Retelling the Untold

The Adventures of Husn

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INTRODUCTION

Through a non-linear interactive story-form, a traditional folktale, Qissa-e-Hatim tai, is retold in a contemporary world. Using the unique form of a text-based game and 'Choose Your Own Adventure' pathways, hosted on a website, the game begins with an introduction to the character of Husn Banu. As the reader begins, their journey brings them to multiple divergences where they must select how their character will proceed and complete their adventure.

The story here focuses on the adventures of Husn, as she attempts to find the solution to environmental degradation; her goal is to revive the Earth – bringing back the nature and life. The reader may be active or passive, kind or unbothered, and witness the unfolding of those choices.

The story retold here is a case for the preservation of the moral value and literary devices of folklore by contextualizing the tale, providing it a narrative that fits into the space and time it is being told in. It is an experiment in the form of a text-based game based on the ideas of active engagement and interactive learning exposing the readers to different moral and ethical values, critical thinking, and the idea of global change, in specific climate change.

Research Question

The research question that began this journey centered on initiating the revival of the art of folklore and storytelling in a more accessible manner for the children of today through illustrated books.

Design Challenge

This evolved into the design challenge of creating a book using contemporary storytelling and visuals that allow children to be exposed to folktales that originate from the South Asian culture, altering them sufficiently to preserve the essence of the tale while also addressing contemporary shortfalls in literature and representations. As the research went on, elements of modernization and contextualization were added to ensure the artefact's relevance in the world.
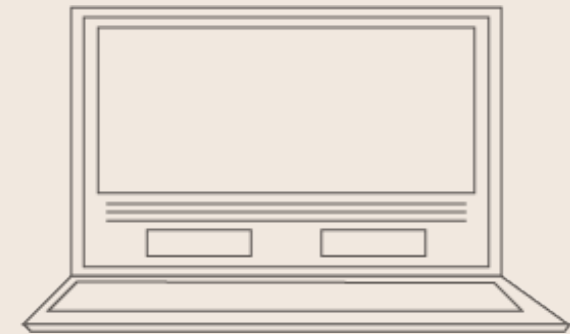
Progression

An illustrated storybook

A series of zines

An interactive text-based story

The work began with the idea of making an illustrated children's book, however, questions of accessibility, length, and methods of didactic communication persisted. Would a stagnant, physical book with a definite storyline fulfill those terms? The illustrated book became a zine, heavily illustrated and divided into smaller portions for easier access and buying capabilities. This tackled accessibility and length but did not address the question of effective education. Bringing the project to digital, interactive text-based game available on the web. So far, it addressed all the major questions.
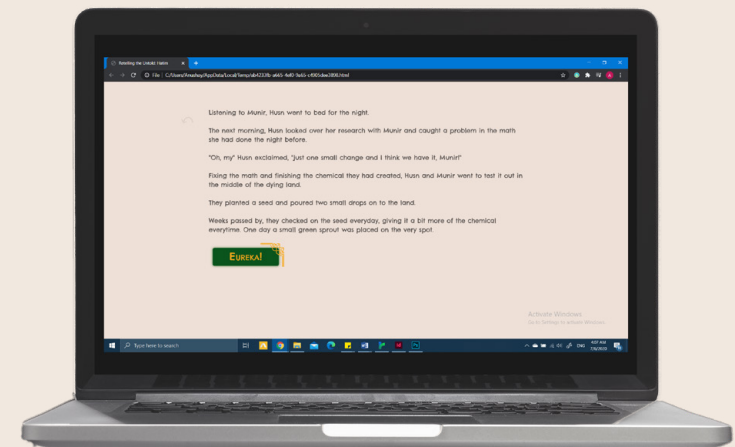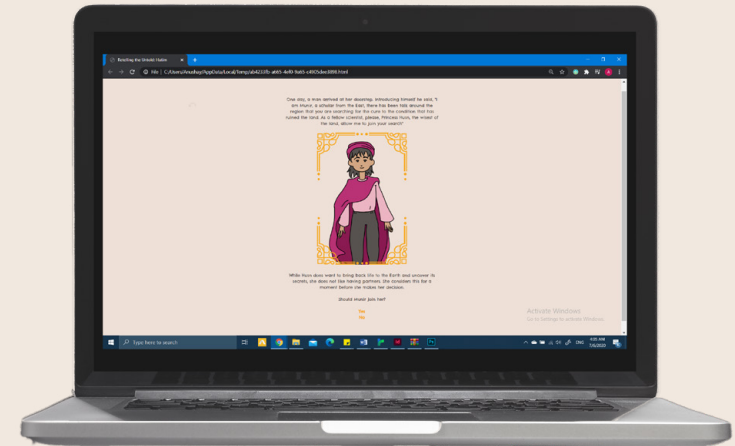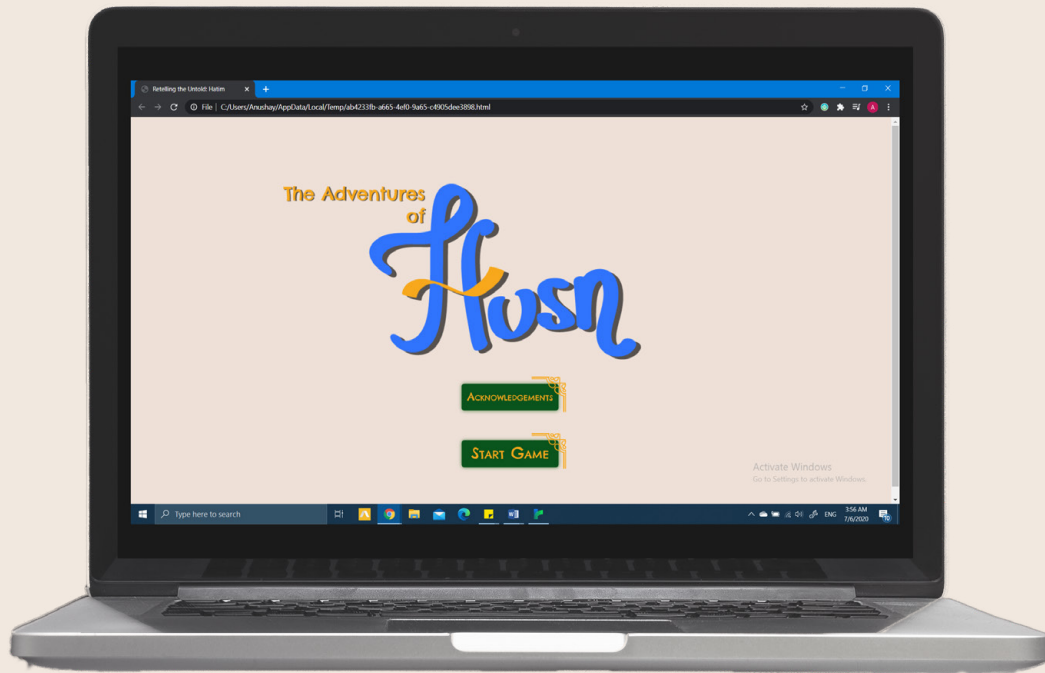
ASSETS AND STYLESHEETS

Backend processing to create both the flow and look of the story is as important as the story itself. Every font and color decision means something; every tool has its functionality; and it is important to understand the process of it.

The back-end of Twine will define the way in which the reader will view and experience the story, while the color scheme will define the tone.

Neutrals
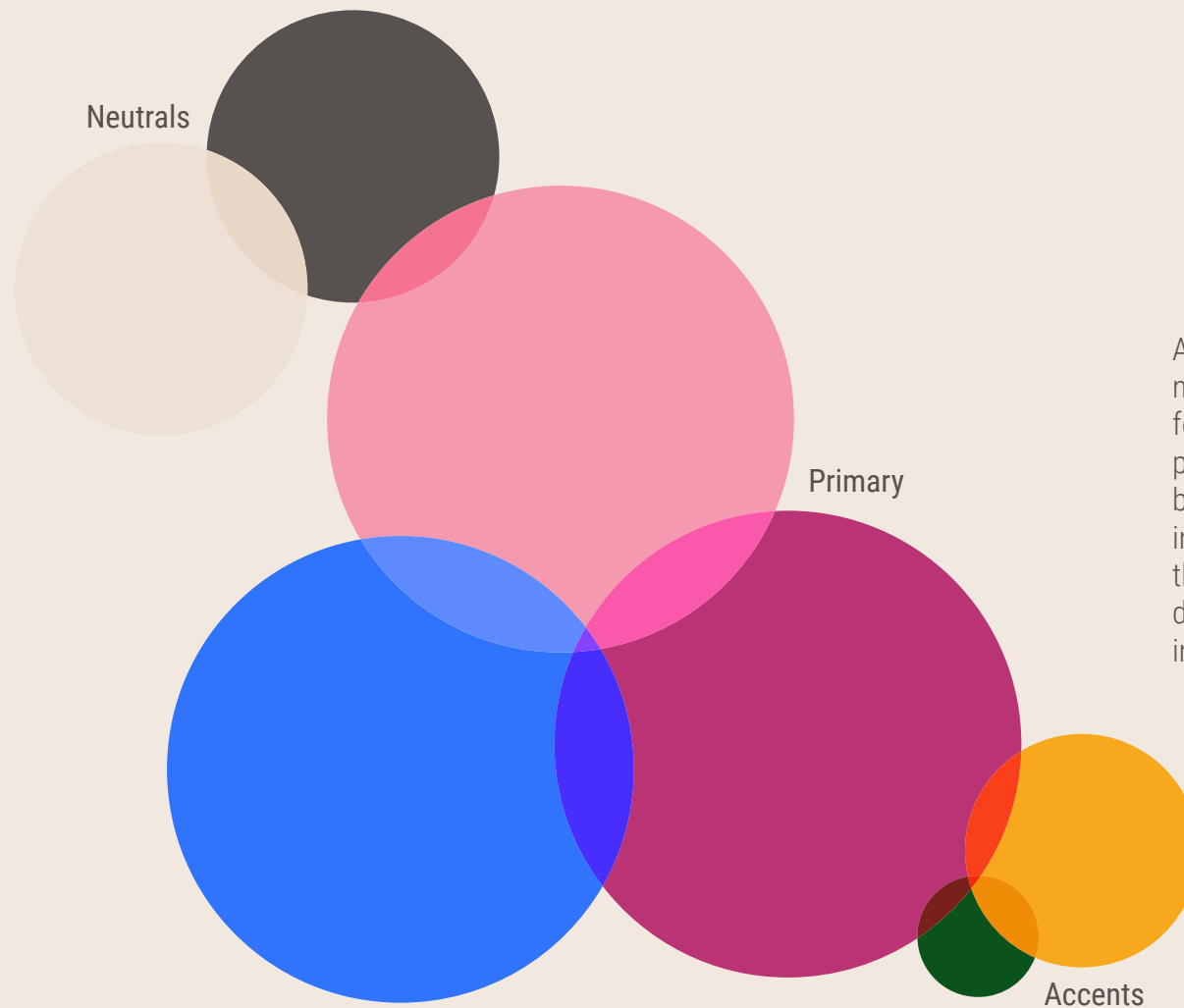
Primary

Accents

An off-white and black serve as the neutrals of the story, the off-white for its resemblance to papyrus and parchment. The primary colors of blue, purple, and pink are visual indicators of gender reversal, while the gold and green are accents decided upon due to their prevalence in Islamic art and decorations.

Chelsea Market
Chelsea Market

Sourced from
Google Fonts
Chelsea Market
is an open-source
font intended for
commercial and
personal use.

Chelsea Market has a fable-esque and childish impression that is adequately balanced with its clean form. This balance makes it ideal to use alongside stories aimed at a wide age demographic, from children to adults.
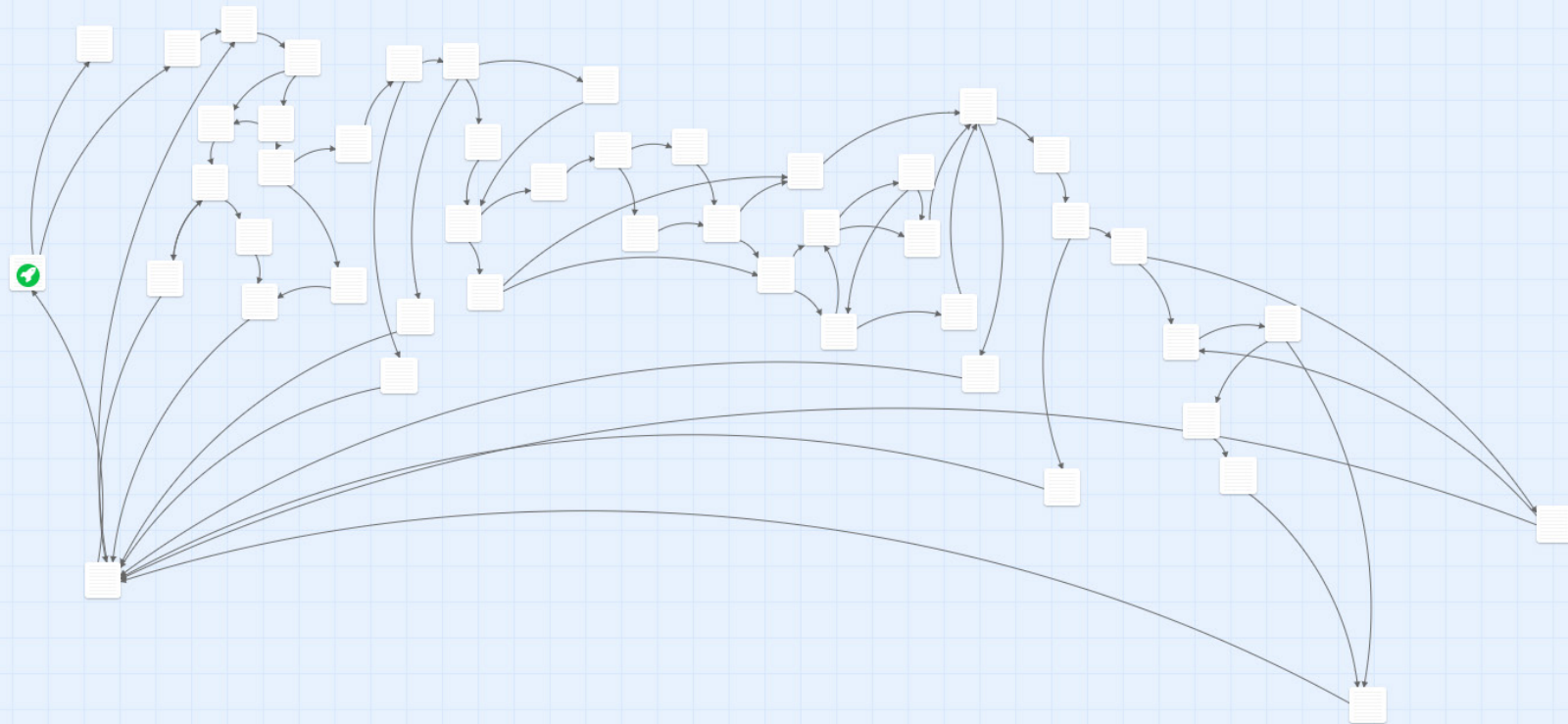
The back-end of the story is formed on Twine. Each moment in the story holds a choice or continues forward to the next scene forming a map of all the possible pathways the reader may take, branching out and back.

Cascading Style Sheets

```
@import url('https://fonts.googleapis.com/css2?family=Chelsea+Market&display=swap');

body, tw-story
{
  font-family: Chelsea Market;
  font-size: 18px;
  background-color: #eee0d7;
}

tw-link
{
  color: #f7a81c;
}

tw-passage
{
  color: #56514f;
}

a
{
  =><=;
}
```

Twine uses the programming language HTML5 for the stylization of which one needs to use CSS, or Cascading Style Sheets, that define the design of the output. This Stylesheet is the master Sheet that defines the color scheme and the aspects of the embedded font.

```
=><=

Husn Bano
<img src= "https://www.dropbox.com/s/ff5kwrzg5mf95fv/Husn-01.
jpg?dl=0" width= "398" height= "581.333" alt= "Husn Bano">

**Husn Bano** is the princess of all the lands and a scientist for
nature. Seeing her land in ruins, she spends much of her time in her
lab trying to find a cure for the dying Earth. Proud of how she does
her research she does not like depending on other people to help her.

[[<img src = "https://www.dropbox.com/s/7vbxrtnctuie97k/Begin.
png?dl=0" width= "220.5445" height= "77.536"> ->Begin]]
```

A stylesheet for a single screen that would output a stylized image and an interactive button. Imagery is stored in an online repository to be accessible through the Cloud.

ART AND ILLUSTRATIONS

Visual aids and art are extremely beneficial to learning, allowing visual cues to serve as differentiators and indicators of the unspoken. They aid the construction of knowledge and retention of clues on a subconscious level, elevating the learning experience. These visuals may also form subtle connections to existing knowledge, drawing them to the forefront of the mind.

In this story, visual aids and color schemes are used to indicate a variety of connections. For instance, the clothing of the characters, inspired by medieval Middle Eastern fashion indicates the time period and culture, while the norm of gendered colors is reversed. Blue for Husn and Pink for Munir, implying reversed gender roles as well as a departure from the gendering of colors.

The colors of the buttons, green and gold, point to popular choices in Islamic art and culture.

Final Designs
Concept Art
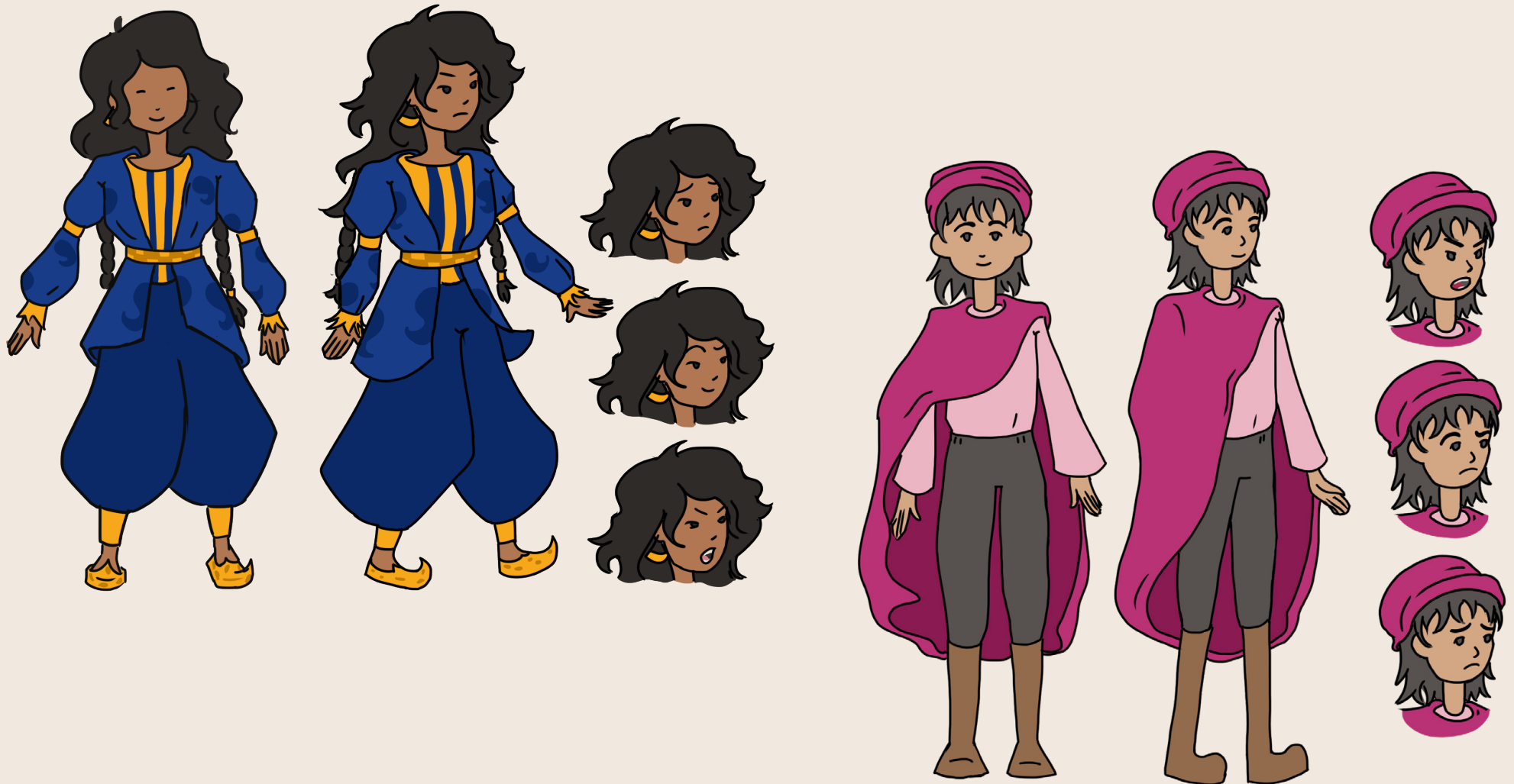
First Draft

Inspirations

www.karnaval.ir

Early Islamic Fashion

Zandian Fashion

www.thelosttreasurechest.wordpress.com

Early Islamic times

Abbasid Empire
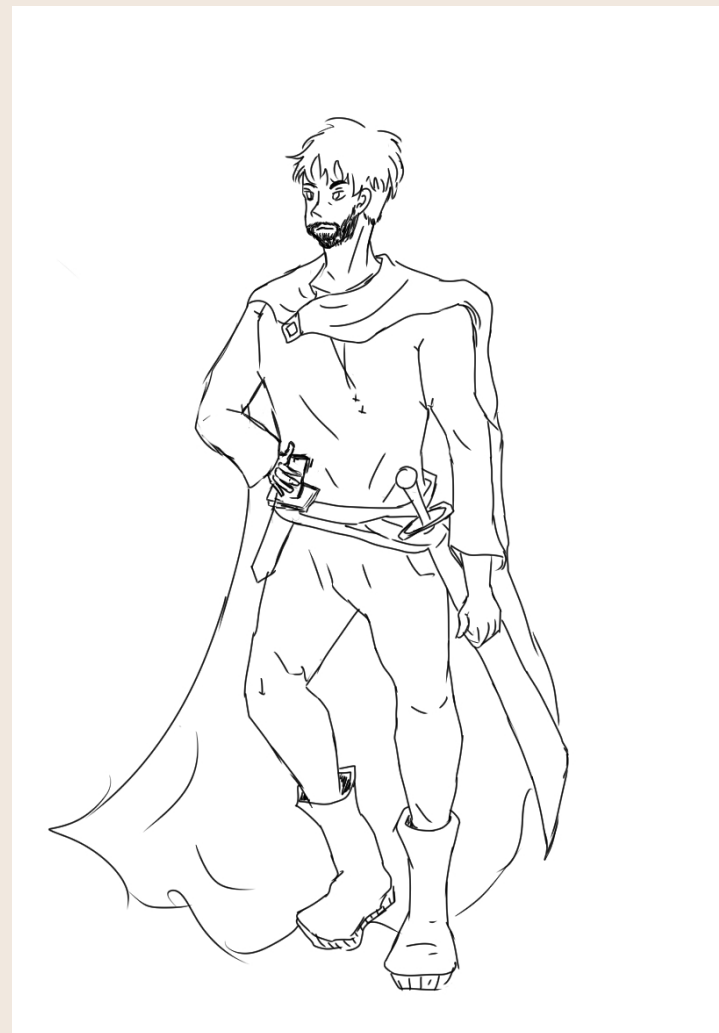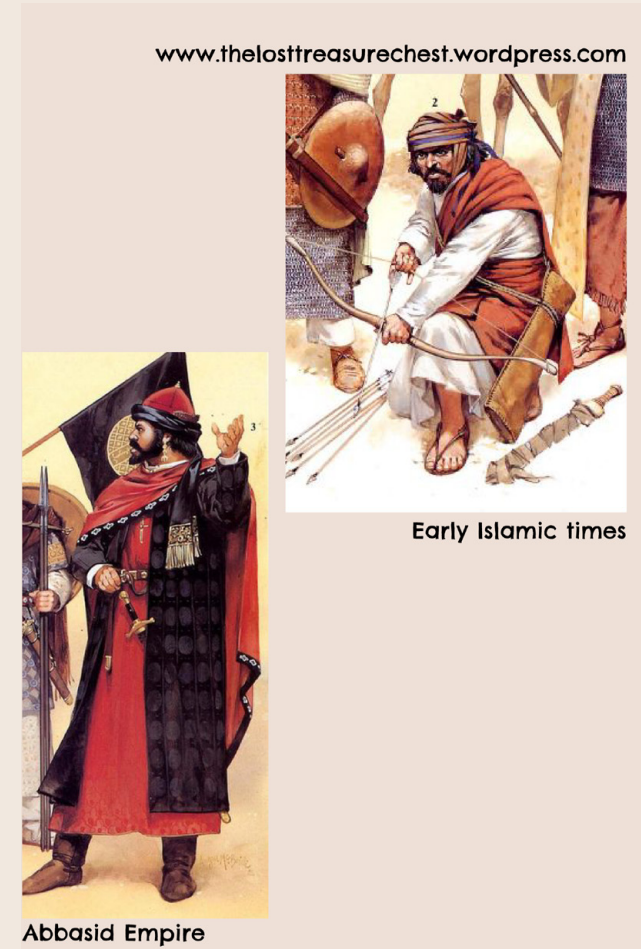
Set in a portion of the Islamic Empire in Persia, the original Hatim Tai has heavy connotations of Islam in both its symbolism and didacticism. To retain the element of Islam in terms of its aesthetic, an emerald green and gold, accompanied by classically Islamic Art, geometric and abstract illumination is utilized within various design elements.

BEGIN

NEXT

EUREKA!

THE STORY

The story is a retelling of Qissa-i-Hatim Tai, with a focus on the Adventures of Husn, who had previously been a side character in the original.

This retelling is a modern tale that combines the ancient Persian setting with present day issues and elements. As a response to the feminist literary criticism, Hatim of the original was removed and the focus placed on Husn to live up to the main character's duties. The story follows Husn as she attempts to save the world of a drought by regrowing the forests, encouraging the animals to return. The reader directs Husn on to their desired path of how to go about it, choosing between getting help from the scientist Munir, staying within the lab to find the answer, or go on an adventure and navigate through that.

In some instances of the retold story, the marriage and objectification aspect is altered, in other moments it has been removed completely. Husn and Munir's initial meeting is based on Munir's obsession about her looks, which was altered to be an obsession and drive to work with her on the problem at hand. Whether that ends in marriage is something the reader may speculate but it is not an official outcome. In the original, the resolution to the riddle and adventure is that the old man wanted to see a beautiful pari and indulge in gluttony; this was altered to focus on the surroundings of the pari, the beauty of the environment she had cultivated.

The retelling focuses on the choice of helping others – the saving the deer or not; if the reader chooses to save it, they then have to provide food for the Wolf, this comes at a cost of either giving away your own food or gathering something new, in this case, fish.

It is about the consequence of one's actions and the ability and drive to see them through to the end.

The Princess and the Prince

One day, a man arrived at her doorstep. Introducing himself he said, "I am Munir, a scholar from the East, there has been talk around the region that you are searching for the cure to the condition that has ruined the land. As a fellow scientist, please, Princess Husn, the wisest of the land, allow me to join your search"

While Husn does want to bring back life to the Earth and uncover its secrets, she does not like having partners. She considers this for a moment before she makes her decision.

retelling

"I am Prince of Khazrim; thy portrait has driven me mad, and my ardent desire to see thy face has sent me hither." Husn Banu held down her head, and after some time said, "Young man, abandon such vain ideas; if you were the zephyr itself, you should not have wafted your breath over my ringlets." The prince to this replied, "At least I wil sacrifice this my miserable life at thy gates." – "To give away your life," said Husn Banu "is easy, but to see my face is impossible; however, if this idea has found a place in your heart, then you must submit to my injunctions."

original

The Wolf

Out in the world, Husn decides to follow the last river that runs through the land. After a while of walking, she spots a ravenous wolf chasing a deer, carrying her small child. "Stop!" Husn cries out to the wolf, "she has a child!"

The wolf stops in its tracks and looks over at Husn as the deer runs away. Approaching Husn, the wolf spoke "You must be Husn, the wise and kind."

"Yes, I am." Husn replied.

"Now that you have stopped me from devouring my prey, I am in need of food, how can the wise and kind help me today?"

Husn looks around and remembers that her bag has a small amount of meat in it, and the river should have some fish in it.

retelling

Hatim shouted at the wolf, "Ravenous animal desist, she has a young one, and the milk flows from her udder."

The wolf stood still and said "Undoubtedly, you are Hatim, as your heart is endowed with such compassion. […] But as you have now withheld me from my prey, let me now have something to eat" – "What do you eat?" asked Hatim.

The wolf answered "Flesh is my food. […] Nothing can be better than the flesh on your thigh." Hatim then unsheathed his knife, and having cut away the flesh from his own thigh he threw it to the wolf.

original

INSPIRATION

Inspiration is a surprise. You are searching in one direction while inspiration attempts to pull you to another.

The project began with a children's book evolved into a zine and eventually to a chooseable path adventure. The stagnant and definite book form that is the zine and the children's book was uninteresting; the ability to choose between what the main character would do and how that would influence the story piqued my interest.
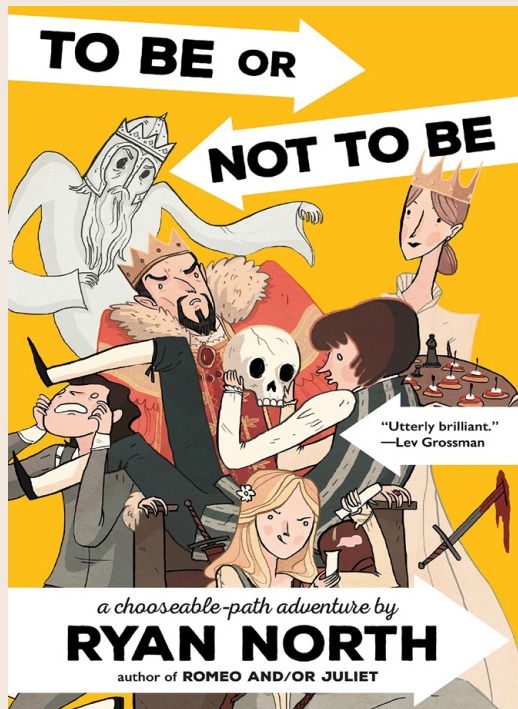
While going through the process of finalizing a mode, I came across this book, To Be or Not To Be, a modern retelling of Hamlet, in a chooseable-path adventure. It drove me to explore what a retelling of a folklore as a text game could look like.

Around the same time, the Netflix Interactive Special of Carmen Sandiego was released, mimicking the ethical and moral dilemmas, and the message of 'actions have consequences', that I wanted to feature in the retelling of Hatim Tai.

RESEARCH

Cultures are vast and never-ending, stretching backwards through time and forward to the ever-changing future; every culture contains its history as heritage, intangible knowledge in music and folktales, and tangible structures and artifacts. The act of preserving culture, communicating it, has as many methods as there are cultures to preserve.

The journey began with the desire to deal with the heritage of folktales and fantastical stories; with fast-paced lives and modern, sometimes mindless, entertainment the value of the folktale has rescinded. With the growing phenomenon of the global citizen, generations that grew up with the internet rarely associate stories that have didactic value with their specific culture.

Folktales allow their immersed readers to enjoy the fantasy and reality meeting, as well as develop tools of communication, problem solving, critical thinking, and cooperation. The stories also allow the reader to interact with and learn of other cultures, creatures, and creeds, teaching important lessons of empathy. This is beyond a doubt crucial to the times we live in in which learning empathy, respecting global citizenship, and the fellow creature is becoming more and more important to peace.

As this importance of folktales is established, a new question arises: how to make them consumable for children of all ages? New modes of transmissions, experimental modes, need to be explored that may fulfill the expectations of technology and digital storytelling. (Kim)

Digital Technologies

The digital world has expanded the worldview and connected individuals from across the globe to one another. This connection and subsequent learning involves the enlightenment of and growing emphasis on the self and the social, of how one behaves with others as well as oneself.

THE ADVENTURES OF HATIM TAÏ, A ROMANCE

FORBES, DUNCAN, 1798-1868, TR

It has the "potential to engage students worldwide in learning about the local contexts that are affected by and contribute to broader global problems" (Truong-White and McLean 21)

Digital storytelling provides the foundation of inter-cultural mingling, in countering negative ideas, and being introspective. (Roschelle, Pea and Hoadley 89-90) It elevates the lesson, beyond what is expected of regular storytelling and traditional education.

Interactive Learning

For a long time formal learning has been passive, of being told the lessons and memorizing them, however, in recent years research into pedagogy has allowed the social scientist to conclude that passive learning is not the optimal solution. Instead there has been a growing emphasis on active engagement, interactive and experiential learning.

Children learn best "by actively 'constructing' knowledge from a combination of experience, interpretation, and structured interactions." (Roschelle, Pea and Hoadley 79) Drawing a conclusion based on action and reaction is more likely to ingrain a lesson into a child.

Feminist Literary Critique

Issues of representation arise often in the original version of Qissa-i-Hatim Tai, where the original Husn Banu is simply a means to an end; first, she is robbed, then sought after for beauty, and finally serves as a device to send Hatim off on his adventures. Additionally, every woman encountered in the story is either extremely beautiful and strategically placed to entice Hatim, or is sought for marriage and bartered off.

Lieberman, a literary critic, proposes retellings include women in active roles, not needing men to save them. According to her, they should serve as role models for young children, especially girls, so they do not think that the lack of excess beauty or the ability to be independent will keep them from being happy.

She urges authors and retellers to subvert the trope, allowing the woman to incorporate both the masculine and feminine, to fail and to succeed, disregard their beauty, and show their worth in other ways, this would provide complex characters that children could relate to and be positively impacted by.

REFLECTION

A Case for the Artefact

This Chooseable-Path Adventure is attempting to make a case for the further retelling and subsequent preservation of the folklore, the argument being made is that traditional folklore can be preserved and retold, without feeling archaic and disconnected from the conversations happening today.

The medium of the web and the interactive form is in line with education research of the impact of digital technologies and active engagement, creating an experience that is evolving with the time and context it is placed in. Husn's retelling deals with a feminist view, moral and ethical lessons, empathy towards the world, the consequences of one's actions, the pursuit of knowledge, and a sense of adventure, while making it a global conversation for a non-restrictive demographic.

It is important to note that this project deals only with one riddle of the seven Husn and Hatim concern themselves with in the original.

As a prototype, I believe it falls short because it fails to adequately address the possible visual aspects of the story. However, this project is simply one prototype out of the many possible to further the conversations on the adaptive reuse of the heritage of folklore and fiction. It fulfills its role as a case study of the possibility of retelling traditional tales into modern times.