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Personal Statement

My dream has always been to attract people's attention to social issues using game technology. I am a deep game lover. I started playing games on the first computer in my family when I was a child. From the game Zuma Frog to MMO, I can always find joy when exploring the virtual world. I am also an observer of society. I always pay attention to the events happening in society and want to solve problems that exist. Luckily, I find game design is an excellent way to attract everyone's attention to social issues.

My memory of winter has always been the thick white snow as one who was born and grew up in northern China. When I was a little girl, I used to go ice skating and have snowball fights with my best friends every winter. But such joy suddenly ended. Just in the winter of 2018, though the wind was freezing, I suddenly found that the snow had become so thin. Later, all children in the neighborhood were not able to experience the joy of playing in the snow that existed in their memory. At that time, a voice arose: environmental protection should not be just the responsibility of governments! We should work together to give children a beautiful memory of ice and snow and an unforgettable childhood. Then how should I do that? When sitting down to check my favorite games, the idea of combining gaming and being a voice in society was suddenly born. Since digital media has developed so rapidly over the last decade, I can use games, my greatest interest, to achieve the environmental protection goals in an effective and fun way!

With this idea in mind, I made a conscious decision to study computers and game design since high school. During my undergraduate years, I studied many related courses that could facilitate my dream, such as game design theory (MDA, etc.), art education (Photoshop/Premiere/After Effects/Rhino, etc.), Human-computer interaction, Virtual Reality, Computer Graphics (shaders), computer vision (shaders), and Artificial Intelligence (facial emotion recognition), etc. Those courses greatly encouraged me to think about games from a designer perspective. Simutaneouly, I use Internet-free resources to learn Blender, which helps me create models and apply them to game scenes. I also dive deep into shaders, ink styles, and 2D styles and keep creating new styles of shaders to achieve various effects for games. In addition, I'm also looking for courses on YouTube to learn Unity features in preparation for developing my own games.

Such knowledge accumulation allows me to turn ideas into reality. In spring 2022, my team members and I created a game that reflected the damage industrialization does harm to trees and animals, leading everyone to raise awareness about environmental protection. In this game, the protagonist can use an ancestral machine to return to the past and do his best to save the world before it is destroyed. In the project, I was responsible for mission design, writing events, including mission flow and combat system, as well as testing and debugging. The project was ultimately successful and helped us get into Gee! Award Finalist. More importantly, it has improved my game art design skills and given me the confidence to tackle bigger challenges.

Motivated by the success of this project, in summer 2022, I designed the Underground Princess, a story-driven, single-player 3D room escape game to raise people's awareness of under-represented groups. I am a girl, and I always sense that the world is built more for men, and girls belong to the minority group. Women are generally more sensitive, empathetic, and caring than men, but in the meantime, our gender group also gives girls an inferiority complex through all kinds of open, private, and invisible harassment. Such gender injustice motivates me to create this design to tell girls to be brave and stand up and resist any kind of harassment. In this project,

I used what I learned about Unity and modeling to create the basement scene and designed different styles of decryption. Interestingly, I used cheese (the specialty in Wisconsin) as a key prop to provide players with different ideas (a shortcut) for decryption. Things do not always go smoothly, and I also encountered roadblocks. While programming the combination lock, I realized that instead of modeling the different gears separately, I had built them as a group and imported them into Unity. At this point, they couldn't turn individually. I learned how to ungroup a set in Unity instead of fixing and exporting again from Blender, which saved me a lot of time. When adding animations to it subsequently, I originally wanted to add different unlocking animations to it. But since I wanted to build a delicate system, I will now leave it until I learn animation creation systematically, which is one of the reasons why I am applying for graduate school. In summary, this game design experience strengthened my skills in game design, both in modeling and programming.

I have a concrete plan for my career. Shortly after finishing my graduate degree, I would like to join a big company in the game industry, such as Riot Games, Origin, and Tencent, as a game designer. I look forward to working with the team to learn how the game design chain actually works and will collaborate with others to create popular games such as League of Legends, It Takes Two, and Apex Legends. Thus, I can gain experience in all aspects of a successful game-creation process. In the long term, I want to create a startup to produce games independently. Among them, MMO-style games, especially MMORPG, attract me the most. Our world is experiencing the rapid development of the Internet and a COVID-19 case work-from-home culture; thus, people spend more of their time living virtually on the Internet. I believe that with my game design skills for social good, I can help create a free and safe world where everyone can work freely and live happily. Although these two projects have been very successful, I realize that my knowledge base is still not enough for me to create a game that can attract millions of gamers. Thus, I still have much room for improvement in game production. Therefore, a master's degree or a possible Ph.D. would be a great booster for my dream.