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MYTHOS

By

Mattea R. Guldý

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the requirements for the
Master of Fine Arts degree in Animation

School of Film and Animation
College of Art and Design

Rochester Institute of Technology
Rochester, NY

December, 2022

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Abstract

Mythos is an animated TV series pitch created by Mattea Guldý and Selma Peña. The pitch consists of a pitch deck, a set of 3 scripts, and an animated proof of concept. I worked on the art for the pitch deck as well as the animated proof of concept, while Selma worked on the writing of the pitch deck and the set of 3 scripts.

The ultimate goal of our series is to explore the themes of self-love and appreciation through the lens of friendship and comedy. Utilizing mythical creatures as a vessel for a universal appeal to any demographic who goes through experiences of feeling like an outcast. Our series reflects the concept of how our individual differences create value and that you don't have to change yourself to love who you are.

Primarily we wanted to target the tween-to-teen demographic, but also allow audiences of any age to enjoy the series and learn important life lessons.

Proof of Concept Story Abstract

The film begins with a fairy, faun, and unicorn hanging around a pond enjoying each other's company. Marina is a teenage fairy feeling lost in the world, Enki is a Unicorn obsessed with his nonexistent horn, and Demetri the faun is obsessing over humans again. Marina and Demetri begin bickering about who closed the portal to Earth 1000 years ago when their friend Kodama pays them a visit. Enki reminds Marina that it was her family's fault for the portal closing between their world and Earth.

Enki notices a shiny new necklace adorning Marina's neck that he's never seen before. Demetri chimes in that he wants to have a look at the relic. After reciting the words on the back of the necklace the ground shakes and a portal emerges from the water.

The group decides to go through the portal and ends up on what they suspect is Earth. They come upon a group that seems to consist of a wizard, a maiden, and a knight. They hide in the bushes while the wizard casts a fire spell that startles them. The camera reveals the group Marina and her friends were observing are actually attending a present-day renaissance fair.

Introduction

Growing up, I knew I was different from everyone else because I was made to feel so. There were, and still are, gendered practices that come with raising girls. Social pressure to look a certain way, girls to dress and act like other girls, and play with Barbies. None of this appealed to me, and I felt very different as a result. I wanted to be like my brother - playing video games, with toy cars, and in the dirt and mud most days. A “tomboy” as some may call it. I remember sitting on the bus and looking out the window, wishing so badly I could “be a boy”. But not look like a boy, I just wanted to be free of the confines of the expectation of being a girl. Additionally, with the rise of social media and “skinny culture”, I grew up thinking and believing, that skinny meant beautiful. I was never a skinny girl. The '90s and early '00s were full of articles, news media, and broadcasts about women's weight (Weiser). It felt like every time I visited a grocery store I saw an article speculating on some celebrity's weight. My family even criticized my figure and encouraged me to lose weight from a very young age.

In media, growing up, the “fat” female characters were always supporting characters and never anything other than “funny”. The depth was in their weight, and it showed in how the characters were written. This kind of representation furthered my understanding of how I was perceived by the world in my body. The butt of a joke and would never be the protagonist.

Media representation over the years has gotten better. Characters don't default to being only 100 pounds, and there is a revolution around body positivity. There is still a lot of work to be done, and it is my goal to be that change.

The culmination of feeling different about how I acted, and how I looked, harmed my mental health, as it does for hundreds of thousands of people around the world ("Body"). Therefore, it has become very important in my work, and in my life, that I try and change this way of thinking for future generations through my work.

Initially, when conceptualizing my thesis, the short centered around body dysmorphia - a condition that affects how people see their own bodies. Body dysmorphia affects millions of teenagers and adults worldwide and is a personal issue for me (Himanshu). A few weeks prior to the Spring semester, Selma Peña reached out to the animation MFA students and asked if anyone wanted to collaborate on our thesis projects. We discussed our ideas and realized we both wanted to communicate similar themes and ideas in our theses. The difference would be that our project wouldn't be a short film, but instead a series pitch for an animated TV show. The pitch would involve a proof-of-concept animation that I would make, a set of 3-episode scripts that Selma would write, and a pitch bible that we would create together.

It is not usual that students decide to work together on their thesis projects. Traditionally, students are looking to create a project with a larger and more personal meaning, a theme that is personal to them that is explored at its depths. However, Selma and I felt we could do exactly that with a series pitch and working together. Working with another student, however, is placing your trust in them that they will follow through to the end. I knew especially after our initial proposal that Selma and I would create an amazing team together.

We began by discussing ideas and themes that were important to us in telling our series story. We both identified with feeling outcasted as youths and feeling not right in our own skins. Selma and I knew we wanted this to be a central idea in our project, as well as including characters in our story that may feel “different” in society. In a way, our main character Marina is a combination of Selma and me into one character - embodying our experiences.

First, we had to decide our target audience and the kind of genre we wanted to fit in. Our favorite stories that we had seen in recent years fit into the audience range of 13-17+. For our genre, fantasy adventure, with a touch of comedy, fit our narrative of wanting characters that anyone could relate to. Our setting would be “Mythos” - a land where mythical creatures of all cultures reside. Mythos, we decided, would also be the title of our series. Our characters would be creatures of legend and folklore - a fairy, a faun, and a unicorn. Later, we decided to add Kodama, a spirit from Japanese folklore.

Connecting a series story over multiple seasons, figuring out the character's objectives and goals, the arc of the story, and character development, was a tremendous task. We consulted each other constantly, trying to figure out the perfect story that would be new and refreshing. Our story morphed and grew until we had an epic journey with powerful messages. The initial concept phase was very much a constant conversation, as the basis of the series needed to be agreed upon and conceptualized in unison. After we had our characters’ basic personalities and story structure planned, we split off into our respective roles. Selma handled a lot of story development as well as the scripts, and I worked on designs and our proof-of-concept animation. Though we worked independently Selma, and I would meet once a week at

minimum. In the meetings, Selma would present her ideas for the plot, scripts, and story, and I would show her my progress and we would brainstorm and give each other feedback.

The pitch deck came together with a combined effort from both of us. Selma simplified the concepts of our major characters and story to put together the text we needed to effectively pitch Mythos. Then, I gathered images, and designs and made additional drawings to accompany the text. We then assembled our Pitch Deck to present during our screening.

Our Story

Mythos, as described before, is both the title of our series as well as the name of the land in which mythical, or folklore, creatures from every culture reside. The lore of Mythos says that 1000 years ago there was a portal that connected them to Earth. The portal closed when Zia, the Queen of Mythos and grandmother of Marina, disappeared and closed the portal for seemingly malicious and selfish reasons. Marina is our main character. She is a fairy with very little power compared to her grandmother and ancestors. Because of her lack of magical prowess, she feels separated from society, and her family is largely blamed for closing the portal. Therefore, Marina finds kinship with others who are odd-ones-out. Demetri is a faun and is considered strange and weird for his obsession with humans, while Enki is a descendant of elite Unicorns, but has no horn to distinguish himself from a common horse. The ragtag group of friends spends most of their time in a hut Marina constructed with some simple magic. This is where they discovered their companion, Kodama, who comes around whenever the group is together. The anti-hero of our story is the Huli-Jing, a foxlike Chinese mythical creature, who can shapeshift.

For decades, many shows were against serializing their stories due to wanting to show reruns of episodes without losing the viewers in contextualized situations, for example, SpongeBob or The Amazing World of Gumball, where there is no real running story. There would be an occasional thread of a story that the showrunners were able to add in for avid viewers, but there was a distinct lack of continuity. The new wave of linear storytelling has introduced a new way to explore characters and their stories over a longer period, like Steven Universe or Gravity Falls (Jones).

When Selma and I were initially discussing our series, we ourselves toyed with the idea of having Mythos be akin to Adventure Time, where a viewer could watch any episode and enjoy it but there would be a lack of a distinct story arc. We quickly realized that we didn't need the same sort of cartoons we grew up with in order to pitch our story.

Our proof of concept begins with the re-opening of the portal between Mythos and Earth. However, our story continues with Marina finding evidence on Earth that Zia is alive. Our cast of characters also encounters a trove of colorful characters on their journey to return to Mythos.

To flesh out the series as much as possible to prepare it to pitch after graduation, we had to develop our first season in its entirety, and plan for additional seasons. We had to ask ourselves a lot of questions about the world we were building, our characters, how we wanted the series to develop over time, and how to sustain an interesting conflict.

We first had to ask ourselves a ton of questions about Mythos and Earth. Was Earth a good place to go as a mythical creature? Was it punishment? We decided ultimately that the people of Mythos *loved* Earth and its human inhabitants. They were even a little obsessed with

each other, humans and mythical creatures alike. The people of Mythos worshiped humans and were devastated when the connection between their worlds was cut. This leads to the whole of society blaming Marina's family for losing the connection between worlds, and why that anger runs so deeply. Delving further into the world of Mythos, we had to decide additionally how their architecture worked, how advanced of a society they are, and how their political system worked. Ultimately, we decided on a mixture between futuristic design and ancient design for their architecture, and a royal family that governed their land.

For Earth, we had to decide what decade we would have our mythical cohorts would land in when they went through the portal. Initially, we toyed around with the idea of the setting being back-in-the-day - maybe the 70's but landed on modern-day ultimately. The complete transformation of society from the last time people from Mythos traveled to Earth seemed way more interesting than any other period.

We also had to ask ourselves how our characters would change over time, and how we could keep the conflict interesting. We ended up deciding that the villain would eventually integrate into the group, and we could sustain a second season plot and conflict with their addition to our group. Additionally, we decided that each of the characters would have a main point of growth during the first season. Marina realizes that her powers come from within all along, Demetri realizes that he doesn't have to be strong to have value, and Enki understands that his beauty is inner and outer, even if he doesn't fit the typical societal standards.

Pre-Production

Pre-Production on a film is hard enough, let alone developing an entire series. It was obvious that our proof of concept should be a part of our pilot episode- introducing our characters and the world they come from. The more difficult part was coming up with a series story arc, and additional potential seasons. After we decided on the world our series would live in, a mythical land where magical and folklore creatures reside, we had to choose which of those creatures our characters would be. Additional pre-production choices we had to make were casting our voice actors, designing our characters, and for me, coming up with the storyboard and animatic while Selma developed the script.

Inspiration

Recently, a wide variety of animated content has been released for a wide variety of viewers to enjoy. From Pendleton Ward's *Midnight Gospel* to Rebecca Sugar's show *Steven Universe*, there has been an awesome variety of TV content that I drew inspiration from. Of course, I also wanted to add some of Hayao Miyazaki's flair for a strong female protagonist.

I wanted our series to have a unique look, but I also wanted the appeal of a TV animated series. I took inspiration from designers that I admire, like Pendleton Ward and Patrick McHale, and their very uniquely identifiable characters, and how they utilize shape language.

For Enki specifically, I looked at Evan Palmer's design for Horse in *CentaurWorld* (Palmer). The shape breakdown was perfect for understanding how to animate a horse character and break down the shape design to create a dynamic and interesting horse design that was suited for 2D animation.

For the background design of Mythos, I drew inspiration from Steven Universes' background design. I have always admired their hand-drawn feel and simple but effective lighting. Often, I would bring up Steven Universes background designs to inspire the look of Mythos. The color design of Steven Universe also influenced the choices I made for both character color and background painting.

On top of looking at designers in the animation industry, I also looked at Pinterest, created a Pin Board of character designs I liked, and utilized those as a path for exploring different designs for our characters. In addition, I also explored different design ideas that Selma would put together for me to look at based on what she thought would be good for our characters. These images helped me understand Selma's idea for our character designs, and I integrated these ideas into our final character designs.

Iterations

The iteration of our story that we initially pitched to our thesis committee went along the lines of having Medusa, a Greek mythological character, be a villain that follows the group through the portal to earth to wreak havoc on humans, luring them into a spell where they would be obsessed with Medusa's beauty. Later in the story, Marina would become a resistance leader against Medusa, and it would culminate in an epic battle.

We later realized that using Medusa as a villain would continue the narrative that Medusa was evil. After all, Medusa's story is more than what is often portrayed in popular media (Waugh). We tried to spin that on its head and make her character a misunderstood villain. However, despite wanting to communicate Medusa's nuanced personality we felt we

were still falling into the trap of making her into a villain, even if we were planning to reveal her true nature later.

Character Designs

To start from scratch is difficult, so I began doing research on mythical creatures prior to deciding what our characters would be. We didn't want anything too "scary" - unfortunately, most folklore creatures are unsettling. Even fairies are unsettling, though they look very loveable in popular modern media. I looked at many images of unicorns, fauns, and fairies, wanting to subvert the expectations of the audience by keeping these images in mind. Selma and I wanted our characters to be "different".

I began designing silhouettes for each of our characters, experimenting with their body types, sizes, and shape language. It was my goal for these characters to be identifiable and unique, and to relay important character information about them. I designed around 100 silhouettes for all four of our heroines, refining them in multiple passes until Selma and I were happy with the shape language of each character.

I wanted Marina, a stubborn fairy, to feel headstrong but awkward and unsure, and the opposite of the dainty quality in a modern fairy. To show these qualities in her design I made her shapes soft but blocky. I experimented with a variety of clothing and hair looks for Marina, and we settled on curly hair that she didn't like taking care of so she pulls it into a top knot. Demitri as a faun in folklore would have a strong human upper body and be relatively proportionate with his goat legs. In his design, I accentuated his lower half, giving him an

awkward design. The disproportionate nature of his design fits with his awkward and nerdy personality.

Unicorns by definition are horses with long, gorgeous horns. Enki, therefore, couldn't stray too far from that design to detract from the fact that he *is* a unicorn. Instead, we decided to play with proportions and give him a nub instead of a horn on his head. Additionally, horses are notably hard to draw with their muscular structure and complex skulls. I spent a few weeks studying horses as well as looking at designs from the new show at the time, Centaur World, and seeing how animators handled designing horses for animation. I also began studying the different breeds of horses and landed on Clydesdale horses for the base of Enki's design. These magnificent horses fit the majesty of Enki's relatives, the most beautiful unicorns in Mythos.

Kodama's personality is fun and loving, so we gave him a soft design that would echo his traits. When Selma and I were discussing adding Kodama, I was nervous about animating another character, bringing the total to four characters. I decided it would be possible, but I would have to make them a puppet in Toon Boom. A 2D puppet is like a paper doll but utilizes layers in a digital program for each piece. This allows the animator to create key poses where the program puts in-between frames for you called tweening. The phase of creating the puppet takes a while, but the payoff happens during the animation phase by saving time. In Toon Boom, you can make a "3D" two-dimensional puppet. The ability to create a faux 3D/2D character allowed me the freedom to make the Kodama blend well with the hand-drawn animation. Because Kodama would be a puppet, I designed him in a way where he could be rigged in Toon Boom and animated with ease. After hundreds of drawings and sketches later, we had the designs of our four main characters.

Voice Actors

Selma and I knew to sell the concept of our series we would need dialogue in our script for our characters. This was a relatively new challenge, as I had never done a full film with scripted dialogue. We did not immediately find voice actors upon writing the script, as changes were being made frequently and we did not want to have to host multiple recording sessions. Selma did an initial recording of the script to give me direction for how the characters should be acting scene-to-scene. After the script was mostly finalized, we began seeking voice actors.

We posted a casting call and immediately were contacted by a variety of potential voices for our characters. In the end, we had clear choices for each of our characters. We cast Natalie Stornello as Marina, Brandon Munger as Demetri, and J.T. Blake as Enki. Later, we added David DeCaro as Kodama who recorded remotely and sent in his lines. We set up a recording session and rented out a Mix-Pre kit from the RIT Cage to record their lines. It was fun and challenging to direct each voice actor to deliver the lines as we imagined them. Ultimately, the initial recording session went very well, and we had a variety of takes recorded to add to the storyboard.

Storyboarding

The script and storyboard were challenging as our story continued to morph and grow as we discussed the ideas we wanted to communicate. We decided early on that the proof of concept would be a part of our pilot script. However, we were also aiming to have a standalone film that would introduce our characters and tell a rounded story. We decided the content of

the film would be just our main characters and the surprise opening of the portal on Mythos, with our characters ending up on Earth at the end. The storyboards were developed with relative ease.

I first started with tiny sticky notes and drawings on the script to communicate to Selma my ideas for the main shots in the film. After figuring out rough layouts and sketches for the storyboards, I began working in Storyboard Pro timing out the film and developing a clearer look for the layout and posing of our characters. One aspect I kept in mind all the time is the idea that this pitch is meant for TV. TV animation typically is a little less dynamic, and more limited with its motion than a feature-length production. The characters may not “feel” as three-dimensional, and I opted for more simplistic camera shots and infrequent camera moves. The lack of complex animation and camera moves helped give a more “TV” feel to the animation. I spent a few weeks developing the boards and talking to classmates, Selma and our thesis advisor Mari Jaye Blanchard about how they were coming together. I also utilized SyncSketch, an online platform where one can upload timed content and make comments for my review and reference. SyncSketch was extremely helpful for the entirety of production on Mythos, as I could always reference what needed to be changed, and still can today.

I enjoyed coming up with boards that worked with the comedic nature of our script, and really enjoyed the payoff when the timing of the jokes landed well. Of course, this was not always the case, and I did have to come up with different line deliveries and adjust the timing of the lines to make them more comedic. A few times, we realized that the delivery of the joke by our voice actors wasn’t lining up with how we wanted the joke to be interpreted by the audience. This did require some back and forth with the voice actor, as we often weren’t there

to direct them and had the actors recorded remotely. After a few weeks of work on the storyboards, we had a completed animatic.

Equipment

I've owned a desktop computer for the past eight years, upgrading to fit the needs of the work I had been doing year after year. Unfortunately, for this project, I had to purchase new RAM to ensure I had enough computing power to render my scenes without waiting too long. I exclusively did all my work for my thesis from home due to convenience. Additionally, prior to my thesis, I purchased a Wacom Cintiq 22. With a Wacom and a decent PC build, I felt confident my hardware would be sufficient for working on Mythos.

For my software, I have been paying the Adobe Suite fee for the past few years and did not mind continuing to pay out of pocket for the convenience of having it at home. I also had to continue my subscription to Toon Boom Harmony Premium, and temporarily paid for Storyboard Pro while working on my animatic and storyboards. The cost of software for the Fall and Spring semesters totaled around \$500. The money spent was well worth it because the Storyboard Pro to Toon Boom Harmony pipeline is seamless. Additionally, I utilized Photoshop, Adobe After Effects, and Adobe Premiere frequently for the duration of working on Mythos.

Production

Sound

The sound of a film is arguably one of the most important components. Selma had in mind a composer and sound designer for us very early on in production and reached out to Andrew Ragan to do the sound of our film. He agreed after seeing what we had planned for our

thesis. Before Andrew could begin on sound, however, he had to have the final recordings of our lines as well as a timed animatic. Thankfully I was able to deliver the final animatic before the end of the Fall semester so he could get to work.

For inspiration for our sound design, we provided Andrew with samples from a few fantasy short films as well as a few references from animated shows like *The Owl House* and *She-Ra*. This film would be different from most short films produced at RIT, as *Mythos* relies heavily on dialogue, so music otherwise should be secondary. Andrew produced a few samples of music for the film, and with a combination of a few of his examples, we had a music track for the film.

Before I handed over the audio recordings from the voice recording session to Andrew, I did some work on the tracks. In Adobe Premiere I adjusted some of the track's audio as there were some recording issues. In some of Marina's or Natalie Stornello's recordings, we had a slight hum in the background. I used YouTube to discover Premiere's Intelligent Audio Cleanup tool and cleared up the dialogue with no issue (AdobeCreativeCloud). Additionally, we ended up changing a line slightly in the film and I blended the new audio for the track without needing a new take for the line.

After Andrew took over sound, he managed to clean up the additional dialogue that we had to send to him due to re-records and some script changes. He blended the audio beautifully, so it was almost undetectable that we didn't record those takes in the same session.

Animation

Animation production started in the Fall semester after finalizing the animatic and creating turnarounds for each of our character designs. Initially, Selma and I discussed puppet animation in Toon Boom Harmony for each of our characters. However, I realized that with Enki's quadruped design it would be difficult to make his movements feel natural against the bipedal characters we had. We settled on paperless animation in ToonBoom Harmony for Marina, Demetri, and Enki. The Kodama, however, could be animated with a "3D" puppet made in ToonBoom Harmony, as he would float through the air, and therefore wouldn't suffer from not feeling "grounded" enough against the other characters.

Paperless animation was the most time-consuming part of the production process. Even though I was going for a more limited TV feel, it took 6 months total to complete the animation alone for Mythos. I started by creating layouts for the animation of each character and scene, starting with a scene in the middle of our film as I knew that my drawings would improve over time. With this knowledge, I saved the beginning and end scenes of Mythos for last. By February I had finished two-thirds of the keyframe animation. Even though I had mostly finished the keyframe animation, I ended up doubling back on the initial keyframes I drew and re-drawing them to improve those scenes. I was also utilizing SyncSketch at this time, so my feedback would be clear to me as I worked through each scene.

By the beginning of March, I had completed keyframe animation for all of my scenes and began to in between the keyframes. This was probably my favorite part of the production process, as I worked from scene to scene making the film and characters come to life. I was staying on or ahead of schedule at all times, committing at least forty hours a week to in-

between animation. It was fun showing Selma the final look of each scene and getting her reaction to seeing our characters come to life. I tackled the in-between process the same as I did for keyframes. I began in the middle and worked my way out, saving the beginning and end for last.

A few scenes did change during production. There is a scene in the middle of the film where our characters are discussing a necklace Marina is wearing, and they all crowd around her. Initially, there were a few cuts to the characters discussing her necklace and asking to see it. It occurred to me that to make the scene feel more crowded and impactful it should be one continuous shot. The end result was much better than initially planned.

Puppet Animation

I had never made a 3D puppet in ToonBoom Harmony before - but I wanted the challenge and aimed for the puppet to hopefully save time on animation for our fourth character. I knew the process for making a 3D puppet in ToonBoom Harmony but had never executed the process myself.

To make a “3D” puppet in ToonBoom Harmony, you must fake the dimensionality of the puppet through different views. At a minimum, there should be a front view, $\frac{3}{4}$ side for left and right, a left and right view, a $\frac{3}{4}$ back left and right, and a back view. I began with the front view of Kodama and managed to rig the puppet with relative ease. The full process took around two days to complete the puppet rig. However, I was perhaps a little overconfident with the initial puppet, as I had made a few mistakes without realizing it and had to go back a few times to

make adjustments for it to work properly. Namely, I switched the arms of the rig without realizing it and had to go back in and fix it. Luckily, I had not begun animation yet on the film.

One of the biggest problem-solving opportunities came with the hood on the Kodama. I wanted to have full control over the animation of the hood, both the inside piece and the outside. I searched on YouTube and found a few tutorials involving a Cutter node (Rumble). Adding this node, and making a few adjustments based on my knowledge of the program, I managed to create an innovative solution that allowed me the control I desired. Overall, the 3D puppet was a learning experience and did end up saving time in the animation process.

Production Challenges

A few weeks into the Spring semester we decided on some changes for our proof-of-concept script. Some of the jokes weren't hitting as intended. And by the recommendation of our thesis committee, and others, we adjusted the dialogue of our characters. The changes were relatively small, mostly references to Marina's grandmother Zia that wouldn't necessarily be understood by the audience. Due to time constraints, we decided to have our voice actors record at home using iPhones. It did take some back and forth with the students, trying to give them directions on delivery for lines through email. After a few passes, we got legible tracks that are barely indistinguishable from our professional recording.

Another production challenge was solving the final reveal in the proof of concept where Marina and friends are observing a group that is revealed to be renaissance fair attendees to the audience. The scene was feeling flat as initially planned, and Mari Jaye helped with conceptualizing a more interesting camera move and reveal for the character. Instead of having

the character cut to a front view and trying to figure out how to obscure their face enough, I opted for a 180-degree camera move where the character would spin into the frame, with a dolly out at the end for the reveal. After realizing this change, the scene felt much more impactful and, more importantly, funny.

Backgrounds

I had the layouts of all of my backgrounds set early on in pre-production when I was storyboarding for the film. I first attempted a layout of Marina's hangout, the main background, in Procreate, an iPad drawing software. I really wanted to have an early concept of how the backgrounds would look with the animation. After importing the background into Toon Boom, I realized that the pixel density of the image wasn't clear enough. Also, when juxtaposed with the vector animation it looked terrible. I attempted to salvage what I had but to no avail. I then attempted to draw the background directly in Toon Boom but felt restricted by the drawing options I had available to me.

Finally, I sketched out a layout in Photoshop and imported the image into Toon Boom Harmony and had a clear image when rendered out from Toon Boom. The vector blended much better than from the Procreate import. From there, I decided I wanted to have each element of the main background in the film separated into different layers so I could create some parallax with the camera and adjust the elements in the scene depending on the camera angle. This saved me a lot of time in the compositing process, as I didn't have to draw a new background for each shot. It also helped with continuity between each scene, placing the characters in their appropriate positions in the scene without having to change much of the background in between shots.

Directing a Team

In February I realized I would need assistance to make sure our proof of concept was completed to a degree that I was happy with. I began contacting students to see if anyone was interested in assisting me with working on Mythos. I had thought initially about asking students to help with in-between animation but realized that I wanted more control over the final look of the film. I settled with looking for help on backgrounds and coloring animation.

A handful of sophomore and junior students reached out to me after I presented Mythos to a few classes. My background assistants were Shine Xing, Kate Harrison, and Saige Kanik who helped with coloring backgrounds for the film. Shine Xing took on extra work and drew a background for me as well. My colorists for the film were John Masternick, Rylee Arenson, and Piper Charron. Working with students was a new experience for me and I wanted the team to be organized and work through the assignments I gave with ease.

First, I designed a tutorial and provided the brushes I wanted the students to use for backgrounds. I also set up a zoom meeting with the students to give them a direct reference of how I wanted the scenes to be painted and provided color palettes for them to follow for each background. Despite what I thought were clear directions, there were a few backgrounds I had to clean up to get the desired look for each background in the film. Additionally, due to some time constraints in the student's schedules, I had to take over some of the final renderings for backgrounds. However, despite these challenges, I planned for the possibility of students not being able to complete their assignments and was able to finish all of the backgrounds in a way I was content with.

My colorists for animation went off without a hitch for the most part. In Toon Boom Harmony there is a process that allows for easy animation coloring, granted when the animation was completed there are no gaps in the line. There is also a secondary layer for coloring that must be utilized in order for compositing in the future to work appropriately. A few times students accidentally did not paint on this layer, and I had to go back and adjust each frame appropriately. Additionally, sometimes students would paint mostly on the correct animation layer, but accidentally color some parts on the line layer. Thankfully this was easy to identify when I went into compositing but was a tedious process to correct, and obvious when it was unedited.

Despite the errors and some students not being able to complete their full tasks, I truly feel that Mythos would not have been completed without their help. It was fun working with students and hearing how much they enjoyed working on our project in return. Unfortunately, we could not provide monetary compensation for the students' help. However, we did give each student a personalized bag at the end with snacks, a sketchbook, personalized artwork, and some additional goodies. Overall, it was an amazing experience working with and directing a team.

Post-production

When the animation was said and done, there were a few weeks left of the semester. I knew I wanted some time to edit and allow myself time to composite the film in a way I would be happy with. However, I did run into a few issues during this process. Additionally, to our post-production of the film Selma and I decided we wanted a physical pitch book to hand at screenings. In post-production, I utilized compositing in Toon Boom and After Effects to achieve the final look of Mythos.

Compositing the Film

The final film was composited directly in Toon Boom Harmony. I settled on Toon Boom Harmony for final compositing, as I knew it had a set workflow with all of the tools I needed to create a clean final composite.

I started by importing all the background layers into Toon Boom and added a parallax to the layers so there would be depth in the camera. This became its own file that I could import into each scene and adjust as needed. Having a set workflow that could move in between scenes with ease made compositing a very easy task.

I then wanted to composite the characters for each scene. At first, I attempted to add highlights and shadows to the characters for the duration of the film. Selma and I opted to only add them in the end when there is a needed light shift when the portal opens. I did not know how to do this technique prior and looked to YouTube where I found a great tutorial from Fabio Gioffre explaining how to use Highlight and Shadow nodes with a simple Apply Peg Transformation (Gioffre). I ended up creating a base file with these nodes attached so I could

easily drag them in between scenes. Utilizing this workflow, I saved a ton of time creating these nodes individually for each scene.

Compositing woes began with adding Kodama to each scene. Because Kodama was animated as a puppet, they would have existed as-is on 1's, 24 frames per second, when most of the film was on 2's, or 12 frames per second. Left as is, it would have been jarring to have the animation side-by-side.

The first solution I explored was exporting each frame of Kodama's animation and trying to composite them in Adobe After Effects. This ~~effectively~~ did not work as I couldn't get After Effects files to import properly back into Toon Boom. I was also running into frame rate issues with After Effects where my 24 frames per second were automatically converted to 30 frames per second and gave the animation a strange effect with frame drops.

I finally settled with rendering out the animation as PNGs and re-importing them into Toon Boom and manually re-setting the frame rate with exposures of frames over time. This gave a nice effect to the final animation and allowed for full control of the frame rate for the duration of Kodama's animation. You might not know by watching that Kodama is not hand-animated due to the final editing and rendering of his animation. To give an ethereal look to Kodama, I decided to add a glow effect. I searched on YouTube and found a solution from the official Toon Boom Harmony channel, and with some of my own tweaking I got the effect I was looking for.

Compositing the final shot for the film to make the camera feel like it's going 180 degrees around the Wizard for the final reveal was difficult. I had to composite and animate the shot in such a way that the reveal wouldn't occur too early. I settled on keyframing the position

of the objects in the scene to come in during the dolly of the camera, so all of the objects in the scene would come in at the right time. After I navigated the challenges of the timing of the shot, it turned out to be one of the best scenes in the film.

PitchBook/Pitch Deck

Selma and I decided towards the middle of the Spring semester that we would like to have a physical edition of our pitch deck, as well as include additional images in our pitch deck to sell our idea. This of course meant more work for both of us, on top of our proof of concept and 3 scripts, to include a fresh pitch deck for our presentation.

We began discussing ideas for the structure of the pitch deck as well as any additional images or text we would like to include. Most of the text we already had ready, written descriptions of our characters, Mythos as a place, and images from the film that we could reuse in the presentation. I opted to draw images for a map of Mythos, a better image of Marina's necklace, a sketch of Grandma Zia and Huli Jing, and a concept drawing of Mythos.

After gathering the text and images, I used InDesign to create the template of the book, which we re-used in our pitch deck for our presentation. Getting the book printed was relatively easy, and a fun process. It was nice having a physical copy of the book to hand out to all the important people who helped us with Mythos.

Audience Reaction

After pitching our series, and screening the proof of concept, I gave my artist statement. I talked about my experience in developing the film and the challenges that I overcame along the way. There were some critiques, of course, during our question-and-answer portion of the

presentation for both the story of our series and the animation. Mostly the critiques were about the portal opening and how it felt like the scene could have been more impactful. Recommendations were made to change the shot angle to be a little lower to make the shot feel more dramatic. I agree with the criticism and have plans to adjust that shot accordingly. This comment came especially due to the high impact of the last shot in the film where the wizard is revealed when comparatively the portal could have been equally dramatic.

Another comment I got frequently, mostly due to my own errors in rendering, was that Marina's eyes appeared uncolored before they entered the portal. Unfortunately, I could not figure out why they were appearing that way before the final export which led to audience confusion on whether they were uncolored or not. I am still searching for a solution to this rendering issue.

Conclusion

Of course, when I watch back the film, I notice every mistake that I made. There's a portion where Kodama is missing their glow effect, frames that I'm not proud of, and adjustments that are necessary that were pointed out during the critique. However, I am proud of where the proof of concept was when it was screened. Adjustments can always be made to make a piece stronger, and I plan on doing exactly that as Selma and I plan on pitching Mythos. I am proud of Mythos and am excited about its future.

Mythos

Directors

Selma Peña - Head of Writing

Mattea Guldý - Head of Animation

A story by Selma Peña and [Mattea Guldý](#)

Kind of Film

Project Bible

Pitch Deck

3 Episode Scripts (20 pages/per)

2D Animation

1:30 Bard's Telling-of-the-Tale (proof of concept)

Rationale

Our goal is to develop a project bible and pitch deck, as well as complete 3 episode scripts and approximately a minute and thirty-second short music video of a bard telling a boiled-down version of our first season as a proof of concept. We will not only be exploring the first season of this series but the following seasons as well, building this magical world from the bottom up. We know that this hasn't been done before, but we are confident that we have the tools to create a successful and well-rounded pitch that we can take with us post-graduation.

We both grew up feeling we were being pushed into a mold that someone else created for us. Because of our shared experiences feeling as though society was trying to tell us who or how to be, we want our series to reflect on how our individual differences make us stronger instead of weak or less valuable. We intend on using mythical creatures and their potential "societal issues" to pursue this narrative, along with some comedy to help discuss these sensitive topics. Over the course of the series, we hope to touch on body positivity, the mental strain of society's pressures, total love, acceptance, and hopefully more. Since we want to cover a wide variety of topics, we know we must reach out and consult with a variety of people to gain their important and insightful perspectives. Feedback will be essential to the success of our series and it is something that we always keep in mind.

Thesis Statement

Society's standards are set to an unrealistic degree and should allow for deviation from the norm.

Overview of Story

Pilot Treatment

Centuries ago, the Earth used to be connected to this other world called Mythos. A portal connected both worlds. Mythos is inhabited by mythical creatures; centaurs, mermaids, dragons, jinns, trolls, kappas, etc. Humans and mythical creatures knew of each other's existence and coexisted in peace. But 200 years ago the portal was closed. It was unclear why, and theories were made by both sides. With time, humans forgot those times and eventually thought that those creatures were part of stories and nothing else. On the other hand, mythical creatures, with longer lives, kept their memories of humans and began to idealize them as a powerful and perfect race, longing for the portal to open again.

Our pilot begins in the present time. Our protagonist: Marina, is a forest fairy. Her grandmother was young when the closing of the portal happened and she has lovely memories of humans. Marina has two best friends: A unicorn without a horn named Enki and a thin and weak fawn

named Demitri. The three of them are tired adults, disappointed by their society where only the most beautiful mythical creatures are important. And where, if you don't meet certain standards you will never fit in.

Enki is currently going through a crisis and really wants to find a horn to fit in with the other unicorns that refer to him as a "horse". In an attempt to get help from powerful humans, the 3 friends decide to try to open the portal to earth. Marina opens the portal, surprised by her powers in doing it. But they don't know that a more evil creature follows behind them: Medusa. - End of pilot

Season Synopsis

The 3 friends realize they are trapped on earth when they try to go back to Mythos and the portal is completely destroyed. Meanwhile, Medusa becomes a celebrity around the world. Humans become obsessed with her beauty and make her their "queen". There are a few humans that don't fall under her charm.

Marina, Enki, and Demitri start leading the resistance, trying to find a way to take Medusa back to Mythos and save humans from her spell. It is revealed that Medusa was never actually a mean creature that transformed people into stone. She was just so exotic and beautiful that some humans were jealous of her and made up that story to keep people away from her.

Marina becomes addicted to her new fame as the leader of the resistance, becoming everything she criticizes Medusa; longing for the love and acceptance of humans. Demitri and Enki stay focused and start digging out the truth about why the portal was closed in the first place, but they are sad that Marina is changing and losing her essence.

Through a series of scenes in the past, it will be clear that it was actually Marina's grandmother who closed the portal because she was trapped in a very toxic relationship with the King of earth, who becomes obsessed with her. He builds her statues and shrines inspired by her beauty and begins to watch every little thing she does. She wants out, but he threatens to turn humans against Mythical creatures if she doesn't stay with him. She plans a complete retreat from Earth and closes the portal forever, thinking that it's best for both sides. However, she never says any bad things about humans, she understands that it would be unfair to generalize, and she tells only nice stories about them.

When Marina learns the truth she realizes that she fell for everything her grandma fought against. She let herself become an idol because it felt good while losing herself in that process. She finally understands that being herself is more than enough and that if her grandma closed the portal she has the power to somehow open it again. Marina uses her magic and with all her strength manages to create for a moment a portal to Mythos. Now, she's ready to get Medusa and fix things.

Medusa refuses to go and in an epic battle where Enki proves to everyone that he doesn't need a horn to be a unicorn, he and his friends finally trap Medusa and force her to "break" the spell

she unleashed on humans. At the end of the season, Medusa reveals that there was never a spell, it is human nature to take things to an extreme, becoming easily obsessed with superficial aspects of people. Still, Marina opens a new portal and brings Medusa and her friends back to Mythos, where things are not that different from earth, but now they've learned the lesson, seeking validation from others is dangerous.

Budget

Project Areas	Supplies	Cost	Notes	TOTAL
2D Animation	Adobe Suite	\$240	\$20/month (12 months)	\$1,403
	Storyboard Pro	\$28	\$7/month (4 months)	
	Toon Boom Harmony	\$160	12 month subscription	
	Cintiq Tablet	\$0	In kind	
	Sound (Composing and singing)	\$500		
	Festivals	\$400		
Screenwriting	Final Draft Software	\$0	In kind	
	Resgistration in the Writers Guild of America	\$75	\$25/script	

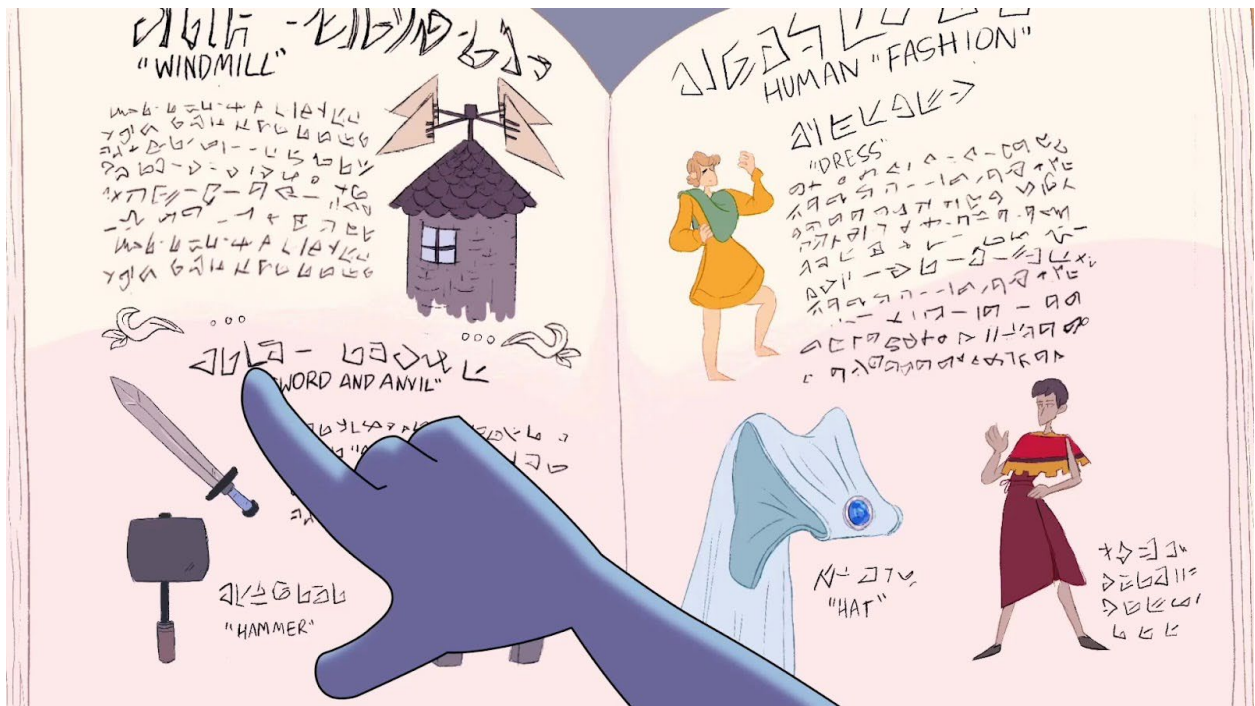
Schedule

		2021						2022				
		August	September	October	November	December	Winter Break	January	February	March	April	May
2D Animation	Character Design											
	Environment Design											
	Turnarounds/Expressions											
	Additional characters/Assets/Props											
	Finalizing Bible/Storyboard											
	Animatic											
	Start teaser animation: Keys and breakdowns											
	Inbetweening											
	Final line											
	Color											
	Editing											
Screenwriting	Sound											
	Final Episode Synopsis											
	Final Pilot Outline											
	Bible information											
	Pitch deck building											
	Outline Episode 2											
	Outline Episode 3											
	Write Pilot script											
	Write Episode 2											
	Write Episode 3											
	Revisions											

References



Screenshots



Screenshots



Screenshots



Screenshots



Screenshots



Screenshots

MYTHOS

**CREATED BY
MATTÉA GULDY AND SELMA PEÑA**

**DIRECTED BY
MATTÉA GULDY**

**SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FUFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
MFA DEGREE IN THE SCHOOL OF FILM AND ANIMATION,
ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY**

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Pitch Deck



Pitch Deck

GENERAL INFORMATION

Length: 22 min episodes

of Episodes (Season 1): 10

Target: Teens (12-18)

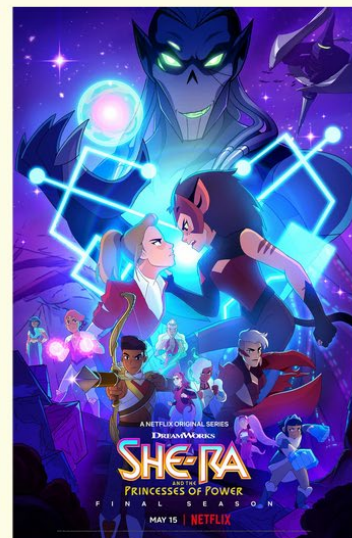
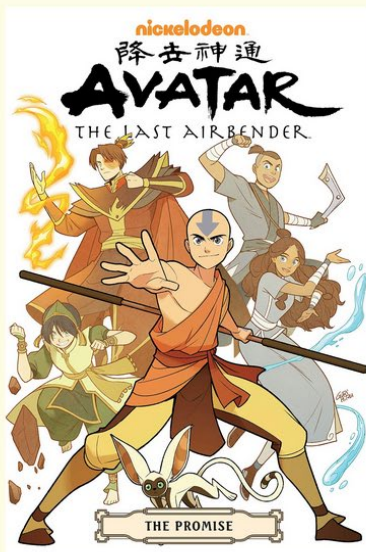
Secondary Target: 18-49
(fantasy fans)

Genre: Fantasy Mystery

Format: 2D full animation



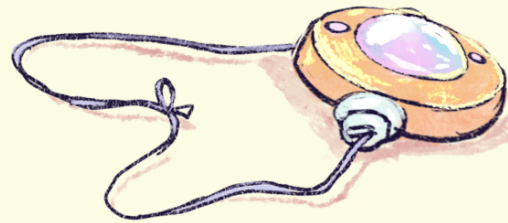
REFERENCE SHOWS



SEASON 1 SYNOPSIS

Marina is a teenage fairy living in Mythos. It has been hard living under the burden of her family's stigma. (1000 years ago, Marina's grandmother infamously closed the portal, sealing herself and everyone on Earth away from Mythos.)

With her other misfit friends: Demetri, Enki, and the Kodama, Marina accidentally activates her grandmother's magic necklace to reopen the portal. Marina and friends are shocked to find themselves on Earth, where they will discover twisted plots, dark secrets, new friends, and devious foes. Most importantly, Marina will realize her great importance in the fates of the two worlds, and in her family's mysterious past, and become stronger and wiser than she ever thought possible.



MARINA

Marina was born in Mythos centuries after the closing of the portal. She is a strong-willed, kind, and patient fairy.

Marina believes there is more to the story of the portal's closing (her family's great shame). She doesn't believe that her grandmother acted out of malice or selfishness: she must have had a good reason for sealing the portal connecting Earth and Mythos. More than anything, Marina wants the truth.

As a fairy from an ancient house, Marina has the potential to wield extremely powerful magic. However, since her family has been outcast since before she was born, she has never been properly trained, so her abilities are simple and limited.



Pitch Deck



DEMETRI

Demetri is a faun who comes from one of the most reputable and wealthy families in Mythos. His ancestors inspired the ancient Greeks and Romans. His kin are known for their attractive, muscular bodies and for throwing the best parties in Mythos.

Demetri has never fit in with his family. He's a nerdy, unathletic, know-it-all. He is passionate about human culture and history before the closing of the portal. He loves to read and learn.

Because Demetri refused to live the way his father demanded, he was banished and disowned. Marina and Alston found him and gave him a home under their roof.

ENKI

Enki is a descendent of one of the oldest families of unicorns; his ancestors inspired the first ancient Mesopotamian tales.

Everyone in Enki's family possesses a horn made of the most precious metals. Everyone... except Enki. Instead, Enki has a tiny bump that looks more like a pimple where his horn is supposed to be.

Enki's dream is to find a way to make his horn grow. He feels insecure, but he rarely lets it show. If you met Enki, you'd will think him a very confident and happy (and goofy) unicorn.



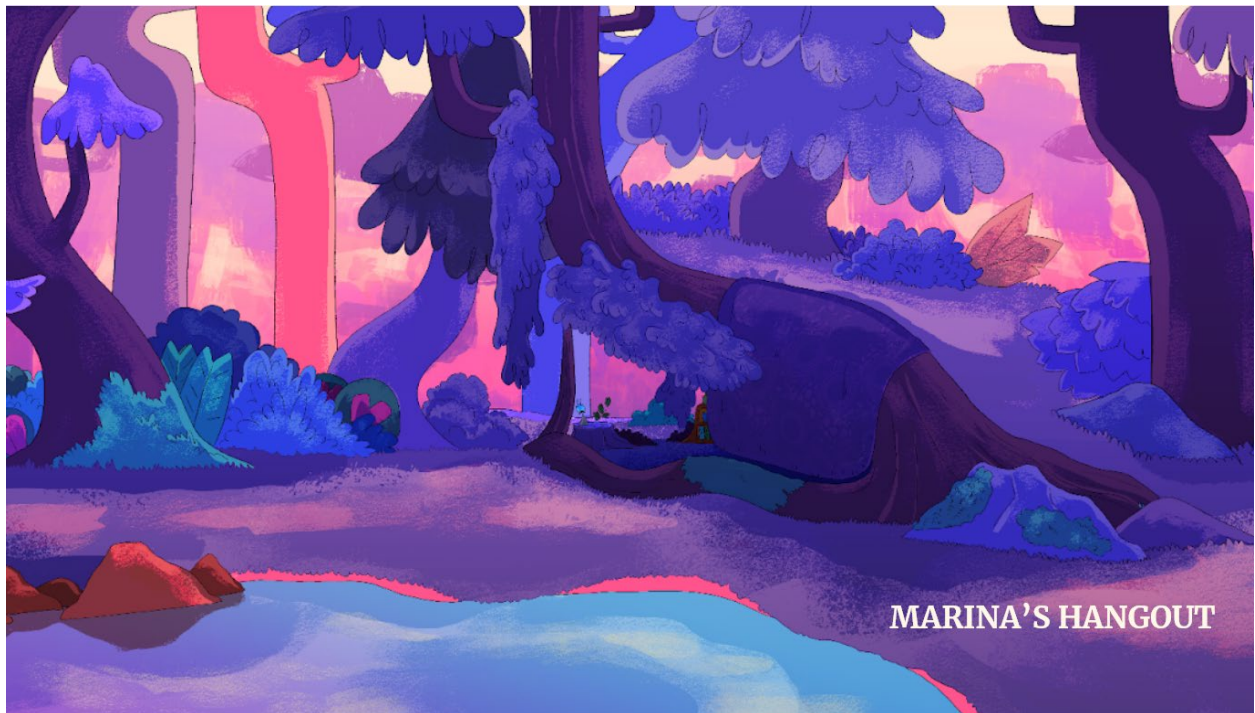
Pitch Deck



THE KODAMA

The Kodama doesn't speak, so we don't know too much about them. They are a type of spirit that likes to dwell in the woods.

The Kodama is good-natured and playful, and likes to be with his friends Marina, Enki, and Demetri, who sometimes call them "Kody".



MARINA'S HANGOUT

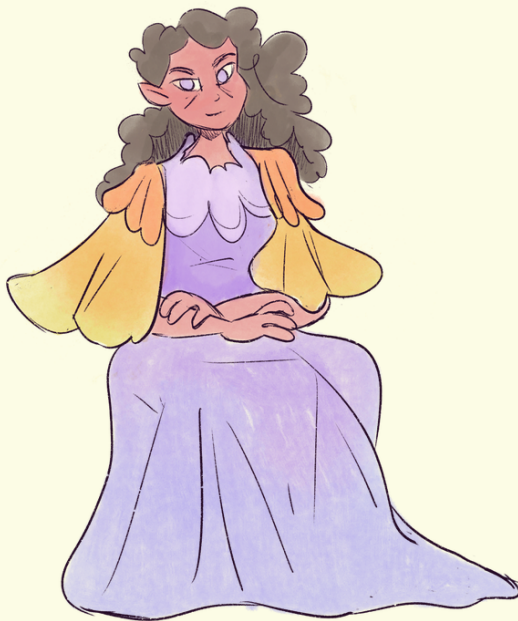
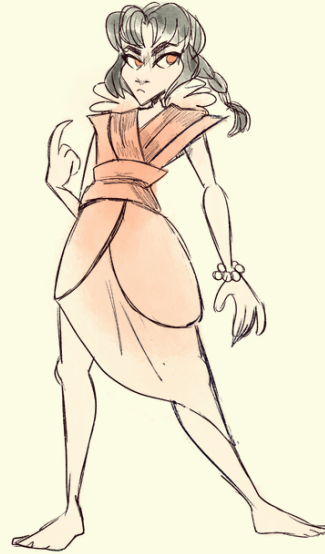
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THE HULI JING

The Huli Jing is a shapeshifter. She is the person truly responsible for the closing of the portal.

Her goal is to corrupt humans and mythical creatures. She wants to rule over the earth, considering herself superior and worthy of humans' admiration.

The Huli Jing's default form is that of a beautiful red fox. With enough power, she can shapeshift into any form she desires.



ZIA

Marina's grandmother.

She fell in love with King Thomas (a human) 1000 years ago, before the portal was closed.

An extremely powerful fairy, she was the queen of Mythos before being trapped on Earth by the closing of the portal. She has been trying to catch the Huli Jing ever since.

Grandma Zia has a great sense of humor.

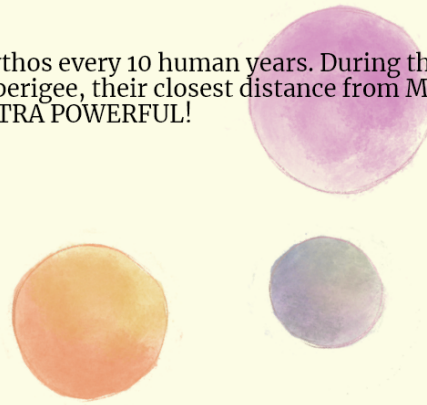
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THE MOONS

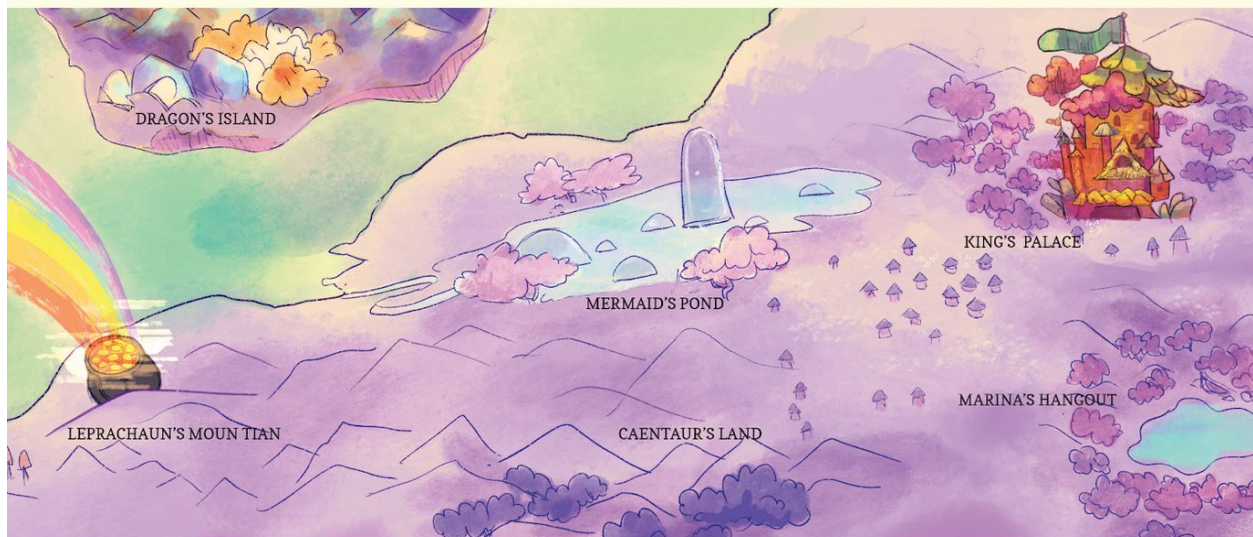
The three moons of Mythos and Earth's Moon are an important element in this series.

The moons give Mythos creatures the ability to recharge their powers. The Moon on Earth can also provide power to Mythos creatures, but it is not as effective as the combined strength of Mythos' three moons.

The Three Moons Festival is celebrated in Mythos every 10 human years. During the festival, the three moons align and are all at perigee, their closest distance from Mythos. This event can make all Mythos creatures **EXTRA POWERFUL!**



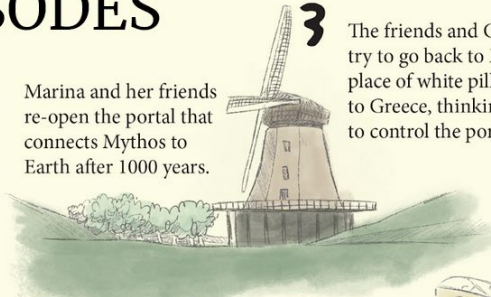
THE LAND OF MYTHOS



Pitch Deck

EPISODES

- 1** Marina and her friends re-open the portal that connects Mythos to Earth after 1000 years.



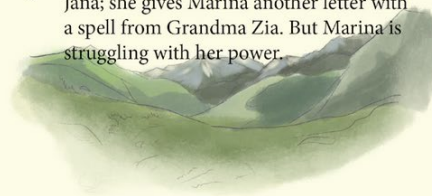
- 2** Along with their new friend, Arif, the friends try to understand the modern world. When they get in trouble a powerful being saves them: Grandma Zia.

- 3** The friends and Grandma Zia unsuccessfully try to go back to Mythos. Marina dreams of a place of white pillars, so the group decides to go to Greece, thinking they'll find the knowledge to control the portal.

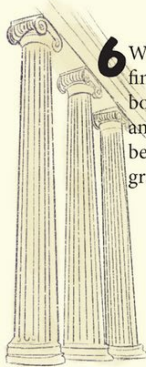
- 4** The friends meet a troll named Greg; Marina realizes that other mythical creatures were left behind on earth. Greg gives Marina a letter from grandma Zia with a powerful spell.



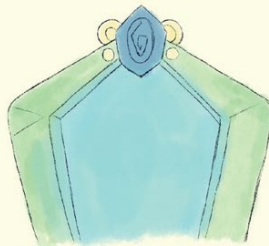
- 5** The group meets a half-vampire named Jana; she gives Marina another letter with a spell from Grandma Zia. But Marina is struggling with her power.



- 6** While in Rhodes, Marina and her friends find grandma Zia's lair. Going through her books, they find the spell for the portal and ... a goodbye letter, implying that she's been dead for a while. Then who was the grandma they saw earlier?



- 7** The grandma Zia they thought they had met was, in reality, a shift shaper called: The Huli Jing. She needs to return to Mythos to regain her strength, get her army, and finally enslave humans.



- 10** The final battle takes place at the doorstep of the portal. Marina battles the Huli Jing with all her strength, and in the end, they win. But knowing how corrupted some of the Mythical Creatures are, should they keep the portal open?



- 9** While imprisoned, Zia's spirit takes everyone to the past to learn the truth about everything that happened 1000 years ago when the portal closed. Learning the truth makes Marina angry, angry enough to let her powers flow.

- 8** Marina and her friends try to escape, but the Huli Jing takes them back to Mythos and makes them look like traitors. Marina's powers are still not enough to save them.

Pitch Deck

SCREENPLAY

Pilot/Episode 4-Ricky



EXT. SMALL TOWN - DAY

MARINA, THE KODAMA, and DEMETRI are riding on top of ENKI. The group of friends look exhausted. Demetri's stomach is growling, Marina's hair is full of twigs; completely tangled and messy. And the Kodama is poking their nose.

MARINA

I would die for some Manna right now.

DEMETRI

A full belly that lasts over forty years... those things are awesome, and delicious. I prefer the Matcha version.

Demetri drools a bit, and cleans his mouth with his arm.

The Kodama begins eating his boogers, making a <squeaky sound>

ENKI

Ughh... I can hear that. Stop eating your boogers, it's gross.

KODAMA

Wii gee gee

ENKI

I know you don't care but as long as you're riding on me, I can decide what you CAN and CANNOT eat!

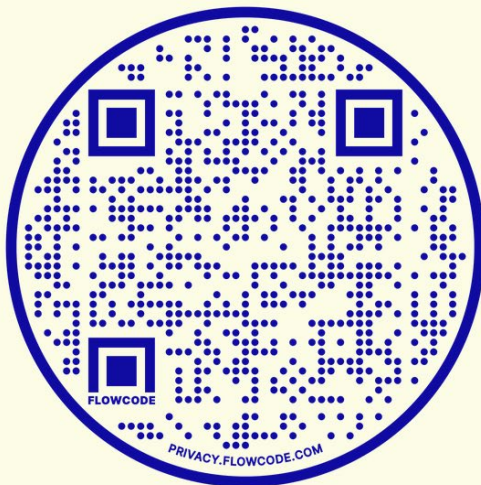
THE CREATORS



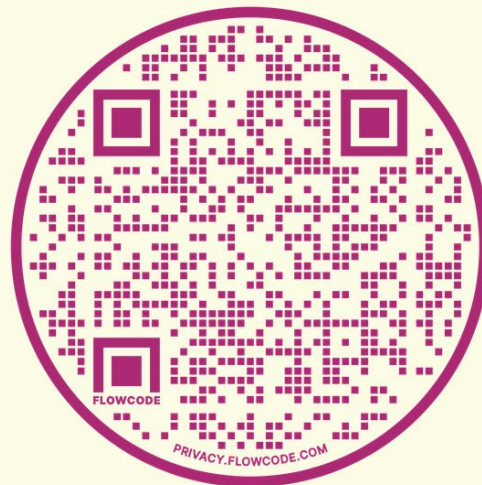
PROOF OF CONCEPT



Animated Proof of Concept Feedback
General Art Feedback



Script and Story Feedback



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