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The Effect of Visual Storytelling on Character Design in Video Games

by

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award of

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Certificate of Authenticity

This dissertation is a product of my own work and is not the result of anything done in collaboration.

I declare that the work in this dissertation has not been and is not being submitted for any other degree.

I agree that this dissertation may be available for reference or photocopy at the discretion of the University of Wales Trinity Saint David.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis will explore the significance of visual story telling on character designs and how this makes them more successful in the industry. This will be found through researching the visual methods of storytelling and how in-depth research can positively impact and improve the visual design of a character, particularly in a Video game setting.

A game design document written in a previous year of study will be utilised to build a fantasy game world and design in-depth cultural and geographical identities to explore character design opportunities. The fantasy countries in the world design of the GDD from the previous year will be utilised as a base to build character designs upon for this project. The plan is to create four to five in-depth lore-driven character designs with different cultural identities and backgrounds, representing how storytelling and geography can impact and improve a character's design, consistency and authenticity in a narrative rich game world.

A literature review was conducted to further understand the topic at hand and what techniques are mentioned by professionals within character design and game development in the industry. The literature review covers books on character design, game writing as well as topics such as the history of the crusades, medieval armour, ancient cultures and symbology. These topics were chosen as they can aid to communicate cultural identity and narrative visually when done successfully.

Additionally, case studies examine successful examples of visual storytelling and character design and analyse why their design choices are effective. The study will investigate supporting examples such as Elden Ring to see how they utilise real world references and what design techniques are used and how this has played a part in their success. Additionally, case studies will be conducted on how different elements such as geography, culture and religion might affect the appearance of armour and clothing from the medieval era.

The thesis will include a section on the methodology of the project, covering Gantt charts, methods of keeping track, techniques and project scope. Additionally, this thesis will follow the development of the practical project, noting the software and techniques utilised and how the research conducted has been utilised and implemented into the designs produced. It will

cover the workflow of designs, from mood boards, to sketches and experiments into final concept illustrations.

Furthermore, the thesis will have an evaluation, covering the aspects of the project that went well, what could've been improved and what was learnt from the research, methods and results of the project. Finally, the thesis will conclude with a summary of the project and conclusion.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Often the first form of storytelling a player encounters is the visual design of a character, this shapes their first impression of a character's role, personality and narrative function. The silhouette, colour palette and design of a character can tell a lot about their personality, role and story; thus, it is important that there is flow between the characters appearance, their story and the game world they are set in. Furthermore, a disconnect can emerge between the characters visual identity, narrative role and world they inhabit if a lack of research and consideration has been put into the characters visual design. Therefore, it is important to research into real world examples of how religion, symbology, meaning and geography can impact design, and how this can be utilised in the design of characters to build on the narrative of a Video game. The literature review will cover various books with useful information that can be utilised to benefit character design.

Visual storytelling and character design

Kenneth, A. Devo, C. Cecile, C. Hollie, M. (2019) discuss the importance of character briefs and workflows for character design, giving insight into what an industry standard workflow looks like and methods to improve character design. This has proved useful in aiding to create character design plans and how to optimise the character design workflow of the project.

“Beyond Art fundamentals” by 3Dtotal Publishing (2016) details methods of illustrating mood, emotion and storytelling for artists, specialising in character artwork. The book covers many key emotions such as anger, courage, horror and isolation and more with example artworks and explanations on how these are represented visually. Representing a character's emotions visually can give viewers further insight on the personality and moral compass of a character. The study of emotions and how they can be translated to visual design can enhance

character designs created within the project by adding depth to the visual narrative already established.

Historical armour and geography

Weapons of the Ancient World, Rivka, G. (1975) discusses in detail the design process, creation and materials of ancient historic armour and where these real-world archaeological examples were found geographically and how their climate might offer insight on their designs. This will be useful for referencing real-world accurate designs when designing characters with armour of a similar nature.

Additionally, a chapter of “Arms and Armour Through the Ages”, Helmut N (1971) discusses the design and creation of historic Japanese armour and weapons, discussing in detail on the design of helmets as well as the construction of cuirasses and the reasonings behind their unique design. This will be useful for the project as a comparison can be made between different cultures and climates and how these differences reflect in the design of armour, clothing and weapons and how this might be utilised in character design.

Religion, symbolism, and culture

G.S.Kirk (1970) documents religious and cultural symbology and its relation to myth and cultures throughout the world. This book covers how such symbology influenced the appearance of armour and weapons throughout history mentioning the significance of symbology and its appearance in carvings, shapes and paintings. This book however mainly focuses on symbology, myth and its meaning and therefore doesn't offer much further insight on its usage in armour. While it has been helpful to understand symbology, culture and their purpose for the project, further research was conducted in case studies to understand how this was applied to armour.

A book which focuses more on arms and armour, by Helmut, N. (1971) details on the religious symbology utilised in armour and weapons at the time of the crusades, and how faith shaped the design and craft of armour of the time. This book gives examples of armour featuring religious symbology and patterns and their significance for the people of the time. Steven, R. (1951) discusses the in-depth history and events of the crusades which may assist in discovering religious meanings and actions and how this may have defined their aesthetic design, armour, culture and choice of weapons. This knowledge can then be applied onto

character designs for the project by understanding how faith can be represented through armour and weapons.

R. Ewart Oakeshott. (1960) details on the designs and construction of weapons, sword hilts, helmets and different armour pieces from multiple cultures. The book details the use of gemstones in decorative swords, helmets and scabbards and their meaning as well as the design of practical armour and weapons from real-world archaeological finds. The study focused in detail on the design of arms and armour, providing insightful knowledge to the project on how real-world examples were designed and constructed.

Shape language, colour, and silhouette

Bryan, T. (2011) discusses the study of shapes and silhouettes and what they might communicate to people viewing them. For example, it is stated that shapes can represent certain emotions and personality shapes and that utilising these shapes within character design adds depth to the character. For example, the book states that a square shape might represent stability, trust and masculinity. Utilising shapes to communicate a character's attributes can prove as a key method of visual storytelling in character designs. Additionally, the book covers how to create a successful character silhouette and why this is important for character recognisability and significance, especially when making important characters stand out.

Chapter 3: Case Studies

- Case study 1

3.1 How geography affects armour design

A large part of the research involved looking into how geography can affect the appearance of clothes, materials used and armour and how this could be utilised in narrative driven character design. To begin with, an investigation was conducted on what regions metal plating armour were most common in history to see if there was a correlation with geography.

Through the investigation, it was found that there is a correlation to types of armour and materials used for it with the climate of an area. For example, it's found that in the Mediterranean they mainly utilised lightweight materials such as bronze plating and reinforced fabrics to combat the heat and in northern regions heavier materials such as iron

mail, heavy metal plating and reinforced leather which would be effective in a cold environment while giving maximum protection. Additionally, scale armour is of a “bionic” design, often utilised in Asia. Its bionic design likely took inspiration from the scales of fish as the climate allowed for many scaled animals, and in armour form it further suited the climate of the region as well as offering protection to the wearer. [1], [2], [3], [4]



Figure 1 - An example of “fish scale armour” commonly seen in Asian history

- Case Study 2

3.2 Armour and clothing in relation to religion and culture

A primary influence for this project is the attention to visual narrative and design seen in Elden Ring [5]. The Video game takes inspiration from real world references and presents deep narrative and lore through visual means to the player. For example, religious symbolism can be seen throughout characters and environments as well as strong examples of colour theory. (See Appendix A)

To further explore this method of storytelling, research was conducted into real world examples of the effect of culture and religion on armour and clothing and how it can be utilised in the project’s designs to create fantasy factions, religions and cultural identities.

Religious figures held much power in medieval times as religion was central to life in this age. The church was a central meeting place for many communities at the time and was used primarily for communion and due to many being illiterate at the time, visuals such as stained glass, statues and paintings often offered people a way to understand the bible and its teachings. [10] The churches central positioning to every community granted it great power over medieval folk, and as such they saw it and its religious figures as a symbol of protection.[11] As a result of this, religious figures and symbology were often seen carved within armour of the time. Examples demonstrate religious figures such as “archangel Michael, the patron saint of knights, or St. George” carved into metal armour [12]. In some instances, as seen on the waistcoat corselet of Captain Cunz Van Unckel from the 1500s, the crucifixion of Christ is decorated. [13]



Figure 2 – Waistcoat corselet of Captain Cunz Van Unckel

- Case study 3

3.3 7 Elements of Design

The 7 elements of design are considered “fundamental aspects of any visual design”. They encompass aspects such as silhouette, colour, line, shape, space and more. [14] These values often set the foundation for a character's design. Research was conducted into the main elements that have a significant impact on visual narrative. (See Appendix B)

3.4 Summary of Case Studies

To summarise, the case studies covered geographical effects on armour design, cultural and religious symbology and how this might be utilised, and the seven elements of design and their purpose. These topics all support the same core idea of the dissertation research, for example, the knowledge gained from the first case study of how geography, climate and materials can affect armour, can be applied to the design process of a character's concept artwork. This application will allow players to distinguish where a character is from and their climate, by visuals alone. This adds depth in visual narrative to a character and makes their presence in the fantasy game world seem more realistic. Additionally, the second case study adds to this, showing how religious symbology was utilised within armour and its designs and its meaning, showing a character's beliefs, faction or moral alignment. Finally, the elements of design covered, that being silhouette, colour and shape, aid in adding visual depth to a character, while also communicating visually the characters importance, morals and even role, such as whether they are a villain or not.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 The practical

To create the practical research of the thesis, an in-depth portfolio will be created showcasing the design process for multiple characters of different backgrounds and cultural identities, showcasing how in-depth narrative driven design choices can improve a character's design and story-telling possibilities. The designs will be based on pre-established fantasy locations and climates. By using this method, a new fantasy culture can be created and feel realistic and grounded in the narrative as it references real world cultures and how their environments impact visual design. The portfolio will consist of three-to-four-character designs, each with their own unique background identity. The practical will demonstrate the use of the research done and the designs will reference real-world examples of religious, geographic and cultural design choices showing how real-world examples can be used in conjunction with fantasy Video game worlds and designs to create believable lore driven designs. The designs will be judged by their visual storytelling capabilities, cultural readability and connection to worldbuilding. A survey will also be conducted to gather intel on whether the designs are successful in the criteria listed.

4.2 Tools

For the practical experimentation, a Huion Kamvas 13 pen display art tablet was utilised, connected to a computer. Using a mixture of Krita, Photoshop and Clip Studio Paint, illustrations would be created to explore the dissertation research and theory. Furthermore, Canva, a browser-based design software was used to create visual research such as mood boards.

Excel on Office 365 was utilised to create a Gantt Chart showing the progress of the project. It also includes a dates system, showing due dates, how many days would be spent on each task and how much of it has been completed. This was to assist in keeping track of the work and to help visualise what tasks needed finishing. [1], [2], [3], [4], [5], [6]

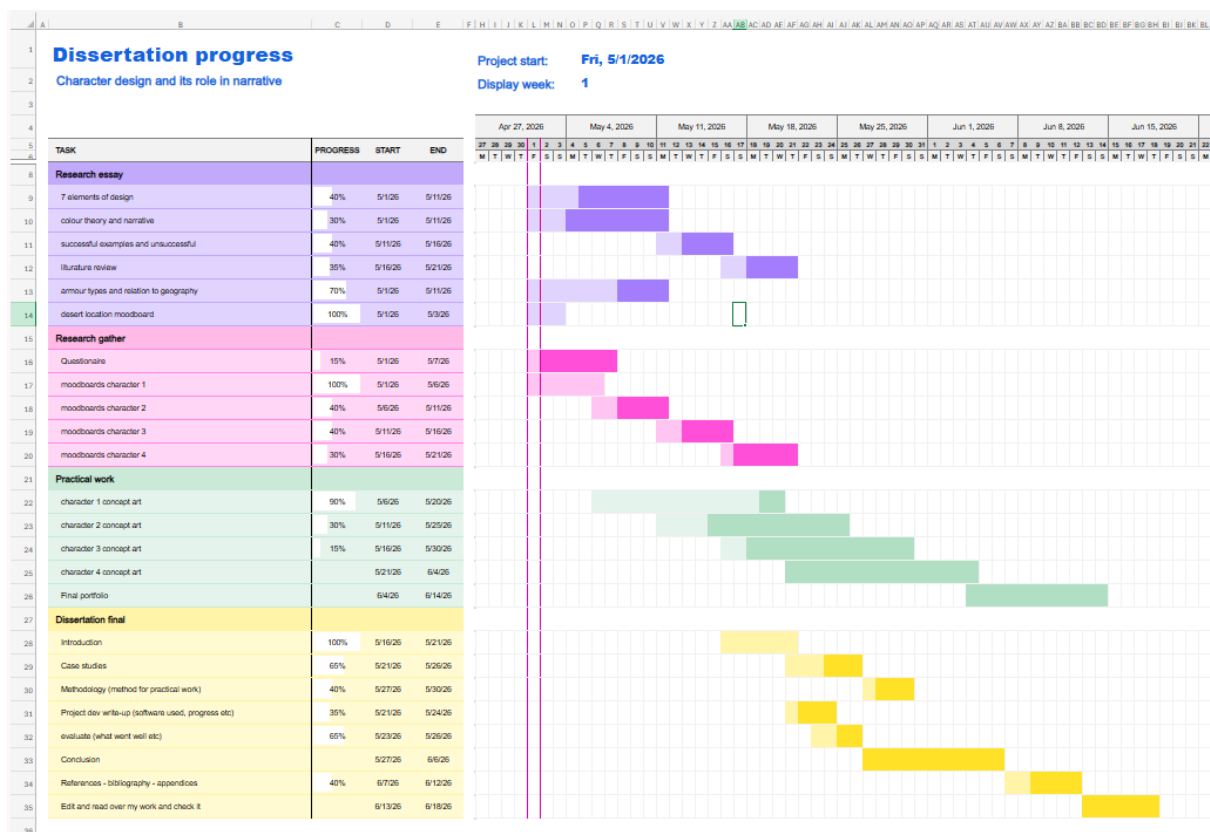


Figure 3 – Excel Gantt chart made for the project

4.3 Survey

A survey has been created using Microsoft Forms to gather quantitative data and qualitative feedback from participants on the topic and to test if the new designs created evoke what was planned in their design. For example, the survey will help identify if people are able to

discern what location a character belongs to based on visuals alone, and how easy this was to do. This will also be compared with an older character design.

Character designs from existing media will also be utilised to see if people are able to discern connections between character designs and affiliations.

Furthermore, the survey will gather insight on how people feel about character designs that have been created for the dissertation, in comparison to an older design created for a previous year. [7]

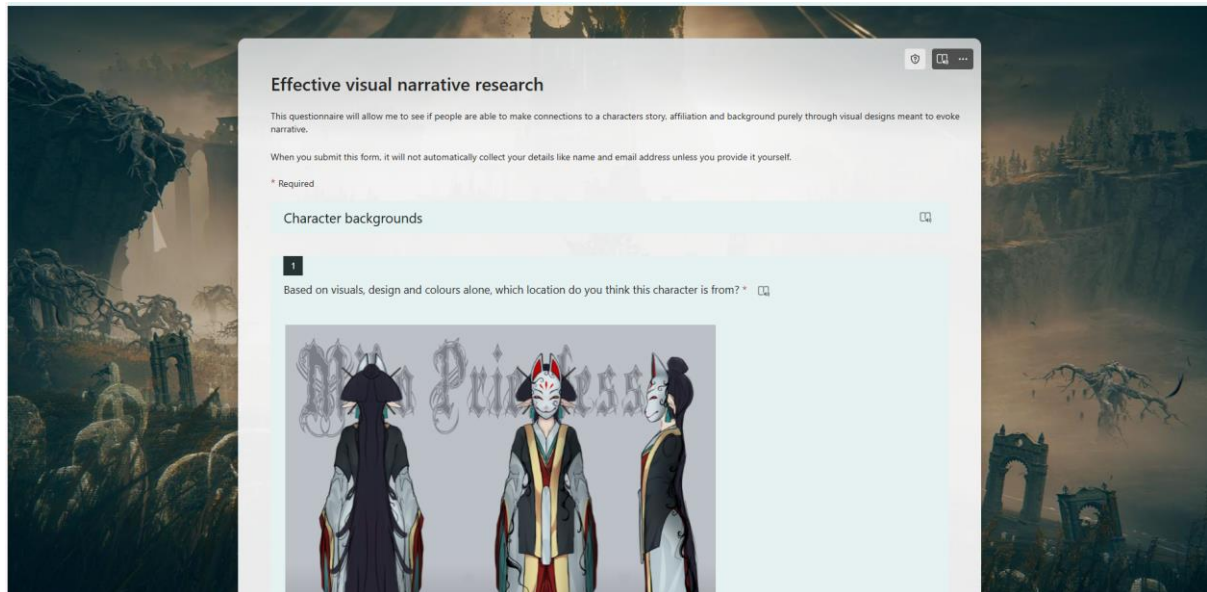


Figure 4 – Screenshot of survey

The link to the survey: [Effective visual narrative research – Fill in form](#)

Summary of survey findings

The results from the survey (see Appendix C) have helped create a further understanding on the public opinion of the topic and its importance, especially for Video game settings. The survey also demonstrated clear improvement in character designs, with more respondents struggling to identify the background of the character design that was done for a previous year of study. Whereas for the other concept art, utilising research gathered from the dissertation into the design, was more successful at communicating to the respondents its design inspirations and intended cultural background.

Moving forward with the research gathered from the survey, techniques such as cultural referencing and strong colour palettes will be utilised with future designs as they have proven successful from this survey. Additionally, gathered from the respondents' concluding

responses, player immersion will be considered moving forwards as this was frequently mentioned as being an important factor in visual design for narrative in Video games. Future design decisions which factor player immersion may include believable material choices, stronger design influences from real world examples and colour palettes that feel fitting within the game world.

Chapter 5: Analysis/ Project Development

5.1 Character 1

Location

To begin with, a character created for a previous year of study will be deconstructed and re-designed testing a new in-depth step by step research-based design process. This will allow for a comparison to be made with the previous design to analyse possible improvements within the design. The design process will begin by establishing where the character is from geographically, based on the fantasy locations created in a previous year of study using mood boards.



Figure 5 – Mood board representing a fantasy location, created for a similar topic in a previous year of university

The location chosen for the design of the first character is inspired by southern Poland, Germany and other European mountainous regions. These regions were chosen for their

similar and distinctive historical armour designs and thoroughly explored medieval history and archaeological finds. The character that will be re-designed is a templar inspired knight named Vincent who is a friendly phantom within the Video game that the player befriends. When the character was first designed, it was not considered how these aspects would reflect into the design. When analysing the location mood board, it should be considered how this location would be colder and for heavy plated armour to be more common due to the mountainous regions and possibility of mining metals for plate armour. Furthermore, people of this region could have a lot of leather due to the fields being ideal for cattle. Their armour could have design details making it suitable for horseback riding as horses would be common in a region with fields and hay.

Morals and personality

To begin, the character design process will be broken down into multiple sections. Step by step research will be conducted into culture, geography and real historical examples which will aid in the design and structure of the character. The characters personality and history will be considered within the design, and as such, a personality basis must be established first to ensure these aspects shine through the design.

It was decided that Vincent's personality would be;

- Patriotic
- Kind
- Empathic
- Gentle
- Humorous

His role in the story and world is morally good.

Research

From this evaluation, the process will begin by designing individual parts of the character. Research is conducted in what type of culture the chosen location would have, its geography and how this would affect the materials its people would have and utilise for their clothes. For example, there would be a lot of iron and metal resources as it is a mining region rich

with resources in its mountains. This meant metal plating armour was more common in these regions, notably southern Germany, northern Italy and the eastern alps share this similarity. [22],[23] With this in mind, visual inspiration gathered would include metal plating armour to match the region this character would be from.

Additionally, the region contains vast landscapes and fields, perfect for cattle and horses. This would mean armour would have to be suited for horseback and would also contain leather details.

For medieval armour to suit horseback, loose fabrics and chainmail was utilised with a split in the middle at the back and front to allow the wearer to ride a horse. [24] This is commonly seen in tunic style cloths and mail which was also worn by the knight templar, matching the initial plans of the character referencing the crusades.

[25]

Mood boards will be created of certain aspects that are inspiring for the character's design, keeping in mind pre-established background and geographical resources available to them.

Mood boards for each main aspect of the design were created, as well as a colour palette that was established based on colour theory and research. All the research can be collected onto the online workspace platform, Miro [26] which will be a great aid in planning visual designs.

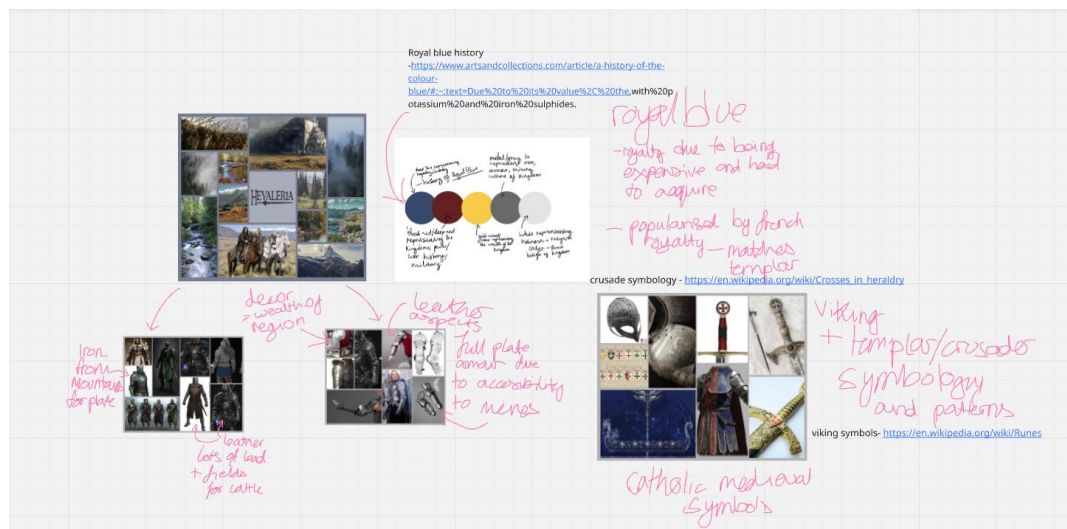


Figure 6 – Miro workspace planning for character one

For Vincents design, it was planned to utilise a cloth tunic, allowing for horseback riding and more moveability while also featuring full plate armour on the arms for protection, which was also often seen on horseback armour. [27]

Vincent would have heavy plating on the arms and lower legs, while utilising chainmail and cloth for flexibility and horseback riding. Furthermore, due to the region this character is from being of a colder climate, research was conducted into how medieval knights in colder regions kept warm. The research indicated that furs were commonly accompanied with plate armour in colder regions. It was found that the most common furs used were “sheep, rabbit, ferret (polecat) otter, wolf, reindeer and bear” [28]. This report also mentions the different methods in which fur and wool were used to keep the wearer warm. It was decided that a wool hood with a fur collar would suit Vincent the most, as it interfered the least with his role as a knight and suited the armour. Furthermore, the use of wool could be extended to his tunic. Additionally, the use of wool and fur would suit the colder climate of the characters background adding to the realism of his outfit. In addition to this, the softness of fur and wool adds to the kind and gentle personality of the character.

Design Stage



Figure 7 – Character one concept sketches and annotations

Some basic designs were created to establish the silhouette, style and colour scheme. Symbology was utilised to represent the characters' cultural identity and background, as well

as their patriotism and pride in Hevaleria, the land they come from as this is the symbol of that region. Often, symbology in armour, especially religious symbols, “served as an expression of piety but were also meant to provide divine protection in battle” [29]. It could be that the symbol of Hevaleria, that bears close ties to the religious symbols of the crusades, would be seen as a symbol of protection and luck to the knights of the region and would be worn on their armour, not only to show where they served.

Final Designs

With the gathered research and experimental sketches, the first full concept artworks were created. Two were made, showcasing the best aspects of design choice so that they can be compared and mixed to a final version. Using these illustrations, a final polished concept artwork was created for the character.



Figure 8 – Character one final concept artwork

When compared with the original design of the character made in a previous year of university, there is clear visible improvement and fluidity within the design. (See Appendix D)

5.2 Character 2

Location



Figure 9 – Mood board representing fantasy location created for a similar topic in a previous year of university

The chosen location for the second character design is heavily inspired by Japan and Japanese culture. The location is designed around Japanese architecture in a swamp-like environment, inspired by the gloomy and dark appearance of Dark Souls' "Blighttown" [30]. With this established, it is important to represent Japanese culture through traditional clothing elements and cultural motifs in the design of the character.

Due to the Japanese inspirations for this location, research will be conducted into traditional Japanese clothing and how it has evolved historically, focusing on the medieval era of Japan. It was planned that the character would evoke a strict and ruling appearance which would align with the characters role of being the priestess of the main temple in this location, which would act as a boss location in a Video game setting. The character would be an enemy as well and as a result would have to evoke a sense of danger and to stick out against the other characters created. It was established that the character would have attributes such as being;

- Cruel
- Manipulative
- Cunning
- Narcissistic
- Trickster
- Creepy
- Sinister
- Authoritarian

To begin with, research was conducted into traditional Japanese clothing, typically what was worn by high society women and the royal family in traditional Japan which would reflect the characters' role in the world. Through the research conducted, it was discovered that there was a style of formal court dress typically worn during the Heian period of Japan, taking place just before Japan's medieval era. This dress was called the Jūnihitoe, meaning “twelve layers”. The robe often consisted of multiple layers; however, this was usually dictated by the wearers rank and wealth. Layer amounts could be as little as two layers, to twenty or more. This dress suited the character as it gave an otherworldly and imposing silhouette which suits the characters presence and position in the fantasy world. The layered silhouette of the robe successfully communicates the characters rank, authority, and intimidation as the many layers of textiles signify wealth and when paired with unsettling themes can appear as intimidating. [31], [32], [33]



Figure 10 – Example of Jūnihitoe robe

Additionally, Japan has an interesting cultural phenomenon involving supernatural folklore masks that share strong connections with medieval Japan and Japanese temples. (See Appendix E). There are many kinds of Japanese masks, such as Noh masks and Matsuri

masks, however they all derive from the same folktales and Shinto beliefs. Matsuri masks, commonly worn on Japanese summer festivals, are intended to protect the wearer from evil spirits and bring good luck. Each mask depicts a Japanese spirit, demon or character of a folktale which symbolises something specific, such as the Oni mask, which is intended to offer protection, the kitsune mask which is intended to bring prosperity and the Okame mask symbolises fertility. These masks can be worn or often displayed in the house. [34]

Design stage

For this design, various traditional Japanese mask designs were experimented with to ascertain the desired result. Initially, the Okame mask was to be utilised for the design as it had a very unnerving and unsettling appearance, while also remaining feminine which would match the feminine and graceful appearance of the Jūnihitoe dress, however, it was decided that the Kitsune mask would be more appropriate in the design as it further evoked authority and elegance in its delicate and sharp design when compared with the Okame mask which has a rounder and softer design. The Kitsune mask's sharp and elegant design would align better with the character's authoritarian role within the world.

In this stage, silhouettes were also experimented with. A long, tall towering-like silhouette was desired to depict a sense of dread and sinister royalty. Furthermore, traditional Japanese hairstyles were utilised and exaggerated for a sharper, aggressive, and unfriendly appearance.



Figure 11 – Concept art of design experimentation

Final Designs

Two concept artworks were created, one with short hair and one with long hair. This was to benefit the concept artwork by further showcasing the design choices. The character was given unnaturally long hair that appears wet, matching the damp, moist and gloomy swamp location the character would originate from. Additionally, this design choice adds to the creepiness and otherworldly presence of the character.

The idea of the location that the character originates from is that it has been corrupted by an evil power, and this has corrupted its residents. It was once an elegant elven location, which has now become murky, damp, and dark. The elves have lost their identity, wearing masks and concealing most of their former selves. This is reflected in how the dress covers most of the character, even the hands and arms, while only the ears and neck remain visible.



Figure 12 – Final concept art of character two

5.3 Character 3

Location



Figure 13 – Fantasy location mood board created for the project

A new location was designed for this dissertation with the aim of it having a vastly different climate to the other locations. This mood board was created to represent this fantasy location.

The second character will be designed based on a hot, dry climate; the name of this location is Nazarhem, inspired by the Mediterranean, particularly Croatia and Jerusalem from the crusade era. When researching into these locations, it was learnt that the climate is typically hot and dry, with temperatures rarely being freezing cold. With this established, it is important to consider armour and fabrics that cover from the sun yet are not heavy. Furthermore, the characters features and species can be designed to suit the climate, demonstrating a new race, peoples, and culture in the world, adding to diversity.

Morals and personality

To begin, it was planned that the character would have animal-like features. Wildlife that is native to the inspired locations were researched to find an inspiration and base for design. Through the investigation, four possible animal inspirations native to Croatia and the eastern mediterranean were chosen. The chosen animals included, the Caracal, the Gecko, the Nubian Ibex and Arabian Leopard. These animals were chosen as they have distinct features not

commonly seen outside of these regions, making them very recognisable and linked to the hotter climate which would work perfectly in line with the planned character design. A mood board was created to compare each and see how their features could be utilised.

Additionally, the base personality and morals of the character need to be established to create flow between the characters visuals and their presence in the world. This allows for more grounded and authentic character designs, while adding to the visual depth.

It was established that the character would be;

- Stubborn
- Strict
- Strong
- Proud
- Charitable

This character's role in the story is morally good.

Research

Furthermore, research was conducted into Arabian and Mediterranean armour and clothing.

A common type of armour found in the Mediterranean through murals and archaeological finds is the Linothorax, an armour made primarily of linen. [36] This armour consisted of lighter materials, offering ease of movement and heat dissipation which would be suitable for hotter climates. Additionally, the unique silhouette of the armour and its distinctive colour palette would add to the characters cultural identity.

Another variant of this with similar design that was found common in eastern Europe and the Mediterranean is Lamellar armour. This armour was constructed in a similar design to Linothorax, however, it consisted of multiple small metal plates called lamellae. [37]

Additionally, research indicated that a common metal used in armour craft in the ancient Mediterranean was bronze. [38] This gives an orange toned colour which is a distinctive colour, matching the established colour palette of the fantasy region as well as the colours commonly linked to the Mediterranean which will be useful to create that visual bridge between the characters armour and respective cultural and geographical background.

Additionally, a “Pteruges” [39] is often paired with the cuirass in Linothorax or Lamellar style. This armour form allows for a visually distinctive silhouette while still maintaining

believable protection and historical grounding. The Pteruges stems from the Greco-Roman World [40] which relates to the Mediterranean, making it perfectly fitting for the character due to them being of Mediterranean and Arabic inspired descent.



Figure 14 – An example of Linothorax armour found on an ancient Greek vase in a British museum

Design stage

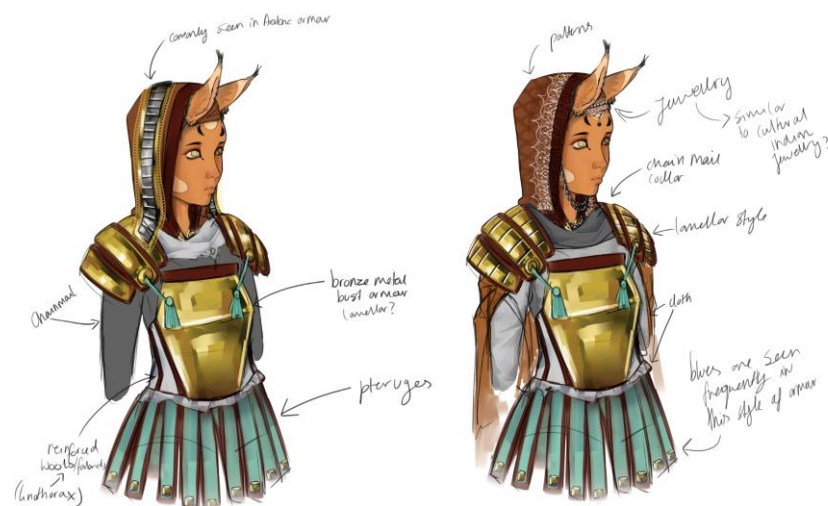


Figure 15 – Concept art of design experimentation

To begin the design process, a colour palette was first established. Using this alongside previous research, sketches are drawn using the established colour palette. Design aspects and material choices are gathered from the research conducted and put together experimenting and creating new designs based on the inspirations for the culture and location. The mix of different Mediterranean cultures creates for a unique appearance fitting for the fantasy world this character is from. Annotations are made explaining which inspirations were used, what aspects could be changed or added. These annotations will be utilised for creating the final design. By creating these sketches, it can be seen what aspects match, and which do not work well before committing to a finished piece of concept art.

To help with the design process, the website “Miro” has been utilised like with the first design. All the visual research, colour palette and sketches were gathered in one place to aid in the completion of the final design. This allows for more efficient workflow and aids in the understanding of the visual goal of the character.

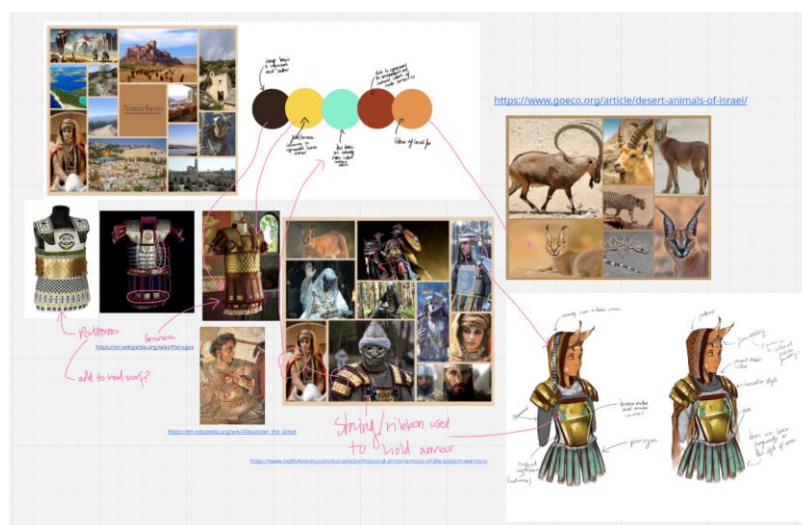


Figure 16 – Miro workspace planning for character three

Final Designs

With all elements of the plan for the design established, creation on the final concept artwork can begin while using the above research and visuals. Two variations of concept art have been created, building upon the previous sketches and utilising the aspects of each that have worked well.



Figure 17 – Character three final concept artwork

Chapter 6: Evaluation

The schedule of the project as well as envisioning how to realise it was difficult at first due to the nature of the topic at hand. It seemed difficult to express the intent of the research and to show what was being theorised through artwork. However, it was found that by annotating each choice and action, and the reason behind it, the intent of project was shown more to the audience. It is especially seen, when comparing the design of the character “Vincent” to his original design from a previous year at the university, that it has been heavily improved, both visually, and narratively speaking. This signifies that thought out visual designs can add to, if not improve, the narrative of the character. The character now shows a more clear and realistic appearance, with his presence grounded in the fantasy universe he is designed for.

Additionally, often during the project, the usefulness of software such as Microsoft Excel was overlooked. The lack of knowledge on this software led to issues with utilising it to its full capacity for the project. This was because a template was used to create the Gantt chart which resulted in the dates being changed and updated, meaning the original deadlines and timeframes would not be accurate. This was due to how the template had been set up, so it could act as a continuously evolving timetable whereas the initial plan was for it to end at the deadline and not exceed May. This caused some confusion in the project and made the deadline system redundant; however, the Gantt chart was still utilised for keeping track of task completion. Moving forward, the project teaches that time should be taken into researching this software so that it can be properly utilised for future projects to improve workflow and work efficiency.

However, a lot of information was learnt through this project. This project was treated as career practice, allowing for skills to be learnt and industry knowledge harnessed to better improve the workflow of the project as well as outcomes of the design. Much was learnt through researching into various workflows of character design and concept art development, looking at industry examples and testing different methods, until it was found what suited the best which will prove useful in an industry setting. Industry-relevant skills such as research gathering, visual development, iteration, annotation, workflow planning, and final concept presentation were developed through this project which will aid in future career development.

Chapter 7: Summary/Conclusion

To conclude, the project has covered many aspects of character design from the history of medieval armour from different cultures, to how geography can play a part in the design of clothing and armour and how the seven elements of design can be utilised to further improve a character. This research has then been utilised within the designs created, showing well thought out decision making and experimentation through sketches and colours, taking inspiration from multiple real-world examples to create the finished product.

The research conducted into geography, history, religion, materials, cultures and design theory have significantly improved the believability and narrative clarity of character designs, answering to the project aim. Furthermore, the project has assisted in learning how to further develop techniques for concept artwork, allowing for experimentation in different workflows and methods of research.

Much was learnt from utilising a mixture of research from both the literature review that was conducted, which covered many books on medieval history and culture, and websites and reports, typically that of museums, documenting real historical findings which could be utilised in the work. Case studies were also researched, notably how geographical factors may influence style and design in the medieval period, and how cultural differences can be seen through assorted designs. It was also found through the case studies that often religious symbology was utilised within armour as a form of protection for its wearer and often worn in pride.

Additionally, to the research conducted, a survey had been created to gather public opinion on the topic and to confirm if the research conducted would benefit character designs. A design that was created in this project was compared with a design created in a previous year of study, and through this it was found that there had been significant improvement in respondents being able to establish the characters background purely on visuals. As a result, the survey had been highly successful in displaying the improvements created from the research.

This project has demonstrated beneficial ways of approaching character design while displaying methods of time management such as Excel Gantt charts and how they might benefit the project, as well as methods of visualising research such as websites like Miro

which was utilised as a digital whiteboard for planning out designs. Throughout the development of the project, new knowledge has been produced and a portfolio of successful, research and narrative driven character concept artworks has been created highlighting the benefits of the research and case studies conducted.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Elden Ring frequently takes inspiration from famous real-world paintings and events, an example of this is seen in the fantasy locations of Elden Ring, the Lake of Rot and the Grand Cloister. These ominous locations are reminiscent of John Martin's "Pandemonium" painting. Another example is seen in the design for the battlefield of Starscourge Radahn which resembles the painting "The Destruction of Pompeii" by the same artist.

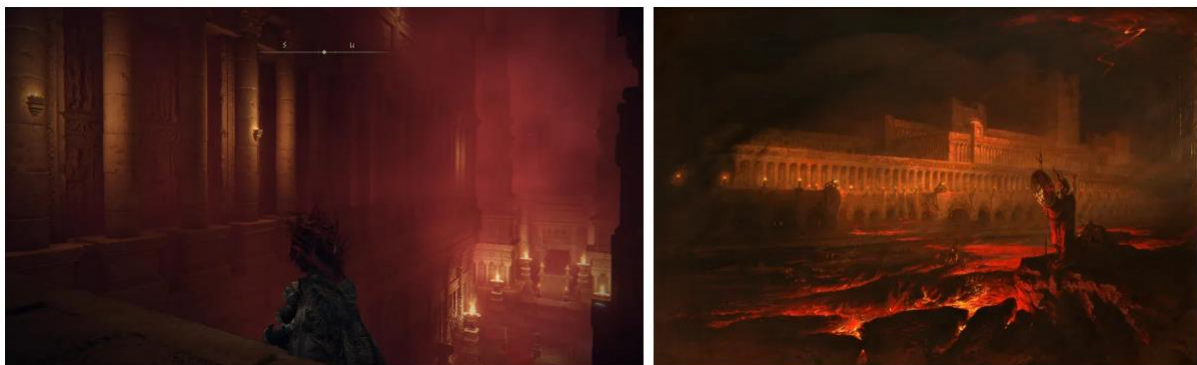


Figure 18 – Elden Ring's "Grand Cloister" location and John Martin's "Pandemonium"

Furthermore, references to north mythology can be found, such as the Erdtree's similarity to Yggdrasil, which is a "sacred world tree" symbolising life, death and rebirth, similarly to the Erdtree's implication in the narrative of Elden Ring. The world of Elden Ring also contains a location named "The Roundtable Hold". This inspiration is taken from the Arthurian myth of the Knights of The Roundtable and signifies the mutual respect and noble clause the Tarnished all share in the narrative.

Additionally, Elden Ring also contains many influences from Christianity and the bible such as Marika's and Radagon's duality, being two personalities in one form, similarly to the Holy Trinity in Christianity, where God consists of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in one body. Furthermore, Elden Ring features many references to symbolic fruitifications in the form of statues and symbols. [6], [7], [8], [9]



Figure 19 – Example of crucifixion seen in the environment of Elden Ring

Additionally, Elden Ring features strong examples of colour theory usage, with certain colours representing factions, locations and beliefs within the game. This helps players recognise where a character in the game originates from as the character designs follow a colour palette representing their background, faction and religion.



Figure 20 – Example of colour usage in Elden Ring

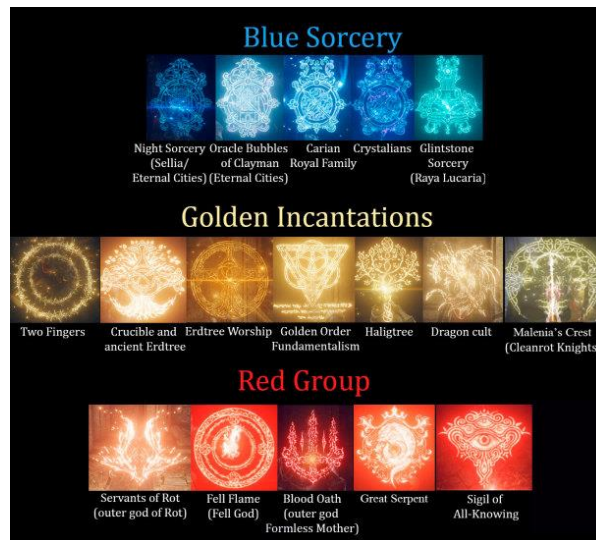


Figure 21 – Example of colour theory utilised in Elden Ring



Figure 22 – Concept artwork of Elden Ring fire monk, showcasing use of colour palettes

Appendix B

Silhouette

The study of the 7 elements of design is used to enhance multiple aspects of a design. For example, when a character is blacked out and placed against a plain background, the silhouette or shape is what lets the character be recognisable. When a character has a poorly readable silhouette, “it weakens its impact and memorability” [15]. The silhouette of a character can also be especially important when utilised to ensure characters stand out in

Video games or animations, especially those with background characters. A strong silhouette can be especially important for indicating to players which characters are key within the narrative.

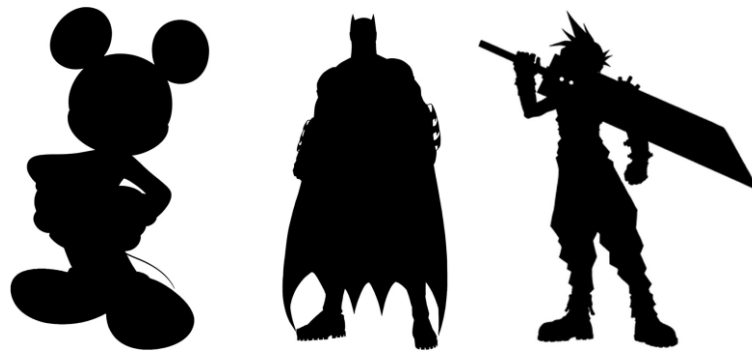


Figure 23 – Representation of character silhouettes

Colour

Another important aspect of the seven elements of design is colour. As a study by Dream Farm Studios states, “a character will look misplaced and inconceivable if you do not consider colour theory psychology” [16]. Colour can often be used to evoke emotion in a design and is often the first thing viewers perceive in a design [17]. This can be especially useful for communicating to players a character's role within a story, for example, some colours might be associated with evil, such as dark colours or reds often representing villains within media. [18]

Shape

Shape plays an important role in the visual narrative of many characters in media. For example, sharp pointed shapes are often associated with evil or morally bad characters or locations, whereas soft, rounder shapes are associated with good. This can be observed in the design of Minas Morgul, an evil fortress in the world of Lord of the Rings. Its design in the movies by Peter Jackson feature sharp triangular edges. This can also be observed in Disney villains, such as Maleficent. This method of visual storytelling helps viewers or players

recognise a character's moral role within a story and whether they may be an enemy or not.
[19], [20], [21]



Figure 24 – The character “Maleficent” from Disney’s Sleeping Beauty



Figure 25 – Minas Morgul, evil fortress seen in the Lord of the Rings movies, by Peter Jackson

Appendix C

The first question of the survey asks respondents to identify which fantasy location the character is from based on appearance. The respondents can choose one of four locations, presented to them through mood boards. These mood boards are the mood boards created in a previous year of study which have been used as a base for the design of characters. The goal of this question was to study if respondents can identify key design choices, cultural references and colour schemes and if they are able to use this to correctly identify which location the character is from.

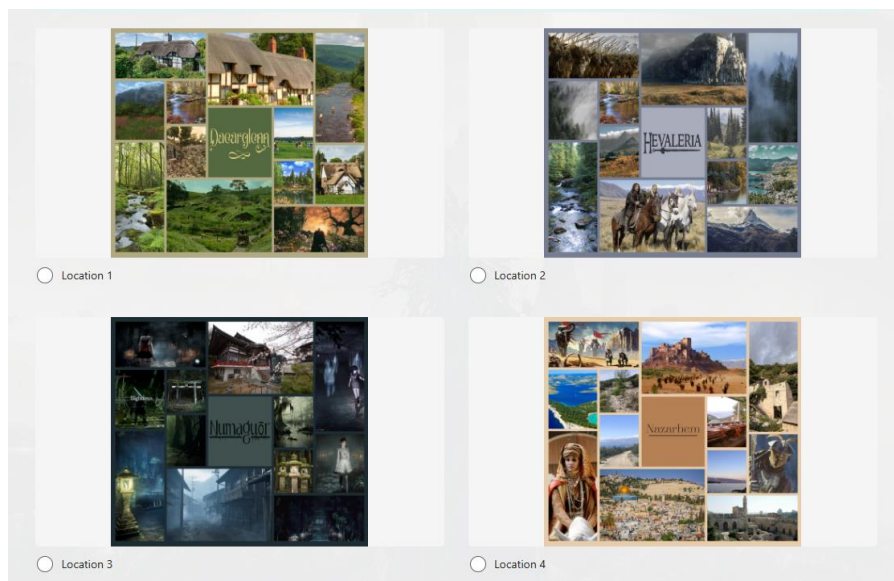


Figure 26 – Screenshot of survey options

The results of this question was a great success, showcasing that 79% of the 15 respondents were able to correctly identify the location in which the character is inspired from which is “Location 3”. Three respondents wrongly identified the location, two of which choosing “location 4” as their answer. This is likely due to both locations containing hints of yellow and red in their colour palette, as seen in the characters design.

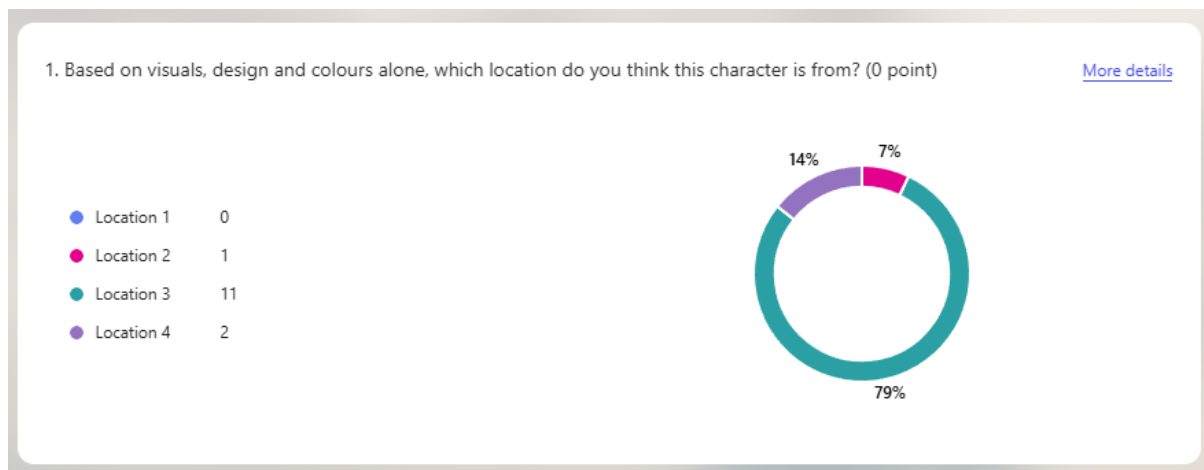


Figure 27 – Survey results

Furthermore, a follow-up question was added, asking respondents if the previous question was difficult to guess. 93% of the 15 respondents stated that the question was not difficult to guess, showing success in the design choices made for the character, as they clearly represent the character's culture and background, even that of a fantasy background.

The survey then asks respondents to describe how they feel about the character. 21% of the 15 respondents mentioned the Japanese elements to the design proving that the inspirations for the design were noticeable. Many respondents also noted that the character had a “creepy” and “off-putting” atmosphere which further plays into the character’s intended role and nature within the story.

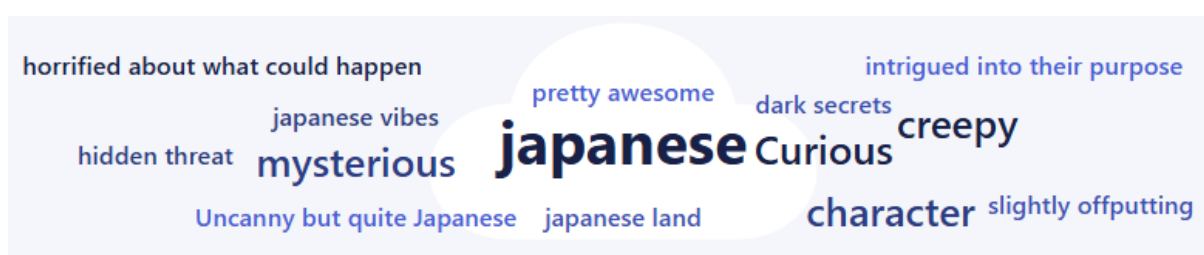


Figure 28 – Survey results

The survey continues by asking the same question about a previous character design which was created in a previous year of study, without the current knowledge gained from the research conducted in the topic.

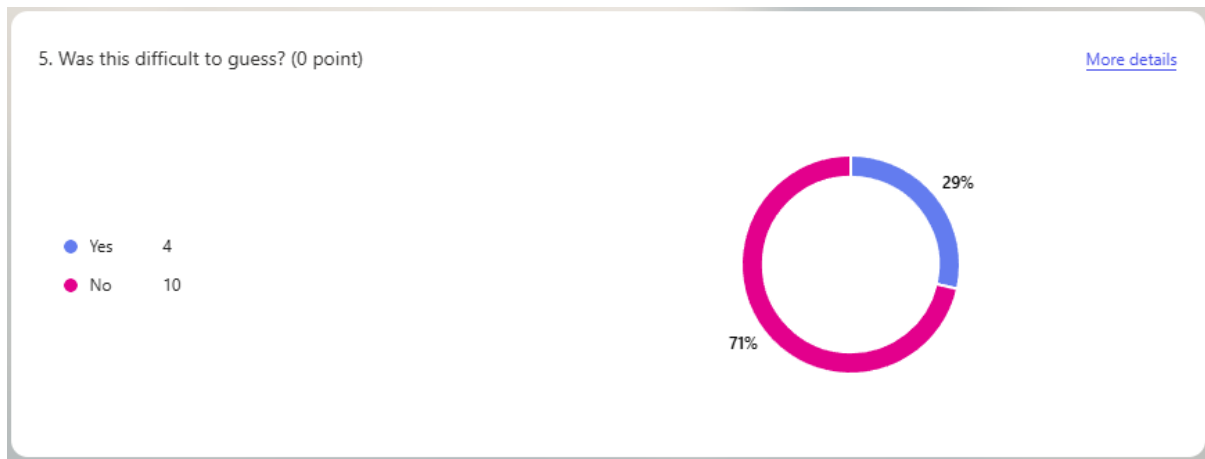


Figure 29 – Survey results

Respondents showed more mixed opinions on the characters background origin when compared with the previous design. Furthermore, there was a notable increase in respondents finding the question difficult to guess, with 29% of respondents stating it was not easy. The survey then asks respondents how the character makes them feel, 21% responded safe which aligns with the characters purpose in the story and morals. Some respondents noticed the crusader inspirations within the design.



Figure 30 – Survey results

The survey continues by asking respondents to choose between pre-existing character designs from media praised for its designs to decide which characters may be affiliated with the character in the question based on visuals alone. Most respondents were able to correctly guess the question, with only three respondents incorrectly guessing.

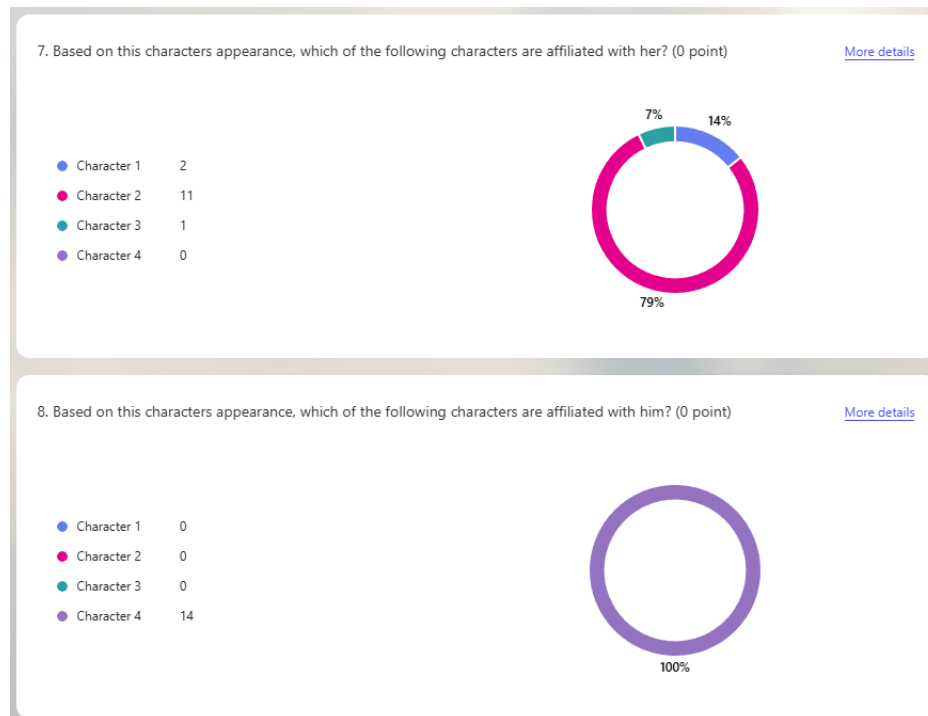


Figure 31 – Survey results

Finally, the survey, respondents are asked if they believe visual designs are important to the narrative of a Video game, with a rating of 1 (not so much) to 5 (very important). The average rating from respondents was 4.57.

Respondents are then asked if character design impacts their immersion in a Video game, using a similar rating system as the previous question with 4.36 being the average response.

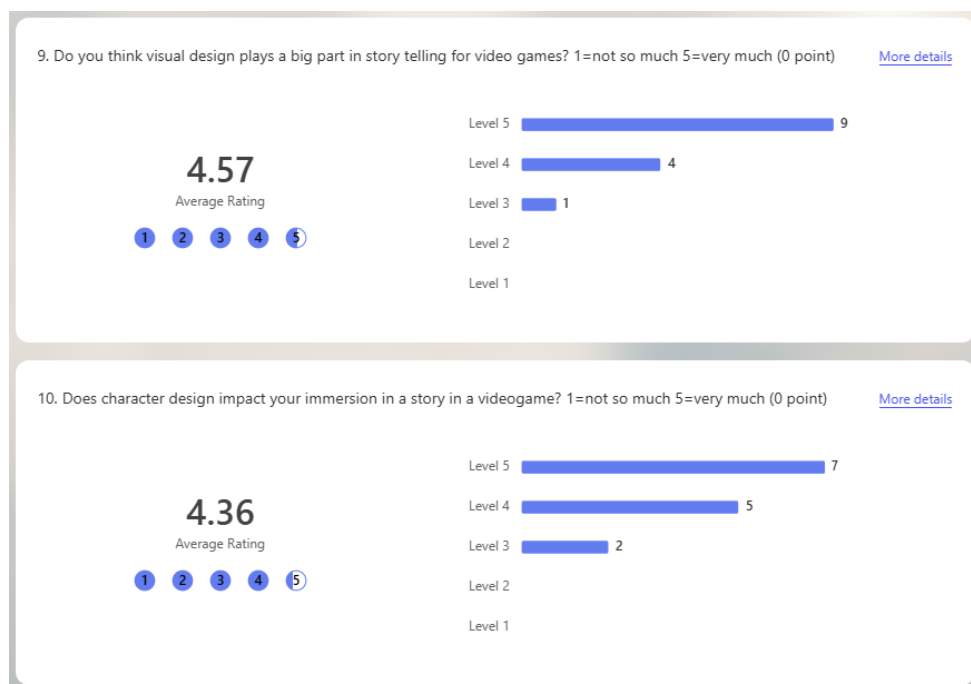


Figure 32 – Survey results

To conclude the survey, respondents were asked their opinion on why character design is or is not important for narrative. All respondents stated that they consider character design an important aspect of narrative in Video games, with many respondents mentioning it being important for player immersion. A few respondents also referenced the rule of “show don't tell”.

Appendix D

For example, the original design lacked realism or fluidity within the design, featuring unrealistic and unpractical armour designs which would not be suitable for combat. This design flaw breaks player immersion in the game world making the character seem unrealistic and out of place. Furthermore, the design lacks a clear colour palette without much indication of the characters origin or faction making the character not feel grounded within the game world. Additionally, the characters design features sharp triangular shapes within the armour which conflicts with the characters personality and morals which may confuse players as it is not clear if the character is friend or foe.

However, with the new design, there is fluidity throughout the design with realistic examples of armour with suitable coverage, which is appropriate for combat which increases player immersion and the characters realism. Furthermore, there is a clear colour palette which links the character to his origins, grounding the character to the pre-established fantasy game-world. Finally, the character features softer shapes and silhouettes which aids in presenting a friendlier appearance showing players that the character is not an enemy but rather an ally.



Figure 33 – Character one old design

Appendix E

While the masks have positive meanings and connotations in modern day Japanese culture, some originate from dark and unnerving folk tales, for example, the Okame mask has many folktales surrounding it, however one in particular tells the tale of Okame, the wife of a renowned carpenter named Nagai Takatsugu, who was working on constructing a temple in Kyoto when he found that one of his pillars was too short to hold the roof. Okame had found a solution and ultimately resolved the problem for her husband, however, the story tells that she had ended her own life to ensure no-one would know that she had resolved the issue for her husband. These dark folktales, alongside their sometimes-unnerving appearance, makes them perfect for creating an unsettling and creepy character design. [35]