

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Visual Novel**

According to Toiya Kristen Finley in their 2022 book *Branching Story, Unlocked Dialogue: Designing and Writing Visual Novels*, a Visual Novel is a type of choice-based game where the player reads through prose to advance through both the game and the story (Finley, 2022). The gameplay is heavily centralized on the story itself which separates it from other choice-based games which tend to feature other gameplay mechanics. This is contrast to games like Role Playing Games or RPGs which while also story focused also has the play interact with a wider world beyond the main narrative

##### **2.1.1 Visual Novel Genres**

Visual novels have been around a long while since their starting roots in the 90s and as such have branched out into many different genres (Finley, 2022 Page 15). This is due to not just the style of game evolving over time but also as visual novels have been published on many different platforms from computers to consoles and mobile devices (Finley, 2022 Page 15).

##### **a. Kinetic**

Kinetic visual novels are those that have a strict linear narrative and do not allow differing outcomes based on choices due to a lack of choices. This in a sense puts them closer to book novels (Finley, 2022, Page 15).

##### **b. Hybrid Games with VN Elements**

Hybrid games as the name would suggest are visual novels that also prominently feature mechanics or systems from other genre of games such as combat, exploring, and more. Alternatively, these are also games that heavily feature the common elements of visual novels

such as character sprites accompanying dialogue and dialogue choice making (Finley, 2022, Page 16).

c. Romance

Romance visual novels are those that focus heavily on romantic story plots and were the main genre of choice by the Japanese who pioneered the modern visual novel aesthetic (Finley, 2022, Page 16). This genre also contains many subgenres based on the kind of romance story contained with some tailored to certain audiences or genders.

d. Stat Raising

Stat Raising is a genre where the player must as the name suggests, increase certain stats within the visual novel. This is usually the way a player may engage in relationships with the characters or designated love interests by doing certain tasks or actions which may have positive or negative results (Finley, 2022, Page 19).

e. Dating Sims

Dating sims are inherently a subgenre of simulation games which can and have been integrated into visual novels. In visual novels, this genre will focus on the player engaging with love interests like in stat raising but with the added touch of activity management (Finley, 2022, Page 20). The activity management is typically used to limit how much a player may interact with a love interest.

f. Mobile VNs

Mobile visual novels are games that are operated and played on mobile devices such as smartphones. (Finley, 2022, Page 21). These tend to follow mobile game trends of being free to play and having other forms of monetization. The monetization of these games come in microtransactions and Gacha mechanics. In recent times, this style of games typically combined with RPG and Gacha elements have been on the rise in popularity especially in the Chinese market as of writing this report.

As there are many different visual novel genres and by choosing the correct one for this project will enable a design that is effective in story delivery and user engagement.

### **2.1.2 Visual Novel Elements**

According to Toiya Kristen Finley in their 2022 book *Branching Story, Unlocked Dialogue: Designing and Writing Visual Novels*, one major aspect a Visual Novel differs from other games is in the elements used (Finley, 2022 Page 37). In a typical video game, a player will find many elements from multiple menus to many different buttons and a heads-up display. By contrast, a visual novel is far simpler and puts focus on elements such as textboxes and character sprites over others.

#### **a. Visual Novel UI**

Within the UI of a visual novel, key elements include dialogue, narration, and choice text boxes. (Finley, 2022, Page 39). These are as integral as the art elements and allow the player to read and interact with the story.

#### **b. Art Assets**

The art asset elements found in visual novels include character sprites and background art (Finley, 2022, Page 41-42). Character sprites in visual novels tend to be static figures with multiple variations to account for emotional states and gestures but may also be animated. Background art is used to visualize the world around the characters for the player and is used extensively for environmental story telling. Background art is sometimes interactable such as for the player to find objects of interest and explore or find out more about the environment they are in. Background art may also lack detail or have certain effects to imply what the player character is feeling much like the visual effects in other genre of video game.

### c. Computer Graphics

Computer graphics are fully illustrated figures or animations which are used for special occasions (Finley, 2022, Page 42). Visual novels convey this sense of splendor and awe by contrasting the highly detailed CG with the more standardized art used for the rest of the game.

Good use of the main elements of a visual novel helps in providing a clear and rewarding experience as it does with any genre of video game.

### 2.1.3 User Interface

Visual novels as with any form of media is made of a group of elements collected into a User Interface. According to Chipman's 2022 book titled UX/UI Design A Complete Beginners to Pro, a user interface is defined as any part or element of a digital product or service that a user will interact with to operate (Chipman, 2022, Page 9). This includes everything from touchscreens, sounds, keyboards, and lights. Alongside user interface, a designer must take into account user experience. User experience is defined as every encounter a person has with a set of user interfaces (Chipman, 2022, Page 12). Where user interfaces focus on the individual parts of a digital platform, user experience focuses on how a person interacts with it such as their user journey.

#### a. Low-Fidelity

Low-fidelity according to Chipman are sketches or prints of a prototype used to figure out how a user interface will look before being produced (Chipman, 2022, Page 48). These frameworks help the designer to gain an understanding of the overall picture and gain insights that weren't considered before the ideas were put to paper.

#### b. High-Fidelity

High-fidelity according to Chipman are higher in detail and quality compared to low-fidelity frameworks (Chipman, 2022, Page 54). These are used after producing low-fidelity wireframes to produce

a prototype closer to the final product. These tend to have full color and enough content for testing.

#### c. Information Architecture

According to Chipman, an information architecture is the organization of material on a given interface or surface (Chipman, 2022, Page 102). Good information architecture must be easy to use as otherwise a UI will cause frustration in the users and make them disengage.

#### d. Typography

Typography covers all aspects of the font in any form of application from size to style and dimensions. In digital spaces, typography plays a wider scope of roles as they are used in a wide range of website contents including text, buttons labels, website menus, and more such as instruction guides (Sidik & Pardede, 2019, Page 29). Considerations in a visual novel's typography includes the font style which needs to match the style and needs of the web page and also size and spacing to ensure readability and legibility especially in the context of interactive surfaces such as buttons.

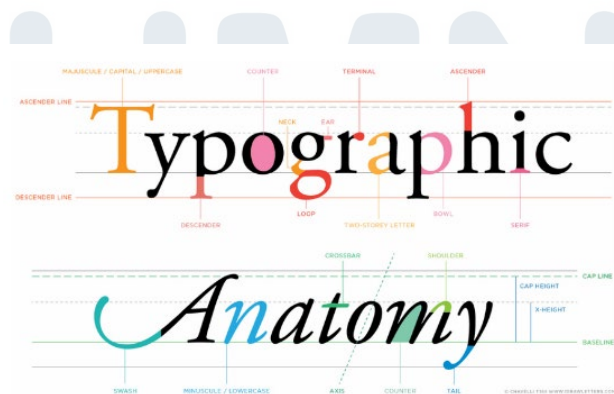


Figure 2.1 Typography Principals  
Source: Abdurrahman Sidik, S.Sn., M.Ds. (2019)

There are many aspects or individual parts of typography. According to Albert Chipman's book *UI/UX Design Beginners to Pro*, these aspects include white space, text alignment, tracking, kerning, leading, and line length (Sidik & Pardede, 2019, Page 145). White space

is the empty space within the design composition of a typeface. Text alignment is how the text is placed and justifying. Tracking, kerning, and leading are the various space settings between characters. Lastly line length is the number of characters allowed for a single line of text.

e. Color

Color is one of the most basic building blocks in design. Color choice in a digital media must take into consideration the function and purpose of the website and the target audience (Sidik & Pardede, 2019, Page 32). This is because the choice of color in a website will inform the user the kind of content, mood, and feeling the visual novel will provide. The choice of colors must also have some unity across the website's content and features to give a sense of familiarity. This can be played to great effect by designating a button or feature with a specific color which can get the implication across faster than text.

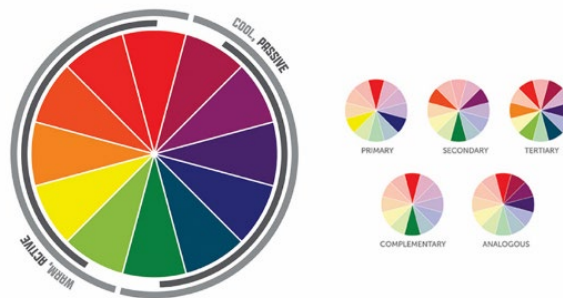


Figure 2.2 Color Principals  
Source: Abdurrahman Sidik, S.Sn., M.Ds. (2019)

#### f. Layout and Grids

Layout is what determines how the elements of a website must be placed in relation to each other (Sidik & Pardede, 2019, Page 34). A good layout will allow the user to browse through it without feeling confused and make it easier for the user to understand the content and features of a digital space. This happens because layouts can create a flow of content which will naturally guide the user across the visual novel in accordance to the designer's intention. Sidik divides

a website layout into page header, content area, and page footer (Page 35).



Figure 2.3 Use of Layout in the Visual Novel Touchstarved  
Source: Red Spring Studio (2023)

Within layouts, grids are also used as guidelines for how the content of a website should be arranged. These grid systems include mostly fluid, column drop, layout shifter, off canvas, and tiny tweak systems or styles. Josef Müller-Brockmann in his book Grid Systems explains that grids are used as a tool to help a designer who is working in either a two- or three-dimensional plane a practical tool for organization and visualization (Maller-Brockman, 1981, Page 9). Grids help with that by segmenting a space into smaller compartments that can be assigned to certain design elements (Maller-Brockman, 1981, Page 11).

g. Balance

Ideally a website must have a balance between the visual objects (Sidik & Pardede, 2019, Page 41). Balance revolves around how the appearance and visual weights of each individual object to a collective figure. Balance can be achieved through symmetry and by contrasting the difference between the objects. The forms of balance are divided into normal symmetry, asymmetry, and radial symmetry. Good use of balance will prevent cluttering and create a sense of order.



Figure 2.4 Use of Balance in the Visual Novel Nekopara Catboys Paradise  
Source: NEKO WORKs (2021)

#### h. Contrast

The principal of contrast in website design is to contrast two visual elements or object with different properties to accentuate those elements respectively (Sidik & Pardede, 2019, Page 42). In a digital space, contrast is applied to ensure that the many elements on the screen will remain visible and not blend into a sea of information which is crucial when displaying important information next to other information. Contrast will ensure that a screen will remain tidy even when containing a multitude of information.

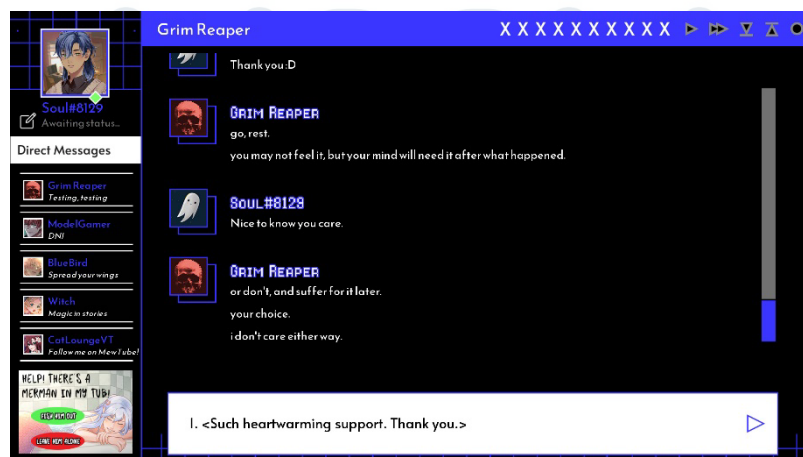


Figure 2.5 Use of contrast in the Visual Novel A Date with Death  
Source: Two and a Half Studios (2023)

### i. White Space

White space or negative space is described as the distance between elements and or the space between (Sidik & Pardede, 2019, Page 43). The presence of white space gives each element breathing room while simultaneously allowing multiple elements to feel cohesive next to each other. White space is important in user interfaces to provide the user ease in reading and deciphering the contents of medium.

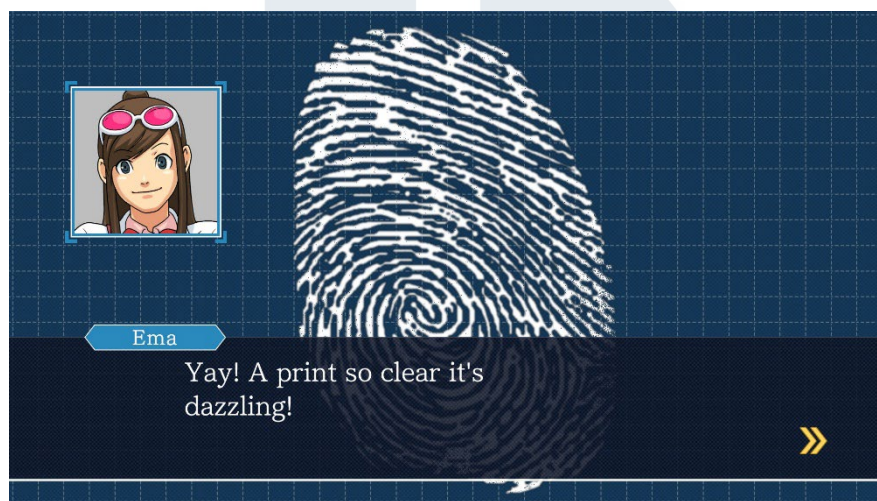


Figure 2.6 Use of white space in the Visual Novel Ace Attorney  
Source: Capcom Co., Ltd. (2019)

The use of user interface elements and principals is a core aspect in any digital interactive media and for visual novels can mean the difference between a smooth gameplay experience and a rough and undesirable one.

## 2.2 Character Design

Virtual characters have been around since the evolution of digital mediums such as video games. Sloan in their 2015 book Virtual Character Design for Games and Interactive Media defines a virtual character as a character that can exist thanks to a simulation run by a software (Sloan, 2015, Page xii). The term virtual character is not restricted to video games as a character simulated by a computer may exist in mediums outside of video games such as other programs (Sloan, 2015). As virtual characters continue to be ubiquitous, the design philosophies helmed by video games may also be of good use to non-video game virtual characters.

### 2.2.1 Anatomy and Physical Cues

Anatomy is a cornerstone of character design as a good understanding of anatomy such as that of a human is crucial in finding ways to adjust and exaggerate bodily features in ways that make sense (Sloan, 2015, Page 4). The core aspects of anatomy are comprised of body proportions, body type, and sex differences. These are especially crucial in human or humanoid character design as humans have a very specific body plan. Among the things that must be considered in anatomy is physical cues. Physical cues are physical attributes that a character may have with the sole purpose of giving the viewer a certain interpretation of said character. These physical cues may allude to attractiveness, health, and age as each tend to have certain physical traits that the human mind can immediately extrapolate from.



Figure 2.7 Use of anatomy in the visual novel Danganronpa: Trigger Happy Havoc  
Source: Robin J. S. Sloan (2015)

Good use of anatomy and physical cues allows a designer to easily convey many aspects of a character without needing any lines of dialogue which is effective storytelling.

### 2.2.2 Visual and Audio Design Principals

Visual and audio design principals cover the many visual and auditory elements that may be attached to a virtual character (Sloan, 2015, Page 25). Visual design principals include line and shapes, silhouette, color, composition. Those elements allow designers to give characters traits to be analyzed and interpreted by others. Line and shapes are the most commonly discussed concepts of visual language (Sloan, 2015, Page 26). This is because humans are naturally skilled at spotting outliers and shapes and as such can be leveraged for effective character design by simple use of line variation and

shape choice (Sloan, 2015 Page 26). A character's silhouette is another key component as it is an indicator of spatial properties (Sloan, 2015, Page 30). Silhouette is often used to check and increase recognizability by blacking out a character's design and testing if others can determine who is who (Sloan, 2015, Page 31). Color is another principal used in character design and is used to increase the potential to communicate more ideas through design (Sloan, 2015, Page 33).



Figure 2.8 Use of Visual design in the visual novel Coffee Talk  
Source: Toge Productions (2020)

Basic visual and audio design principals cover for a good amount of storytelling that is typically left unsaid in the dialogue and or does not interact with the story but is there to enhance the audience's experience.

### 2.2.3 Illustration

A character design naturally is an illustration that contains the aforementioned ideas and elements and as such the illustrative process must also be understood to craft a character. The creation of a character according to Harder in her 2023 book titled "Creative Character Designs for Games and Animation" necessitates a brief to craft a convincing character through a character questionnaire. The character questionnaire is comprised of questions on a character's Name, Gender, Age, Ethnicity/Species, Profession, Origin, Personality, Mainly, Skills/abilities, weakness/fear, Dislike/hate, Hobbies,

Loved ones, Desires, Needs, Struggle, Idealistic, Secrets, Beliefs, Range of change, Appearance, and background story (Harder, 2023, Page 27). From there, the character design process goes through the following steps: Research, Sketch, Clean Up and Color, Turn Around, Expression, Poses, and finally Render. The use of the aforementioned process allows an artist to create a character that is deep with ideas and design cues according to what is needed of the character.

## **2.3 Mythological Figures**

According to James Hillman's book *Mythic Figures*, in the past myths provide an explanation to the mysterious (Hillman, 2007, Page 9). These range from natural phenomena to animals and even very specific events. They also help people understand concepts in society by using them as metaphors such as beauty, war, and more. As such the figures within these myths may take up many different forms as was necessary, typically in the form of gods. Hillman argues that humans like to represent things with figures as in absence of godly worship, people have substituted them with the worship of fame (Hillman, 2007, Page 10). Among Indonesian mythology, those of Balinese origin or shared origin have a wide cast of interesting figures. These figures include spirits, humanoid beings of divinity, and serpents or dragons.

As mythological figures are the central theme around the project, understanding each individual figure is necessary to deliver an accurate enough portrayal of said figures. The figures chosen for the project will be based on their visual appearance, story, and distinctness from each other.

### **2.3.1 Antaboga**

In Jack Tresidder's book *The Complete Dictionary of Symbols*, the Balinese Antaboga is a primordial serpent that existed before both heaven and earth. This Antaboga acts as a creator deity and the creator of the universe by meditating and creating the cosmic turtle Bedawang Nala (Tersidder, 2004, Page 36). Thus, by creating Bedawang Nala, Antaboga sets the foundation for earth itself. According to the same legend, Antaboga then needed to restrain

Bedawang Nala's movements as by moving it caused immense destruction from the shaking of the land. Because of that, Antaboga would then coil around the cosmic turtle along with the help of Naga Besukih to keep Bedawang Nala from ever moving. Antaboga is said to still remain coiled around Bedawang Nala and keeping a vigilant eye on the cosmic turtle should it ever start to move free from the two-coiling serpent-dragons.



Figure 2.9 An Artistic Depiction of Antaboga by I Ketut Gedé  
Source: I Ketut Gedé (2007)

Depictions of Antaboga are fairly consistent across places as it is usually shown as a colossal serpent adorned with jewelry. These depictions focus on the serpent's majesty and power with his stature typically standing taller than other figures he is depicted with. Colloquially known today as a dragon for its serpentine appearance and immense power, Antaboga appears frequently in Balinese and Javan carvings such as those on musical instruments. As such any newer depictions of Antaboga should carry over his serpent body that is adorned with bright ornaments, flowing hair much like in the artwork above, and his nature as a very powerful deity. Antaboga's distinction of being a creator deity merits attention as backstory and the myth of how he created the universe is not as well-known as the character itself, hence why it is chosen to be a part of the project's cast.

### 2.3.2 Barong

In the book *The Balinese* by J. Stephen Lansing, Barong is described as a spiritual being that inhabits a distinctly styled vessel which protects villages from evil spirits. Lansing explains based on what he understood from the locals that the Barong can only act as the village's guardian after a ritual is done correctly, else the Barong will not awaken to protect the villagers (Lansing, 1995, Page 46). In the book, Lansing describes a common story that is played out in the ritual where Barong prevents Rangda's daughter Rarong from stealing the corpse of a child within a graveyard for the witch to consume. As Barong intercepts Rarong, Rangda makes herself known and the two do battle which attracts the attention of the townspeople who then send warriors to assist Barong (Lansing, 1995, Page 44). This story ends along with the ritual as people armed with Keris blades kicking Rangda and forcing her to retreat.



Figure 2.10 Barong as depicted in *Megami Tensei*  
Source: Namco (1987)

The Balinese Barong is typically shown as a large mammalian figure that bears resemblance to big cats, notably the lion. Lansing describes the Barong as looking fierce but not evil as the body is covered with shaggy fur and bronze while needed two men to perform in (Lansing, 1995, Page 44). However, the Barong may take up different appearances depending on the localities. Barong's origins lie in the tradition of ethnic Balinese dances that may have eventually co-opted Buddhism beliefs during the spread of the

religion which could explain its superficial resemblance to the dancing lion. Regardless of appearance, the people of Bali regard Barong highly as they naturally should considering its role as a protector against evils. It also most notable for its rivalry against one of the most prominent evils being in Balinese mythology, that being Rangda. As such any newer depictions of Barong should carry over his mammalian quadruped body, long shaggy fur, distinct ornaments around his body, and a fierce but noble face alongside his personality as a spirit guardian who protects all from evil spirits. Barong's status as a guardian spirit, its mammalian yet unique visual appearance, and its conflict with Rangda merits attention as it presents a uniquely Balinese iteration of the conflict between good and evil. Thus, Barong is chosen to appear as part of the project's cast.

### **2.3.3 Besukih**

Besukih, also called Naga Besukih is a serpentine dragon and is the Balinese incarnation of Basuki. In Nyoman Tusthi E's book *Cerita Rakyat dari Bali Volume 2*, Basuki as depicted in the Bali Straight creation story is a deity that lives on Mount Agung and is a major character in the myth. Besukih is depicted as being compassionate by giving both Sidi Mantra and Manik Angkeran jewelry to sell that fall from his scales, (Tusthi E, 1997). In the story, Besukih does this to help Manik Angkeran pay off his debt due to his gambling addiction. However, Besukih is shown to be capable of great displays of power as it was able to incinerate Manik Angkeran into ashes when the belligerent boy cut off its tail to obtain more jewelry to sell. However, Besukih is still compassionate even after that as it willingly revived Manik Angkeran at his dad's behest so long as the boy stayed with the dragon to change his ways.



Figure 2.11 An illustration of Besukih in the creation story of the Bali Strait  
Source: Nyoman Tusthi E (1997)

Besukih is commonly depicted as a giant serpentine dragon with golden scales which can produce jewelry as the myth suggests. It typically has Balinese style ornament adorning its head and is capable of producing incinerating flames. In modern times however, Besukih is often depicted more closely to a Chinese or Japanese styled dragon with deer antler shaped horns, fur, and carp-like whiskers. As such any newer depictions of Besukih should carry over the serpentine dragon body, prominently scaled hide, ornaments such as the headwear, and the ability to produce jewelry alongside a stern personality that isn't above giving others a second chance. Besukih offers a uniquely Balinese interpretation of a serpentine dragon with unique qualities paired with a distinct powerful yet compassionate personality that merits attention. Thus, Besukih is chosen to appear as part of the project's cast.

#### 2.3.4 Garuda

In a Sonobudoyo Museum official book for the exhibition Meet the Myth, Garuda is described as one of the most prevalent and iconic mythological figures across Indonesia (Priyanggono et al., 2024, Page 14). Among the various stories regarding Garuda is the Garudeya in which it tells the story of

the birth of Garuda and the Nagas (Priyanggono et al., 2024, Page 15). The story follows Garuda as it attempts to obtain the tirta amerta which is colloquially known as the elixir of life in order to free its mother from enslavement by the Nagas (Priyanggono et al., 2024, Page 15).



Figure 2.12 A Statuette and cloth illustration of Garuda  
Source: Museum Negeri Sonobudoyo (2024)

Garuda has a wealthy record of varying depictions from place to place with some being more anthropomorphic or human-like and others being more zoomorphic or animal-like. Generally, Garuda is depicted as a half human and half bird being. As the personal vehicle of Visnu, Garuda is often associated with strength. Garuda has obtained a special kind of relevancy in the modern age as it is gained nationwide prestige when it became the national symbol of Indonesia and as such holds a deeper meaning for the people. However, the Balinese iteration of Garuda such as the one from the Garudeya story which is also the centerpiece of the Garuda Wisnu Kencana statue in Bali is worth exploring. As such any newer depictions of Garuda should carry over the bird wings, humanoid body, and the ornaments and garments typically found on Garuda such as the headwear and the loincloth alongside his personality as being tough, brave, noble, and willing to help others. Despite Garuda's prevalence, the Balinese iteration offers a unique lens in which to see how neighboring cultures may view the same figure differently due to cultural backgrounds and what they value in the selfsame figure. Thus, Garuda is chosen to appear as part of the project's cast despite its popularity all while providing a familiar figure that may aid in increasing familiarity.

### 2.3.5 Rangda

In the book *The Balinese* by J. Stephen Lansing, Rangda is described as a queen of witches and the source of many evils. To be more precise, Rangda is a witch that utilizes black magic and takes joy in devouring the corpses and entrails of children (Lansing, 1995, Page 43). Both Barong and Rangda feature in a ritualistic dance that reenacts their battles.



Figure 2.22 Rangda as depicted in Megami Tensei  
Source: Namco (1987)

Lansing describes the design of Rangda's costume as having long messy hair, long fangs, bulging eyes, dangling breasts and wicked talons (Lansing, 1995, Page 44). This depiction evokes wickedness while maintaining a human silhouette that is distinctly feminine. Within the dance, Rangda acts as the instigator of the conflict by sending her child to dig up a corpse from a grave which leads them into conflict with the Barong (Lansing, 1995, Page 44). Much like the dancer who plays the Barong, both enact these plays while under a trance. Where the Barong incites veneration, Rangda incites fears which drives the Balinese to continue their tradition of the dance in order to protect themselves. As such any newer depictions of Rangda should carry over the wicked features, long hair, and generally humanoid design alongside her personality as a witch that loves to find and eat corpses. Rangda's status as an

evil witch with a unique visual appearance that gives her a wild and terrifying presence, and her conflict with Barong merits attention as it presents a uniquely Balinese iteration of the conflict between good and evil. Thus, Rangda is chosen to be part of the project's cast.

## 2.4 Relevant Research

To get a better understanding of the current researches regarding the topic of this project, the author conducts relevant research of other projects. The projects found and are reviewed have a similar base topic and a similar output medium. The following table below are the research projects that may become benchmarks.

Table 2.1 Relevant Research

No.	Research Journal	Author	Research Findings	Novelty
1	Perancangan Board Game mengenai Hewan Legendaris Indonesia untuk Usia 15-24 Tahun (2024)	Christina, Tabitha	This research paper created a board game featuring Indonesian legendary creatures to incite interest in said creatures.	The author will focus on developing a more informational video game that focuses on Balinese mythological figures.
2	Perancangan Media Informasi Interaktif Legenda Danau Batur untuk Anak Usia 9–12 Tahun di Bali (2022)	Komang Bayu Aribawana, I	This research paper created an interactive storytelling website that tells the legend of Batur lake.	The author will focus on developing a Visual Novel that retells Bali's mythology in a modern form
3	Perancangan Website Dakon sebagai Pengenalan Karakter Wayang Kulit Kisah Mahabharata (2023)	Thefany, Caroline	This research paper created a website as a means to introduce people to Wayang Kulit story of the Mahabharata	The author will focus on developing a Visual Novel to introduce people to Balinese mythological figures.

Based on the relevant research above, the novelty that will be implemented into this project of designing a visual novel is providing an informational media that focuses on the zoomorphic and anthropomorphic depictions of Balinese mythological figures, providing a modern retelling of the

classic stories, and to provide a more relevant and modern way to introduce people to those figures. Visual novels are interactive storytelling mediums and as such may take advantage of the inherent benefits interactive media has over static media to convey stories and messages in a fun and engaging way. Effective and engaging media such as this also aids in introducing uncommon topics and pulling audiences to explore more about said topic.

