



Raya's Psychological Individuation in A Space for the Unbound: A Jungian Analysis

Jasmine Fauziyyah Putri¹, Dwi NCS Kusumaningtyas^{1*}, Ali Mustofa¹

¹Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the process of self-realization of Raya, the protagonist of “A Space for the Unbound” (2023), through the lens of Carl Jung’s individuation theory. This study focuses on examining the character of Raya and her progression throughout the game as she experiences the individuation process. Using a qualitative-descriptive method rooted in Jungian psychoanalysis, the study examines the integration of four major archetypes: Persona, Shadow, Animus, and the Self. The analytical procedure involves a systematic four-stage approach: participatory data acquisition through full gameplay, narrative-ludic mapping of key conflicts, symbolic interpretation of visual elements, and theoretical synthesis. The findings reveal that Raya’s journey meticulously represents a Jungian individuation process, where the ‘Spacedive’ mechanic functions as a sophisticated interactive metaphor for penetrating the unconscious to confront the Shadow and integrate suppressed childhood trauma. The character’s self-realization is achieved not merely through narrative resolution, but through the transformation of ludic-visual elements—such as environmental shifts and symbolic motifs—that manifest her internal psychological reconciliation. This research concludes that *A Space for the Unbound* provides a participatory model for understanding trauma recovery, offering significant contributions to both game studies and psychological literary analysis. These insights provide a foundational framework for further studies exploring the intersection of mental health representation and interactive storytelling in digital media.

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INTRODUCTION

The process of individuation according to Jung refers to the journey towards self-awareness and psychological rebirth through the integration of conflicting elements of the psyche. This process, which is central to Jungian psychology, focuses on the growth of the Self by harmonizing various aspects of the psyche such as Ego, Persona, Anima/Animus, and Shadow in order to achieve wholeness and a higher level of consciousness. The balance between personal development and social roles is achieved through a blend of internal and external environments. The main self provides direction in this process, encouraging personal development through cycles of deconstruction and reintegration that promote ego development and the attainment of self-awareness (Driver, 2022). The aim of individuation is to achieve self-awareness and integration between the conscious ego and the deeper, true self. Psychological issues can emerge when archetypal content surfaces uncontrollably, demonstrating its significant impact on the psyche. In order to allow

*Corresponding author(s):

Email: dwikusumaningtyas@unesa.ac.id (Dwi NCS Kusumaningtyas)
<https://doi.org/10.26740/nld.v6n2.p177-189>

Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia

personal growth and uniqueness, these elements must be made conscious. If unconscious archetypal images remain unacknowledged, the path to self-realisation becomes obscured. Individuation involves shedding the false mask (*persona*) and recognising archetypal forces in order to achieve wholeness (Kincel, 1975). There are four archetypes that require integration during the individuation process: *persona*, *shadow*, *animus*, and *self*.

In Jungian theory, the *persona* is a social mask shaped by cultural expectations and ambition, often hiding one's true self. While useful for adaptation, over-identifying with it may distance individuals from their authentic identity and hinder self-growth (Qalbi, 2024). The *shadow* archetype, representing repressed or hidden aspects of the psyche, often appears in narratives as an antagonist. Though perceived as evil, the shadow usually acts from a moral standpoint, reflecting the relativity of good and evil and the need for integration in self-awareness (Nurani, 2023). The *animus*, the masculine component within a woman's unconscious, influences logic and perception, shaping her interactions with the world (Jung, 1959; Nurani, 2023). At the center lies the *self*—the totality of conscious and unconscious elements—symbolizing balance and unity. Self-realization, the goal of individuation, integrates these opposites, fostering a deep connection with others and the cosmos (Qalbi, 2024), and is often depicted in literature across various genres.

A Space for the Unbound (2023) is a narrative driven game that tells the emotional story of Raya, a teenager who is dealing with trauma. Accompanied by her boyfriend Atma, she explores the town of Loka, completing a series of fantastical tasks. However, behind these adventures hides Raya's latent supernatural ability, which she unwittingly uses to manipulate reality — often triggered by emotional distress. As the story progresses, she increasingly loses control of her abilities, causing the world around her to break down. However, with Atma's support and her ability to 'spacetime' into others' minds, she begins to confront her repressed fears, which stem from a conflict with her best friend and emotional abuse at the hands of her parents. Ultimately, Raya realises that Atma and the world around her are illusions created to escape her pain. This marks the culmination of her process of individuation, where she accepts her trauma and emerges from her psychological coma, symbolising psychological rebirth and self-acceptance.

Researchers have previously examined *A Space for the Unbound* (2023) in several studies. One of these studies, titled *Immersion and Nostalgia in the Game A Space for the Unbound* and conducted by Utomo et al., explores the relationship between immersion and nostalgia by analysing the game's aesthetic elements. The study takes an aesthetic transformation perspective, involving the observation of shifts in design phenomena, the identification of key characteristics of these changes, and the examination of acculturation and inculturation processes over time (Utomo, 2025). The main distinction between the previous study and the current research concerns the theoretical framework, while Utomo et al. focused on aesthetics, the present study will adopt Carl Jung's psychoanalytic theory.

Another related study was undertaken by Tavares et al. and is titled —Self-Reflection in Games: The Representation of the Individuation Process in *Celeste* and *Persona 2: Innocent Sin*. This study examines how psychological aspects can enrich gaming experiences by providing greater meaning. The games *Persona 2: Innocent Sin* and *Celeste* are analysed through the lens of the hero's journey and analytical psychology, with a focus on narrative development (Tavares et al., 2021). In contrast, the current study will use analytical psychology exclusively and focus on a specific game: *A Space for the Unbound* (2023).

However, while traditional literature offers a passive exploration of the psyche, video games introduce a ludic-interactive dimension that fundamentally alters the individuation process. As a meaningful site for psychological research, games like *A Space for the Unbound* (2023) do not merely represent archetypal journeys but require players to navigate them through gameplay mechanics actively. This transition from passive narrative to interactive psychological engagement necessitates a fresh examination of how Jungian concepts, particularly the integration of the *Persona* and *Shadow*, are manifested through digital agency.

The study puts forward two statements about the problem, based on the background which are (1) How do Jungian archetypes such as the persona, the shadow, the animus, and the self, represent archetypes in Raya's journey to the individuation process? (2) How does Raya's character development during the individuation process?. Therefore, the research aims will be to answer the two research questions of the problem. Although studies of Jungian individuation processes have been widely carried out in classical literature and film, their representation in interactive media such as video games offer a new dimension that has not been explored much. Previous research on *the game A Space for the Unbound* tended to focus on aspects of Indonesian cultural representation or its narrative structure in general. However, there is a gap in understanding how game mechanics—such as the 'Spacedive' feature—symbolically represent penetrating into the *unconscious* to confront *Shadow*. This research fills this gap by dissecting how game interactivity allows players to experience Raya's psychological integration process more intimately than passive media

METHODS

Design

This study employs a qualitative research method with a descriptive approach to provide a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena being examined. A qualitative method is considered appropriate for analyzing both the visual and textual elements found in the game *A Space for the Unbound* (2023), as it allows the researcher to explore the meaning behind each dialogue, scene, and interaction between characters within their natural narrative context. Through this approach, the study can capture the subtle nuances, symbolic messages, and emotional expressions that contribute to the overall interpretation of the game's storyline (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Instruments

This study primarily uses visual and textual analysis to collect data. Data were collected directly from *A Space for the Unbound* (2023), a game produced by Mojiken Studio. The game's pixel-based visuals and narrative, divided into seven sections (Prologue, Raya, Erik, Lulu, Marin, Chapter 5 and Epilogue), serve as the core sources of data. Atma, Chapter 1: Raya, Chapter 2: Erik, Chapter 3: Lulu, Chapter 4: Marin, Chapter 5 and Epilogue—serve as the core sources of data. The researcher collected data by carefully observing the game's narrative, dialogue, visual scenes and symbolism. Each relevant element was noted and classified according to Jung's archetypal theory, including persona, shadow, animus and self. This systematic approach ensures that Raya's personality as the main character is analyzed consistently and accurately across different parts of the game.

Data Analysis

The data collection procedure was designed specifically for this study, it was subjected to a preliminary evaluation during the initial gameplay sessions. During this process, the researcher refined the method of identifying and categorizing archetypal elements, ensuring that the approach captured meaningful information accurately and remained relevant to the study's objectives.

The data analysis in this study was carried out systematically through four integrated stages to ensure the validity of the findings. The first stage, data acquisition, was carried out through participatory observation by playing the analysis unit, *A Space for the Unbound*, thoroughly (100% completion) twice to ensure that all dialogue, visual narrative, and gameplay mechanics were comprehensively documented. The second stage involves narrative-ludical mapping, in which key scenes representing the internal conflicts of the main characters are identified and categorized into four main Jungian archetypes: *Persona*, *Shadow*, *Animus*, and *Self*.

Furthermore, symbolic interpretations of visual elements as well as environmental changes are carried out in the 'Spacedive' mechanics—such as the use of floral motifs and color schemes—

which are considered to be symbolic manifestations of Raya's psychological state. The final stage is theoretical synthesis, in which all data findings are contextualized with the stages of Carl Jung's individuation process. Through this procedure, the study not only describes the storyline, but also synthesizes the relationship between the interactivity of digital media and the psychological reconciliation process of characters in depth.

Ethical Consideration

This study analyzes the game *A Space for the Unbound* (2023) and does not involve human participants. The ethical considerations of this research therefore emphasize integrity, intellectual property rights, and the responsible use of the game as a research object. The game was accessed through official and legal channels to ensure compliance with copyright regulations. All visual and textual materials used in the analysis have been properly cited and referenced, in accordance with the rights held by Mojiken Studio, the developer, and Toge Production, the publisher. Data collected from the game, including narrative, dialogue, visuals, and symbolism, was analyzed objectively and systematically, with careful documentation to ensure transparency, accuracy, and verifiability.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Raya's Archetype

In this section, the researcher analyses the archetypes that emerge during Raya's process of individuation, applying Carl Gustav Jung's psychoanalytic theory. The focus is on four key archetypes: the persona, the shadow, the animus and the self.

Raya's Persona

The persona is an archetype that represents the social mask individuals adopt to meet societal expectations, regulating thought, emotion, and behaviour to create a favourable impression while concealing the authentic self (Puspitarini, 2020 & Aisyah, 2022). In *A Space for the Unbound*, Raya's interactions with Atma exemplify this dynamic: she performs cheerfulness and resilience to mask emotional vulnerability and physical exhaustion caused by the overuse of her powers. This self-presentation functions not merely as a coping strategy, but as a means of maintaining social stability while suppressing inner conflict.



Figure 1. *Raya and Atma meet at school after movie date – Chapter 2: Erik*

Raya's early psychological pattern is defined by an overreliance on the persona, functioning as a mechanism to conceal vulnerability and regulate others' perceptions. In her interactions with Atma, she suppresses physical exhaustion and maintains emotional composure, signaling a prioritization of resilience over authenticity. This behavior aligns with Jung's concept of the persona as a social mask that enables adaptation but risks alienation from the true self when overused (Jung, 1998; Tyler). Raya's reassurance—framed through cheerfulness and minimization of distress—

demonstrates how the persona operates as a form of self-protection, establishing a recurring pattern that later necessitates psychological confrontation and integration.



Figure 2. *Raya and Atma meet at classroom – Chapter 1: Raya*

Raya's interaction with Mr Agung illustrates her strong internalization of the "model student" persona. Her composed response to praise reflects a deliberate performance of a socially sanctioned role rather than authentic emotional expression, aligning with Jung's concept of the persona as a social mask for securing acceptance (Broady, 2025). By sustaining this idealized image—particularly in relation to authority figures—Raya derives validation and stability at the cost of distancing herself from her authentic identity. This pattern extends into her personal relationships, where she consistently adopts a dependable and competent role, further reinforcing an identity shaped primarily by external expectations.



Figure 3. *Raya and Atma meet at classroom - Chapter 1: Raya*

Atma's remark in Figure 3—"Of course, you're the smart one here"—reinforces Raya's established "reliable girl" persona rather than marking a psychological shift. Her composed and supportive demeanor reflects a sustained effort to embody trustworthiness and dependability in emotionally significant relationships. By maintaining this persona, Raya continues to suppress vulnerability and project an idealized self, illustrating Jung's view of the persona as a socially constructed identity shaped by the pursuit of recognition and approval (Broady, 2025).

Raya's Shadow

In psychology, the shadow is an archetype representing a person's repressed, darker personality traits, such as feelings of anger, fear or envy, which are often hidden due to social norms. *In A Space for the Unbound*, Raya's shadow emerges when she is faced with emotionally distressing situations, revealing the parts of herself that she tries to suppress.



Figure 4. Erik meets Raya to give her black forest cake and apologize - Chapter 2: Erik

Raya's impulsive attack on Erik constitutes the most explicit manifestation of her shadow, marking a critical psychological rupture. Her outburst, "Shut up," signals a breaking point at which unprocessed grief, fear, and frustration erupt into violence. In Jungian terms, the shadow contains traits rejected as weakness; for Raya, emotions such as sadness and helplessness are suppressed beneath a strong façade. Under acute stress, this repression generates inner tension that surfaces destructively, illustrating how an unintegrated shadow can drive irrational and harmful behavior (Kessler et al., 2017).



Figure 5. Atma doing spacedive on uncle budi - Chapter 3: Lulu

Figure 5 illustrates the consolidation of Raya's shadow dominance following its earlier eruption. Her lack of remorse when questioned about Erik reflects the persistence of repressed hostility and vengeful impulses that, in Jungian terms, characterize an unintegrated shadow. Raya's unresolved resentment—shaped by prolonged bullying—surfaces in her dismissive remark, "Why should I ask him?", and her claim that the world is better without Erik, signaling the erosion of empathy and moral restraint. Such sustained grudges, rooted in unresolved emotional pain, are prone to resurface under psychological pressure (Van Monsjou et al., 2022). Triggered by heightened stress and suppressed fear over Atma's condition, Raya's shadow temporarily dominates her judgment, exemplifying Jung's view that an unacknowledged shadow leads to destructive, emotion-driven behavior.



Figure 6. *Raya and Atma save the cat - Chapter 1: Raya*

Although Raya typically maintains a composed persona, this moment functions as a minor rupture that exposes underlying emotional conflict. Her initial concern, “Are you hurt?”, reflects genuine fear, which is quickly displaced by irritation in her reprimand, “What were you thinking?!” This shift illustrates how emotions that threaten her idealized self-image—particularly fear—are suppressed and redirected into anger. As Glazer (2020) observes, social pressure to regulate emotion often produces psychological strain, reinforcing Jung’s view that an unacknowledged shadow frequently surfaces through frustration and aggression.

Raya's Animus

In Jungian psychology, the animus represents the rational and critical function within the female psyche, shaping perception, judgment, and decision-making (Jung, 1968, as cited in Nafiah, 2023 & Nurani & Amelia, 2023). In *A Space for the Unbound*, the emergence of Raya’s animus signals a psychological transition following the dominance of her shadow. Her reconnection with Atma functions not as emotional dependency, but as the activation of inner guidance that facilitates reflection, reality-testing, and rational clarity. This marks a shift from affect-driven reactions toward cognitive integration, positioning the animus as a mediating force in Raya’s movement toward individuation.



Figure 7. *Raya who had begun to accept Atma to talk to her on the roof tile - Chapter 5: Raya Fitri Nirmala*

Raya’s increasing self-awareness signals the integration of her animus, marking a critical stage in her psychological development. Previously, she used her powers as a means of emotional escape; however, she now recognises the shared world with Atma as a projection of her inner conflict rather than an external reality. This shift indicates the animus’s transformation from a disruptive influence into a rational guiding function, enabling clarity and balanced judgment. Her statement, “Of course not! We’re not actually here, remember?”, reflects a conscious preference for

reality over illusion, aligning with Jung's view that animus integration facilitates individuation and psychological wholeness.



Figure 8. *Raya meets the memories of her abusive father – Chapter 5: Raya Fitri Nirmala*

Raya's confrontation with her father's shadow signals the integration of the animus as a regulating psychological function rather than a reactive force. This integration replaces fear-driven repression with rational resolve and agency, reflecting Jung's view of the animus as an inner guide that enables clarity and decisive action. Her statement, "I won't let it stop me... even if it means leaving you behind," demonstrates a deliberate choice to confront trauma instead of avoiding it. This moment represents a pivotal step in individuation, as Raya achieves psychological autonomy and allows the animus to operate as a liberating force that supports self-definition and growth.

Raya's Self

In Jungian theory, the Self is the central archetype that signifies the integration of conscious and unconscious elements, resulting in psychological wholeness (Gusti, 2022). This stage is marked by the individual's ability to confront past trauma without denial and to reinterpret suffering as part of personal growth (Nurani, 2023). In *A Space for the Unbound*, Raya's attainment of the Self is most clearly evidenced in the game's true ending, when she returns to the river where she once drowned with Atma. Rather than functioning as a narrative callback, this moment represents Raya's acceptance of both loss and reality, indicating the resolution of her inner conflict. Her willingness to face this site of trauma without escapism signals the completion of her psychological integration, where fear and repression are replaced by self-acceptance and emotional balance.



Figure 9. *Raya went to the river where she once drowned with Atma - True ending*

Raya's final meeting with Atma at the river functions as a decisive indicator of the emergence of the Self through the integration of her persona, shadow, and animus. In Jungian

psychology, the Self signifies psychological wholeness achieved when conscious awareness no longer rejects unconscious material. Raya's declaration, "I'm not afraid to write anymore," marks a clear shift from dependence on external validation to authentic self-acceptance, including previously repressed fears and vulnerabilities. Crucially, this moment demonstrates not emotional catharsis but structural psychological integration: Raya no longer escapes pain or reshapes reality to preserve control. By acknowledging loss and imperfection as inevitable aspects of life, she reaches self-realization characterized by internal balance, resilience, and emotional autonomy.

Raya's Before Undergoing Self-Realization *Anti-Critique*



Figure 10. *Atma did a spacedive on Mr. Agung - Chapter 3: Lulu*

Prior to self-realization, Raya's difficulty accepting criticism reflects her overidentification with the "model student" persona. Feedback that challenges this identity is perceived as an ego threat, triggering emotional defensiveness rather than reflection. Her response to Mr Agung's critique—"Stop, please... I can't hear it again..."—signals resistance to confronting the shadow, as fear of losing her idealized self-image suppresses self-awareness and hinders psychological growth.

Self-Centered



Figure 11. *Lulu meets Raya in her horrifying form - Chapter 3: Lulu*

Before achieving self-realization, Raya's self-centred behaviour reflects an unintegrated psyche shaped by overidentification with the persona and repression of the shadow. She maintains control by distorting her fantasy world, eliminating figures who threaten her self-image. This is evident when Lulu accuses her of placing everyone as "side characters," prompting Raya to transform Lulu into a monstrous figure—a symbolic defence mechanism that protects a fragile ego by externalizing perceived threats (Cramer, 1999). This scene is significant because it reveals a

stable psychological pattern rather than a narrative conflict, showing that Raya suppresses opposing traits instead of integrating them. By reinforcing persona dominance and shadow denial, the scene establishes a critical pre-individuation state, making Raya's later psychological integration and self-realization analytically meaningful.

Controlling



Figure 12. *Raya took Atma to the classroom where they first met - Chapter 5: Raya Fitri Nirmala*

Before achieving self-realization, Raya displays a controlling tendency arising from the gap between her expectations and reality. In her fantasy world, she seeks total control, including over an idealized version of Atma, shaping him to fulfill her emotional needs rather than engaging with him as an autonomous subject. Her desire for permanence—"I wish to be with you forever"—and her manipulation of his responses indicate attachment driven by fear of abandonment rather than mutual recognition. As Liotti (2011) argues, such controlling behavior reflects an unintegrated ego and unresolved insecurity, underscoring Raya's inability, at this stage, to tolerate relational autonomy.

Always Wants to Be the Most Perfect



Figure 13. *Atma spacedive on Raya - Chapter 5: Raya Fitri Nirmala*

Before self-realization, Raya's perfectionism reflects her overidentification with the persona as a social mask that suppresses authenticity. Shaped by her father's rigid standards, this pursuit becomes psychologically constraining rather than developmental. Her admission, "I've put so much effort into being perfect," signals an emerging awareness that her achievements are driven by external validation rather than personal fulfillment. In Jungian terms, this moment marks a critical turning point toward individuation, initiating the integration of persona, shadow, and authentic self (Wynne, 2000).

Raya's After Experiencing Self-Realization

Against Her Fear

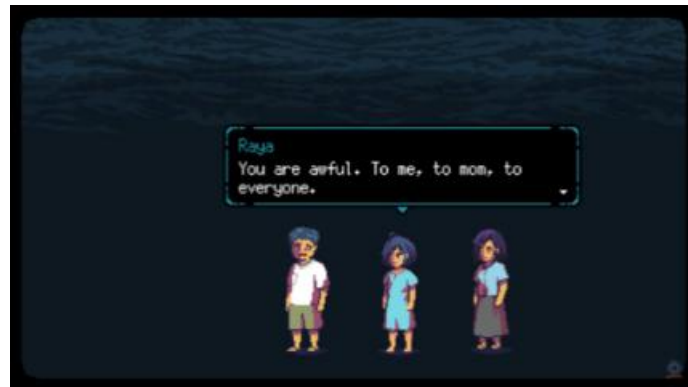


Figure 14. *Raya meets her abusive father - Chapter 5: Raya Fitri Nirmala*

Raya's confrontation with her abusive father marks a decisive moment in her psychological growth. In Jungian terms, this scene represents the direct confrontation and partial integration of the shadow, formed through long-suppressed trauma previously managed via perfectionism and obedience as defensive strategies. Her statement, "You are awful... I hope you know that," signals a shift from fear-based compliance to conscious self-assertion. By articulating her pain, Raya moves from victimhood to agency, illustrating Jung's claim that individuation requires confronting and transforming suffering rather than avoiding it (Benjamin, 2021).

Self-Acceptance

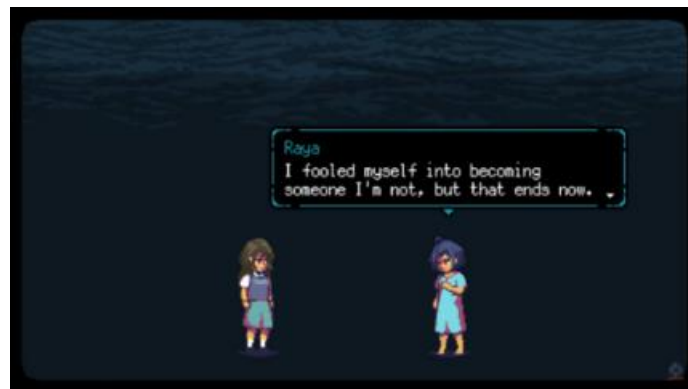


Figure 15. *Raya meets her friend Lulu - Chapter 5: Raya Fitri Nirmala*

After prolonged internal conflict, Raya reaches a pivotal turning point by relinquishing her pursuit of external validation through imitation. Her admiration for Lulu reflects over identification with the persona, which, as Jung cautions, can alienate individuals from their authentic selves. Raya's realization—"I fooled myself into becoming someone I'm not"—signals the rejection of imposed standards and the emergence of self-acceptance. By shifting from comparison to internal validation, she integrates the persona into a more authentic identity, marking progress toward psychological grounding and self-confidence (Swaby, 2020).



Figure 16. *Raya reunited with her friend Erik whom she hated - Chapter 5: Raya Fitri Nirmala*

The final stage of Raya's self-realization is marked by emotional maturity and her capacity to empathize with Erik, once the source of deep personal pain. In Jungian terms, this moment reflects successful shadow integration, as reactive anger is transformed into conscious understanding. Raya's statement, "I can sympathise with you," signals a shift from hostility to compassion, enabling the release of resentment and recognition of Erik's trauma. This movement toward forgiveness and healing, rather than control, indicates a balanced and integrated self (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2025).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *A Space for the Unbound* (2023) illustrates Raya's psychological transformation through Carl Gustav Jung's theory of individuation. Rather than simply recounting the game's plot, this analysis highlights how Raya gradually integrates key archetypes: persona, shadow, animus, and ultimately the Self. Initially, her rigid persona—crafted as a model student—conceals emotional turmoil, leading to psychological imbalance. Suppressed emotions manifest as the shadow, emerging through fear, anger, and destructive behavior. The turning point arrives with the emergence of the animus, which allows for rational thought, emotional clarity, and courage to confront personal trauma. Raya's eventual embrace of the Self represents psychological maturity, marked by acceptance, inner harmony, and reconciliation with reality.

Before reaching this point, Raya displays maladaptive traits such as perfectionism, defensiveness, and control—signs of an unintegrated psyche. These traits dissolve as she confronts denied aspects of herself, demonstrating individuation as a non-linear yet transformative process. This study affirms the value of Jungian psychoanalysis for interpreting narrative-driven games, positioning them as rich literary and psychological texts. *A Space for the Unbound* not only visualizes internal conflict but also stages a symbolic journey of healing. Future studies could apply alternative psychological theories, such as Maslow's self-actualization, to explore Mojiken Studio's broader thematic focus on trauma, identity, and the unconscious.

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