

Introduction

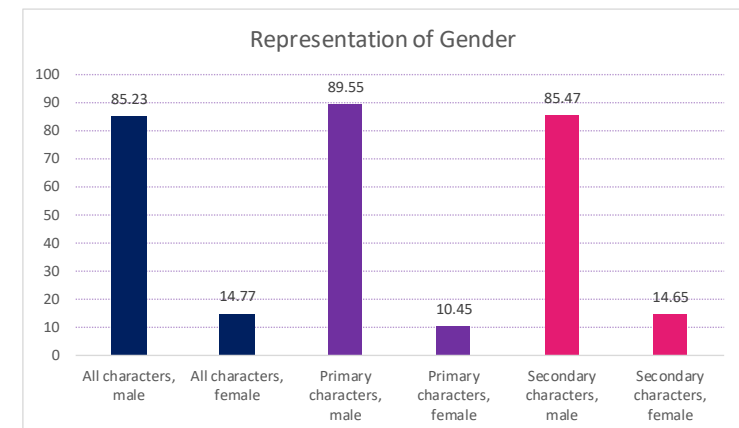
The Path to Realization

Games were not always my go-to companion. Feeling burnt out from a string of multiplayer defeats due to my lack of motor skills, I left the controller behind, only to pick it back up as a preteen when my older sister headed off to college. The simple, colorful worlds that kept me entertained for hours in their simplicity were not just pretty pictures that I could stroll through; they were worlds I could interact and have fun in. Titles with bright worlds and easy to draw characters like Sonic were what initially pulled me back, but as I grew older and more adept, games with more nuanced approaches to storytelling and worldbuilding like Earthbound kept me interested. Everyone has trouble figuring out what they want in their teenage years - I wanted to be everything from a marine biologist, to a veterinarian, to an interior designer, to an animator. Part of me is still unsure what my exact path in life will be, but if I make at least one game, I'll be satisfied.

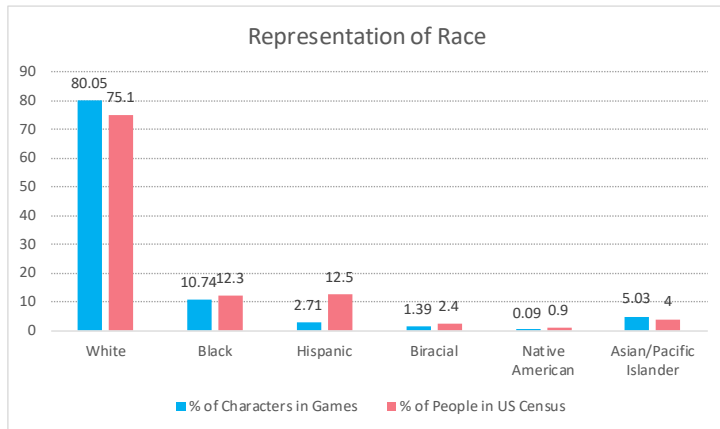
Once my true interest in game design started to grow, I started paying closer attention to what I was looking at when I played. While I had (and still have) definite preferences in genre, I liked to try or at least research lots of different games just to see what it's like. Many a night, I sat with a controller in hand, or hands hovering over the keyboard, furiously taking in as much information as possible. Time and time again, I noticed a disappointing but unsurprising trend - across the board; game worlds are populated by straight, gritty white men with a bone to pick. Even in games where you can create your own character, the "default" protagonist on the box is almost always a white man. In games where women are the stars, mechanics are frequently steeped in a sexist veneer, leaving rarer titles who present women as simply people open to harsh, unwarranted criticism by upset fanboys who want to forget that half of the world exists. Furthermore, in games where the protagonist is from a racial

minority, they commonly fall victim to racist design decisions, or, again, when represented in a faithful light, heavily criticized. Looking deeper, LGBTQ+ characters, situations and themes are barely present. The few times where it is included in big titles, it's presented as an inconvenient romance option, a stereotype, something for the fans to mod out. In indie titles, queer themes make a comfortable and more genuine niche, but are, again, open to vicious criticism. Deeper still, games are full of traps for potential disabled players - strobe effects that cannot be turned off for players with epilepsy, terrible or no support for players who are colorblind, lack of control binding for players with a physical impairment, and a smarmy disdain for scaling difficulty which opens play for more people across all abilities. I still love my favorite games, but almost all of them have one or more of these issues. Moving forward from this realization, I tentatively began to plan my own game, but wanted the research to back up my design decisions before they were pulled to the stake by a mob of angry male 20-somethings online.

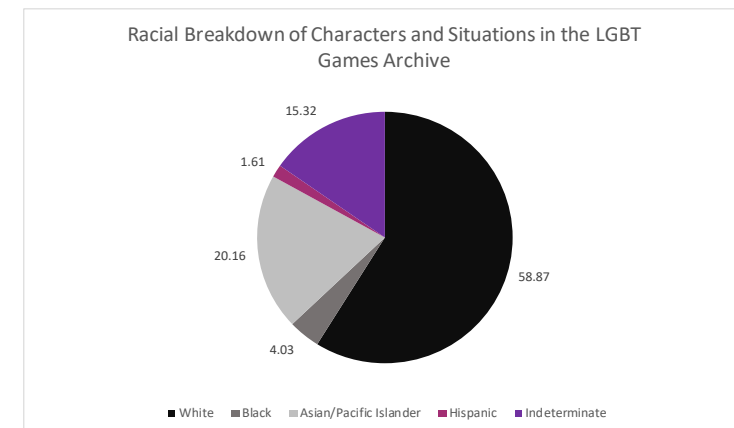
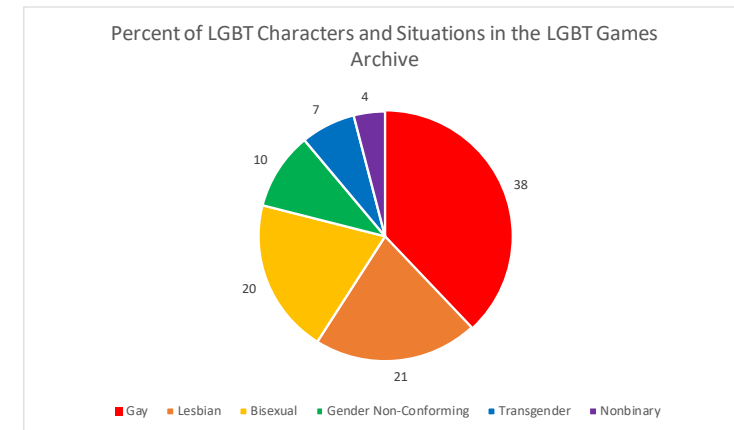
In a "virtual census" conducted from a sample of 8,572 game characters in 2009, a team of researchers found the numbers to back up my suspicion that games are inherently white male centric. As detailed in the recreated graphs below, there are overall more male characters by a margin of over 70%. The difference between male and female main characters is dismal; men outnumber women as main characters by nearly 80%.



When looking critically at the representation of race, the numbers are even worse. White characters are represented in 80% of games - the remaining 20% are all other races. The study compared these numbers to data gathered from the US Census, where the only groups that are realistically or over-represented are Caucasians and Asians/Pacific Islanders (Williams et. al., 2009). There are games that the study did not cover due to the time it was published, but in the following nine years, there has not been much noticeable change in the industry based on current trends.



Based on the dutiful research of Adrienne Shaw and her LGBTQ+ Games Archive, queer representation does not fare much better. Out of the over thirty thousand video games that have been made since the art form's inception in the 1980's, only about 250 have any sort of mention of queer characters or themes (Mejeur, 2018). Of those 250, the situations and characters represented are mostly gay men or lesbian women (59%, again shown in below in a recreated graph), with the remaining 41% including all instances of bisexuality and gender nonconformity (Utsch and Bragança, 2017). In consideration to the intersection between queer characters and characters of color, the data is even more disappointing; almost 60% of queer characters in games are white, reflecting trends in other popular mass media.



The lack of representation is not altogether that surprising. Most older forms of pop media such as film, television and comics have had longer to establish themselves and potentially fix this problem, yet, they still have not. Video games are a very young art form, and a vocal minority of fans make it difficult for better representations to happen. In 2015, a series of events colloquially known as GamerGate reared the ugly head of gamers (almost all white and male) who wanted to remain the imaginary majority (Ruberg, 2017). Angry over imagined slights caused by the "wide-spread feminist takeover of games", they carried out a campaign of rumors, slander, harassment, and stalking of several

game developers, reviewers, and fans who did not share their opinion.

The same types of men linger on forums, perpetuating and defending racist and/or sexist stereotypes like in the critically panned *Resident Evil 5* (Mckernan, 2015), or harassing other players during online play because they “sound black”, “sound gay”, or “sound like a woman”. It doesn’t help that these depictions are often built on violence-driven narratives that black gamers are split on in the first place (Gray, 2018), giving them the entitlement to make assumptions without thinking critically. All these issues build off each other, despite seeming like separate failings. The more one delves into a group or society, the more apparent it is that they relate to every other group in some small way. To improve representation, attention must be paid to all components of diversity so that they can flourish together (Shaw, 2018).

Attention to diversity is doubly important when it comes to gamers with a disability. Not only are they poorly represented within games, they are often blocked from playing games due to their control styles. There are a select few games made specifically for disabled gamers to be used as effective therapy tools for motor training and cognitive practice (Molina-Carmona et. al., 2017), but scientists and society tend to forget that people also like to just play games for fun. In a Swedish study of disabled gamers, they learned that video games are effective stress release and entertainment, and a way to forge and maintain friendships when they may not have the mobility otherwise, either through online play or communities. However, sometimes they need the help of abled family members or friends for certain repetitive tasks, do not have the same stamina as other players, or outright cannot play certain games due to the inflexibility of their controls (Wästerfors and Hansson, 2017). Thanks to the Library of Congress, there is a long list of resources of disability support options for game makers, disabled gamers and their allies, which I will include in the back of this book for additional reading.

Manifesto

Making Games to Get Inspired By

In preparation for my research, I happened upon Anna Anthropy’s book, *Rise of the Videogame Zinesters*. Her perspective was truly enlightening; as long as there are widely available tools, anyone can make a game, and the games market would be better off for it. The wider a pool of creators is, the more stories, perspectives and out-of-the-box mechanics will come to fruition (Anthropy, 2012). Before I sat down with the book, I was obsessed with being perfect, dreaming that if I worked hard enough in the shadows, I would become the next indie darling and show the world my dream. After finishing it, I realize that perfection is neither expected or possible, and that just by making it, I am changing the world one small step at a time. Since the book’s release in 2012, there have been a slew of weird, different, and profound games that have lit a fire under me. But even before then, I have slowly been thinking about what I would want people to take from my works in the future.

As the years have passed and I have slowly grown used to the responsibility of moving up from a kid with a dream to an adult with a dream, I have spent countless hours dreaming about my perfect game, working in a team with other developers, and eventually carving out my own niche. Every time, I remember why I wanted to make games in the first place; I was inspired. I sat down and became enraptured in another world, went on an adventure, and felt deeply for the pixels I controlled on the screen. As a developer, I want to stoke that feeling in others, and eventually see games made by people I inspired.

With that in mind, I take my long standing inspiration as a responsibility to create a world where people of all backgrounds are not only present, but shown in a realistic, non-stereotypical way. Not only will I continue my research of different cultures, sexualities and genders, I plan on networking from people from these communities to get their direct perspective and critique. While I have an open mind, I have only lived through my

experiences. There are limits to my knowledge that can only be filled by the accounts of people who have lived through them, which is a reality I welcome.

Thus, we move on from the research to the meat of the project; a world that I hope will inspire future game developers. My first planned title, *A Very Catty Game*, follows the story of a young bounty hunter who wakes up to find her best friend and brother missing from their shared house. She sets out to find them, only to find her backyard full of angry animals and the country's Crown Prince offering a ridiculously large amount of money to protect him on a journey of self discovery. Along the way, they form a group of colorful characters to unravel a conspiracy that traces all the way back to the mother she escaped as a child. While the current material is not in its complete state, I want to utilize my research to help CB, the Prince and their friends come alive.

A Very Catty Game

As it is Now, and How it Will Be

In this project, my intent is to show as much of the foundation for this game as possible both in effort to share my research, and share my story with other interested parties. As such, while the contents to follow are complete from my self imposed standard in August of 2018, the true nature of this project is for it to grow, change, and evolve as I work and research more.

As it stands now, I have been quietly working on *A Very Catty Game* for the better part of six years, beginning on a whim in my freshman year of high school. It has come a long way since then, and I expect that it will go a long way from now. This piece will serve as an important resource and a mark on the calendar to see just how far I will go in the future.

Basic Mechanics

Movement

Due to the unfinished nature of this project, the controls are not set in stone but can still be easily explained. Using the directional buttons or joystick on the player's preferred controller, they can walk in eight directions: up, down, left, right, and their caddy corners. Holding down a certain button (for the purpose of example, the B button on a typical Nintendo controller or the Circle button on a Sony controller) can make the player character run. To interact with objects and NPCs, the player presses a separate button (ie Nintendo's A or Sony's X).

In a real time menu (separate from the pause menu, accessible from example Nintendo's X or Sony's Triangle), characters can check their inventory, character status, and choose to talk with other party members. Their dialogue would change based on who's in the party at the time and their location. This menu would also be used to access character-specific puzzle actions in dungeons.

Once the player has unlocked an area, they would be able to travel back to it utilizing subway stops. Acting as a sort of fast travel, the player can access every area they've been to previously.

Shops and Hostels

In every populated center the team visits, there is one Shop and one Hostel. In a shop, players can buy items, ask for hints, or just talk with the shop owner. If players buy a room in the hostel, they can go to sleep, recovering HP, MP and Status Effects.

Saving

When CB and company are not in danger of being attacked (such as in a Shop, Hostel, Subway Car or other unspecified building), CB can take a seat and jot down some notes in her journal, saving the game. Before fighting a boss, a different screen labelled "Last Will and Testaments" appears, allowing players to save right outside the boss room. Other save locations

include areas that have been cleared, "safe" areas (such as the interior of CB's house), and the lobby areas of dungeons.

Pausing

Players can pause the game at any time except mid-battle. From this menu, they can access the following options at any time:

- **Volume** - players can adjust the volume of music, text noises, effect noises, and other background noises.
- **Text Speed** - players can adjust the speed the text is displayed.
- **Light and Dark Contrast** - players can adjust the contrast of the overworld, battles, and submenus like the ones available in the microgames. This setting is automatically set to max on Colorblind mode.
- **Window Mode** - players can change the resolution the game is running at, as well as whether or not it is running full screen.

Puzzle Mechanics

Frequency and Reason For Inclusion

Each main area has a lead-up area with basic enemies to fight, shops, hostels, item chests and Non-Player Characters (NPCs) that the player can interact with. Puzzles only take place during the "dungeon" section of a particular area, where the player can find more enemies and a set of circumstances to reach the boss. While referred to as a dungeon for the moniker of play, the dungeon play field can be anything from a corporate basement, to a garden, to a mountain cave.

Individual Character Actions

For dungeon puzzles, most of the time the solution involves finding a key to unlock a door, obtaining an item for an NPC, flipping a switch, finding clues to a password, etc. Occasionally, to either reach these items or move onto the next area, the player characters have a small set of actions that they can perform to

reach the solution.

- CB can crawl through tight spaces (like vents), see in the dark, pick locks when they aren't broken or rusted, and climb up certain surfaces.
- The Prince can shadow step through certain walls and or/ obstacles, and use his magic to affect environmental hazards (freezing a water spout, burning a block of ice, etc).
- Dom can use Didot to sniff out where an object is hidden, see in the dark, and climb up certain surfaces.
- Lily can move or destroy certain obstacles, and knit pathways or ladders out of colorful yarn.
- Gerard can fix damaged puzzle components (like locks, doors or stairs), and purify environmental hazards like poison.
- Rosaline can move past enemies undetected with her cloak, fly over small gaps using her alternate form, and destroy heavy duty obstacles.
- Jack has a grappling hook that can take him across gaps or rapple up walls, and he can cook to satisfy an enemy or NPC.

Battle

Health, Bravado and Magic

There are 3 sets of vital numbers that players have to pay attention to in AVCG - a red bar labeled HP, and either a purple bar labeled MP or a yellow bar labeled BP. HP stands for Health Points, standing for the amount of points a character has left before they're knocked out. MP stands for Magic Points, which can spent by some characters to cast a spell. MP starts with a full bar and depletes as the player spends points. BP, or Bravado Points, can be spent by some characters to unleash a powerful attack. Unlike MP, a BP bar starts at zero and fills up as the character in question deals or takes damage.

Items

There are several items that can be found, purchased or stolen throughout the game that can replenish HP or MP. While rare, there are a few items that can replenish BP. For an extra level of

protection, there are wards that can be equipped to increase HP, MP, offense, defense, or hasten the speed of a BP or Special bar. These are not to be confused with alternate costumes; the player can put the characters in different clothes to change the character's look, but otherwise do not change gameplay.

Turn-based RPG Mechanics

A certain subset of Role-Playing Games are given the additional label of turn-based. Every playable character and enemy on the playing field has a turn to select an action before moving onto the next character's turn. In A Very Catty Game, there are four player characters active on a battlefield at a time, with up to four enemies on the opposite side. When either party attacks, they can either buff one of their own attributes, debuff their enemy, cause a status effect, or take damage. When a character takes enough damage to lower their HP to zero, they pass out and cannot take any actions. If the player has more than four characters in their party, they are immediately given the option to swap the passed out character with a healthy one that was on the back burner.

Microgames

When the player executes a player character action, they are given a microgame to complete. Microgames are short actions, such as pressing buttons in sequence, guiding an icon to a goal, or pressing a button at a certain time or within a certain graphic window. By performing a microgame well, the player character carries out an action at full capacity. If the player underperforms on a microgame, the player character carries out an action at mid-to-low capacity.

Status Effects

Certain enemies are able to inflict status effects on the player characters. These temporary states can last anywhere from four to eight typical battle turns, and effect the characters in a negative way. Either they will do damage to the character they are affecting, prevent them from attacking, or lower a status effect. There are certain items or spells that can be used to

immediately remedy status effects, but they tend to be rare and expensive (both monetarily and MP wise).

- **Asleep** - the enemy sings a slow song or releases special spores that make a character fall asleep. The character cannot attack when asleep, and is left vulnerable to damage until they wake up.
- **Burning** - an enemy uses a fire or thunder summoning move that causes a character to catch on fire. Once burning, the character takes a set amount of damage for every turn the fire isn't taken care of.
- **Drunk** - Happens most frequently when a character drinks too much alcohol, but can be caused by an enemy in some instances. When drunk, character's accuracy goes way down and the chance of hurting themselves or a teammate goes up. It follows the character outside of battle, and does not go away until the party stops at a hotel to sleep. This effect does not work on Lily or Gerard, because neither drink alcohol.
- **Frozen** - an enemy that is either made of ice or uses an ice summoning move encases a character in frost when touched. The character cannot attack, and takes a set amount of damage until they are thawed out.
- **Special Blocked** - Magic-talented enemies can remove the use of special attacks from any character. The effect lasts until the enemy's health is at 25%. In the Prince's case only, removing his powers removes his sight, which causes a small chance that he will hit a teammate.
- **Spooked** - An effect that scares a character so much that they are unable to move, let alone fight back. It deals no damage, but leaves the affected character wide open to attacks.
- **Woody** - When an enemy is especially charming, certain characters can be wooed into not attacking. This effect only works on the enemy that cast the charm, so any other enemies on the play field are fair game. This effect does not work on Lily or Rosaline.

Special Attacks

Each character has a special meter that fills up slowly by executing attacks with good accuracy and racking up combos. Like HP, MP and BP, the meter stays the same in between battles. Once full, the player can select a special, extra-powerful attack as a reward.

Alternate Forms

As opposed to special attacks, two characters have access to alternate forms when their special meters are filled. Thanks to his royal lineage, the Prince has the power of shapeshifting, telekinesis and extreme magical ability thanks to a hidden third eye. His alternate form, Shadow Step, is the product of arcane fire blending with his soul to create a protective shield around his entire body, giving him the ability to temporarily phase through objects and fly short distances. Rosaline's alternate form, The Wraith, takes the shape of a sharp skeletal form hidden under her cloak and rolling smoke, with glowing red eyes staring down and lowering the defense of her enemies. In the short window where it is active, her damage doubles, and she has a small chance of spooking opponents.

CB also has a temporary alternate form in the final battle called Felica Bloodline. It greatly enhances her strength, jump height and attack power, and has no limit in that specific fight.

Play Styles

Each character has a basic attack action that they can perform to take damage. On top of that, each character also has different actions that they can carry out on an average turn.

CB

Passive Ability: Spring Boots - Her equipment gives her a 50% chance of hitting a flying enemy with her base attack.

- **Steal** - CB pickpockets an enemy of the player's choosing, with a fair chance of her taking whatever they're carrying.
- **Bomb** - While basic bombs are always available, the player can purchase specific bombs at shops for CB's use. Some do pure damage, while others can make enemies go to sleep, freeze them, or burn them for a few turns.
- **Slice** - CB attacks the enemy with her dirk.

Special Move: Sneak Attack - CB sneaks up behind one enemy and stabs them (on special occasions, she may also suplex them). Guaranteed KO for lower level enemies.

Prince of Dreams

Passive Ability: Flexible - Using Ember on a frozen teammate will thaw them, using Icicle on a burning teammate will douse them, and using Bolt on a sleeping teammate will wake them up.

Cut - The Prince attacks the enemy with his dagger with a low damage hit.

Magic

Fire

- **Ember** - a small burst of fire that comes from the Prince's dominant hand.
- **Flame** - two small bursts of fire, one from each hand.
- **Blaze** - two large bursts of fire. Chance of burning.
- **Inferno** - a tornado of fire directed by the Prince's dagger. High chance of burning.

Ice

- **Icicle** - a small beam of ice that comes from the Prince's dominant hand.
- **Sleet** - two small beams of ice, one from each hand.
- **Hail** - two large beams of ice. Chance of freezing.
- **Blizzard** - a full scale ice storm directed by the Prince's dagger. High chance of freezing.

Thunder

- **Bolt** - a streak of lightning, summoned from the sky.
- **Storm** - three streaks of lightning, one after another.
- **Whirlwind** - three streaks of lightning, as well as whipping winds full of debris. The drunker the Prince is, the more likely the winds will hurt his teammates.

Seduction

- **Mild Seduction** - the Prince woos one enemy into not attacking him.
- **Seduction** - the Prince woos all the enemies on the field into not attacking him. The effect is broken if he attacks. It naturally wears off after a couple turns.
- **Extreme Seduction** - the Prince woos all the enemies on the field into not attacking the party. The effect is broken if anyone attacks directly (healing spells and buffs don't count). It naturally wears off after a couple turns.

Special Move: Shadow Step - His alternate form. The Prince can perform all regular moves except for Cut.

- **Fake Positive** - the Prince appears directly behind the enemies, causing damage as well as having a high chance of spooking.
- **Ghost Hand** - the Prince phases through enemies and messes with them, causing damage and having a high chance of spooking.

Dom

Passive Ability 1: Martyr - if Dom passes out during Pick Me, the entire party gets a 15% XP bonus.

Passive Ability 2 (Post-Mothership, after having his sword enchanted): Paragon - Dom's sword can cut through the shield of magic using enemies.

Buff

- **Regroup** - Dom tells his teammates to stay calm and regroup. Buff party's defense.
- **Rally Cry** - Dom shouts words of encouragement for his teammates. Buffs party's attack.

Sick 'Em - Dom orders Didot to flop all over a chosen enemy.

Detect - Didot sniffs out the enemy to deduce their strengths

and weaknesses. He can also occasionally pick up on items they might be carrying.

Defender - Dom summons his shield, which can last anywhere from four to nine turns. It unfortunately only covers him.

Strike - Dom attacks the enemy with his sword.

Special Move: Pick Me - Dom taunts the enemy/enemies, getting them to focus their attention on him. The attacks of the rest of the party hit harder, as if the enemies are surprised.

Lily

Passive Ability: Fighting Spirit - At the start of every battle, Lily gets a small attack buff.

Focus - Lily steps back and takes a breath to focus herself. Buffs her attack.

Pep - Lily hypes herself up by jumping. Buffs her speed.

Shock and Awe - Moving at super-human speed, she fools the enemies into thinking she has made multiple copies of herself. If she attacks during the next turn, she gets a damage bonus for the surprise attack. Has a 20% chance of Spooking.

Pummel - Lily attacks the enemy by punching or kicking them.

Special Move: Dragonheart - Lily lets her energy loose and lands a devastating corkscrew punch to one enemy.

Gerard

Passive Ability: The Healer Is In - If Gerard is the only one not passed out, their health will slowly regenerate until either they are knocked out or able to revive one of their teammates.

Bonk - Gerard attacks the enemy with their staff for a low damage hit.

Magic

Refresh

- Restore - replenishes some of the health of one character.
- Revitalize - replenishes all of the health of one character.
- Rejuvenate - replenishes some of the health of the entire party.
- Reinvigorate - replenishes all of everyone's health.

Heal

- Calm - removes burning, freezing, or sleep from one character.
- Cheer - removes all status effects except Drunk from one character.
- Mitigate - removes burning, freezing, or sleep from all characters affected.
- Remedy - removes all status effects except Drunk from all characters affected.

Soothe

- Hush - chance of sending one enemy to sleep.
- Lullaby - high chance of sending one enemy to sleep, moderate chance to send multiple.

Tempo

- Pulse - buffs speed for one character.
- Cadence - buffs speed for entire team.

Spirit

- Good Essence - buffs attack and defense for one character.
- High Morale - buffs attack and defense for entire team

Wards

- Grounding Ward - defends team from getting spook'td. Lasts 3 turns without a ward-killer.
- Anti-Flirtation Ward - defends team from getting wooed. Lasts 3 turns without a ward killer.
- Protection Ward - lowers physical enemy attack damage. Lasts 6 to 8 turns without a ward killer.
- Deflection Ward - lowers physical enemy attack damage and hits them back. Lasts 6 to 8 turns without a ward killer.
- Aura Ward - lowers magical enemy attack damage. Lasts 6 to 8 turns without a ward killer.
- Facade Ward - lowers magical enemy attack damage and hits them back. Lasts 6 to 8 turns without a ward killer.

Special Move: Revive - Gerard revives a character who has passed out. Their special meter fills 5% faster than the other characters after they reclaim Kuzugori, so they can use their special more often.

Rosaline

Passive Ability: Thick Skin - At the start of every battle, Rosaline gets a small defense buff.

Scare - Rosaline glares harshly at the enemy, lowering their defense.

Intimidate - Rosaline squares up with the enemy, lowering their attack.

Charge - Rosaline attacks the enemy with her scythe.

Berserk - Rosaline snaps and attacks all enemies one slice after another, causing massive damage.

Special Move: Wraith Form - Rosaline's Wraith form greatly increases her power and defense for a short time. She also has a small chance of Spooking enemies.

Jack

Passive Ability: Longshot - Jack will not miss any flying or floating enemy.

Whip Up - Jack makes a tasty treat and gives it to a teammate, recovering a random amount of HP, MP/BP, or both.

Jeer - Jack makes a nuisance of himself, distracting the enemy and lowering their speed.

Shoot - Jack attacks the enemy with his crossbow.

Special Move: Pincushion - Jack focuses on a particular enemy and shoots it full of arrows.

Further Options

The following options are available from the start menu only, as they cause major changes to the game.

- **Text Size** - players can increase or decrease the size of text in-game.
- **Dyslexic Friendly Font** - while I plan on using a dyslexic friendly font for the base game, I will provide an alternate option that is easier to parse for players with reading disabilities
- **Contrast and Color Blind Mode** - players can adjust contrast of menus, text boxes and microgames. Color Blind Mode automatically maxes out the contrast, and puts the game in a color mode that emphasizes mechanics, important objects and button inputs on screen.
- **Controller Support** - the game will offer native support for the keyboard and mouse, as well as all of the popular controllers available at the time of publishing. While they may not be the most popular when the game is actually released, the current equivalents would be the XBOX One Wireless Controller, the Playstation Dualshock 4, Nintendo's Joy Con or Pro Controllers, the Steam Controller, etc.
- **Button/Controller Input Settings** - for non-traditional controllers or to optimize personal play, players can select the output for each control to a method or key of their choosing.
- **Sensitivity** - the player can lower or raise the sensitivity of their movement and button presses.



CB

Full name: Catheryn Beatrice Nox

Age: 26

Sexuality and Gender: Bisexual, Cisgender Woman (She/Her)

Occupation: Bounty Hunter, Journalist, Freelance Writer

Class: Rogue (BP)

Weapon Type: Dirk, Bombs

Endgame Alternate Form: Felica Bloodline

A fleet footed rogue, CB uses her silver tongue and light hand to catch criminals, steal what has been stolen, and expose injustice. She, Dom and Jack hunt bounties by night for the Rogue's Guild, but by day she writes detailed articles for the local news station. As talented as she is sharp, her mouth and hand occasionally run faster than her brain, occasionally landing her in hot water. Utilizing an array of bombs and a curved dirk, she can swiftly dispose of most threats on her own if it weren't for the strange aura affecting the local people and creatures. Her past is one of her most haunting secrets, because her biological mother is one of the world's most wanted criminals.

Little-Known Fact: She was a prolific athlete in high school, being a prominent member of the track and gymnastic teams. The cheerleading team asked her to join them too, but she politely declined.





Prince of Dreams

Age: 22

Full Name: His Majesty Takeshi Ishiguro III, The Prince of Dreams

Sexuality and Gender: Pansexual, Genderfluid (Typically He/Him)

Occupation: Crown Prince of the Night

Class: Black Mage (MP)

Weapon Type: Magic, Dagger

Alternate Form: Shadow Step

Coming off of a traumatic childhood, the kingdom's heir to the throne fell into destructive habits to cope. The King, his grandfather (who lives in failing health), fears that his beloved grandson is not mature enough to take his place when he passes away, so he sent the Prince into the world to get to know his constituents and gain an awakened sense of awareness. The Prince heard of CB and her company through his loyal retainer, and paid her a handsome sum to make sure he doesn't accidentally do something idiotic. While gregarious and somewhat spoiled, he means well and is eager to learn about the life outside the castle.

Little-Known Fact: One of his favorite hobbies is playing music. He tries playing as many instruments as possible with his telekinesis to perform as a one man band.





Dom

Full Name: Dominic Nox

Age: 24

Sexuality and Gender: Gay, Transgender Man (He/Him)

Occupation: Guard-for-hire, Bounty Hunter, Freelance Artist

Class: Ranger (MP)

Summon: Didot

Weapon Type: Longsword

While he occasionally hunts with CB and Jack, he prefers to go on protection details and stand as a body guard, because he typically does not like to fight. When pushed to violence, he is dangerously effective with his expert swordsmanship, magic shield, and buffs. Motivated to grow past the tumultuous circumstances of his birth, he has established a reputation as a courageous and friendly hand of justice. Since he has difficulty keeping a low profile, he leaves most of the heavy duty espionage work to his partners. He also would prefer not to be a guard forever, so he illustrates comics in his spare time.

Little-Known Fact: The scar on his right eye was given to him by his mother when he and CB ran away from her (at age 4 and 6, respectively). CB had given him his first haircut in a simple act of control, which made her angry.





Lily

Full Name: Lillian Sadat

Age: 24

Sexuality and Gender: Asexual Lesbian, Cisgender Woman (She/Her)

Occupation: Martial Artist, Fashion Blogger, Model

Class: Fighter (BP)

Weapon Type: Gloves

Lily is famous for her style and modelling pieces, but she also has an envied reputation as the country's strongest, most decorated martial artist. Secretly, she protects the people of Kintsugi as a masked vigilante, the Pastel Protector. She operates independently of the Rogue's Guild due to the secrecy surrounding the organization, but she has been on their recruitment radar for years. Spurred by the injustices she's witnessed all her life, she strives to live a life fueled by kindness, and a goal to protect the innocent.

Little-Known Fact: She's incredible at dance and rhythm games. She and Gerard like to go to the arcade twice a month together, and she constantly smokes them on the dance pad.





Gerard

Full Name: Gerard Morgan-Thompson

Age: 19

Sexuality and Gender: Pansexual, Nonbinary (They/Them)

Occupation: Teashop Server

Class: White Mage (MP)

Weapon Type: Staff

A relative unknown to the outside world, Gerard suffers from strong anxiety and simply wishes to be left alone. They have been gifted with incredibly strong healing abilities, and tend to the sick and wounded in Huerto Verde free of charge. They're young and have overbearing parents, and if they weren't pushed, would willingly stay put in their hometown forever. Thanks to their strong friendship with Lily, they have cautiously branched out and explored Kintsugi since graduating from high school. Despite being a bit of a scaredy cat, they want to set out and travel to figure out the extent of their powers.

Little-Known Fact: Their favorite hobbies are gardening and wood carving. In high school, they put on a whole show revolving just around their wooden sculptures.





Rosaline

Full Name: Dame Rosaline Mendoza

Age: 35

Sexuality and Gender: Lesbian, Cisgender Woman (She/Her)

Occupation: Knight

Class: Berserker (BP)

Weapon Type: Scythe

Alternate Form: The Wraith

Rosaline is one of the deadliest and secretive weapons in the country of Phlogedolph. In her youth, an unfortunate accident left her in the balance between life and death, but she came out of the incident with the ability to harness the powers of the undead. With her cloak of invisibility, rare scythe skills and power to shapeshift, she frequently goes on covert missions for the Knight's Guild. Stoic and quiet, she speaks only when necessary and thinks little of mindless chatter. In her downtime, she patrols the Wanderer's Forest to keep herself busy when her wife isn't home, protecting Fantascolina with a swift and merciless hand.

Little-Known Fact: The jazz club in Fantascolina is one of her favorite spots. It holds a special place in her heart beyond just being a place to listen to her favorite music; it was the location of her first date with Nia.





Jack

Full Name: Jack Velasquez

Age: 27

Sexuality and Gender: Bisexual, Cisgender Man (He/Him)

Occupation: Bounty Hunter, Chef

Class: Archer (BP)

Weapon Type: Crossbow

Jack, despite his sharp appearance, is a gentle giant with a heart of gold. Being the longtime childhood friend of CB and Dom, he looks after them with the unending patience of a saint (despite their antics). Thanks to his close relationship with his abuela, he is a budding professional chef and can frequently whip something up quick when it's needed. His fathers were both former soldiers, and taught him how to hunt and use a crossbow at a young age. Despite meaning well, his altruism can frequently land him in trouble when taken to the extreme, which is what landed him in the situation at Mt. Mino.

Little-Known Fact: The garden and chicken coop at the house were both his idea. Subsequently, he's the one who takes care of them the most.





Ava

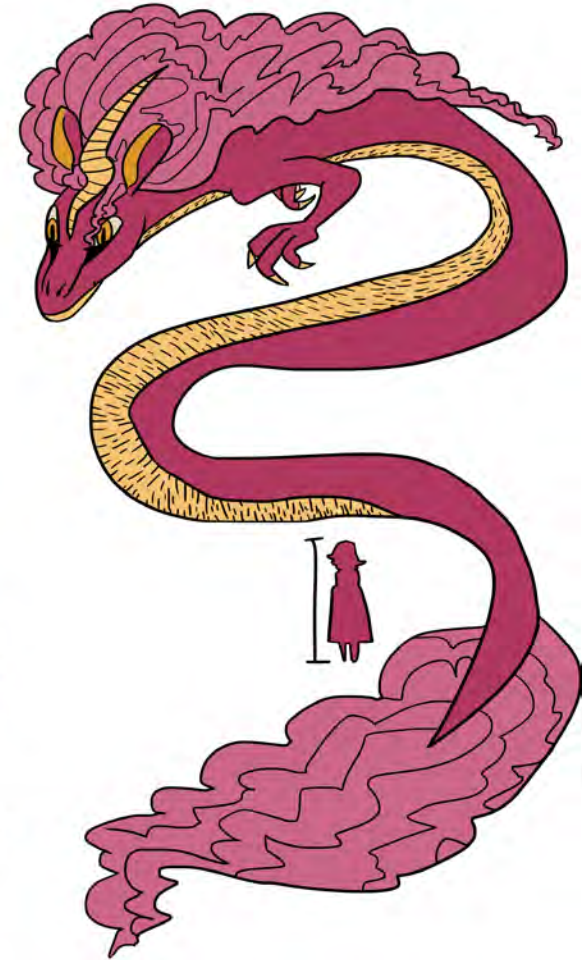
Full Name: Ava Waymire

Age: 24

Sexuality and Gender: Lesbian, Transgender Woman (She/Her)

Occupation: Bounty Hunter, House Sitter, Liaison to the Rogue's Guild

Ava's parents took care of CB and Dom when they were children, and they all view each other as siblings. Out of their circle of friends, she was the first to learn of the Rogue's Guild and recruited the others. She typically runs undercover operations (despite her cheery and personable front), but with the resolution of Caracol's meltdown, she happily takes care of the house and offers occasional advice while CB and Dom are out on their mission.



Nia

Full Name: Madam Nia Rashid-Mendoza

Age: 33

Sexuality and Gender: Bisexual, Transgender Woman (She/Her)

Occupation: Royal Advisor

Nia is a magical history nerd, and spends her days in the castle archives digging through ancient tomes. When she isn't doing that, she helps the remaining royal heirs practice their magical abilities, serving as specifically the Princess of the Stars' retainer. As one of the rare zarkany, she is the only person outside of the royal family who can remotely attempt to shadow step, and can turn into a beautiful fluffy dragon.



Damien

Full Name: Damien deMartin

Age: 48

Sexuality: Bisexual, Transgender Man (He/His)

Occupation: Royal Servant, Positive Fatherly Influence

Serving as the Prince of Dream's retainer, Damien has been with the heir through some troubling times. After the death of his parents, Damien stepped in as a surrogate father, even teaching the Prince his notorious knife skills. While he does carry out managerial tasks such as bringing tea and cleaning, he mainly serves as the castle's interior watchdog, keeping a close eye on visitors and maintaining clear escape routes in the case of an emergency.



Skip the Gladiator

Full Name: Siti "Skip" Rashid

Age: 27

Sexuality and Gender: Bisexual, Agender (She/Her)

Occupation: Knight, Entertainer

The main attraction at Phlogedolph's Colosseum Reenactment Troupe, Skip is made for the stage and loves living in the spotlight. Performance serves mainly as a coverup, however - she is a high ranking Knight, and the of the Prince of the Moon's retainer. She is the leader of the team that patrols the castle exterior, typically making her the first responder in the case of an emergency.



Abuela Velasquez

Full Name: Maria Velasquez

Age: 69

Sexuality and Gender: Straight, Cisgender Woman (She/Her)

Occupation: Hotel Owner

Owner of the Casa Nieve, she welcomes travelers going up Mt. Mino with a warm place to stay. She is also Jack's paternal lamnidaer grandmother, raising him when his fathers were temporarily deployed. When he was seven years old, they found a pair of battered half-felica children and brought them into their community. Despite not being able to adopt them, she still loves them as her own, and will always have a bed open for them free of charge.



Princess of the Stars

Full Name: Her Highness Anri Ishiguro IV, Princess of the Stars

Age: 19

Sexuality and Gender: Bisexual, Cisgender Woman (She/Her)

Occupation: Crown Princess of the Night

In the Prince's absence, she helps her grandfather keep the kingdom running. Dry witted and wry, she makes meetings and interactions with the parliamentary body a breeze. Her icy maturity makes her a good candidate for the throne, but deep down, she's still a kid. For now, she's content to stay in the King's shadow so she can learn, and enjoy her youth while she's in the moment.



King of the Night

Full Name: His Highness Jun IX, King of the Night

Age: 74

Sexuality and Gender: Pansexual, Cisgender Man (He/Him)

Occupation: Crown King of the Night, Grandfather

A jolly old man, the King reigns over the realm of magical knowledge with humor and wisdom. He would have retired a decade ago if the cards were in his favor, but the death of his daughter extended his time in the hot seat. In recent years, his health has steadily declined, and he quietly arranges for his passing when it comes. He worries constantly about his heirs, and cares less for who will take his place than the happiness of his darling grandchildren.



Mr. Matsuo

Full Name: Unknown

Age: Presumed mid-40s to early-50s

Sexuality and Gender: Unknown, Cisgender Man (He/Him)

Occupation: Head of the Rogue's Guild

A man of mystery, no one knows much about the Rogue's Guild leader beyond his dated fashion sense and dry wit. He is completely impossible to read, and the only pieces of his past anyone can trace sound like salacious rumors. Focused on the state of information and the safety of Phlogeddelph's people, he operates his web of assets from the shadows to maintain the balance of peace.



Monique Morgan-Thompson

Age: 15

Sexuality and Gender: Unsure, Cisgender Woman (She/Her)

Occupation: Tea Shop Server (in place of Gerard)

Gerard's younger sister; she steps in to run the family tea shop while they're off adventuring. She's significantly more laid back than their older sibling, and loves to joke around with customers.



Anna Sadat

Age: 30

Sexuality and Gender: Straight, Cisgender Woman (She/Her)

Occupation: Coder

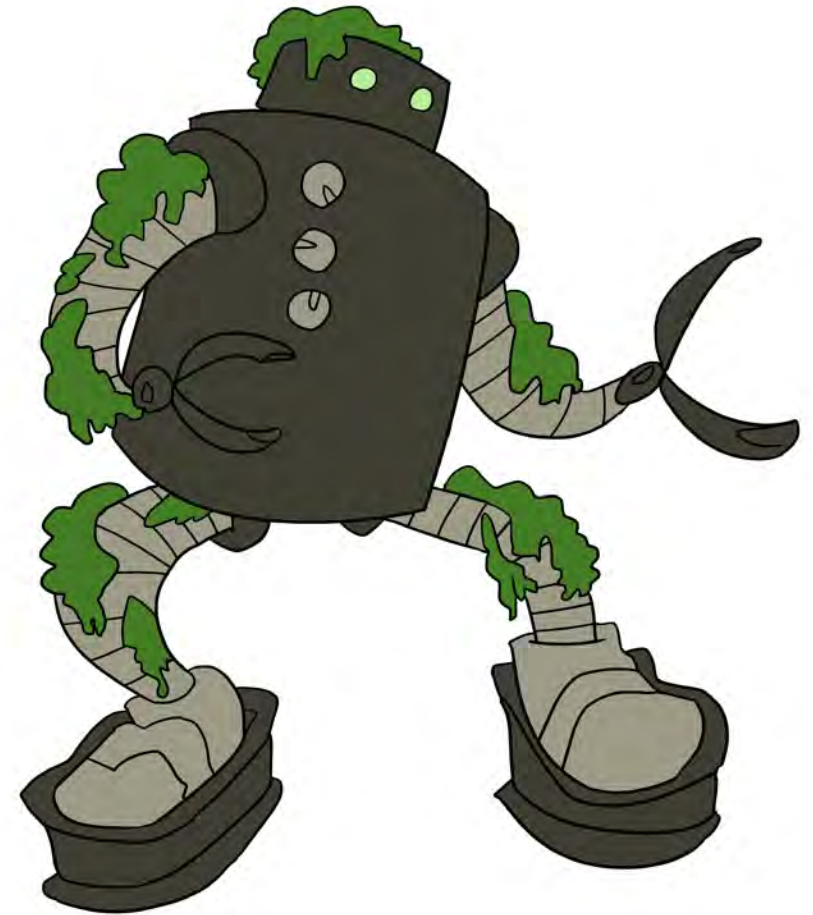
Anna is a resident of Caracol who was kidnapped and taken to the Bank Basement during the invasion. Weaponizing her love of technology, she keeps goons off the gang's backs and opens doors for them during their descent. She is also Lily's cousin, and tells them of her existence once freed.



Lieutenant Scribbles

Area: Bandido's Backyard

A nasty, bootlicking little worm who's desperate to prove himself. He drives all of the wildlife in CB's backyard mad, and wants to claim her turf as his own. While frustrating and weak, he is a tough customer to take on alone.



Decay

Miniboss

Area: Bandido's Backyard

Hidden in Unalesca's lush forests, a rusted up and forgotten robot waits to be woken back up. They were originally here for a strong purpose, but their speech chip is so broken that any attempt at communication is garbled.



Trilby of Misogynistic Mysteries

Area: Caracol

You would think that a hat this big would definitely be hiding something underneath it, but there's seriously nothing in there. It's being remotely controlled by a curmudgeonly old man with an agenda, and those tiny little tapping legs are a distraction from its powerful delayed magic.



Eagle Eye

Miniboss

Area: Caracol

His presence during the invasion is peculiar; it seems almost as if he were anticipating it. Keeping his identity a close-guarded secret, he's willing to spar as a momentary distraction from his mission.



Hannah-chan

Area: Kintsugi Convention Center

Misplaced priorities are her middle name. Angered by the perceived lack of room for animation fans at Lolita Regalia, she and her swarm of loyal friends take over the convention and wreak havoc.



Starlit Heroine

Miniboss

Area: Kintsugi Convention Center

Initially interested in the display of fashion, she too seems to have anticipated the chaos of the takeover. Fighting the gang is a welcome distraction from the others; they at least offer a challenge.



Pastel Protector

Area: Huerto Verde

After CB's careless comments about Gerard, she tracked their company all the way to Huerto Verde. While she tends to protect the innocent, this time it's personal; her best friend is in danger, and she would do anything to protect them.



Nimbus

Miniboss

Area: Huerto Verde

Cloudy and serene, Nimbus is seemingly wandering the gardens by chance. Flowers grow as she walks by, water clears, and she knows more than she lets on.



The Wraith

Area: Wanderer's Forest

While the creature seems like any other denizen of the dead, it has a different, more dangerous aura. Armed to the teeth with a recently sharpened scythe, this angry spirit won't go down easily. The group has angered it somehow, and it has come to collect its' dues.



Le Mort

Miniboss

Area: Wanderer's Forest

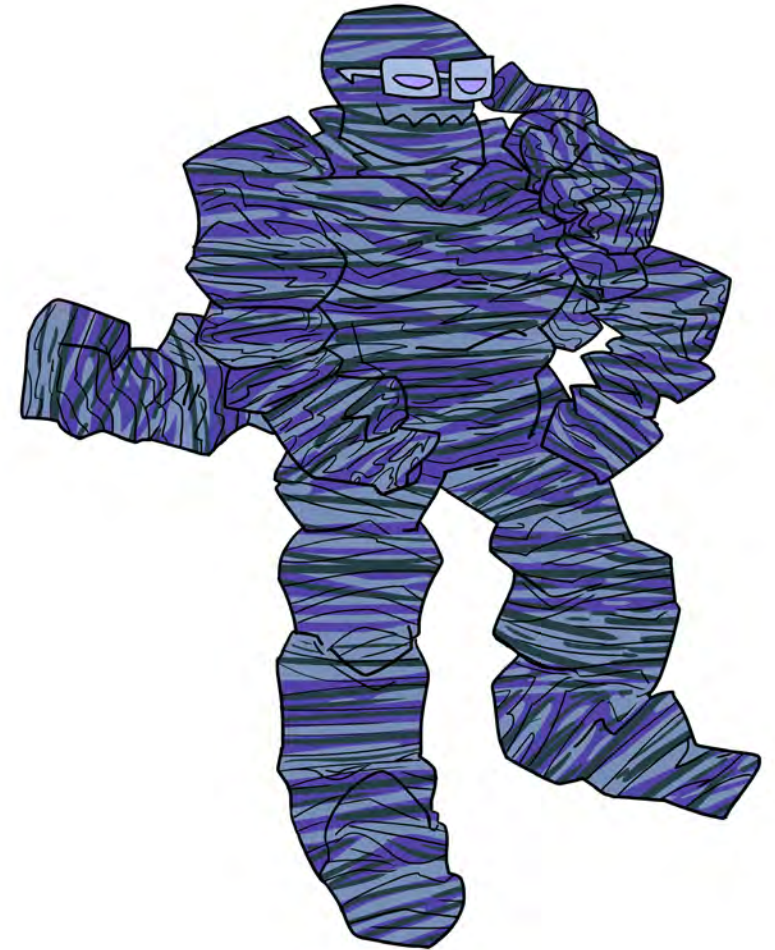
Goopy and liquid like candle wax, this phantom wants nothing more than some entertainment. The scythes-per-capita in Fantascolina is through the roof now.



Madame Yuki-onna

Area: Frozen Hellscape (Mt. Mino)

A popular socialite in life, the woman of the winds carries over her busybody tendencies in death. She likes to keep a well decorated home, so maintain her gory style, she tricks Jack into meeting her with enough money to buy a new fridge, having him walk head first into a trap to use him as a centerpiece for her great room.

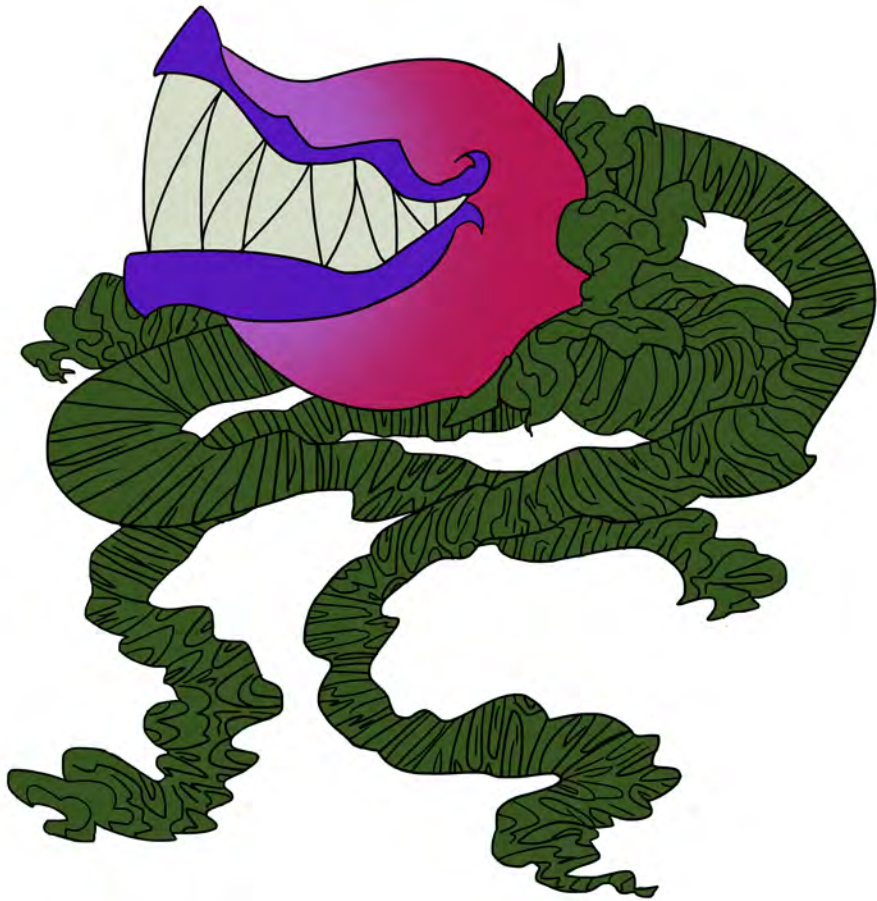


Strata

Miniboss

Area: Frozen Hellscape

While this hulking mass of rock looks like a monster at first glance, he's actually a classically trained academic. He came to Mt. Mino to study the wildlife, but won't shy away from a fight if provoked.



Baby Pearl

Area: Kuzugori

A giant, carnivorous plant that somehow learned how to walk and speak. It has organized the monsters in Kuzugori to keep the normies out, using the ever-rising smoke as a convenient cover story for the underground drug operation.



Tempest

Miniboss

Area: Kuzugori

Mistress of storms, this mage has let lightning magic make up her entire being. Her hair and dress swirl and thunder like a hurricane, and she uses it as armor against anyone who would dare approach her.



Usurper Prince

Full Name: His Highness Yoshi Ishiguro III, Prince of the Moon (In-Game), Her Highness Yoko Ishiguro I, Princess of the Moon (Epilogue)

Age: 16

Area: Cesoir Castle

The Prince's younger brother has tumbled headfirst into a fit of rage. Somehow, he has gained telekinetic control of all the castle staff and residents to use them as a private armed force. The King and Princess have a few loyal staff members locked up in the private chambers, but their shields won't last forever. If anyone is going to talk to him, it has to be his older brother.



The Duelist

Miniboss

Area: Cesoir Castle

The more the gang interacts with these strange opponents, the more it becomes clear that they are related in some strange way. The Duelist has heard of our heroes from her companions, and she actively wants them to test their abilities against her in a fit of bloodlust.



All-Seeing Eye

Area: Mothership

All oculum report to this terrifying, ten-foot neon monstrosity. They have been keeping a close eye on CB and her friends for quite some time before meeting them, and relishes the chance to drag them through the dirt before delivering them to their client.



Golden Goddess

Miniboss

Area: Mothership

The other leader hiding away on the Mothership is a beautiful but dangerously powerful woman, who directs all of the World's Defense on their mission of keeping the peace. She has seemingly been captured, but the oculum's cells seem to hold no challenge for her.



Smoking Void

Reward Miniboss (For defeating all Shadow Enemies)

Area: Gato Plateau

After defeating every area's dedicated mortis, an unidentifiable man approaches the gang before they set out for their final battle. Before he can say anything coherent, mortis smoke violently bursts from his body, and the only way to bring him back to his base state is to fight the smoke.



Sibling Rush

Area: Gato Plateau

A group of Magnolia's best agents. They're just seven of hundreds; after all, a cat can have upwards of twenty-four kittens in a year. Each has abilities roughly comparable to each party member, and will systematically whittle down their health bit by bit.



Smoky

Area: Gato Plateau

The oldest of Magnolia's children, and her right hand man. As an unstable maniac with a mean streak and inferiority complex, he relishes the chance to put his half-siblings in their place as grunts. He steps in to finish his underling's dirty work, and is purposefully impossible to defeat.



Magnolia

Final Boss

Area: Gato Plateau

Phlogeldelph's most notorious crime lord, who just so happens to be CB and Dom's mother. For nearly her entire life, she's maintained a destructive timeline of sex, violence and death. Once the entire party is down, she and Smoky will purposefully pin Dom down and attempt to coerce him into being a successor, until CB gets a second wind and takes her on for a one-on-one final battle.

Story

Prologue - The Nature of the Beasts

One quiet, late-summer morning, a young woman wakes up after finally being disturbed enough by the sun to open her eyes. Her house is suspiciously quiet; with two young men as her roommates, there's hardly a dull moment. She crawls out of bed and takes care of the morning chores (feeding the chickens, watering the garden, checking the mail, etc.) before realizing something truly is wrong. A squirrel wearing boxer gloves comes and punches her in the ankle unprompted - a swift kick is all she needs to take care of it, but suddenly, angry animals are surrounding the house. With just enough time to close the coop and pick up the watering can, CB runs to the house and locks the door behind her, confused beyond belief.

Upon settling, she notices two things; one piece of paper posted on the fridge with a magnet, and another sitting on the counter. The first reads, out on assignment, see you in a few days, signed by her friend Jack. The second reads, Jack hasn't come back in a while, I'm going out to find intel, signed by her brother Dom. She takes a moment to be exasperated, but there are more important matters at hand. Gathering her gear and getting dressed, she goes back outside to find the source of the commotion.

The cliffside just past the house seems to be where the creatures are at their angriest, and it's easy to spot why; some pink floating bastard is maintaining a wide forcefield and driving everyone crazy. CB tries to take care of it herself, but gets her ass summarily kicked due to her lack of ranged attacks. Fed up with the lack of results, she retreats and decides to venture into town to see if she can find some back up.

Chapter 1 - The Mysterious Stranger

CB doesn't get far before bumping into a weirdo in a trench coat and scarf. He asks if CB needs a job; she reasonably asks who he is and why he's asking these questions. Shedding the

disguise, the young man launches into theatrics, showing off a strong talent for black magic and a decadent fashion sense. He introduces himself as the Prince of Dreams - while skeptical at first, CB kneels when she sees his brilliant and terrifying third eye. He thanks the rogue for her respect, but respectfully asks that she stands out of embarrassment for the attention. Based on a personal rule, he drops the formalities and makes his sales pitch short and sweet; he's been sent out into the world to do some self-exploration, and he needs an expert bodyguard. While CB initially rebukes his claim to her expertise, she completely changes her tune when she sees the amount on the check he wrote her. The two strike a deal - if the Prince helps her take care of her pest problem and thereafter aid in the search for her companions, she'll gladly protect him on his journey. Shaking hands, they have the feeling that whatever happens next will be the beginning of a long trek.

A sharp dirk and an open flame are surprisingly good battle partners, and the two make quick work of what's left of the agitated animals. They reach the cliffside to find the tentacled menace patiently waiting for their arrival. The creature introduces itself as Lieutenant Scribbles, and blabbers on about some scheme for galactic conquest, working for a high-end planet side client, and his intent to steal the two's brains to amplify its psychic power, but CB and the Prince tune out most of it. Angered that he isn't being listened to, he attacks them, but is defeated quickly with their combined power.

With the homestead secured, CB decides that it's time to move on and try to at least find her brother, and perhaps a house-sitter. The Prince suggests a pleasant walk down to Caracol, an urban neighborhood not twenty minutes away. As the morning sun climbs higher into the sky, they set off down the hidden, forest-dense pathways to the city.

Chapter 2 - Stifling Masculinity

Stepping into to Dom's shoes, CB knows that there's only one place that he would go on a night's notice - the bar at Bonito Inn, where the internet connection is strong, and the liquor is cheap.

Sure enough, his guide and familiar, Didot, is tied up outside and happy to see them. Inside, the only patron left at the bar top is a man dressed in simple, blue-tinted fatigues and a t-shirt, fast asleep in front of a laptop.

CB wakes him up, briefing him on the situation regarding the Prince, and chides him for not being more specific in his note. Packing up his things, he explains that his research bared some fruit; Jack hasn't been responding to his texts, but he made a rare social media post that displayed a view in the distant suburb of Huerto Verde. They leave together, unhitching Didot from the side of the building to accomplish number two on the to-do list - finding a house-sitter. The dog leads them to an innocuous looking mailbox but tapping on the side with his paw rouses its lone inhabitant, a pair of bright cat eyes.

Ava, Dom and CB's adoptive sister, leaps out of the mailbox and greets the three of them brightly. Having overheard their itinerary, she agrees to house-sit on one condition - the three of them help her with the area's brewing civilian crisis. Before they can ask what that means, a rush of very red-looking men come spilling out of the office building down the street, harassing and kidnapping anyone they come upon. Ava and the gang rush to try and stop them, but they can only delay a few as the rest carry hostages into the corporate crypt. One hostage, seeing that there are a few people trying to help, tosses CB two tracking devices and asks her to find them before the door is closed on her.

After dealing with the stragglers left on the street, the four advance into the office and split up. Ava hops into the vent with one tracking device to scout ahead, while CB, the Prince and Dom head through the basement by foot. Following the tech-savvy hostage's directions, they gather enough passwords and keys to make their way into the room where activity seems to be centralized. Just as they break in, Ava unlocks a vent in the center of the room and attempts a soft landing in a comically large hat. Its size should have been a dead giveaway, because it flips over and traps her, before sprouting tiny legs and rushing towards the CB's group. They wipe the floor with it, only to have it come back to life after seemingly being defeated.

Dom and the Prince distract it while CB and Ava try to find the source. In old film fashion, a decorated curtain hides a curmudgeonly old man orchestrating the whole affair. After getting some sense knocked into him, he releases control of the army he had sent after them and set the hostages free.

While the battle largely went in their favor, the amount of close calls they had was enough to make CB think that they should look for some more people to hire into their party. The tech-savvy hostage thanks them personally, introducing herself as Anna. In a stroke of luck, when CB offhandedly mentions their struggle in the battle, Anna tells them about her cousin over in center city who happens to be a world-renowned martial artist. Satisfied with the conclusion of the crisis, Ava splits off to watch the house, and the gang advances to center city Kintsugi with a picture of their prospective teammate in hand.

Chapter 3 - Luck is a Lady

By checking her page, they realize that this famed martial artist is making an appearance at the local decora fashion convention. The only problem is that to get in, the three must have the appropriate clothes. Luckily, a nearby boutique has a good price on some outfits that gets them set up relatively quickly.

Getting into the convention is a snap, but finding their mystery woman is debilitatingly tough even between the three of them. The convention hall is incredibly crowded, and the picture Anna gave them, while a great start, is a little blurry and perhaps a few years old. They start asking random con-goers, getting some familiarity, but no solid location. Just when they're about to give up, CB and the Prince stand stock-still, confusing Dom as to why they stopped so suddenly. Following their line of sight, he sees that they've been taken aback by a beautiful woman in a beautiful pink and yellow getup... who just so happens to look like a slightly older version of the woman in their picture. He almost reaches out to her, but a loud disturbance in the distance draws her attention and sends her running. The three set out after her, discovering that a of girls are wreaking havoc to the other

convention goers.

Their leader, a teenager in a pink school uniform, announces their takeover of the convention. With no evidence, she claims that the convention board set up event with the wrong crowd in mind, and that she and her posse will be rectifying the manner by force. The mysterious woman adjusts her hijab, assuring the encroaching mob that she won't let that happen. A scrap breaks out, and the mysterious woman defeats the goons foolish enough to swarm her in a blink. The mob scatters, and their woman chases the ringleader, sending CB, the Prince and Dom chasing after her.

Running through the labyrinthian convention hall is nothing short of madness, and the gang lose their people of interest almost immediately. At the very least, they're able to contain the hecklers to the less populous back quarters, but they can't see hide nor tail of the crazy girl in the sailor suit. That is, until, the Prince mistakenly sets off a tripwire that he couldn't see. He's dragged up into a net, and the ringleader, announcing herself as Hannah-chan, details her plan to torture them one by one. The battle begins, but with the Prince struggling to burn himself out of the net, CB and Dom are severely outnumbered.

A swift, flaming kick to the net sets it ablaze, giving the Prince just enough leverage to wiggle his way out without an ounce of grace. His savior? The beautiful and deadly Lily Sadat. Finally, they've found the other person they've been looking for, and her aide makes the tide of the battle turn quickly. Hannah-chan and her loyal minions flee in defeat, but just as CB goes to congratulate Lily, she's gone.

The three leave the convention, considering the whole thing a bust. Changing back to their regular adventuring clothes, they decide to push forward to Huerto Verde to try finding Jack. CB bitterly grumbles out a rumor about a powerful healer hiding out in the gardens in the little town and implies that she would kill to get them on the team. Trailing slowly behind them, a crusader caped in yellow advances their pursuit.

Chapter 4 - Magic Gardens

Arriving in the quaint, green little neighborhood, the gang makes quick work of looking for Jack. Surprise! He's not there. Frustrated, they take a break at the local cafe, discussing theories as to where he might have gone. A barista at the counter quietly takes their orders and looks at them nervously as another worker brings them their drinks. The Prince and Dom continue discussing theories, but the way the barista's phone shakes in their hands immediately catches CB's eye. They glance at each other, but the barista spooks and begins to run, throwing off their apron and grabbing a staff from a nook in the kitchen. CB bolts after them, and the boys follow her with their drinks in hand, incredibly confused.

They follow the scared barista through the mystically decorated gardens, fending off fairies and angry animals at every turn. CB can shout a few questions at their retreating frame (what's wrong, why are you running, etc.), but receives only squeaks as answers. Finally, they advance to a dead end, leaving the frightened stranger with their back against the wall. CB stops the Prince and Dom from advancing and holds her arms up in a show of peace. She asks again why they ran, and finally receive an answer - because she would kill to get a healer on her team.

Before she can attempt to clarify, she narrowly dodges a kick to the back of her head, and tussles with masked crusader in yellow. The woman in the mask leaps away, standing in front of the barista, claiming that CB threatened her friend. She had come to protect them, but refuses to listen to any clarification before she can wear the rogue down in a fight. Despite being three against one, the Pastel Protector holds out for an absurdly long time, but eventually is worn out by the fight's intensity. CB, sporting a black eye and a busted lip, lays down her weapons and kneels in forgiveness. She apologizes for the confusion, explaining that her words were spoken in frustration and anger, and that she meant no harm to anyone. Just as she promises to change her behavior, the Pastel Protector and the barista take her hands, and thank her for the apology.

The barista introduces themselves as Gerard, and apologizes

for running with explaining themselves. As for the Pastel Protector, she un.masks to reveal her secret identity - Lily Sadat. She apologizes for taking CB's words out of context, and thanks her for promising to change her behavior. Dom and the Prince watch as the continue to apologize to each other, and only get them to stop when Dom loudly reminds them that no one had eaten anything for lunch yet. As a group of five, they make their way back to the cafe and sit down together for a meal. CB gives the details of the situations regarding the missing Jack and the Prince's quest and offers Lily and Gerard to join their team. They accept, and the fearsome fivesome make way to the next town to ask a local royal advisor for clues to help track down Jack.

Chapter 5 - The Huntress

Adjacent to Huerto Verde is an old, dark, definitely haunted forest that is famous for housing the lost and ill-fitting. It's foggy and confusing, and incredibly easy to get lost in, especially if you draw the spirits' ire. As they inch into the forest, CB steals a trinket from a ghoul in battle, and suddenly the fog encircles them tightly, limiting their visibility. As they wander, Gerard (who's very familiar with the area) notices that the paths have been randomized somehow. Fighting through the enraged ghouls and spirits as usual, they think they're making headway, but they're just walking in circles.

Since only the Prince has the advantage of taking a higher vantage point, he shifts forms and rises above the treetops. The cover is so thick that it covers most of the forest, but once he's high enough, he can spot a whirlwind of impossibly dense fog that's emanating red light. He tries calling out his findings to the team, but the light targets him and he suddenly can't get the words out. He returns to his body and tries to explain to the best of his ability, but the light has completely prevented him from talking about it. As he fails to recount it, it surrounds them, making the air around them hard to breathe.

In the center of this thick fog is an incredibly angry Wraith. It describes how it has tracked them since they stepped foot into the woods, and that it wants them to return what they stole. CB,

taking responsibility, holds out whatever she stole and explains that they're just trying to find their friend. This answer does not satisfy the Wraith - it wants to teach these foolish thieves a lesson.

A ferocious fight breaks out, with the scythe-wielding Wraith holding out just fine against five incredibly prone warriors. As it wears on, it becomes clear that the being they're fighting is more than an angry corporeal spirit - it's a person with incredibly devastating power, and a bone to pick. Eventually, the team wears down their frighteningly strong opponent to force it to switch forms, revealing a tall, muscular woman in a stealth-enhanced cloak. She moves to attack the Prince, but stops just a hair short of his body, as if she recognizes him. The feeling isn't mutual - the Prince stares at her, grateful not to be split in half, but confused at her mercy. The Wraith rapidly looks at the monarch's adventuring party, realizing that she had thrashed at a group of younglings, and withdraws her scythe.

She greets the Prince, explaining with few words that they had met once when he was much younger. He seems to remember now and is rattled by the realization, but she doesn't give him time to fret over it. Apologizing for the needlessly harsh reaction, she leads them to Fantascolina without another word. Lily explains that they're looking for a royal advisor in town, and the Wraith says that's exactly who she's taking them to. The group exchanges confused glances, but wordlessly trucks on.

The Wraith leads them to a violet cabin on the forest's edge, places her scythe at the edge of the door with familiarity. Unsure of what else to do, the team also places their weapons next to hers, after which she invites them inside. The interior of the cabin is warmer than they expected and not completely decorated with skulls, and there's a woman in the common room curled up in an armchair reading a book. The Wraith lets down her hood, revealing delightfully golden hair and honey-brown eyes, and the woman in the chair immediately leaps up and greets her lovingly. The Prince, astonished, recognizes the other woman as Madam Nia Rashid, one of his family's most prominent historians and advisors. Nia greets him and his friends warmly,

and introduces the Wraith as Dame Rosaline Mendoza, one of the kingdom's deadliest knights.

Nia tells them that she saw a young man matching Jack's description who came through town a little while back, mentioning that he had a mission to undertake on Mt. Mino. She wants to come with them but increasing tension on the parliamentary floor is preventing her from straying too far from reliable transportation. After a moment's thought, Rosaline suggests tagging along, both to keep an eye on the rowdy party and to fend off Mt. Mino's devastatingly strong residents. Everyone agrees to the terms and exits the cabin. CB tries to thank Rosaline for helping them, but the knight rejects it, assuring that she's simply in this to keep the five of them out of trouble. Despite losing a bit of the wind in her sails, CB has everyone get a set of warm clothing for the trip up the mountain, and then sets out with confidence.

Chapter 6 - Meat Popsicle

The occasional strong enemy stands in their way up the mountain, but with the added manpower of Rosaline's scythe, they're able to make it to the halfway point with ease. CB and Dom urge the group to take a rest at the snowed-in town, because they're incredibly familiar with the local innkeeper. They enter the warm cabin and are immediately greeted with boisterous joy by the owner, a short and stocky lamnide woman that they call abuela. Abuela invites everyone in for a hearty meal and some intel, gathering them all to sit in a delightfully soft living room. She recounts that her grandson, Jack, had stopped by just a few days ago, telling her of some business that he had further up the mountain. Having not heard from him since, she asks CB and Dom to take their group up to the Crystal Caves to search for him.

With a full night's rest pushing them through, the group goes further up the mountain fighting off the intense snow storms. The Crystal Caves aren't much better; they're full of ghosts and supersized crystal bugs, all hungry and tempted by the arrival of fresh, living meat. The cave systems are blessedly not complex, but there's very little sign that Jack had been there save for one

arrow embedded in the cave wall.

After a few hours of searching, they're about to go back to town with nothing to show for when they suddenly hear the weak cracking of ice in an open room. Upon investigating, they finally find Jack, stripped down to his usual tank top in the intensely cold weather and encased in ice that he's slowly trying to break. The set up looks like an obvious trap, especially to the espionage-savvy CB, but she can't let her best friend die of frostbite. Carefully, she edges towards the center of the room, stepping incredibly lightly until she's right in front of her frozen friend. He greets her, relieved to have her next to him, but warns of an incredibly powerful being that's hiding in the shadows who put him in this predicament. CB tries to chip away the ice with her dirk, ignoring Jack's insistence that whoever captured him with snatch up CB and the rest of her search party in an instance.

In the blink of an eye, CB is knocked back to the cave wall, and Jack is thrown to the cave ceiling. Dom catches his sister, but Jack isn't so lucky - he hits his head against the craggy ceiling and immediately loses consciousness. The force containing him reveals herself as a giant ice spirit, apologizing for not being a good host. She insists that they all stay and make themselves comfortable - after all, why have one human decoration when you can have seven?

The ensuing fight is complete madness, and only ends when the Prince unleashes a hellfire bushel of magic to finally make the yuki-onna dissipate. When they're finally able to focus on Jack, his condition doesn't look good - there are several spots on his face and arms where he's bleeding, he's dangerously cold, and he may be concussed. Rosaline wraps him in the outer portion of her heavy cloak while the Prince and Gerard keep him warm and try to heal his wounds. Dom summons a shield large enough to carry him on, and with some team effort, they're able to situate him on it and hitch Didot to the edge to pull him back to town. To conserve warmth, Rosaline shifts forms and acts as the leader, while everyone else tries to stay huddled together.

Even with the rocky ride down, they're able to make it back to the inn before nightfall and the worst of the snow. The Prince,

Gerard, CB and Abuela Velasquez tend to the unconscious Jack, while the rest warm up in front of the common room fire. It takes a while for the situation to settle, but eventually the group splits up into three rooms for the night; CB and Jack in one room, Dom and the Prince in another, and Gerard, Lily and Rosaline in the last.

Late at night, Abuela Velasquez checks up on the party to make sure everyone is doing alright. In the room closest to the lobby, she overhears a conversation between Dom and the Prince about the monarch's feelings of incompetence and fear of taking the throne after what happened to his parents. Hearing gentle Dom reassure and comfort the Prince, she moves next to CB and Jack's room. They're both awake, which is a good sign, and the rogue seems to be giving Jack a good scolding for running off without telling anyone, so she moves on and leaves them alone. In the third room, Gerard asks Lily and Rosaline if they've ever seen the locals in any of the nearby neighborhoods be so aggressive in their lives. Both respond in the negative; Lily has only seen petty crime by random individuals, not huge groups like they've seen so far. Rosaline has seen it before in territories that are currently going through land or governmental disputes, but the overall pulse of Phlogeddelph is seemingly normal despite all the instances of widespread agitation. She suspects that an outside force is causing the madness but can't say who that could possibly be. Abuela Velazquez sighs, knowing senseless conflict all too well, but decides that everyone is good enough to leave alone for the night, and decides to rest.

The snow storm that they barely escaped is so severe that they stay holed up in the cabin for a few days, discussing where to go next. When the weather is finally clear enough for them to leave, Rosaline gets a line of correspondence that details a growing monster situation in the abandoned mining town of Kuzugori. Sensing that the next piece of the overarching hysteria puzzle would be there, the team decides to travel there and see if they can't get some answers.

Chapter 7 - Little Mine of Horrors

Upon reaching Kuzugori, the team is struck by how much nature has reclaimed the town, and by the ceaseless tower of smoke that constantly billows from the fiery mines below them. At first glance, the area just looks abandoned, but the longer they stay, the more monsters come out to play. Most of them don't talk, giving away nothing about the burgeoning monster crisis that could overtake neighboring towns. However, the more they fight, the more monsters they find that refer to "The Boss", leaving clues to a plant creature nearby that is having the weaker Joe Schmoes do its dirty work.

The gang fights their way to an abandoned, roofless dentist's office where they find exactly what they were looking for; a gigantic carnivorous plant with teeth the size of Lily's entire body, tendrils so long they extend throughout the entire town, and a grin so wide it looks like someone just won the lottery. It introduces itself as Baby Pearl, and thanks the group for coming right to her as opposed to making her come to them. Its' nameless employers will be very happy that it found them and will pay handsomely to keep the Kuzugori Secret Drug Ring going.

Baby Pearl puts up one hell of a fight, but the team squashes it through the ground. They're unable to get the name of its' employer, but they get one vital clue as it wilts and melts - the employer is from outer space, and its' the middle man of the middle man.

The crew exits the abandoned dentist's office and watches as the remaining monsters scatter, questioning just who the mysterious employer could possibly be. Before they have too much time to think about it, a beautiful teal-and-pink dragon descends from the sky, pulling a rare smile from Rosaline. The beast waves to them all, and everyone is understandably confused why such a rare creature would act so familiarly with anyone. Rosaline explains that the dragon is Nia's alternate form, and that she can't speak normally when she's this way. Nia points at Rosaline's phone, prompting her to take a closer look at it. Aghast, she explains that chaos has broken out at Castle Cesoir, and that all royal retainers are needed immediately. Rosaline

insists that they hop onto Nia's back, so they can get there faster, and the Prince desperately agrees. Despite everyone else still being weirded out by the knowledge that Rosaline's wife is an all-powerful dragon, they get on and fly to the heart of the kingdom.

Chapter 8 - Teenage Angst

Once they touch down at the castle and disembark, Nia changes forms back to her human body. There's not enough time for explanation, for another figure hops into the fray - Skip the Gladiator, one of Phlogeldelph's hottest entertainers and warriors, approaches them at the gate to go over the brewing coup. That morning, the youngest of the royal siblings, the Prince of the Moon, took control of all of the guards, creatures and spirits in the estate in a fit of psychic rage, leaving the Princess of the Stars and the King of the Night holed up in a far-off bedroom. Skip and Nia plan to advance and clear a path in the gardens, allowing the Prince of Dreams and his entourage make their way to the King and discuss what should be done about the matter. The group splits according to plan, and the gang begins fighting their way through the castle.

A stone's throw away from the King's bedroom, they are surrounded by telekinetically controlled flaming daggers, caught in a deadly trap. The Prince seems unphased, reminding someone unseen that he hasn't changed that significantly since he left. The knives almost instantly disappear, and the one controlling them steps out of the shadows - a sharply dressed tiefling man, carrying a tray under his arm, walks into the open and smiles at the Prince with familiarity. He introduces himself to the group as Damien deMartin, and apologizes for the quick reaction, blaming current events. Immediately leading them to the King's chamber, he melts the heavy sheet of ice barricading the door and quickly lets the group inside.

A young lady sitting on the edge of a bed immediately freezes the door again, treating the group with suspicion. Under the covers is a frail, elderly man who is delighted to see them. The Prince greets his younger sister and grandfather warmly,

introduces his group, and kneels at the bedside awaiting wisdom. The King entreats his eldest grandson with talking with his youngest sibling, as he believes something terribly strong is controlling him. The Princess asks them all to come back safely, including the Prince of the Moon, and that she will keep the few uncontrolled people in the estate safe in the room they're currently in.

Dropping down from the window, the group finds themselves in the estate garden where a fierce battle is taking place. Nia, Skip, and a few other loyalists are disabling the soldiers that are being controlled. As they advance, Damien descends from the same window and joins the fray, mentioning that he saw the young Prince in the back of the garden.

When they finally find the youngest monarch, he's lighting the surrounding foliage aflame without mercy, as if he cannot control his own magic. CB prevents their Prince from rushing in when she notices a strange detail - a tendrilled creature, just barely out of sight, is clutched tightly to the back of his head. With caution, the seven jump into battle, trying to pry the creature off the back of the Prince's head without hurting him, his older brother pleading him to calm down. The battle is long, arduous and not without injury, but eventually they are able to pry the creature off and calm the youngling Prince. He cries as CB and Jack quietly investigate what was controlling him, revealing his frustration over an apparent lack of control of his life. The battle in the background slows to a halt as control is relinquished. His older brother sits with him in the scorched dirt, Dom and Rosaline looking on, as the two discuss what's gone wrong.

Meanwhile, CB figures out exactly what had been controlling him - Lieutenant Scribbles, the pink little bastard from forever ago who aggravated all the wildlife in her backyard. While charred, he appears to still be alive, and is delighted to have found her again. He tells her that his boss will be delighted to hear this news, and then disappears out of her hands before she can clobber him. In the background, the two princes have seemingly come to a conclusion, hugging tightly as Nia, Skip and Damien walk up to survey the scene. Before they can catch

another up to speed, a neon green light shines down on the scorched gravel, seemingly searching for something.

The green light sways to and fro, psychically lifting all the adventuring party one by one. The Prince of the Moon, Nia, Skip and Damien are seemingly not what it wants, and no matter how hard they try, they can't get anyone back on the ground. In an instant, the seven disappear in a burst of strobing light, taken into a strange octopus-shaped ship flying not too far above the estate. The ship disappears, leaving everyone on the ground dumbfounded and afraid.

Chapter 9 - It Came From Outer Space

The part wakes up in an enclosed cell with a large window, seemingly in the middle of the night. They remember the beam of light but were seemingly knocked unconscious when they were dragged up. All their weapons are abandoned on the floor, but intact. None of their surroundings are even remotely familiar - the walls are all made of brightly colored, incredibly strong metal, and look like nothing they've ever seen before. Lily and Gerard peek out the window, wondering how much time has passed, and are flabbergasted to find that it's not the middle of the night - they aren't planet side anymore. Their planet, beautiful and blue, rotates below, and offers no explanation as to how they ended up in this mess. CB, while terrified, connects the dots; Lieutenant Scribbles wasn't kidding when he talked about belonging to an alien race, and they've been taken hostage.

While there's no true way for all of them to exit the room, Dom notices that there's a small grate on the wall that may be attached to an air duct, just big enough for either CB or Lily to crawl through to find a way out for the rest of them. Lily offers to go because she's the smallest, but CB insists, citing her prior expertise. Jack, Dom and Lily wrestle the grate off the wall, but before she can leave, Rosaline removes her cloak and drapes it around the rogue. She apologizes for being harsh between their first meeting and now and asks that they both come back in one piece. CB thanks her and starts crawling.

Carefully proceeding the alien ship on her own, CB avoids

contact for the most part, finding an odd sphere, an object that looks like it might be a key, and an unlocked data pad with what appears to be a passcode in a language she can't recognize. Before she can slip back to her cell, she's noticed by an alien just barely shorter than her, strongly resembling Scribbles, but in lime green. She introduces herself as Pen, and explains that she's the ship's scientist, studying the people of CB's planet. Her boss previously didn't want any contact between her race, the oclum, and the people of CB's planet, but changed their tune upon a check from a disgustingly wealthy planet side client with advanced technology. Pen helps CB get back to the cell door undetected, and the two free CB's party.

In between the time she left and the time she got back, Dom and the Prince had a personal moment that ended in an enchanted sword. Apparently, it was pretty sappy, because the rest of the party is teasing them endlessly about it. Pen and CB want in on it, but the Prince loudly exclaims that they refuse to explain.

With the group together, they can go through the ship and battle recklessly. They make it to the ship's helm, which is surprisingly quiet for a vessel of this size, and break down the door to what appears to be the bridge. They're met by a monstrous, 10-foot tall neon oculus that refers to itself as the All-Seeing Eye. The beast promises to introduce them to the mysterious client if they can best it in battle, so a fight ensues. Halfway through the conflict, the alien turns off the onboard gravity to the room for a more hazardous go about, but the gang still manages to win. As promised, despite being badly battered, the All-Seeing Eye contacts their client on a large screen, leaving the group in suspense as it presses a button and passes out.

On the screen, the figure that greets them is a gray tabby felica with golden eyes, appearing to be in his mid-to-late forties. Most of the group don't recognize him, but CB and Dom know exactly who this man is. Smoky looks pleased with the fact that the oclum were able to capture his youngest siblings and their hilariously weak friends, and tells them that both the aliens and Undergrowth, his mother's gang, had been watching

the two half-cats since they escaped their grasp. He had paid the oculum a handsome sum to draw them out, and now that they've been captured, they're getting taken right "home". CB growls at him, unwilling to go back from the hell she ran from, and mashes the button that the All-Seeing Eye had hit before passing out in anger. The beam that had surrounded them before surrounds them again, and Smoky demands that she change the location. By the time he finishes his sentence, it's too late - they've all been dropped neatly where they came from, in the empty castle gardens.

Chapter 10 - Controlling Hands

CB and Dom are noticeably enraged. Their companions who watched them get snatched by the aliens are presumably back in the castle, leaving just the seven of them and the setting sun. Everyone is glad to be away from the oculum and in one piece, are understandably confused by CB and Dom's strong reaction. While she loathes to admit this part of her history, CB slowly weaves a tale about two halfling children in a forest, wearing sacks.

Almost exactly two decades ago, CB was cutting her baby brother's hair with a pair of rusty scissors she found on the edge of her colony's encampment. Her hair was matted to all hell, but Dom's was decidedly worse, so she had to cut very close to his head. He wasn't scared of the blades, and quietly read a dirty children's book they had found in the garbage. Once she finished, she carefully cut off her own matted locks, and the two set out for a puddle. Watching their reflections dance in the waves, they giggled over their newfound autonomy, proud of their "style".

The fun is cut short, as it always is, when their mother found them. Mother and their other siblings are the only ones in the picture; their human father had disappeared without a trace when CB was about three, dragged away by an unseen assailant and unable to get to the two in time. Even though she had several children to order around, Mother always seemed to pick on them the most. Once she realizes what her youngest had done, she froths in unfathomable rage, disgusted that her own blood would

want to shed themselves of her image. Her giant hand wraps around Dom's body, squeezing hard enough to make it hard for him to breathe. Her long nail slashed down his right eyelid, drawing a frightening amount of blood. In a moment of panic, the little CB does the only thing she can think to do; swing the scissors in her tiny fist, as hard as she can.

The hit connects, slicing the felica across the forehead and digging solidly into the back of her hand, surprising her enough to let go. She blindly sliced in defense, hitting CB's right shoulder and Dom's left knee. Acting solely on instinct, CB grabbed Dom's hand, and started to sprint as fast as her legs could take her. Mother screeches at their retreating figures, ordering their siblings to catch them, but only a handful pursue. In the chaos, several break off into different directions, causing absolute chaos.

In the end, the older siblings were too distracted with the other deserters to worry about the halfling runts. CB and Dom ran on and off for three days, eventually ending up in a small town northeast of Kintsugi. There, they are discovered by another halfling child and his lamnide grandmother, who, with the help of their community, nurse them back to health and have a somewhat functional life.

CB darkly looks at her companions, not for any fault they have made, but in complete rage over a past that she and her brother could not escape. Dom finally speaks, sharing that if the rest of the group were willing, they could go straight to Smoky's hideout and have the chance to take care of their mother and Undergrowth for good. A quiet man in an oversized jacket and square frames waltzes into their group without a word, only earning recognition from CB, Dom and Jack. He puts an arm around the rogue's shoulders and asks them all to come inside and rest for a bit before making any decisions.

At the castle dining table waiting for them are the King, the Princess, Nia, Skip and Damien, and woman that they recognize as the prime minister. The stranger (who Jack affectionately calls Boss Man) sits to the left of the King, gestures for the rest of the party to sit with him. Once everyone is comfortable, the party

takes turns explaining all the strange behavior on their journey, the things that happened on the spacecraft, and questioned what to do next. Surprisingly, the King asks Mr. Matsuo, the man to his left, what intelligence he has for them.

Mr. Matsuo quickly and efficiently lays down the situation. The organization following CB and Dom, Undergrowth, contracted the aliens to cause enough tension in the region to taunt the two out into the open and cause general chaos. What their leader didn't know is that the Rogue's Guild was able to deduce their location due to the sloppy wire transfer, leaving them none the wiser if anyone decided to attack. By the analysts' research, there's anywhere from fifty to two hundred Undergrowth agents currently stationed at their base, making a quick and ruthless sting the best option to take them out. The King and the prime minister nod, weighing the gravity of the situation while Mr. Matsuo turns to his three charges and their little group of friends. He ultimately leaves the decision to execute the attack up to the prime minister but offers a spot in the part for them all if they decide to accept. CB, Dom and Jack immediately accept, and the others follow shortly after, incensed by what they had heard.

After some quiet discussion, the prime minister informs the group that she has decided to approve the sting, and that every primed fighter along an approved task force will move out at dawn. Chatter breaks out, and while CB is sickly delighted by this news, she starts to feel incredibly nauseous.

On the Gato Plateau, Mr. Matsuo's task force takes the advance, drawing the Undergrowth agents out into the open. The Knight's Guild sent back up on Skip and Rosaline's insistence, who pack up the non-combatant and forfeited agents into police vans, occasionally driving off and coming back empty. After a while, enough of the loyal agents get agitated enough to fight back, which the task force, CB and their allies take care of with ease. Interrupting the flow is a group of Undergrowth's seven strongest, sending their mother's regard before specifically asking to fight CB and her party. The battle should be a breeze with their current synergy, but CB keeps vomiting and collapsing,

as if something is seriously out of whack with her body. It's a struggle to finish the fight without their leader in top shape, but they manage to scrape along and defeat the seven agents. Just when they thought they had a moment to rest and check in with each other, the gray tabby from before saunters onto the scene with a powerful gun shell, taunting the group before opening fire.

One by one, Smoky manages to single handedly disable the entire party, having his younger siblings restrain them individually. Rosaline, Jack and Lily require multiple to prevent them from surging and escaping, while the Prince and Gerard are held down by one each, too weakened to use any sort of magic. CB is too far gone to be considered worthy of being held down, while Smoky takes care of Dom personally. He snidely comments that Dom looks much different than when he last saw him, and that their mother would be angry with his choices. Dom tries to wriggle out of Smoky's grasp but is promptly shot in the abdomen when he tries, drawing a cry of anguish from the Prince.

As if on cue, the big boss idly makes her way into the chaos, laughing at the foolish effort to overthrow her as if amused by the actions of a child. Deeming him weak enough to not move, Smoky decides to let Dom go while he and Magnolia discuss how they'll punish the halfling for his mistakes. Slowly, CB finds the energy to rise to her knees, stand, and slowly head towards her brother's direction. The agents restraining her party immediately take notice, but she attacks them with a strength they thought impossible for her size and condition. Just as Magnolia tells the nearly unconscious Dom that she's decided to put him out of his misery, the Prince explodes in a fierce, scorching hot electric energy. His magic sends a shockwave that takes care of the remaining restraining agents and knocks back Smoky and Magnolia, giving him and CB just enough time to get close to Dom. The Prince collapses in a spent heap atop the swordsmith, and the enraged CB takes advantage of the chaos by taking Dom's sword and slicing with all her might at Magnolia's wrist.

The hit removes her hand completely, and hits Smoky in the right eye, completely incapacitating him. The rogue informs Magnolia with a growl that they have a fight to finish, just the

two of them, and the bemused crime lord can't help but agree. While in the moment it lasts forever, the final conflict between mother and daughter only lasts about twenty minutes, leaving CB in a daze, and Magnolia without her head. With the death of their leader, all the agents either flee or turn themselves in. Smoky mysteriously disappears, and none of the Rogue's Guild or Knight's Guild agents can discern whether he died. Jack slowly stands, walking to his best friend, informing her that they had won. When she doesn't respond, he carefully shakes her shoulder, asking for her attention, but only receives a blank stare towards Magnolia's corpse.

After a few blank minutes, just as the rest of the party had found their bearing, CB collapses, blood very slowly pooling around her. The last thing she remembers before finally losing consciousness are her friends surrounding her, trying to come to her aide.

Epilogue - The Nature of Men

An unknown amount of time later, CB wakes up in a hospital bed surrounded by her friends and family, each quietly nursing an injury of their own and not quite watching her. She makes a barely audible rasping noise, and Dom, who had been sitting next to her, urgently gestures to everyone else that she was finally awake.

She tries to ask what happened, but her brother asks her to conserve her energy and let everyone explain. They had confirmation that Magnolia was dead from the coroner, and while Smoky was nowhere to be found, there were only a handful of major casualties from the sting. Dom just got off an ordered two weeks of bed rest, the Prince somehow disabled his powers, Jack had broken a leg, Lily had broken an arm, and Gerard had bruised some ribs. The healer tearfully explains that they were afraid that they might lose CB, because the damage she had sustained was incredibly severe. All in all, they had all gotten very lucky, and it was time to rest. CB rests her head against her brother's side, glad that this part of the nightmare is over.

Quick Backstory of Phlogeldelph

Phlogeldelph is a small country surrounded by deciduous and pineforests on one portion, a mountain on the second, and the ocean on the third. With cold winters and hot summers, it's a relatively reliable region for farming, but it's more known for its renewable energy grid, democratic socialist government, and booming tech industry. It achieved this calm state around forty years ago after a long period of feudal conflict.

The country is deeply connected through public transportation, and owning cars or other vehicles tends to be rare. Housing, health care, and basic access to free food and water are free to its residents. Its most popular tourist destinations are the handful of beaches, culturally rich metropolitan area, hiking trails, mountain slopes, and a world-famous ghost tour route.

While Phlogeldelph itself is peaceful, its neighbors aren't as lucky. Meridian, its coastal neighbor to the south, has been in a state of continued turmoil due several feuding gangs. Quetzal, its neighbor to the northwest, is stubbornly ignoring trade embargoes from close-proximity regions placed due to their actions. Despite all that, the parliamentary body of Phlogeldelph remains kind to all the neighbors who need to flee through their borders.

Groups within Phlogeldelph

Rogue's Guild

Headed by Mr. Matsuo, the Rogue's Guild is an underground investigative body that investigates and takes care of criminals and their dealings, similar to the CIA or FBI. While it operates on its own terms, it is technically a subset of the Knight's Guild. On top of aggregating information regarding the actions of known threats, agents apprehend suspects, recover stolen or illegal items, and protect hostages. CB, Dom and Jack are long term agents.

Knight's Guild

The Knight's Guild protects and serves the citizens of Phlogeldelph. There are several sub-groups that deal with different public services. The Royal Police Department (RPD) deal with petty criminals, settle domestic disputes that can be handled outside of court, and undertake investigations of murder, arson, assault and battery. They are constantly monitored due to past systemic abuses and are not allowed to use force in any instance except immediate threat. Aptly named, the Blaze Battalion responds to fire and other natural disaster related incidents. Medical Cavalry are the equivalent of Emergency Services, driving ambulances to retrieve victims who need medical treatment to hospitals. The Secret Service protects members of parliament.

Mage's Guild

While its primary function is sharing magical knowledge between all of Phlogeldelph's mages, it also contains all of the region's scientific research community, the health care system, and the education system. All this knowledge and care is accessible to average citizens for free if they contribute to it by creating, researching or working at some point in their adult life.

Military Bodies

Phlogeldelph has a very limited volunteer army, navy and coast guard for emergency purposes only. They are made up mainly by members of the Knight's or Rogue's Guild.

Phlogelphian Parliament and Court System

The parliament, court system and prime minister are the three branches of the Phlogelphian government. The parliament drafts and approves legislation, which is passed onto the prime minister to either sign into law or veto. The prime minister is also the most important diplomat in the region, acting with their cabinet to maintain peace and trade with the world. Courts settle domestic, criminal and governmental disputes in three separate circuits.

Royal Family

Acting more as a source of current magical knowledge, the only act of power a reigning monarch has is to act as an advisor to the current prime minister. The position is either passed down by blood or marriage, and the position of king, queen or ruler goes to the eldest child regardless of gender.

Undergrowth

Magnolia's criminal empire, named from their willingness to work from the ground up. They control the flow of gun shells for mages, dangerous illegal substances and technology in the region, and have been spying on CB, Dom and their friends since they escaped her grasp.



Aviseau

Singular avise, plural aviseau.

Loosely based on French for "bird".

Bipedal bird people with clawed hands and talons, with wings capable of flight on their backs. The species has a wide variety of feather colors and patterns, so much to the point that no one individual has the same coat. DMAB avise are typically more colorful, while DFAB tend to have more bland feathers, making feather dye in the community very popular. While most live in long term settlements, some stay in north most areas in the summertime, and fly south in the winter.



Dwarves

Singular dwarf, plural dwarves.

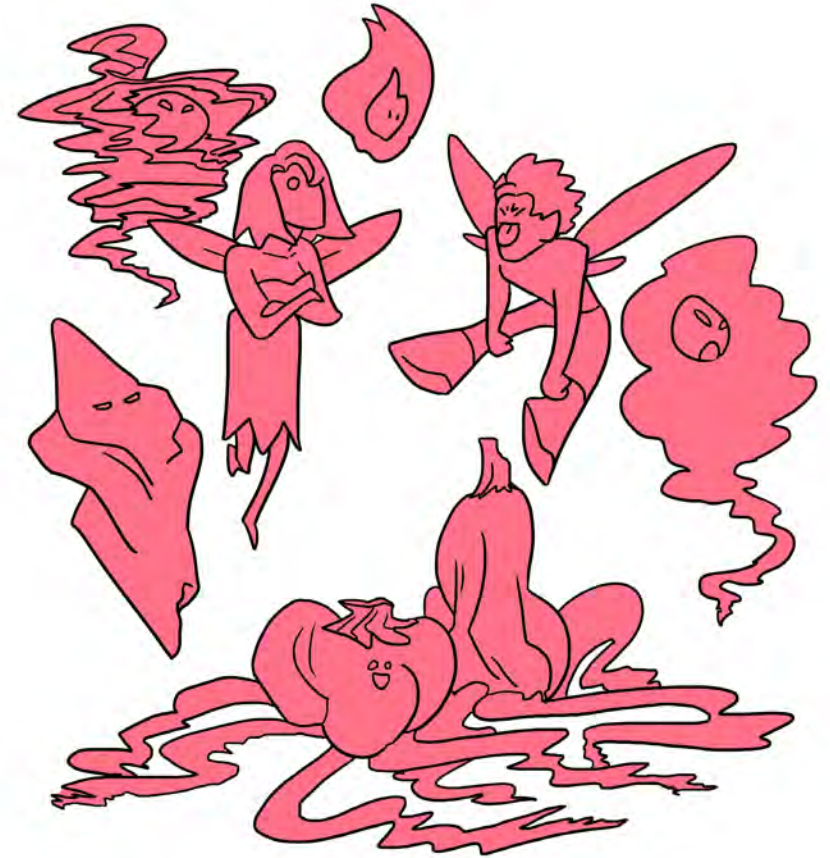
Famous for their mining and technological prowess, dwarf settlements tend to be hubs of the most advanced data and computing companies. There is very little sexual dimorphism in their race due to their rates of hair growth, with dwarves of all sexes typically growing long beards and ample body hair by their mid teens. They tend not to grow past 5', but certain individuals have grown as tall as 5'5".



Elves

Singular elf, plural elves.

Elves are the progenitors of magical ability, and their tendency of widespread interracial marriages caused the ability to spread through the bloodlines of almost all species. Unlike their Tolkein counterparts, they have a normal lifespan that tends to cap out at around 150 years. Their adult height is usually over 5'9", and when they aren't settled into the cities, they usually tend to the farms.



Fae/Fairies

Singular and plural fae, alternatively singular fairy, plural fairies.

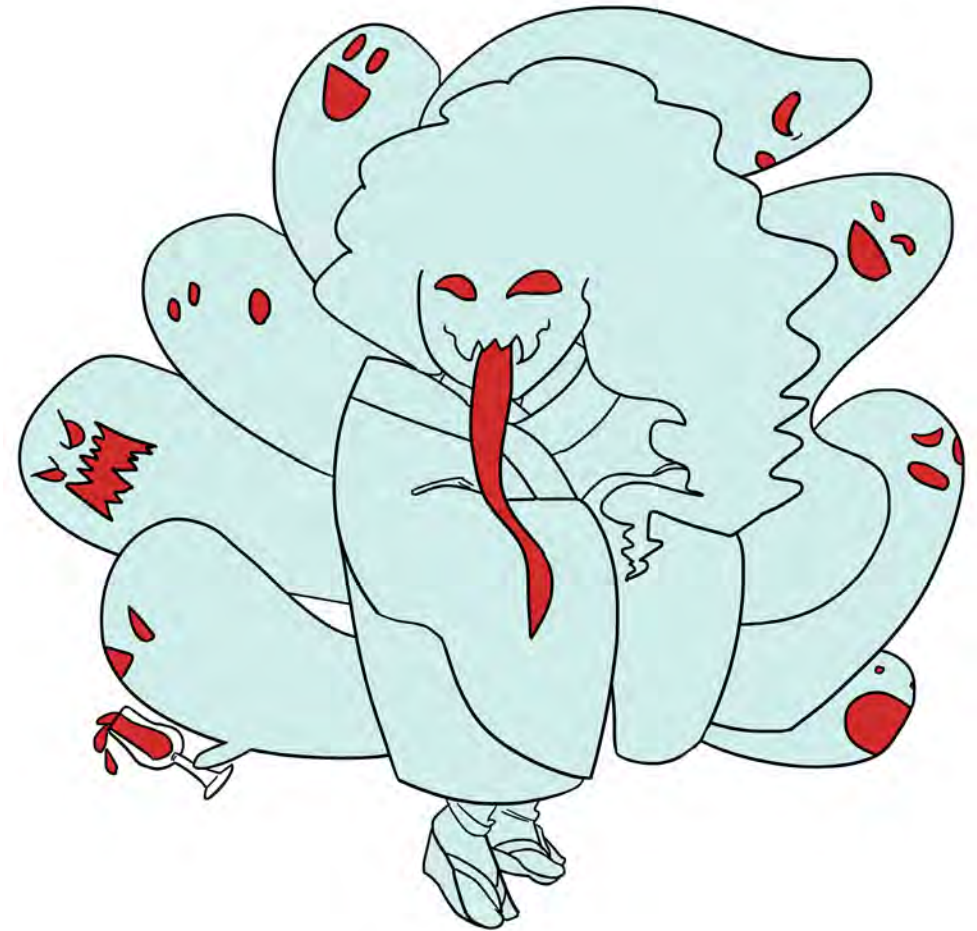
These mischievous little beings dwell in gardens, forests, marshes and ponds. There are several different subtypes of fae such as imps and sprites.



Felicus

Singular felica, plural felicus.

Bipedal cat people with five fingers on each hand, five toes on each foot, paw beans, and claws. Their ears are located on the top of their head, and they typically have tails. Felicus can have variety of coat colors and patterns, with only one or two instances of limited sexual dimorphism (calico, tortoiseshell, etc.). Generally, they have excellent sight and night vision. Before integrating with other races, insular felicus communities were largely matriarchal, due to the fact that individuals with the ability to get pregnant would grow in size and strength with each gestation.



Ghosts

Singular ghost, multiple ghosts.

Any individual of any race can become a ghost when they pass away. They are usually amorphous looking, but certain strong personalities can gather more coherent forms. As they are creatures of habit, they tend to stick to areas they were familiar with in life and not move around much.



Halfflings

Singular halffling, plural halfflings.

Colloquial slang for people of mixed race.

Due to good relations between races, there are many people of mixed race who live in Phlogeddelph. CB and Dom are half human and half felica, where Jack is half felica and half lamnidae. Characteristics of parent races are subject to genetic lottery just like normal traits, such as hair or eye color. For example, both CB and Dom have slightly enhanced strength, reflexes and night vision, but no fur, tails or ears on the top of their heads. Jack has the enhanced felica eyesight, claws, and sharp regenerative teeth, but just barely stands past 6' tall.



Humans

Singular human, plural humans.

Humans have a very wide diversity of size, shape, and skin color. Out of all the races located in or near Phlogeddelph, they are the most commonly come across. While lauded as the “everyman” race in the past, several strings of infighting have left other races skeptical of their leadership abilities.



Lamnidaer

Singular lamnide, plural lamnidaer.

Based on the Latin classification for the family of white sharks, as well as Tolkien orcs.

Lamnidaer are a race of incredibly large, incredibly strong orcs that have the characteristics of sharks. Common traits are sharp regenerative teeth, webbed fingers or toes, and strong sense of smell. All adults typically grow in excess of 6 feet. They have a very strong relationship with the nsómba, being long time neighbors and trading partners.



Machina

Singular machine, plural machina.

Sentient robots created in a joint effort between the humans and dwarves. Throughout the years, other races have built machina in their image, meaning that they can look like just about anything. Due to protective laws in place, they suffer little discrimination in Phlogedelf, but have faced strong animosity in the past.



Mortis

Singular mort, plural mortis.
Latin and French for death.

Some consider it a race, while others consider it an affliction. While there are individuals who appear to have been born as mortis, the widespread phenomenon is to be turned into one. Any individual of any species who is turned into one become a specter of pure smoke who can phase through objects, and typically gain otherworldly magical abilities. Thankfully, they tend to be quite rare.



Nsomba

Singular and plural nsomba.

Chichewa word for “fish”, based on African Cichlids (specifically from Malawi). Tall, bipedal fish people with great strength and the ability to breathe underwater. Their scales can come in a variety of colors, and tend change throughout their lives. Biological sex is an easily changeable factor to the nsomba, so they have a very loose concept of gender. They have a very strong relationship with the lamnidaer, being long time neighbors and trading partners.



Oculum

Singular oculus, plural oculum.

Slight variation of Latin for the eye.

Very strange aliens that look like large eyeballs attached to cephalopods. They have very strong magical and psychic ability, so it looks like they swim in midair. They have absolutely no concept of gender, and can present in any number of dazzling patterns and colors.



Tieflings

Singular tiefling, plural tieflings.

Tieflings are very similar in height and magical ability to elves, with their main difference being the presence of horns, lean-to-muscular builds and pronged tails. About half of the population have multiple horns or black scleras. Previously discriminated against for being “devils”, tieflings have come to common ground with the other races in recent years.



Undead

Singular and plural undead.

Also colloquially known as zombies, ghouls, etc.

Similar to ghosts, any individual of any race can become an undead when they pass away. Since they are reanimated corpses, they are typically either raised by a necromancer or carry a very rare gene that extends life into undeath.



Zarkans

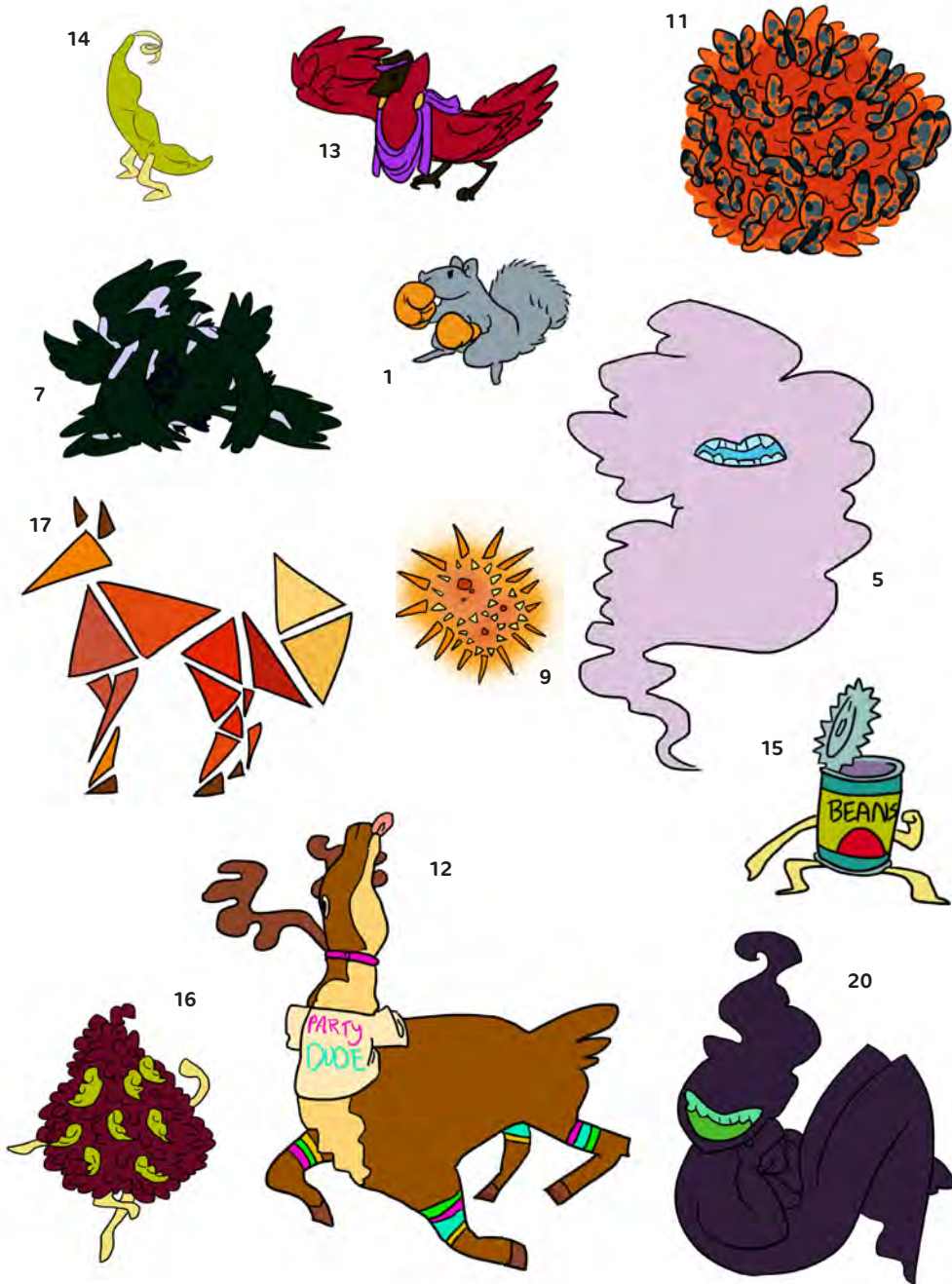
Singular zarkany, plural zarkans.

Slight variation of the Hungarian word for dragon.

A very rare race, zarkans typically look like humans or elves in their default form. They have the ability to transform into gigantic dragons, but this transformation typically takes a tremendous amount of energy. In the Phlogeddelphian region, Nia is the only publicly known zarkany.

Bandido's Backyard

1) Sucker-Punch Squirrel 2) Fox? 3) Harsh Hedgehog 4) Hard-Boiled Shrubbery 5) Hostile Winds 6) Kamikaze Pigeon 7) Small Flock of Magpies 8) Birch Walker 9) Morning Sun Sprites 10) Definitely A Fox This Time 11) Monarch Swarm 12) Wild Buck 13) Captain Cardinal 14) Bean Bean 15) Mean Bean 16) Bean Dream 17) Are you sure you know what a fox looks like? 18) Pumpkin Walker 19) Squash Walker 20) Shadow Goon



Caracol

1) Ghost Of Pone 2) Defeated Pone 3) Body Pillow Gone Wrong 4) Nice Guy 5) Livid Kiddy 6) Creepy Salaryman 7) Scrubs 8) Chivalrous Chav 9) Pizza Rat 10) Party Goblin 11) Beta Dudebro 12) Alpha Dudebro 13) Trilby Trilobite 14) Meninist Peon 15) Misogynist Masterwork 16) Mr. Double Standard 17) GentleCrab 18) Gropey Goon 19) Stack o' Hats 20) Shadow Fool



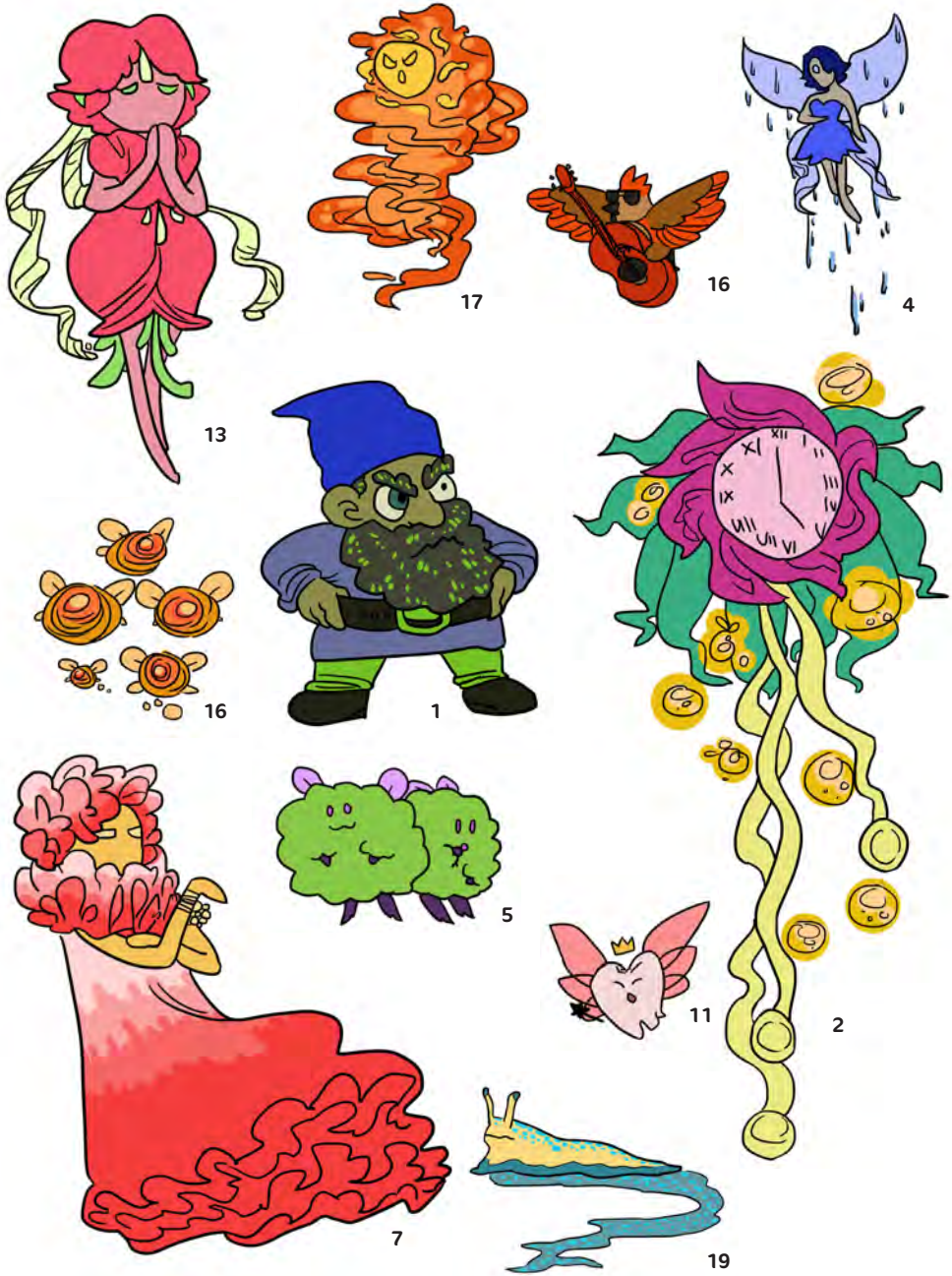
Kintsugi

- 1) Lesser Weebie 2) Rogue Weebie 3) Swift Weebie 4) Elder Weebie 5) Confused Fan 6) Sock
Puppy 7) Paddle Girl 8) Misplaced Collector 9) Cosplay Elitist 10) Cat Girl 11) Mademoiselle
Mannequin 12) Mad Cat 13) Hoops 14) Electric Elemental 15) Abandoned Cosplay Prop (Sword)
16) Abandoned Cosplay Prop (Scythe) 17) Abandoned Cosplay Prop (Gun) 18) Abandoned Cosplay
Prop (Axe) 19) Abandoned Cosplay Prop (Hammer) 20) Shadow Princess



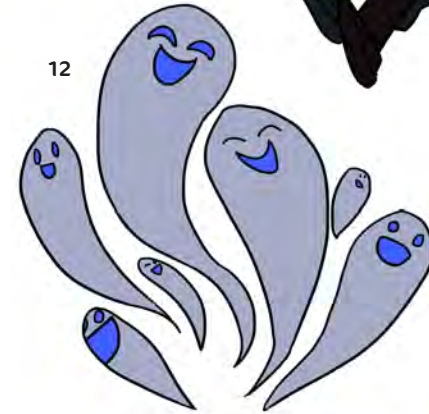
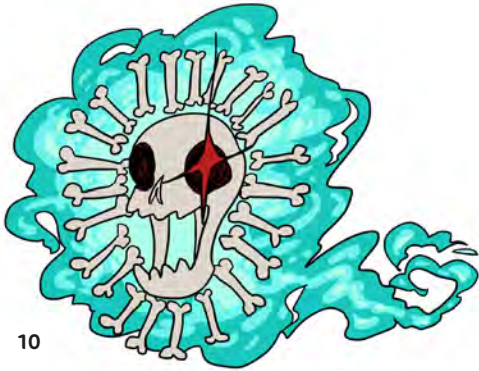
Huerto Verde

1) Hostile Gnome 2) Tick Tock 3) Fairy Lights 4) Sinkerbell 5) Bush Sprites 6) Picky Imp 7) Peonista 8) Sunpower 9) Violetta 10) Grumpy Dryad 11) Glinting Glynnis 12) River Rock 13) Bleeding Heart 14) Crow 15) Murder of Crows 16) Rockin' Robin 17) Fire Elemental 18) Koi Boi 19) Just a slug. 20) Shadow Fae



Wanderer's Forest

1) >:V 2) Skelly 3) Drac 4) Sparkle Drac 5) Zambie 6) Zoombie 7) Zumba 8) Zimby 9) Thrills n' Chills 10) WHEEL O' BONES 11) Aloof Spirit 12) Grim Grinning Ghosts 13) Mimic 14) Deer That God Forgot 15) Deer Out For Blood 16) Ghoulie 17) Skeleton & Skeleton, Partners at Law 18) Fire Ants in Some Pants 19) Admiral Stag Beetle 20) Shadow Commando



Frozen Hellscape

1) Emo Icecube 2) Fancy Penguin Procession 3) Fox! 4) Out-of-Place Sledder 5) Sea Unicorn 6) Blubber Puppy 7) Morose Snowman 8) Working Bear 9) Banshee 10) Well Maiden 11) Geode Spider 12) Jewel Beetle 13) Crystal Mantis 14) Shimmer Moth 15) Luster Muster Ant 16) Just A Regular Caterpillar 17) Diamond Monarch 18) Attendant 19) Ice Elemental 20) Shadow Comtesse



Kuzugorī

1) Zydron 2) Creeping Vine 3) The Reanimated 4) Butcher 5) Undying Flame 6) Electric Boa 7) Frozen In Time 8) Goop n' Grime 9) Invisible Sorcerer 10) Where Wolf 11) Why Wolf 12) Whomst Wolf 13) Boogeyman 14) Big Ol' Lizard 15) Mutant Moth 16) Mega Croc 17) Leg Leg 18) Corpse Flower 19) Pitcher Plant 20) Shadow Flytrap



Castle Cesoir

1) Castle Guard 2) Cyclops 3) Dancing Silverware 4) Glazed Mirror 5) Lost Ghost 6) Fancy Wine n' Spirits 7) Sword and Shield 8) Fire Spirit 9) Ice Spirit 10) Thunder Spirit 11) Shadow Spirit 12) Ground Spirit 13) Haunted Spear 14) Jewel Hummingbird 15) Eyes in the Hedge 16) Mother Mimic 17) Haunted Heirlooms 18) Birdless Cage 19) Bridge Crocodile 20) Shadow Joker



Mothership

- 1) Dry Eye 2) Eyesore 3) Eyedrop 4) Eyelet 5) Jealousy 6) Conjunctivitis 7) Teary Eye 8) Lear 9) Wandering Eye 10) Nearsight 11) Farsight 12) Bird's Eye View 13) Mr. Blue Sky 14) Eye Candy 15) Eye of the Storm 16) I Spy 17) Public Eye 18) Mind's Eye 19) On the Ball 20) Shadow 8-Ball Fracture



Able Gaming Resources

In my research, I found a long list of resources to more easily make gaming accessible to people with various disabilities. I've outlined some ways that I plan on making my games as accessible as possible, but I wanted to include the full list I found as a reference for myself and others.

7-128 Software

Reviews and rates the accessibility of games for people with visual disabilities and mobility impairments.

Website: www.7128.com External

Ability Powered

Features product reviews, articles, videos, and links to other resources for people with an interest in accessible gaming. Posts accessibility reviews of games before they are released to the public.

Website: www.abilitypowered.com External

AbleGamers

Modifies and adapts controllers for gamers with disabilities and raises awareness of the importance of accessibility within the gaming community. Publishes articles on trends in accessible gaming and presents at gaming conferences. A nonprofit organization that does not charge for its services.

Website: www.ablegamers.org External

AppleVis

Publishes accessibility reviews of iOS applications, including more than four hundred games, submitted by Apple users who are blind or visually impaired.

Website: www.applevis.com External

AudioGames.net

Lists games that are accessible to people with visual impairments.

Website: www.audiogames.net External

Ben Heck

Modifies Xbox controllers so they can be used with one hand.

Website: www.benheck.com/single-handed-controllers/ External

Blind Gamers

Shares nearly forty games for people with visual disabilities, developed by a retired computer programmer in Australia who has been creating accessible games since 2004.

Website: www.spoonbillsoftware.com.au/ External

BrandonCole.net

Reviews the accessibility of games for people with visual disabilities. Offers sound demonstrations of games and links to other gaming resources for people with disabilities.

Website: www.brandoncole.net External

Broadened Horizons

Sells independent-living products for people with disabilities, including game controllers and consoles with sip-n-puff inputs that allow users with severe mobility impairments to interact with the game environment.

Website: www.broadenedhorizons.com/products/ External

The Controller Project

Modifies game controllers to fit the unique needs of people with physical disabilities.

Website: <http://thecontrollerproject.com> External

D.A.G.E.R. System

Reviews video games and game controllers using a four-tier rating system to rank the accessibility of video games, Barrier

Free being the highest. Annually honors one game with the Diamond Award for most accessible.

Website: <http://dagersystem.com> External

Game Accessibility

Reviews the accessibility of new video and computer games for users with specific disabilities. Informs game developers about the importance of making their games accessible.

Website: <http://game-accessibility.com/> External

Game Accessibility Guidelines

Offers examples and advice on how to structure video games for people with disabilities. Developed by gaming studios and academics.

Website: gameaccessibilityguidelines.com/ External

Game Box Controllers

Adapts PlayStation and Xbox game controllers and switches for people with severe disabilities who cannot operate a standard handheld device.

Website: www.rjcooper.com/game-controller/index.html
External

Gaming Controllers for You

Reviews gaming controllers for a variety of users, including controllers adapted for people with disabilities. Also reviews switches that can be applied to controllers to give people with disabilities greater access.

Website: <http://gamingcontrollersforyou.com/> External

Geeky Gimp

Reviews games and game controllers for their accessibility; published by a woman with muscular dystrophy.

Website: <http://geekygimp.com/about/> External

GMA Games

Designs and sells Windows-based computer games for people with visual disabilities. Some games offered for free.

Website: www.gmagames.com External

Help Kidz Learn

Lists games for people with mobility and learning disabilities, including games specifically to be used with the EyeGaze adaptive technology.

Website: www.helpkidzlearn.com/ External

Ian Hamilton

Specializes in helping studios avoid excluding gamers with disabilities. Author collaborated with NLS to add and expand on resources in this publication.

Website: ian-hamilton.com External

Illegally Sighted

Reviews video games on YouTube for people with visual impairments. Provides hardware reviews, tutorials on how to use assistive technology, and product demos.

Website: www.youtube.com/user/IllegallySighted/videos
External

Includification

Provides standards from the AbleGamers Foundation for making games accessible to people with visual, physical, auditory, and cognitive disabilities.

Website: www.includification.com External

International Game Developers Association: Game Accessibility Special Interest Group

Brings together developers with an interest in game accessibility, acts as a resource for them, and educates and collaborates with them to make more video games accessible.

Website: <https://igda-gasig.org/> External

OneSwitch

Offers ideas on ways to use adaptive switches to make gaming consoles more accessible.

Website: <http://www.oneswitch.org.uk> External

PCS Games

Lists and reviews iOS, PC, and online games for people with visual impairments.

Website: <http://www.pcsgames.net> External

Smash Clay

Audio engineer advises people who want to add audio to their games to make them accessible.

Website: <http://smashclay.weebly.com/> External

SpecialEffect

British non-profit matches players with disabilities with adaptive gaming consoles.

Website: www.specialeffect.org.uk External

Titan One

Produces software that allows users (including those with limited functions in their extremities) to convert their game controllers into fully compatible game consoles without violating the warranty of the original controller.

Website: www.consoletuner.com/products/titan-one/ External

Unstoppable Gamers

Reviews video games and controllers for their accessibility. A project of the AbleGamers Foundation.

Website: www.unstoppablegamer.com/category/ External

Warfighter Engaged

Nonprofit, volunteer-operated organization modifies devices, including video game controllers, to meet the specific needs of military service members with disabilities.

Website: www.warfighterengaged.org External

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