

Subject: *A Journey of Heroes: Dante and the Inquisitor*

To Whom It May Concern,

*A Hero's Journey: Dante and the Inquisitor* is from my second semester at American Public University Systems and it is noticeable. I was still in the process of relearning the MLA format and that unfortunately led to more than one writing error those first couple of semesters. When I submitted it for feedback from Dr. Broyles, she pointed out that there were both formatting and writing errors, but also gave me the idea of using it as an example of my improvement. While I have chosen to correct the formatting errors, I am leaving it otherwise unedited at this time for that very reason.

I plan to use this work to show how much my writing ability has improved over the last four years and how far I have come since those first couple of courses. I know that the sentence structure in my introduction and thesis sections could use improvement; as well as some of my transitions. I may choose to make the needed revisions at a later date, but at this time I like having a reminder of how much of an impact the past four years have had, not just upon my work, but on myself.

Thank you,  
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A Journey of Heroes:

Dante and the Inquisitor

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An unknown path, a quest for truth, and grand destiny to be fulfilled. Several obstacles of various types, and the final climactic battle against a great foe; all of these are just some of the primary aspects that make up the classic heroic journey tale. It is through the use of such tales, that the adventures of King Arthur and Camelot, Hercules and his 20 labors, Jason and the Argonauts, and Beowulf have survived the ages. More recently, characters such as Bilbo and Frodo Baggins, Percy Jackson, and Harry Potter have been added to the list of epic tales of heroic journeys. In fact, the literary world is full of heroes and their great journeys to inspire and entertain people.

Not all of the new stories can be found in written format though; a new genre has emerged in the world of heroic journeys that pulls the audience into the story in a new way. While books and films can draw the audience into the story, making them feel like they are a part of the hero's tale; video games, however, can quite literally make the player a part of the story. This ability to give the audience some semblance of control over how the story goes and makes it more engaging than books for some people. While not for everyone, this ability to live out a heroic tale, has helped to bring new interest into the more classic storylines from people who might otherwise pass it by.

Players can often chose the actions that the hero takes, which in turn can change several aspects of the game; in this way "...people can become heroes themselves through only a click or two" (Klaus, 372). A single action can change how you interact with others later on or what options are available for the game ending; in some cases it can also change how much of a hero the character still is. The world can suddenly become more accessible to those unable to travel or get out of the house; "Video games increasingly recreate real-world events and spaces, making tangible connections to the outside world." (Campbell, 109). These factors often make video

games more desirable to some people than books and open up many possibilities for using this media as a way to bring the heroic journey model to more audiences.

How do games like *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, compare to the great heroic journey tales, such as Dante's journey through Purgatory? Do they hold up to the classic tales and carry on the tradition? And what exactly is it that makes a journey heroic though?

A heroic journey has certain elements that help to define it as such; the hero are less defined by who they are and more by what they do and how they do it. Some of the primary elements to look for involve the hero having to fulfill a series of rituals or tasks, completing the required quests, learning from the experiences, and proving their self – worth. They do these things with the help of a mentor while passing through different realms as they work towards filling their destiny or achieving some form of transcendence. By achieving the goals and completing the various elements, a journey becomes that of a hero, rather than a simple journey. The heroic journey tale is one that inspires the audience as much as it entertains them. It gives people something to dream about and aspire to. This is one of the many reasons that it is a popular story model and has been used by many great authors, like Dante.

In his story, Dante travels through the circles of Purgatory in the second book of his work *The Divine Comedy*. Accompanied by his guide and mentor, the poet Virgil, Dante hopes to make it to the Gates of Heaven and the fair Beatrice. Rather than create a fictional representative, Dante chose to make himself the hero of his epic tales and refers to himself as the Pilgrim. As he travels through Purgatory, Dante must complete rituals to enter into the next circle and get closer to his end goal. While seeming fairly simple, often involving him making it down the right path to the next gate, these rituals are important for him to be able to advance in his journey. It is also

important for him to understand why the souls are in each of the circles they have been sentenced to.

On a journey of knowledge and enlightenment, as much as salvation, Dante is told by one spirit in Canto 36 that, “Blessèd are you who for a better life, store in your soul experience of these realms you travel through” (Dante, 374). This sums up one of the primary goals of Dante’s journey through Hell and Purgatory; to experience and gather knowledge so that he might avoid the fates of the souls he has thus far encountered on his way to Heaven. The many souls he meets act as secondary guides along the path to Lady Beatrice and Divine Love. His primary, and appointed guide, is Virgil who must lead Dante along the correct paths, despite having been sentenced to Limbo. Virgil is meant to represent Human Reason to Beatrice’s Divine Love and the journey from one class of thought to another; as well as the achievement of enlightenment and salvation.

In BioWare’s *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, players are thrust into the midst of conflict and confusion, with little knowledge of what is occurring or their own role in the current events. The Inquisitor, as they are to be later titled, is viewed with both suspicion and relief as it is unknown whether they are responsible for the disaster that has recently happened, or a savior. Players soon learn that the Inquisitor is the sole survivor of a Conclave meant to negotiate peace between the realms mages, Templars, and clerisy; all that remains though, are the Inquisitor, a rather large crater in the ground, and a strange glowing rip in the sky known as the Breach, that matches the hole in the player character’s hand.

Things are further complicated by the belief of many that the Inquisitor has been saved from the Fade by Andraste, a female religious figure in their world, and so have declared the Inquisitor to be the Herald of Andraste. This naturally ends up turning some against the

Inquisitor for perceived blasphemy; this is especially true if playing a race that does not follow that religion. While the world's religion does play a part in how the Inquisitor interacts and deals with the different aspects of the storyline, it is not as great an influence as it is on Dante.

The Inquisitor starts out on a journey to discover, not only who is responsible for what happened at the Conclave, but to regain their lost memories. They end up leading the Inquisition, an independent army that is created to find out what happened and save the world, but without the politics and religious entanglements that would be involved with a Chantry or royal army from one of the other regions of Thedas. Travelling with them are an assortment of different companion characters, but one of the primary guides and mentors is the apostate mage named Solas. Solas helps the Inquisitor navigate through the realm of the Fade or spirit world, as well as learn how to work with the weapon their hand has become. The main storyline takes players through a journey to uncover what really happened, gain back memories, and save the world from what appears to be an Elder God.

Both Dante and the Inquisitor must complete a variety of tasks, travel through different realms, and seek knowledge that will help them advance in their quests. Both are also guided by a mentor and fellow traveler who is there to help them on their journey. While they have much in common, they also have many differences; Dante's choices are set in stone, but the Inquisitor's choices are variable and based on the player's choices. Even taking into account the player's choice, how the two characters deal with each aspect and the exact goals they have, can differ as much as the stories they star in.

An example of how the two characters differ in their approaches in dealing with things on their journeys, as they go through their respective realms, Dante and the Inquisitor both meet up with different types of spirits that attempt to convey their own knowledge onto the heroes. In the

realm of Purgatory, the spirits often informed Dante of people and events that might be of interest to him; some of present and some of future. Often, this information was meant to provide further examples of either that circle's vice or of ways to help the souls trapped there shorten their sentences. By taking this information and learning from it, Dante could move forward and, hopefully, prevent his own penitence stay in that circle.

Whereas in *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, while spirits are generally helpful, wanting only to impart their knowledge or be left alone to wander the Fade; they can become dangerous. If twisted by a being's wants, they can become demons that seek to take over and corrupt the summoning being. It is also frowned upon to speak to the spirits in the Inquisitor's world since they are often seen as a corrupting influence upon mages due to many mages becoming possessed by spirits that have turned into demons. For the Inquisitor's world, the spirits are viewed more as temptations than as helpful.

Thus, while Dante is encouraged to engage in conversation with the spirits for information, the Inquisitor is warned to be careful of which spirits he communicates with since they could be more dangerous than helpful. The interaction with the spirits is important to both stories though, for it is with the help of those spirits that Dante and the Inquisitor learn information that helps them to complete their journeys.

An important aspect of the heroic journey is the hero's travels through different realms or worlds and the various tasks and rituals they must complete in order to move on. Dante does this by travelling through the circles of Purgatory. At each circle he must make sure that he follows the rules of the circle and travel the correct path; he must also learn the virtue that is the opposite of the vice represented in that circle in order to advance. By gaining the knowledge each circle

offers, Dante hopes to avoid a similar fate and redeem his soul before his death. Each circles grants him more confidence in himself as well.

The Inquisitor travels through the Fade, a realm of spirits and demons to regain their memories and find out what happened at the Conclave. They encounter many creatures, most unfriendly representations of vices, and gain a greater understanding of what happened to start the Inquisitor on their journey. In order to escape the Fade and return to the regular world, the Inquisitor must both fight off the representations of fears and find the memories that were taken from them. In addition to regaining their lost memories, the Inquisitor also gains strength in their own beliefs; “All of this happened because of fanatics and arguments about the next world. It's time we start believing in this one” (Inquisitor, *Dragon Age: Inquisition*); they state this not just to themselves, but to remind their companions of what is important on this journey.

Although the realms they go through are different, both Dante and the Inquisitor are greatly affected by the places they travel through on their respective journeys. Dante gains the knowledge he needs to improve himself and continue advancing. The Inquisitor learns about themselves, and gains strength to complete the tasks given to them. Like the Classical heroes, Dante and the Inquisitor are improved by obstacles that they faced in the otherworldly realms.

Throughout their journeys, both Dante and the Inquisitor have questions about their worthiness. For Dante, it is a matter of overcoming the self-doubts and fears that plague him through the first two books. He worries that he will be too late with his redemption quest and be forced to spend time in Purgatory working off his sins. As Dante travels through Hell and Purgatory, he gains more confidence in himself and in his abilities. By the end, he feels like a new person and no longer fears what may happen to him after his death. For the Inquisitor though, it is not just their own confidence in themselves that they must come to terms with.

While the Inquisitor has their own doubts about their ability to lead the Inquisition, they must also deal with the fact that many view them with religious fervor and near adoration over their hero status. They do not see themselves as a hero, but rather a normal person who has been pushed into an impossible position; they do not feel they are capable of the actions that everyone is claims they must do. They must get over their own self-doubt and come to terms with the hero worshipping that continuously confuses and overwhelms the Inquisitor.

Neither Dante, nor the Inquisitor have much faith in themselves to complete their goals, nor in the faith that others seem to have in their abilities. Dante struggles with both his faith and his self-worth. The Inquisitor struggles with the belief others have in him to save the world and fix the many problems that arise. The Inquisitor is not only made the leader of an independent faction trying to save the world, but also viewed as a religious figure for a faith they may not follow (depending on character background). As they both go along in their quests, they gain more confidence in themselves and their abilities; although how comfortable the Inquisitor is with their religious associations depends on the player's choices.

Nearly every hero has a companion to help them on their way; in *The Divine Comedy*, Dante has Virgil who embodies Human Reason, and later Beatrice who embodies Divine Love. The Inquisitor has Solas as his primary advisor for all things magical, as well as several companions to offer advice on other things. Both Virgil and Solas seek to guide their charges down the right path and help them gain the knowledge that they need in order to succeed in their quests. While Virgil helps Dante out of a fellow love of philosophy and knowledge; Solas helps out the Inquisitor in order to help save the world from events Solas ultimately set in motion.

There is also a difference in that Virgil was discovering many of the places he went with Dante, "You think perhaps we two have had some long experience of this place, but we are also

pilgrims...” (Dante, 195). Virgil is on his own journey in that regard; he is seeing all the things he cannot access because he is considered a “virtuous pagan”, but not redeemable in Dante’s afterlife (HUMN520). Even though Virgil had not been to Purgatory before his guiding Dante, he still took his duties seriously and made sure that Dante made it to the next realm safely, and more knowledgeable.

Solas on the other hand, had a great deal of experience with the Fade and was able to help better direct the Inquisitor because of it. Through his journeys into the Fade, Solas is able to guide the Inquisitor on how to deal with the spirits and demons that dwell there. He is also able to help lead the Inquisitor through various rituals that, while not seeming tied to the main plot, make a difference to how things may end.

It is through the support of their companions that the Inquisitor slowly begins to realize that, while they may not feel they are worthy of their position, but others do. Throughout the story, the Inquisitor is reminded that people believe in their ability to stop the rifts that are spewing demons, and save the world from what disaster is about to strike it now. Depending on the course the player takes, the Inquisitor may never fully accept the near blind faith that people have in them, but they do accept that they are worthy of being a hero.

That is something that both the Inquisitor and Dante had in common; neither would have made it as far as they did without the support of others. Virgil gave Dante knowledge, but also the confidence to continue on the journey through Hell and Purgatory. Solas and the other companions constantly reminded the Inquisitor that they were not alone in their battles and that, even if the Inquisitor did not believe in themselves, others did. In both cases, this helped the main characters to gain the belief in themselves and continue on, even when they would have given up.

Dante ultimately knows that his journey through Purgatory will end at the Gates of Heaven. He will meet Beatrice and begin a new journey, this time guided by Divine Love, and continue on his way. He may not know what he will encounter, but he knows that there is an end and that he will come "... back from those holiest waters new, remade, reborn..." (Dante, 382). Dante's journey, unlike the Inquisitor's, has a fixed end; once *The Divine Comedy* is finished, there is nothing more for him to do, at least as far as the reader knows.

The Inquisitor, however, does not know where their journey will end; they know what they hope to find, and the outcome that they would like to happen, but do not know if that will be the end of their journey, or merely another stop along the way. As they complete each quest, the secondary objects of the journey change, but the ultimate goal, in this case to save the world, remains the same. Even after being successful in completing the main quest of stopping the supposed Elder God, there are still other things to do and always a new threat to the world.

A journey's end does not mean that there is no more to do. Dante may have finished his journey through Purgatory, but he still has Heaven to go through; what happens after that is left for the imagination of the reader. The Inquisitor has saved the day, but still has work to do; such is the way of video games. For both Dante and the Inquisitor though, even if what the end will bring is unknown, they know that there will be an end.

The goals of Dante and the Inquisitor shift as they progress on their journeys. In *Purgatory*, Dante moves from being guided by Human Reason to being guided by Divine Love; you see this progression starting in Canto 28 after Dante is "...crowned Lord of Himself by Virgil..." (Dante, 357) and becomes a leader rather than a follower. Dante has proven his self-worth and his devotion; while he still has much to learn, he no longer needs Virgil to lead him

down the path. Much of the doubt he had, is now replaced by wonder at the sites awaiting him along the rest of the path and he is more than ready to learn his next set of lessons from Beatrice.

Dante's values take a similar shift, from the mortal world and logic, to the more divine world and pursuit of faith. His goals and values are intertwined throughout the journey; as he learns more, he changes what knowledge means something to him, thus changing what his ultimate goals are. For Dante, this means he no longer follows Virgil (Human Reason), but rather leads him and ahead of him is Beatrice (Divine Love), who will in turn lead Dante through the next realm.

The Inquisitor has their own shift in what is important as well; at the start of the story, they are more concerned with proving their innocence regarding the explosion that destroyed the Conclave, and stopping the strange magic in their hand from killing them. After regaining their memories in the Fade however, their focus changes to protecting others and stopping the destruction of the world they know; although they are not above expressing their frustrations with their position in life, "Shit...damn it! We saved Ferelden, and they're angry! We saved Orlais, and they're angry! We closed the Breach — twice! — and my own hand wants to kill me! COULD ONE THING IN THIS FUCKING WORLD JUST STAY FIXED?" (Inquisitor, Dragon Age: Inquisition). Their frustration is something that makes them more relatable to many; being tired and angry at having to redo the same task over and over is something that everyone has gone through at one point or another.

As with Dante, the Inquisitor's values aligned with their goals. They go from valuing their life and self-preservation to valuing the lives of others more; by the end of the game, they are looking at ways to save everyone, even a possible future villain. They have grown as a character by becoming less self-centric and more interested in doing what is best for the whole. It

is no longer their own lives that are the most important thing, although that is still a fairly vital aspect of why they are doing things; the lives, and wellbeing, of others takes precedence over their own safety and comfort. The Inquisitor is now more interested in stopping the many plots that would throw the world into chaos and allow the villain to destroy everything in this world.

The Inquisitor and Dante both grew in character as they travelled along their journeys to the end goal. They go from being more concerned about themselves and worldly matters, to having a focus on the bigger picture; in Dante's case, the new life he can begin and the understanding of Divine Love that he is now working on. For the Inquisitor, that means focusing more on helping others and less on their own welfare. Their goals and values changed to reflect their new focuses. In both cases, the change in focuses equals a change to the outcome of the journey; what that means exactly is dependent upon the character and the story.

Although it might seem a given, there was always a chance that Dante or the Inquisitor could have failed in one part of their quests and thus, failed to achieve their final goals of fulfilling destiny or becoming transcended. Luckily for both characters that did not happen. Dante comes to terms with his fears and faults, then moves past them to achieve transcendence. He does so by embracing Divine Love in the same way he embraced Human Reason. His eyes are open to the light and his soul is lighter after being freed from the weight of sin.

The Inquisitor saves the world from the demons that threaten to destroy it and helps to unite multiple groups in a tentative peace. While told throughout the game that it is their destiny to do so, their acceptance of such depends on the player. The character often denies that they are fulfilling a destiny, even as they are doing it; while it may seem counterproductive, it fits the very human mentality of free will and choice.

Whether trying to fill destiny or seeking transcendence, Dante and the Inquisitor met and achieved the necessary goals to reach their journeys' successful completions. This achievement helped to signal the end of their heroic journey and completion of what made them both heroes. While there are many other elements required before a journey is considered "heroic", the fulfillment of destiny or achievement of having transcended are a key requirement.

The heroes have completed their rituals and tasks, and travelled between the realms of the living and the dead, all while being mentored by their companions. They have learned much from their many experiences and proved their self-worth to both themselves and others. The various quests have been accomplished and their destinies fulfilled. Their goals and values may have changed, but the heroes have grown because of it; they have proven themselves to be heroes and not just travelers. Their stories have become more than simple tales, they are now heroic epics to be told to the future generations.

Dante and the Inquisitor were both viewed as the heroes of their journeys. Dante, or the Pilgrim, becomes a hero of his time by making his way through the realms of Hell and Purgatory to reach realm of Heaven. He was going on a Holy Pilgrimage, not to a great holy site, like Rome, Jerusalem, or Bethlehem, but rather to the realm of Heaven itself. It was a reminder that anyone could still achieve redemption and forgiveness; even if they were no longer among the living, making "...the afterlife as a place of fair judgement, not simply a place to house the dead" (HUMN520). Now they simply had to put in the effort and have the willingness to learn if they wanted to receive redemption. Dante showed that atonement was not limited to the physical world and that anyone could achieve enlightenment.

All of this helped to make Dante a more relatable hero for many of the people of the Middle Ages; anyone who had felt as though they had been mistreated or unjustly cast aside as

Dante felt he had unjustly been by his home country. Believing that there was still a chance to gain a heavenly reward, meant that even those who started late in life on the path of redemption now had something to look forward to. They also now had a way to speed up their reparations in Purgatory with prayers from the living (Dante). Although Dante never did receive the redemption he wanted in life, he frequently alluded that he would receive fairer treatment in the next life with *The Divine Comedy*.

The Inquisitor starts out as a fairly regular person, who through no fault of their own, is suddenly informed they are responsible for saving the world from a terrible evil. Suddenly they have become a highly important person, and all because of a weird glowing hole in their hand; they do not understand where it came from or how it works, only that they are expected to use this new power to save the world. That is when they are not being blamed for what has happened. Like Dante, they are often unjustly blamed for actions that are not their fault.

It is a scenario that many can relate to, even if the terrible evil is nothing more than finding oneself responsible for cleaning up a mess they did not contribute to. The Inquisitor is the hero type that many people can more easily relate to; someone who, despite being blamed or shunned, still tries to do what is best; it is, after all the basis for more than one superhero story. People also like the idea of getting to go from a person that nobody knows of, to a great hero that is known by all, and that is what happens in *Dragon Age: Inquisition*.

The Inquisitor becomes the hero the player wants them to be, thus making "...the player, the one who will incarnate the heroic virtues that embellish the virtual hero. In the end, everything will depend on the player's experience and skill to emerge as victor or to face defeat." (Villalobos, ix). That is one of the major differences between *The Divine Comedy* and *Dragon*

*Age: Inquisition*, while the reader can find themselves relating to Dante and putting themselves in his place, they have no effect on the actions that Dante and Virgil take during their journey.

However, in a video game, it is the player that controls the hero and, while the plot of the game may limit the player's actions, they still have some say in what actions the character takes, "...a real player embodies the personality of a virtual hero who comes alive on the screen..." (Villalobos, 77). While religious pilgrims may have compared themselves to Dante and his heroic journey through the realms of the afterlife, a video game player can quite literally put themselves in the shoes of the game's main hero character.

In both of these cases, the heroes are a reflection of what is needed by the people at that time. Dante showed that there was hope for salvation and fair treatment, even if one was not able to receive such in life. The Inquisitor made the player equally the hero, allowing control over the fictional world where they may have little control in the real world. Both the characters and the stories would have allowed the audience a glimpse at a better life and a different world than the one that they might currently have. This is ultimately one of the greatest reasons that heroic journeys are so loved; they give people a chance to glimpse at something new, to find something that could be possible for them to achieve in some way.

Dante and the Inquisitor both had to travel the path of the traditional heroic journey; although their paths might have looked completely different at first glance. Even though the journeys were different in the way they are presented, they still both qualified as heroic. They both had to complete a series of rituals or tasks, and gained knowledge through their various learning experiences. Each of these various things has helped to further shape them as individuals; which in turn has allowed for the changes in their goals and in their values. With the help of companions and mentors, they were not only able to prove their worth to others, but to

confirm their self-worth to themselves. They traversed different realms in order to accomplish their quests and fulfill their destiny. They achieved everything required of them by the rules of heroic journeys.

Dante was proclaimed a leader by Virgil, as well as reaching the transcendence that he desperately sought; thus allowing him to advance from the world of Purgatory and begin a new journey through the world of Heaven with Beatrice. The Inquisitor fulfilled the destiny that others had proclaimed was theirs to achieve, thus saving the world for another day; his goals and values shifted from being self-centered to focusing more on those around them. Both did what was asked of them, and more, in order successfully complete their journeys and have become relatable heroes best suited for their times.

Although *Dragon Age: Inquisition* is not one of the more standard formats for a heroic story, like the tales of King Arthur or Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, *Dragon Age: Inquisition* still meets all of the requirements put forth and helps to breathe new life into the heroic journey story model. The video game genre has proven to be, not so much a worthy successor to the written tale, but rather a comfortable companion that helps to promote the great stories in a new way; much as film has helped to bring some of the great classics to new audiences. It holds its own without taking away from the mediums that came before it.

The two heroes have finally earned their rest and they have been deemed worthy of their titles of hero. Their journeys, and their tales, have come to an end, at least for now, and new journeys await for their heroes to come. "Now far ahead the Road has gone, Let others follow it who can! Let them a journey new begin..." (Tolkien, ln 19 – 21). Be it a more classical style, such as Dante's book *Purgatory*, or a more modern style video game such as *Dragon Age:*

*Inquisition*, the heroic journey story still manages to draw its audience in and live on in greatness.

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