CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Problem

In the contemporary digital era, literature has transcended traditional forms, such as novels and poetry, to encompass interactive and immersive digital narratives. Digital literature is defined as works that incorporate digital media as a fundamental element of storytelling, including hypertext fiction, interactive narratives, and video games. Among these, video games have emerged as a particularly potent medium for narrative delivery, capable of conveying intricate plots, profound character development, and critiques of socio-political issues. The interactive nature of video games engages players in ways that conventional literature does not, allowing them to directly experience the consequences of characters' decisions and evolving circumstances within the narrative world.

A notable example of digital literature that intricately weaves storytelling with environmental critique is Final Fantasy 7 Remake (FF7R). As a reimagining of the classic 1997 game, FF7R presents a dystopian landscape in which corporate greed and industrial exploitation have led to significant environmental degradation. The game employs meticulous world-building, dynamic character arcs, and an emotionally resonant storyline to illustrate the disastrous impact of unregulated capitalism on both nature and society. This renders it an exemplary subject of eco-criticism, a literary framework that examines the representation of nature and environmental issues in literary works.

The narrative of FF7R centers on Cloud Strife, a former soldier-turned-mercenary who initially exhibited little concern for environmental issues but gradually became engaged in the struggle against the Shinra Electric Power Company, a megacorporation that exploits the planet's energy resources, Mako. The game further introduces Barret Wallace, the passionate leader of Avalanche, a resistance organization dedicated to halting Shinra's ecological destruction, thereby embodying the struggle of environmental activists. Concurrently, Aerith Gainsborough, a descendant of the Cetra people, symbolizes humanity's spiritual

connection with nature and the tragic repercussions of its exploitation. In conjunction with the game's intricate world-building, these characters present a compelling narrative that critiques corporate greed, social inequality, and environmental collapse.

By adopting an eco-critical perspective, this study analyzes how the Final Fantasy 7 Remake, as a form of digital literature, articulates its environmental message through its characters and storyline. By exploring the intersection of digital narratives and ecological concerns, this research demonstrates how video games serve as a contemporary form of literature that provides entertainment, promotes environmental awareness, and stimulates critical discourse on corporate exploitation.

Renowned Japanese game director and character designer Tetsuya Nomura works for Square Enix (previously Squaresoft). In addition to being the creator and director of the Kingdom Hearts series, he is well-known for designing the characters for numerous Final Fantasy video games.

Japanese video game director and developer Naoki Hamaguchi is employed at Square Enix. He has almost 20 years of experience in the game industry and is well-known for having contributed to several significant projects, most notably the Final Fantasy series.

He started as a systems planner and programmer before becoming the chief director of the Final Fantasy VII Remake.

Motomu Toriyama is a longtime game director and writer at Square Enix. He is known for his involvement in various mainline Final Fantasy titles and cinematic projects focused on deep, emotional narratives.

He began working at Square (formerly Squaresoft) in 1994 after previously working as a news producer at Fuji TV. At Square, he was known for his ability to direct poignant and cinematic stories, with an emphasis on character development.

1.2 Identification of the Problem

Environmental issues presented in literary works and popular media are garnering increasing attention within the field of ecocriticism. Final Fantasy 7 Remake (FF7R), a prominent video game that presents a compelling narrative about the exploitation of nature and capitalism, offers intriguing representations of environmental degradation resulting from corporate greed.

Within the game, the energy company Shinra employs Mako Reactors to extract the planet's energy for economic gain, neglecting the ecological consequences of its actions. As a result, the environment suffers severe damage, reflecting real-world environmental issues, such as resource exploitation, pollution, and climate change. This representation serves as a critique of the capitalist system that prioritizes profits over ecological preservation.

Although the environmental themes in Final Fantasy 7 have been frequently analyzed within gamer and academic communities, there has been a scarcity of studies specifically employing an ecocritical approach to investigate how this game illustrates the relationship between resource exploitation, ecological impact, and criticism of corporate entities. Therefore, this research aims to explore how the Final Fantasy 7 Remake represents environmental degradation and corporate greed through its narrative elements, characterizations, and visual aesthetics.

1.3 Limitations of the Problem

The semiotic analysis of eco-critical components in Tetsuya Nomura, Naoki Hamaguchi, and Motomu Toriyama's Final Fantasy VII Remake video game is the only focus of this study. The study is limited to examining the ways in which corporate greed and environmental degradation are portrayed through signs, symbols, and narratives utilizing the framework of ecocriticism and Roland Barthes' theory of semiotics—more especially, his ideas of signifier, signified, and myth.

The main emphasis is on a few chosen scenes, characters, conversations, and visuals that powerfully convey issues of environmental injustice, ecological damage, and resource exploitation—especially those pertaining to the Shinra Electric Power

Company and its effects on the environment. The analysis is supported by case studies of locations like the city of Midgar, the Mako reactors, and the Sector 7 slums.

This study does not intend to include the full Final Fantasy VII universe or its enlarged franchise, including the original 1997 edition, prequels (e.g., Crisis Core), sequels (e.g., Dirge of Cerberus), or other spin-offs. Additionally, the study is limited to the 2020 Remake version and ignores player preferences, gameplay mechanics, and fan interpretations unless they are specifically related to the semiotic reading.

Additionally, a comparison with comparable ecocritical video games or literary works is not included in this study. Additionally, outside the purview of this study is how spectators and critics have responded to the game. As a cultural artifact, the study only looks at the game's linguistic and visual representations.

1.4 Formulation of the Problem

Based on the background and problem identification presented, this study aims to address the following questions:

1. How is the relationship between human and their environment symbolized in the Final Fantasy VII Remake through the sign?
2. How is denotative, connotative, and mythic meanings construct the idea of eco-criticism in the Final Fantasy 7 Remake?

1.5 Objective of the Research

This research aims to:

1. Analyze the sign that symbolized the relationship between human and their environment.
2. Examine how denotative, connotative, and mythic meanings are constructed.

1.6 Benefits of the Research

This research, which concerns the Final Fantasy 7 Remake (FF7R) and employs an ecocritical framework, is anticipated to yield a range of benefits in both academic and practical contexts.

1. Academic Benefits

- Contribution to Ecocriticism Studies

This study enriches the field of ecocriticism by examining the representation of environmental degradation and corporate greed within video games, a medium that is frequently overlooked in literary and cultural studies.

-   Enrichment of Video Game Narratology

By analyzing the narrative structure, character development, and visual world building of the FF7R, this study contributes to the burgeoning domain of video game studies, particularly about the exploration of environmental themes.

- Interdisciplinary Insights

This research bridges the domains of environmental studies, literary criticism, and game studies, providing valuable insights into how interactive media may function as a medium for environmental discourse.

2. Practical Benefits

- Raising Environmental Awareness

By illuminating the ways in which FF7R depicts environmental destruction and corporate exploitation, this study fosters dialogue regarding real-world ecological challenges and the repercussions of unregulated capitalism.

- Understanding Video Games as Social Commentary

This study aids gamers and scholars in recognizing the capacity of video games to serve as a form of critique, thereby influencing viewpoints on environmental sustainability and corporate responsibility.

- Encouraging Game Developers to Address Environmental Issues

By examining the portrayal of ecological concerns within the FF7R, this research may act as a valuable reference for game developers seeking to incorporate substantive environmental narratives into their creations.

**1.7 Systematic Organization of the Research**

Chapter I: Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of sthe research, encompassing the background of the study, identifying the problem, formulating research questions, delineating objectives, significance, scope, and limitations, and a systematic organization of the research framework. It lays the groundwork for the study by elucidating the relevance of ecocriticism within the context of the Final Fantasy 7 Remake (FF7R).

Chapter II: Literature Review

This chapter engages with previous scholarly studies pertinent to ecocriticism, video game narratives, and discourse surrounding environmental issues in digital media. Additionally, it investigates the theoretical framework, particularly focusing on ecocritical
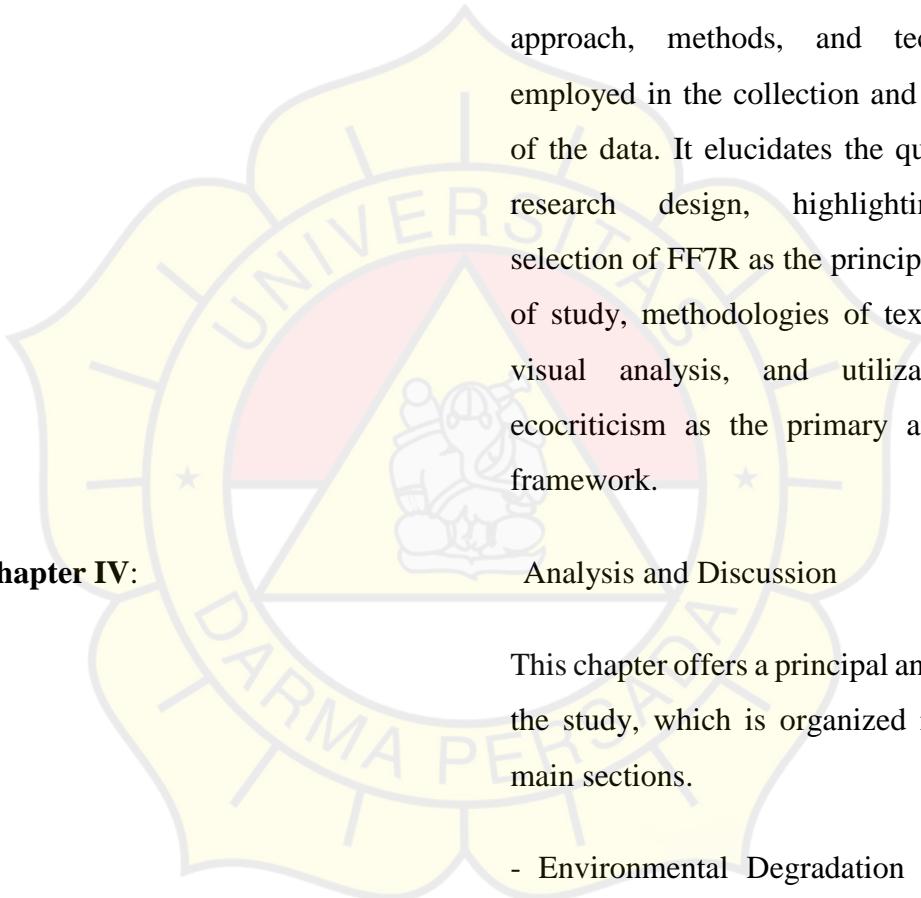
theories and critiques of capitalism, along with their applications in the analysis of FF7R. This chapter aims to establish a robust conceptual foundation for this study.

Chapter III: Research Methodology

This chapter delineates the research approach, methods, and techniques employed in the collection and analysis of the data. It elucidates the qualitative research design, highlighting the selection of FF7R as the principal object of study, methodologies of textual and visual analysis, and utilization of ecocriticism as the primary analytical framework.

Chapter IV: Analysis and Discussion

This chapter offers a principal analysis of the study, which is organized into two main sections.

- Environmental Degradation in Final Fantasy 7 Remake – This section examines the representation of environmental destruction as conveyed through the game's world-building, narrative elements, and symbolic characteristics.

- Corporate Greed and Capitalism Critique – This segment analyzes the role of Shinra Corporation as an allegorical reflection of real-world corporations that exploit natural resources and elucidate themes of power, corruption, and resistance.

Chapter V: Conclusion and Suggestions

This chapter synthesizes the findings of the research, emphasizing how the Final Fantasy 7 Remake illustrates the themes of environmental degradation and corporate greed from an ecocritical perspective. Furthermore, it posits recommendations for future research and discusses the broader implications of environmental themes within the realm of video games. This chapter presents a comprehensive summary of the research findings, illustrating how *Final Fantasy 7 Remake* embodies the themes of environmental degradation and corporate greed from an ecocritical perspective.