Olivia Shepard
Fourth Year Award Proposal
31 March 2022

<center>Regency Romance Tabletop Roleplaying Game</center>

Introduction:

As a Studio Art and Media Studies double major, I have spent a significant amount of my coursework studying the intersection between visual art and roleplaying games. From my studies, I find that role playing games are under-explored as a New Media art form. This has become increasingly apparent in recent years with the explosion of Interactive Storytelling spaces like Tabletop Roleplaying Games (TTRPGs) and Live Action Roleplaying (LARPs), where art, narrative, and game systems intertwine to form fascinating interactive media. Furthermore, within these spaces there are under-represented genres and audiences. Most know *Dungeons and Dragons* (D&D), but may overlook how it represents the dominance of high fantasy and male-oriented war gaming mechanics. This dominance seeps into the broader sphere of roleplay games/media and neglects the gaming preferences of women and other underrepresented groups. Romance is a female-dominated genre represented well in art and fiction, but is severely absent in TTRPGs. It is this intersection between role playing games as new media art and issues surrounding thematic/gender representation within these spaces that leads me into my proposed project work.

Project Description:

I propose that I will spend the 2022-2023 school year creating and visually designing a romance TTRPG. I am particularly interested in Regency romances (e.g., Jane Austen and Netflix's *Bridgerton*) and will create my game under this theme. In my game, players will use character sheets of my design to create characters in Regency England's high-society. While each player's character will have a different personal aspiration from the others, the players and their characters all share one main goal: to debut into society and find love. In line with *Bridgerton,* my game will be more inclusive of BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and multicultural perspectives than perhaps what is historically accurate. Nonetheless, the staples of the Regency romance genre will be maintained for the entertainment of avid Regency fans and newcomers alike. Players may find their characters promenading during affluent luncheons, attending lavish balls, and doing their best to not be caught in a surreptitious rendezvous. Liberties will be taken and rakes will be reformed as players make haste to find love before the social season's end. Before beginning, The Game Master (GM) will write the campaign. They will then act as an anonymous narrator (i.e., *Bridgerton*'s Lady Whistledown), whose job is to illustrate the events of The Ton and the character's journeys in finding love. To visually and artistically design my game, I will be using Adobe products such as Photoshop and InDesign, as well as Microsoft Word or other word processors. I have access to these programs through my New Media courses and have worked extensively in these programs through my New Media coursework and Third Year Award project, *Pandora's Holographic Box.*

Project Overview:

I will now discuss my plan to complete the project by the end of this upcoming school year. In June, I will begin my design process by investigating a series of TTRPGs as physical artifacts and game systems. My research materials will include games like *Monsterhearts* by Avery Alder, *Bluebeard's Bride*

by Marissa Kelly, *Thousand Year Old Vampire* by Tim Hutchings, and others. In discussion with my mentor, we agreed that engaging with TTRPGs as tangible, primary resources is an excellent research method for game development. I will take rigorous notes during this phase to begin the visual, artistic, and mechanical design of my game. In July, I will synthesize my findings and finalize a basic layout for my game. This will include the game's artistic design and system. During this time I will also conduct research on Regency media to create my game, through a combination of online and literary research. To aid in the completion of this project, I will use Skillshare.com, a resource I found useful for my creation of *Pandora's Holographic Box.*

Between July and August, I will continue to work through my concept designs and writings to create a first draft playable prototype. I plan to have this done by September 1st (beginning of Fall Semester). After completing my first playable prototype, I will follow a rigorous playtesting process to iterate the design of the game through play sessions with members of the UVA community and elsewhere. This will include reaching out to gaming communities within and outside of UVA. My mentor will aid in connecting me with interested students. I will observe these game sessions and collect feedback from the players to workshop my game. I will repeat the play-testing and iteration process twice, with a second prototype to be completed November 1st, 2022, and the third by January 15th, 2023. I will complete the final prototype by March 1st. Toward the end of the year, I will finalize the game and have a few copies of the game materialized through a printing company. My top choice for a printing company is Bookbaby.com. By the outcome presentation, I propose to have a printed prototype of the game available to present with an accompanying online PDF version. I will make this PDF available on my website, www.oliviashepard.com, as well as through popular online independent game shop platforms like Itch.io , DriveThruRPG , and Etsy. At the end of the year, through drafting and iterating playable prototypes for the game, I will hone a set of mechanics, aesthetics, and designs for a successful romance-based RPG.

Mentor:

For this project we were asked to choose a mentor. I asked Media Studies Assistant Professor Sean Duncan to assist in the development and design of my game. Professor Duncan's research focuses on games and game design, with other emphases on comic book history, creation, and superhero media. He has expertise teaching the game design knowledge needed for my project, shown in his courses Games and Play (MDST 3704) and capstone class Designing Play (MDST 4510). Professor Duncan also has experience creating and teaching visual design in games and other media, shown in his Interactive Storytelling (MDST 3712) and Comics and Sequential Art (MDST 3710) courses. I have taken all of these classes, minus the Capstone class. I fully believe Professor Duncan is highly qualified and well equipped to mentor me in all aspects of the game's development and design. To aid this mentorship and cultivate my game development, I will enroll in a year-long independent study with Professor Duncan. Additionally, I will enroll in his capstone Designing Play course if that is taught by him next spring. To supplement this mentorship, my New Media professor and Third Year Arts Award mentor, Professor Federico Cuatlacuatl, will occasionally aid in my use of Adobe Photoshop and InDesign. This help is informal and will be on a case-by-case basis.

Conclusion

This project will contribute to my long term goals because it will broaden the types of media I create and expand the application of my art skills to new media. Obtaining game design experience can be applicable to my future career endeavors, as digital artists like myself tend to find careers in a variety of

fields, including toy and game design. Broadening my design experiences will be useful for my portfolio and expanding connections to potential employers and career opportunities. The intersection of art, gender, and games is a topic I have been interested in pursuing in both an artistic and scholarly sense. TTRPGs provide a unique and relatively undiscovered platform to write narratives, create game systems, and make New Media art. I hope the Miller Arts Scholars program will consider granting my proposal for the upcoming school year. I thank the committee for their time in reading my proposal, my timeline, budget, and involvement in the arts are attached below.

Timeline:

Summer:
- June 1st: Begin researching games through engaging with games as physically printed objects and primary resources
- June 15th: Develop visual conceptual understanding of game as well as mechanical understanding of game
- July 1st: Finalize idea of game and begin developing aesthetic, style, visuals, etc.
- July 15th: Begin preliminary designs for game manual, character sheet, and other supplementary visuals
- August 1st: Finalize preliminary designs for game, begin compiling materials into prototype
- August 15th: Finish compiling preliminary designs and ideas into a playable prototype

Fall:
- September 1st: **Prototype Draft 1, Play session round 1**
- September 15th: Collect Feedback from first play session, integrate into prototype draft 2
- October 1st: **Play Session round 2**, continue working on draft 2
- October 15th: Finalize prototype draft 2
- November 1st: **Prototype Draft 2, Play Session Round 1**
- November 15th: Collect Feedback from round 1, integrate into prototype draft 3

Winter:
- December 1st: **Play session round 2,** continue working on draft 3
- December 15th: work on draft 3
- January 1st: work on draft 3
- January 15th: **Prototype Draft 3, Final play session**
- February 1st: Work on final prototype
- February 15th: Finalize final prototype
- March 1st: **Finish Final Prototype and Send to Publisher for Printing**
- March 15th: Receive print materials and complete outcome report
- April 1st: Receive print materials and complete outcome presentation

Budget:

Gaming Research Materials: $600

[Including the following games (with availability to purchase others based on mentor recommendations or that fit the needs of the project during development):

- Dungeons & Dragons Core Rulebooks Gift Set (Special Foil Covers Edition with Slipcase, Player's Handbook, Dungeon Master's Guide, Monster Manual, DM Screen) - $110
- MonsterHearts - $60
- Starcrossed - $30
- Trilogy - $10
- Dialect - $40
- Bluebeard's Bride Bundle - $210
- The Ultimate Micro-RPG Book - $20]

Educational Materials:

- Skillshare: $120

Final Prototype Materials:

- [Bookbaby Quote](): $500

Prototyping Materials:

- Sketchbook: $20
- Sakura Pigma 30062 Micron Blister Card Ink Pen Set, Black, Ass't Point Sizes 6CT Set: $15
- Dice Set: $10
- Custom game card set: $60
- Paper and other prototyping/crafting materials: $75

Promotional Expenses (DriveThruRPG, Itch.Io): $100

Total Proposed Expenditure: $1500

Involvement with the Arts

Fall 2019:
- Member of UPC Arts and Enrichment committee

Spring 2020:
- Member of UPC Arts and Enrichment committee

Fall 2020:
- Introduction to Studio Art: A-
- Drawing I: A

- Member of UPC Arts and Enrichment committee

Spring 2021:
- Introduction to New Media I: A
- Introduction to Oil Painting: A
- Member of UPC Arts and Enrichment committee
- Accepted into Miller Arts Scholars Program

Fall 2021:
- Introduction to New Media II: A-
- Miller Arts Scholar Third Year Award Project work: Pandora's Holographic Box
- Miller Arts Scholar Fall Minigrant: Website/Portfolio Development
- Attended MAS course CASS 1010

Spring 2022:
- Miller Arts Scholar Third Year Award Project Work: Pandora's Holographic Box
- Spring Minigrant: Cosplay as New Media Art