

The Grand Compendium of Velentra Thesis Written Material

By Sydney Kattine

Artist Statement:

Sydney is a concept artist and illustrator based in Portland, Oregon, who studied illustration at the Pacific Northwest College of Art. She is an unabashed fantasy and sci-fi nerd. Her work explores characters and creatures of fictitious worlds, but she draws inspiration from a deep love for the creatures of earth and a nearly equal love of traditional painting techniques. When she's not behind her drawing tablet battling monsters, magic, and robots she loves to travel or go on hikes with her pup Leo!

Thesis Proposal:

I intend to create a concept art book composed of a series of character studies and full scene illustrations that takes readers on a fanciful and sometimes frightening journey through a vibrant land based in a fantasy past where mythology and magic converge. This book will illustrate the lore and fictional history of an Earth-like world where magic is a field permeating the physical world. One in which powerful spirits dwell, and humans and creatures can influence, for better or worse. The book will also serve to provide background information for future stories.

The impetus to create this book was somewhat self-indulgent. There are a number of things that have been lifelong interests of mine. I've always loved learning about animals, mythology, and ancient civilizations. Drawing has always just been the lens through which I can understand the world. I also grew up reading many fantasy books, and retrospectively fantasy film and literature have had a strangely spiritual role

in my life. I'm enamored with the idea of a world where magic could exist and have been fascinated by magic as an element to tell stories with real-world significance. *Lord of the Rings* was about wizards and elves and magical rings, but it was also about how sometimes we must make great personal sacrifices for the good of the world. *Princess Mononoke* was about spirits and talking animals, but it was also about looking for the good in our enemies and learning to see the world through the eyes of another. These types of stories still mean the world to me and have always been some of my most significant influences. This project is an opportunity for me to research in-depth many of my personal interests and also an attempt for me to make a contribution to a genre that has played an important role in my life and perspective.

I want the scope of this project to span a relatively large fictional region. Each chapter will lead the reader through a specific location, from the towering city of Ithica, where dragons live alongside humans to the crypts beneath Northspire, where Carcovex spirits guard the souls of the damned in their penance. As the pages turn, the people, creatures, and spirits of these places will be brought to life with realism and painterly flair. To do this I'll start by designing a geographical map that the book will be built around and designate locations for the places, etc. that I have already done some concept work for. I will then continue to add locations on the map for the illustrations and designs as I create them. This I believe, will ground my ideas in a clear reality and aid me in building relationships between various elements of the project.

The book will be formatted to print as a 36 page 8.5x 11 hardcover perfect bound book. The first page of the book will be blank followed by a title page, table of contents, and introduction. The last two pages will be an acknowledgments page followed by

another blank page. The remaining 24 pages will be divided into four chapters, each containing six pages which will include a title page/ full spread illustration, followed by four more pages of half-page illustrations, vignettes, and accompanying text.

Regarding my influences for this book, it seems necessary to discuss Tolkien. As with many involved in the fantasy genre, *Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* series were hugely influential to me. The in-depth world building and complex overlapping narratives in the books still very much captures my imagination today, and the combination of dark, gritty, and high fantasy aesthetics developed in the movies is something that I've always been enchanted by. The concept art by Paul Lazaine for those movies are still some of my favorite paintings and highly influential to my own painting aesthetic. However, some of my other major influences are informed by films and television created through a very different cultural lens. Miyazaki films and *Avatar The Last Airbender* are some of my other greatest sources of inspiration. The concept of a spirit world that exists all around us but is usually hidden is an idea that still fascinates me, and the visual style of movies like *Spirited Away*, *Princess Mononoke*, and *Howl's Moving Castle* have informed many elements of my visual work as well. I've also been inspired by many wonderful artbooks. Some of the works, in particular, are James Gurney's *Dinotopia* Series, Ian Mcaig's *Shadowline*, and Iris Compiet's *Faeries of the Faultlines*. I find all of these books to be beautiful amalgamations of illustrations and short stories that I will in many ways, be modeling my art book after.

It is my hope that I will be able to combine my inspirations in this book into something that is both my most ambitious project to date, and something which will provide the foundation for future projects based in the same world. My realism-based

visual style will lend itself to this project by balancing the highly fantastic designs with a firm structure for believability. I use a combination of loose textural and refined brushwork, inspired by traditional oil painting techniques, which I believe will add an air of sophistication and timelessness to the work.

My vision is that through creating this art book I can create a collection of work that showcases the development of my skills as an illustrator, and builds a foundation from which I can create many other projects from in the future, while at the same time functions as a product for many people to enjoy. It is my hope that I can combine my artistic influences to create a unique flavor within the fantasy genre and produce an immersive glimpse into another world that would make a fun addition to any coffee table book collection.

Project Statement:

This thesis project is the presentation of the first 26 pages of a concept art book composed of a series of character studies and full scene illustrations. The working title of the book is *The Grand Compendium of Valentra*, and it is a collection of illustrations and short writings that takes readers on a fanciful and sometimes frightening journey through a vibrant land based in a fantasy past where mythology and magic converge. The book depicts some of the many creatures, characters, and places of an Earth-like world where magic is a field permeating the physical world. One in which powerful spirits dwell, and humans and creatures can influence, for better or worse.

Oral Presentation:

Hi everyone! Thank you so much for coming to my thesis defense. I'm really excited to talk to you all about the project I've been working on, so let's dive right in!

SLIDE

My intention for my thesis project was to create the building blocks of a compelling world filled with fantastic creatures and characters. In the last seven months I have been making the introduction and first chapter of a concept art book composed of a series of character studies and full scene illustrations. It is my hope that in its final form this book will be an eye catching portfolio for potential clients, but also an art book that anyone can enjoy. The working title of the book is *The Grand Compendium of Valentra*, and it is a collection of illustrations and short writings that takes readers on a fanciful and sometimes frightening journey through a vibrant land based in a fantasy past where mythology and magic converge. It depicts some of the many creatures, characters, and places of an Earth-like world where magic is a field permeating the physical world. One in which powerful spirits dwell, and humans and creatures can influence, for better or worse.

SLIDE

So I have to be honest with you all and say that my impetus for creating this project was somewhat self-indulgent. I wanted the opportunity to really study some of my lifelong interests like; animals, mythology, and ancient civilizations. For me drawing has always been a lens to understand the world through, so doing a project that would enable me to draw and research subject matter that I was eager to learn about was really important to me.

SLIDE

And now I'd like to speak a bit about my creative influences—

SLIDE

Aside from being inspired by a desire to learn about things in the real world, some of my other sources of inspiration for this project were fantasy film and literature. I'm enamored with the idea of using magic as a device to tell stories with real world significance.

SLIDE

As with many involved in the fantasy genre, *Lord of the Rings* was hugely influential to me. I love this story because to me it was about wizards and elves and magical rings, but it was also about how sometimes we must make great personal sacrifices for the good of the world. The in-depth world building and complex overlapping narratives in the books still very much capture my imagination today, and the combination of dark, gritty, and high fantasy aesthetics developed in the movies is something that I've always been enchanted by.

SLIDE

One of my other major artistic influences is Studio Ghibli films. I was introduced to the concept of yokai through the film *Spirited Away*. I fell in love with these zany characters, and the concept of a spirit world that exists all around us but is usually hidden is an idea that still fascinates me.

SLIDE

In addition to the many sources that have been conceptual inspirations for my work I've also tried to incorporate my visual influences into my work as well.

Some of the artists whose work I aspire to most are illustrators and concept artists working in the entertainment industry. Such as Karla Ortiz, Tyler Jacobson, and Andy Park. I think their design sensibilities are incredible and I often look to their work for inspiration.

SLIDE

Many of my aesthetic considerations are also heavily influenced by Golden age illustrators like Dean Cornwell and Mead Schaefer. Their handling of composition and brushwork are something I greatly admire and I continually attempt to capture some of those qualities in my own illustrations.

SLIDE

(Project overview title slide)

SLIDE

After considering my inspirations and influences I knew I wanted to embark on a project that centered around fantasy world building and characters. And the decision to create it in the form of an art book seemed obvious because I wanted this body of work to be in a form anyone could pick up and enjoy anytime, also I feel that books have a certain magic to them as objects that I felt would lend itself to the content. I decided to make a compendium rather than create something that followed a strict narrative because I knew my strength was in visual storytelling rather than writing and I wanted to showcase that.

SLIDE

The last thing I took into consideration before starting the project is who the intended audience would be. — I wanted the book to showcase my work and be appealing to potential clients, but also a fun collection of images any fantasy lover might want to have on their bookshelf. Though I believe this book will appeal most specifically to young adult and adult audiences, and contains some content that may not be suitable for young children.

SLIDE

When I initially pitched this project I had proposed to create a 36 page book with four 8 page chapters. But I realized that in its ultimate form I wanted this project to be much more extensive than what the timeline for my thesis would allow, so instead I opted to do the introduction and first chapter of the book only and continue creating content for it after my thesis was over. This would allow me to make the chapters longer and more in-depth, which is something I really wanted for the book.

SLIDE

Once I had a clear vision of my goals for the project, I knew it was time to make definitive choices about the worldbuilding premises that I would create all of the content around.

SLIDE

The idea for this art book had been forming in my mind long before I officially started the project, and I had a lot of illustrations and concept designs I had already produced for the fantasy world I knew I wanted to create, but had not yet defined. So when it came time to solidify the worldbuilding of the project I approached it with a bit of reverse engineering and used the imagery I had already generated, that I was really excited about, to start writing the core material from.

SLIDE

One of the first decisions I made was who would narrate the book. I knew this would be a key element for connecting the reader to the world I was creating, so whomever it was must be worthy of the task. I landed on a character named Mirroth. He's the book master and scribe for The Infinite Library, which is home to all books concerning the places and happenings across all dimensions of time and space. In the introduction Mirroth will tell us he has written this book as a record of the land of Valentra (one of his favorites), and invites those who are inquisitive about worlds outside of their own to enjoy it for as long as they like, but to please return it to The Infinite Library when they are finished.

SLIDE

After I had the narrator decided on, I began mapping the world. I knew I wanted the book to span a fictional continent, so I mapped out the land, mountains, rivers, and different types of terrain. Then I placed some of the locations I already had done some concept work for where I thought they would fit best on the map. And after that Valentra was starting to take form.

SLIDE

The next step in my process was designing a system of magic for Valentra. I decided that this world would be encompassed by a sort of magical field, called The Wraith. The magic in The Wraith isn't evenly dispersed though, there are areas where the magic is

very concentrated, or dense, and areas where it is very thin. In the areas where it is more dense people and creatures who have developed the ability to use magic have strengthened powers.

SLIDE

In the Wraith there are beings or spirits that both exist within it its magic and are made from it. The densest areas of the Wraith are where the most powerful spirits live, and in the highest concentration. They are sentient and have their own desires and agendas that often collide with the physical world. Though they normally can't be seen by humans they occasionally take on a temporary quasi-physical form so they may be seen. People who are skilled magic users can train themselves to sense them even when they are not in a physical form.

SLIDE

There are also people, and plenty of creatures in the book. All of which can potentially use magic. For humans and humanoids, anyone is capable of harnessing and using the magic of The Wraith, and many people can perform simple magic. But few become masterful magic users because it is a difficult skill to learn and requires great knowledge and training. Some of the flora and fauna have also learned to use magic, like dragons breathing fire, or creeping water vines that cast a magical force field.

SLIDE

So now that I've told you a bit about some of the most essential world building elements, I'd like to talk about my process for creating the designs and illustrations in the book.

SLIDE

All of the designs and illustrations created for the book started with research, both conceptual and visual. This includes researching everything from functionality of clothing and anatomy to particular character archetypes.

SLIDE

And of course gathering plenty of reference images which might look something like this.

SLIDE

After gathering reference I start doing thumbnail sketches, and once I've landed on a rough idea of what the design will be like I do a set of variation sketches to really help flesh out what directions I might want to take the design in.

SLIDE

And follow that with a round of color variations--

SLIDE

Before taking the design to a final render.

SLIDE

My illustration process is more or less similar. (slide through process)—and I mention the steps of my process because it was a big consideration for me to show work in every stage of development in the book, and I felt that having work at various levels of finish would be part of the appeal of the body of work.

SLIDE

My final set of considerations was what the layout and design of the book would be.

SLIDE

Even though I had made some changes to the book from my proposal, I kept with the decision that the book would be formatted to print as an 8.5x11 inch hardcover perfect bound book. Following a more general introduction I wanted the different chapters to correspond to different major regions of Valentra. So while writing and producing images for the first chapter I kept a singular geographical region in mind. I wanted to plan the layout in such a way that the images would garner the most attention, but the text was there as a contextually interesting and visually pleasing accompaniment.

SLIDE

To accomplish this goal I created a layout for the introduction and the first chapter composed of placeholders for images and text so that I could assess the overall impact of these elements on the pages. Next I made a rough outline of what I wanted each of the images and sections of the text to be about, and then set about completing the visual elements which included all of the paintings, character vignettes and sketches, and then wrote the text and placed it around my imagery.

SLIDE

And now I'd like to show the completed pages of the book.

SLIDE (through pages)

(slide to introduction page)

One of my favorite things about writing the text for the book was playing with the format of the narrator. I got to do a lot of fun quirky things in regards to writing the book in his voice that I haven't seen done in many art books before. He does things like make direct addresses to the reader, which I felt would be an interesting way to keep the audience engaged and really bring them into the world. I also felt that writing the book as if it had been written by this kind of flamboyant but still very scholarly character would give me the perfect balance of poetic flourishes and visceral descriptions of the world, while still maintaining a somewhat informative tone.

SLIDE

(map slide) In addition to designing the topography of Velentra, I also created a map that would showcase the different levels of magical density. For the first chapter and location I wanted to choose a very magically dense area to see how far I could push this idea and what directions it might take me in.

SLIDE

(slide to Mindrell title page)

This project gave me some opportunities to make illustrations that were really outside of my comfort zone as well. This title page being one of them. Because the chapter title

pages also correspond to different locations I wanted the illustration to feature an environment. My primary focus in illustration has been on character design and character illustration, and so painting this environment scene was a really fun challenge. It forced me to approach composition very differently than I normally would and tackle subject matter that I had little experience with like architecture. I tried to create a piece that would lead the viewer's eye through multiple focal points, and really learned a lot from this.

SLIDE

(Mindrell slides) The Empress character design was actually the first piece I created regarding the city of Mindrell. I wanted to create a character that in many ways would embody this place and give me a better idea of what the values and culture of this city might be like. I also had some specific design motifs that I was really interested in playing with. I went through multiple variations before landing on a design that I felt was not just visually interesting but also represented a character and story that I was eager to continue to explore. I decided to go with an older character that had an air of both elegance and power. I was also really excited about exploring some of the swirling art-nouveau inspired shape design and felt that this combined with the high contrast red and white color palate gave me the emotional impact I was looking for.

SLIDE

Once I had the Empress character design and title page completed I used the visual information I had included in those paintings to write the lore from. I decided the lavishness and motifs of the swirling red vines needed to be explained, and incorporated them as a plant that was both a source of wealth and magical protection for the city.

SLIDE

Another goal for this project was to use it to improve my painting speed and tackle more complex subject matter. I chose to do a festival scene because I felt that this would

really challenge me to attempt to weave together the crowd, architecture and magic into the scene in a cohesive way. I feel I still have a lot to learn in this regard, but glad to have tackled an illustration such as this.

SLIDE

The painting on the left of this spread was one of the first paintings I created for this project, when the idea of making an art book was just a pipe dream in the back of my mind, still I referred back to it often to remind myself of the tone and aesthetic that initially inspired me to create the book.

SLIDE

The water dragon was also one of the earliest paintings I did for the book, but the sketches on this spread I did much later and felt by the time I had reached them I had really improved in both the speed of my sketching and in my line quality.

SLIDE

Developing the spirits was one of my favorite parts of the project. I had written the lore beforehand and knew they were an ephemeral type of being that could take on a physical form if they pleased, but were not really physical beings. And I wanted to develop a visual language that would really symbolize this and be something very special and unique.

SLIDE

What I landed on was two things; the first being that they would be depicted with smokeyness and displaced color effects. And the second being that they could be more chimerical in their design, and what I mean by that is that their anatomy could be more Frankensteined parts that didn't need to be anatomically functional. Which was not only really fun to design but again gave me a jumping off point in fleshing out the lore. These visual choices inspired me to make dense areas of the Wraith have some psychedelic physiological effects on humans.

SLIDE

By the end of this process I had actually made a lot more content for the book than I had initially planned to when I first decided to only do the introduction and first chapter. I had originally planned to create the first 20 pages, but ended up with enough content for 26, and ultimately felt that the book flowed better and was more interesting with the additional illustrations and text.

SLIDE

I feel that this project could potentially have a very unique place in the cultural marketplace.

SLIDE

Comparatively it shares many commonalities with art books such as Iris Compiet's *Faeries of the Faultlines*, Larry McDougall's *Gwelf*, and James Gurney's *Dinotopia*. Though it would likely attract a similar audience I feel that the visual language I've developed within it, and the style of narration will set it apart.

SLIDE

Upon completion I intend to have a kickstarter to fund printing and self publish the book, although I would also consider pitching it to publishers like Eye of Newt or possibly Saga Press.

SLIDE

Even though I have a lot to add to the book before it reaches its final form, I think in many ways this project has already propelled me on the path towards reaching my career goals. It has made me a much better artist and writer but also it has opened up several professional opportunities for me which is more than I could have dreamed of.

SLIDE

My vision for this project is that it will showcase the development of my skills as an illustrator, and build a foundation from which I can create many other projects from in the future, while at the same time functioning as a product for many people to enjoy. It is my hope that this body of work is an elegant combination of my artistic influences that

creates a unique flavor within the fantasy genre and produces an immersive glimpse into another world that would make a fun addition to any coffee table book collection.

SLIDE

I want to thank you all for coming to my presentation today, and take some time to answer any questions you may have.

Creative Brief:

Project vision:

This thesis project is the presentation of the first 26 pages of a concept art book composed of a series of character studies and full scene illustrations. The working title of the book is *The Grand Compendium of Valentra*, and it is a collection of illustrations and short writings that takes readers on a fanciful and sometimes frightening journey through a vibrant land based in a fantasy past where mythology and magic converge. The book depicts some of the many creatures, characters, and places of an Earth-like world where magic is a field permeating the physical world. One in which powerful spirits dwell, and humans and creatures can influence, for better or worse.

Audience:

I believe this book will appeal most specifically to young adult and adult audiences, and contains some content that may not be suitable for young children.

Methods and Materials:

The book is formatted to print an 8.5x11 inch hardcover perfect bound book. The first 8 pages contain the title page, table of contents, introduction, and a map of Valentra. The first chapter is 16 pages composed of full spread, half page, and vignette illustrations accompanied by text.

Though the illustrations and designs that are featured in the book have been created primarily digitally, it is my hope the work will retain an aesthetic of having been

created with traditional mediums. I've chosen to work digitally for the flexibility and efficiency it provides, particularly during the design process, but have attempted to emulate the textures of oil paint and graphite to keep in line with the tone of the book.

Comparative Media:

Some of the best examples I've found of media that are similar in nature are Iris Compiet's *Faeries of the Fault Lines* and Larry Macdougall's *Gwelf*. Both of these art books also focus on fantasy world building without detailing a single long format story. I believe that while in many ways my art book is similar to these books, and appeals to similar audiences that it is differentiated both in the style of the narration, as well as in the more opaque painting style and the somewhat psychedelic aesthetic of the spirits.

Marketplace Application:

Upon completion I would like to either self-publish the book, and have it available for sale on my own website as well as through Amazon and Barnes and Noble. Or pitch it to publishers, some of the ones I've been considering are: Eye of Newt Publishing, Titan Books, Saga Press.

Bibliography:

Compiet, Iris. *Faeries of the Faultlines*. Toronto, Ontario: Eye of Newt Books Inc., 2021.

Gurney, James. *Dinotopia*. London: Dorling Kindersley, 1994.

McCaig, Iain. *Shadowline*. S.I.: Insight Editions, 2021.

Miyazaki, Hayao. *Spirited Away*, 2001.

Miyazaki, Hayao. *Princess Mononoke*, 1997.

Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Lord of the Rings*. 3. Vol. 3. 3 vols. Bristol, UK: Intellect Books, 2015.

Tolkien, J.R.R., Christopher Tolkien, and Ted Nasmith. *The Silmarillion*. London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2021.