

***CINDERS FALL: A CREATIVE ARTIFACT AND STUDY IN FEMALE  
PROTAGONISTS OF FANTASY WEB-BASED GRAPHIC NOVELS***

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

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AMELIA MCCARTHY

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Sam Woodfin

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## ABSTRACT

*Cinders Fall: A Web-based Graphic Novel and Study on Female Protagonists*

Amelia McCarthy  
Department of Visualization  
Texas A&M University

Research Faculty Advisor: Samuel Woodfin  
Department of Visualization  
Texas A&M University

Fantasy genre-based media is a long and varied canon and continuum. Female protagonists of this genre have long been pandering and pedantic, and only recently have female protagonists been given the empowering and engaging characterization that their male counterparts have enjoyed for decades. With the advent of web-based graphic novels, ease of access to publishing and reading graphic novels has increased greatly. With this, there are more female-written and female-featuring graphic novels than ever. And yet, there still lies a deficit for the fantasy genre of web-based graphic novels. Female protagonists of this genre in this medium are often fawned over by a cast of males or lack any real agency or authenticity. With these thoughts in mind, *Cinders Fall* is the culmination of my research on female protagonists of the fantasy genre as a larger canon, female protagonists of fantasy web-based graphic novels, web-based graphic novels as a medium, and fantasy media. *Cinders Fall* is my web-based graphic novel featuring my female protagonist Nox as she travels the world on a dangerous quest, finding out more about her lineage and herself along the way. My worldbuilding, characterization, and production of my creative artifact were all affected by my research, and I

am proud to display it all here. I go into detail on my process, my research, the struggles I encountered, and all the hours I have poured into making this creative artifact. This thesis is the synthesis of my research and my passion, and *Cinders Fall* is a love letter to the fantasy genre and web-based graphic novels.

## DEDICATION

*I dedicate this thesis to my mom and dad (Class of '84), and sisters Kate (Class of '15), Clare, and Maeve. Without your unending support, love, and encouragement I would not be the woman*

*I am today, writing this thesis.*

*In addition, this thesis is dedicated to my grandfather, Emory Preston Curry (Class of '49). A good Ag, father, and grandfather. I did good, Grandad. And it turned out good.*

*I also dedicate this thesis to Mr. Christopher Lyon, my core inspiration and the reason I fell in love with fantasy, storytelling, and history in the first place. From eighth grade and beyond, you have been a central mentor in my life. This one is for you.*

*Finally, to Angel. Love endures all things. Thanks for the support, the coffee, and the sushi dates.*

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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 are there so few strong female protagonists in fantasy stories, especially those in the web-based graphic novel? Why are most of them pandering and pedantic, rather than engaging or empowering? This was a question I have long asked myself. While growing up I enjoyed web-based graphic novels, traditional novels, and traditional graphic novels with both male and female protagonists alike, I saw a recurring theme that male protagonists were better written than their female counterparts. I wanted to connect with female protagonists, but I found most of them either subservient to a male, or so loud and brash and masculine, that they were essentially trying to be a male protagonist in female dressing.

There are a few female characters who stand out as breakers of this mold. They are not hyper-masculine, nor are they subservient to a male. They are independent, have thoughts and feelings outside of men, and have their own goals within the story. However, this does not exclude or prevent these female characters from being leaders or more masculine in nature. On the contrary, many of the female characters I will detail are military leaders who exhibit leadership qualities. There are also female characters whose strength is because of their feminine nature. It is these characters, those who feel like real women, that captured me and inspired me. I wanted to create strong female protagonists like these characters I have seen in the media that I consumed. I strove to understand what it took to make one such character.

Another aspect of storytelling that captured me was the level of detail in the worldbuilding of the stories I loved. The stories were not just kept to one singular cast of characters, but rather they had a world that lived, breathed, and changed alongside them. The



characters' actions had effects on their world, and those outcomes in turn affected them. *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, *The Dragon Prince*, and *Fullmetal Alchemist* are all stories that had fantastic and deep worldbuilding (Arakawa et al., DiMartino et al., Ehasz et al.). I have examined each of these stories in depth and will present my analysis in Section 2

Another aspect of my research was the advent of web-based graphic novels, more colloquially known as webtoons. Due to these stories being portrayed through art, I am enchanted by their aesthetic quality and art style. These attributes of web-based graphic novels will be detailed later in the breakdown of my aesthetic motivation. For now, let us continue with the aspects of storytelling that motivated me to produce my research.

Due to their digital nature, web-based graphic novels are easily published, distributed, and shared amongst people. They're frequently updated on their hosting sites, facilitating the serialization and the growth of these webtoons and stories. This is due to the monetization system on these websites. If a graphic novel creator continually uploads episodes weekly, they earn more money and popularity. Yet, with these rapid updates, deep characterization and worldbuilding can often fall to the wayside in place for a constant stream of updates. A lot of webtoons find that they don't have enough time to explore character arcs and worldbuilding in their constant updates. Rather, they drop hints and placeholders along the way as they barrel towards the next high stakes plot point.

This isn't to say that good characterization and worldbuilding are completely absent in webtoons. On the contrary, *Solitary Lady* is one such webtoon, that has concise characterization that supports the plot of the webtoon. The characters are not necessarily deep, but they are interesting as a result and you root for the protagonist and jeer at the antagonist. This itself is a

product of good characterization because if you engage with the characters, you're invested in the story and will follow their journeys.

Characterization, worldbuilding, and serialization. It's these three aspects of storytelling that led me to my research question: How can one create strong female protagonists and solid worldbuilding in a serialized web-based graphic novel without sacrificing art style or commercial success? This is my core research question and what motivated me to create my creative artifact *Cinders Fall*.

## 1.2 The Aesthetics

Now let us delve into the topic of aesthetics. Aesthetic qualities are not limited to visual aesthetics, but also literary aesthetics as well. My literary aesthetics for my research topic were well defined from the beginning. I wanted to explore the fantasy genre. Telling a fantasy story has always been one of my aspirations, seeing how great classics such as *Harry Potter* and *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe* inspired me from a young age (Rowling; Lewis). Strong characterization and worldbuilding are major tenants of the fantasy genre and are key literary aesthetics that I draw from. I strove throughout my research to keep these literary traits in mind when creating characters, the world, and the overarching plot of *Cinders Fall*.

In terms of visual aesthetics, I was mainly inspired by Japanese manga and Korean manhwa for my art style. My main choices from these mediums were the Japanese manga *Fullmetal Alchemist* and the Korean manhwa *Solitary Lady* (Arakawa et al.; Kin et al). However, I did look at Western animation for inspiration as well. *Avatar: The Last Airbender* and *The Dragon Prince* were integral to me to find a pleasing blend of Eastern and Western art styles, and formed a great foundation for me to base my art style (DiMartino et al.; Ehasz et al.).

I also wanted to keep in mind the rapid serialized nature of web-based graphic novels. Most web-based graphic novels are made by one person, though many that are monetized also have assistants who help the creation of the graphic novel. For my creative artifact, I wanted to have an art style that had the visual appeal of a web-based graphic novel but was also simplistic enough that I could complete the chapter creation process weekly. I will describe my process later in Section 3, but this was my original goal and aesthetic motivation in terms of visuals.

### **1.3 My Proposal**

Now we have come to my official research question and proposal. My research question upon entering the Aggie Creative Collective was: “How can I synthesize deep characterization, strong worldbuilding, and a visually appealing art style to best tell a fantasy story featuring an engaging and empowering female protagonist?” This was the main question that fueled my research and the formation of my creative artifact. I set out to find the best answer to this question, through research, careful analysis, and experimentation and error

### **1.4 The Project**

So, what specifically is my creative artifact in specific? What is the culmination of all my research and analysis? The answer to those questions is *Cinders Fall*, a web-based graphic novel of my writing and artistry. *Cinders Fall* is a web-based graphic novel that is centered around the female protagonist Nox, her brother Ner, and the imperial twins Apolleos and Arthemias. Nox is the hidden heir to the lost Queendom of Lunae, and she must spark a rebellion to return her queendom’s realm and rule to its former glory. Ner must learn how to step out of his sister’s shadow and become a leader in his own right. Apolleos must grapple with the glorious destiny he was born with and the militarism of his empire. Arthemias struggles with her encroaching madness due to the human experimentation her draconian empress mother subjugates her to. In

this creative artifact, I produced the first three chapters of a larger story. These first three chapters introduce Nox, her brother Ner, and a general expository on the world in which they live. It also sets up some rising action for later chapters, with Nox being hired to assassinate Apolleos.

## **1.5 Why I Researched This Question and Its Importance**

This research question holds a lot of personal importance to me. As I mentioned earlier, I grew up consuming fantasy books, manga, and animation. I loved seeing grand battles, involved worlds, and other awe inspiring events. Yet I found that the best stories of these mediums had male or hyper masculine protagonists. Why? I did not necessarily think that male protagonists were better than female protagonists, I just found that I related more to the male protagonist led shows versus the female shows. After reflection and thought, I found that in general female protagonists and characters of that time were less well written than their male counterparts. Now of course there are some exceptions here. *Avatar's* Katara and *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic's* whole cast of female protagonists was well written and interesting (DiMartino et al.; Faust). And yet, my heart yearned for more.

As I grew older and started to expand my horizons on the internet, perusing sites like Tumblr and YouTube, I began to find that I was not alone in my thoughts. Many videos and articles existed critiquing and criticizing female characters, protagonists, and antagonists alike. On the opposite end of the spectrum, other videos were praising well-written female characters, including the characters I have previously mentioned. These videos and other critiques on writing, characterization, and even worldbuilding helped me form my own opinions and thoughts on how to write well. It fueled my passion for writing and inspired me to form my own stories, with strong and interesting female characters in the lead.

Along with online critiques and articles, I had in-person mentorship as well. My eighth-grade English teacher, Mr. Lyon, encouraged and mentored me and helped me form core creative writing skills in his English class. I also studied poetry, classics, and world history under his tutelage. His vast breadth of knowledge and mentorship gave me my passion for worldbuilding and characterization. My goal has long been to write a modern folktale, one that can be told and remembered like the great stories of old are.

However, the venues for storytelling today are much different from when I was a child, let alone generations before me. Rather than the oral story, people now consume their stories largely from their devices, especially their phones. This is what caused the advent of the web-based graphic novel. Rather than having print comics scanned and uploaded to the internet, these graphic novels were created for and distributed on websites for people all over the world to peruse and read. And yet they had the quality if not more so than their print-based cousins. I fell in love with web-based graphic novels from an early age, with classics such as *Homestuck* being among those that I read (Hussie). The art styles, the stories, the ease of access. It does not take much thinking to realize online publishing will be the storytelling venue of the future, graphic novel or not.

With all this in mind, I grappled with this question. How do I synthesize this passion for storytelling, my love for the classics of old, and this new digital form of storytelling along with my artistic skills? This is the foundation of my research question, and why it is of so much importance to me.

But it's not just about me, far from it. If I can somehow find a concrete enough answer, perhaps someone like me can see that a deep and involved web-based graphic novel can be done, especially with a female protagonist. I hope to inspire my peers, and leave behind a story that

inspires other writers, other women, to pick up the torch and blaze a trail of storytelling. Thus, I pick up my torch and invite you along my journey, the ups and downs, and the eventual destination I have reached.

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

### 2.1 Research Done

I have read and consumed multiple media in preparation for this. I looked at Tigana and *Fire Emblem: Three Houses* for fantasy worldbuilding and character design (Kay; Ikeno et al). I looked at character-driven fantasy stories, especially those that are female-led. For female protagonist research, I will examine how women are portrayed in *RWBY*, *The Dragon Prince*, *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, *Solitary Lady*, *Fire Emblem: Three Houses*, and *Fullmetal Alchemist* (Oum et al.; Ehasz and Richmond; DiMartino et al.; Kin et al.; Ikeno et al; Arakawa et al.). I will analyze their portrayal and their strengths and weaknesses of them.

In general, all the literature I read and the media I consumed for my thesis are of the fantasy genre. Thus, I will make notes on how each work contributes to and corresponds to the greater canon of the fantasy genre when I address each piece of media and literature.

#### 2.1.1 Notes on Tigana

*Tigana* by Guy Gavriel Kay was a real find for me (Kay). I was in a local Half Price Books, looking for a new fantasy book to read. I was drawn to the book's spine, with its embossed golden letters. After a cursory examination, I purchased it for \$4.59. How little did I know that this little paperback book would enkindle my love for writing once more.

*Tigana* tells the story of a fictional world that mirrors Renaissance Italy in both its culture and fractured political status (Kay). The Peninsula of the Palm is under the control of two independent tyrants (Kay). A group of rebels, mostly hailing from the lost province of Tigana,

incite discord between the two tyrants, hoping that they will defeat each other in combat, freeing the rest of the peninsula (Kay).

However, there is another aspect to the story. The Tiganese people are the only ones who know they exist (Kay). Due to one tyrant's son being lost in battle, this tyrant exacted his revenge by crushing Tigana and magically erasing its name and history from the minds of all the people in the Peninsula (Kay). Only those who were born in Tigana before the tyrant's rule can hear its name or speak it (Kay). Thus, their history is erased, and they fight not just for their freedom, but for their history and identity to be restored (Kay).

What I learned from Tigana was stellar storytelling and good structure for worldbuilding. As I mentioned previously, the Peninsula of the Palm was inspired by Renaissance Italy. This was a major lesson for me, as I quickly learned how to use real-world examples as inspiration for worldbuilding. It also sparked in me the desire to talk about historical erasure. History is mainly written by the victors, with the subjugated left behind. I wanted this theme to be very central to *Cinders Fall*, and I have Tigana to thank for it.

### 2.1.2 Notes on RWBY

RWBY is a 3D animated web series in an anime art style produced by Rooster Teeth Productions. It follows the story of Ruby Rose, a young girl who hunts demons, and her all-female-team of demon hunters as they uncover secrets of their world and a plot to destroy it. Overall, on rewatching RWBY, I took it as a lesson in what not to do. While it started with a good foundation of worldbuilding and characterization, it quickly derailed itself and became a terrible execution of poor writing and direction.

My core points of my research being around characterization and worldbuilding meant that I had to look at RWBY with a more critical eye than when I watched in my youth. The



female characters that were enjoyable in the beginning quickly became exaggerated, pandering, and one-note. The worldbuilding was there but also was retconned in later seasons and quickly became as hole-filled as Swiss cheese.

In terms of art style, RWBY is made by an independent animation studio with smaller budgets than most animated TV shows. As such, the art style for RWBY is simplistic but limited. I did not watch RWBY for its artistic style since I knew this going into it. However, I noticed that even the simplicity of the art was charming in its way. I noted this as a key part of the art style in animation.

Overall, I liked RWBY in my youth, but when I rewatched it for my critical analysis, I found a lot of crucial parts of characterization and worldbuilding lacking. What was interesting though was that the online fan community for RWBY had taken the source material and created lots of fanworks that rewrote the story, improved upon it, and ameliorated it. However, since my analysis was over the source material itself, and not the thousands of fanworks produced from said source material, I stand by my original statements and analysis.

### *2.1.3 Notes on Fullmetal Alchemist*

Fullmetal Alchemist is a critically acclaimed manga written by Hiromu Arakawa detailing the events of two brother alchemists as they try to regain lost limbs, save their world, and resolve their residual father issues. Fullmetal Alchemist is a stellar manga with a fantastic story. The main characters are well-written and relatable, with even the side characters having impact on the story. Also, the worldbuilding is amazing, being based on an amalgamation of many European and Asian countries as well as a myriad of periods. This was a big point of my analysis when watching Fullmetal Alchemist. I loved the worldbuilding in Fullmetal Alchemist and how it was a mixture of real worldbuilding and fantasy tropes.

Another thing I learned from Fullmetal Alchemist was their female protagonists. Even though the main protagonists are male, the female characters are also fleshed out and integral to the story. This may be in part because Fullmetal Alchemist is written and drawn by a woman.

Speaking of drawn, let me go into the art style of Fullmetal Alchemist briefly. Being made in Japan, it has an anime art style. It's also very simple and appealing to the eye, which allows the panels to be drawn quickly but also allows for high detail panels to be drawn as well for action filled scenes.

Overall, Fullmetal Alchemist is a very influential manga for my research, both in terms of art style and storytelling. The melding of real world countries, cultures, and ideals with fantasy tropes was a key lesson for me to learn. I also liked the simplistic art style and wanted to take that.

#### *2.1.4 Notes on Solitary Lady*

Solitary Lady is a Korean web-based graphic novel and I used it as a touchstone for both my art style and writing specifically for web-based graphic novels. Its story is very simple, but is appealing and keeps its readers engaged with each chapter that is released. Its characters are not too deep but are very engaging and the protagonist immediately grips the reader and makes them relate and empathize with their plight. Thus, even with less than stellar characterization, the manhwa is still fun to read.

In terms of art style, it is really simple yet appealing to the eye. A lot of manhwas are very detailed and post-processed, but Solitary Lady is pretty simple in its art style and it makes it very easy to study and therefore replicate.

### 2.1.5 Notes on *The Dragon Prince*

The *Dragon Prince* is a 3D animated Netflix show and is a stellar story with rich characters, deep worldbuilding, and amazing storytelling. The world is expansive and plays off of many fantasy tropes while also taking inspiration from medieval kingdoms and real world allegories. Its art style is western but very anime inspired. While being made in 3D, the concept art for the show is very appealing and is a great reference for visually appealing yet simplistic art style. Overall, the *Dragon Prince* was a great reference for me in my research.

### 2.1.6 Web-based Graphic Novel Medium Analysis

I read a lot of web-based graphic novels in my free time, and for this research I focused on *Solitary Lady* and a few others. I found that a lot of webtoons vary in both style and detail. Many are beautiful and feast for the eyes, while some are more simplistic in their art. A lot of the more popular webtoons are the former, having really detailed and aesthetically pleasing art styles. In addition to this, a lot of the more popular webtoons are made by multiple people. Typically there is one main artist and writer and then they hire assistants to help them draw the panels and finish the webtoon chapter for release. On the other hand, the more simplistic ones are typically made by one person and have a slower release schedule than those that release weekly.

For myself, I decided to lean into a more simplistic art style since I am one person working on this web-based graphic novel, without worrying too much about the aesthetic value of the web-based graphic novel to the point that it impedes progress.

## 2.2 How My Research was Implemented in Terms of Worldbuilding

My research was implemented in my creative artifact through worldbuilding and characterization of the story of *Cinders Fall*. Here I will go into detail on my worldbuilding and how it was affected by my research.

### 2.2.1 *Explanation of World*

The world of *Cinders Fall* has two major states, so the focus of worldbuilding will be on them. The world is set on a planet that is a near copy of ours, with two poles, an equator, etc. However, there is only one major landmass that spans the globe. This landmass goes from the north pole to the south pole and covers much of the globe (Fig 2.1). There are a variety of biomes across this landmass, including savanna, temperate rainforests, tundra, and more (Fig 2.2.1-2). This world has one moon, which is aesthetically shattered due to the recent conquering of the Queendom of Lunae. While normal physics would dictate that a shattered moon would affect the tides and such, for this story, it functions the same as an intact moon. That is why I clarified it is *aesthetically* shattered, but not functionally. There is also only one sun for this world. As I said earlier, this world is figuratively a copy of ours, with a few key differences which I laid out above.

The time period of our main story is 18 AC (After Conquest), or 2068 PF (*Pax Facta*, or “Peace Made”). The difference in calendars is due to the Lunaeans using the conquest of their people as a point of reference for their calendar in the contemporary day. For the Lunaeans, any time before the conquest of their people is BC (Before Conquest) and any time after the conquest is, as we have previously mentioned, AC. For the people of Solis Regnum, however, conquest is of course natural to them and is just another queendom to absorb into their empire. For them, they base their calendar on when the two major states, Solis Regnum and Lunae, “peacefully” split. The quotations will be explained later under a different heading. For the people of Solis Regnum, any time before the split is SM (*Simul Mundi*, or “United World”) and any time after the split is PF, as mentioned above.

The similarity of time periods between this world and ours is that 2068 PF would be 2068 AD, so this story would be set roughly 40 years in the future if this story took place directly in our world. Thus, they have the technology and science we have, plus a few additions that could exist in our near future. Examples of this are holograms, different models of mobile phones, and sleeker modes of transportation.

Now while most things are similar between this world and ours, I will point out a few socio-political differences.

As a whole, gender does not affect one's standing. Mainly, the Queendom of Lunae is matriarchal, and the firstborn female of the line inherits the throne in the royal family. For the Solis Regnum Empire, the people care more about one's drive and tenacity over one's identity or genitalia. In the imperial family, the right to rule is determined through combat, as a testament to the militaristic might of the empire. This is because the empire values might so much, they only want the strongest to rule. Also, even though there is an imperial family through which rule is passed, anyone may challenge the ruling emperor or empress for the right to rule. This challenge will also be resolved via combat.

Overall, women are seen as equal to men, though within some groups and factions, this is not true. For example, right before the conquest of Lunae, there was a rapidly expanding faction of people in the royal court who believed it a heinous crime that women should be ruling the queendom.

Another difference is that sexual orientation, gender identity, etc. are not discriminated against. It is simply looked on with a "matter of fact" type of view. For example, if someone loves someone of the same sex, then it is love, plain and simple.

In terms of ethnicity and race, there are some conflicts between the Solis Regnum Empire and the Queendom of Lunae, but these are rather negligible in scale. The Solis Regnum Empire promotes unity through might, so they actively condemn any form of racism. Sadly, however, some movements and groups slip through the cracks. For the Queendom of Lunae, before they were conquered, they promoted equality of character and virtue. Any form of discrimination was seen as a direct deviation from their core values and was quickly dispelled. However, now that they have been conquered, more tumultuous groups and individuals have sprung up in these lands.

My reasoning for making the deviations from our current reality in my fictional world is because I want the main conflict of the world to be that of the erasure of history and history being written by the victors. I did not want to make this world “perfect”, but a slight deviation from our current world, to show how even if some socio-political problems are “solved”, there are still those that need to be addressed.

Now, I can go into more detail about the states themselves.

### *2.2.2 Detailing the Empire of Solis Regnum*

The first state I will be talking about is the Solis Regnum Empire, the Empire of the Sun. Solis Regnum is the Empire of the Sun, and as such, they are home to a type of magic wielders called the Sunbearers. These Sunbearers harness the power of the sun to create fire, manifestations of light, and more powerful users can create raw nuclear energy. As a society, Solis Regnum promotes drive, tenacity, and patriotism. While there is a class system with a monarchy rule, Solis Regnum prides itself on the people’s ability to rise through the class system, if they have enough drive. A lowly farmhand can become a Grand General of the army, for example. Solis Regnum is the largest state in the world and has a hunger for conquest. Even

the very ruler can be challenged for the right to rule, and this challenge will be resolved via combat. Even with a monarchical rule, anyone can rise through the ranks to become leader of Solis Regnum. Thus, their militaristic worldview and philosophy are exacerbated by this drive for conquest.

As mentioned above, Solis Regnum operates on the Pax Facta calendar. They also largely promote gender equality, placing might and power above one's gender. The same goes for racial equality, although this can be disputed amongst individuals themselves.

The personal history of Solis Regnum is that it was once the only state on the vast continent. Their promotion of unity through might starts here. However, one major faction of the empire grew very malcontented with being forced to fight wars in which they had no personal stake. Thus, this faction began to rebel. Though the empire had larger military forces, the fires of revolution and change had already been lit. A peace was made, and the Queendom of Lunae was formed. This was the year of the Pax Facta and is the point from which Solis Regnum derives its calendar. However, throughout the centuries that passed, there was a belief that Solis Regnum should become "whole" again. This culminated in the recent conquest of Lunae. And that is where we begin our story.

Solis Regnum was heavily inspired by the Roman Empire at its peak, as well as 18th and 19th century Britain. I wanted to make a heavily imperialistic state, which is both nationalistic and militaristic, while also promoting unity and strength from within. It does not systematically discriminate from the top-down, rather, if one had been recently conquered by the empire, you would have a venue of rising through the ranks, if you aligned yourself with the views of the empire. I also took inspiration from the fictional state of Noxus from the universe of Runeterra,

the world in which the world-famous video game franchise *League of Legends* is placed (Riot Games *Noxus - Regions*).

Aesthetically, it borrows heavily from multiple periods and regions of our world. It is set in the "near future" of sorts, and as such, they do have slightly advanced technology compared to us. The architecture is heavily influenced by Roman architecture as well as Victorian buildings. Fashion and clothing mirror contemporary English culture, with hints and flavors of Victorian aesthetics and 20th-century British military wear.

### 2.2.3 *Detailing the Queendom of Lunae*

The second major state is the Queendom of Lunae, the Queendom of the Moon. As the queendom of the moon, this state is home to Moonweavers, a type of magic-user. These magic-users harness the power of the moon to create illusions, control and create shadows, and enter dreams. The more powerful Moonweavers can even divine the future. As a society, Lunae promotes equality through opportunity, virtue, and character. There is a class system, but there is much upward mobility, for Lunae promotes that through righteousness and hard work, one can rise to the heights of the system. They do not have a drive for conquest, rather, they want to focus on internal politics, infrastructure, and providing the best quality of life for their current citizens. This was the state of Lunae before it was conquered.

As mentioned before, Lunae operates on the After Conquest calendar. Having been conquered eighteen years before the current events of the story, the Lunaeans operate under this calendar as a reminder of the injustice done to them, and to inspire them to take back their land. They are also gender equal, and they use a matriarchal system to track lineage. They have female-based primogeniture, as the firstborn female of the royal family is the one who will



inherit the throne. Racial inequality is also largely nonexistent, as their society judges people based on character and virtue, not on physical attributes.

The personal history of Lunae is that during the united rule of Solis Regnum, there was a faction of people on the eastern side of the continent that wanted independence from the empire. They were sick of their people being used as pawns in military conquests in the far west, in lands they would probably never see or benefit from in their lifetimes. They wanted a society that valued the overall excellence of a person rather than their might. Over time, this philosophy spread and lit the fires of revolution on the eastern side of the continent. This revolution was led by a powerful female warlord, whose troops rallied behind her and whose people followed her philosophy of virtue-based equality. Eventually, the infant Queendom of Lunae made a peace with the Empire of Solis Regnum, and they followed the Pax Facta calendar alongside the Empire of Solis Regnum. However, this Queendom's destiny was written in blood. Centuries later, Solis Regnum returned and swiftly conquered and pillaged the Queendom, taking the land back as "colonies". Solis Regnum did their utmost to erase Lunae from history, literally burning their names out of any records. The people of Lunae were kept as second-class citizens, and those who were in power at the time were either imprisoned or dispersed throughout the empire. The royal family, however, was killed. At least, this is the public thought. However, the King Consort of Lunae escaped with his son and daughter, fleeing back to his nomadic clan of mercenaries. There he raised his children with the knowledge that they were royalty but that they must keep it hidden. This is where we begin our current story within *Cinders Fall*.

Lunae is heavily based on colonial America, the American Revolution, humanist ideals, and Aristotelian concepts. Inspiration can also be attributed to ancient Greece, specifically the League of Athens. Lunae before unification and revolution was made up of city-states ruled by

warlords under the thumb of Solis Regnum, and after the split from their empire overlords, they largely kept the city-state model of ruling in place, with one Queen to rule them all. However, with the recent conquering of Lunae, the city-states are much more autonomous than they were under the Queendom but are also constricted more by the rule of the Empire of Solis Regnum.

Aesthetically, the Queendom of Lunae borrows heavily from multiple periods and regions of our world. It is set in the "near future" of sorts, and as such, they do have slightly advanced technology compared to us. The architecture is heavily influenced by Neoclassical architecture as well as 20th-century American buildings such as early skyscrapers, apartments, and more. Fashion and clothing mirror contemporary American culture, with hints and flavors of early 20th century American aesthetics and 20th-century American military wear.

#### *2.2.4 Explanation of the Magic System*

Since this is a fantasy world, I wanted to include magic in my story. Magic is the physical manifestation of one's soul. When a magic-user uses magic, they draw upon their soul, their emotions, memories, etc. to power their magic. There are key concepts of my magic system. These are Sigils, Typing, Power Growth, and Cost.

##### *2.2.4.1 Sigils*

Those who can manifest magic are born with sigils on their body, a type of marking that identifies the magic-user of the type of magic that they use and how it can manifest. Sigils also can be emblematic of one's heritage. For example, the imperial family's sigil has been passed down their bloodline for generations. Thus, a sigil can act as a sort of family crest.

Only magic-users have sigils, and most magic users only have one. I say most because one can artificially splice sigils onto their body, like skin grafting. But this is a very dangerous

and often fatal operation, and thus is not widely known or practiced. However, this concept is key to one of our key characters.

#### 2.2.4.2 Typing

While in the beginning, I had planned for there to be multiple types of magic, along with multiple countries, I decided to pare down the types of magic to two main types. These two types are Moon and Sun. The users of these types are called Moonweavers and Sunbearers respectively.

#### 2.2.4.3 Moonweavers

Moonweavers draw their power from the elusiveness and energy of the moon. Their souls are shrouded in mystery, intelligent, and are quick thinkers. Their power waxes and wanes with the moon and is most powerful at midnight on a full moon. It is weaker during the day, especially at noon. The season of summer is an especially weak time for Moonweavers. On the day of the summer solstice, they lose the ability to use any magic. Moon magic has the properties of bending reality, understanding the truth between dreams and waking, future and past, reality and illusion. Moon magic is very dual, which can often lead to dualistic personalities in Moonweavers. Moon sigils are associated with deceit, lies, intelligence, manipulation, love, emotions, relationships, secrets, death, perception, philosophy, alchemy, charm, duality, and assassination. Many Moonweavers are excellent informants, assassins, and enchanters. They can also make great therapists, doctors, craftsmen, and philosophers. While they prefer to stay out of the limelight, they are adept at leading from the shadows, pulling at the invisible strings that hold us all.

#### 2.2.4.4 Sunbearers

Sunbearers draw their power from the heat and energy of the sun. Their souls are bright, boisterous, and, well, fiery. Their power is at its strongest when the sun is at its highest during noon. It is weakest at midnight, and during the winter especially. On days of a solar eclipse or the winter solstice, Sunbearers lose all ability to use their magic. Sun magic has two major properties: it can conjure spells of light and healing— or it can manifest fire, nuclear energy, and destruction.

Sunbearers are much like fire signs from astrology in terms of personality and aspects. They are intense, charismatic, and make natural leaders. They are also hotheaded, obsessive, and jealous individuals. Sun sigils are associated with teaching, honesty, truth, fury, wrath, charisma, leadership, and oppression. Many Sunbearers become leaders in their fields, whether it be in politics, academia, or science.

#### 2.2.4.5 Power Growth

Moonweavers and Sunbearers alike can grow in their powers through training and practice. There are schools for both types of magic scattered across the continent. Also, individuals can have sigils of other individuals spliced onto their skin, much like skin grafting. The sigil donor often ends up dying, since sigils are thought to be connected to one's soul. In addition to this, sigil grafting is often a failed process due to the two sigils being incompatible with each other. This can result in a split personality as if there were two or more souls in one body. They can also get artificial sigils grafted onto their skin. This can be considered a similar operation to tattooing, but its different due to its magical nature. While not as deadly, most tattoos end up being nonmagical and are simply for appearances sake. Both methods are highly

dangerous and are often fatal to the individual. Thus, these methods are not often practiced and are looked down on. However, they are not illegal, just viewed as amoral.

#### 2.2.4.6 Cost

The cost of using magic for both Moonweavers and Sunbearers is energy. Using magic is much like using a muscle, and if an individual uses it too much or improperly or without “stretching”, it can cause serious harm to their body. If they use too much magic, they can burn their soul out and kill themselves. Thus, Moonweavers and Sunbearers must take special care of their bodies, minds, and souls in equal tandem, so they do not adversely affect their selves.

#### 2.2.5 *How My Research Affected My Worldbuilding*

Overall, the research that affected my worldbuilding was the most was my research with the *League of Legends* Universe, *Fullmetal Alchemist*, *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, *The Dragon Prince*, and *Tigana* (Various Authors, Arakawa et al., DiMartino et al., Ehasz and Richmond, and Kay). From each of these pieces of media I got the general notion that the best fantasy worlds take inspiration from real life. Whether it be the Roman Empire, Victorian England, or the Qin Dynasty of China, history is the world’s greatest reference when it comes to worldbuilding. That’s why when I turned to my worldbuilding, I took a few specific cultures and governments to form my fantasy kingdoms. As I mentioned earlier, Solis Regnum is inspired heavily by the Roman Empire and Imperialist Britain. The Queendom of Lunae is inspired by colonial America, revolutionary France, and Ireland. These real life cultures and political structures were my muse when creating my fictional kingdoms.

### **2.3 How My Research was Implemented with My Characters**

I will describe the characters themselves here as a result of my research. I will describe their personality, their backstory, any special powers or talents they have, and their overall

character arc. I will give a brief description of their appearance, but I shall go into detail about their character designs and development within Section 3 as it directly relates to the creative artifact.

### 2.3.1 *Characterization of Nox*

Nox is the main character of *Cinders Fall*. She is the daughter of the late Queen of Lunae and King Consort Lysander. She was raised in her father's nomadic clan of mercenaries and grew up learning combative skills as well as diplomacy. She is fully aware of her royal heritage and wants to take Lunae back.

As a Moonbearer, she has the magic powers emblematic of one. However, she has two sigils, which is an abnormal trait for her. This is because she was cursed with a second sigil implanted on her body. It reacts to her emotions and can cause a berserker-like mode for Nox. Her powers become vastly stronger, but she loses all control of her body and becomes like a wild beast. This second sigil is a secret kept between Nox and her family.

Nox can be deadpan and sarcastic, but she struggles with showing her emotions. This is because of the second sigil she bears. She must keep her emotions in check, especially anger and fear. Yet, she still feels them and while her facial expressions can come off as detached, she has a big heart for her family and her friends.

As a Moonbearer, her sclerae are black and she has feline ears instead of human ears. This is because her magic is so “wild” and powerful that she manifests animal-like features.

Throughout *Cinders Fall*, she grapples with her royal destiny, her emotions, and her magic powers working against herself.

### 2.3.2 *Characterization of Ner*

Ner is Nox's older brother and a secondary protagonist. While he is the older brother, he is not the crown prince and heir to the throne. This is due to the matriarchal society of the Queendom of Lunae and thus Ner is not heir to the throne, Nox is.

He also has no magical powers. However, he is physically athletic and very wise due to his education by his father and his upbringing in the mercenary clan.

He is Nox's emotional and moral compass. He acts as an advisor, supporter, and close friend to her. When Nox is struggling with learning about who she is, her royal duties, and leading a revolution, she can always rely on her older brother. After Lysander dies, Ner leaves Nox to lead his father's mercenary clan, but they always stay in touch.

Throughout *Cinders Fall*, he emerges from Nox's shadow and how to be a leader in his own right.

### 2.3.3 *Characterization of Apolleos*

Apolleos is the crown prince of Solis regnum and a primary character in *Cinders Fall*. He originally is an antagonist, but eventually comes to join Nox in her journey as the main protagonist.

He is the older brother of the twins and is also the crown prince of Solis Regnum. Arthemina is his twin sister. He is a powerful Sunbearer and carries the imperial family's sigil. He has lion's ears instead of human ears, due to the powerful nature of his magic.

Apolleos has recently become the subject of multiple assassination attempts. This is because there is a growing faction within the imperial court and the senate for Arthemina to become the heir to the empire, not Apolleos. Apolleos, due to his caring nature for all his

subjects and his “lack of might,” is not popular with the elite and powerful of Solis Regnum. Thus, the assassination attempts.

What comes off as a lack of might to others is a strength of mind. Apolleos has a brilliant knack for strategy and guile, which he uses to his advantage. This is how he has survived past assassination attempts.

Throughout *Cinders Fall*, Apolleos learns how to save Solis Regnum from the inside, retaining his power, and not being afraid of direct combat and conflict.

#### 2.3.4 *Characterization of Arthemias*

Arthemias is the main antagonist of *Cinders Fall* along with her mother, the Empress of Solis Regnum. She is constantly a threat to both Apolleos and Nox and can be considered the primary active antagonist.

She is the younger sister of the twins, Apolleos and herself, and is the imperial princess, though not the heir to the empire. Like her brother, she is also a powerful Sunbearer. However, she has a fragile physical condition which leads her to be unable to fully master her powers. Her sigil does not manifest in a normal manner, rather it appears as fractal scar on her face forming the imperial crest. This sigil is often compared to a brand on her face.

Recently, Arthemias has disappeared from the imperial court, and no one knows the real reason why. The cover story is that Arthemias is doing a private study in a secluded location in the far hinterlands of Solis Regnum. Even Apolleos does not know the truth. The Empress of Solis Regnum is subjecting her daughter to “sigil-splicing” experiments, trying to enhance her physical stamina and her magical strength so that she can challenge Apolleos for the right to rule.

While Arthemias does not have a personal vendetta against her brother, she does carry out her mother’s orders. When the Empress orders Arthemias to try and assassinate Apolleos



throughout the story, she obeys. She does not view Apolleos as a brother and sees him as an obstacle to overcome to become the heir to Solis Regnum and thereby win her mother's affection.

Her character stays rather static throughout the plot of *Cinders Fall*, and she just wants to earn her mother's love and affection. She just wants to be seen as a valid heir, but she loses herself to the madness that the sigil-splicing caused her. Ultimately, she is defeated by Apolleos and Nox.

### 2.3.5 *Characterization of the Empress of Solis Regnum*

The Empress of Solis Regnum is another main antagonist and the instigator of all the current events in the world story and the characters' stories. She is the one who led the conquest of the Queendom of Lunae, the execution of Nox's and Ner's mother, the human experimentation on Arthemias, and the attempted assassination of her son Apolleos.

She is the current empress of Solis Regnum, and she reached this position by killing her own older sister for the throne, instigated by her father. Thus, she is carrying out the cycle of bloody ascension with her children. She is an orthodox subscriber to the militaristic philosophy of Solis Regnum and believes that she must share the prosperity of Solis Regnum with the rest of the world, even if it means conquering the rest of the world. This was instilled in her by her father, who began conquering the continent, and the current empress is carrying out her father's wishes.

She is a Sunbearer like her children and is very strong. She is a military leader and commander of the imperial army. She has a knack for guile, direct combat, and subjugation.

She carries no personal affection for her children; instead, she sees them as tools for conquest and power. She is a constant threat to both Apolleos and Nox, and is the main

antagonist of *Cinders Fall*, though she does not become truly present until the later chapters of the story. Yet, her presence is always felt, and her tendrils are rooted all over the empire, which constantly causes obstacles and situations for Apolleos and Nox to overcome. She is ultimately defeated by Apolleos and Nox.

### 2.3.6 *Characterization of Lysander, King Consort of Lunae*

Lysander is the King Consort of Lunae, the husband of the late Queen of Lunae, and the father of Nox and Ner. He is a stern yet comforting figure in Nox and Ner's life. He raises them in his nomadic mercenary clan. He is a secondary character in *Cinders Fall*, and a key figure in the overarching world story and Nox's story.

Lysander was born into a nomadic clan of mercenaries, a group of sigil users, Sunbearers and Moonbearers alike. He learned about combat from an early age and has been feared and revered as a mighty warrior in his adulthood. Lysander married into the royal family of Lunae, having won the queen's heart through his kind heart, his stern exterior, and knowledge of military combat. He deeply loved his wife, and the two children she brought into the world. He was wary of the empire of Solis Regnum, and he tried to prepare as best he could for an invasion. When the invasion happened, he tried to sacrifice his own life for his family, but his wife did instead. The Queen died, and Lysander fled with his two children. He made sure to disguise three corpses as himself and his children, so the empire would presume them dead. He then returned to his nomadic group of mercenaries under a different name, Cyrus. Thus, he lived a disguised life, raising his children as mercenaries and as royalty in secret.

He inspires Nox and Ner to be good people, to act as royals would even though they have to throne to rule from. He is a core leader of the Lunae rebellion, a role which Ner ultimately

fills in for. Like his son, Lysander is not a sigil user, rather he uses his brains and brawn to outsmart even some of the more powerful sigil users.

He meets his untimely end when Arthemias tracks him down and kills him as a means to enrage Nox and draw her out so that Arthemias can kill Nox herself. His death is what sparks the revolution's flames and leads to the endgame of *Cinders Fall*.

### 2.3.7 *How My Research Affected My Characterization*

My research helped me immensely with building my characters. I knew that the characters didn't have to be too deep, but they had to be relatable. I took this lesson from *Solitary Lady* (Kin et al). I also knew that I had to care about my characters and keep them consistent, unlike with RWBY (Oum et al). With all this and more in mind, I set out to create a cast of characters that would be relatable and interesting, but also fit within their world. I took parts of me that I'm proud of, parts that I'm ashamed of, and took the message of my story and put them all together to create my cast of characters. Ner is like the older brother I wish I had, a mentor who both teases and is kind. Nox is my anxiety and my hurt, trying to move past the pain of my youth. Apolleos is the mask I wear in public, the crispy clean persona which underneath lies a trickster. Arthemias is my hurt taken to an extreme, someone who doesn't move past the pain but becomes pain itself. My parents, both Lysander and the Empress, are adults in my life who either hurt me or helped me along my path. With this personal attachment and the research I've done, I have created a cast of characters that is both personable and relatable. A cast of characters you can root for.

## 2.4 How My Research was Implemented with My Storytelling

Here is where I will go into detail about the backstory of *Cinders Fall*, as well as the plot of *Cinders Fall* itself. I will also entail how my research affected my storytelling within *Cinders Fall*.

### 2.4.1 Backstory

The overarching world story of *Cinders Fall* is that the Queendom of Lunae has recently been conquered by Solis Regnum, and there is much unrest within the empire and the newly conquered state. While the Queen of Lunae was publicly executed, as a show of strength from Solis Regnum, the royal family has not been found. However, they are presumed dead. This is not the case after all, as detailed in Section 2. Yet for a brief recap, the King Consort fled with his two children, Ner and Nox, to his nomadic tribe of mercenaries from which he hailed. There he raised the two children with them fully aware of the knowledge that they were royal but keep it a deep secret from the rest of the world.

In the current year of the story, 2068 PF, there are rumblings and murmurs of a revolutionary faction from the colonies of Lunae. This has been put into motion by the King Consort's nomadic mercenary group, as they travel through the colonies of Lunae and "put down revolutions" at the behest of Solis Regnum. Though, they merely quiet down the unrest and provide them resources to spread the flames of revolution. The citizens of Lunae have been waiting quietly and patiently for the chance to reclaim their Queendom, and the time to do so is nearing.

Along with the colonial unrest, the empirical court is also seeing hints of disorder and disruption. There is a faction, instigated and supported by the empress, within the empirical court of Solis Regnum that wants the current crown prince, Apolleos, killed so that his younger sister,

Arthemias, may rise to the throne. This has resulted in multiple assassination attempts on Apolleos' life, though he has survived all of them unscathed.

This is the overall world story *Cinders Fall* is set upon. While the worldstory does affect the characters and their personal stories, the actual story of *Cinders Fall* itself is more closely tied to the characters' stories, specifically that of Nox's.

#### 2.4.2 *Current Story*

My current story is that Nox is hired to kill Apolleos at his coming-of-age ball. She attends the ball and meets Apolleos there. Together they converse and grow close throughout the night, Apolleos unaware of Nox's true reason for being there. Apolleos takes her outside into a courtyard for a romantic kiss, but at that moment, Nox attempts to kill him. However, both are foiled in their separate attempts by a second unknown assailant. This unknown assailant is Artemia in disguise. Artemia engages in combat with Nox, while also trying to attack her twin brother. Eventually, Nox flees and has to escape the capital with Ner. Together they decide that it's time to start the revolution and they must return to their lost homeland.

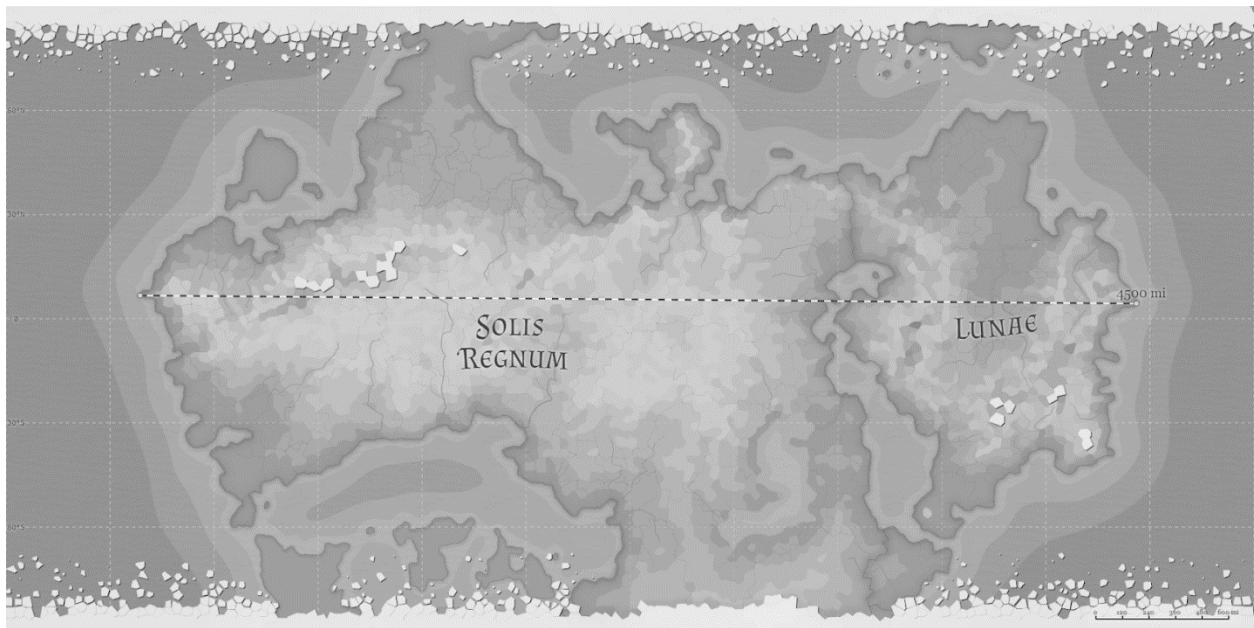
Meanwhile, Apolleos decides to track down Nox. Whether it's to win her over or to kill her, even he doesn't know. What he does know is that he must see her again. Artemia follows Apolleos, seemingly aiding him on his quest, all while preparing to kill him herself.

The story culminates in a grand battle between Solis Regnum and Lunae, where Apolleos and Nox are against Artemia and Ner. How this happens is a grand story, but this is a general synopsis of *Cinders Fall*.

#### 2.4.3 *How My Research Affected My Storytelling*

As I've detailed in my research notes above, every one of my sources provided me with a lesson in storytelling. In worldbuilding, characterization, and how to tell a good story in general.

In particular, *Fire Emblem: Three Houses* helped me understand how to write a political conflict from multiple viewpoints, which is something I wanted to get right within my story (Ikeno et al.). Also, it helped me with the erasure of historical events, which is what Solis Regnum did to the Queendom of Lunae after its conquering. This is something *Fullmetal Alchemist* helped me with as well (Arakawa et al). Both stories helped me with pacing and keeping things obscured from the viewer while dropping hints and breadcrumbs along the way before the final reveal. Overall, my research left me wanting to tell a story about history, conflict, and politics. But it also called me to tell a story of internal conflict, the self, and growth. So I used what I had learned from my research to create the plot of *Cinders Fall*.



*Figure 2.1: A height map of the world, showing the two major states of the world: Solis Regnum and Lunae. It also shows how large this landmass is, which is 4500 miles long, and it spans the globe of this world*

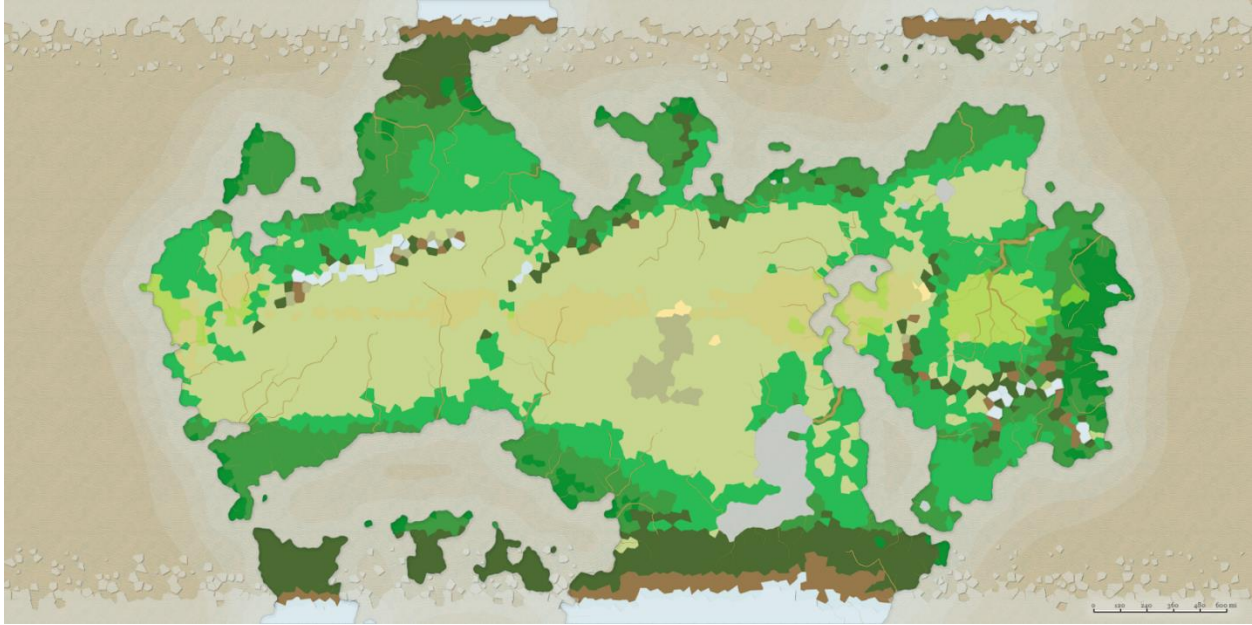


Figure 2.2.1: A map showing the biomes of the world. The Key can be found in Figure 2.2.2

Biome	Habitability	Cells ↓ <sub>1</sub>	Area	Population
Grassland	% 30	□ 1419	📖 2.2M mi <sup>2</sup>	👤 7.5M ⓘ
Temperate deciduous fore:	% 100	□ 1046	📖 1.4M mi <sup>2</sup>	👤 19.1M ⓘ
Temperate rainforest	% 90	□ 817	📖 1M mi <sup>2</sup>	👤 13.4M ⓘ
Taiga	% 12	□ 550	📖 710K mi <sup>2</sup>	👤 1.4M ⓘ
Savanna	% 22	□ 262	📖 393K mi <sup>2</sup>	👤 1.1M ⓘ
Glacier	% 0	□ 257	📖 411K mi <sup>2</sup>	👤 0 ⓘ
Wetland	% 12	□ 221	📖 237K mi <sup>2</sup>	👤 763K ⓘ
Tundra	% 4	□ 195	📖 257K mi <sup>2</sup>	👤 222K ⓘ
Tropical seasonal forest	% 50	□ 143	📖 199K mi <sup>2</sup>	👤 1.5M ⓘ
Cold desert	% 10	□ 53	📖 83K mi <sup>2</sup>	👤 60K ⓘ
Hot desert	% 4	□ 9	📖 12K mi <sup>2</sup>	👤 288 ⓘ
Tropical rainforest	% 80	□ 9	📖 14K mi <sup>2</sup>	👤 194K ⓘ
Biomes: 12   Cells: 4981   Land Area: 7M mi <sup>2</sup> Population: 45.3M				

Figure 2.2.2: A key showing the world's biomes and how they relate to population, area, and habitability.

### **3. EXPLANATION OF EXHIBIT**

#### **3.1 Description of Creative Artifact**

*Cinders Fall* is a web-based graphic novel of my creation. I both wrote the plot for it and drew the comic chapters. I also designed character sheets for both Nox and Apolleos. I shall entail the specifics of each below.

##### *3.1.1 Character Designs for Cinders Fall*

The two character designs are a forward view of each characters, in both their combat outfits and their casual outfits. It also showcases the color palette used for the characters, and their sigil, if it is known. These two sheets are in the appendix for reference (Fig I.1-2).

##### *3.1.2 Cinders Fall Web-based Graphic Novel*

*Cinders Fall* is a web-based graphic novel, and for this creative artifact I completed the first three chapters of the story. It introduces us to Nox, Ner, and their world. It also sets up future events, like the ball and Apolleos' attempted assassination at the hands of Nox. (Fig II.1-x)

#### **3.2 Planning the Creative Artifact**

I needed to begin planning my creative artifact, and while I had a basic concept and outline from the summer, I knew it needed substantial refining and revisions for it to be ready for scriptwriting and drawing. So I started by focusing on my worldbuilding and characters. I knew that they had to be strong before I delved into the story itself. I had so many notes and inspirations from my research sources. I also kept a Pinterest board of visual references and general writing advice, like on how to write good protagonists and the like.



After the planning phase was complete when I was content with the world and my cast of characters, I began creating a rough story outline. It was a simple progression of events, a linear progression of cause and effect. I wanted my story to stay tight and concise, so keeping things only to their cause and effect helped me understand how to progress through the story to the end I had envisioned. With this outline done, I began to create my creative artifact.

### **3.3 Process of Creating the Creative Artifact**

After planning my creative artifact, I began to script write for about thirteen chapters. Then I started drawing the prologue, and I quickly realized that the amount of drawing being done per text was much larger than I expected. So I immediately took my goal of chapters completed from thirteen down to eight. Once again, I realized that this too was not doable, so I pared my goal of chapters completed down to three. This was very doable, and this is what I completed for my creative artifact.

In addition to three chapters being completed, I also designed two character sheets for the main characters of *Cinders Fall*, Nox, and Apolleos. This was a healthy break for me in between drawing the chapters, as I was still working on my creative artifact, but I was not concerned with the actual graphic novel. The character sheets were also helpful because they gave me a concrete reference for me to use when drawing Nox and Apolleos.

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

For story planning, characterization, and worldbuilding organization, I used Notion to help me keep things in one digital notebook. This was useful for planning and easily moving things around if need be. For scriptwriting, I used Microsoft Word. I used Clip Studio Paint EX for drawing my creative artifact, both the web-based graphic novel and the character sheets. All

these tools are industry-standard in each of their fields, and I became quick adept at using each software throughout my research.

### **3.4 Presenting the Creative Artifact**

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

I created my presentation using Google Sheets and a layout from an online catalog of slideshow themes. I chose a book-themed layout because I wanted my presentation to feel like a story. When writing the slides, I wanted to take my current thesis and make it concise enough for the online symposium. After all, my presentation is but an extension of my thesis itself.

#### *3.4.2 The Recording and Submission of the Presentation*

I recorded my presentation using OBS Studio, a recording software, and I used my microphone to capture my audio and my phone as a camera. I then submitted it to the University Research Scholars online symposium, where it would be displayed for the general public to view.

## **4. REFLECTION**

### **4.1 Reflecting on My Presentation and Feedback**

Making my presentation was a fulfilling experience because I got to present all my hard work concisely. I enjoyed talking about my process and research, as well as my process. Since it was an asynchronous presentation, I did not receive live feedback or a Q&A session. However, I did receive feedback from viewers, and the feedback was emailed to me after the URS symposium. All of the feedback was positive and helpful. I am glad that my presentation and thesis was so well received. Some parts of the feedback were very helpful in that they wanted to see more of my art, and thought I should not be so negative on myself when speaking on learning opportunities. I also apparently did not have my video and audio synced up, which was a technical issue of mine.

Overall, I appreciated the opportunity to present my work, and I am proud to say that I did a very lovely job at presenting my thesis and my creative artifact.

### **4.2 Moving Forward**

Moving forward, I want to continue making comics but in a much more casual sense. This thesis was a great opportunity to learn how to create comics, from the beginning planning process through drawing and producing chapters. I learned a lot and enjoyed the experience, but I also experienced burnout and crunch time. These conditions and lack of mental motivation deflated my sense of artistry. There were times when I didn't want to sit down to draw at all because of the fear of messing up or not being good enough. Moving forward I want to keep myself motivated throughout the comic creation process. I plan to do this by being kinder to myself and reminding myself that perfection is unattainable and I should be happy with

completing anything. I also plan to work more on shorter comics and other means of content for my stories.

### **4.3 Conclusion**

Overall, this thesis has been a great opportunity for me to study and learn a lot about the comic creation process and storytelling. Having to study great works and analyze them led me to learn about storytelling, characters, worldbuilding, and drawing and producing web-based graphic novels. I also worked on my presentation skills, planning, and budgeting time. I am happy to have done this and I can say that I have found an answer to my research question. Writing female characters is a matter of creating them to be relatable, consistent, and fun to watch. Worldbuilding is a matter of taking real life inspiration and melding it with tropes and ideas you want to convey. Storytelling should be kept concise and cut out a lot of the jargon that the reader does not need to see. Drawing needs to be kept simple and easy to produce for one person. All this and more I have learned throughout my thesis process and creating my creative artifact. I have learned a lot, and I hope to continue my learning process, even outside of this thesis. I move forward, and ever upward, always desiring to learn more.

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# APPENDIX: CREATIVE ARTIFACT

## APPENDIX I (CHARACTER SHEETS)



Figure I.1 – Character Sheet of Nox



Figure I.2 – Character Sheet of Apolleos