



Asia Pacific College

School of Multimedia and Arts

The Sky Deity: A 2D Animated Film and Soundscape on Improving Philippine Mythological Representation Through Fantasy Worldbuilding

In partial fulfilment of the requirements

For the degree in Bachelor of Arts in

Multimedia Arts

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BMMA 203

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June 2023

Abstract

The representation of Philippine mythology depicted in different types of media—especially in films and TV series—throughout our childhood is most common in the horror genre where mythological creatures in the country are most of the time shown as wicked, vile creatures that prey on human beings—which is not usually the ideal theme for children. Myths in this country are not limited to its creatures only—rather, there are plenty of other elements that can be used such as the concept of creation stories. This paper is composed of discussions revolving around the fantasy genre such as worldbuilding and how it has become popular over the years. Thus, for our creative output, we will be creating an animated film and soundscape that exhibits myths in the country while focusing on worldbuilding as a process in the fantasy genre with the objective to give emphasis to its role in further representing this country's myths.

Keywords: *fantasy, Philippine mythology, worldbuilding*

Introduction

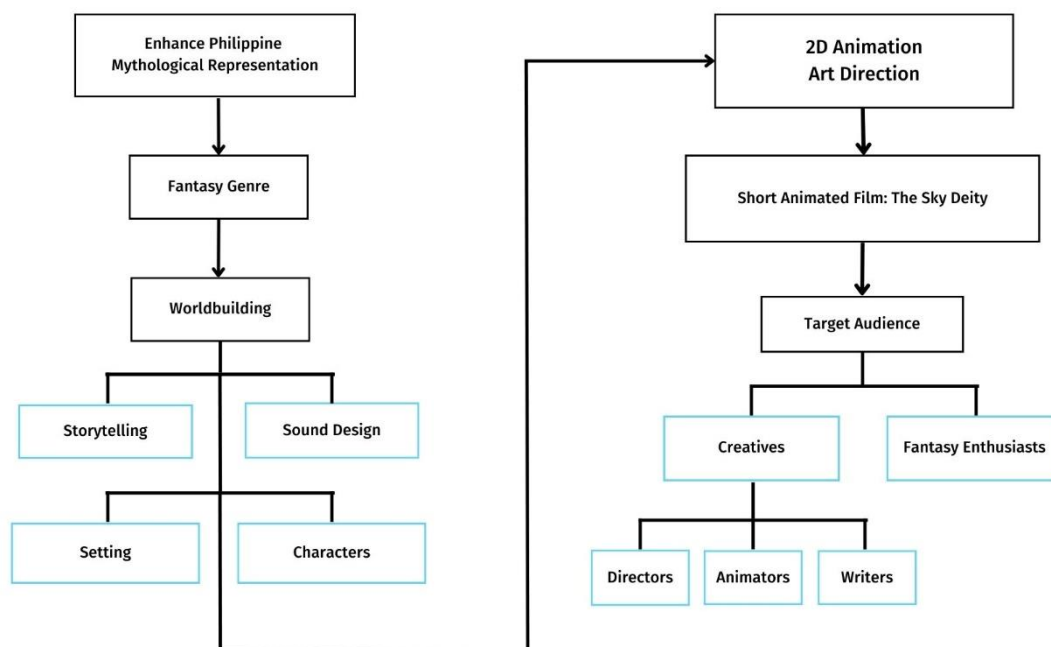
Fantasy as a genre in different types of media—specifically the entertainment industry—continues to have a huge impact in terms of being able to connect and explore various cultures through developing fictional worlds with eye-catching imagery. As young artists who find comfort and inspiration in consuming media associated with this type of genre such as films produced by Studio Ghibli, we have always been inspired by how memorable their produced films are—especially its representation of their folklore and myths— and how it is still being continually discussed on different platforms worldwide despite being released long ago. One of the most noticeable aspects of their films is its worldbuilding— how it creates a sense of realism among its viewers through accurately depicting culture, myths, and folklore in the overall setting while also being able to incorporate real-world issues. By presenting viewers with a story and setting that they are completely unfamiliar with while containing themes of reality, this gives them the freedom to explore the world and come up with their own theories in relation to the world as a means of personal enjoyment. Another possible reason that viewers such as young adults, besides children, find enjoyment in fantasy stories is the thought of being represented in a fictional world as a way of escapism from problems in the real world—finding comfort in seeing themselves in the character struggling with the same things even in a fantasy setting (Holcomb, 2019). As Filipino children growing up with a lack of representation of our very own myths and folklore in media such as animated cartoons and comics, we used to create fantasy concepts derived from foreign myths such as Greek or Norse mythology while only hearing about local myths through oral communication from our elders. In addition, most of the mainstream representation of Philippine myths that we have seen growing up are in the horror genre where depictions of these myths—most especially mythological creatures such as aswangs—are usually corrupt and wicked which is not bad, but way too common as Philippine myths are not limited to its creatures only. In a recent animated series released in Netflix namely *Trese* (2021), a fantasy-horror story with a touch of magic realism depicted from a Filipino comic produced by Budjette

Tan and Kajo Baldisimo, the visualization and representation of different Philippine mythological creatures has created conversations regarding how Philippine myths and folklore have never been truly popularized globally—specifically in the West—unlike Greek or Roman portrayals that has always been accessible to the majority of viewers across the globe (Soberano, 2021). During the time of its release, we had developed overtime an interest in creating original concepts of other possible stories depicting Philippine mythology and folklore—we thought of how there are currently accessible and efficient methods other than oral communication to improve and be able to visualize our local myths to make it as memorable as other foreign myths.

For our creative output, we aim to produce a short 2D digital animated film with focus on fantasy worldbuilding inspired by Visayan folklore and mythology. The worldbuilding will mostly be seen on the designs of the characters, people, creatures, environment, and soundscapes which include sound design and music. The film will be about a day in the life of our main character who is a sky deity based on the Visayan Goddess, Alunsina. In the morning, she wakes up to the gloominess of the land below them. Seeing its state, they go on an expedition to fly through the sky to create a path for the sun to pass through—overall granting relief throughout the land. The land is a world where everything in nature is controlled and protected by spirits and deities.

Figure 1

The Sky Deity Creative Framework Diagram



The study starts with the primary goal of enhancing Philippine mythological representation in the fantasy genre in which our focus would be worldbuilding. The main elements that will be focused on in terms of worldbuilding would be storytelling, setting, characters, and sound design. “The Sky Deity” would be a 2D animated short film and soundscape wherein our main target audience would be fantasy enthusiasts and creatives—such as but not limited to directors, animators, writers—since these are the people that create and consume this type of media. Moreover, apart from our main target audience, we would like as much people as possible to be able to watch our film and see the wonders that Philippine Mythology has to offer.

To further elaborate on Worldbuilding, the process of building a world involves setting the tone and theme of the story, introducing the people or creatures that will inhabit the world, and setting the environment where the characters will grow and perform in the story (MasterClass, 2021a). In the article written by MasterClass, its purpose of creating a story structure is discussed along with examples of the different genres under worldbuilding such as sci-fi and horror. It mainly addresses the basic elements of what should be kept in mind when designing a world—taking note of the laws, establishing the world, defining the culture and language, and taking inspiration from history and existing works. Like the definition from MasterClass, Kassé (2022) states that before writing any type of novel or story, worldbuilding comes first—offering completely unique governments, religions, and creatures—with the purpose of giving the audience a concrete location of where the story is set.

In the book “World building Transmedia, Fans, Industries”, compiles a series of research in media studies—one of those including worldbuilding practices. In film theory, the use of complex systems or spaces is relevant in terms of the concept of time—when one is consuming media such as novels and film while unfamiliar spaces unfold, it leads them to immerse themselves in that different reality while completely disregarding the medium itself (Boni, 2017). When done right, it makes sure that the new world created seems believable or captivating enough for it to capture the imagination of the audience and overall be able to fully occupy oneself with the story structure set. In relation to our output, utilizing the spaces to conceptualize visuals and sounds for the environment or world design plays a big part in creating an immersive experience for viewers.

Heavy research through reading an abundance of literature regarding Philippine Mythology – specifically Visayan myths – would also be required for this project because despite our work being fictional and in the fantasy genre, our main goal is to give representation to the culture we are basing our work from and making sure that appropriation and unintentional revisionism will not occur is a step that is necessary to take.

For the technicalities of the worldbuilding, we aim to conduct interviews with Filipino artists and authors that make use of fantasy worldbuilding in their creative works to gather insight into their respective processes which make their works stand out in the fantasy genre. Specifically, we will be asking about their approach in coming up with ideas for their stories based on myths or culture and the processes behind creating noteworthy character and environment designs. We will also be conducting interviews with sound designers regarding their technical and creative process wherein questions will be about how the sounds of each element in the project

are created and how this contributes to the greater soundscape and ultimately the world within it.

Research Design

As mentioned, “The Sky Deity” will be a 2D animated short film and soundscape without dialogue with a heavy focus on its worldbuilding aspect in which the world within the film would be based on precolonial culture and beliefs from the Visayas Region of the Philippines. It will have a whimsical, playful, and lighthearted mood to capture the wonder that the world has and convey that to its audience.

Interviews

Artists

One of our interviewees Murton, known as *murton.arts* on Instagram, is a digital illustrator that focuses on worldbuilding and character design. They are known for their extremely detailed and captivating works that revolve around the fictional fantasy world that they created. Growing up, they consumed media such as movies in the fantasy genre which made them inspired to create their own. They were fascinated by how the people behind the creation of those movies were able to conceptualize and bring their ideas to life through their own fictional worlds. Ultimately, they want to express and illustrate their creativity through manipulating ideas from the ordinary and bringing it to life as their own through different forms of art.

In terms of worldbuilding, they mentioned that it takes a lot of planning and research to be able to gather the necessary elements that are aligned to the vision of how one wants to portray their fictional world. In their case, they put their focus on gathering world elements to follow their goal to create a space to serve as their platform for their ideas and concepts. Their main priority is conceptualizing the environment, culture, characters, story, and magic systems including the government system. They emphasize that before creating a story, one must create a setting where it takes place. Major details in the world before minor details are made before writing the story behind it. As for the characters residing in their world, they believe that the characters themselves should naturally have their own respective traits and personality that are unique to them. They mentioned that they prefer to apply their own personal emotions and expressions to their own characters while retaining the individuality for each one of the characters. When it came to the inspiration behind their character designs, they mention taking inspiration from their favorite artists and shows—one namely “*Over the Garden Wall*” in which it has a mix of modern and Victorian clothing—that they also apply to their worldbuilding.

For influences towards their work, they name three artists that have changed their perspective and style in terms of illustrating fantasy-based illustrations. One of those is Tim Burton, a director known for their works such as *Corpse Bride* and *Wednesday*, who has inspired them to love the idea of fairytales and storytelling. Second to them is John Kenn Mortensen—an

illustrator that they admire for the dark fantasy-themed illustrations. They add that their name “Murton” was influenced by the two that have changed their approach towards the fantasy genre of worldbuilding. Lastly, they mentioned an artist named Mako - who specializes in fantasy illustration but with a rather lighter theme and atmosphere compared to the two they have mentioned previously. They put emphasis on the artist’s attention to detail and linework that has also inspired them to improve their own, which has contributed a lot towards their improvement over the past months.

Sound Designers

The first sound designer interviewee is Pepe Manikan. He is currently a professor of Audio Production in De La Salle – College of Saint Benilde and is known for films such as *Rekorder* and *Kiko Boksingero*. He also has his own YouTube channel called *Keyboard Kung Fu* with Pepe Manikan, where he posts various videos where he teaches music and audio production, as well as recounting his experiences and giving insights to his viewers.

Manikan started his career through music, which was already his passion from a young age, but to make a career through his passion - he needed to make money and that is how he jumped from music to sound design. He mainly works on film scores and music but naturally, he also takes sound design projects for both film and animation. Further, he mentioned *Star Wars* to be his favorite film in terms of sound design because of how the sound felt real despite it being a completely fictional world with most elements not existing in real life. He then proceeded to talk about Ben Burtt and Walter Murch who are considered legends in sound design and that they really influenced him and his works.

Throughout the interview, Manikan really emphasized that before producing or recording anything for a project, one must first fully understand the story in terms of its nature, tone, the feelings each scene is supposed to evoke, etc. It is the most important factor to consider because the sound must be parallel to the visual aspect of the film in which he said that if the sound goes unnoticed by the audience, it means that it was done right or that it is natural enough for it to feel believable.

For his creative process, he said that the hardest part is the conceptualization which takes place before everything else. This is the part where he would understand the story and create mind or concept maps for the sounds needed in a project in which he highly considers how sound can portray an emotion for a certain scene. Understanding the different elements of sound – background, sound effects, dialogue, music, etc. – is necessary for this step because it is not about using as many elements as you can, but about knowing when and how to use them with the story in mind.

When creating sounds for things that do not exist in real life, he likes to do associations wherein he looks at the visual in the project and then looks for things in real life that have the same look or movement to it. For example, if a magic spell of a character looked sparkly then he would look for things in real life that are also sparkly and listen to how they sound and take inspiration from those to create the sound of the magic spell. A notable quote he said was

“Walang tama at mali, meron lang bagay o hindi” which means that when creating sound for a fictional world, it is not a matter of the sound being factually correct, but if the sound feels correct and believable.

For his technical process, he would refer to the lists he created during conceptualization to create the sounds he would need for each element in the film and piece them together first. Once they are pieced together, that is when he would mix them. For organization, he likes to separate his project files, one for all the dialogue, another for all the sound effects, etc. He renders each into one long file so that it would be easier to arrange them all together along with the visual and this also makes it easier for the software to handle.

Target Audience

Generally, since our film is about Philippine culture, Filipinos would naturally be targeted. Furthermore, based on the mood of our project, children and teens would also be drawn to it as well as some adults. With representing Philippine culture in our film being one of the main goals of our project, we would really like to show as much people as possible how colorful and rich our heritage as Filipinos is and that it is just as interesting as the cultures of other countries that we are more exposed to. This is also the reason why we opted to make our film have no dialogue so that we can be inclusive to audiences that are not Filipino.

Our main target audience, however, are creatives and fantasy enthusiasts. Creatives such as writers, directors, and animators would be able to create media about Philippine myths in the fantasy genre in which fantasy enthusiasts will be the first ones to discover these works and increase interest where a cycle can be born. As the interest in the topic increases, more works about it will be created, and vice versa.

By first focusing on the world within the film instead of a complicated story, it would be easy to understand and can open the minds of audiences to the endless possibilities and potential that Philippine culture could give and contribute to the fantasy genre and to the entertainment industry in general. Starting with the main target audience to increase interest and influence others, children and teens can start learning our culture earlier while adults can create more media and research on this topic to give it more exposure and importance.

Design Process

Preliminary Research

Before beginning to create the story and the characters, a lot of research was done by looking for literature on our topic. The Visayans had an abundance of cultures and practices from different regions of the area. Some were unique to a specific community while some overlapped with others in which their significance varied. This preliminary research is greatly significant for conceptualization to be able to represent the cultures and stories properly.

For the deities we have chosen, we decided to stay within central Visayas and the Panay Bukidnon beliefs. We narrowed it down to choosing three main deities which were: *Alunsina*, the Goddess of the Eastern Skies; *Luyong Baybay*, the Goddess of the Tides; and *Maria Cacao*, the Diwata of Mount Lantoy in Argao, Cebu. We also chose an additional two deities which were: Kanlaon, Goddess or God of the Harvest or the Supreme God and Ruler depending on the version; and *Suklang Malayon*, Goddess of Happy Homes and *Alunsina's* sister in the epic of Hinilawod.

For the general environment, we looked into several tourist spots and landforms in Visayas, and the livelihoods that the pre-colonial people of Visayas had. The landforms we have chosen to include were: Chocolate Hills, a famous tourist spot in Bohol where the hills turn green when wet and brown when dry; Mount Lantoy, the mountain where Maria Cacao resides; Mount Kanlaon, the volcano where the entrance to Kanlaon's home is said to be in; Hinagdanan cave, found by a farmer from a hole on the ground and built a ladder to get inside, hence the name; Rice fields; and the sea.

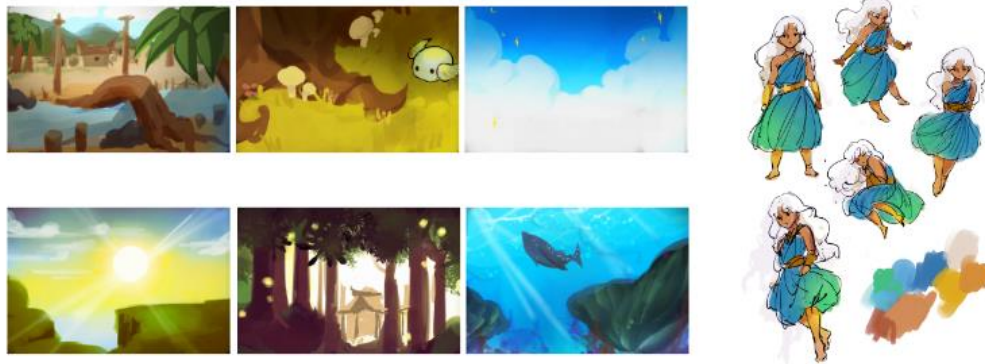
For the creatures, we researched animals that were unique to the area of Visayas and existing myths of the people. They were as follows: Kalaw, also known as Visayan Hornbill, is a bird native to the Philippines and is found mostly in the Visayas and around Sierra Madre; Tarsier; Maya bird; *Umalagad*, also known as ancestral spirits; *Bakunawa*, the serpent that ate the moons; and *Kataw*, *sirena* of the Visayas.

Chosen traditional musical instruments to be used for the original soundtrack of the film were the following: Panay Bukidnon *Agung*, *Kudyapi*, *Bombo*, and *Paratikan*.

The culture and people of the ancient Visayas were also researched pertaining to their appearance, attire, mannerisms, culture, practices, etc.

Pre-Production

For the pre-production stage of our project, we created the following assets: Concept art for environment, creature, and character design; sequence treatment for the flow of the story on the screen; storyboard and animatics for the flow of the animation; initial soundscape structure per scene for the flow of the sound alongside the animation; sample animations with sound; and music conceptualization.

Figure 2*Character and Environment Studies*

In the process of conceptualizing character designs, we considered the time it would take us to finish the entire animation as animated films usually require a variation of artists to finish different elements of the film such as the main animation, line work, coloring, background, or even special effects. To ensure that we can finish it on time without sacrificing the quality of the animation overall, we decided to go with designs that are simple yet appealing—enough to be recognized by the audience. For our main character, the Sky Deity, we decided to take elements from the sky—the white hair resembling clouds and the blue *malong* to represent the color of the skies with gold accessories to represent their standing in their world. The overall shape of the character has flowy, rounded edges to convey their personality as bouncy and playful. The same approach is applied to background characters, Sea Deity and Cacao Deity, but with a bit more detail compared to the Sky Deity since they will only be seen in the film for a short time. When creating environment studies, we gathered references of our chosen places set in the Philippines—this includes photographs of the place taken in different angles, the materials that are used in constructing certain structures, and plants or creatures that can be seen in their respective settings.

The preliminary research was referred to when creating the sequence treatment in which one of the things considered was how to highlight each element in a short amount of time. Since our main topic is about worldbuilding, we decided to keep the story simple and highlight the world where the characters reside, choosing the Sky Deity as our main character as she can traverse the world with ease.

There are seven (7) sequences in total wherein Sequence 0 is the first that serves as the introduction of the world. It is very rainy which causes the people to become sad, the mystical maya bird sees this and goes up to the sky. This brings us to sequence 1 which serves as the introduction of the sky deity where the maya bird wakes her from her slumber and urges her to stop the rain that is causing suffering to the people.

Sequence 2 is where the sky deity stops the rain in the village and the people are finally able to go out of their houses followed by Sequence 3 where the sky deity stops the rain on the land where the chocolate hills can be seen, and the creatures and animals go out of their hiding in the forest. The sky deity reaches the cacao plantation by the mountain shaped like a woman and finds the Cacao Deity. The Cacao deity takes a cacao fruit, turns it into chocolate and gives it to the sky deity then the maya bird prompts her to the next location.

Sequence 4 starts with the people on the boats struggling because of the heavy rain and strong waves, where the sea deity is the one controlling the waves. The sky deity goes high up in the sky, hums a tune, and the rain stops. The sea deity hears the tune and lets the waves become calm.

In Sequence 5, the sky deity and the maya bird take a short rest inside the Hinagdanan cave where more creatures can be found as she eats her chocolate. She then instinctively shudders and peaks out the cave where thunderclouds were forming over Mount Kanlaon and does her biggest gesture that makes the clouds everywhere dissipate and the skies become clear leading us to Sequence 6. This is the sequence where scenes in each location show that the people are happy, safe, and that the rains are officially over. The Maya bird parts with the sky deity, and she goes back up in the sky indicating the end of the film.

We made sure to be as descriptive and detailed as possible when creating the sequence treatment – from the simple gestures of the characters to the camera movements – to have a solid basis for our storyboard, sound list per scene, and sound list per environment, followed by our sequence composition, color script, and music conceptualization.

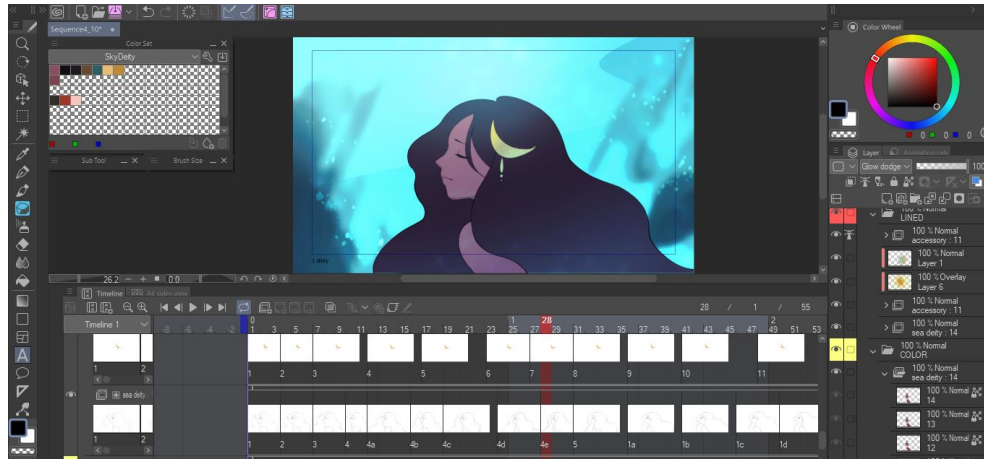
Interviews were conducted with artists, authors, and sound designers during this stage to solidify our story and its elements. We chose artists, authors, and sound designers as our respondents to gain insights on their worldbuilding processes regarding their respective mediums to better our own process for our creative output.

Production

During the production stage, the process of animating and placing temporary sound effects took place. The animation was done digitally frame by frame using Clip Studio Paint EX— a software that specializes in the creation of illustration and animation with tools that can speed up our progress. Adobe After Effects was also used to create the camera movements in the animatic.

Figure 3

Screencap of Clip Studio Paint EX Software



In the first stages of animating, the panels from the storyboard and animatic were closely referenced while some were traced to create the keyframes included in the rough animation. In the animatic, the camera movements were placed as well as transitions that would be seen in the final product—this gives us the scope of how we should scale our animated scenes to give enough space for the camera movements in the final stages of placing the final touches for the animation. The environment studies were then used as a placeholder for the environment scenes.

The stage where the rough animation is cleaned up includes placing sufficient in-betweens per scene while placing the line art. To remain consistent throughout the film, only one brush type and size were used in lining the clean animation. Lastly, in the final stage before the final effects and camera movements are placed, the base colors were placed using an automatic filling tool from Clip Studio Paint EX that helped speed up the process of filling the colors per frame. After the base colors have been placed, light airbrush shading with simple cell shading were done throughout the film; and then finally the environment backgrounds were done in more detail and stitched together with the main animation to proceed with the compositing during postproduction.

Figure 4*Field and Foley Recording Documentation*

While the frame-by-frame animation was being developed, sounds were also being recorded to be used for the film. Field recordings happened in Lucena and Pagbilao, Quezon where various sounds of nature were supposed to be recorded; but due to continuous heavy rains, only limited recordings were done. What was not recorded at the field was recorded through Foley in the Foley recording studio at Asia Pacific College where several materials were used to create the sounds for the film such as: using raw rice to create a quieter type of rain sound; using a thick plastic strip to create the *umalagad* sound; using cloth to create the maya bird's wings flapping, etc.

Once enough recordings were gathered, the ambient soundscapes per environment were created. The sound script was made for the sound effects and movements seen on screen based on the animatics and storyboard of the project. The greater soundscape – which consists of the ambient soundscapes, sound effects, and vocals – started to be pieced together once the clean animation was finished wherein it was continuously modified as seen fit while the final animation progressed. Since the ambient soundscapes, vocals, and sound effects were mostly ready, once the final animation is done, postproduction for sound was done immediately. FL Studio and PreSonus Studio One software were used to modify the sound recordings, piece together the soundscapes of each scene and environment, and produce the score of the film.

Post-Production

Finalizations occurred during this stage. Animations and compositing were finalized using the Adobe After Effects software as well as the addition of certain visual effects such as tweaking camera angles, refining the lighting and color of the film, etc. Fully creating the greater soundscape of the whole film was done during this stage wherein all the sound elements were put together in accordance with the timings in the final animation. Additional sounds that were not initially made were produced to give more detail to the soundscape and added to the mix. The soundscape of the film was mixed in stereo audio and the music was the last to be finalized.

Review of Related Literature

This chapter breaks down the topics included in the study into sub-topics which features the following: The Fantasy Genre; Worldbuilding; Animation Approach; Environment Design; Soundscapes; Audio formats; Visayan Myths; and basis for environments and concepts. These will be discussed along with literature related to the topic which will support the overall creative process to achieve the desired output.

The Fantasy Genre

According to Vandermeer (2020), fantasy as a genre is a wide-ranging category of concepts in which elements that are far from reality permeate reality or any set of stories can be identified as something not seen in the real world. It is not the same as the horror genre, as fantasy as a genre does not primarily incorporate terror or the state of fear and alienation. Being one of the broadest genres, the article “How Fantasy Literature Helped Create the 21st Century” written by Vandermeer, breaks down the history of how fantasy developed post-war and how it formed its subgenres. For instance, there is high and low fantasy, magic realism, dark fantasy, classic fantasy, “weird” fantasy, and so on. Fantasy, may it be in literature or any media, borrows attributes from post-modern literature which develops the genre for it to become mainstream—which a handful of readers seek. Fantasy literature is a part of the genre of post-modern literature (Alsharab, 2019) wherein changes occurring in relation to its characteristics can potentially affect or influence it and by doing so makes the genre more appealing. Regardless of the medium, the number of subgenres that the fantasy genre has is what makes it a good instrument or opportunity to make use of the genre to visualize and represent myths in different forms—making it diverse in terms of reaching numerous audiences with different types of preferences.

According to the statistical results of the study conducted by Alsharab (2019), there is a high average of literature students that show positive attitudes toward consuming—reading or watching—fantasy literature with a clear preference for extraordinary or fantastic elements. A huge part or primary reason as to why fantasy fiction is popular and has shown a significant success is due to the rise of new technology which enables these fictional literary works to come to life—may it be through computer-generated images (CGI) such as 3D or 2D Animation. Thus, it is certainly more effective to use animation for the output to create extraordinary fictional settings.

Worldbuilding

For an audience to be effectively immersed in a fictional world is to present a world that can make one believe it exists. In films—especially the animation genre—worldbuilding plays a huge part in creating a believable world. Not to be confused with another element in film such as the setting, worldbuilding covers a much wider range of themes such as culture and myths rather than its physical elements as to provide meaning and context (Taylor, 2017). Thus, Wolf (2012) states that in the process of creating an entirely new world, the elements included in the

world must come from what exists in the real world—in drawing similarities between the fictional world and reality, it allows viewers to understand the world based on what they have experienced themselves. For instance, our approach in worldbuilding consists of researching topics related to Philippine culture such as its myths and folklore. As discussed by Wolf in his book *Building Imaginary worlds*, the mentality of creating characters for a story should be applied the same way in the process of creating an imaginary world. The way characters are designed by referencing the traits and characteristics of humans must be applied to worldbuilding as well where audiences can see a part of themselves in those characters the same way they see themselves in the fictional world itself.

According to Coronado (2021), worldbuilding in animated films stays as an essential and unique feature for an audience to be consistently immersed. Under worldbuilding, they summarize that the fundamental elements include the place, time, and culture wherein all three influence the visual or art direction of a film. In terms of believability, they mentioned three rules that are crucial in intentional worldbuilding namely "Researching Reality" where elements used in the world are derived from the real world, "Establishing the Rules" that establishes consistency in a film, and lastly "Defining Details" in order to construct a world that is complete with just enough information to make a world seem believable.

Moreover, Edwards (2022) discusses the importance of sound wherein he considers it to be 50% of what makes a film because when watching, one uses 2 primary senses which are sight and hearing. The main points he gave about the importance of sound are that it gives feeling, it builds a world, and that it dictates the flow. He states that sound design is crucial to worldbuilding because it is what can bring a world to life, the example he gave was that it is one thing to see a busy street and another thing to hear it. Elaborating on this idea, fictional worlds feel believable to a person when they can hear it, from the sounds of fictional creatures to the sounds of spaceships or magic. It is what bridges the gap between the screen and the person watching, thus not only seeing the world, but hearing it and ultimately, feeling it.

Animation Approach

To make sure an audience stays focused and immersed in watching an animated film, the approach in which creating an animation where it is suitable for a theme or genre should be carefully considered. Looking into successful animated films over the years which have similar themes to our project, Studio Ghibli films remain to be one of the most popular all over the world in terms of its overall approach in animation—especially its attention to detail. Animators at Studio Ghibli make use of hand-drawn Traditional 2D Animation wherein they create every single frame while also making use of new technologies to speed up the process in certain subjects such as environments (Tiwana, 2022).

Emphasizing on how Studio Ghibli animators excel in terms of making every scene feel real and immersive, the attention to detail along with proficiency in techniques that are used in animation are done to create every visual element that are seen—everything is created from scratch (Isbrucker, 2018). The movements of characters in each scene are done in a way where

subtle details contribute to making the characters in the film feel real while also giving a sense of scale and weight. Composition-wise, every single element--characters, environment, props, seemingly insignificant objects-- that are seen are placed with intention and purpose. For this approach, Ishbrucker believes that what makes Studio Ghibli films stay timeless is because of its approach to animation that conveys immersive realism. Thus, for our project, we believe that making use of the techniques mentioned can greatly contribute to making the final product visually appealing yet impactful towards our target audiences.

Environment Design

Backgrounds that are seen in animation are one of the factors that can affect how an audience immerse themselves in a film—just as how background characters support the flow of a story, stories portrayed in animation would feel empty without it (Collins, 2020). Environments play a part in establishing the setting of the story while also revealing information to the audience about the world. While our story takes place in an imaginary world, taking inspiration and conducting research referencing from real life should still be done to make the setting believable.

There are plenty of processes behind producing environments in animation-- one of those includes making sure its composition is fit to tell the story. According to Chen (2015), every second counts when it comes to capturing the audience's attention in terms of digesting enough information--because unlike still illustrations, a viewer has enough time to do so. The first step is to produce thumbnails with a simple composition that is enough to provide context. Then comes the stage where research takes place--gathering enough references to decide on props to include and lighting to study. Once the composition has been chosen, determining the size of the setting and placement of lighting is done by placing base planes. The next step includes setting the perspective along with creating textures and architectural details, if necessary, in order to create depth and add a sense of realism to the environment. The last steps are comprised of adding the remaining details or props that are essential to conveying information about the scene--this can include foreground or background elements along with the main subject itself. In executing this process properly on each scene of our film, we can achieve the goal of providing an immersive experience for our target audience.

Soundscapes

Soundscapes are comprised of three categories which are geophony, biophony, and anthrophony. Geophony refers to the sounds that originate from natural sources or the world itself like the sound of flowing water or the howling of the wind; Biophony refers to the sounds created by animals; and anthrophony refers to the sounds made by humans. With these three categories in mind, soundscapes can show just how everything relates to each other and makes up the world. Furthermore, there are no known soundless environments in the world and despite lightless environments existing, the sound is still present in those areas in which the sound is essential for the survival of the organisms that reside there. A notable quote by Bernie Krause

that talks about this idea is “While a picture may be worth a thousand words, a soundscape is worth a thousand pictures.” (Listening To Earth, n.d.)

Guzy (2017) defines soundscapes as sounds when they are understood as environments. They also add that within soundscapes there exist soundmarks which are specific sounds that are unique to the soundscape of an area like the sound of a wind chime in a person’s backyard. There are no two (2) places with the same exact soundscape and sounds of the past could be different from sounds of the present. Meaning, that sound only exists for a brief time making it everchanging. Although it would be difficult to differentiate each soundscape due to dominating sounds like car horns, loud music, etc. in places around the world, beneath the surface there would also be a lot of soundmarks that are unique to the area that can tell a lot about its people and the area itself.

Through both sources, it can be concluded that there are soundscapes all around us in which they are able to tell us a lot of things about our surroundings no matter how quiet or loud. It is essential to worldbuilding because sound is a crucial part in the world in which alone, it can already be considered one.

Stereo, Surround, and Immersive Audio

Stereo is the simplest multi-channel sound setup where it only uses two (2) channels which are left and right front speakers that create a phantom sound source which makes listeners think that the sound is coming from the middle of the two (2) speakers. The difference between this and simply using a mono speaker placed at the front center is that with stereo and the phantom sound effect, things sound more natural and realistic. The more speakers added to the set-up, going surround up to immersive, the more authentic the sound and gives a better impression or illusion of 3D space (Teufel, 2019).

“Immersive audio” is the latest term used to refer to audio being projected in a 3D space. Earlier terms were “3D audio” and “Spatial Audio” but were still in the realm of surround sound and 2D space except spatial audio has evolved due to Apple’s usage of this term where it now utilizes 3D space (Oh, 2020). The main difference between Immersive audio and surround sound can be seen with the speaker setup where with surround sound, all the speakers located in one plane which is why it is still 2D, while with immersive sound, the surround sound speaker setup is still used but with added height speakers that are usually installed on ceilings which makes it 3D.

For now, stereo sound is enough to bring the Sky Deity to life and give the necessary immersive experience to our viewers. However, the most ideal format to be used is immersive audio. This is because our audience would be able to better feel as if they were in the soundscape or the world within the film as compared to if only stereo sound was used. As the project emphasizes the immersion of the audience, being able to hear the sound from all around apart from the screen would really help them not only watch the world, but also feel it. Soundscapes are something that we hear every day and each sound we hear does not just come from one direction or one source which is what immersive audio can allow us to recreate. Apart from

enabling the listener to hear the sounds as if they all had their own individual sources like they would in real life, it will also allow us to manipulate the sounds to travel around the audience and give them the feeling that they are also within the world of the film.

Alunsina

Our film is inspired by Visayan myths in which our main character is based on the Goddess Alunsina. Alunsina is known in Panay to be the Goddess of Eastern Skies in which her name can be translated as “Unmarried One” or “The One from Foreign Skies.” She is mentioned in the Panay Bukidnon creation myth and in the epic entitled “*Hinilawod*” (Luzviminda Philippines, 2013a).

In the creation myth she was married to *Tungkung Langit* whose name can be translated to “Pillar of Heaven.” They were the most powerful beings in the universe. *Alunsina* was known to be lazy, carefree, playful, and is the one who brought life into her and *Tungkung Langit*’s home in the highest part of the skies, while *Tungkung Langit* was known to be loving, hardworking, and always leaving their home to arrange things in the universe. One day, *Tungkung Langit* told Alunsina that he would not be going home for a while and when he left, *Alunsina* ordered the breeze to follow him. *Tungkung Langit* caught the breeze and when he got home, they had a big fight. The fight caused *Alunsina* to leave their home, and at first *Tungkung Langit* did not think much of it because she would come back, but she did not. He grew anxious so he created the ocean in hopes of seeing *Alunsina*’s reflection in the water because it was something she would do in their home, but she did not appear. He created the land next and filled it with plants and animals because he remembered her playfulness, but again she did not return. Lastly, *Tungkung Langit* saw *Alunsina*’s jewelry in their home, and put them in the sky as his last call. Her comb turned into the moon, her crown the sun, and the jewels the stars. After all this, *Alunsina* never returned. Now it is believed that whenever it rains, it was *Tungkung Langit*’s tears, and whenever it thundered, it was his cries (Clark, 2016).

In *Hinilawod*, *Alunsina* is the daughter of *Kaptan*, the Supreme God, and when she came of age, she was ordered to get married. Many gods asked for her hand in marriage, but she fell in love with a mortal named *Datu Paubari* who was the leader of *Hinilawod* and they got married. This angered many of the gods and they planned on flooding *Hinilawod* where the married couple resided. *Suklang Malayon*, the Goddess of Happy homes and *Alunsina*’s sister found out about this plot and told Alunsina about it so that she and *Datu Paubari* could be safe. The couple avoided the flood and went back in secret and eventually had three children who were the main characters of the epic (Papeldeliha, 2011).

Taking inspiration from these stories of *Alunsina*, we conceptualized that the Sky Deity would be cheerful and playful to a fault because these qualities would also make her easily distracted and cause her to neglect her duties of controlling the sky including the rain; hence her journey in the film.

Maria Cacao

Cacao Deity, another character in our film, is based on *Maria Cacao*. She is known as the *diwata* that guards Mount Lantoy in Argao, Cebu and is associated with *Maria Makiling* of Laguna and *Maria Sinukuan* of Pampanga wherein the three of them are the most famous mountain goddesses of the country and known as the “Tres Marias.” *Maria Cacao* is named after the large cacao plantation on Mt. Lantoy and she is known to reside in a cave on the mountain. The people know her to leave the mountain at times and sell cacao to the townsfolk, neighboring cities, and even in America in which she travels from place to place on her golden ship (Auro Chocolate, 2022).

Not much was said about the personality of *Maria Cacao*, but she was also known to be very generous with the people and lent them items whenever they requested which is why we made cacao deity in our film to be approachable, kind, and playful towards the Sky Deity and the maya bird in which she even made chocolate for them.

Luyong Baybay

The Sea deity in our film is based on the Panay Bukidnon Goddess of the Tides, *Luyong Baybay*. Her name can be translated to “she who was born from the sea” and she controls the rising and falling of the tides. *Luyong Baybay* is present in many myths in which her origins differ in each but nevertheless, she is a sea goddess in all of them. The people of Panay offered red meat to the sea to thank *Luyong Baybay* for great harvests and stayed respectful to the sea for she is known to cause accidents to those that disrespect her domain. Furthermore, she is known to be married to a fire spirit known as *Paigrab* and they have a daughter named *Magsauladung Biday* who is known to give instructions to fishermen on how to have a great catch. Another notable myth of the sea goddess is that she was in love with the moon god *Libulan* and whenever he gets closer to the Earth, the tides would rise higher than usual as *Luyong Baybay’s* attempt to get closer to him (Luzviminda Philippines, 2013b).

Since *Luyong Baybay* is a sea goddess, we based her personality on the sea in which it is not always calm but is always cool and collected. The Visayans believed in many sea goddesses, but we chose *Luyong Baybay* because of her connection with *Alunsina* and because through our research, she is not mentioned as much as the others.

Suklang Malayon

The mystical maya bird that accompanies the Sky Deity throughout the film is based on the Goddess of Happy Homes, *Suklang Malayon*. Luzviminda Philippines (2013c) stated that in the epic *Hinilawod*, she is known to be the sister of *Alunsina* who took the form of a Maya bird or sent one to get to *Alunsina* and warn her of the flood that the other gods were planning out of jealousy to harm her and her husband. Once the flood was over, *Suklang Malayon* once again took the form of a maya bird or sent one to the couple to tell them it was safe to go back.

The maya bird is known to be her symbol because these birds would create their nests or homes near the villages where the people reside in which their birdsong during their mating season is considered to have a happy melody. Moreover, whenever a Maya bird appears in one's home, it is believed that it is *Suklang Malayon* giving her blessing of happiness to those within.

Initially, we chose the Maya bird to accompany the Sky Deity because it was the previous national bird of the country, but upon further research, we found out about *Suklang Malayon* and saw that she was a perfect fit for the role of the Maya bird. This is why the bird has a glowing aura throughout the film indicating that it is not an ordinary bird. As we were conceptualizing, we chose the maya bird as a symbol for the prayers of the people within the world wherein the prolonged rainfall was causing them suffering and making them unhappy thus the creation of the beginning of our film where the Maya bird sees the sad little boy and goes up to the Sky Deity to stop the rain.

Kanlaon

Kanlaon – like *Alunsina* in the creation myth of the Panay region – was the supreme god of those in the Negros region where they believed him to be the creator of everything in which his domain can be found in the upper heavens, the peak of Mt. Kanlaon being its entrance. He was described as a dignified old man that eventually disappeared from the people after they disappointed him, perpetually staying in his home. He was also believed to be a goddess because of the unpredictable nature of the Kanlaon volcano. Mt. Kanlaon is still known to have great positive spiritual energy making it a pilgrimage site where *babaylans*, hermits, *mangkukulams*, etc. reside and do their practices liking meditating, doing rituals, and offering prayers and sacrifices either to the god Kanlaon, or to other deities. The worship and belief in Kanlaon are one of the strongest among the Visayan gods and followers still exist at present, never to be forgotten so long as the volcano bears his name (Luzviminda Philippines, 2013d).

We chose to include Kanlaon in our film as a testament of its surviving belief throughout the years and as a way to highlight the good energy of the mountain and the *babaylans* of Visayans.

In our film, after the sky deity does her final gesture and grants the world clear skies, a yellow aura can be seen starting at the peak of the second mountain and spreading throughout the land. The yellow aura represents the positive spiritual energy of the mountain and grants the people good energy to enjoy the end of the rainy period.

Visayan Landmarks

Aside from the Village, Mt. Lantoy, the Cacao Plantation, and Mt. Kanlaon, the Chocolate Hills and Hinagdanan cave were also highlighted in our film as well as rice fields and the sea.

Visayas is the central Archipelago of the Philippines where several of its main islands are characterized by their mountains while other are hillier. Moreover, since the Visayas – like the

rest of the country – is an archipelago, it is surrounded by several bodies of water. Rice, sugarcane, and other crops are widely grown, while fishing is also widely done (Discover the Philippines, 2022).

Located in Bohol, Visayas is the Chocolate hills which is one of the most popular tourist attractions in the Philippines and was declared the 3rd National Geographic Monument of the country. It is also featured in the 200 Philippine peso bill along with the Tarsier. These hills are known to be green during the wet season and turn brown during the dry season, hence the name (Muzones, 2023). We chose to include the Chocolate hills because of its fame. Since our film has no dialogue, this landmark is something that is very distinctively Visayas in which the audience will surely recognize it.

The *Hinagdanan* Cave is another popular tourist spot in Bohol, Visayas located at the coast by Alona beach in Panglao Island. It was discovered by a farmer who found two (2) holes in the ground where he threw a rock inside only to hear a splash of water. The farmer then made a ladder to descend into the hole and found the beautiful underwater cave and freshwater lagoon. This story is how the name of the cave came to be (Melon, 2022). We chose this landmark to be featured in our film because of its beauty which is unique compared to other famous caves in the country.

Visayan Creatures

The Visayan Hornbill, scientific name *Penelopides panini* – Also known locally as *Kalaw* – is an endangered species of bird that resides in the forests of the Panay and Negros Islands. These birds are large but smaller compared to other hornbills. They have black wings and bare skin around the eyes and chin and the females are fully black while the males have brown and white hues. Their voices are short and like that of a squeaky toy (eBird, n.d.).

Tarsiers are considered to be a symbol of Bohol and are an endangered species. They are nocturnal creatures and the smallest primates in the world where in the Philippines, they can only be found in Bohol. They are known to be very delicate and sensitive which is why touching them and taking pictures with the flash on is strictly prohibited and one must be quiet in their presence so as not to disturb their sleep (Melon, 2022).

The Chestnut Munia or Black Headed Munia – Locally known as *Mayang Pula* or *Maya* – is the previous national bird of the Philippines before the Philippine eagle. It is predominantly red around its body with a black head and is a common bird around Southeast Asia where it can mostly be seen around grasslands (Animalia, n.d.).

Umalagad is a term used to refer to ancestral spirits and are commonly heard of in Suludnon beliefs and myths where in the word “*Alagad*” means “voluntary servant” or “follower” (Tagalog Lang, 2022). The creation of our small, rounded creature in the film was inspired by the *Umalagad* wherein they can be found wherever there are people, silently helping them with their tasks as they live their lives.

Mermaids are a common myth in countries around the world and commonly known as *Sirena* in the Philippines, but in the Visayas, they are known as *Kataw*. Looking into the traditional hilt of Panay Bukidnon daggers that were carved into *Kataw*, they did not look like the more common mermaids described by western countries but rather resembled Hindu mermaids instead (Clark, 2022). We referred to this literature when creating the design for the *Kataw* and for the Sea Deity.

In the past it was believed that there were seven (7) moons that shone brightly in the sky at night until the *Bakunawa* came and ate them one by one. When the six (6) moons were gone, the people heavily guarded the last moon and that whenever the *Bakunawa* would attempt to eat the moon, they would shout from the top of their lungs saying, “return our moon,” crying, pleading, and making loud noises until the moon is back in the sky. It is said that what is happening in the story is an eclipse, but several people today still believe in this which is why shouts can still be heard whenever one happens (Clark, 2019).

Precolonial Visayan Clothing

Caballes (2020) stated that in the Boxer Codex, the Visayans were known for their tattoos or *batok* in which for men it was their clothing and pride, and for women, they were a symbol of beauty and protection. Caballes also mentioned that although tattoo culture has died down throughout the years, many of the patterns of tattoos can still be found in traditional clothing. An example they gave was that of the Panay Bukidnon people’s embroidery showing striking similarity to the tattoos shown in the boxer codex.

Bahags were also often worn by men which are loincloths wrapped around the waist covering their privates. Another piece of clothing mentioned in the text was a *Pudong* or a head dress wherein it is either wrapped around the whole head, or just wrapped around excluding the top of the head.

For women, *malongs* were commonly used. Malongs are typically a tube skirt that can be easily adjusted and cinched on the waist depending on the height and stature of the lady. They are also known to be versatile and can serve as blankets, bags, baby wraps, etc. The women were also fond of wearing gold as jewelry and to help fasten their clothes and wear crowns of tinsel or flowers.

Precolonial Visayan Instruments

The Visayans had several traditional musical instruments, some of them can also be found in other places in the country but with different names. The *Kudyapi* is a boat lute that has 2-3 strings and plucked when played wherein only men played this instrument and were usually used for love songs. Another instrument is the *Agong* which was considered to be the most important. When played slowly, it means that bad news was about to be announced, while when played quickly it means that the datu wants to summon the people. The *Agong* is also played during a war when the tribes ships would approach their enemy (Caballes, 2012).

The *bombo* is a single headed drum made of cow skin and played using the *palad* or hand or a stick called *paratik*. This instrument is typically played along with the *paratikan* which is a bamboo slit drum also played using the *paratik*. These two (2) instruments are usually played during celebrations of *pasasalamat* or thanksgiving and originate in Anilao, Iloilo from the Ati tribe (Katunog, n.d.-a & Katunog, n.d.-b).

The four instruments mentioned are the traditional instruments to be used for the original soundtrack of the film along with the more classical instruments like piano and violin.

Review of Related Works

For the related works, animated films with a similar genre to our output such as *Spring Herald*, *Trese*, and *Sol Dalusung* and *The Nameless Hero*. Along with sound installations, they will be examined for its meticulous use of worldbuilding in creating an overall mesmerizing experience through incorporating eye-catching imagery of environment and creature designs inspired from its respective myths and folklore.

Spring Herald

Spring Herald is a 90-second animated student film created by Curie Lu—a Chinese American studying in California Institute of the Arts. The short film showcases Chinese folktales and myths in a fictional world with captivating art style incorporated in the environment and creature designs

Figure 5

Scene from Spring Herald



The story revolves around a character along with a dragon summoning rain to pour down the land below them while flying through the world—guiding the viewer through eye-catching imagery throughout the film. Feedback and comments under the film also point out comparisons in terms of the quality of animation and worldbuilding between it and animated films created by Studio Ghibli. According to an article by Schnier (2020), where Curie Lu was questioned regarding their process and inspiration, they mentioned that they wanted to create a cultural film with subjects that their grandparents are already familiar with to get past the language barrier between them. The student animator also mentioned that they find Chinese folktales and myths interesting—one of the examples mentioned includes the connection between dragons and the forces of nature along with its significance in Chinese culture. In relation to my output, I aim to represent myths that are somehow familiar among most of the audience—where the viewer can find or recognize these elements and at the same time immerse themselves in the unfamiliar world.

Trese

Netflix’s first Filipino animated series released in 2021—*Trese*—is based on a comic book developed by Budjette Tan and Kajo Baldesimo that revolves around an occult detective named Alexandra Trese that investigates crimes in the city and slays creatures along with her two bodyguards. She also serves as a path or connection between the spirit realm and the real world—a part of her duty as a babaylan warrior to maintain the peace between the two worlds. Its setting or worldbuilding is not entirely fantasy, but it does fall under one of its genres which is magic realism—where the real world has elements of magic or fantasy which blurs the line between reality and fantasy (MasterClass, 2021b). Meanwhile, in comparison to our creative output, we will be referencing the fantasy genre in terms of creating an entirely new, reimagined setting or environment along with its mythical creatures. The story is set in Manila in a supernatural setting where well-known mythological creatures such as the *tikbalang*, *tiyanak*, and the *manananggal* co-exist with human beings.

Figure 6

Scene from Trese

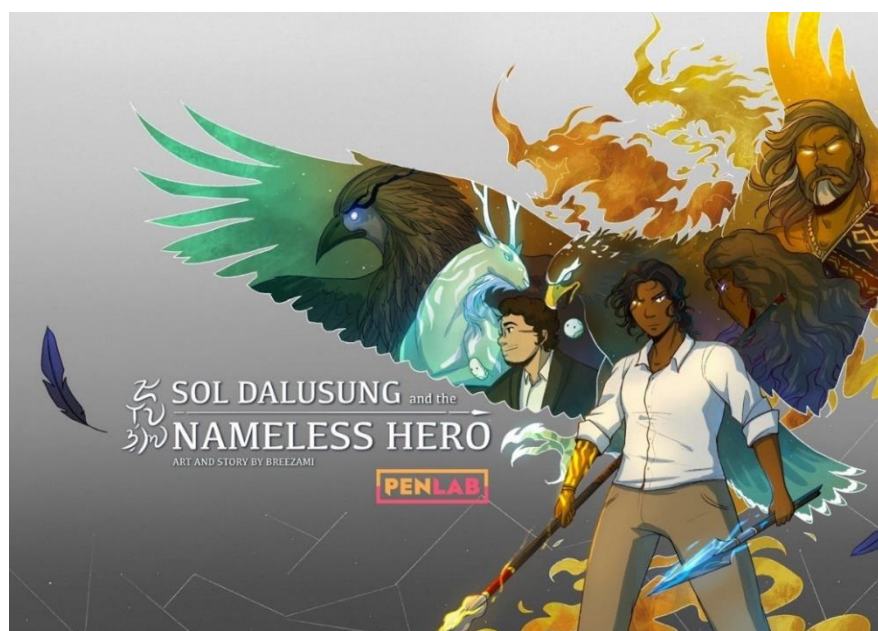


Sol Dalusung and the Nameless Hero

Established in a fantasy setting, *Sol Dalusung and the Nameless Hero* is a “queer mythic fantasy adventure” graphic novel written and illustrated by Cams Cabezas that features Philippine mythology—specifically Kapampangan mythology and folklore. It is currently released in Penlab Comics where comics created by Filipino creatives are featured. The story revolves around the main character, *Soledad Dalusung*, a formerly celebrated demi-god that has turned into an archeologist wherein she makes use of her remaining powers for the historical research of the country. Unfortunately, as the immortal attempts to live a quiet, peaceful life, she discovers an artifact that placed a curse on her. To break the curse, she must set on an adventure into the world of mystical creatures along with powerful gods to discover her past (Legaspi, 2021).

Figure 7

Cover Art for Sol Dalusung and the Nameless Hero



The author emphasized the issues surrounding Eurocentrism along with its underrepresentation in especially Western countries which led them to be inspired to create a character—an archeologist—that goes on adventures to discover their own history. To celebrate and remember their heritage and at the same time get readers to potentially develop an interest, they personally chose to make use of *Kapampangan* mythology incorporated in their worldbuilding. In their comic, it is evident that the creature design along with its environment design is well-researched and composed. Like the comic version of *Trese*, they make use of magic realism wherein there is a fantasy world within the real world—but this time inspired from their cultural heritage.

FOREST (for a thousand years...)

FOREST (for a thousand years...) is a sound installation by Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller that takes place in a forest. Over 30 speakers were installed around the location and the audience sat on tree stumps where they experienced the installation that blurred the line between art and reality. Cardiff and Miller incorporated sounds that supported the natural environment of the location but also incorporated sounds that challenged the vision of the listener. The forest that the listener can see could be calm and tranquil but then they would hear the strong winds of a typhoon or an explosion. Just like the title, Cardiff and Miller allowed their audience to experience moving through time and history through sound (CardiffMiller, n.d).

In this work, what the audiences can see was challenged by what they could hear, and eventually, what they can see turned into the backdrop of what they can visualize with the sounds that they hear from the installation. The sound transported the audience into another world which is the same thing that we would like to achieve with "The Sky Deity" but with a focus of both visuals and sound wherein they would be supporting each other.

Figure 8

Forest (for a Thousand Years...) Audience Experience



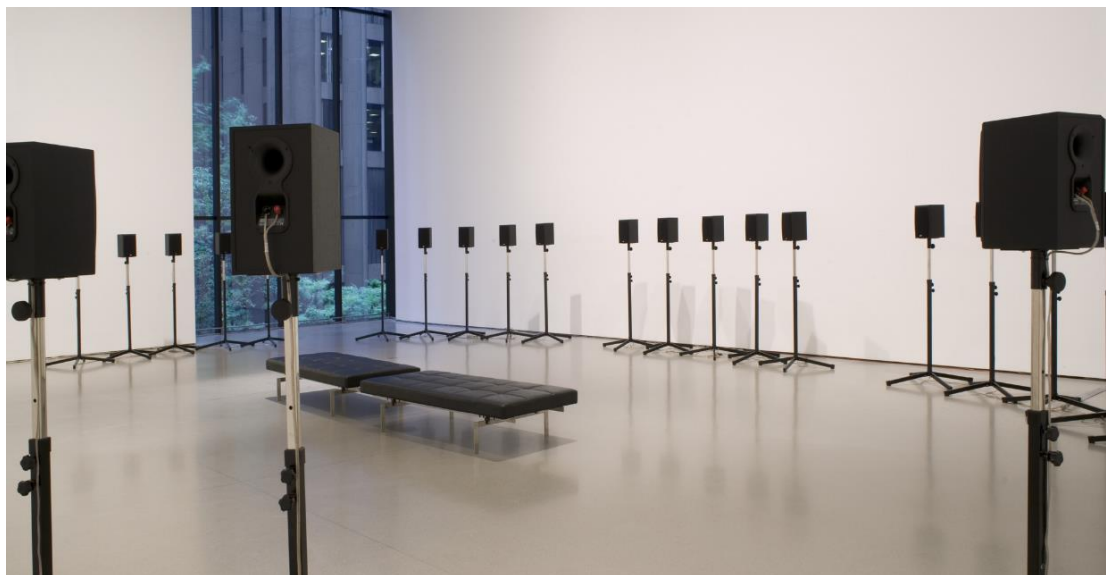
Forty Part Motet

The Forty Part Motet is a sound installation by Janet Cardiff in 2001 which showcases Thomas Tallis's Choral composition in the 16th century Spem in Alium translated into English as "In no other is my hope." Forty members of the Salisbury Cathedral Choir were recorded separately as they sang the piece. The Forty Part Motet was composed of 40 speakers in which each speaker played the recording of one member of the choir singing. The speakers were arranged in a large oval and the listeners can play an active role in experiencing the installation. The overall sound of the piece by Tallis changes depending on where the listener is located. When the listener is located at the center of the installation, they will be able to hear all 40 voices of the choir harmonizing with each other. If the listener is up close to one speaker, they will mainly be able to hear the sound from that single one, while as they go to spaces between multiple speakers, they will be able to listen to the harmonization of the voice recordings based on their spot (The Museum of Modern Art, 2019).

Since this installation allows listeners to actively participate in exploring what they would like to hear by going around the speakers, it is a solid example of how soundscapes and people interact with each other in real life. Immersive audio is the what we would like to utilize for "The Sky Deity" wherein instead of the audience directly interacting with the sound however they want which would change the way they hear things, the audience would instead hear the sounds as if they were tagging along with Sky Deity and the Maya bird through their journey and the sounds would change according to that. Though we cannot use immersive audio due to our limitations, we will still try our best to give this illusion through panning in stereo sound.

Figure 9

Forty Part Motet Speaker Installation



Results & Discussions

The following paragraphs will be discussing the results of our research and discussing them based on our experiences starting with the interview results, to the preliminary research, and all the way to our creative output process.

Interview Questions for the Artists

The interview questions for the artist we chose consisted of four main questions with follow-up questions asked during the interview to further gain an understanding of their answers. The questions were mostly centered around the artist's work, inspiration, and their main process which are necessary for the entire production process of our creative output.

Murton Arts

1.) What inspired you to create comics/illustrations in the fantasy genre? Why did you specifically choose fantasy as the genre to portray the story that inspired your comic/illustrations?

"I grew up watching movies and series that are mostly in the fantasy genre. As I got older, I started to become more fascinated by how the people who created these shows have this vast creativity inside their head; specifically, people who created their own fictional worlds from their own concepts and ideas.

"To create/manipulate an idea from the ordinary and bring it to life making it their own through different forms of art, it inspired me to start thinking that I want to have my own world as well; where I can express and illustrate my creativity and ideas with only my mind being my only limit."

Since creatives are one of our main target audiences along with fantasy enthusiasts, we initially wanted to ask them about the factors that made them interested in creating media in the fantasy genre in the first place. Based on their answers to both questions, they were inspired as they grew older from watching movies and were intrigued by the process behind making these shows. They also wanted to create their own fictional world just as how these shows that inspired them conceptualized and illustrated their ideas.

2.) In the process of building the fictional world for your story/artwork, what steps did you take to gather information? What was the thought process behind it?

"World building can be a lot of work when it comes to planning on how you introduce your world or the process of gathering the necessary elements first that are aligned to the vision on

how you portray your fictional world to be like. There are many ways on how you can start building your world. “

“In my case, I focus more on gathering the overall world elements as my goal was to create a place that serves as my platform for my ideas and concepts first. My priority is to conceptualize my ideal type of environment, culture, characters, story, lore, magic system and even the type of government system. My approach leads me to thinking that before creating a story, one must create a setting for that to start into. I plan to create every major detail first and then leave the minor ones when I start writing the story behind it. “

Both of us have prior experience in worldbuilding but since we specifically chose fantasy as our genre, we asked them about their process to further improve on the areas that we may be lacking. The factor that they consider important in starting out scriptwriting and worldbuilding is to conceptualize the major details of the world first before the minor ones. We applied this by taking note of the main landmarks that will be shown throughout the film followed by slowly adding details of the characters along with the creatures residing in the world. We created the environments first before creating the elements within it to create a believable world where the character and creature design blend well with the environment. Naturally, these required a lot of research which is a huge part in worldbuilding—to create a believable world, the world must reference from real life but with consideration of other’s cultures.

3.) What were the factors that you considered in the creation of your characters? What was the inspiration behind their designs?

“Characters should naturally have their own unique traits and personality; however, creators behind their creations are still able to give a part of them. I personally applied my personal moods such as emotions and expressions but at the same time retaining individuality for each one of them.”

“When it comes to inspiration for designs, different art styles and clothing apparel from my favorite artists, culture, and shows come to my mind. Some examples are clothing designs from the show “Over the Garden Wall” which has a mix of modern and Victorian clothing that I try to apply on my world building. “

The characters are the ones that will appear for the entire duration of the project, so we considered different approaches in the creation of the characters for our film. As mentioned by our interviewee, characters should have their own unique traits and personality—ones that will separate them from one another and be recognizable by the figure itself. They also mentioned taking inspiration from existing designs and apparel by referencing reality to make it more believable. For instance, we created our main character with a theme surrounding the skies and Gods in mind—such as gold motifs to emphasize their standing in the world. We also made sure that their bubbly, playful personality shows in the design through round and flowy shapes.

4.) Who or what were your biggest artistic influences in creating these comics/illustrations? What specific elements in their works did you find interesting that also influenced your works?

“When it comes to major influences on my works, there are three amazing artists that have changed my perspective and art style throughout my years of drawing and illustrating fantasy-based illustrations.”

“The first one is Tim Burton, a director who inspired me to love the idea of fairytale and storytelling. The second one is John Kenn Mortensen, an illustrator, who I admire for his work on dark fantasy illustrations. These two are the origin behind my artist's name ‘Murton’ as their influences have greatly changed my approach towards the fantasy genre of world building. The last one is an artist named Mako who specializes in fantasy illustration but more on a lighter atmosphere compared to the other two I have mentioned. His attention to detail and linework inspired me to improve my line works as well as the number of details I apply on my illustrations which has become a big improvement over the past months.”

Interview Questions for Sound Designer

The interview questions for sound designers consisted of three parts. The first part being an introduction for the designer, the second part being a discussion on their creative process, and the third part being their technical process. All three parts were necessary to get insights from the interviewee for the sound design of the creative output.

Pepe Manikan

1.) Why did you pursue sound for your career? What projects do you usually take?

Mr. Manikan pursued sound for his career because he wanted to make money out of his passion which was music. However, to make actual numbers he could not just focus on music which is why he also jumped into sound design. Nowadays, his usual projects include producing for other artists, and sound designing for film, animation, and motion pictures.

Though he did not start with sound design, I think that his roots being from music helped him a great deal. This is because music is focused on emotions and expression which is mostly the same when telling a story through film, so by having a better grasp on this, it would be easier to conceptualize for the sound design of a project.

2.) Do you have any favorite animated or live action films in terms of their sound design? What are they and why?

For this question, he answered that his favorite live action film in terms of its sound design is Star Wars in which it was spearheaded by Ben Burtt. He explained in simple terms that the reason why this was his favorite is because despite all the films in this franchise being set in a completely fictional world, everything sounds natural as if they were all real.

As someone who consumes a lot of fictional media from books to TV shows, sound really plays a big role in a world's believability. When things sound natural, it is easy to think that it sounds "right" even if it is not real which is why Star Wars is such a famous franchise and why Ben Burtt is renowned in his field. If things did not sound right in Star Wars, I do not think it would have the impact that it has today.

3.) As a sound designer, what do you think makes you distinct from others?

Mr. Manikan answered that there are many great sound designers, but most tend to look only at the technical side despite it also being very creative, therefore he thinks that his focus on understanding the story and using sound to tell it is what sets him apart from the others. As simple as using background sound in evoking the emotions of the audience based on the story. Storytelling using sound doesn't just look at the visual aspect but looks at the feeling and the emotion of the scenes.

I agree a lot with Mr. Manikan's answer to this question because the story is the primary driving force of a whole project when talking about film or animation. Personally speaking, I usually stay for the story whenever I am consuming any type of media that has one. If the story is good, even if the overall quality of the piece of media is not the best, I still continue and vice versa. To base the sound on the story rather than on the visuals alone would give it more depth.

4.) In the process of creating or enhancing the sounds and soundscapes of your projects, what steps do you take to gather information or determine what you need? What is your overall process?

The first is to flesh out the story and read the script to know the point. Next is creating a concept map as a guide for the sounds he will create and how he brainstorms how he portrays each emotion through sound. After conceptualizing, he then starts recording and editing the sound from the background followed by the sound effects and dialogue then music.

He emphasized the need to understand how and when to use the different sound elements because it would not always be necessary to use all elements in a single scene in which sometimes one or two are enough.

Creating a concept map would indeed be efficient based on his answer to the question since it would also serve as his main guide for the sounds that he needs to which since it is organized, would be easier to locate specific things and edit whatever needs to be edited. Moreover, I think that the concept map would also help in knowing which sound elements are necessary at certain scenes in the project because if too many elements are used, it can be overwhelming; and if too little are used, it could become underwhelming.

5.) What factors do you consider when creating the sound design for a project? Which factor would you consider to be the most important?

For him, the most important factor to consider is always the story because it is the primary driving force of the whole project therefore everything, including the sound, must be parallel to it. He also mentioned that when the sound goes unnoticed, it means that it was done right.

I think part of the reason why sound design is not very well known is because so much work is put into trying to make everything sound right and seamless, and as Mr. Manikan said, it goes unnoticed. This is a compliment to the people involved in the sound of projects but at the same time can affect the overall industry because as I have observed, it is also often neglected.

6.) How would you create sounds for things that do not exist in real life? (Ex: magic, visual effects, etc.)

He uses associations to come up with the sounds in which he would look at the visual and look for similar objects in real life that make the same movement, same material, etc., deduce what type of sound it could make and then proceed with trial and error.

A notable quote he said with his answer in mind is *“walang tama at mali meron lang bagay or hindi”* which means that there is no right or wrong when it comes to sound but rather if it sounds natural regarding the visual.

He then mentioned that before proceeding to production, always be finished with conceptualization first.

This answer really helped me a lot because since our film is a work of fiction in the fantasy genre, there are several elements that would have to be made up for the things that do not exist in real life. Moreover, for the creatures that do exist in real life, since it is a fantasy representation, their sounds would have to be reimagined as well. Through associations and trial and error, he is always able to find the right sounds for his projects which is why I will also try this method and utilize it for the Sky Deity.

7.) Who or what are your influences when doing your projects? What do you find interesting about these works that influenced your art style?

He mentioned that the story for his projects are his main inspirations for his works as they are his primary guide to what he needs to do.

Ben Burt is one of his role models and inspires him to create his own style because he noticed that in our country, there are limited projects that would really allow sound designers to be very creative as fantasy and action genres are not usually pursued. He also mentioned that there are several films where the sound design did not follow the story.

8.) What speaker set-up/s do you usually work with and how does your process differ with each in terms of technicality?

He would always start with stereo or mono first and then move to surround if it is needed in which the speaker set-ups would depend on those factors.

9.) Have you worked with surround or immersive sound? How does it differ from stereo sound in terms of its mixing and effect to the listeners?

For immersive and surround sound, the first thing to consider is if your interface can handle the number of speakers you need for your project. He suggested using the Reaper software for the sound design because it has a plugin that is suitable for mixing in surround and immersive that is like the Dolby Atmos object-based method.

Since the project will only be in stereo, a simple 2 or 2.1 speaker setup would suffice, and we may stick with the PreSonus Studio One software for cost efficiency and feasibility since it is the software most familiar to us.

10.) What is your overall technical process in terms of recording, designing, and mixing sound?

During Conceptualization, he creates a list of the sounds he needs to create or record and then creates separate files for each sound element and renders each; and then puts those rendered files together in the main project file. He said that this is what works for him best as it is also the method that is the lightest for his PC.

Conclusion & Recommendations

Conclusion

To effectively create an immersive fictional world from scratch, referencing from real life is the first step. For instance, during the first stages of our project as we were coming up with concepts while searching for resources to take inspiration from regarding Philippine folklore and myths. We realized that there are still plenty of stories that are yet to be told through mediums that are effective in storytelling such as film—although that does not permit to simply referencing cultures from communities that we are not a part of as this country is not a monolithic country. Part of the process in worldbuilding is engaging and communicating with the people around us—whether it be creatives, our families, or our fellow countrymen—to gain feedback, understand the story behind each element that we place, and apply our own experiences. We may still be greatly lacking in different aspects of our final output, but we consider this an important step in our goal to exhibit one of the many stories and abundant culture that this country has.

Worldbuilding is not a simple task to accomplish since it requires a lot of consideration for several factors and a lot of research on different elements. Upon the duration of this study, we noticed that most works in the creative realm have a certain degree of worldbuilding to them

whether the creators knew it or not, which shows its importance. Moreover, through our own experience in working in our project, observance of the literature and works of others, and the responses of our interviewees, we have concluded that focusing on worldbuilding can indeed enhance Philippine mythological representation.

With the world we created now sets it in stone with how the people act and look like, the locations, the Goddesses we presented, etc., the number of stories that can be told from these are immense. No matter the complexity of the story or whatever elements are added, so long as it stays true to the origins and basis, it will always be safe to say that it is the world of our beloved Sky Deity.

Recommendations

Throughout our study and process, we have several recommendations that can be made to further the projects of future researchers and those aiming to produce a creative output like ours. In this section, the recommendations are separated into two parts: our journal paper, where we will be discussing the research on our topic; and the creative output, where we will be discussing the sound design, animation, and final film.

Journal Paper

For our paper, we mainly focused on searching for Visayan Myths in which we did not even cover a fraction of those exist in that region alone. The Philippines has a diverse number of myths and folklore all around Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao that has yet to be highlighted; therefore, our first recommendation is to explore the rest so that more of the country's myths can be appreciated and remembered for more generations to come.

Our second recommendation for the paper is for the myths to be learned from the people themselves. Due to our limitations, we could not go to Visayas ourselves and converse with the people and experience their culture which is why we heavily relied on the literature we could find, whether those be blog posts, articles, or books. For a better representation and understanding of the culture and myths you wish to research, experiencing it and talking to the people from those cultures would be the best way.

Animation

The production of the main animation for our creative output was the longest and most challenging process to accomplish with the time given for the entirety of MMAPRO1 and MMAPRO2. From the start, especially during the pre-production process where we were still conceptualizing the characters and environments that will be seen throughout the film, we took into consideration the amount of time it would take to animate each element—ultimately deciding on using simple designs. This made us hold back with the amount of detail we used on the characters such as the clothing and accessories. We also were not able to create dynamic,

impactful animations due to this limitation which was pointed out by a panelist during MMAPRO1 in one of our scenes with the deities. Since we only have one animator for this project, we recommend that it's advisable to hire at least four helpers that could assist in placing in-betweens, cleaning the line work, cell-shade individual frames, and assist in the compositing stage. It would also be helpful to hire illustrators that could create the environments for each scene.

We decided not to include dialogues between characters to save time from animating the mouth movements and placing voice overs to focus more on the visuals of the film—although we have received recommendations from our thesis advisers that it would improve the overall quality of the film and can give more insight on the relationship between the characters in the story.

Sound Design

The first recommendation we have for sound design is like one of our recommendations for the paper. It would be better to do field recordings in the actual place where the story of the chosen myths originated from to keep authenticity and to have a better feel for how the actual place sounds. This would give the sound designer a more accurate understanding of the soundscapes they need to create and the sounds they need to recreate.

Our second recommendation for the sound design is about our process. Usually, the process of sound design begins once the animation or film is already on “picture-lock,” meaning that visual wise, it would no longer be touched or edited, hence the name. However, due to the heavy time constraints of this project, that process was not followed, and we had to do the sound design simultaneously with the animation.

We decided on this method to comply with our deadlines, but it was not efficient because whenever there was a change in the animation, the sound also had to be edited once more. We also found it quite difficult to do the sound at the same time as the animation because the compositing process was also not finished, and we could not make a rough cut; therefore, constraining the sound design to be done per shot instead of a whole. Having said that, we recommend not to do the method we chose and to stick to editing sound once the film is already on picture lock to avoid confusion and unnecessary and redundant edits.

The next recommendation for sound is about the music of our film in which it would be beneficial to work with people who specialize in playing traditional instruments from the region of focus. This would make for a better representation of the melodies, harmonies, and rhythms present in the culture and would also help give more exposure to actual precolonial music.

For the fourth and last recommendation, to take the project to the next level, immersive audio may be used since the purpose of this is to allow viewers to experience sound as if they were within the soundscape. Using immersive audio would let the viewers understand the world with a different perspective from just stereo or surround sound.

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