



NEOMENIA

Artist Statement

Caitria Aldrich is a Portland based animator currently attending the Pacific Northwest College of Art where she is working towards a BFA degree in Animated Arts, with a minor in Creative Writing. Their practice consists of character design, character animation, storyboarding, and writing, primarily with themes of friendship and fantasy. She is currently working on a webtoon comic called Neomenia which she plans on finishing and publishing after she graduates. Caitria also plans on getting an internship with an animation company, where they can continue to improve their writing, character design, and storyboarding skills before launching their own animated show.

Caitria Aldrich

Neomenia Proposal

In a fantasy world where magic is somewhat commonplace, Vanessa, a criminal human, is suddenly face-to-face with a lonely mermaid named Moon. Because mermaids are hard to find, exceptionally gifted with magic, and possess valuable body parts, Moon has lived her life in danger, stuck in a pond deep within the forest, alone. With a newfound appreciation for the sweet mermaid she stumbled across, Vanessa offers to help Moon out of the forest, and into the life she longs for: as a singer. Despite Vanessa's criminal record and wanted status, she decides to take the risk as she is captivated by Moon's innocence and selflessness. What neither of them realize is that they may find more happiness running away with each other than in anything they were running towards.

Within this project, I will be trying to answer the question: How can I successfully create an immersive, magical, fantastical love story that tackles themes of trauma and reigniting trust through love and compassion? With themes close to my heart, like escapism, adventure, companionship, self improvement and love, I will be exploring how to compose these big ideas into a captivating graphic novel.

Neomenia... would fit right in with the LGBTQ community, as well as attract the attention of fantasy and monster lovers. Several really brilliant graphic novels that are a huge inspiration to me include *Snapdragon* and *Thirsty Mermaids*, both by Kat Leyh, *Nimona* by Noelle Stevenson, and *The Prince and the Dressmaker* by Jen Wang. Each of these stories has unique and interesting character design as well as intriguing relationships of all kinds. I am also taking inspiration from animated shows like *Steven Universe*, created by Rebecca Sugar, and *Adventure Time* by Pendleton Ward which both excel in terms of world building. They have so much depth within the world whether it be a long, defined history or unusual architecture, they bring a boatload of fantastical elements together to create a unique and engrossing environment. All these time-based artworks, and dozens more, are also really excellent examples of iconic character design, as many of the main characters have a very fleshed out personality and are realistic acting while still maintaining a visually interesting and stylized look. These are just some of the ways I am drawing inspiration from these sources, but I could talk about them all forever.

For my thesis, I will begin by writing a 120 page script for a graphic novel. To split my work up into a five part series of comics that can later be combined into a paperback novel, I will be illustrating the first 20 pages for my thesis. Once the

script is written, I will sketch out the panels traditionally on paper as I go along. I will then organize the placement of each panel across the pages, scan it, then finalize the lineart for the pages digitally. I will then put in the dialogue before sending the finished files as well as the descriptions to Samantha Filosa who I will be working with to color it all. By the time I will present my work for defense I will have printed the 120 page script and five bound 20 page comic books as well as print each two-page spread to display on a wall sequentially. While working on the project I am constantly researching animated shows, other graphic novels, and writing techniques as well as how to actually create a graphic novel as it will be my first time creating a fully realized comic. I am also working on developing a consistent style, and finalizing the character designs of the main two characters as well as beginning to work on some of the background/side characters.

My final pieces of work will consist of a full written script of the 120 pages of the proposed story, concept art, character designs, and the first fifth of the story drawn as a comic book which will be the first issue of the series of comics that will eventually be composed into a full graphic novel. While this does sound like a lot of work, I have already written the first draft of the script, made a lot of thumbnails for the panels, and I have even created several of the first draft page

layouts. The second term of thesis I will then be able to focus on completing the art for the final product of the comic, and I will be editing and finalizing my script.

I will be working digitally in Procreate for the majority of the visual work, the exception being traditional sketches which I will eventually bring into photoshop or procreate and edit anyway. The writing is being done in google docs currently. My biggest concern regarding the medium will be when it actually comes to printing the work to be hung up and bound. I have little experience when it comes to printing, but I am hoping to take a class on it next term and have already been in communication with the digital print studio at PNCA.

My main goal for my thesis project will be to have created a well written love story that can later be turned into a graphic novel. The final pieces of work will consist of around 18-20 pages of a composed comic as well as a bound script of the 120 pages of writing. There will also be concept art of the characters, backgrounds, and props on display along with the finished pages, all hung up for viewers to browse easily.

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Caitria Aldrich

Project Statement

Neomenia is a graphic novel created for scrolling digital platforms like Webtoon and Tapas. The story follows Vanessa, a human outlaw, and a mermaid named Moon, as they attempt to evade the law and mermaid hunters to win a singing competition. My goal for the project is to make an immersive, magical, fantastical love story that tackles themes of trauma and reigniting trust through love and compassion. These characters will explore strange worlds and build connections with one another, laughing, growing, and falling in love; which is the exact type of content I am passionate about creating and sharing with the world. I have outlined the entire narrative, fully scripted the first half of the book and illustrated an approximate eleven page sequence. The project is far enough along that I am confident it will be fully illustrated and launched on Webtoon by the end of next year.

Caitria Aldrich

NEOMENIA - ORAL DEFENSE

FIRST SLIDE:

Hello! I'm Caitria Aldrich, I'm an Animated Arts Major with a Creative Writing Minor, and today I will be telling you about my thesis project *Neomenia*.

SECOND SLIDE - BLACK SLIDE WITH KISS

In a fantasy world where magic is commonplace, Vanessa, a criminal human, is suddenly face-to-face with a lonely mermaid named Moon. Because mermaids are hard to find, exceptionally gifted with magic, and possess valuable body parts, Moon has lived her life in danger, stuck in a pond deep within the forest, alone. With a newfound appreciation for the sweet mermaid she stumbled across, Vanessa offers to help Moon out of the forest, and into the life she longs for: as a singer. Despite Vanessa's status as a wanted criminal, she decides to take the risk as she is captivated by Moon's innocence and selflessness. What neither of them realize is that they may find more happiness running away with each other than in anything they were running towards.

The story begins by showing us the threat of the antagonists: mermaid hunters. They plan on heading to the forest ponds outside of the town **Primitus**, then we cut to Vanessa, who is caught stealing potions from a shop within that same town. She is chased into the forest by some guards where she accidentally falls into a deep cavernous pond within the forest, only to be saved by Moon. Vanessa is whisked away to an underwater crystal cave where the fully illustrated excerpt takes place.

Neomenia in its completed form will be an approximate 156 page, fully colored webcomic for scrolling platforms such as Webtoon and Tapas. At this point in time currently, I have fully illustrated pages 9 through 20 - the latter half of the first act - and have storyboarded most of the first 8 pages. I have also written half of the script already, and will finish it by the end of september.

THIRD SLIDE - MAGIC & ADVENTURE

Ever since I was little I was always interested in magic/fantasy/mythical creatures, etc. I used to spend almost all my time as a kid playing **outside** with my sister and friends. We would climb giant rock structures, trees, and mounds of dirt. We would jump across and into rivers, looking for little

trinkets to take home. We would "mix potions" from flowers and berries, and try to carve our own bowls from somewhat degradable rocks.

When outside wasn't an option, we would build forts inside, create little worlds out of clay, and religiously read *Dragonology*. My mom and dad even bought us "dragon eggs" which unfortunately just turned out to be painted rocks - *who would've guessed*.

The world was what we made it, and when we were finally introduced to videogames, the main ones we would play were Wizard 101, Skyrim, and this random Harry Potter game for the Xbox. This quickly led to my fascination with **Magic**. My life has been shaped by magic and fantasy, and as I matured I explored ways to incorporate that energy into my artwork.

FOURTH SLIDE - OLD ADVENTURE TIME ART

While I was entranced by the natural world around me, I also took inspiration from many shows I watched, namely animated ones. The first show that really changed my world was *Adventure Time*. Much like the other shows I was obsessed with at the time like *Chowder*, and *The Marvelous Misadventures of Flapjack*, I was hooked on the style of *Adventure Time* - it was so cartoony and colorful, the whole show felt playful, funny, and very

relatable. Many of the characters inspired my own, and the concepts within episodes flooded my brain with my own fun ideas.

While I loved animation as a kid, it was hard to do, and I felt I lacked the skills to accomplish what I wanted. However, from the minute I found out that **graphic novels** existed, I became absolutely obsessed with making one. They seemed easy enough, but because I used to try to draw comics straight-ahead with no planning, I had no clue what the story was, or where it was going. All I knew was that I wanted to draw my silly little characters.

FIFTH SLIDE - PINK CHARACTER ART

Back when I was in middle and high school, I began creating characters that had magical powers, or were part-monster part-human, etc. I cared for these same characters for years, redeveloping them, writing their stories, watching them grow with me. When I changed between my mom and my dad's house every week, I usually packed one bag of clothes, my school backpack, and several massive bags of drawing books and art supplies every week. They were the most important things to bring, because my mind was fixated on art, and characters.

I created hundreds of characters over the years, so many it was hard to keep track, but there were some that occupied my

brain more than the rest. As I got better at art, my favorites became more well-rounded, got better designs, and their stories started to develop.

SIXTH SLIDE - MOON AND VANESSA

I had created Moon when I first started making characters. She had bird wings and was a sweet, blonde, popular girl. However, as years progressed, I realized she was a very flat character, and I wasn't sure which direction to take her. Conversely, I had created Vanessa during my later years of Highschool, and felt she had endless opportunities. She was one of my first Bi characters, and I spent years writing partial stories, giving her new outfits, and adding and subtracting other characters she would interact with. Despite my desperate attempts, I still could not figure out exactly what to do with her until one night I was struck with the idea to pair Moon and Vanessa together. At first I thought it was sort of strange, but the more I experimented with it, the more I liked the idea.

Once I took a scripting class with Jason McNamara, I was able to bring their story to life, and it was one of the most exciting things I had ever done. I loved seeing the story unfold in front of me as I wrote and rewrote their introduction to one another. I was very familiar with my characters, so I had a good

grasp on how they would interact, but I was less convinced with the world they occupied.

This meant that I had to think more about what I wanted to see in a fictional world, what young Caitria would have been interested in.

SEVENTH SLIDE - WORLD BUILDING

I thought a lot about the shows I watched and about the games I used to like playing and I realized something that was very important to me and integral to my world making. When I looked back on shows like *Adventure Time*, *Chowder*, *Flapjack*, and *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, I realized a lot of the reason I loved and related to them was because there was a lack of technology.

Because I spent so much time outside and playing make-believe, I did not have much of an interest in electronics generally. I recognized that a lot of the kids around me *did* have electronics, and thus they were often much more interested in them than in me. Because of this, I got along great with other people that didn't focus on them, and in turn we encouraged one another's creativity.

When we did participate in electronics, it was often to

fuel our own imagination. We would take what we wanted from media, and use it to our advantage. I used my phone and computer to write stories, and ipad and DSI to create digital art and animations. Technology in my life was used as an inspiration rather than a necessity or an interest of its own. I would always rather interact face to face with my friends and family, and as I created stories, I wanted to incorporate this aspect of my childhood into them. With no phones to distract, my characters would instead have to explore their world, and focus on connecting with the other characters around them.

I took advantage of the lack of technology to emphasize the uniqueness of world-building, and focus more on an interesting setting that did not have to follow the societal expectations the real world had set in place.

One of the main things I changed in my fictional worlds was that there was no homophobia or transphobia. I decided that this is something I may write about later, when a story calls for it, but in this story, the way that I'm addressing homophobia is by omission. Like my favorite queer pieces of media, I wanted to create a world that normalizes being part of the LGBTQ+ community. I think one of the best ways to introduce people to accepting one another is to show what that looks like, and in my fantasy world, no one will have to worry about hiding their

sexuality. There are enough cruel things in the world, like disease, poverty, the patriarchy, etc. I don't think hating someone's self-expression and identity should be one of those things, so in *Neomenia* it's not.

Another one of the reasons I do not want to include homophobia and transphobia in my story is because it detracts from something very near and dear to my heart: escapism.

EIGHTH PAGE - SELF PORTRAIT PAGE

While I was growing up I had a really hard time in the real world. I wasn't diagnosed with autism until I was 21, meaning that I lived my whole life knowing that something about me was different but never understanding what it was. I had a hard time making friends in school, and a teacher even described me once as "thinking so far out of the box that I couldn't even find the box." I thought, acted, and understood things differently than my peers, but I was always rewarded by my family as being unique. Though my family and I enjoyed my weirdness, I wasn't living in an environment that supported my way of being too well.

My family and home life was all over the place and I needed **consistency and routine**. To aid in this, I created a place in which I could indulge in my interests, and be myself, a place in

which the problems of reality didn't interfere. This place was the fictional worlds my characters lived in, that I lived in *through* them.

Although my childhood worlds were fun and exciting, they always felt incomplete in some way. I upheld standards set by the world around me like being straight and cis for a very long time, despite changing everything else. Because I didn't see any content with LGBTQ+ representation, only hints of queerness, I didn't understand a lot about myself. I often felt confused, so I avoided addressing how I felt and instead channeled my feelings into my characters. If there was more content for people with different identities than those frequently depicted in media, I think I would've felt a sense of community, and connection that I often lacked. I wished that when I was growing up I had content like *Neomenia*, so in a lot of ways, I'm creating this story for my younger self.

When I graduated high school and was able to move away from my restrictive home town into the world as a new "legal adult," I learned a lot about art, but more about who I was and my relationships to others. I became more and more comfortable being myself, and by the time I started to attend PNCA I was the most me I'd ever been. I had a newfound understanding of love, friendship, and being queer that I was excited to incorporate

and represent in my art. Throughout my time at PNCA my knowledge has grown extensively to the point that now, creating *Neomenia* I finally feel like I'm able to properly express these concepts in my work.

Neomenia is a really perfect combination of my love for childhood and nostalgia mixed with my new understanding of life and relationships. It is the best of both worlds and everyday I grow more and more excited and passionate about creating this piece of work.

NINTH SLIDE - IDEATING STICKY NOTE BOARD

During the first year of the pandemic, I decided to take a creative writing class with Jason McNamara. Then I immediately signed up for a creative writing minor because I had no idea how much I was missing out on, or how fun it would be. I had never had a clue how people plan out comics, write a script, or even create consistent characters. I knew how to draw stuff, and I loved to write, but there was a whole world behind writing and scripting I never even considered.

The idea I pitched in class was a story about a human thief who fell into a pond and met a mermaid, then snuck her around, simultaneously trying to not get caught while somehow making the mermaid famous. I continued to develop the script - getting up

to page 25 by the end of the term - then two semesters later I began my thesis.

I may have had the first act written and some fairly developed characters from my childhood, but I had still never done anything like this before.

This led to the sticky-note wall. Because I spent proposal trying to write as much of the script as possible, I found that I had poorly planned everything out. I realized that the characters didn't have an end goal, the villains were flat and introduced too late, the dialogue needed a lot of work and the climax of the story was pretty uneventful.

To sort out this big ol' problem, I took to writing the general idea of each scene on a different sticky note, then hung them up on my studio wall. Putting them all in order and adding more sticky notes as I got ideas along the way, helped me get a better perspective of the story as a whole, and let me ideate about what the scenes would look like aesthetically. Each scene relied heavily on the time of day, mood, and setting, so as I got a better understanding of the context, I was able to attach colors and better decide the characters actions and feelings. Despite my attempt at planning, the more I worked on it, the more knots I found, *but* the better it got.

Every change was necessary and beneficial, and with the help of my easily-digestible beat sheet on the wall of my studio, I figured it was smooth sailing.

TENTH SLIDE - SCRIPTING & FRIENDSHIP

At the start of defense I finalized the script of the first act and shared it with several friends and family members for feedback, including my good friend and colorist Sami Filosa. A huge part of art making for me is **collaboration**. While I grew up, I made art with my friends every day, and as we grew we created characters together that we would draw art of. Because of this, everything we made felt like a team effort, and that's what made it fun. Through art I had a **community**. The best I ever felt was when I was pitching ideas to my group of friends, drawing up things we all wanted to see, and creating new interesting characters.

Because of this, I knew that I would want to work with others on this project, even if only for a small portion. I asked Sami at the start of the term during proposal if she would be interested in helping me color the comic, as well as let me talk at her for hours, and she punched me in the throat. No, I'm kidding she said yes, of course. Sami not only helped me color, but she also gave me great constructive criticism on several

aspects of the project, namely the sketches that acted as a basis for the final works.

ELEVENTH SLIDE - OLD STORYBOARDS

I had begun sketching/thumbnailing during proposal, but I had already run into several problems while practicing. I had started in a 16:9 ratio canvas, and was doing everything in the same dimensions that I would animation. This was problematic because in a graphic novel, nearly every panel is a different size. This meant that I was limiting my art right from the beginning, and when it came time to organize the sketches into the right format for a graphic novel page, I had to completely rethink everything. I figured out soon enough how to begin this process, and managed to create one full page in time for proposal.

TWELFTH SLIDE - SKETCHING CORRECTLY:

Then the next term came and I decided pretty quickly that I wanted to change it to a digital scrolling comic like Webtoon and Tapas. There were several reasons, but even just technically: Printing was way out of my sphere of knowledge. It was too complicated a task to take on given how much I was already new to, and would be quite expensive. *Plus* I would've

had to get all the pages, 1 through 20, done a few weeks before thesis because I would be paying someone to print books and that would take forever to get done. This alone was a hefty task that I definitely would have rushed. However, this shift meant that I would have to reorganize the layout again.

Instead of benefiting from wide panels stretching left to right, Webtoon thrived off of long panels that one could continue scrolling through, watching the scene unfold. I continued to sketch the rest of the pages with this new format in mind. Most - if not all - of the sketches were done by hand traditionally in my sketchbooks, then I photographed them and put them into procreate. In a SUPER tall canvas, I organized each sketch a reasonable distance apart, adding any details I had forgotten, then began lining.

THIRTEENTH SLIDE - LINE ART

Line art is fairly straightforward - or at least I thought. I started drawing over the sketches I had placed down, everything went well, then I realized I had been using a different digital brush than I used for the original page. It took about 6 pages until I noticed that when Sami had drawn the glow from Moon's hair, the lineart underneath couldn't be seen very clearly because the lines were too thin, so I had to go

back in and re-do the lineart for Moon's hair in all of them, and then for the last few I avoided this issue and just used the right pen. In addition to this little issue, the background had to be addressed. I hadn't drawn it in the sketches, therefore after I lined the characters, I had to draw the background in to complete the piece. This meant that every single drawing I did, I drew a new background.

Though the backgrounds were fairly simplistic, If it were an animation, I would have gone about this process much differently. I would've drawn the background from the necessary angles, and reused it per image. But because it *wasn't* an animation however, I for some reason didn't think of that. I knew I had to draw the characters interacting and reacting, and that was all that mattered. So as I started lining pages 10 through 20, I continued to go about the backgrounds in probably the most inefficient way possible. I tried to reuse as many as I could, but essentially I just lined a new background every time..

FOURTEENTH SLIDE - COLOR & TEXT

This then left me to start my next step: Coloring. Though I had sketching and lining issues, overall, coloring went very smoothly. I created a color palette in procreate that I stuck to, ensuring that every color would be the same between

illustrations. However, it was much more time consuming than I had anticipated. Getting every section filled perfectly, blending colors, and remembering what colors went where. I managed to develop a routine over time that helped it move along smoothly. I completed the flat colors on every page - aka, all the colors as they are with no shading, lighting, effects, etc. Then passed the procreate file off to my colorist Sami.

Working with Sami has been an absolute delight and I can't wait to finish this comic with her. I hope that I can always enjoy art with a group of people, and continue to work on a team to create. It's one of my favorite things to see what our different perspectives can create together. Samantha Filosa is an illustration major, and I've loved her art since I met her. If you want to see more of it, her social media handle is @Tomatosaucekin. Because my least favorite part of digital art is shading, highlights, and effects, I passed that work off onto her. One of the best things about this project has been getting my pieces sent back to me, completely finished and dreamy looking, it made me so excited to finish it off with the lettering!

With literally no prior experience with lettering, this was one of my biggest obstacles. Jason suggested I read *Comic Book Lettering: The Comircraft Way* by Richard Starkings and John

Roshell, which has been super helpful. I have also been looking at other webtoon comics for references of how they handle adding lettering, particularly within the margins between panels of the comic.

I started with creating basic bubble shapes, then added lettering in the appropriate spots and showed it to Jason. It was a steep learning curve, but the more I did it the more comfortable I got with the process. There were a lot of revisions between each attempt, but seeing the finished pages paid off!

FIFTEENTH SLIDE - FORMATTING FOR WEBTOON

The last step is making sure everything reads well when it's all put together.

I for some reason thought this part would be a breeze, and once again I miscalculated horribly. I had finished the art, then *finally* finished all the lettering, and all that was left was to put in any last touches, then post. What I did not know was that Webtoon had way more specific requirements than I thought.

I had read a few articles when I first began, so I thought most of my files were in the right dimensions, but I didn't

realize that I could only upload a certain amount of images per "episode." Not to mention they had to be cut up into the right sizes, and the program I used had two different settings that didn't describe what they did so I used the wrong one first, then after editing ALL of the images into an insanely large photoshop file, I cut them down, then recut them with the program, and they still wouldn't fit!! SO I had to download another program just to make the files smaller, so that I could even fit them into two episodes. I think I did well all things considered, but oh my gosh now I know how to organize my files before I start illustrating again.

SIXTEENTH SLIDE - SCHEDULE/WHERE IT STARTED

Tell me why I thought this whole thing would go way smoother than it did! Once I began my second term of thesis, I immediately switched my idea from a print comic to a webtoon, and then quickly found that I absolutely overestimated the amount of work I'm able to get done in such a short amount of time. My way of working was not only inconsistent, but impractical and time consuming. Everything turned out to be twice as hard as I anticipated, and took twice as long as I thought it would, despite knowing some of my issues with working in a timely manner - namely perfectionism and hyperfixation.

Because of my poor planning, however, I learned **a lot**. One of the absolute best things this project taught me is that I need to help myself. I need to force myself to make a **schedule** - even if I don't want to. At some point in my life, for some unknown reason, I convinced myself that I don't work like that. This is horrendously false and I don't know why I thought that, or what gave me that idea, but now I can confirm that I really really *do* need to make a schedule. Because of this revelation, I have already started to plan the timeline for the rest of the project. I am calculating the hours I spend on each part of the project, like scripting, sketching, lining, coloring, and lettering, and I'm assigning myself a reasonable amount of time to complete each aspect. In addition to my scheduling issue, I also struggled with my organization. I began the project in one giant sketchbook, and on my ipad, but over the course of the term I somehow managed to spread my sketches throughout several sketchbooks, took notes in *different* books, hung up ideas in my studio, and wrote my script across like 10 different google docs. This was inefficient as hell.

Instead of jumping blindly into the project, I should have solidified what I was doing and how, organizing myself in a way that is concise and effective. For example, I wish that before lining and coloring *anything*, I made a color guide and checklist

of what needs to be included in every image. Oftentimes, I would finish a whole page, then halfway through another page I would realize I had forgotten something on several others that I had included in the first one, etc.. If I had a checklist to go through every time I created a page, I would consistently know what to do without having to open the other files over and over in the middle of whatever I was doing - which shifts my attention, bringing me out of the flow. This also goes for organizing files earlier on so that I don't spend an actual full day trying to upload to webtoon again! Plus now I know roughly how long each chapter is able to be, so that will help me plan breaks in the script.

SEVENTEENTH SLIDE - STORYBOARDING

Something I did *not* anticipate while working, however, was how impactful my storyboarding class would be. It taught me many different tips and tricks I hadn't thought of, as well as various techniques involved in the actual making of good storyboards. The first helpful tip was that when sketching out a frame, I should draw the border last.

Basically, just draw on a big canvas the general idea of what I was depicting, then once I liked the drawing I could decide the shape of the frame. This was a small and seemingly

obvious tip, but it sped up the process of sketching quite a lot because it meant that I didn't have to alter the shape later on.

The first *big* issue I had that was quickly exposed, was that previously, I would just sketch the main action of a character without visualizing the space they were in.

While this isn't entirely wrong in terms of comics - because you don't necessarily need to know the *exact* layout of a room since the images in that space are very limited - it *can* create a lot of confusion, and doesn't benefit the story as much. Not to mention, it led to me using boring angles, and "flat" framing, meaning that the angles weren't very dynamic, and therefore less compelling. While storyboarding the first 8 pages of my story for class, I found out that by creating a map of the buildings, I could better enhance the actions of the characters and add drama to the scene. To do this, I drew a shot map of the entire area within the scene, but because I have a difficult time visualizing spaces, when I "placed a camera" down to help me create a shot, I couldn't picture it when it came time to sketch it out. So while this technique was helpful in theory, I had to make it work for me.

To do so, I created a small miniature of the store Vanessa steals from out of sticky notes and hot glue, and was then able to take photos of the different angles seen within this setting.

This not only helped me to place the characters appropriately in the space, but also to understand the effect of different camera angles without having to draw them over and over to see if they work. That being said, I realize this isn't entirely beneficial when dealing with larger areas, like an entire town for example - because obviously I don't have time to build a massive set only to take 8 photos in it - but it does encourage me to look into 3D programs that can accomplish a similar effect, digitally. Not only will this help me in future projects with visualization, but it will also help me to practice and improve my background skills, and potentially begin to learn 3D programs like blender and cinema 4D, which can help later down the road when trying to get a job in the animation industry.

Now that I had a decently composed shot, it was down to making the scene as well composed as possible to direct the viewer's eye towards the action happening in the scene. By creating leading lines with the background elements, I was able to point to the most important part of the scene. There were plenty of other helpful aspects to the class, but instead of telling you all my secrets I'll let you take the class to figure them out yourselves.

Overall the core of the project stayed the same. All I really wanted to do is write this story about Moon and Vanessa

building their relationship in a world of magic, a little danger and comedy, and lots of colors. Just like everyone said, I proposed more than I could handle at one time, and I went through a lot of obstacles, mainly revising my creative process. Along the way, I learned more about the story, who the characters are, and how to show this all more effectively. I have also learned a lot about what this story means to me, and more about how much work goes into every single aspect of creating a big story. The script alone has changed so much from last term to now, and continues to evolve still. But just like I am an ever-changing person, so is my creative process. While it is annoying at times to change so much and so often, it is also really exciting to see how this project takes on a life of its own, so in the end I'm very happy with how it evolved.

EIGHTEENTH SLIDE - THEMES

The main themes I am exploring in *Neomenia* revolve around self-improvement, love and companionship, building trust through vulnerability, adventure/discovery, and LGBTQ+ representation.

In order to communicate these themes, the central importance of the story is the main protagonists: Moon and Vanessa, who express these values through building their relationship.

I remember having a crush on a girl for a long time, and years went by before eventually in high school, I finally started seeing her more romantically. My mom commented on our relationship, saying "I don't think you're **gay**." She wasn't ill-intended, but that made me think: well, maybe I'm not... I've never seen anything gay represented realistically, so how would I know what being gay feels like? What it looks like? This was around the time I found the *only comic book* store in town, and stumbled upon *The Lumberjanes*. I loved the art style and bought a four dollar floppy comic. I began reading and to my surprise, **two of the main girls liked each other, romantically**. Along with this, all the main characters looked very different. They were all girls but they **didn't all look girly**. When I first started reading I actually wasn't sure if two of them were girls. And I loved it. It gave me the *option* to make **masculine girls**, to make **gay characters**, and to feel accepted.

I wanted to include the **culture** and **variety** amongst the LGBTQ+ community within my comic, and the best and most exciting way for me to do this, was to make basically every character that makes an appearance queer and/or trans.

This of course, includes the antagonists. Their names will likely never be revealed in the story, but because you all have taken the time to be here I'll let you in on some secret

information. The main bad guys are two-gay-for-each-other men named Cairn and Dannan. While they have a great relationship with one another, and are generally well-intentioned, they do have their faults - namely that they are planning on killing Moon.

I wanted to comment on the privilege that men have over others through these two characters, but without giving away any twists in the story my discussion of this may seem a bit vague.

An unfortunately prominent influence on my life has been that our world is run by men who have abused their power. I wanted to represent this difficulty in my story through the intentions of the antagonists, those being that they want something from Moon that they *could* ask for, but instead they are set on taking it by force. By the end of the story, they are challenged to face their learned privilege and grow as people, recognizing that asking for help is not a sign of weakness, but rather a strength.

Along with these themes, I wanted to address the oversexualized view of women in our society, primarily women who love other women. Being someone who was born female, neurodivergent, and romantically interested in anyone I am, regardless of their gender identity, I was not made a priority in our patriarchal society. I was not shown media that

represents me, rather I was shown how to be what society does desire in a woman. Generally this meant: skinny, sexy, complacent, and quiet.

Because of this, I wanted to create a relationship between Moon and Vanessa that is defying these portrayed aspects throughout culture. I am well-aware of work that does not continue supporting these themes, and I want my work to follow this trend.

While they do kiss upon their initial meeting, it is intended to be a metaphor for breaking down barriers and becoming vulnerable, as well as an act of expressing care and helping those in need. It is not made out to be sexual, rather affectionate.

As they continue building their relationship, the girls learn to communicate their needs to one another, growing their trust and becoming better people by learning through each other. Their story is one of self-improvement, companionship, and overcoming trauma through evolving a supportive relationship.

One of the ways I express this change is through the use of color. Color is a really integral part of the comic, as it is essential to me and my life. Originally I considered creating

the comic in black and white or even just with one accent color, to save time, but quickly decided against it.

The world is so rich and beautiful. The sky, clouds, and nature are endlessly inspiring, capturing so many feelings and setting a scene excellently. I wanted to use the effect of the colorful world around them to create a mood and influence the setting. Much like Moon and Vanessa change throughout the story, so does the world around them. As time passes, the world shifts and they find themselves with a companion still, experiencing new colors for the first time in a long time, together.

NINETEENTH SLIDE - MERMAIDS

When I was 2 years old, I could barely talk, but could fluently sing the song "Part of your world" from *The Little Mermaid (1989)*. It apparently was one of my biggest influences, as here I am writing about a singing **mermaid** 20 years later. As I grew, I took to watching the movie *Aquamarine (2006)* over and over - I was obsessed with the message about **friendship-love** being just as valuable as romantic **love**. I had never seen a movie convey a message like that, but I have firmly believed that theme for as long as I could remember. Then, reading *Thirsty Mermaids* by Kat Leyh last term, which had a similar theme: **friendship** is everything, I was brought back to my

original fascination with **Mermaids**. Mermaids have always been a symbol of love to me. A symbol of friendship, curiosity, and transformation.

TWENTIETH SLIDE - ONLINE ART

As I steadily got more and more acquainted with the internet, I stumbled upon very compelling pieces of art that frequently sparked new ideas. One of the various types of work that stuck with me, and definitely compelled me to make *Neomenia*, was the wlv art of mermaids with humans. I saw several different iterations, but I kept these two particular images in my camera roll for years. I often contemplated what sort of story these images told, and found that I wanted to tell my own. I can only assume that this was the first seed planted that drove me to start writing *Neomenia* late one night, struck with inspiration.

With my aforementioned interest in mermaids and the type of stories they influence, I knew that mine would also revolve around love and change. I wasn't sure yet what form it might take, but I was starting to develop ideas of what it might look like.

TWENTY FIRST SLIDE - WORLD BUILDING

Though there weren't many, *Merlin* (2006) was one of my absolute favorite live action shows to ever exist. Some of my fondest memories revolve around this show, and for good reason: *Merlin* was chock-full of magic, adventure, and brilliant characters.

Alike to *Merlin*, *Skyrim* is set in a fairly "Medieval" time period, and the visuals of these two pieces helped inspire *Neomenia* quite a bit. *Skyrim* was the first ever experience I had with open world games and I remember being absolutely blown away that I could do anything I wanted, so I just explored. I walked around, all over the place and it was fucking awesome. *Merlin* additionally has a lot of traveling involved and seeing the different landscapes throughout these two reminded me of when I used to just roam around in nature as a kid.

Because of the positive memories I have for these pieces of media, plus my favorite past time as a child being exploring outside: adventure/exploring is a huge theme in my story.

Something that was not so prevalent in these works, however, were girls. There were a couple, but they still represented only the few types of girls that were already in most media.

Conversely, *Adventure Time* did a really great job of expressing **different acting girls**, like Marceline and Princess Bubblegum - who ran a kingdom, and picked their nose. Things girls aren't supposed to do. It **humanized** them, and as time went on, they had more scenes together, more moments that hinted at them being **gay**.

It wasn't until I was in my second year of college that they had their **on-screen kiss**. This changed everything. One of (if not my absolute) favorite shows ever had gay characters? Main characters at that. They got more screen time than most other characters, and even had both a mini-series (*stakes*) and additional episodes in the spin-off adventure time show: *Distant Lands*.

In addition to *Adventure Time*, *Steven Universe* opened a gateway for LGBTQ+ content - even inspiring the kiss between Princess bubblegum and Marceline "...by featuring the first **same-sex kiss** on the lips involving a major character in American children-oriented **animation history**." (citation needed) *Steven Universe* also introduced a variety of different female-presenting characters that kick-started my minor obsession with the show.

Though these shows and games inspired me greatly, I still am only a team of one, which is one of the reasons I was drawn towards graphic novels.

TWENTY SECOND SLIDE - COMICS & WEBTOONS

I've already briefly discussed my first interaction with comics: *The Lumberjanes*, but once I started I could not be stopped. I continued to buy books whenever I came across one I liked, and since living in a city with POWELLS: yeah...

A few of my absolute favorites are written by Kat Leyh: *Thirsty Mermaids* and *Snapdragon*. Kat Leyh's style is incredibly inspiring as it allows for the exaggeration of features while still being realistic enough to take seriously, plus the lineart is really grainy which adds a lot of texture to the piece and makes for a more visually appealing comic. She creates stories with a variety of LGBTQ+ representations, and has been my favorite author and contemporary artist since I found *Snapdragon* in 2020.

Alternatively, at a point in my life where I was broke, stuck at home, and alone, I downloaded Webtoon and I stumbled across *Lore Olympus*. It was way different than anything I had

seen before, lineless art that flowed downwards, leading the eye along between images with a smokey trail. It was glorious and I quickly fell in love with the story, and the platform. I continued to read it weekly, and when there were no new episodes out I would skim through other suggested stories. Eventually I found *Stick n Poke*, *Love Bites*, and many other great stories on Webtoon as well that inspired me when it came to my own story.

I really adored the interactivity within webtoon, seeing the comments at the bottom of each episode that echoed my thoughts and feelings exactly. It garnered a sense of community that I hadn't shared while reading any graphic novels. While I loved them, I didn't know anyone else in my life who read the things I did until I started going to PNCA.

TWENTY THIRD SLIDE - MY WORK IN CONTEXT

My general audience stayed the same while I worked on my project: LGBTQ+ people with an interest in magical/fantastical worlds and characters. The main thing that changed is where my piece fits. Originally I had planned to stick my book on a shelf, but when I considered other options and remembered the sense of community prevalent on Webtoon and Tapas alike, I quickly shifted directions. This isn't to say that my work wouldn't fit in stores, just that as a starting place, I could

gather a big audience online by regularly posting my story on scrolling platforms.

As someone who reads webtoons, and has for several years now, I knew that there were plenty of people who would love to read a story like mine. With the app being free, this also allows for more accessibility for those with lower income that might not be able to shell out money for a random graphic novel. Regular posts on instagram advertising the weekly episodes I will eventually upload, will also aid in guiding people towards *Neomenia*. Because I plan on adapting *Neomenia* into a graphic novel someday, by accumulating a large amount of support through webtoon, I will have a big advantage when approaching funding. I would be able to create a kickstarter that would be backed by all the fans that I have made through regular posting.

This would also help me to grow a general audience on social media, paving the way for enhancing my career as an artist, and helping me to get jobs in the industry later on.

Because *Neomenia* is a continuation of the type of works I have and continue to make, it fits wonderfully into my portfolio.

My main intention in my work has always been about characters, and storytelling. I think with *Neomenia*, I am able

to both show my skill set in regards to my character work, but also my background work, my storyboarding skills, my storytelling/creative writing, and the type of content I'm passionate about. I love to create stories where the main draw is how the characters grow and change with one another, interacting in a somewhat unusual world. In addition to that, many people in the animation industry create graphic novels and comics on the side of their main job within animation. Rebecca Sugar, for example, got her job working on *Adventure Time* by giving out zines of her comics at conventions. In many ways I am doing the same thing by making my work easily accessible online. Among many other great works on Webtoon, it's likely my comic will be advertised on the app to people looking at similar stories.

As for my next steps after this, I plan on starting with finishing the script, continuing to storyboard and sketch out panels as I go. This will ensure that the story is consistent and doesn't have any major changes *while* I'm illustrating. That being said, the first third of the script has been completed, and I am continuing to work on it in my scripting class this term. By the end of May I plan on having the first 75 pages of the script finished/finalized. Then I plan on having the script

fully completed by the end of October, with sketches to accompany it.

The order of illustrating however may seem somewhat strange as I plan to finish pages 21 through 156 before finally coming back to the first 8 and illustrating them very last. I'm doing this because the first pages of the comic are meant to hook the reader, and the more I draw, the better I get, so if I save them for last, it will likely be the best pages of them all, because I have the experience of drawing the whole rest of the comic beforehand.

While I continue to work on *Neomenia*, I will be frequently posting online to further accumulate an audience that I can corral into reading *Neomenia* once I begin publishing episodes. I will be taking classes next term that will assist with the entire production process, and have already begun planning out the schedule of which I will follow to continue working on *Neomenia* until completion.

I will then work on creating a patreon to further gain an audience, and begin to make some money off of my work. While I continue to post updates on Webtoon, I will also begin to sort the artwork into the format of a print graphic novel, before eventually starting a Kickstarter. I will raise money to publish

and print the graphic novel of *Neomenia*, including bonus art and scenes that will increase the value of the item.

TWENTY FOURTH SLIDE - CONCLUSION

Creating *Neomenia* has been the best time I've had in a long time. Despite the stress, I'm finally doing exactly what I've always wanted to do. I have been learning so much so quickly, and getting really great feedback from my peers and mentor. Though it has taken me longer than I anticipated, it has all been really exciting and fun nevertheless. Every day I woke up ready to work on it, and every day I wished I had more time to make even more art. It's so invigorating to be able to put my whole self into my artwork, and create something with depth and personal meaning, something bigger than a one-time image, or a short animation with one small premise. *Neomenia* has big themes, tackles issues I struggle with, and is accompanied with lots of pretty colors and cute characters that I care for deeply. It has been a dream come true working on it, and I can't wait to share it with everyone. Thank you to my friends and family who have helped me along the way, and thank you all for coming!

TWENTY FIFTH SLIDE - QUESTIONS

What questions do you have for Moon, Vanessa, or myself?

Caitria Aldrich

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