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On to Wisteria: Designing an Action-Adventure Role-Playing Game for the Empowerment of the Preteen Female Audience

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On to Wisteria: Designing an Action-Adventure Role-Playing Game for the Empowerment of the Preteen Female Audience

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts
Digital Production Arts

by
Kira Noelle Foglesong
December 2019

Accepted by:
Dr. Eric K. Patterson, Committee Chair
Dr. Victor Zordan
Professor David Donar
Professor Insun Kwon
Abstract

This thesis document details the design for an original action-adventure role-playing game (AARPG) specifically targeted towards the preteen female audience, ages 10-12, as well as the production of a promotional trailer to communicate the design. This thesis aims to bring this untapped market to an already established video game genre in order to communicate to this young female audience that these games are not “just for boys” by providing a clear example of an empowering and inclusive game that is designed to appeal to their demographic. Given that there are currently no AAA action-adventure RPGs targeted towards this group as well as limited research into the relationship between video games and female youths, a broad net of research is cast in order to design a game that would celebrate this demographic without relying on stereotypes or being too narrow in defining what it means for a girl to be “strong.” Through this work I investigate female gender representation, the current gender biases in the video game medium, and what prevents young females from playing games in order to create a solution that inspires and engages this audience.

The complexities of gender development in youths is considered, focusing on how media and other gendered products are marketed towards young audiences and how they can potentially influence their perceived identities. Television shows such as My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic and She-Ra and the Princesses of Power are considered as examples of popular media aimed at the young female market acclaimed for their strong storytelling, themes, diversity, and female characters. It also examines games like Kingdom Hearts, well-known exemplars from this genre aimed at boys of the same age demographic. After breaking down the core components of the AARPG genre itself, this thesis presents a game design following this structure with original characters, story elements, and gameplay features that would especially appeal to the target market. From this design, it develops key moments in an animatic for a trailer designed to excite and capture the feeling of empowerment the game would hope to achieve for this audience if it were fully realized as a production.
Artist’s Statement

I believe that compelling characters resonate and empower the voices of those who connect with them. I want to create passionate characters who break down social norms and possess a universal appeal connecting us all. I gravitate towards stories of “light” that embrace uplifting themes and celebrates the strengths of the human spirit. I believe this “light” is capable of overcoming inequalities in society and inspires the next generation to be the best of what humanity has to offer.

Magic plays an important role in my world (art), as I believe the emotions, spirit, energy, and values of the practitioner manifest into powerful effects that are naturally empowering, full of wonder, and undeniably beautiful. Art, to me, is the closest form of magic we can perform in our world; it is where we create a fantastical manifestation of feeling and expression. It is my goal to capture the whimsy, energy, and powerful feelings of magic and fantasy within the art I create and use this to instill “light” into my work.

I believe that video games are a unique form of art that empowers the creator to build a world of self reflection while also allowing players to craft an experience of self in that shared world. However, games have traditionally been created by and for people who are predominantly white and male and have, albeit unintentionally, alienated others due to a limited variety in perspective from other groups. I have a great passion for advocating that games, as works of art, should be accessible to all kinds of people. This can include designing features and controllers to assist those with disabilities in physically playing the game and also opening up the medium to encourage participation in both design and play from minority groups who might shy away from games more often due to lack of representation or relatability.

Growing up, I was told that the video games I played were for “boys,” and I struggled throughout my formative years trying to balance my tomboyish nature and unfeminine interests with a growing desire to fit in with girls around me. I love games as an outlet for participating in
grand, fantastical adventures, and I want to encourage girls to embrace such an exciting media form free from judgments. I want to create a game that emboldens and empowers young females at a crucial time of change in their lives, to inspire them to explore new strengths and abilities, and to discover themselves.

Lauren Faust, a writer and animator for *The Powerpuff Girls* and the creator of *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*, a major inspiration for my project, creates media designed just for the young female audience in order to show them that their needs matter and that they can accomplish big things. She understands what it is like to be a minority in her career, so she tries to defy majority expectations in her work and fights for depth and sincerity in her female characters. Despite creating media “just for girls,” Faust’s works have grown to be cultural phenomena that garner a highly diverse viewership.

This project is a means for me to push my own skills in design to appeal to a specific female-centric audience, but it has also been a means for me to express my values in building one’s own self-confidence along the journey to develop one’s sense of self, especially beyond the confines of binary gender stereotypes. This same approach is similar to Rebecca Sugar’s, who was the first woman to create a series for Cartoon Network with her Emmy-nominated show *Steven Universe*, a show acclaimed for its inclusivity and deconstruction of gender norms. She, too, was more entertained by media aimed at boys because she felt the shows made for her market were inauthentic, aimed at a minority group without having been created from that group’s perspective and experience. Her work was inspired by exploring and analyzing her own journey of self identification and expressing herself to a “dangerously personal” degree in her show.

*On to Wisteria* is a game concept that incorporates these ideas of equality, female youth representation, character depth and diversity, empowerment, adventure, and magic within a video game genre that has traditionally contained male-centric titles. The themes and inspiration for my game’s content and narratives come from a childhood surrounded by fantasy, that devoured magic from the books I read. The first novel I ever bought on my own was *The Goblin Wood* by Hilari Bell [5], a vengeful story about a young witch who renounces her humanity to help protect goblinkind from humans. A book I read yearly, it showed me how a young girl could become a leader, using her skills in tandem with the skills of those around her to stand up for what she believes in, how arduous but rewarding the journey to discover who one is as a person can be, and how to see all kinds of people as individuals with their own stories, beliefs, and motivations, all deserving of equal
measures of kindness and compassion.

*On to Wisteria* works to bring up and introduce young females to the video game world, but I believe it could have the power to reach beyond my intended audience as a fun game for anyone who enjoys the AARPG genre. It is not a vehicle by which I try to put up a wall and attempt to separate what a “girl” or “boy” game is, nor does it pit females against males thinking one is above the other. Rather, this game is about representation and inclusion. It is an open invitation for young females to fearlessly partake of the AARPG genre, featuring an all-female main cast in order to encourage them to pick up the controller and truly feel like they can relate to who they see and get to play as on the screen. The purpose behind my work is highly feminist, hoping to make the market more equitable by offering more representation of a particular group to balance the playing field and design an action-adventure role-playing experience that would appeal to all genders. However, distinctly separate from the feminist agenda, the content of the work is highly female-centric, meant to encourage young females by portraying characters, worlds, and themes with more female representation for them to identify with.

The game I have designed may channel Faust’s spirit in being girl-centric, but I have put so much of myself in the characters, the story, and the world like Sugar. Combined with all of my favorite elements from the video games I love, I ultimately and simply just designed the game I would have loved to have played as a girl growing up. But in doing so, I am also encouraging designers to make games that are inclusive for girls, underrepresented groups, and anyone who may have been disenfranchised, so one day we may see a world that does not question “what” characters are in regards to gender, race, or identity but rather discovers *who* they are by playing and experiencing their stories.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Playing video games is an increasing part of everyday life for people of all ages. As of 2019, 75% of American households have at least one gamer and the demographic distribution of male and female players is 54% and 46% respectively [41]. The Pew Research Center’s 2018 report indicated that 97% of male teenagers and 83% of female teenagers play games [89]. However, despite these statistics, video games are primarily viewed as a “boy’s” medium [74]. The vast majority of games being published by mainstream AAA studios, analogous to major blockbuster films for movies, are marketed towards boys and men despite the growing female player base.

The dangers of creating all male-centric games, especially when statistics show that women are indeed playing more and more games, is the potential for the misrepresentation of women and the effects therein. This influences how all players view females because media has been proven to affect the belief and value systems of the consumer [66]. Through my background research, females are shown to be misrepresented, whether by being oversexualized, presented as one-dimensional, or simply not included in the general population for examples, so the danger exists that gender biases are being created [79]. If the idea that video games are still for boys continues to be perpetuated, mainstream designers will continue to create games geared towards boys which continues the cycle of alienation, misrepresentation, and furthering of gender bias towards females.

One particularly overlooked group is the preteen female audience. In my research, I was unable to find statistics regarding this age demographic and their participation in the medium, but I believe that young females especially get into games later in life because of the lack of mainstream titles from popular genres being created and actively marketed towards them as pre-teenage girls.
By the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB)’s rated (T)een and (M)ature standards, there are a few female-lead action-adventure games, but there are none for the preteen age or below. For this age group, which falls into the Everyone 10 and Older (E10+) rating specifically, the top AAA games in 2017 were *Mario Odyssey*, *Knack 2*, *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild*, *Lego Marvel Super Heroes 2*, *Mario + Rabbids: Kingdom Battle*, *Crash Bandicoot N. Sane Trilogy*, *Lego City Undercover*, *Yooka-Laylee*, and *Splatoon 2* [75]. While it is encouraging 3 of those 9 offer the choice between playing as a male or female character and one features a female sidekick, the rest are helmed by males with no other choice. Young females do not have many characters to identify with in mainstream gaming.

The issues stem from a deeply rooted stigma that games are “for boys” and that girls do not play games or should not play games, which began with gendered marketing back in the 90s that put up a wall excluding girls from playing mainstream games [69]. When a few games were aimed at the young female market, they were created as wholly separate genres that built its content around female stereotypes and overall were of lesser quality game design. This furthered the divide as girls were still not invited to play “regular” games and their games were not viewed as games of substance [19].

Particularly for a young audience, the age group is highly impressionable and it is important that media is encouraging with uplifting themes to help them through this time of change in their lives. Preteens between ages 11 and 13 especially are highly self-conscious and become increasingly preoccupied with how other people perceive them [3]. Thus, if there is a social stigma around girls playing games, girls are socially discouraged from playing. Then if audiences are being influenced into developing gender biases based on the games themselves, they are perceiving girls in potentially negative, inauthentic ways, further discouraging girls not only as game players but as females. For the impressionable preteen female audience, I want to be able to empower them through games and let them know that games are for them, too.

So it is not about creating a separate safe space for females to approach gaming, it is about bringing this minority group to the same shared gamer space. Thus, the change has to come from within this “boy’s” medium, where the same popular genres are proven to still be fun and exciting to gamers even when new hero characters challenge the current norm. This would saturate the market and through quality game design with characters of genders or races not normally seen in lead roles, who are represented more authentically than they have been in the past, gamers will see that the
The integrity of game design is not lost. The existence of these games will also prosocially normalize seeing diverse characters at the helm. Eventually, should more games follow suit, the market will achieve a state of equilibrium where it does not matter how a hero character identifies themselves because the gamer community is now used to seeing an authentically representative society of all kinds of people. The introduction of this game as a new intellectual property to the market achieves a highly third-wave feminist agenda by calling for a different portrayal of women in media and making mainstream games more accessible to a wider range of individuals [25]. The stress on an entity being a new intellectual property is important because it is not simply enough to interject female characters over an existing game. Some movies have tried to retell a male-centric story with female characters instead like the female version of Ghostbusters [24] and have met with great controversy as a result. In my opinion this is because they feel disingenuous, where the pieces are perceived as making a statement for the sake of the statement rather than retelling the story in a refreshing way. The existence of the all-female cast of the new Ghostbusters seems to criticize the original without solving any of the issues it might have taken with the male-centric story because it positions women as something instead of men rather than sharing the film’s space.

However, because the market is so skewed, in order to overcome the barriers to entry for young females to even pick up a controller in these game genres, they have to be encouraged by content that is unmistakably designed with them in mind. Currently, they have few if any characters in popular games for their age group to identify with, and thus my project must be marketable to the female audience and cater its content to that audience by being unapologetically female-centric. Lauren Faust’s My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic stands as an exemplar of a media work that has universal appeal despite being female-centric and designed specifically for females. It is simply considered a good show because it presents in a high quality production, authentic and humorous characters whose depths and stories reach beyond the target audience [98].

In order to address the issues of breaking down stigma, normalizing diversity, and encouraging young females to play more video games, my project focuses on an original game design that would be marketed towards young women from 10 to 12 years of age with in-game content geared towards their interests. Because this is a vulnerable age group who arguably needs extra encouragement, the game would center around the theme of empowerment. The game’s features are described in a game design document that considers and develops the mechanics, narrative, and main characters to accomplish the thematic depth and empowering nature of what the player can
do and experience in the game. The game design looks to classic exemplars in the action-adventure role-playing genre, a popular genre with a vast array of male-centric titles, in order to create a “good” design for a game that would universally appeal to gamers who enjoy AARPGs regardless of the target demographic and marketing. This genre is also an excellent vehicle to drive my desires to create a game that focuses on adventure, fast-paced action to excite participation from the audience, multidimensional characters, and narrative depth in its themes. From my creative and visual research, I additionally designed a teaser trailer that is used as a marketing tool to bridge the gendered marketing tactics and attract both my target audience and the universal group. It encompasses the feelings of empowerment the player will experience within the nature of the game by way of its chosen genre and carefully selected components of the games story, characters, and actions featured in the trailer.

This paper further investigates the issues barring young females in participating and being authentically represented in the action-adventure role-playing genre and video games as a whole. It analyzes what design features could be integrated into a game design to appeal to this target audience and instill a message and feeling of empowerment to that audience. It details the purposeful design decisions behind the game concept and the components of its promotional trailer to reinforce its central themes and ultimate goal of being a feminist piece that appeals to a universal audience while featuring female-centric design.
Chapter 2

Background

The psychosocial topics introduced in the beginning of this paper are complex. Analyzing the issues surrounding media influence especially in regards to the development of young audiences, gamer identity, and gendered marketing as potential root causes for any gender biases and the lack of female youth targeted games are paramount to adapting a solution to the problem at hand. Additionally, it is important to note the qualities of media consumed by young female audiences in order to better incorporate appealing content that aligns with their interests and represents them accurately in that solution. My goal is to use the understanding and awareness of these issues, the analysis of the target markets interests, and the iconic elements of the action-adventure role-playing game genre to create a thoughtful and inclusive feminist game design that will resonate with the target market and beyond.

This section evaluates what the overarching issues are in regards to what discourages females from playing games, validating the existence of the issues at hand, and how those issues can contribute to the gender biases seen in video games today. The section starts with how media influences young audiences and why these biases are dangerous for youth development. It then analyzes how games have developed as an exclusive space “for boys” and provides information for how these biases developed in the first place through gendered marketing of toys and later games. It concludes with researched evidence supporting features of games that would appeal to young female audiences and how the AARPG genre applies for a solution to overcoming the issues presented at the start of the section.
2.1 Media Influence on Young Audiences

Digital media has become a major part of children’s lives, and young audiences are susceptible to its influence. Any high frequency consumer of media is susceptible to adopting the beliefs and attitudes that align with what is depicted in the consumed work, but children who obtain and adopt behaviors primarily from what they observe around them, are still forming patterns to deal with life’s social and emotional challenges [66] [49]. Consumed media then becomes a primary source for how children learn to adapt to life and how they perceive and relate to others [78]. For preadolescents, developing peer networks and building relationships become particularly important [49].

This relationship between media and young audiences can be beneficial. Media aimed towards younger audiences oftentimes put a focus on character building and teaching them life lessons by using the characters and their stories to encourage the development of positive traits and skills like perseverance, teamwork, responsibility, compassion, communication, friendship, resourcefulness, and empathy [78] [45]. Games especially have been found to serve a number of emotional, social, cognitive, and creative needs [60]. A study conducted by Columbia University’s Mailman School of Mental Health surveyed over 3000 children with reports from their parents and teachers and found that the 6 to 11 year old game players who played more than 5 hours of video games a week had higher intellectual functioning, higher academic achievement, better peer relationships, and fewer mental health difficulties than those who did not [28]. Playing games is also particularly known for improving spatial skills, or the ability to manipulate shapes and understand 3-dimensional constructs, which has been linked to creative and academic achievement. Historically, males outperform females in this arena, and it is proposed that this gender difference could be virtually eliminated if more females played action-oriented games [64]. A study even discovered that young girls who play games are three times more likely to pursue STEM degrees, studying the science, technology, engineering, or math fields. This particular study called for encouraging the young girl gamers of today to become the leaders in these fields tomorrow as more female representation in the male-dominated science fields has been a particular goal for the feminist agenda for some time [97].

While the above benefits of media consumption in young audiences is encouraging, there is an inherent danger to this influence as well. Media influences gender role socialization in kids, and studies point out that video games do influence the gender formation of young audiences [98] [79]. Misrepresentation of groups within media can have an adverse effect of certain inaccurate
expectations being indoctrinated into the beliefs of the consumer over time [66]. Games have been criticized for its portrayal of women, where historically females in games have been presented over-sexually and with one dimensional personalities where their roles in games have been secondary or used to initiate the conflict or “cause the problem” of the game [19] [26]. While more mature social issues such as over-sexualization and aggression towards females are less prominent in games marketed towards youths, one can still see a lack of female representation in ESRB rated E and E10+ games. The absence of female characters or the inclusion of one-dimensional or stereotypical female characters as secondary or catalytic plot devices can instill in an audience, both male and female, a lack of understanding of womens roles and potential in society, influence young women to attach to limited portrayals of what it means to be a woman, and perpetuate an idea that the contributions of women are less important than those of men [79] [66].

Even in kids’ television, where animated television especially is considered to be more progressive in terms of developing diversity first before other digital media forms, male characters outnumber female characters nearly two to one in 2018 [66]. Another observation that occurred in the same publication year found that ratio to be even three to one and stressed once more the importance of children being able to see characters on screen that look and sound like them. Mis-representation of groups can confuse young audiences in regards to aspects of their identity within the groups they adhere to [21].

### 2.2 Wishful Identification vs. the Gamer Identity Crisis

The notion of a person’s identity, or self-concept [37], is significant when it comes to media appeal to a particular audience. It is closely related to and heavily influences a persons ability to relate to characters and their stories, which is considered a key component for media works to achieve success and gain an audience. This success is fostered by the audiences personal relationships with the characters, their concern and interest in the characters’ lives, and the potential desire to even be like those characters. Wishful identification refers to this admiration of particular characters to the point of having a desire to be like them [34]. According to an examination of potential gender bias in children’s games, researcher Lisa Roach surmised that whether or not a person decides to play a game is influenced by this ability to identify with the characters in addition to doing so in a positive social environment [74]. Girls face social barriers when trying to achieve either of those
requirements, which could contribute to their limited participation in playing video games.

From the previous section, despite there being benefits and incentive for girls to play games, there is a lack of representation and diversity of females in games and media as a whole which can have oppositely negative effects instead if not handled well. The majority of girls might not be approaching certain games because of being unable to identify with the characters present in games marketed towards their age demographic. Roach’s study found that 70% of games rated E contained more male characters than female whereas 0% of the games contained more female than male characters. Additionally, she looked at what choices players had in main characters to play and found 45% of the games required the user to play as a male whereas 0% had a female lead. The rest had either no characters to play as or allowed a choice between the two genders. Even in games where the player can choose the gender of their character, the supporting characters in games were primarily male which would mean a female gendered character would still be in the minority [74]. Women are not as likely to identify with a masculine character, as people more strongly identify with characters who seem similar to themselves, which primarily comes from sharing characteristics that stem from either their gender or personal attitudes or both [74] [34]. Thus, requiring a girl to play a game as a male makes her less likely to enjoy playing games that are male-dominated. As the majority of games are male-dominant, it further perpetuates the idea that games are masculine and “for boys” especially when it could be argued that playing from the male persona constructs game players as male [74] [19].

This assumption that games are a masculine pastime and that women do not exist or do not belong to game spaces [4] [74] causes an even more significant social barrier that likely keeps young girls from approaching even the activity of playing games in itself let alone particular game titles. Identity comes into play again as a persons social identity derives from being a member of a social group that provides a sense of belonging to the individual [37]. Men are encouraged to play games and gaming is a topic of casual conversation. Boys’ social status can also be positively tied to owning and mastering games [60]. However, as the activity of playing games is considered a masculine pastime and women exist outside of the male social group, women run the risk of being denied entry to the male-dominated space by the male in-group and even being ostracized from their own female out-group for their interest in games [74]. They might be isolated as other girls may be less accepting of girls who play games a lot, and women have less of an opportunity to share gaming with other girls [39].
The idea that women are not allowed in this space was also found to be influenced by the “gamer” identity, meaning whether or not a person self-identified as a “gamer.” Statistics from consumer research across 13 different countries show that while 46% of the people who play games are women, only 30% of people who consider themselves as “core” players, defined as players who view gaming as an important part of their lives and spend a significant amount of time playing and enjoying them, are women compared to the 70% who are male. Only 8% of these self-identified core players are females in the age demographic of 10 to 20 years old [8]. In a 2015 study that surveyed over 1500 middle school and high schools students, 65% of females who played games did not consider themselves “gamers” where as 65% of males did [31]. It is evident that just playing games does not necessarily mean there is an affiliation with this self-identification as a gamer [37], and there is a noticeable difference in how females are treated and act based on this identity or lack thereof.

Women have faced push back from the “gamer” community, who is strongly perceived and even marketed to as young, white, and male [99]. For example, “Gamergate” was an event that occurred in 2014 that brought focus on the harassment female game designers and players receive online. A subgroup of this gamer community even issued death threats to female game designers out of fear that the traditionally over-sexualized games aimed towards young men were going to be diluted and replaced by games marketed towards women or gender-neutral audiences [15]. This extreme reaction to a call for a greater diversity in games was seen as a defensive move as if female game designers and players were outside entities that should not invade the comfort of their game space, the “games are for boys” space. Another example of the gamer self-identification and perception influence was seen with reactions to the most recent Battlefield title, which featured more female characters in the game’s trailer than had been before seen in the previous games in the series. The community complained that this inclusion did not align with the identity of the majority of the game’s playerbase, once again protecting and excluding the female gender from the game space and perpetuating the idea that a gamer can only be male [37]. These extreme examples also work to quiet those in the male majority who actually sympathize with the plight of the female gamer. The study of 1500 students indicated that 86% of the boys want to see more girls play games. Some are welcoming to females into the game space, but they receive less notice than the extreme views of what might actually be a minority of the community that is skewing the perceptions surrounding video games and girls [31].

Because games are male-dominant and the vocal side of the gamer community itself is
defensively male-dominated, the idea that games are a male pastime is continually reinforced. This adds to the difficulty in appealing to a young female audience and extending to them an invitation to play, too, when they are discouraged to play games from two fronts: being unable to identify with the games themselves and having to deal with the social stigma surrounding their playing of games in the first place as they face an environment that passively, and sometimes even actively works to keep them from joining in. This exclusive environment can even perpetuate harmful biases towards females by way of its exclusivity as a media form and potential misrepresentation of the female group in that sphere.

2.3 Gendered Marketing of Games and Toys

The development of the gamer identity to be so enclosed and continually perpetuated begs the question of how this seemingly gendered divide came to be. Marketing in particular has played a major role in establishing this gender divide by first presenting the idea that games were for boys and then continuing to promote that idea as games gained in popularity with this demographic. Marketing commodities to specific demographics, especially those based on the binary gender differences, is nothing new. For marketing towards kids, one can see the clear divide in the pink aisles full of dolls and blue aisles full of action figures just by walking around the toy section of supermarkets. There is definitely a categorical difference between toys meant for girls and those meant for boys. Historically, this divide was originally established during wartime as traditional gender roles of females as the domestic homemakers and males as the titans of industry were reinforced in children's toys [17]. Data affirms that marketers are still segmenting toys by gender today, where girls toys are associated with physical attractiveness, nurture, and domestic skills and boys toys are associated with more violent, “exciting,” and dangerous activities [11] [55]. And much like media has the ability to affect children’s social development and understanding of the world around them, so too, do toys in reinforcing particular biases especially in regards to gender and gender roles [17]. Kids notice this gender divide and it informs their understanding that certain toys, activities, roles, and behaviors are for boys and others for girls, to the point that it can even change their interests as they begin to develop their own understanding of gender identification and where they fit in those categories [11].

Early video games were not originally marketed towards boys yet, however. Games like
Pong were unisex and game consoles were geared towards entertaining the entire family. However, a crash in gaming interest occurred in the 80s, and many developers went bankrupt. In effort to respark the industry, the company Nintendo assured its games would reach a certain level of quality, but they could not afford to try to appeal to a large target market and chose to hone in on a more specific group. Rebranding games as toys for the youth market, 90's Nintendo looked at the already apparent gendered toy divide and ultimately chose to market to boys [69].

Not to say that historically games have only ever been created for boys. Before the change in the millennium, feminist designers saw an opportunity with the untapped female market and wanted to address the imbalance they saw. As more and more games were incorporating and catering to masculine interests and the male market, a few companies chose to create games that were more in line with traditional and stereotypical feminine interests in contrast. Their marketers operated under the belief that if they “put pink on it,” then young girls would want the games despite having been a boy’s medium for some time [61]. And they were not wrong. Video games that came out during that time that followed popular franchises like Barbie, American Girl, and Nancy Drew along with other titles that featured traditionally feminine activities like shopping, fashion design, and cooking, did garner a female player base and met with commercial success. However, these “girl games,” also called “pink software” due to every entry with few exceptions thereafter having pink packaging, for better or for worse recognized and relied on the gender divide already seen in young boys and girls media and toys [19]. This choice to create a separate genre of games specifically for girls established a convention that certain types of games and genres were for girls only and the others for boys and built a wall between the two. If it was not packaged pink, it was not for girls, and separate marketing stands in stores contributed to this idea that these specific games were solely for girls and a much more problematic and subconscious idea that these were the only games girls were supposed to play. Everything else was for boys by default [11].

Some argued these girl games were a celebration of the female culture, an act of resistance to all of the patriarchal entries that currently existed [19]. It was already a feat to have companies making games for girls as it was believed the market did not exist at all and girls would have no interest [69]. However, because of the influence that media has on children, many more see the long term issues in having positioned girls as especially separate and presenting them in their stereotypical roles. Not that anything is inherently “wrong” or “right” about the traditional domestic roles attributed to the female gender, but it is dangerous to potentially instill values in society that
limit female roles and participation. Should these games impact a girl’s future career choice, it was
seen as a poor decision to establish girl games in juxtaposition to the regular game [19]. These
games do not solve any of the female representation issues because they rely on the female gender
stereotypes to build their content [102].

In addition to the limiting portrayal of females, many of these games were and are consid-
ered to be inferior in regards to quality of game design and production value. Even game companies
creating pink software today recognize the limits of what they offer, from lack of diversity in stereo-
typical themes to lack of innovative mechanics and gameplay. However, it is proven that this genre
of games do resonate with this audience, and companies are wont to change when the market model
is still lucrative [72]. So while these girl games did try to address the imbalance of the gaming
market and still exist today, the games are a part of a small subgenre hardly recognized by the
core gaming community, and they ultimately failed at fixing the issue they were trying to solve in
encouraging more girls to play video games. They even went so far as to further the divide even
more, contributing to the alienation and misrepresentation of female gamers today.

There is hope as some believe the market is maturing, and with the given statistics that
girls and women do play games, some marketers believe that businesses should be doing more to
actively engage female gamers as a lucrative market [8]. Many independently created games are
on the rise that present more diverse and inclusive themes for players [61]. Proponents calling for
more diversity in games point out that people do not play games to live out just the male fantasy
and that representation in itself can be innovative, pushing further that games should be looking to
develop more games that appeal to both men and women without the crutch of relying on stereotypes
[61] [102]. However, in the AAA sector of the industry, some publishers are still concerned about
potentially losing the current male player base for their games [102], which have a degree of merit
given some of the pushbacks shown by the gaming community when it feels threatened by changing
developments.

While it has already been shown that this young audience faces difficulties in being able to
identify with the medium and being included in the activity by a perceived greater majority than
is actually true, these difficulties are even further reinforced by the marketing categorizations of the
genders and large companies that do not break the current mold. Together, it all perpetuates the
idea that the regular game sphere is for boys. The majority of games that cater to young males along
with the few entries that do cater to the female youth market lack authentic female representation,
either in their absence of females or their presentation of females in their traditional stereotypical roles. This influences the beliefs of youths of both genders about who female gamers are, what they do, and what they are “allowed” to play.

2.4 Representing & Catering to the Young Female Audience

When it came to the designers’ decisions back in the late 90s to create what would be called “girl games,” the question that came up as they saw the gender bias in games was do we encourage girls to beat boys at their own game, or do we construct a girls-only space? [19]. This question already set the initial goals of balance and equality up for failure by having only two options that were both fundamentally rooted in perspectives that believed games were only a space meant for boys and that girls had to combat this space to be included. The inequality that we see in games was created because of the divisive binary constructs of gender and the bias that occurred as one of these sides was privileged over the other [19]. By trying to come up with a solution that worked against the existence of the boys only space, it reinforced this boys-only monicker and that somehow girls needed to reposition themselves above that to conquer the space or isolate themselves in their own construct. It seemed the only perceived options were to take away from boys or create an oppositely but equally exclusive “other” space for girls rather than focusing on inclusivity and creating games that promote the medium as a shared common space for both genders.

As striving for a more inclusive social environment of all races, genders, and ages is the actual aim of third wave feminism, the current era of the feminist agenda [63], the focus needs to shift to including this audience in the space that already exists. As shown, the misrepresentation of females is one of the central problems blocking this goal as it makes it hard for girls to identify with the female portrayals or lack thereof in games currently, and it perpetuates the gender bias that feminists are trying to dismantle. However, developing games for inclusion of the female market is difficult because it asks the question of whose understanding of what it means to be “female” is being portrayed in the game. Too often it has been decided that what women want out of gameplay is based on their gender, as if gender itself was a static construct that could be easily categorized [19]. So how do you represent females more authentically?

According to third wave feminism, being a female does not always constitute a shared experience, especially in regards to gender. In the previous wave of feminism, the self-discovery
of what it meant to be a woman, the celebration of sisterhood, and the idea of “girl power” were the primary foci as women in this era acknowledged the mistreatment they faced for being women and wanted to instead celebrate and feel empowered because of the fact they were women. Third wave feminism developed to celebrate the individual and a person's unique desires and goals in life, looking to change the relationship between society and the individual to blur the lines between what constitutes the “us” and “them” mentality [19]. Women today simply want to be portrayed as human with their own story, where their sex and gender do not influence how they are treated as individual people [89]. This implies that a more accurate way to represent females is to remove the focus of gender altogether or at least not use stereotypical gender constructs as the sole factor in trying to appeal to women in games. Third wave feminism calls for more personal narratives as a means for people to take away meaning from their experiences. Gender experience is not shared, as one woman’s life experience because of her gender can be very different from another woman’s experience due to hers [19], so it is hard to use it as the basis for a more universal solution to including women as a whole in games.

There is additional support for removing a focus on gender when it comes to resonating with young audiences and creating appealing media, whether specifically for females or not, as well. While media incorporates prosocial themes in order to teach life lessons to youths and build their character, the pre-adolescent to adolescent age group does not resonate well with media that is obviously trying to promote certain behaviors or beliefs. If a message is perceived to have an agenda, the absorption and perception of relevancy of the work's themes to this audience are actually rejected by this group. They are at an age where they are mentally mature enough and prefer to handle interpreting and discussing the conflicts in character that occur when faced with a moral dilemma with no clear-cut choice [45]. This implies that focusing on a specific gender for the sake of promoting gender equality as a direct plot point within a work of media might actually prevent young audiences from taking away the other important values the media might be trying to instill in the group let alone its message for gender equality.

It would seem that focusing on gender is not a viable method to appeal universally to a female audience, so representing women more authentically might simply be to ensure the design of female characters is not wholly based on a single or a few gender stereotypes. It would be better to present female characters as individuals on a human journey that is not specifically geared towards calling attention to their gender. However, because it was also shown that women have difficulty
identifying with male characters and a lack of female representation can be problematic for authentic portrayals of women, another layer to add to the solution is to include more female characters with whom women can identify in games. The study of 1500 middle school and high school students found that 60% of teenage girls preferred to play as female characters whereas only 39% of boys preferred to play as male characters. This implies that having more female characters in primary roles in games would be appealing to girls especially while also not alienating the majority of boys who have no preference whether they play as female or not [31].

Now, the appeal of a game is not based solely on self-identification with the main characters. If it were, we would have likely seen less participation of the female community in playing games. Studies have analyzed what other elements of games women do prefer and what genres, or categories, of games they play. Analyzing current interests in games and their design can help inform what particular elements of games could be incorporated in order to additionally cater to the young female market. It was found that girls particularly appreciate rich narratives with engaging characters, appealing graphic design, and appealing sound design. They also like games that include exploration, collaboration, a variety of activities to do, appropriate levels of challenge, communication and social interactions in-game, opportunities to design and create, strategy, logical puzzles, and skill development [19] [77]. Women seem to be attracted to cute, clever, and humorous qualities in characters, both in personality and in their visual design, before other qualities like brains, physical strength, or beauty. They like to feel a sense of belonging and ownership in the games they play, and being able to create their own avatars contribute to this feeling of agency. They tend to play games for fun in comparison to men who tend to play games to win [104].

The most popular genres that women claim as their favorites are action-adventure, strategy, puzzle, arcade, and simulation games [8] [105]. However, another study looked to analyze the makeup of the gaming community of a wide variety of genres and found that only the simulation and match3 genres had a majority of the player base being female (nearly a high 70% each actually). The percentage of gamers that were female who played the puzzle genre was 42% but below 30% and even 10% for the genres of action-adventure and strategy respectively [105]. Even if women prefer certain genres, they are sometimes heavily in the minority of participation in specific ones, implying that their preference may not equate to the amount of titles they play within that genre. Additionally, it would seem that game title within a specific genre itself plays a major role in garnering a female audience. This was affirmed by the statistic that even though women only made
up 26% of the action-adventure playerbase in this study, the amount of females who played the specific title *Dragon Age: Inquisition* within this genre was 48%, with females representing almost an equal half of the gamers who played it [105]. As a fan of the game myself, I can attest that, in line with the idea that women enjoy games where they can create their avatar, perhaps this turnout is because the game allows for the player to create their own character where a major feature is player choice in choosing dialogue options while interacting with other characters. There is no difference in how the story plays out based on the character’s gender (besides romance options which is based on the non-player character’s sexual orientation which is in its own way interesting), and the player has a greater control over how this character’s personality develops in the game where they can present a character how they want to see and act as one. Additionally, the game itself is well-written and well-designed with engaging mechanics and a rich game world of authentic diversity.

While these statistics analyze gender differences, they do not necessarily analyze why women might prefer a genre, participate in a genre, or play only a specific game of a genre. It begs the question of whether these discovered differences are caused by inherent gender preferences or some other factor like specifically marketed titles. Are women the majority of the fanbase for simulation games because they prefer the genre more, or is it because it is a more accessible genre in comparison to the male-dominated action-adventure which makes it a more difficult game space for women to enter? Perhaps it is the game titles within certain genres themselves that are created to be more contextually appealing to a certain gender demographic, and when all or the majority of titles within that cater to a specific gender, the genre itself looks less appealing or is less accessible to the other. It is at a young age that children are reinforced with the notion that some games are more for boys and others for girls. Roach’s study found that the majority of games created for children in the E-rated category did indeed favor boys and their preferred genres, where those genres themselves then perpetuated a cycle of having more games in that genre that catered to those boys [74].

Because *Dragon Age: Inquisition* had an even distribution of players that were male and female, it is implied that the content of the game speaks more to securing gender participation than the genres themselves. This could explain why females may favor the action-adventure genre but do not make up as large of the audience. They may not approach the genre as often, but when they do, they really enjoy it. A major factor as to why they may not approach as many of the games in that genre could be attributed to the contextual marketing of this genre and games within it towards the male-dominant audience which started to build this player base at a younger age. This is encour-
aging, however, because it means there is opportunity to bring women to playing different genres of games, even those traditionally believed to be more exclusively catered to masculine interests, provided a game’s content itself is appealing to this audience.

2.5 The Action-Adventure Role-Playing Game

The action-adventure role-playing game (AARPG) genre is actually a popular combination of 3 other genre classifications: action, adventure, and role-playing. Breaking down the AARPG genre begins with looking at these 3 other genres and their components and observing how these are used together to build the AARPG genre into what it is today.

Action games primarily focus on dynamic, fast paced action, where the player spends time using action-oriented mechanics to run and fight their way through different obstacles and enemies. These enemies typically grow in difficulty as the player progresses through the game, ultimately climaxing in a fight with the final boss, often a key villain [71].

Adventure games are more slow paced when compared to action games, where the focus strays away from fighting and features more intellectual content and exploration. Problem solving is an important aspect of challenge in these games as opposed to having enemies to defeat, and puzzles are prominent. The progression of the game typically revolves around exploring a unique world, discovering and travelling to new places, and solving puzzles to unearth the mysteries therein [71].

Role-playing games are all about the character or party of characters the player assumes the responsibility of and controls throughout the game. The mechanics focus on the main casts narrative progression, the development of their skills in-game, and getting the player to identify with them and their story as the player acts them out. In these games, the player might have no control over who the main character is or looks like, put on the path of a predetermined and designed hero, or be given the opportunity to design their own character through avatar creation whom they then control throughout the game [71].

Action-adventure role-playing games, as the culmination of all three, often go back and forth of having gameplay sections of fast action and enemies to fight and sections for exploration and puzzle solving. Because of the role-playing component, character driven plots and narrative usually provide the progression for these gameplay sections, tying them together into a journey that develops the hero character or characters both mechanically and narratively [71]. These elements
provide an inherent structure and guide to what elements are included in the game design described in this paper.

With the information presented in this chapter, I have worked to design a game that is a solution to many of the problems indicated. It is designed to both appeal to the young female market and invite young girls to participate in the core gaming community. Choosing to design a game in the action-adventure genre, a male-dominant genre with a playerbase that is 70% male [105]), that is marketed towards females adds a diverse entry to the current pool of game titles, opens the male-dominant space up to be more inclusive, and crosses the current barrier of gendered game categories for young audiences. The AARPG genre itself is favored among women, despite their lesser participation within it currently, and contains components in its game structure like rich narrative, exploration, and puzzles that women have reported to enjoy in game design. Designing a game in this genre appeals to how girls like to play games and featuring content that is more female-centric and does not solely rely on gender stereotypes to allow young girls to more easily identify with the characters, setting, and narrative, while representing their group in a more authentic way. Because of media influence and my goals to empower the audience as well, my game will focus on positive messages and uplifting themes that encourage the player beyond even my target audience.
Chapter 3

Related Works

In recent years especially, strides have been made by AAA studios to diversify games, featuring more female characters and taking care to portray these women in prosocial ways beyond traditional gender norms. Some of these titles are exemplary for their game, narrative, and character designs that promote the inclusivity of women while being critically acclaimed games in their respective genres. However, they fail to offer a gaming experience that is geared towards the young female market as they are all rated Teen or Mature. I had to look to a different media form to find examples of works that were marketed towards this preteen female audience while representing this group in an authentic way and found a few in the television sector. Given that neither of these media forms offered examples of exciting AARPG design appropriate for this age demographic, the rated E or E10+ categories, I also looked to exemplars of the genre that were aimed at young men.

3.1 Modern Games Rated Teen or Mature

An iconic female heroine throughout video game history is Lara Croft, known as the Tomb Raider. Well known and established across the community, she has gone through many game remakes and a few film adaptations, where she has stood as both a symbol for female empowerment but also a symbol for sex, never really one without the other [76]. However, proof that the industry is making more conscientious strides towards better representation of females, the most recent game franchise reboot developed by the studio Crystal Dynamics that launched their Tomb Raider in 2013 [16] was praised for finally establishing Lara for being more than her sex appeal. This Lara is in her early
twenties and throughout this origin story deals with themes of self-doubt and many of the traumatic experiences that shaped her into the character, now more conservatively dressed and reasonably proportioned than previous installments, being portrayed on the screen [67]. A Mature-rated game for its violence and adult themes, I find it interesting that perhaps the industry started its more prosocial approach with a title aimed at the adult market. This might imply the waves of change would be better handled or tested in the adult community first but still introduced it somewhat gradually by starting with an already established and known character.

Another game that pushes for more diversity but is not just centered around female representation is Blizzard’s Overwatch (2016) [7]. It is a rated T online multiplayer first person shooter, where the player picks from a wide variety of hero characters, individually unique from their character designs and their gameplay roles and abilities. It was particularly noted for the diversity of the roster, with males and females represented fairly equally of different ages, body types, and cultures, as well as the gameplay balance of these characters’ abilities against each other [8]. Along with this diverse cast of characters, the flagship character of the game is the enthusiastic adventurer Tracer. She is a cheeky, quick-witted, and perky young British woman in her twenties with time-jumping abilities focused on being quick and dealing damage while delivering cheerful quips through dialogue lines as she whizzes by. It was nice to see that even though there were a multitude of characters to choose from, Blizzard put a female as the face. I think she represents and promotes the fun, fast-paced energy that the game encompasses and was a great choice to represent the game. With another progressive move, Blizzard later revealed in her backstory that she is also a lesbian, which added a layer of representation for the LGBTQ community, another underrepresented community in games today.

An outstanding and award-winning AARPG rated T that features not only a female lead, but a female-lead society, is Guerrilla Games’ Horizon Zero Dawn (2017) [29]. It revolves around the story of the strong-willed outcast, Aloy, who fights in a land overrun by machines to uncover her past on a journey of self discovery. Along the way, the player can engage in interacting with characters and completing quests where Aloy stands against prejudices with little patience and works to unite the other tribes of the world against extinction by being forthright and blunt with a gritty personality. Many gamers on public forums declared they would never play a game with a female protagonist in response to it being described as a “feminist” action game. Sony’s executives, the heads of the publishing company behind Horizon, expressed concern about alienating too many gamers by
featuring this female hero as well [13]. However, as of early 2019, *Horizon Zero Dawn* is the 5th best selling game for the Playstation 4 having sold over 10 million copies worldwide and was seen as a triumph for its expansive, unique sci-fi yet primitive tribal setting, breathtaking realistic visuals, emotionally engaging story, and dynamic gameplay [38] [13]. Aloy especially received attention for her depth of character and her completely non sexual visual look and has been praised as the “first legitimate feminist hero in a mainstream video game” [13] [10]. A wonderful example of a wholly new intellectual property with strong story-telling surrounding a female hero that could reach critical success, its now about adapting this example into a more stylized and age appropriate world to send these same strong messages to a younger female audience.

Developed by A+ Games, *Little Witch Academia: Chamber of Time* (2017) [1] is likely the closest action role playing game (not quite an AARPG as it lacks focus on adventure) out there that matches my game design as far as visual look, female-centricity, witch characters (see Game Concept in Chapter 4), and expected appeal to the young female market. It is a game adaptation of the popular anime, *Little Witch Academia*, which is rated TV 7+ on Netflix. However, the game adaptation was released as rated T for Teen for its partial nudity, suggestive themes, and violence [1]. While this disparity might be due to some differences in how games and television shows rate their media, its an interesting observation that despite being a show that is accessible to female youths, its game adaptation would be rated for an older market and be reported for more sexualized themes which are not as prevalent in its television form. Critically, the game was known for adapting the series well but suffered from average to mediocre gameplay. Critics comment it would appeal most likely to fans of the show but few else [52]. While this stands as a good visual model, perhaps, it falls short in its potential as a game design reference either in either its gameplay or appropriateness for my target age group and might even stand as another poor example of how females can be presented more sexually in games.

3.2 Television Shows Aimed at the Young Female Audience

Perhaps the strongest work in this analysis which encapsulates the spirit behind the purpose of my game design and was used as a model for many of its narrative themes and character designs is Lauren Faust’s television series *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* which started airing in 2010 [23]. It is loosely based on the classic franchise that made its debut in the 80s, but this remake
has set itself apart as a show noted for its high quality production value, unique, quirky female characters, humor, and diverse fan base despite being aimed at young girls [98].

The show is marketed towards females ages 6 to 12 and is unapologetically female-centric as evident by its bright aesthetic, themes of love and friendship, and the normative society where all of the primary characters are female and the secondary characters are male. It challenges common female gender portrayal issues in media by having female characters in positions of high authority and primary roles, where they are central and active in the story’s plot [43]. It follows the story of Twilight Sparkle, a genuine and passionate bookworm who enjoys rules, structure, and logic, and whose dedication to study had kept her from developing meaningful relationships with others. She is tasked to learn about friendship, and the audience experiences her development and journey full of magic and many well-intentioned but often clumsy mishaps as she makes mistakes where she misunderstands situations and problems that her wealth of knowledge and magical skills cannot always solve. She learns moral lessons from and with the other engaging characters around her through those mistakes and misunderstandings about how to be a better friend. Over time as she becomes more of an expert in the lessons of friendship, she becomes a leader and a mentor to others experiencing the same things. Even in her growing role as a leader, she deals with many insecurities as she doubts herself and her decisions especially if they will affect others, but when faced against large threats, she grows confident trusting in herself and her friends who help her. Together, they triumph over injustice time and time again but often because of Twilight’s care for others, she extends sympathetic concern for the villains she defeats hoping to teach them compassion and lesson in friendship as well. The content of the show revolves around the ups and downs of friendships, the development of personal identity, and the value in individuality through the eyes of sympathetic heroines who represent a wide variety of personalities. They have unique quirks, strengths, and weaknesses that go beyond one-dimensional stereotypes, which helps validate the self-worth of the female youths who can easily identify with them [43].

However, challenging gender portrayals was not a focus of the show and actually fostered a more well-rounded perception of gender roles in young viewers because of it. While males are secondary, the show does not position female characters above them or really in any primary relation to them. It focuses on the relationships between the main female characters. These characters are not “strong” solely because they are women nor are they strong by way of comparison to the men around them. They are identifiable and interesting characters because of their sincerity and depth
as unique individuals, and their character development and stories resonate more universally than focusing on problems unique to the female gender experience. Gender is not used as anything more than an aesthetic choice and a means for appealing to its target market [98].

And remarkably, despite being female-centric, the show is a critical hit that appeals to many young boys in the same age demographic as well as teens and adults of both genders. The characters are seen as relatable and funny, and with the show being produced at a high quality with a well designed world, solid script, fun musical numbers, smooth animation, and a talented, dynamic performing cast, *My Little Pony* is simply viewed as a “good” show. Often, media centered around women is treated as a lesser form of media only watchable by women. Movies and television shows that are male dominant are considered neutral, but a female dominant piece is viewed as more of a “chick flick” which has a connotation that they will not appeal to men although women are expected to relate and enjoy media that is the norm of being male-centric [22].

An additional related work came from another reimagining of an 80’s classic, DreamWorks’ *She-Ra and the Princess of Power*, an action-adventure show aimed at the young female market which premiered late 2018 [86]. The rallying cry of the show is to be brave, encouraging and empowering young people, especially women, to stand up [9]. Themes surrounding the show include friendship, questioning authority, obtaining power and experiencing limitations to that power, living up to parental expectations, fighting for respect as youths, accepting responsibility, and dealing with self-doubt, all legitimate challenges faced by many pre-adolescents and adolescents today which adds emotional authenticity to the show [6] [95] [9]. It is praised for its representation of different skin tones and body types along with being another show that presents young females in positions of leadership while leaving the gender discussion at the door [95]. The all-female writing staff of the show believed the way you truly made something “girl-friendly” was simply to allow her to do what everyone else does. The fact that she is a girl is of no concern as you just experience the story of a character who is simply doing the best she can [9]. The main character, Adora, is a brave and powerful warrior who struggles with her doubts in being able to embrace and control her powers as her own and in dealing with the pressures she faces as a leader. She can be clumsy as well when trying to develop her skills and when she interacts with others as another character whose social skills were stifled by her circumstances, but she faces her fears and continues to fight for what she believes in.

Shows like *My Little Pony* and *She-Ra* are starting to appear more frequently in children’s
television. They provide more female representation in media but stand out not for their gender, but their personalities, the lessons they learn, and how they handle problems [95]. These shows work to foster an environment where young females have role models that encourage a variety of positive traits, and they provide frameworks for how to approach authentically representing the young female demographic in media. My game design incorporates many of these same characteristics, themes, and messages while also featuring a cast of diverse characters who centers around a main character that stands as a relatably flawed but empowering role model on a positive journey of growth and development. Again, the goals of my game design are to be female-centric as both inviting and empowering for females, but also to be engaging to a broader audience by having more universal appeal in its narrative themes and game design.

3.3 Exemplars of Action-Adventure RPGs Aimed at the Young Male Audience

There were a multitude of games that were referenced for the game design behind On to Wisteria, but there were a few that were more instrumental in forming the overall age appropriate gameplay features and mechanics. These were some of my favorite titles growing up, and I relied on their designs and how they made me feel as a player as inspiration for many of the features I wanted to provide for my audience so that they could have a similar experience. Particularly the following games provided reference for visual appeal, objectives, game progression and structure, and the feeling of playing a fantasy-based action-adventure role-playing game. Although being violent in nature due to the focus on fighting as action games, the enemies are usually evil creatures far removed from other humanoid. However, they often do have a final villain that is an adult human pulling the strings behind the main conflict in the game. Defeating enemies does not produce blood, and many simply poof out of existence sometimes leaving items for the player in their wake. This cartoon-like violence helps in being more age appropriate.

The initial concept and fantasy-action feel of my game was first inspired by Jak and Daxter: The Precursor Legacy (2001) [56]. Its fantasy setting and visual aesthetic were considered immensely regarding shape language and features of nature, primitive technology, almost tribal tones, ancient ruins, and villages. It follows the story of Jak, who goes on an adventure to find a cure for his best friend Daxter, who was turned into an animal after being exposed to a dark, magical substance
called eco. The quest becomes a journey to save the world when Jak discovers the greater threat of villains who want to spread this dark eco throughout the land. Daxter sits on Jak's shoulder and is both moral support for Jak and comedic relief for the player throughout the entirety of the game. Combat is broken up by gameplay sections with a vehicular racing component and other minigames which add variety to the gameplay experience along with sections of platforming and puzzle solving which test the players control skills in order to proceed through the game. It has a collection system, where there is an incentive for certain types of players to return to the different locations along Jak's journey and continue to explore the areas. Additionally, my main character has an animal companion who rests on her shoulder as well, and the fluidity of the squash and stretch animation in the combat animations of Jak and Daxter together are a part of the visual appeal of the game that would be captured in my own. Additionally, it is the beginning of a trilogy of games where the characters mature over time, seeming to grow with the original audience it first captured with this game. I found this interesting and unique to other games franchises which stick with the target demographic rather than the audience it originally reached. On to Wisteria is designed to be a trilogy like this so the female audience I reach can continue to grow with the franchise as the characters face even greater challenges relevant to the new age.

The Legend of Zelda franchise has 19 games in its series. Each game is its own iteration of the main character Link, who must save Princess Zelda from the evil villain, Ganon, in a classic but archaic damsel in distress story. The games are all AARPGs that include adventuring, puzzle solving, item collecting, and fighting, but all have rather different visual aesthetic and tones to their games. I focused on my childhood favorite, The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time (1998) [57], because of its visual aesthetic regarding character body and equipment proportions and how it presents exploration and puzzle solving. It takes place in a fictional fantasy world of many different races and nations, and Link searches these nations ancient temples for items to aid in his quest to save the princess. Each temple provides a structure of puzzle solving and exploration fraught with enemies, and usually Link discovers a tool that he must use throughout the temple's puzzles and against enemies to master it and use against the final boss of the temple. It is a formulaic progression, but it allows the player to explore, solve puzzles, and learn to master new mechanics through the game design itself. The puzzles themselves are related to forward progression in the temple, where a logical puzzle stands in his way of going to the next room or floor as Link tries to get to the heart of the temple to retrieve the item he needs. In between going to temples, when Link
arrives at a new nation, he is able to interact with the non-player characters in a safe environment free of enemies, play mini games unrelated to the main story and with different mechanics than the main game, and buy items and supplies to aid his journey.

Neither Link nor Jak are speaking characters in their respectively games, and they are the sole hero characters. A game rated E10+ that does have a party system of speaking characters where the player character fights with allies was Square Enix and Disney’s collaboration project, Kingdom Hearts (2002), designed by Tetsuya Nomura [83]. A primary theme of the game is friendship, where the main character, Sora, scours different Disney-themed worlds (based off of some of their classic animated movies) to find his friends who had disappeared and gains additional friendships with the characters he meets and fights with along the way. He is another brave hero, fiercely loyal and optimistic, who perseveres in defeating evil but also often shows concern for and forgiveness towards enemies, extending them friendship similar to Twilight Sparkle. He builds in confidence because of his friends, too. His optimistic genuineness paired with his smalltown island upbringing leads him to be a bit gullible, and he can be childish and quick to anger. His journey becomes a quest along with the iconic Disney characters, Donald Duck and Goofy, to save the princesses of heart, one of whom is one of Sora’s missing friends and the others classic Disney princesses. Cutscenes that break up portions of interactive, mostly combat-focused gameplay help to further the story and build those relationships.

Although following the classic damsel in distress trope again, this game was a major success. It drew in a wider audience because of its association with popular Disney films, but people stayed for the positive themes of hope and triumphing over a clear conflict between light and darkness. Symbolism abounds surrounding a coming-of-age narrative with visual metaphors of characters drowning or falling and fighting to make it back up. The game is especially known for the feeling of playing it, from its emotional narrative to its moving soundtrack, and hands-on gameplay [73].

Approaching more complex and universal themes than the other games previously mentioned, the role playing features in the game’s mechanics here are more complex as well. This game features a leveling up system where all of the main hero characters have and gain different abilities as they grow stronger throughout the game, and the player has the opportunity to customize which of those abilities the characters use in gameplay. They also have the agency to switch out Donald or Goofy for other Disney character allies (almost all male save one) to fight alongside Sora. Sora fights melee style with visually flashy action-packed combo moves with his keyblade sword-like weapon.
Bright particle effects erupt from enemies with each contact until the enemy bursts, defeated, into items for the character to pick up. He can also use magic attacks for range and fight suspended for a time in the air before dropping back down to the ground. My favorite combat style out of all three games because of its quick, visceral pace and visual appeal, KH provided the strongest reference model for how to combine different attack styles, especially with magic, for real-time, engaging and empowering combat.

*Kingdom Hearts* has many more titles in its franchise that launched after the first game, including sidestory games and the long-awaited *Kingdom Hearts 3* which came out last year that concluded the series. Sora grows a little in age between each game, and the combat systems continue to add even more grand combo moves with even flashier, magical visual effects. Friendship is still the main theme throughout, but other themes dealing with guilt, self doubt, and personal identity are also prevalent. Many players have responded that the franchise means so much to them because its themes and characters helped inspire them and for some, even helped their battle with dealing with mental illnesses [44]. The franchise is an empowering example of an AARPG with emotional and interesting narrative and character depth, wrapped in an engaging interactive experience in a fantastic, magical universe. It stands as a series that shows the positive influence games can have on people, especially those of young ages who can grow alongside it.
Chapter 4

Design and Implementation

This chapter details the design process and purposeful decisions made to support the goals of the project. There will be more focus given to why certain elements of the game were designed over descriptions of what those elements are. To see further details regarding those elements, see the Appendices.

Going into the design and implementation, it was important to stress again that the game design be “good” in order for the message to come across that it should not matter if a game is female-centric or aimed towards women when the game can stand as a good game on its own. Horizon Zero Dawn is an AARPG that was simply a great game, and it has likely been the most successful feminist game to date. On to Wisteria as game entity is feminist, but its game content through a vehicle of female-centricity is centered around the theme of empowerment. That theme should be prevalent in the game design decision laid out in the game design document component. The trailer that encompasses and represents the game design additionally seeks to capture that sense of empowerment and showcase the strong characters that drive the identification of my target market with the game.

4.1 The Game Design Document

A game design document (GDD) contains a summary of the game itself and details all of the essential components that go into the game design. It is a document the team can refer back to in order to understand what the game is trying to achieve. In most companies, this is a living document
or even a living website where they can follow the design history as updates occur, mechanics are getting figured out, and the design itself changes over time [27]. For this thesis project, it was necessary for me to be able to communicate my design decisions through a document that could then be attached in the appendix as a reference. Most GDDs have unique categories based on the needs of the project itself and features unique to that game, but the general understanding of what is necessary for a GDD includes the overview of the game concept along with its purpose, target audience, and platform. As more features such as characters, story, or mechanics are designed, they get added to the GDD. In order to track changes, most GDDs contain a design history as well [12].

As for a template structure to guide the design of my game, I looked at GDD templates from game design textbooks, including Tracy Fullerton’s Game Design Workshop and The Game Production Handbook by Heather Maxwell Chandler, along with templates provided by my professors from my undergraduate studies in Game Design at High Point University. These two books along with An Architectural Approach to Level Design by Christopher W. Totten helped inform the game design principles I use to support my game design in tandem with the observations I gleaned from AARPG exemplars in regards to designing a “good” game in this genre. Collectively, the design elements I needed to design and describe were decidedly the features that were iconic to my game and important to communicate female-centricity and action-adventure role-play. My GDD provided the following categories: the games introduction, its characters, its story, its gameplay, its art style, and its audio design. These were particularly important categories based on the research that reported what young girls seem to like the most in video games: engaging characters, original narrative, gameplay centered around exploration and puzzles, and interesting visual appeal and sound design. These categories served as a template for me to explore important mechanics and make design decisions that would appeal most to my target market.

My process was organic, and I would start by brainstorming possibilities for a particular component, then pare down based on how those components balanced with the other elements. If some other component was already decided, it was about catering the next experience or characteristic (in the case of character development) so it would best use and utilize that previous decision. Sometimes it did not work, and there was an iterative process of influence that happened with certain character traits, certain character abilities, and mechanics that had to go back to the drawing board and be rebalanced as additional elements were introduced to the design. In many ways the process was similar to which came first, the chicken or the egg. One aspect would inform one piece,
that piece would get rebalanced, and that would go back and affect that first process. So much of the features are deeply integrated thematically across the mechanics, characters, and story, that one change to any of those aspects had a ripple effect into everything else.

4.1.1 The Game Concept

A game’s introduction in a GDD is meant to establish the purpose of the game, its concept, genre, audience, look and feel, key features, and a broad summary of the general gameplay. Because part of my initial purpose of creating this project already had the target market in mind and the reasons behind my motivation for creating the game was established (see Appendix A), the beginning of the process was to hammer down a game concept that would appeal to this market. The content of the game is solely focused on empowering the player. My work as an artist focuses on fantasy and whimsical magic, so the concept I wanted to pursue would naturally revolve around a female character in a fantasy setting who was empowered through the use of magic. A female character, of course, to be the vehicle to address both the feminist and female-centric goals of my project. However, to make sure that fantasy and magic would provide a successful vehicle for my thematic goals and convey a sense of empowerment, further research into the topic confirmed from psychologists the benefits of fantasy stories in stimulating the brain and promoting imagination, the belief in possibility, and a sense of optimism [93]. Optimism in particular is a trait seen often in female heroines in female targeted shows (see Pica below), so I felt I was on the right track. Magic in itself is a form of visual power, and AARPGs geared towards fast-paced action rely on visual cues connecting with player agency and control to connect the feel that player has produced that empowering move. Seeing bright, magical effects for controlling a player character will instill a sense of optimistic power.

My instincts pointed to witches as my main practitioners of magic. Growing up with fantasy, I gravitated towards characters like Kiki from Hayao Miyazaki’s Kikis Delivery Service (1989) [53], Hermione Granger from J.K. Rowlings Harry Potter franchise, and Makenna from The Goblin Wood. To dive deeper into why witches are culturally significant and appealing to this young female market, I analyzed some of the cultural effects witches had on society and how they evolved from being hag-like in European legends and fairytales to women burned at the stake in the Salem Witch Trials to Hermione Granger, “the brightest witch of her age,” considered the number one favorite female character in Hollywood [85]. Having been coined as a negative term to describe healer women whose
work was seen as coming from the Devil, the monicker took on even more negative traits associating women with hysteria, evil, and sexual deviousness that beguiled and controlled men or the stereotype of being ugly, old, and childless, the opposite of the perceived desirable woman [82] [32]. However, a cultural shift occurred in the 90s and early 2000s where witches began to be portrayed more positively and she became fashionable. Women reclaimed the term and refashioned it in a more positive light. Stories were being developed that took traditional villains like these and turned them into sympathetic heroes by re-imagining and exploring their origin stories. Gregory Maguire’s *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West* (1995) is a prime example of this phenomena where this iconically evil witch from *The Wizard of Oz* is re-imagined as a relatable and sympathetic character [50]. Its musical adaptation is Broadway’s second highest grossing musical of all time attesting to the success of its subject matter and themes [35]. A witch became a feminist icon as an identity associated with freedom, rebellion, and self-creation. Magic is a direct result of her own passion to seek knowledge and practice her craft, where she is completely unlimited to explore her abilities. In many tropes where feminists rejected the idea of a prince coming to her rescue as the princess, a witch was preferred because she relies on her own powers and spells to solve her problems. She actively has control and agency over her own life. Witch cultures, fictional or real sects, also stress the importance of community, of camaraderie amongst sisters in a coven [103].

Many of these basic principles and ideas as witches as icons perfectly fit my goal for an empowering feminist piece, that encourages young women to form their identities, explore themselves, and discover who they are while developing support from an accepting community. My lead character was planned to be optimistic and a symbol of freedom already, and with modern witches already promoting that sense of self in fiction and modern day culture, she would most definitely thrive as a witch who would inspire may of those sensations in the young girls who identify with her. However, not wanting to discount or ignore the negative cultural contexts of witches, either, the stereotypes surrounding their evil is explored in my villain, Nerys (see subsection 4.1.2.10 below).

The concept then became about a young witch who embarks on a journey seeking knowledge to develop her magic abilities, who crosses paths with other young witches who join her trek to seek their own individual goals. However, a threat to all of witch-kind bands them together to fight for what it means to be a witch and protect their way of life. This would fulfill my purpose of empowering women to fight for their themselves and their identities, while stressing another important theme of friendship. Again, the content of the game is focused on empowerment. By encouraging females,
there is a sense of the feminist agenda coming through, but in order for the narrative to be effective, the story itself would not revolve around feminism explicitly lest the entire narrative be rejected by my target audience and the gamer community that is already wary of feminist pieces.

4.1.1.1 The Three Pillars

One of the things that I learned in my undergraduate degree was to solidify the key features of the game into three pillars, where the pillars represent what your game is on a fundamental level [65]. If any of those three elements is changed or missing, it would no longer be the game you are trying to pitch but another game concept altogether. These pillars capture the soul of what your game is from a feature perspective and every decision you make should cater to one of those pillars. These key features and pillars as well end up becoming how you can market the game because they should be uniquely defining features to your game that help set it apart from others.

When it comes to designing a game, one of the approaches is to be player-centric, where throughout the process you are thinking of the player and their experience as they are going through the game. This includes designing for emotions and feelings the player has while playing the game, and that every decision you make mechanics-wise is to cater to that feeling and experience. Part of interesting game design includes shooting for innovation [27]. My game concept is geared towards a new type of player who has potentially different tastes and skills than the gamers who have come before them. There are interesting adaptations that can be made to figure out what would be unique. Another way to innovate is to design games with unique play mechanics and think beyond genres and their limitations [27]. However because I am purposely choosing to use an existing genre, the innovation comes from the newer target audience and potentially being able to refresh mechanics that are known already and appreciated in a way that is perhaps more coherent, purposeful, or empowering than others.

The first pillar of my game focuses on empowering the player front and center. Not only does that mean its narrative is thematically empowering, but it also means that the entire feeling of playing it is centered completely around empowerment. The game focuses on giving the player a sense of confidence, power, and being in control from the narrative, the game progression, the level design, character development, and through the mechanics. I felt that sending a message that instills strength and self-confidence in those in this pre-adolescent age who are vulnerable and still developing who they are as individuals would be of great value to this audience. With the
additional pillars of epic real-time combat and mechanics that allow the player to customize the
witches’ abilities and weapons in a unique item-based upgrade system, the player can exact levels of
control and agency taking ownership of the epic feel of their gameplay experience and designing the
playstyle that suits them best and empowers them most. Sound design is particularly important for
emotional gameplay, and even the soundtrack itself would promote a sense of freedom and expression
that builds in the music and inspires and energizes the player.

Part of this process is again also geared around creating a game that fits the action-adventure
role-playing genre and would appeal to players who enjoy this genre. There were a lot of mechanics
and design decisions that were made not because it would necessarily appeal to the female audi-
ence but would just represent interesting and potentially unique, innovative mechanics that would
universally appeal to players.

4.1.2 The Character Design

I wanted to approach the design of the hero characters themselves first and then design a
story around them that allows them to thrive, grow as individuals, and meet their own personal
goals by the end. This would make the characters and their development the primary focus, which
is important to me for mimicking the journey of self discovery and identification I want to instill in
the young audience. Understanding that I could not represent every potential type of young female,
my goal was to create a diverse cast from their personalities and aspirations to their abilities, roles
in the game, and visual look, who possessed enough unique characteristics and range of traits that
would allow those in the audience to resonate and identify with at least one character, or even a few
parts of each. The decision to have 5 characters was instrumental in capturing that variety, having
enough unique roles personality-wise and gameplay-wise, but also without being too many where
the girls lost their contrast against each other or their functions in the game becoming repeated.

4.1.2.1 Personality Development

Despite being unable to represent every possible trope or characteristic, I needed to make
sure the personalities that I did choose represented themselves and who they were in an authentic
way. The issue is not that female characters have mannerisms or physical features that are too
definitive or too masculine, where I should feel the need to champion traditional femininity or try
to go to the opposite extreme. I do not value femininity or masculinity as one over the other.
Whether the girls have traits that fall into traditional feminine roles or not does not matter so long as they have depth beyond just one trope or stereotype and are presented genuinely. I made sure to include some traits that align with more traditional views of femininity on principle that I am not out to denounce the women who do have or appreciate feminine qualities, and I also made it a point to include traits not usually considered feminine as well in order to present a dynamic cast that represents the wide variety of personalities women could have by simply being human beings. Yet, because many shows do rely on having a few prominent tropes in their characters for clear, distinguishability between characters, there are a few traits that stand as more defining features and archetypes for these girls so that they might better stand in contrast to each other as unique individuals.

To gain an additional layer of depth, I considered my audience. My target audience and my characters are both at a critical time of change in their lives as they are exploring and building their sense of self, defining their values and dreams for the future. I wanted to capture the complexities of that formation of identity by having characters whose personality traits and actions might contradict each other at times or do not always align with who they think they are as individuals or who they might want to be. I took reference for this phenomena from Kiki, the main character of the film *Kiki’s Delivery Service*. A young witch of 13 years of age who independently sets out to train to become a better witch and make her mark on society, Kiki faces many internal struggles as she attempts to do define who she is as a witch. She may stubbornly refuse the friendship of a young boy but still become somewhat jealous when she sees him spend time with others. Usually strong-willed, upbeat, and hardworking, she becomes depressed as her work efforts seem more and more futile and less rewarding with each delivery. What gives her so much depth in my opinion is that she is not always one or two things, and while she possesses so many admirable traits, she also struggles with her own weaknesses and fears. For my characters I wanted to develop their own explicit weaknesses which would then be tested in the narrative of the game. They would learn how to deal with those struggles, ultimately overcoming them and maybe even teaching a thing or two to those who are playing through their story.

With these goals in mind, I decided to develop these characters using a character profile sheet structure that one might see in a game art book or a graphic novel. These sheets give broad descriptions and summaries of each of the characters, capturing them in a brief snapshot, but they gave me a framework of objectives to develop. Each character is also represented visually, where
this one visual depiction of the character is purposefully posed to reflect that personality. The traits I wanted to establish for each main character’s overall background was as follows: name, age, physical description, personality, interests, dreams and aspirations, their motivation for partaking of the journey in the game, and their origins. Along with their background, I needed to additionally establish their roles and abilities in the game. The sheets also detail their witch type, class type, what School(s) of magic and Essences they ascribe to (see Story section of Appendix A), their familiar, weapon, spells and abilities, Essences, and skills. This added context is important to their character design because how they use magic especially reflects and is deeply rooted in the characters’ sense of self. It also helps to balance the variety in gameplay with each character having unique magic abilities and play styles due to their weapons and class types.

4.1.2.2 Classes and Witch Types

Although I had started out the development of this project and game with a particular character and type already in mind (see Pica below), I was daunted by the infinite breadth of possibilities for the supporting cast and how this main character I was already envisioning might change to fit better with those other characters. Because I wanted there to be purposeful design in each quality of the characters, I started with their mechanic function (much fewer options) in games and work backwards to gleam what sort of character personalities might fit that play style. Many games with multiple characters place them in particular roles, or classes, that inform their abilities, strengths, and weaknesses for the party. Overwatch classifies characters into 3 classes: damage, tank, and heal [7], and many games operate similarly where primary functions for characters are in the realm of offensive, defensive, or restorative. Games like Final Fantasy XIII expand those functions further, having additional roles that offer status buffs to the party or status debuffs to enemies as well as having characters that can be developed into having multiple roles [84].

With 5 main characters and a vast array of possible witch abilities that could justify several classes, I chose to have 5 classes of characters, where each girl would represent a class apiece. To add variety to the gameplay styles and more development to their character, each girl would also have access to a few spells or abilities that tapped into one of the other classes as a secondary class. The classes are Damage, Heal, Tank, Enhance, and Sabotage (see Appendix A for more details), and the combination of classes for the girls are as follows, listed primary then secondary:
Each class is represented once as a primary class and once as a secondary class. This was to balance the characters and availability of each class. It also helped to define the characters and their function more clearly without being overly complicated for the player (see Gameplay section).

With the classes set and balanced, another layer of development occurred to define what sort of witch the character would be. Each girl was to be a unique type of witch as well. Research was conducted to survey what sort of witches had appeared throughout cultural folklore, history, and works of fiction, such as the sea witch, cauldron witch, or cosmic witch. Being able to label a girl a certain type helped guide what spells and abilities the witch would have related to that class combination. They each have a familiar as well as another symbol and layer to defining their characters and connecting them back to witches whose familiars were companions or spirit guardians.

To additionally and visually inform that they are witches, each girl also has a themed witch’s hat, weapon, and mark on their face that represents their affinity for magic. The hat in particular is an icon that originated in European children’s books in the 1700s with pointy tips resembling a devil’s horn that represented their evil and association with dark magic that I wanted to explore in each of the girls, either straying from this traditional look or embracing it, with all keeping the motif of a pointy tip.

4.1.2.3 Age, Occupation, and Name

Children prefer to watch characters that are the same age as them and tend to idealize characters that are slightly older. In an attempt to have these characters be inspirational to the young audience but still be relatable, I chose to have these characters be within the 11-14 age range versus my target’s 10-12. They stand to be both close enough to be relatable and identifiable but also slightly above as role models for what these girls could become in the next few short years. Additionally, the character’ ages are used to reflect differing stages of preteen development and
differing levels of maturity, either by being in line with people’s perceptions of that age or to stand in contrast in spite of. One of the oldest sees herself above the other “children” whereas another is the most insecure. Childishly, one of the youngest tries to act more wizened than she is while the other is perhaps the most emotionally intelligent and insightful of the group.

Another layer of character development that was important to me was seeing these girls in an “occupational” role or roles, defining jobs the girls could represent or be actively pursuing. Doing so was to help me explore their dreams and aspirations, but it primarily functioned as inspiration for young female players to see girls use their talents to pursue different career or life paths. Many career fields especially in STEM are male dominated, and I wanted a chance to add another layer of representation, encouragement, and empowerment for my audience. These roles are not envisioned to be stated explicitly in the game but rather give off a feeling of potential that would encourage young females to explore different paths in life.

I used these “occupational” roles to help inspire their names as well. Monty Oum’s characters in the action-packed animated show *RWBY* had an interesting naming convention where the four main characters were named after a color and a fairytale. Wanting to do something similar but promote strong females again, I chose to derive my characters names from female scientists throughout history in a field somehow related to their developing personalities and roles. It would be a small treat, or “Easter egg,” for players to uncover, but the naming convention is not meant to be a prominent feature of these characters and was mainly a tool of inspiration for me during the development process of purposeful design.

4.1.2.4 Body Image, Language, and Pose Development

Body image is an important subject for highly self-conscious developing teens. *She-Ra* does an excellent job of representing a wide range of body types and skin tones across its female characters especially. With the age of my characters and their origin stories, however, it was difficult to justify certain body types for the sake of having diverse body types. Children and pre-teen bodies are less developed, with curveless hips and figures. The older two characters have the wider range of body type because they are going through puberty. One is fuller in figure due to wider bones and constant physical training that built up her muscles, whereas the other is tall and gangly as if she hit a growth spurt that she has not completely adjusted to. The other 3 characters have skinny, child-like proportions in their bodies. Body types aside, the characters’ skin tones were easier to
approach in representing cultural diversity in the cast, and they were inspired by Middle Eastern, Asian, African, and European descents. However, while their skin tones were inspired by a diverse set of cultures, I rely on the fantasy genre and their colorful hairstyles to obscure the lines of the girls’ specific ethnicities. In the main character’s case, a tan girl from the desert, I would hope that her representation in the group could be identifiable with many girls of different cultures that tend to have darker skin tones such as Middle Eastern, African, Hispanic, or Southern Asian for example.

With only one visual depiction of the characters, posing was heavily considered in portraying their personalities. The language intentionally reflects certain character traits and values the characters hold. This same language per character then carried on into the animatic of the trailer. Once the characters were developed in their traits, I did a pose test (shown below in Figure 4.1) looking to a large pool of drawn stick figures to help find the one that I thought captured best how I visually wanted to portray the characters.

Figure 4.1: Exploration of poses for the main characters
4.1.2.5 Pica

The main character in *On to Wisteria* is Pica Barakani, age 13. In summary (see Appendix A for more details on all characters), she is the Explorer and the Scholar. She is an adventurous and optimistic girl who loves to explore new places on her sandboard broom with her desert gecko familiar, Jelly. Her favorite thing in the world is magic, and it is her dream to one day master every school. She can manipulate both sand and fire to perform Destruction magic and produce glass weapons by heating the sand. She also has some ability to manipulate time which will further develop throughout the game as she learns new magic. Her function in game is focused on dealing damage with secondary abilities to heal herself as a natural survivalist. Having never left her small, remote desert village before, she embarks on a journey to discover a lost magical art and develop her skills. However, as she gets exposed to new people and discovers a bigger threat to the world at large, her journey becomes a quest to defend what it means to be a witch and to save the witches’ magical way of life. Her colored and posed character concept can be seen below in Figure 4.2.

![Figure 4.2: Color concept of Pica in pose](image-url)
Her character design was initially inspired by a previous iteration of this character that I had developed in a digital sculpting class where I wanted to push what it could mean for a witch to come from a desert environment (because this early character was a sand witch named PB with her companion Jelly). The visual development of this character and her props explored desert fashion from different cultures, primarily Middle Eastern and African, and fantasy elements relating to wanderers and explorers in these types of environments, some of which can be seen in Figure 4.3. Wanting to incorporate some elements that were iconically witch-like but re-imagined, her sandboard witch’s broom became her mode of travel through the dunes, and I immediately saw her as a sporty adventurer similar to Jak who in later games had a hoverboard similar to this broom. Because she reminded me of and was inspired by a lot of the AARPG heroes I grew up playing, I saw her as the flagship character of a similar video game even if it did not exist. The entire game design and game concept for On to Wisteria began its development centered around this particular witch and her abilities.

However as the development process went on and each other girl was beginning to take shape, I really had to dive deep into Pica as a character in order to make sure that above all she was unique and still retained the qualities that justified why she was the main character. Many games that involve party systems, systems with multiple main characters that work together through a game, and even TV shows geared towards the theme of friendship still revolve their main stories around a single, lead character. Kingdom Hearts has brave and loyal Sora, My Little Pony has passionate and intelligent Twilight Sparkle, and She-Ra has bold and heroic Adora. A vast part of this came from the idea that as a flagship character like those aforementioned and Tracer from Overwatch, she needed to align with and represent the themes of my game, much more so than the rest of the group. The themes represented in my game of empowerment, magic, self-discovery, exploration, adventure, encouragement, perseverance, and on a higher level, the theme of breaking gender norms, needed to be championed by my main character.

As such, her character shifted from the cool, sandboarding tomboy to an adventurous academic wanting to further her skills as well as a prosocial activist wanting to fight for the empowerment of herself and others not unlike Aloy from Horizon Zero Dawn. She is similar in character to Ruby, the titular main character from RWBY, whose energetic spirit, optimism, and focus on teamwork leads her team through high action situations. When looking at the leads of other franchises like these, the main characters all share a willingness to never give up. In every case regardless of other
Figure 4.3: Early sketches and concepts of PB the Sand Witch, Pica’s predecessor

personality traits, they had the spirit and drive to be leaders and to persevere. Pica is a character that represents that willingness to never give up and she embodies the spirit of adventure that goes on throughout the game. Her desire to push limits and metaphorically soar on her broom to pioneer adventure is akin to Amelia Earhart, and her spunk, tomboyish interests, and optimistic nature in assuming the good in others is reminiscent of Scout, the main character and narrator of Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Pica leaves her home on a grand adventure to discover a lost art of magic because she is hungry for exploration, knowledge, truth, and building up her own skills. She might be seen as naturally gifted and talented, but her skills were built on seeking knowledge and putting in the effort to study and understand the power that she holds. To young girls who identify
with Pica, I wanted to impress the message that genius can be developed through hard work and practice.

She represents freedom and daring, especially the freedom and excitement that comes from daring to be yourself. That fiery and daring spirit is reflected in the magic she wields. While grounded in herself like earth, the lightness of sand keeps her idealistic and her fire magic sets the world ablaze with her bold personality. She is light-hearted, open, positive, and quick to laugh, seeing the joy in the novelty of the world around her to encourage girls and players to revel in the uplifting theme of awe at the world. The player is meant to connect with the same sense of wonderment and awe that she experiences upon the discovery of new places, people, and knowledge in this fantastic world that the player and she is experiencing for the first time.

She is protective of the people she cares about, stands up for what she believes in, and inspires those who feel they cannot stand up for themselves to find courage and rise. She is the one who encourages Clove (see below) to join her on her quest and is instrumental in helping now powerless witches in connecting them back to the world around them. However, much like Kiki, leaving a small town home unaware of many of the struggles in life, Pica will suffer from her naivete in the game. She makes the assumptions that others have the same goals and perspectives that she has, especially in regards to the positive sides of magic, and she must learn empathy like Makenna from *The Goblin Wood* and embrace changes to her worldview as she experiences new people, new perspectives, and new truths like Scout. Her ability to manipulate time is initially reflective of her eagerness to move forward, but time in itself also becomes a metaphor for the whirlwind of fast changes and challenges she has to overcome which is relatable to this audience. For Pica, it is being thrust into conflicts she did not fully understand before leaping head first into trying to solve, reflected in the interactions with non-player characters and even battles where the enemies are overwhelming in number. The power to pause time becomes a vehicle for her to attempt give herself just a few more seconds to breathe and think, a desire I believe is present in anxious and overwhelmed teens especially but also adults.

Characters in *She-Ra* must also deal with the consequences of the decisions they make as leaders, and Pica will fail. As someone who has always worked hard and seen her efforts succeed on an individual level, it is going to be difficult for her to see how her actions affect those around her. She will also learn that she and her friends are not infallible and immortal like many young teens naturally assume [3]. Magic is everything to her, and the greatest threat to that in this story is that
she could lose that forever. Her hasty actions in trying to protect this self-serving ideal results in
the insightful character Clove being mortally injured, and this near loss is a hollowing moment of
realization for Pica.

In regards to her visual design, she is inspired by Sora, Jak, Ruby, and Tracer, other flagship
characters for their respective game or TV series. They can be seen in Figure 4.4.

Figure 4.4: Top row: (l to r) Sora from *Kingdom Hearts* [83], Jak and Daxter from *Jak and Daxter* [56]
Bottom row: (l to r) Tracer from *Overwatch* [7], Ruby from *RWBY* [62]

Visually, she was designed with a bit more boyish and androgynous characteristics in mind
in a way that could make her as appealing to a male audience as she would be to a female audience,
while also pushing the gender norms of a young female character. Her short, spiky hair, shorts, and
combat boots have more masculine roots and her top is actually based off of breast binding, which has
significance with samurai culture in the Japanese sarashi, corsets of Europe, and transgender cultures
today for disguising femininity. Her outfit, while revealing, is not sexualized and is representative of
growing up in a desert climate and the sportiness of it points to her adventurous and explorer tones. Her hat is thus a pointed hood on her cloak and takes additional inspiration from Ruby, who is based off of Little Red Riding Hood, and Link. It was originally designed to be a softly curved traditional hat, but the traditional approach did not match her character. Her witch’s weapon is a magical tome that houses different spells that she can access and continue to compile and study, and her witch’s mark is akin to a storm on her cheek representing her cheeky personality, her quick pace, and her destruction magic. Her pose is an extreme action falling with her board. Her body language is open and excited, and her facial expression emits a feeling of happiness and an open invitation for adventure which encompasses her bright and confident personality. This openness as well is somewhat more masculine in comparison to more traditional feminine conservative traits, and I purposefully continued to capture this openness in her posing in the designed trailer. Her color palette, supported by color psychology, is focused on yellows, reds, and purples: yellow for energy, cheerfulness, and intellect; red for power and determination; and purple for creativity and magic.

Her name was inspired by Dr. Carolyn Porco, a modern planetary scientist considered one of the top 25 most influential people in space-related science today for her contributions as the leader of the imaging team on the Cassini mission around Saturn, an imaging scientist of the Voyager mission to the outer solar system, and an associate of the New Horizons mission to Pluto and the Kuiper Belt. As Pica eventually develops the lost magical art (see Story), she develops powers related to the very nature of the universe itself.

4.1.2.6 Clove

Clove Len Tau, age 11, is the Doctor. She is a gentle and innocent soul who has a rather feral side to her due to her upbringing. Orphaned at a young age, she was taken in by an eclectic old witch who lives in the swamp isolated from other civilized folk which stunted her development of social skills. Her “grandmother” taught her how to use herbs for restorative and poisonous properties and how to use plant-based magic as a swamp witch, especially those related to Divination which gives her some future sight. Her function in the game is focused on healing others with secondary abilities to sabotage the enemies with poisons as a master of natural, medicinal ingredients. When her grandmother loses her witch powers, Clove sets off on an adventure with Pica to find new magic for a cure so she can protect the only life she has ever known and wanted. Her posed character
Clove developed out of the interesting class combination of Heal and Sabotage where I was trying to imagine what sort of witch would simultaneously heal, implying a sense of life, and sabotage, implying a sense of decay. This life and death contrast reminded me of nature and the life cycle as a whole, and I wanted to develop a witch who encompassed both, truly a nature-like witch who understands that with life comes death, and that nature is both beautiful and harsh. Clove is essentially feral, having grown up in, around, and with nature. Her desires are simple and she has a skittish curiosity for new things. Always on her own to play, she found solace in the company of animals and other creatures throughout the swamp and adopted many of their behaviors. She especially loves bugs and playing in the mud like her frog familiar. She is both dainty like a flower and uncouth like untamed vines. She stands for the girls and people who feel they have diametrically
opposed qualities to their identity, where although the traits may seem opposites, the dynamic parts
of humanity suggest that they can just as easily be both.

As the youngest, she represents child-like innocence which is heightened by her lack of socialization with other people, especially kids her own age. However, she is particularly observant. Clove is deaf and has developed her other senses, especially sight, smell, and touch to learn, and especially with her relationship with animals and powers of divination, she is particularly insightful when it comes to others’ emotions, especially in times of distress. Her gentle nature then actively goes to soothe those emotions. Although she may have difficulty expressing emotion herself, she can most certainly feel it, and she imparts themes of caring for others and in her own unique way, being a good listener. Her insight and maturity in regards to emotional intelligence is a refreshing contrast to her young age.

The choice to make Clove deaf was to fulfill another layer of representation, by having a character with disabilities, and she is not the only character to have them. It thematically caters to her Divination abilities and contributes to her difficulty in overcoming her innate fear already of communicating with other people. Similar to the idea that narratively I am not calling attention to the fact that these characters are girls, so too will I call little attention to the disabilities presented besides the girls initially having to solve how to best communicate with her. General Amaya in the Netflix original *The Dragon Prince* is a strong reference for a compelling character who also happens to be deaf. Interpreters and the use of sign language are abundant tools for her to communicate with others and the show simply presents this with no further context or evaluation calling attention to her disability, as her disability is part of the show’s normative state. Clove is not solely defined by her disability either, nor does her story need to revolve around her overcoming it. It is another way of presenting underrepresented people and characters normatively, and it will be up to the other girls and Clove to work together to figure out the best way for them to communicate with each other which is normal for any kind of human interaction.

Clove was inspired by the following visual references in Figure 4.6:
She is rather petite, hinting at a malnourished upbringing with a more expressionless face, simple clothing, and a level of wild dishevelment. Her witch’s hat is shaped like a mushroom, tying her back to nature and her affinity for poisonous ingredients while her mark goes across her nose like a tribal marking, highlighting her nose and eyes which are especially used as her primary senses. Her weapon is a small flowering wand. Her color palette is primarily greens and blue-greens with a splash of yellow. The greens of course are representative of her closeness with nature, but it additionally represents healing power, stability, and calmness [70]. Her pose is gentle but somewhat unlady-like, with a hint of a smile because she is happily interacting with nature. The choice for the insect to be a dragonfly was to give off the same gentleness as a butterfly, but do so with a less effeminate creature to show Cloves interest in all insects. Dragonflies are whimsical as well and natural to a swamp.

Her name was inspired by Dr. Helen Taussig, the founder of pediatric cardiology. She relates to Clove because of her pursuits in medicine and ties to children, but she also stands as a member of the deaf community who developed a sense for lip reading and her sense of touch to continue her doctoral practices, communicate with her patients, and feel their heartbeats [92].
4.1.2.7 Sarai

Sarai du Châtelet, age 14, is the Leader. She is a strong-willed princess of one of the flourishing nations specializing in light magic and Enchantment and Evocation. Refined and elegant, she excels at the feminine arts of socializing and music, but also fierce and unyielding, she excels at the masculine arts of tactics and fighting as well. She trains relentlessly because she wants to be a better Queen than her mother and all who came before her when she ascends the throne. She wants to surpass the already high expectations placed on her to succeed. She uses light magic to create defensive barriers and inspire her subjects with rallying cries that boosts their stat abilities. Her function in the game is focused on protecting others and attracting enemies to her with a secondary ability to enhance the team to encourage them with stat boosts to end the fight. When not taken seriously by her mother to pursue the investigation into the disappearance of many witches’ abilities to perform magic, she runs away from home and joins Pica and Clove so she can prove herself capable of saving the world. See her character concept in Figure 4.7.

Figure 4.7: Color concept of Sarai in pose
The combination class of Tank and Enhance naturally lead me to think of a paladin-like character who protects and is a beacon of light and hope. Sarai is in line with a classic princess trope which is appealing to young females, but she has a Jeanne D’Arc tenacity presenting her more like a princess knight to add dimensionality to the princess stereotype. She is similar to Glimmer from She-Ra, another princess who lives under parental expectations and actively rebels against them when she is not taken seriously by her mother. She is also based off of Weiss from RWBY, another character from a noble class who shares Sarai’s disgust of the unclean and interests in music. Her desire to be a leader is thwarted and threatened when Ruby is chosen to be the leader of their team, and she struggles at first to relinquish that control to someone she has additionally judged as being unworthy of the title. Sarai is stubborn and short-tempered like both of these other characters, and she resorts to yelling in frustration when things do not go her way and it feels impossible to wrangle up the party.

Sarai’s experiences at being a proper warrior princess, her desperate desire to be a proven leader, and her status as the oldest contribute to an ego where she positions herself above the rest of the girls in the group often trying to impose her way of doing things and being unwilling to compromise very much like Weiss. This happens often because she looks down on the younger members as children, where her older and high-class nature contrasts Clove’s primitive lifestyle for example. She has to deal with relinquishing leadership control to Pica, a much more natural and charismatic leader. With a familiar that is a lion, her regal pride has a fear of showing weakness, and her narrative arc represents the themes of living up to expectations and learning how to be a true leader. She learns how to listen and she becomes a character who represents physical strength and the desire to work everyday to be one step closer to your dream.

Her visual design was inspired by Glimmer and Weiss, along with an additional concept piece and a piece from the card game, Magic the Gathering shown below in Figure 4.8:
As a paladin of light magic, I saw her as angelic so her palette is more white and gold with splashes of red: white for cleanliness, light, and perfection; gold for status and wealth; and reds for strength and war. She is a black character, and I wanted to portray the black community, another underrepresented group, especially in a leadership and noble class role which is not commonly seen in American media. Her witch’s hat is a tiara and her weapon is a strong mage’s staff. I originally designed her with a large, ornate traditionally shaped hat, but it took away from the strength of her facial expression, and the subtlety of the tiara allows her head to stand proudly tall and is an homage to Wonder Woman’s design. Her mark is like rays of golden sunlight emitting from around her right eye. Her pose is grounded, with her body firmly planted and stable but stiff. She works so hard and forces herself in many ways to be regal and proper. Part of her journey will be to remember that she is just a teen, and that she should join the more child-like girls in letting loose while there is still time.

Her name was inspired by Émilie Du Châtelet, the famous French philosopher, physicist,
and mathematician of lesser nobility who was discriminated against consistently throughout her illustrious academic career. She, like Sarai, was well rounded in the feminine arts like musical performance and dance but also practiced fencing and horseback riding [20].

4.1.2.8 Elysia

Elysia Meitner, age 12, is the Inventor and the Entrepreneur. She is a witty, practical girl who excels at theatrical showmanship and illusions. She is a seafaring artificer who can use Essence gems to fuel her inventions, and her goal in life is to retire early and wealthy from the profits of her inventions on her own private island. Her function in the game is to enhance the rest of the party and augment their abilities with her inventions while her secondary abilities focus on dealing damage with homemade bombs and her water based powers as a sea witch. She initially joins the crew because she believes the girls’ journey will lead her to rare Essence gems to fuel her inventions. Her character concept is seen in Figure 4.9 below.

![Figure 4.9: Color concept of Elysia in pose](image-url)
Elysia is a non-committal type who moves on from places and people if they no longer suit her interests. She has been on her own for years now after building her first set of leg prosthetics for herself (as she was born without some of her limbs) and running away from the responsibilities of taking care of multiple young siblings in an impoverished home with the promise she would return. Now, years later, she looks after herself and has no intention of going back. She may be selfish, greedy, and a bit mischievous, but much of Elysia’s personality is a front as another clever illusion to protect herself. Her heart and intentions are more pure and altruistic than she would have you believe. Most of her profits are sent home to the destitute family she abandoned and most of her inventions go to other struggling kids for free in atonement for her shame of being unable to face her own siblings. In her mind after living on her own since a young age, soft people do not make it out here in the real world. She fears commitments and making connections with people because she believes that she will just abandon them too and she cannot be relied on.

She is tough and likes to rile things up with the party as a trickster and instigator. She is the realist of the group which helps keep them in line but also steps on toes in her delivery. She represents people who succeed at being independent and self-reliant. She is also representative of people who try to hide behind a mask of bravado, and in many ways she is the most masculine of all the main characters because of this vulnerability she refuses to show. In fact, her primary character references were found in the male characters of Flynn Rider from Disney’s Tangled [36] and Sokka from Avatar: The Last Airbender [46]. Both have a comedic charm, but one is suave and a scam artist while the other is inventive and a realist. Her journey in this narrative will open her up to be vulnerable with her friends whom she learns to trust and see as family. She will learn how to connect with people and form a bond, seeing the power in having support and friendship.

Her visual design was based on fantasy pirates, Ariel from Disney’s The Little Mermaid as another icon of the sea, and Flynn Rider, shown below in Figure 4.10.
As a crafty seafarer, she is most similar to a pirate, and her outfit reflects that in her captain’s jacket, hat, and trousers. Her color palette is mainly blues and red: red for desire and love, blue for compassion, imagination, and water [70]. Her cleverness evokes a witch familiar in an octopus, but her witch’s mark is two lines on each cheek, symbolic for still waters but visibly look somewhat like a fox’s whiskers, too, implying mischief. Her pose is easygoing with a sly smile as she holds up three round objects in between her fingers like she’s about to perform a magic trick. These objects are props to show her interests: a bomb for instigation, a metal nut for invention, and a coin for income.

Her name was inspired by Lise Meitner, a nuclear physicist whose contributions to nuclear fission paved the way for the development of nuclear reactors and weapons [58].

4.1.2.9 Mimi

Miriam Ludmila Kurie who goes by the nickname Mimi, age 14, is the Molecular Gastronomist and Caretaker. She is a painfully shy and insecure girl who has faced many prejudices for being a cauldrón witch with dark, necromancy powers. She has a talent for alchemy and potion making and a passion for making confectionaries. She brings her talents and understanding of chemistry to boil cooking down to a science and one day she would love to have her own cafe.
However, she is looked down upon for her magic by those who think dark magic is evil, and she joins the cast hoping that the lost magic they find could help her change her magical aptitude to some other school of magic so she no longer has to fear or be ashamed of her own powers. See her character concept in Figure 4.11.

![Figure 4.11: Color concept of Mimi in pose](image)

A dark witch fit the theme of the last class type of Sabotage and Tank. Someone with dark powers would be able to inflict curses upon enemies and frighten them, and would be a strong, defensive class by raising spirits for protection. However, to show that dark magic does not equate to evil, I wanted to represent a character who is for all intents and purposes good and moral. This is to aid the theme of getting to know a person as an individual before you make judgments based on stereotypes and prejudices. Even in the group, Sarai, as a light mage, stands in direct opposite of the tenements of dark witches, and she and Mimi have to get over their biases towards each other as well.
Mimi is the caretaker and represents many traditional feminine qualities in the role of nurturer as well as visually represents the traditional witch. Being one of the oldest both caters to her feeling some responsibility for the rest of the girls as a mother figure but in contrast also the insecurities and lack of confidence fraught by girls her age. Even though she is shy and sweet, she is a passionate powerhouse whose raw magic ability is the strongest out of any of the girls'. She is based off of the character Fluttershy from *My Little Pony* who is known for being nurturing but has a fiery-temper not afraid to be stern if she needs to and even flies off in a rage of uncontrolled anger, not usually a traditionally feminine trait. Mimi is similar in that if she can get over her initial fears, her sincerity and concern knows no limits, and if you invoke her wrath, usually by picking on those weaker than you, she becomes a frightening, unstable dark mage indeed. She is also based off of the character Megumi Tadokoro from the manga *Food Wars!* [96], who is also shy and insecure in her abilities who develops self-confidence over the course of the series in her cooking style which offers a sense of motherly care to those who eat her food. See Figure 4.12 for both of these character inspirations.

Figure 4.12: Character illustrations. Fluttershy from *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* [23] and Megumi Tadokoro from *Food Wars!* [96]

Her arc is similar to Elsa from Disney's *Frozen* [47], who fears hurting people with her powers so much that she has no control over them which contributes to her shy, reserved personality as she tries to stifle them. The lesson by the end of the film is self-love, acceptance by being shown love from those around her, and seeing the beauty in her powers. Mimi must go on a similar journey where the solution is not to change who she is, although she thinks that's the solution, but rather to
learn to be proud of herself and see the beauty in her own unique strengths and talents. She learns this because of the journey she takes with her new friends who support her and accept her for who she is now. She does not need to be ashamed of herself, but she and her friends can work to actively change society's view of dark magic where she can be a representative of that cause.

Her visual design is based off of Fluttershy and Megumi. Her color palette is primary pink and black: pink for tenderness, vulnerability, nurture and kindness; black for power, evil, and fear. Her pose is awkward with a frightened expression. She is lanky and tall, but she slouches due to lack of confidence. Her bangs symbolically cover up her witch's mark which is a black diamond above her right eyebrow, meant to symbolize power and passion like the gemstone.

Her name was inspired by Marie Curie, the only female to win the Nobel Peace Prize twice, and she did so for her contributions to physics and chemistry.

4.1.2.10 Nerys

It was also significant to define at least some characteristics of the main villain in the story, and her early sketch development can be seen in Figure 4.13 below. Nerys is purposefully female as well in order to serve three ideas: the female-centricity of the game, the feminist ideals of the game entity, and as another layer of representation of females. By being a female-centric game, all primary characters are designed to be female. Like My Little Pony, the game's centricity on females also keeps the game from being focused around the girls' relationships with men. Particularly for the feminist agenda of the game entity, I especially did not want to solely villainize males in this game which is all about inclusion and specifically not pitting one gender above another. Lastly, I have seen other issues with media that depicts primary female characters as essentially “perfect” individuals without flaws. This might be seen on the surface as being positive, but this is just as flatly disingenuous as a representation of authentic females as negative representations. Thus, Nerys and her villainy also represent another kind of female who is not necessarily coming from a place that is inherently moral. However her backstory and motivation do allow room to be somewhat sympathetic towards her as a plot device. This was also another chance to recognize and incorporate the negative stereotypes surrounding witches as a subject matter in my piece. Nerys is a fully developed adult woman and is portrayed as a dark evil mistress similar to Angelina Jolie's performance in the Maleficent remakes (another interesting example of media that takes a villain and reimagines their origin story) with a femme fatale archetype. Sexualization of females has not necessarily been the issue in games

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but rather that women have been over-sexualized especially when that quality is their only defining
trait as a character in games.

Figure 4.13: Early sketch development of Nerys

4.1.3 The Story

Because the hero characters were designed first, I had the goals and motivations of all the
girls, and it was a matter of establishing world lore and a story that would allow the girls to thrive
and reach their goals by the end, should the player successfully beat the game by defeating the final
villain.

For the world itself, I wanted to develop how magic originated and how society functioned
because of it. Because the girls are different witches using different schools of magic, the world
lore needed to define how witches and their society formed around this distinct formation of magic
and witch types. (See Game Design Document). Pica’s goals of exploring the world to discover
the different magics implied that the magic schools were somehow separated or isolated to unique
cultures or geographical factors. Having magical elemental powers and potential nations related to
different schools of magic, I looked to the example of Nickelodeon’s animated children’s show Avatar:
The Last Airbender [33] to see how they handled the mature themes of conflicting political systems
centered around the cultural ideology behind the magic powers in its show. The 4 elements: water,
fire, earth, and air, were deeply rooted in each of the 4 nations’ cultural identities, where the nature of the element itself informed that nation’s behaviors and beliefs. When those identities clashed due to fundamental differences in ideology, the show did not shy away from themes of war. Preteens are mature enough to be faced with stories of moral ambiguity, and *Avatar* dared to present themes like that even to young children. Through its example, I could be bold and introduce a rich narrative and world in this game that would still be appropriate to the age group. Inspired by more world building ideas from *Avatar*, symbolism for each school of magic was important to establishing their identities and ideologies. A nod towards traditional femininity and the idea that I find magic to be beautiful, the symbols for each school were to be flowers with meaning incorporate with the tenants of the school.

A potential idea developed where the overarching narrative revolves around warring schools of magic where the girls were to unite the schools to face a common enemy behind one witch who mastered all of the magic types, essentially the plot of *Avatar*, it did not cater to the action-adventure aspect of the game, primarily in regards to exploration. I could only see the characters visiting towns and villages, no longer exploring ancient ruins with puzzles to discover the treasure within. However, the undertones of prejudice and looming discomfort was a strong quality to the *Avatar* story that fit my game especially with Pica as a champion for equality and Mimi suffering already from prejudicial tones. I had to figure out what in the narrative could inspire exploration, item collecting, and spell mastery with purposeful motivation.

As the main character, Pica’s narrative offered the clearest motivation and opposition for establishing the overarching game narrative. Her goal is to learn the different kinds of magic in the world. Sparking her journey as a catalyst should come from something that motivates her to do just that, and the conflict should come from whatever would fundamentally prevent her from doing that. To incite exploration and feed her wish for knowledge, she discovers a ruin and finds an ancient book that hints at a lost art of magic. Eager to chase down more information about this magic, she optimistically heads on her journey. On the other end, the most extreme way to prevent Pica from learning magic is to take it away either by removing it from the world altogether or removing her ability to perform it.

With the chick and the egg situation appearing once more, this idea of a lost magical art combined with a threat to the magical arts themselves, the world lore started to shape further. This lost art could help the situation or be the cause of it, and it is important for the party to explore the
possibilities and investigate, looking to ancient clues and figuring it out before the villain does. It becomes a race to find the secrets to this lost magical art, and with flowers guiding the schools, they must find the lost art of Wisteria. Wisteria blossoms represent exploration, victory over hardship, and releasing burdens [51]; all symbolic for Pica’s journey reflected in the game title and the rest of the story.

One dynamic I wanted to solve was why a grand threat like the removal of witches’ ability to perform magic would warrant a small band of young witches to save the day. A common stress for preteens at their age especially is the feeling of being underestimated by people of authority. Having these witches save the day would be a good underdog sort of story that would empower a young audience should they succeed. However, why were the adults not helping? To add a further layer of underestimation of young witches, it developed that the villain begins the process of removing magic from the elders and the adults. Clove’s grandmother, an ancient but highly experienced eclectic witch was one of the first to lose her powers. Adults begin to lose it their own, and now the only ones left who can stop the villain are the teens. It becomes a race to solve the puzzle before they lose their magic, too. This narrative arc threatens their own identity as witches, and this is a good framework for allowing them to develop their own sense of self and question why they should fight for their magic, metaphorical for the themes of self identification I want to instill in my female audience. It also functions gameplay-wise as an action-adventure where the investigation of ancient ruins and solving a grand puzzle cater to that adventure.

Now that motivation is clear and conflict is there, the climax needed to relate again to Pica and her wanting to learn magic. It is the most integral part of her identity, and in the climactic scene of the game she sacrifices her ability to perform magic to save her friends, who have become more important to her. To complete a happy ending that is focused on empowerment, and magical empowerment in-game specifically, however, Pica sees a creative solution as her magic is draining away and she unlocks the secret to the lost magical art of Wisteria.

4.1.4 The Gameplay

Regarding the choices for mechanics and other gameplay features, I relied on the backbone of the research conducted above to cater to the genre and reported female preferences in games. The mechanics were also heavily considered for their usefulness to the three pillars set out in my game concept. Giving the player a sense of agency was particularly key in the empowering and
playcentric design process, but so too was designing for both the age and the skill level of the target
audience to maximize the effectiveness of that design. I did not want the game to be inaccessible to
my audience due to overly complex mechanics or too high levels of challenge, or perhaps not high
enough of either. It had to be considered that perhaps members of this audience, due to accessibility
reasons, have never played an AARPG before but also that members could be very experienced or
quick to learn.

First and foremost to establish player agency was to determine to what degree the player
had control over the development of the female characters to suit their play style and to design their
own experience. While avatar creation was a desirable trait in games reported by women, these
hero characters and story were purposefully designed around the uniqueness and journey of these
predetermined individuals. Thus, I needed to give the players a way to engage in customizing their
own play experience and developing the characters’ skills within the confines of their classes and set
abilities.

4.1.4.1 The Party System

The choice to have a customizable party system catered directly to this idea. Having a party
system at all was to reinforce the theme of friendship and aid the player by having AI-controlled
allies on the field that could use other class abilities to balance or enhance the skills that the hero
class and perhaps even the player lacked. However, being able to pick who all is in that party
and which of the heroes the player wants to play as throughout the game gives the player a chance
to explore different play styles, heroes, and team makeups. The party size is limited to 3 similar to
Kingdom Hearts so that there is a limit to the abilities in combat with fewer things to keep track of
while still having room to customize. Given the age of my target group and the high focus on being
able to identify with certain characters, there was an additional need to ensure that regardless of
who they picked to play as or see in their desired party, particularly if strategy of team class balance
was disregarded for character personality-related preferences. I had to ensure each girl had enough
range of skills to be both fun to play and effective as a team member. This was another reason
why each girl was given a secondary class ability and each have a melee weapon that can deal some
amount of damage. Every character should still be active, hands-on, and engagingly action-oriented
even if they are primarily in support roles.

Not to say that class abilities or team makeup does not have any effect on gameplay. To
cater to the lowest denominator in case there is a young gamer who does not understand how
to use the feature of switching out characters, the default starting party system of Pica, Clove,
and Sarai is the most balanced team makeup. All of the classes are represented in that trio with
the strongest individual classes as their primary roles, and Pica is the most frontline action-oriented
character who has additional healing abilities accessible to the player for ease of use. Should a player
understand how to switch out characters but not necessarily understand the nuances of balancing
and maximizing class skills, again, the girls were designed for balance of abilities with secondary
classes so any team makeup can still be useful albeit being a bit more imbalanced. However, to
cater to more experienced players, there are higher difficulty modes that then stress the importance
of team makeup in regards to strategy. Certain situations might call for more specialized teams
and abilities. Each team makeup also as a unique team ability which can be especially effective or
ineffective given the situation. This was a common problem to solve with all of the mechanics and
features in this game throughout this process: being simple enough so everyone (ten and older) can
play but have room for added complexity and challenge for the more experienced to master. In
many ways I tried to ease the amount of punishment on more inexperienced players but offer greater
rewards to those who become more experienced as they play it.

4.1.4.2 Combat and Leveling Up

Another layer of player agency that is present in the development of the characters’ skills is
the leveling up system. As a player gains quantifiable experience as they progress through a game,
the player is usually rewarded with some type of enhancement like stat boosts or better gear. Skill
trees and weapon trees, paths that unlock different abilities, skills, or weapons as the player levels up
are common in role playing games as a type of leveling up system that gives the player more choice
in designing a particular play style for a character. A character could become more defense focused
or stealth focused for example, depending on the path developed. These systems can get rather
complex especially if a character has multiple trees and different webs of development. Kingdom
Hearts features a leveling up and ability customization system for the rated E10+ audience, but does
not do so via branching trees. I was inspired the most by some of my favorite tree-based leveling
up systems from Dark Cloud 2 [48] and Dragon Age: Inquisition for including one in this game. I
believed it to be a great way to develop the girls’ weapons and spell abilities to show mastery of
their powers mechanically and going down particular paths of development to form their identity
as a witch thematically. Despite those games being rated T and M, I believe the target audience will be able to handle this kind of mechanic and that it is worth having, even so far as being its own pillar to the game, for the sake of player agency and empowerment (see Appendix A for more details).

Part of the simplification process was to narrow what was available to upgrade and develop via a tree system and how to accomplish each level up. The girls only have their one primary witch-themed weapon which is simplified to having a single binary tree for development. Rather than having another branching tree for the girls’ spells and abilities, unlocking them for use is based on the level of their weapon. See Figure 4.14 to see these structures visually. Once they have gained enough experience through the use of the weapon in combat and have infused the weapon with the Essence requirements as specified by the branch they desire to go down, the weapon will transform visually and unlock the next tier of spell abilities, which includes branch specific spells based on this new form of the weapon. This is thematic for a witch developing her powers and enhancing her weapon which channels her magic to perform even more powerful and specific spells. Then, in order to promote mastery of particular spells to further empower the player, the spells exist in a simple, linear form of leveling up where, similar to weapons, the spell will level up through continued use and infusion of Essence. The next form of a spell, limited to 3 forms, will give it additional strengths and effects represented visually and in their stats.

![Binary tree and linear progression for leveling up weapons and spells](image)

Figure 4.14: Binary tree and linear progression for leveling up weapons and spells
Having different forms of weapons and spells will inherently change the way combat looks and feels for the player. The combat system is designed to be fast-paced and fluid, with epic attack combinations balancing both melee and magic attacks. This fast-paced action will engage the player and actively empower them as they immediately see the effects of their decisions with the controller and in a grandiose way. As spells and weapons also increase in power and effects, so too will the feeling of empowerment in the player. Even if the player falls in the category of being unable to understand the leveling up system in regards to fusion of Essence, the base stats of the players weapon will still increase through the use of combat and can still be used against stronger enemies. The player will just be unable to unlock different forms and different spells beyond the girls starting abilities. Again, allowing everyone to play the game but offering opportunity for those mastering the play to explore more complex ideas and being rewarded for doing that well.

Additional design was considered to balance the effects of spells and abilities in a rock-paper-scissors like relationship. This was to add challenge and thought to how a player might develop not only the individual girl and have agency over her development as a character, but the party makeup as well. For example, even if one girl’s fire-based weapon might not work well against a fire-based enemy, the player might have developed another member of the party to have more water-focused spells who would be better suited for that fight. See the Game Design Document in Appendix A to see the balance of these effects. This also caters to the mentioned interest in strategy that girls reported.

4.1.4.3 Inventory and Item Collection

Many AARPGs have an inventory component to their games. Often this is to house important items that help the player throughout combat or for the story. In Kingdom Hearts, the items are potions and components for boosting stats, and in Ocarina of Time some of the items collected are shown in the inventory as a visual cue to show the player’s progress in the narrative, as the collection of those items is central to the story’s progression, and for the player to know what tools they have to use during gameplay. By including an inventory, I am purposefully encouraging the players to collect items. Collection of items, in turn, then encourages players to continue to explore the world around them, another aspect to the game and to AARPGs that has an appeal to both young girls and the general audience. The player will have the opportunity to gather resources and also be incentivized to revisit places and solve puzzles to discover unique, rare items like in Jak and
However, the items in this game go beyond just being a health potion or a tool for the player to use and keep track of. An essential component to this game is that every single item shown in the player’s inventory has multiple uses. The player will have potions for the characters and tools to use against enemies, but they will also collect Essence gems, ingredients, and other witch-themed components which can all be used to craft additional potions and build helpful tools. However, while each will have its intended purpose, e.g. a health potion restores health or this component builds into a bomb, any item collected throughout the game has another potential function: to break down into raw Essence.

Part of the leveling up requirements is an infusion of Essence. How the inventory and item collection works is that the player can use items as intended or break them down into raw Essence that can then be used to augment their weapons and spells. This infusion method was directly inspired by *Dark Cloud 2* where most inventory items can be broken down into multiple base stats and added to weapons for further development. This was a unique way to give more use to items collected and directly serves my pillar for the leveling system. I have felt the frustration of gathering arbitrary items throughout games that cluttered my inventory, taking up valuable space if the inventory was limited to a certain quantity, ultimately either to simply be sold or thrown away. This not only gives items more purpose in game, accomplishing what I believe to be better and more purposeful design, but I included it especially to encourage and impress on the player certain narrative themes as well.

Because all items in this world can be broken down into its Essence, the player can begin to feel the interconnectedness of everything in that world. This is important to the belief system of the witches in this world and is important narratively for Pica and her friends to ultimately break down the barriers that currently exist between the different schools of magic. Everything is made of Essence and when combined and connected in unique ways together, it can be used to make something new and better. That is how witches are able to perform magic, and being made of Essence themselves, they are just as interconnected with the world as they are to each other regardless of their differences. Because I strive to show the connections between characters and the connection between all people regardless of gender, race, and identity, as an artist, this feature is an integral aspect of my game.

Additionally, having items with multiple purposes helps contribute to a theme that all things
are not limited and can be used in different and creative ways. An item does not have a singular potential to do its one designed purpose in life. Nothing in this game world, and metaphorically for the players - nothing in their life, including themselves, is strictly boiled down to one use and purpose. All people have multiple strengths with unlimited potential, and those can be used in many different circumstances and help solve a multitude of problems. By having an inventory system that allows players to collect and use these multifaceted items, they are actively seeing the variety of uses and purposefully making decisions that capitalize on what they need it to solve. I want young girls especially to feel that their potential is unlimited and to be encouraged to think creatively about problem-solving, seeing the potential in all things as well.

4.1.4.4 Puzzles and Level Design for Linear Progression

Creative problem-solving is naturally and more directly encouraged by purposefully designed puzzles. Solving puzzles can also be rewarding to the player as a sense of accomplishment and encourages logical thinking and development of spatial skills depending on the puzzle design. Many of the puzzles in this game are similar to that of *Ocarina of Time*, where the puzzles are used as obstacles to bar the players progress forward and are generally environment and level based. This means that the temples and dungeons the player is exploring inherently provide the puzzles in their environment and level design. For example, the player might have to solve a puzzle by seeing a pattern in floor tiles and traversing carefully in the right pattern in order to unlock the door forward. These puzzles are often logic-based but are player character action-oriented so the player must actively use the character and their abilities along with their gamer skills to actively solve the problem and perform the solution. Pica’s witch abilities to affect time, Sarai’s spells to illuminate, and Elysia’s tool craftiness for example are character-related abilities that would be used to help solve puzzles throughout the game. Each girl has different skills, further encouraging young girls and players to see their own strengths and the strengths of others in order to work together to solve an issue. It also encourages that not one person has every skill, to help encourage a young girl that she does not have to be good at everything and it is okay when other people have greater skills. Solving puzzles can also be rewarding to the player as a sense of accomplishment, and I want to encourage young females especially to develop their spatial skills.

These puzzles are heavily tied into the level design of the game. Good level and puzzle design is accomplished by teaching the player through the design itself, inherently nudging the player to
make the right decisions. They will introduce patterns and offer the player a chance to observe those patterns and practice what they are trying to teach [94]. In *Ocarina of Time*, a type of enemy is introduced and after the player has sufficiently learned through visual cues and experimentation how to defeat this enemy, the level design will then use those motifs throughout the rest of gameplay, culminating in a boss or continuing to build on these enemy types where the first step is to use the solution methods the player has discovered and already mastered. A theme this game impresses is the multiple use and function of its components, and the characters’ spells and abilities will be used outside of combat as well to solve puzzles and continue forward.

Moving forward in the game is purposefully linear in design. Because of the age group of the demographic and the importance of the main narrative and mastery of skills in the game, the progression through the levels is meant to encourage straightforward, upward progress. By being linear, the players have a clearer direction through the level design of where to go to keep moving forward through the story. The players will be moved through the story more directly and each new level they face will expound upon the skills they learned in the previous level and introduce and teach new ones in the current. This is thematic as well with Pica’s development especially, as she will learn new spells as she meets new people from different schools of magic and the game gets more dangerous and difficult the closer she gets to confronting the main villain which will be the ultimate test and challenge to everything she has learned and everything she believes in.

### 4.1.4.5 Breaking Up Gameplay

Often in game design, it is important to break up repetitive gameplay [27]. In action-oriented games, this can be achieved by different enemy types that introduce new combat while in adventure-oriented games, this can be achieved by having new areas to explore. In AARPGs, this can be done by going back and forth between these gameplay sections of high combat and exploration, but many games additionally offer safe zone areas which are usually towns or villages the player arrives at where they can interact with non-player characters. Sometimes these NPCs are shop owners who will barter with the player or quest givers who will reward the player for doing a task for them. Because girls have reported that they enjoy socializing in-game, *On to Wisteria* also features these safe zones which will allow the player to explore and interact with NPCs. Having others to interact with will also add to the player’s understanding of the different cultures and perspectives in the game, essential to understanding its central conflict.
All three games mentioned in the AARPG exemplar section of the Related Works in this paper all feature minigames as well to some degree to break up gameplay, too. These minigames introduce totally different gameplay mechanics from the base game, which refreshens and brings in new skills to use or develop. Girls especially like having multiple activities and things to do within a game, and minigames serves this offering of variety in gameplay. The minigames in *On to Wisteria* will be centered around each of the main characters and their particular interests (see Minigames in Appendix A), which gives import and insight to these characters. It encourages players to participate in activities that are important to the character, deepening their connection and understanding of that character, while expressing a theme to the audience that exploration of ones interests is important, fun, and rewarding. The player has total freedom to do these activities or not as they are not essential to completing the game, but they are included to provide opportunity to dive deeper into the world and its characters in a refreshing way.

### 4.1.5 Art Style and Audio Design

The visual style and audio design of the game are both focused on instilling in the player senses of whimsy and optimism. These visual and auditory cues will also energize the player. The whimsy is captured in presenting a European fairy-tale like environment that also exaggerates proportions in a stylized 3D cartoon-y way similar to that of the *Kingdom Hearts* franchise and *Dark Cloud 2*. See Figure 4.15 for samples of gameplay from both games. The stylized look as well is more in line with the interests and other media designs for the target demographic, and it also helps keep the energy and tone lighthearted. The adventure should feel more fun than perilous.
Color can especially affect tone. Steven Universe has a whimsical color palette, marked by vibrant pastels primarily in the pink, cyan, and purple families. Environments are close to monochromatic with a primary tone, but have some pops of secondary colors either analogous or complementary to that primary tone. Characters tend to be more saturated to stick out from the background. Vibrance and saturation of color can bring energy to a scene, and the pastels of Steven Universe add a gentle femininity and maturity to the mix. See a few scenes from the show and movie below in Figure 4.16. Following this example, On to Wisteria approaches its color palette with vibrant pastels and more saturation for the characters where the primary colors will be yellows, pinks, and purples. Particularly, the palette will be warm and inviting, especially in safe zone areas but will tend to the cooler side in areas of danger and combat. Yellows as mentioned represent optimism and purples represent magic, both catering to the uplifting themes surrounding this game. The pinks will continue to reinforce a sense of female-centricity with the more feminine tone. In a quick color key test, a small environment concept piece featured below in Figure 4.17 was explored to convey the brightness and contrast of the yellow and purple tones. For the target female audience on the cusp of being teenagers, having too saturated colors felt childish and the energy too high when the characters themselves would bring in a lot of energy. The saturation of the female characters and their magic will stand out more against the muted backgrounds.
In regards to audio design, *Kingdom Hearts* does a great job with having sweet-sounding and magical sound effects which are often high pitched chime-like sounds, clearly unique from those we hear in our natural world, adding to their mysticism. Light tones like these would be abundant in the player’s interactions with this world and contribute to the whimsical, fun nature of the game.

In regards to music, the style would feature more classical instruments to give an archaic fairy-tale like sound and follow the examples of *Kingdom Hearts*, *Dark Cloud 2*, and *The Legend of Zelda* franchises in regards to memorable compositions with defined melodies and themes per character and location. Having main themes that evoke a picture of the character and environment it describes are excellent ways to connect the player with those characters and locations. However, in order to appeal to the modern, young audience, elements of modern pop and electronic dance music will place the game in a unique genre reflectant of modern day. Barring the lyrical component and Scottish influences, an example of this modern sound is the film version of the track “Where No One Goes” from DreamWorks’ *How to Train Your Dragon 2* [18]. Adding these sounds I believe will add a sense of freedom and feel like the player is soaring through an adventure, once again looking to capture that feeling of optimism in order to inspire and energize the player.

Figure 4.16: Environment scenes from *Steven Universe* [88]

Figure 4.17: *On to Wisteria* environment color key concept
4.2 The Trailer

As marketing was a contributing factor to creating the gendered divide we see today, it is appropriate to combat that marketing with a marketing piece of my own. Game teaser trailers seek to capture the essence and spirit of a game in a short amount of time while also being one of the primary ways to garner interest to get people to buy and play it. Since I am targeting female youths, a teaser trailer will be paramount in showcasing the female centricity that caters directly to them. However, because my game is designed to appeal to all genders and audiences who would enjoy the AARPG genre, it is as equally important that a trailer capture the empowering spirit of the game and showcase some of its design.

After looking to the trailers of many of the games and TV shows mentioned throughout this paper, it was observed that many balance cuts of gameplay, snippets of cutscenes from the game, as well as some cutscenes unique solely to the trailer itself that might carry a short narrative arc within the trailer in between the cuts to gameplay and in-game cutscenes. Chosen scenes might hint at the central narrative of the game, but many are not explicit, focusing more on the visual effects, tone, and feel of the game rather than the details. Overall, the choices made especially for AARPGs was to evoke excitement and showcase plenty of fast-paced action. Music plays a major role in instilling that tone, usually showcasing the game’s main track. Some trailers featured dialogue where others let the actions alone speak for the game.

For my game, the feeling of empowerment and the introduction of the main characters were the most important. I felt the best way to prepare the trailer was to feature a narrative arc structure so that way the characters could be introduced and the audience could get a feel for a linear story that builds similarly to the game that focuses on empowering actions to ultimate victory. Going off of the examples in my research, my trailer features gameplay, cutscenes, and a miniature narrative arc solely for the trailer itself. The trailer additionally features many symbolic moments that hint at the main overarching narrative.

My process was to create a scene breakdown in order to organize what each cut reinforced thematically, how each shot showcased either the game, the story, or the characters, and how that fit within the narrative structure. I followed the 3-Act Structure shown in Figure 4.18 of having a setup, confrontation, and resolution, where across those 3 acts the trailer begins with an introduction, moves into rising action where the stakes get higher to the point of a crisis or climax, and resolves
with falling action. See Appendix B for the details of the breakdown.

The Three-Act Structure

ACT I       ACT II       ACT III

setup       rising action stakes get higher crisis

Figure 4.18: Chart from the Elements of Cinema Blog representing the elements of the 3-act narrative structure [54]

Starting with the first act, the trailer introduces a calm scene that is broken up by a rambunctious character diving straight into action-oriented gameplay. Pica and her abilities are given more screen time throughout the trailer than any other character to solidify her place as the flagship. With her diving onto screen, I wanted to make sure the trailer was unmistakably for a game and not a TV show out the gate. The introduction section makes nods to Picas narrative arc, finding a book and leaving home, and then has quick vignettes of each of the other girls first as individuals, and then altogether. The vignettes were meant to introduce the characters in order of how Pica meets them in-game, with a fast depiction of their personalities and values shown mostly by actions shown. The scenes of them together represent the relationship that they have with each other after they have met. Friendship is a central theme to the game, and part of this section is to show the dynamics of their relationships together where it is not always peaceful, but in the end they forgive and they continue to fight together. Because the teaser is so short, each action has to be deliberate and showcase the personalities of the girls at every stage. Sarai and Elysia are more stubborn and butt heads often due to them both wanting to exhibit control over a situation, where Mimi and Clove are more gentle in nature and sit idly by knowing it is not a serious fight. Mimi, the caretaker, gently brushes Clove’s wild hair as she sits on the ground and plays in the dirt. Pica, ever the optimist who appreciates that they are all here together in the moment, jumps in happily.
to have the girls make up by bringing them together and celebrating their friendship.

Moving to the second act of rising action, the miniature narrative arc begins. It is a battle scene where the girls confront a large wave of enemies who are blocking their progress forward. Through this miniature narrative arc, their goal is to continue to make forward progress, always running to the right. Here is where you first get to see a taste of their magic abilities and a stronger sense of action as they rush to overpower the enemies ahead. Mimi sends minions in ahead of her, Elysia smiles slyly as she throws bombs, Clove blows out a poision cloud, Sarai gallantly leaps through with her staff-turned-shield, and Pica boldly comes straight towards camera with her heated up glass weapon. Wanting to represent the rising action and the meat of the game itself as well, there is a cut to a gameplay scene that introduces the party system of the default trio of girls working together in a fight and a cut to an environment scene of the girls travelling together, implying the adventure and exploration part of the game. To raise the stakes, we begin with a confrontational cutscape of the party meeting the main villain, Nerys, who is in a domineering pose above and looking down at the girls. She is a fully developed adult woman and with her positioned above the girls, there is a clear message that these girls are at a disadvantage, hinting at the theme of young people having to fight authority for respect.

This kicks off where the girls are starting to lose the battle. Visually metaphorical, Pica is driven backwards to the left of the screen, halting her forward progress to the right. Stakes are raised even higher as the girls become surrounded by enemies, halting any movement at all. In this perilous tone, tensions build with faster cuts. Additionally, I wanted to show the sense of narrative depth that comes from these characters' weaknesses and fears, and these fast cuts quickly go through them adding to the sense of dread and peril thats going on in the battle scene. Sarai is thrown down in a position of powerlessness looking up at a queen and throne that put her there, introducing the theme of trying to meet expectations. Elysia's anxiety of being caught and taken culminates in her terror and her usually confident self collapses, introducing the themes of feeling small and helpless. Mimi is attacked by her own magic, introducing themes of not feeling in control. Pica holds Clove's body and unleashes magic in a rage, introducing themes of loss, whirlwind emotions, and consequences to actions.

At the height of this build, we get to the climax and see whether or not these girls will rise to victory or admit defeat. They rise above the challenge by fighting together, friendship and empowerment reinforced again, and Pica as the main character is highlighted with an ultimate epic
ability that secures their victory. Continuing their run forward, a last component that is important to the sense of player agency and identification with the characters is presenting a run cycle in gameplay that shows the controlling of each main character. This communicates that the player can play as any of the girls, a unique feature that reinforces identification. The trailer ends with the girls arriving at their destination at the cliff’s edge, looking off into the distance, representing forward adventure and optimism for the future. Pica, in classic, epic flair, daringly jumps off the cliff and reaches for the Sun, symbolic of her narrative arc racing towards the lost magic art of the Cosmos. The audience seeing this trailer will feel adventurous and share in the girls’ victory and hope for that better future.

Augmenting all of these tones and themes is the music track itself which plays a key component in having the audience feel the emotions of the scenes especially since I specifically chose not to have dialogue because the song captured all of the emotions I needed. I use the song “Edge of Freedom” by composer Bo Vaughn and even the title encompasses the story in this trailer: running to the edge and overcoming all challenges towards freedom and a bright future ahead. It uses both classical and modern instruments exactly as described in the audio design section above to tell an optimistic story of adventure and victory. The music rises and falls with the story beats in the trailer. There is also a clear melody motif which represents Pica and her bright, confident personality, and the actions of the trailer shown during each instance of this tune are purposefully powerful images of the girls using their abilities and ending on an image of Pica. The instruments here are also lighter and feel more feminine, and the melody itself is happy and encouraging, inviting the audience in.

These feelings establish the female centricity of my game and the sense of empowerment I want to instill in my target audience.

Teaser trailers are meant to showcase the feeling of playing a game and by introducing the characters, their abilities, and allowing them to rise to victory in a short story despite all odds within the trailer, the audience shares that empowering victory and can look forward to experiencing those same feelings in-game.
Chapter 5

Conclusions and Discussion

While this project focused on the theoretical design of a game concept using research and exemplary related works to build upon ideas that should appeal to the young female audience, the next steps to prove that the principles and design decisions actually do appeal to that market is to present it and playtest its effectiveness. It is also hard to gauge the true necessity for games that are geared towards young females when little research is being conducted or exists related to them in their relation to games. The absence in itself could be a rallying cry to ask for more research related to this market, but I feel many steps will have to be taken first in order to legitimize the group as a viable market for games and, in another topic in its entirety, to continue to legitimize the video game medium as an academic subject worthy of study.

Much of the market issue is reliant on the developers in the game industry. Rebecca Sugar’s comment on creation of authentic media comes from having members of the team be from the group thats being represented. In the game industry, only 22% of game developers are women, and only 11% of women in the industry do develop in comparison to other jobs held by women in the industry [15] [4]. The balance of perspectives here is still not balanced and the industry as a whole is still predominantly male. Further diversity should be achieved in the industry as well, but hopefully more designers will pioneer more inclusive games at the AAA studio level.

On to Wisteria is a game concept that took inspiration from many AARPGs geared towards the young male market as a structure for a compelling gameplay experience within the popular male-centric genre. It took this reference and designed an empowering female-centric experience in order to encourage young female audiences to play more video games. Playing games is becoming normative
to society, but many social groups are currently misrepresented, underrepresented, or overlooked by major developers as target markets for new games. While I believe the theoretical framework for a young feminist game was supported by the research and execution of this project’s game design document and trailer, there is still more that can be done to bring a fully realized game production like what is suggested in this theoretical design to the actual market shelf.

Just like the 46% of female players who can still find a way to love all kinds of games despite the market offerings being male-centric, I believe many boys can also find ways to love all kinds of games that could be female-centric as well. In both, the challenge is to balance representation and inclusion so that the normative society of the game is diverse and rich with character depth, much more like our society in real life. Not that every game has to have an equal number of one gender to another, one race to another, etc., but that hopefully games reach a point where the portrayals of characters and their life experiences are treated with equal respect and strive for authenticity. What I presented in this project as well is not the only solution, and I am hopeful it will come to a point in game development and society that no one bats an eye at what a hero looks like or where they come from or who they love. We have a long way to go and I think it starts by throwing more bold games like On to Wisteria into the ring, but eventually the market will balance out so any group, or any combination of groups, is just represented in authentic, engaging stories about unique people.
Appendices
Appendix A The Game Design Document

The following insert contains the written Game Design Document for this project. It details the essential components that comprise the game design for On to Wisteria including a broad introduction of the game that introduces the concept, purpose, target audience, target platforms, and key features of the game along with sections detailing the story, characters, gameplay, art, and audio design. A revision history is also described to show when components were developed or changed. Much of the thought process and early development decisions from versions 1.00-1.04 are detailed in the Design History Log at the end of the document.

On to Wisteria

Game Design Document

Created by Kira Foglesong

DPA-8910 Master’s Thesis Research
Clemson University
Fall 2018 - Fall 2019
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<td>Worldbuilding, Narrative, Characters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

II. Game Introduction

A. Purpose

The higher purpose of the game is to create something that encourages young teenage female gamers to partake of the action-adventure role-playing genre. It’s a game where they can feel empowered by a game with heroines they can relate to. No other mainstream action-adventure RPG’s out there currently target this market. The industry has made strides in creating games with female leads, but these are in more mature games targeted towards older teens and adults. There are no titles that target the younger preteen market specifically for girls. I want to create a game that emboldens and empowers the player, and specifically one that is geared towards empowering young females who, at a crucial time of change in their life, might find comfort and excitement in a game that’s all about finding individual strengths and being confident in yourself and your abilities.

B. Game Concept

Play as Pica, an optimistic and spunky young witch on a journey to learn and discover new magics, who finds herself on a quest to stop a force that’s threatening all of witchkind by removing their abilities to perform magic at all. Kingdom Hearts meets the Powerpuff Girls in this epic 3D action-adventure game all about magical discovery, exploration, and mastery of magical combat. As Pica, lead a group of other young witches on a quest to champion for magical freedom and harmony amongst different Schools of magic by embodying the creativity of spellcraft with
your own customized magical powers and weapons. Master the Essence of magic and show the world what you can do.

This original IP is planned to be a trilogy series of games that matures over time as the characters grow and the franchise’s first audience grows older, too. The later games would be grander in scale, include even more content, and push the characters’ story through more mature themes, but still keep the heart and soul of the first game.

C. Genre

The game is a third-person 3D action-adventure RPG with some elements from the JRPG genre. The narrative surrounding the game is a fantasy adventure.

D. Target Audience & Platforms

The target audience is pre-teen girls ages 10 to 12 to be released on console and PC. The game hopes to have an audience outreach beyond this target audience, inclusive of males in this age group and older audiences, but it is primarily geared toward the stated market. The game could also be a PS4 or Nintendo Switch exclusive due to its similarities to other exclusive IP’s on these platforms. The Switch is also a console that typically targets a younger audience.

E. Look and Feel

The game will have a similar look to other 3D action-adventure games like Kingdom Hearts or The Legend of Zelda franchises with the spirit of a light-hearted and optimistic adventure. It feels epic and uplifting with themes of prevailing against all odds, mastering your own style of play, and rising to your fullest potential. The journey does not feel exceptionally perilous but is geared around the feeling of rising to the challenge head on and succeeding.

F. Gameplay Overview/ How to Play

The game is played by controlling the main character from a third-person perspective whose objective is to explore the world, learn new magic, and defeat the evil that is plaguing the land. The character and player will learn how to utilize their own spells, develop their powers, and build up to their own unique fighting style that allows them to rise above any challenge the game throws at them.

1. Game Progression

You’ll start the game as Pica in her hometown, learning how to use magic and getting introduced to combat, creating magical items, and basic gameplay as Pica explores a ruin near her home. The story picks up when she discovers a book that hints at a lost art of magic, and she leaves town to uncover its secret. Once she leaves, the game will follow a linear progression based off of a linear narrative that drives a consistent theme of travelling to a new location, uncovering new information by interacting with the locals, exploring their
surrounding area, taking out enemy threats, and then moving on to the next location. Towns will be safe zones where you can gather and discover new resources, play different minigames, and fulfill side quests to break up the flow of travel and combat in dungeon-like areas. This pattern will continue as the general play flow even when the objective shifts from uncovering the lost art into discovering its secrets before the villains until the climax of the story where you must fight Nerys, the villain behind it all, to save the world.

2. Key features
a) Empowerment - the game will focus around instilling feelings of empowerment in the player through the characters, story, soundtrack, combat, and customization mechanics.

b) All Things Magic Real-Time Combat System - the combat system will be fast-paced and fluid, full of epic attack combinations of both melee and magical attacks for an empowering sense of badassery.

c) Essence based Upgrade and Leveling Up System - another feature will be a system of leveling up your weapon and spell abilities by collecting items throughout the game that you can not only use as intended but also break them down to their Essence (see Story) which provide stats that you can add to the weapons and spells that you want to level up. Changing the Essence of objects however will have different effects in how the equipment functions and looks, offering a gameplay experience that’s full of magical experimentation to create builds that suit the player’s gameplay style.

3. Win/Loss State
You win the game by playing through and following the main storyline to its completion and defeating the last boss, consequently saving the world. The loss state of the game simply occurs by not completing the story, but throughout the game for minor losses in battles or environmental hazards where the player character perishes, there will be a checkpoint based system for respawnning and trying that section over again.

III. Story
A. World
1. A world where everything is comprised of the 6 Essences. The four Elemental Essences: Fire, Water, Earth, and Air, and the Planar Essences: the Divine (ethereal plane) and the Cosmos (physical plane). Every creature, plant, rock, etc. can be broken down into these Essences and matter can be changed, enhanced, and even created by infusing and combining Essences.
2. A society of witches that had split the use of Magic into 10 different Schools: Abjuration, Restoration, Conjuration, Evocation, Divination, Illusion, Necromancy, Transmutation, Enchantment, and Thaumaturgy. The current society only has 9, as Thaumaturgy was lost (see History below). These Schools are dictated by their own tenants that in turn dictate practitioners’ ethical code and behaviors. Each school is represented by a flower, and many refer to the school by its flower rather than its proper name. Each is led by a Highmaster who represents that School in the Grand Council that upholds the laws and ethics of magic users worldwide.

3. History:

   At the dawn of time, the 6 Essences fused to create the universe and everything in it. Ancient creatures were able to manipulate the Essences to perform what became magic to this world, and humans, too, were able to observe this, feel the Essences in the world, and use them to perform magic. Now mages, referred to as witches if female and wizards if male, early history saw emergence in a variety of specializations. As studies continued and the use of magic became widespread, witches and wizards were able to classify the use of magics into the 10 Schools. In the beginning, all witches and wizards were able to perform, at least a rudimentary degree, spells from all 10 schools and manipulate any of the 6 Essences, even combinations. Master witches and wizards could perform outstanding spells in a few Schools, having become experts in their field of study. These mages naturally rose to leadership positions in society, and together they crafted ethical codes for their respective Schools, and in doing so, created the ethical codes for the rest of society. Each School had their own hierarchy and governing style, but a Grand Council was formed with the head of each School in order to govern and uphold the ethics of society worldwide.

   However, standing above all other mages even in the Grand Council, was a highmaster Thaumaturgist, who could manipulate the Cosmos Essence to affect time, space, and even the very fabric of the universe. Extraordinarily rare that a Thaumaturgist would emerge with such mastery beyond a few time pause and gravitation spells, but nevertheless, Thaumaturgy itself, represented by the Wisteria flower, was seen as a god-like school to be both reverently admired but also feared: how do you keep in check a mage who can manipulate the very fabric of the universe?

   Over time, the conduct of the different Schools began to shape differences in political and religious thought surrounding the tenants and principles of each (as determined by the masters of the School). Mages ascribed themselves to certain Schools, and their perspectives on life morphed to the beliefs of the School. Naturally, differences in opinions amongst the masses caused chaos. Schools and their practitioners began to separate and travel the rest of the world, similar Schools settling in their own towns and cities to establish
their own order. Over time, although many mages grew more powerful in their respective fields, society began to lose the ability to perform multiple Schools. The ability to manipulate Essences was never lost, but new generations of mages were born being unable to perform anything beyond the few Schools they were born under, with tendencies to manipulate only a fraction of the 6 Essences depending on the specialties of their villages. Nations formed with armies of mages crusading that their School(s) was dominant and nations clashed. In the greatest war of the civilized world, the first Highmaster Thaumaturgist brought peace by separating governing bodies of cities and nations from the Grand Council and masters of the respective 10 schools. The Grand Council can determine the best conduct for the performance of magic and punishment for magical crimes, especially those working against magical society, but general conduct and government should not be limited by a particular School of magic.

Eras of peace were abundant as witches and wizards proliferated throughout the land. Witches and wizards were not the only sentient magical creatures in the land, but the remaining grand creatures were in decline as mages expanded. Small animals could still manipulate Essences, but only in a primitive way. The 2nd Highmaster Thaumaturgist emerged by studying the ancient creatures, but in exchange for the power and understanding of high Wisteria, the mage devolved into a delusional madness, drunk with power. Threatened by the thought of other high Thaumaturgists, this mage began to hunt the last of the ancient beings. When all were eradicated, the mage turned to removing the threat of any Thaumaturgists, committing mass genocide of any witch or wizard who showed signs of practicing the art.

A second great war erupted as the world’s nations banded together to stop this Highmaster. It was a period of pure desolation as the entire wizarding world could only hold back a single Highmaster Thaumaturgist, never truly defeating him. At best they could produce a stalemate during battle. More often than not, stalemates did not occur and many mages lost their lives.

The 3rd highmaster emerged and was able to defeat the evil one, who after 50 years of wielding high Wisteria had completely slipped into madness, having lost any semblance of their humanity. Now the savior of the entire magical world, the 3rd highmaster used his abilities to wipe his name from history, limit the abilities of all magical beings to perform Wisteria with the Essence of the Cosmos, and removed his abilities to perform magic at all in atonement for manipulating the universe this last time and stunting magical development.

Wisteria became a lost art. Manipulation of the Cosmos Essence continued as that was a key Essence in many of the other Schools of Magic, but with the passage of time, the savior and the 10th School of Magic became pure legend, a mere fairytale to aspiring witches and wizards wanting to revolutionize their field.
B. Game Narrative

1. A millenia passed. While the Schools and governing bodies of nations remain separate, the draw of similar people living in the same place remained. Deeply rooted in society are prejudices against other witches and wizards who performed magics opposite in principle and Essence structure to their own skills. For example, Light witches who are primarily experts in Abjuration (defensive/protection magic) revere life and find the Dark witches who practice Necromancy to be barbarians and the embodiment of evil who disturb the natural rest of death. Civil unrest plagues society, but the Grand Council has kept the peace until now. Until the day the Highmaster Diviner sees a future of pure destruction and sees a witch perform magic she’s only heard about in legends. The same day the entire Grand Council wakes to having lost all of their abilities to perform magic. As her magic fades, she sees a group of young witches emerging from the ashes of destruction and a new Highmaster of Wisteria.

2. The gameplay begins in a remote desert village where the player wakes up one morning as the bright, optimistic young witch named Pica (see Main Character). She continues her exploration of the desert around her, something she does to escape much of the boredom she has at home but also to learn more about magic and practice it. On this morning’s journey, she discovers an ancient ruin, and at its heart, a magic tome that hints at a lost magical art called Wisteria. Eager to learn more, she packs up and leaves for a journey with this new book in tow, hoping to visit all of the nations throughout the land to find any clues as to what this art used to be. Along the way, she meets other young witches in different witch villages/towns who begin to show Pica that there’s a greater issue at hand: the ability to use magic is disappearing in witches. Convinced this lost art will be the solution to the problem, Pica, now accompanied by a small group of witches, races to find the secrets to this lost art before all of their abilities are lost as well. On this journey, Pica will be faced with many realities that shake her core beliefs in the awesomeness of magic and threaten to beat down her naive, optimistic worldview. However, she also learns more about herself and the beauty of magic, and by the ultimate climax, she is able to stand firm in her belief in magic and in witches. Although practicing magic means everything to her, she sacrifices it all to save her friends and their abilities in the final confrontation with Nerys. In that sacrifice as her magic fades, she is able to see a fundamental connection between herself and magic that allows her to unlock the secret to Wisteria. She bursts forth with greater magic and she and her friends have one more battle with Nerys. Together they triumph, and Pica uses her new understanding of Wisteria to restore all of those who have lost their powers.
IV. Characters
   A. Player Characters
      a. There are 5 playable characters in the game. The main story revolves around Pica, but 4 additional witches will be met along the journey and become playable either by the player or through AI-control as members of the player’s party (see Combat). Each witch has particular focuses in different Schools of Magic and start out by default aligning more with certain Essences. Each character is limited mechanically by a finite list of spells that she is able to learn and master throughout the game, but this list will contain a unique variety of abilities offered to the player and is unlockable based on how the player wants to develop the characters. Many of the spells and abilities were inspired by Dungeons & Dragons as a base and just a few examples are sampled in the character descriptions below.

      b. Class System
         i. There are 5 classes featured in this game, where each girl has a primary class and a secondary class. Most of her spells and abilities will be based on her primary class, but her secondary class offers a small variety of spells as well as build styles for the player. The 5 classes are as follows:
            1. Damage - deals higher damage, meant to defeat enemies
            2. Heal - heals the party, removes harmful status effects
            3. Tank - has greater defense, meant to attract enemies and/or protect the party
            4. Enhance - enhances and strengthens the party with status effects such as increase defense, speed, damage, etc.
            5. Sabotage - diminishes and weakens enemies with status effects such as poison, decrease speed, etc.
### Main Character: Pica

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Pica Barakani</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>The Explorer &amp; The Scholar. Bony but toned, tan skin, short spiky purple hair, snaggletooth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>Optimistic, spunky, adventurous, easygoing, daring, free, inspiring, protective, natural leader, intelligent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witch Type + Familiar</td>
<td>Sand Witch, Desert Gecko (pet named Jelly)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magic: Essence/Schools</td>
<td>Fire, Sand (Earth), Cosmic : Destruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spells/Ability Examples</td>
<td>Manipulation of Time (&amp; later Space: gravitation), sand, fireball, minor healing, phasing, meteor storm, moonbeam &amp; sunbeam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>Damage / Heal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weapon</td>
<td>Magic Tome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>Sandboarding, athletics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interests</td>
<td>Magic, exploration, sandboarding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dream</td>
<td>To master every School of Magic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation for Journey</td>
<td>To discover the Lost Art of Wisteria, to protect the magic way of life</td>
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<tr>
<td>Origin</td>
<td>Remote desert village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character Reference</td>
<td>Soma (Food Wars!), Ruby Rose (RWBY), Tracer (Overwatch)</td>
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d. Character Two: Clove

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Clove Len Tau</th>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>The Doctor. Deaf, small, long dark green hair, pale olive skin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>Gentle, innocent, feral, anti-social, curious, insightful</td>
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<tr>
<td>Witch Type + Familiar</td>
<td>Swamp Witch, Frog</td>
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<tr>
<td>Magic: Essence/Schools</td>
<td>Plants (Earth, Water), Divine : Restoration, Divination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spells/Ability Examples</td>
<td>Poison cloud -&gt; prismatic spray, detection, future sight/augury, major healing, entangle/ensnaring strike, hail of thorns, remove ailments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>Heal / Sabotage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weapon</td>
<td>Flowering Wand Stick</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>Medicine, insight, arcane eye, animal care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interests</td>
<td>Bugs, mud, growing plants, meeting creatures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dream</td>
<td>To live a peaceful life with her grandmother surrounded by nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation for Journey</td>
<td>To find the cure to restoring her grandmother’s magic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Origin</td>
<td>Orphan found and taken in by the eclectic old witch who resides deep in the swamp away from civilized folk</td>
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<tr>
<td>Character Reference</td>
<td>General Amaya (The Dragon Prince)</td>
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e. Character Three: Sarai

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sarai du Châtelet</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>The Leader. Tall, dark skin, full muscular shape, light hair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>Refined, elegant, strong, unyielding, clean, prim, feline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witch Type + Familiar</td>
<td>Light Witch, Lion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Magic: Essence/Schools</td>
<td>Air, Divine : Abjuration, Evocation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spells/Ability Examples</td>
<td>Smite, Aura of power, shield, true strike, beacon, shell, light blast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>Tank / Enhance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weapon</td>
<td>Magic Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>Investigation, intimidation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interests</td>
<td>Music, tactics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dream</td>
<td>To be the best Queen when she assumes the throne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation for Journey</td>
<td>To prove herself capable of saving the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Origin</td>
<td>Princess in one of the flourishing nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character Reference</td>
<td>Weiss Schnee (RWBY), Glimmer (She-Ra)</td>
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f. Character Four: Elysia

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Elysia Meitner</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>The Inventor and The Entrepreneur. Wears legs prosthetics, average build but short in height, red hair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>Inventive, witty, practical, theatrical, mischievous, greedy, confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witch Type + Familiar</td>
<td>Sea Witch, Octopus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magic: Essence/Schools</td>
<td>Water, Cosmic : Illusion, Alteration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spells/Ability Examples</td>
<td>Damage and magic wards, barriers, lightning, power enhancers, haste, invisibility, setting traps, illusions/distractions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>Enhance / Damage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weapon</td>
<td>Cutlass</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>Acrobatics, stealth, sleight of hand, performance, set traps, bombs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interests</td>
<td>Urban legends, robotics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dream</td>
<td>To retire early and wealthy on her own private island</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation for Journey</td>
<td>To find rare Essence pieces for fueling her inventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Origin</td>
<td>Seafarer who ran away from taking care of her destitute family, sends them most of the money she earns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character Reference</td>
<td>Flynn Rider (Tangled), Sokka (Avatar: The Last Airbender)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
g. Character Five: Mimi

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Miriam (&quot;Mimi&quot;) Ludmila Kurie</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>The Molecular Gastronomist and The Caretaker. Gaunt and gangly, pink hair, ashy pale skin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>Shy, insecure, passionate, unstable, earnest, sincere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witch Type + Familiar</td>
<td>Dark Cauldron Witch, Fruit Bat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magic: Essence/Schools</td>
<td>Divine : Necromancy, Alchemy, Transmutation, Conjuration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spells/Ability Examples</td>
<td>Animate, curse, dark shield, blight, madness, disintegrate, frighten, spirit guardians, leech life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>Sabotage / Tank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weapon</td>
<td>Spoon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>Perception, religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interests</td>
<td>Cooking, reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dream</td>
<td>To have her own café with potion drinks and pastries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation for Journey</td>
<td>To change her magic affiliation (to convince herself she isn’t evil)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Origin</td>
<td>City run by dark mages, she’s afraid/ashamed of her own powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character Reference</td>
<td>Fluttershy (My Little Pony), Megumi (Food Wars!), Elsa (Frozen)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
B. Non-Player Characters

The player will be able to interact with a multitude of NPC’s especially in the safe zones of towns and villages. Of the interactable NPC’s some will be shopkeepers who offer goods to the player, others will offer side quests, and others will be key characters in driving the plot. There will be other crowd NPC’s throughout the towns that the player will be unable to interact with beyond collisions.

C. Enemies and Bosses

The grunt-like enemies that the player encounters most often in dangerous areas are elemental and Essence based creatures being manipulated by the darker forces of the main villain, Nerys. She has additionally summoned dark spirits to aid in her efforts to eradicate magic abilities in witches. These dark spirits possess many of the ancient creatures that reside in the temples and ruins that the girls explore. Bosses will include some of these possessed creatures as well as sympathetic witches and wizards that have joined Nerys’ cause. Nerys is a ceremonial witch who uses summoning and transmutation circles to perform magic. Motivated by the disgust and rage she has towards her past where her studious exploration of magic was used by older witches to abuse others for the sake of School superiority, she figures out how to use Cosmic Essence with Transmutation to block a witch’s ability to use magic. She stands as the potential future that Pica could go down should her bright, optimistic eyes be tainted by the harsh realities of the world and her knowledge of the magical arts turn to evil use.

V. Gameplay

A. Narrative Play Flow/ Game Progression

The narrative will be told through a series of cutscenes that take place whenever the character or the player reaches certain points in the game’s story. During these times the game will feel more like a cinematic film rather than a game as control is taken away from the player while they watch the story unfold in more detail. The travel and dungeon gameplay is a vehicle for progressing through the narrative and experiencing and building upon the narrative and its message. Throughout the game there are opportunities to do side quests from NPC’s as well as little mini games and other aspects of the gameplay. These events do not inherently have an impact on the game’s progression forward and are unnecessary for the player to beat the game, but they do affect the player’s experience of and exposure to the rest of the game world, which is hopefully rich in interesting lore. The player will get to experience other aspects of the world and get a better understanding of the culture and society in which the main narrative takes place if the player chooses to do these things.
B. Mechanics

1. Movement
You will be in control of the main character in third person perspective, where you will be able to run, walk, jump, swim, and climb with the desired hero character. Additionally, depending on certain spells and abilities that are developed, the character will also be able to fly, swing, and use vehicles such as sandboards or brooms.

2. Actions
Actions that the player will be able to do is interact with NPC’s who might offer up quests or provide shops and ways to buy items, and interact with the world itself by being able to open chests, open doors, and break items. They’ll be able to harvest and mine materials naturally occurring in the world for ingredients. The character will be able to interact with puzzle elements in case of levers or pulling on rope, etc. that might need to be actions in order to solve the puzzle also depending on the spells and abilities that the player unlocks. The player will be able to turn invisible, speed up time, pause time, amongst other spell like abilities based on the characters in the party. There will be minigames such as potion creation where the player will be able to experiment with ingredients and potion making or Alchemy. This gameplay style will be completely different than just the ability to interact with objects in the main gameplay. Fast travel. Pick allies.

3. Combat
The combat system is all in real-time. The player can initiate an attack on an enemy by attacking it first or being detected by the enemy AI.
   a) Once engaged in combat, the player can disengage by running away to safer zones outside of the patrol area of the enemies who will only chase you so far.
   b) If the player would like to engage further, they will have access to two types of attacks that can be combined in a multitude of combinations:
      (1) Standard melee - standard attack with a primary weapon that with repeated, properly timed single button presses will express different melee attack combos. These attacks will have damaging magical effects in their combos on top of the melee damage which reflect the magical Essence makeup of the weapon. Combos do have a finite end and repeated presses will just cycle back through the same animations, but there is no limit to how many standard attacks can be used.
      (2) Special Abilities and Spells - at the start of combat, the player will have already mapped abilities and spells to the controller's other buttons and triggers. On top of and in between melee attacks, the player can activate these spells and abilities, all of which have some
sort of grand magic effect. There is no limit on how many of these attacks you can use, but these combat moves will be on a cooldown whose length depends on the ability itself and the player's mastery level of the spell. Different spell types and abilities might include but are not limited to:

(a) Elemental like fire, water, ice, wind, earth, lightning, etc.
(b) Time based magics for speeding up/slowing down time, rewinding time, or seeing into the future
(c) Summoning magics like spawning spectral weapons, creatures, or undead beings that fight alongside you
(d) Dark magics that debuff enemies with poisons or traps, have occult themes like necromancy or dimensional magic (creates black holes or high damage inflicting orbs)
(e) Supportive magics that buff allies or heal them

c) Another added dimension to the combat system will be a party system where the player can choose two of their allies to join them in combative situations. Cutscenes will feature the entire party, but gameplay will only have the two other ally partners also walking around, interacting with the world with you, and fighting alongside you. The player may choose to be any of the characters.

d) Although there are only 6 Essences to build up (see Leveling Up), the 6 Essences can be used to produce 10 different magic power/damage types that balance against each other. Below is the chart of powers and their strengths and weaknesses based on the damage types they deal:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Strong Against</th>
<th>Vulnerable To</th>
<th>Weak Against</th>
<th>Resistant To</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fire</td>
<td>Plants, Ice</td>
<td>Rock, Water</td>
<td>Lightning, Fire</td>
<td>Fire, Light</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>Rock, Fire</td>
<td>Plants, Lightning</td>
<td>Ice, Water</td>
<td>Water, Dark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ice</td>
<td>Air, Plants</td>
<td>Rock, Fire</td>
<td>Water, Ice</td>
<td>Ice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wind</td>
<td>Plants, Rock</td>
<td>Ice, Lightning</td>
<td>Fire, Wind</td>
<td>Wind, Ghost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lightning</td>
<td>Water, Air</td>
<td>Rock</td>
<td>Fire, Lightning</td>
<td>Lightning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plants</td>
<td>Rock, Water</td>
<td>Fire, Ice</td>
<td>Lightning, Plants</td>
<td>Plants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock</td>
<td>Fire, Ice, Lightning</td>
<td>Wind, Water, Plants</td>
<td>Rock</td>
<td>Rock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghost</td>
<td>Light</td>
<td>Dark</td>
<td>Ghost, Wind</td>
<td>Poison, Ghost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dark</td>
<td>Ghost</td>
<td>Light</td>
<td>Water, Dark</td>
<td>Poison, Dark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light</td>
<td>Dark</td>
<td>Ghost</td>
<td>Fire, Light</td>
<td>Poison, Light</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Inventory
The game will have an extensive inventory system that holds all things related to the player: magical items that can be used in combat or outside of combat, weapons, ingredients, and other research related materials for magic like recipes and instructions, quest items, and an adventurer’s journal that has lore entries for things discovered in the game. Besides the journal and essential quest items, anything in the inventory can be used as intended, e.g. a health potion would restore health, and also be used as upgrades for other inventory items (see Leveling Up). Every item has inherent stats related to its Essence makeup, the basis of all magical things in this fantasy world. All items present in the inventory system can be broken down to their Core Essence and infused with the Essence of the item you are attached it to. The inventory would have a limit on how many items you can hold and expansions will be available at different points in the game. There will also be limits to the max quantities of certain items like health potions that the player can carry, but base materials and ingredients will not. Inventory is only restricted by quantity of unique entries, e.g. 1 health potion takes up the same single inventory slot as 10 health potions, so realistic weight of these items or weight of equipment has no impact on gameplay or the ability to hold onto these items.

5. Levelling Up/Customization Trees

![Image of customization trees for weapons and spells]

a) The player will gain experience from completing story beats, side quests, and defeating enemies. These experience points will and can be used to level up characters and their abilities. Story related rewards from quests will affect the player character stats like maximum health and max mana. Defeating enemies with a melee weapon will build experience points for melee weapons, and defeating enemies with special abilities or spells will build experience points for those special abilities or spells.
b) The player can then use these experience points to upgrade the stats of their spells and weapons by infusing these items and abilities with the Essence of other items broken down from their inventory.

c) The player character weapons exist in a binary tree like structure. Changing the Essence of your weapon to certain degrees will evolve it down throughout this tree, both aesthetically and mechanically. For example, an ice rapier that is infused with more fire than ice would change the Essence of the weapon so much that it might evolve into a fire broadsword.

d) Once the next tier of weapon has been achieved, that tier’s spells become available to the player to use and customize into their loadout of spells in combat. Spells exist in a linear leveling system where through use and infusion of essence, they will evolve into grander and more powerful effects until max level.

e) Allies as well have their own spell and weapon trees. It is up to the player to customize the Allies’ progression just as much as they customize their own, but allies’ trees might have a much more limited weapon tree and learnable spell list in comparison to Pica.

6. Minigames

A variety of minigames will be available for the player in the safe zone town areas. The minigames will be an extension of the interests of the 5 main characters. For Pica, she offers the player an opportunity to partake in action-packed and high-speed sandboard races, akin to Jak and Daxter’s hoverboard races or the snowboard races of SSX. For Clove, she’d have a witch-familiar caretaking center akin to Sonic 2’s Chao Garden. Sarai’s would involve music, Elysia’s would be a gambling game, and Mimi’s would be a potion-making cooking game. Rewards for winning or completing the challenges offered by these minigames would result in Essence gems or other rewards for the player that they can then use to augment regular gameplay.

7. Economy

Gold or some other currency will be used for a basic economic system in the game. Ingredients, items, potions, weapons, recipes, etc. will all be for sale at merchants in each city and you will be able to sell resources as well. Certain characters and guides might even require monetary compensation for items where a certain amount of currency is needed, and rewards from errands given by other characters might be of a monetary nature. Adding just a bit of depth to the mercantile system is that items will be valued based on the stats of the item (an upgraded potion will be valued more than a non-upgraded potion) and the preferences and predisposition of the merchant. Items that are difficult to obtain for a nation due to lack of available resources will be worth more both buying and selling due to higher demand, and vice versa, if a nation
is abundant with a particular ingredient, it will be cheaper to buy and worth less selling to anyone in that nation. If a merchant is particularly stingy or prejudiced against particular items of other coven origins, you can expect fewer returns on trying to sell those items to that merchant.

C. UI

1. Basic HUD elements will indicate the status of the character’s health and mana as well as provide a visual for ability cooldowns and items that can be accessed and used during combat.

2. There will be a UI menu, potentially a spatial or non-diegetic element, that houses the player’s inventory as well as the spell and weapon webs of the main hero and all allies, maps, and research notes discovered throughout the game. Customization of equipment and spell attributes will take place here as well as fast travel.

3. Lastly there will be another non-diegetic UI element that’s a pause menu with general gameplay options including things like sound volume, axes of camera rotations, closed captioning options, and exiting the game.

D. Victory Conditions

In order to beat the game, you simply have to follow the main linear storyline and succeed in defeating the final boss. The necessary sequence of events that are prerequisites to reaching that final boss are chronological in the story, so the only condition to win is to simply let the story take you along for the ride. There will be secondary achievements to obtain through collectibles, side quests, and minigames, but these will have no impact on whether you win the game or not.

E. Hours of Gameplay

This first iteration of the game is shooting for a main story that could take anywhere from 12-18 hours, but with the added gameplay outside of the main story and achievements for 100% completion, the game should provide up to 25-30 hours of content for the most casual player. An average play session might be between 30 minutes and 2 hours. Subsequent titles in the series should expand the game to include more content akin to the length of Kingdom Hearts games whose main game can take on average 30-40 hours and added gameplay and 100% completion pushes that to approximately 50-60 hours.

VI. Art

The overall visual style of the game resembles the 3D styles of games like Kingdom Hearts 3, Ni No Kuni, and The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild. The visual style of the characters will be different, somewhat similar to the characters in the TV show RWBY, but the feel of proportion and level of detail the games mentioned are a great reference. The overall world will have different tribal fantasy elemental designs in the environments, items,
and clothing styles akin to those seen in *Jak and Daxter*, *Journey*, and *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker*. The primary palette style for the environments will be similar to the TV show *Steven Universe*, where it uses both vibrant and pastel colors mainly where there is a primary tone with pops of secondary color either analogous or complementary to that tone. The overall feeling will be warm and inviting, looking at mainly yellow tones for energy with other foci on pinks and purples.

VII. Audio

A. Global Elements

1. A major component of the game will be a recognizable soundtrack with themes for each character, area, and boss fight. The overall sound and style would be similar to the soundtracks of *Dark Cloud 2* and *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker*, meaning orchestral woodwinds, strings, and percussion with some synth as the primary instruments, but the game’s sound will also be combined with some elements of EDM (electronic dance music) and/or ambient worldbeat music to give a more modern pop sort of sound to the tracks. Adding some of these elements will give a feeling of lightness, of flying high, of feeling free and open. This is what I want for the feeling of magic and the discovery of beautiful landscapes to be like for the player. It’s openly creative, freeing, fun, adventurous, powerful, and beautiful. It’s inspiring and whimsical. A good example of this modernization is the difference between the main theme of *How to Train Your Dragon* and the instrumental sections of the track “Where No One Goes” from the second movie.

2. Being a game that’s set in many natural environments, each area will be rich with sounds of unseen creatures and other natural elements: leaves rustling, water running, birds chirping, and all sorts of other ambient noises.

B. Character Elements

1. There would be fully recorded dialogue for the game, where dialogue is featured in both cutscenes and in-game interaction with NPCs and allies. Short conversational lines would also be triggered when party members are in new locations and new things are being discovered to have the characters interact with each other and show their relationship dynamics in non-cutscene situations. Naturally the same actors would provide non-dialogue related sound cues, like fighting grunts, as well as spell incantations for certain attack combos.

2. A crucial audio element will be the sounds of the magic and spells themselves. The audio plays a major role in the feeling of power behind the casting. Each type of magic would have its own distinct foley with multiple tracks of different records for a wide variety of combinations. The weapons as well will offer a lot of audio feedback when used.
VIII. Design History Log
A. August 2018: Idea Generation and Concept Selection
1. In concurrence with the brainsprouting sessions of another class I was in that was also designing a game, I came up with 3 game concepts I wanted to choose from for my thesis (all 3 are geared towards a pre-teen to teenage audience):
   a) **Pea Petite** - name inspired solely from a bag of frozen petite peas, you play as a chubby little princess in a cutesy brawler beat 'em up to escape her castle home and go outside after being expressly told she was not allowed to.
   b) **A Witch's Action Adventure RPG** - (inspired by PB the Sand Witch concept) Jak and Daxter meets the Powerpuff Girls in an action-adventure RPG built around a society of different factions of witches, mages, and other magical folk. It's a high fantasy adventure with fast paced action and all-things-magic combat and leveling up systems designed for compounding spells and abilities where a group of young witches must band together to defeat the evil threatening the land.
   c) **Bubble Puzzler** - a puzzle RPG game that focuses on all of the different uses of a bubble and the different reactions things can have with a bubble. Similar to games like *Braid*, we'd follow a hero as he/she/it solves puzzles using one specific main mechanic. *Braid* centers around time, but this would be about using different types of bubbles while avoiding/interacting with the many perilous things that work against the highly poppable substance. Potentially the hero is also a bubble or is a bar of a soap (which adds inherent extra slipperiness to the mix).

2. Regardless of which concept, I wanted a game that had a recognizable soundtrack with distinct themes per character, themes per level/world, and boss battle themes done in a similar style and treated with as much care as many fantasy JRPGs. *Super Mario, Legend of Zelda and Final Fantasy* are all franchises with impactful, memorable soundtracks. Another desire that I had was for the game to offer and deliver some variety in the gameplay through minigames or other objectives not directly related to the main story/goal of the game. I wanted separate, small achievements here and there that break up the routine gameplay experience. They would have a bit more substance than easter eggs or trophies for doing specific actions with the mechanics in the primary game but wouldn’t be so big as to divide the gameplay experience into fully separate games. Mini-game was the best way I could think to describe it because I didn’t necessarily mean side quests, either, as side quests imply using the same mechanics and systems for an objective that is unnecessary for the victory conditions of the game. *Dark Cloud 2* is an excellent example of this. Outside of the main gameplay experience (which is a real-time combat dungeon crawler), the player can choose to fish and raise the caught fish for fishing competitions as well as at the end of each dungeon level, there is an optional mini golf game that you can play inside the dungeon to get a special item and achievement for that specific level. Both minigames are completely optional and completely different than the main gameplay, but they add a little something extra to achieve that break up the routine and keep things light.

3. When narrowing down to the final choice, I adopted a "go big or go home" sort of mentality. This was a chance for me to design a game that’s as close to a pet project as possible, with no limit on my designs and ideas for the game due to accessible resources (or lack thereof) as my goal is not to produce the entire game in full during this thesis. This meant I had the freedom to adapt mechanics of games that I love to play and piece them together into my ideal game, adding features and designing characters that really showcase me as an artist and designer. As much as I wanted to push my creativity to design a game that wasn’t centered around magic and witches sparked from my idea back with PB the Sand Witch, it was the idea that evoked the most passion and interest out of me and is an embodiment of a game I have been wanting to design/play for a
long time. Both Pea Petite and the bubble puzzler were both smaller projects in scope, where I saw them both as indie games I could potentially create on my own in full (but maybe not in the time span of a thesis). The puzzler was also the first to be struck down for the same reasons another proposed puzzle type was eliminated in the class I was taking: designing puzzles is an art in itself and an art outside of my current skill set. So as much as I wanted to push my creative juices to think of something else, I wanted much more to design and create something I could put my whole heart into and that was the Witch RPG.

4. Regarding the witch idea, however, I was/am totally aware of the potential pitfall of piecing together mechanics and systems from other games that I like into one conglomerate. The benefit is potentially adapting tried and true successful mechanics for the game genre I wanted to emulate, but there's a high risk of being derivative and unoriginal. Despite this risk, there was a specific experience I wanted my target audience to have and a purpose behind my choice in target audience that I think sets it apart from other games out there now. I want to create an action-adventure RPG that’s targeted towards the young pre-teen/teenage female audience. Strides in games featuring heroines have been made with the revamp of the Tomb Raider series and new series like Horizon Zero Dawn, but those games are targeted towards older teens or adults. Looking up current games rated E10+, they’re either revamps of old action adventure titles with classic (male) heroes like Crash or Spyro, LEGO games, sports games, or Minecraft, with a few dance and party games thrown in. No major console titles are targeting this market. Major hits like Fortnite and the ever popular Mario franchise feature playable female characters, but there really isn’t a single player RPG with a female as its lead for this market. Some might say that the argument is girls at that age don’t play/like action RPGs or more “violent” games, but I’m willing to bet a portion of that has to deal with what gets labeled as “boy” and “girl” games. It’s such an impressionable age especially in developing esteem and identity, and I remember looking up to and respecting any strong-willed female character wherever I saw them and wanting to be like them (even trying to adopt their interests, quirky habits, or personality traits to be more like them). Most (if not all) action-adventure games are targeted towards boys, and to that age group it does make a big difference from a young girl’s perspective whether the main character is a boy or girl. It makes sense to me why girls don’t play those games as often and I’d like to give them a chance. I grew up playing amazing action-adventure RPG’s like Jak and Daxter and I want that experience again for the next generation.

5. I did imagine this game as a 3-part franchise like Jak and Daxter, so it would be a series of games. However, the important part is that it would grow with those originally in the target market when the first game is dropped. Each Jak title grew more mature as Jak grew older in the series, with more mature storylines and combat mechanics, and I would like to see this RPG be a similar trilogy that grows with its audience.

B. September 2018: 3 Pillars, Early Narrative, and Target Audience

1. Cemented the 3 pillars of my game were:
   a) Empowering the player - a core component of the game is going to be centrally focused on the feel of playing it. The game wants the player to feel powerful, in control, and confident. This is especially important to me in regards to my target audience as this group is extremely vulnerable at their age. I believe having an outlet for the whirlwind of emotional, mental, and physical changes they’re going through, especially an outlet that instills feelings of individual strength and self-confidence, could become something of great value for the player. It will accomplish this with epic real-time combat, a story themed around empowerment in the classic tale of rising up to your potential by learning new perspectives and finding strength in many different ways of life, mechanics that allow the player to
customize the witches’ abilities, weapons, etc., so the player can become the witch they want to be or safely try out new things, and an extremely freeing and expressive soundtrack that should inspire many of these emotions in the player.

b) **Real-time magic based combat system** - combat will be designed to be fluid and full of grand magical attacks that build on each other for epic combos. Magic is tricky and is often portrayed as passive or ranged only, but the focus will be on creating a system that feels very active, hands-on, and simply badass.

c) **“Break it down” Upgrade and Leveling Up System** - there will be a levelling up system that focuses on building up spell, weapons, armor, etc., stats by being able to break down inventory items and adding their power to the items of the player’s choosing. Resources, ingredients, clothing, armor, weapons, etc. can all be broken down to add to the stats of other things. There will be weapon trees and spell trees for players to see their spells and weapons evolve.

2. Thinking on general narrative goals for the game:

   a) *Avatar: The Last Airbender* and *Legend of Zelda* follow similar narrative frameworks in that the main character meets and allies with all the different tribes/peoples/nations to take down the universally hated baddie. This would benefit a party system where there’s a wide variety of girls (or boy and creature characters too) that the main character meets along her journey and recruits as allies against the main villain.

   b) Another thought was to gear the game towards exploration:

      (1) Exploring ancient magical ruins to unleash the old magics there to save the world
      (2) Finding missing/stolen archaic magical items
      (3) Finding and developing new magics

   c) An important location I would like to feature is a grand library or archive. The game could have that at the center, where the main character is put on a primary mission or quest from this central hub. If exploration is the goal, perhaps there are missing pages from the archive that the player must find and keep out of the wrong hands. Information from several of the different covens have stopped flowing and the player must investigate. The entire game could be exploring this fantastic library.

   d) Could be a *Kiki’s Delivery Service* type narrative where the witch is in training and must go out and see the world in order to complete her studies. Doing so, she’d better understand and appreciate the different sorts of magic out there and by learning their ways, she’d push her own magic beyond what she ever could have staying at her own village.

3. Another important note about the target audience discussion was that it’s not that having a female lead makes a game a “girls” game, nor that having a boy lead makes a game a “boys” game. But representation is important for relatability and I don’t see female representation in action-adventure games geared towards the 10-15 year old age group. I think having a female lead will encourage my intended target audience to pick up and enjoy the action-adventure genre. That being said, I do hope the game would find a similar success in target outreach of media titles like *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*. This is a television show specifically aimed at 6-12 year old girls, but the show’s actual viewership touches a much wider fan base. Many young boys in that same age group enjoy the show and it has become a cult classic to older teens and adults. Ideally, this game would reach beyond my intended target audience, and I think it could. As an action-adventure title it should appeal to many who enjoy the genre, and with it being geared towards a young but not child audience, it will have a light hearted ease to it that makes the game accessible to casual players as well. With just a cast of interesting characters by itself, I think it could find success with cosplayers and fan artists even if the game wasn’t a critical success (but of course all the more so if it did).
4. With my primary audience being a female young teen age, there also needs to be more thought on the message and overall ethical depth of the game. As much as I don’t care for defining games as "boy" vs. "girl," promoting this game with my intended audience does caution that I must be conscientious of what the game inherently signals to those who play it. I want to encourage female participation, but not by pitting females against males or thinking one is above the other. It’s about representation and inclusion. But the need for my conscientiousness goes beyond feminism as well. It’s a very different message if you are fighting evil witches or fighting evil sludge monsters, and it’s a very different message if you are killing these enemies or exorcising the evil out of them. I don’t mind violence in video games, but I do think there’s subconscious workings happening in regards to who the violent acts are inflicted towards/upon. Also, “good” vs. “evil” is potentially a contrived story, and not the magic itself that is evil. Magic in this world is natural, so it’s hard to blame for the sins of individuals. That being said, there’s a benefit to having a clear enemy without the moral ambiguity of what you’re doing. Maybe enemies aren’t important. Perhaps it’s an exploration game where successfully saving the world is based off of discovery rather than punishing or defeating something else. I asked more questions than I answered really during these mindful discussions I had with myself.

C. October 2018: Combat, Inventory, “Essence” and Weapon/Spell Upgrade System

1. I looked to some of my favorite games’ combat systems to think about how I could design my own:
   a) Kingdom Hearts - attack combinations are driven by a single attack button, i.e. pressing “X” repeatedly causes the character to attack in a flourish of different attacks stacked together in a combo. There’s a list of attacks that you can unlock and choose for your character to create different combos, but the primary combat control with the keyblade is simply pressing one button repeatedly. You do have spells, but you could only use spells if you had enough mana. I’d imagine that for my game, melee attacks would send out different types of spells as well as doing melee and magic damage at close range. The KH system has the benefit of being a simple and straightforward method of combat (but still visually rich in cool-looking move sets), which might make it more accessible to my target and others. I would want to avoid at all costs long animations or cutscenes when using spells or special abilities, though. The more recent Kingdom Hearts games have special, epic moves but they can take upwards of 5 or more second clips of animation that break up/ halt your active combat experience.

b) Dragon Age: Inquisition - here you unlock spells and abilities in a variety of skill tree options, but you load up and map a smaller amount of those unlocked abilities into your controls which you can then use in combat. If a mage class, you do have your primary attack which sends out a basic sort of spell based on your weapon’s strongest magic in an interesting combo sequence at no mana cost. At any point, you can activate the spells and abilities that you’ve loaded onto your controls, but they are on a cooldown timer of varying lengths before use again. Using these abilities visually felt pretty epic, but they were all ranged abilities for the most part and the 2-3 second animations for some of them made the combat have just a hint of slowness sometimes. Until I got a special skill that summoned a blade, combat became pretty detached from the action despite its visual appeal. My experience as a mage makes me want to make sure characters have some sort of melee weapon so they can get in on more close range action and feel the contact of their weapon against a foe. The lack of a mana systems was also nice. I don’t want the player to have to look for ways to replenish mana throughout a fight, especially when their primary attacks are magic based and all use some sort of magic. If I wanted to have a limit besides scripted...
attack combo lengths like in KH, I could have a mana bar that regenerates and operates exactly like a stamina bar.

**c)** *Darksiders 2*: A system that I absolutely adore is Darksiders. Similar to Dragon Age, you map special abilities from skill trees to other buttons that you can activate on a cool down system. However, Darksiders has a more complex primary combat system. Much like fighting games, there’s now specific button mashing sequences that perform vastly different attack combos if timed out correctly. I’ve never played another game with combat as engaging as Darksiders where you feel very much in control of your attacks and all of the attacks look and feel badass. My only caution against adopting a system similar to this is that the complexity of this combat system on top of the complexity of my leveling up system might be reaching beyond the skill level of my target audience.

**d)** *Dark Cloud 1 & Dark Cloud 2*: In DC1 each character you can play as has their own way of attacking but the controls are the same: you have a regular attack which you can chain into a set combo and a charged attack. DC2 is the exact same, but here you have two different weapons, one in each hand, where one of the weapons is always range and the other one is melee. A cool thing to note about DC2 though is that depending on your weapon, you could have a different base combo chain with a different timing and feel. Evolving one weapon into something else could also potentially change the combo you’re used to using. More mature games like *Dark Souls* do this all the time, but this is a pretty subtle and sophisticated system for a game geared towards a younger teen audience.

**e)** Lastly, I did entertain looking at JRPG’s that use a semi real-time turn based system as a thought experiment looking to different types of interesting combat systems. Games like *Final Fantasy XIII* did a turn based mechanic where you could think about your move a little before doing so, but due to the semi real-time aspect, you did have to make quicker snap decisions. These were dismissed because they stray too far from my fast paced combat pillar.

2. I believed I could design a compromise system that expands on the simplicity of the KH system with the less complicated pieces of *Darksiders* as a guide, but it would depend heavily on how magic attacks are designed and how spells are used. I could actually adopt a more complex system like in *Darksiders* but provide the option/feature to automatically do certain things. Some games have auto-combo settings and auto-leveling up features in order to take off the burden of the systems’ complexity for players who don’t want to or can’t go all in. Another way to work around complex systems and challenge without sacrificing or downplaying the purposefully designed systems in place is to have difficulty modes. Also, a note regarding the mobility of the player character when attacking: there would be a lock-on system that allows the player to mash their button combos for attacks and hit their target. If an enemy is thrust into the air via a weapon attack or spell, the character is capable of honing in on it still, hitting it with a ranged spell or jumping up and continuing their attack combo but in the air (very similar to KH). I was just working out the details of whether it’s based off of timing and certain combinations of buttons or you map certain abilities or it’s that you just kind of button mash and it automatically does interesting combos for you.

3. The inventory/upgrade system I’d like to implement is heavily taken from the game *Dark Cloud 2*. It’s a brilliant system in my opinion and I’d want to bring it back to the front. In DC2, you have an inventory of a variety of items, items that repair weapons, restore health, give stat boosts, are used to craft items for quests, etc., and the leveling up system was mainly related to the weapon. Killing an enemy with a weapon gave that weapon experience points and when the weapon itself increased in level, it got a certain amount of “synthesis” points to spend to increase its stats. In order to increase specific stats however, it required that inventory items (all of which have stats of
their own) be synthesized with the weapon. It cost one synth point to attach a single item, and it was up to you to collect the best raw items that could increase the stats you wanted to boost as much as possible or as needed. You could even build up weapons and break those down as well (for a greater synth point cost) to augment all stats at once. The game had a weapon tree system, and it showed you which of your stats were too low to evolve into either of two possible evolutions. So now with a goal in mind, you could strategize what items you could/should break down in order to increase specific stats and continue getting better and better weapons.

a) So adapting this for the game that I have, I would like to thematically change it to this idea of “Essence.” Magic is a very natural thing in this world, and being able to get to the Core Essence of something is the basis of harnessing and using these naturally occurring magics. You’d be able to strip away the items in your inventory to get to its core essence, and that essence is what you can use to upgrade your stuff. Because you are adding essences to your other items, you are effectively changing the essence of that item. This is the thematic basis for why a weapon evolves. Putting enough fire essence into an ice weapon should have an effect on the weapon, both in what it can do and how it looks, i.e. evolving down a weapon tree. I would also want to expand this to not just be about weapons since combat is additionally geared towards spells attacks.

b) Straying slightly from the DC2 model, I’d want a spell leveling up system where potentially there is an experience gain using certain spells over others or that by breaking down items, reading books, or discovering new magic throughout the game you can “master” your favorite spells more. They would not only increase in strength, they might even change to being a cooler ability that does a slightly different effect and it would use less mana (if using a constantly regenerating mana bar). Spells and abilities would have their own sort of trees and ways that you can build them up.

c) Had the idea to have access to any weapon or spell from any place in the skill/weapon trees. Rather than a tree, it’s more of a web. Putting so much fire on an ice weapon then takes the weapon down the fire based weapon trees. This way you can really have the freedom of designing your play style. As the main character gets introduced to new magical cultures, she would have access to that magic tree, picking and using spell experience points to travel down any of these paths, whereas ally members might just go down their specific tree with just a few deviations into other ones.

d) A primary component of DC2 outside of the dungeon crawling was to talk to NPCs and rebuild their homes which required base materials like glass, metal, and wood. Having these items to collect also lent itself to having that wider variety of materials in your inventory to break down for stat boosts and weapon upgrades. Items had multiple uses. Since I want a similar break-down-to-build-up system, there would need to be a reason why you have an interesting variety of items in your inventory in my game as well. I did not want a crafting system that’s about creating buildings or stuff like that, but with subject matter that’s all about magical folk like witches, crafting might look like alchemy or developing magical items and potions. Thus, you’d need specific ingredients that you can find, harvest, mine, etc. throughout the game world that can both help in creating items to aid you on your journey or augmenting your own magic and gear.

e) Lastly, I’d want to adapt this system to also be on clothing and armor. In many games you find and equip better protective armor as you go because its stats are better than your current loadout, but I’ve had experiences where I don’t get to enjoy an armor set because it quickly becomes useless and there’s an absolute need to equip objectively better pieces. A lot of people enjoy the fashion aspect of games, so I would love to see you be able to upgrade the stats of your clothing in order to build up your favorite outfit in ways that it can always suits your combat needs as well. You can get the essence of a strong armor set and equip it to a shirt. If you find a new chestplate you’d like to wear, you can break down
the one you’re wearing and have been building up and infuse it with the new. This feature is simply to enjoy customizing the main character to look how you’d like, another added sense of agency and control for the player.

D. November 2019: Party and Quest Systems

1. Because source material for inspiration of my game are the shows *RWBY* and *My Little Pony*, I did imagine the game to have a party system. So even if the main character is not relatable to some girls, there might be other characters they can play with or as that they might relate more to. Each of these characters would have their own unique personalities and magic/combat styles since they would come from the different tribes with different magical expertise (all of which then provide opportunities to learn for you). It is up for debate still about the composition of the ally cast: all female characters, mostly female characters with some male characters, female + male + creature type characters depending on the different clans of magical folk that exist in the world. It will take some more narrative thought and refinement of the game’s message to figure out what I imagine would appeal to my target audience the most and augment the empowerment of the player pillar I have. I did look at different party systems of games I like:

   a) *Kingdom Hearts* - You control solely the main character but you have two main narrative allies that aid you in battle. They’re AI driven, but you have the say in what abilities and weapons their AI can use in battle. You do meet temporary allies along the way and you can switch out one of your two allies for this temporary ally in combat areas. Narratively all allies, main or temporary, are shown in cutscenes, but the extra member just isn’t present during fights. This system puts the focus and story on the main character but allows room for some auxiliary quests and interesting story lines with the ally characters.

   b) *Dragon Age / Dark Cloud 1* - While you primarily role play as the main character, you have a cast of characters that you can cycle through during combat specifically and play from that character’s perspective with their abilities and weapons. In Dragon Age, the chosen party fights together and you can cycle through whose perspective you want to follow and whose abilities you want to use. (There is a strategy aspect here too, in case you really need a character’s ability and the AI is unpredictable.) In Dark Cloud, a single character fights and switching means that character is directly replaced with another. Either style opens up the game to a player who might enjoy having the option to control a witch or magical being that has a particular type of play style or personality that they relate to the most. It also lends itself to having areas where you might have to be a specific character to get through a story.

   c) *Mass Effect* - You collect a large gaggle of characters by recruiting them through quests, favors, or other means of increasing their affinity towards you. When it is time to enter an area that has combat, the game will impose a party select and you choose any two characters from the list to fight with you. They’re AI and you solely control the main character. The game inherently has a very clear distinction between being in a combat vs. a non-combat situation, so this imposed party select before a mission doesn’t really interrupt the gameplay experience. I was concerned that this system would break up the real-time action-adventure aspect of my game too much. It’s makes more sense in my game to explore the different areas of the world not knowing when you might stumble upon an enemy lair.

   d) *Final Fantasy XIII* - The party is a cast of characters somewhat similar to *Mass Effect* in that there would be times where you might get forced to pick a party loadout but they gave the option of changing that party loadout any time that there isn’t an enemy nearby. You were also able to cycle through them during non-combative situations as the group moves together through the narrative and you can control any one of them. Different party compositions make for different dialogue situations and such. They even split the group for
parallel narrative chapters that you jump between and experience the story as different main characters. This system was ousted pretty quick because the scope was gargantuan, has its own implications of what the main story is and what we're reaching for, and layers of in-depth character designs and gameplay experiences. All of which remove the need for me to have a main character that can learn all the different types of magic and custom creating your own since you could just be the witch that does have the play style you want.

e) Experimented with thoughts of having no party system at all. It'd be an RPG with a single character like Jak or Lara Croft. This system lends itself to being a game where you do a witch build exactly how you want it to be and you are relying solely on yourself. There is an appeal to that, but I wanted allies for exposure to a variety of potential personality types. Jak is pretty flat in the first game, probably likely so the player can impose their own sort of personality onto him and his experience. I don’t want a flat heroine for reasons of empowerment again. So for narrative depth, there might not be as much variety just because you're really only ever seeing the one character and if you don't like the one character then you might not enjoy your experience as much. A message I might want to convey is that independence and strength doesn’t mean doing everything on your own. There is great value in relationships with others. Could potentially still have no party system and meet new friends in places who help the player by introducing them to new magic, at least having those messages conveyed in the narrative even if not during combat. But benefits to having a party isn’t just for narrative reasons, having extra allies like Donald and Goofy make the gameplay a little bit easier for player by getting extra help with crowd control. You also get to see cool ally magic while doing your own really cool stuff, and depth is added when designing your witch abilities by building on your allies’ own. This decision may have to wait on narrative direction to define which system would be better.

f) The Witcher or Dark Cloud 2 - both games offer a single character RPG experience but narratively has a main character and another secondary character. The narrative jumps between playing as either character to eventually meet in the end. This would require a reason for why you would want to be two separate characters in my game, and at that point it just doubles the work for me for reasons that aren’t strong enough to warrant that effort. The narrative is not one of my pillars explicitly (it’s important for the empowerment of the player implicitly), and using a system like this would most certainly put narrative at the forefront. Two characters is also a bit too few for me in trying to convey a variety of character types.

2. In regards to size of the party, I can’t imagine there being less than 4 or more than 6. RWBY is successful with a distinctive but varied main cast of 4 characters and anything beyond 6 would just be too much in that the game wouldn’t be large enough to make use of having a party that’s greater than having six options. I’m leaning the most towards a no party system and a 4 person party system where the narrative surrounds the 4 and in combat you either have the entire party or you choose a single partner from the 3 other characters whose magic abilities might suit the situation best in tandem with your own. You’d control solely the main character, but you’d have agency over the other characters in that they’d have their own spell and weapon trees. Perhaps for major boss fights or the final boss, you get to fight with the entire party at your side. If narrative was designable, I would want the player to play as the 4 characters individually through their own stories and it’s about them meeting up along their journey (as they’re all potentially witches in training all heading out on similar quests) and the player then gets to choose to play as whoever they’d like of the members available during that part of the narrative. This would make it a game about 4 characters equally (with maybe one as the leader) rather than 1. Once again, narrative direction would help refine which system is more appropriate.
3. Quest systems/ ways to progress game. Even without a full narrative in place, it’s important to figure out how the game would progress. Of course I looked at systems I felt could potentially work for my game:

a) Quests like *Witcher*, *Elder Scrolls*, or *Dragon Age*. It could be that the game features quests where there’s just a big laundry list of things that you can do and complete in any order you wish with enemies that auto-scale to your level. Completing the main line would be how you beat the game.

b) *Kingdom Hearts* is open somewhat but has a much more linear story progression. You have the option to go to different worlds along branching paths and each one has their own story within their area to progress the main overarching narrative. You have to complete all of the areas, sometimes going back and forth as the main story adds more to a previously completed area, in order to reach the final boss and beat the game. There’s just a main story line that just requires everything to essentially be done eventually and offers a completion system that gives the player some choice in the order of how they do it.

c) *Final Fantasy XIII* offers a very linear story with linear or small level areas, but each provide little optional sideline quests that are more Slice of Life-esque that break up the main ever-forward questline.

d) *Jak and Daxter* 1 has a system of collectibles for each area. A certain percentage of completion is required to open up the next area and progress the story that way. You can return to each area in order to 100% complete the game, but the system of collecting items that power up a device to send you to the next area in the story is a potential option.

e) A dungeon crawl like *Dark Cloud* could be a type of progression, where there’s distinct gameplay difference between the safe, usually narrative heavy, zones and the dungeons themselves and you progress by travelling a set amount of literal levels/stages within the dungeon. Each level is mechanically the same. My hesitancy there is the potential of separating the narrative and the combat too much. I wanted a fluid gameplay experience, and evidence from playing *DND* campaigns also show how much a dungeon crawl can halt the narrative experience when it’s just combat all the time. *Darksiders* 2 is a good example of a game that balances narrative with combative gameplay or just narrative progression in gameplay with combat because when you are in a dungeon where there are no events to really progress the story, the level itself is usually in a place that has discoverable lore with interesting puzzles and enemies.

f) Last progression type is like *The Legend of Zelda* where there is a finite but semi open world and through exploration you can find and go to these different tribes in different areas. They each have an associated dungeon with a set level design for you to go explore, solve puzzles, fight enemies, and get items. The issue here is the lack of a more straightforward progression that I was starting to want to this type of game.

E. December 2018: Narrative and Gameplay variety

1. Gave some more thought to narrative, but less on what the narrative is but how it functions and how the player interacts with and within it. The narrative is in a linear game world feeling more like a *Kingdom Hearts* type rather than a vast open world game such as *Skyrim*. There are different areas to explore and experience, but they have a much more limited sense of scale and be designed in such a way that it inherently pushes you to continue down the narrative. The narrative would be told through cutscenes, in-game or otherwise, removing player choices in dialogue. The thought behind this was to cut down on creating content that players won’t use or gain anything extra by having those choices. No need to oversaturate their experience with faux-agency.
2. I did want to cement that exploration and discovery of magics will be apart of the narrative and gameplay experience in some way, at bare minimum to just add to the world building of the game. Discovering items that have more attached to them and enrich the world these characters live in.

3. As mentioned back in month 1, I would like to see some sort of variety in the game play itself so I gave some more thought to what those could potentially be. Things to do in the game that's outside or unrelated to the main goal and progression of the game. Little mini games or things like that to break up the routine and add bits of gameplay, providing a bit of relief and variety to the experience.
   a) I can accomplish this by adding things to the levels themselves or safer city/village areas by coming up with interesting puzzle and level designs that use the tools and the magics you have in different ways than just combat. The NPC's of the covens can offer little side quests or mini games, or a minigame like *Dark Cloud 2*’s golf game at the end of every dungeon level could be created. Since every witch character would have his or her “schtick,” a mini-game could revolve around that.
   b) For example, proposed that if PB the Sand Witch was the main character, a fun piece of gameplay would be riding around on her sandboard. Travelling between areas could be a mini game in itself, zooming around or going down slopes like in the snowboard game *SSX*. Jak has a hoverboard in the second game, and there are races as well as skater-boy trick competitions. Each character, especially if it’s designed that the player can be anyone from the main cast, could have little gameplay mechanics added just around their interests.
   c) I think potion creation or an alchemical system will be a must in the game, the complexity of which will be designed later. Or really anything that explores the fact that there are other non-combative uses of magics in the world, other arcane arts that could provide fun and different achievements that offer new ways to be immersed in the world itself.
      (1) Another option that builds on this idea of using magic in different ways is having secret, discoverable areas in each tribe location. These areas might be accessible through creative use of magic, and within them, there could be puzzles or challenges that haven’t been seen in the game anywhere else. Secret little dungeon areas that have no effect on the narrative, but do offer a bit of exploration excitement and achievement for completion.
   d) I also gave thought to having companions for the characters. PB had Jelly the desert gecko, and I could see a multitude of uses for him in the game, anywhere from providing as little as secondary animation on the character, to being a special spell ability where she enlarges him and he attacks people, to having his own mini games or sections of gameplay where you use Jelly to open locks or get into small spaces. The other characters could have similar secondary abilities related to props or companions.
Appendix B  Trailer Scene Breakdown

The following tables detail the organization of the trailer designed to capture the feeling of *On to Wisteria* from introducing its characters, themes, and gameplay with a few hints to the overall narrative. It follows a 3-Act narrative structure (Setup, Confrontation, and Resolution) based on the music beats of the track “Edge of Freedom.” The breakdown uses abbreviations to differentiate the cuts throughout the trailer: gameplay (GP), cutscenes from the game (CS), and the battle scene (BTS) unique to the trailer’s story. Any entry without a designation is assumed another cut unique to the trailer used to achieve its goals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCENE</th>
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<th>SHOT / MOVE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>EST</td>
<td>Pica</td>
<td></td>
<td>Establishing shot of desert mountain overlooking a forested area, maybe a city off in the distance with the sun rising on the horizon. When the music builds, Pica launches over the camera towards the forest on her sandboard.</td>
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<tr>
<td>200</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pica</td>
<td></td>
<td>GP of using Pica, running/boarding around and in combat, exploring a ruin and using time powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300</td>
<td>Truck</td>
<td>Pica</td>
<td></td>
<td>CS shot of Pica discovering the book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>400</td>
<td>MCU</td>
<td>Pica</td>
<td></td>
<td>CS Pica leaves home, saluting a goodbye to her family and village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500</td>
<td>Dolly back</td>
<td>Clove</td>
<td></td>
<td>CS Introduction to Clove: Clove watches as blossoms rise through the air while holding divining tools. She watches as they point up to the moon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>600</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sarai</td>
<td></td>
<td>CS Introduction to Sarai: Sarai sits delicately playing a harp by a window. She performs a kara with her mage’s staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>700</td>
<td></td>
<td>Elysia</td>
<td></td>
<td>CS Introduction to Ellysia: Ellysia drops down in front of the party. Sparklers erupt and she takes a bow. Closeup of her with a sly, nonchalant look tossing a small bomb behind her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>800</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mimi</td>
<td></td>
<td>CS Introduction to Mimi: Shyly watches from around a corner. Gets excited about pastries/makes a witch’s brew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1200</td>
<td></td>
<td>Everyone</td>
<td></td>
<td>CS Quick cuts of campfire scene. Ellysia and Sarai butt heads. Mimi brushes Clove’s hair while she plays in the mud. Pica jumps onto the two fighting, and then CU of her smiling, the other two calming down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>900</td>
<td></td>
<td>Everyone</td>
<td></td>
<td>All hands in for a pact, throw hands in the air</td>
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<th>SCENE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1000</td>
<td>Boom &amp; Jib following girls</td>
<td>Everyone</td>
<td>BTS Everyone runs together straight towards a line of enemies on the top of a cliff face.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1100</td>
<td></td>
<td>Everyone</td>
<td>BTS of sequential quick beats of each girl using their weapons/magic. Mimi -&gt; Elysia -&gt; Sarai -&gt; Clove -&gt; Pica.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1300</td>
<td>Pica</td>
<td>Pica</td>
<td>BTS Pica landing and unleashing a burst of magic towards enemies running away.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1400</td>
<td>Pica, Sarai, Clove</td>
<td>GP: showing gameplay as a 3-man party.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1450</td>
<td>Bird's Eye</td>
<td>Everyone</td>
<td>Wideshot Bird's Eye View of team exploring, trekking together through another environment.</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1600</td>
<td>Truck</td>
<td>Everyone, Nerys</td>
<td>2 fast trucks of opposite directions of the girls lining up against Nerys and her looking down on them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1700</td>
<td>Wide</td>
<td>Everyone</td>
<td>BTS the girls start getting cornered, surrounded by enemies on all sides.</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1800</td>
<td>Orbit</td>
<td>Everyone</td>
<td>BTS of spinning around the group of girls one at a time, seeing Sarai first, then Elysia, Mimi, and finally Clove and Pica.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>Sarai</td>
<td>CS of Sarai on the ground defeated, she looks up at her mother's back walking to the throne.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Elysia</td>
<td>CS of Elysia curled up with knees to chest trying to hide, terrified.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2100</td>
<td>Mimi</td>
<td>CS of Mimi's magic overtaking her, she looks up crying with dark magic spreading on her face.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2200</td>
<td>Pica, Clove</td>
<td>CS of an unconscious Clove in Pica's arms in the pouring rain. Pica unleashes an outburst of powerful magic, halting the rain and forcing it away in a dome.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCENE</td>
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<tr>
<td>2300</td>
<td></td>
<td>Everyone</td>
<td>Music 6 - Main Theme 2</td>
<td>BTS, the spin comes back to Sarai, the team smirks and Sarai lets out a beacon of light magic, invigorating the team. The girls band together and take down the rest of the enemies with big feats of magic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2500</td>
<td></td>
<td>Everyone</td>
<td></td>
<td>GP: run sequence that switches between all girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2600</td>
<td></td>
<td>Everyone</td>
<td>Music 7 - Swirl + Fade Down</td>
<td>The other 4 girls all line up at the edge of the cliff, Sarai first standing strong, Mimi ghost phasing in behind her, Elysia turning visible in a seated position, Clove walking forward. Pica launches in overhead above them on her board.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2700</td>
<td>Full -&gt; Close up</td>
<td>Pica</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pica lifts from her sandboard midair reaching forward, CU of her hand reaching for the Sun. Fade to white.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2800</td>
<td></td>
<td>Title</td>
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Bibliography


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