

Beth Starkey

Thesis Oral Defense Speech

## Monsters of Aslamere

### **Part 1 – Introduction**

Hello, and welcome to my thesis oral defense... My name is Beth Starkey, and I'm presenting my project, the "Monsters of Aslamere," a 36-page conceptual art book, with the intention that it will be turned into an open world video game. A project that has been two long years in the making.

I have always loved writing stories, and creating my own character and monster designs, so worldbuilding something like this became the natural end result. Actually doing so has taken all kinds of twists and turns in order to reach the project it is now... Ultimately, I wanted to create a world for the kind of game I would be excited to play.

A heads up before I really start, there are going to be a lot of names thrown around due to the scope of this project. Please don't worry about remembering them all, I don't intend to quiz you on them.... Many of the names came from BehindTheName.com, because that name generator is a character creator's best friend.

With that disclaimer out of the way, let me tell you about my thesis, the Monsters of Aslamere.

## **Part 2 – Monsters of Aslamere: How it started**

Monsters of Aslamere is set in a fantasy world, where civilization is only just starting to take its first steps... With permanent settlements and farming starting within the last few generations, Aslamere is filled with fantastical, occasionally magical, monsters that still control most of its territories... The people struggle to survive each day, hunting monsters that are just as likely to turn around and return the favor by hunting them....

All of this starts to change when a nonbinary young hunter and aspiring researcher named Kai sets out from their village, along with their small winged familiar, Vanati, determined to create this world's first monster book... Kai grew up fascinated by monsters rather than fearing them, and so explores all the corners of Aslamere to hunt down every monster, gathering information about each of them in different ways.

With some luck, food, and a gentle hand, Kai is even able to tame some monsters to bring back to their village. Doing so helps their people expand and open up greater possibilities for farming, crafting, hunting, and traveling for Aslamere, setting the trail for animal domestication in this world...

The way Monsters of Aslamere started for me was as the project during my Spring 2023 Visual Development class with Yer Za Vue... The assignments for the class did have certain requirements to meet in terms of style, so I was originally heavily inspired by...

...Level 5's Fantasy Life series for character and monster designs, as well as the general feel for the story... This game is one of my favorites from the Nintendo 3DS titles, one I've played and completed several times, prompting my desire to make a similar game world that offers different ways to explore and play.

I was inspired that semester by Monsters of Aslamere, using it as a starting point for the final project in Phoenix McNamara's Design and Image class; a book based on a seven-letter word...

Well, "monster" is a seven-letter word, and Kai's main mission is to create a monster book. The ideas merged and I was able to create a physical mockup of Kai's monster book...

With letters and type design being a main part of that project, it led me to also forming a runic typeface that could be used on Aslamere. This was something I'd never done before that, so learning how to create a usable typeface made for a fun challenge.

Once the Fall 2023 semester started, I had made the decision to expand Aslamere's story to be used for my senior thesis project... which has turned it into the video game concept artbook you see now. With a more singular focus, I started changing the style to match my own a little more while taking Cultural Marketplace with Mehran Heard... This way it wouldn't look like a Fantasy Life rip off, though I still held onto some of the design elements as an homage to the original project...

I also used a project in that class to create a 3D model of Vanati in Nomad on the iPad. This was the first time in years I'd done any 3D modeling, while learning a new program, but it helped a lot in getting a 360 view of what Vanati's species look like.

Taking David Hohn's Picture Book classes during both Fall 23 and Spring 24 gave me the chance to really develop the story and characters, with their motivations and personalities ... This turned into two picture books that act as the prologue that would lead up to the start of the main story within the game, and could even be

used as reference to make an in-game tutorial level start. That moment of regular childhood for Kai before time skipping forward a few years to the main adventure.

### **Part 3 – The World and Characters**

This brings me to today, where I've spent the summer and all of this semester building even more into this world under Chuck's mentorship. With Kai and their family more developed during the previous semesters... I spent most of this time working on the rest of the world, such as the other kinds of monsters that would inhabit Aslamere, and other important characters that Kai would encounter on their journey.

Aslamere got a much more detailed map, giving me actual landmarks that I can use in other illustrations.... Aslamere itself is a large continent, with massive mountain ranges that surround the western side of it, forming off into three separate branches....

These mountains affect the environments of the rest of the region, each one acting as individual levels within the game.

While my ideal is that this is an open world game along the lines of Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild, I also acknowledge that console or development limitations may require separate areas... much like how Pokemon: Legends Arceus did their own world.

Kai sets off on their journey in the northwest forest village of Che'naku... That forest acts as an initial tutorial level for the player, since Kai grew up in them and already knows a lot about the monsters living there. It's when Kai leaves that forest, traveling either to the coastal bay or the mountains...that the real challenge of the game begins.

As the main character, Kai has a full spread within the concept book for their character sheets.... With these, I wanted to show their skill with archery and fascination with monsters. Kai is an open person who enjoys helping people, while also being adventurous with big hopes and dreams, like the childlike hero archetype they are...

But they are also still 17 years old, and are occasionally stubborn and hot-tempered about getting others to see their point of view... Growing up enough to see that their ideals about monsters isn't always the best way is part of Kai's emotional journey throughout Monsters of Aslamere.

Of all my designs, Kai has gone through the most changes, from start to finish. While their initial color scheme was more earth neutral, that made it hard for them to stand out as the main character when grouped with everyone else. So, I changed their tunic to these brighter reds and golds, building on that happy, energetic personality they have, while giving Kai some more armor accessories to suit with the dangerous world Aslamere is...

The fur underlining was made after I came to the decision, and realization, that Che'naku is settled close to the continent's Ice Step Glacier, so the villagers would have more insulation in their clothes to combat the cold.... The feather features are all meant to provide a connection to Vanati, whose feathers molt out every

year. Kai then takes the better-quality ones, and uses them for crafting. This is a feature I want added into the game.

Vanati is Kai's familiar companion, a five-year-old Nyuca, which is a winged rodent species. Nyucas lay eggs like birds... so, after Vanati's egg fell out of its nest, it was found by Kai in the river near their home. After some convincing, Kai's parents allowed them to keep and raise the then unknown creature....

This is the story I wrote about in my first picture book, *Fight for the Egg*. Writing and illustrating it gave me the ability to develop Kai's family dynamics... establishing their relationship with their father, Altaulf, as argumentative, while their mother, Isaura, is the peacekeeper.

My second picture book, *Mama Doesn't Look Like Me* is from Vanati's point of view over his first year as Kai raised him... It describes how Vanati sees Kai as his mother... and shows various high-jinks that Vanati gets into from fledgling to adult.

After growing into an adolescent at about six months...Kai was able to train Vanati to perform certain tasks to assist them in their traveling and research. These include collecting fruits from trees...carrying a rope to a high branch and looping it for Kai to climb...or going into small spaces to determine if there's anything to be found. While most of the game is played from Kai's point of view, these are moments where the player may take control of Vanati instead to find extra supplies.

One of my favorite things within that book was actually showing Vanati grow up and the size difference at the start of the book to the end, while also showing Kai grow up a bit as they enter puberty.

After leaving Che'naku, Kai explores the various regions of Aslamere thoroughly, researching each monster they come across. Outside of the ancient forests that the Che'naku reside in, there are five other villages that Kai can use as rest and supply

points. Each of these places act as central hubs for the surrounding level environments.

Most of my summer was spent developing those villages more, especially the designs of the leaders. I focused on them more because they're the ones who Kai would interact with the most in each region, while the other Nonplayer Characters would be more generic and job-focused...

One important character design element I decided on for the leaders is that they all wear a necklace crafted with stones, shells, and/or bones. These necklaces act as a status symbol, and are passed down to the next leader whenever the current one retires or passes away...

While it is something I've been going back and forth on...to the point that I didn't add it into the book itself... I did have ideas about making the central pieces of those necklaces a sacred item, that was granted to each village by a deity long ago in order to aid them in protecting themselves. But that was taking me down a

massive rabbit hole a bit too big for the project on its current scope, so I had to stop.

Kai has known most of the village leaders since early childhood. I've had the idea that the villages gather together for a harvest summit every few years..., allowing them all to exchange produce, important news, and even finalize cross-village marriages when appropriate...

As the child of a village leader, Kai is treated like a nibling by the older generation of leaders, and a younger sibling by those who gained that role later. So, Kai is already familiar with each of them when they encounter them in the game after Kai reaches each respective village... There is a chance Kai may encounter them all in their territories performing some kind of task – hunting, gathering materials, just taking a walk – but that's only after Kai reaches their village for that first player introduction....

Althaulf is Kai's father and the leader of the Che'naku village, acting as both the Mentor and Guardian archetype. Althaulf has

spent Kai's whole life teaching them how to fight and survive on their own in the world... However, he is also much more wary, stubborn, and protective about bringing monsters into society..., and thus acts as a barrier for Kai to overcome on occasion when the two butt heads over the topic.

Altaulf tends to lump all monsters into a single category of "Dangerous," regardless of how they actually are. Kai's determination to create a monster book is in direct contrast to this, and a goal Altaulf doesn't always understand, but does eventually allow in that "go ahead, I clearly can't stop you" kind of way.

Altaulf's design from the beginning was meant to convey "Big Muscle." He's the tallest of the characters, and one of the most physically powerful. While initially wielding a hammer in my first design of him, he wields a large axe now, to more suit the forest environment Che'naku is found in. The fur crest is intended as not only an interesting texture on him, but also makes him bigger and more imposing.

Drusus is the leader of the Bu'gami village, which is set in the central mountains, in the high cliffs and caverns of the Sunglow Gorge.... Drusus is the eldest of all of the leaders, serving the Wise Old Guide and Aging Warrior type. He gives advice to all the other leaders and Kai in equal measure, and is a steadfast figure, even in moments of crisis.... Drusus, however, does have a tendency to sometimes fall asleep standing up while in the middle of conversations, before startling awake with a shouted proverb that still somehow suits the situation.

Drusus is an extremely powerful warrior, and climbs some of Aslamere's highest peaks on a weekly basis with ease. This is usually how Kai will be able to find him out in the world, sometimes even fighting another monster with his giant hammer....

Drusus' design was me focusing on an aging warrior with a bit of pot belly, while still being completely ripped. So, his coat stays tied around his waist to show that off... While I originally gave him

hair and a ponytail, that made him look too much like Altaulf, so I made Drusus bald with tattoos, and carried that ponytail design into his beard instead. The concept of a braided beard is honestly really cool, so any guys who take care of their beards enough to do that get an instant 50 points of respect from me, which is why I wanted at least one of my characters to have something similar.

Charis is another transgender character, and Le'ridan's leader, set in the southeast delta, near the Devouring Swamp. This kind of location has made the people there develop building techniques for stilted, dock homes.... Charis is a bit of a cynical prankster, showing zir Trickster type in how zey will shift between causing some kind of trouble for a laugh, a lackadaisical attitude over life, and determination over doing zir job as leader when the moment calls for it. Charis frequently plays with zir dagger, taking it out to toss it about even in the middle of conversation.

Charis is extremely sneaky, and takes great joy in coming up behind people to startle them with zir presence at the most

unexpected moments, almost as if by teleportation. This also means that they're the one who Kai might find out and about in Aslamere most often, sometimes in the weirdest of places, usually just lounging around.

Charis is another character that got a massive design shift from start to finish. The decision originally came down to me thinking the first design was too bland compared to some of the others, and wanting an interesting pattern or texture on zem... I also find it hilarious when the sneakiest person in the room wears super bright colors despite that.

Maile is the leader of the Co'astere village, set on the coast of the Dragon's Horn Bay. As the youngest of the leaders, she displays that by being the Virtuous/Child-like-Adult of the bunch. Maile treats Kai like a younger sibling, offering support and teasing in equal measure....

Maile's an open book with her emotions, and the one who happily greets people with an open armed hug, or gives a helping hand to

those in need. But beware her temper, because Maile will hold onto that grudge to the end of time....

When it came to Maile's design, I focused on making her shape design to convey personality. Making her plus sized was partially made out of a desire to diversify my cast, but also to emphasize even more she's a soft character who gives big, squishy hugs. I didn't want all of the leaders to be using leathers or animal furs as clothing, so I wanted at least one that uses grasses as the primary material instead....

Kertu is the Zu'kavi leader, set in the desert, on the edge of the Crystal Glow Oasis. Kertu is a Comic Relief-Warrior by acting as the fun auntie type to Kai, and very physically affectionate to everyone around her (also very much the kind of person to jokingly use shorter people as arm rests, and is tall enough to do it to most).... She's a master of the blade with a heart of gold and muscles of steel, who will always almost break someone's back when she bearhugs them.

Raised in the desert, Kertu is one of the best at navigating with stars, but gets completely turned around the moment the sky is covered up by trees or caves.... She's also a nervous nail-biter, but not many know about that, because Kertu usually gives off such a confident persona.

Kertu's design faced its biggest challenge with the color of her skin. I wanted her to have dark skin, but putting it too dark meant that details kept getting lost.... So, it took a bit of back and forth before finding a happy medium of still being dark, but not so dark that she would print as a featureless shape... Going with white-blond hair was a way to provide a unique feature, with the bright colors of Kertu's clothing providing some contrast that normal leathers wouldn't provide. Her jewelry, like many in Zu'kavi, comes from the crystals that grow out of their home oasis.

Birkir is the leader of Mo'hua, a treehouse village set around the branches of the Great Mother Tree in the southern rainforest....

As the Silent Observer Sage, Birkir doesn't talk much, but speaks

Words of Wisdom that everyone listens to when he does. He spends more time in the trees than on the ground, perfectly at home leaping from branch to branch.

Birkir is likely somewhat high on some kind of hallucinogenic at all times, primarily through tea drinking. Some of his sage advice is occasionally...questionable because of this.... It does little to affect his archery skills, however. Meeting him gives Kai another teacher, someone who can teach them specific archery skills that they couldn't learn before.

When designing Birkir, him living in a rainforest became a key feature, which is why part of his outfit is made up of large leaves weaved into a mini-poncho. I have a lot of shorter characters, so I wanted another tall character who was lankier rather than bulky. The longbow is meant to help emphasize this more, and contrasts to Kai's use of a shortbow.

Two other characters who are important, but that I didn't have time to create character sheets for are Kai's mother, Isaura, and

her own mother, Aldara.... Isaura is the Caregiver archetype of Aslamere's cast. She's the primary healer within Che'naku, with a lot of knowledge in herbal medicines and cures. Over the course of the game, Isaura transitions from not only being a healer for people, but monsters, too.... Aldara is the spiritual Elder within Che'naku, and, while an optional dialogue for the player, a primary source of Aslamere's history for Kai to learn from.

Isaura's design was primarily focused on making her soft and round – very few sharp edges – while also having Kai inherit their physical coloring from her. Aldara's design was created on the idea that she looks like Isaura, but a little old lady. While a little cliché, I love the concept of tiny old people getting a walking-stick-staff taller than they are.

#### **Part 4 - Process and Setbacks**

Creating all of these characters and a group shot of them had all kinds of ups and downs. I mentioned it before but my initial design and color choices ended up having some of them blend together

far too much... This led me to giving them each a different color to separate them from each other... while creating a second design for them that changed their outfits. In other ways, I wanted to give them clothes made out of more unique textures and patterns, showing that some of their clothing is an altered animal hide....

One question that came up during my midterm reviews was “why so many villages and leader characters?” The answer to that question is I wanted a village in each of Aslamere’s main regions/environments.... Ultimately, though, hindsight has me wishing I’d reduced those village numbers down to three or four, possibly by combining a few of the villages. None of these characters would be removed for doing that, but their roles would be changed to reflect that kind of change, and so I wouldn’t have felt the need to put so much starting focus on so many of them. This could have also given me more time and energy to give Isaura and Aldara, maybe even Vanati, the same kind of

character design treatment, rather than doing just the village leaders and Kai.

Worldbuilding is in itself a massive, complicated endeavor. There are so many notes I wrote, designs I created, and ideas bursting every which way, that the hardest part from the beginning was pulling myself back.... All of the ideas made it overwhelming sometimes, especially when I was still coming up with newer ideas for images even within these last final weeks before presenting. I kept bouncing from one file to the next.

Unfortunately, there are a limited number of hours in a day to work on the project, especially when I still had to go to work, and complete other class assignments, as well. I had all kinds of plans and concepts that never made it to the final book design, simply because of that lack of time.

One weakness I know I have is that I will hyperfocus on certain details in my art, and do so for far too long, not helped by being a perfectionist sometimes... I would get stuck in a loop of needing to

make my art perfectly match the vision in my head, spending half the day on something that should have probably taken two hours at most. Unfortunately, this only increased the feeling of being overwhelmed by this or that project, leading to creative burnout... Moments like that were the hardest part about trying to complete this project. Setting a timer is helping me get past that loop, but that feeling may always affect me.

One thing that did help in the end was working on something that wasn't a digital painting or drawing. I did a lot of work this semester for Monsters of Aslamere within Phoenix's Capsule Collection course... One of those assignments was carving out and printing linocut prints. This particular image is a confrontation between Kai and a giant monster, riding their aerial mount.... Lino cut isn't a medium I use often, but sitting down and carving up the board made for a great change of pace from my usual methods of drawing on my ipad.

And the kind of break I ultimately needed, because I was ready to go at everything else again not long after.

Capsule Collection also gave me the opportunity to create a variety of stickers and enamel pins for Monsters of Aslamere to sell. PNCA Capsule Collection has a pop up shop that went live last Friday and will continue until the end of the semester. I also intend on attending the Makers Market here in two weeks to sell any other products and get table experience for any conventions I attend in the future.

Here I stand before you all now, with a completed book project that I've spent two years working on. The original plan involved a much larger book at 48 pages. Doing that would've been tossing in everything and the kitchen sink however, which is admittedly everything that has gone into this slideshow instead. So, this is one of the (many) times I got pulled back and more focused on the final product, which turned into 36 pages, instead...

Actually getting the book printed brought its own challenges. The Picture Book classes did give me experience with how to print and bind books, but I kept going back and forth on whether I wanted to do a 12x8 perfect bind or a 9x6 saddle-stitch.

Going with the 9x6 ultimately ended up being an economical decision in the end, because it is not a cheap thing to print a book.... 12x8 would require much larger paper to print for saddle-stitch binding. And while I had the tools available to me to figure out perfect binding, I wasn't 100% confident that I could complete the gluing process without destroying at least one set of printed pages.

Despite initial concerns about 9x6 being too small, a test print showed that that wouldn't be an issue, even with the type. So I took some time to create a 19x13 document page in photoshop, creating what essentially made a 4-up page for two full spreads that I could then cut to size. While a bit of a headache making sure all the pages were where they needed to be, getting that

experience felt great because I would normally have inDesign or a PDF print figure out that separation.

## **Part 5 - The Monsters**

Of course, only part of my project was directed towards character design and map creation. With the title Monsters of Aslamere, actual monster design needed to be another large portion of this book, and takes up an equal sized chunk of it... Kai has Vanati from the start, but there are two other monsters I created back in Spring 23 specifically for Kai to use as actual mounts further into their journey. Finding these monster mounts would entail a specific quest or random encounter to find out in the world, where Kai needs to perform a task in order to gain these monsters as allies.

The first is the Byrahmen, a lizard mount that can reach high speeds on land and climb short cliffs with its sharp claws. The roar it makes would be a cross between a toad's loud croak and a crocodile's grumble hiss. One idea I had on how Kai gains this

one's trust is that they all ended up stuck in a cave-in for a few days. The Byrhamen ended up injured and so Kai nurses it back to health, and then the two work together to get out. It sticks around afterwards, and eventually Kai is able to train it as a mount.... No one has ever successfully done so before, so this act becomes a turning point in Aslamere's story on what is possible with monsters.

The second mount is a Kynevhak, which looks like a massive lion with wings and a feathered mane. The idea I had here is that Kai has to actually fight this one in order to earn its respect...After a fight that leads to Kynevhak being trapped and submitting in defeat, it's surprised when Kai just takes some notes and releases it, instead of killing it. Intrigued by this smaller being, Kynevhak follows Kai around for a while, defending them from other larger monsters.... It takes some time and care, but eventually the Kynevhak allows Kai to get on its back in order to

fly around Aslamere's skies, which is also the only way to get to certain areas or encounter specific aerial-based monsters.

When it comes to my other monster designs, styles and techniques changed depending on when I created them. Some are based on animals or mythical creatures of Earth that already exist, with personalized flairs, while others are creatures that I've created myself by combining features and shapes and shaking them in a blender.... Most of the time, I simply sketch the designs out first, or make general reference sketches of the features I want to combine before figuring out how to fuse...

Once I have a design I like, then I can fiddle with silhouette designs to find a good shape. In the end, I probably had almost 100 designs in some form or another.

The decision for how some of them got fully finished was admittedly sometimes not very purposeful. For some, I needed

this or that design for another image or it plays some kind of role in the story.... More than anything, though, the decision came down to just liking some concepts more than others, regardless of the role or environment that particular monster may play in the story or world.

Organizing them onto pages within the book depended mostly on where the monster is found, whether it's an aquatic creature, has the ability to fly, or is purely a ground-based monster. But only the ones that got more detailed work got added into the book.

One suggestion from Chuck was creating a set of monsters that could act as big story bosses, something that is much more of a threat or harder to find and research. That's where two of these designs came in; a sea beast that can cause massive waves with its tail, and a sky dragon with some control over weather, causing storms and lightning strikes.

I definitely have favorites amongst them all, of course. I'm fully biased towards Vanati's design, I will freely admit that. But of the

ones I created within the last few months, this particular bunch holds that crown. Roachbear was especially fun.

Kai's primary mission is to make a record of all of Aslamere's monsters. How they do so will vary between each monster – where they're located, whether they would be considered a prey or predator monster, how big or small they are, if it's solitary or a herd group... The main forms of research would involve sneaking up and hiding somewhere out of sight long enough to get the notes needed – most likely shown through a progress percentage bar of some kind. Aslamere has numerous kinds of fruits and vegetables that Kai can collect to use as bait – either to lure a monster somewhere or distract it. Over time, some monsters will grow used to Kai's presence enough to allow them closer, even take food and pets from them.

Ultimately, getting the monster's information completed will allow for the option of taming it for village use. Kai will receive requests from either the leaders or another non player character to collect

something that may help with a certain task.... Larger monsters can assist with travel or farming. Fishermen may ask for an aquatic monster to help with fishing by luring schools nearby. Others may be requested for some kind of material the monster produces, like wool or honey....Monsters with mineral features can help craftsmen with tool manufacturing. Fire-based monsters can heat a kiln that results in metal tools being possible....

At first, only the Che'naku village will receive these kinds of boosts provided by monster taming. But once word gets out to the other villages about how much the village has grown because of this, they all start to ask for Kai's help, too....

This is a midpoint conflict I was thinking about for Monsters of Aslamere's story, because tensions initially get high and alliances may almost break because of the fear monsters cause in the people. The player's response will have an effect on the rest of the story, because it could turn into a balancing act of finding monsters to suit everyone's needs.... Not all monsters can be

tamed, and some can only be suggested to certain villages depending on home environment, but each of them will level up the society in some way that provides some kind of upgrade to Kai's gear and supplies.

There's one monster that did get a lot of work over and over again, and it's the Magma Drake. It's been suggested throughout this whole process that I needed some kind of climax or end-game threat. Which is where this beast comes in. Hints of it would be found all over Aslamere, either in nonplayer character dialogue, particularly from Aldara's stories, or landscape features like ancient cave paintings.

A titanous monster with tremendous power, it's a world level threat that would require a lot of help in order to defeat. An idea I had was that this is something that was sealed away long ago, maybe even by the deity of this world that I spoke about earlier... Kai accidentally stumbles upon this sealed ground during their

adventure, and releases it without understanding what it was. One of those “curiosity killed the cat” scenarios.

When anyone in Aslamere thinks of a horrible, village destroying monster, this is what comes up in nightmares.

Regarding the design for this, I wanted something almost dragon-like, and even initially went with the generic winged, fire-breathing dragon at first. But then the idea of it being sealed in a mountain somewhere led to the idea of it being almost like a volcanic eruption on a destructive scale.... So, I dialed in on the magma rock aspect, while adding design elements like the scorpion tail to increase the Magma Drake’s menacing shape. That tail is dripping with molten rock, ready to melt anything it strikes. The inside of its mouth shows that its entire core is white-hot lava, ready to belch out in giant bursts...

How it gets defeated and resealed, especially considering its size, is something I’m still considering. My linocut print was a concept of everyone in Aslamere gathering to help fight the beast, but how

it gets taken down and resealed is still up in the air. But ultimately, the Magma Drake does get defeated, and Monsters of Aslamere's main story will come to its conclusion. There are probably some areas of the map permanently changed by its rampage, and that might lead to additional post-game content, but otherwise, life moves on as it did before... Kai goes back to completing the monster book, quests still come in for certain monsters, but Kai is now much more careful while they explore Aslamere...

They have always wanted to show that not all monsters need to be feared. But the Magma Drake proved as a reminder that some in this world will always rightfully deserve that fear.

## **Part 6 - Key Art Illustrations**

Outside of Characters and Monsters, creating moments of key art that show the world became important as well. Where possible, I used my class assignments to create these.

A good example of this is in Jason McNamara's Graphic Novel class, for the assignment of eight perspective shots of a single scene. As a way to show my work process, I included all eight of those perspectives into the book.... This scene shows Kai after they tracked what they thought was a normal monster for food hunting.

What they end up finding is something much older and more powerful instead. This stag is a forest guardian spirit that should definitely not be hunted, and so it regards Kai as they stare in shock.

Of the eight, the worm-eyed-view is what I decided to turn into a full-colored piece, because it's the one that gave most of the power of the piece to the guardian.

One decision about this piece is that I ultimately gave Aslamere two moons, one smaller than the other. A second moon helps add a unique feature to the sky that marks it as otherworldly and Not-Earth.

After some back and forth with color and value, I used a digital zorn palette that Todd Hagler had created and uploaded for free use to the ProcreateFolio website. If any of you use Procreate frequently, like I do, I definitely recommend this as a download, because it creates the palette swatches directly into the app.

The two moons from the previous piece are shown in another showing one of Aslamere's landmark features – the Crystal Glow Oasis and the Zu'kavi village that is settled on the water's edge. Magical glowing crystals grow from the center of the lake, spreading out. The only village I had ever drawn before was the Che'naku village, so I wanted to draw at least one more.

This next piece was an early semester market project in Zach Meyer's Advanced Illustration Class, where I wanted to get a general feeling of Kai quietly interacting with their environment and other monsters. I wanted to have a moment to show how the other monsters get used to Kai, and just see them as a part of the environment and Not a Threat.

Another moment of landscape key art is a group of monsters drinking around a lake. A lot of my pieces before this had monsters in an environment at a distance or from the back, so this was an option to show some living normally in Aslamere, without Kai's presence in the actual piece.

Chuck suggested that I needed a few gameplay specific key art moments, which led to the following prints... The first is Kai interacting with a monster up close. This point-of-view-perspective of petting a camelmoose is one of the few moments in game where it would go first person, since I intend most of it to be over the shoulder, third person gameplay. This particular moment is me just trying to emphasize the dopey cuteness of some of the monsters, especially once Kai starts feeding and petting them.

The primary purpose of the game is to research monsters, but the question of what that looks like specifically is why I created this next piece. Kai is hiding somewhere, trying not to be noticed long enough to fill the progress bar. Targeting circles would show

where monsters the player could research were, with a highlight outline on the primary target. ...

The Heads Up Display on the screen would be relatively clear. In the bottom corner would be a circle map showing the immediate area centered on Kai with spots of interest highlighted. In another corner would be button controls, the ones I have here being; Inventory Bag, Research Book, Weapon Choice, and calling for Vanati to perform some kind of action.... Game development would change the specifics of that, as well as console choice, but that's the general idea.

Being able to look at that monster book, what monsters have been completed, and where they are found is an important part of the game. This piece of art shows how that would look like. The name of the monster is available in both Aslameran and English - a way to showcase this bit of worldbuilding in a way for the player to see. Information on the page would consist of a sketch of the monster, that would get more detailed depending on how much

that research bar has been filled. Other information is vague size comparisons, footprints, and a visual of the map, with the location area highlighted.

## **Part 7 – Going forward**

Taking Monsters of Aslamere onwards from this point, I'll be using the book as a portfolio piece to find future work. But as I've said, I want this to become a video game one day. That will take time, luck, and likely a lot more work, just to get a developer to take it on. I don't currently know where to take it, but I do know that I may have to expect more "no"s before finally getting that "yes."

One place Chuck suggested to me was Portland's Indie Game Squad. They hold a variety of events for people to gather and share ideas, and network with other developers and artists. Going to those, and bringing the Monsters of Aslamere book with me, is definitely something I plan on doing, along with taking it to other conventions.

Currently, I see this game sitting in that space between the kid-friendly Pokemon series and the more mature Monster Hunter games. I want it to be able to show the true danger Aslamere presents to the characters, which may require a higher rating. At the same time, making it open to younger audiences so that they might be able to learn something about how animal domestication played a role in the development of early civilization. This could involve charities that focus on wildlife or environment protection, because of how some monsters are marked as no-domestication, or maybe even natural history museums due to the early-civilization aspect.

My inclusion of transgender characters, through Kai and Charis, comes from a desire to normalize the concept to whatever audience it comes to. Even from the beginning, Kai was nonbinary. We need more lgbtq+ characters across media, now more than ever, to show how normal it is for transgender people to exist in society. This is especially important in light of what

happened earlier this month with our elections. We have always existed. Having some transgender characters in an early-civilization world is my way of showing that.

But I'm not here to talk about politics. I've been standing here telling you about my thesis project, the Monsters of Aslamere. A 36-page video game concept art book that has taken on a variety of other forms of media over the last two years I've worked on it. In a world of harsh survival, Kai's mission is to create a complete monster book about all of Aslamere's monsters, a research journey that will take them all over the continent. Their final goal is to show the people who currently fear all monsters that they can actually aid society, even if some monsters should be kept away from it.

Thank you all for coming to my thesis defense. I now open it up to the panel to ask whatever questions they have about Monsters of Aslamere, before we open to the rest of the room.