

**SHEATH SHATTERED: USING RECORD KEEPING TO BUILD YOUR  
WORLD**

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

Sheath Shattered: Using Record Keeping to Build Your World

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In my research, I explore using historical examples of non-artistic record keeping as inspiration for worldbuilding in epistolary fiction. For example, in Lewis and Clark's expedition, they discovered new plants and animals and mapped routes to the Pacific Ocean. Their detailed recording of maps and routes, which laid out which areas were great for agriculture and settlement, had a strong impact on American life in expanding west and became the leading force of Manifest Destiny. History is often used as inspiration, while epistolary fiction is apt at creating intimacy between the letter-writer and the reader through the transparency and intimacy of emotion in the idea of writing in the moment. The genre even holds historical ties as the letter novel was considered a popular genre in the 18th century, with many readers enjoying reading the everyday life of fictional characters. In recent times, the writing style isn't as commonly employed as there are many rules to upkeeping the realism of the style. However, with the introduction of technology, the genre has expanded to various forms such as research reports, newspaper articles, and even emails and texts. This has allowed the style to be less restrictive, while still playing on the strengths of realism. The genre was also associated with the feminine

voice as it was considered favored to use as moral instruction to women at that time. Considering the main character of my artifact is female, further research into the topic offers further subversions from epistolary fiction's original intent. To emulate the strong worldbuilding offered by historical recordkeeping, I created *Sheath Shattered*, a creative artifact in the epistolary fiction genre, which takes a more explorational stance as it introduces a fantasy setting.

## DEDICATION

*I dedicate this thesis to my friends, family, and instructors, who offered support and advice throughout my writing.*

*And most importantly, this thesis is dedicated to my cats, who lifted my spirits every step of the way.*

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All work conducted for the thesis was completed by the student independently.

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# 1. AESTHETIC MOTIVATION AND RESEARCH QUESTION

## 1.1 The Question

Why is there a lack of epistolary fantasy novels when the documentation of a journey is a perfect immersion into the world? What makes epistolary a tough genre to write in settings not synonymous with real life? With an interest in worldbuilding, the exercise has had me looking into potential ideas for immersing a reader. Immersion is created through thorough and passionate descriptions of the world. However, these can become exhaustive for both the writer and readers who wish to return to the character-driven plot points. To tackle both descriptive worldbuilding and character voice, I investigated the idea of creating a travel journal and became engrossed with the epistolary genre.

Despite the popularity of epistolary fiction in the 18<sup>th</sup> century for its intimacy with its characters, the subgenre is not commonly employed now. It could be speculated that the writing style is far too rigid for writers. The character in the story would need to be sitting down and writing the letter for the sake of realism. Therefore, it could become an impossible task to write urgency and action scenes when they are not during the current moment of writing. However, with the introduction of technology, epistolary fiction can include modes of communication such as email, text, newspaper clippings, and many more options that would work in getting past that boundary.

There are many historical accounts of journaling being employed for the sake of keeping a record of both the environment and their own personal thoughts. While some are kept simply for personal use, there are also those that would be written for the sake of documentation towards further exploration and development. A strong example of this would be Lewis and Clark's



explorations to the Pacific Ocean (Lewis, Clark). Whilst the expectation of the journey was to find a passage to India, the preparation and creation of the journals led to a resource that allowed Americans to find the best lands for settlement and agriculture and opened up more trade. The social importance of the records such as Lewis and Clark's exploration has led to hugely impactful academic paradigms around record keeping, and I am interested in marrying this format and tradition to the act of world-building.

With world-building and historical inspirations in mind for the creation of a travel journal, I wish to take these ideas into the fantasy setting and take the storytelling to a higher level. Therefore, this brought me to one question: How can one utilize the epistolary subgenre for a fantasy setting to create an immersive and enjoyable story? This was the core research question on my mind during the creation of my creative artifact *Sheath Shattered*.

## **1.2 The Aesthetics**

My research is heavily rooted in the aesthetics of the story, both in the writing style and artistic style. For literary aesthetics, I wanted to utilize the epistolary subgenre and apply it to the fantasy genre. Fantasy stories are rich in unique worldbuilding and diverse settings, which is why I had been drawn to the genre. Japanese Role-Playing Games, such as *Tales of Symphonia*, inspired the story arc and journey of my characters as they explore new environments. Along with this, the Tabletop Role-Playing game, *Dungeons and Dragons*, was a role model to my worldbuilding being that it is diverse in races, cities, and geography. Since there are not many fantasy epistolary fiction stories, I branched out more in my research of such. *The Screwtape Letters* was one of the books I began with in delving into the genre, studying the unique character voice applied to make the letters interesting (Lewis, C.). I also read *Dracula*, drawn in by the variety of point-of-views within the story, as well as the creative use of various medias

such as journals and newspaper clippings (Stoker). With worldbuilding, character voice, and story structure, I took all these elements in writing *Sheath Shattered*.

For visual aesthetics, I wanted to show progression through the art style of the work. As the main character journeys through the new country, she picks up new pigments and comes into contact with new art movements. These slowly get incorporated into the illustrations in the journal, representing her growth as a character. As her original country was inspired by aspects of ancient China, her art style at the beginning of the story is similar to that of literati paintings, being detailed in shape and form, but staying strictly in black and white. As the story progresses, she buys new pots of ink with color and studies the art styles of the new country. For the transition, I was inspired by art nouveau styles of painting. While not completely abandoning the old art style, I will be incorporating aspects of art nouveau such as the color and line art style as well as the ornate circular designs.

Through both the literary and visual pieces of the creative artifact, I wanted to show positive growth. Taking inspiration from many different areas, it was my intention from the start to take advantage of the character-driven voice I was producing. Therefore, all of the aesthetics culminate in the final product which is *Sheath Shattered*, a fantasy travel journal.

### **1.3 My Proposal**

Now that I have explained the driving inspirations and interests in this creative artifact, I now offer up my official research proposal. Whilst creating my artifact for the Aggie Creative Collective, I had one question in mind: “How can the epistolary genre and historical recordkeeping be brought into the fantasy genre in order to highlight and expand the act of worldbuilding?” Through the creation of my work, I explore what aspects of the subgenre worked in my writing and art, and which aspects bottlenecked the story’s potential.

## **1.4 The Project**

*Sheath Shattered* is a Fantasy epistolary travel journal that is written from the perspective of the main character, Maeyu, an elf girl hailing from the country of Tianluna. Her travel journal consists of letters addressed to her brother, who she has been tasked with bringing home from a trade city called Casanza. However, due to her mana-intolerant disease, Maeyu has never left home before and is determined to prove that she can handle this mission without any help, unhappy when she must take along her assistant. Not being able to use magic, and naïve of the dynamics of the world, she becomes prey to hunters, who mistake her as a faerie due to her abnormal appearance. Upon losing her assistant, she is saved by a mysterious thief, who helps her learn her way around the city and look for her brother. When her brother is not at the university as she expected, Maeyu struggles as she is determined to find him and prove her worth to her family. The first chapter is meant to introduce Maeyu as a character, the next three chapters are during her time in Casanza, and the last four chapters are about Maeyu discovering her brother was dead all along and finding her purpose.

## **1.5 The Importance**

Worldbuilding is an important piece of storytelling as it grounds the reader in the reality of the plot. Therefore, when the author needs to offer exposition to the reader, they want to ensure that everything is covered. This tends to lead to long blocks of text and can risk taking away from the overall experience of reading the story. Therefore, I wanted this creative artifact to be experimentation with exposition, creating the journal as an in-world object, and developing immersion through experiencing the world from Maeyu's eyes.

As a concept artist and storyteller, this artifact benefits me greatly. In my professional work, I am always designing in order to tie the environment, people, and props to an overarching

story and its world. I have also written stories in the past, yet I would choose to push for a character-driven narrative due to the work required for worldbuilding. By creating my work, I will not be shying away from worldbuilding. As this is meant to be a journal filled with the main character's observations of her surroundings, I am striving to embrace worldbuilding.

While I benefit the most from the creation of the artifact, the work would allow others to be exposed to a new blend of genres. As mentioned previously, rarely is there a letter novel that is tied to a proper fantasy setting. Most may have fantasy elements, but most of these stories are always set in a world parallel to our normal world. I hope that by writing my work, I would be able to encourage others to try out the epistolary genre for themselves. For such a small pool of works that lack in fantasy worldbuilding, exposure is what will nurture the genre.

## 2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT, DISCIPLINARY PARADIGMS, AND AESTHETIC STANDARDS

### 2.1 The Research

#### 2.1.1 Epistolary Fiction

Having never written epistolary fiction before, I needed a lot of research before I could try my hands at it. The first book I read was *The Screwtape Letters* (Lewis, C.) per my professor's recommendations. This book allowed me to see a strong use of character voice, and how to provide context despite only seeing one side of a conversation. I read more epistolary fiction books, such as *Dracula* (Stoker) to get a stronger grasp from epistolary. However, considering the focus of my project is worldbuilding, I needed a little bit more than storytelling plots. It was from here I decided to be more methodical with my research. Since real-life recordkeeping is a physical example of how the world was documented in the past, I decided to add nonfiction accounts to my literature review, reading *The Journals of Lewis and Clark's Expedition* (Lewis, Clark). This allowed me to get a better idea of adding immersive realism to my work.

For all my research, I wanted to compare and contrast the various works I was consuming in order to pick out which elements I wished to implement into my work. Therefore, I will go through each one below, detailing what I liked versus what I disliked.

##### 2.1.1.1 The Screwtape Letters

*The Screwtape Letters* is a religious satire piece written by C.S. Lewis in dedication to his friend and fellow author, J. R. R. Tolkien. The book is of the satirical epistolary genre, written from the perspective of the Senior demon known as Screwtape as he coaches his nephew and

junior, Wormwood. The novel consists of the letters Screwtape has sent to his nephew as he mentors him in tempting a British man and securing the man's spot in damnation.

This novel was an excellent example of an engaging character voice. Despite the fact we are only seeing correspondence from Screwtape's end, his formal way of speaking offers inference to what Wormwood is asking for advice on. Screwtape "Notes" what his Nephew has mentioned in his previous letter before he tells him his advice on the matter, offering context before the content. Being that Screwtape is a demon, his personal worldview is injected into his pieces of advice, stating his abhorrence to God and Angels, and encouraging his Nephew to tempt the man with unsavory thoughts. This voice akin to an unreliable narrator is an interesting trope to experiment with as, while you are being informed of the world, you are also being informed of the character you are seeing the world from. As this story is set in a world parallel to ours, you already know of the morals and rules on which Screwtape is basing his views on. Therefore, this reads more as a character study rather than a misdirection, which is why I am taking inspiration from the eloquent writing of this novel.

#### 2.1.1.2 Dracula

*Dracula* is an epistolary novel written by Bram Stoker in 1897. The plot is centered around the Transylvanian nobleman, Count Dracula, and his eventual demise as Professor Abraham Van Helsing leads the hunt against him to free the people of Whitby from his terror. This novel not only uses letters to tell its story but also newspaper clippings and diary entries, telling the story from various perspectives.

This novel is a famous piece of literature and an excellent example of epistolary. With the usage of various mediums and various paper trails laid out in the contents, the novel gives an exploratory feeling to the reader, as if they are the ones investigating this story. The journal

entries were detailed, more detailed than what would be expected of someone writing a journal. However, the usage of first-person writing kept it feeling natural while still being able to incorporate scenes of action and tension. This is another story set in a world akin to ours, and the story has a stronger focus on character interactions rather than world explanations. How characters react at the beginning to Dracula is already telling that he is a frightening man, and the events that occur after only solidify that reputation given to him. The usage of character-driven storytelling was strong in this story and, along with the multimedia aspect of the writing, will be something I take away from this story.

#### 2.1.1.3 The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition

*The Journals of Lewis and Clark* were the nonfiction journals I had chosen to read during my research. These journals detailed the expedition of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark as the two, along with their team, explored west of the Mississippi. The creation of these journals was done meticulously. Lewis and Clark had field journals of their own that they would write in during the course of the journey and would expand on their field notes in the official journals that were to be presented to Thomas Jefferson after the journey. In a way, some of the entries could be considered second drafts as Clark kept a consistent personal field journal that looked to be transferred over to the official journals and a loose-leaf paper was found in Clark's notes that had a draft of Lewis's descriptions of Platte River, which is also found in the official journals under Codex O.

As speculated in the introduction to the journals on their website, the methodology of the two during their recordkeeping was what fascinated me the most. While both had personal notes, they adapted them to a more organized journal for presentation and were able to lay out their findings in a way that aided the country in moving west. Along with this, they also squeezed

illustrations and maps into the journal, showing off their discoveries. As I am interested in incorporating an illustrative aspect to *Sheath Shattered*, looking over their diagrams was helpful.

Overall, compared to fictional epistolary, the real-life recordkeeping of Lewis and Clark was more methodical but less neat. Being that these were written during an expedition, it makes sense there would be issues with grammar, and illustrations and maps not fitting well where they are placed. There is also no dialogue, and entries are much shorter, the focus being primarily to document the journey rather than telling a story. Since nonfiction is not meant to be engaging but rather telling, I want to take away the illustrative and informative aspects of these journals and combine them with the writing styles of my previous research.

### 2.1.2 *Worldbuilding*

As I have familiarity with worldbuilding, much of the research that went into worldbuilding was to strengthen it. My main inspiration was *Dungeons & Dragons*, their diverse races and magic systems being a starting point as I build my world. I was interested in creating different social hierarchies based on the different countries, and, to aid me with that, JRPGS were what I looked to.

In *Tales of Symphonia*, there are two worlds within Aselia: Tethe'alla and Sylvarant. The mana within these worlds is flowing from Sylvarant to Tethe'alla, leading to the Tethe'alla being more advanced technologically. As a result, the two worlds developed differently, having different cultures. These differing worlds were something I wanted to explore more in my story as I wanted to take advantage of my character traveling from one country to another.



## 2.2 How the Research informed my Worldbuilding

Having all the research in mind, I want to detail my worldbuilding to show how the research aided its creation. I will cover the general setting before I go into more detail about the countries and their systems.

### 2.2.1 *Explanation of the World*

For this story, my wish was to deviate from the normal world setting, opting for a High Fantasy setting instead. Rather than just having humans, I wanted to have a variety of races in one world, such as elves, orcs, and fae people. While the world will have physics and gravity similar to ours, the planet will be powered by a magical source called mana. In this world, everyone is born with mana, and it is used to do magic, as well as power machines. All races have the ability to do magic, except for humans. Those who cannot do magic must make use of a gem resource called mana stones. Mana stones allow these people to channel their mana through the stone, and out into the physical world. These are often embedded into weapons for easy use. Despite being commonly used by those with no magic, these stones can also be taken advantage of by those who can do magic. In these cases, they would use the stone to amplify their magic, create powerful attacks, or make jobs in heavy labor easier. The magic system of the world is based on spells. Different spells use different amounts of mana, some spells scaling up for larger effects. The Classic Schools of Magic are broken up the same as *Dungeons and Dragons*, there being 8 categories: abjuration, alteration, conjuration, divination, enchantment, illusion, invocation, and necromancy. As more research is done, more ways for the magic to be called upon have been found, allowing for a blossoming of technology.

The world has countries similar to ours, with similar climates. While there are countries specifically for one race, most countries are a melting pot of races. For example, the two

highlighted countries in the story, Tianluna and Casanza, are polar opposites of one another. Tianluna would be considered mono-ethnicity, being the residence of solitary elves. On the other hand, Casanza is considered a melting pot country. However, there is obvious discrimination against those of the fae race which leads to much of the conflict within the novel.

### *2.2.2 Explanation of Tianluna*

Tianluna is the country from which our main character, Maeyu, hails. It is of a colder climate, the mountainous regions of the country are covered in snow, while the land is barren of crops. The residents of this country rely primarily on their farm animals, and the monsters they hunt as a food source as the only crops native to the country are small forage crops. Outside of that, Tianluna must trade with other countries for other crops. Their main items of trade are meats, furs, and mana stones specific to their region.

The residents of this country are known as the Highland Elves. They are a solitary race, and the rare interactions with foreigners are generally from trade. Many of those that live in the mountains have never been outside of the country.

Knowledge and strength are the ruling forces of this country as those in power belong to high positions as either civil servants or military officers. There is a ruling Emperor and council, with smaller clans ruling over regions of the country. Maeyu's father is the leader of a Clan in the mountains. Their family is known for their military status, training warriors from far and wide for the aid of the Emperor. Maeyu was meant to become a warrior. However, warriors use mana stones to strengthen their power. Since Maeyu was intolerant to mana, she grew up in the scholars' quarters of her home, learning recordkeeping and art. The country's art is similar to that of the Literati paintings from The Southern School of Chinese Painting.

The country takes pride in its military forces as well as its art, which is why they have separate high positions for both.

### 2.2.3 *Explanation of Casanza*

Casanza is the country that Maeyu is traveling to in search of her brother. It is a warmer, more Mediterranean-adjacent region, being a trade hub for many countries far and wide due to its prime location. This is why the country is a melting pot of races, many people traveling to the country to make a better living.

The country has a strong focus on research in magic and mana. As a result, the country has made technological advancements, creating artistic magic such as fireworks and installations, and practical magic such as mana-infused elevators and message planes. The country is reigned by the church, while small regions are ruled by lordships. These lords will often choose to sponsor artists and researchers, boosting their reputation and encouraging the Enlightenment. The art of this region is similar to that of Art Nouveau, with intricate details and linework being the desired aesthetic.

However, despite the diversity of the country, there is racial discrimination towards a specific neighboring race: The fae. The fae are considered tricksters and liars, marked as dangerous to the country. However, these are unfounded rumors, spread through ill-intended children's tails of the race.

## 2.3 **How the Research Informed My Writing Style**

For my epistolary writing, I decided to combine various aspects of my research. Maeyu is a naïve and prideful main character at the start and, while she takes her recordkeeping seriously, speaks strongly in her letters to her brother, telling him many times not to worry about her and

her capabilities. In giving her a strong character voice, I wanted to establish her character quickly just from her speech.

As she writes, Maeyu's letters will also have the inclusion of illustrations. While there are still descriptions of some characters, especially in areas where an illustration would not make sense to have, Maeyu is a thorough person, illustrating to create a strong picture of what she is seeing around her. While these images are meant to be descriptive, I also want to depict her growth as a character through the change of art style, making the illustrations essential.

Lastly, I would like to explore the usage of different paper trails in my work. Maeyu's letters to her brother are the primary medium in which the story will be conveyed. However, throughout the story, it would be interesting to use newspaper clippings and other items as well. There is a specific scene where Maeyu discovers her brother's research notes. Utilizing these notes as another addition to the story would be interesting, as it would provide more context outside of Maeyu's own writing and opinions on his work.

These three key aspects, each taken from different places of my research are the ones I believe will strengthen my work the most. If I am to make the writing realistic for a fantasy setting, then the blend of fiction and nonfiction choices should successfully achieve this.

### 3. EXPLANATION OF EXHIBIT

#### 3.1 Description of Creative Artifact

*Sheath Shattered* is an epistolary fantasy novel that I have created for my thesis. For the creation of the novel, I planned out the story outline before writing out the chapters. In order to add visuals to my work, I also created illustrations that would be placed throughout the novel to give the reader a view of the world.

During periods when I was unable to work on the novel itself, I also created supplementary concept art of the main character, Maeyu. The first of these pieces was Maeyu in her warrior uniform from her home country, depicted in an orthographic format for referencing purposes. The second piece was a story moment of the novel, in which she finds out the truth of her brother's disappearance, and what he had done for her.

##### 3.1.1 *Sheath Shattered* Concept Art

These works primarily focused on the main character, Maeyu. Since she is the character the reader will be spending the most time with, I wanted to make sure her design and personality tied together well. The first concept piece I had done of her was the reference sheet. For this, I wanted to show the very first outfit the reader will see her in, as well as highlight important features of her design. For example, while all elves in this universe have white hair, Maeyu was born with black hair due to having an intolerance to mana and magic properties. As she had picked her strength up throughout the years, she now has white peeking from her roots. Important ties to her character and worldbuilding were key in my design process, and this was meant to exhibit that.

The second piece I did was the visual development for a story moment that occurs later in the book. For context, as Maeyu has been searching for her brother the entire book, during a distressing moment, she happens upon a cabin where he was conducting research. It is here that she finds out he was researching ways for her to utilize magic and realizes her brother has been away and working for her this whole time. In her tears, this story moment is when she tries out the magic that he had painstakingly researched to give her. Because this is later in the book, I wanted to illustrate a change in Maeyu. The most obvious change would be a change in her attire, her donning a fit that is more fitting for the new country. Along with this, my goal was to show off the emotions of this scene and highlight how this scene is meant to be a turning point for Maeyu.

### 3.1.2 *Sheath Shattered Epistolary Fantasy Novel*

*Sheath Shattered* is an epistolary fantasy novel with illustrative elements. For the artifact, it is still pending how much was completed for the sake of the thesis. In the introductory chapters, we are introduced to Maeyu and her assistant, Peng Siyu, her goal of meeting her brother in Casanza, and an introduction to the new country as Maeyu tries to navigate her way through. As Maeyu is unable to use magic due to her disability, her ventures through Casanza are affected by this, with her unable to use household appliances of the country due to its reliability on magic.

## 3.2 **Planning of Creative Artifact**

The Aggie Creative Collective's summer program was a time of planning the creative artifact. I went into the program knowing I wanted to do a piece centered around some kind of worldbuilding. However, I was unsure what would be a meaningful work to create. In discussions with my faculty advisor, we came up with a travel journal of some kind. From there

it was up to me to decide what kind of work I wanted to create. To highlight the worldbuilding aspect of the travel journal, I decided that the main subject would be travel to a foreign country. From there, the planning for the story flourished. I created visual reference boards to get an idea of both the environment and art style I was interested in emulating. I also put together a mind map in order to sort my thoughts and come up with a basic plot. Once I figured that out, I wrote out barebone plot beats. The idea started extremely rough. Therefore, it took a lot of refining to get to a story plot that I liked.

### **3.3 Process of Creative Artifact**

Once I was satisfied with the plot, I begin writing out the chapters. My workflow got rhythmic. I would start by writing a chapter out first, and once I was happy with the writing, I would then thumbnail the chapter. These would be rough drawings of the pages to get an idea of how I wanted them to look. Upon any feedback I would get on my thumbnails, I would then start illustrating the chapter. This required its own workflow. First, the simpler drawings would be drawn out. These would be things such as full bodies, headshots, or props. For more complicated drawings such as environments, I would do rough sketches and thumbnails first before diving in and finishing those illustrations last. When all of the illustrations were finally complete for the chapter, I would combine the writing and the art. This would be pasting the writing on the pages and formatting the art and writing so that they fit together properly.

The originally intended number of chapters was 10 chapters. However, this proved to be too much for the deadline. Therefore, I cut it down to 8 chapters. While this felt doable, unfortunately, many unforeseen events such as illness occurred, and I felt I needed to cut it down again. I was only able to create the setup of the story, not delving into chapters that further the plot.

During heavy workload periods in my studio classes, I took advantage of my in-class projects to create supplementary pieces. These were the reference sheet of Maeyu and the visual development of a story moment in the novel. These were extremely intensive classes. Therefore, I couldn't work on chapters during this period as it would have affected my health. Taking advantage of the freedom given to me for these class projects allowed me to still work on pieces for the artifact despite the misfortune of having not much time.

### *3.3.1 Tools Used for the Creation of the Creative Artifact*

For my story planning and writing, I took advantage of notetaking software such as Notion. This allowed me to keep everything in one place, and have everything organized by chapter. Everything illustration based was created in Clip Studio Paint EX. Since this software also has a feature to create pages, I took advantage of it in order to combine art and writing, using it to make the final product. These were software that I was already familiar with before creating the artifact. Therefore, this allowed for a comfortable workflow.

## **3.4 Presenting the Creative Artifact**

I presented my Creative Artifact at the URS Symposium. I chose to do an oral presentation, meaning I would be presenting to an audience. To get into the URS Symposium, I submitted the draft of the abstract I had at the time. Closer to the date of the presentation, I was sent confirmation that I would be a part of the Symposium along with notes for how long my presentation was meant to be. For my presentation, I wanted to show some of my current work. Therefore, I made sure I had a chapter ready to show off in my PowerPoint.

### *3.4.1 Creating the Presentation of the Creative Artifact*

While a PowerPoint was not required for my presentation, it was highly recommended. To create my PowerPoint, I utilized one of the templates that were offered by the Undergraduate



Research Scholars. I looked at examples of oral research presentations and created my layout based on those presentations. However, since my work is a creative artifact, and does not have the usual components of a research thesis, I did deviate from this to show more of my process for my illustrations and, lastly, a chapter of my work.

### *3.4.2 The Presentation of the Creative Artifact*

I presented to a small audience alongside two other thesis presenters. After each presentation, any questions that arose would be answered before the next presenter would go. After we had each presented our works, we were then called upon to receive feedback from the active listener of the presentations. He provided general feedback on our presentation skills, and what he would've liked us to add to our presentation.

The active listener provided me feedback to speak more confidently and to take more time scanning the room as I talk. It was also recommended that I talk more about my writing, as I had a stronger focus on the illustrative process of my work.

## **4. REFLECTION**

### **4.1 Presentation and Feedback**

Despite the nervousness I held, my presentation went smoothly. I did enjoy seeing all my hard work come together in the presentation. Many people in my audience were not aware of the epistolary fiction genre, and some people came up to me at the end to ask me more questions about the nuances of the genre. It made me really happy that I was able to introduce others to something they may not have known before. The feedback I received was also extremely helpful. My nerves were attributed to my lack of confidence while presenting. Therefore, I hope to take the feedback provided on my presentation skills and utilize them to improve in any future presentations I may do. Overall, it was a fulfilling experience, and I am glad I got to see some of the curiosity my work piqued.

### **4.2 Moving Forward**

Going forward, I hope to revisit this project and bring it to completion for my own personal satisfaction. This thesis allowed me to try writing in a genre I wasn't initially familiar with, and I feel I have been given the tools to continue this project. Working on this creative artifact in the format of a thesis also allowed me to learn to better approach my research for projects, and I plan to take these skills with me as I enter the creative industry.

Due to the intensive nature of my classes this year, I experienced extreme burnout and illness as I worked on this thesis. There were times my mental health was low, and I felt my work on this thesis and the creative artifact wasn't up to standard. I feel that my current work allowed me to get a feel of the epistolary genre, and I now understand the complexity of writing

for such a genre. While I will be continuing to write for this story, I will be taking it slow, learning to problem-solve those complexities without harming my health.

### **4.3 Conclusion**

Overall, the thesis was an excellent opportunity. I learned of a genre I wasn't familiar with and learned how to blend illustration and storytelling in ways I hadn't tried before. The works I had chosen to reference and read from were engaging, each being amazing reads for character voice, worldbuilding, and overall excellent storytelling. I want to take what I learned from these works with me as I continue as a creative. As I move on to new projects, I want to improve upon my presentation skills, time management, and planning, continuing to experiment with new writing styles. With epistolary, I learned to write within limitations. While the preparation of worldbuilding and character arcs remained the same, there was the problem-solving aspect of trying to incorporate those aspects in a way that wasn't exhausting. This was usually done through in-world reasons, creating events and conversations that weaved in these ideas. However, there remained the issue of how to create urgency and action in the writing. In these cases, I had to think about whether breaking away from aspects of the genre would be best, and how to do it in a way that wasn't off-putting. Despite some stress, I had a great time learning and problem-solving from these issues, and what I've learned here will be taken with me as I write in the future.

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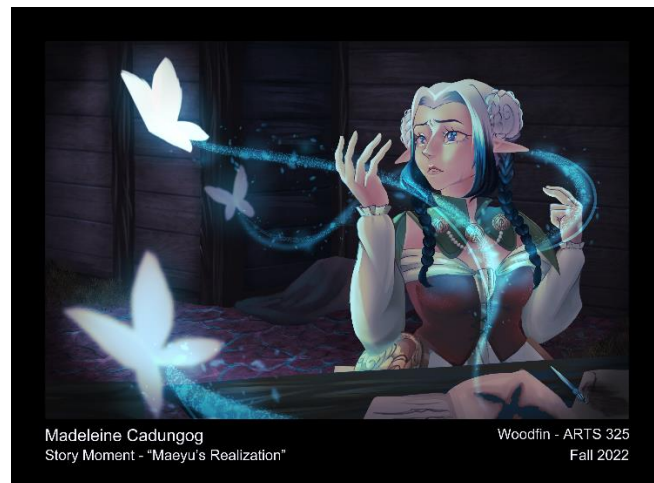
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# APPENDIX: CREATIVE ARTIFACT

## APPENDIX I (ADDITIONAL ART)



*Figure I.1: Character Sheet of Maeyu*



*Figure I.2: Story Moment Illustration of Maeyu*