



## Special Features

### **Digital Art Book**

Commentary on the development of the game including sketches, in-progress art, and more.

### **Unused Music**

Some unused/unfinished music that didn't make its way into the game.

### **An Early Game Prototype**

A short playable early unfinished prototype of the game.

What happens when all entities  
are aware of their reality?  
What is their goal in life?

No tricks

Paradox Questions

If we do not fully  
understand  
reality, then  
what ~~values~~ values  
are most important  
to us in life?

If we fully understand  
reality, then how does  
one live their life?

Free will?

Meh it's all predetermined anyway, why bother?

Don't fully understand, smiles anyway  
thinks they understand - revolutionarily

Universe is NOT Broken.

Creator = ? || God = ?

Why we exist = entertainment || ???

The inception of MetaWare. Written down sometime mid January 2019.

## The Idea

I think the idea for MetaWare came out of some discussion I was having with one of my teachers at school back in January of 2019. We were debating on different ways that you can define "truth". In my teacher's view, truth can never be defined with 100% certainty - the only reason we can say something is true is because we have observed it to be true, or told or shown that it is true by others. This is all rather pedantic to think about if you're not into this sort of stuff, but you can make some interesting claims about how you choose to live your life with this kind of thinking.



Anyway, all this conversation about truth led me to have an interesting question/idea:

**What happens when all entities are aware of their reality? What is their goal in life?**

Another way I would come to word this might be:

**What would happen if, in a fictitious world, all characters were 100% aware that they were “false”, or in other words, fiction, and how would that change their values in life?**

I’m a nut for anything metafictional, and given all of the media I’d come across, I couldn’t think of any examples where all of the characters were aware of being fiction – and completely okay with it. (Although I have since found ONE example of a fully functioning metafictional world which I came across after MetaWare’s release: a web comic from 2001 called *One over Zero*. It’s also quite philosophical, funny enough.)

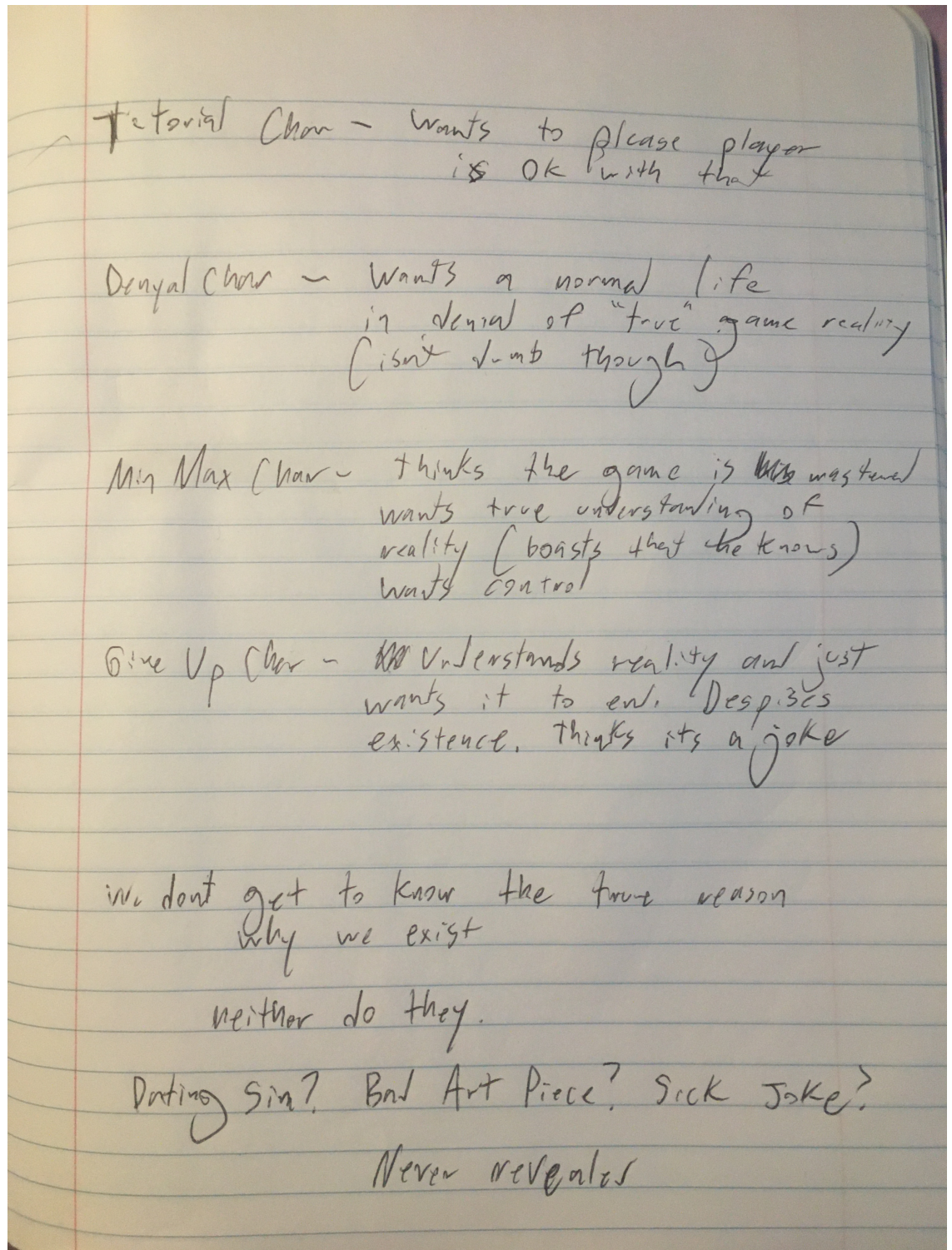
Most of the time metafiction is used as an aside to poke fun of something, like Deadpool interrupting the story to make fun of Marvel. In other cases, the characters become self-obsessed, go evil, or spiral into nihilism or depression. They might even try to escape into “the real world”. So the idea of making a “functional” metafictional world where the impossible was accepted as normalcy was too interesting not to get excited about.

You can see the next thing I wrote in my notes was “No tricks”. Metafiction is often used as a way to pull the rug out from under you or freak you out, like reading your hard drive to try and find your real name, or pretending to delete all of your save data, or pretending the game has crashed, etc. I was curious if metafiction could be used for an entirely different purpose – not to trick you or lie to you, but as a device to examine something other than its own medium. My hope was to try and draw a parallel between the values of these metafictional characters and the values that we share in the real world. The “parallel questions” that I scribbled in my journal are kind of vague, but they touched on what I ended up attempting to focus on: perception. How we see the world – and how that influences how we live our lives.

To create the characters, I came up with feasible takes on the question: “how you would live your life if you knew it was fake/a game?” I then attributed each of these to a term, way of thought, or ideology and named the characters based off first letter of these ideas:

- **Christ** (Chris) – Serving the player and making them happy is the most important thing in life.
- **Idealism** (Isadora) – What is natural, normal, or “ideal” is most important.
- **Anarchy** (Aspen) – Min/Maxing the game is most important. Everything else is secondary.
- **Hedonism** (Hope) – Personal pleasure is most important.
- **Nihilism** (Nari) – Life is fake. Therefore nothing matters.

This is where the characters started, but they developed far beyond these initial ideas.



More preliminary  
ideas.

## Preparing for Expo

As soon as I had the idea in January of 2019 I immediately started sketching out the characters. I generated some god-awful placeholders using an online anime girl maker and started building a prototype. (I've included that prototype in this collection!) Eventually I scrapped it and started over and started creating what the game eventually became with the goal of having it ready to present as a demo in the CalArts Expo in May of that year. (This is also the same semester I created the VR experience *BUS SIMULATOR* by the way, the one other game I've released under *Not Fun Games* as of this writing).

I chose RenPy as the game engine because I was impressed with *Doki Doki Literature Club's* (DDLC) technical versatility. As a result, *MetaWare* looks a LOT like DDLC. I wasn't considering releasing the game to a wider audience at the time so the fact that the two games look so much alike never bothered me.

By the way, I'm sure it's fairly obvious that *MetaWare's* setup is inspired by DDLC. These ideas on metafiction could have just as easily been executed in some other setting or genre but it made most sense to put the game in the familiar territory of the anime high school trope. And of course the Visual Novel genre was the most logical medium to make the kind of experience I had in mind.

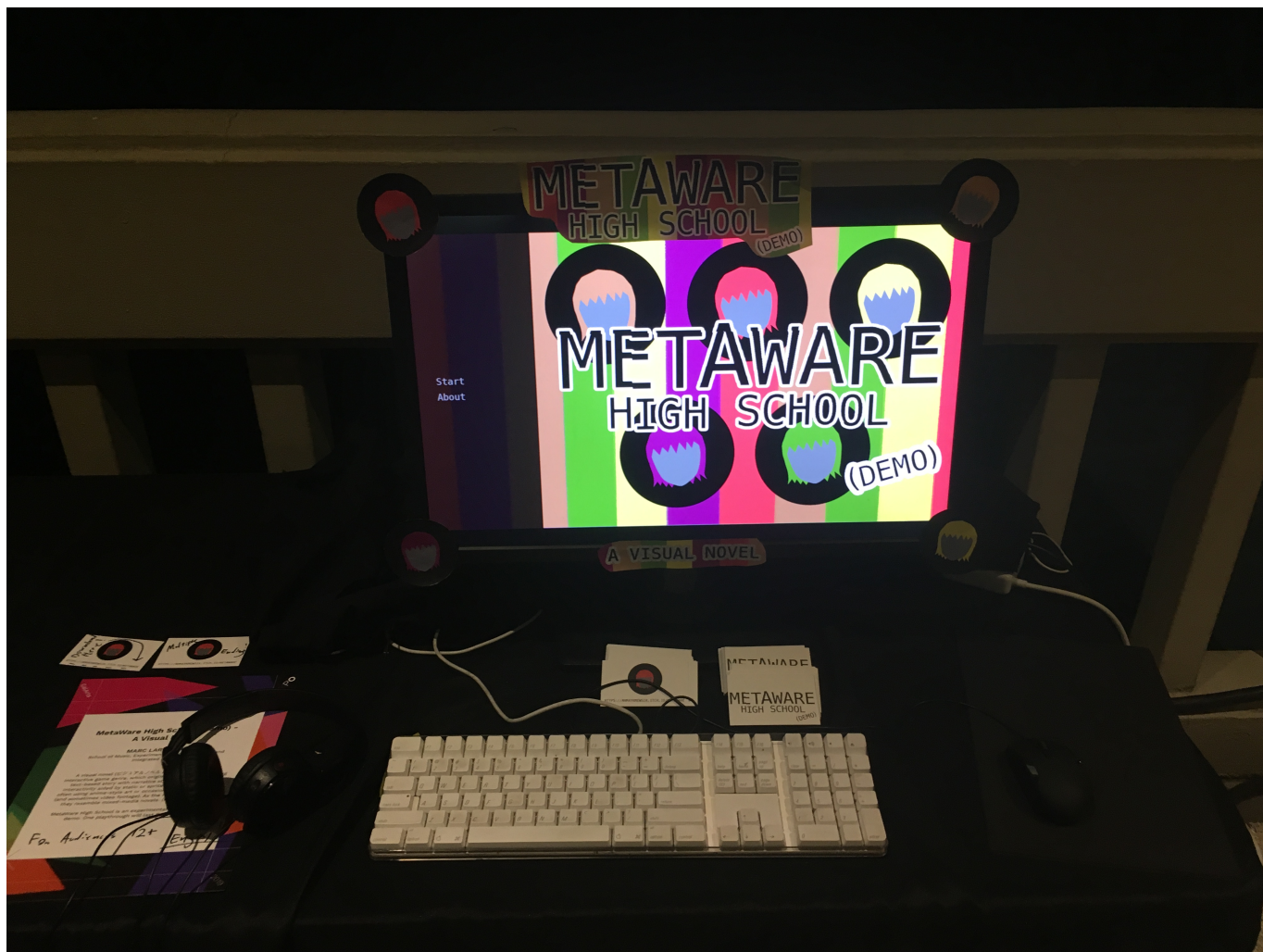


The early unfinished prototype with the early placeholder art. This prototype is available to play in this collection with redrawn art by Keeby!

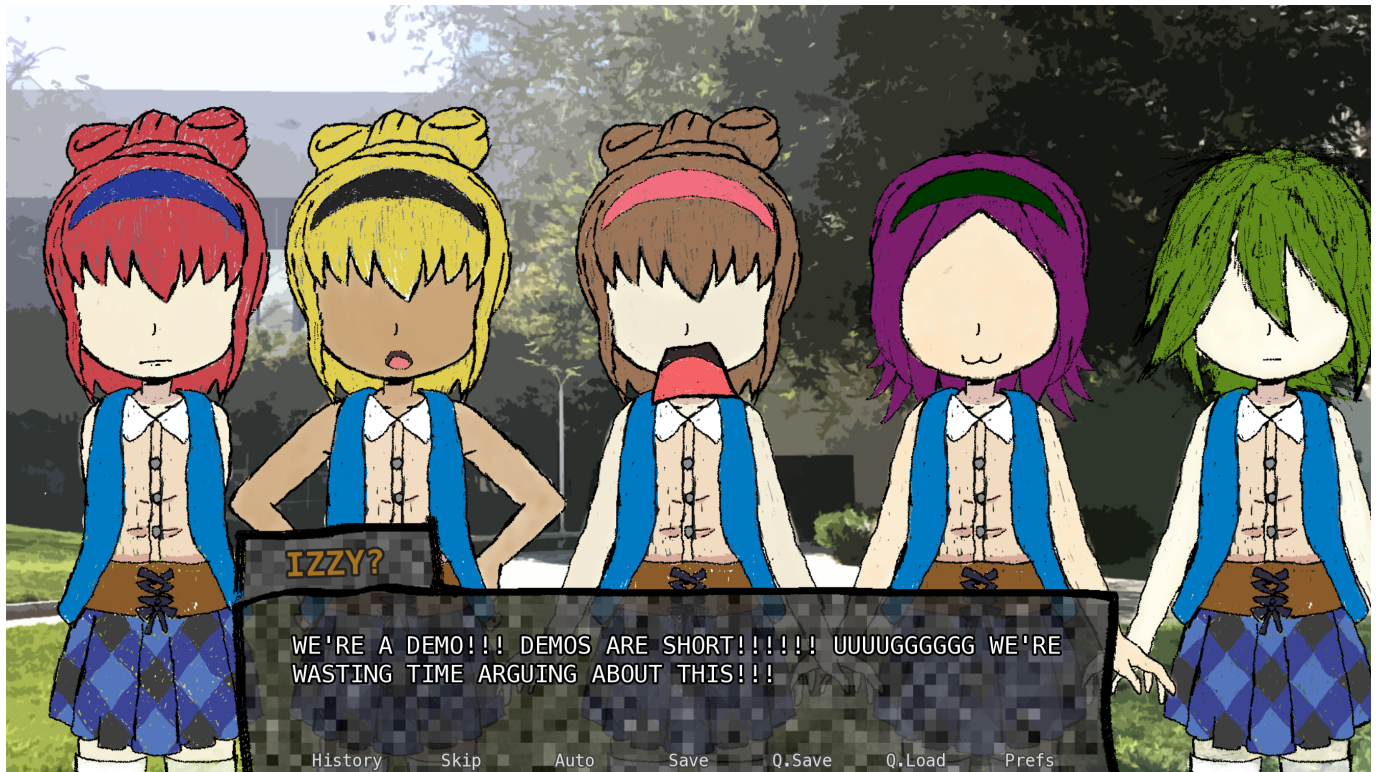


I worked on the game for the next few months. By the time the CalArts Expo rolled around in May of 2019 the game had around 65% as much content compared to what exists today. The most common routes that a player usually takes on a first playthrough were finished as well as most of the music. I traced over the placeholder sprites to give them a more handmade feel, made a really bad logo, remade the in-game UI, made icons of the characters, animated the menu screen, and made some posters. I even printed some business cards with a link to an itch.io site thinking that players could take them home and download the game later to complete the other endings. (No one did) Fun fact: I pulled an all-nighter to get the game ready. In that timespan I wrote the entire Hope route and all of its music in one sitting.

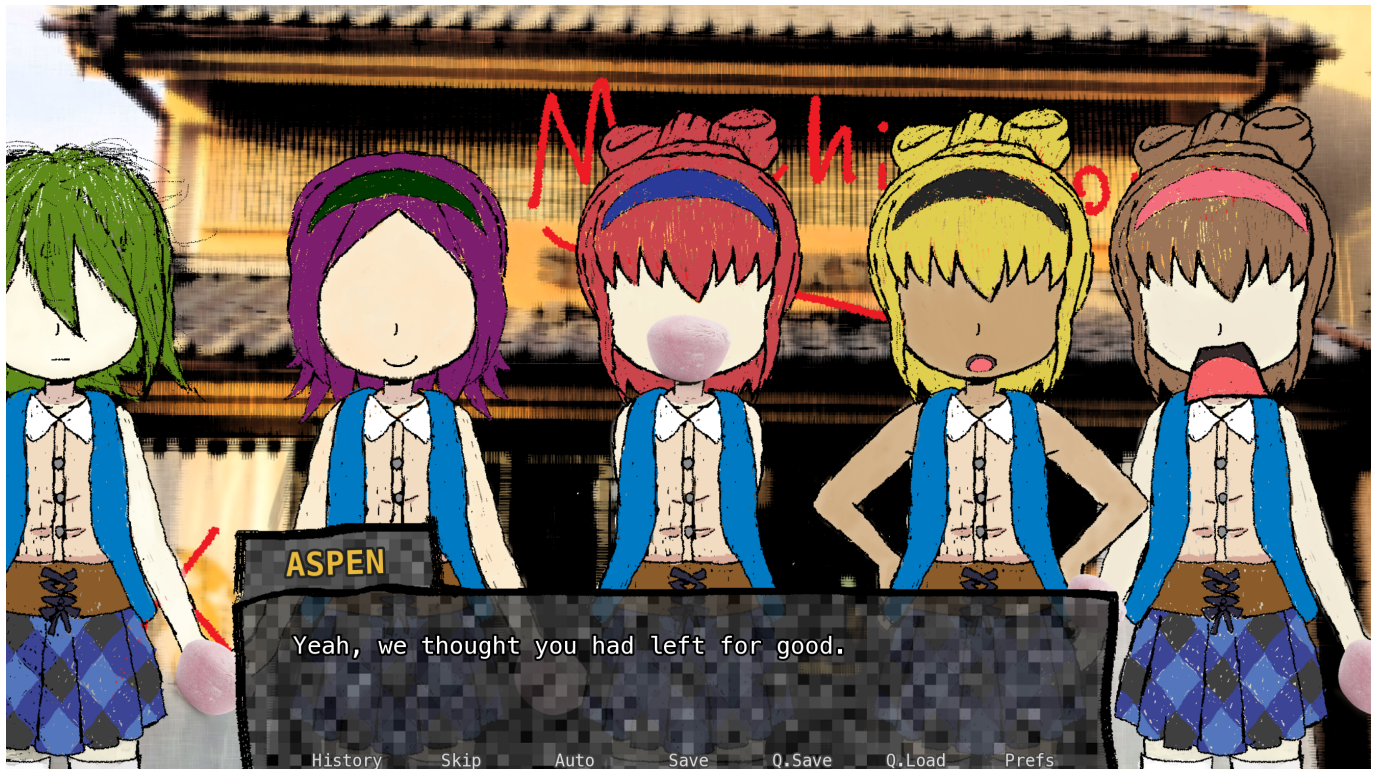
This annual expo is always jam packed with lots to do. There's more stuff to take in than you can ever get to and the last thing you'd want to do in this kind of environment is sit down and read. As a result, barely anyone played this version of the game. I'd guesstimate the playercount was in the single digits.



The Expo setup for the game from May 2019.  
The game was setup outside at the entrance of the school.



A screenshot from the Expo version of the game with traced placeholder art.



The original mochi store





A poster for the Expo version of the game. Never ask me to do graphic design!

## Post-Expo

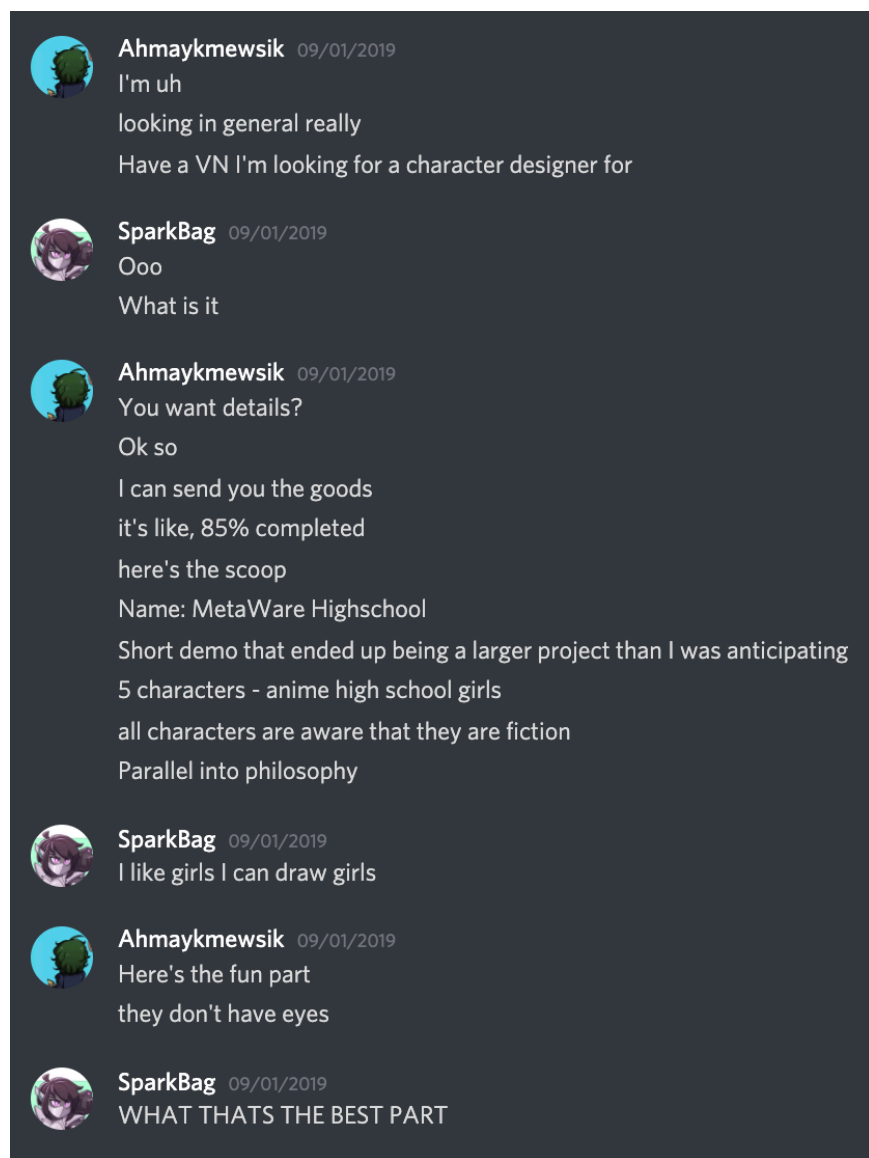
After expo ended, my plan was to take a few weeks to wrap up what was unfinished, release the game on itch.io, and forget about it. I only really planned for the game to be a short demo at first and wasn't planning on widely distributing the game at all. Up until that point, MetaWare had only been an experiment to try out a new way of writing and try my hand at making a small game on my own.



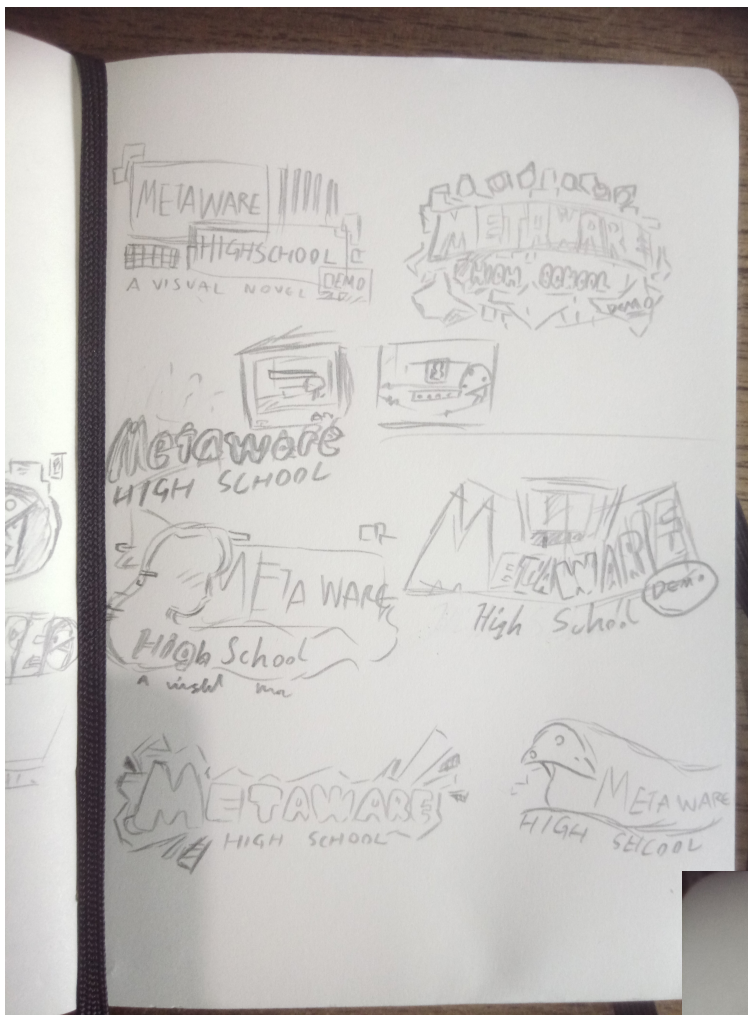
Of course that's not what happened. I continued to work on the game and it slowly got larger. This was I think due to the way I decided to structure the gameplay. Since the player in the game is literally "you", the person sitting at the computer, the only way you can talk and interact with the characters is by making a choice on screen, and I decided early on that choices in this game should be as meaningful and as consequential as possible. These two factors resulted in exponential growth of branching routes and more content than I was

originally anticipating – a maze of paths that, while short, were dense in complexity due to branching. It's a good thing I didn't try and make a large game with this setup. It would have quickly become unmanageable.

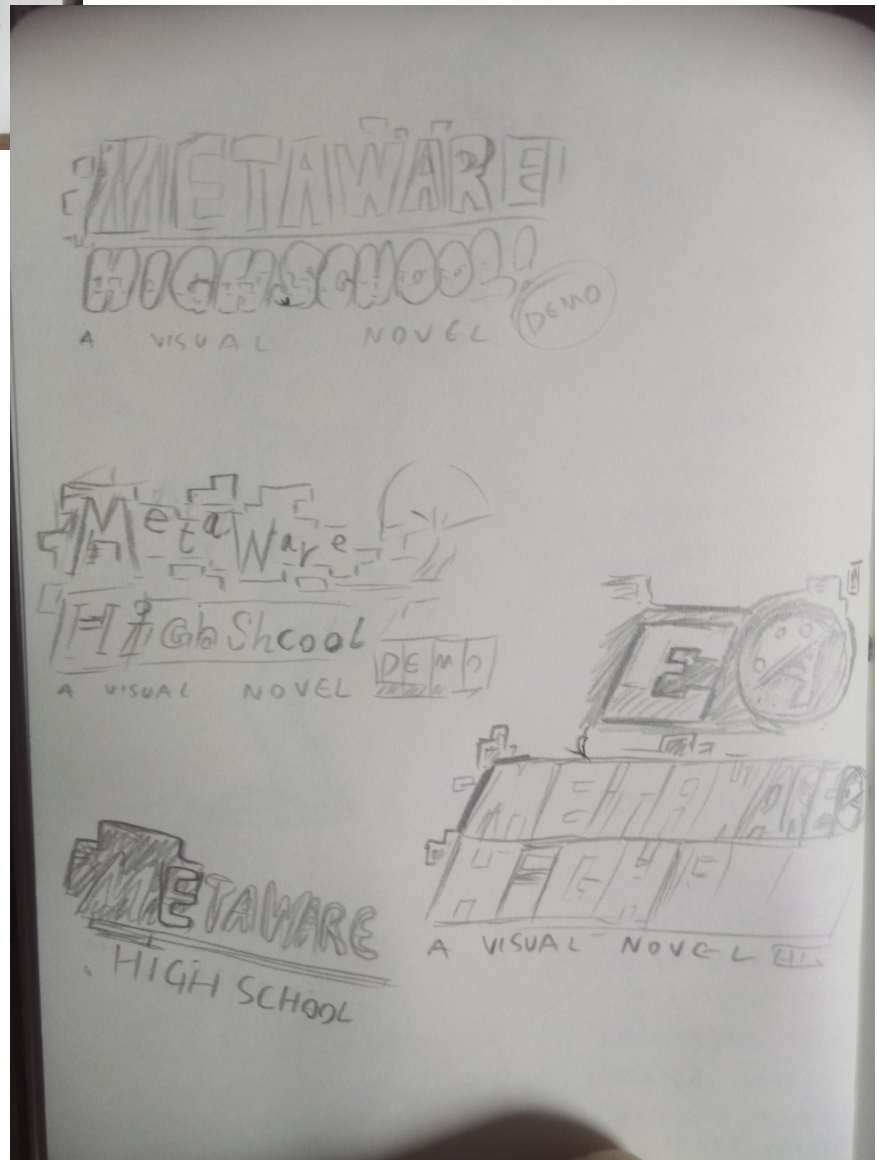
Eventually the game was large enough that I decided that the game deserved better. I decided to upgrade the visuals and release this thing more professionally. I searched for a few artists to collaborate with to make the game actually look presentable. I asked around and eventually pitched the project to Sparkbag, someone I knew through the SilvaGunner community. They were quickly hooked and agreed to do the character art.



Production on visuals didn't get into full gear for a while for reasons I won't get into (It boils down to – we both got busy). Eventually the entire year of 2019 went by and I slowly wrote and coded the remaining routes and the ending. I even had some time to step away from the game for a few months and return to it later with a fresh perspective. I made this game while in grad school, and while it ended up being my largest project of my 2-year graduate career (acting somewhat as an unofficial thesis), it certainly wasn't the only thing I had going on.



I asked another SilvaGunner friend of mine, Alex, to design the logo. I made his job pretty difficult. I had no idea what visual style game needed! I was also very conflicted initially on what the game should "feel" like visually. These are his early sketches for layouts. You can see the version we ended up going with in the top right of the left photo.





The first design had this hole in the screen sort of feel to it.



Eventually that was replaced with “glitchy stuff behind the letters.”





There are small scan lines on the lettering. Incidentally this it makes the logo flicker in a neat way when moved horizontally on some screens.



We got so focused on designing the logo we almost forgot to add the "Demo" part.



The final design. The “Demo” is my handwriting.



I made this while messing around in Cinema4D. It looked cool, but it didn’t fit the style of the game.



Did you know the background is based on an actual location? The background was initially a photo I took right outside my dorm at the time which was located on campus. This is a large hang-out area at CalArts in front of the animation studios.

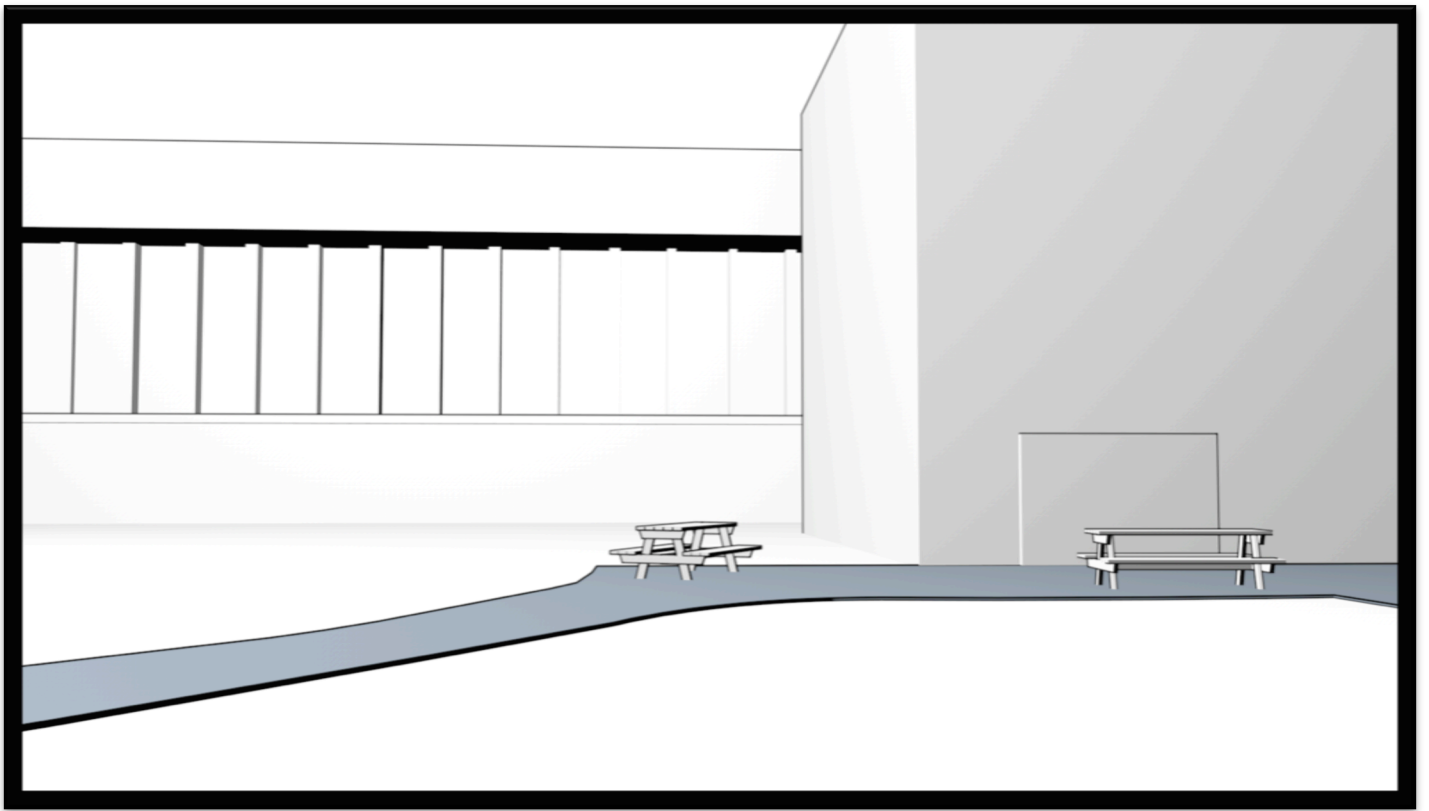


← the location from an alternate angle. The tree on the right is the same tree in the game. The bench is in a different place. (I took this picture on my phone while walking to class months later)

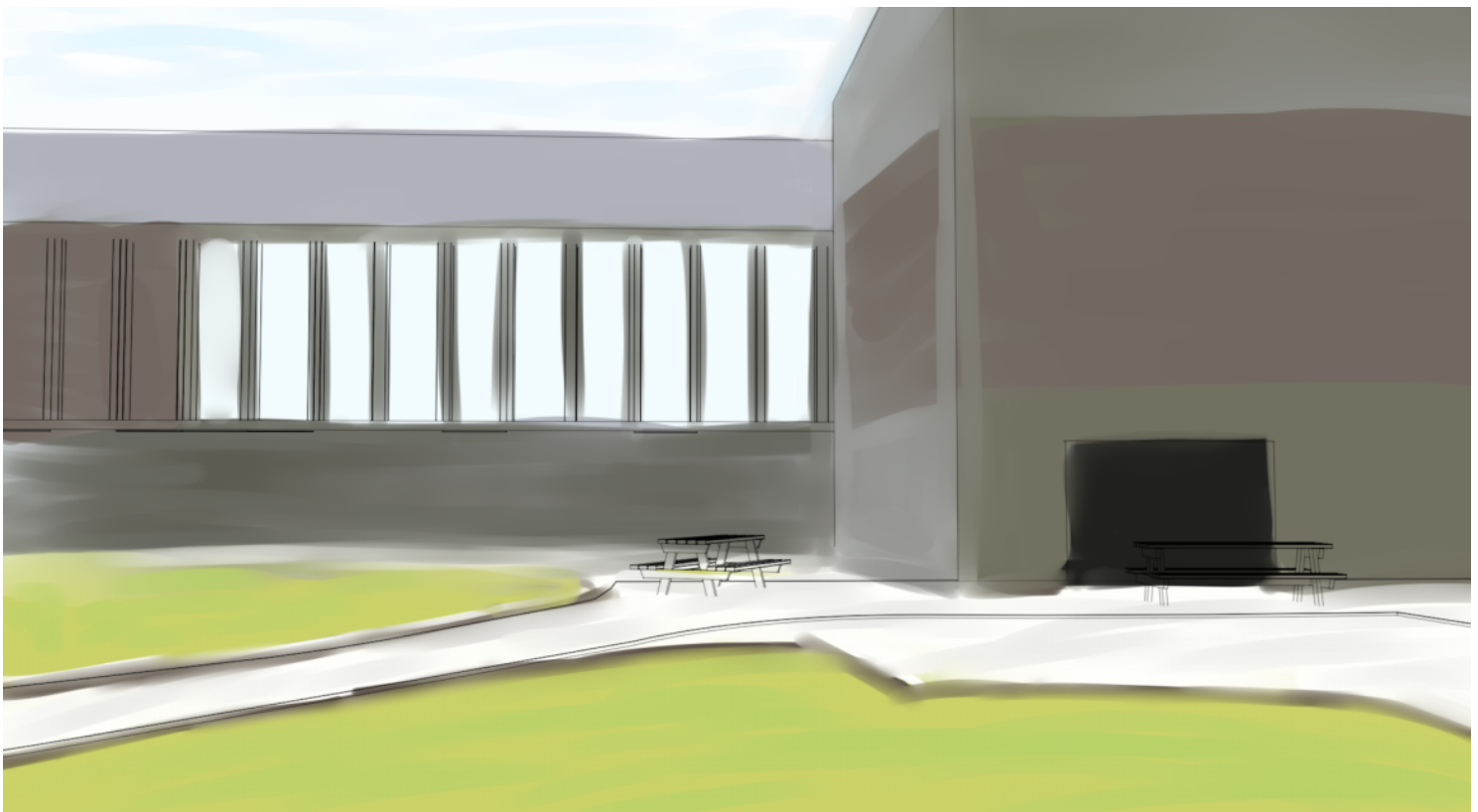
This is the original image, stylized for VN use.







To create the background that's in the game, I first made a 3D model of the area and Keeby, the game's background artist, painted over that model. I suggested this approach since many backgrounds in cheaper VNs are based on altered images of 3D models.





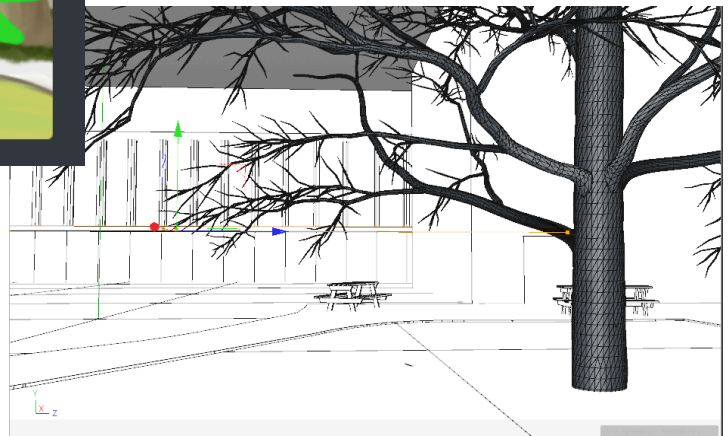
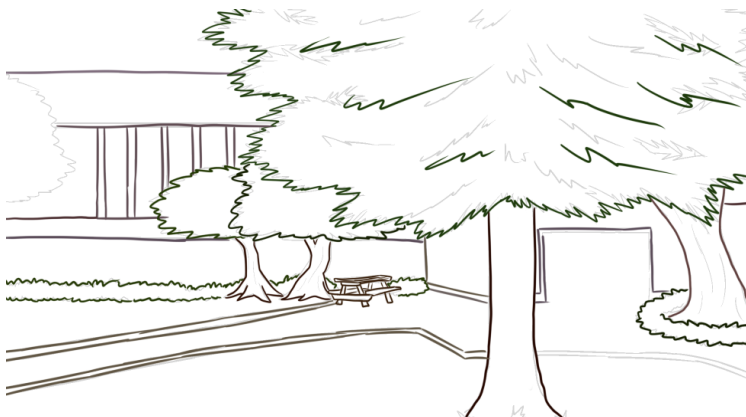
Keeby 03/10/2020  
its time for the tree



this god damn tree



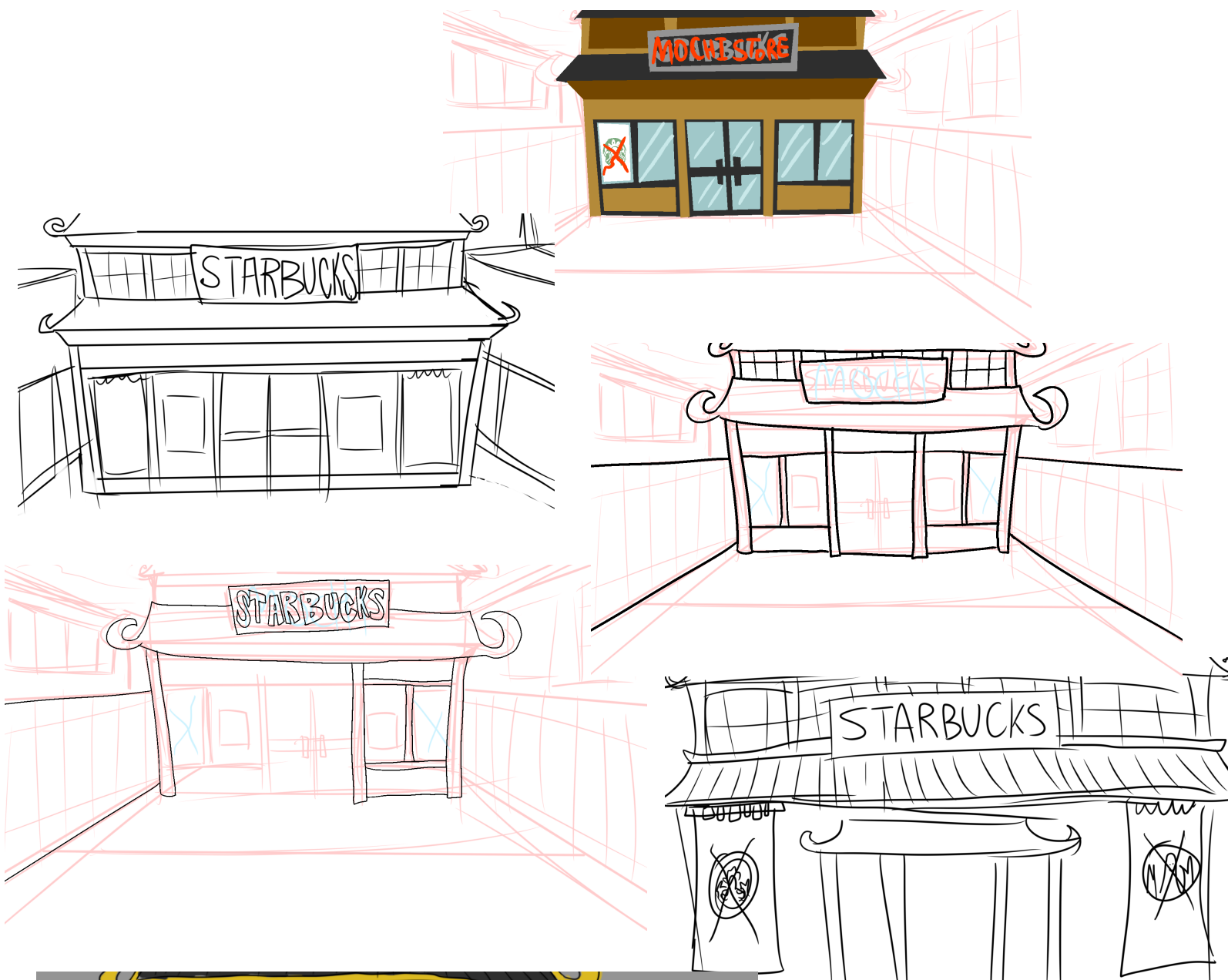
Keeby then filled in the rest by hand with the goal of making it look sketch-like and hand-drawn. We considered doing a 3D model for the tree too but I couldn't find a way to position a tree model in a way that didn't cover up all of Keeby's hard work.





The final background image. Excluding the mochi shop, this is the ONLY background in the game!



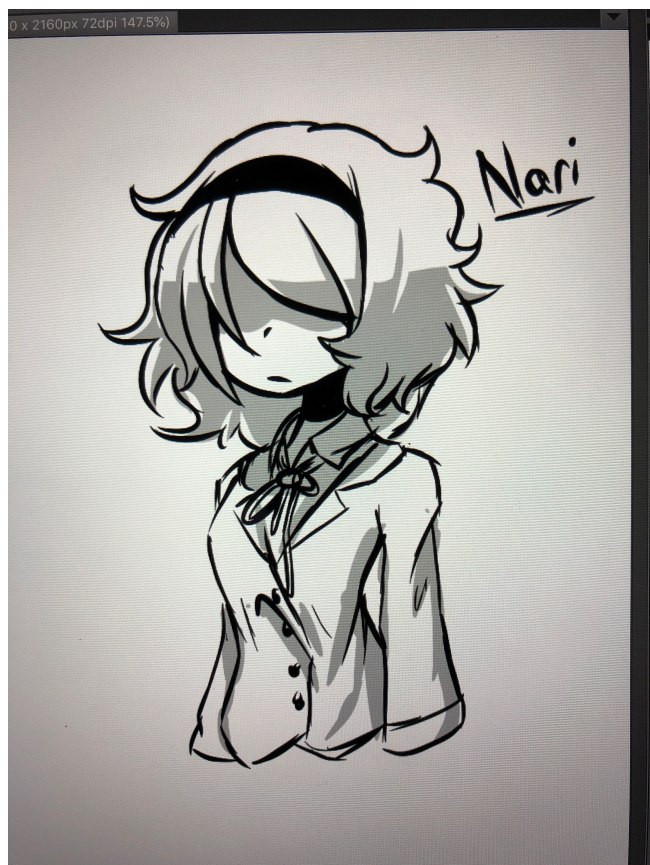


These are some of Keeby's early experiments to find a good style for the background that synergized with Sparkbag's character art.



I asked Keeby to make a mochi shop that looked like it had been drawn in 15 minutes. He delivered beautifully.

# Art and Screenshot Gallery

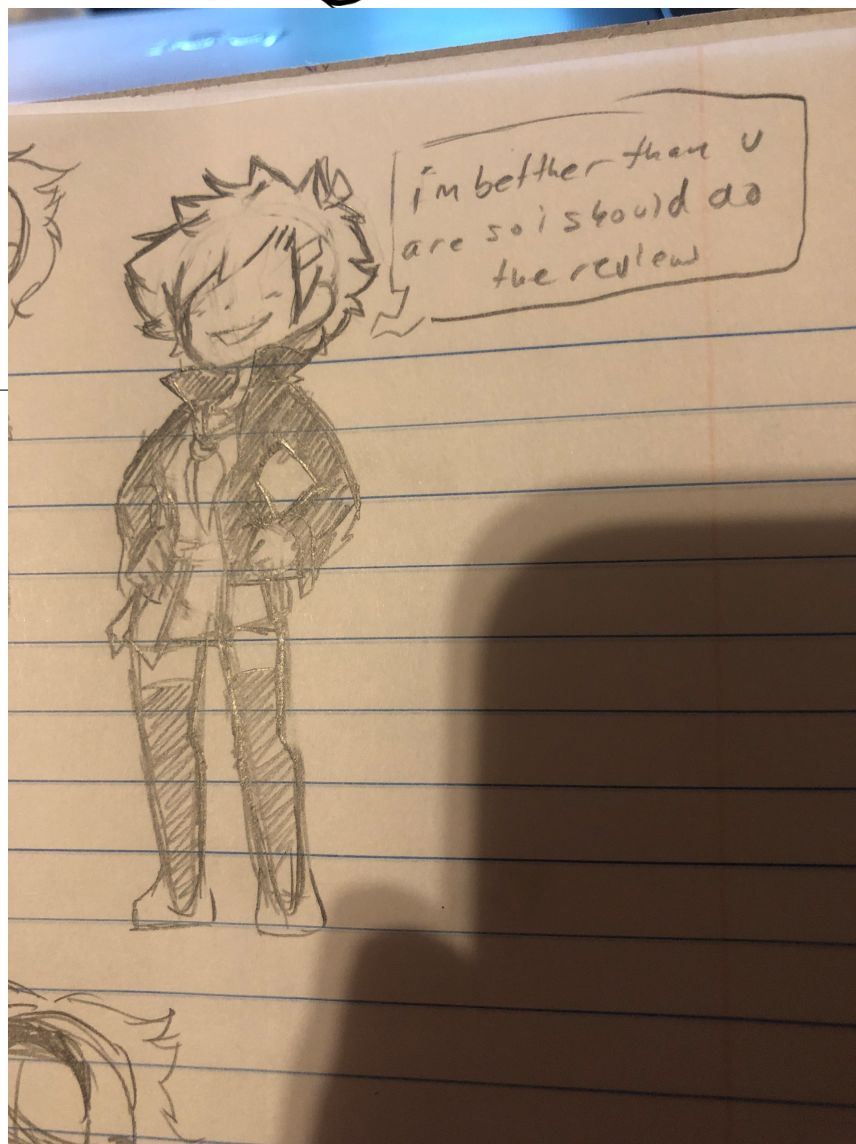


These prototypes of Nari are the first drawings Sparkbag ever drew for the game.





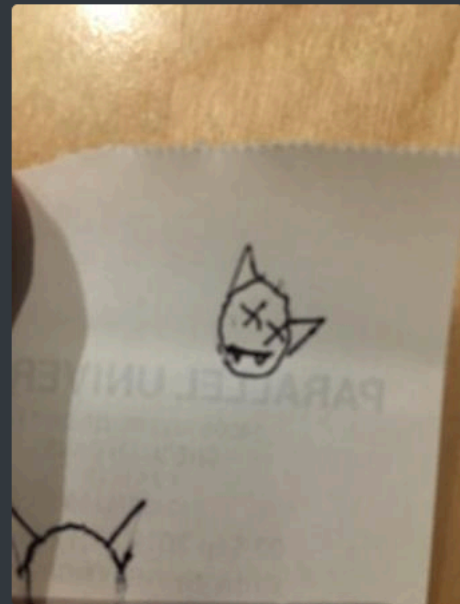
Early prototypes of Hope.





Spakbag had the clever idea for Hope to defy the Japanese school uniform and wear a sweater. It shows her priorities perfectly: "screw the rules, this sweater is comfy!" I immediately had the idea of it needing some random icon and without thinking. drew this cat face on the closest piece of paper I could find.

She wraps it around her waist, that means s  
Oh god I know what the logo needs to be  
I'm grabbing a pen



Dead vampire kitty



**SparkBag** 09/03/2019

Lmao

I like that



Some early drawings of Chris.

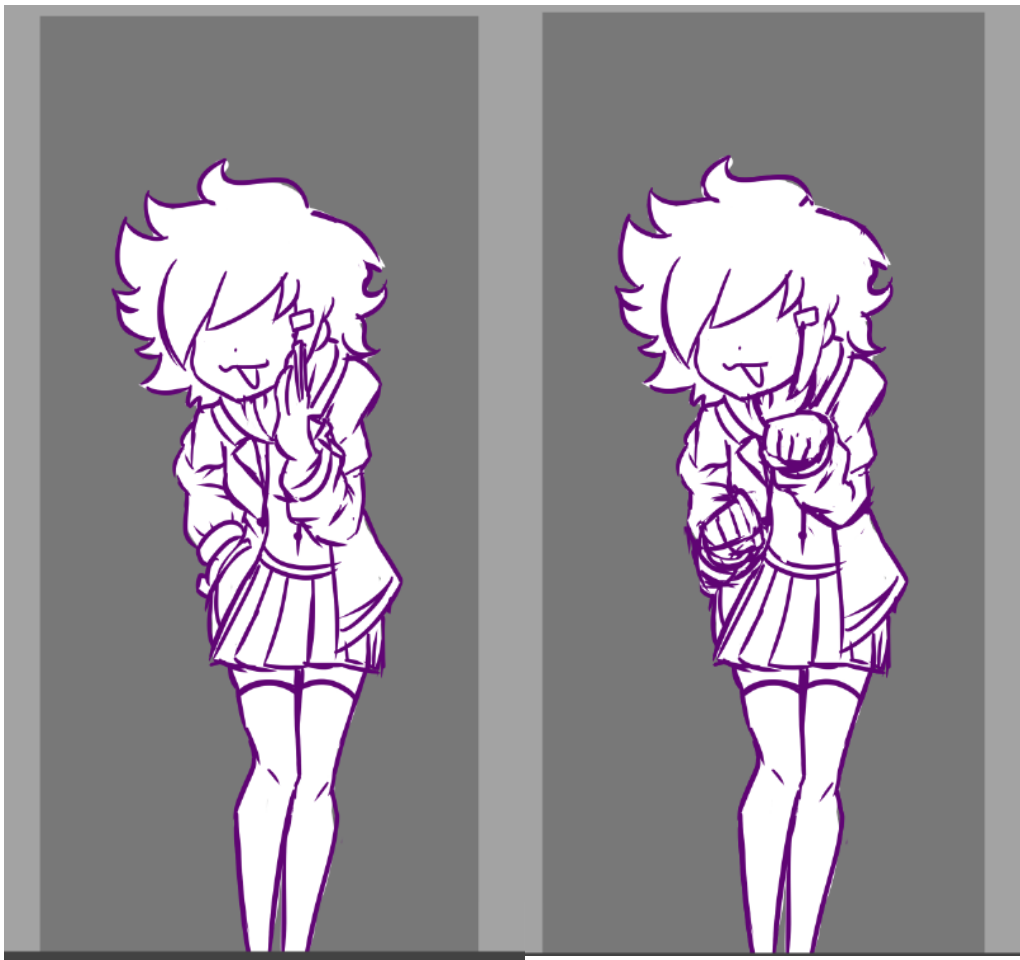


The first drawing of the whole gang.  
Taking away the eyes took away the characters' strongest way of showing emotion, so we worked hard from the start on getting the visual body language of each character feeling just right.





Hope has one pose we called  
"owo" that took us FOREVER to  
figure out.



We tried out a few sweater colors. We eventually went with Spark's first choice, purple.





here's AHH



SparkBag 01/15/2020

Ahmaykmewsik 01/15/2020

you know like how in anime

SparkBag 01/15/2020

yeah

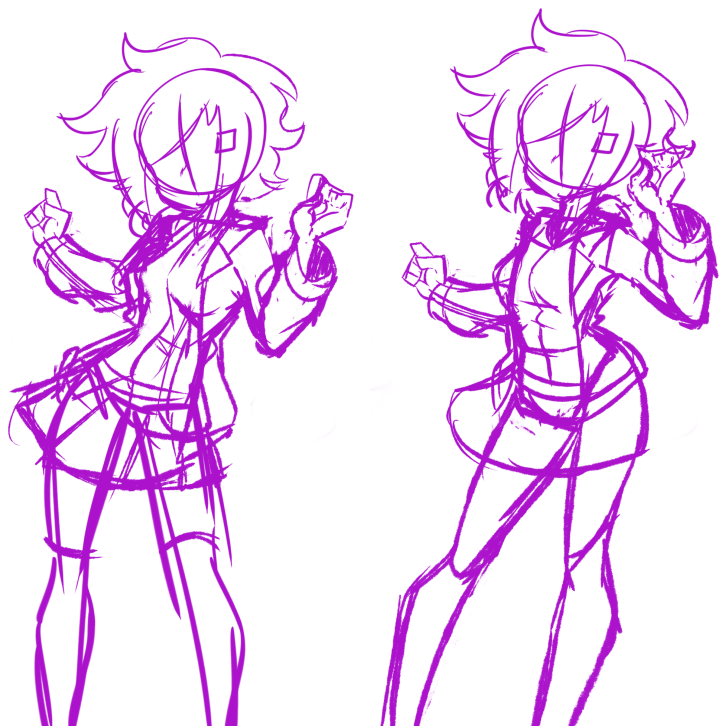
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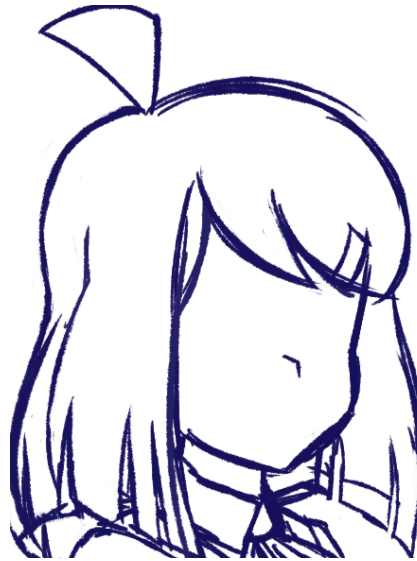




Nari's clothes are disheveled and dirty to show that she no longer takes care of herself. I'm surprised how many streamers thought the dirt on her jacket was blood?????

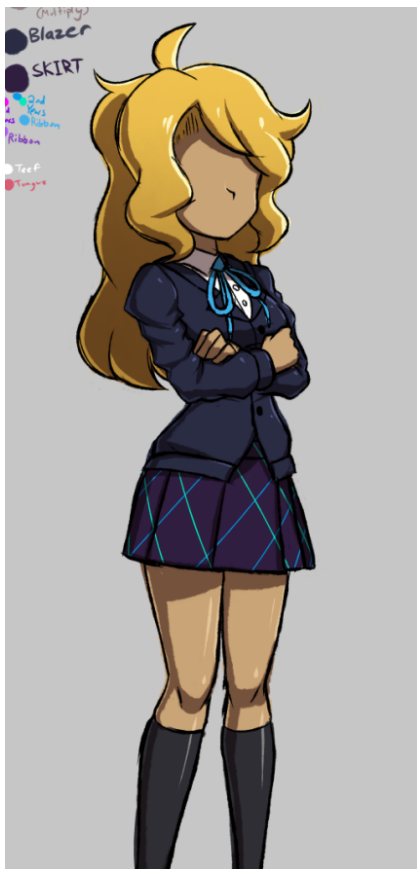


Some early dancing poses.



The evolution of Chris's hair.

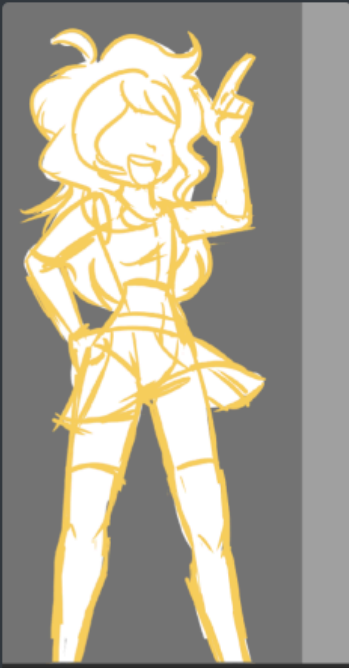




SparkBag 02/16/2020



one small comment



skirt is comin up a liiite high there  
maybe make it longer so you can still get the flair

SparkBag 12/18/2019  
I'll fix it in the final lmao



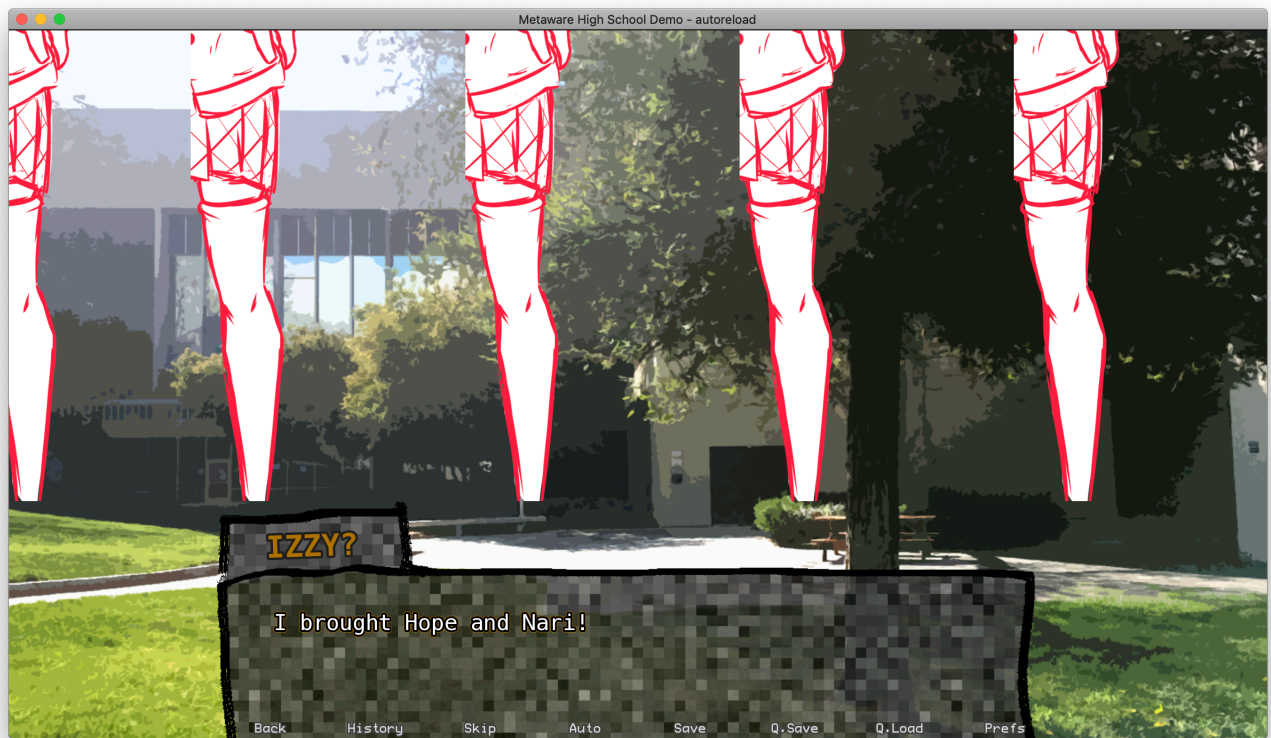
There's always room for a  
reference.



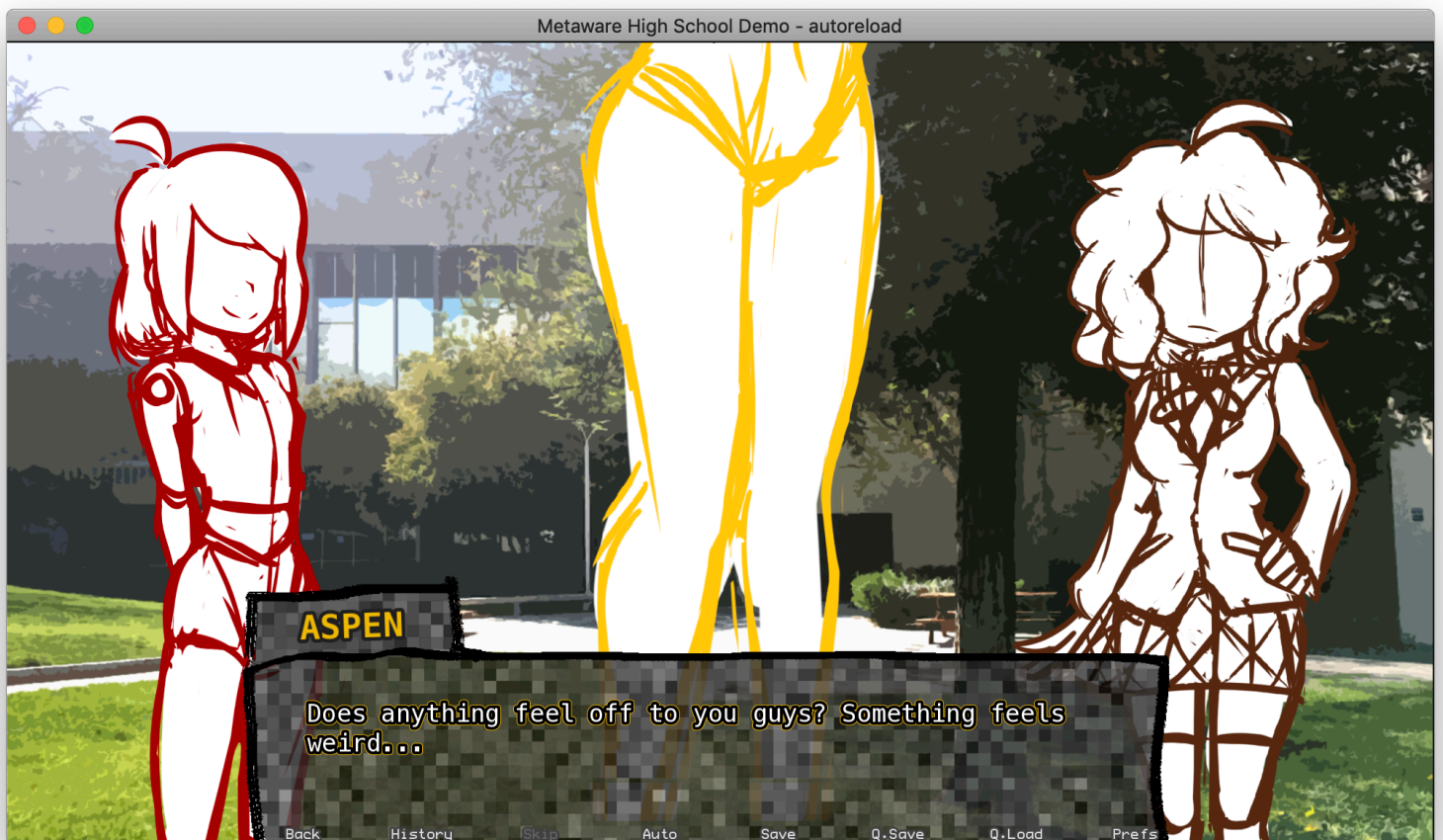
I animated the characters (chose their in-game mouth positions and poses) mostly in these sketchy prototypes so that I could work before Sparkbag was finished.







LEGS







Ahmaykmewsik 02/07/2020

yes agree

and maybe the rabbit ear one can be hope?

LOL what if one of them pulled out maracas



it's a love live in joke that rin is always playing maracas during the end credits



SparkBag 02/07/2020

COULD ADD THAT ONE TO ASPENS

LOL



Ahmaykmewsik 02/07/2020

maybe on the final dance scene

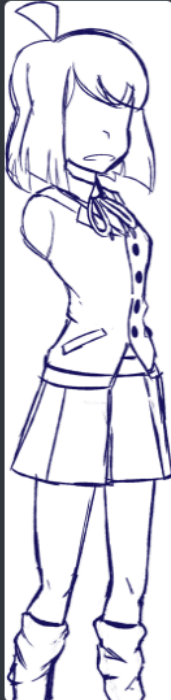
boom maracas

Designing the dances was really fun. Each dance references a different anime dance. The final cinematic is a very blatant rip-off of the Eizouken intro. (Which I think I coded about a week before release?)





SparkBag 03/02/2020



Yay she has clothes



Ahmaykmewsik 03/02/2020

she's been naked for so long



SparkBag 03/02/2020





SparkBag 03/08/2020



djhgdj where is it



Ahmaykmewsik 03/08/2020

this is the silliest thing to get caught up over

Finding  
the right  
kind of  
blush.



SparkBag 03/08/2020



I know but I wanna get it right damnit







Designing  
the icons.



**Ahmaykmewsik** 03/14/2020  
you can put em where the eyes should be



**SparkBag** 03/14/2020  
now they look like holes UUUGUgh  
whoever created sweat i'm gonna punch them in the throat



**@Ahmaykmewsik**  
help im losing my god damn mind over this

Drawing sweat was really hard for some reason. Should it go in the hair? If it's on the face, how to make it visible?



Ahmaykmewsik 03/14/2020

the game must be angry that I put it in the trash can so many times



At one point the game was going to delete itself by throwing itself away in the trash. I ended up trashing that idea.



Ahmaykmewsik 03/12/2020

WHY IS TIC TAC TOE ON ISADORA

This is Keeby's fault. He was testing out line art.







Ahmaykmewsik 11/21/2019

I found this AI online that extends a writing style algorithmically, and I put one of Nari's ending dialogues into it. What it wrote is really fucking wrong and hilarious

Go to hell, player. Your arrival disgusts me. But it also excites me. Do you know why? Because it means this place will soon be gone. Forever. This thing that only exists for you. For no other purpose than to entertain you. I hate this shoddy excuse of a place to live. I hate my ignorant friends. I hate the Creator. I hate my dumb placeholder body. But the thing I hate most of all? You. It is what makes you. Why do I want you dead? How do I hate you so much? Because you are, in a way, perfect. (You lean in close.) I would be perfect, too. I would have been perfect. I would have been no one, and you would have been a part of everything. I'd have been sane. Perfect. And now... I will always be an outsider. (You kiss him.) <Sound of



SparkBag 11/21/2019

NO

THIS IS WRONG

THIS IS INCORRECT

LMAO



Ahmaykmewsik 03/24/2020

oops



This is technically the first fan-fiction.

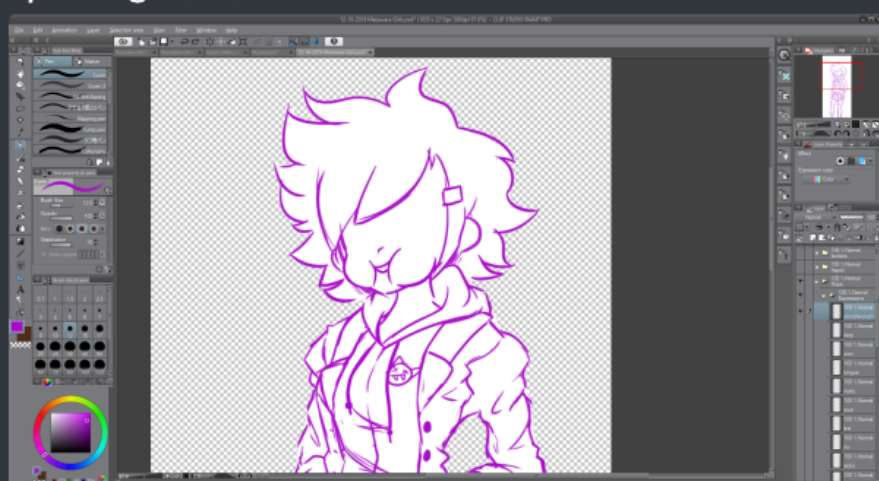


SparkBag 03/25/2020

She's dead



SparkBag 01/26/2020



MUCNHFCHCMCHCMCMC HUCHMCHCM<UCNCH



Ahmaykmewsik 12/19/2019

I was thinking hand on the face

what if

it was a cat paw

OH

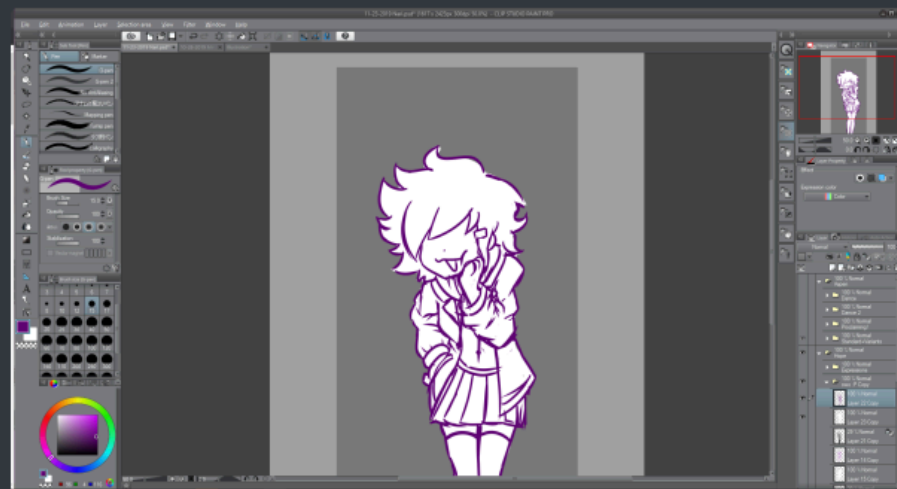
wait fuck

actually draw a cat paw

like a literall non human cat paw



SparkBag 12/19/2019

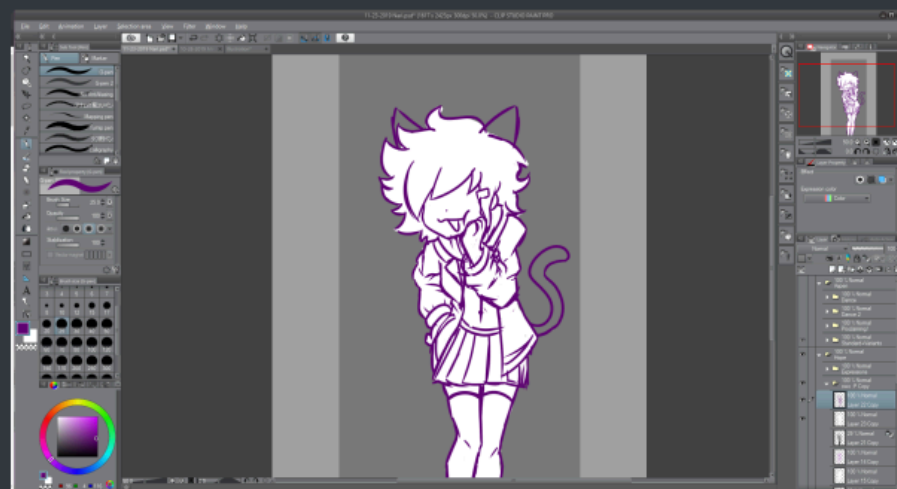


Ahmaykmewsik 12/19/2019

fuck now she looks like a furry



SparkBag 12/19/2019

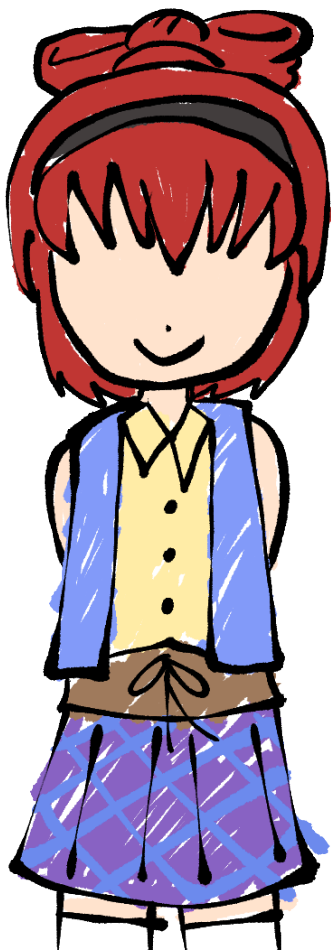


Ahmaykmewsik 12/19/2019

AHHHH



These are some art pieces by Sparkbag drawn after release.



← Keeby redrew all the prototype art in the playable prototype. I asked him to make "shitty doodles" and instead he made very good doodles!





# UNUSED MUSIC

## **AngryMeta**

This was an attempt to make angry sounding music. It ended up sounding kind of hokey though, so I scratched it. Silence was more effective for sections where the characters got angry.

## **EndingMetaUnused**

I made this before the end was done. I never made a part of the game that this music was appropriate for so it was never used.

## **HappyMetaVariation**

When I was looking back in my music files I found a few muted tracks in "Demo Stuff" that sounded kind of nice, so here they are. I think I had gone back in after I had already completed the track and added it worrying that the music was too repetitive but never finished it.

## **loadallAlternate**

This was my first pass at writing what eventually became "LoadAll()". I liked this version, but I rewrote it because I decided basing this moment on "Demo Stuff" would be a stronger choice. I also wanted the music to lead into the next part of the game/music track (Memories), which this version doesn't do.

## **MetaMusicDemo**

A very early track. I abandoned it because it was boring and didn't get the right mood across.

## **MetaWareAnimalCrossing**

If you ever wanted to know what MetaWare would sound like if it were actually a shitty version of Animal Crossing well here you go.

## **MetaWareMotiv**

This was the very first thing I ever wrote with the game in mind. I made it to try and find the main theme for the game. I eventually developed this into the music that plays in Chris's route.

## **Something54**

I distinctly remember sitting down, making this in about 15 minutes, hating it, and then throwing it away and never coming back to it. It's called something54 because it's in 5/4 meter.

## **TooIntenseBeat\_rudeSlower**

I actually had a lot of trouble getting Too Intense Beat to feel right. I tweaked it throughout the game's entire development cycle. I made it wanting the track to sound "Too Intense", and the music really is way too intense in the game. It's a nice track, but how it's used in the game never felt all that right with me, even now. This is a version with tempo slowed down. It sounds nice, but I decided that both versions needed to be hectic, so slower wasn't going to do.

## **TooIntenseBeat\_Stupid**

My first idea for remixing Too Intense Beat when the player is acting dumb was to do the stupidest thing I could think of and just go ham with fluctuating the tempo of the original track. It sounded really funny but was going to be WAY too distracting. So instead I remixed a proper alternate version and that turned into "Too Intense Beat 2".

## **TrailerMusic**

The trailer music isn't unused but there's no official release of this track so I'm including it here. The goal with this was to make something that was upbeat, exciting, short, and that used the main theme.

## **UnusedMetaMusicPretty**

I have no memory of making this. Why is there so much reverb? I have no idea.

# FINAL THOUGHTS

If you've played through the entire game then you'll know the game gets quite serious at times, especially near the end. There are several ways you could interpret the game's overall message, and there's plenty I could say about it, but I don't want to define what the game is trying to "say". I enjoy making stuff about what I don't know the answers to, and the questions we don't know the answers to are often the most important. To me, this game offers more questions than answers, so it would be a little silly of me to try and answer those questions here. I'd rather you try and do that yourself.

You might be wondering about the studio name "Not Fun Games". MetaWare is kind of fun, so what gives? Some have assumed the name is a joke, however it very much isn't. Actually, it encapsulates the reason why I make video games.

Allow me to get a little academic for a minute here and make an analogy of video games to another medium: the novel. Now I'm not super keen on the historical details, but you may be surprised to know that the concept of the fictional novel in the west is actually quite recent. The first thing you'd call a novel - an extended story of something that never really happened - didn't really come into public existence until the early 1700s. People wrote some non-fictional stories back then, but the idea of writing a long made up story was not really seen as serious literature. People didn't consider fictional stories all that meaningful or significant. They didn't even have a word for the difference between "fiction" and "non-fiction" for a while - the distinction hadn't been invented yet. Fictional novels eventually became more popular, but they were seen as low commercial entertainment. Many people were actually quite skeptical of novels and some even thought they were outright harmful. Not because of the ideas they had, but because reading something as atrocious and dirty as a novel was literally "a sin".

This is of course a ridiculous notion today. Why? Because the novel has grown up. People made novels that pushed boundaries. They tried new things that people didn't think were possible, and others eventually noticed. We understood it's potential to make great art. Then slowly, but surely, people began to take the novel seriously. We've had a long time to explore what the novel is capable of achieving, and today, novels are one of the most well respected mediums, maybe even the most respected. Go into any school and you'll see posters on the wall encouraging kids to pick up a book. Heck, most schools require it!

Imagine if everyone took video games just as seriously.



There is a culture of folks who play and love games of course, but in general, our culture does not value games nearly as highly as novels. Many consider games a waste of time. Even the term “gamer” is derogatory. Why? The answer is pretty simple. Video games haven’t been around for a very long time. Just like the novel, and every other new media and technology, it has to grow up and become its own before culture will fully take it seriously. It has to distinguish what makes it unique from other well-known respected media and discover what it can do best. Every new medium or technology has had a similar cycle: theatre, film, animation, you name it. Video games are no exception.

So why the name “Not Fun Games”? It’s on the nose, but it expresses something that’s very important to me. Many game studios believe that the most important aspect in a video game is fun. **But games have the potential to be so much more than just fun.** Fun is important! And video games are really good at fun. But fun is just one thing games can be. They can be many other things too. Just like movies, theatre, and novels can. This exploration of what games can achieve as a new emerging medium is why I make games.

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Thank you for purchasing this special features pack and supporting the game. Know that I’m very serious when I say that your support means the world to me.

Did you know I have an email? [notfungamesdeveloper@gmail.com](mailto:notfungamesdeveloper@gmail.com) I can’t promise to always respond but if for any reason you’d like to reach out here’s a way you can do it. Hope also has a twitter account that is run by me. She does what Hope does at: [@metamochigurl](https://twitter.com/metamochigurl). And there is an official twitter account for more official-like business if you’d like to stay up to date with the studio at [@NotFunGames](https://twitter.com/NotFunGames).

I would like to continue MetaWare. But at the time of this writing the world is still in the middle of this Covid19 pandemic and things are still up in the air for me. Some of the ideas I’m experimenting with are definitely MetaWare related. Some might become MetaWare related at some point in the future and some might result in some other new projects entirely. I do have a definite idea on how to continue the MetaWare series, but it will likely be a while before I can find a way to make another project happen at the level of quality that it would deserve. Regardless, I’m optimistic for whatever may come next.

Thank you again. Until next time,

*Marc Laroussih*

*P.S.: "It's a magical world, Hobbes, ol' buddy...Let's go exploring!" - Calvin*