

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is divided into several subchapters, including the background of the study, the research question, the objectives of the study, the significance of the study, and the scope and limitations of the study. These sections are essential to discuss as they provide a general overview of the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

The concept of the "Hero's Journey" has been a foundation framework in analyzing narratives across various media, from mythology and literature to modern films and novels. First proposed by Joseph Campbell in his 1949 work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, the Hero's Journey outlines a universal narrative structure in which a hero embarks on an adventure, faces trials, and ultimately returns transformed. This monomyth has been observed in numerous cultures and stories, suggesting a shared human experience of growth, challenge, and transformation.

"A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered, and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man." Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949, p. 23) Campbell's Hero's Journey consists of several key stages, including the "Call to Adventure," "Crossing the Threshold," "The Ordeal," and "The Return." Each stage represents an essential step in the protagonist's evolution, both internally and externally, as they progress from an ordinary individual into a transformed hero. This theory has been extensively used to analyze both ancient myths and contemporary narratives, revealing underlying patterns in storytelling that transcend time and culture.

In recent years, the Hero's Journey has been applied to various genres, including fantasy and light novels, where protagonists are often portrayed as ordinary individuals who gain extraordinary abilities and face

otherworldly challenges. According to Attebery fantasy is a genre that transcends the ordinary and provides a space for exploring the boundaries of reality.” (p. 3) Attebery, B. (1992). One such example is the South Korean light novel *Solo Leveling*, written by Chugong. *Solo Leveling* follows the story of Sung Jin-Woo, a weak hunter who is thrust into a dangerous world of monsters and dungeons. Through a mysterious system, he gains the power to "level up" and gradually becomes the strongest hunter.

The story of *Solo Leveling* fits neatly within the structure of Campbell's Hero's Journey. Sung Jin-Woo's journey from a powerless individual to a god-like hunter mirrors the transformative stages of the monomyth. His adventure not only involves external challenges but also internal struggles, such as the burden of power and the responsibility of protecting others.

Given the clear parallels between *Solo Leveling* and the stages of the Hero's Journey, this thesis seeks to explore how Campbell's monomyth applies to the novel. By analyzing the narrative arc of Sung Jin-Woo through the lens of the Hero's Journey, this study aims to provide deeper insights into how modern light novels reinterpret classic mythological structures.

The decision to focus this thesis on *Solo Leveling* is grounded in the narrative's alignment with the classic "zero to hero" archetype, which is a central theme in literature. *Solo Leveling* exemplifies this archetype through its protagonist's transformative journey, where the character evolves from a state of weakness and marginality to a position of exceptional power and prominence. The narrative traces the development of Jinwoo, the protagonist, as he rises from being a low-ranked, powerless hunter to becoming the most formidable individual in his world. This progression reflects core themes of personal growth, resilience, and transformation, which are crucial elements in the study of heroic narratives. The story's embodiment of these themes makes it a fitting subject for analysis using Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey framework, as it provides a comprehensive representation of the stages of transformation that constitute the hero's path.

The choice to analyze *Solo Leveling* is supported by a structured approach using Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey theory and narrative analysis. Campbell's theory provides a well-known framework for understanding the common patterns found in heroic stories, making it a useful tool for examining the novel. By applying this framework to *Solo Leveling*, the analysis aims to show how the novel follows or challenges traditional heroic structures. This approach helps to highlight the unique aspects of the story and deepen the understanding of its narrative techniques.

Using narrative analysis as a method allows for a deeper look into how the story of *Solo Leveling* is put together. Instead of just focusing on what happens in the plot, this approach examines how the novel builds its narrative—how the characters, events, and themes work together to create a story that is both captivating and meaningful. This method helps to show not only how the novel follows the traditional Hero's Journey but also how it uses storytelling techniques to make Jinwoo's transformation more powerful and impactful.

Several studies have applied Joseph Campbell's Monomyth, or Hero's Journey, to various literary works, highlighting its adaptability across different genres and narratives. Fatimah Fatihatullaili's *Hero and Villain: A Study of Joseph Campbell's Monomyth in Neil Gaiman's The Graveyard Book* explores the Monomyth's structure through the protagonist's development in Gaiman's narrative. Wu and Wang's *Using Mythic Structure of Campbell's Monomyth to Analyze Spirited Away: A Heroine's Journey* examines the heroine's journey in Miyazaki's animated film, focusing on the unique elements of a female protagonist's path. M. Yusril Ihza Mahendra's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz Novel: An Analysis of Monomyth Stages in Dorothy's Character* addresses Dorothy's transformation in L. Frank Baum's classic. Boukemmouche and Al-Khawaldeh's *study on The Monomyth or the Hero's Journey in William Faulkner's Screenplays: The Last Slave and Drums Along the Mohawk* investigates the application of the Hero's Journey in Faulkner's screenwriting. Lastly, Julius and Robby Satria's *Analysis of Hero's Journey*

in Jack London's "The Call of The Wild" delves into the stages of Buck's journey as he encounters challenges and finds his primal identity. Together, these studies demonstrate the versatility of Campbell's Monomyth in analyzing the archetypal journey across diverse narratives, providing a robust foundation for studying its application in contemporary literature.

While existing studies have effectively used Joseph Campbell's Monomyth to analyze a variety of works, several research gaps remain, particularly concerning modern light novels and web novels, which are increasingly popular in contemporary literature but remain underexplored in academic research. Although Fatihatullaily, Wu, and Mahendra examine the Monomyth in established Western and Japanese narratives, and Boukemouche and Al-Khawaldeh analyze it in the context of screenplays, none address the unique narrative structures and themes found in light novels or web novels. Additionally, most studies focus on classic or widely recognized works, leaving room for exploration of lesser-studied, internationally popular novels like *Solo Leveling*. This gap suggests an opportunity to examine how the Monomyth framework operates within this genre, particularly with a protagonist and setting influenced by East Asian storytelling traditions. Therefore, applying the Hero's Journey to *Solo Leveling* can contribute new insights into how Campbell's framework adapts to the evolving structure and themes of modern light novels and web novels.

First one is The study *Analysis of Hero's Journey in Jack London's "The Call of the Wild"* by Julius and Robby Satria examines how Buck's journey aligns with Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey framework. Buck begins in his comfortable life on a ranch (Ordinary World) before being kidnapped and forced into a harsh existence as a sled dog (Call to Adventure). Initially, he resists adapting to his new life (Refusal of the Call), but mentors like François and Perrault guide him, enabling his growth. As he endures various trials, including conflicts with other dogs and severe weather (Tests, Allies, and Enemies), Buck rises to lead the sled team (Approach to the Inmost Cave). His greatest challenge arises when he must decide between staying

with humans or following his primal instincts (Ordeal). Ultimately, Buck embraces his wild nature, achieving freedom in the wilderness (Resurrection), completing his transformative journey. The study emphasizes how London uses Buck's experiences to delve into themes of survival, identity, and the clash between civilization and the wild.

Secondly The study *Hero and Villain: A Study of Joseph Campbell's Monomyth in Neil Gaiman's The Graveyard Book* by Fadhillah Fatihatullaily explores how Neil Gaiman's novel aligns with Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey framework, focusing on the protagonist, Nobody Owens (Bod), and his progression through the twelve stages of the Hero's Journey. The research examines Bod's transformation from a fearful child in a ghostly environment to a courageous hero who overcomes numerous obstacles. It also analyzes the antagonist, Jack Frost, and Bod's eventual confrontation with him, underscoring themes of personal growth and the conflict between good and evil. The study highlights how Gaiman adapts the classic Hero's Journey for a contemporary audience, infusing the narrative with fantasy elements while engaging with universal themes of identity and resilience. Through this lens, the study illustrates Bod's journey and the significant interplay between hero and villain within the story.

Third one is The study by Wu M and Wang Y examines how the film *Spirited Away* aligns with the Hero's Journey framework established by Joseph Campbell, which encompasses key elements such as facing challenges, embarking on a journey, and returning transformed. The researchers analyze the protagonist, Chihiro, and her progression from a frightened girl to a courageous and determined individual. They likely outline her journey, including pivotal moments such as her entry into the spirit world (crossing into the adventure), encounters with bizarre creatures, and the arduous tasks she must overcome to save her parents and find her way back home. The research emphasizes that *Spirited Away* not only adheres to this classic narrative structure but also presents a distinctive journey for a young heroine, highlighting her personal growth and transformation throughout the film.

Fourt is The study by Boukemmouche H and Al-Khawaldeh S investigates how William Faulkner's screenplays, *The Last Slaver* and *Drums Along the Mohawk*, adhere to the Hero's Journey framework, also known as the Monomyth, which consists of twelve distinct stages, including the hero's ordinary life, the encounter with challenges, the arduous journey, and the eventual return transformed. The researchers likely analyze how the protagonists in these screenplays navigate through these stages, confronting difficult circumstances, learning from their experiences, and evolving as individuals. The study aims to illustrate how Faulkner employs this traditional narrative structure to craft engaging and meaningful stories, rendering his characters' journeys both compelling and relatable to the audience.

The study analyzes Dorothy's journey in The Wonderful Wizard of Oz using the Hero's Journey framework. It follows Dorothy's adventure as she is swept away from her dull life in Kansas to the magical land of Oz. She meets new friends, faces dangers, and learns important lessons. The story highlights stages like her decision to follow the Yellow Brick Road, her challenges against the Wicked Witch, and her realization that she always had the power to go home. Through these experiences, Dorothy grows stronger and learns that "there's no place like home."

Lastly Lazear (2007), in *Narrative and Conflict: The Driving Force of Literary Development*, emphasizes that conflict is fundamentally the driving force behind narrative development, acting as a catalyst that propels characters toward growth and self-discovery. Without conflict, stories tend to lack the tension necessary to engage readers and to facilitate meaningful change within characters. According to Lazear, conflict can manifest both internally within a character's mind or externally through their interactions with the environment or other characters. This duality allows for a multi-layered exploration of the protagonist's struggles, as internal conflicts often reflect moral dilemmas, psychological battles, or emotional vulnerabilities, while external conflicts may involve societal obstacles, physical threats, or interpersonal disputes. Lazear (2007) states, "Conflict in literature functions

as the core mechanism that propels characters toward self-discovery and transformation. It often manifests internally within characters or externally within their environment, shaping their journey toward resolution and understanding” (p. 45). This perspective underscores the importance of conflict as a central element in storytelling, shaping not only the plot but also the emotional and moral development of characters. In the context of Jin Woo’s journey, conflict acts as the catalyst that pushes him from a place of vulnerability and limitation toward a path of resilience, inner strength, and ultimately, freedom. His internal struggles and external challenges exemplify Lazear’s assertion that conflict is essential for fostering growth and transformation in narrative arcs.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

1. How does Sung Jin-Woo's character transformation reflect the archetypal hero in Campbell's Hero's Journey ?
2. How does Sung Jin-Woo's internal conflict and moral dilemmas during his journey align with the psychological aspects of the Hero's Journey?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1. To analyze the narrative structure of *Solo Leveling* using Joseph Campbell’s Hero’s Journey framework.
2. To identify and examine the stages of the Hero’s Journey as they appear in *Solo Leveling*, mapping key events in the novel to Campbell’s monomyth.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study holds both theoretical and practical significance in the fields of literature and contemporary genre fiction. By applying Joseph Campbell’s Hero’s Journey to the modern light novel *Solo Leveling*, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of how classical narrative frameworks continue to shape modern storytelling. It highlights the relevance of the monomyth in today’s narratives, particularly within the growing popularity of light novels and web novels of *Solo Leveling*,

providing insights into how traditional structures are adapted in contemporary works.

From an academic perspective, this study bridges the gap between classical literary analysis and contemporary genre fiction, offering a fresh lens through which light novels can be critically examined. It also adds to the broader academic discussion of narrative theory, illustrating the versatility of the Hero's Journey across different genres and cultures.

For readers and fans of *Solo Leveling*, this research offers a more profound appreciation of the story's underlying structure and themes. It sheds light on the protagonist's journey and the novel's broader narrative complexities, enhancing the understanding of the hero's transformation. This study also encourages further exploration of other modern works through similar frameworks, expanding the discourse on how contemporary fiction interacts with timeless storytelling traditions .

1.5 Scope and limitation of the Study

Scope of the Study: This study focuses on analyzing *Solo Leveling* through the lens of Joseph Campbell's monomyth, commonly known as the Hero's Journey. The research will examine how the various stages of the Hero's Journey, such as the Call to Adventure, Trials, and Return, are represented in the narrative and character development of Sung Jin-Woo. By utilizing Campbell's framework, this thesis aims to explore the alignment of the novel's plot with traditional narrative structures and identify any unique adaptations that contribute to its modern appeal. The analysis will specifically highlight themes of power, transformation, and self-discovery as they relate to the Hero's Journey, providing a comprehensive understanding of how this theory applies to contemporary light novels.

Limitations of the Study: While the study aims to provide a thorough analysis of *Solo Leveling*, it is limited to specific dialogues, utterances, and narrative elements within the text. This means that certain aspects of the story may be underrepresented or overlooked if they do not directly correlate with the stages of the Hero's Journey. Additionally, the focus on

the monomyth may limit the exploration of other theoretical frameworks or literary elements that could also provide valuable insights into the narrative. As a result, the findings will primarily reflect the alignment of *Solo Leveling* with Campbell's model rather than offering a comprehensive analysis of all possible interpretations of the text.