



Concept Art Booklet

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Hello, my name is Dan Salvato. I'd like to extend my gratitude to you for purchasing the Doki Doki Literature Club Fan Pack! Your support means a lot to us – thanks to you, we'll be able to continue making games.

The Concept Art Booklet is a little treat that will take you through some of the game's development process. If you're interested in game development or just want to learn more about DDLC, then I hope you find some of the stuff in here interesting!

The Beginning

Doki Doki Literature Club dates back to as early as the beginning of 2015. I was already months into writing another visual novel at the time. While I was hanging out with my friend Corey on college campus, I brought up an idea that I was playing with in my head. The idea was to design a visual novel that perfectly mimicked all the tropes you'd find in any other tacky romance game – but with a twist that resulted in things being “off”, as if the cute setting was only a façade for something insidious and disturbing underneath. I imagined the game slowly breaking over time, with unsettling glitches and character behaviors, until you finally discover that one evil character has been controlling the whole show.



The first iteration of the DDLC logo, with different colors and no outer circle. Quickly vetoed by my friend due to the subtle(?) boobs joke.

On the surface, it wasn't too far-fetched of a concept. I was heavily inspired by “uncanny valley” horror that you'd find in games such as Yume Nikki and Eversion. Anyway, Corey responded really strongly to the idea, so it ended up sticking with me, despite me already being waist-deep in developing another game.

Fast-forward one year, and I was still working on that same other game – often closely with my friend Masha, who helped tremendously with scene-by-scene editing and continuity of the story. By chance, I ended up mentioning my little horror game concept in conversation – and, to put it lightly, she was enthusiastic. We both shared a desire for the VN industry to be a little more daring and not rely on the same tropes over and over, so to design a game that literally made fun of them was definitely appealing. In the end, it was Masha who convinced me to start development on the game.

Meet The Club!

It didn't take long to come up with a bunch of generic anime character tropes, but refining them in writing proved challenging. The goal was to give nods to games that are *genuinely* badly written, while keeping some level of authenticity that would make the game and characters enjoyable.

To add to the parody, I wanted to use generic-sounding Japanese names for the characters. I thought it would be funny to jab at Western VNs that take place in "pseudo-Japan" – that is, the anime influence has taken over the VN, but the writer doesn't quite know enough about Japan to make it fully culturally accurate.

I picked "Natsuki" and "Yuri" to describe the characters who were fiery/assertive and quiet/elegant, respectfully. "Sayori" was some kind of unholy fusion between "Sayuri" and "Saori", and to this day I'm not even sure if it could pass off as a real Japanese name. Finally, "Monika" completes the satire by literally taking an English name and throwing a "k" in there to match Romanized Japanese. Aside from Monika sounding like a stereotypical popular-girl name, it's also a subtle hint that she doesn't fully belong in the game setting like everyone else.

Yeah, so there's the first-year girl who's blunt and tsundere, kind of full of herself but not very smart

She tries to put herself above other people but they don't really take her seriously because she's all talk

Then there's the third-year girl who is the mature one who studies hard and gets intimidated when people tease her, and she timidly tries to keep people on track. She expresses her feelings that she's too shy to voice through very metaphorical writing.

Then the third girl is your childhood friend, she's pretty naive and innocent but is always nice to everybody and just wants to help. She likes to relax and enjoy the simple things in life (like leisurely spending her club time with the boy she has feelings for wink wink)

Well I could make the childhood friend the crazy one, but I was thinking about having the typical smart/athletic/pretty popular girl be the crazy one

I also want to kill the childhood friend.

premise of the game

Killing the "I just want everyone to be happy" girl is the most disturbing

Especially if she commits suicide

I'm Not An Artist

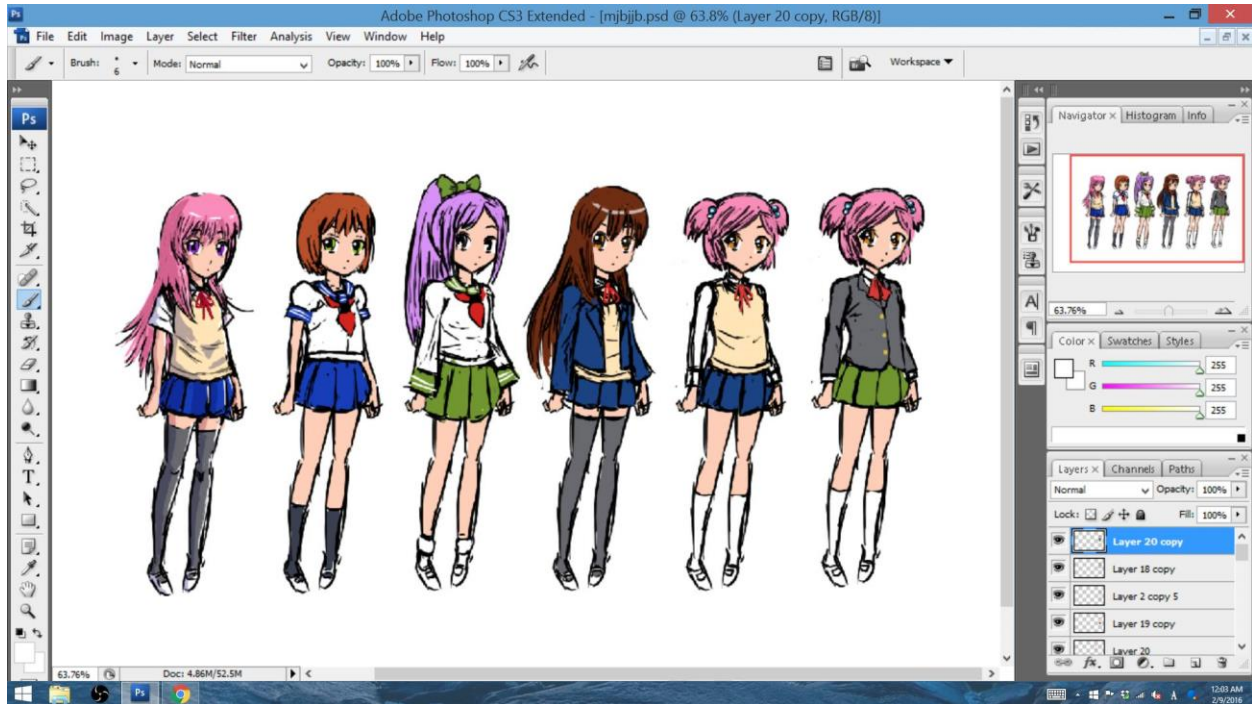
...And that meant if I wanted to start making this game, I had to use some placeholder art. So, I hopped online and used a free "anime character creator" tool to Frankenstein these abominations to life.



I'm not gonna lie, these little gremlins actually got me pretty far. I used them in development for the first couple chapters, as well as a lot of the poem response stuff. But since the game was actually beginning to shape up, I really had to design these characters for real, and find myself an artist.

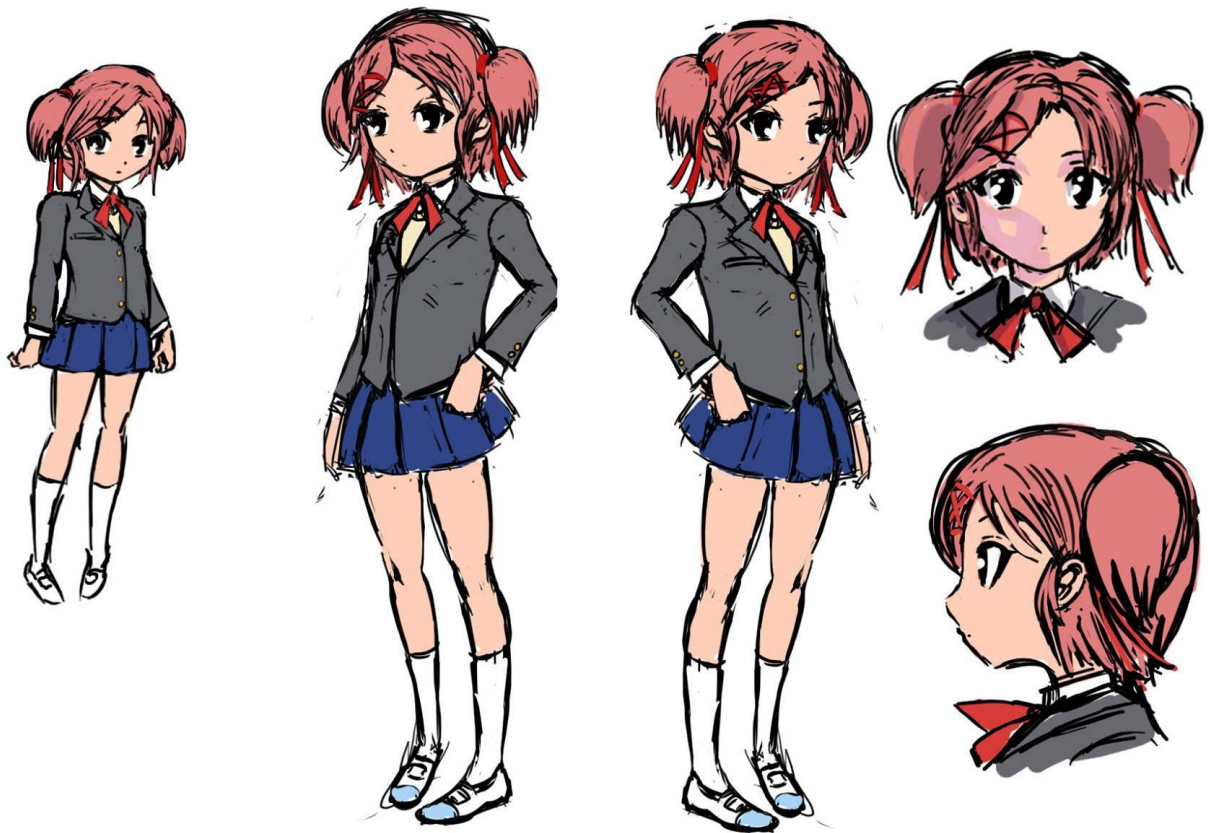
Dave Is An Artist

...And a good college friend of mine! Dave was pretty onboard with the project once I described the overall concept to him, and after a few weeks I had managed to impress him with my progress on the story, logo, and theme song. So, he grabbed his tablet and started sketching around.

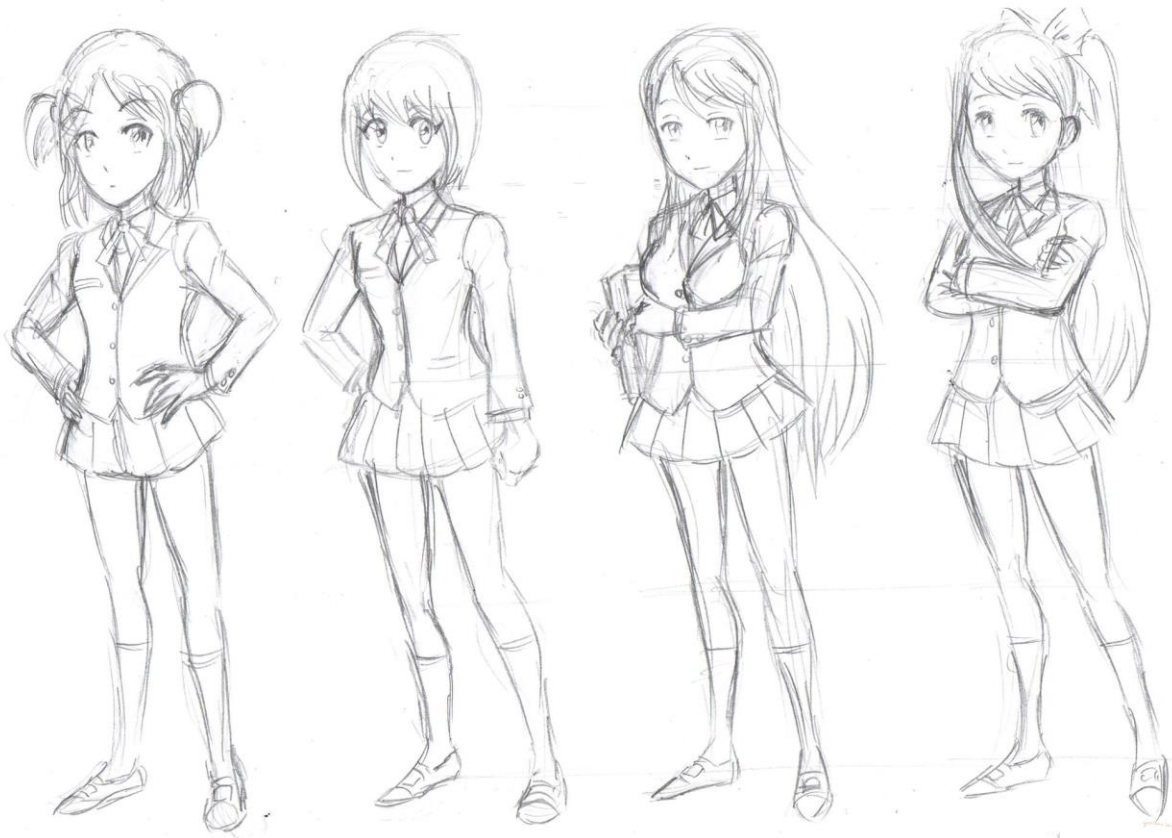


We started off by working on the school uniform. In the blink of an eye, Dave had already amassed an anime schoolgirl army. Does the blazer on the far right look familiar at all? We ended up going with that design, but swapping in a blue skirt.

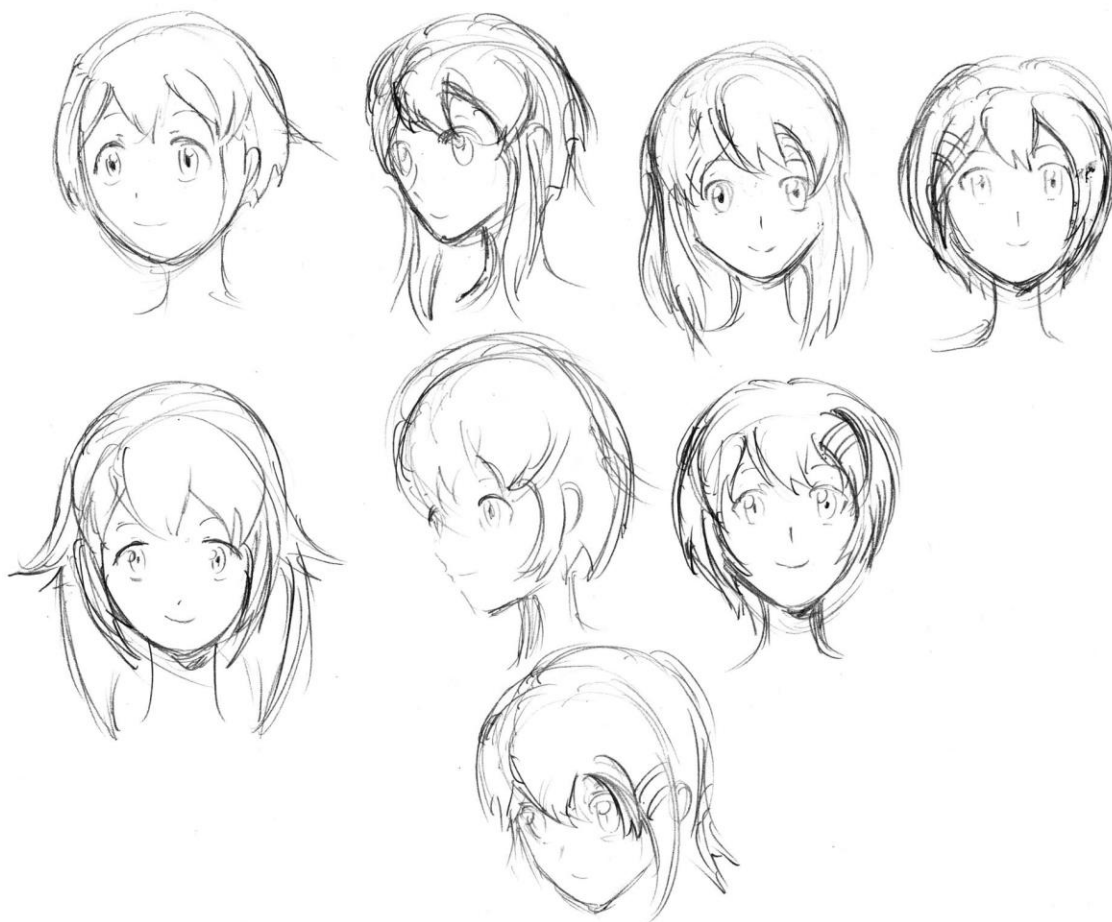
With the school uniform more or less in place, it was finally time to fine-tune our characters!



Natsuki's character concept as sketched by Dave. A completely different art style, but her design is pretty close to the final version, right?



And now, rough sketches of the whole cast. I don't think I provided any reference for character height, so he drew them all at the same height. I told him that Yuri and Monika were looking pretty spot-on, but Sayori and Natsuki needed some adjusting in proportions, hairstyle, etc.



Here are some hairstyle concept sketches for Sayori! (Can you tell Dave is really good at helping with character concepts?) I was pretty sure I wanted to go with short hair, but it always helps to see some variety. Maybe she had longer hair in middle school and cut it all off because it got too bothersome?

“I can never wake up early enough to get my hair right... Also, shorter hair looks more mature!!”

“Now you’re just trying to justify your laziness...”



Here she is! Of course, later on, her hair became just a *little* bit longer, so that it hangs down a bit. I'm sure this is what it looked like right when she got it cut, though.

This is Dave's color sketch of Monika. Pretty interesting how her side bang is only on one side, right? That ended up changing later on.

Putting that aside, the art style really changes the feel of the character, doesn't it? Dave has always been more inspired by anime styles you'd find in the 90s and early 2000s, and it definitely shows.

Dave now works as a translator for Sekai Project, helping bring visual novels overseas to be enjoyed by the Western audience.

You can find him on Twitter: [@shinhoroko](https://twitter.com/shinhoroko)



Kagefumi

After Dave, another amazing artist by the name of Kagefumi was briefly involved with development for a couple months. She helped further set the character designs in stone. She was originally going to illustrate the entire game, but unrelated personal difficulties resulted in her having to step down. To this day, I tremendously admire her art, and I'm very proud that she could take small part in bringing the Literature Club to life.





Fumi's original illustrations of Yuri, Sayori, and Natsuki. Again, character heights hadn't yet been perfected, so Natsuki is pretty tall here!

I also think this version of Yuri is absolutely stunning. She looks so gentle and timid, doesn't she?



And here's an early rendition of Monika. I remember wanting to have one character wear higher stockings – I thought Yuri might be a good fit, but we decided that she isn't the type to draw attention to herself. Monika, being the confident one who cares about her impression, was the obvious choice after that.



Here are Fumi's completed promo images for Monika and Sayori. I still love them!

You can find Fumi on Twitter: [@kagefumis](https://twitter.com/kagefumis)

The Final Sprites

After Satchely came on board, the sprites progressed fairly quickly. I first had her sketch all the sprite poses so that I could finally update my in-game placeholders to something that would be closer to the final art.





Here are some old screenshots of the game with the initial placeholders, then later incorporating the sketches. What an upgrade! Of course, the UI still needed some work at this point, but it wasn't worth focusing on when there was so much to do with the script and scene construction. Set your priorities!

I was pretty specific with the “poses” system for the art. The plan was to give each character three poses: A basic pose, an “alternate arms” pose, and an action pose. The alternate arms could be fastened to the basic pose in any combination, which leads to a total of four distinct poses: AA, AB, BA, BB. Then, the action pose would be a special, standalone pose that truly feels expressive and animated in a way that matches the character.

Working these into the game was a bit of a challenge. A lot of extremely careful image editing produced character “halves” that I would later programmatically stitch together in the game itself. This way, I could use just a few source images to create many different character sprites.

Here’s an example of what the raw image files look like:



Pretty funny, right? In the end, it worked out very well. But once we added the facial expressions, it got *really* crazy.

Here's an example of a "cheat sheet" I used during scene construction. Each facial expression is assigned a letter for convenient reference. Including expression "y" which isn't in this sheet, Sayori has 25 different facial expressions. Combined with the arm poses, can you calculate how many total combinations there are?

The answer is 100 – that's 4 possible bodies times 25 facial expressions. Now you can really see why having full sprites would be a huge pain. Not only would it take up a ton of space, but making a small adjustment to a pose or facial expression would be so painstaking, I don't even want to think about it.

Natsuki is special – she has two different heads (front and turned), with the front-facing head fitting both her basic pose and her action pose. Because of that, she is officially the most expressive, with 155 possible combinations. Being tsundere takes a lot of work, huh?



Backgrounds

Designing the backgrounds was a fairly straightforward process. I would provide Velinquent with a whole bunch of reference images, and his talent would take care of the rest. He would start out by creating a 3D model of the scene, showing me temporary renders until we decided on the best camera angle. They would look something like this:



After the scene was decided, he would import the render into Photoshop and paint over it, giving it the beautiful, illustrated look you see in-game. Velinquent was great with perspective and lighting, making sure the characters fit perfectly into the backgrounds with no rendering discrepancies.



Here's an early rendition of the clubroom that, while beautiful, couldn't be used because the scene wasn't well-lit enough.

Final Notes

I think that about wraps it up! While I can't take you through the *entire* development of the game, I thought I would highlight some of the more fun and interesting aspects that you wouldn't get to see anywhere else.

It was an absolute pleasure and an honor to work with so many amazing people to design Doki Doki Literature Club. I've always really admired artists, and I wanted to give every contributor the attention I feel they deserve.

If you're an artist or game developer, I'd love to take a look at what you're working on, so don't be afraid to hit me up on Twitter: [@dansalvato](https://twitter.com/dansalvato)

Thank you for your dedication to the Literature Club! I'm always working on new stuff, so I hope to see you again sometime in the future.

Dan