

## Introduction

Hello everyone, thank you kindly for coming here today. My name is Ale and as many of you know, I'm an international student from Peru. Before coming to PNCA I worked in an animation studio back home and taught part time, but left it to chase my dreams, an education and career in the United States. I often joked with my mom that I did everything backwards, I went to art school and drop out, I got a job, I taught at art school, and then I went back to school to get my undergraduate degree. Even though that was definitely an unconventional route, I wouldn't change it, and I'm happy of my decision to come to the United States and to this school. This project is the culmination not just of my career here in PNCA from the past two years and a half, but it is a project that was born years before that. It started off as a 3 character line up I quickly made for the first year I applied to PNCA back in 2020, that I picked up again a couple years later when I was fortunate enough to be chosen by Jessie Kate for her amazing mentorship program's work and study option and it was here when I expanded their story and design.

This is be a visual development project, in which I developed a story around three young witches who are all misfits in their own disciplines. In a world in which magic is slowly disappearing, and you can only practice the kind of magic you are born with. An unconventional friendship is born between a healer who would rather break bones instead of fixing them, a necromancer terrified of the dark and everything spooky, and a summoner who is unable to summon in the conventional way who comes from a background of all witches with food related powers.

In this project I will show character designs, interactions, prop and background designs and key story moments, which I plan to develop further once I graduate into a visual novel or, if possible, an animated project pitch in the future. In an ideal world this would be something like Hilda. How it went from comic to a netflix series.

This is the kind of show I would have liked to binge watch as a child and even now as an adult. To me, as a neurodivergent person, building friendships has always been tricky. This project is all about not just the friendships between the main characters but also how their differences play such a crucial role in their story. None of these characters do magic in the traditional way their world so strongly demands them to, and all of them had to go through a process of self discovery to figure out how to make things work in a way they are comfortable with. I believe most people here are familiar with me, so you will probably be aware that during the course of my education in PNCA I became disabled myself, a huge part of this was discovering how to function with a new set of challenges, and without realizing I introduced this into my characters. Things that come easy for everyone else are impossible for them, but none let this become an obstacle between them and their goals. At the end of the day, while this is a story about magic, fantasy and adventures, my biggest concern was to make these characters deep and relatable. This is a work celebrating problem solving, found family and also your blood family, and breaking stereotypes, celebrating differences.

This is a story about three witches who are forced to go to a magical university per the new rules, something required of all those born with magic, but these three witches just don't fit their powers. One of them thinks the system is stupid, the other is too terrified of everything her powers mean, and the last does not agree with how abilities like hers have been used through the ages. Together they will unveil mysteries, conspiracies and a web of lies that seems to get deeper and deeper, and they will find themselves in the middle of it.

I would like you to meet the cast!

However, before we go further into depth with these characters, I would like to show you how they have evolved with the years. I went through multiple passes of style tests while also figuring out the designs they would have. There was a time where I was changing the style almost daily, and they have gone from being kind of anime-inspired to something extremely cartoony that you would expect from a western 3D feature film.

First, we have the summoner, she is a really happy girl who loves to cook and she will give you a hug. That is a promise. She smells like pancakes and absolutely loves taking care of her friends, making sure everyone is taking care of themselves, sometimes to a degree that might annoy some people. Her design was one of my favorites to me, as I am the most comfortable with designs with a lot of very curved, flowy lines. I took special attention to make her bubbly personality shine with bright and saturated colors, especially yellow as it is usually associated with being a color representing happiness and sunshine. Her design was thought with the intention of having a lot of movement but I also considered giving her an apron of sorts to reflect her role as someone who cooks a lot and has food as something extremely important to her. Her hat was a tough choice, since I wanted to give her a chef's hat at first but the silhouette wasn't working as it was no longer recognizable as a witch hat, however, after some investigation I discovered that the hat of a chef has one fold per each way they know how to cook an egg, so I decided to add the folds on her hat.

Her clothes are loosely inspired by safari outfits, as they were the main source of inspiration for the summoners for their connection not only to taming creatures, but also to the original routes of the uniform, colonization and control, which is what they do to the creatures they summon from the magical realm.

For the necromancer, I was inspired by the character design of "Fear" in Inside Out. I will never forget a video about shape language in which a designer explained that the main shape for that character was a squiggly line, representing his anxiety, and I wanted to do something similar to that. Her personality is extremely anxious and jumpy, she is terrified of anything dark and scary and I wanted her design to show that. The tip of her hat goes over her face, which she sometimes pulls and hides behind. While designing her I wanted her to be very covered, almost as if she was trying to hide herself from the world. She is someone who would rather stay in a place she deems safe, and something that helps comfort her are soft blankets, which is why she chooses to have a soft, fluffy sweater. Her color palette is overall very dark and muted, I chose to go with dark colors as they fit the kind of magic she does, however her sweater is much lighter, this is because unlike everything else, her sweater is not part of the usual wardrobe of a

necromancer. She does not use her powers at all, but by not doing so and not engaging with the dead as she should, she is neglecting herself as well, which causes her to always be cold. This is the reason why, while the other two are wearing short sleeves and even shorts, she still dresses like it's much colder. I would also like to point out that the flower on her hat is a spider lily, which has a meaning of death, afterlife and life's transience, which are all related to her powers. The necromancers have a long story of using their power for evil purposes, and even though her family has tried to great lengths to get away from it, the past haunts them. They also believe her to be a complete disappointment, because while she is powerful, she is extremely scared of what she could do and what her powers mean, so she is too scared to even try and is even happy of staying that way... though, for how long?

The healer was the hardest one for me, as I explained with the summoner, curved lines are the easiest for me, and I found great difficulty in a design with harder, straight lines. For her I wanted to focus on a design that showed how sporty she is and doing something that would greatly separate her from the rest of her peers. While the top half of her outfit is the healer's outfit, the bottom half are just joggers. She doesn't really care with fitting in with the rest of the healers, she knows that just by her body type and personality she never will, so by being even more obvious with her fashion choices she is kind of drawing a hard line between them. I wanted to design something that would allow her easy movement, as she is much more a fighter than she is a healer. The healer puts great effort on her body, especially because she comes from a family where everyone has magic related to body-enhancement and strength, the magical differences between her and the rest of her relatives were too much for her to bear, so she tried to be as strong as she could without using magic. Her siblings make fun of her often, and to be honest she is still not happy with it. Healers are known to be physically weak, though extremely necessary to society of course, but she just never expected to be one of them. Even though her desire to become strong was born by the need to fit in with the rest of her family, it develops into a desire to be able to protect her friends. While the necromancer could be absolutely powerful and terrifying herself, physically she is weak, and she cannot use magic to protect herself, so the healer will do it for her.

I would now like to talk a bit about some important moments of their stories.

The summoner has never been able to summon anything, because in her opinion the whole practice is wrong. However, it is one fateful day when she is joking around in her family's kitchen that hey, her cooking is SO good actually, it can definitely bring a magical creature from their realm. And it actually works. For this piece I wanted to focus on her WHOA, WHAT?! Expression, an "I DID THE THING!!!!" moment of pure joy and triumph. This piece was hard because of the angle and I ended up trying to find out multiple different ways to do it until I eventually landed on this one thanks to the help from my mentor. In the first iterations the summoner was the one in the foreground but this was just not quite working, so I am happy with the result!

For the necromancers moment, I wanted to show a vulnerable and scary moment. She has found a way to keep the spirits at bay for the most part, but these protections end in her room,

and the spirits have noticed this, so they started chasing her around. For this illustration I went with a dutch angle for a more dramatic effect, and I also wanted to go for a dramatic light effect, playing with the light and shadows, showing something only she can see. While the shadows she and the objects around her cast are purple, I opted out for a green tone for the spirit's shadow, to emphasize the unnatural element of it. I also thought this angle plus the poses would help deliver the message that she's being pushed, cornered into a situation she's extremely uncomfortable with, and completely terrified of. One of my biggest challenges with this piece was that at the beginning, the shadows felt too flat, but I realized that by basically cutting the shadow to pieces and moving them along with the volumes of the background, that problem was solved!

Lastly, for the healer's piece, this was the "Oh... Oh no" moment in which her fears are confirmed to be true. She has been suspecting the healers are actually up to no good for a long time, but couldn't put her finger on why at first. It's not until she sees the medicine they have given the necromancer for her anxiety that she connects the dots, they have been lying to them, those pills don't help with anxiety, they make it worse, they induce paranoia, and she still doesn't know what they could possibly want with her, so... she starts sneaking around. And it is at this moment when she discovers the master of this faction has a hidden door in her office between some bookshelves, and she feels a terribly dark energy coming from behind. My biggest difficulty with this piece was I couldn't really figure out how I wanted the values to go, but I ended up setting for a dark foreground with a suspicious, unnatural light coming from the secret door.

Now, let's get to see a bit more of them. First i would like to talk about the summonners prop.

(Something that was always really important to me was highlighting the friend dynamic, and how everyone helps each other. I made this a huge part when designing her prop, a portable kitchen. The base of it was provided by the healer who stole it. I mean, borrowed an apothecary box from the other healers, the plates and most ingredients were provided by the necromancer, as well as the sigil used to make it light and easy to transport, and the eternal fire was provided by her new allies, the dragons. It was assembled all together with the help of her family. This allows her to cook on the go in case she needs to make an important summon that requires a more complicated dish.

Showing off their personalities was, of course, a priority during this project, I worked on a series of expressions for each. I believe the one with the biggest range of emotions, at least the ones she will show, is the summonner. I wanted to focus on making her super expressive, being someone who doesn't shy away from showing off her emotions or telling you how she feels. For the necromancer, she is way more reserved, she will usually hide her face behind her big fluffy hair of her hat, and her insecurity and anxiety are also obvious in how she expresser herself. Lastly, for the healer, she is much more.... Grumpy. She has alot of rage from how she feels within her family and is not afraid to show it, she is, at the end, someone who has more violent tendencies than the other two and definitely should seek healthier ways of coping.

(HOUSE, PRINT HOUSE)

As I mentioned before, for the summonner, cooking is extremely important. It is the way her family bonds together, and they help their community as well, she cannot imagine a life without her kitchen. If you pay close attention, you might realize some of these items are... mismatched. Some of the handles in the furniture have broken off with time, however her family does not have a lot of money to properly fix it, so they make do with what they have. It is a little cluttered but every single thing there has a reason. Putting together this room was a huge challenge, because not only for all of the elements contained in it, but also because of how to make the palette cohesive with so many things? How to tell the story only with just this one image? Does it have enough personality? Am I showing enough? Or is it too much? Part of the challenge was involved in how to organize the clutter, so it does not look like an unorganized mess. This piece took a really long time, from initial idea to finalized result. But it is in my opinion the best background design I have ever made, so it feels like a huge step up for me.

The necromancer's room was tricky. She is organized and clean, and this posed as a challenge because at the end of the day, you have to make a room feel lived in. In her story I explained she took some precautions against spirits, however it is an extremely simple, almost childish solution. They show up mostly in shadows, so what do you do? Make sure to have as little shadows as possible! She has covered her entire room in as many lights as she can get her hands on, even getting some night lights meant for toddlers. Her room is has an ever growing collection of posters and random things covering her walls, why? Because the spirits started to get... a little aggressive, even leaving marks on her walls. Instead of facing this problems head on, though, she decided to.... Hide them, cover them and pretend they are not there. I dont think i need to elaborate on why this is an absolutely terrible plan, of course, but I am sure it is one many of us will find relatable. Her room was a challenge because of that window design, I first planned to model this off of sketch up to make my life easier, something i have done many times before, however sketch up woke up and chose chaos that day, deleting all of my progress, and i was pretty frustrated with technology at that point so i decided. Return to roots. Box. I went to my kitchen, raided the recycling bin, and made a new maquette to go off of with a frozen box. The pizza was. Okay. It was great value but it worked! And i drew over that!

The original scope of this project was way bigger, planning to explore their world further by designing the people that surround them and other places in their university, however this was planned by working during summer break, and this schedule took in consideration the time i would be unable to work due to a surgery. What I did not expect, however, was needing two surgeries over the summer. Another difficulty was that due to my health, working on certain periods became extremely hard as my arm would start hurting to the point of noticeable tremors, which made me have to change my workflow, using the pen tool on photoshop and the line tool in clip studio for lines, and avoid lines if possible and relying more on shapes. Having to adapt to these changes made me learn different workflows and tests which were more useful, fast and viable with the current limitations. A minor problem I also encountered was that I planned to use sketchup from the beginning to make the process of designing backgrounds easier, however some unexpected issues with data loss with this program forced me to take a more

unconventional route. After losing hours of work and having a lack of interest in doing so again, I went to my kitchen and built a starting point for my room layout with a frozen pizza box.

As for the audience of this project, I expect it to be most likely a 13+ project, with themes that can get dark at times such as in the owl house or adventure time, or centaur world. Dear lord, centaur world.

Looking back at this work now and keeping in mind how much I want to expand this project, I do wish I had been able to create more during this period of time, however I still felt I learned a lot. While I have a background with character design and some with background and prop design, doing illustrations such as the key story moments was something I have not taken the time previously to explore, and this experience pushed me to do something like this, which has always seemed quite intimidating. Mixing character acting with a background had always seemed like a daunting task but I am proud of the work I achieved this past few months.

In the end, I am extremely proud of my work, as finishing projects has always been hard for me. I'm grateful to my professors, who have had a lot of patience with me as I learned how to work with my condition and new reality and always offered nothing but support and words of encouragement. I am grateful to my family, who have been a huge source of inspiration with the summoner's family, as food has always been such a huge part of our culture and they believed me when I threw the crazy idea that I wanted to leave the country to study in the US and stayed behind me the four years it took me to finally be able to get the financial aid needed to chase my dreams, also for the many times I went asking if someone could please pose. To my mom for being my number one fan and allowing me to rant my ideas like a mad woman at unholy hours of the night, and also put with the piles of paper I had thrown around the house. I don't know if they will ever see this, but my biggest thanks to the William Jamison Memorial for their extremely kind scholarship, you are the reason I was able to be here today, and I am beyond grateful for this. Thank you for making my dream possible. To Jessie Kate for choosing me all those years ago! You rock, thanks for believing in me. To Pann, Shou, Land, Zheng and Ray because I really would have never made it here if it wasn't for all of your help with art. To Allison Perry because you were literally like. One of the biggest helps regarding art I ever got and also one of the reasons why I am here. To my friends, both online and in real life, in Peru, the US and around the world who have stuck with me through this crazy ride, to all the help some of you have provided art wise and the crits and reviews when I was still trying to come here. MASSIVE thanks to Tania, Lazaro, Vivi and Comix for helping me color the character expressions and special poses when my arm couldn't keep going anymore. Gracias a mi abuela, y esta va en español para ti, por la paciencia y el cariño y todo lo que has hecho por mí, incluso cuando no tenías idea de lo que estaba hablando. Thanks to the friends in my fandom, the one we do not talk about, because a lot of the ideas I threw around in the chat provided critical inspiration for this project. But yeah that fandom is between us and god. Thank you for always hyping me up even when I didn't make any sense.

To everyone who contributed to this project, by words of encouragement, or sweet treats when my mental health was hanging by a thread, to everyone who contributed to me being able to be

here. This was a teamwork, and I could have never been able to do any of this alone. To me, this project is extremely personal but also, it feels like coming full circle, since that first drawing I applied to schools with, to the final project I am finishing my education with.

It is my dream that one day I can publish this and make something with it, and even if it does not work out, these three witches, this little world was part of my life during times of change. It saw me go from hopefully an art student, to a professional artist to a student in the country of my dreams. I was with me when I was healthy, and then when I wasn't, and I think if my character figured out how to create a completely different method for summoning, maybe i can figure this out too.

