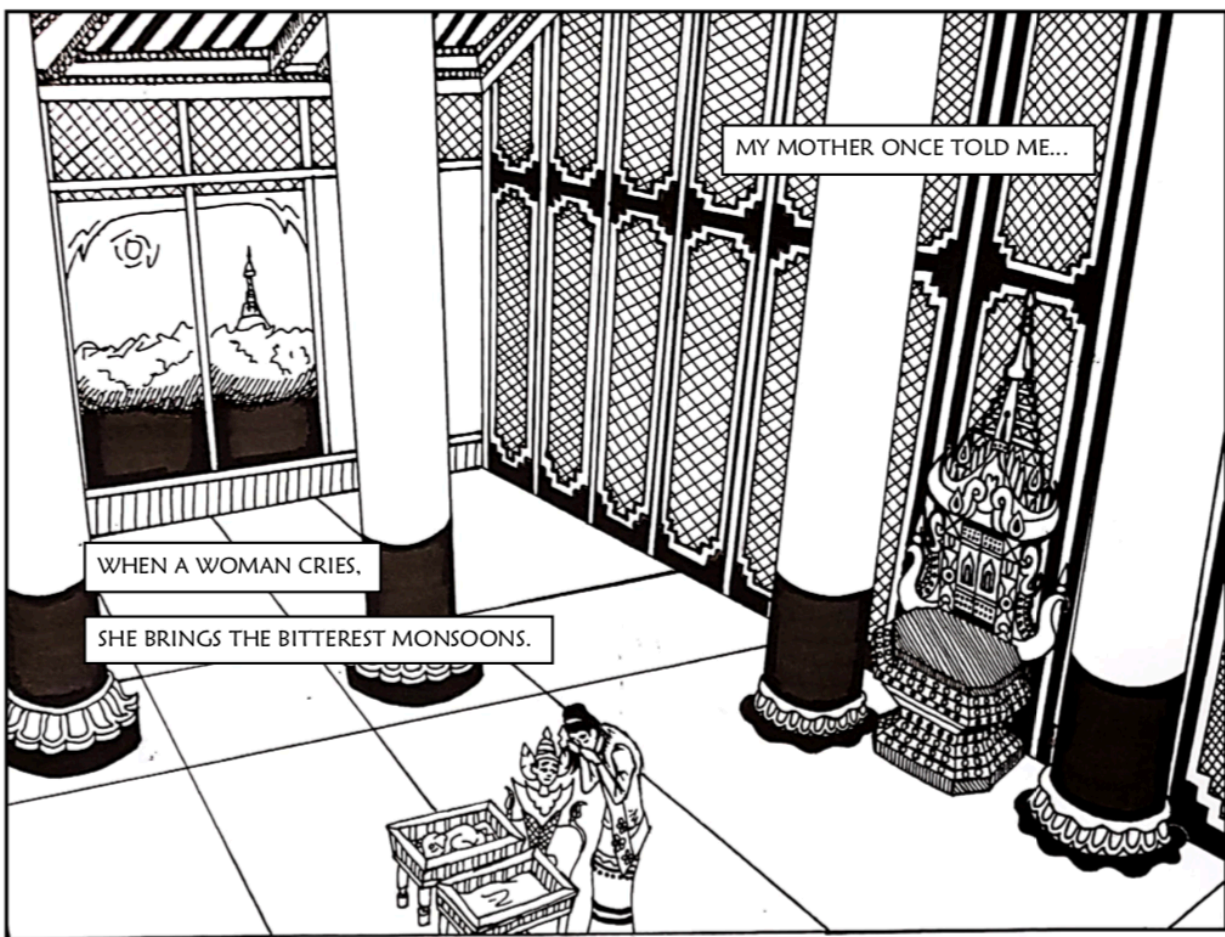


## THE ROAR OF A *CHINTHE*: AN ORIGINAL COMIC

Adelle Ingrid F. Dimitui

**In a Tortoiseshell:** *In this comic, “The Roar of a Chinthe,” Adelle Dimitui **orients** the reader to Burmese culture and mythology. Her story distills the myth of the chinthe, a lion-like creature that stands guard in pairs at the entrances of many Burmese temples. Together, her visuals and text showcase traditional Burmese architecture, dress, and symbolism.*

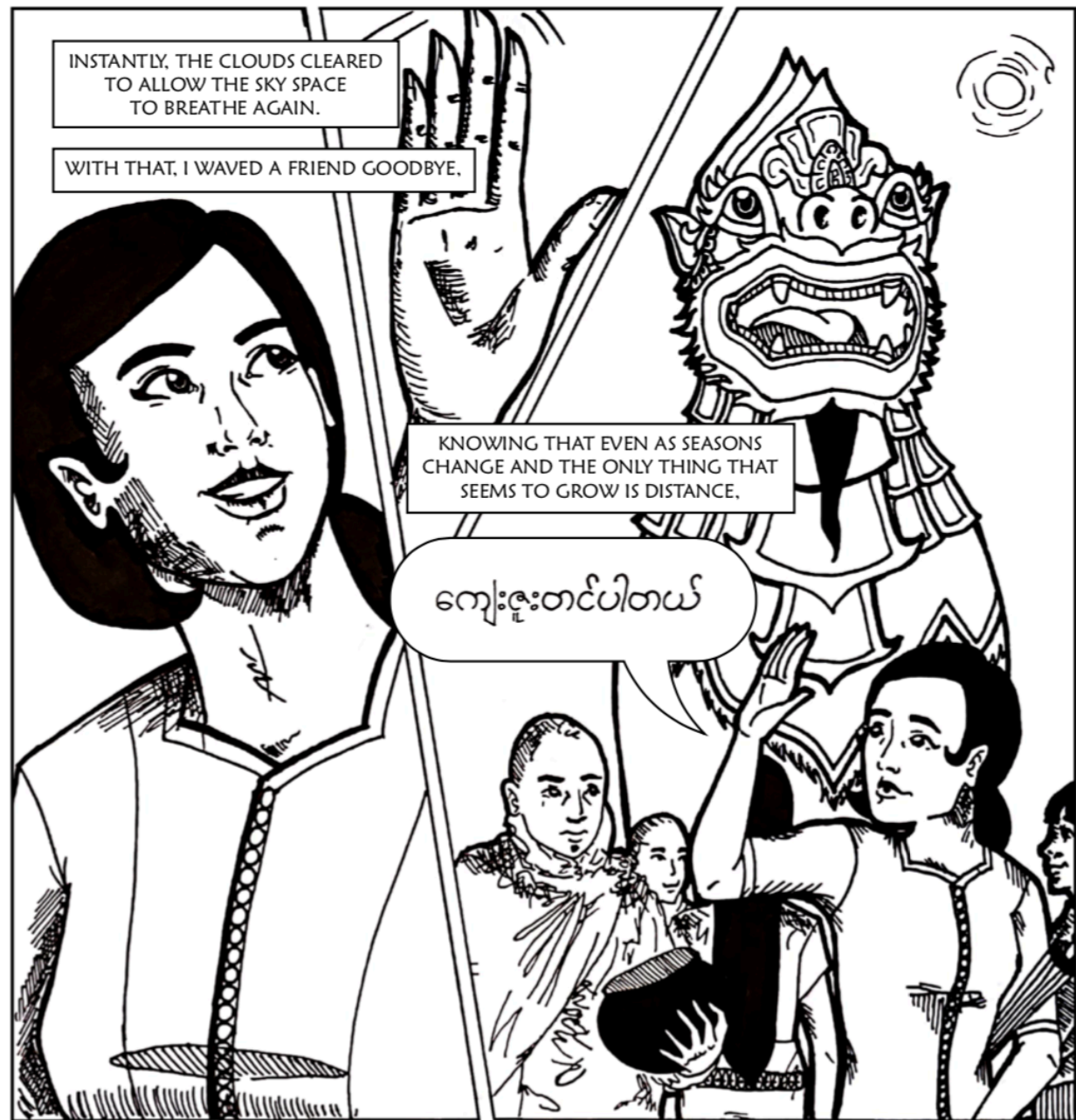
*Excerpt*











## *Author Commentary*

Adelle Dimitui

This original comic was my final assignment for the “Graphic Novels and Comics” class taught by Professor Alfred Bendixen. After some storyboarding, each page was hand drawn in pencil then inked. These drawings were then scanned and lettered electronically.

This piece is incredibly personal, as it serves as my ode and love letter to the country of Myanmar. Though I am not Burmese myself, the country served as my home for my first thirteen years of life, so I wanted to highlight what I consider to be some of the most captivating aspects of its rich culture.

To this end, I grounded the foundations of the story upon Burmese mythology, with particular attention paid towards the *chinthe*, a legendary leogryph revered for being guardian to the pagodas ubiquitous throughout Myanmar. The *chinthe* has always acted as a symbol of strength in my life, having been the mascot of the school I attended when I was growing up. Thus, I wanted to center the story around a figure that the audience could similarly regard as a representation of power; as the story progresses, the *chinthe* matures into a source of physical and emotional strength for the young female protagonist, before eventually becoming the emblematic protector the Burmese people know him to be.

The architectural elements of the story’s various settings are drawn with especial ornateness, due to the influence they draw from grand, real-life locations in Myanmar. For example, the interior of the palace at the beginning of the comic is based on the throne room of the Kanbawzathadi Palace in Bago, and the pagoda at the end is directly modelled after the Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon. The nods to Burmese culture also extend to subtler visual tributes. For instance, the protagonist is drawn donning a traditional *longyi*, and in the last scene, a Burmese parasol. Then, upon bidding her old friend farewell on the last page, the protagonist says “thank you” (transliterated as *kyay zuu tin par tal*) in Burmese.

Finally, the motifs I chose to incorporate into the story allude to certain facets of Burmese culture. Notably, in reference to its impact on daily life and industry, weather is used to represent the emotional state of the protagonist, as measured by her proximity to the *chinthe*. When they are together, it is sunny and happy, but when they are apart, the monsoon season and sadness prevail.

## *Editor Commentary*

Myrial Holbrook

The lexicon terms can be applied just to visuals as well as texts. In Adelle’s comic, for instance, we see that graphics can provide eloquent orienting. The first panel alone already creates an immersive space for readerly analysis: note the majestic columns, the detail of the walls and altarpiece, the elegant robes worn by the characters, the sweltering sun and the spire of a pagoda in the distance. And of course, the story itself derives from the mythology of the *chinthe*, a lion-like creature that guards and protects the people of Myanmar.

In anthropology, images are often referred to as “thin” description, as opposed to the “thick” description of words. But such a distinction, I think, misses the greatest power of images: the creation of an immersive reality. Although we may not know the intricate history behind everything we see when we look at images, the concreteness of the image alone eliminates subjective possibilities. To put it slightly differently, with images, we are not left entirely to our own imaginations of things, which is helpful for trying to understand things we might have never seen before.

I would also like to emphasize that Adelle’s comic is not only visual: the narration of the story contributes textual orienting too. “When a woman cries, she brings the bitterest monsoons,” reads the first panel, evoking the monsoon season of tropical climates and, even more profoundly, the likening of the protagonist’s emotions to the mutability of nature. In the final panels, the protagonist, all grown up, having lost her *chinthe* years before, finally reunites with him and notes that “there is always a time for sun, and there is always a time for rain.” The sun, which in the first panel was distant and foreboding, is near and benevolent in the final panel. The weather-woman interplay is a common feature of Burmese culture and mythology, and Adelle expresses it beautifully in her comic.

With her deep academic and personal knowledge of Myanmar, Adelle uses both the visual and the textual to orient us to a different culture and mythology. Even someone with no background in Burmese culture, like me, can dip into this world with the help of her comic. I’m no natural artist, but her comic has made me reconsider my own writing process. Perhaps the next time I sit down to write a paper, I can do some visual world-building first—if not on paper or on InDesign, at least in my mind—to make my orienting all the more immersive.

*Professor Commentary*

Alfred Bendixen, Department of English

Students in my English course “Graphic Novels and Comics” (Fall 2018) had the option of writing conventional critical analyses or of doing creative work that demonstrated their mastery of the material covered in class. Adelle Ingrid F. Dimitui chose to create an original comic narrative based on her admiration for Burmese culture. The result, “The Roar of a *Chinthe*,” vividly illustrates the possibilities and power of visual storytelling and sequential art. Instead of a conventional grid structure, this work uses a wide variety of physical formats in its fourteen pages including slanted divisions as well as longer horizontal boxes, effectively establishing the work’s thematic treatment of separation and unification—the idea of missing halves finding completion. The work is also distinguished by an acute awareness of the qualities inherent in black and white composition (light and darkness), the use of specific but varying sizes to create emphases, and the repeated focus on meaningful details, particularly hands and eyes. Furthermore, the words are artistically placed in separate boxes which are inset into the visual works with care and precision. The work has a clear beginning, middle, and end but seems to move organically through these stages thus demonstrating the transformative growth of both child and animal as well as the creator’s complex relationship to Burmese culture.

**Bios**

**Adelle Ingrid F. Dimitui '19** is a mechanical and aerospace engineering major. She has lived in Southeast Asia her entire life and hails from the Philippines. When she is not completing problem sets or debugging poorly written code, Adelle likes to spend most of her free time drawing, songwriting, and laughing boisterously with her friends. She wrote this as a senior.

**Myrial Holbrook '19** is a Comparative Literature major pursuing a certificate in European Cultural Studies. She hails from Columbus, Ohio. Beyond editing for *Tortoise*, she also serves as a Fellow in the Writing Center, a member of the Independent Work Committee, and an Executive Board Member of the Community House Big Sibbs program. In the past, she has contributed to *Innovation* and *The Nassau Literary Review*. When she isn't mixing up English, Chinese, and Spanish at home and abroad, she can be found chuckling over such literary scoundrels as Twain and Cervantes, watching classic movies, tying herself into yoga knots, and tossing back espresso shots. She wrote this as a senior.