

**ROLL FOR REPRESENTATION: THE ANALYSIS OF THE BABAYLAN AND  
HEADHUNTER FROM THE ISLANDS OF SINA UNA**

An Undergraduate Thesis Presented to the  
Department of Arts and Communication  
UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES MANILA  
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

In Partial Fulfillment of the Course Requirements  
for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Philippine Arts

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2021-46154

Bachelor of Arts in Philippine Arts

June 2025

**APPROVAL SHEET**

UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES MANILA

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This undergraduate thesis, entitled *ROLL FOR REPRESENTATION: THE ANALYSIS OF THE BABAYLAN AND HEADHUNTER FROM THE ISLANDS OF SINA UNA*, prepared and submitted by Maleah Rae K. Frange, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Philippine Arts, is hereby accepted.



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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I would like to express my extreme gratitude to the following people who have helped in completing this thesis:

**Sir Joey Ogatis**, my thesis adviser, who had guided and supported me throughout the entire process. Your expertise and encouragement have been an immense help and a guiding light in the completion of this thesis, especially since it is a pioneering study. Thank you so much for your never-ending patience and your ever-ready presence during face-to-face or online consultations.

**Ma'am Rohzie and Ma'am Basco** who served as panelists for the thesis defense. Thank you as well, not only for the insights, but for the patience and understanding. Your feedback and criticisms have been a tremendous help in refining my work.

**Ma'am Labor** for taking the time to link me to valuable resources that aided in my thesis. Thank you for keeping tabs on me and for asking the progress on my thesis whenever we meet on campus.

**Ma'am Joson** for pushing me to pursue this thesis. I was just about ready to give up and move on to the next topic, but you had given me a chance to refine this even more during the proposal stage.

**Ms. Makenzie, Ms. Pam, and Sir BJ**, the interviewees for my thesis. I am extremely grateful that you took the time out of your day to assist in fulfilling this thesis. Without your insights, this would not have been completed. If it were, it would not have been as fruitful as this. Our conversations were delightful and I loved hearing about how Sina Una's Babaylan and Headhunter classes came to be. Thank you as well for helping bring Sina Una to life. It is such a special part of my life as a D&D player.

**Mx. Alyssa Visscher, Mx. Virginia McShannock, Mx. Sinta Posadas, Mx. James Hodes** for helping me in contacting Ms. Makenzie and Mx Lucia. Thank you for your patience and the effort to reach out to them. Your kindness is extremely appreciated.

**My D&D friends, especially in TAK**, who have expressed interest in my thesis. I am also incredibly grateful for the support you gave, especially during my crashouts. Thank you for being patient during those crashouts, and I apologize for the feedback in the mic during calls.

**To the rest of BAPA 2025**, who helped me remain sane despite the difficulties experienced in the entire process of writing this thesis from start to finish. You guys were my anchor.

Lastly, **thank you to my family, especially to my mom and Marla**, who were patient despite my frustrations and hardheadedness. Thank you for still helping me despite my being difficult, especially when things went awry. Thank you for guiding me in writing and submitting to REB. Thank you for double checking any grammatical mistakes and thank you for hyping me up pre-thesis defense. Thank you as well to my “other mother” **Ninang Myra** for helping me in sending the tokens to my interviewees. Your love is felt from the other side of the world.

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### ***ABSTRACT:***

The *Islands of Sina Una* is a fan-made campaign setting book for the fifth edition of Dungeons and Dragons created by a passionate group of Filipino D&D players. The new classes that are added to the book are the Headhunter and Babaylan. This study aimed to answer how the writers of *Islands of Sina Una* translated the roles of the Philippine Headhunter and Babaylan as classes for the setting to fit the world of Dungeons and Dragons through textual analysis and key informant interviews with three important figures integral to the project's creation. Guided by the *Cultural Translation Theory* by Talal Asad and the *Imagined Communities Theory* by Benedict Anderson, the study showed that though cultural translation can never be neutral, as argued by Talal Asad, it is possible to minimize or mitigate such biases by maintaining awareness of them and addressing them within the product. In doing so, a more informed product is created, leading to better representation and understanding. Through their thoughtful translation of the Babaylan and Headhunter, the creators not only introduced these roles to new audiences but also encouraged the ongoing dialogue of Filipino heritage, identity, and representation in contemporary gaming spaces.

## **CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION**

### **A. Background:**

The Islands of Sina Una is a fanmade campaign book for the fifth edition of Dungeons and Dragons created by a passionate group of Filipino D&D players. The Islands of Sina Una features a world named *Sina Una*. This can serve as a standalone world or a different continent in the larger space of Dungeons and Dragons' lore. Sina Una contains seven unique islands featuring creatures and monsters derived from Philippine mythology, practices inspired by indigenous and pre-colonial traditions, character races inspired by nature and animals of the Philippines, and classes and sub-classes derived from traditional community roles. The new base classes that are added to the campaign book are the Headhunter and Babaylan.

### **B. Statement of the Problem**

There are efforts in the tabletop roleplaying game (TTRPG) community to create games based on a certain culture or specific traditions. In the case of the Islands of Sina Una, the creators wished to create something that Filipinos across the globe could enjoy and have their culture represented in a broad gaming sphere. These creators took aspects of Philippine indigenous and precolonial culture to be reimagined into the fantastical world of D&D. One such aspect is the Babaylan and the Headhunter figures. However, questions arise regarding the authenticity, accuracy, and ethics of cultural representation, especially when translating important and revered cultural figures into a TTRPG setting. While the inclusion of these classes offers the opportunity for Filipino representation in TTRPG spaces, it also poses the challenge of translating deeply rooted cultural roles into a game system

shaped by Western mechanics and storytelling norms.

This study seeks to examine how the creators of Islands of Sina Una translated the Babaylan and Headhunter into playable classes. The main question the research aims to answer is: *How did the writers of IoSU translate the roles of the Philippine Headhunter and Babaylan as classes for the setting to fit the world of Dungeons and Dragons?*

### **C. Research Objectives:**

To answer the research question, the objectives of the thesis are presented below:

1. To determine how the roles of the Philippine Headhunter and Babaylan were translated as classes for the IoSU setting.
2. To determine the motivation for adding the Philippine Headhunter and Babaylan as classes for the IoSU setting.
3. To understand the process of creating the build behind the Philippine Headhunter and Babaylan as classes for the IoSU setting while simultaneously maintaining cultural integrity and respect towards the classes' real-life counterparts.
4. To understand how the writers connected with their Filipino roots in creating the Headhunter and Babaylan as classes.

### **D. Significance**

Representation and diversity are crucial facets in creating enriched learning platforms, especially as gaming media become integral to educational settings. (Darvishinia, Goodson, 2024). This study will help in understanding how Philippine

cultural heritage can be represented and translated into globalized gaming media, particularly in the tabletop roleplay industry, such as Dungeons and Dragons. This can aid future game designers and campaign supplement writers who aim to go beyond the typical “sword and sorcery” Eurocentric fantasy aspect of D&D and borrow aspects from other cultures while incorporating them responsibly. It contributes to ongoing discussions on cultural representation and gamification in the gaming industry, particularly within the context of Indigenous and postcolonial influences.

The Philippines is a country with a rich and diverse heritage seen in traditional practices and cultural roles. By analyzing its representation in an international and well-known gaming medium, the research can promote the richness of Philippine culture, bridging Philippine culture with pop culture media. This bridge can foster a deeper appreciation among both local and international audiences. The study aims to share the findings with the following audience:

1. To the **academe**: It will provide valuable insights for researchers studying the intersection of cultural heritage and pop culture.
2. To **game designers**: As gaming media increasingly become tools for education, the findings will be useful for creators aiming to incorporate diversity and cultural authenticity in their game designs.
3. To **players of TTRPG and D&D**: The study can provide a deeper understanding of the cultural nuances behind the campaign book, especially for international players who are interested in using this for their future game sessions.

4. To the **Philippine Government**: The study can encourage the government to forward laws and actions to preserve, conserve, and protect indigenous practices, especially since they can serve as future sources for possible media similar to this.

#### ***E. Scope and Limitations***

TITLE	YEAR	NO. OF PAGES	PRICE (PHP)	
The Islands of Sina Una	2020	337	PDF Version: 1,800	Hardbound: 3,000

Table 1. Scope and Limitations

This study will center around the analysis of cultural representation and game mechanics of the Babaylan and Headhunter classes in the Islands of Sina Una, a fan-made campaign setting for the 5th edition of the tabletop roleplaying game: Dungeons and Dragons. The study is limited only to how the Babaylan and Headhunter function in-game, drawing from indigenous practices and cultural context, and mechanically. It will not discuss the other new subclasses available for IoSU. Additionally, the research will make use of Version 1.4 of the PDF file shared with the researcher by a friend.

#### ***F. Methodology:***

The study used descriptive qualitative research. It utilized online and digital resources supported by related frameworks and theories. The study was conducted remotely as the interview was held online due to physical limitations brought about by the difference in geographical locations. The interviewees live in the United States of America, Canada, and in Manila; therefore, this mode of study was done online

and used their time zone for their convenience. The copy of the Islands of Sina Una is accessed digitally through a PDF version of the publication.

### *Participants and Sampling*

The researcher conducted a semi-structured interview using purposive sampling to gather data. The recruitment process involved identifying the heads and writers of the Islands of Sina Una through the public information accessed on the project's website. They were contacted through email and Facebook Messenger. They were given the background of the study, objectives, and the questions for the interview. The aforementioned was supplied with the informed consent form before any kind of interview or data collection.

### *Data Collection*

Data collection was done by reading the supplementary book for D&D, Islands of Sina Una, to understand the build and creation of the Babaylan and Headhunter as base classes. The initial reading was possible due to a friend sharing the PDF file of IoSU version 1.4. with the researcher. Data collection was also done by interviewing the head writer and consultant-writer of this project. The interview with the head writer, lead researcher, and lead consultant explained the process of implementing the roles of the Babaylan and Headhunter into a campaign setting for Dungeons and Dragons and how they managed to collect this information to incorporate into the setting.

### *Data Analysis*

Data Analysis was done by describing the build and mechanics of the Babaylan and Headhunter as D&D classes. Then, the data gathered from the interviews and the supplementary book were interpreted using the following theories: Cultural Translation Theory by Talal Asad and Imagined Communities Theory by Benedict Anderson. Cultural Translation Theory examined whether the writers have imposed their own understanding of the roles of the Headhunter and Babaylan onto the version translated into the setting and how cultural elements and rituals were adopted into the classes and gamified, especially with how they fit within the context of the predominantly Eurocentric fantasy lens of Dungeons and Dragons. The Imagined Communities Theory examined how the project connected the Filipino and Filipino-American writers and heads to their cultural roots.

## **CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***What Is Dungeons and Dragons?***

To understand the analysis of the Babaylan and Headhunter classes of the Islands of Sina Una, one must look into the background of where it stemmed from: Dungeons and Dragons. *Dungeons and Dragons* is a fantasy tabletop roleplaying game (TTRPG) created in 1974 by Gary Gygax and David Arneson (Britannica Encyclopedia, 2024), inspired by his love for the board game *Wargames* and the fantasy genre (Zink, M.). This TTRPG uses several dice, the main being a 20-sided die to determine the actions and effects of in-game events. Initially, D&D's prototype, created in 1971, was called *Chainmail*. It was an experimental game design that incorporated magic and had a sixteen-page booklet of rules. Additionally, Gygax created it as an improvement to *Wargames* (Zink, M.). However, when commercially sold, *Wargames* enthusiasts disapproved of the use of magic. This led Gygax and Arneson to create a variant of *Chainmail*, leading to the birth of *Dungeons and Dragons* (D&D). The very first edition was originally published by Tactical Studies Rules (TSR), Gygax's company before being bought by Wizards of the Coast (WotC), a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. Since its creation, D&D has gone through several iterations. Currently, it is in its fifth edition. Rules and lore have been revised throughout the years, adapting to the current playstyles. In addition, WotC has released other guidebooks and campaign books to guide new and old players alike. Such publications are the basics: *Player's Handbook* needed for everyone who desires to play, *The Dungeon Master's Guide* for aspiring Dungeon Masters (DM), and the *Monster Manual* to be made aware of what kind of adversaries players would encounter (Demma, 2024).

Since its creation, playing Dungeons and Dragons has become a staple in pop culture and a pastime for those interested in the fantasy genre. It has inspired several other forms of media such as cartoons, games, books, and films (Demma, 2024). It has made notable appearances in popular television series such as *The Big Bang Theory* (as seen in S12E16: *The D&D Vortex* aired in 2018) and *Stranger Things* (notably S01E01: *The Vanishing of Will Byers* aired in 2016 and S04E01: *The Hellfire Club* aired in 2022), most probably inspiring more players to take part in this TTRPG.

D&D does not have a limit to the number of players; the only requirement is that there must be a *Dungeon Master* (DM) to mediate the game. The role of the Dungeon Master is important as the DM is the one that builds the campaign by describing the world the game is set in, the characters, usually Non-Playable Characters (NPCs), that the players will come across, set up encounters such as combat or puzzles, and controls the flow of the game. “*The Dungeon Master (DM) is the creative force behind a D&D game*” (Dungeon Master’s Guide, p.4). Incentivized by leveling up or gaining magic items or unique loot, players interact with the events thrust upon them by the Dungeon Master. Essentially, the DM guides the game while the players progress the story.

Players create their characters by choosing their race, class, background, and stats. Races range from humans to typical fantasy races such as dwarves, halflings, elves, orcs, and fairies. D&D features new races for players to choose from as well such as *tielfings* (demonic-like creatures), *dragonborn* (draconic humans), *gnomes*, *genasis*, *goliaths*, *tabaxis*, and so much more. There is a wide variety of races to choose from,

each offering different boons and racial features that can aid the player. Such racial features include the lifespan, abilities, size, speed, and languages spoken.

Backgrounds are essentially what the player's character worked as or is currently employed in before partaking in the campaign's adventure. *"Your character's background reveals where you came from, how you became an adventurer, and your place in the world."* (Players Handbook, p. 125). Once again, backgrounds offer certain perks, items, and proficiencies that may aid the player. For example, a player chooses the *Acolyte* background. This gives the player proficiency in the religion skill.

Ability scores (stats) are made up of six (6) components: *Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma*. Strength measures physical power, Dexterity measures agility, Constitution measures endurance, Intelligence measures reasoning and memory, Wisdom measures perception and insight, and Charisma measures the force of personality (D&D Basic Rules, p.60). The Dungeons and Dragons community, however, explains these ability scores through a "tomato analogy." Strength determines how far a character can throw tomatoes, Dexterity determines how fast a character can dodge the thrown tomatoes, Constitution determines whether or not the character can digest rotten tomatoes, Intelligence is when a character knows that tomatoes are fruits, Wisdom is when a character knows that tomatoes are not used in a fruit salad, and Charisma determines whether a character can sell a tomato fruit salad or not.

Classes, as defined by the Player's Handbook (p. 45), are "*the primary definition of what your character can do. It's more than a profession; it's your character's calling. Class shapes the way you think about the world and interact with it and your relationship with other people and powers in the multiverse.*" There are 12 base classes featured in D&D: *Fighter, Barbarian, Cleric, Paladin, Bard, Rogue, Sorcerer, Wizard, Warlock, Ranger, Druid, and Monk.* These twelve classes "*define the spectrum of typical adventurers.*"

In creating a campaign, the Dungeon Master has two choices. The first choice is to make use of storylines or worlds canon to D&D. These types of games, called *adventure modules*, are crafted by WotC with published books that accompany them (Demma, 2024). The second option is to create one from scratch. Worlds created by the DM is referred to as *homebrew*. When playing homebrew, players are thrust into a world entirely constructed and developed by the Dungeon Master. These worlds are not canon to the world of Dungeons and Dragons and are not affiliated with Wizards of the Coast. One such example of a homebrew world is the *Islands of Sina Una*.

### ***The Islands of Sina Una***

The *Islands of Sina Una* (IoSU) is a fanmade homebrew campaign book for the fifth edition of Dungeons and Dragons. It was created by a group of Filipino and Filipino–American players who are passionate about D&D and published by *Hit Point Press*. IoSU was created by a team of passionate players headed by co-directors Lucia Versprille and Joshua Mendenhall and led by lead writer Makenzie de Armas, an associate game designer for Wizards of the Coast (Tumesa, 2020). This allowed

the team to connect with their Filipino heritage and share it with others. This campaign setting came to be when Versprille encountered a compendium of pre-colonial Filipino deities and monsters. Inspired by these, Versprille shared with Mendenhall her desire to implement them in a D&D campaign and share the mythology, as well as culture, of the Philippines to an international audience. The creators of the Islands of Sina Una wanted to introduce a new theme in the TTRPG community through an educational and respectful representation of Philippine mythology and culture. In doing so, it expands the boundaries of creating characters and monsters that the players will encounter. The creators had additionally intended for IoSU to be an entertaining and accessible resource for Philippine pre-colonial mythology and culture. (Tumesa, 2020). The campaign book has a list of Appendices (seen on page 321 onwards in the 1.4 version of the PDF) containing a glossary and a master list of the resources utilized in their research. Islands of Sina Una can be purchased on Hit Point Press's website in a PDF form or a hardbound copy shipped to the buyer's address.

The Islands of Sina Una introduces a new setting with a world of seven new fictional islands: *Timanduk*, *Kandaya*, *Puthawanan*, *Nasirakna*, *Adlawadto*, *Talunan*, and *Kotobalon*. Each island has its unique geography, reflecting the various ecosystems of the Philippines. The setting features creatures and monsters derived from Philippine mythology, such as the *aswang* or other terrifying monsters, such as the *sigbin* or *amomongo*. It contains practices borrowed from Indigenous and pre-colonial traditions. Important figures in the setting are usually *datus* or *babaylans*, but make mention of other roles such as the *Binukot* from Visayan traditions. The character races featured are inspired by nature and animals of the

Philippines. Players may play as a carabao tiefling or an elf born from the roots of a balete tree. Finally, the classes and sub-classes are derived from traditional community roles. Aside from the twelve base classes, IoSU features 12 subclasses and two new base classes borrowed from Philippine culture: the Babaylan and the Headhunter.

### ***The Babaylan and the Headhunter in the Islands of Sina Una***

#### ***The Babaylan***

Babaylans are defined by the Islands of Sina Una (p. 164 of the book) as *“mediums, channeling the power and wisdom of the spirits through offerings and communion. Accompanied by a patron spirit companion known as an abayan, babaylan serve as leaders, protectors, and healers for their communities.”*

The book describes that in-game babaylans start as apprentices of older ones and must undergo training to fulfill the role. The babaylan is conferred a spirit guide called an *abayan* once the training is completed. Abayans remain tied to their babaylans for the rest of the babaylans' lives as the abayan serves as a connection between spirit realm and the mortal realm. IoSU further explains that an abayan is different from a familiar or animal companion as the relationship between the spirit guide and the babaylan is that of friends instead of a master and servant. Additionally, babaylans are widely revered and considered on par with community leaders. *“If a village leader were to go missing, a babaylan would be given control in their place.”* (Islands of Sina Una, p.165). This is due to the babaylan's duties in healing the sick, guiding the harvest, and communing with the spirits.

The authors of *Island of Sina Una* offer a quick build for players who wish to create a Babaylan character but have no time to fully develop it. Intelligence is recommended to be the highest ability score, followed by Dexterity or Constitution. As for the background of the player's character, *Lorechanter* is suggested to take.

The Babaylan is a *caster* class in *Dungeons in Dragons*; thus, playing as a Babaylan allows the players to cast spells. *"A spell is a discrete magical effect, a single shaping of the magical energies that suffuse the multiverse into a specific, limited expression... Spells can be versatile tools, weapons, or protective wards. They can deal damage or undo it, impose or remove conditions, drain life energy away, and restore life to the dead."* (Player's Handbook, p.201). In addition to spells, the Babaylan cast allows players to cast *cantrips*. A cantrip is *"a simple but powerful spell that characters can cast almost by rote."* The number of spells a Babaylan can cast, the number of spell slots, the number of known spells (list of spells), and the spell level (the power of the spell) scale as the player levels up.

*"As a babaylan, your journey is guided by a steadfast spirit companion known as an abayan. Part guardian and part mentor, your abayan helps you better understand your connection to the spirit realm and channel your magical gifts"* (p.167 of the book). The abayan is a medium-sized creature that only the player's babaylan character can see. Players may cast spells using their abayan. For example, players are unable to cross a chasm to heal an injured character. The player may send the abayan across the chasm and cast a healing spell upon the injured character. Abayans may also telepathically confer with their babaylan when it is within 60 feet. *"An abayan is always truthful, but they may answer questions cryptically or withhold*

*information as they see fit in order to best facilitate your spiritual journey as a babaylan.”*

The Babaylan class features three subclasses, also known as *Babaylan Callings*. Page 168 of IoSU defines them as *“a specific purpose or fulfill a particular destiny. Some [babaylans] are drawn more towards healing and herbalism, while others find themselves pulled to become vessels to facilitate communication with the spirits. And still others are guided by the spirits to become fearsome warriors called to defend their communities.”* The three Babaylan Callings are: the *Call of Clairvoyance*, the *Call of Sacrifice*, and the *Call of Wrath*. The following table lists the Babaylan Calling as well as their descriptions. Each Calling receives a special feature at certain levels exclusive to the chosen Calling.

Babaylan Calling	Description
Call of Clairvoyance	Babaylans who heed the Call of Clairvoyance specialize in divination and history. Steeped in the unseen spirit world, these babaylan learn to open their bodies as vessels, allowing the spirits to pour forth their guidance, knowledge, and memories through them.
Call of Sacrifice	Experts in healing and herbalism, babaylan following the Call of Sacrifice

	dedicate themselves to remedying the hurts that plague their communities. Beyond healing physical wounds, these babaylan can reach forth and snatch away a creature's pain in an instant, and even give up parts of themselves to restore things that seem irrecoverable.
Call of Wrath	Babaylan dedicate themselves to the protection and well-being of their community—and none more so than babaylan who heed the Call of Wrath. Wielding menacing martial prowess alongside powerful sorcery, these babaylan are some of the most fearsome warriors in living memory.

Table 2. Babaylan Subclasses

### *The Headhunter*

Headhunters in the world of Islands of Sina Una are not only warriors but fighters who commune with the spirits. The book defines the Headhunter class, found on page 170, as people who *“are trained to commune with the spirits of their ancestors, and it is via this connection that they hone their martial skill. Through rites and omens, they receive knowledge of those to pursue; from those that they send to the afterlife, they learn ways to hone their tools of combat.”*

In the setting of IoSU, the role of a headhunter is stated as someone who brings justice to people who have committed crimes *“beyond what mortal law can rectify”* against the community or its people. Headhunters will traverse land and sea for their quarry with the guidance of their ancestors through rituals and omens. *“There is no place that their ancestors cannot see; there is no place where a headhunter will not go to right the wrongs committed”* (Islands of Sina Una, p.171). In-game headhunters are described to be disciplined and determined with fearsome presences. However, IoSU emphasizes that killing and the taking of the heads is only half of the duty of the headhunter. *“The other half is spiritual in its nature and is the greater task. For all the distance that they have traversed, they must do so again.”* The headhunter travels back to the community they were sent to and casts the perpetrator’s soul to the afterlife to join its ancestors. *“When the crime of the slain was committed, the blame also befell the community that the perpetrator came from.”* Casting the perpetrator’s soul to the ancestors shows that the community they came from does not receive the ire of the offended. Headhunters deal with not only justice but also absolution and forgiveness.

A quick build for the Headhunter class entails the following: Strength or Dexterity should be chosen as the ability score with the highest number (depending on whether the player chooses the melee fighting style or ranged combat). The next highest ability score depends on the Omen (subclass) of the Headhunter: *Omen of Knowledge*, *Charisma* for *Omen of Strife*, and *Wisdom* for *Omen of Swiftness*. Finally, the recommended background for a Headhunter’s quick build is the *Sea Raider*.

The Headhunter class features three subclasses also known as *Hunter's Omens* which can be found on page 173 of *Islands of Sina Una*. Hunter's Omen reflects how a Headhunter character would reflect the spirits that guide them throughout their role as a headhunter. *"As wielders of death, headhunters are heavily aware of the spirits around them. Like babaylan and others well-versed in the ways of the unseen realm, headhunters commune with the spirits, offering gifts and petitioning for guidance. In turn, the spirits do provide aid, but not in the ways most would expect."* Each Hunter's Omen contains features exclusive to the chosen Omen at certain levels. The following table lists the Hunter's Omen as well as their descriptions.

Hunter's Omen	Description
Omen of Knowledge	Headhunters beset with an Omen of Knowledge carry the weight of what they've done with them every step of the way. It is grief, but it is not mourning; rather, it is a solemn recognition of their role as an agent of violence. These headhunters carry the memories of the dead with them always, learning from their errors and offering absolution.
Omen of Strife	Headhunters carrying an Omen of Strife are some of the most formidable forces in combat. Embracing the violence of their profession with grim and fearsome

	skill, such headhunters are loath to let anything escape their dreadful purview.
Omen of Swiftmess	Headhunters bestowed with an Omen of Swiftmess find themselves pulled towards Amanikabli, the god of the swift hunt. Through worship and offering, these headhunters learn to become channels for Amanikabli's power, using divine magic to aid their journey across the islands.

Table 3. Headhunter Subclasses

Omen of Swiftmess is the only subclass under the Headhunter class that grants players the ability to use magic, thus making them a part-caster. Due to the subclass's nature of being a part-caster, players who choose this Omen are given a limited number of spells, spell levels, and spell slots compared to full casters like the Babaylan class.

### ***The Babaylan and the Headhunter in the Philippines***

#### ***The Babaylan***

Babaylans (Visayan term) or Katalonans (Tagalog term) are deeply rooted in the culture of the Philippines, with their origins dating back to the pre-colonial period of the country. In the field of anthropology, the babaylans would be categorized as shamanistic (Padilla, 1996). However, it is important to note that this kind of classification stems from the Western ethnocentric label of "witch doctors," "seers,"

and “magicians.” The babaylan was one of the three specialists and central figures in the socio-economic structure of the ancient barangays alongside the Datu and the panday. Their expertise and societal contributions were treated with reverence. According to Zeus A. Salazar (1999), the babaylan were considered proto-scientists as they were central to ancient Philippine culture, medicine, and nature. Babaylans took charge of rituals, medicine, and the mythology of their respective barangays and communities. Usually, rituals done by babaylans would involve ingesting hallucinogenic plants and/or drinking alcohol that induces altered consciousness (Padilla, 1996).

They worked with their datus in agriculture and economy, through their knowledge of astronomy, by advising the kaingin system, determining the optimal times of harvest, and aiding headhunters in collecting heads related to agriculture. The babaylan also presided over the myths and religion of their barangays, functioning as keepers of cultural heritage. They would memorize epics, poems, and other studies and teach these to those studying them— particularly the younger babaylans who study under their tutelage. Professor Ian Nibalvos of the University of the Philippines added in his essay *Babaylanismo: Ang Maka-Pilipinong Ekofeministang Lapit sa Pagsusuri ng mga Eko-Siday* that aside from such, Babaylans would serve as mediums for the precolonial Filipinos to commune with the diwata and spirits. The reason for such communication is so that the community members may be able to ask for blessings during farming, harvests, hunting animals, good weather, for victory in feuds, for health, and for wishing peace on the deceased.

However, the function that is commonly associated with the babaylans is being a healer and psychologist as they not only dealt with medicines of the body but medicines of the mind as well. Due to psychological beliefs being the basis of Filipino understanding in the precolonial times, a babaylan's knowledge of this is an important factor in medical practice. They heal the body and, most importantly, the *kaluluwa* and *ginhawa* of a human soul, as the spirit and its health are what give life to man. If one's soul is captured by supernatural beings or *aswangs*, or when one angers a spirit, the babaylan is called to cure the sickness linked to these. Babaylans mediate with the spirit world through spirit guides, which in turn, grants them the ability to heal and grant insight. The Spaniards were repulsed by such rituals and practices upon their discovery of them. Plasencia wrote in his *Customs of the Tagalogs* that the Spaniards found such practices and the belief in animism as an act of idolatry introduced by the Devil himself, labelling the babaylans as "ministers of the Devil" that cast lots— an act of fraud and deceit and one of ignorance of the Creator. (Padilla, 1996).

According to Sabino Padilla Jr. (1996), not everyone can just become a babaylan as it requires a great sacrifice. Taking up the mantle and role of a babaylan is a *panawagan*, a calling that comes in various forms. These callings come in the form of dreams from the many *diwata* or *anito*, or as a repetitive sickness without being healed. Callings cannot be shunned or rejected. It is at this point that the person who received the babaylan calling will become an assistant and serve the community's babaylan. Thus, through their servitude, their training commences by memorizing songs, prayers, and herbal plants for medicinal purposes.

Salazar noted that it is important to define babae in relation to the babaylan. Babae is not just the sex of a person but also the person's function in the community. Originally, females (babae), effeminate people (bakla), or ACDC/neutral people (otherwise known as hermaphrodites) were the ones who took up the role of a babaylan of ancient bayans and baranggays (Salazar, Z., 1999). An Asog is what one would call an effeminate man, or the precolonial version of a transgender woman, who practices the works of a babaylan. (De Guzman, D., 2017.). Another term for the asog is the bayak. Bayak were described as dressing like women as they wear a garment called tapis. The bayak also wore their hair up similarly to women, emulating the physical appearances of the women in the community. Bayugin is an additional term for feminine men, or as Nibalvos describes as "binabae." He also quotes William Scott's *Barangay*, stating that women from prominent families usually dominated the babaylan profession as they could learn and perform such rituals. However, Padilla stated that no one, whether man or woman, is rejected from becoming a babaylan. He continues by saying that depending on the community, babaylans are exclusively either men or women, or babaylans can be taken up by either gender. He goes on to say that some communities have babaylan that are transvestites.

Each region or ethnic group within the Philippines has a particular name for the babaylan that serves within their community. In the highland regions of CAR, particularly the Kanakaney and Ibaloi regions, they are called "Mambunong" which translates to the maker of "bunong (prayer)." "Magbugi" is what the people of Sierra Madre call their babaylan. In the Cebuano society and Central Visayas, the title given to them is "Mananambal" because they are practitioners of "panambal," the

work of healing. “Marayaw” is what the Iraya Mangyan call their community’s babaylan. In the eastern side of Visayas, Leyte, and Samar, Tambalan is what the people call their folk healers. Other terms are the Mumbaki/Mombaki, Mansipnok, Balyana, Dawac, Ma-Aram and Mangngallag.

In Nibalvos’ paper, he discusses the term babaylanismo— the practices and philosophies of the babaylan. He notes that there is no definite description of what exactly it is in the Philippine academe, stating that there are different meanings in the various texts about the babaylan. However, Nibalvos’ defines it through literary criticism, particularly as a foundation for analyzing siday, transforming it into a critical theory on ecology and feminism in the Philippines. Babaylanismo in his context is used to emphasize the connection between humans and nature, rooted in indigenous belief systems, decolonization of analyzing literature by centering indigenous practices, and most importantly, women's empowerment as central figures, especially in patriarchal societies.

### *The Headhunter*

In the northern areas of the country, specifically in the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), there is a group of warriors known as the *headhunters*. While the babaylan role is usually taken up by females or effeminate people (Salazar, 1999), the role of a headhunter is taken up by males (Mikkelsen & Søgaaard, 2015). They were common in the communities of the *Bontoc (Bontok)*, *Igorot*, *Apayao*, *Kalinga*, and *Ilongot (or Bugkalot)* peoples. Among the ethnolinguistic groups of CAR, the Igorot and the Ilongot people were most known for their headhunting practices. In Bontok mythology, headhunting came to be as a practice when the Moon (Kabigat)

struck the Sun's (Chal-Chal) son's head as the boy watched her make a large copper cooking pot. Though Chal-chal's son's head was returned to its place and was revived, the people of the earth adapted the act into practice and has since become a tradition (Clark, 2022).

Headhunting is deeply rooted in the culture of these communities. In the Kalinga tribe, *kayaw*, or headhunting, is central to their communal life. *"Kayaw is the best expression of Kalinga justice and chivalry in times of tribal conflict; it is a genuine occasion for a warrior to prove himself fit as a Pangat (tribal leader)"* (Namiki, 2016). The practice reflects their namesake as *Kalinga* can be translated to fighter or headhunter in the Ibanag and Gaddang dialects. The *kayaw* tradition was to take heads from rival tribes and later celebrate on the return home. In fact, the *Tadok* and the *Sagli* dances have evolved from the communal celebration of a successful hunt.

In the Ilongot or Bugkalot community, headhunting was also a sign of prowess. However, there was an additional reason for this tradition. Renato Rosaldo, an American anthropologist known for his Ilongot research, argued that *"headhunting was structured around a continuous effort to transform people's unruly emotional states into controlled energy"* (Mikkelsen, 2016). The Ilongot used headhunting as a form of catharsis by tossing *"a body part, which by a principle of sympathetic magic represents the cathartic throwing away of certain burdens of life—the grudge an insult has created, or the grief over a death in the family."* Headhunting in the Ilongot tribe was used as a therapeutic tool to manage grief and anger in one's emotional state. The grief usually stems from the loss of a loved one. Other negative emotions, such as insult, envy, and humiliation, are attributed to the act of headhunting as well.

Younger men in the Ilongot community used headhunting to channel their passionate and youthful vigor. Headhunting allowed young men to emulate their fathers and thus prove themselves as worthy bachelors to transition into the stage of marriage. However, headhunting expeditions were tied in with the older, more experienced men. Older Ilongot men hunted heads mostly to cope with the intense hatred and pain they experienced upon a kin's death, whilst younger Ilongot men did it to alleviate the intense emotions of their youth. Headhunting trips were typically triggered by the death of a relative rather than the coming of age of a teenager.

While there are no records of Visayan headhunting— the explicit tradition of purposely taking heads— there is a form of it in Visayan traditions. It differs from the practices of Luzon. While headhunting was used as a form of catharsis in the northern regions, the Visayan practice of taking heads was done in the course of warfare or murder during *ngayaw* or raids. In addition, taking heads was done as part of a ritual. Taking the head of an enemy was seen as a sacrifice utilized in practices such as the *pagdaga*— the launching of warships, where the blood was smeared on the prow and keel of the boat. In the Visayas, headhunting was not limited to human heads. Headhunting included surrogate heads like coconuts or prestige items acquired during raids (Gowey, 2018).

However, Western views have skewed and labeled this tradition as a barbaric spectacle, most especially with the headhunters of the Igorot people. In the 1900s, when America had a trend of *human zoos*, the Igorot people were put on display for American onlookers. A group of Igorot headhunters was made to perform mock tribal

ceremonies and consume dog meat for the 1905 Coney Island Amusement Park in New York (Qiu, 2014). Horrified by the display, the Americans tainted the tradition, and subsequently, the Indigenous groups who practiced headhunting were portrayed as uncivilized. This Orientalist view, paired with the violent label the Catholic colonizers have placed upon the tradition (Dizon, 2015), caused such a practice to die out in contemporary times.

### ***Imagined Communities Theory***

Imagined Communities discusses the origins and the development of nationalism. According to Anderson, a nation is an *"imagined political community"* that is inherently limited and sovereign. Members of even the smallest nation will never meet or know the majority of their fellow citizens. However, they share a mental image of their communion as a component of a broader collective identity. In imagined communities, symbols like flags, maps, and national anthems are essential for creating a sense of unity. Additionally, Anderson's theory highlights the emotional strength of nationalism, which motivates sacrifices traditionally associated with religious commitment. These symbols and emotions often serve as a form of representation in an imagined community, allowing an easier connection and unification between its members.

Representation in gaming media should be explored because *"the investigation of representation reflects a thorough knowledge of the industry's difficulties"* (Darvishinia, Goodson, 2024). When games are used as a means of education alongside entertainment, representation and diversity become crucial in creating *"enriched learning platforms"* (Darvishinia, Goodson, 2024). Implementing and

embracing diversity is imperative in what Darvishinia and Goodson describe as a “*constantly changing environment of educational gaming.*” This statement is supported by a 2015 thesis published by Balela, M.S., and Mundy, D.P. discussing cultural heritage, its accuracy, and interpretations of historical and cultural elements within video games through a case study analysis of two games: *Assassin’s Creed I and Unearthed: Trail of Ibn Battuta*, the authors argued that there is a concern regarding the cultural representation in the chosen games. They noted that there is the risk of reinforcement of harmful stereotypes when cultural elements or aspects are oversimplified or inaccurately presented. The paper concludes by emphasizing the many aspects of cultural heritage and the various approaches used to portray cultural elements so that more thought would be given to the cultural impact of their design in video games. Balela and Mundy state that having the perspective of “greater awareness leads to greater consideration” leads to a more informed product.

In the Philippine context, Cerda published a paper in 2021 discussing how video games are a potential tool for promoting Filipino culture, emphasizing the importance of representation in video games. The paper noted that there is a lack of Filipino video games (video games developed by Filipinos, having Filipino narratives and subject matter, or catering to the Filipino audience) in the mainstream media due to the popularity of the Western video game industry. Cerda made use of four Filipino-made video games to show how Filipino history, culture, and politics were used in their narratives and designs to make Filipino culture accessible and engaging. The paper goes on to say how a Filipino-centered game would not only serve as entertainment but also as an educational tool to teach Filipino history,

values, and culture. The paper concluded by emphasizing the importance of student-made games as well as the role of the academe in understanding Filipino video games and Filipino culture and identity. The principles in Cerda's paper can be utilized in understanding the design of the Islands of Sina Una, especially since limited research has analyzed Indigenous or cultural representation in the context of tabletop roleplaying games (TTRPGs). Research regarding the concept of cultural and/or Indigenous representation has focused on digital media such as video games.

### ***Cultural Translation Theory***

Talal Asad's Cultural Translation Theory is found in his essay "*The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology*" published in "*Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*" (1986). His essay focuses on critiquing several texts, mainly Ernest Gellner's "*Concepts and Society*," which he observed was commonly used in undergraduate courses in British universities.

Cultural Translation Theory by Talal Asad critiques the process of translating cultural aspects from one context to another and describes it as an institutional practice. This theory emphasizes that power dynamics are involved, reinforcing social hierarchies. Due to this, scholars and researchers may unintentionally impose their cultural frames when translating cultural aspects to be understood in their realm of work or the academe. Asad's theory urges researchers to consider the nuances of cultural elements, roles, and traditions in understanding them in different sociocultural contexts, and to be mindful of assumptions that can be placed during the process of cultural translation.

Wlosek (2023) noted in his master's thesis entitled *Characterization, culture, and canon: Fantasy fiction and the rulebooks of Dungeons & Dragons* that fixed racial characteristics and roles of D&D's rulebooks often reinforce usually Eurocentric ("sword and sorcery") fantasy stereotypes that impact the freedom of both players and related media inspired the game. He argues that the "sword and sorcery" genre spills into the culture that surrounds the game. He concludes by stating that "*players need to be aware of the canon implied by the rulebooks.*" With the basis of Dungeons and Dragons being rooted in the medieval, Eurocentric, sword and sorcery aspect of fantasy, Cultural Translation theory can be applied in adapting the Philippine mythos and culture into the game. This is especially useful as a part of the team behind the creation of the Islands of Sina Una are members of the Filipino-American diaspora (Tumesa, 2020); thus, utilizing the theory as a tool may determine whether the writers and directors were influenced by their own language and jargon in translating these aspects into the world setting of Dungeons and Dragons.

Nibalvos' Babaylanismo also emphasizes Asad's critique by stating the importance of analyzing Philippine literature through the lens of Filipinos instead of Western counterparts. The goal of Babaylanismo as an eco-feminist theory and a branch of eco-critical theory is to conceptualize, from a Filipino perspective, the status and role of women in the environment or ecology. Though hinged on the topic of feminism and ecology, Nibalvos' Babaylanismo can aid in analyzing the importance of a babaylan, especially of women as babaylan in Philippine history and literature.

## **Content Analysis of Philippine Literature**

*Philippine Mythical Creatures Perceived as Reimagined Hybridized Characters in Trese (Vol. 1-3) and The Mythology Class (Vol. 1)* by Bianca Santiago and *Mga Mundong Higit sa Naririto: Isang Folkloresque na Pagsusuri sa World-building ng Mga Nobelang Janus Silang ni Edgar Calabia Samar* by Justine Vince de Dios are both unpublished undergraduate theses from BA Philippine Arts. Both these made use of the descriptive qualitative research method. De Dios's thesis described how he utilized key informant interviews, as one of the methods for data collection, from the author, publisher, and vice president of product development of the *Janus Silang* novels and a high school teacher who included the novels in her summer reading lists for her students. The theses of De Dios and Santiago focused on the content analysis of their respective chosen literature as the mode of data analysis. The aforementioned theses are examples of content analysis using a descriptive qualitative research method on Philippine literature, particularly the mythologies and culture of the country. However, there are no known published studies regarding the Islands of Sina Una, notably, about the Babaylan and Headhunter as base classes.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study aims to determine the motivations behind the creators of *Islands of Sina Una*'s inclusion of the Babaylan and the Headhunter as base classes for the setting. The analysis will focus on how these Indigenous community roles are represented and translated within the context of a tabletop role-playing game and whether cultural integrity and respect were maintained. For this, the study will employ two key theories: Benedict Anderson's Imagined Communities and Talal Asad's Cultural Translation.

### *Cultural Translation*

There is a risk of translating these representations from Philippine culture to Western gaming culture. Hence, to address the translation of these cultural codes, a primary theory will be employed to enrich the analysis: Talal Asad's Cultural Translation Theory found in his essay *"The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology."*

His essay critiques the process of translating cultural aspects from one context to another and describes it as an institutional practice. Asad starts his critique by observing how culture is transformed into the notion of a text– *"something resembling an inscribed discourse"* (Asad, 1986). He furthers that this change is due to how the *"notion of a language as a precondition of historical continuity and social learning came to dominate the perspective of social anthropologists."* He quotes Lienhardt's *"Mode of Thought"* (1954) stating, *"The problem of describing to others how members of a remote tribe think then begins to appear largely as one of translation, of making the coherence primitive thought has in the languages it really lives in, as clear as possible in our own."* In other words, he pointed out that social anthropology tends to explain or describe foreign cultures in a manner that the researchers would understand. The word *translation*, in this sense, is defined as "modes of thought" instead of its linguistic nature.

Asad's Cultural Translation theory emphasizes that power dynamics are involved, reinforcing social hierarchies. Due to this, scholars and researchers may

unintentionally impose their own cultural frames when translating cultural aspects to be understood in their realm of work or the academe.

He notes that a good translator would allow his or her language or academic jargon to be penetrated by the foreign concepts or nuances used to describe the “*other*” culture they are translating from. He poses that the challenge relative to this topic is whether or not the translator can test the tolerance of his or her own language for “*assuming unaccustomed forms.*” He acknowledges that a good translation from one culture to another is difficult. However, he encourages researchers to consider the nuances of cultural elements, roles, and traditions in understanding them in different sociocultural contexts, and to be mindful of assumptions that can be placed during cultural translation. He advises researchers and scholars not to be too reverent of their own language or jargon lest the essence of what they are translating be lost.

With these key concepts in mind, Asad’s Cultural Translation Theory was employed to examine whether the creators of Islands of Sina Una (IoSU) have imposed their own understanding of the roles of the Headhunter and Babaylan onto the version translated into the setting.

### *Imagined Communities*

Imagined Communities is a theory proposed by Benedict Anderson, discussed in his publication entitled *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Imagined Communities attempts to define where the concept of nationalism originated and how it developed over time. Its main insight and argument are that, contrary to what nationalists often claim, nations are not ancient

communities bound together by history, blood, language, culture, and/or territory. Nationalism, according to Anderson, is the result of a state's population's distinctly modern imagination that results in an imagined community produced by nationalism. He states that *“that nationality, or, as one might prefer to put it in view of that word's multiple significations, nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind.”* (Anderson, 2006, p.4).

Anderson defines a nation as an *“imagined political community”* that is inherently limited and sovereign. Members of even the smallest nation will never meet or know the majority of their fellow citizens due to how broad or large a nation is for each member to actually know one another. Thus, members of a nation imagine the relationship they have with one another to entail a sense of community or unity. These members share a mental image of their communion as a component of a broader collective identity. In imagined communities, symbols like flags, maps, and national anthems are essential for creating a sense of unity.

He described the arrival and advent of printing and capitalism aided in the contribution to the emergence of nations (Anderson, 2006, pg. 61). Books, prints, and newspapers being sold enabled the dissemination of cultural ideas, connecting people without direct interaction. It allowed the members of a nation to imagine that they are part of a larger, shared linguistic and cultural space. Anderson also noted that the decline of religions and dynasties contributed to the emergence of a nation. Members of a nation sought new forms of identity as monarchies and religious administrations declined over the years. The concept of the nation replaced the spiritual and political cohesion previously offered by religion and dynasties.

Additionally, this theory highlights the emotional strength of nationalism, which motivates sacrifices traditionally associated with religious commitment. These symbols and emotions often serve as a form of representation in an imagined community, allowing an easier connection and unification between its members.

The theory examined the motivations of the creators to make the Babaylan and Headhunter classes. In addition, this theory will be utilized to understand how the writers connected with or enriched their kinship with their Filipino roots in creating the Headhunter and Babaylan as classes.

Both theories examined how cultural traditions and symbols or elements were gamified into the context of a D&D world setting. This will be done by analyzing if the design choices reflect a hybridized identity influenced by both Filipino cultural heritage and Western gaming (by understanding the challenges the writers faced in maintaining cultural integrity while adapting the Headhunter and Babaylan to D&D's Western mechanics and audience expectations), analyzing class features, analyzing how real-life practices of the babaylan and headhunter were reinterpreted, and analyzing how these adaptations balance cultural authenticity with the fantasy elements found in D&D.

### ***Conceptual Framework:***

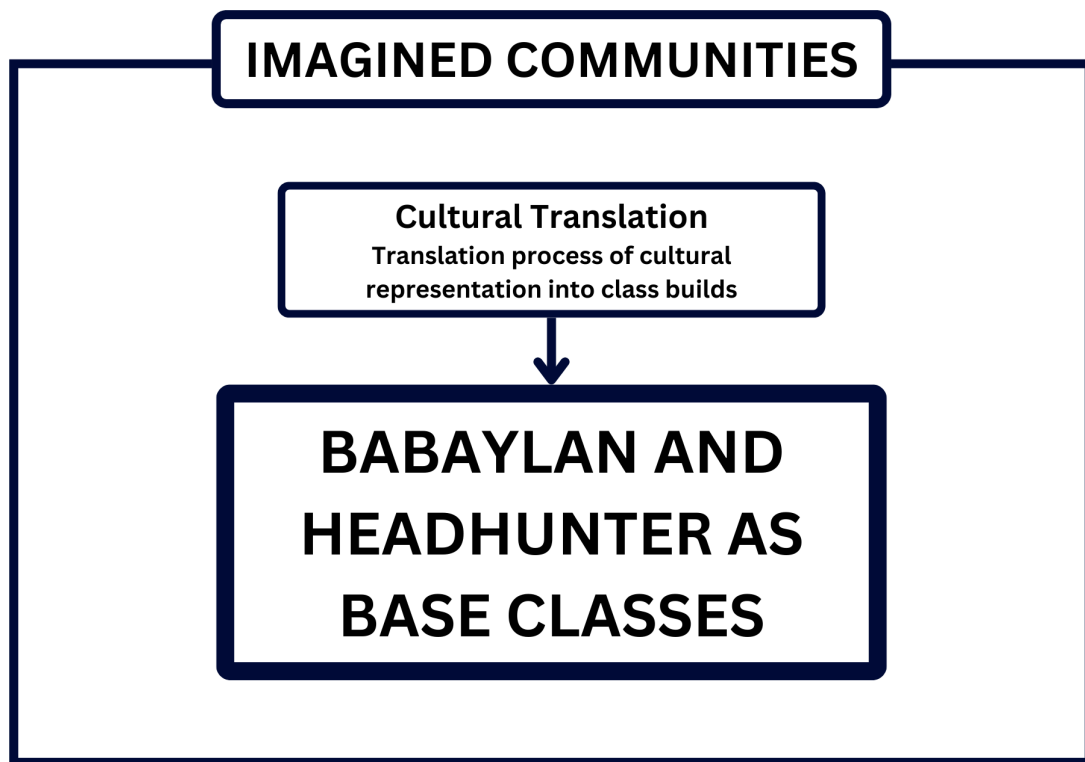


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework illustrates the connection of the theories to the Babaylan and Headhunter classes from the Islands of Sina Una. The Babaylan and Headhunter as classes are the center of the study as they are the focal point of the study. Imagined Communities theory by Benedict Anderson encompasses the structure of the study. It provided the lens through which the cultural symbols, elements, and practices of the Philippines' babaylans and headhunters were implemented as unifying symbols for the local and diasporic Filipino communities. Cultural Translation theory was employed to understand how cultural representation (the identified symbols, rituals, practices, elements, and cultural heritage) was translated into the classes.

### **CHAPTER III: DATA PRESENTATION**

This chapter presents the key findings from the interviews and textual analysis of the Islands of Sina Una. The results of the data collection are organized according to the themes that have emerged relating to how the roles of the Philippine Headhunter and Babaylan were translated into the game's mechanics and lore. These themes were then selected in line with the main research objective: to determine how the roles of the Philippine Headhunter and Babaylan were translated as classes for the IoSU setting.

#### ***Participants***

Participants of this study included three team members of the project. The first participant is Makenzie de Armas, the Lead/Head Writer of the Islands of Sina Una, who wrote for and did much of the design work of the project. De Armas is a member of the Filipino diaspora community living in the United States of America. She works as a game designer for Dungeons and Dragons under the Wizards of the Coast. The second participant is Pam Punzalan, the lead cultural consultant and editor of Islands of Sina Una and its follow-up book, *Tales from Sina Una*. She is an award-winning game designer and editor for tabletop roleplay games. Punzalan is queer Filipino woman who was born in the Philippines, lived in the Philippines during her years as a teacher in Ateneo, FEU, and Trinity College and is currently based in Canada. The final participant is Billy Joel Recio, BJ Recio, who worked closely with Makenzie in designing several aspects of the game and is the lead researcher of the project. He currently works in the corporate world as an actuary, but remains active within the TTRPG spaces writing for several projects.

## ***Emergent Themes***

Seven themes have emerged from the data collection. These themes are listed in Table 3. These themes support an understanding of how Philippine pre-colonial culture and indigenous culture were translated into the 5th Edition (5e) setting of Dungeons and Dragons and how they were able to connect Filipino and the Filipino diaspora through the project.

<i>Emergent Themes</i>	
Theme 1	<i>Motivations behind the Headhunter and Babaylan in IoSU</i>
Theme 2	<i>The Headhunter as an Honorable and Solemn Profession</i>
Theme 3	<i>Spiritual Power and Ancestral Authority in the Babaylan</i>
Theme 4	<i>Balancing Fun and Factual</i>
Theme 5	<i>Challenges in Translating Culture into Game Mechanics</i>  1. Subtheme 1: Concept of Historical Accuracy  2. Subtheme 2: The Biggest Challenges
Theme 6	<i>Connection to Philippine Roots</i>
Theme 7	<i>The Future of Cultural TTRPG.</i>

Table 4. Emergent Themes

### ***THEME 1: Motivations behind the Headhunter and Babaylan in IoSU***

In determining the motivations behind including the Headhunter and Babaylan into the Islands of Sina Una, the participants reported that it was already decided by the main leads of the project (Lucia Versprille and Joshua MendeHall) that only the

Headhunter and the Babaylan were to be added as classes. Though Punzalan shared that though the decision was already made beforehand, the further development and design of these classes, like much of the project, was a collaborative effort.

De Armas stated that from a design perspective, the team wanted a spellcasting class and a martial class, respectively. *“A lot of the things we wanted to cover kind of were covered by the archetypes that base 5e has in it.”* The Babaylan and the Headhunter are archetypal cultural roles that are not typically found in the base 5e settings of Dungeons and Dragons. She states that *“there are some ways where you can maybe stretch and bend the narrative, but in that doing so would be a disservice to the notions and the people who have worked and served in those real-life professions... what is the character archetype? What is the reason why this character has to exist?”* With these parameters in mind, from a game design perspective, the Babaylan and Headhunter were chosen as they did not have a comparable counterpart in base 5e.

Punzalan elaborated on this further by stating that these two are is most familiar and/or interesting to both the local Filipino and Filipino Diaspora communities. Punzalan noted that due to the lack of research and available texts regarding Philippine culture and tradition, the team was limited to what the entire team could get their hands on. In addition to this, the Babaylan and Headhunter are what she considers most marketable to foreigners interested in utilizing IoSU as a setting for their campaigns. She also stated that the team was constrained to what was promised in their crowdfunding campaign for the book. However, she noted that a set

of alternative jobs or classes was made for the project's second book: *Tales from Sina Una*. Although she said that these alternatives were made to be more original rather than direct homages from Philippine culture.

Recio added that they drew a lot of inspiration from GMA's television series, *AMAYA*. While he did acknowledge the inaccuracies of the series, he shared that the series' efforts to include the various cultures of the Philippines and visuals served as a creative reference point for imagining precolonial Filipino identities in a fantasy setting. Any alternative new classes would have fit better narratively and mechanically as a subclass or a background rather than a base class.

## *THEME 2: The Headhunter as an Honorable and Solemn Profession*

Most of the data collected under this theme came from De Armas, given her role and position in the project. However, she shared with the researcher that she frequently consulted with Punzalan, Recio, and the other consultants of the team. De Armas shared that the Headhunter class was the easier class to design compared to the Babaylan. She stated that the main thing that the team wanted to convey with the Headhunter is the idea of *"violence not as something to be celebrated."* The Headhunter in the Islands of Sina Una was designed with the narrative that violence was wielded as a tool to stop a larger cycle of violence.

During the research phase of the project, a lot of what the team found regarding previous ideas or concepts of Philippine headhunters in a TTRPG setting *"veered into the stereotypes of savagery... this sort of, for the lack of a better term, joy that comes that comes out from killing. And that wasn't what we wanted to express in this*

*class.*” Recio pointed out that the concept of D&D is a colonialist game— it has a colonial narrative wherein a group of adventurers would travel into new areas, kill some inhabitants, and/or loot whatever is available to them. He continues by saying that this kind of colonial mentality has led the previous concepts of headhunters to be described as savages and the team wanted to destigmatize that.

De Armas expressed that the team is aware that headhunting is a prestigious and venerated tradition in some communities. In doing so, they leaned into the aspect that a Headhunter in IoSU would protect their community and the people around them. In the book, the Headhunter is described as a *People’s Messenger*. *“For these darker acts—for crimes committed against a community by an outsider or atrocities beyond what mortal law can rectify—it falls to a headhunter to make things right.”* (p.171) Recio’s answers during his interview emphasized that the Headhunter is a *“deliberate killer,”* sent to *“appease the cycle of violence”* in order to end it.

The second concept that the team wanted to convey with the Headhunter is the idea of the class listening to and following *“omens”* and *“walking the line between life and death in a way different than the Babaylan.”* Because the Headhunter is familiar with violence as a tool and with death due to the nature of their profession (within the narrative of the setting), they can commune with the spirits of the dead and the deceased. This decision was a more “supernatural” flavor that the team wanted to add to the class. Recio described the Headhunter as a class as *“an instrument of the gods, instrument of the spirits”* or the *“final resort”* from the spirits.

De Armas shared that in D&D Design, each class has a key mechanic that they are built around to give players different options to interact with. With the Headhunter, she stated that they anchored the key mechanic on the notion that Headhunters are “*persistence incarnate*,” they are relentless in hounding their quarry. The team wanted to combine the “*meta feeling of death being inevitable with this idea of this kind of relentless tracker and hunter*” to convey the role of a Headhunter in the Islands of Sina Una. This led to the class feature of the *Conviction* damage. The simplest way to describe this feature is that even though the player as a Headhunter will miss their attack on a target, due to their tenacity, they will still do some damage to the target. This feature improves as the player levels up, which supports the narrative that the Headhunter is committed to the practice of headhunting.

The *Forgiveness of the Slain* feature of the class allows the Headhunter to commune with the spirit of a deceased 24 hours after the person’s death. This feature was based on their research that headhunters would utter a prayer after their kill. Players had the option of choosing the headhunting axe, which the book identified as *Bunang*, as their headhunter character’s weapon. There is also an additional feature that the player may choose when leveling up, entitled *Headhunting Master* where the player character gains proficiency in using the Bunang. Other design aspects of this class, such as the subclasses, had a more liberal approach to fit the fantasy aspect of the game. The team divided it into three to fit the different playing styles of the player,s and doesn’t necessarily ascribe to the traditions of real-life headhunters. In the appendix, they acknowledged that headhunters do not have the same spiritual capabilities as the Babaylan in terms of communing with the dead. In the appendix, De Armas writes:

*“In the real world, people don’t learn from the whispers of the dead, don’t swing weapons charged with spiritual energy, and don’t cast spells. In order to keep the fantasy of the headhunter preserved in a fictional setting that has magic, the capabilities and prowess of a headhunter has to grow accordingly.”*

In the setting narrative, headhunters are prominent in one of the seven islands, *Puthawanan*, as the setting only mentions them when discussing the culture and traditions found in the island. The Settlement of Himpapawiran found in Puthawanan has a datu who was *“the bravest and most powerful headhunter in all of Himpapawiran”* before he became a datu. Datu Lakadkambing, a tiefling adorned with tattoos, became the datu after winning against a rival chieftom in the northeast side of Puthawanan. Used his metallurgy skills and knowledge to ward them off, cementing *“his rule as the chief of the Kedatuan of Himpapawiran.”*

### *THEME 3: Spiritual Power and Ancestral Authority in the Babaylan*

Like with the headhunter, most of the data collected under this theme came from De Armas. She shared that this was the harder class to design given the different roles and functions of babaylans per region. They had difficulty balancing spells and figuring out how to incorporate them into the narrative, which then led the team to consider how spells and magic were reflected in the precolonial setting of the Islands of Sina Una. Punzalan shared that the foundation of D&D was built on the preconceived notions of fantasy being the “sword and sorcery” Eurocentric view, as it was founded by a Western Catholic Caucasian man. Magic in a typical D&D setting is based on divinity. However, with the precolonial Philippine culture being rooted in

animism, the team described the way a Babaylan would use spells, spellcasting, or magic as *“a drawing and exchanging of energy from spirits around us.”* De Armas writes in the appendix:

*“We took a lot of liberties with portraying babaylan as spellcasters, due to the complicated nature of magic and divination in the actual precolonial Philippines. A lot of the same principles we used when approaching magic overall in the setting applied here.”*

This is why the Babaylan was designed to be a spellcaster because of their connection to the spirit world. De Armas shared that the team wanted to honor the role of a babaylan as a leader and healer who is steeped in tradition and training. This led to the Babaylan class’s key mechanic being centered around the Intelligence ability. De Armas stated that they wanted to reflect the real-world tradition of babaylans undergoing training and learning to become one. She goes on to say that in the Islands of Sina Una, the Babaylans are connected to the world through *“this intense studiousness.”*

The first core feature that they added to the Babaylan class is the feature of using an *abayan*, the spirit guide of the Philippine babaylan. However, in the source book, the team has spelled it as *abayan* instead of *abyan*. De Armas shared that this was an aspect of the Babaylan class they had trouble translating into the game due to the nature of the abayan being a spirit guide. In the appendix, she wrote:

*“...something important to note is that the babaylan never controls or commands the spirit guide, and this*

*idea goes directly against traditional 5e design. In 5e, characters are meant to have individual control over everything they can do; even when having animal companions or familiars, the character directs where the companion goes and what the companion does, and the companion obeys unquestioningly. Our resolution for this was a halfway point between mechanics and narrative: the babaylan can direct the abayan to move as a bonus action, but we put in a clause that predicates the movement on the abayan's willingness, allowing the abayan that agency."*

In the interview, she stated that the abayan is a conducive tool to the player's journey. It was a door for the Dungeon Master to take some control of the game while reflecting the nature of the abayan being a *guide* and not a familiar. Recio added that the abayan is the team's way of representing the precolonial Philippine concept of having more than one soul. He shares that the abayan is not just a spirit guide, it is a representation of the player as a Babaylan.

The second and last core feature of the Babaylan class is the *Spirit Conduit*. In this feature, players are given a pool of dice, called the *Spirit Dice*, that goes up in number as they level up. De Armas shared in the interview that the team chose for this feature to be a variable number, hence the pool of dice to be rolled, as a way of saying that this is how much power the spirits can lend the player character. It is not definitive, as spirits have a mind of their own in the setting of the Islands of Sina Una.

This feature reflects someone who *“communes with and allows the spirits to flow through them,”* as De Armas describes.

Similarly to the Headhunter class, the Babaylan subclasses are subdivided into three based on the players’ styles. However, the team also divided it into the different roles a Babaylan would take. De Armas shared that this led to her questioning and asking the researchers if Babaylan fought martially. In the interview, she said that they also took more creative liberties in regards to the subclasses of the Babaylan to fit the fantasy nature of D&D. In the appendix, she writes:

*“We took the most creative liberty with the Call of Wrath subclass. Babaylan are historically noted to fight in some cases, though this kind combative terminology is mostly used in reference to repelling an evil spirit. But we knew we wanted a more martial-inclined babaylan subclass; to quote our Discord chats, ‘I want to know if babaylan can throw hands, damn it!’ The answer was yes, and so we decided to lean more into the fiction here.”*

The other two subclasses were split into the Babaylan’s role as a healer, seen in the *Call of Sacrifice* subclass, and the Babaylan’s role as a spirit conduit, seen in the *Call of Clairvoyance* subclass.

In the setting narrative, Babaylans were described to be shamastic. Additionally, they were very influential figures. Every settlement on the seven islands of the world of Sina Una has a babaylan, which the writers have named and given a backstory to.

One such prominent babaylan is *Babaylan Kaylahon*. In the book, she is described as the following:

*“A determined and kind half-elf, Kaylahon soon formed a large community on the shore of Timanduk, bravely searching for the great spirits with the island itself to forge a new safe place for her people to thrive. The community grew into a town, which grew into a city, and thus the bustling port became the heart of the islands: the center of life and rebirth in the wake of Bakunawa’s attack. But for Kaylahon, this wasn’t yet enough. She had grown in strength as a babaylan, and she knew in her heart that there was more she could do. She appointed leadership for her city, and set off onto the sea. No one has seen her since, but stories say that the great babaylan still wanders the islands, searching for another way to ward against the Celestial Eaters lurking beyond the horizon. Until she returns, though, life in the islands goes on, with new adventurers rising and ready to make legends of their own.”*

Narratively, Babaylans are the ones who communicate with spirits of the island and for the living to commune with the dead. The gender and age of the babaylan vary per settlement. The youngest listed in the setting is fourteen years old. Some of the babaylan are asog, some are women, some do not ascribe to the gender binary of male or female (the babaylan’s gender in the setting is listed as they/them). However, in the Islands of Sina Una, asog is referred to as essentially the

transwomen babaylan instead of the feminine males or barren males that became babaylan. *“There are records of babaylan who were assigned male at birth but transitioned into women; in Sina Una, we use the term asog to refer to these individuals,”* as written about the Babaylan in the appendix.

Babaylans in the lore of IoSU are also important during festivals, communing with spirits via offerings and nature like the balete or kanyaw. The setting also displayed that a settlement can have more than one babaylan, as there are two babaylans in the settlement of Nahulog (who are sisters). Like the headhunter, players are asked to consider the babaylan’s relationship with their settlement and how their calling happened. Babaylans have their spell list unique to the class. Some spells are from base 5e, and some are made specifically for the Islands of Sina Una.

#### *THEME 4: Balancing Fun and Factual*

When asked how the team balanced authenticity to indigenous roles and cultural sensitivity while ensuring the classes remained playable and engaging in a fantasy setting, Punzalan shared that playability was ironically the lowest priority for the game. The reason for such a decision is that the team’s main goal was to *“connect people to a heritage they don’t have access to.”*

She shared that the process and methods they used in bringing the Islands of Sina Una to life are done sincerely and in a nuanced way since the supplementary setting is what she considers a cultural project and a love note to pre-colonial Philippines. The research and consultation had a lot of back and forth with different cultural roots for representation. De Armas’s insights during her interview expound on this. She

stated that there was a mesh of foundational understandings of D&D mechanics, with a lot of research using a lot of careful thinking. She had a desire to educate while making it seem like one isn't reading a textbook.

Recio shared that he used several credible sources that he can access to aid in balancing authenticity with indigenous roles and cultural sensitivity. He cited works such as *"The Soul Book," "Baranggay," "The Boxer Codex," "A Sagada Reader," "Tapping Ink, Tattooing Identities: Tradition and Modernity in Contemporary Kalinga Society, North Luzon, Philippines,"* and many others. He states that it is important to remember that while the team members are Filipinos or have Filipino blood, they do not speak for those who belong to the community they are borrowing from. To maintain respect and integrity, it is imperative that they listen to the indigenous community and make adjustments.

Balance was achieved by being transparent in the appendix, detailing what they included and didn't include. Punzalan noted in her interview that they didn't add any additional specific cultural or indigenous roles, symbols, or traditions other than what is necessary, as the team wanted to *"straddle the line between specificity and generality."*

In the case of the Babaylan class, the team incorporated the way babaylans are called as a narrative experience rather than mechanically. Recio shared that they even considered adding the balete tree as an integral part to the Babaylan where they would undergo the trance and live within a balete tree before taking up the mantle of the Babaylan. However, the team ultimately decided to make the balete an

important narrative element instead. In terms of the Babaylan's gender, the team acknowledged the presence of asog and that typically women took up the mantle of the babaylan. They also acknowledged that there are people who fell out of the gender binary that took up the roles of babaylan, but noted that the records they had of this facet spoke of the non-binary individuals with derision. In the appendix, it was written that the team omitted any instances where it might seem like players need to identify a certain way to play a certain role to avoid issues of gender essentialism. *"However, it's important to note that a lot of the modern language we use to speak about gender is constantly evolving, and the history of precolonial notions of gender does not map exactly to the concepts we use now."*

In addition to this, the book's appendix states that the team purposefully left out how babaylans are called to take up the mantle.

*"...in historical accounts, potential babaylan were beset with seizures, fugue states, vivid nightmares, deep depressions, and other manifestations of both physical and mental illnesses that could only be cured by accepting the call of the spirits. Such material, though, may be uncomfortable or too close to personal experiences for some players, so we opted to allow individual players to choose how much they wish to engage."*

In the case of the Headhunter class, the team decided not to touch upon and gamify the tradition of tattooing. In the appendix, it is written that:

*“Research for the headhunter actually led to the decision of not having magical tattoo armor, which is something that was toyed around with for a while, and somehow became something of rumor in online talk of the book. Tattoos were a social, cultural thing that possessed a lot of inherent meaning, chiefly that they were earned through, for lack of better terms, going through heavy challenges and coming out alive. Removal of magic tattoo armor development came with not wanting to gamify what is inherently a core cultural theme.”*

Recio added that the team wanted to include spears as a symbol for the Headhunter. However, further research showed that the spear was a sacred symbol amongst various practices, such as wedding proposals. Therefore, the team decided against it.

#### *THEME 5: Challenges in Translating Culture into Game Mechanics*

Translating Philippine pre-colonial and indigenous culture into the game setting is a main component of the thesis. Therefore, two subthemes were identified across the data collected. Within the theme of challenges in translating culture into IoSU game mechanics are subthemes A. *The Concept of Historical Accuracy* and B. *The Biggest Challenges*.

##### **Subtheme A: The Concept of Historical Accuracy**

Punzalan acknowledged that historical accuracy was a difficult task to handle due to several factors. The first factor was the challenge of connection. The Islands of Sina Una were announced in 2019 and completed over the course of the COVID-19 Pandemic in 2020. The team could not go to Indigenous Peoples' Communities or

seek experts from the said communities due to travel and medical restrictions; thus, they relied on whatever resources they had available. She shared that the team used texts they could find online or through oral word and tradition,s or sources that were familiar to the writers and consultants. She said that one of the team's writers came from a line of babaylans from Palawan, so they acknowledged that while they had several resources on babaylan, there would be a bias towards the Palawan babaylan because their resource for babaylan came from there.

In addition to that, the team kept in mind and acknowledged that some of the texts that they had available would come from a colonial mindset (a Western perspective) or be written by someone from the city or, in her terms, a Manilenyo. Punzalan, Recio, and De Armas acknowledged that the team had to take a step back and decentralize and break down the text they were consuming. This was most significant to De Armas as a member of the Filipino diaspora, distanced from her Filipino roots. She did a lot of reading and had a lot of back-and-forth with the researchers. In the interview, she shared that she had asked the researchers to “yell at her” whenever she designed something wrong or misconstrued any cultural aspect in designing.

In a follow up interview she shared, “[I] will always be inadvertently swayed by my lived experiences in Western society, and that I needed to actively work to remove that bias from my work in order to properly honor the cultures and history we were exploring within the book.” She decentralized any Western notions in two parts. The first by recognizing that the texts they were referencing can have a colonial bias and a “muddled understanding.” The second is learning when her own biases came into

play. She also shared that there are times when the biases aren't so obvious. *“Take, for example, the Headhunter and its relationship to violence and death. In Western society, death and violence bear incredibly negative and evil connotations: killing is savagery, and death is something to be feared. And you can see a lot of these connotations bleeding through in other past Western interpretations of headhunters as malicious and violent killers.”*

The appendix has a subsection entitled *“The Lie of Historical Accuracy,”* where it discusses that though the team did their best to correctly and respectfully represent precolonial Filipino cultures, it describes why *“the concept of ‘historical accuracy’ in this fictional setting is inapplicable at best and fundamentally impossible at worst.”* Two reasons are listed as to why. The first reason is so that players may feel comfortable in exploring their identity or portraying characters that reflect aspects of themselves, due to the nature of D&D being a tabletop roleplaying game. The second reason is that *“there can really be no ‘historical accuracy’ when it comes to things like gender and sexuality.”* They acknowledged that most resource texts are biased or filtered through Western lenses.

*“Most historical accounts we have are filtered through the colonial machinery and non-Filipino perspectives, which renders the ‘truth’ they present as relative to the authors’ own biases. And even now, we may see these accounts and insist upon our personal interpretations of them, in our deep yearning for some sort of representation— thus, viewing things through a contemporary lens and not attempting to*

*approximate, as best we can, what things were “really like” during those time periods. It isn’t a bad thing to want to see our modern selves reflected in our past. And in the end, Sina Una is a fantasy setting, and we as modern marginalized gamers want to design a fantasy that’s better than our current reality. This section goes into more detail about where and how we approached certain topics with this mindset.”*

The same subsection discusses Sexuality and Queerness and Disabilities within the world of the Islands of Sina Una.

Recio’s answer summarizes the team’s challenges with historical accuracy. He stated that in the end, the team must choose the game because that is the project’s end product. He shared the theory of games wherein *“playing games is a construct of a human condition that allows you to understand each other better... The game is still a social construct that reinforces something that you want to see in the world.”* He goes on by saying that the way Dungeons and Dragons is played now is about living the human experience in a fantastical way. In his opinion, because of this manner of play, while it is important to maintain cultural authenticity and respect, D&D allows some irreverence or leeway when creating mechanics or narratives for the Islands of Sina Una.

### **Subtheme B: Biggest Challenges**

Punzalan shared that she thinks the biggest challenge was not the making of the classes but rather the world that the Headhunter and the Babaylan move around in. She shared that the team was trying to balance culture and playability in a respectful and nuanced way saying, *“Are you going to compromise your desire to make*

*something Filipino-inspired on the off chance that the D&D fan will find the game imbalanced?”* Her challenge as a lead consultant and writer was to guide the diaspora in making the Island of Sina Una. She shared that not everyone in the team was receptive to her suggestions of what to add. In De Armas’s interview, she said that there was an incident of a fight occurring within their Discord (a social media and communication platform) over disagreements on what cultural aspects to add or omit.

Punzalan said that there is a fallacy in the mindset of making the setting making it fun for everyone because it is impossible to design for everyone. What is fun for X may not be fun for Y. While the Islands of Sina Una may not ascribe to what is typically considered fun in D&D, the “sword and sorcery” Eurocentric idea of fantasy, it will be fun for Filipinos and the Filipino diaspora because it was made for them. She shared that if people have an issue with the playability and find the game imbalanced, there are other options and settings they may utilize. The Islands of Sina Una was made especially for the Filipino and Filipino Diaspora.

De Armas shared that her biggest challenge was deciding what cultural aspects can shine and what they can keep that feels integral to D&D. This bled into aspects that surround the Babaylan and Headhunter. Babaylans are spellcasters in the setting of the Islands of Sina Una. In base 5th edition (5e) of Dungeons and Dragons, spellcasters use magic presupposed on divinity. But babaylans aren’t divine as they connect with spirits using animism. Thus, the team had to learn how to fit animism into the setting and connect it to the babaylan. Headhunters in Philippine culture had traditional hunting weapons, such as the Bunang, for headhunting. Base 5e weapons

and armour were also presupposed on Eurocentric or Western items. This led to the team researching what weapons were available or used back then, or what kind of armour they could use if ever a player chooses to wear armor for the player's Headhunter character. Ultimately, they cannot make assumptions about things, traditions, and cultural symbols, especially if they desire to educate about Philippine pre-colonial culture. They have to be flexible and avoid preconceived ideas.

Recio shared that his biggest challenge was balancing game elements. He stated that a lot of the process was questioning whether the Headhunter or Babaylan can stand alone as a class or not. "Why not a subclass instead of a class," "How do we balance game elements," and "How do we make these classes not overpowered," were some of the questions he had encountered during the creation of the Babaylan and Headhunter. He concluded that it was best to make them as classes because it is ingrained in the idea of the setting. The Islands of Sina Una would not work without the Babaylan or the Headhunter. The classes were not meant to exist outside of Sina Una; while pulling from other D&D sources would be easier to fit into the world of Sina Una, pulling anything out of it would be much more difficult.

#### *THEME 6: Connection to Philippine Roots*

Another objective of this thesis was to understand how the writers connected with their Filipino roots in creating the Headhunter and Babaylan as classes. De Armas shared that growing up in the United States of America, she learned the "shame" of being Filipino. She grew up disconnected from her culture as a Filipino, but being brought onto this project allowed her to connect with her roots.

*“I’m here to learn,”* said De Armas during her interview. She had to do a lot of deconstruction as someone who is a Filipino diaspora. She leaned into the disconnect as it allowed her to connect with her roots better. She stated that a lot of her writing and design came from the perspective of encouraging people to feel excited about learning about the culture. She learned how to engage in who she is when she doesn’t know much about her roots. The project allowed her to feel more cultural pride and connect to others (Filipinos and Filipino diaspora).

Punzalan, on the other hand, shared that while she does speak Filipino, lived in the Philippines for several years, and has a connection with the country, she does not have that much authority over the others. She shared in her interview that *“understanding subject positionality is VERY important.”* She said that there is a fallacy in believing that one is an authority on a subject just because they are part of a certain group/community. Just because one is a part of a certain community, it does not make him or her an authority on the matter because that person is just one person. Though she did share that she feels like she has some authority only because she was trained as a scholar to distance herself and not because she was born and lived in the Philippines.

She noted that there is no middle ground for the Philippine diaspora as they have the mindset of *“I am not Filipino enough but not foreign enough for the community.”* She goes on to say that the team needs to make the diaspora curious to engage in the project. She acknowledges that they share different cultural experiences but are reaching out in finding ways to work together, and how to connect the Filipino and

Filipino Diaspora. Punzalan says this can be done by making both curious about their roots and connections.

Recio, who was born and raised in the Philippines and is currently based in the country, shared the same sentiment as Punzalan. He states that his locality did not affect the way he approached cultural representation in the game, but noted that it does come into play as he has different experiences from those of the diasporic community. He goes on to say that a lot of the writing for the game is a mix of diasporic yearning and local anger towards injustices from colonizers. It is essentially *“Filipino from every point of view.”*

Furthermore, he reflects on the use of the word *indigenous* regarding this. He notes that the term itself is shaped by a Western perspective that tends to “other” indigenous groups, treating them as separate from the rest of the Filipino identity. Recio says that *“we are also indigenous, [just] not in the traditional sense of the word.”* The local Filipino community is indigenous in the sense that they are Filipino living in the Philippines. Despite this, he reiterates that while the local Filipino community has more leeway in creating something Filipino, it is important not to disregard culture. It is essential to listen to those who are experiencing the culture the team is drawing from and make the necessary adjustments.

#### *THEME 7: The Future of Cultural TTRPG*

The participants were asked what they hoped players would take away from playing the Babaylan and the Headhunter or reading about them in the Islands of Sina Una

and what advice they would give to future projects that wish to utilize indigenous cultures.

Punzalan shares that she hopes players have fun and to *“taste the world.”* She hopes that playing would enrich the player’s knowledge rather than detract from it, to *“aspire to change people’s minds, but aspire curiosity, intrigue, and fun.”* She wants to help educate individuals through play because they are being familiarized with something, training their critical thinking skills. Her advice to others wanting to make something similar is to evaluate what fun means for them, what they are trying to say, and who they want to play. She cautions that it is good to start from the personal (especially when dealing with cultural heritage), because there are aspects of culture, especially one as diverse as the Philippines, that do not belong to those who are creating the game. She explains this by giving an example saying that she can safely write about Bacolod legends into a game because her wife is from Negros Occidental or legends from Batangas since she grew up in the location.

De Armas, on the other hand, shared that she wanted to broaden the idea of *what* fantasy could be; it doesn’t have to be limited to the Eurocentric concepts. *“There are so many rich and entertaining myths and traditions outside of Western perspectives. Sina Una was a way to marry oral tradition with TTRPG.”* She said the Islands of Sina Una served as a doorway for those curious about Philippine culture. She goes on to give three pieces of advice in designing a tabletop roleplay game based on tradition and culture. Advice 1 is that historical accuracy is a lie in fantasy. She says most people use it to justify horrendous acts when it does not have to be added. However, historical accuracy allows freedoms to recognize some aspects are bad

while still honoring culture. Although this means they do not necessarily have to include it. The least that can be done is honor these traditions, culture, and symbols and acknowledge them in the appendix. She said it is best to keep in mind that sometimes people are referencing texts from a colonial mindset. One must extract and deconstruct these mindsets.

Her second advice is to understand that as a creator, he or she may not have the connection. Future creators must be brave to ask “stupid questions” to learn and to find a group who wants to explore this as much as they do.

The final advice is to acknowledge that culture is not a monolith. In the appendix, she writes:

*“It’s imperative to recognize though that, while we use the phrase ‘precolonial Filipino’ as an overarching term to describe the content of the book, there wasn’t actually a singular monolithic ‘Filipino’ identity during that time. This book draws from the multitude of indigenous cultures present across the various regions of the Philippines. We chose this approach because our ultimate goal with this book was to explore, represent, and highlight as many facets of the precolonial Philippines as possible. Nevertheless, it’s still important that we do what we can to avoid conflating these identities, or treating them as identical even if they share many similarities.”*

She states that the Islands of Sina Una is A product, not THE product of Philippine TTRPG. Future creators must center people in the now without erasing those of the past.

Recio shared that he hopes that the idea of indigenous and precolonial Filipinos being primitive and savage will be destigmatized, most especially for the non-Filipino players, as they play the game. He stated that the team tried their best to show that the Philippines is rich in culture and history, but much of it was unfortunately lost due to colonialism. He adds that he hopes Filipino players will understand that Filipinos are spiritual people despite Christianity, that Filipinos have their own brand of spiritualism.

He offers three succinct pieces of advice to those creators who wish to reproduce something similar to Islands of Sina Una. The first is to recognize that the Philippines is a colonized country. There will be research gaps, and as creators and/or researchers, they must be “okay” in filling the gaps with their own experiences. As creatives, they must paint a whole picture. The second piece of advice is to draw from other Southeast Asian countries while being mindful not to position oneself as their sole interpreter. He shares that *“the Philippines as an entity is drawn by borders that were defined in the 20th century.”* When writing Filipino-inspired tales, he suggests reflecting: *“What defines the Philippines as a country?”* He shares that historically, several islands near or even currently outside the country’s present-day borders were once part of its landscape. For this reason, he encourages future creators to explore Southeast Asian influences without hesitation, while remaining aware of cultural boundaries and responsibilities. The final advice is to fill in cultural

gaps with what you know and have experienced. Recio emphasizes that, as a Filipino creator, it is valid to draw from one's own memories, insights, and emotional connection to the culture when certain historical or cultural details are unavailable. He acknowledges that the result may not be entirely accurate, but stresses that representation can still be approached with respect, inspiration, and genuine care. *"If they [players of the game] get mad at you, then they don't know you,"* he says, highlighting the importance of intention and authenticity in cultural storytelling.

## CHAPTER IV DISCUSSION:

How each of the study's emerging themes and subthemes relates to or deviates from earlier results in the literature is examined in the sections that follow.

### *TALAL ASAD'S CULTURAL TRANSLATION: Applied to Themes 2 to 5*

A theme that emerged through the textual analysis and interviews is the portrayal of the Headhunter not as a savage and bloodthirsty warrior but rather, a persistent protector of their community. The headhunter class was designed as a venerated people's messenger, the one to serve as executioner after a violent act was committed upon their community. *"For these darker acts—for crimes committed against a community by an outsider or atrocities beyond what mortal law can rectify—it falls to a headhunter to make things right,"* (The Islands of Sina Una, p. 171). This portrayal of the Headhunter demonstrates that the class's design was based on the team's understanding of Philippine headhunters practicing this tradition as a means of justice and chivalry in times of tribal conflict (Namiki, 2016).

Narratively, the act of headhunting was not only characterized as a communal duty but also, an honorable tradition that showcases prowess and capabilities. In the setting, the Headhunter may attain power or a chieftom by winning against rivals. This reflects the act of headhunters, specifically from Kalinga, to prove himself fit as a tribal leader (Namiki, 2016).

Additionally, the portrayal of the Headhunter in the Islands of Sina Una as *"persistence incarnate,"* as a relentless hunter and tenacious warrior, reflects the team's understanding of the headhunting tradition as a means of controlling

emotional states, specifically that of headhunters from the Ilongot tribe. By channeling the anger into tracking down the quarry, Headhunters from IoSU use their practice of taking heads as a form of catharsis. It is used as a therapeutic tool to manage grief and anger in one's emotional state. Other negative emotions, such as insult, envy, and humiliation, are attributed to the act of headhunting as well. This aspect of the Philippine Headhunter was portrayed in the class's *Conviction* feature which serves as the mechanic to the Headhunter class within the game setting.

Under Talal Asad's Cultural Translation theory, this translation of the Headhunter reflects an effort to respect and honor the Philippine headhunters' notion of justice, chivalry, prowess, and "*the transformation of emotional states into a controlled energy*" (Mikkelsen, 2016). The team designed the class's significance and cultural roles in such a way that is understandable to IoSU's audience. Instead of reducing the traditional role to stereotypes of a "savage warrior," the team translated it that reflect intellectual clarity and cultural sensitivity. They reframed the act of headhunting as a morally complex duty rather than as senseless slaughter, thus maintaining the role's spiritual weight and community-focused actions. This aligns with Asad's emphasis on considering the nuances of cultural elements, roles, and traditions, as well as the act of being mindful of assumptions that can be placed during the process of cultural translation.

Another emergent theme identified through data collection was the portrayal of the Babaylan as a prominent and authoritative figure within the communities they serve. The team's decision to describe magic within the Islands of Sina Una as "*a drawing and exchanging of energy from spirits around us*" exhibits their acknowledgement of

the pre-colonial Filipinos' concept of magic. By portraying the Babaylan as a Spirit Conduit, the team bridges spellcasting mechanics with the real-life role of the babaylan as a spiritual medium, reflecting a deeper understanding of animism and spirit-world connections. Furthermore, the team's decision to make the Babaylan class an Intelligence based class shows that they understood the deeply rooted role of a babaylan as a leader and healer who is steeped in tradition and training.

The decision to make the Babaylan's abayan an uncontrollable spirit, contrary to the typical companion mechanics in base 5e, demonstrates the team's understanding of the babaylan's traditional role as someone who is granted the privilege, not the power, to commune with spirits. This is also reflected in the team's design choice of the Spirit Conduit feature being a pool of dice instead of a definitive number. These aspects of the Babaylan reflect the belief that the babaylan does not command spirits, but serves as a vessel through whom spirits act to heal, guide, and lead. It also demonstrates the team's respect for spirits having a mind of their own.

Narratively, the Babaylan is portrayed as a shamanistic but influential or authoritative figure within the communities. The team made them central figures to the various settlements per community of the islands, presiding over various rituals in festivals, healers, and lorekeepers in their respective settlements. This displays that the team of the Islands of Sina Una respects and acknowledges the babaylan's key roles as proto-scientists (Salazar, 1999) and community specialist in pre-colonial Philippines. Additionally, the team had also portrayed by including the asog as a Babaylan within the setting, the team shows their understanding of the nuances behind the Babaylan's gender in the source setting.

Like the Headhunter class, the team's design and lore choices surrounding the Babaylan class align with Asad's call to understand the culture or text they translated from. The team allowed their understanding and usual jargon to be penetrated by the foreign concepts or nuances translated from pre-colonial and indigenous Philippine culture. This is a mark of what Asad considers to be a "good translator." By taking a step back and prohibiting any presumptions from bleeding into their designing or writing, the team displays a tolerance to their "*language assuming unaccustomed forms*" (Asad). There is an effort to respect and honor the Philippine babaylan as a fundamental figure within pre-colonial and indigenous Philippine culture.

However, despite their careful translation of the Philippine babaylan and Philippine headhunter as classes, the team has acknowledged that they had purposely veered from tradition and cultural practices in some aspects of the Babaylan and Headhunter classes. These emerged within themes 4 and 5. Even though playability was the lowest priority for the team, due to the nature of Dungeons and Dragons being a *tabletop roleplaying game*, it was still necessary for the team to consider it. There were some abstractions and modifications for the classes to be playable in character creation and in-game. The end goal of the project is the game setting, therefore, the team must still choose it.

For the Headhunter and Babaylan subclasses, the team had to take more creative liberties to fit the game mechanics of D&D. The team had to reinterpret certain tasks the Philippine babaylan or headhunter would do. For instance, the team used the combative terminology in a babaylan to banish an evil spirit. It translated it into a

physical sense to fit the Call of Wrath subclass's more martial aspect. The same reinterpretation was reflected in the Headhunter's Forgiveness of the Slain feature. The team took the headhunter's tradition of saying a prayer after their kill and translated it into a more supernatural flavor to the class. The same supernaturality is applied to the Headhunter subclass, Omen of Swiftmess. Headhunters in Philippine culture are not magic by nature or connected to the spirits the same way the babaylans are, but this Headhunter subclass was reframed to fit a spellcasting aspect for the sake of player preference.

The team had also acknowledged that they intentionally picked which aspects of tradition and culture they wanted to portray within the narrative and mechanics of the setting. For instance, the setting demonstrates leniency in assigning gender to the Babaylan and Headhunter classes. In traditional Philippine culture, gender played a significant role in these positions. The role of babaylan was typically held by women or feminine men, while headhunting was a practice exclusively associated with men. However, Islands of Sina Una intentionally departs from these historical gender norms, allowing players of any gender to play either class.

These decisions directly fall under Asad's critique of scholars and researchers imposing their cultural frames when translating cultural aspects. This design choice reflects a modern, inclusive approach to representation, displaying a conscious divergence from tradition for the sake of accessibility and player identity exploration. This falls under Asad's critique that translation of culture cannot be neutral. Asad's theory states that translating from one culture to another is institutional and can be unintentional.

But the team rectifies this imbalance and hierarchy by displaying an awareness of this. They acknowledged the tension in negotiating between cultural authenticity and the demands of D&D as a TTRPG. The team understood that they are actively taking out a cultural aspect and transforming it into something more digestible to their audience. By cautioning players in the appendix of such decisions, the team is making the players aware of the hierarchy and power inherent in cultural translation in translating these cultural roles and traditions into the setting. Through these precautionary measures, the team warns the players that this part of their translation is not integral to the culture they are drawing from and should not be taken as fact.

However, because of the project's goal of connecting "*to a heritage they don't have access to*" and the desire to educate outside of an academic setting, the team still made a conscious effort in their commitment to cultural authenticity and respect. Their decision to straddle the line between specificity and generality suggests that they do not want to make any presumptions about the Philippine precolonial culture from which they are translating. They are not attempting to produce a "*faithful copy*" of the babaylan or headhunter, but a reimagining that encourages learning and respectful consumption from their audience. Their approach seems to align with Asad's notion of ethical translation, which recognizes power dynamics and attempts to preserve the integrity of the source culture.

It is worth noting that through the interviews, the participants brought up an underlying issue that has long occurred within the Philippine academe. A large part of research or studies on precolonial Philippines and Philippine indigenous culture

was written with a Western or detached lens. Additionally, a significant portion of readily available information tends to center disproportionately on Visayan cultures, often sidelining the diversity of other ethnolinguistic groups, as pointed out by Recio. Though not a part of this thesis' objective, it is still an important discussion to be had, especially with the study's subject being rooted in cultural narratives. This issue is aligned with Anderson's critique of cultural translation being an institutional practice that often imposes structures of knowledge shaped by the Western academe.

#### *ANDERSON'S IMAGINED COMMUNITIES: Applied to Themes 1 and 6*

Theme 1 discusses the motivations behind adding the Headhunter and the babaylan into the Islands of Sina Una as classes. Though the insights shared by the participants were surface-level, due to the decision already being made beforehand, it shows that these two traditional roles and positions in the community were something already familiar to the Filipino and Filipino Diaspora, both within the team and to the players interested in using IoSU as a setting. This finding is consistent with Benedict Anderson's Imagined Communities theory. Anderson theorized that a nation is an "imagined political community" constructed through shared language, symbols, stories, and media even when members of that community never meet in person. People imagine themselves as part of the same group through common references and cultural narratives.

The Babaylan and Headhunter are deeply rooted figures in precolonial and indigenous Philippine culture, thus serving as cultural symbols that connect Filipinos through the game. Including such symbols transcends any geographic boundaries that separate the Filipino communities. In addition to this, their roles offer unique

archetypes to the game design, fostering a sense of familiarity and emotional connection. This is most applicable to those of the Filipino Diaspora, as the inclusion of such symbols transforms into a feeling of belonging. The familiarity and association to Philippine culture fostered by the Babaylan and Headhunter, and other traditional symbols included within these classes, allows players to resonate with the culture their characters are moving within. They embody these symbols to build a shared sense of cultural memory and nation. As Pam Punzalan states in her interview, *“Out of everything, the decision had several layers. What is most familiar to the foreign audience, anything kind of thing they can latch on to? What is most familiar to the team?”*

De Armas’s experience as a member of the Filipino diaspora is an example of such. Embarking on this project, especially as the lead writer and designer for the Islands of Sina Una, served as a means of finally emotionally connecting to a community she was once taught to be ashamed of. Being involved with the world-building and designing of the Babaylan and Headhunter as classes functioned as an act of cultural imagination and identity-building. It allowed her and the other diaspora members in the team to connect with their Filipino siblings within the team and with those who played the game. Translating pre-colonial Filipino figures like the Babaylan and Headhunter into gameable classes functioned as an act of identity-building and forming a community. Through the team’s curiosity and willingness to engage in a culture that is theirs, they are able to unite through shared experiences and symbols, forming a community that transcends geographical limitations.

These symbols and emotions served as a form of representation for the Filipino and Filipino Diaspora, allowing an easier connection and unification between its members. Though the Islands of Sina Una is a supplementary setting for a tabletop roleplay, it demonstrates how Filipino history, culture, and politics were used in their narratives and designs to make Filipino culture accessible and engaging (Cerdeña, 2021). When games are used as a means of education alongside entertainment, representation and diversity become crucial in creating “*enriched learning platforms*” (Darvishinia, Goodson, 2024). Implementing and embracing diversity is imperative in what Darvishinia and Goodson describe as a “*constantly changing environment of educational gaming.*”

#### *THE FUTURE OF CULTURAL TTRPG DISCUSSED*

The Islands of Sina Una is an example of how tabletop roleplaying games can be used as an educational tool and as a doorway to broaden the definition of fantasy. It also demonstrates its ability to connect members of a community from different parts of the globe, forming a sense of unity and wholeness. This reinforces Anderson’s theory of imagined community; Filipinos across the globe share a mental image of their communion as a component of a broader collective identity. Cultural ideas are disseminated through the source setting without members directly interacting with one another. Playing a Babaylan or Headhunter allowed the team and the players of IoSU to imagine that they are part of a larger, shared linguistic and cultural space.

The creation of IoSU served as a tool in exercising Asad’s advice in his paper to practice nuance when translating cultural elements, roles, and traditions. By being mindful of assumptions that can be placed during cultural translation, a TTRPG

sourcebook such as this can serve as an engaging educational tool while simultaneously being a form of entertainment. Balela and Mundy (2015) noted that there is a risk of reinforcement of harmful stereotypes when cultural elements or aspects are oversimplified or inaccurately presented. When creators of TTRPGs or games based on culture keep in mind Asad's arguments of cultural translation, they embody the perspective of "*greater awareness leads to greater consideration.*" Thus, this leads to a more informed product (Balela & Mundy, 2015).

Punzalan, De Armas, and Recio offer insightful advice for future TTRPG game source settings similar to the Islands of Sina Una. Their main advice is to evaluate what fun means for them and that there is always a chance that the culture the future creators or game designers will translate from does not belong to them. They must handle these cultures and traditions with respect and nuance, to keep in mind that there will be biases and when to step back from them. As Recio pointed out in his interview, Islands of Sina Una is not a flawless means of representation of Filipino culture in the tabletop roleplaying community. Further into the future, he shared that there will be more appropriate means of representation. However, Islands of Sina Una is a project done out of respect and love from the source culture. Future creators should start with what they have before branching out, and if they do, they must not hesitate to ask questions lest they risk appropriating or misconstruing the culture they are translating from.

## **CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### ***Conclusion:***

The Islands of Sina Una is a fan-made campaign book for the fifth edition of Dungeons and Dragons created by a passionate group of Filipino and Filipino-American D&D players. The Islands of Sina Una features a world of seven islands featuring creatures and monsters derived from Philippine mythology, practices inspired by indigenous and pre-colonial traditions, character races inspired by nature and animals of the Philippines, and classes and sub-classes derived from traditional community roles. The new classes that are added to the campaign book are the Headhunter and Babaylan.

This thesis aimed to examine the translation of the roles of the Philippine headhunter and babaylan into the Islands of Sina Una (IoSU), focusing on their representation, cultural significance, and the motivations behind their inclusion. Using the lens of Talal Asad's Cultural Translation, the analysis emphasized that his critique of translating aspects from one culture to another cannot be neutral. In translating the Philippine Headhunter and Babaylan into a source setting for a tabletop roleplaying game, the team had to adapt elements of the Philippine babaylan and headhunter to fit the structure of TTRPG and to accommodate modern audiences. However, they acknowledged this tension and cautioned readers or players in the appendix of the book of the changes that took place. Despite this, the team's effort to preserve cultural respect and authenticity with most aspects of the Babaylan and the Headhunter in the setting demonstrates an example of what Asad considers a "good translation."

With IoSU being headed and conceptualized by members of the Filipino Diaspora, the thesis utilized Benedict Anderson's Imagined Communities Theory in determining the motivations behind adding these roles as classes and how the team reconnected with their Filipino identity and roots. By designing the Philippine babaylan and headhunter into the setting, the local and diasporic team members and players can connect with one another by identifying with symbols and roles that are already familiar to them. The Babaylan and Headhunter served as cultural symbols, manifesting Philippine pride and a mark of representation in a Eurocentric tabletop roleplaying game.

Ultimately, the Babaylan and the Headhunter classes from the Islands of Sina Una illustrate that though cultural translation can never be neutral, as argued by Talal Asad, it is possible to minimize or mitigate such biases. This is done by maintaining awareness of these biases and addressing them within the product. The handling of these class translations opens doors for other creators navigating between authenticity and respect for culture and adaptation for modern audiences, especially in spaces that are dominated by Western lenses. The creators of Islands of Sina Una acknowledged their limitations within a tabletop roleplay game through intentional design choices, consultation with experts, careful research, and cultural sensitivity. This awareness does not erase the power dynamics but opens the door to more accountable and context-aware cultural storytelling. In doing so, a more informed product is created, leading to better representation and understanding.

The decision to generalize certain cultural features, such as the use of headhunting as a tool for catharsis within the Headhunter class, reflects the team's careful

negotiation between specificity and accessibility. The decision to straddle specificity and generality reflects a desire to unify the Filipino identity within a gaming system dominated by Eurocentric narratives. Anderson's theory of imagined communities shows that the act of world-building for IoSU becomes an act of imagining a shared cultural memory, one that reaches across regions and diasporas via gameplay.

Through their thoughtful translation of the Babaylan and Headhunter, the creators not only introduced these roles to new audiences but also encouraged the ongoing dialogue of Filipino heritage, identity, and representation in contemporary gaming spaces. The Islands of Sina Una serves as an example of the continual effort to decentralize Eurocentric or Western perspectives imposed in the tabletop roleplay gaming community. The Islands of Sina Una allows the reimagining of what it means to tell stories that are respectfully rooted in Filipino culture. As cultural media continues to evolve, both scholars and creators need to be conscious of their biases and intentional in how they represent complex identities, histories, and traditions.

### ***Recommendations:***

Firstly, this thesis employed key informant interviews from only three members of the team involved in conceptualizing and designing the Headhunter and Babaylan. While Ms. Pam Punazalan, Mr. Recio and Ms. Mackenzie De Armas are key figures in the process of creating the Babaylan and Headhunter classes, it is recommended that further research employ interviews with the Director of the Islands of Sina Una themselves, Mx. Lucia Versprille, and the other research consultants who guided everything. Another focus of the study can include the subclasses created for this source setting. This can branch out even further into the second book of this project,

*Tales from Sina Una*. The second book focuses more on the narrative aspect of the classes, therefore, there will be less focus on the game mechanics.

Second, this thesis can include the more mechanical aspects of the Headhunter and Babaylan classes and examine the gamification of the translated symbols and roles. Scott Nicholson's Meaningful Gamification theory can be employed to support this objective and deepen the examination of such. Conversely, this thesis can deepen the narrative aspects of the Headhunter and the Babaylan in the Islands of Sina Una sourcebook and the second book, *Tales from Sina Una*. It is recommended to use Stewart Hall's Representation Theory when undertaking this objective. It can further support Asad's theory of cultural translation by examining what kind of representation has been reflected in the Babaylan and Headhunter from Sina Una.

Lastly, this study can incorporate the players' perception and reception of the Babaylan and Headhunter as classes. Gaining insight from local and diasporic players can be analyzed using Anderson's Imagined Communities theory, deepening the examination of how Filipino and Filipino Diaspora members connected despite the geographical limitations imposed upon them.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: UP Manila Research Ethics Board Certificate

UPMREB FORM4(Q)2019: UPMREB CERTIFICATION OF EXEMPTION FROM ETHICAL REVIEW  
25/04/2023



**University of the Philippines Manila**  
**RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD**  
Room 126, National Institutes of Health, UP Manila  
623 Pedro Gil Street, Ermita, 1000 Manila  
Telephone: +63 2 8526-4346; Email: upmreb@post.upm.edu.ph

### UPMREB CERTIFICATION OF EXEMPTION FROM ETHICAL REVIEW

The **University of the Philippines Manila Research Ethics Board (UPMREB) Review Panel 5C** has processed your request for *EXEMPTION FROM ETHICAL REVIEW* for the following study protocol and related documents which has been reviewed with resulting panel conditions and considerations:

<b>UPMREB CODE: 2025-0290-EX</b>
<b>SUBMISSION DATE: 22 May 2025</b>
<b>STUDY PROTOCOL TITLE: Roll for Representation: The Analysis of The Headhunter and Babaylan in Islands of Sina Una</b>
<b>PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: MS. MALEAH RAE FRANGE</b>
<b>SPONSOR/FUNDING AGENCY: Investigator</b>
<b>DATE OF ACTION: 30 May 2025</b>
<b>JUSTIFICATION FOR THIS CERTIFICATION:</b> The study protocol qualified with the criteria for exemption as stipulated under provisions 47-48, pages 48-49 in the National Ethical Guidelines for Research Involving Human Participants (2022), since the study does not involve any vulnerable population and that it does not cover contentious and issues.

<b>Document/s included in the review on which this certification was based:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Study Protocol version 3.0 dated 21 May 2025</li><li>2. Conceptual Framework version 3.0 dated 21 May 2025</li><li>3. Timetable version 3.0 dated 21 May 2025</li><li>4. Budget version 3.0 dated 21 May 2025</li><li>5. Diagrammatic Flow version 3.0 dated 21 May 2025</li><li>6. Informed Consent Form version 3.0 dated 21 May 2025</li></ol>
<b>Composition of Team on Record:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Maleah Rae K. Frange</li><li>2. Asst. Professor Jose V. Ogatis I</li></ol>

**RESPONSIBILITIES OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR WHILE STUDY IS IN PROGRESS:**

1. Continuing compliance with the exemption criteria of the National Ethical Guidelines for Research Involving Human Participants (2022) in the duration of the study;
2. No substantial changes in research design, methodology and subject population from the protocol submitted for exemption. Modifications that significantly affect previous risk-benefit assessment or qualification for exemption may be submitted as new protocol for initial review.
3. Notice of termination of the study using 3(C)2012: Final Report Form

All further queries regarding this request may be forwarded to the undersigned through [upmreb@post.upm.edu.ph](mailto:upmreb@post.upm.edu.ph) or telephone number +63 2 8526-4346.



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Chair, UPMREB Review Panel 5C

*Appendix B: Islands of Sina Una Cover*



### *Appendix C: Interview Questions*

- 1.) What inspired you to include the Headhunter and Babaylan as base classes rather than backgrounds, subclasses, or feats? (Why not panday, etc)
- 2.) Did you consider any alternative class concepts before finalizing the Headhunter and Babaylan? If so, what were they?
- 3.) How did you approach adapting the Philippine Headhunter and Babaylan into Dungeons & Dragons mechanics?
- 4.) How did you balance authenticity to indigenous roles and cultural sensitivity while ensuring the classes remained playable and engaging in a fantasy setting?
- 5.) Were there any specific indigenous roles, symbols, or traditions that you wanted to include in these classes?
- 6.) How did the team navigate the balance between historical accuracy and creative liberties in designing these classes?
- 7.) What were the biggest challenges in adapting the Headhunter and Babaylan for *Dungeons & Dragons*?
- 8.) Did your experiences as part of the Filipino diaspora shape how you approached cultural representation in the game?
- 9.) What kind of historical or cultural research did you conduct to ensure the authenticity of the Headhunter and Babaylan?
- 10.) What do you hope players take away from playing a Headhunter or Babaylan in *Islands of Sina Una*?
- 11.) What advice would you give to other game designers attempting to adapt indigenous cultures into TTRPGs?

## *Appendix D: Informed Consent Form for Makenzie de Armas*

### **TITLE OF STUDY**

Roll for Representation: The Analysis of the The Headhunter and Babaylan in Islands of Sina Una

### **PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR**

Maleah Rae Karganilla Frange

Department of Arts and Communication, College of Arts and Science  
University of the Philippines, Manila Padre Faura St., Ermita, Manila, 1000

+63 9158222818

mkfrange@up.edu.ph

### **PURPOSE OF STUDY**

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, you must understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if anything is unclear or if you need more information.

The purpose of this study is to complete partial fulfillment of the requirements of the researcher's undergraduate thesis for the course BA Philippine Arts (Cultural Heritage and Arts Management). This is done under the supervision of the researcher's co-investigator and thesis advisor, Professor Jose V. Ogatis I.

To be fully informed as the participants of the study, kindly read the following:

#### ***Research Objectives:***

1. To determine how the roles of the Philippine Headhunter and Babaylan were translated as classes for the IoSU setting.
2. To determine the motivation for adding the Philippine Headhunter and Babaylan as classes for the IoSU setting.
3. To understand how the writers connected with their Filipino roots in creating the Headhunter and Babaylan as classes.

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4. To understand the process of creating the build behind the Philippine Headhunter and Babaylan as classes for the IoSU setting while simultaneously maintaining cultural integrity and respect towards the classes' real-life counterparts.

## **STUDY PROCEDURES**

By participating in this study, you will be asked to join the researcher in an interview regarding the process and motivations behind adding the Babaylan and Philippine Headhunter as classes. The interview will take thirty to sixty minutes and will be conducted via online means (Zoom or Google Meet), whichever you prefer. Additionally, the researcher may email you for any follow-up questions imperative to the study. There will be a total of 2 - 3 participants in the study.

The interview will be recorded and transcribed for the purpose of the thesis. The recordings will be safely preserved digitally, and only the researcher and her advisor, and the interviewees if requested, will have access. For the course of the study, the data will be transcribed and kept in a Google Drive folder accessed only by the researcher and advisor. An encrypted/password-protected folder will serve as a backup file to be stored on the researcher's desktop. All interviews will be handled within ethical standards and with the utmost confidentiality.

The researcher aims to publish the thesis once it is completed. Audio and video recordings will be retained for one year after the completion of the study to allow for verification and further analysis if needed. After one year, all recordings will be permanently deleted from both the encrypted storage and Google Drive.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

For this research study, your comments will not be anonymous. Every effort will be made by the researcher to preserve your true character and will not misconstrue any statements made by you to fit her study. Confidentiality will be maintained by keeping notes, interview transcriptions, and any other identifying participant information in a locked file cabinet in the personal possession of the researcher.

However, there is an exclusion of personal information such as the address and contact information of the interviewees. Unless the interviewees wish otherwise, the recordings will be safely preserved digitally, and only the researcher and their advisor, and the interviewees if requested, will have access. For the course of the study, the data will be transcribed and kept in a Google Drive folder accessed only by the researcher and advisor. An encrypted/password-protected folder will serve as a backup file to be stored on the PI's desktop. All interviews will be handled within ethical standards and with the

utmost confidentiality. Audio and video recordings will be retained for one year after the completion of the study to allow for verification and further analysis if needed. After one year, all recordings will be permanently deleted from both the encrypted storage and Google Drive.

#### **CONTACT INFORMATION**

If you have questions at any time about this study, you may contact the researcher, whose contact information is provided on the first page.

Additionally, you may contact the UPMREB Ethics Review Panel, who have sufficiently approved of the study, through the following:

[Name of UPM REB Panel Chair]

Address: Room 126, Ground Floor

National Institutes of Health, UP Manila

623 Pedro Gil St.

Ermita 1000 Manila

Email: upmreb@post.upm.edu.ph

Tel: +63 2 8526-4346

#### **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form. After you sign the consent form, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Withdrawing from this study will not affect the relationship you have, if any, with the researcher. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, the data will be deleted.

**PLEDGE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:**

I, Maleah Rae Karganilla Frange, the principal investigator of the study, formally pledge to ensure the protection of identities and privacy in my research endeavors. The key consideration in protecting privacy and confidentiality in research includes informed consent, confidentiality, and secure data storage. As a researcher, I understand the importance of safeguarding the personal information of the participants involved in this research and ensuring their confidentiality.

This research will abide by the Data Privacy Act of 2012 concerning confidentiality. By adhering to these principles, I can contribute to heritage conservation knowledge while also upholding the trust and confidentiality of those who participate in my research. I recognize and respect the right of every participant to withdraw from the study at any time. The researcher will securely store the documents and data given. After the interview, the researcher will provide the participants with a debriefing on how the data will be used in the study.

Signed:



**Maleah Rae Karganilla Frange**  
Principal Investigator

Noted by:




**Asst. Professor Jose V. Ogatis I**  
Thesis Adviser

## CONSENT

I, Makenzie De Armas [Your Name], hereby grant my consent to participate as a key informant for the study to provide insights into the process associated with developing the Babaylan and Philippine Headhunter as classes for the Islands of Sina Una.

I have thoroughly reviewed and comprehended the purpose of the undergraduate thesis titled "*Roll for Representation: The Analysis of the Headhunter and Babaylan in Islands of Sina Una*," including its background, overview, significance, data-gathering protocols, and ethical considerations.

By affixing my signature below, I acknowledge that I have familiarized myself with the contents of the informed consent document. I am aware that the research will involve a semi-structured interview lasting approximately 30 to 60 minutes, which will be audio and video recorded. I understand that all *personal* information, such as address or contact information, shared will be treated with *strict* confidentiality. Additionally, I acknowledge that my participation in this study is voluntary, and I retain the right to withdraw my consent at any stage of the research process.

Participant's Signature over Name:   
03/31/2025

Date:

Should you have any additional questions regarding this request, kindly contact the researcher at +63 9158222818, or email at [mkfrange@up.edu.ph](mailto:mkfrange@up.edu.ph).

*Appendix E: Interview with Makenzie de Armas*

Date of Interview: April 06, 2025

Mode: Zoom

Legend:

- A: Interviewee: Ms. Mackenzie de Armas
- B: Interviewer: Maleah Rae K. Frange

*[TRANSCRIPTION OF PART 1]*

**B:** Okay, good morning. For formality sake, I'll just be introducing myself. Um I'm Maleah Karganilla Frange. I'm a BA Philippine Art student and this interview is for my undergraduate thesis. So if you could kindly please introduce yourself for the recording.

**A:** Uh, hello, I am McKenzie de Armas. I am a game designer for uh Dungeons and Dragons. I currently work at Wizards of the Coast, the company who produce uh produces and publishes Dungeons and Dragons. Uh but previously I was a freelance game designer and writer working on numerous projects including uh the Islands of Sina Una. Uh which I served as lead writer for and did much of the design work for.

**B:** Perfect. All right. Thank you. So, let's get right into it. All right.

**A:** Yeah.

**B:** So Our very first question is what inspired you to include the head hunter and the babaylan as base classes. So like because my friends and I were—

**A:** Ah—

**B:** Oh sorry... my friends and I were wondering—

**A:** Oh no, no, Yeah you can keep going.

**B:** Okay. because we were wondering why like it was those two instead of like other stuff like the Panday and um yeah, so.

**A:** Yeah. So I will be entirely honest. uh by the time I got brought onto the project, uh that decision had already been made. So I actually don't have much insight into why we cho— or why the product leads chose the Babaylan and the Headhunter. Uh that was something that was decided uh when the uh project had first launched over on uh not Kickstarter but whatever... Indiegogo. Um so I actually unfortunately I can't answer that question.

**B:** All right. It's okay. Okay, thank you. Yeah, that would be uh I

**A:** I, I will say if you do want the answer to that question, I would uh if you are able to get in contact with uh Lucia Versprille or um or uh Paladin Mendenhall, they would have either of them would have more insight into that. Uh unfortunately, I got brought onto the project towards the midpoint. So I I don't have insight into that. Yeah.

**B:** Alright, okay. Thank you. So for the second question. Um Oh, I'm not sure if you can answer it as well but um was there any— did they tell you about uh any alternative class concept before they finalized the headhunter and the babaylan?

**A:** Um, not, not, uh I don't it didn't come up. Um, it was just one of those things where I think we floated a bunch of concepts especially specifically for the subclasses. Um, but we um for the the other class concepts we didn't end up uh exploring. A lot of uh things that we wanted to cover kind of were covered by the archetypes that uh base uh 5E has in it. Um so the things with the Babaylan and the Headhunter was that or the reason why they kind of resonated as class concepts

especially for me. Um and this is not to say this is the reason why they were chosen, but this is something that I how I approach it from a design perspective is that those archetypes of like what makes a Babaylan the Babaylan doesn't directly translate to any of the existing character archetypes that we have in base 5E. Uh the same thing with the Headhunter. Uh there are some ways you can maybe stretch and bend the narrative, but in that doing so would be... not exactly... it would be a disservice to the notions and the people who have worked and and served in those real life professions uh and so something that we take into account whenever we're creating a new class or concept in a new class is this idea of what is the character archetype? What is the reason why this character has to exist and uh something that I always approach, is like um, and this comes to any form of design, is this idea of like does this character archetype exist somewhere else already? Um and with the babaylan and the Headhunter, those very clearly did not. uh and they didn't have a comparable uh counterpart in base 5E.

**B:** Oh, got it. Okay. Thank you.

**A:** Yeah. Uh I I I apologize for the amount of like I I love doing design work and a lot of my work on Sina Una was just doing a lot of thinking about like narrative and mechanics and how to marry those two. Um and it's something I do a lot in my work uh, even years removed from Sina Una. so it's such my one of my favorite things to talk about. so I'm so sorry for going off on many tangents about that.

**B:** No, it's okay. No, I love it. Actually, it's it's one of the favorite things that I loved about Sina Una is how you guys were able to marry the design with the lore and everything else. That's it's why I think why I think it's like very successful. At least it seems successful because a lot of my friends are talking about it.

**A:** Oh, yay!

**B:** Yeah, so okay, moving on, um uh uh I think if you could add any more insight because the third question is kind of related to the second. Uh how did you guys approach adapting the Philippine Headhunter and the Babaylan into the Dungeons and Dragons mechanics?

**A:** Oh, there was there was a lot. Um so do you want me to start with the Babaylan or the Headhunter? Because both of them have very... There were a lot of conversations that went into both of these uh these classes... Uh so which one would you like me to start talking about first?

**B:** Um, we could start with the... which... We could start with the Headhunter.

**A:** Okay, cool! Uh the head hunter is actually the the slightly– the simpler one. Um also, a lot of this is also going to be in the appendix for Sina Una, uh because we have that was my uh writing down everything after we did it so I wouldn't forget. Um so that is also a very good reference. I assume you've already looked at it, but I'm just–

**B:** Yes.

**A:** I'm just prefacing with a lot of what I'm going to say is also going to be in the book.

**B:** Okay, okay.

**A:** Um but yeah, so for the Headhunter, we really wanted to there were there were a couple main sticking points that came up with the Headhunter when we were first creating it. Uh and the the biggest main thing that we wanted to convey when we

were creating the Headhunter is this idea of violence not as something to be celebrated or something to be uh to relish in but really creating a class around the idea that violence is a tool that we we that Headhunters wield reluctantly because they view it as a tool to stop a larger cycle of violence. Um and we wanted to a lot of times when we we've done some previous research into um what had previously existed for D&D in terms of Philippine uh Filipino representation uh especially when it came to like the concept of a Headhunter. Um, a lot of what we found sort of veered into these stereotypes of savagery and almost like, relishing in the triumph of killing and violence. Um, this sort of... almost like— for lack of a word like joy that comes from like killing. And that wasn't what we wanted to express in this class. Like, for us we we knew that the the role of the Headhunter was somber and it was highly venerated but the people who took who undertook that role didn't necessarily take it because they enjoyed violence, but rather as a means to protect the community and protect people around them. And so we wanted really to make sure that when we made this sub class, we didn't lean into those stereotypes of savagery, and uh brutality, uh and, blood thirst because that wasn't what the Headhunter should be. Yeah. And so from that, the other thing we wanted to make sure that we uh combined in the Headhunter is the idea of Headhunters listening to and following Omens and walking the line between life and death in a way different from the Babaylan. Um where the the Headhunters, they are so familiar with uh, death and violence as a tool that they also communicate uh with the spirits of the dead and the deceased and they kind of walk that line uh and also kind of commune with the spirit world. And so we wanted to also add a supernatural, for lack of a better word, flavor to this class that was less than the ones that we have in uh base 5E because they we didn't want them to be like full spell casters. We didn't want them to have any

devotion to to gods and stuff like that. Um but we wanted them to have that kind of uh connection. Um And then the third thing that sort of runs through the core of the sub class is this idea of inevitability. The Headhunters were known to be ridiculously persistent and dedicated to their craft. And so that was the main thing that that is I think for me what shines through most in the mechanics is this idea of a very persistent class. Uh and that is how that idea of persistence and inevitability uh and combining the sort of meta feeling of death being inevitable with this idea of this kind of relentless tracker and hunter... um kind of led us to create the Conviction Mechanic, which is what I believe it's called. It's been a hot second since I've looked at this book— so give me one second to actually pull it up and make sure I'm not not seeing the incorrect things... Oh yeah. So yeah, the Conviction damage. Uh, which basically means that anytime you um take the attack action, um or anytime you make an attack with a weapon, even if you hit or miss, you're still going to be doing a little bit of damage.

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** Uh and it's this idea of just like you are hounding the or you are persistence incarnate. You are relentless. Uh and that was how we that was what we wanted to build the class around. Um, in a lot of uh D&D design, um when you look at a lot of how the game structures its base classes, all of them kind of have a key mechanic that they build around. The sort of uniqueness that they build around and give you different ways to interact with. Um for the head hunter, that key kind of mechanic that we wanted to build around that um improves as you level up was the conviction damage. Um and so that also keeps that narrative idea of uh relentless persistence... um and this sort of almost like commitment to the act of doing it— uh,

the act of of head hunting and this practice uh sort of kept into the core of the subclass. Um and then from there, we, uh, so that's the main uh core feature. And then um we put in some of the other things that are kind of common in a lot of D&D martial classes. Uh like a fighting style which like the Fighter has, the Paladin has. All those sorts of things. Um, there's uh other things that sort of deal with the theme of like resilience, um, especially when it comes to like mental fortitude. Uh. one of my favorite features in the main Headhunter is the Forgiveness for the Slain feature—which is um taken from the uh we were talking with uh and I know I remember looking through your questions and so this is uh sort of skipping ahead to answer one of them. We had amazing researchers for Sina Una. They were so helpful and we basically— like we they were able to get us copies of like PDFs of different books, but also like they were so steeped in like the uh the the stories uh and like— so many folks in uh on the team had these knowledge of stories that have been passed down that like yeah, we couldn't find too much written reference of but they had everyone could corroborate like yeah, no, this story exists. Um so yeah, we had um the the uh Pam Punzalan and uh BJ Recio uh were both uh were our key consultants for this. Uh we had other uh researchers as well. uh but uh Pam and BJ were the ones who I worked very closely with for the sub classes.

**B:** Wow. Nice.

**A:** Um but they they brought up that like something that head hunters would do uh when they killed someone was that they would say uh or depending on the tradition they would say a prayer over the person who killed and like invite them to join their ancestral spirits. Almost as if this act – and again, it's leaning into the narrative like this is not a class that relishes in violence. This is a class that does it as a means to

better the world of the living. Uh, and so that was one of my favorite features to throw into the class because it really counteracts this narrative or really counteract the stereotype of like head hunters being violent and savage. Yeah. Uh yeah. Uh so that was one of my favorite things. um and then uh then you have all three of the sub classes. Uh and these ones um we for the subclasses for the Headhunter, this was where we leaned a little bit more into the fantasy and more into the D&D of it all rather than the... the... um the tradition of it. Um because we had to take a little bit more flexibility here because of how the nature of subclasses work. Um we wanted a very large spread of um how people can interact with the class. Um so we wanted one that promoted more tactical play. We wanted one that's the easy you pick up, you do the thing uh no thoughts on there. And then we wanted one that um incorporated spell casting because that's a very uh traditional part of uh D&D side of subclass spread. Uh and so that's kind of how we broke down the subclasses. Uh the one that I think is the archetypal uh Headhunter subclass is the uh Omen of Knowledge one where you carry around the different memories of of the people uh and the things you've encountered uh and also like the the spirits and stuff because we wanted to uh keep that always at the forefront. Uh but um but yeah, all the other ones are just sort of um all the other ones they have some uh story and historical significance but we did definitely take a little bit more um creative liberty with the uh with the sub classes. Uh so I'm happy to answer more questions about uh those or about the Headhunter overall before we move to the Babaylan.

**B:** Um yeah, uh okay, this is more of a mechanical thing because I played I I forgot what I forgot the subclass what it's called but the one with the the more of the spell casting one because I just wanted to ask why why why is it... because I know you guys use cleric spells. So why specifically cleric and not like— I I kind of understand

because okay, they're going to be like um because it's connected to one of the gods if I remember correctly. So it– like why cleric instead of the Paladin because it feels like because you're choosing – because the way I understood it, felt like, okay, I'm going to follow this god instead of I because right? Because right?

**A:** Yes yes, you're correct. you're correct.

**B:** Yeah, okay. I I followed this god instead of I was chosen by this god. So like, yeah.

**A:** Yeah. So I think uh one of the reason why we made it uh we we decided for it to be uh the Cleric over uh the Paladin is a purely mechanical reason. Uh in that the cleric has more access to more spells. Uh overall, the Paladin spell list is going to be on the shorter side, uh whereas the cleric has more spells uh because the cleric class in base 5E is a full spell caster, so they have a way more full rounded suite of spells to choose from. So that is the main reason why. Um Paladin would also work well. The the thing is the Paladins have a lot of overlap with the cleric spell list, which is the other reason kind we went for it. Uh while we also didn't want to uh the Paladin has so many very unique Paladin spells. Yeah. Um and we didn't want to create a class that then immediately pillages from another like class's iconic identity. Like the a lot of these smite spells are very iconic to the Paladin and we didn't want uh and this is a thing that is not just for Sina Una but in almost all kind of D&D game design. We didn't want a like you're playing a Headhunter, but they're really just a Paladin lite. Uh and we didn't want that especially for our Headhunter. So we wanted something that like interacts and interfaces with another class and really integrates into the system while still maintaining a very core identity. Uh so that was the other reason. Um the the other other reason um was that uh with the all the Conviction

damage, uh the uh uh the Headhunters didn't need a lot of those iconic like Paladin smite spells because they already are dealing so much damage. And so having a more support-based uh spell list like the Cleric which has a lot of healing um, uh, and and stuff like that and a lot of concentration sort of ongoing spells uh, really helps uh with uh more compatible with what the Headhunter's core mechanics are.

**B:** Mm, got it. All right.

**A:** And then the third reason why is we wanted to tie it to we wanted to tie it to.

**B:** Okay, I think I'm sorry for the Yes, that's all I have for the –

**A:** Yep.

**B:** Headhunter. So, Yeah. for the Babaylan.

**A:** Yes. Uh oh, this one. um.. So, I will say I I love the Headhunter. I I've played a Headhunter in my first campaign. I love the Headhunter so much. Uh I I never I- I- I will say I didn't play the Babaylan not because I didn't like it but because I liked it so much that I just was like afraid to touch it once I made it because I was like this is so wonderful. I love this class so much.

**B:** You're afraid you do a disservice to it?

**A:** It's just one of those things where it's like, oh God, if I play it and I'm I'm just like, "No, that's my baby." I'm I'm happy to see I like watching other people play it brought me way more joy than like me ever playing it would. So I'm just like, yeah, it's okay. Uh but yeah. So uh the Babaylan was the infinitely more complicated class to design because anytime you incorporate a spell you're trying to create a new spell classing class, you not only have to uh, balance the spells and figure out how to incorporate

the spell casting into the narrative. You also have to figure out how does this class uniquely interact with spells in a way that none of the other class existing classes already do. Uh this also brought into question sort of our larger conversation when we were uh writing Sina Una about like what are spells. In the world of Sina Una in this world that is based in a lot of animism and animistic traditions. Uh how do you how does magic work? Um and again, we we took a lot of liberty from how like magic is portrayed in real life versus how magic is portrayed in D&D. Uh instead of it being like uh sorcery or witchcraft, uh we sort of throughout Sina Una, we describe uh like the act of like spell slots and casting very much as drawing and exchanging uh energy from the spirits around us. It is, it is connecting that way... Uh and that is one of the reasons why the Babaylan was going to be a spell caster. Uh the other reason is from a mechanical perspective, we wanted one non- spell casting and one spell casting class uh in the book.

**B:** Got it.

**A:** Um so we definitely need a lot of conversation about how the Babaylan was going to interact with uh spells. And the uh uh the the main things that we wanted to um I'm just flipping back to the absolute essay I wrote about the Babaylan back in the book. Um we wanted to honor the Babaylan's role as like a leader and as a healer but also as someone who is steeped in tradition and training. Um a lot of in in D&D, uh a lot of different classes have different uh essentially what we call the core ability like the the main ability for the class. Um especially for spell casting classes, that ability can which ability that is carries a lot of the identity of the class. Um like for example, Wizards having intelligence because they're very studious or Clerics having wisdom

because they are uh connected to uh like higher power and they have that sort of other worldliness.

**B:** Yeah.

We made the decision to make a Babaylan an intelligence-based spell caster pretty early on in the process I recall because we really were like, no, this is someone like, yeah, are they connected to the world? Yes, but they do so through this intense studiousness. Yes. They are so they are trained, they are they go through the same amount of work that the archetypal wizard would do in a D&D world in order to get where they are. So that was one of the the biggest sort of narrative and mechanical uh marriages we made in the subclass is making that decision to have the Babaylan be uh an intelligence-based uh spellcaster. Um the other the trickiest part of the Babaylan uh was the figuring out how to tackle the abayan. Yes. Um because we wanted to honor what that spirit guide actually is. But also having to wrangle with the fact that the uh in D&D, your normally your companions are supposed to be fully under your control.

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** Uh and so there was a we went through a lot of play testing for the uh the Abayan. Um and we ended up creating this kind of system where it's like... the DM can just it's it's almost this uh system of generally speaking your abayan wants to work with you, but if ever you're role playing and you decide to do something that uh your abayan doesn't want to do, the DM, we we created a door in the mechanic for the DM to basically go, nope. They don't do that. Um or just basically being like, yeah, they see things, but they're not going to tell you that because of like... I think the exact wording is like they they're conducive to your character's journey.

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** And so we intentionally created that doorway in the mechanic for the DM to essentially step in uh without actually impeding on the way it's played in the game of like when you're moving it in combat and stuff like that. Um I'm I'm going through. There's so much happening in the Babaylan –

**B:** It's okay.

**A:** Um but yeah. and then uh for the Babaylan, so yeah, we've gone over spell casting, we've gone over theon. Um we yeah, we we'll get over to the sub classes. I'm trying to make sure there's nothing else before I jump into the absolute uh nonsense that is the spirit dice mechanic because that one took a while to come up with.

**B:** I still couldn't understand that.

**A:** Yeah, it's it is the Babaylan is a complicated sub complicated class. Uh and that is again, uh one of the things I don't think it was necessarily thought of when we started out, but certainly something that when I was designing both of the classes that I wanted to balance this idea of like one being more complex than the other and having this widespread of complexity to address. So for um the sort of in similar way that the uh Headhunter has the Bonviction damage that's kind of the very core mechanic. Uh Babaylan has uh two core things. It has the abayan, uh and it has the Spirit Conduit feature. Um and this was how we wanted to portray this idea of the Babaylan being as the feature call a conduit for spirits uh in this way that like the Babaylan is someone who communes with and allows the spirits to flow through them. Uh and because we decided earlier that spells and spell casting and magic

were going to be how we represent spirits interacting with the world and uh spirits uh and and their power. We knew that how the Babaylan was going to be channeling these spirits would have to interact with um spell casting and it's its spell casting ability in some way. Um we also wanted this to be unique and different than every existing class that that already is in base 5E. So what we ended up deciding to do is this sort of pool of dice. Um we wanted it to be I think a pool of dice because we wanted it to be more variable than just flat numbers because spirits have a mind of their own. So we wanted them to be like more like you're channeling these spirits, they're going to give you a variable amount or or they're going to be cooperative in a variable amount. Uh but you can use that kind of calling and channeling of these spirits to boost the way that you channel magic into the world. Um and so that's why we have this pool of dice that you pull from and you can roll them and then alter different ways or different uh ways that you're um that you interact with your uh your spell casting. Um so we have um for spells that make attack rolls, you can increase the attack roll to hit. Uh for saving throws, you can essentially make those saving throw thresholds way higher. Uh and then we had uh the simple option of sometimes you make damage number higher. Um and again, it's it's one of those things where it's like one of those whenever you're whenever I'm thinking about game design, uh you always want that easy. I don't want to think about it. I just want the simple option and so that was the simple option there. Um but that was kind of the the thought process that we went through with the Spirit Conduit of this idea of creating a way for uh to really make tangible the way that the the way that we're approaching spell casting in this whole book. Um and so having that, you just take dice and you channel the spirits around you and you commune with them to help give you strength and help people around you and and in doing that you improve your own spell

casting prowess was that way of you're physically picking up these dice and rolling them and adding these numbers and you can tangibly see the way the math and the numbers work with the narrative of your, sort of, take like channeling these spirits and letting them flow through you to strengthen you. Uh and having that fun marriage of tactile visible mathematical improvements with the narrative sort of, use, uh letting these spirits channel channel through you uh and increase your strength uh is was something super fun. Um And yep. And I think those are the main uh things we really just lean into uh the idea of the Babaylan being this, um, we wanted to lean into this idea of like being a leader and uh like with many uh classes when you get higher in level, you just become incredibly awesome and powerful. Um and we really for both the head hunter and the Babaylan, we wanted to lean into that and Yeah. Um there is some like always a little bit of fudging of like, yeah, you know what? Um I don't think that's how it worked in real life, but getting to play with the fantasy of it in a way that honors the people who do practice and uh who have uh ancestors who practice as Babaylan was super fun. Um, and then um we have the subclasses uh as well because we would always have the the the uh the subclasses. Um I will start out by prefacing um, or, I will start out by saying similar to the Headhunter we split the three sub classes into different niches um and took some liberty into splitting up the role of the Babaylan and the traditions that pretty much all Babaylans did and splitting them up into kind of three distinct categories, uh, because of mechanical needs. Um, the one that takes the least uh inspiration from history is the Call of Wrath, uh, which fits into the niche of uh a lot of spell casting classes in D&D will have uh the one subclass that is very uh martial or combat focused. So we knew for introducing a new spell casting class, we would need a martial uh focused class. Uh but we did uh

talk with our wonderful, wonderful researchers and we're like, can can Babaylans fight?

**B:** Fight?

**A:** Can they can they fight? Um and the answer was yes. So we were like, great. The Babaylan is going to fight. Um and that was the research we did for that subclass. Uh I think it is a very cool subclass nonetheless. Uh, but um, that one is the one that we take the most creative liberty for. Um the other two, uh so you have Call of Clairvoyance which really leans into um, we wanted a subclass based around the idea of how the um Babaylans would have their spirit guides come and essentially inhabit their own bodies and speak through them and help them provide that knowledge and that, um, that I don't want to say wisdom because that's an actual ability score but like – the uh the guidance that they need to be leaders uh and uh of their communities. Uh and we also wanted to have a subclass that leans into the more divinatory aspects of thelan. So the main feature for call uh for the Call of Clairvoyance is that is quite literally you pull the abayan into you and we wanted to just lean directly into that. Um, and so that one in that way the uh connection between uh historical accounts of the Babaylan and the mechanics were very easy uh to sort of marry and are very obvious. Uh the one that is I think draws the most from history uh but in a way that is almost not, in in a subtler way is the the last remaining subclass that we haven't talked about, the Call of Sacrifice. Um there is very specific wording in this subclass in the way that we described some of the features that we took directly from different accounts of uh Babaylans and Babaylan traditions. Um, like uh in the second level feature where we talk about uh being able to seize pain and pull it away. Uh that is a almost direct snippet uh and a description

of a um an account of uh techniques and rituals that Babaylans actually used. Um, I believe that one uh based on what past me said in the appendix, um that is the uh.. Agaw which is yeah actually like the snatching and seizing away pain that that is why we we very specifically put that wording in there. Um and this is one of the other things in Sina Una that sort of was something that we had to balance while we were creating it was this desire to educate while not making you feel like you were reading a textbook. Um, and so like especially in uh Call of, Call of Sacrifice I think is the one that is almost um the the best example of that in in the book. Uh this idea of like you see a lot of these uh features where it's like it'll have descriptive text where it's like, yeah, you're taking pain and snatching it away. Um and it's cool. You have mechanics that go along with it. Uh but then also you go, no, that was an actual thing. That is actually how they were described interacting with uh the people that they help and the people that they heal. Um and so that one is super cool. So a lot of Call of Sacrifice is based on those ritual descriptions and those uh accounts that we have from uh people about how the Babaylan interacted with other people. Um and um mechanically the Call of Sacrifice fits into the um the healer niche. Uh so you have your uh divination utility niche with the Call of Clairvoyance. You have your martial niche with the Call of Wrath and then you have your healing niche with the Call of Sacrifice. Um but yeah, my favorite thing um looking through the Babaylan was just taking those like bits of from actual history books and then putting them almost word for word into the game text uh and just letting that descriptive text carry through the mechanics. Um and that was me rambling for half an hour about subclass and subclass design.

**B:** No, no, no, that's it's very it's very insightful and very interesting because Yeah, because I because I had to do uh, specific research about Babaylan because it was

assigned to me and I was reading it and like, okay, I don't know how to play this, but it's surprisingly kind of— I surprisingly, surprisingly at least accurate in a DND setting that um ..

**A:** Yeah.

**B:** Oh, this is what they do in real life. So yeah, it's nice to see.

**A:** Yeah, there was um there was a lot of a lot of love poured into uh the Babaylan and the Headhunter, but especially the Babaylan because it was such a the Babaylan, like with the Headhunter we had the battle of there's a lot of stereotypes about the Headhunter. We got to like combat. With the Babaylan, it came with the weight of this is something that people do and honor and love. There are people in our family lines who are Babaylans. This is something that carries a lot of weight to us personally. Um and so we approached that subclass with so much love and thought and a whole lot of double checking and passing it back and forth and going, hey, does this work? Are we are we doing good? Are we being respectful? What else would you like to see? What else do you want to include? Can we actually include that without absolutely shattering the game? Um and all those sorts of things. Uh I remember having a conversation with the researchers and just being like, “Hey, here's the draft. Is it okay?” And then like waiting for them to yell at me uh and staying up and reading about uh so many like pages of pages on history and tradition uh and then just presenting it to them and then being like, no, this is this is we're doing it. We're doing the right thing. Um and uh I wouldn't have I— I cannot stress enough how gosh darn important and wonderful the research team on this book was because I could not have done that without their guidance. I'm making sure. I'm just checking our credits really quickly so I'm not missing any lovely

researchers. Okay. Yeah. I think I am missing a couple of folks, but those are the I don't remember. I, I, I really only remember them by their discord handles. Oh, yeah. Uh but yeah. I think uh the Zoom meeting is going to close in like three-ish minutes. Uh but I'm happy to uh jump back into a call uh to continue uh if you've got further questions. Especially because I just mostly yapped for the past half hour.

**B:** No, no, it's it's great. Um okay. Once it reaches the one minute mark, I think I'm going to send another one.

**A:** Okay.

**B:** Uh no, it's the same link actually. I'll just restart it again and then.

**A:** Sounds good.

**B:** Thank you so much. All right. All right. Okay, I think a lot of what you said um answered because I was answered a lot of the questions. Um but just to let I'll just—

**A:** Yep.

**B:** — go over it to see if you have any more other insights. Okay. Um so for the fourth question, like because you said you wanted to the goal here was to educate without um making it seem like a like a textbook. So in doing so, how did you balance authenticity to like cultural and indigeous roles while ensuring that they remained playable and engaging?

**A:** Yes. Um It was a lot of thought and a lot of just sort of really carefully thinking and and uh a very a very close understanding of a foundational understanding of D&D mechanics uh uh teemed with a lot of research. Um so there are things that we did not include in the Babaylan. Um like we didn't include and for the sake of gameplay

specifically, like um with the historical Babaylan, we know that like a lot of the ways that they sort of received their calling uh were had some like it was like seizures or or deep depression or other like physical physical ailments or or mental uh struggles and stuff like that.

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** And we know that that can be something that is not fun to enjoy or play at the table. So we did not include that as part of the subclass because we didn't want to force players to engage with that. Uh similarly with um gender roles. We know that the Babaylan role has a lot of gender uh or has a lot of gender connotations.

**B:** Yes.

**A:** But we didn't want to essentially tell people, you must be in certain gender here to play this class. Um so we didn't want so that was one of the other things that we wanted to not... we wanted to... end up or we ended up removing because uh for player access. Uh part of the way that we helped balance this was having the very thick appendix that explains all of our research uh because we knew that if we took something out in the game, we wanted to have record of exactly what we removed and why uh because we wanted to be honest and transparent with history. Um so a lot of the things that we did change and remove were either things that were like, how do how are players, real life players playing now going to engage with this material? And what do we need to remove so that way they can engage with it comfortably? Yeah. And the other thing that we um sort of removed was um not going into too specific of like uh like what the rituals are uh because that doesn't quite fit into the D&D framework. Yeah. It is less than a minute, so shall we reconvene in a new link. All right, you're good. Thank you. I'll see you in a little bit.

**B:** Alright.

*[TRANSCRIPTION OF PART 2]*

**B:** All right, okay, so wait, where did we leave off?

**A:** So I was talking about how did we balance authenticity with mirroring mechanics, and a lot of it was that I think I covered everything I wanted to cover right before the meeting had to swap. But yeah, that's basically what it was. The way that we balanced it was that anything we removed or anything that we changed, we wanted to keep a log of, and that is why we have the appendix. So that way, when we change something for the fantasy of it, or change something for player experience or something on a meta level, we're still honest and honoring the traditions in the past, whether they are positive or if they are more negative.

**B:** I'm just taking notes.

**A:** No, you're so good. No worries.

**B:** Alright. Okay, so based on that, based on what you said, were there any specific roles or symbols or traditions that you want, oh, I think you already answered that, that you wanted to include in these classes? So I think you mentioned with the Babaylan, you said you wanted to, how they connect with the spirits. Is there anything you want to add to that?

**A:** I think for the main thing that we wanted to include with the Babaylan, I touched a little bit on it when I was talking on the mechanics, but I can also touch on it from a narrative perspective, was the idea of the Abayan or the Spirit Guide. I know that the

Spirit Guide goes by multiple different names, depending on the tradition. For the book, we just sort of solidified it as the Abayan. We definitely—

**B:** Sorry, hold on, because something happened with my thing and then I can't hear you. Is it all right if I end the meeting and then we rejoin again? Because I can't really hear you. Something happened with my audio. Thank you.

**A:** Can do.

**B:** Okay, no, it's working now. Are we good? Yeah. Hold on. Let me check. Because, all right.

**B:** Alright. Yeah, it's working.

**A:** Hello. Are we good?

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** Awesome. I also just checked my audio on my end to make sure I was actually using like my proper mic and not the that's attached to my headset, because sometimes that happens. But yeah, so from a narrative perspective, we really wanted to include the Abayan, because we knew, and that Spirit Guide, because we knew that was super important to the Babaylan tradition. So that was something we really wanted to highlight. And so again, sort of circling back to what he said earlier about the mechanics, kind of creating that balance between something that is a guide, but also functions as a companion that you, as a player, have some agency over, was an interesting design challenge. The other thing that we kind of wanted to keep with the Babaylan, in addition to things that we've already mentioned, like the Spirit Guide and the way that they interact and are a conduit for the spirits, is this

idea of Babaylans are called. Babaylans are chosen oftentimes by the spirits, and they feel this kind of pull towards this role. In a game that is all about player choice, it is really hard to make something that's like an outside force goes and now I am going to make you do a thing. And so the way that we did that was instead of making that a mechanical thing, we just made it very narrative focused. We had the all D&D subclasses for each class. Their subclasses have a sort of similar theme in the way that they're named, on the way that they're referred to. And so for the Babaylan, we decided to call all the classes different calls. So that way you could have that sort of call of a role and keep that sort of narrative and historical importance without imposing on the player's will.

**B:** Got it. That's okay. That makes sense now that I'm wondering like, okay, why is it called calls? And then I realize, okay.

**A:** Yep. And in a similar way, the omens for the Headhunter were called that because we wanted to honor the fact that headhunters would do rituals to read omens from their ancestors. And so that's we called those subclasses Omens because we wanted to sort of lean into that narrative of you're getting these messages or you're getting this calling in this sort of direction from the spirits. Again, without being like, and the DM, you got to fill in what's going to happen here. We wanted to provide that kind of framework within the narrative for those subclasses. So even if your DM was not someone who is very good at giving you foresight or giving you planning and creating these omens, you could still engage with that part of the history.

**B:** Okay. So that being said, kind of seems similar to the fourth question now realizing it. So how did the team navigate balancing? Like specifically more of like

the balance was there... like aside from like a lot of research and careful thought, was there any other precautions that you guys had to take or?

**A:** The precautions were the research. The precautions were we gave the researchers full permission to yell at us if we went out of line. That was the precaution. That was, yeah. So it was a lot of just like, yeah, researchers... I am a diaspora member. So like my family, especially my mom and my dad wanted me for so long to have like nothing to do with Filipino history or culture. They wanted me to be fully Americanized. And so when I came to this project, I looked at the people who are researchers went, yell at me if I screw this up. I do not know. I do not have the wisdom. I do not have the perspective. I need help. And I think it's less of a precaution and more of a conscious step that a lot of people who are American or Western based on this project had to take was this sort of willingness to deconstruct our mindset and deconstruct a lot of the preconceived notions and the assumptions we had and really opening up ourselves to criticism, to critique, to being told that we were wrong and the way that we were approaching stuff was wrong. And that is something that I like the lessons I learned from Sina Una about that specific sort of opening up my mind and being open to deconstructing my worldview and decentering myself is something that I've carried on to this day from Sina Una. But that was the I think the biggest step that a lot of the Western centered individuals like myself on the project had to do and had to be very careful about doing. And again, I will say it until the cows come home. I will say it until the end of the earth. God bless our researchers. They dealt with so much on that project. I love them so much.

**B:** They were the ones who, the backbone, you could say, of the whole project.

**A:** Genuinely, we could not have done that without their knowledge and their guidance because otherwise we would have made mistakes because we are Western centered. We're gonna miss some things. And yeah, it was a getting humbled by the researchers was awesome.

**B:** Were you humbled often?

**A:** I blessedly was not humbled often. I think, I don't think I was, I was a very cautious person. And I think a lot of what I did was a lot of just going like, "hey, is this okay?" And just asking for a lot of like, my own reading. And I just, basically, I think instead of being humbled, part of so I came into it with the mindset of like, if I'm wrong, and I ask a stupid question, I'm going to get yelled at and that is okay. But part of my mindset of opening up myself to critique, and being humbled allowed me to ask really, really silly questions. And, and learn a lot because I kind of let that guard down and just was like, Alright, I'm sorry, researchers, but I gotta ask. And then I would put something in there. And they'd be like, yeah, here you go. And so it was less of me getting humbled, but more of me just not wanting to make assumptions. And yeah, to free myself up with the I don't know anything. And yeah, being open to learning and understanding, understanding that I knew nothing. It was fun when I did my own reading, and I discovered things and some of the other leads were like, "No, we shouldn't do that." And I'm like, "but it's but it's historical, we can do that." We had very long arguments about tops in the in the role of like spinning tops, and how and the cultural role of spinning. Yeah, in the game and in history, I was fully I discovered that and I was so happy.

And we had a very long drawn out argument with one of the project leads about like, "We're not putting one of the gambling sets as tops." And I was like, "Yes, we are.

Yes, we are.” And that was one of those. Sometimes you get the researchers get to back you up on really silly debates like that. Yeah, super fun.

**B:** So it's more like a how do you say like a like an open dialogue? Like an open forum? Okay, okay, okay..

**A:** Yeah. Oh, yeah. Yeah. I know like some I think there were a couple like and that's not to say that there weren't any conflict. At least I know for a fact that having been seated on the the sidelines of the discord chat while it was happening, some of the leads would get into big tiffs or big fights with the the researchers about certain cultural aspects, because like the lead didn't understand. I think that was something that happened in like my first month or so of being on the team. There was a big argument between one of the leads and the researchers that just kind of exploded. And that didn't necessarily scare me, but it did really opened my eyes to the fact that I don't know anything. And because of that, I think that was a very good sort of ground level entry point of Alright, I trust the researchers. I know nothing and I am just going to ask and be certain and read as much as I can and figure out what I can do. So it was very much an open dialogue and very much open conversation. And it was also very fun because we worked together so much that it was less of like them lecturing us and more just it felt like talking to big siblings and being like, “Hey, what is this?” And that back and forth.

**B:** Yeah

**A:** Explain, explain this.

**B:** Please help.

**A:** I was like, please help explain why this? Yeah, no, it was lovely. I it's one of those things where it's like that was one of the most and then the other thing that was great is like we had researchers, but we also had a bunch of people who were based in the Philippines who were just writers on the book. And so they also had a lot of cultural stories from their families and such. That was super fun to hear them also chime in when the researchers like "this is a thing, right?" And be like, "Oh, yeah, no, my parents or my grandparents would tell stories about this." And hearing them all talk about their different experiences was something that was really cool, and also helped us evolve, help us avoid a problem of essentially making the book feel monolithic, of that, like, there is exactly one Filipino representation.

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** Having, having so many people from different perspectives, kind of contributing to the book and sharing their different stories, and contributing to the way that they wrote the different islands in the settings was super helpful in avoiding and really feeling or avoiding the monolith, the monolith problem. And really feeling like this is a celebration of everything.

**B:** Okay, I'm going to skip the seventh question, because we're already on a roll with on this topic.

**A:** Yeah, of course. Yeah, you're good. You're good. Yeah. Yeah.

**B:** So we'll just go back to it. But you said, you said something about how you guys were like working together. And then there's different backgrounds. And because for me, like reading through it, it, I think it was able to convey that to avoid the monolith

of— Okay, this is Filipino representation, blah, blah, blah. And so that being said, I'm trying to articulate it.

**A:** Yeah, you're good. You're good. Take your time.

**B:** I forgot the question. Um, okay. [Unintelligible] since there's a lot of different backgrounds and stuff. And you mentioned how you said you were you're a part of the Filipino diaspora in America. So aside from having an open dialogue and realizing that there's a different, different backgrounds and how it helped? Was there any, like your personal experience, as part of the diaspora community, did it shape how you approach cultural representation in the game? Like aside from— you have anything to add from that? Like, aside from the fact that you had to, you had to decentralize yourself? Was there any other processes that you've had to do? Or?

**B:** Um, so yes, the short answer is yes. The long answer is, yes, but not necessarily in a, like a formal sense, or something that impacted me like on a day to day basis, like the consciously going reminding myself, I know nothing. This is not about this is about me, but not about me. And making sure that like, being aware that I was one who didn't know the most in the room. The other thing that I really leaned into when we were making Sina Una, I leaned very hard into the disconnect I felt when learning about a culture, Filipino culture and stuff for the first time. For me, for the longest time growing up for me, Filipino culture for my parents was something to, for lack of a better word, be almost ashamed of. It was something that we just didn't talk about, we didn't want to share. And something that I really loved about the approach to Sina Una was approaching it with this almost newfound love and discovery. And this desire to almost deprogram myself of thinking like all of this, this part of me was something to hide, and creating it as something that I wanted to share. And I think

that was something that helped with a lot of the writing was coming from this from the perspective of, “I want people to be excited about this culture, to learn about this culture, to engage with it and discover it”, and feel the way that I did when I was first discovering and reading about the stuff while I was creating the book... and this excitement and wonder, and just like thrill of learning about these people who I am connected to, however distantly. The other thing that my experience really shaped was the, every chapter has a little poems at the front. All of those were written by me based on my own feelings about, yeah, those were all written out as I was doing a lot of reflection about what does it mean to be, being Filipino diaspora and being like, how do you engage with who you are, and who you are when you don't know your roots, and this idea of connectivity and honoring the people and the ancestors who came before you, and honoring spirits. All of that is something that has very cultural significance, but it also had a lot of personal, almost metatextual significance to us working on the project. And that is one of the other things that carries deeply through the book.

**B:** Wow. That's, wow. No, words. I felt very, wow. That was very, that's a very insightful, very beautiful reflection.

**A:** Thank you.

**B:** So, wait, leading into that, it's not here, okay, because the question came up while you were talking about it.

**A:** You're so good.

**B:** The question, sorry. I just wanted to ask, were you able to connect? Like, did you feel like connected, like doing this? Did you feel like you could connect to like other

Filipinos, whether from the diaspora or born in the Philippines? Did you feel like there's a sense of like, okay, we're one big community?

**A:** Oh, yeah, there is a lot more of like, I mean, like, for a long time, I had weird imposter syndrome about being Filipino. Like, I was like, I'm Filipino, but I don't speak language. And I don't really know the food. And I don't do this. And I don't do that. And after this book, I was like, "No, I am Filipino. And it doesn't matter what I do or don't do." And that was super awesome. The other thing that made this book wonderful is like, I'm so much more happy and excited to be like, "yeah, Filipino. Oh, my God." Like, just talking about all the things.

**B:** Represent!

**A:** Yeah, it's given me so much more pride. And cultural pride, because I got to meet some people who were very happy and proud. It's easier to make connections when you're way more open about the things that you can connect about. And so when I'm not like hiding, or like just being like, "Yeah, I mean, I'm Filipino, but—" it was like, "Yeah, no, I'm Filipino." And being proudly Filipino allows me to connect with so many more folks.

**B:** Yeah. Perfect. I think that's a good, I think this is like, this is a sign that more people should D&D.

**A:** Yeah.

**B:** So you felt like connected more cultural pride. So that being said, like, there are ups, but there are also downs. So going back to question seven, were there any... challenges in adapting, like the Headhunter in the Babaylan for Dungeons and Dragons, from a mechanical and narrative perspective?

**A:** So many. Yes. Yes. Yes. The answer is yes, so many. I mean, like I said, I talked a lot about this in the very early second, where I just broke down the full design process. So there's a lot of the challenges sort of when you're designing anything for D&D. But the main specific thing is the framework for D&D is based around a Western assumption of how magic works, and how monsters work, and how like even the categorization of monsters and creatures is... very Christian. It's very Christian, it's very Western. And so like for the Headhunter and the Babaylan, there was a lot of like, like for the Babaylan, it's like, well, when you look at base D&D, you have like your holy casters, like your Clerics and your Paladins and, and your primal casters, like your Druid.

**B:** Yes.

**A:** Where does animism fit into that? Because that's not a god. And kind of like, one of the hardest struggles we had was this thing of D&D is based on this pre this Western presupposition of deities. In an animistic tradition, like many of the indigenous cultures in the Philippines, that doesn't marry. So,

**B:** Yeah

**A:** That was one of the biggest narrative struggles that we had to wrestle with is how do we take all of these things, all of these mechanics in D&D that presuppose the existence of multiple deities?

**B:** Yeah

**A:** How do we make that? How do we remove all of that, like, and the way that those deities are referred to and venerated is very Christian in influence. So we had to do a lot of kind of dissecting and removing bits and re-explaining bits. The other thing that

really challenged us, and this was this came up in like the Babaylan and the Headhunter, but also came up in the mechanics overall, was materials. The things that the the things in D&D that are made that that like are like the equipment and stuff, it presupposes a Western-centric approach to armor and weapons and other different things. And so we had to fully do a whole inventory list of all the equipment in D&D and go, what things can and can't exist? How do we change that? And it's things that you don't even think about, like armor. We did so much research into, like, "did we have plate armor?" Turns out we did.

**B:** We did, yeah.

**A:** Which was like, cool, awesome, that makes things easy. The other thing was, like, for weapons, and this came up for the Headhunter especially, because they have their specialized axes and we wanted to represent them. But we also, that led to a whole other conversation about weapons. One of the things we were like, looking through history, like, "Oh, we don't have bows. Oh, D&D assumes we have crossbows and longbows and shortbows", and there are middling historical accounts about those at best. "Oh no, ranged weaponry is a very big part of the game, what do we do?" And so, like, things like that where it was like, yeah, we were just kind of building the classes and then things we took for granted in the D&D system, we were like, wait a minute, hold on. This is, again, we have to remove the Western perspective and go, "Nope." And like, one of the really weird things was just like, I think for a while we were debating whether or not we wanted to change how the monetary system works, because the monetary system is based on gold. And gold was super common in the Philippines. "What do we do? Do we make it not gold?" I think we ended up settling on just keeping it as gold pieces for the sake of ease of

play. But those were the conversations we were having on a day-to-day basis of all of these weird presuppositions of gold is super valuable, iron is readily available, all these sorts of things, and we're like, we can't make those assumptions. Even such things as, like, iron rust is exposed to seawater. This is an island! These are a bunch of islands! We can't have an iron-based equipment system because everything's made of rust! And it was like, all of those things came up beyond just like the classes, like all those little things. We're just having to figure out, like, what is the core of D&D? What can, what is just sort of like, shine or like narrative flare that we can just sort of remove while still keeping the mechanics and what people love about D&D, while also being true to our culture and our ancestry. But yeah, there was, there were so many things that was like, "Well, we can't include these because we didn't have chess, so what can we do?" And then to a week-long montage of me researching, like, pre-colonial, like, gambling games because gaming set is a thing in the game that is an equipment piece that we had to find a comp for. But yeah, no, it was, there was a lot of challenges, but it, it encouraged us to learn and I, I loved learning about all the things. And really, like, also helps me when I play D&D, not set in Sina Una, of like, avoiding these presuppositions and also being way more flexible with what, like, a sword is made out of, what is armor made out of. It really, it was a super eye-opening experience in that way.

**B:** Okay, so I think we have the last two questions. Okay, it feels more, yeah, it's more, it's more of a broader perspective. So that being said, because you have a lot of insight at saying how you wanted to respect, but there's also a lot of things that you couldn't keep. There are things that you wanted to shine, etc. So at the end of the day, what do you hope as the writer and the game designer that, how, what do

you hope that players take away from playing, from playing Sina Una, or more specifically, the Headhunter or the Babaylan in this whole setting?

**A:** I think, so there are a couple things that I want people to take away from Sina Una as a whole, and I think one of them is something that was one of the weird, unexpected challenges when it came out, was people asking permission to play from us.

**B:** Oh!

**A:** Especially from a lot of our Western friends, a lot of our non-Filipino friends, there were a lot of things like, “Can we play? Like, are we allowed to? Can we engage with this?” And like, the thing I would really want people to take away from, like, reading and playing in Sina Una is that, Sina Una was created as a doorway. It was a means to perpetuate kind of this oral tradition, and the way that we pass down traditions in the Philippines, and marry it with the oral tradition that is built into tabletop role-playing games. I want people to read Sina Una and just feel like they've opened a door to a culture that is oftentimes overlooked, and I want them to feel, like, I want them to experience curiosity, as Sina Una is a starting point, not an end point. There's so much to learn and so much to study, and I would love for people to understand that. And then the other thing I would love for people to take away from, especially if they're playing The Headhunter or The Babaylan, is this broader idea of what fantasy can be, and this understanding of, like, we look at myths and we look at tradition as our inspirations for fantasy, but there are so many other myths and traditions out there that can be just as rich and entertaining and fantastical and awesome. And I would love for people to read this, especially with the knowledge that this is based on the pre-colonial Philippines, and really get a sense of how wide

the world and the inspiration and the people within it are, so that way when they write their own fantasy or explore their own fantasy realms and their own magic and sorcery and adventures like that, they can really see and feel the breadth of things, of real world things that we can draw from, and do so in a way that is respectful and fun. And the other thing I want people to take away from it is that there is a big food section in this book, and it's great. We were immediately like, we have room for a food section, we're putting a food section in.

**B:** Yeah, when I was reading it, I was like, oh, it's like you guys covered a lot of things, like in a whole world-building perspective, aside from mechanicals. Yeah, with the food and then the stories, oh, the lore of the islands. I was like, yeah, okay, we're all set. It feels like there's a guide. Anyway, I might take up too much time.

**A:** You are so good. I have set aside plenty of time for this. I love talking about game design. I knew I was going to run my mouth. So no, absolutely no worries here.

**B:** Alright. Okay, for our last question, we have 10 minutes left. What advice would you give to other game designers attempting to adapt indigenous cultures into TTRPGs? So like, you can take it from a Philippine perspective or just in general.

**A:** Yeah. And this is something like a lot of people have actually asked this about uh for for very since came out. Um Yeah. So advice point one. Yeah. There is a lie historical accuracy, like the term historical accuracy is very much a lie when it comes to designing a fantasy setting. Because like, you hear that a lot when people use it to justify, people almost always use historical accuracy to justify like, sexism, racism, violence and stuff like that. Um and so... allow yourself that freedom to understand like recognize that the past is bad. And recognize that like, sometimes when you're adapting something, you will make those changes, but you can still honor the culture

and recognize those things that don't– aren't compatible with real world values uh and change those. Uh so that is like kind of a starting point. The other half of the lie of historical accuracy is that especially when you're coming from a culture that is non-western, a lot of your historical accounts are going to be filtered through a western lens. And that is something we struggled with a lot in Sina Una was parsing, reading through text and going, alright, so where is the western bias in this and having to sort of extract it. Um and so when people say something is historically accurate or not, they're referencing often times these texts that are built from a colonialist perspective, that are informed with like these colonialist mindset. Um, and really approaching it with that twofold perspective of historical accuracy does not mean that you excuse or you should include uh things in your game that are not fun for players. You should honor them and note them and reference them in an appendix or somewhere in like the discussions about it, but you don't have to include them and two, understand that a lot of your reference texts are probably going to be written from a very white or colonialist perspective. And you're going to have to deconstruct that. Um the other thing, um it goes back to what I talked about when I was brought onto the project as someone who isn't from the Philippines and is diaspora and has been so far removed from this culture for so long. Um, rely on the stories that you like learned growing up if those are the things that you were able to experience. And if you weren't and you didn't have that connection to the culture, understand that you don't have that connection and be brave enough to ask and research and be brave enough to ask the really stupid questions, like: "Did they have plate armor? Did they have iron? What is the what is the equivalent of holy water?" You be brave enough to ask these questions that seem like the game takes for granted. Um take nothing in your experience for granted and just ask and find

yourself a group of people who love your culture and want to explore your culture as much as you do, um and just uh be, be free to sort of dechain yourself from this idea that you have to know everything and you have to be the center and it has to be your experience. Um and then the third thing is that when you write a product that is based on your uh a culture, it is simply going to be a product based on that culture, not the product based on that culture. The, something that we were very careful with Sina Una that we wanted to make sure that when we made Sina Una, we didn't shut the door for other people to make uh Filipino game design for D&D. We wanted this to be representative of the Philippines but not monolithic. We didn't want this to be the Filipino setting. This is the one thing that represents the Philippines, nothing else can and nothing else will. This is it. If you want to learn about the Philippines, this is your one spot. Um remembering that the culture, even if it's your own culture is not a monolith and your experiences are not going to be the same as everyone else's and approaching it from that perspective is really, really important. Uh does that all make sense?

**B:** Yes. Yes.

**A:** Uh there is there is more about the uh the historical accuracy bit. I'm not quoting it well uh because it's been a hot second. Uh but there is a lovely paragraph that past me wrote in the appendix about um what um historical accuracy uh in regards to fantasy... Um there is a very good chunk that goes into more detail about how we uh approach, how you should approach historical accuracy when adapting a culture for a modern gaming, uh, modern gaming sensibilities. Uh it basically boils down to center the people in the now while understanding that– but without uh erasing the past.

**B:** I'm going I will quote you on that. That's very... Yes. Okay. All right. Okay, so I guess that ends our this ends our um interview. Is there anything else you want to add before I formally close?

**A:** Um, not particularly. I I think the only thing is um for a lot of a lot of the game. This is me speaking about Sina Una years removed from the process. So I have the caveat of saying some of my memory might be a little bit fuzzy. I might not be recollecting things. So— take everything I have said with that in mind. Um a lot more accurate statements are going to be reflected in the book's appendix. Um and if something... if something I said conflicts with something in the appendix, trust the appendix because that was written right after the book we had finished production on the main guts of the book. Uh and so that is going to have a more accurate reflection of what my actual thoughts and processes were immediately after creating and writing things. Uh and also thank you for bearing with me for my spotty memory of trying to piece down in there or trying to figure out what did we do five years ago now? Goodness. Four years ago.

**B:** Oh yeah, that was five years ago.

**A:** Yep. Yeah. Um but yeah, I think that's the other thing. Uh and the other thing I will say, it was absolutely lovely talking with you. I'm so glad you were able to uh make uh today um instead of yesterday. I hope everything got resolved. Yeah. Yeah, it's got resolved. Thank you so much.

*[END OF RECORDING]*

## *Appendix F: Informed Consent Form for Pam Punzalan*

### **TITLE OF STUDY**

Roll for Representation: The Analysis of the The Headhunter and Babaylan in Islands of Sina Una

### **PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR**

Maleah Rae Karganilla Frange

Department of Arts and Communication, College of Arts and Science

University of the Philippines, Manila Padre Faura St., Ermita, Manila, 1000

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mkfrange@up.edu.ph

### **PURPOSE OF STUDY**

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, you must understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if anything is unclear or if you need more information.

The purpose of this study is to complete partial fulfillment of the requirements of the researcher's undergraduate thesis for the course BA Philippine Arts (Cultural Heritage and Arts Management). This is done under the supervision of the researcher's co-investigator and thesis advisor, Professor Jose V. Ogatis I.

To be fully informed as the participants of the study, kindly read the following:

#### ***Research Objectives:***

1. To determine how the roles of the Philippine Headhunter and Babaylan were translated as classes for the IoSU setting.
2. To determine the motivation for adding the Philippine Headhunter and Babaylan as classes for the IoSU setting.
3. To understand how the writers connected with their Filipino roots in creating the Headhunter and Babaylan as classes.

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4. To understand the process of creating the build behind the Philippine Headhunter and Babaylan as classes for the IoSU setting while simultaneously maintaining cultural integrity and respect towards the classes' real-life counterparts.

## **STUDY PROCEDURES**

By participating in this study, you will be asked to join the researcher in an interview regarding the process and motivations behind adding the Babaylan and Philippine Headhunter as classes. The interview will take thirty to sixty minutes and will be conducted via online means (Zoom or Google Meet), whichever you prefer. Additionally, the researcher may email you for any follow-up questions imperative to the study. There will be a total of 2 - 3 participants in the study.

The interview will be recorded and transcribed for the purpose of the thesis. The recordings will be safely preserved digitally, and only the researcher and her advisor, and the interviewees if requested, will have access. For the course of the study, the data will be transcribed and kept in a Google Drive folder accessed only by the researcher and advisor. An encrypted/password-protected folder will serve as a backup file to be stored on the researcher's desktop. All interviews will be handled within ethical standards and with the utmost confidentiality.

The researcher aims to publish the thesis once it is completed. Audio and video recordings will be retained for one year after the completion of the study to allow for verification and further analysis if needed. After one year, all recordings will be permanently deleted from both the encrypted storage and Google Drive.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

For this research study, your comments will not be anonymous. Every effort will be made by the researcher to preserve your true character and will not misconstrue any statements made by you to fit her study. Confidentiality will be maintained by keeping notes, interview transcriptions, and any other identifying participant information in a locked file cabinet in the personal possession of the researcher.

However, there is an exclusion of personal information such as the address and contact information of the interviewees. Unless the interviewees wish otherwise, the recordings will be safely preserved digitally, and only the researcher and their advisor, and the interviewees if requested, will have access. For the course of the study, the data will be transcribed and kept in a Google Drive folder accessed only by the researcher and advisor. An encrypted/password-protected folder will serve as a backup file to be stored on the PI's desktop. All interviews will be handled within ethical standards and with the

utmost confidentiality. Audio and video recordings will be retained for one year after the completion of the study to allow for verification and further analysis if needed. After one year, all recordings will be permanently deleted from both the encrypted storage and Google Drive.

#### **CONTACT INFORMATION**

If you have questions at any time about this study, you may contact the researcher, whose contact information is provided on the first page.

Additionally, you may contact the UPMREB Ethics Review Panel, who have sufficiently approved of the study, through the following:

[Name of UPM REB Panel Chair]

Address: Room 126, Ground Floor

National Institutes of Health, UP Manila

623 Pedro Gil St.

Ermita 1000 Manila

Email: upmreb@post.upm.edu.ph

Tel: +63 2 8526-4346

#### **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form. After you sign the consent form, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Withdrawing from this study will not affect the relationship you have, if any, with the researcher. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, the data will be deleted.

**PLEDGE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:**

I, Maleah Rae Karganilla Frange, the principal investigator of the study, formally pledge to ensure the protection of identities and privacy in my research endeavors. The key consideration in protecting privacy and confidentiality in research includes informed consent, confidentiality, and secure data storage. As a researcher, I understand the importance of safeguarding the personal information of the participants involved in this research and ensuring their confidentiality.

This research will abide by the Data Privacy Act of 2012 concerning confidentiality. By adhering to these principles, I can contribute to heritage conservation knowledge while also upholding the trust and confidentiality of those who participate in my research. I recognize and respect the right of every participant to withdraw from the study at any time. The researcher will securely store the documents and data given. After the interview, the researcher will provide the participants with a debriefing on how the data will be used in the study.

Signed:



**Maleah Rae Karganilla Frange**  
Principal Investigator

Noted by:




**Asst. Professor Jose V. Ogatis I**  
Thesis Adviser

## CONSENT

I, Maria Pamela P. Punzalan [Your Name], hereby grant my consent to participate as a key informant for the study to provide insights into the process associated with developing the Babaylan and Philippine Headhunter as classes for the Islands of Sina Una.

I have thoroughly reviewed and comprehended the purpose of the undergraduate thesis titled "*Roll for Representation: The Analysis of the Headhunter and Babaylan in Islands of Sina Una*," including its background, overview, significance, data-gathering protocols, and ethical considerations.

By affixing my signature below, I acknowledge that I have familiarized myself with the contents of the informed consent document. I am aware that the research will involve a semi-structured interview lasting approximately 30 to 60 minutes, which will be audio and video recorded. I understand that all *personal* information, such as address or contact information, shared will be treated with *strict* confidentiality. Additionally, I acknowledge that my participation in this study is voluntary, and I retain the right to withdraw my consent at any stage of the research process.

Participant's Signature over Name:  Maria Pamela P. Punzalan  
4 April 2025

Date:

Should you have any additional questions regarding this request, kindly contact the researcher at +63 9158222818, or email at [mkfrange@up.edu.ph](mailto:mkfrange@up.edu.ph).

## *Appendix G: Interview with Pam Punzalan*

Date of Interview: April 10, 2025

Mode: Zoom

Legend:

- A: Interviewee: Ms. Pam Punzalan
- B: Interviewer: Maleah Rae K. Frange

### *[TRANSCRIPTION OF RECORDING]*

**B:** Okay. Um, hello. Good morning. Uh my name is Maleah Rae K. Frange and I'm a BA Philippine Arts student. And today I'm here with Miss Pam Punzalan, one of the writers and I believe researchers for um the Islands of Sina Una. So if you could please introduce yourself, po.

**A:** Uh, so hi. I'm Pam Punzalan I am a Filipino queer woman currently based in Canada. I am an award-winning designer and editor and I was the lead cultural consultant and editor for the Islands of Sina Una and its follow-up book among other projects.

**B:** Okay. Thank you. So, Um, let's start. Um, were you given any insights as to why they wanted to just include the Headhunter and Babaylan as base classes and not other aspects like the panday etc, etc.

**A:** So, I think a lot of the creative decisions were made purely for artist preference because the for context, the people who wanted to make the islands of Sina Una were diaspora. So to be honest, wala sila talagang alam-alam sa deep knowledge or mythology of the Philippines, right? Eh, alam natin na, pagibig sabihin Pilipinas, maraming islands yan, diba? I mean there are a lot of ethnic groups and ethnic groups within ethnic groups. And that was precisely why they felt the need to tap in on local talent. Uh I was one of the first bridges that they crossed kumbaga because

at the time that they asked for us, I was still working in the Philippines. Pandemya yan eh. So all of us freelance— yeah. The development of the Islands of Sina Una started around 2020. So they were making noise about it, right, around 2019 and then 2020 hits. So all of the talent was really work from home, right?

**B:** Mhm.

**A:** Uh, so some opportunities but mostly a lot of uh problems, right?

**B:** Uh. Yeah.

**A:** Uh but that's a story for another time, no? Um, so the ayun, the the inclusion of those specific tropes are what was most familiar to the diaspora people that were directly involved in the project. Which would have been Joshua Menda Hall at the time, yung former creative director, right?

**B:** Mmhm.

**A:** And then um, Lucia, who is the lead, and McKenzie, who was one of the main designers on the mechanics front, right?

**B:** Um. Yeah.

**A:** Uh... The two researchers that handled a lot of the front loading were not actually what was not actually me. Um it was BJ Recho and uh Joaquin Saavedra, I think, those two.

**B:** Okay.

**A:** Um so that generally it was a very collaborative process. Yung, aliw You know, like people have heard lots of stories, right? about the the supposed headhunting tribe in the north, right?

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** Eh syempre babaylan continues to be a cultural icon, 'di ba? Even if people barely understand exactly what the babaylan is, right?

**B:** Mhm.

**A:** And kada, kada region, ibang definition, right, of what the babaylan does, 'di ba? Like the babaylan legacy in Palawan is very different from 'di ba, from the babaylan legacy, let's say in Benguet or elsewhere, no?

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** Uh but you cannot go into those specificities in a game like Dungeons and Dragons where at the base core, Dungeons and Dragons 5E is imperialist and white.

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** You won't, right? You won't be able to make something truly culturally nuanced.

**B:** Mmm.

**A:** In, in any fashion, right? Because the, the system simply won't allow it. So you are stuck doing what you can, right? And at the end of it all, 'di ba? The point of the book is to sell it.

**B:** Yes.

**A:** And since those two were the most popular ones, how do you explain Panday for example to an American audience?

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** Noh? Uh pero pag pinag-uusapan mo yung mga puti, uy headhunter, they're gonna think, wow, that's so that's so exotic, right? That's what they're gonna think, 'di ba?

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** Or babaylan. Oh yeah, I've heard of that before, right? So and it's not just the white people who will think that. Your, your brothers and sisters in the diaspora will think so as well.

**B:** Right.

**A:** So out of everything, right, the decision was, at several layers. Like what is most familiar to the foreign audience, like any kind of thing that they could latch on to.

**B:** Yes.

**A:** What is most familiar to the team, right? Because as researchers, uh that in itself is also a problem. You know, Philippine Studies is a field that should be a lot more varied and wide and yet here we are due to the lack of funding and you know, other bullshit from our government, right?

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** So, right? So it's it's hard because people will always say, why didn't you this do this or that? And I'm just like, well, have you tried fucking doing anything related to our culture and expect someone to pay for you? They're not going to help you.

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** Di ba?

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** So that's the long and short answer to why we chose those two, right?

**B:** Okay. Thank you, Po.Um So the second question, medyo related po siya. So

**A:** Mhmm

**B:** There weren't any other alternative class concepts before the headhunter and babaylan? Kasi you said po 'di ba the most familiar to the team and diaspora. Were there any other like, okay, maybe we could include that, but then you thought, eh, maybe not.

**A:** From what I remember, huh? No. Uh, a lot of it, like the the constraint as well was because there there had already been a plan in place to fulfill a Kickstarter project product, right?

**B:** So. Yeah.

**A:** Uh, I think a lot of the alternative ideas came in the second book. Which has another set of jobs, right? Uh or that that I think got went a little more original rather than like direct homages to an aspect of Philippine culture. No? Uh, but no, I – from what I recall and I could be wrong because it's it feels like it's been a century since we developed that. Uh, we did not have–

**B:** Five years.

**A:** Yeah, I know. five years, it's crazy.

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** Uh, pero yeah, I don't I don't think um, I don't think there was a lot of room either because we also wanted to focus on like yung new monsters, the setting, adventures, right? Because the point was to make a setting. Uh, icing on the cake lang yung classes eh. Kasi D&D is a combat-based system.

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** If you don't introduce some kind of combat, you know, people are going to ask you is it really D&D 'di ba?

**B:** Yeah. So.

**A:** For better or for worse. Kasi syempre um then this is off the record. Dungeons and Dragons is my least favorite system even if I work a lot for Dungeons and Dragons. I don't. It's just you know, everybody plays it. So what's a girl to do?

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** I– I have a wife. I have to work, right? So I don't have a choice, right? So.

**B:** It brings in the money.

**A:** Exactly, precisely, you know, people can say D&D is evil and I'm like, well, are you paying my bills? I don't think so.

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** You know. So...

**B:** Um, alright. Ay, actually wait. Um I was able to, di ko po na-mention but um uh Miss Makenzie was able to get in touch with me so I interviewed her.

**A:** Oh great, wonderful.

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** So she said a lot of insights. She said, nakatulong po kayo ng sobrang-sobra.. So in in saying so, she said that um, when she for the third question because it I'm it's tackling how um the Philippine headhunter and babylan were adapted into D&D mechanics. So she said that she approached you and the other researchers a lot. She said, I might do— she in fact she said she said she came in with the mindset na sinasabi niya, if “I do this wrong, yell at me.” Yung sinasabi niya po. So, did you help were you able to help po in adapting the head hunter and into D&D mechanics or..?

**A:** Yeah, I did take a look at the last iteration. Uh, but in terms of like guiding through the process, that was more BJ from what I remember. Kasi, BJ, uh, I think you might you've probably stumbled across this book in school already. Barangay, right? Because Barangay is the seminal text when it comes to studying pre-colonial. Like everybody has to read Barangay or are you really a Philippine Study scholar? There's no choice, right? It is it is the book, right?

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** Flaws and all, it is the cornerstone of how we understand pre-colonial culture. Noh? Um, BJ was the one who had read that from cover to cover at the time that Sina Una was developed. Uh for me, I was offering more the queer and feminine perspective. Um because the the problem with Barangay is, you know, beyond the fact that it's written by a white person, it's written by a man.

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** Right? Um and as we know, guys don't know the shit 'di ba? About anything. Noh? So, BJ provided the historical accuracy and the mechanical know-how. with D&D mechanics. Whereas I was the one who was like, maybe this might be a little offensive, you know, possibly, right? Um, especially since one of our other friends who was working at the project at the time, consultant he was a contributor.

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** Uh he is a gay man from Palawan and his lineage is direct to Babaylan in Palawan. "So when Mahar would step in and tell BJ, "Huy, gago ka." BJ would have to listen because here is a cultural object literally telling you you're wrong. Yeah. Di ba? So that was it it was– the the thing with the development of Sina Una and what makes it so historically interesting to anybody in Philippine Studies and art history for the Philippines is that, um, you know how Western projects tend to presume a hierarchy. Noh?

**B:** Yes.

**A:** So you know, bossing says this, you follow, no?

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** Uh Sina Una was more collaborative, right? So while we had people on paper uh and leads, everyone was weighing in on what they thought on– because – precisely because you know, we had diaspora folks who with much love to them. They had no idea what they were getting into when they said that they wanted to do a Philippine-inspired book. In fact, uh my my favorite asterisk, not really, incident of dealing with uh Paladin, sorry, Joshua. Because you know, Makenzie and I are very good friends. Joshua and I, we talk. We're not [unintelligable] anymore.

**B:** Okay.

**A:** He's too guy for me, I guess. Anyway... Um, he, Joshua could not understand why me, Joaquin and BJ were so insistent on the the ritual of the Betelnut. That is very important, 'di ba, to Philippine pre-colonial– Like you can't escape the fucking Betelnut. That is important as hell, right?

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** Um, Joshua could not conceive it. He immediately thought in his American diaspora brain that it was disgusting and weird. And I was like, listen up, buddy, that is Philippine heritage. If you are doing a pre-colonial book, you better fucking have betel nuts. So it wasn't even really the whole like the jobs were ironically the easiest part of translating the setting. It was all of the other things around it that took a lot more work and I guess compromise and education. Uh like Lucia was a lot more receptive because she she had – like Lucia had a greater sense of when to step back and listen and try to do an homage to original cultures than Joshua did. So may may kasama pang konting tension when it comes to like, you know, diaspora and local. Kasi, the, let's also call the white elephant in the room here. Manilenyo ang laht ng mga writers ng Sina Una you know? With the exception of Mahar, but even Mahar comes from Manila, right? Sure, Batangueño ako, but I grew up in Manila. Right?

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** Right? So how are we dirty imperialist fucking Manileños supposed to do homage to living heritage from from tribes, indigenous people who are persecuted by people like us? Right? So that that it was a it was an interesting experience. Tapos D&D pa. Parang huh? Of all the systems that you could choose and yet that's the one that is most popular.

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** So you're picking an ineffectual hammer to try to slam a square nail into a circular hole.

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** 'Di ba? Right? So Yeah. I'm glad the book is so popular even despite all of those problems, right?

**B:** Yeah. I think uh when I was reading it, I think there the team was successful in, ano naman, like showing that the Philippines wasn't a monolith like, ito yung, representation ng Philippines dapat. Nakikita ko naman po, like, I saw that there was um at least like other cultures like oh, okay, nice. They're in this thing for this thing. Okay, great.

**A:** Yeah. Yeah.

**B:** Yeah. Oh,

**A:** It's wonderful. Yeah. Interesting na din kasi– Oh yes.

**B:** Yes, po. Ay no, no, no. Keep going, po.

**A:** I was just saying na on the table top history front. Uh, Sina Una was reputedly the inspiration for a lot of people from other countries trying to do their own setting. Uh like, I know that there is a setting called Koboa, K O B O A. Latin American yata or it's either Latin American or African. I'm not sure which one. Uh where when they saw that Sina Una happened, they wanted to do their own thing. Um

**B:** Wow.

**A:** So you know, flawed as a project is kasi you know, no project is perfect. Noh? Ksi we're all human, right? Like, no. Um, uh, it opened the floodgates for others. Now, again, you can argue to death on is it worth, is it worth doing D&D or not? That that's that that could be an entirely new thesis, right? Um and I would not actually encourage you doing that.

**B:** Okay.

**A:** Um. But mostly, mostly because like mostly because I feel like a thesis about whether it is worth doing Dungeons and Dragons or not as a as a as a, you know, a production of cultural, right?

**B:** Cultural setting.

**A:** It's that's more a philosophical discussion

**B:** Yes. than it is a artistic discussion.

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** Right? So.

**B:** Yes.

**A:** We should just focus on other easier things.

**B:** Yeah. Yeah. And I I suck with philosophy. Um wait, before we continue with the interview, po. Um, I I just want to remind you po that this will be like transcribed into the thesis.

**A:** No problem.

**B:** So.

**A:** That's okay. I'm 40. I really don't care.

**B:** Oh okay. Kasi, I'm scared like I'm scared po like because ako din po kasi minsan when I'm so passionate, I tend to like um say expletives po. So are you okay with that—

**A:** Yeah

**B:** Oh okay, okay. I just want to be sure because I don't want to like, tarnish your character or anything.

**A:** Anything that helps your research. I used to be a master student for literary and cultural studies. I get it. So...

**B:** Okay.

**A:** Anything that helps your research, honestly.

**B:** Okay. Thank you so much. Alright. So let's continue, po. Um, how were you able to help the other uh like help the heads or other writers balance authenticity to uh indigenous roles and cultural sensitivity while ensuring the classes remain playable and engaging in a fantasy setting?

**A:** So, interestingly, playability for us was the lowest priority.

**B:** Oh.

**A:** Which might be um which might be questionable for most hardcore dungeons – because they they want a balanced game, right?

**B:** Yes.

**A:** Air quotes, balanced game.

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** Again, you know, I I like darling, I am a designer of literally every table existence. It's like, don't fucking talk to me about balance. That is an illusion. Right? Uh my my very strong feelings about game design aside... Playability was the last priority because the real priority of Sina Una was to connect people to a heritage that they do not often have access to. And to do it in as nuanced and earnest and compassionate way as possible. Because to date, there's only ever been one Philippine-inspired thing in an official D&D supplement and that is my work.

**B:** Oh.

**A:** Journeys through the Radiant Citadel is a supplement uh, official, for Dungeons and Dragons. I wrote between Tangled Roots. I am the first ever Filipina from the Philippines, huh, not diaspora to contribute to an official work.

**B:** Oh, congrats.

**A:** Makenzie. 'Di ba? And Makenzie is the only Pinoy that they have ever hired. So, you know, Philippines and D&D despite all of the love that Filipino players have for Dungeons and Dragons, we as a people are invisible to these people.

**B:** There's not much like representation, po?

**A:** There's none. And when when my adventure came out, uh in Radiant Citadel, people could see its effects. I was getting comments like, I am so emotional that I can actually see my language in a Dungeons and Dragons book. So basically, and excuse my French, fuck playability. The point was to make sure that you could see yourself in the work or something familiar to you. One of the side things that we paid a lot of attention to for example was food. Because what is a Philippine— 'di ba? What is a Philippine setting if it doesn't have good food. Right?

**B:** Mhm

**A:** So those were the things that mattered to us, representation, um passion and I guess aesthetic. The CEO was very careful to choose the right artists and also our writers all wanted to bring something familiar to the table. We – one of our diasporic writers is James Mendes Hodes. He's also well known in the tabletop circle. And he's Fil-Am. And he ended up going all the way back, I think to his grand aunt who had written right. I forgot it's a known book. I just don't remember what, but he's related to someone who wrote one of the premier— Yeah, you might know what I'm talking about already. It was a premier folklore and myths for for children. James' aunt, his tita, was the one who wrote that or was part of it. and he went all the way back to that to try to make an adventure as an homage to that city. Di ba? So again, like if you can't play it, well, that wasn't really the point in the first place. Um and and if that is apparently a problem, then why'd you buy our book, man?

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** So like I've gotten a lot of interesting comments from people about, oh, but it's not really D&D and I'm like, oh, so you mean D&D like white people fantasy murder hobo. That's the Dungeons and Dragons you want. Oh, okay. Well, then I guess I don't want to fucking play with you.

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** So—

**B:** I I think there was a I read a thesis po uh doing doing the what you call this? Related literature of the thesis. D&D is very like— like there are there are modern attempts now to like, okay, include other cultures. Um, but then it people are always seeing it from a Eurocentric, the swords and sorcery, swords and seer sort of—

**A:** Yeah, Swords and Sorceries, yeah.

**B:** Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So, yeah.

**A:** You got a lot of reading to do. Cuz I know I know you might already be close to finishing, but like like taking the interview we hat off and the former teacher hat on. Um, you cannot critique Dungeons and Dragons without understanding that the man who created it is a he is the most, sorry, was because he's very dead now, right?

**B:** Um. Yeah.

**A:** He was the most white bread of white Catholic American dudes that you could ever possibly meet. He was bioessentialist to the core. Um, he reputedly stole work, fun fact. Um to make yeah, right? You Gary Gygax and um

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** Overall not pleasant human being.

**B:** Yes. Uh

**A:** Like uh and I say this with a lot of love to the many friends I have who work for D&D. You know. Like um, I have had a very good conversation for example with

Jeremy Crawford, the current modern architect of Fifth Edition, you know. Um, I've talked to Peter Atkinson who used to be involved in Wizards of the Coast, right? They know the legacy that they're dealing with. But they also know that like the community that they're handling are frankly players who just cannot conceive of any reality outside of themselves. You know, and Dungeons and Dragons reflects that. It is very much not like Pathfinder. It's its more progressive sister.

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** Noh? Uh and nor is it like any of the many other table top games that are just like, fuck alignment, right? What's balance? Noh?

**B:** Yes.

**A:** Uh or dungeons actually do kill you, right? You don't get to conquer the dungeon, the dungeon eats you, right? So, it's a it's a lot. Dungeons and Dragons is such an interesting um game system. That's also why I don't like it. Yeah.

**A:** Okay. I don't. Like it was my love for the team of Sina Una that that carried me through.

**B:** And yeah, like you said po since you didn't focus on playability, did that um since yeah, you didn't focus on playability and you're not fond of the D&D setting. That also helped with like at least tolerating the project because at least we're you're sharing it to—

**A:** Oh yeah.

**B:** —other people. Oh.

**A:** Because at the end at the end of the day, 'di ba? If you are a game designer and you want to take this seriously, at the end of the day, you must be professional. Noh? You you like talk to any corporate person, how many corporate people say, “oh my

god, I love my job,” right? Like Come on, you know. Even even your most passionate teachers have their off base.

**B:** Yes, yeah, yeah. Right.

**A:** So that's the fallacy. 'di ba? That's the fallacy of people who work in hobbyist spaces. Akala nila its all fun ang games. In actuality, game designers have the least fun with games more often than not. Kasi trabaho nila 'yun eh. No. Uh so for me, yeah, I have all of these opinions, but the end of it all was there was a project that needed to be done. It needed to be done in the most cleanest possible way with the most care, the most nuance, especially since we were handling a cultural object. It'd be one thing if it was just kung ano man or whatever, 'di ba? This was supposed to be a love note to pre-colonial Philippines, right? We did not want to offend people. We wanted people to become curious and we wanted those who knew what we were doing to look upon our work with appreciation for how we interpreted.

**B:** And that well, that being said, um, was there any specific indigenous roles or symbols or maybe traditions that they wanted or that you thought would be best to include in um not just in Sina Una but like specifically in the classes of the Babaylan and the Headhunter.

**A:** No, we wanted to, we wanted to straddle the line of um specificity and generalism because for one, we were a project that had not hired somebody to literally go to a tribe and ask them for permission if we could use this piece of heritage. Because you know, in, in social anthropological ethics, no, that is what you should be doing. You should be asking for permission. You should be finding some way to give back to the community whose heritage you are representing.

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** Otherwise, it's cultural appropriation.

**B:** –appropriation. Yeah.

**A:** Noh? So and uh, you know, beyond that, we were also again, uh a bunch of I guess kids who know some things but don't know everything. So we were in no way experts. Right? Uh, we none of us were even historians, none of us held any kind of specialization. I think I was the closest person to have a specialization in some kind of cultural studies because I literally studied it, right?

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** Um, and then Mahar would have been the other person as someone who had like a direct line to heritage. Yeah. But beyond that, no. So we were very careful to um to check in like, hey, can you look for example at this tattoo? Is it appropriate to use this kind of image? No. I'm pretty sure that if people had a deeper read of Sina Una as a cultural object, they'd find a lot of cracks despite our best efforts, but we did what we could.

**B:** So, basically, you just use, okay, you just use whatever the knowledge is and whatever available texts there are.

**A:** Yeah.

**B:** –rather than, okay. I'm just I'm just writing it down. I'm sorry if there are any lapses and silence.

**A:** Oh no, no, no problem.

**B:** Okay. Alright. So moving on, um, So how did the team navigate the balance between historical accuracy and creative liberties in designing these classes? Since you wanted to straddle the line between specificity and generality.

**A:** So I think the only time that... Basically, any time that there was some kind of question about whether something was appropriate or not, the main text of reference is really Barangay. So the normal questions that would be fielded to researchers

during the creation of Sina Una was, hey, is X thing in this? Like, what did people wear on this island? And then we'd have to look at Barangay. And the answer, again, from the oracles would either be, we have no idea, or Barangay kind of has this, right? And then it would be a flurry of research of all kinds of sources. So that was more it. Historical accuracy is a little tricky, because even then you kind of understand that there's no such thing as you getting accurate.

**B:** There's not a lot of text, and if there were, it could have been like, yeah.

**A:** Exactly, right. Or it could have been taken from the perspective of someone who was ultimately an auteur, right? An auteur, and not somebody properly immersed in the culture, and with an eye for respect. So that was mostly it. It was mostly just people writing their thing in their little holes, and then coming to us with questions, and then checking.

**B:** A lot of back and forth.

**A:** A lot of back and forth, and then occasionally be like, hey, Pam, is this offensive? And I'd be like, either hell yes, like on a scale of one to 10, I'd be like, yeah, or I guess, right?

**B:** Excuse me. Okay. So sorry. Here, okay, since we're aiming at with the historical accuracy and all, since it's difficult, were there any other, like, what are the biggest challenges in adapting the Headhunter and the Babaylan for D&D?

**A:** Like I said, those are the easiest parts. Everything else in the setting, that was a little trickier, right? Because the job with the classes, sorry, I play Final Fantasy XIV, so I say job instead of class, right? Class, class, right? With any class in D&D, you already have a set template, right? It's going to be difficulty X, that has to have these stats, it has to have these abilities, or these are the things that you can draw from, right? Pero with setting, and like I mentioned, the infamous Betelnut case, right?

Like, how do you explain to people who grew up American, rather than Filipino, with all of the ingrained imperialism and colonialism and Catholic trauma, that this is a cultural thing, right? To your Ninunos, and they might not even be your fucking ancestors, they just happen to be Filipino too. This was important, right? So that really was the challenge, having to remind members of the team, especially Joshua, because McKenzie and Lucia were just like, oh, we trust you. It was a wholesale, you got this, right? But then we had to hold the hands of the other Diasporic members and go, "No, please remember this is culture." And then we also had to deal with the false assumption, right? That we're making a Dungeons and Dragons game, it has to be this and that. Again, are you going to compromise your desire and your honest desire to make something Filipino-inspired on the off-chance that a Dungeons and Dragons fan will find your game imbalanced? We have had some playtesters for the second book, right? Be very harsh about the designs for the new classes that are supposed to be part of the second book. And alam mo naman, gamers are the worst enemy of game designers. They always think that they are better than you, which is really fucking funny to me. Girl, I have designed so much, and the only response I tend to tell these people is, well, did the publisher hire you? Because last I checked, pangalan ko ang nasa libro diba, right? So ibig sabihin nun, magaling naman ako sa trabaho ko diba, right? Eh ikaw?

**B:** Naglalaro ka lang, andun ka lang.

**A:** Girl, sit down. Or stay in your lane, bitch, right? But yeah, anyway, that aside, there were a lot of people who were very harsh about the jobs and that they wanted to rewrite it. And the constant critique was, it's not balanced, it's not balanced. And I'm like, well, Edi don't play it. Di naman toh video game, diba? Because it's a different matter.

**B:** It's very flexible.

**A:** It's very flexible, right? At the tabletop, if you don't like something, then just don't fucking touch it. If it's a video game, you don't have a choice, then you can get mad.

**B:** Yes.

**A:** It's literally stopping you from playing. But in a tabletop, what is stopping you? You're the boss.

**B:** Yeah, because you have liberties to change it.

**A:** Yes. And you can also keep your mouth shut when you do.

**B:** They're like, why are you going to tackle it? I'm like, okay, if I don't know this. Yeah, makes sense.

**A:** You're looking at the face of someone who has to deal with playtesters all the time. For context, I am the lead designer for the Dagger Isles supplement. The Dagger Isles supplement is a Southeast Asian inspired supplement for a game called Blades in the Dark.

**B:** Oh.

**A:** Yes, I'm the one heading that project. And I got some of the most ridiculous complaints. You know, Sino Uno is easy compared to these chuckle fucks that I was dealing with at Dagger Isles. So one of the complaints I got was from a white guy saying, what are all these made up words? You know, why are you doing that?

**A:** Wow.

**B:** Just because it sounds cool. So I told him. "Pare, lenguahe ko yan. It's my language. I'm not making it up to be cool. It's literally my heritage." So, syempre tumahimik ung gago. And I'm like, fuck this piece of shit, right? So I went on my blue sky and I told people, hey, politely, fuck off.

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** Because I made this game not to talk to you. I made this game and this table to represent my people.

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** Brown women, Filipinas, Canadian fast sports, very gay. If you are not any of these things, then you're welcome to play. But if you don't like it, I don't care.

**B:** May representation ka na. Ako naman

**A:** Exactly. That's what Sina Nna, I think, for as long as it persists, we'll always have to deal with. Because it's Dungeons and Dragons. Dungeons and Dragons. Yeah. You're always going to get the white people going on. You have so many books of white shit. Baldur's Gate, for God's sake, the whitest fucking video game you could possibly play. Faerun, made by Ed Greenwood, another very white man. He's very nice. But he's also very exceedingly white. I've met him twice. He's based in Ontario. He has a beard longer than half my body. He's gay. And he's very white. If you wanted a white man's game, then play his shit. His game. Don't play my shit. Play his shit.

**B:** Yeah. Makes sense. I forgot to say, but there's a something for everyone. And this is ours.

**A:** The fallacy is people tell you, you should make a game that is fun for everyone. But the truth is, the moment you design for something, and your mindset is fun for everyone, your game will be unfun. Because you cannot design for everyone. You need to design for a specific audience. And sometimes fun is not fun for everyone. The fun of Dungeons and Dragons is categorically anti-feminist. It has been for years. The white dude comes in, saves random village, picks a damsel in distress. Have you seen the old art? I've never seen so many titties in my life. I read the older texts for first edition Dungeons and Dragons. They had a villainess called the

Amazonian. Are you fucking kidding me? Those are the roots of Dungeons and Dragons. And people still play that. And they will still look you in the eye as a brown person and say, well, it's fun for me. And I'm like, "So what you're telling me is that it's fun to kick the shit out of a woman whose skin color is not yours." Fun for everyone is bullshit. Because normally, the fun that they say is for everyone is the cis het white American standard of fun, which Sina Una, to bring it back to the discussion, is not. And because it's not, it does have its cracks. It does have its tension points. And it did have to compromise many aspects of Dungeons and Dragons in order to resist that system's colonial underpinnings.

**B:** You had to de-center a lot of the colonialism.

**A:** Post-colonial reading na ang Sina Una. Whether people were cognizant that that was what they were doing or not. You don't wake up one day and go, I'm going to fight the post-colonial system. You only do that if you are actually a post-colonial studies scholar. Rarely will you meet an artist that will just wake up one day and go like, fuck the popo. In a specific fashion.

**B:** Moving on. You mentioned you were here in the Philippines when it was being made in the pandemic pa po. I changed the question when I sent it to you. Did your experiences as part of the Filipino community, as someone who was born here, shape how you approach cultural representation in the game? Since you lived here, did you feel like you were more comfortable in certain aspects?

**A:** Oh yeah, definitely. Although this is less about, I think, because understanding subject positionality is really important. One of the greatest fallacies of cultural studies, sorry, cultural sensitivity and cultural consultancy is that just because you are part of a lived experience means that you are an authority. It goes against all logic because people say, well, you should get somebody who is from that lived

experience. And I'm like, yes, but they are still one person. My gay experience is very different from the gay experiences of many of my peers. The same applies to anybody else who comes at me. But that said, in this specific case of writing *Sina Una*, it vested in me a lot of confidence on several fronts. One, I was living the experience of being a Pinoy who was born and bred basically in Manila. As born and bred as I could be because TLDR, I was born during the EDSA revolution. My parents fled in 1985 and then we fled when I was eight months old. Right after my mom had celebrated EDSA, we moved all the way to America and we bounced over to Canada. I grew up there for eight and a half years and I came back in 1995. So 1995 all the way until 2022. Pinoy na Pinoy ako. But that meant that I had, whether I had studied it or not, the perspective of someone local. And beyond that, even with the pandemic, I had access. It was easier for me to talk to people on our time zone. To absorb local news, to research on related issues versus the American divide that diasporic peers experience. The diasporic experience is an experience of wounding. That's how a lot of people put it, right? There are many approaches to being diaspora. And some of the greatest trends are you try to render yourself invisible, meaning you're not Filipino. You're pretending to be white in order to pass. Or you cling so hard to your roots, but you have no access to your roots. So you feel unmoored, right? There's no middle ground when it comes to the diaspora. And that wounding means that they are as foreign to the lived experiences of the Philippines. As, let's say, the richest of the rich in our country back home are to the poorest of the poor. *Delulu yung mga ibang mayaman*. So the Philippines is like, are you living in the same country? No, obviously you're not because their money isolates them. From what you go through and what I went through when I was back home. Even my experience now as someone who was migrated back to Canada means that I am

insulated from a lot of what's happening back home. And if I can feel that weird, I'm neither here nor there. Imagine growing up like that and telling yourself as a diasporic person, I want to write about home. What is home? Americans don't like you because you're brown, but Filipinos don't think you're Filipino because [unintelligible] kababayan. That's the usual argument that a lot of people have, right? Diaspora are not really Filipino, but I'm like, well, their blood is as brown and coconut as yours, man. They just speak English. On many fronts, yes, I felt like I had more authority, but it had very little to do with the fact that I was ethnically Filipino and I was local. I think it was more because I had already been trained as a scholar to know how to distance myself from cultural objects. When to immerse and when to jump back in, how to approach things with academic humility. And then from that positionality of academic humility and compassion, how do you translate that again into art? How do you make the art accessible to other people who are coming usually with good intentions to absorb your work? You'll rarely ever meet the weird gamer that will buy your work just to hate on it. Why would you throw money to hate on something? Yes, there are people who exist who do that, and I really think that they need help. But more often than not, people will come to your work with an open mind. Maybe they'll be disappointed. Maybe they won't. But when they entered, they were in a position of neutrality or excitement. So the point was, you need to make these people curious. You don't need to drive them away. So how do you do that? When what is memes for us back home, they wouldn't know shit because they had never gone upstairs. We ended up having the funniest conversations off the record for Sena Una. Talking about, let's say, the experiences of net cafes. No such thing in America. Why would they need a net cafe? I live, for example, in the suburbia in Ontario. So I'm very far away from a major city. And the city that we're technically a

part of is also super quiet. Kids don't end up on their phones over here. They can literally go out, walk in the park and touch grass for hours. Hours and hours. Their idea of fun is throwing axes, tobogganing in the snow, trees. And mind-boggling, right? If you're from Manila, you're like, what trees? So those are very different experiences. Those are the worlds that diasporic kids grow up in. And of course, it changes a little bit depending on where you are. But the point is, there's a lot of cultural exchange that was happening. When you realize that, yeah, my experiences are not universal to yours. Now, how do we work together? And if that's the case, who is our audience here? Is it the audience back home where they will understand these things intrinsically? Or at least be able to ask their Lola or their Lolo or their mom or their dad? Or is it the diasporic people who have literally no fucking idea about what these things are? As for an answer to that, I think we were trying to do both. We were trying to hit both people who knew and people who did not know. Understanding that even people who supposedly knew, especially the ones in Manila, also are sort of disconnected from pre-colonial heritage.

**B:** Yes. Yeah, I think Makenzie said that in answering this question. But from my perspective po, at least from what I've seen, I think it was successful naman because a lot of my friends and I, when we were playing it, I think one of my friends even had to use it for their thesis. We're like, oh, this is so, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. It's more of an art book, but we had to play it. It's a very short campaign. But they used Sina Una a lot. Okay, we got very excited. And I think it was, I'm not sure from the diaspora part, but at least for us, "UY, Philippines!" So we were super excited. So I think at least that goal was met. But, yeah.

**A:** Good. I think Lucia would be very happy to hear that. Yeah. I just need to get in contact with her. She's a MIA these days.

**B:** Oh, yeah. I hope she's doing okay.

**A:** You had a struggle trying to find her. It's the same for all of us, honey. The world's on fire. It's sometimes hard to contact our friends.

**B:** Yeah. I hope they're doing okay. So, in number nine, it kind of relates to your experience as a scholar for this. Is there any, what kind of, did you do any extra historical or cultural research to ensure that the, I wouldn't say.. authenticity, or at least the closest representation to the Headhunter and the Babaylan? Aside from the text of Barangay, were there any other resources that you used? Or..?

**A:** I'm not sure. Because, yeah, I was brought in for the last iteration and to handle more setting and general stuff, right? But I do, I vaguely recall that, yes, BJ and Joaquin worked quite hard to try to find other alternative sources. Even just deep diving on Google Scholar and et cetera. They were looking to see if there was anything else. Because none of us had any direct academic contacts. Nor were they from the areas of this or that. I think the closest thing that we had for babaylan was Mahar. So, Mahar weighed in whenever he could about the babaylan specifically, because that is his heritage, right? As for the headhunter, well, we did what we could.

**B:** Yeah. It's so difficult finding stuff about the Headhunter. I had to ask for, I asked my anthropology teacher. And she referred me to Barangay. I'm like, okay, well.

**A:** It's oral history, palagi. If you happen to have a friend who has this or that, or an ancestor. Or the equivalent of your senior grand-titas and titos making chismes about people long dead. That is my experience as a Batangueño. My family were related to the katipuneros in Taal. So, some of my great-great-great titas and titos used to get together. So, occasionally my father would drive up to Taal and spend the day listening to them making chismes about people long dead. And one of my, I think, my

great-great-aunt was a girl who watched Rizal get shot.

**B:** Oh, dang!

**A:** That was her claim to fame. So, occasionally I would tell everybody, like, oh yeah, I saw him get shot. Dlaaga lang ako..! So, when people ask me about Taal history, I'm like, I've got plenty to say. But if you ask me about Babaylan and Headhunter, I'm like, I don't fucking know. Read Barangay, I guess. So, you make do with the pieces that are left to you. Which is really the tragedy of any colonized country. Your history is fragmented and you need to do the psychological and research equivalent of archaeology. You're digging shit up, you don't know what it means. You're making a lot of assumptions now. Like, was this a toothpick or was this a spear? I don't know. Or is it just a piece of stick?

**B:** I'm so sorry, my cat is doing something. He's hungry, I thought I fed him.

**A:** Cats will always be hungry.

**B:** Yeah, I'll just ignore him for now. Okay, the last two questions are, we are in the last leg po. So, for the second to the last question. Since you said the aim here was to reach out to Filipino people, whether part of the diaspora or in the Philippines. What do you hope players, whether Filipino, diaspora, or maybe someone outside of the culture in general. What do you hope that players take away from playing Sina Una? More specifically for this thesis, playing as a headhunter or a babaylan.

**A:** Well, of course, I'd hope that they'd be able to have fun. Even if, how do I put this? I'd hope that they'd be able to taste the world of the book. And hopefully, playing as a babaylan or as a headhunter will enrich that experience rather than detract from it. Because the real sell is that this is a vision, one vision only, of what a pre-colonial fantasy Philippines could look like. It's one path among many that can be taken. Especially if other designers decide to make their own versions of Sina Una or

their own versions of a pre-colonial fantasy Philippines in any kind of setting. So, I don't aspire to change anybody's minds. Because that's not my job. Unless you pay me, in which it becomes my job. That is part of what I do, cultural consultancy. Occasionally, people will pay me a sweet amount of dollars to be like, Pam, why is this offensive? And then I'm going to have to debate with you on why it's offensive. But in terms of the game itself, I don't aspire to change minds. But I do aspire, and I think a lot of the team would agree with me, to, as I mentioned, curiosity, intrigue, and fun. Because it's a different flavor from Dungeons & Dragons, and that was a selling point. And not just that it's a different flavor, it is something that tastes like home. That isn't just standard, like if you wanted something standard, go in the DMG, or go in the Dungeon Masters Guild. So much standard, white bread stuff over there. Sina Una wanted to be something special. And wanted to show you another way in which you could use Dungeons & Dragons to connect with something a little bit more familiar.

**B:** Would you say it would be like, in a way, to educate in a way, but by having fun at the same time? Or at least expose people that this is a thing.

**A:** I think more exposure, yeah. Education is an interesting word, because people tend to presume that education cannot be fun. And that when we say education, we mean, we have very rigid ideas of what education entails. When in fact, human beings keep learning unless they're dead. And one of the ways that we learn best is through play. When we are in a setting that you're not actually thinking about learning. You're thinking about grabbing at experiences, at understanding what they mean. It's the standard thing of any tabletop, where you ask the questions of your GM. What's in the room? What does she look like? And then sometimes it's in those descriptions that you'll have an out-of-character discussion of like, I don't know that.

And then you're going to end up talking about it. And for something like Philippine Heritage, just imagine the possibilities behind that when you're dealing with somebody who is either diasporic and therefore not connected to home, Manilenyo or Filipino and didn't know that this is part of their culture, or fucking white and doesn't even under can't even pronounce the name, right? You can end up with so many fascinating discussions and you're not in what we traditionally understand to be an educating setting. You're at a table with friends where the stakes don't feel so high, where you're not worried about grades, where you're not worried about judgment, right? True education happens when you're playing, not when you're in the classroom.

**B:** Mm. It's more no, it's more nuance, I guess. So Yeah

**A:** Yeah. Like if you're a video game fan for example, you're educating yourself constantly on how to fuck with the system. Right?

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** And you you get familiar with it, right? You know which NPC to go to for that thing, right? And those are training your critical thinking skills. You're learning so much more in play than you are in school. It's not to say school isn't important because of course. Right? When you change those stakes when you change the stakes and you change the perspective and when you understand that play makes us human, you open your mind to so many more possibilities.

**B:** That that's wow. That's uh I I will directly quote you on that.

That's very that's a good um way to what do you call this? to summarize this the answer for this question. Yeah. Um, so, for the last question, oh, because we're I don't want to take more of your time.

**A:** It's fine.

**B:** Um, so, what advice would you give to you know, other game designers or consultants attempting to adapt indigenous cultures into TTRPGs. So, I wrote a whole essay about this actually. Um, where and I you can remind me to link you if you need it for reviewed literature or whatever or you're just bored and you want to for some reason you want to read more of my words, right? Um I cannot speak on a universal level and I refuse to because the act of design and designing something for play is intensely personal, right? Um, you have to, for example, interrogate what you mean what fun means for you. Right? And then you have to think about um what you're trying to say and who you are trying to play a game with, knowing full well that when you design this game, you will likely never meet the majority of the people who will pick it up and they will never meet you. So you are designing for a theoretical, imagined and invisible audience, right? And you have to translate your fun for these people who will not know you. They won't know you from Adam or Eve. And they will probably never deign to ask you what you're feeling. Right? Nor will they ask you why. Like very rarely will a game designer actually get into an interview with let's say a thesis student like you and get to explain their entire philosophy, right? It just they'll only talk to each other because that's what they do, right? So I think my advice would be start from the personal. Determine what your fun is. And then if you are dealing with cultural heritage, it becomes even more important to start from the personal. Because there are things, lived experiences, heritages, objects and traditions and rituals that are not yours.

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** Like bawal yan. Like for example, hindi ka Igorot why are you talking about Igorot culture, right? Simple logic, right? So understanding that your own heritage, your specific heritage as a Filipino person from X, Y or Z, already has so much to offer is

the first step. Like a lot of my design is always inspired by Batangas. Because I spent many years going back and forth from Manila to our ancestral 300 year old home. Like, I learned anecdotes, crazy anecdotes about people long dead, who I happened to be related to, right? Um I I learned for example that the Santo in our house used to be the saint on a galleon.

**B:** Oh.

**A:** Um and and apparently it was a very important Santo and we and my family had no idea. It just so happened that a priest friend came over one day, he took one look at that dilapidated statue and he said that's gold folded, right? That's apparently very important because and then he had this whole explanation behind why our specific statue is important to art history. We had no fucking idea. We just knew that it was on a galleon, right? So, and it is opening your mind to that intrigue and curiosity rather than convincing yourself that your life is boring that will allow you to be able to design well and design authentically and design with minimal offense. Like why are we grabbing at inspiration from other countries or from other heritages in the Philippines that are not ours, when you could simply look harder at your backyard and determine what you have direct access to. Like not to be that old bitchy lady, but like why are for example people going, well, Philippine culture is so boring, I'd rather write about Japan. Hindi ka naman Hapon. Anime fan ako, sure, yeah, I love my anime. But I would never write a Japanese inspired table top game. Why the fuck should I when there is so much more that I could do. If I just turn for example to my wife who's from Bacolod and she could tell me all about Bacolod and she can tell me all about Talisay and Hiligaynon. When I could ask my dad again, hey, could you ask, could you remind me what our Tita said about so and so Katipunero, who we used to be related to, right? That would be the long and short of my advice. Look to your own

backyard. Find the intriguing things and discover your roots first before touching the nerves and the roots and the hearts and the brains of other cultures. Like why would you have to do that when there's so much more that you could look into. Especially if you're from the Philippines and you have the means. Ateneo library is massive.

UP library has so much shit. There are so many historians who are so eager to talk to you if you just email them, right? Don't email them, ma'am, please read my manuscript. Like find their work. And ask them about it. Or and if pay walls are a problem, oh my God, you know, they don't usually get paid. I think you might have discovered this, right? They don't get paid for their contributions. So a lot of them are very willing to give it to you for free. You just have to ask them. There's no excuse to go Korea boo or Weaboo or whatever or to be a fans of of God forbid American culture, whatever that means. Americans have no culture. You know. The Philippines has a lot of culture. Canada has more culture than America does. You know. But okay, I stand corrected. America does have culture. It's genocide and guns and I don't know.

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** Monster trucks and shit. Like most boring things ever, right?

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** So yeah, that's that's my advice. Look to your own backyard. Decouple yourself from the idea, especially if you're Pinoy that there is something shameful about you and your culture. No such thing. We are a beautiful people. Uh, we might not be a beautiful nation, right? Kasi ibang usapan iyan because there's people, nation, country. Our nation as a political entity might fucking suck. But our people are great. Our food is wonderful. Our country is beautiful. So you could have so much more to design for than I don't fucking know any other country really.

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** I'm very, very like I'm I would not consider myself patriotist, patriot or a nationalist, but you know, I've seen enough of the Philippines to know that we're a beautiful country and there's just so much to talk about.

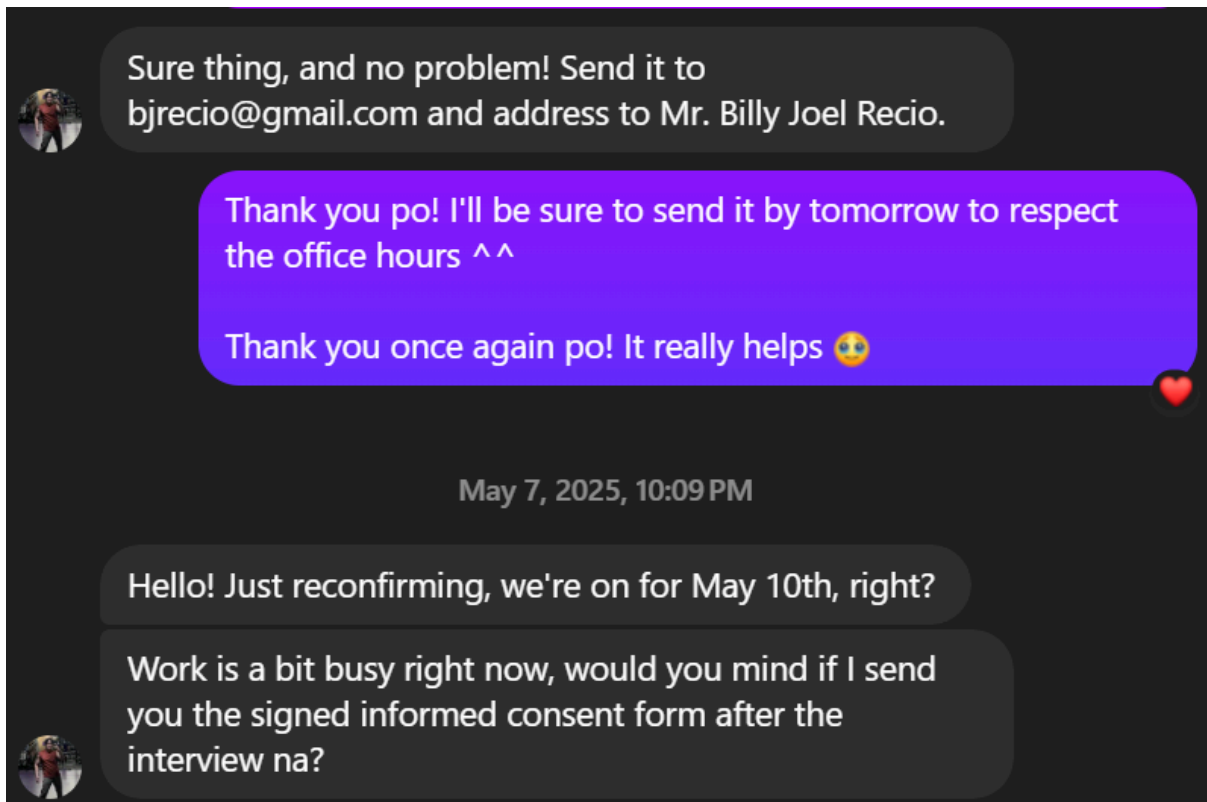
**B:** Yeah. Wow. Okay. So I think that's it. Do you do you want to add anything that you want to say or—

**A:** Oh, delikado yan. You already know that I just go off. So I think I think I'm good.

**B:** Okay, all right. So, okay, I'll stop the recording.

*[END OF TRANSCRIPT]*

*Appendix H: Informed Consent Form for BJ Recio*



**TITLE OF STUDY**

Roll for Representation: The Analysis of the The Headhunter and Babaylan in Islands of Sina Una

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR**

Maleah Rae Karganilla Frange

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**PURPOSE OF STUDY**

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, you must understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if anything is unclear or if you need more information.

The purpose of this study is to complete partial fulfillment of the requirements of the researcher's undergraduate thesis for the course BA Philippine Arts (Cultural Heritage and Arts Management). This is done under the supervision of the researcher's co-investigator and thesis advisor, Professor Jose V. Ogatis I.

To be fully informed as the participants of the study, kindly read the following:

***Research Objectives:***

1. To determine how the roles of the Philippine Headhunter and Babaylan were translated as classes for the IoSU setting.
2. To determine the motivation for adding the Philippine Headhunter and Babaylan as classes for the IoSU setting.
3. To understand how the writers connected with their Filipino roots in creating the Headhunter and Babaylan as classes.

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4. To understand the process of creating the build behind the Philippine Headhunter and Babaylan as classes for the IoSU setting while simultaneously maintaining cultural integrity and respect towards the classes' real-life counterparts.

## **STUDY PROCEDURES**

By participating in this study, you will be asked to join the researcher in an interview regarding the process and motivations behind adding the Babaylan and Philippine Headhunter as classes. The interview will take thirty to sixty minutes and will be conducted via online means (Zoom or Google Meet), whichever you prefer. Additionally, the researcher may email you for any follow-up questions imperative to the study. There will be a total of 2 - 3 participants in the study.

The interview will be recorded and transcribed for the purpose of the thesis. The recordings will be safely preserved digitally, and only the researcher and her advisor, and the interviewees if requested, will have access. For the course of the study, the data will be transcribed and kept in a Google Drive folder accessed only by the researcher and advisor. An encrypted/password-protected folder will serve as a backup file to be stored on the researcher's desktop. All interviews will be handled within ethical standards and with the utmost confidentiality.

The researcher aims to publish the thesis once it is completed. Audio and video recordings will be retained for one year after the completion of the study to allow for verification and further analysis if needed. After one year, all recordings will be permanently deleted from both the encrypted storage and Google Drive.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

For this research study, your comments will not be anonymous. Every effort will be made by the researcher to preserve your true character and will not misconstrue any statements made by you to fit her study. Confidentiality will be maintained by keeping notes, interview transcriptions, and any other identifying participant information in a locked file cabinet in the personal possession of the researcher.

However, there is an exclusion of personal information such as the address and contact information of the interviewees. Unless the interviewees wish otherwise, the recordings will be safely preserved digitally, and only the researcher and their advisor, and the interviewees if requested, will have access. For the course of the study, the data will be transcribed and kept in a Google Drive folder accessed only by the researcher and advisor. An encrypted/password-protected folder will serve as a backup file to be stored on the PI's desktop. All interviews will be handled within ethical standards and with the

utmost confidentiality. Audio and video recordings will be retained for one year after the completion of the study to allow for verification and further analysis if needed. After one year, all recordings will be permanently deleted from both the encrypted storage and Google Drive.

#### **CONTACT INFORMATION**

If you have questions at any time about this study, you may contact the researcher, whose contact information is provided on the first page.

Additionally, you may contact the UPMREB Ethics Review Panel, who have sufficiently approved of the study, through the following:

[Name of UPM REB Panel Chair]

Address: Room 126, Ground Floor

National Institutes of Health, UP Manila

623 Pedro Gil St.

Ermita 1000 Manila

Email: upmreb@post.upm.edu.ph

Tel: +63 2 8526-4346

#### **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form. After you sign the consent form, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Withdrawing from this study will not affect the relationship you have, if any, with the researcher. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, the data will be deleted.

**PLEDGE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:**

I, Maleah Rae Karganilla Frange, the principal investigator of the study, formally pledge to ensure the protection of identities and privacy in my research endeavors. The key consideration in protecting privacy and confidentiality in research includes informed consent, confidentiality, and secure data storage. As a researcher, I understand the importance of safeguarding the personal information of the participants involved in this research and ensuring their confidentiality.

This research will abide by the Data Privacy Act of 2012 concerning confidentiality. By adhering to these principles, I can contribute to heritage conservation knowledge while also upholding the trust and confidentiality of those who participate in my research. I recognize and respect the right of every participant to withdraw from the study at any time. The researcher will securely store the documents and data given. After the interview, the researcher will provide the participants with a debriefing on how the data will be used in the study.

Signed:



**Maleah Rae Karganilla Frange**

Principal Investigator

Noted by:



**Asst. Professor Jose V. Ogatis I**


Thesis Adviser

## CONSENT

I, BILLY JOEL S. RECIO [Your Name], hereby grant my consent to participate as a key informant for the study to provide insights into the process associated with developing the Babaylan and Philippine Headhunter as classes for the Islands of Sina Una.

I have thoroughly reviewed and comprehended the purpose of the undergraduate thesis titled "*Roll for Representation: The Analysis of the Headhunter and Babaylan in Islands of Sina Una*," including its background, overview, significance, data-gathering protocols, and ethical considerations.

By affixing my signature below, I acknowledge that I have familiarized myself with the contents of the informed consent document. I am aware that the research will involve a semi-structured interview lasting approximately 30 to 60 minutes, which will be audio and video recorded. I understand that all *personal* information, such as address or contact information, shared will be treated with *strict* confidentiality. Additionally, I acknowledge that my participation in this study is voluntary, and I retain the right to withdraw my consent at any stage of the research process.

Participant's Signature over Name:  BILLY JOEL S. RECIO  
MAY 29, 2025

Date:

Should you have any additional questions regarding this request, kindly contact the researcher at +63 9158222818, or email at [mkfrange@up.edu.ph](mailto:mkfrange@up.edu.ph).

## *Appendix I: Interview with BJ Recio*

Date of Interview: May 10, 2025

Mode: Zoom

Legend:

- A: Interviewee: Mr. Billy Joel Recio
- B: Interviewer: Maleah Rae K. Frange

**B:** Hell good, ay afternoon, hindi pala morning, good afternoon po. My name is Maleah Rae Karganilla Frange and I'm a fourth-year student from the BA Philippine Arts in the University of the Philippines. Today, I'm here with Sir BJ Recio, one of the consultants and writers po for Islands of Sina Una. If you could please kindly introduce yourself.

**A:** Okay, so I'm Billy Joel Recio, BJ Recio. You can call me BJ. I worked on the Islands of Sina Una, specifically on the writing side, on the research side. I was the lead researcher. Tapos uhm, ano ba ginawa ko..? I also did a lot of game design, specifically some monster side. So background about me, I'm actually from a science-based course, so I'm a graduate of science-based mathematics. Medyo napalayo ano, but I've always been in D&D, even back in UP. And ever since, even when I was in college, it was already one of the goals for me personally that I wanted to see more Philippine fantasy, Philippine mythology, Philippine culture in D&D. So because of that, I started writing independently around 2009. Tapos... After that, I published a few things, self-published PDF, ganyan, and then I started to get noticed. And I think my big break came with a thing that happened in Twitter a few years back. There was this hashtag that went viral that I started called Manila Encounters. When that happened, because originally Manila Encounters was supposed to be for

D&D. It was just a bunch of short prompts for D&D that we wanted to use using Manila culture. Tapos, it got viral and people noticed it, and that's when people started hiring me to work on other projects also. So I also have some writing credits on an independent RPG called ARC: Doom, tabletop RPG. I also have writing credits in Pathfinder Bestiary 3. And on the D&D side, it's mainly Islands of Sina Una that I worked on, although I was also culturally consulting on a few third-party items that were also for D&D. I guess that's it for tabletop RPGs. By the way, I work in the corporate world as an actuary.

**B:** As a what? Sorry.

**A:** As an actuary.

**B:** Ano po yon?

**A:** Okay. Wow.

**B:** Sorry.

**A:** Short version. Actuaries are basically mathematicians in the corporate world who use probabilities to compute for your risk profile. So usually in insurance, or in my case, in retirement. Or in health, HMOs, ganyan. Because you have to figure out the value of the risk so that you can price things accordingly.

**B:** Oh, I see. Wow. I think there's really a pipeline from STEM to D&D or anything creative. Because nag-STEM po ako tapos biglang Philippine Arts.

**A:** Sa akin, ano, the application of my field is that there are a lot of probabilities in D&D because dice rolling is basically just normal distributions.

**B** Right. So okay, lets, tuloy na po tayo

**A:** Sige, let's go.

**B:** Our first question, po. Were you given any insights, po, about the inspiration to why they added Headhunter in Babaylan classes, po?

**A:** Sige. Ah, like I mentioned before the interview started, that was actually one of the hardest that we went through of all the design things that we were going to. So to give you some perspective of my role in that, I did not write the Headhunter, nor did I write the Babaylan. But I did consult for the design. So the people who did design it, I think, was Paladin, Joshua Mendenhall. Paladin's moniker is online. And Makenzie. Makenzie is now working in Wizards of the Coast. That was right before she started working for Wizards of the Coast. So for them, I think what they did was they started out with what they wanted classes to do. So Babaylan and Headhunter. Let's start with the Headhunter. I know that they wanted to do something that got around the D&D heartache that is missing your attack roll. So if you miss your attack roll, especially kung warrior type ka. I'm not sure if we're going to show this interview to people that don't play D&D, but we're going to talk like everyone knows. So as a warrior type, whether that's a paladin or a fighter or whichever, barbarian, you wait a long time in between rounds, especially if you get a lot of wizards. Tapos pagdating ng turn mo, mag attack roll ka lang. And then you already miss.

**B:** Tapos yun lang.

**A:** To combat that heartache, they started with the idea of the conviction wherein whether or not you miss, the conviction will deal damage. Because you are devoted to slaying your enemies. And at the same time, the way we fluffed that is we wanted the headhunter to be a very thinking type of warrior. It doesn't just make many attacks. It makes just one attack, but it will hit with that attack. So the game balance that went around that was more of a... So paano yan? Para pag nagcrit? That was, para pag nagcrit, hindi ka naka tumatama, tas nagcrit ka pa. So we had to balance it around that so that even when you crit, the conviction dice don't count towards the crits. I think people keep asking that, and that's usually our answer. Kasi since it's not contingent on the attack roll, then it will not get multiplied on a crit. Ayan. So doon siya nagstart, and then nagkaroon na lang discussion na, we wanted to do a warrior type. So which culture can we draw inspiration from? And I think when you are writing, well, in my experience, when I'm writing something inspired by Philippine culture, it's easy to draw from the Visayan islands. Kasi yun yung pinaka maraming data. Kasi madali ka, you can go to the Boxer's Codex. If you're familiar with the Boxer's Codex, it's a... So familiar ka na, hindi ko i-mention. Tapos, there's also a lot of... Ah, Barangay by William Henry Scott. So it has a strong focus on Visayan culture. So madali lang gumuhan ang inspiration doon. Pero we were thinking, um, especially when I'm talking to Paladin and Makenzie and Lucia, they are part of the diaspora kasi. They're not local Filipinos. They are Philippine-Americans. They were interested in sourcing from as many cultures as possible. And that's when we started looking at yung cultures sa Cordilleras.

**B:** Yeah, sa north naman.

**A:** Sa north naman tayo. So there's positives and negatives there. The positives is, um, they still exist. So you can just go there and ask them. So one of our principal sources was someone who can still trace their roots. Well, they don't currently live there, pero parang second gen sila na nasa Manila na sila ngayon, pero Cordillera na sila before. So yun yung parang tinatanungan namin. Pero of course, meron din kami academic readings. I think sa Sagada Readings yung hinanap ko, which was also by William Henry Scott. So same author as Barangay. And then I was looking also at, um, something ink tattooed identities. It was this book. I'm trying to remember. I don't have the book anymore kasi I gave it to Paladin.

**B:** Okay.

**A:** I don't know kung mara mahaharap natin. Tattooed identities.

**B:** Parang nakita ko din po siya nung nagre-research ako. Pero ayun nga.

**A:** There you go. Tapping ink. Tattooing identities.

**B:** Ah, tapping ink.

**A:** So doon pumasok yung idea namin ng Headhunter. We were also going with, kasi the Babaylan, we just called it the Babaylan. We were thinking of the Headhunter as the minor yung term na ginagamit sa kanila, yung local term nila. Yes. I don't remember kung bakit we settled on the Headhunter as a name. Pero I think it's because it's easy to visualize what the Headhunter is. Ah, yes. As opposed to Babaylan. If we turned it to an English word, I think the closest would be shaman. But it's not quite what we wanted.

**B:** It's not the same.

**A:** So yung Babaylan, but the minor became the Headhunter. And consequently, we were also thinking, we really wanted to integrate yung tattoos ng cordilleras. As well as, kasi may tattoo culture din sa Visayas naman. Yung mga batikad, yung mga batukad. Yung mga pintados. Or as the Spanish would have called them. So we wanted to integrate it. Pero early on in the design, we toyed with doing it as magic items. Yung mga tattoos. We felt that it was borderline disrespectful. Kasi that's not what it is. It's more of a mark of pride and not something that you would use to produce a one-time effect. Maybe parang we toyed around. Maybe it adds to intimidation or something. Pero that's not necessarily what it is. We just made it aesthetic. Specifically, we wanted it to be visible sa Headhunter. So yun yung background ng Headhunter. And how we developed it. Yung Babaylan. Pero Babaylan is interesting. Kasi marami kang makukuhang ideas din. Again, sa Barangay. Very rich. I also had a strong connection to Babaylan in the sense that this is something that you could trace to today. They would have their roots in Babaylan. I am also so fascinated at how a lot of our revolutionary movements can be traced to spiritual journeys. The first people who rebelled against the Spanish were Babaylans. Because of the difference in religion. Later on, in the colonial era, yung mga confradia. The confradias of the different Filipino sects na hindi ka pinakayagan maging pare. Instead, you create your own denomination. Even now, meron tayong mga Christian denominations na local that don't answer to Roman Catholic authority. Kasi they would prefer their own take on it. Even our Roman Catholics, maraming mga die-hard Roman Catholic yan. Pero magtatabi0tabi po yan pag dumaan [unintelligible]. That's why we really wanted something spiritual. Tsaka we wanted to focus on the animist part of pre-colonial culture. Kaya pumasok nyo mga Mabailan.

As to where we draw the inspiration from, funnily enough, a lot of the inspiration came from Amaya.

**B:** Ay yung kay—

**A:** Yung kay Marian Rivera. It's funny because you would encounter people who would scoff at Amaya. Because it's a teleserye. Pero napaka-rich ng culture ng teleserye. In addition to.. Sure, they get a lot of things wrong. But what they get right is the culture of us. Our own culture. Interpreting what we've seen sa pre-colonial texts. So that's what makes Amaya so interesting to me. Tsaka yung ano, At the same time, ng teleserye, people sometimes will bash the writing of teleserye. Especially pag GMA. Kasi yung GMA, yung mga pausong nila na parang may water gun, or may lightsaber, or whatever. Pero kasi it's written that way. I was also consulting, I forgot who it was, I was consulting someone from Mass Comm, and what they're saying at the time was, kaya ganyan yung mga teleserye. Kasi yung mga nanonood niya, most likely habang nanonood sila, biglang utusan silang bumili ng coke ng amo nila. Or kailangan ipa-plancha sila. So sometimes, parang bakit parang mabagal yung plot? Mabagal niya mga events. It's because they want to give people time to digest yung mga big plot points nila. Anyway, sorry na tangent ako. Going back to The Babaylan, we wanted something spiritual, and if you notice, the Babaylannasan Abayan, and it's very, very reminiscent nung kambalahas ni Amaya. Doon siya nakabase.

**B:** Wow! Okay po. Ang interesting naman. Okay po. So, second question naman po. Kasi po, I was able to, I was fortunate enough to play, I think, one of my friends, they also used it sa thesis niya po. So while we were having downtime, we were wondering po, were there any alternative class concepts like mga panday or

something? Kasi nung nung binabasa ko po yung kay si Salazar po, he noted na datu, panday, tsaka babaylan.

**A:** Yes. I've read that too. Especially ano, even if you look at, what was that text? Laura Lee Junker naman. Something about raiding. Raiding, trading, and feasting. Laura Lee Junker. So they talk about the complex political society in Philippine chiefdoms. How a chiefdom works and how a lot of it is pageantry. The personal power of the datu is derived from the people's belief that they are the chosen one. In order to do that, you need proof of your legitimacy in several ways. I'm also drawing from Southeast Asian context. It's not just Philippines. In order to get that, you have to be a provider of your people, which is why important na mga panday. Because your panday is your smith. Although that's a very simplistic way of looking at it. Panday can also be a panday of boats. It's your maker. Of course, yung babaylan mo, yung spiritual source mo. If you're not in good relations with your babaylan, you will probably not last long because they don't believe you. Then, there's also some fun things there about marrying the spirits of the land. Bilang political chief, bilang datu, parang may diwata doon sa lake, ganyan. So you would claim it as your wife. Yung mga gano'ng statements, I think— Sorry sandali lang..

**B:** Okay lang po. I

**A:** think dito ko naman siya kinuha sa Ancient Southeast Asia. Okay, thank you. This is basically a history book. But this one looks at Southeast Asia. These are things that we looked at in order to figure out yung mga classes na pwede natin kunin. The panday, because of that, because of its importance in the society, we wanted also to make sure that the panday would have a place, if ever. Ultimately, we decided because of two things that the panday will not be a class. The first one is that if

someone really wanted to play a panday in DND, they could just play an artificer. And it works out. It's the same, right?

**B:** Yeah, mechanically.

**A:** Number two is we feel like if you're a panday, you would be very tied down to your culture, to your settlement. So hindi mo magagawa yung DND conceit of leaving and adventuring.

**A:** Ah, hindi magadventure. Ah, okay. Makes sense.

**B:** Unless na panday ka na FPJ. Ibang panday yun. Pagpanday lang mo yan. So we decided instead, I'm not sure if it made it to the final book. I'd love to check, but we decided to make it a background. Did it actually become a background?

**B:** Let me check. I don't think so, po. Hindi. Check ko lang.

**A:** It's in page 199. So we decided to make it a background. It makes sense that someone grew up as a panday and then when you enter the perilous life of a DND adventurer, then you become something else.

**B:** Ah, okay.

**A:** Yung parin yung background.

**B:** Makes sense. Yes.

**A:** The Datu, we considered it, but it's just a noble. I mean, it's more than that, of course. Napaka-western nung idea ng idea natin ng noble. Pero, that's something that you could work with. Tapos, yung yan nga, yung mabailan, meron na. And then,

what else? There was a lot of backgrounds around sailing that we were thinking about.

**B:** Ah, yeah. I think one of them, isn't Seafarer po was a background nalang?

**A:** So, we wanted, also, to have a setting wherein, since islands na siya, di ba? So, maki-feature yung mga boats and ships. So, we thought about, pano kung meron tayo parang yung mga mangangayaw?

**B:** Ah, yeah.

**A:** Right? It eventually ended up becoming a ranger build, if I'm not mistaken.

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** Pero, these are some of the things that we considered. Para, we wanted to emphasize na, if you're going to draw from, if you're going to do a fantasy based on the Philippines, it will most likely involve some kind of seafaring. So, there's a lot of sea travel. Yeah. Which is, medyo challenging siyang gawin sa D&D. Kasi yung, the way D&D maps are made, parang 5x5 yung isang square. Tapos may several squares ka. Tapos parang, the actual size of the boat is 2 to 3 squares lang. So, you have to, when I run sila una, nilanaki lang mo yung boat. It's not realistic anymore. Pero, sometimes you have to make sacrifices to make the game work.

**B:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**A:** So, we considered a lot, but we eventually ended up with a babaylan nalang.

**B:** I think, worked out naman. So, based on that though, How did you approach in adapting the Headhunter and Babaylan sa D&D Mechanics? Kasi na-interview ko na

po si Makenzie po, and si Miss Pam po. They mentioned you po, kaya sabi ko, sige, interview ko na lang po. Kasi di ko po, kaya na po nakita. Kasi on the page po, it was linked to your Twitter, and then naka-deactivate po.

**A:** Nag-deactivate ako because politics. It's no longer fun.

**B:** Yeah, I know.

**A:** Okay, but can you repeat the question?

**B:** Sorry po. Ayun nga po, how did you approach adapting Philippine Headhunter and Babaylan sa D&D Mechanics? Because I think they talked to you a lot.

**A:** So, ayun nga, they, we've already started to answer that earlier. They came with me with what they wanted to do mechanically, and then ako yung magpapasok noon. Ako yung nag-start magpasok noon. This is how we can do it in terms of how we will tie it to the culture. This is where I will talk about the Babaylan more, I think. Because the Headhunter already talked about earlier, how we adapted the conviction, tsaka how we wanted the tattoo to be part of it, at least aesthetically.

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** May point pa pala ako sa Headhunter. So, itulay na muna natin yung Headhunter.

**B:** Sige po, okay lang po.

**A:** The other thing we wanted to do is, there is something about D&D being the colonial's game. It is the game of the colonizer. If you look at it, it is on a very simplistic level. Of course, it's more complex than that. But on a simplistic level, it is a game about going into someone else's place and stealing their stuff. And killing

them, diba? And gaining experience points. So, napaka colonial narrative diba? But at the same time, these same colonial mentalities have led them to think about concepts like someone who takes the heads of their enemies as savage behavior. So, we wanted to put in the Headhunter because we wanted to destigmatize the idea of taking the heads of your enemies as savage. So, para we wanted to... the culture that we eventually settled into. It is not one-to-one with the actual minor of the Cordilleras. Yeah. But what we wanted to portray was someone who is deployed by their community as a last resort. Parang, naguubusan ng lahi yung mga tao. They're killing everyone discriminately. And the Headhunter is a very hindi sya indiscriminate. It is very deliberate. It is a deliberate killer. So, it's still a game about killing your enemies. So, we can't really do that. That's how D&D is. The Headhunter will kill their opponent and take their heads as a last resort to appease the cycle of violence. So, the way it's described is that if a Headhunter is sent after you and then you were killed by the Headhunter, this is understood to be an instrument of the gods. It's an instrument of the spirits. They were sent to end. They are final. They are basically your final resort. So, we wanted to do that for the Headhunter. And I think it works out doon sa culture ng minor na headhunting is the measure of your of your manhood. That's why I feel like para sa atin yung kumpil. So, something, we're simplifying it, pero that's something that we wanted to integrate, but in a way that makes sense for the D&D world. So, that's Headhunter. The Babaylan naman... We wanted to emphasize the idea of a spirit medium. You are in between two worlds. You are mortal, but you speak for the spirits. And at the same time, when you're conversing with spirits, you speak for mortals. [Unintelligible] an ambassador. A lot of it is that kaya ka may abayan, para meron kang representation of yourself. It's you, but it's not you. It's one of your souls. We were toying with multiple souls. Para...

The idea of just one soul is very specific to Catholic culture. Many cultures tend to think of having multiple souls. So, we wanted that. Tapos, we also wanted culturally naman, in the society that they live in, the Babaylan also functions as their wise person. So, it's also their wizard. It's their wizard in the tower. There is something that is bothering the town, in the western town. Consult our wise wizard in the woods. That's also the function of the babaylan. So, that is why the babaylan, I think, became an int-based class. Is it?

**B:** Yes, yes. Intelligence-based.

**A:** So, ayun yung mga considerations na pinasok namin. Balit siya int-based? Bakit siya may abayan? Given that na parang wizard yung role niya, bakit divine spellcasting pa rin siya? Doon papasok ung spirits eh. Kasi... Primal energies. 4th edition had a primal power source, but in this case, in 5th edition, it made more sense to make them divine. So, ayun... So, ayun.

**B:** Okay. So, okay. Ang ganda po ng ano yun, yung representation po. Kasi, yung sabi po nila, familiar, they related it to the familiar. Maganda po yung parang... Yung concept ng kaluluwa, mga kaluluwa.

**A:** There's also something in the soul book that I am particularly fond of, pero lalabas naman yung politics ko. Na parang... There is one culture described in the soul book that while you're waiting for childbirth, you place a small cradle above because you're drawing the spirit of the ancestor that will first inhabit your baby. And it will only happen once you're, once the baby is actually born. That's when you bring down the small cradle. So, parang, it implies that ano, it implies that your first soul is given to you at birth, not at conception. Yeah.

**B:** Ah, yeah. Okay.

**A:** Pero very political, politically charged claim na so.

**B:** So, okay lang po. Um, Okay po. So, sa next question naman po. Um, Nahihirapan po ba kayo when balancing authenticity ng, yun nga, ng pre-colonial or indigenous cultures sa playability ng D&D po?

**A:** Okay. Short answer is yes. Okay. Um, you have, it's imperative that you have to be respectful to indigenous cultures when you are drawing inspiration from them. You have to accept that even though you are both Filipino, you don't necessarily speak for them.

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** That this is their, this is their culture.

This is, if they find something objectionable, um, then you should listen to them and make adjustments. So, I believe for the Islands of Sina Una, we asked several, um, people who are related to indigenous folk to, to read through it and see if there's any problems. I think yung pinaka, yung pinaka kinabahan kami was we decided to stat one of the gods of the Cordilleras. Si Lumawig ata. Tama, andito si Lumawig. We wanted a challenge rating 20. So nilagay namin si Lumawig. Pero Lumawig is the supreme god of the Igorot. Question mark. I forget.

**B:** I, I'll go back to—

**A:** But, and we didn't want then, we didn't want their god to be reduced to just a monster. So, this is also why when we were adapting the, when we were adapting it, we eventually decided na, iba yung section ng monster, iba yung section ng spirits.

Kasi the spirits, you're not supposed to fight them like you do monsters. It's possible that you enter into conflict with them. Kaya sila may stats.

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** So, kaya siya hiniwalay. Um, but let's, let's go back to the Headhunter and the Babaylan. So, it is very difficult to balance that. But something that we should also take in mind is that we are also indigenous. Not in the traditional sense of the word, pero, um, kasi, kasi sometimes mga, ma-blind tayo ng Western lens eh. When, when the West says indigenous, they think of the Native Americans, um, and how to respect their culture na parang hands off ka talaga, right?

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** Pero, Filipinos, um, like for example ako, I am Manila born and raised and my family has been Manila people since, since the 19th century. So. Manila na talaga kami. Doesn't mean we're not indigenous because Manila is in the Philippines. So you are still indigenous and in fact, the injustice that happened to us is that our culture, as we knew it, was forcibly changed by colonizers.

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** So, in that regard, we have a little bit more leeway to create something that is ours, that draw inspiration from other groups within the same culture, within the same superculture of the Philippines. And, um, interpret it in our own way. This isn't to say na i-disregard mo na yung concerns nila. Whenever they have concerns, you should still, um, as someone who is, um, city-based, we should still listen to them, make adjustments, and if, um, we do something in error, apologize and change. Ganun naman talaga. But at the same time, the Islands of Sina Una was written so

that it represents us, not necessarily yung, um, every, every culture that don't even play D&D. So, doon, yun yung parang push and pull nun. Yun yung, that's eventually where we settle in na parang, okay, meron tayong mga bagay na kailangan nating palitan kasi D&D, but at the same time, as long as we understand it as, as people who culturally play D&D and are also culturally Filipino, it works out. Um, here's another example of that. Um, not Headhunter and not Babaylan. An example, an example is, um, sa Aswang. Um, I keep going back to monsters kasi that's where most of my research.

**B:** Ah, yes. Okay lang po.

**A:** So, sa Aswang, um, if you're familiar with Aswang, um, lore, you, the way to become an Aswang is to swallow, um, yung itim na sisiw.

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** Yung, yung itim na sisiw, 'di ba? With the, the black chick. So, if you look at Islands of Sinauna, it's a black egg. Hindi na balut.

**B:** Yes.

**A:** Hindi siya black chick. Um, the reason is not because ayaw namin ng itim na sisiw. The reason is that there's no way to say "black chick" without offending someone who's reading in America.

**B:** Oh, okay. Okay, makes sense po.

**A:** So, it, it doesn't, parang, in the end, you make concessions, not just with the indigenous cultures but also of the cultures who play D&D. So, another, another example of that is, ayun nga, yung, Ibbalance yung idea of headhunting. Going back

to the headhunter. Um and headhunting indiscriminately. Does that kind of fit the narrative of. Um. Of the culture of D&D. Na parang, unless evil ka siguro, chaotic evil headhunter ka— But that's not what you assume. Player characters will be. You assume that to be the deliberate type of um. Of hunter. So you make that adjustments from the side of D&D naman. So. There's there was a lot of that during development you adjust, based on the culture, the indigenous culture. Then you adjust, based on the Dnd. But then you are at the center because you are A. D&D player, who also is Filipino. So that's how we individually drive the balance it. Now we now to answer the question is did we find it difficult? Of course, ang hirap niya. And I'm not even saying that we, um, did a perfect job. Kasi I'm pretty sure that in 10, 20 years' time when someone reads Sinauna, they might say that, okay, this is culturally problematic because of X, Y, Z. And that's okay. Um, because, one of the reasons also why we, why we created the Islands of Sina Una is we look at, um, I'm not sure if you're familiar with earlier D&D books called the Oriental Adventures, right?

**B:** Oh no. Medyo problematic na by the title.

**A:** Pangalan pa lang, 'di ba? Title pa lang.

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** So, there's a D&D source book written by Gary Gygax known as Oriental Adventures. Um, and then it was actually, um, remade in third edition naman. Um, and in third edition, they incorporated the Legends of the Five Rings, uh, which is another intellectual property na fantasy din, in order to, um, fit, um, the idea of an Asian fantasy setting. So, why do I mention that? I mention that kasi doon, there are some parts wherein Gary Gygax found some ideas from Philippine culture and just

pulled it in. One example is the Pinanggalan. Sorry, Pinanggalan. Um, Berbalang, sorry. Pinanggalan is Malaysian. The Berbalang. The Berbalang is a Filipino monster that exists in D&D. It's actually in Monster's Manuals if you, if you look for it.

**B:** Oh. Okay.

**A:** I think the Berbalang is in, uh, Monster Manual 1. It's, it's in the most basic one. So, ganun siya ka-ingrain sa culture, but its first printing was in Oriental Adventures wherein it was pulled from Philippine culture. Pero, since Gary Gygax has no connection to Philippine culture whatsoever, it is unrecognizable.

**B:** Ah, okay. I'm reading it again.

**A:** The Berbalang of, uh, of D&D does not align to whatever Berbalang is for us Filipinos.

**B:** Ah. Yeah.

**A:** So, that is why, um, um, in the Islands of Sinauna, there is a Berbalang na aswang.

**B:** Pero iba po.

**A:** So, which is vastly different from what the Berbalang is. And in that case, parang, kinonsider ko namin, papapalitan ba natin yung pangalan or we're just going to name given that there is an actual Berbalang in the Monster Manual? Pero we're like, no, because that was ours first before Gary Gygax took it.

**B:** Yeah. Screw him.

**A:** Pero at the same time, at the time that Gary Gygax made this thing, he's the guy who created D&D in the first place, right?

**B:** Yeah, yes po.

**A:** So, when he created that, he was not coming out of a place of malice. He just wanted to include as many cultures as possible. So, it's problematic, yes. We understand that it's problematic to call it Oriental Adventures. It's problematic to simplify, um, Japanese culture and Asian culture in general to this honor-based society. May ganoong push and pull. Um, parang nabasa lang niya yung ano, nabasa lang niya yung Shogun, tapos biglang, "Ah, okay, ganoon pala ang Japanese culture." So parang, it's very problematic, but at the same time, he was a product of his time. In the same way that we are the product of our time. And we apply our own biases and our own politics into it. And in 20 years' time, when someone else makes, makes another Filipino, Filipino setting, they might change it again. And that's fine. Um, because, um, Philippine culture is dynamic in the same way that D&D culture is. Dynamic.

**B:** Ah, I'm been called po.

**A:** Sige lang, sige lang.

*[Meeting momentarily paused]*

*[Meeting resumed]*

**B:** Hello po. Sorry po. Medyo nagka-emergency lang konti po.

**A:** Yeah, it's fine. Ah, but you're okay na? Or you need time?

**B:** Yes, okay na po. Okay. No, okay na po. Ah, kasi po, 'yung pusa po namin makulit po. So medyo, may nag-ano.

**A:** Kaya rin ako nagsara ng pinto kasi cat din. Otherwise guguluhin na lang ako. Okay.

**B:** Yeah, opo. Pero nakalusot pa siya. Ah, okay. So, moving on po. Um, aside po from the 'yung magic tattoos po, when it comes to the Babaylan 'tsaka Headhunter, are there any other indigenous roles or symbols or traditions that you wanted to include sa classes po?

**A:** Okay. Sa Babaylan, sa Headhunter kasi we mentioned the tattoos 'di ba? Sa Babaylan, parang, um, what do we associate with the Babaylan? That would be nice, um, as a visual guide to our artists? To me, um, what I, what I eventually recommended, um, I'm not sure how much of it got into the art. I think some of it did, is, um, I think the Babaylan was associated with smoke.

**B:** Mm. Uh, Yeah.

**A:** May ano 'yan, may, may some interplay 'yan with Amaya kasi 'yung mga promotional materials ni Amaya, maraming mga, may mga usok. So, how about smoke? But at the same time, um, the idea of smoke as a, as a transient state of matter between, um, between liquid and gas, or between solid and gas in the case of fire.

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** Basta it's somewhere in between those two states, 'di ba? So that is something that we wanted, um, for the Babaylan. And I think 'yung abayan, that's why medyo

wispy and smoky 'yung itsura ng Babaylan. Parang abayan. So we wanted to do that. Another thing that, um, I think this one was originally something that we wanted to introduce to the Babaylan but was instead, um, introduced to the islands themselves, is 'yung, um, Balete trees. Kasi, um,

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** The Balete trees had a place of prominence in our culture as a spiritual focal point. In the same way that churches are today. And we wanted that kasi it persists up to now. There's something otherworldly about,

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** specifically large Balete trees. 'Pag pass by 'di ba? Yeah. Even if you're as atheist as you could be, 'pag dumaan ka doon, you, you feel it, right?

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** And we wanted to incorporate that. Um, so there's, there's a lot of ano rin eh, parang, um, I read somewhere, I can't remember now, parang when you become a Babaylan, um, the triggering point is that you would have had to have had an episode wherein, um, you were visited by a spirit. Um, in modern parlance, it's probably 'yung nagka-lagnat ka ng malala or something like that. Parang ganyan na parang, parang nade-deliryo ka na. Um,

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** To, to the, to the Babaylan, it was like, okay, um, this is, um, a candidate for Babaylan. Tapos parang you go through a lot of, um, a lot of tests and rituals in order

to become a... There's a term for a Babaylan apprentice eh. It escapes me at the moment. Pero, to, to become that, um,

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** Parang sometimes iiwan ka sa loob ng Balete tree for a few, for a night. So that you have to see things.

**B:** Ah, so parang si Trese. Yes po.

**A:** Oh, that's exactly it. Si Trese, that, that idea of Trese came from that. May mga, may mga ganung interpretations that we wanted to, to bring in. But in the end parang, we also decided na parang Babaylan in the, in the end, the important thing is that 'yung class is there, 'yung abilities niya. So, pumasok na lang siya sa parang when, when we're talking about Babaylan as NPCs, there's a lot of them na parang meron silang home base na Balete tree or...

**B:** Mmm.

**A:** There's at least three Balete trees in the islands na parang dinescribe namin na parang, ito 'yung itsura niya, this is why it's, it's awesome and cool. So 'yun, so smoke, Balete trees. Sa head hunters, we were talking about spears.

**B:** Ah, spears?

**A:** Uhuh. Spearheads, 'yung mga, the... Pero, we decided against it kasi spears are more of a cultural thing in the Philippines as a whole. Like 'yung, like 'yung 'pagka magpo-propose ka, you will take your spear and then strike it on the ground.

**B:** Ah, yes, yes.

**A:** Of your...

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** Of your beloveds, of your beloved's house. So, napaka, may sexual connotation na parang... You, you fertilize the soil or something like that with your spear. Yeah. So, meron siyang cultural significance. So we thought, we thought about it. Instead, we just wanted to have spears as weapons. So, um, and we wanted the head hunter to have a spear in addition to 'yung panabas nila.

**B:** Mmm.

**A:** So 'yan. Um, well, that's funnily enough also another thing that we were looking at when we were researching was, um, are you familiar with the, I think it's in the History Channel, the show Forged in Fire?

**B:** Ah, yes po. 'Yung it will kill 'yung ganoon.

**A:** Oh, it will kill. Tapos si, I think ano 'yun eh, I think Fil-Am 'yung guy na 'yun eh. Si...

**B:** Yes, yes po. Si Danny something po.

**A:** I forgot his name. Um, pero, um, because of his Fil-Am roots, makikita mo na sometimes 'yung mga weapons na ini-introduce nila Filipino. So 'yung panabas was actually in one episode and the kampilan was also in another episode.

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** So, it's also fun to watch, um, not as a direct, um, parang symbol, symbol, uh, symbolic, um, adaptation, pero nakikita mo lang, this is how they make, uh, this is

the, the things that a blacksmith would consider to make this weapon. Tapos, um, how would they have done it during the pre-colonial times?

**B:** Mmm, I see. Ay. Speaking of that po, um, is it a mechanical reason kung kaya hindi niyo, like, you didn't include the, kasi usually 'di ba, from my research po, they usually carry 'yung head hunters, they have like a head hunting axe.

**A:** Oo.

**B:** So, it's more of mechanical reason po but that's why you didn't include it as, okay, dapat kasama po 'to sa head hunter as a class.

**A:** May panabas naman tayo.

**B:** Ah, okay.

**A:** I remember. I think it was one of the... What happened eventually was that we, we decided to have our own equipment section that is separate from the equipment section of the Player's Handbook. Even though a lot of it is similar, um, it was different enough kasi culturally, um, the sword is not as important as the spear. Or the sword is more of a rich person's status symbol than the spear, which everyone had. It was like the iPhone of the time. So... So we wanted, we to push that. Instead, we decided to have it as part of the equipment section. Tapos binuff namin ng konti 'yung mga spears na nandoon. So to, to incentivize the players to play with spears. Tsaka parang ano rin eh. Um, I've been playing D&D for a lot of editions 'no. There were editions na mahirap talagang gumamit ng sword sa tubig. Parang may minus ka to attack rolls or something like that. It doesn't exist in 5th edition na kasi parang super, uh, superheroics, um, rule of cool goes above, um, what do you call this, um,

simulationist ideas. Pero I think in 3rd edition may minus ka kasi parang mahirap mag-swing ng sword underwater but a spear is easy to thrust.

**B:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. Ah.

**A:** So 'yun.

**B:** Okay po. Um, that being said, um, I think medyo nasagot niyo po 'yung sagot, ay, 'yung tanong na for that, uh, question but in case you want to reiterate anything or, um, may gusto niyo pong idagdag. How did the team navigate in balancing 'yung historical accuracy 'tsaka creative liberties po in designing these classes?

**A:** Ayun. So, yes, we answered that already 'no. So,

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** In the end, we are not historians.

**B:** Mmm.

**A:** Um, I did a lot of research, specifically because I was one of the researchers. Um, I've got a lot of books. Um, one of the reasons why I got the books was, um, compared to our diasporic counterparts, I had access. Like, um, the same tattooing book that we mentioned earlier, um,

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** it's 2,000 pesos here.

**B:** Oh my God.

**A:** Mahal, 'di ba? Yeah. But it's a full, it's a full color book. It's 2,000 pesos here. Oh. But it's \$300 on Amazon. So...

**B:** Oh my God..!

**A:** Mas lalo. Right? So, in that regard, parang advantage sa atin na, um, na locals na we're easy, it's easier for us to access. To the point where in, um, they actually generously, um, gave me some stipend to buy some of the research books that I wanted.

**B:** Oh.

**A:** So, okay. So, kasi the, the idea being, if they were the ones who were getting it from their side, Yeah. then it would have cost a lot more money. It would have been easier for me to buy two copies here and send one copy over to them. Yeah, okay, logistics. It worked out.

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** But yes, even, even that taken into consideration, um, first of all, I don't have a degree in sociology. I don't have a degree in anthropology. Um, I think there was someone on the research team who had, who did. Pero, that doesn't mean that this was their thesis. It was, it was not their thesis and ultimately, we are writing for a game. So, if we had to make a choice between historical cultural accuracy and what works in the game, you have to choose the game.

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** Because that is the end product. That being said, if it were, if it were something else, if it were me pursuing a Master's degree in, actually I thought about it. If I were

pursuing a Master's degree in anthropology, then mas important 'yung ano, 'yung nuances natin. Doon siya papasok. So, it's that. But at the same time, I am not saying naman na hindi na siya important at all. Kasi you still have to respect the culture because, um, games, this, this goes back to the theory of games, which is separate from game theory, which is a branch of mathematics. So the theory of games, the, the discourse of games, um, playing games is a construct of the human condition that allows you to understand each other better. So, when, when two kittens are playing games, they are playing it because they're learning how to hunt. When humans are playing games, um, it could be considered na, um, humans from, from the earlier times, they, they played games so that they learn how to hunt as well. But there were all, there are also like games for, uh, um, for enforcing gender roles, for example, na, that's why you give girls dolls because you, they are supposed to be mothers.

**B:** Yeah. Yeah.

**A:** Whether or not you agree with that, that was how games are introduced. So,

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** In the end, the game is a, is still a social construct that reinforces something that we want to see in the world. Um, D&D is about overcoming, it could be killing opponents and taking their stuff, going to dungeons, slaying dragons. But a lot of the D&D we play now, um, inspired by Critical Role, inspired by Dimension 20, it's all about living the human experience in a fantastical way. It is our version of telling the stories of Thor. So, it's important in a way that can still be irreverent. So ayun, medyo high-minded 'yun. Pero 'yun 'yung doon ako, doon ako nagsu-swing personally. It is, it is important for us culturally, but it is irreverent in the same way na, I mentioned

Thor kanina, hindi ko na-expand. Parang, um, the, the Nordics would have stories of Thor's adventures that they tell to children so that, um, it would become part of their everyday conversation, it becomes part of their storytelling, and it becomes cultural. I want to be like Thor when I grow up. Thor the god, not the Marvel character.

**B:** Yes.

**A:** But you can't do that now with actual gods that you believe in. Yeah. When I grow up, I want to be like Jesus Christ. I want to turn, I want to turn water into wine. You can't do that. Kasi, kasi we, we attribute some reverence to it. So, D&D is what comes in as something that we can, we can be irreverent. Ha, ha, magkakaroon tayo bigla ng culture about ano, about, um, what's a good one? Uh, malas sa D20 rolls or things like that. Um, and we can, and we can make jokes about it, and we can make jokes about characters, we can make like out of character comments and stuff like that.

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** But at the core of it, the setting is serious. Parang ganun. Or as serious, as serious as it should be on paper. Should be, yeah. 'Yun 'yung, 'yun 'yung balance natin doon. I hope I answered the question kasi medyo ano.

**B:** Yes, yes po. Sorry po. If it looks like I'm spacing out po kasi I'm trying to type your answers po.

**A:** Okay lang.

**B:** Sige po. Um, so, um, ayun. Now that you mentioned po na, yeah, D&D with some like irreverence po. Um, aside from like, 'yun nga po, accidentally, um, ano 'yun?

Cultural appro, culturally appropriating some, um, 'yun nga from traditional cultures po sa Philippines. What were the other biggest challenges of, uh, in adapting the Headhunter and Babaylan po? Kahit sa personal opinion niyo po.

**A:** Okay. I think personal challenge, a lot, a lot of the time we were going back to, why don't we just make a subclass? Instead of an actual class. Kasi, um, this is, this is more D&D now than, than the culture behind it. There's a reason why there's not new classes in every book of D&D. And that is because, um, a lot of it will change the way the game is. Um, I come from an edition of D&D na may mga bagong classes na lumalabas talaga. Na straight up class. Like there was a binder class in, um, Tome of Magic, which was not a warlock, something else. There was a, there was a shadow, shadow something class also. And then there was like, um, a sword sage, like a wizard of swords na class. Then I come from that version of D&D. Sa 5th Ed, they made a, they made a conscious decision, the designers made a conscious decision to almost never do that. The only time they did that was with the Artificer for Eberron campaign setting. Kasi, kasi very tied down siya doon sa setting na 'yun. So, the challenge for us was, um, why are we making, we were always push, um, going back to, bakit 'di na lang natin gawing cleric subclass 'yung Babaylan? Bakit 'di na lang natin gawing, um, Ranger subclass 'yung Headhunter? Because there is a way to make them fit in those spaces.

**B:** Yes.

**A:** But in the end, um, we had to, um, and the reason why you would want to do that rather, is, um, I think I was, I was reading a review of The Islands of Sina Una a few months ago. That someone who was, he had no idea what it was, he just read it and

he just took it at face value for the mechanics. Um, I think he was under the impression that the Babaylan was overpowered.

**B:** Oh. Oops.

**A:** Um, I think, uh, he had a point. Kasi, I think the Babaylan had to have the abayan have true sight at second level, which is super strong.

**B:** Yes. Yeah.

**A:** Pero sa akin parang, it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter in the sense na when you're playing Sina Una, you would want your Babaylan to have true sight as soon as possible because you're, that is the class that will see through illusions.

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** Pero if you put it in any other setting, ay, mahirap siya. So 'yun 'yung isang challenge na parang, um, how do we balance the game, uh, the game elements as game elements? Um, in the end we decided na, okay, um, first off, we're going to put the Babaylan and the Headhunter in, not because, um, as classes, um, specifically because of the same reason why there's an Artificer in Eberron. They are, they are ingrained in the idea of the setting. Na, the setting of Sina Una does not work without the Babaylan. It does not work without the Headhunter. So there's, there's always that. Um, even the Head Hunter, even though it does not cast spells, it's very tied to the spirits as the agent of the spirits that delivers the final, um, punishment. So, we decided to do that. So 'yun 'yung isang challenge. Paano mo siya ipapasok ng, ng hindi OP? The way I see it is, um, Sina Una, the classes, classes, they were not meant to exist necessarily outside Sina Una. I don't see the Babaylan as a, a class that you would necessarily want to play outside of the Islands of Sina Una. Yeah. So

if you're playing in Forgotten Realms, 'yan. So that's how I see it personally. Um, but Sina Una at the same time is designed as a, as a setting wherein you can pull from someone, from something else. Like, 'yun nga na-mention natin na if you really wanted a panday, you could just have an artifice, artificer, like if you want...

**B:** Just say panday na siya. Yeah.

**A:** If you wanted to include the celestials of traditional D&D, 'yung mga angels for example, 'yung mga archons, just tell them, just say that they're spirits from Skyworld because that's how the Spanish conquistadors explained it to us when they arrived, first arrived here. So... Yeah. So ganun. Um, so Sina Una very ano, it's easy to put D&D things in it. Um, pulling it out into other D&D might be a little bit more difficult. Um, pero pwede. You just have to make adjustments.

**B:** Okay. Thanks po. I think, okay, personal opinion ko lang po, but I think hindi naman siya OP kasi ang OP diyan 'yung monsters so... Medyo nahirapan po kasi we were playing with 'yung isang, 'yung isang aswang po 'yung may white na hair. I think half the party, hindi naman po TPK pero muntik na po.

**A:** 'Yung Gabunan ba 'yun? Ah, ako nag-design 'yun.

**B:** I think so. Grabe. Ano po, medyo na-stress po ako but it was like good stress.

**A:** Yeah, I had a lot of fun making that one. Ang inspiration niya is 'yung ano, 'yung humahaba 'yung daliri niya, 'di ba?

**B:** Yes po. I think.

**A:** Ang inspiration niya is 'yung ano, 'yung Elder Toguro. Pero, uh, it also works kasi in the Aswang lore, um, 'yung, the Aswang will not die of old age unless 'yung itlog

na sisiw niya. So, parang this is someone who did not give up, in this case 'yung black egg. He did not give up the black egg for and then ended up living for centuries. So parang sobrang, sobrang, um, kapit, sobrang kampante na siya sa sarili niya. She doesn't even shapeshift anymore. Kasi, hindi siya ano, she's no longer concerned about that.

**B:** Yeah. Bahala na.

**A:** Kasi they're that powerful na.

**B:** Yeah. Makes sense. So, sige po. Medyo hindi na po, okay, it's not the last, last four questions na po. It's not, um, hindi na po mechanically, more of experiences on working po. So, um, for this question po, did your experiences as a member of a local Filipino community na dito po talaga, um, shape how you approach cultural representation in D&D?

**A:** It's an interesting question. Um, outside of my role sa Sina Una, um, I was also part of Gamers and Gaming Meets, which was a group that, um, that hosted RPG conventions, small RPG conventions. Um, we were active around just before the pandemic. Post-pandemic, not so much. Pero that was also we were doing. So, a lot of it is also, um, interacting with people whose thoughts and ideas differ from you. Kasi, you, you get a big group in eh. So siyempre, ako, I'm culturally a bit more on the liberal side. Tapos, um, you encounter people who are more on the conservative side. Um, parang, um, Pinklawan ka tapos biglang may makakalaro ka na Duterte. You know, ganun. Uh, that's, that's an interesting challenge locally. Um, ang iniisip ko if that changes the way I write. I think hindi naman. Kasi ultimately, it is true that my personal politics will go into my writing. But it's not something that I like to highlight also na parang, kasi para sa akin kapag ano, kapag pino-point out ko 'yung political

stances ko sa writing ko tapos talagang ano, I wrote this, I wrote XYZ outside of this interview. I wrote XYZ because I wanted to show, um, the injustice of XYZ of ABC or something. Uh, I feel like that's bad writing. In the end, dapat 'yung writing mo is appealing to your reader regardless of their own cultural biases. So, a little, a little difficult 'yan kasi sometimes you would then encounter 'yung mga offensive to them personally. And that is why you, that is why 'yun nga, ginawa namin 'yung adaptation namin for the black egg, but that is for the Fil-Ams. Black egg instead of itlog na sisiw. Um, locally, ano bang binago namin? I think wala naman. Pero I'm also looking at my other writing na sometimes I would, um, I would not write something that is a very, um, one-to-one translation of what is happening currently in the real world. For example, because I don't want to offend their sensibilities unless I do. Because there will be, there are some write-ups naman na parang 'yun talaga 'yung intent nila. Eh 'di sige. Kasi sometimes you just write for hire and you do what your editors tell you to. Um, so ayun, sa local community ganun siya. Um, but, ipa-plug ako bigla. Ayun, I mentioned earlier that I wrote for Arc RPG.

**B:** Yes po. Um, ano po 'yung spelling no'n? A R K? A R C?

**A:** A R C. Ah, okay. Arc Doom RPG. Teka. Link ko sa'yo.

**B:** Sige po, thank you po.

**A:** So message ko na lang.

**B:** Yes, sige po.

**A:** Maliya, maliya?.

**B:** Maleah po. Depende po [unintelligable] Pwede nga po Malaya.

**A:** Ay! Ano 'yan? Ba't password? Cancel.

**B:** hindi ka naman po nakita. Okay lang po.

**A:** Hindi ko nga alam kung saan password 'yun eh. Mukha lang siyang password. Okay. Uh, so I write for, I wrote for Arc RPG. I, I mentioned this kasi 'yung adventure scenario na sinulat ko dito. Mmm. Um. Sorry, medyo matagal. Um...

**B:** Okay lang po.

**A;** Hindi ko rin maalala eh. Ah... Arc Ventures. Arc Ventures. Yeah. Ayan, nahanap ko rin. So, I, I wrote an adventure called The Minting of the World. This is very pre-colonial based din siya. Pero, the, the way, um, the, the plot is that may, may dumating na ano, may dumating na robots from a far away universe called Conquistadors. Oh. Tapos they wanted to, ano, they wanted to take all the gold because they wanted to, um, they wanted to mint it. Tapos parang no one understands why they want to mint it. And when you ask them, they just say that it's for encryption. So, um, teka, kita natin ang ano. May chat ba tayo dito?

**B:** Ah sa Zoom po? Yes, I think. Yes.

**A:** Ayan. Magsi-send ba 'to? Tingnan natin kung mase-send. Pero anyway, um, the reason I point this out is because, um, this is an example of how I write naman, um, with some political intent. Para, ito siya, um, meron akong talagang gustong sabihin sa kanya na, um, that is informed by me being here locally. Na parang, ah, this is about, um, the divinity of light na kinuha ko 'yung idea from ano, um, lleto. Anong pangalan niya? Pasyon and Rebolusyon by Reynaldo Ileto. So, doon ko kinuha 'yung idea na parang, um, um, the divinity of light and how, um, the idea of the divine is prevalent in, um, the Pasyon ceremony and how it has in, and how it has, um,

inspired the revolutions of the Confradias and eventually the Katipunan and 'yung religious undertones ng Katipunan, etcetera, etcetera. So, may ganun siyang undertone. But at the same time, when the, when the Conquistadors arrived, they didn't, they didn't care about any of that. They just wanted the gold, which is basically solid light. Yeah. They just wanted the gold because they wanted to encrypt it for their own, for their own, um, technological purposes. So, ang sinasabi ko dito is I wanted to, I wanted to show something, um, na this is what we feel as a local that is being constantly invaded by other ideas. So, 'yun siya. So, it does, it does come into play the fact that we're local and that we experience something that no one else experiences. Even our, um, fellow Filipinos from abroad na their experiences are different from our experiences. Sila, when I talk to them, something that I notice about the way they write is that they have a longing for home.

**B:** Tayo, we want to leave.

**A:** If you, if you look at The Islands of Sina Una, 'yung every, every start of chapter, merong, may sinulat si Makenzie dito. It's very nice, it's very beautiful.

**B:** Yeah. Yes.

**A:** But it's, um, but I, I highlight it because it's also very, um, um, melancholic about something that they have, that it's looking for something that you've never seen. So, meron silang ganung spice. Tayo as local writers of Philippine culture, hindi 'yun, iba siya, iba 'yung the way we write. So, I find it interesting kasi The Islands of Sina Una is a large team. It's not just me. Uh, I have a big role on research, but um, on in terms of writing, I had a big role on monster writing, but not a lot of roles elsewhere. So, a lot of their, a lot of the writing is a mix of 'yung, um, the diasporic, um, the diasporic melancholy combined with the, um, the local rage at the injustices of the, of

the foreigner. And then meron din, um, violence as passion. Um, para, uh, it, ito term ko lang is interesting. Um, it's from one of the writers. Uh, 'yun 'yung theme na nakukuha ko sa kanya na parang sa kanya kasi parati, parati nating sinasabi 'di ba na parang 'yung the struggle of the, the struggle of the masses na bakit kailangan nilang maging violent 'pag nagra-rally sila, ganyan ganyan. And it's because violence is, it forces action from someone else. And it's easy for people to judge violence just because, um, they see that all violence is bad. Sometimes you have to be violent in order to, in order to show how passionate you are about something, which isn't to say that it's, it's good to hurt someone. It's not. That's not what I mean. What I mean is that, um, violence is, revolution cannot happen without violence. 'Yun 'yung parang the struggle of Rizal versus Bonifacio, 'di ba? How do you, how do you enact change? Para, can you enact change from within or through, through force? 'Yun 'yung clash. And eventually, what, um, what won out historically was a combination of both. Parang, um, there, there is, there is multiple battlefields that you have to fight in order to achieve something. So parang, I think may ganun din, may ganun din sa writing ng Sina Una. Um, not from me personally, that's not my writing style. My writing style is basically just, um, anger at the world above us. Ayun. So, this is long-winded way for me of saying na, um, as a local, I have my experiences. As another local who is more attuned to the masses, they had other experiences. As the diaspora, they had experiences. And they all curated it to The Islands of Sina Una to create something that is Filipino in my opinion. Kasi it's Filipino from different points of view.

**B:** Mmm. I will quote that. Teka lang po. Filipino from different points of view. Okay po. Um, teka lang. I'm so sorry. Mabagal po akong mag-type. Okay. Um, okay po. Last three questions na po. Um, so, 'yung third to last po, aside from 'yung paggamit

niyo po ng Barangay and back and forth with other people. Um, are there any other, 'yun nga po, um, cultural research that you did po? Like, did you call anyone na ano po, na from this region and then, okay. Parang ganun po.

**A:** So like I mentioned, we, we consulted with other people na parang, what do you think of this? What do you think of XYZ? Um, in terms of actually trekking to the mountains and consulting with someone living there, I don't think anyone did. Um, not because it was not right to do so, but because, um, we are busy people. We needed, we are busy people who have lives. It's not our job to do research. We're not, we're not a research grant in order to do that, 'di ba? Ah, okay. I believe that that has value and I believe that if given the chance, the team would have. But we couldn't. Um, it was a budget and a time constraint that we did not have. Um, but we tried our best. Um, a lot of it then happens as a translation of our own personal experiences, number one. Uh, number two, um, consulting people who are adjacent to, adjacent to the culture that we're drawing inspiration from. And number three, um, books. So there's a lot of books.

**B:** Yes, sorry. Ay, sorry po. Um, what, uh, we're getting.. tinawag po ako ng mom ko. Tekang po.

**A:** Sigeng po. Sorry, I'm so sorry. Mag-break din ako saglit.

*[Meeting pauses]*

*[Meeting continues]*

**B:** Ah sigeng po. Okay, 'di okay lang po. It's, it's makakatulong pa talaga po sa thesis ko kasi medyo, actually hindi po medyo. Sabi po ng thesis adviser ko po na bago po 'yung topic kaya... taking everything that I can po.

**A:** Sige lang. Okay. Um, where were we?

**B:** 'Yung, 'yung sa, um, 'yung pag-travel po ng community kasi with the lives.

**A:** Hello?

**B:** Hello po. Sorry. Nag-freeze po ako. Nag-hang.

**A:** 'Yan, nag-freeze ka. Okay.

**B:** Ay, okay na po. Ayan, okay na. Okay, let's go. Okay po. So, ayan, last, second to the last na po. It's more of as a, someone who, since you write a lot po and since you're a writer for Arc po, um, from, in your experiences po sa Islands of Sina Una, what do you hope that the players would take away from playing a Head Hunter or Babaylan?

**A:** Depends on who's playing. Um,

**B:** Oh.

**A:** I think when you are, um, a non-Filipino, someone outside of the Filipino context who plays Sina Una, and there are a lot of them. Napromote tayo sa Critical Role once, 'di ba? So, that, that's a, that's a point of pride. Um,

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** For someone like that, what we want is, what we wanted to show for the Babaylan and the Headhunter, both of them together is that, um, we were not savages. 'Yung, the idea na parang, ah before, before the Spaniards arrived to give us Christianity, we were ano, we were just, um, we were just communities with huts and ano. And primitive, primitive tools and the like, 'di ba?

**B:** Yes po. Yes po.

**A:** We had a very, we have, we had a very complex belief system as represented by the Babaylan. Um, as, um, the Head Hunter now represents our, um, our sense of justice. And, um, in general, um, when you look at our equipment and our weapons, ganyan, um, there was writing, there was, we had gunpowder.

**B:** Ah, yeah, yeah, yeah, 'yun ano.

**A:** Um, it's funny kasi there's a new edition of D&D, 'di ba? There's a new set of Player's Handbook, Dungeon Master's Guide, and Monster Manual. In that very newest set of books, there are firearms. And but in the longest, for the longest time, Time wala po 'yun. Wala firearms sa D&D.

**B:** Crossbows lang.

**A:** So, it's funny kasi, this is actually one of the comments that I've heard from some random people in the internet na parang, um, it's inconceivable for them that, um, the Filipino, the Philippine pre-colonial setting had firearms. And they were, they couldn't, they couldn't absorb. Na biglang parang, that's not realistic. It's a...

**B:** That's not realistic. Oh my gosh. Wow. But, how do they know that?

**A:** But when, when Miguel de Legazpi charged the palace. 'Yun, una sa lahat 'yun ah, palace, the palace of Lakandula.

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** First of all, there was a palace. Secondly, um, they raided Lakandula's cannons.

**B:** Mmm.

**A:** So there were, um, there were, um, molds for cannons that, that were being prepared by Lakandula's men. Siguro ini-expect niya na they would have conflict with the Spaniards. And, and, and the like. So, so that's, that's also one of the things that we wanted to highlight. Um, Yeah. We put in firearms because every, every, um, research material that we looked at implied or directly stated that we did have firearms of some sort. That firearms.

**B:** Yeah. Yeah.

**A:** So, why not, 'di ba? Uh, 'yun 'yung naging stance. So, there. So as a, as, as someone who is, um, from the traditional global north, I think that's the term for all of us now. As people from the global north, we want to show them that we had our culture and a lot of it was lost because of, um, things that were done to us. As a local, um, as a Filipino, um, my answer is a bit more pointed na, if there's something that, uh, the Filipinos have that is common all throughout, is that we are a spiritual people. And this occurs across the Babaylan, uh, the very magic-oriented spellcasting class, as well as in the Headhunter, which is a non-spellcasting class at all. Pero there's still a lot of, um, integration with spirits. So.. And, yes, it manifests today as, as us being a Christian majority nation.

**B:** Yes. Yes. But, Yeah.

**A:** We are spiritual in spite of Christianity, not because of it. Mmm, yeah. That's, that's what I want to impart, uh, when, when people are playing these classes.

**B:** Ang ano, kasi iba din po 'yung Catholicism din natin. May—

**A:** Very, very animistic po 'yung.

**B:** Yes po.

**A:** Mahilig tayo sa mga anting-anting, 'yung mga pupunta sa ganyan.

**B:** Yes po. 'Yun nga po, exactly. 'Yung ano po, folk Catholicism po ata 'yung. Hindi ako sure. Ah, okay. So ayan, last question po. Ah. What advice would you give to other game designers po attempting to adapt indigenous cultures into TTRPG?

**A:** I have a few. Okay. First one, um, 'yun nga, papasok ulit tayo doon sa colonization. We, we were a, we are a colonized people. Um, which means that unfortunately, there will be gaps. There are things that we can no longer know for certain. Kasi, um, either it was not written down or if it was written down, it was destroyed. Or because tropical climate tayo, natunaw na 'yung 'yung kawayan kung saan sinulat, sinulat. So, there will be gaps. Be okay with filling them with your own experience. Kasi 'yun nga, going back to, you're not researchers. That's the job of the researcher. That's the job of the anthropologist to find the missing parts. Tayo, um, as creative writers, we want to present a complete picture of whatever it is that we want to present. So, that's the first one. Um, don't be afraid to fill in gaps with your own experiences. Um, the second one is, um, the Philippines as an entity is drawn by borders that were defined in the 20th century. So, with that in mind, don't hesitate to also look at other Southeast Asian cultures. And draw inspiration from them. So, um, Borneo for example, um, Borneo is not part of the modern Philippines, but it was part of, um, the Sulu Sultanate. So, there is an argument that it was once part of the Philippines. Philippines. But then that's still a very politically charged. Kasi what is the Philippines? Is it, um, the, the area that was colonized by the, by the Spaniards, in which case the entirety of Mindanao almost would not be part of the Philippines, 'di ba?

**B:** Yeah.

**A:** So, doon pa lang eh. What is the Philippines? When you're writing Filipino, um, inspired tales, what does that mean? Um, but at the same time, parang ang, ang wide brain naman, ang galaxy brain naman no'ng, um, magsulat ka ng Southeast Asian kasi sino ka para maging, para i-represent 'yung buong Southeast Asia, 'di ba?

**B:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**A:** So, draw inspiration from it. Um, don't be afraid to draw inspiration from it, but do not be its sole arbiter. Parang ano, parang, um, fill in what you know. Maganda lang ako sa from the heart. Fill it in with what you know. All the gaps, fill it in with what you know. Um, and if someone gets mad about what you know, then they don't know you. Ayun, ano pa? Tatlo 'yun eh. Um, we cannot be, we cannot be 100% accurate in the end. But we can be respectful. We can be, um, we can be inspired, we can be, um, we can be loving for the culture that we are representing, even if we are not representing them with accuracy. So... So, ilan 'yun? Tatlo.

**B:** Tatlo na po 'yung advice. Three, three pieces of advice po for the, 'yung fill in the gaps, draw inspiration, tapos 'yung be loving po about the, um..

**A:** Parang ano, I think the third one is more of ano, um, if people get mad.

**B:** Oh. They don't know.

**A:** They don't know.

**B:** Okay po. So I think that, ayun po, it concludes our interview po. So thank you so much po. If you have any parting words po before I end everything.

**A:** I think ang parting words ko is that, um, I will go back to what I believe Islands of Sina Una is. Um, it is part of a long line of things for D&D that is going to be inspired by Philippine culture. Um, D&D and RPG in general ano. Um, 'yun nga, like I mentioned, that line started unfortunately from a white person. So that started from Gary Gygax with Oriental Adventures. Um, it continues with The Islands of Sina Una, which I believe is a, um, a noticeable upgrade from what was given before. And then from there, we also, we also see that it's also moving forward already. Like, I feel like, um, Sina Una is already actually an artifact na, na, in the, in the D&D space ha, na parang, ah, as with the new edition, parang hindi na siya completely, um, applicable. Parang kailangan mo na siyang i-doktorin ng konti para magkasya. So, but at the same time, we, we're also starting to see things that are very Filipino in D&D. Um, not long after Sina Una, the Radiant Citadel came out. Um, Radiant Citadel. And there was an adventure there with, with a Bakunawa, right? Yeah. Um, and there's a reason kung bakit walang Bakunawa na stat block sa Sina Una, but there was a Bakunawa monster doon sa Radiant Citadel. And then moving forward, that's how I see it. Eh, parang D&D na lang will become this kind of deal na, D&D kasi parang it pulls, it's not a European fantasy setting. Kasi parang wala namang, wala namang England doon, walang France, 'di ba? Even in your like, uh, monsters from all over the, from all over Europe. Um, medyo I'm rambling. But I wanted to say is, um, Islands of Sina Una is nice, but it's not gospel. It's going to change. Um, I expect as more people play D&D, learn D&D, as the generations roll out, there will be better representations of it. Ako personally, they, I could, I am thinking of a different representation of Filipino culture in D&D. This is distinct from Sina Una. So these are things that will happen in the future. And whether or not it's under the

banner for Wizards the Coast. So, ganun siya. Uh, I think 'yun 'yung parting words ko. Um, um, it will happen and I'm excited to see it happen.

**B:** Mmm. Okay po. Ayan po, thank you so much po.

**A:** Thank you, Maleah.

**B:** Thank you po. I'll end it now. Thank you po.

*[END OF TRANSCRIPTION]*

## Appendix J: Interview Request

### To Makenzie De Armas

From:	"Maleah Rae Frange" <mkfrange@up.edu.ph>
To:	<a href="mailto:info@seersword.com">info@seersword.com</a> <a href="mailto:Lucia.seersword@gmail.com">Lucia.seersword@gmail.com</a> <a href="mailto:makenzie.de.armas@gmail.com">makenzie.de.armas@gmail.com</a> <a href="mailto:httpaladin@gmail.com">httpaladin@gmail.com</a>
Date:	3/3/2025 11:30:00 AM
Subject:	Request for Interview for Undergraduate Thesis on The Islands of Sina Una

Good day!

I hope this email finds you well! I am Maleah Rae Karganilla Frange, an undergraduate student at the University of the Philippines Manila, currently working on my thesis for the BA Philippine Arts program. My thesis focuses on the analysis of the Philippine Headhunter and Babaylan as new character classes for The Islands of Sina Una, particularly in how they incorporate Philippine cultural and historical elements into tabletop role-playing game mechanics.

I would love the opportunity to interview you and gain insights into the creative and research process in developing the classes for the campaign book. The interview would cover your inspirations, design choices, and perspectives on cultural representation for the setting.

At this stage, my research proposal is still under review by the university's ethics board, so I don't have a set interview date yet. However, I wanted to reach out to you in advance to inquire about the possibility of scheduling an interview once I receive approval. If you are open to it, and once the ethics review is completed, I can follow up to coordinate a time that works best for you. Please let me know if you have any questions or require any additional details regarding the thesis.

Thank you for your time and consideration! I really enjoy using The Islands of Sina Una as a setting for my games and campaigns and look forward to the possibility of speaking with you.

Best,

Maleah Rae Karganilla Frange  
2021-46154, BA Philippine Arts  
University of the Philippines Manila

## To Pam Punzalan

From: "pam punzalan" <pam.punzalan@gmail.com>  
To: "Maleah Karganilla Frange" <mkfrange@up.edu.ph>  
Date: 3/5/2025 5:30:58 PM  
Subject: Re: [TheDovetailor] New message received from mkfrange@up.edu.ph

Hi Maleah,

It's a pleasure to connect with you. :) I'm happy to be interviewed - am sure we can work something out with respect to time zones. I am on EST, based in Canada.

Mx. Mendenhall would be difficult to reach, I feel, but Mx. Armas and Mx. Versprille might be more available. [Try this link for Lucia](#), and [try this one for Makenzie](#).

Best wishes,  
Pam

On Wed, Mar 5, 2025 at 9:54 AM Maleah Karganilla Frange <noreply@carrd.com> wrote:

Name: Maleah Karganilla Frange

Email: [mkfrange@up.edu.ph](mailto:mkfrange@up.edu.ph)

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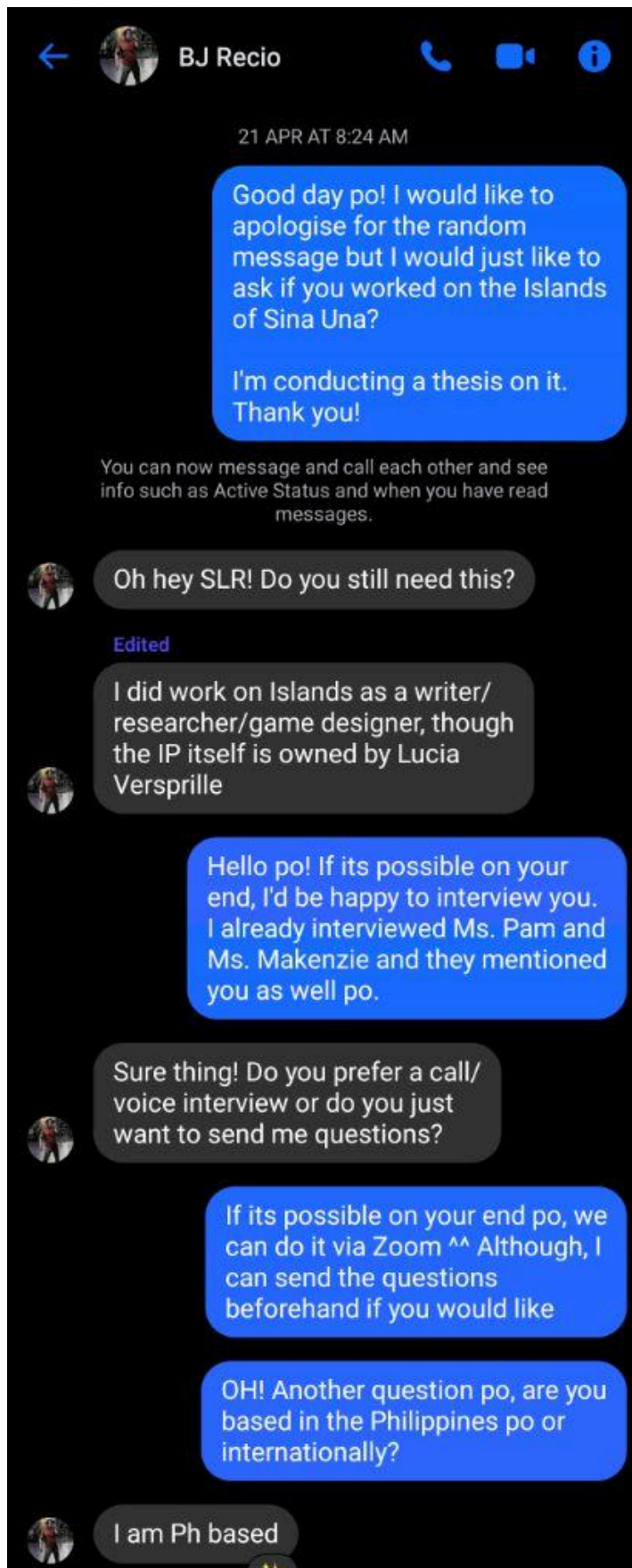
Good day!

My name is Maleah Frange, an undergraduate student at the University of the Philippines, Manila taking BA Philippine Arts. I'm currently conducting research for my thesis on the analysis of the Philippine Headhunter and Babaylan as new character classes.

I would love the opportunity to be able to interview you in regards to the creative and research process in developing these as classes. Additionally, would it be possible to share the preferred contact information for Mx. De Armas, Mx. Mendenhall, and Mx. Versprille? I would love to be able to get their insights as well. If sharing their contact details is not possible, I completely understand, and I would appreciate any guidance on how I could reach them through the proper channels.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I truly appreciate any assistance you can provide!

To BJ Recio





Much easier to access research materials here haha

Oh okay po, at least we're in the same timezone ^^

May I ask what dates and time you're available to have the interview?



Generally I'm okay on weekend afternoons, though not available this Sunday in particular

Is May 10 (Saturday) 3PM feasible po?



Yep! That should work



Okay, thank you so much po!

For formalities' sake, may I ask for your email so that I may send the informed consent form as well as the questions for the interview?



Sure thing, and no problem!  
Send it to [bjrecio@gmail.com](mailto:bjrecio@gmail.com)  
and address to Mr. Billy Joel Recio.



Thank you po! I'll be sure to send it by tomorrow to respect the office hours ^^

Thank you once again po! It really helps 🙏



## Appendix K: Thesis Defense Form

College of Arts and Sciences  
University of the Philippines Manila  
Padre Faura, Ermita, Manila

The Registrar  
University of the Philippines Manila

Sir/Madam:

This is to certify that Mr./Ms. Mariah Frange, satisfactorily completed his/her undergraduate thesis entitled: Roll for Representation: The Analysis of the Babylon & Headhunter from the Islands of on May 21, 2025. Sina Uno

The following faculty member/s served as panel:

Grade: 1.0

Rochanne Hilario Philomeno  
Janet Martin Sam  
JOSE OLATIS

Adviser

It is therefore requested that the above mentioned faculty be paid his/her honoraria as per the schedule approved by the Board of Regents at its 822nd meeting on July 31, 1972.

Recommending approval:

Laufred I Hernandez, MM,MA  
College Secretary

Ma. Teresa G De Guzman, PhD  
Dean

Registrar