his link to her. This is another trial for Squall at this stage.

Squall is determined to take Rinoa to Esthar himself by crossing the Horizon Bridge. At the end of the pass, Edea and his friends wait for him. Edea explains she wants to go to see the famed scientist Dr. Odine, who have studied sorceresses, in Esthar and fix her fear of being possessed by Ultimecia again. Squall carries the unconscious Rinoa on his back through the Salt Flats where the party discovers Esthar City. It is camouflaged behind a cloaking device. Esthar, a technologically advanced city, has been silent and hidden from the world since the Sorceress War.

As Squall and his company arrives in Esthar, Squall faints and he and his friends fall asleep to enter another dream sequence. Laguna had set foot in Esthar, but had been taken confined in forced labor in Lunatic Pandora Laboratory. He found a way out and tracked down Ellonein Dr. Odine's lab where the scientist had been researching her powers of telepathy and mental time travel.

The party wakes up and is taken to Dr. Odine who examines Rinoa and Edea. The scientist tells Edea she no longer is a sorceress. After a sigh of relieve in hearing this news, Squall demands on taking Rinoa to see Ellone. Thus, he and a group of his friends are launched via the Lunar Gate into outer space to Esthar's Lunar Base where Ellone is said to be in. The Lunar Base is known as Esthar's space station for moon study. Unbeknown to many, however, is its true purpose to oversee Sorceress Adel, Esthar's ruler during the Sorceress War, who is sealed in a tomb that prevents her from passing her sorceress power to others. Squall, then, meets and reunites with Ellone who has come to

the Lunar Base to meet a certain person, but would not reveal the identity. Squall express his recollection of his childhood and now remembers Ellone as his sister from the orphanage. He begs her to send him to Rinoa's past. Ellone finds it impossible to change the past even with her ability. She preaches learning from the past instead can allow one to change the present.

Another trial for Squall comes at Ultimecia's possession of Rinoa in the Lunar Base. The sorceress takes Rinoa to the control room and puts her on a space suit then floats out to space where she opens the seal on Adel's tomb. Ultimecia dispossesses Rinoa's body in space as the Lunatic Pandora back on the ground sets off the Lunar Cry that pulls down monsters from the moon to Earth. Adel's tomb is swept into the tide of monsters and falls into the Lunatic Pandora, while Esthar City is ravaged by it.

As all of this is happening, Squall and the rest of the crew evacuates the space station. Squall begs Ellone to help him find Rinoa, so Ellone sends Squall's mind back in time and discovers Rinoa was possessed by Ultimecia at Galbadia Garden. Squall feels helpless in this trial as he is unable to change the events. When Squall awakes, he pleads Ellone to send him back again. Ellone ends up sending Squall to Rinoa's consciousness as she floats alone in space. Through Ellone's power, Squall communicates to Rinoa to activate the emergency oxygen supply in her space suit. She does so and Squall exits the escape pod to go after her. He catches up with Rinoa in space and they come across the rickety spaceship called Ragnarok. This is one other trial and quest for Squall – the return to the planet. He has to figure out how to maneuver and navigate the spaceship and safely lands it on earth.

Squall and Rinoa are relieved to find the ship still have oxygen. Squall, being surprised to also find radio communication is working on the ship, contact the ground base on earth. All the while, it was Adel's tomb's sealing device that disrupted radio waves back on the planet, and now that the tomb has fallen, radio is functioning once more. The next trial for Squall at this stage is Rinoa, having become a sorceress, is demanded by Esthar to be handed over to their custody as she poses a threat to the world and humanity. Squall needs to make a choice. Will he hand Rinoa over them or will he trust himself to be able to protect Rinoa and the world at the same time?

g. Face and Conquer Discrimination and Prejudice

Later in the journey, the hero is faced with societal structures that discriminate against him or her that are larger than himself or herself. The hero must overcome this obstacle to continue on their hero quest. This leads to deeper awareness of injustices. Caserta (2021) terms this stage as Face and Conquer Discrimination and Prejudice. Being a sorceress, Rinoa is a clear character of being prejudiced and discriminated. After Ragnarok lands on earth, Squall let Rinoa be taken by Esthar soldiers to be sealed away as Adel had been before her. Squall faces discrimination and prejudice at this event in the plot because of his stoic reaction to the situation. Despite having a romantic moment with Rinoa on the Ragnarok, it can be a little bit surprising to see Squall let his love go like that. He, alone in the spaceship, is found by his friends unsure of what he is to do from this point on. We must remember that at the start of Final Fantasy VIII, Squall starts as a loner and estranged from almost everyone. Although most of his teachers find him difficult to deal with, they still highly regard him for his natural talent. Though he never really wanted to be a part of a team, he ends up being in one. In spite of his reservations, he learns that he can perform in a ragtag group of people where every member depends on each another. When he meets Rinoa, his relationship with her grows and his trepidation wanes. He learns to accept his vulnerability and open it to others. This is, however, still a new experience for Squall which leaves him at a loss in thought when Rinoa is taken away.

Thankfully, Zell, Selphie, and the rest of the gang reason out with Squall and pushes him to rescue Rinoa from being sealed at a place called Sorceress Memorial. The plot point expresses Squall's conquer of discrimination and prejudice as he risks being marked as humanity's threat for saving the new sorceress Rinoa. The team then goes back to Edea's house. Rinoa finds the uncertain future bleak and despairing. Squall, with his found chivalry, swears to protect her even if the whole world is against them. This is the part of the plot where the conquer of discrimination and prejudice is becoming more evident in Squall. Squall and Rinoa vow to meet at the flower field behind the orphanage should they be parted from each other.

The group is called back to Esthar and discovers Laguna is Esthar's president. Laguna reveals Ellone has been taken captive inside the the Lunatic Pandora by Galbadia that now controls

it. Laguna and the Dr. Odine have put together a plan to stop Ultimecia for good.

h. Apotheosis

In the Apotheosis stage following the Face and Conquer Discrimination and Prejudice, the hero transcends and achieves self-actualization. According to Campbell (1950), this is a point of realization in which a greater understanding is earned. Armed with this new awareness, the hero is resolved and ready for the most dangerous part of the journey. In Final Fantasy VIII, this would be the battle with Sorceress Ultimecia. Squall in this event in the game has gathered himself and accepted his role as the leader of the company. From reluctantly accepting his leadership, he outgrew himself and becomes the hero he is meant to be. He and his friends invade the Lunatic Pandora and save Ellone. After Fujin and Raijin unsuccessfully convince Seifer to stop his romanticism of being a sorceress knight, the group fight through Seifer and shortly after, defeats the possessed Sorceress Adel. With no other body to take over, Ultimecia possesses Rinoa, which gives Ellone the chance to send Ultimecia's mind further back in time. Ultimecia hastily casts the time compression spell that allows Squall and his friends to travel to the future and confronts her. At this point, Squall has risen up from the Call to Action and identifies himself as the hero of the quest. Armed with this new knowledge and perception, the hero is resolved and ready for the more difficult part of the adventure (Caserta 2021; Vogler, 2007; Campbell, 1950). The time to face the biggest threat in the game has come - the battle with Ultimecia.

i. The Reward

The Reward stage, Caserta (2021) asserts, is the moment in the hero story when the ultimate battle takes place. During the fight, the hero emerges victorious and wins a reward. Vogler (2007) agrees with this notion and preaches the reward to be in various shapes. It could be an object, a new relationship or even a new piece of knowledge. The reward, which typically comes as a result of the hero's perseverance and diligence, signals the conclusion of his or her hero quest. The fight with Ultimecia is a very hard one, but Squall and his friends are able to subdue the sorceress and succeed. Squall's external reward in defeating Ultimecia during their battle that traversed space and time is the salvation of the world and humanity. The universe goes back to normal. Internally speaking, it is Squall's acceptance of the past and the acquisition of new meaning of the orphanage he has an attachment to since his

childhood that is the reward for the hero. He has overcome his past trauma in the place he once called home and prison. The place has become a meaningful scene for Squall as he promised Rinoa to meet her there, thus he must find his way to reach it. Given that the hero has attained his or her goal and fulfill his or her purpose, it is a time of great triumph and celebration. However, the Road Back can be as dangerous or more treacherous than the journey's ordeal.

3. Return

j. The Road Back

Vogler (2007) argues that at this stage the hero must finally recommit to the journey and see it through till the end. In order to do so, he or she must accept the Road Back to the Ordinary World. A Hero's success in the Special World may make it hard to return. Similar to Crossing the First Threshold, The Road Back needs an event that will enable the Hero move pass the return-threshold, then back into the Ordinary World. In Final Fantasy VIII's case, this is when a dying Ultimecia and Squall travel back in time and surface at Edea's house. In this part of the story, Squall comes to terms with his past instead of just putting it away. In the end, he gives Edea the idea for SeeD to be created. This showcases the Final Fantasy VIII's story origins and gives the game narrative a full circle. It also shows that Squall accepts that he cannot change the past. He simply has to welcome it. From there, he moves on and goes back to the compressed time and tries to find Rinoa in the present. Back in the Ragnarok, Laguna told Squall and his squad to remember the people and place they cherish so that they can return to ordinary time. Squall desperately reaches out for his love, Rinoa, but his fear of intimacy and loss still lingers and hinders him, which itself is the final test for the hero.

k. The Resurrection

Vogler (2007) conveys that The Resurrection is the final Ordeal stage which brings the hero's mastery of the Special World at the forefront. This Resurrection stage represents the Hero has emerged from death and acts as cleansing or purification of himself or herself. The Hero is thus reborn or transformed with the qualities of his or her previous self with the addition of the experience he gained and the wisdom he has learned from the other characters he met in the heroic adventure (Campbell, 1950). The resurrected hero has now grasped a deeper understanding of the collective world and himself or herself. This results to his or her complete command and supremacy of two worlds (Caserta, 2021).

The Resurrection in Final Fantasy VIII begins when Squall finds himself on a small rock island, alone and powerless. He exhaustedly falls on the ground. Then, upon catching a feather floating towards him, he finds himself where Rinoa is. He calls out her name, and she turns to face him. Rinoa's face is blurry in Squall's vision. At this point of the game's tale, Squall is brought to different events in the past where he met Rinoa, but he seems to cannot clearly see Rinoa's face. Her presence is all a blur to him. This is all happening because of Squall's losing hold of his own memories. He is trying to picture Rinoa but could not make out her face. This results to him losing his face as well, symbolizing his emptiness, his troubling memories, and his lacking grip on what is real and what is not. The hero in this stage, Vogler (2007) teaches, uses all lessons learned on the journey and is transformed into a new being with new insights, but before this occurs, he may first have to die. That is why following this, Squall dies on screen, yet he is found by Rinoa. Amidst this, another feather falls to the ground which later alters into a field of flowers where Squall promised to meet Rinoa should they part from each other. From hereon, Squall resurrects from his death and finds himself around the arms of Rinoa. The hero, Squall, is reborn from the dead and his former self. He is purified by a last sacrifice, another moment of development and maturation, but on a higher and more complete level. By the hero's action, the polarities that were in conflict at the beginning are finally resolved. Finally, Squall heads back home, changed and evolved, and with the person whom he loves the most.

l. **The Freedom to Live**
This is the last stage of the monomyth. The hero is free to live his or her life. Campbell (1950) delineates this stage as the hero being resurrected, purified and has earned the right to be back into the Ordinary World and share the boon of his journey. Final Fantasy VIII starts this stage at the port of Balamb town where Seifer fishes with his friends, Raijin and Fujin in the same bright weather of Squall and Rinoa's reunion. Fujin kicks Raijin into sea, and Seifer cracks up laughing. Seifer, then, looks up and smiles as Balamb Garden flies by overhead. On the next frame, Laguna, stands at the foot of Raine's grave. A flasback of Laguna proposing to Raine follows the scene. The present Laguna sees Ellone running to him. Together with Kiros and Ward, they look up at Balamb Garden that hovers over them.

At the credits portion of the game, a video clip is shown where all the characters are celebrating. Cid, Edea, and Quistis are in attendance. Irvine dances silly, Selphie hops around cheerfully, and Zell stuffs himself with hotdogs. Rinoa stands on the school's balcony with Squall under an astral evening. She raises her finger in front of her lips, and Squall smiles at her.

Squall achieves everything he wants in his quest of saving the world from Sorceress Ultimecia. He also manages to come back from the void to the present time. Having succeeded and changed, he chooses to live without apathy to those around him. This is Squall's choice in his freedom to live his path and go through twelve stages of the monomyth to be able to make the decision. He could have rejected his mission of battling Ultimecia in the time compressed world of the future which has a very low chance of success and high probability of failure and death, but he did not. Squall, along with his friends, have sacrificed a lot to get to the point of the world's salvation. It is the duty of the hero to sacrifice for others. There is little difference from Squall's journey with the Hero's Journey. In the Final Fantasy VIII story, there were several periods where Squall was called to action. He did not refuse the first call when he was tasked his first SeeD mission, but he did hesitate the acceptance of his leadership role in various occasions. One instance was at the Call is Tested stage during the Battle of Gardens when Headmaster Cid appointed Squall complete command of Balamb Garden against Galbadia Garden. Another occurrence was in the Face and Conquer Discrimination and Prejudice juncture when Squall had a difficult time choosing between duty of sealing the dangerously-possessed Rinoa or discard the notion of it and save her instead by defeating Ultimecia in the future. He, at the onset, chose the former. Despite these many Refusal of the Call moments in different stages of Squall's journey after the Refusal of the Call stage, they did not affect the completion of Squall's adventure and his mission to save his friends, mankind, the world, and his love.

When Squall goes back to his world with his new wisdom and power, Squall offers it as a gift to his old companions, his friends. He is also free from the burden of pursuing the goal he initially set out to accomplish now that he's met it. He is free to live as he chooses. This time not with himself and alone, but with the person he cherishes the most. This is Squall's Freedom to Live.

II. **Squall Overcomes Obstacles**

Caserta's (2021) Hero's Journey teaches us that the hero needs to pass twelve stages along his quest to reach his goal. To achieve this, he or she is to face many difficulties. Twelve stages divided into three major phases namely, Departure, Initiation, and Return. Each has its own obstacle the hero will face. The obstacles will later strengthen the hero, his character, and resolve. The Hero's Journey is its own test for the hero. The journey demands from the hero the skill to adjust, adapt, and adopt strategies to target his objective. The hero will have his or her knowledge, skills, and personality develop on top of what he or she already have. This signifies his or her rebirth into someone better. That is why the obstacles have to be overcome if one wants to be a hero.

In meeting his mission and becoming a hero, Squall went through many challenges which obstruct his heroic quest. He did everything to fight through them. Obstacles have indeed been handed to Squall from the beginning to the end of his adventure. His ability to face and resolve difficulties developed along the way. This resulted to his finish of his journey, but this was not possible with a lone effort but with a help from friends. Amalia (2020) explains that in the Hero's Journey, he is to meet friends and allies that inevitably aids him or her in overcoming obstacles.

Squall, on his journey, tried his best to conquer his difficulties. His Ordinary World was that of a student life in Balamb Garden. His first outer problem was passing a final exam to become a SeeD. His inner problem was his deep fear of intimacy which projected his introverted and antisocial persona. He later received a Call in his story to be a leader of his group and soon after the whole school which he initially refused. The Refusal would not last though. After meeting his Mentors, he reluctantly accepted the role. As Squall crossed the First Threshold, he momentarily died as he was hit by ice projectiles from Sorceress Edea and eventually woke up in a Galbadian prison. He was then rescued by his friends and allies and later they planned a confrontation with Edea where they succeeded but not without paying a price. Rinoa was comatosed because of the battle with the sorceress and Squall was greatly affected by it.

As the game progressed, snippets of Squall's past were visually and textually communicated. In these excerpts, it was discovered that Squall's aloofness and emotional absence was because of an irrational fear of abandonment. Through flashbacks, a deeper understanding of Squall is gained. He was separated from his adopted big sister Ellone. With his stepsister gone, Squall constructively retreated into himself. This sense of abandonment was intensified because of the use of GFs, the summons in Final Fantasy VIII, which gives memory loss to its users. Due to a genuine sense of loss of his past and the loss in his former life, Squall saw caring for people as a weakness; an Achilles heel because he could be hurt again if he got close to somebody once more.

Unlike Squall, Rinoa was braver and more reckless, joining a rebel group against her father's own government. This was partnered with the fact that Rinoa did not keep emotions and duty separate. Rinoa and her opposing personality served as the major catalyst into forcing Squall out of his shell. Squall's motivations changed, slowly and gradually, due to his interactions with Rinoa. She was ultimately what pushed Squall to his breaking point. Squall's icy exterior was ploddingly decimated underneath the one motif that the game constantly alludes to: Love.

Love was also the real Test Squall faced. It came as an intrusion to his developed persona from his past trauma. This challenged his resolve to continue his journey. Squall frantically looked for a way to help Rinoa. His drive began to shift, changing from his fear of being abandoned to succumbing to the feelings of love. This time it was not him looking for solace, but the one offering it. Squall traveled to Esthar then to space to meet Ellone, as he believed that she could heal Rinoa's soporose state. While Rinoa was being treated in the space station, Sorceress Ultimecia possessed her to free Sorceress Adel from her seal. Having selected Adel as her next body, Ultimecia left Rinoa in outer space. Squall rescued her, and they returned to the planet on the Ragnarok aircraft and shared a romantic time. His relationship with Rinoa deepened, with Squall taking more initiative to pursue Rinoa. In their landing to Esthar, Squall was faced with prejudice and discrimination as he was with the new embodied sorceress Rinoa who was then captured by Esthar soldiers to be sealed. With a push and encouragement from friends, Squall was metamorphosed into a real leader taking charge of releasing Rinoa from her bonds and deciding to defeat Ultimecia once and for all. This moment was Squall's Apotheosis.

Squall and his friends carried out a plan concocted by Esthar president Laguna and Dr. Odine and invaded the Lunatic Pandora, save Ellone and travel into the future to defeat Ultimecia in her real body. In the final battle, Ultimecia met her demise. This was Squall's

Reward and his boon to the world, but the Road Back was treacherous. He could not go back to the present time and his memories were beginning to fade. Suddenly, he remembered the field of flowers he and Rinoa promised to meet at when they separate from each other and this remembrance led him to the place. However, he died in the void of that space, but was saved by Rinoa with her powers within. This is the Resurrection stage of Squall where he was reborn with the new Freedom to Live. The game story ended with a party at Balamb Garden in celebration of the SeeDs victory over Ultimecia. Squall stayed out the balcony with Rinoa and kissed her under a moonlit sky. The shooting star that followed gave a sense of peace and release from Squall's insecurities and past trauma as well as a relieving ending to the game of Final Fantasy VIII.

In this analysis, it can be seen that the hero, Squall had his own way of overcoming his obstacles. The variety of challenges experienced by him, may it be from his past, his persona, or his internal and external problems, also resulted in his responses to them being varied and diverse. With this construct, Squall's journey through his monomyth had him unravel slowly. While his friends, acquaintances, and narrative events as well as his developing maturity helped him open up more, this could also be credited to Rinoa. As the icy exterior finally was thawed, Squall, as the protagonist, went from an introverted teen to a mature young hero.

Conclusion

Squall as a hero has gone through Caserta's twelve stages of her monomyth. Each stage has a function to lay bare the journey the hero takes. These stages include the Call to Action, Refusing the Call, Crossing the First Threshold, Call is Tested, Road of Trials and Quests, Face and Conquer Discrimination and Prejudice, Apotheosis, Reward, Road Back, Resurrection and Freedom to Live. Squall has successfully passed these twelve stages.

Ultimately, the Final Fantasy VIII narrative is a story of Squall's journey which is archetypically a tale about a character whose life is disrupted by a call to adventure forcing him to venture into the hero path, learns lessons, overcomes ordeals, defeats enemies, then coming back home with a boon and having himself reinvented and transformed.

Nonetheless, Squall's transformation does not come easy and fast. Squall has to overcome the obstacles in his way and grow from each one of them. He wrestles with his difficulties by being pragmatic and having an extreme sense of responsibility while being cold and uncommunicative to his comrades. In

the game story, Squall tells his thoughts and feelings through inner monologues, in which he divulges his apathetic persona as a result of being afraid of getting close to people. Squall does not remember his folks, and his stepsister and maternal figure, Ellone, was taken away when he was young, making him fear the loss of loved-ones. Squall does not believe in depending on others, as friends and family comes and goes, and in the end, leaving him alone. Squall's crafted persona soon vanishes when he meets and falls in love with Rinoa and resigns himself to the support of his friends, becoming more open and social. Squall later finds out that he needs the help of his company to overcome his obstacles and the threat that endangers mankind and the world.

Implications

Video games are becoming more and more present in people's lives especially that of the youth. Their stories can affect the players' engagement and immersion in the games' world. Hence, JRPGs like Final Fantasy VIII are implied to be of use in classrooms as potential objects of in-depth exploration and discussion particularly in English and literature subjects. This may increase learner participation, engage disengaged students, and connect language and literary concepts across media through multimodal instruction. Thus, there is a use for story-rich and story-based video games such as JRPGs to migrate into educational settings.

Recommendations

This paper only focuses on the twelve stages of the Hero's Journey experienced by Squall as the main protagonist and how he overcomes his obstacles in the game. Beyond the study, there are several facets that can be analyzed in Final Fantasy VIII with other literary theories. Thus, it is suggested that the next researchers to undertake such approach to the game. The next researcher may use the same narrative with different lens or use the Hero's Journey in a different game plot. In case another researcher chooses Final Fantasy VIII as the material for his or her study, the researcher suggests him or her to examine it using the archetypal literary criticism of Carl Jung which was an inspiration to the monomyth. Lastly, the Final Fantasy franchise is a home to many rich JRPG narratives and most of them, if not all, are virgin stories that have yet to be analyzed. Future researchers are recommended to study them from a narratological perspective, ludological view, or even a mix of both. Much can be explored from the popular JRPG series and the literary world can benefit much from their academic study.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no significant competing financial, professional, or personal interests that might have influenced the performance or presentation of the work described in this manuscript. The study involves only human participants who volunteered for this study and informed consent was obtained from them.

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