

This world is neat and all, but what if everyone had superpowers? What if the earth was suddenly submerged underwater? What if we were all thrown under the rule of some sick, psychotic despot and had to steal, scavenge, and murder just to survive? I LOVE worldbuilding: the process of writing, designing, and illustrating worlds of my creation. I could stay in bed for hours with my tablet, carefully evaluating every intricate moment, every dramatic scene, every character, just to bring a new fictional world to life.

I use worldbuilding as an escape from reality, but more often, it serves as a form of “tribute.” The worlds I create are my tribute to a lifetime of obsessing over animation, comic books, and general media. I think I’ve seen nearly every Disney and Studio Ghibli movie, as well as most adult animated TV shows. I have an ongoing list of over forty animes I’ve finished, and I regularly browse suspicious sites on the internet for manga to read. Naturally, this constant intake of stories and content inspired me to try my hand at creating my own fictional fantasies. At seven years old, I had already completed three entire eleven-page comics (albeit in pencil) starring the teenage girl superhero Violet. In class, I would litter my math problems and reading exercises with drawings of duck-people, kitty-cats, cutie eyes, and 3D shapes. During recess, my friends and I would ponder the misadventures of Fancy Paw and Peppi Paw, two of our original characters, whom, if you can tell by their last names, were cat sisters battling the trials of cliché high school drama.

Then – the internet. With the help of Procreate, my tablet, and overly-curious friends, I ventured into the world online. Here, I could create OCs (original characters), make fan art of *Star vs. the Forces of Evil*, or browse YouTube recommendations for seemingly endless animation memes. I was one of a community, one that I trusted, one that allowed me an identity of my choosing. My former baby steps into the art world had blossomed; I was now interconnected with millions online, and my index of inspiration had simultaneously multiplied.

Ultimately, it’s pride I seek. I draw, not just because it’s fun, but to honor the artists I look up to: RinoTuna, Bacheally, and Demizu Posuka (to name a few). I write stories, not just to get lost in them, but as gratitude for the brutal dystopias of Neal Shusterman or the breathtaking world of Wynn (from the game *Wynncraft*). One summer break, a friend and I decided to create a game in a week’s time using the beginner’s coding platform – Scratch. We toiled over this project: multiple animated cutscenes, various expression rigs, even a fight scene. We wanted it to be just like the games we played. Of course, it wasn’t, but we loved it nonetheless. It was the fact that we finished it, that we created something all on our own, accompanied by the bright beaming light from our cheesy, happy-go-lucky end screen, that made it all worth it.

Even in school, every assignment and every test was a challenge to be completed in the best possible way. I would get in what’s psychologically known as the flow, a groove to get lost in, guided by the stories in my head. Suddenly, I was a steampunk engineer, building the kingdom’s finest skyship through the powers of centripetal force and kinematics, or I was a detective, solving the case of Grannie’s missing cat through quadratics and synthetic division alone. The most mundane of tasks, the most lifeless of conversations, the most boring of people can be absolutely thrilling given a second glance, a second chance, and the slightest bit of

imagination. Ultimately, I wish to see the beauty in all things, with worldbuilding – the performing arts of the mind – being the holy shepherd guiding my studies.