

# NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS ImagineFX SKETCHBOOK SPECIAL!

OVER



## EPIC SKETCHES!

Pro artists showcase their favourite doodles to help ignite your imagination

## INTERVIEWS

- DAN DOS SANTOS
- GREG BALDWIN
- ALIX HILLMER

## FEATURING...

- BEN MAURO
- NELLI SUNELI
- ACKY BRIGHT
- COREY SHILLINGFORD
- VALENTINA GRAZIUSO
- GREG LAMBRAKIS
- ERIC TALBOT
- AND LOADS MORE





Painted by Nina Vakueva



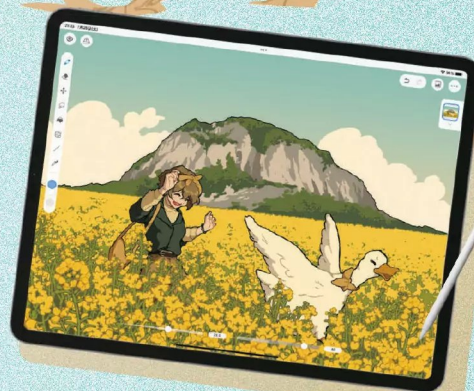
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*Enjoy creating more.*



## Welcome to... NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS ImagineFX



Sketchbooks are often a big part of an artist's life. They can be an almost ritualistic place for brushing up on key skills with regular practice, or they can be a simple place to jot down ideas, doodle creative thoughts or work on parts of a project without needing the commitment to a fully rendered end result.

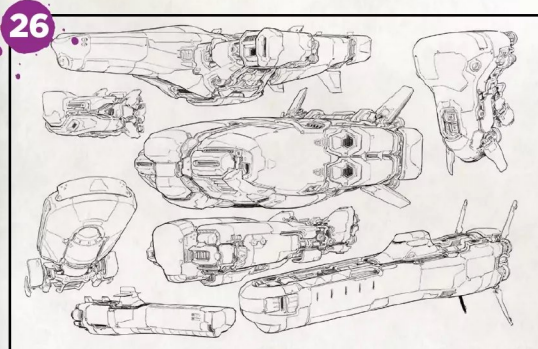
No matter what, they're fascinating to explore and we know you love to see them, so we thought it was high time for us to put together another one of our Sketchbook Special issues. This month you'll find all manner of sketches, from the loose to the polished, from sci-fi mechs to whimsical creatures, and everything you can imagine in-between.

These sketchbooks are from a wide variety of artists working across a swathe of industries in the art world, including comics, TV, video games and movies. Plus, we have some extended sketchbooks with exclusive interviews to give you insight into the creative lives of three top artists, along with their honest thoughts on what sketchbooks bring to both their careers and lives. Enjoy the issue!

Rob

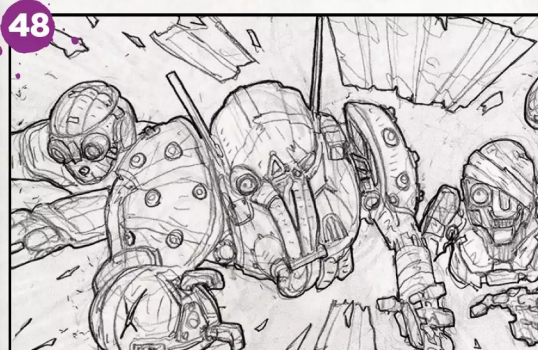
**Editor**  
Rob.Redman@futurenet.com

### EDITOR'S CHOICE Three of my top picks this month...



#### Window into the future

Explore the quirky vehicles and beautifully portrayed hard-surface details of games artist Gavin Manners.



#### Step into a sci-fi universe

Art director and concept designer Ben Mauro shows us some of the sketches behind his Huxley graphic novels.



#### Darkly detailed forest drawings

A background in tabletop wargames shines through for Phil Moss and his sketchbook filled with epic fantasy.

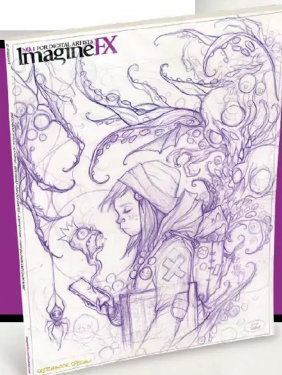
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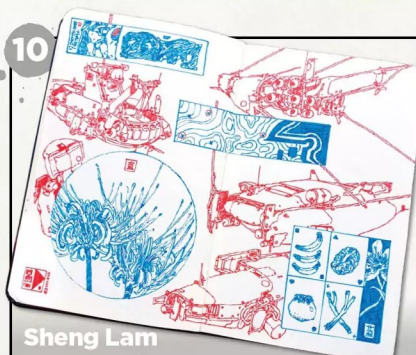
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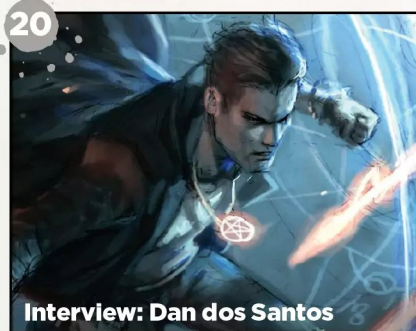
Intricate artworks ready to captivate.



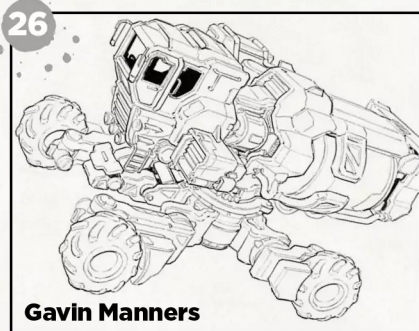
Sheng Lam



Paul Schoeni



Interview: Dan dos Santos



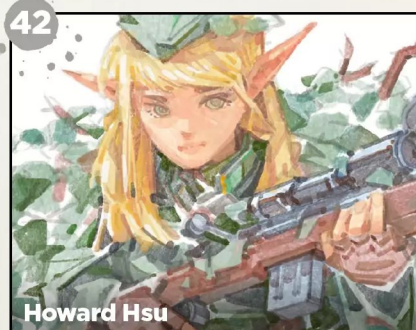
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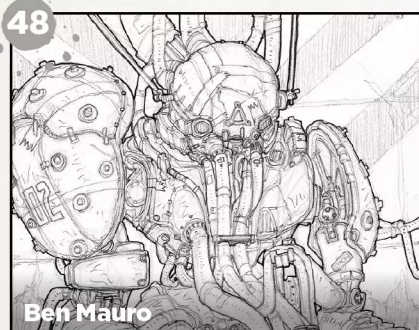
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Rain Rouhani



Howard Hsu



Ben Mauro





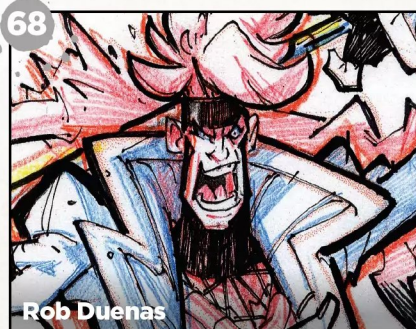
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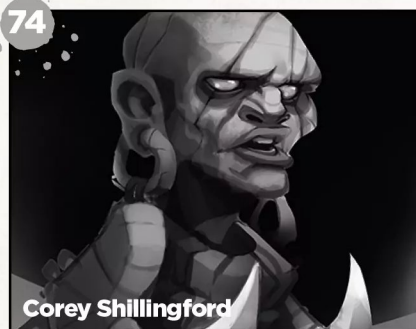
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Rob Duenas



Jennifer Park



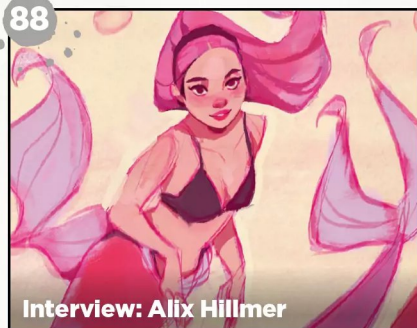
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### 98 Next month: Learn how to master the human form

Get to grips with anatomy thanks to expert advice from professional artists.



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Artwork by  
Jen Bartel

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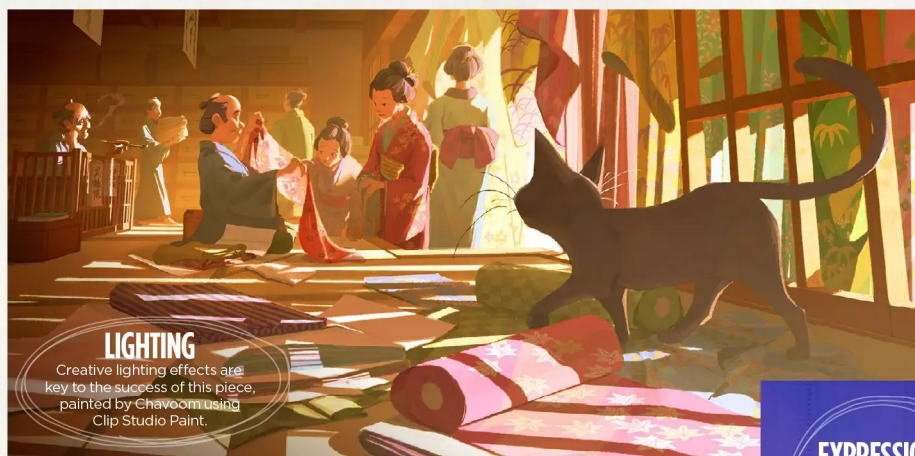




Software

# Next-level painting at your fingertips

From bold comic panels to delicate picture books, **Clip Studio Paint** gives artists the tools, freedom and flair to bring any creative vision to life



## LIGHTING

Creative lighting effects are key to the success of this piece, painted by Chavoom using Clip Studio Paint.

**C**lip Studio Paint has long been a favourite among artists, from hobbyists painting for fun to professionals in comics, illustration and 2D animation. Its developer, Celsys, is continually enhancing the software, expanding its features and improving workflows to make it more capable than ever.

## Artist PROFILE

**Hitomi Tamura**  
LOCATION: Japan



Hitomi (Chavoom) is a visual development and concept artist from Japan who has over four years of experience working in the animation industry. Her main passion is bringing characters to life through carefully crafted scenes, with a focus on spectacular lighting and colour.  
<https://chavoom.myportfolio.com>

With access to a vast library of free and paid assets, including brushes, materials and even 3D models, artists can work seamlessly across devices, from full Mac or PC setups to tablets and smartphones. While offering a natural drawing experience, the app also introduces helpful features such as realistic colour blending, painting directly onto 3D models, layer comps and watermarking tools to help protect your valuable artwork.

No matter your art style or genre, Clip Studio Paint provides plenty of creative power to help you produce your best work. You can try it for free by visiting [www.clipstudio.net/en](http://www.clipstudio.net/en). And if you're not already subscribed to **ImagineFX**, you can sign up for a chance to claim a free six-month Clip Studio Paint licence! See page 6 for all the details on our exclusive offer.

Artists are using Clip Studio Paint, for all kinds of spectacular creations, Hitomi Tamura – also known as



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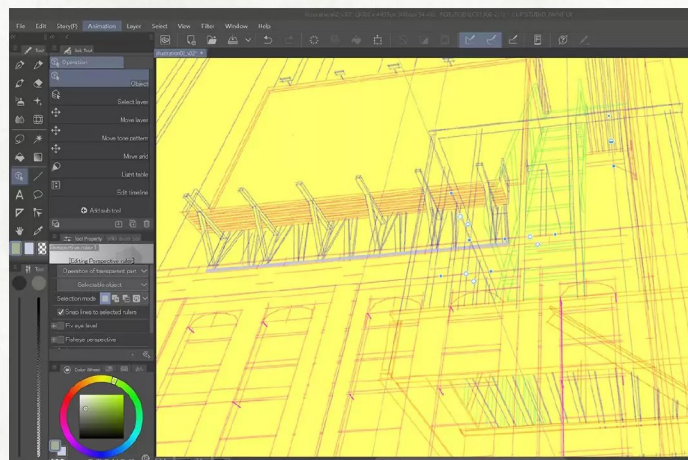
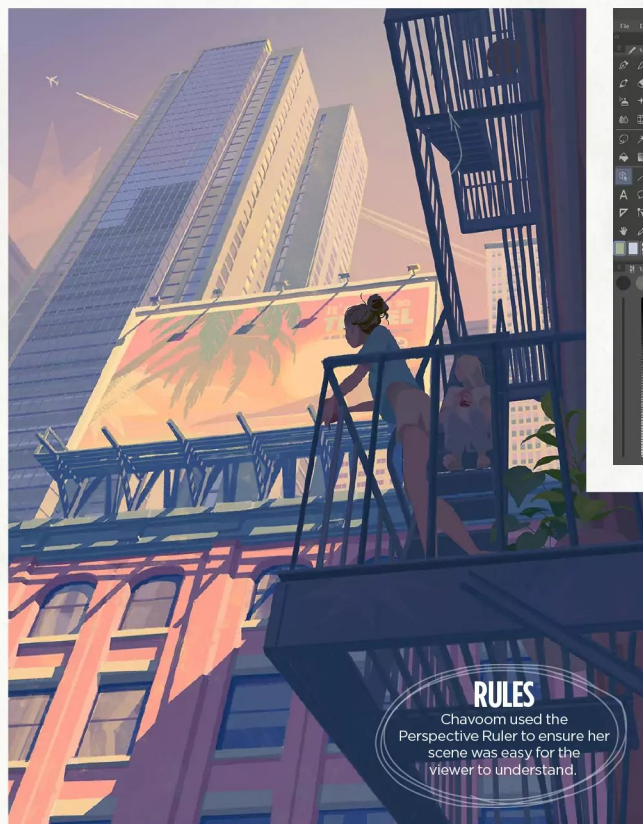
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## EXPRESSION

Dexarts uses the ideas of objects rather than aiming for photorealism, which creates a more playful mood.







Artist  
**PROFILE**

**Dexter Isaac**  
LOCATION: England



Dexter, who is also known as Dexarts, is a UK-based visual development artist and illustrator. With a keen eye for expressive colour and lighting, he shares art tips and advice alongside freelance projects.

[www.instagram.com/dexarts\\_01](https://www.instagram.com/dexarts_01)

Chavoom – paints gorgeous cityscapes. Her results are born from imagination but powered by the app's Perspective Ruler, which aids her in laying down shapes for buildings in the background to develop a sense of realism.

To understand the structure of the image, Chavoom uses different colours to break down each element and make the sketch easier to reference. When she's done painting with a customised Wet Blotting Ink brush grabbed from the community brush store, she uses the Tone Curve to correct colours and transform the mood, before adding final touches like reflections in glass.

Dexter Isaac prioritises believability over technical accuracy, as do many



artists. Telling a story in an engaging way can be preferable to representing reality. He paints authentic, appealing and emotionally impactful artworks that demonstrate a cohesive narrative, drawing the viewer into the story.

In the illustration above, Dexter creates exaggerated shapes, using the Figure tool to get sharp and defined silhouettes that intensify drama and a sense of speed. His tree shapes are

**STYLE**  
Although not realistic, the foliage of the trees is instantly recognisable, making it easy to discern their form.

abstract but still communicate their form and place without drawing focus away from the action. Bold colours and high contrast make the image dynamic and engaging, so Dexter is constantly checking on his values while painting, using a black fill layer placed on top with the blending mode set to Colour.

To explore more features, tutorials, updates and community inspiration, visit [www.clipstudio.net/en](https://www.clipstudio.net/en).



# Sheng Lam

The hard-surface specialist shares a spectacular array of futuristic vehicles, robotic creations and thoughtfully designed props

## Artist PROFILE

**Sheng Lam**

LOCATION: England



Sheng Lam is a freelance concept artist working in the video games industry who specialises in hard-surface designs. His main inspirations come from Japanese media, where there's a big emphasis on line work and mechanical designs. Outside of work, he enjoys cooking and making interesting ice cream flavours, as well as sleeping.

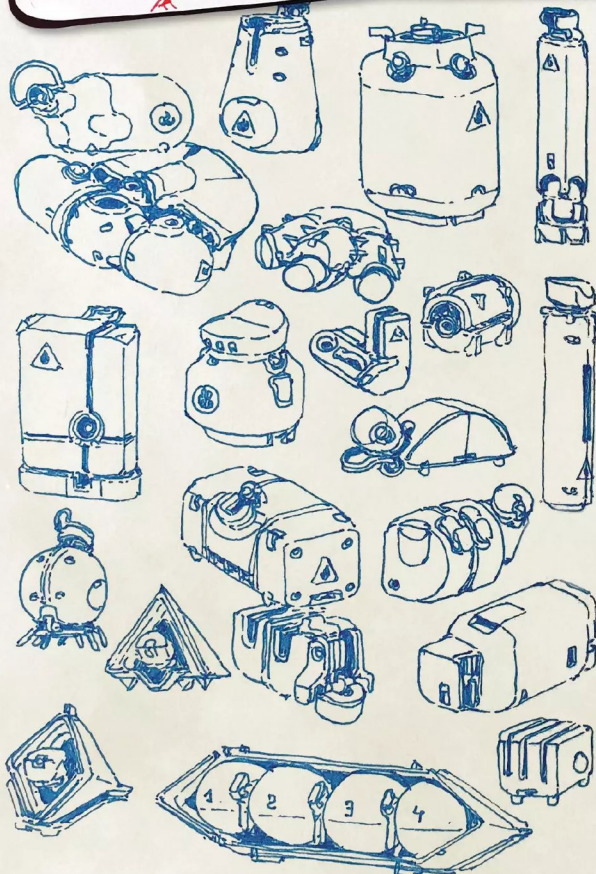
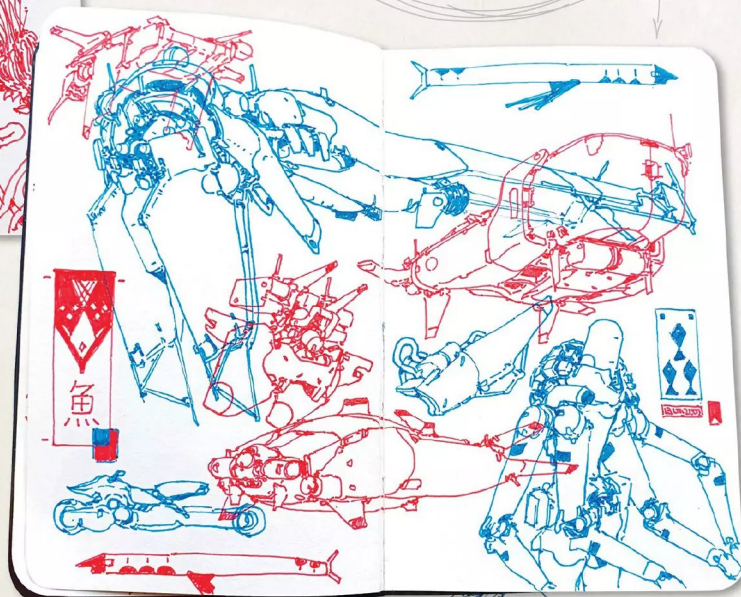
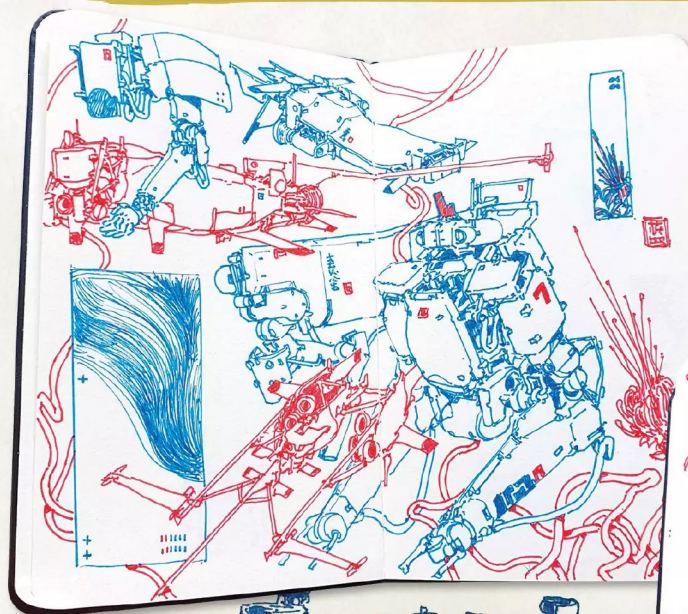
[www.artstation.com/shenglam](http://www.artstation.com/shenglam)

### RED AND BLUE

"I went into a stationery shop and told myself I definitely wouldn't buy anything, since I have so many pens already. Of course, they got me eventually, and I ended up buying Sakura Microns for these doodles."

### OVERLAPS

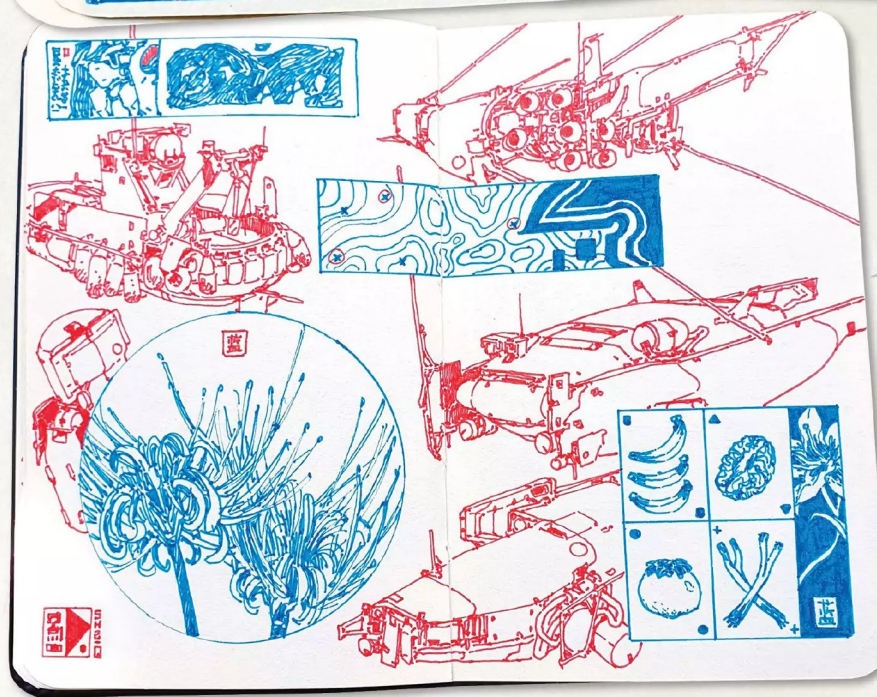
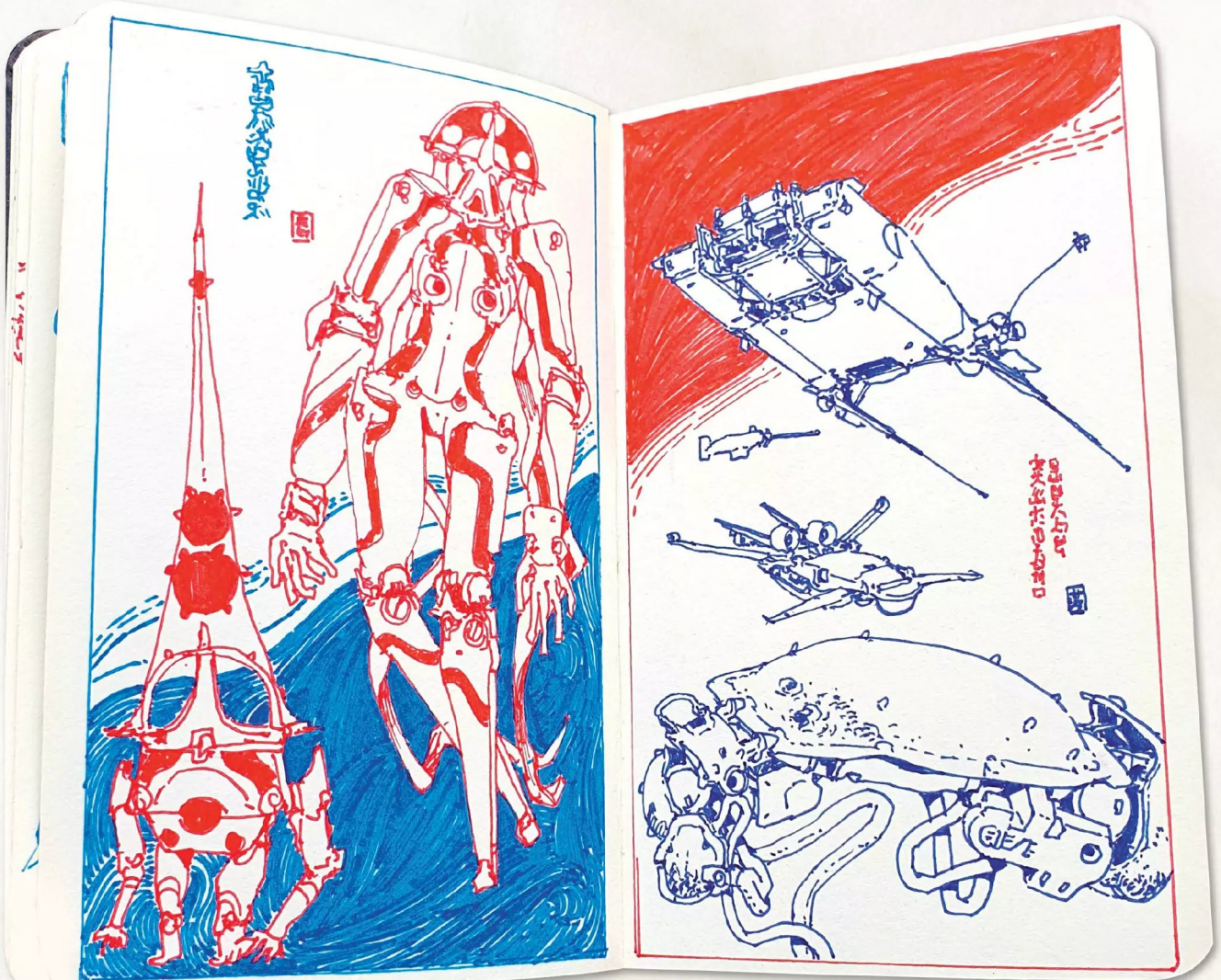
"The goal for this sketchbook was to use only two colours and see how many layouts and combinations I could come up with. The inspiration here came from risograph prints and their colour layering process."



### PROPS

"I like to create pages that just explore a mundane prop, and then try to find ways to make it more interesting."





## OPPOSITES

"This composition was thinking about opposites, especially the background."

## VARIATIONS

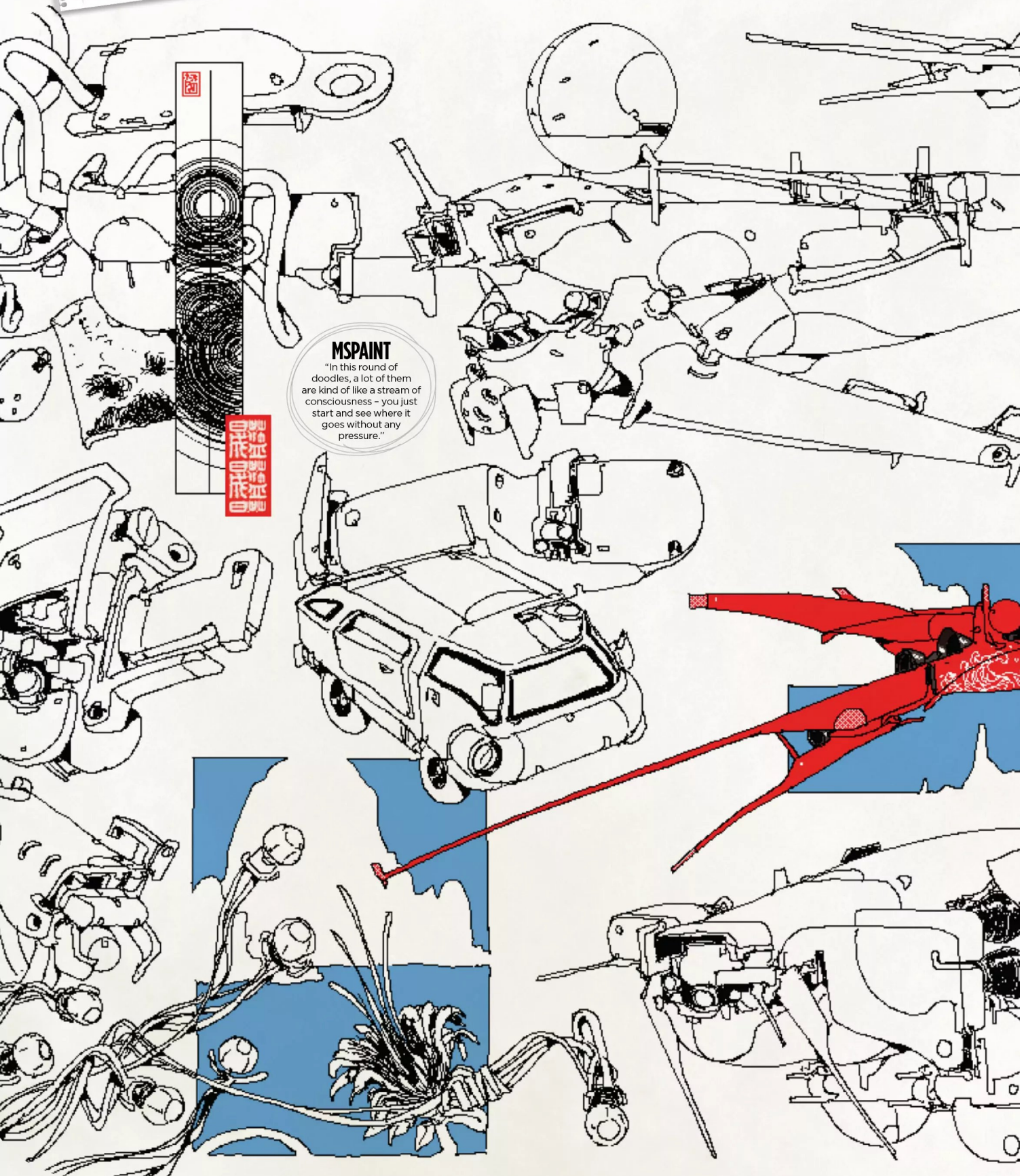
"Here I wanted to do the opposite of the previous page, where I had the graphic elements in the foreground and in another colour. I used the bottom of a mug for the circles."

“I like to explore mundane props and find ways to make them interesting”



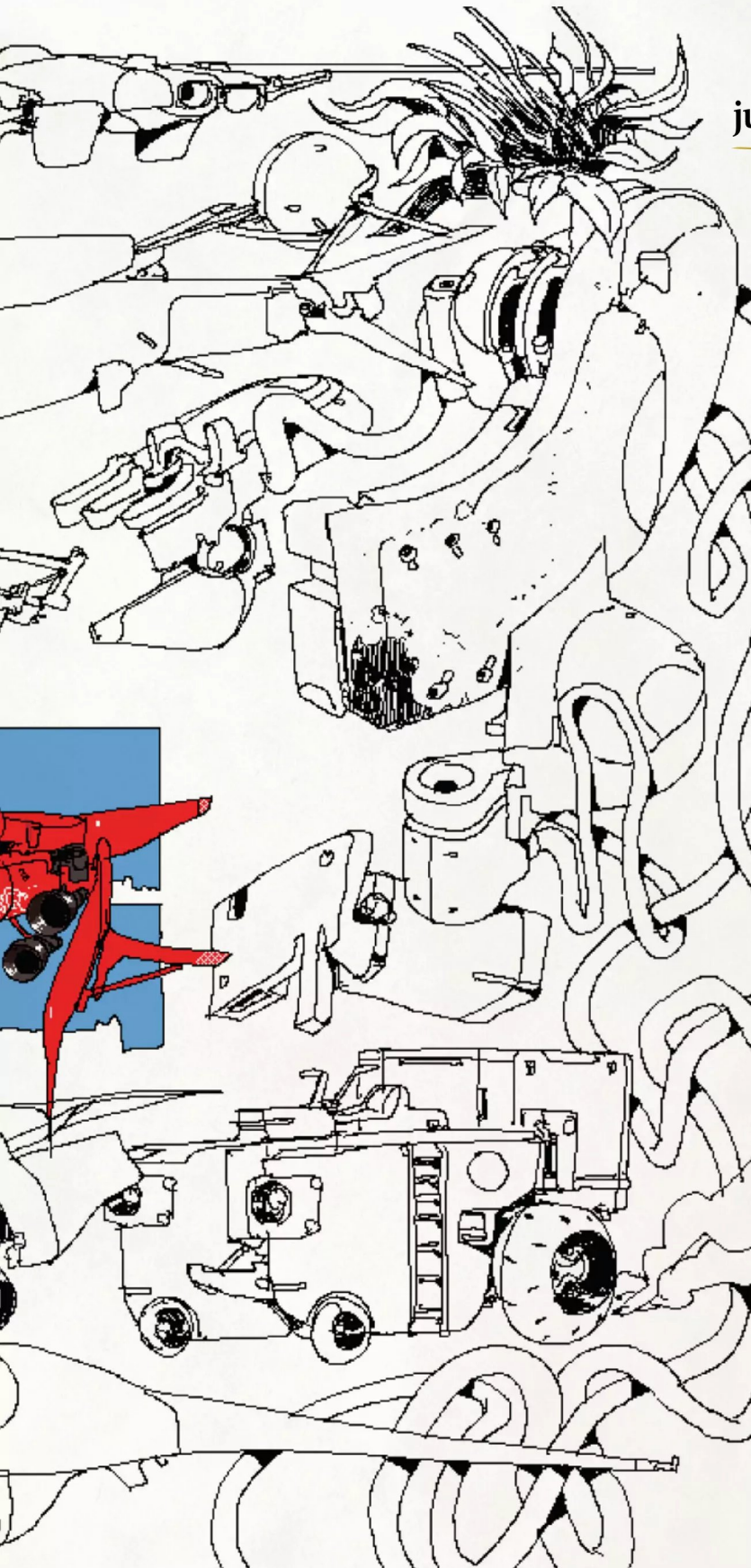
# MSPAINT

"In this round of doodles, a lot of them are kind of like a stream of consciousness - you just start and see where it goes without any pressure."





“Some sketches are like a stream of consciousness – you just start and see where it goes”

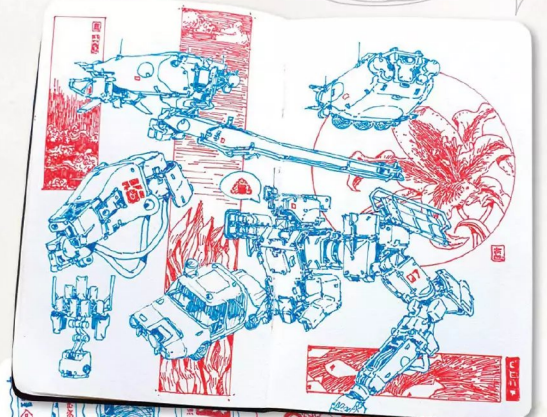


## TRIANGLE

“Going a little more experimental. With these, I tried to make it look even more graphical with a diagonal split in the middle.”

## GRAPHIC ELEMENTS

“Here I started to think about graphical compositions, so I added some more of these elements into the background.”



## STAMPS

“I’ve always thought postage stamps were really cool and designed with intention. Some are also very graphic looking, so I wanted to make a spread of them.”



# José Garcia

Explore the unique monsters and myths drawn up in the South American illustrator's creative mind

## Artist PROFILE

**José Garcia**

LOCATION: Chile



Venezuelan illustrator José currently lives in the Chilean capital Santiago. His speciality is in digital art, where he focuses on character design for comics, games and books. Inspired by artists such as Joe Madureira and Jim Lee, José enjoys bringing expressive, dynamic elements to his art projects for a host of clients based around the world.

[www.artstation.com/garciartist](http://www.artstation.com/garciartist)



### TURTLE BOY

"A character design that I worked on for my personal portfolio. It depicts a character with a turtle-like appearance, whose hammer-shaped hands are extremely heavy, allowing him to deliver powerful blows."

“This character blends styles for a unique take on the angel archetype”

### MAXIMUM POWER

"This sketch is about a character who was unaware of the magnitude of his own power. In a moment of crisis, he reaches a level even he can't control and becomes lost in it."

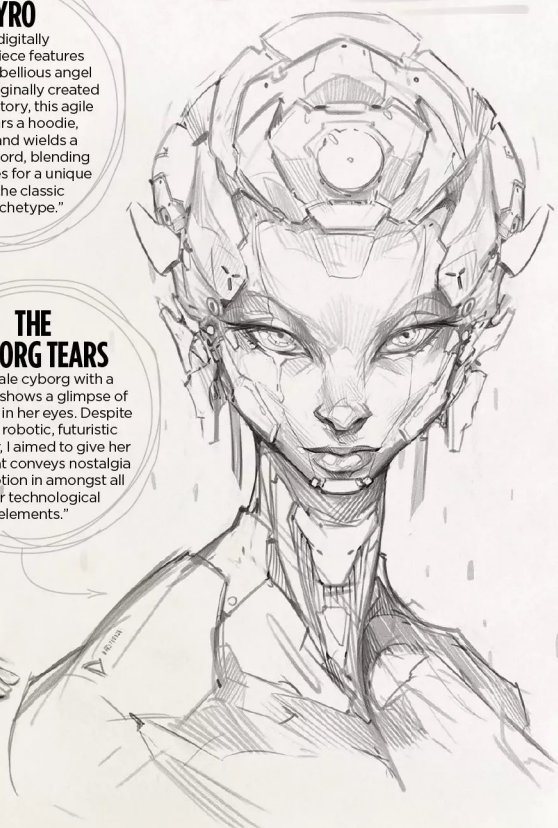


### ASYRO

"This digitally sketched piece features a modern, rebellious angel character. Originally created for a comic story, this agile figure wears a hoodie, sneakers and wields a futuristic sword, blending various styles for a unique take on the classic angel archetype."

### THE CYBORG TEARS

"A female cyborg with a tear that shows a glimpse of humanity in her eyes. Despite being a robotic, futuristic character, I aimed to give her a look that conveys nostalgia and emotion in amongst all of her technological elements."







## THE KABURUS

"Meet a villain character with a very strange appearance. The horns actually form arms that control a magical eye capable of predicting every move of his enemies."



SOCAM

SNAKES MOVE THROUGH BODY

THEY TURN INTO POISONOUS WEAPONS

SNAKE'S EYE PUNCHES RIVALS' MOVEMENTS

## POISON

"This character design is for an alien who has the ability to merge with venomous snakes and manipulate them at will, turning them into lethal weapons."



## THE SNAKE GIRL

"I created this character a long time ago in a pencil sketch I posted on Instagram. It was one of the first sketches shared on my account, and I wanted to create an enhanced version of the character as a tribute to that original sketch."

## KINATE

"In this sketch, I wanted to evoke a young warrior who has trained for a long time, and whose time to show her sword skill has come."





# Paul Schoeni

From blotches to beauties, the veteran visual development artist fills out every inch of his pages for fun montages

## Artist PROFILE

**Paul Schoeni**

LOCATION: US



Paul spent 17 years at DreamWorks on films such as Kung Fu Panda, How to Train Your Dragon and The Wild Robot. He's now working for Warner Bros. Pictures Animation and teaches part-time at ArtCenter College of Design. In his free time, Paul loves drawing comics. <https://paulschoeni.artstation.com>

### RED HEADS

"I love practising sketches like these in Procreate. It's relaxing and unlocks the creative part of my brain!"



### SHAPESHIFTING

"I start by putting down random blotches of colour on the screen, and then look for interesting shapes in those blotches that could potentially become something."

“The goal is always to keep the sketches loose and not put too much pressure on myself”

### SPACE INVADERS

"Sometimes the empty space in-between my blotches can provide opportunities for more fun details that I wouldn't have otherwise added."







## GETTING MESSY

"In the beginning, the messier the brush, the better. Messy brushes offer some fun, unexpected results that can help to spark ideas."

## IN THE ZONE

"The goal is always to keep the sketches loose and not put too much pressure on myself as I do it. I just draw whatever comes to mind in the moment and have fun with it!"

## MORE DETAILS

"I'll eventually switch to a more refined brush so I can continue carving away at the blotches until characters begin to emerge."





# Michael Buffington Jr.

The masterful worldbuilder introduces his character designs from a pair of captivating projects

## Artist PROFILE

**Michael Buffington Jr.**  
LOCATION: US



Michael, also known as drawaholic1124, is a concept artist and art director with credits in games and animation, including the Star Wars: The Clone Wars series. He has been addicted to drawing since his early days, and lives to create immersive characters and environments that inspire imagination and push visual storytelling forward.  
[www.instagram.com/drawaholic1124](http://www.instagram.com/drawaholic1124)

### AFROPUNK

"The characters featured here belong to the universe of Future Swords, an original action Afropunk story set in the near future. Stylised and kinetic, the world blends high-tech rebellion, mysticism and identity through bold design and fierce energy."

### SPACE OPERA

"All the characters shown below are part of Dark Empire, a gritty space opera steeped in political betrayal, ancient power and interstellar warfare. Set in a fractured galaxy stood on the brink, this original universe blends sci-fi drama with mythic ambition and cinematic scale."





“I scanned in a piece of toned paper to mimic the feel of traditional media”

## BURT'S FRIEND

"A man, possibly an executioner, makes friends with a bird. I wanted to explore the idea of a gentle giant."

## CLAUDIA

"I was keen to give the clothes for this character a different texture, so I scanned in a piece of toned paper to help mimic traditional media."



## MEET GARTH

"While sitting on the couch an elephant wandered into my head. My hand turned it into a creature with an exposed brain as part of its trunk."



## CONJURING

"A sorceress performs a ritual. I was practising figure drawing while developing a story and used a piece of tan paper to play with white highlights."



## FIDO

"I drew a shape that reminded me of a dog, but thought it would be more fun to shapeshift it into a new creature."



# Matthew Tak

We see the gentle side of an executioner and an eccentric elephant design among the artist's doodle collection

## Artist PROFILE

**Matthew Tak**

LOCATION: US



Matthew can't remember a time when he wasn't trying to create art. Since earning a degree in media arts and animation, he has made a living working in the video games and greeting cards industries. Matthew likes to use both traditional and digital mediums, and gravitates to fantasy themed subjects, with a particular soft spot for monsters. <https://bit.ly/3IPqgwa>



Interview

# Dan dos Santos

The expert illustrator shares his story, tells us about his sketching habits, and gives an insight into his workflow for creating stunning book covers

**S**even times a nominee for a prestigious Hugo Award, we had certain expectations when we asked Dan dos Santos for a peek at his sketches. Even then we were awestruck at what we saw. His talent explodes from the page, whether it's cover art for bestselling books and comics, or his work on the Marvel Masterpieces trading cards. Dan was kind enough to give us the lowdown on how sketching fits into his process.

## Did you have a formal education in art, or are you self-taught?

I went to a four-year art school, and studied illustration pretty intensively.

I focused as much as I could on traditional principals and painting techniques during my time at school, but learning art never really ends. I've picked up just as much since then from other sources over the years, including workshops, online courses, my peers, and just plain old experience.

## How much of a part does sketching play in your workflow, and what does that look like?

Sketching has a huge role in my work. Because I'm a commercial illustrator, I'm always working within my client's guidelines. Sketches provide my client not just with options, but a roadmap for the entire project. Sketches are

absolutely integral to any project, and arguably the most important phase.

## Is sketching more for practice, or is it better suited to playing with new ideas and building on something you have in your mind that has yet to actually hit the page?

For me, sketching is always ideation. Every sketch that I do is an attempt at finding an elegant solution to whatever visual problem it is I'm trying to solve. Personally, I think of it a little like panning for gold. I spend most of my time sifting through countless bad ideas until I stumble across the glimmer of a good one, and that's when I start digging there. ➔➔

## THE DRESDEN FILES

"I've had the pleasure of painting Harry Dresden a multitude of times for various projects. These are a few unused ideas."

### OPTION 1

"With this sketch, I wanted to give the client the option for something more romantic, so I showed Harry more as the handsome leading man saving the damsel in distress."

### OPTION 2

"I thought it would be cool to show Harry summoning his force field. This zoomed-out street scene offered me the chance to add his car, an important narrative element."





# Interview Dan dos Santos

“Every sketch that I do is an attempt at finding an elegant solution to a visual problem”

## OPTION 3

“My favourite of the bunch, this sketch was meant to be as cinematic as I could make it. I wanted to capture a sense of fireballs violently ricocheting off Harry's shield.”

## Artist PROFILE

**Dan dos Santos**

LOCATION: US



With a back catalogue of hundreds of published book covers to his name, including dozens of New York Times Best Sellers,

Dan is one the most recognised artists working in the illustration field today.

WEB: [www.dandossantos.com](http://www.dandossantos.com)



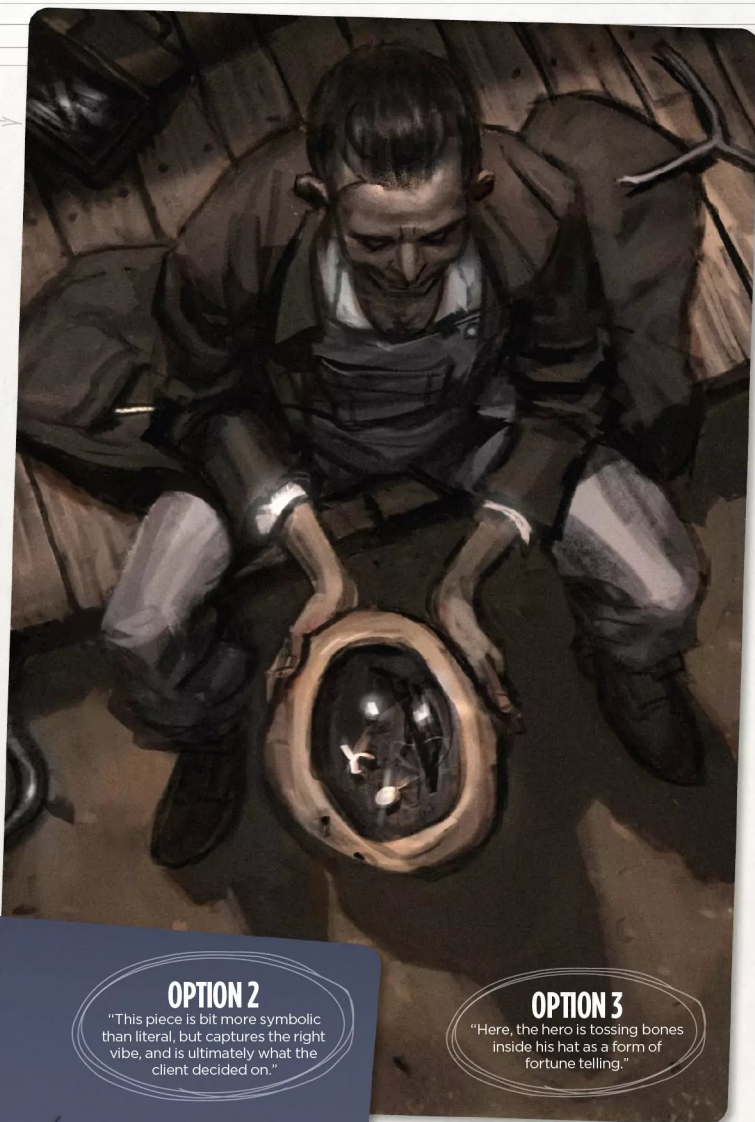
## THE CUNNING MAN

"This book, by D.J. Butler and Aaron Ritchey, had an amazing mood and focused on an American pioneer who uses an odd mix of Earth magic and demonism. A large part of the magic revolves around the main character's hat."



### OPTION 1

"When the main character puts his face into his hat, he re-emerges on the other side in an alternate world where he can commune with demons. I thought the eye symbology would be a clever way to allude to this supernatural sight."



### OPTION 2

"This piece is bit more symbolic than literal, but captures the right vibe, and is ultimately what the client decided on."

### OPTION 3

"Here, the hero is tossing bones inside his hat as a form of fortune telling."

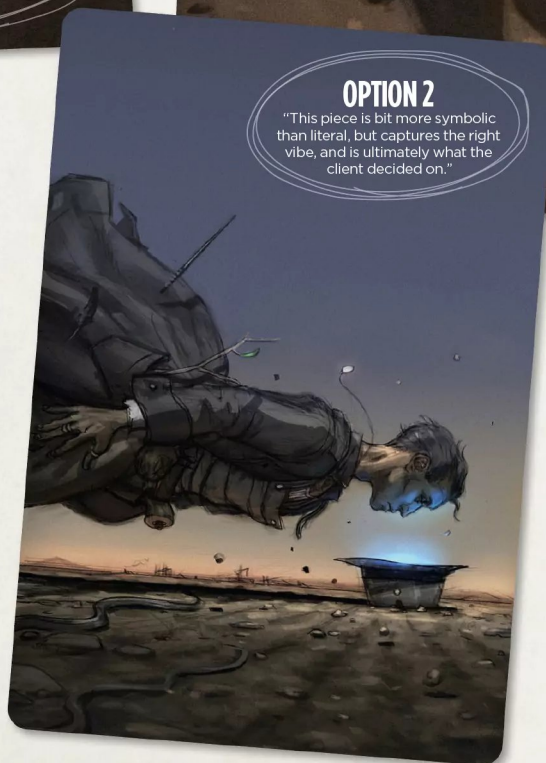
» You've produced work across many mediums, from film and TV to comics and tabletop games. Is there one of these that sparks your enthusiasm more than others? If so, which one and why?

They each have their own appeal, but cover work, no matter the genre, will always be my real passion. Unlike sequential art, a cover provides you with just a single image in which you need to capture a sense of the whole story. I see that as a uniquely difficult challenge, and one that I really love.

Describe your process for us. Do you make notes first? Work digitally or traditionally? And do you often refer back to earlier sketches or unfinished pieces?

However much time I have for a job, whether a day or a month, I typically spend half of it sketching out ideas. That may seem like a lot, and it is. It's atypical for a lot of illustrators, but I prefer to really front-load all of my problem solving in the process.

I'll often find that when an image develops past the sketching phase and closer into final, new problems start to arise that often spoil the piece for me. It doesn't look as cool as I thought,



“However much time I have for a job, I typically spend half of it sketching out ideas”

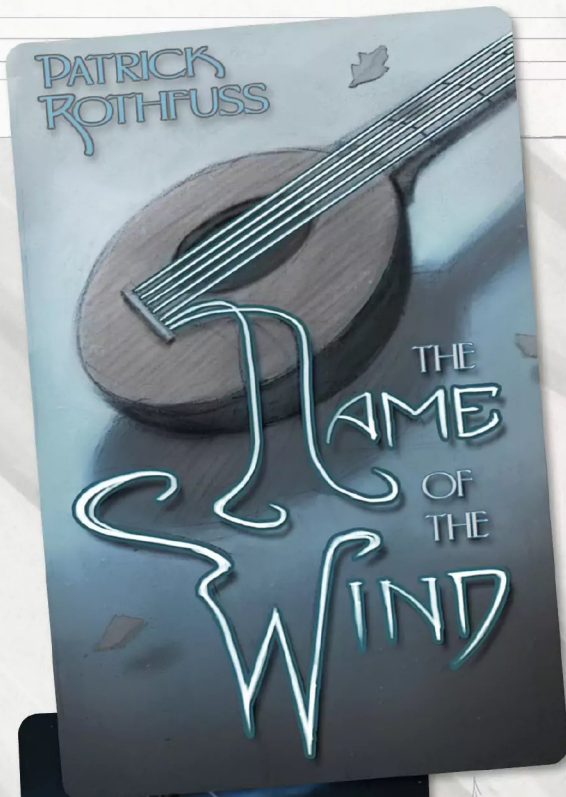
or something is too confusing to understand. Whatever it is, I want to make sure I figure out that fatal flaw before I offer it as an option to a client. Likewise, as I start to develop a sketch further, I'll oftentimes stumble across something completely magical that I couldn't have anticipated, and it ends up making the sketch so much better.

It's because of these reasons that I typically bring my sketches to an incredibly high level of finish, usually in full colour. It wastes a lot of time in the initial phases, but once a sketch is approved, the final goes extremely quickly due to all of the pre-planning, and I easily make my time back.

What does your process look like for developing a sketch into a fully rendered piece? Do you work over the top of a sketch, or use that as reference for a new piece?

Even though I paint all of my finished work traditionally, typically using oil paints, I do all of my sketching »





## OPTIONS 1 & 2

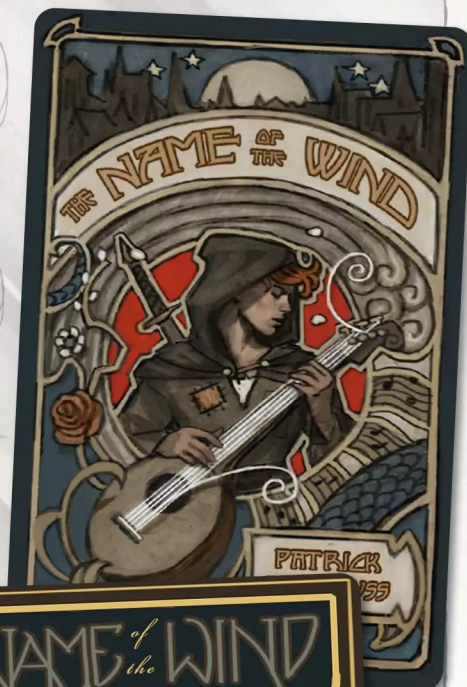
"This book deals with both wind and music a lot. As a result, I felt the musical staff lines could serve as a clever visual device for both of those elements in this image."

## OPTIONS 3 & 4

"For these sketches I focused on only the lute, omitting the hero completely. The lack of a figure on a cover sometimes gives a title a more adult-focused mainstream appeal, which helps to invite non-fantasy readers into picking up the book."

## OPTIONS 5 & 6

"There are many things about this book that make it feel like an old, sprawling, epic fantasy novel to me. As such, I tried to evoke a sense of classic fantasy and treat the cover like an old fashioned embossed edition, as you might see on a Jules Verne book."



## BOOK COVER JOURNEY: THE NAME OF THE WIND

Dan offers insight into the thought process that went into producing the front for a heroic fantasy novel

Sketches are an opportunity not just to explore options, but for my clients and the authors to explore. The same book can be targeted to a variety of different demographics with just a few tonal shifts. For this project, I explored a lot of options for the illustrated version of Patrick Rothfuss's *The Name of the Wind*.

In this grouping, you can see how I'm presenting my client not just with different compositions,

but totally different approaches as well. You'll also notice that I'm already playing with the type design at this point. Although the type will ultimately be designed by a professional graphic designer later on, I sometimes incorporate it into my sketch, especially when it's an integral part of the composition. In the last sketch for instance, the concept is entirely dependent on the type and vice-versa.



## MERCY THOMPSON

"I often think of the book's title when I'm conceptualising a cover. It's often really important. For instance, if a title has the word 'queen' in it, or the word 'blue', then the cover should probably have a queen or the colour blue in it somewhere, or it's going to be confusing to the viewer. Likewise, the title is often a source inspiration. In this example, the book was called Storm Cursed. Those two words served as my main inspiration as I sketched. I kept asking myself if I was evoking the spirit of them in my images."

➤➤ digitally. Because so much of my concepts revolves around a sense of colour and light, digital sketching is much better suited for it. By sketching digitally, I can work with colour and quickly evoke a sense of light and mood in a way the traditional pencil and paper just can't do.

**When you paint fantastical creatures, heroes or monsters, where do you start? Are you more of an anatomy-based artist, or do you start with the end image in mind and work backwards?**

Another benefit of having really refined sketches is that I readily know exactly what I don't need to know for an image. That's surprisingly helpful, as it means that I can spend my time more effectively on the things that are actually important, rather than spending an entire day drawing the hind legs of a dragon that you're not going to see in the final art anyway.

**What powers you through the day? Do you prefer silence, or are you more of a music and podcast type of person? How does your environment affect your work?**  
Oh, it's just obsession and a lot of caffeine. I'll sometimes put on an



### OPTION 1

"In this image, I used a specific scene from the story that I felt was a symbolic moment."



### OPTION 3

"This was a total departure from the others and owes its power to not being able to see the character. She's walking into the image, which effectively draws the viewer in too."



### OPTION 2

"For this shot, I wanted to use the heroine's hair as a chance to evoke a sense of storm and magic at the same time, as if she was the source of this wild power."

“Painting is like having a conversation with your art – silence helps me hear it”

audiobook or some old Star Trek reruns, but nine times out of ten, I'm just working in silence. I think most people find it disconcerting to do that, but I enjoy it. I'm intensely focused when I work, and painting is quite often like having a conversation with your artwork. The silence let's me better hear that conversation.

**What's the proudest moment in your career? Has there been a time you've had to do a double take at what you've achieved, given the clients you've worked with?**

Probably the release of my most recent Marvel Masterpieces trading card set. I did 140 oil paintings in under two years. In the end that all worked out to be a full painting every three days – absolutely non-stop. That's just an insane amount, but I still managed to pull it off. It was easily the hardest job that I've ever done but, despite the constraints, I really like the work I'd produced come the end of it.

**Finally, do you have any advice on sketching, or making a career in art generally for those at the beginning of their journey?**

I'll keep it short and tell you what a teacher once told me: "Beneath every good painting is a great drawing." ●

## GOING BEHIND THE SCENES

Every book gives Dan tons of conceptual flavours to explore

One of the sad facts about commercial illustration is that for every sketch that gets approved, three or four equally deserving sketches will be rejected, never to see the light of day again. Sometimes those rejected sketches are actually my favourites. To me, they're the inklings of paintings full of great potential that I'll never get to see fulfilled.

I figured I'd share some of those unused concepts with you, and give you a peek behind the curtain at the thinking that goes into every job I take on. In each group, you'll see alternate options for the same title. I'm often exploring a singular theme in a variety of ways. Sometimes I'll try to make something feel mysterious, other times romantic or action-packed.





## ASSESS ALL YOUR OPTIONS

When you have a set of sketches prepared, Dan advises taking a step back

Grouping your sketches together is a really handy tactic when generating new ideas. Having one sketch right next to another ensures I'm looking at the bigger picture and really offering something different with each option. Even in this case where I decided to stick with the same palette

and narrative for every sketch, I make a conscientious effort to explore a wide array of camera angles and figure sizes.

On top of that, when I see my sketches together like this, I can see which ones have the most impact at a distance, not unlike the way it will be viewed on the book

shop shelves. Quite often I'll pick just a few of the strongest sketches to submit and then pre-emptively edit down the sketch options. If I submit three sketches to a client, it's likely I produced five or six decent ones, and simply culled the options down to the strongest contenders.



# Gavin Manners

Get your creative motors up and running with a peek into the mechanical designs of the games concept artist

## Artist PROFILE

**Gavin Manners**

LOCATION: US



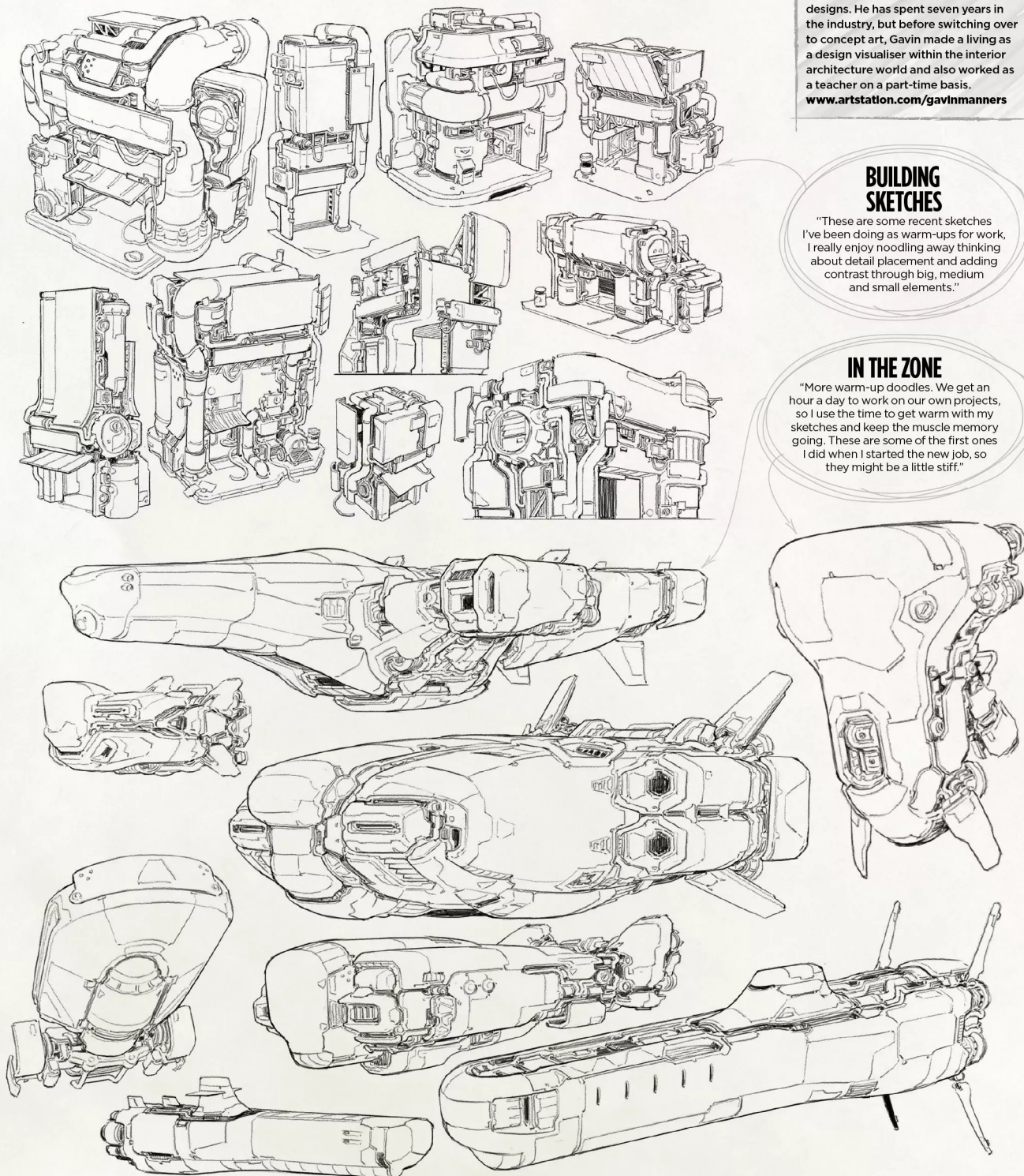
Originally from England, Gavin currently works as a principal concept artist at id Software in Dallas, Texas, where he mostly makes environments and hard-surface designs. He has spent seven years in the industry, but before switching over to concept art, Gavin made a living as a design visualiser within the interior architecture world and also worked as a teacher on a part-time basis.  
[www.artstation.com/gavinmanners](http://www.artstation.com/gavinmanners)

### BUILDING SKETCHES

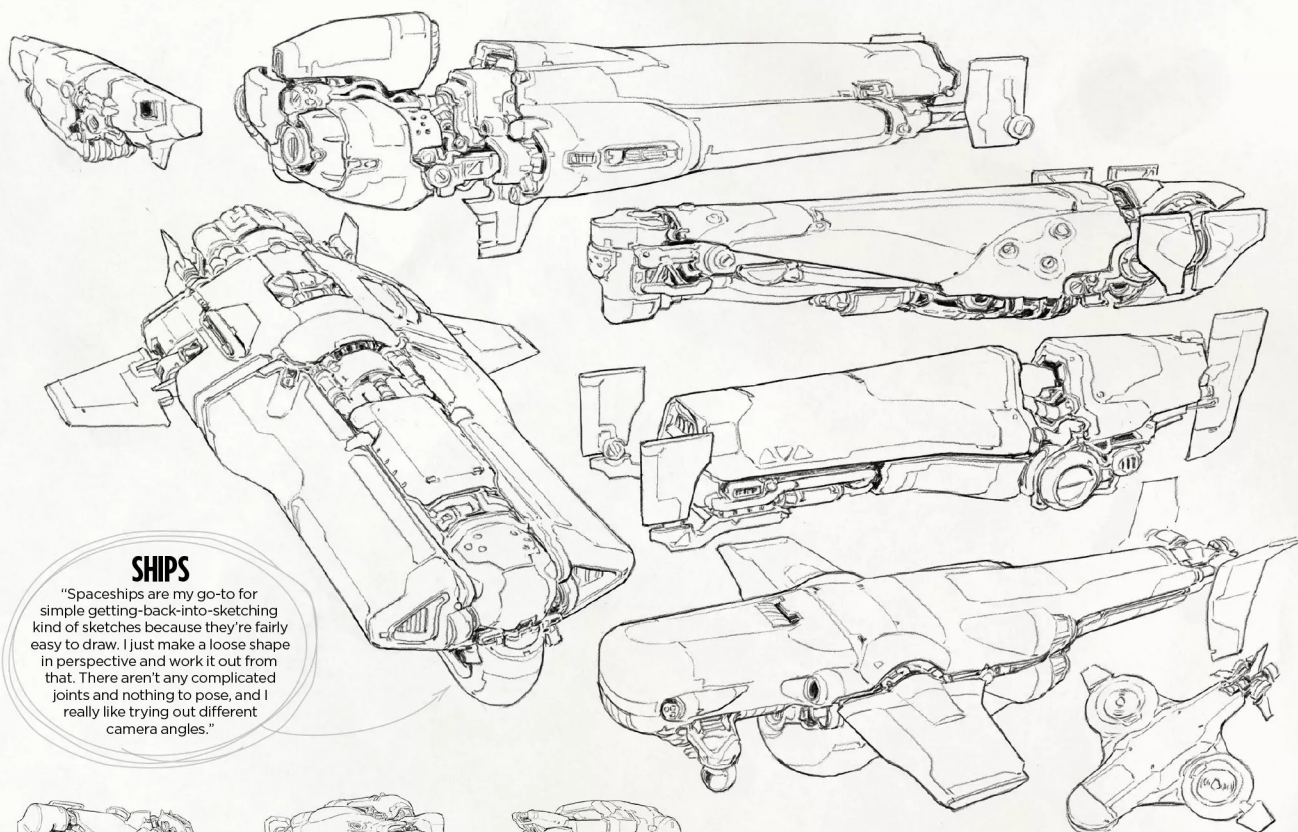
"These are some recent sketches I've been doing as warm-ups for work. I really enjoy noodling away thinking about detail placement and adding contrast through big, medium and small elements."

### IN THE ZONE

"More warm-up doodles. We get an hour a day to work on our own projects, so I use the time to get warm with my sketches and keep the muscle memory going. These are some of the first ones I did when I started the new job, so they might be a little stiff."



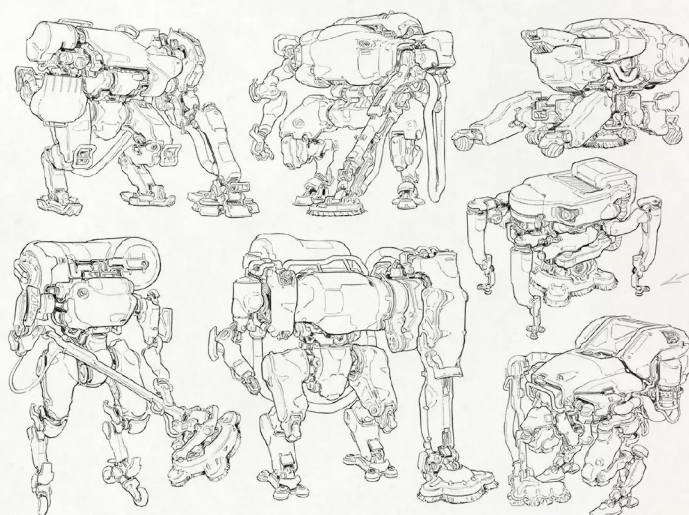




## SHIPS

"Spaceships are my go-to for simple getting-back-into-sketching kind of sketches because they're fairly easy to draw. I just make a loose shape in perspective and work it out from that. There aren't any complicated joints and nothing to pose, and I really like trying out different camera angles."

“It’s more of a design challenge to make something we typically see as everyday look cool”

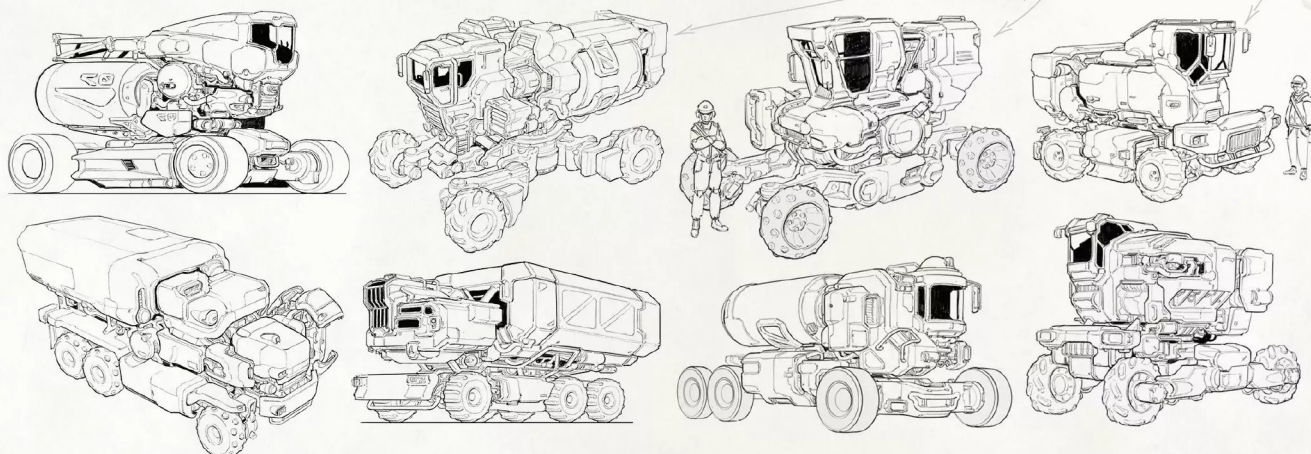


## STREETSWEEPER

"I wanted to design some cool-looking mechs that were used for something that seems so ordinary. I usually try to produce personal work without weapons, because I think it's more of a design challenge to make something typically seen as everyday look cool."

## TRUCK SKETCHES

"Little vehicles from when I was testing out a new sketch workflow. I use a big round brush with pressure set to opacity and draw lots of loose shapes in perspective, then use that as a base to pull shapes out from the page. It's a really nice way of getting happy accidents."





# Sergio Eceiza

Portraits galore from stunningly expressive facial renders to horror legends – plus a side of amphibious associates

## Artist PROFILE

**Sergio Eceiza**

LOCATION: Spain

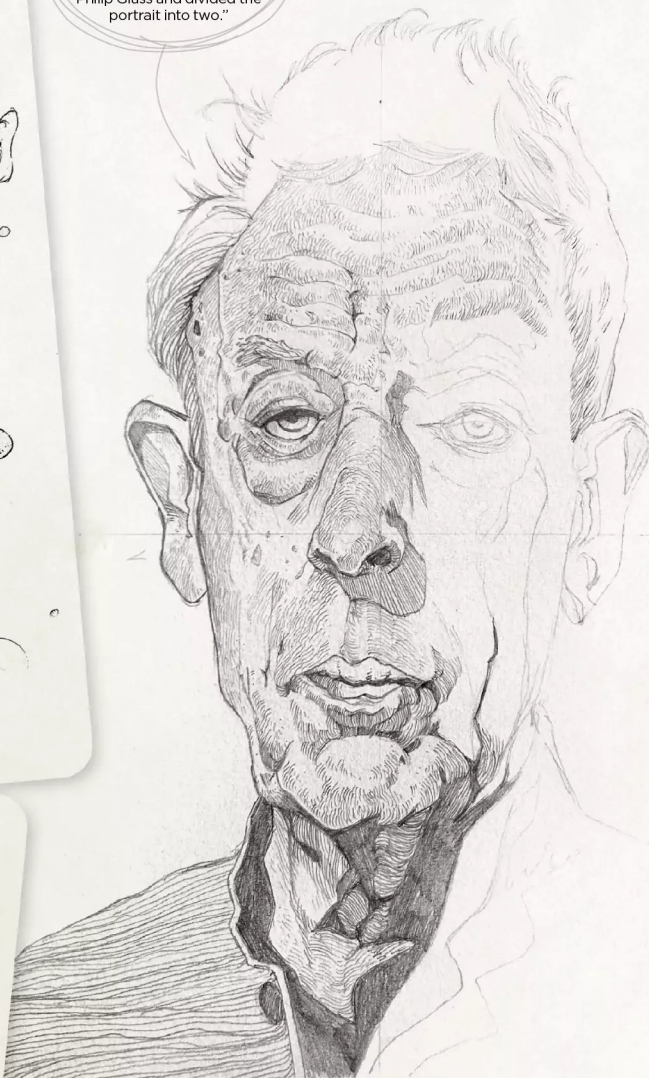


Sergio is a self-taught illustrator from northern Spain who uses pen, ink and watercolour to create his artwork. His primary influences are Kim Jung Gi, Somnath Pal, Karl Kopinski, Katsuya Terada, Eliza Ivanova, Moebius and Lauren Marx. When he's not drawing, Sergio loves spending time with his wife and daughters, cooking, reading history books and watching tennis.

[www.instagram.com/sergio\\_eceiza](http://www.instagram.com/sergio_eceiza)

### PHILIP GLASS

"I wanted to make an ink study using two colours – plum and blue – so I took a reference of the composer Philip Glass and divided the portrait into two."



### THE SAINT

"This is a portrait of a nice guy, the artist Dylan Sara. And he's crowned with a holy doughnut. He deserves it!"

### NOSFERATU

"One of the most detailed illustrations I've done. A lot of hatching and a weird colour palette for another iconic monster!"



“I crowned my sketch of the artist Dylan Sara with a holy doughnut – he deserves it!”



## WEIRD FACES

"Sometimes I take references from a Telegram art channel called Cane.yo. It's full of funny portraits and cool people - a nice way to draw and practise weird facial expressions."



## TOAD GIRL

"A girl with a haughty look. Two toads. Soft colours. Toned paper. What could go wrong?"



# Johanna Forster

Dive into the natural world with some vegetable-flavoured character designs amid a host of delicate doodlings

## Artist PROFILE

**Johanna Forster**

LOCATION: Germany



Illustrator Johanna has a background in video games and colouring books, and says nature is her number one artistic inspiration. Drawing in her sketchbook is part of Johanna's morning routine and helps her improve as an artist. She hopes a peek into her latest creations can fill you with new-found inspiration. [www.johannaforster.com](http://www.johannaforster.com)

### COMBINE IMAGINATION AND OBSERVATION

"To create something new and exciting, you can use reference images of things you find interesting and combine them with other elements. In this case, I imagined a herd of retro devices coming to life as robots powered by plant energy."

### EXPLORING VARIATIONS

"A larger project can keep you motivated. At the moment I collect a lot of ideas that would fit into a series of illustrations of lost places that I'm working on. I don't erase anything, but scribble down many variations in my sketchbooks."



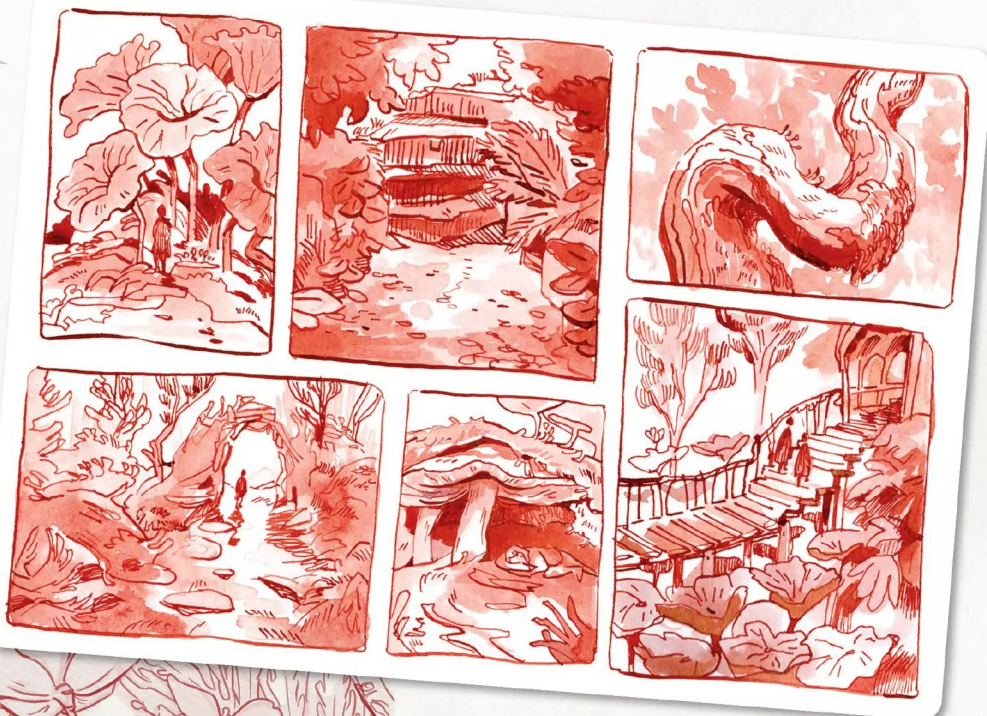


## PLANT IDEAS...

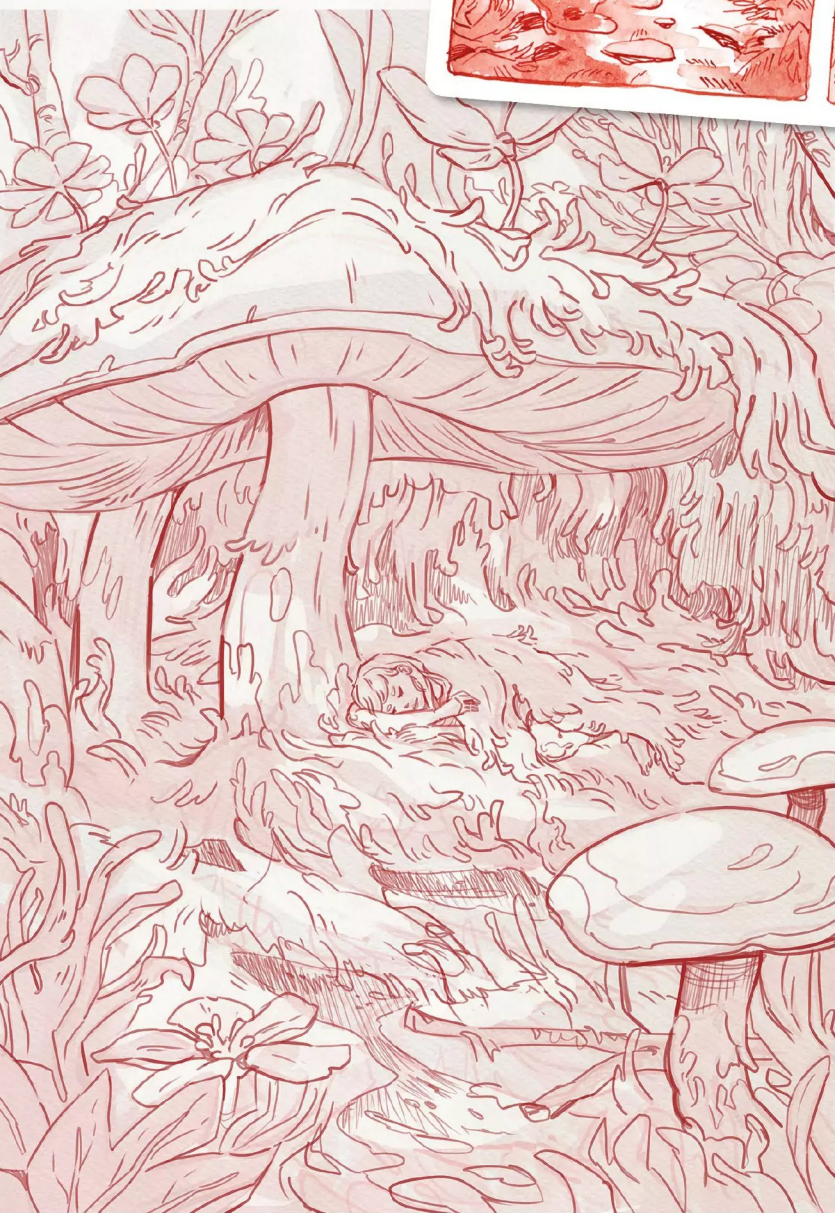
"A sketchbook is a great place to collect all the little things that spark your imagination. Small mock-ups and a limited colour palette are good ways to keep ideas simple. On this page, done in ink, I started with photo references and added my own twist."

## ...AND LET THEM GROW

"If I like one of my ideas, I develop it further by creating a more detailed sketch, like this nap amid the moss. For larger illustrations, I usually work digitally so I can experiment with options more easily."



“A sketchbook is a great place to collect all the things sparking your imagination”



## PEEL THE LAYERS

"If a sketch is to serve as the basis for an artwork, I draw one or two more layers of sketches on top of each other that will become increasingly cleaner before I place the final line-art on top."





## EXPERIMENT WITH TECHNIQUES AND MATERIALS

"You don't have to stick to one style or medium. I even believe that trying new things helps you develop as an artist. This was the first time that I tried out acrylic markers and I worked out some good colour combinations with them."



## SETTING A THEME

"It helps to set yourself a prompt for pages like 'spring flower faeries'. When I don't have the time to draw, I note down these ideas on my phone."



## FINDING THE STYLE

"Practising life drawing realistically is important if you like to draw characters, but stylising them from imagination is way more fun to me. I don't always stick to one style and like to experiment in my sketches."

## OUR BEAUTIFUL WORLD

"Nature is a huge source of my inspiration, and a sketchbook is the perfect tool for capturing its most beautiful aspects. In this spread, I sketched the plants around my apartment and experimented with colour combinations using water-based markers."

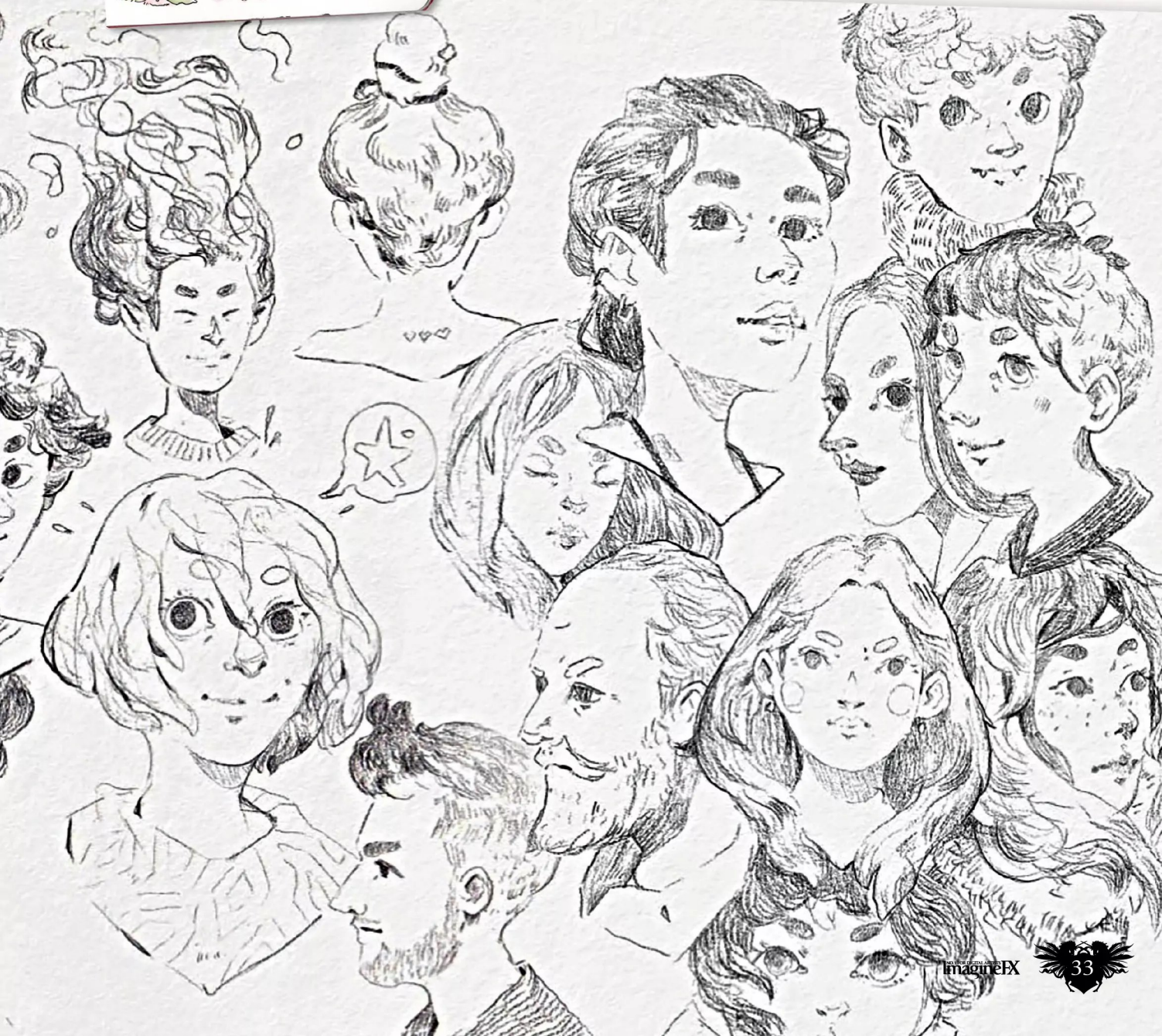


“You don't have to stick to one style... trying new things helps you to develop as an artist”



## FROM THE PLAYGROUND

"Sketching silly creatures is one of my favourite things to do. I often start out with silhouettes in watercolour or markers and then draw over them with lines."





# Julie Arendt

Mesmerising, intricately crafted artwork make for an evocative sketchbook from the video game artist



“Richly detailed head decoration and complex jewellery fade into the structure of the skin”

## PORTRAIT

“Exploring the concept of the portrait itself. Is it a sum of its parts or something more? The face is in part a purely decorative element.”

## Artist PROFILE

**Julie Arendt**

LOCATION: Ireland



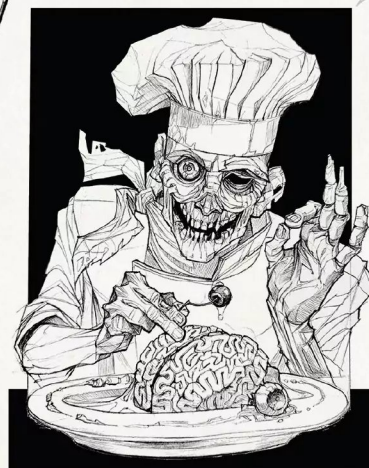
Julie traded architecture for game development and has worked on titles such as *Cyberpunk 2077*, *Dying Light*, *Call of Juarez* and its sequel *Gunslinger*. Her domain is urban design, flow of movement, and game maps. Julie also designed sets for the Netflix series *Wednesday*. [www.artstation.com/julare](http://www.artstation.com/julare)

## PRIESTESS

“This is a part of my portrait series based on the beauty of structure and symmetry. The richly detailed head decoration and complex jewellery fades into the skin’s structure.”

## BON APPÉTIT

“Playing with the form and lines. Zombies will always be dear to my heart after working on *Dying Light*.”







## KISS

"I wanted to play with the idea of elements in contrast using a static composition and its mirror image."



## BARBARIAN

"With this sketch, I used a cartoon style with disturbed proportions and sharp lines. It was part of a bigger project."



## INSIDE BEAUTY

"For this poster, inner beauty is expressed by a chaotic mass of altering forms. Showing yourself is the moment when we're vulnerable; the face is focused and waiting in fear."



## WARRIOR

"Decorative style and simple lines were key for this forest person portrait."



## THE DIAMOND PRINCE

"Geometry and structure used directly to create a sketch of uneven levels and density."



# Rain Rouhani

Join the artist on his journey through life, doodling the sights and stories he finds along the way

## Artist PROFILE

**Rain Rouhani**

LOCATION: US



Multitalented Rain is a 3D character modeller, CG generalist, and visual and look development artist. He is passionate about storytelling in both 2D and 3D, and loves playing his part in the creative process. Whether he's working on films, series or video games, Rain's goal is always the same: to help bring worlds and characters to life.

[www.artstation.com/rain\\_rouhani](http://www.artstation.com/rain_rouhani)

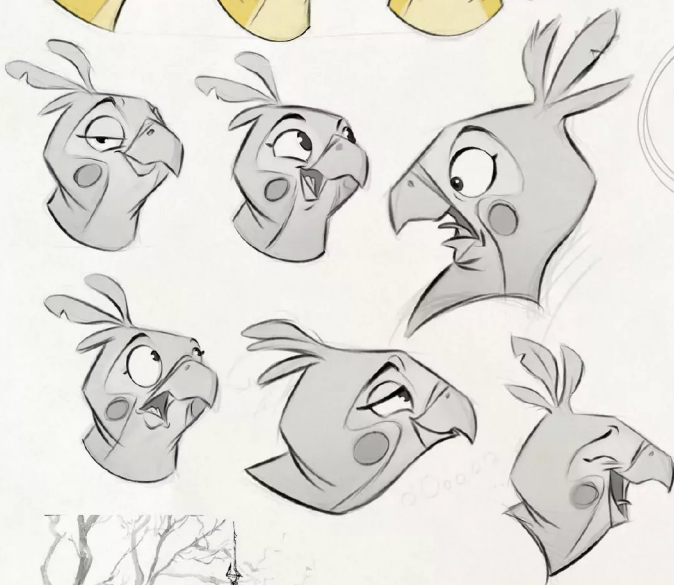
### KESHA THE COCKATIEL

"Making characters out of everything is just the best. For example, this is Kesha - she's based on my best friend's cockatiel! She's feisty and a little crazy, and sometimes I wonder that if Kesha could tell us everything she's thinking, what would she say or do? Then I sketch her acting it out."



### FROM LIFE TO PAPER

"I noticed these two people talking outside a restaurant and wanted to make a quick sketch of them to capture the moment in my sketchbook."



### EVERYTHING CAN BE INTERESTING!

"When I want to sketch, I look at everything! From buildings and people to funny-looking rocks, and how light, shadow and colour play together. There are so many ways to make it fun. For example, in the right corner of this image, I did a quick rough sketch of a building in Paris, then drew myself sketching it."







## FUN SKETCHES OF ANIMALS

"Exploring the anatomy and shape language of animals and playing with their facial expressions is one of my favourite pastimes!"

## PEN, PAPER, PEOPLE

"My sketchbook is filled with people living their life, captured still amid their daily activities."

## WATERCOLOUR EXPLORATION

"It's fun to get inspired by real people and then do something different. For instance, here is a goblin dad helping his daughter win a fight with her hair."



“ My sketchbook is filled with people living their life, captured still amid their day ”





## CHARACTERS IN THE MOMENT

"The fun part comes after sketching outside. I either get inspired to create something new or build on a character based on someone I saw. I can turn them into a character design, give them different expressions, imagine what they do, and create a whole world around them."



## NEGATIVE SPACE

"I've been having a lot of fun playing with negative space; letting the viewer's eyes rest and fill in all the gaps."



## WHAT'S THE STORY?

"I love going out to draw, especially at cafes. Watching people and how they live inspires me. I'm always making up little stories in my head, wondering what someone is reading, what they might be thinking, or what their name could be. I ask myself questions about their hobbies or fears and imagine answers. These people become part of my day, even if only in my mind."



“Sketching like this is supposed to be fun and freeing. There’s a beauty in making mistakes”





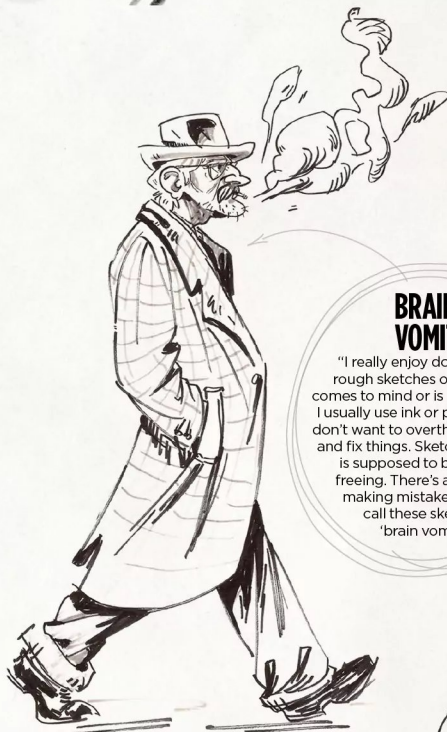
## THEIR FACES SAY IT ALL

"One of the best parts of sketching is paying attention to people's expressions and trying to see the scenario they are in from their perspective."



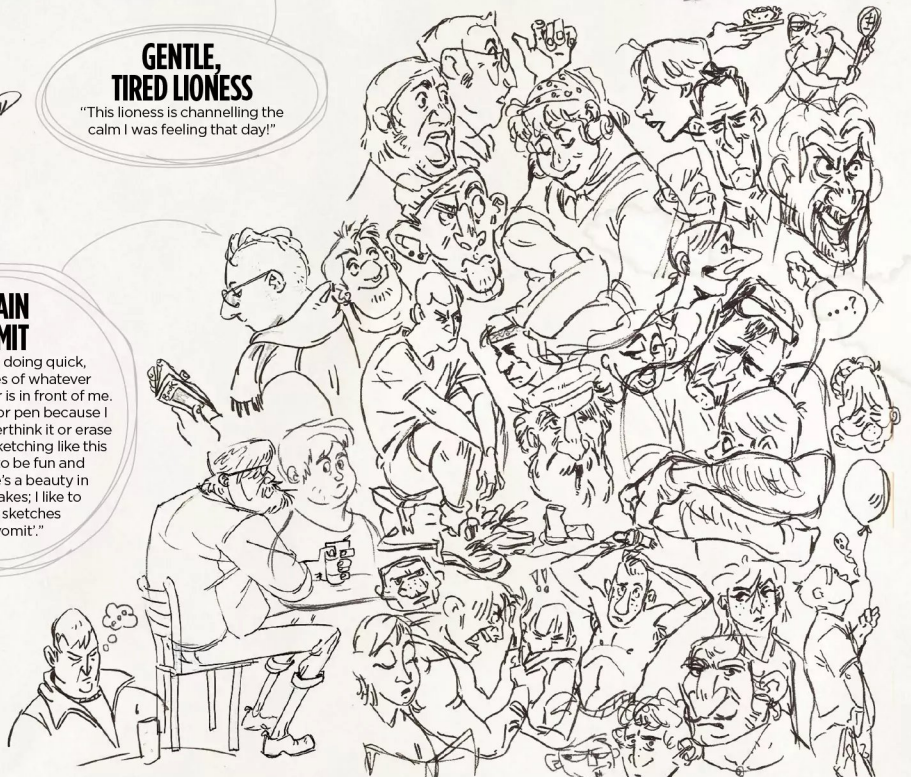
## GENTLE, TIRED LIONESS

"This lioness is channelling the calm I was feeling that day!"



## BRAIN VOMIT

"I really enjoy doing quick, rough sketches of whatever comes to mind or is in front of me. I usually use ink or pen because I don't want to overthink it or erase and fix things. Sketching like this is supposed to be fun and freeing. There's a beauty in making mistakes; I like to call these sketches 'brain vomit.'"





# Karlis Ulmanis

Wrap your brain around the Latvian artist's mind-bending but beautiful work and learn all about his influences



## Artist PROFILE

## Karlis Ulmanis

**LOCATION:** Latvia



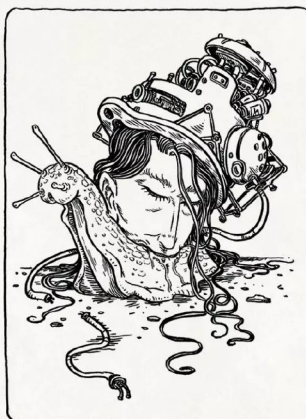
Karlis, also known by the name Carlos U-Man, is an artist who has shifted his focus from tattoos to fine art study and drawing.

To document his change in direction, Karlis launched his Umanvisionart channels on social media and found a growing audience for his art. His journey as a professional artist began around 15 years ago when he started tattooing while living in Denmark. Before that, Karlis had also studied at art schools while growing up.

**www.instagram.com/uman.visionart**

## A2 DOODLE SESSION

"From time to time, I enjoy doodling on a bigger canvas. I've learned that pushing yourself out of your comfort zone is one of the best ways you can grow and improve your skills."



## ETERNAL CURSE

"There's something fascinating about the idea of a head attached to a slime's back. I have a routine where I regularly sit at a local coffee shop in the mornings to brainstorm all kinds of characters in my sketchbook. I really enjoy drawing in the mornings - it's when the mind is freshly awake and filled with new ideas."

“Pushing out of your comfort zone is one of the best ways to improve”



## CHRYSLIS CIRCUIT

"I'm really into adding lots of detail to my doodles. It's a meditative process, and I enjoy filling the page with visual information. These doodles are all part of my practice; every time I draw, I try something new to expand my visual library."

## SCRAP DOG

"When I use references, I'm not trying to copy them exactly, it's more about studying the information and interpreting it in my own style. For example, in this piece I was trying to draw mechanical elements mixed with a cartoony style."

## PROBLEM SOLVER

"I enjoy drawing female characters. I'm inspired by many artists who focus on them, especially Katsuya Terada. His influence definitely shows in my work."

## STELLAR MOTHER

"This one was drawn on an A2 canvas using markers. Many of the elements - like boots, mechanical parts and faces in profile - were first explored in my sketchbooks. I find that doodling right after sketching makes the process flow more easily. That's why warming up with sketching is always important to me."

## MASK BLOOM

"I love using sci-fi themes and futuristic elements like machinery and robotics. I also enjoy surrealism. I'm a big fan of Moebius, whose style has been a huge inspiration."



# Howard Hsu

Mechanical gladiators? You got it! Chicken motorbikes? Why not!  
Take a look as the illustrator sketches out some fresh twists

## Artist PROFILE

**Howard Hsu**  
LOCATION: Taiwan



Howard is an illustrator with a background in industrial design. He also teaches drawing at Krenz's Artwork and specialises in perspective techniques, freehand technical sketches, and mechanical and architectural structures. Howard has also created concept designs for a wide range of collectible figures.  
[www.instagram.com/howarddelevi](http://www.instagram.com/howarddelevi)

### CHESS

"In chess, the king and queen pose vastly different threats. I visualised this power imbalance as a stark contrast in presence and dominance."

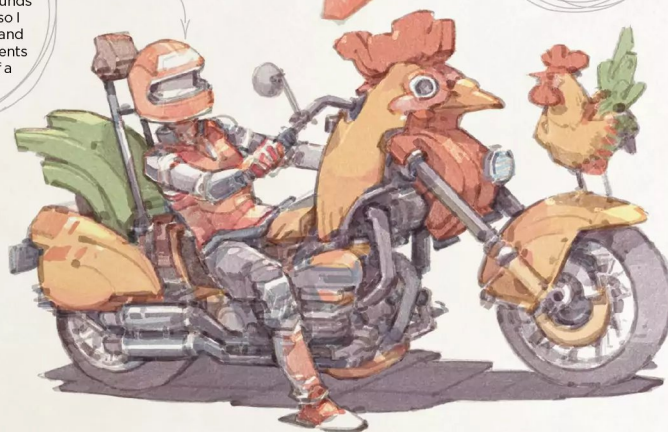


### SNIPER

"The classic elven sharpshooter gets a modern twist. With a sniper rifle, her firepower reaches a new level."

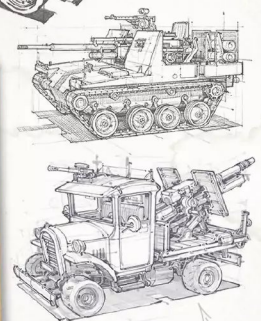
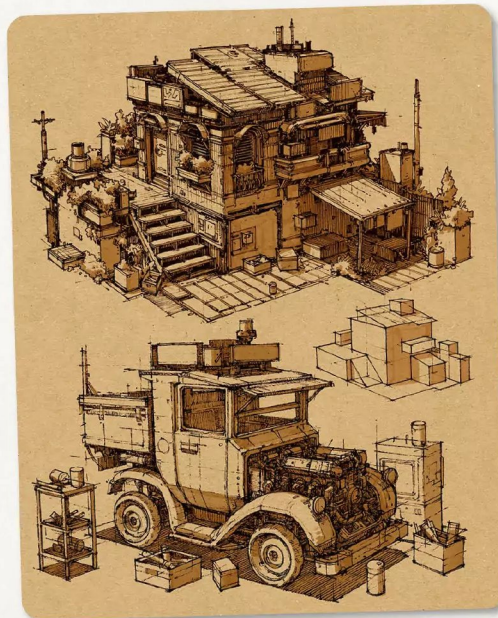
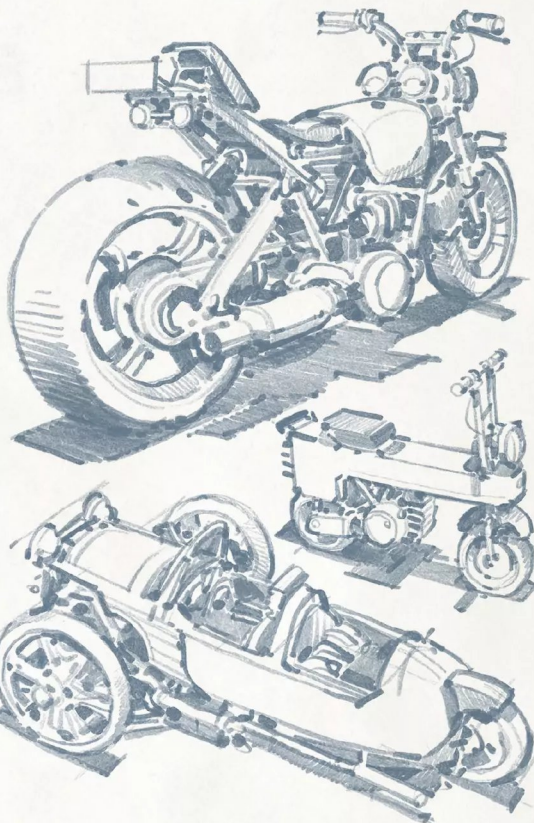
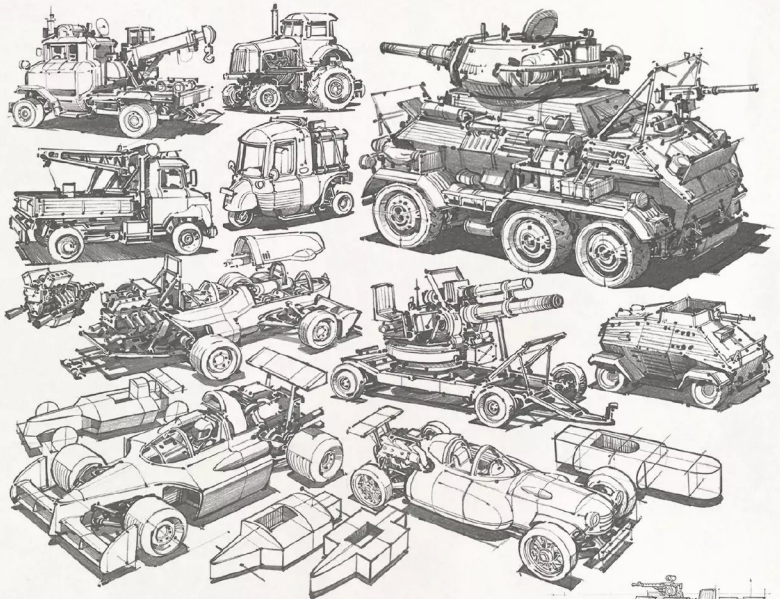
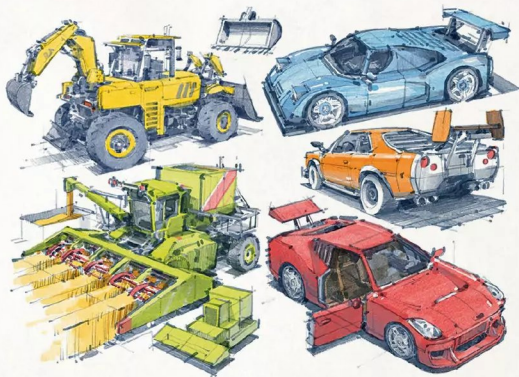
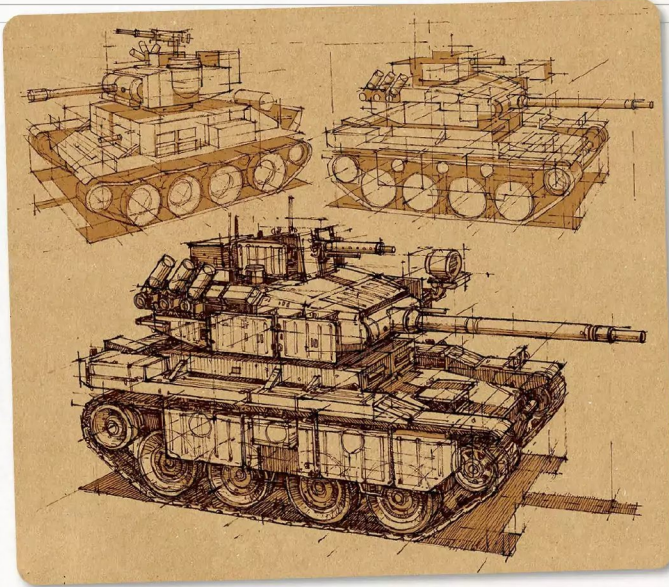
### CHICKEN BIKE

"In Mandarin, the word 'motorbike' sounds like 'chicken bike', so I embraced the pun and fused chicken elements into the design of a motorcycle."





“ Sketching vehicles is one of my favourite ways to relax and sharpens my industrial design ”



## VEHICLE STUDY

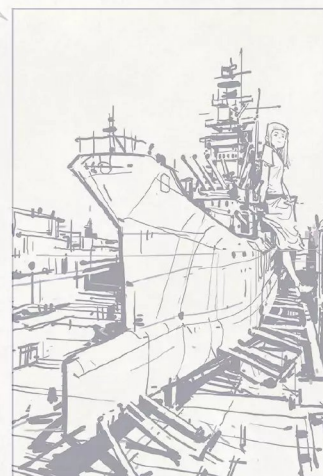
“Sketching vehicles is one of my favourite ways to relax while sharpening my industrial design skills. It's a staple in my daily drawing routine.”





## TOWER GIRLS

"My first digital art series combined exaggerated perspectives with giant characters. Redrawing it years later brings back fond memories of my early days learning."



## WARRIORS

"A mechanical gladiator becomes a mobile turret. I explored other weapon setups, but a soldier-operated gun best highlights the scale contrast."







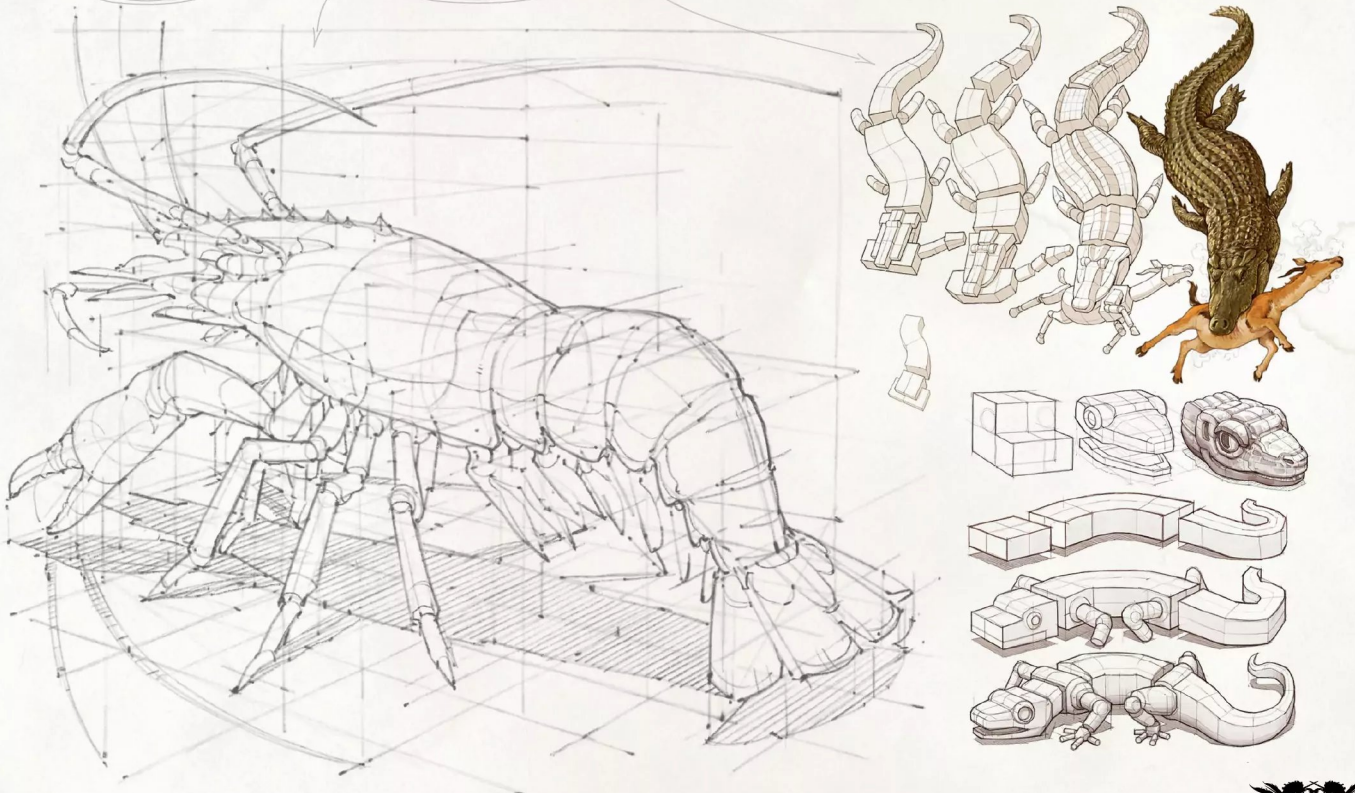
## FIGURE PRACTICE

"A study featuring my girlfriend as the model, so it's great for both practising anatomy and sharing sweet couple moments online. Two birds, one stone!"

## ANIMAL STUDY

"Though animal forms differ greatly from machines, I break them down into simple blocks and cylinders. I enjoy adding step-by-step breakdowns to show how I mentally construct each different form."

“Redrawing my first digital art series years later brings back fond memories from my early days”





# Nelli Suneli

Take a little breather and relax with some of the adorable characters jotted down in the illustrator's sketchbook

## Artist PROFILE

**Nelli Suneli**

LOCATION: Georgia



Nelli is an illustrator and creator of educational materials. She combines simple shapes, expressive details and rich textures to bring her charming characters to life. Inspired by nature – an endless source of stories, moods and forms – she aims to make people smile and pick up a pencil themselves. Nelli believes that creativity makes us happier.

[www.instagram.com/nelli\\_suneli](http://www.instagram.com/nelli_suneli)

### CUTE SKETCHES

"I love giving my characters a soft, charming feel with rounded shapes, big eyes, and sometimes a bit of a silly expression. I often add small details like flowers, stars or a book. And round glasses are my favourite – they somehow make the character feel instantly huggable!"

### STYLED PORTRAITS

"These types of portraits are something I can draw endlessly – and every time, they turn out different. I enjoy simplifying and rethinking faces, freely experimenting from the most basic shapes to more complex ones. These studies always bring new discoveries and keep the drawing process exciting."

### SKETCHBOOK SPREAD

"When I need to warm up or get back into the flow, I love drawing different variations of the same subject and often dedicate a whole sketchbook spread to it. It really helps me loosen up, like in this example."



“I’ve been drawing almost every day for many years – it’s truly the variety that helps me stay in love with it”





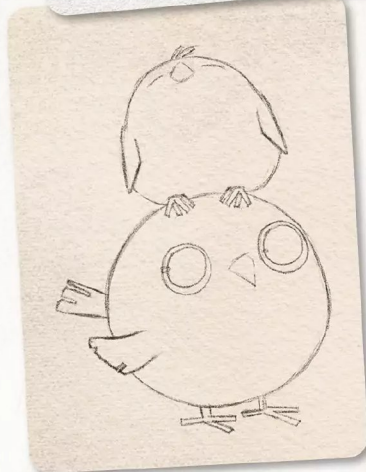
## SKETCH TO FINAL

"Sketching on a tablet has its perks: for example, you can pick up where you left off anytime and anywhere. That's not always easy with a traditional sketchbook, especially if you're not at home. So when I'm working on sketches for a future illustration, I usually go with the iPad."



## IPAD SKETCHES

"I love sketching with pencil on real paper, but I also enjoy drawing in Procreate just as much. I didn't want to choose between the two, so I use both. To make digital sketching feel more like traditional, I create paper textures and add a warm cream tint, which gives it that real sketchbook vibe."



## THE POWER OF VARIETY

"I believe it's important to draw different things - and in different ways too! It not only helps you to improve your skills, but also keeps the process fresh and exciting. I've been drawing almost every day for many years and I truly think it's variety that helps me stay in love with what I do."



# Ben Mauro

The artist unveils sketches behind the Huxley universe, his graphic novel saga telling a post-apocalyptic sci-fi story

## Artist PROFILE

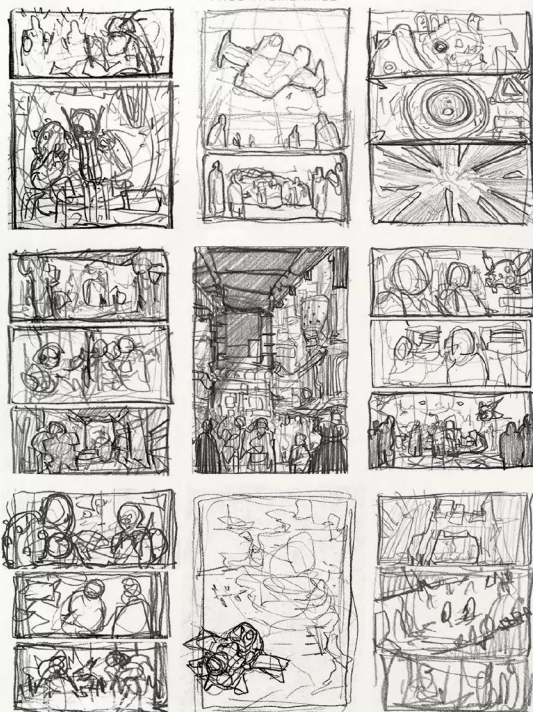
**Ben Mauro**  
LOCATION: US



Ben is an art director, concept designer and author who works in the video game and film industries. Known for his work on Elysium, The Hobbit, Halo Infinite and Call of Duty, he is also the creator of sci-fi graphic novel series Huxley and continues to develop new original stories in the universe.

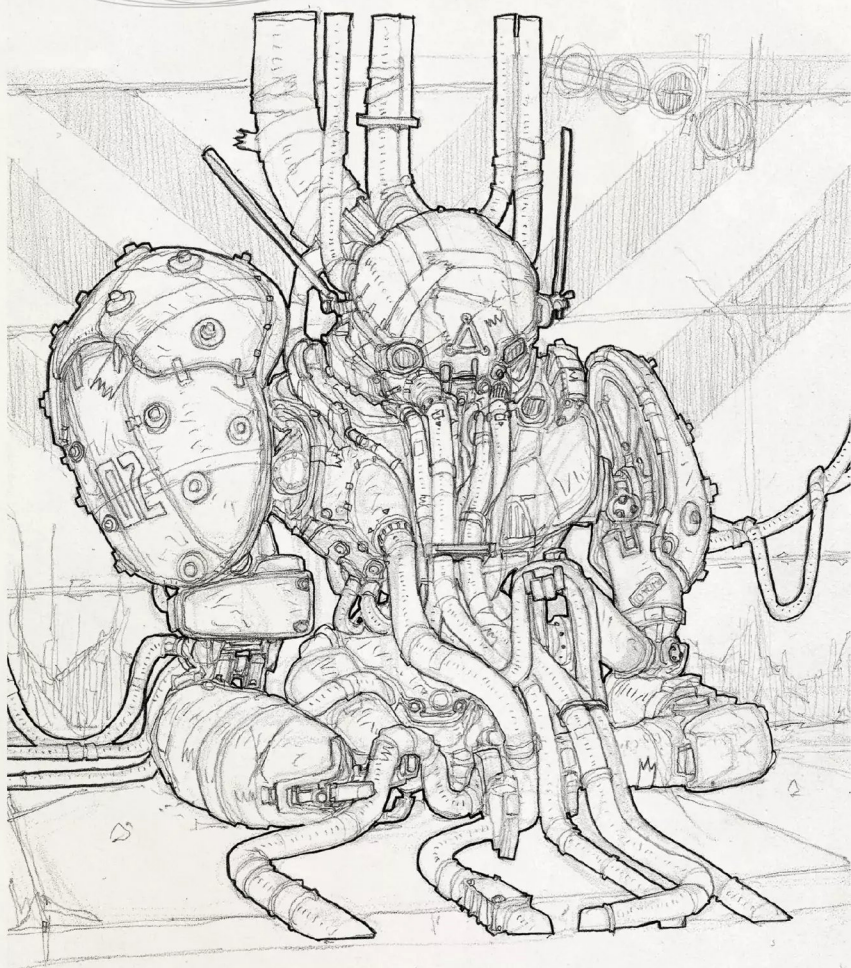
[www.artstation.com/benmauro](http://www.artstation.com/benmauro)

PAGE THUMBNAILS



### PAGE THUMBNAILS

"Early thumbnails of pages for my Huxley graphic novel. It helped to sketch things out in a simple way to design compositions and page flow."



### HUXLEY

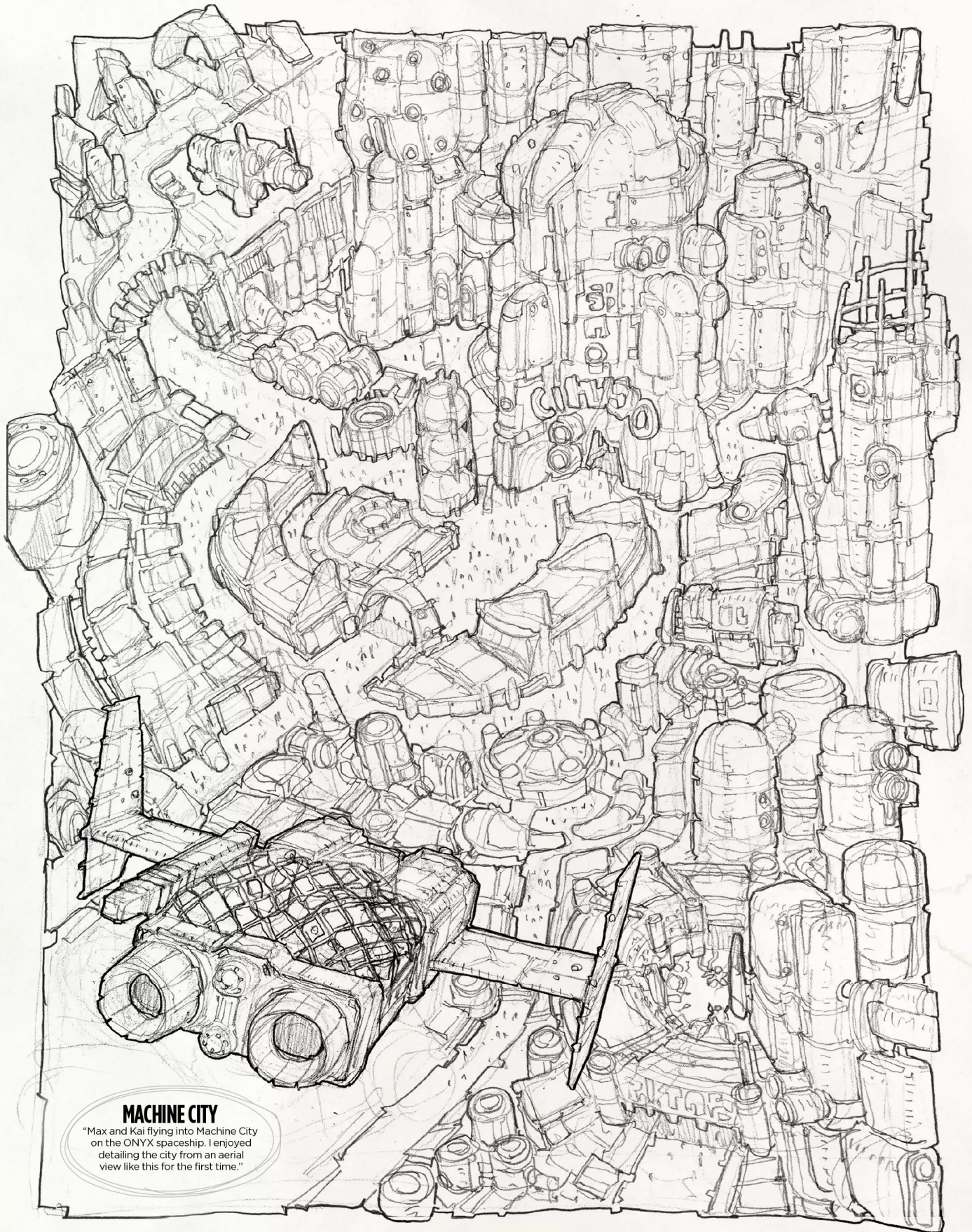
"The very first drawing of Huxley back in 2014 - over 11 years ago! This led me down a long path to figure out who this character was and create my graphic novel."

### UNDERWORLD

"Max, Kai and Huxley flying into a seedy part of the city to meet Karmak. It was really fun to detail out these landing shots."

“The thumbnails helped me sketch things out simply to design the flow of the pages”





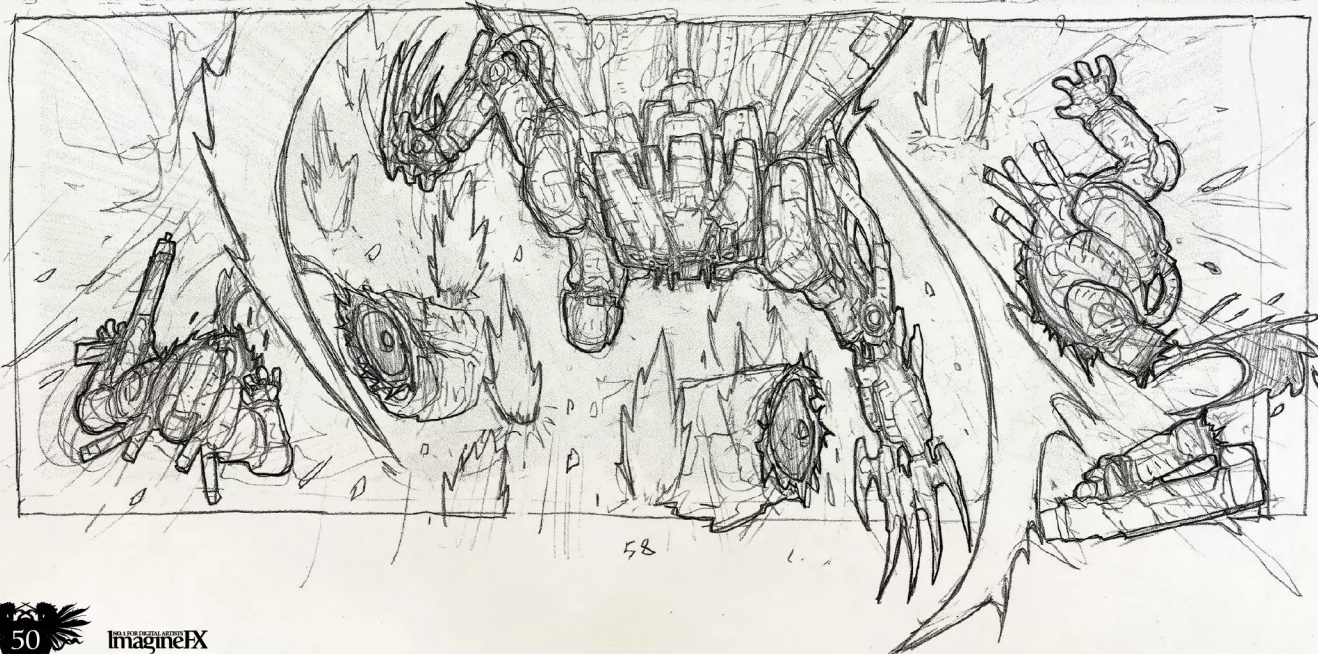
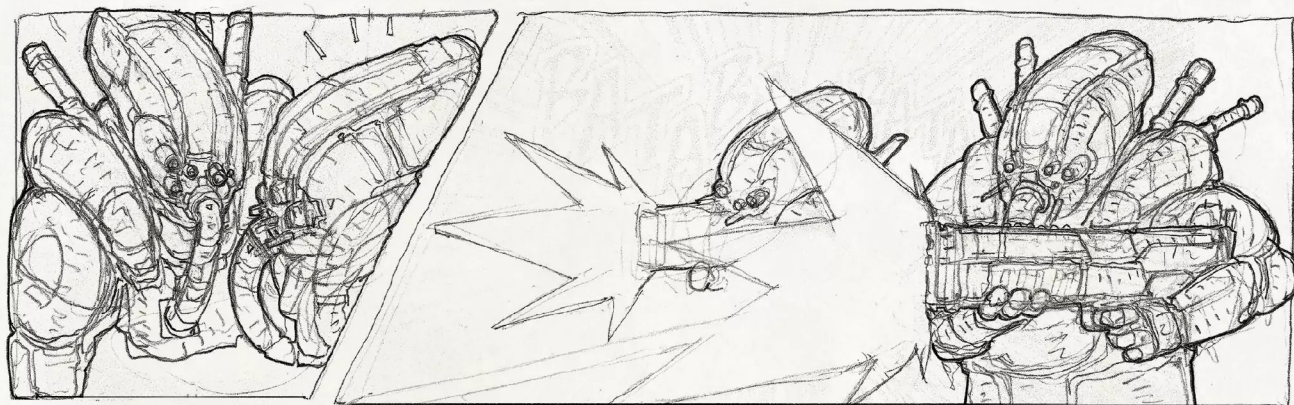
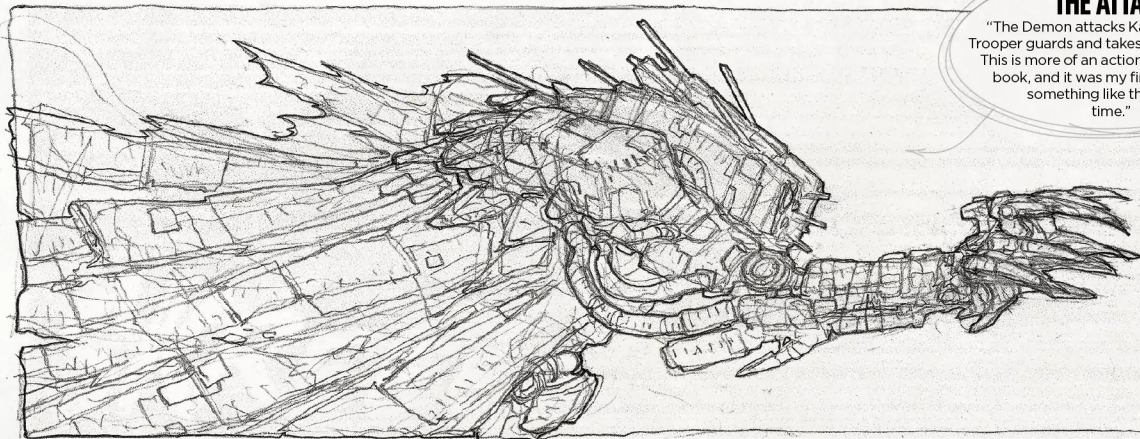
### MACHINE CITY

"Max and Kai flying into Machine City on the ONYX spaceship. I enjoyed detailing the city from an aerial view like this for the first time."

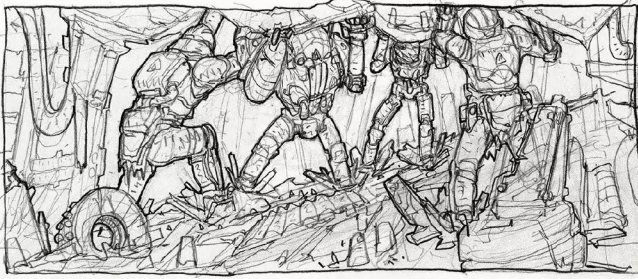


## THE ATTACK

"The Demon attacks Karmak's Necro Trooper guards and takes them out swiftly. This is more of an action moment in the book, and it was my first time doing something like that at the time."





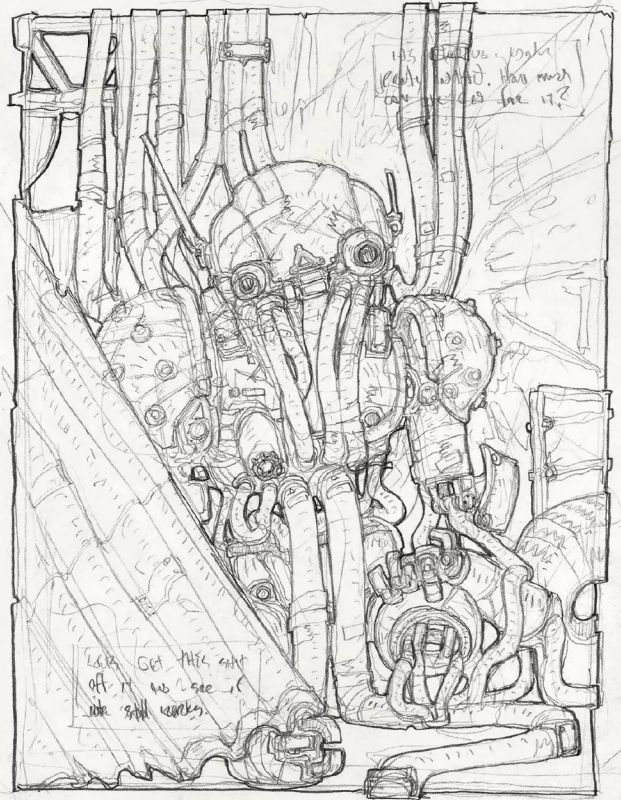
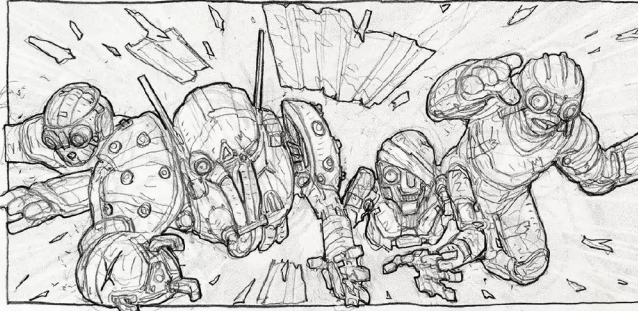


## BREAKING FREE

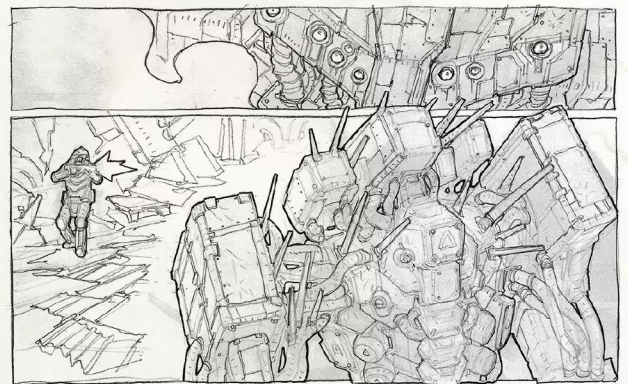
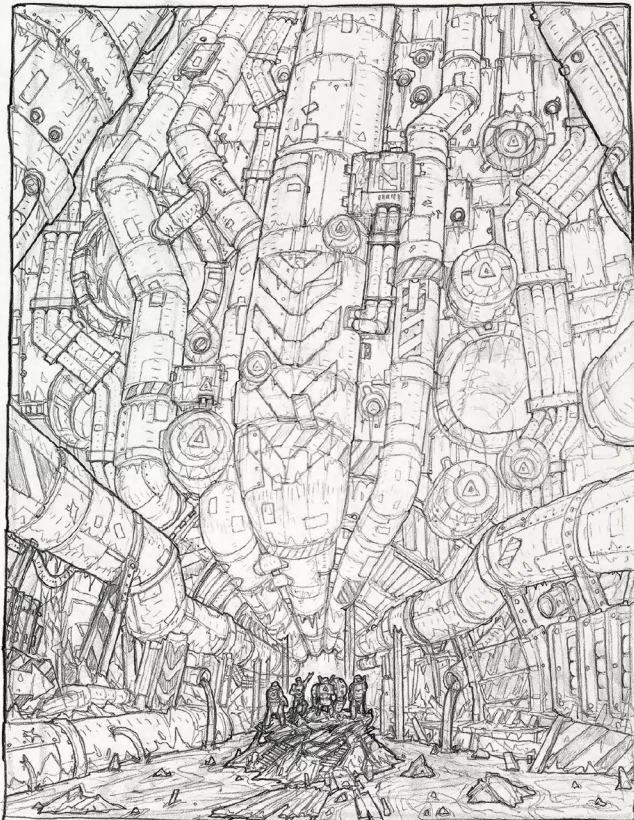
"The team helps prisoner Scrape break through from his underground prison after being stuck for many years."

## HUXLEY 2

"One of the early drawings of Huxley when Max and Kai first discover him."



“I loved the work detailing and designing the back of the Phantom character in the bottom panel”



## THE ENTRANCE

"Scrape leads our heroes to a hidden entrance into an old ATLAS ship with machines to repair Huxley's memories. Detailing the full page in pencil was great."

## DEMON ATTACK

"An evil Phantom robot breaks through a wall and attacks our heroes. I loved detailing and designing out the back of this character in the bottom panel."



# Lucas Matos

Akira Toriyama's influence shines through in the manga fanatic's charming character designs

## SOMEONE'S TRASH IS ANOTHER'S TREASURE

"This piece was my attempt at taking a fantasy-themed approach to an existing prompt."

## GEPPETTO AND PINOCCHIO

"A reimagining of the classic Pinocchio tale. This concept was developed with the help of some koala sketches made during a study session."



## Artist PROFILE

**Lucas Matos**

LOCATION: Brazil



Lucas is a concept and character artist. He began studying art in 2018 and has worked in the industry since 2021. A big fan of 80s and 90s manga, video games and animation, Lucas's biggest influence is Akira Toriyama, who shaped the way he thinks about character design. In his work, he likes to mix and reimagine concepts to create something new, while making subtle nods and tributes to the things that inspire him.

[www.artstation.com/lucasmatosart](http://www.artstation.com/lucasmatosart)



## BOMBARDIER BEETLE

"A character concept developed for a personal project. The idea is that their hammer uses a small explosive system to boost the impact of each strike. The design was inspired by El Chapulín Colorado [The Red Grasshopper], a character by Mexican comedian Chespirito."



## FORGOTTEN IN THE FOREST

"This illustration was inspired by fantasy video games. The idea was to explore the contrast between nature and machines; a theme I really enjoy working with."





## BABIRUSSA, THE CHIMERA

"Character exploration inspired by a more rebellious vibe: a punk-style character with sharp elements throughout. This was day 201 of the daily sketch challenge I set myself for 2025."



## ANÉSIO THE BLACKSMITH AND PENELOPE

"Character concepts made as practice from some study sketches. The inspiration came from Tōtōsai, the blacksmith from the anime Inuyasha."



## QUEEN OF THE CROCODILES

"This character study was an attempt to unify the character and everything related to them under a single theme: the crocodile."



“I try to learn from Toriyama’s artistic style and apply it myself”



## CHIMERA EXPERIMENT

"A character exploration inspired by 90s anime, specifically YuYu Hakusho and its themes of youth gangs. While I didn't stick to the setting entirely, I aimed to keep the gang leader vibe."

## THE TRAVELLER

"The inspiration for this character came from some of Akira Toriyama's older works. I'm a huge fan of his concepts and creativity. I try to learn from his artistic style and apply it to almost all of my own imaginative creations."



# Valentina Graziuso

There's a story in every sketch from the illustrator, who shows us her characterful creations and colourful scribbles

## ANIMAL PIRATES

"These are some of the concepts that I came up with for the theme Animal Pirates. I'm sorry piglet, I'll colour you next time, I promise!"

## AIRPORT SKETCH

"While waiting for gate announcements, I sometimes like to sketch wee, fuzzy animals - this one had some Robin Hood vibes to it."



## WEE PEGASUS

"There's nothing cuter than a bunch of chubby, winged horses with a perm, which is all I need to sketch at the end of a long day!"



## Artist PROFILE

**Valentina Graziuso**

LOCATION: Scotland



Valentina is a self-taught 2D illustrator with a knack for shapes, characters and entertaining. She has drawn on professional projects for the past five years, with Disney Lorcana one of her highlights to date. When she's stuck, Valentina looks up her favourite creatives such as Don Bluth, Akira Toriyama, Glen Keane, Bill Watterson, Rebecca Sugar and Chris Sanders - her list is endless. <https://bit.ly/4m2pqLn>



## OGRES

"It's so liberating to play around with shapes, and I've found that ogres are the best characters to do this with. They don't need to be pretty, they can strike fear with their faces, and also use face paint. Exactly what the doctor prescribed."





## MY SMALL HYENA

"This is taken from one of my digital sketchbook pages, and inspired by a song from Afterhours, who are one of my favourite Italian bands. I wanted to show the rebel, punk-rock nature of hyenas with this piece, personifying them and giving them the attitude that we all know they have in real life."

## VULTURE LADIES

"With these sketches, I explored a different kind of femininity, one given by hooked noses and some vaguely inspired ballet outfits. I can imagine them being the leading ladies for a tragedy in a freezing land with some Kate Bush music as the soundtrack."



## FLOWER PEOPLE

"This was just an experiment to combine people with flowers. The world would be a better place if everyone's biggest concern was a little chip in their leaf or if they happen to be a late bloomer."



## A WITCH'S WARDROBE

"Sketchbook pages where I explored a variety of witchy styles, playing with the colours and vibes. The things I'd give for such swagger when it comes to fashion!"



“For me, there’s nothing cuter than a bunch of chubby, winged horses”



# Chris Deboda

All manner of whimsical wonders and architectural delights await in the pages of the artist's sketchbook

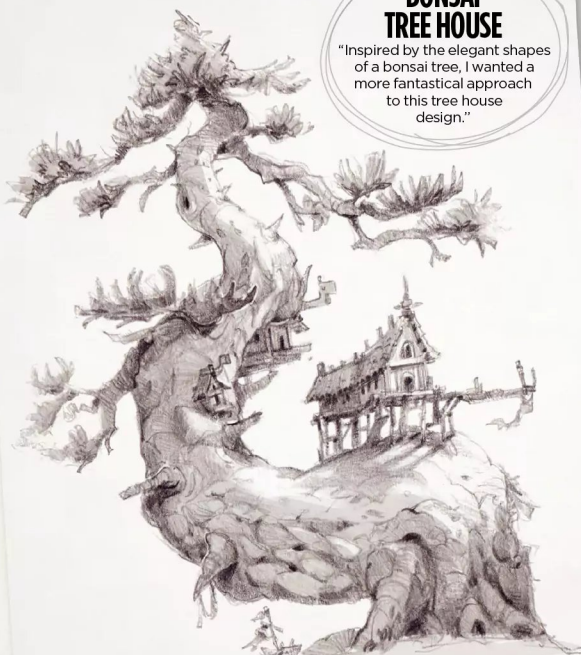
## HAUNTED TREE HOUSE

"What originally started as an exercise in scribbling around random shapes and lines eventually turned into a whimsical haunted tree house sketch."



## BONSAI TREE HOUSE

"Inspired by the elegant shapes of a bonsai tree, I wanted a more fantastical approach to this tree house design."



## Artist PROFILE

**Chris Deboda**  
LOCATION: US



Visual development artist Chris is based in L.A. With more than a dozen years of experience in animation and video games, his work specialises in designing immersive, stylised worlds while adding touches of light-heartedness and charm. Over his career, he has worked for studios such as Blizzard, Disney, Sony Pictures Animation and Rockstar Games.  
[www.chrisdebodaart.com](http://www.chrisdebodaart.com)

## HAIR TRANSPLANT

"An experimental character sketch where I mix up a photo collage with a Ronald Searle style of line quality. Playing around with different styles and approaches that I'm not used to helps continue my growth as an artist."



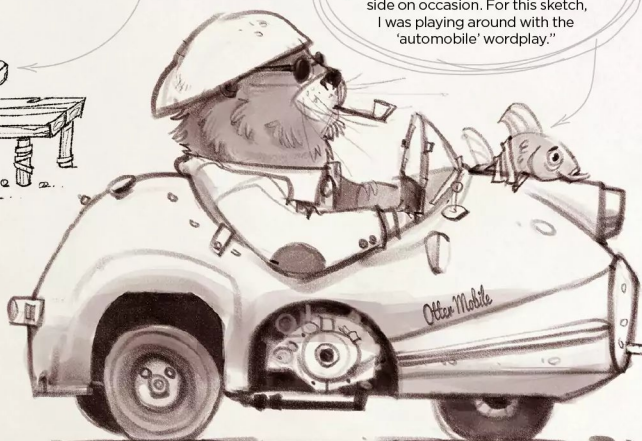
## TAVERN PROPS

"I believe props are the unsung heroes in environment design, so often overlooked. So much storytelling can be depicted through the use of props and set dressing."



## OTTERMOBILE

"While my main professional focus has been on environment design, I'll do character-based sketches on the side on occasion. For this sketch, I was playing around with the 'automobile' wordplay."



“Playing around with different styles and approaches I’m not used to helps continue my growth”



## TRAILERS

"I don't normally draw a ton of vehicles and often find them quite challenging. But these trailers were a fun excuse to get me to practise drawing more vehicles."



## DOG TREE HOUSE

"Taking a more classical approach to these tree houses, but with some extra whimsy. I wanted to add a cat and dog character for a bit of entertainment and a storytelling touch."



## TEA SHOPS

"Whenever I'm looking for something to draw, I can always count on small shops or cafes as a fun subject matter."

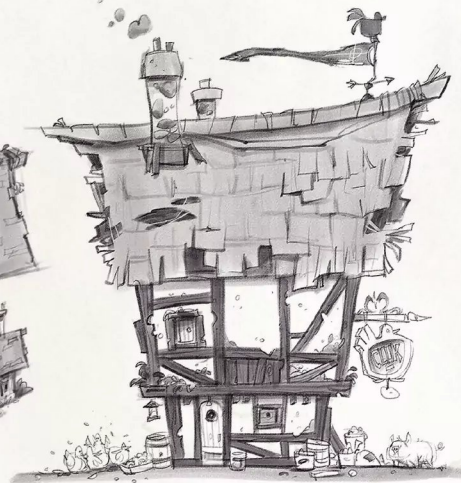


## URBAN SKETCHING

"Straight onto my sketchbook pages, drawing from observation not only helps with developing my drawing skills, but it also trains my eyes to see the world around me. It's very useful in then helping my fantastical designs feel more grounded."

## MEDIEVAL TOWN STRUCTURES

"Using medieval buildings as the reference, I wanted to play around with exaggerated shapes and proportions to give this a more whimsical and cartoony appearance."

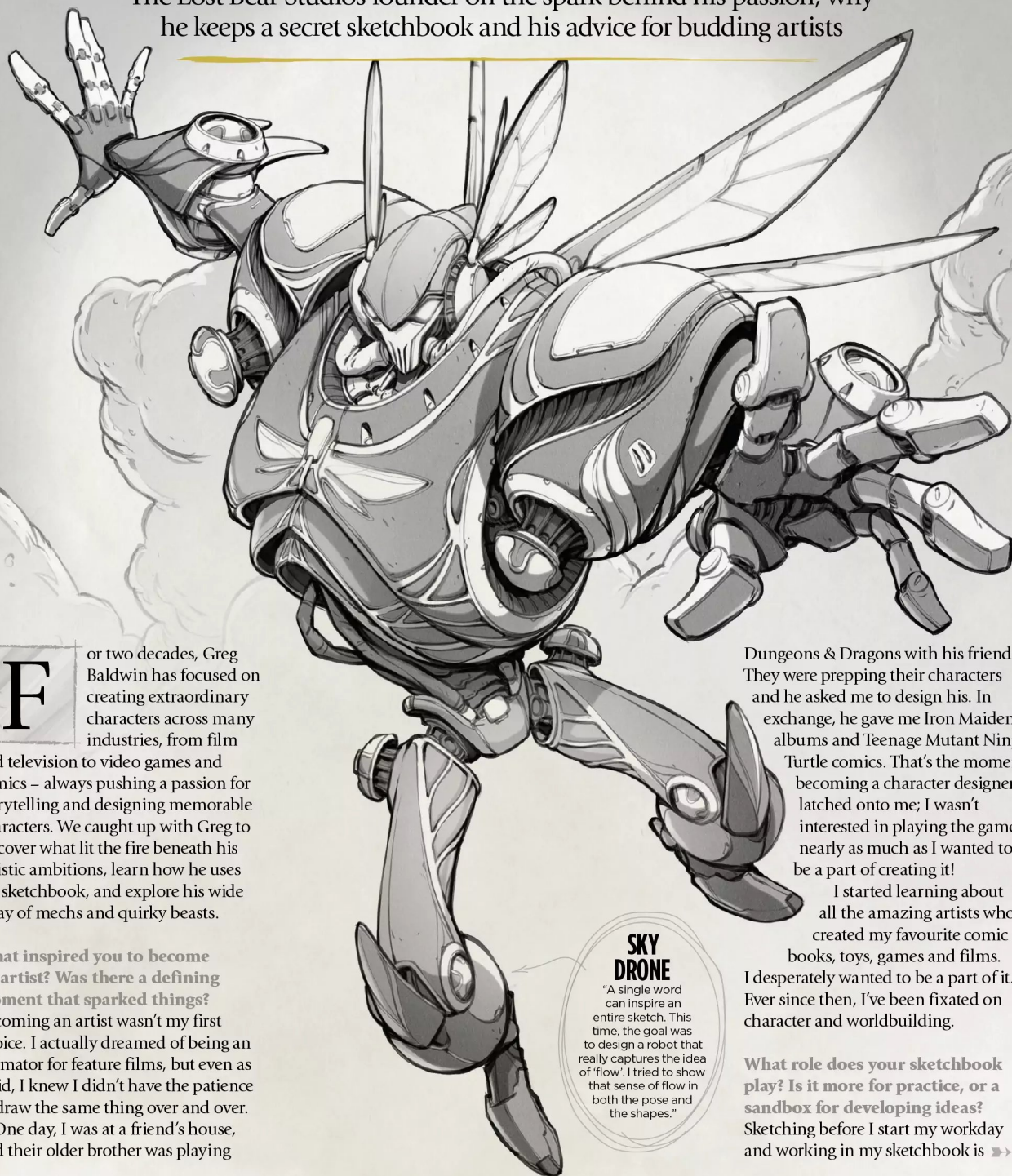




Interview

# Greg Baldwin

The Lost Bear Studios founder on the spark behind his passion, why he keeps a secret sketchbook and his advice for budding artists



**F**or two decades, Greg Baldwin has focused on creating extraordinary characters across many industries, from film and television to video games and comics – always pushing a passion for storytelling and designing memorable characters. We caught up with Greg to discover what lit the fire beneath his artistic ambitions, learn how he uses his sketchbook, and explore his wide array of mechs and quirky beasts.

**What inspired you to become an artist? Was there a defining moment that sparked things?** Becoming an artist wasn't my first choice. I actually dreamed of being an animator for feature films, but even as a kid, I knew I didn't have the patience to draw the same thing over and over.

One day, I was at a friend's house, and their older brother was playing

Dungeons & Dragons with his friends. They were prepping their characters and he asked me to design his. In exchange, he gave me Iron Maiden albums and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle comics. That's the moment becoming a character designer latched onto me; I wasn't interested in playing the game nearly as much as I wanted to be a part of creating it!

I started learning about all the amazing artists who created my favourite comic books, toys, games and films. I desperately wanted to be a part of it. Ever since then, I've been fixated on character and worldbuilding.

**What role does your sketchbook play? Is it more for practice, or a sandbox for developing ideas?** Sketching before I start my workday and working in my sketchbook is ➔

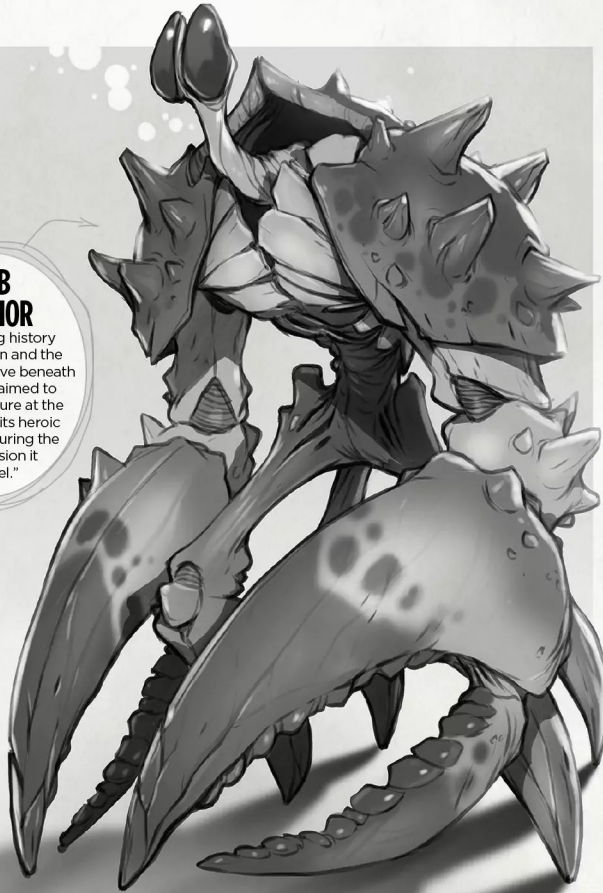
## SKY DRONE

"A single word can inspire an entire sketch. This time, the goal was to design a robot that really captures the idea of 'flow'. I tried to show that sense of flow in both the pose and the shapes."



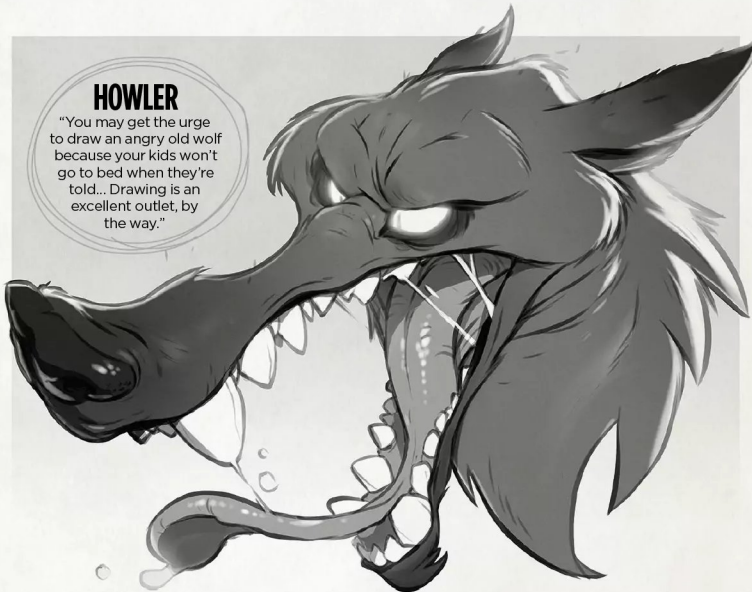
## CRAB WARRIOR

"I have a long history with the ocean and the creatures that live beneath its surface. I aimed to design a creature at the beginning of its heroic journey, capturing the apprehension it may feel."



## HOWLER

"You may get the urge to draw an angry old wolf because your kids won't go to bed when they're told... Drawing is an excellent outlet, by the way."



“ Sketching before I start my day and working in my sketchbook is essential to keep pushing myself as a designer ”



## MAKE A DOODLE FOR A NEW DAY

Why jotting down a quick rough helps Greg to develop his ideas

Sketching is essential to my daily routine, much like my morning coffee. I make it a point to sketch every day, even if it's just for a few minutes. This practice serves as a warm-up, helping to ignite my creativity. I liken it to a workout for the brain.

A recent habit I've settled into is splitting my time. Often at the end of a long day, I'll have had a few ideas pop into my head that I want to explore, but I'm too tired or have other life events to focus on. So I'll messily sketch them out in a few minutes, then set them aside until the next morning. With fresh eyes and time to explore, I revisit the sketches and see if anything stands out as something to take further.

This method allows me to stay objective about random ideas and then use my refreshed morning mind to delve into whatever I think might work. It's yielded some of my favourite ideas.

## SHROOMER

"Sometimes just a shape or structure in nature is something I want to explore. A patch of fresh mushrooms I saw while walking my dog inspired this good boy."





» essential for me to keep pushing myself as a designer. I draw from life almost every day. Most importantly, I find that exploring new ideas, forms, and materials – anything that grabs my attention – helps me build a repository of elements I can use when creating new characters or designs. Being comfortable drawing as many things as possible lets me focus on the design itself rather than getting bogged down with how to draw specific aspects.

I think sketching and being in my sketchbook is the number one part of my practice that lets me focus on the design itself, unhindered. Investing in my process to continue to improve both my skills and thought process is basically an artists' way of training at the gym. It can be tough to get motivated, but once you get started things will start to flow.

I really love to draw my dog, he's probably what I draw most, and in turn my animal anatomy has become less reference-based, more instinctive, allowing me to focus on the idea.

#### Do you plan what you sketch, or draw more spontaneously?

Both. Lately, I've been more interested in using spontaneous and new ideas. As artists we face a lot of hurdles. There is so much incredible content being made every day, and it can be hard to stay relevant or feel like it's possible to bring anything new to the table.

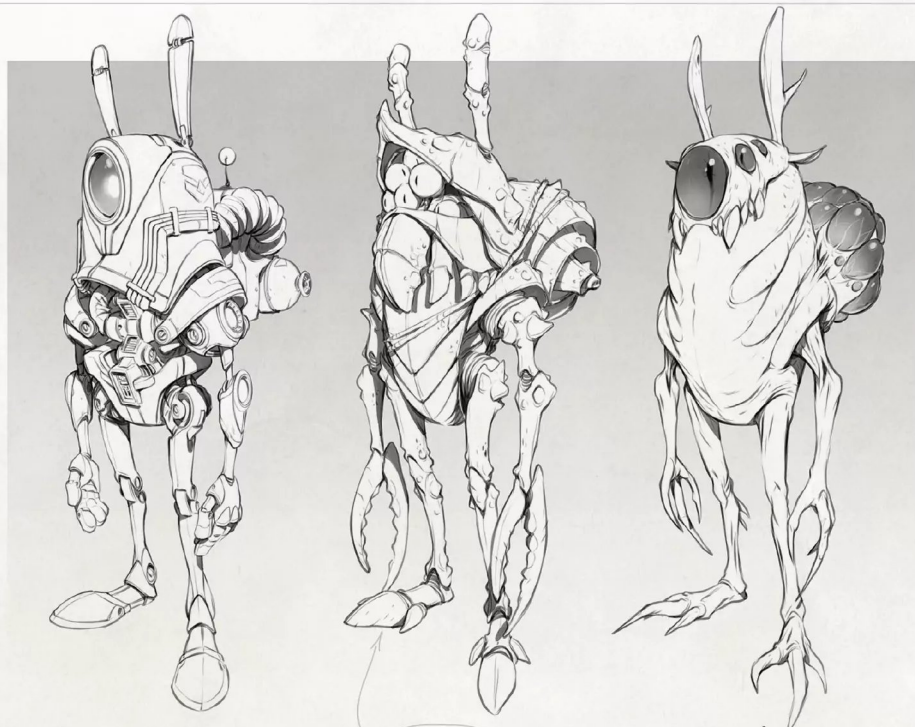
My personal solution is to avoid stagnation and constantly push my comfort level. The sketching process allows me to try out as many bad ideas as I can muster up before stumbling across a good one with very little risk of wasting time. Ruling out the bad ideas takes practice and helps to refine your personal taste for what it is you actually want out of your work.

### Artist PROFILE

**Greg Baldwin**  
LOCATION: US



Greg founded Lost Bear Studios and focuses on character development and worldbuilding. His work has been featured in Disney's *Moon Girl* and *Devil Dinosaur*, and PlayStation's *Ratchet & Clank*. Greg lives in the quiet forests of North Carolina with his wife, his gigantic dog and numerous woodland critters.  
WEB: <https://lostbearstudios.com>



#### Do you find yourself returning to certain themes, or do you prefer to explore areas you haven't delved into before?

I definitely return to the themes and genres I'm most excited by. I love monsters, zombies and robots. But these are just kernels for exploring new ideas.

If I want to focus on a unique shape language, a composition, a pose, or even an emotion, I can take a theme I'm comfortable with and use that as a starting point for the challenge I'm trying to work out. I always want to focus on the actual challenge and not be distracted by other aspects of the sketch. Trying to find something unique and fresh is hard enough!

#### Do you keep mistakes or sketches that you feel don't work for you, erase them, or leave them to refer back to and rework an idea?

The truth is, I keep two sketchbooks, and I'd recommend this to any artist that I meet. One is for the sketches I wouldn't mind somebody else flipping through, while the other is for my eyes only. It's a hot mess that's filled with terrible sketches, scrawls of illegible notes, and the occasional shopping list. It's my safe place – a book of free

#### JOURNEYMEN

"This was a test to see if I could use the same silhouette for various character types, allowing internal details to drive the variations. From a distance, these characters would all appear the same, which I found interesting."

#### LOSING IT

"It turns out that starting my day when things are going off the rails is quite tricky. I'd been planning on drawing a cute bear but, courtesy of my morning chaos, it just ended up channelling my inner nut job."



thoughts uninhibited by what anyone else might think of them.

I love having a place where I don't have to be performative; where I can fail miserably with no consequence. If something amazing comes out of it, great! But I don't put that pressure on those sketches. It's simply a safe place to draw like a kid again and make mistakes to my heart's content.

#### How organic is your sketching process? Are you ever surprised by what ends up on the page?

My sketching process is super organic. I usually start with something in mind; a subject or a pose I want to try out – something to get me into the page. But almost immediately I think, "If it comes too easily, it's probably been done before." Maybe it has, maybe it hasn't, but it nags at me, and I force »

“ Ruling out the bad ideas takes practice and helps to refine your personal taste ”



## NIGHTMARE

"Exploring new ways to draw zombies is a challenge that will never get old. Sometimes inspiration comes from tried-and-true prompts."



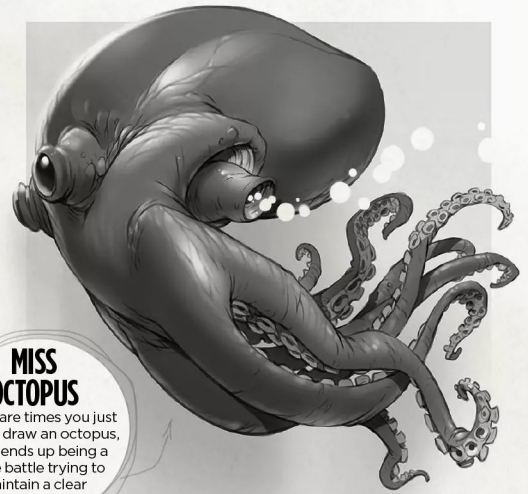
## FLUFFY

"I like to spark ideas by mixing opposing themes. Combining cuteness with darkness can make unsettling topics more approachable and intriguing."



## MISS OCTOPUS

"There are times you just want to draw an octopus, and it ends up being a whole battle trying to maintain a clear silhouette."



## FIND CREATIVE FLOW, THEN GO!

Follow Greg's advice – grab a scrap of paper and just start sketching

Sketchbooks can be anything from fancy, beautifully bound books of premium paper to simple Post-it notes or a collection of paper scraps. I'll often sketch digitally and save them in some dark corner hidden on my computer or iPad. Whatever feels comfortable is the right choice; it doesn't have to be fancy.

The best-case scenario is that the medium itself disappears, leaving just you and your sketches fighting the good fight. This allows you to put your entire focus on whatever challenge is set for yourself without being distracted by the tools you're using.

Whether you're doodling on a napkin or creating detailed drawings on a tablet, the important thing is executing an idea to the best of your abilities. Over time, these sketches can evolve into bigger ideas and projects. So don't worry about the medium – just keep sketching and let your creativity flow.



» myself to explore further, finding the least obvious juxtapositions to see if I can make them work.

For me, the goal is to end up with something I haven't seen before. I think that's the most exciting part about making art and seeing other people's art: being presented with something unexpected that feels like you've always been searching for it.

**If someone flipped through your sketchbooks over the course of your career, is there anything they'd notice? Would they spot any changes in theme or style?**

I think they'd notice a shift towards more organic, cleaner forms and shapes. Focusing on what makes something iconic and relatable has become a major point for me. Finding the most efficient way to express my ideas without any unnecessary fluff.

I once had the chance to sit and talk with Chuck Jones, one of my absolute idols. He mentioned how a budding artist might spend so much effort on drawing every little wrinkle and bump on a finger, while a seasoned artist could say the same thing with just a single line. That idea has stuck with me as an endless pursuit ever since. How can I say more with less?

Style for me isn't something that you deliberately choose, it's your interpretation of the world and

## “Worldbuilding, backstory and implied history are at the forefront of every sketch”

how you choose to distil it down to the parts that you find most important. I think there are through lines in my work from the very start, aspects that linger in my art. I see them as the small success along the way in my career that I thought worked and continued to refine.

**Do you do much worldbuilding with your sketches, looking at the concepts and lore?**

Worldbuilding, backstory and implied history are at the forefront of every sketch or final piece I create. When I was designing for video games, it was crucial to tell the player as much as possible about their location or the point of view of an enemy or NPC without having to record dialogue or

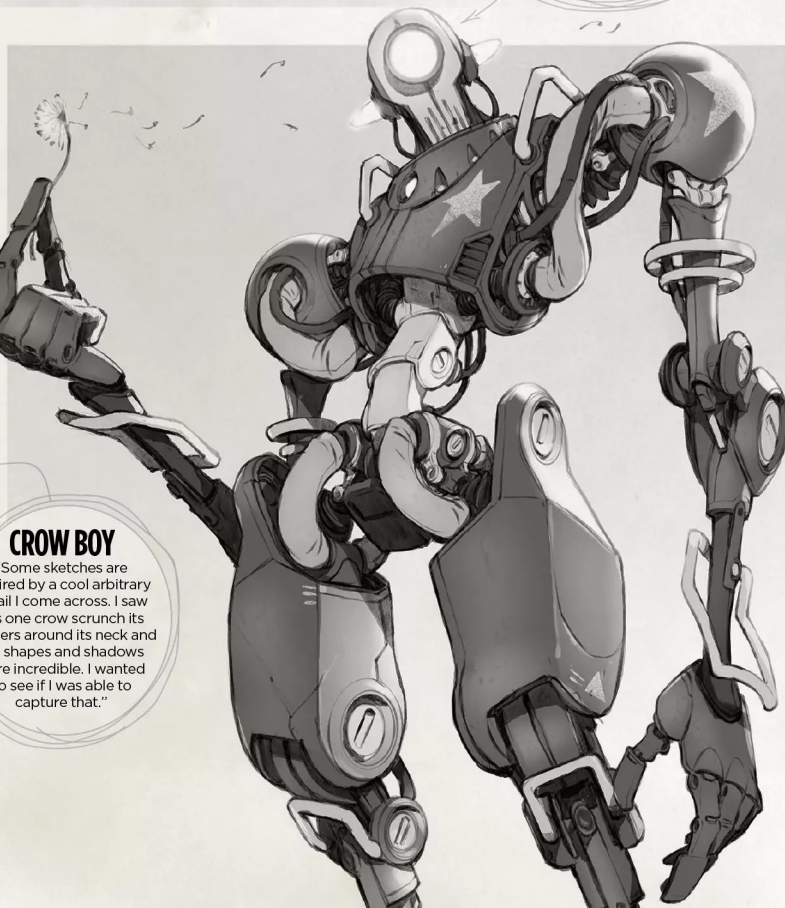
### MEGLATOOTH

"The idea of a shark with buck teeth made me laugh, so I had to draw it."



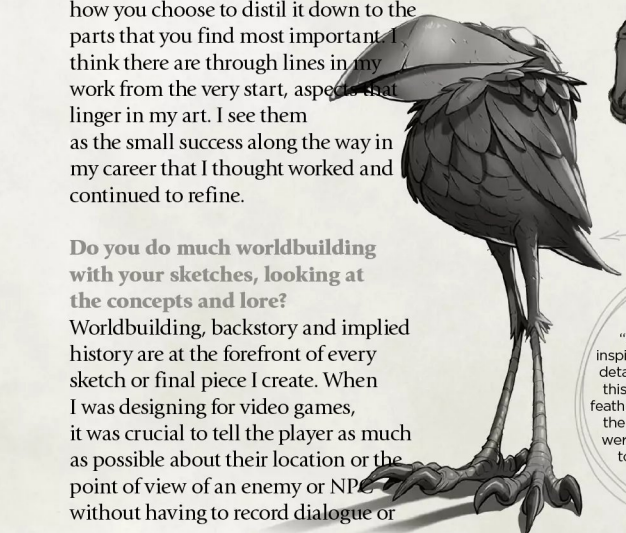
### WISHBOT

"Juxtaposing an imposing or scary character with an innocent activity to evoke an emotional moment can add interesting layers to the scenario."

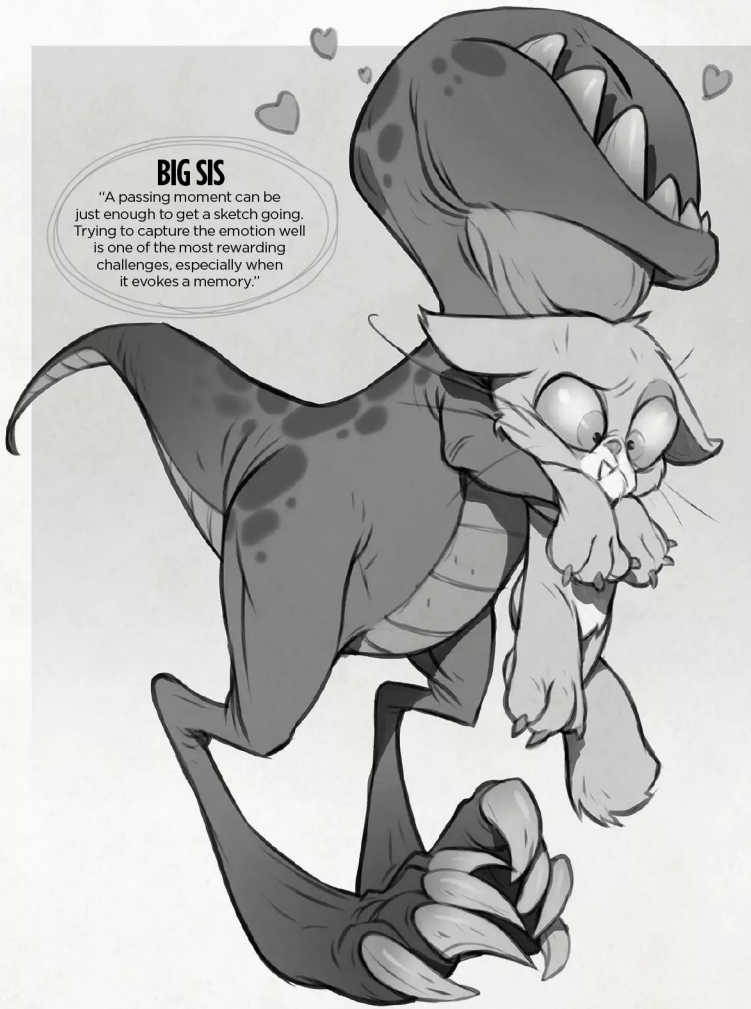


### CROW BOY

"Some sketches are inspired by a cool arbitrary detail I come across. I saw this one crow scrunch its feathers around its neck and the shapes and shadows were incredible. I wanted to see if I was able to capture that."







## BIG SIS

"A passing moment can be just enough to get a sketch going. Trying to capture the emotion well is one of the most rewarding challenges, especially when it evokes a memory."

add a cutscene. The more we could imply and inform through the design, the more time we could spend on progressing the gameplay or story.

As an artist, these aspects are exactly what we're acting out in our heads as we get to know our surroundings or the character we're designing.

## How often does a quick idea or doodle end up developing into something more complete?

I definitely have my one-and-done concepts, but I try not to stop at my first idea. If I can design it too quickly, then the idea probably hasn't been pushed as far as it could go.

Iterating on an idea is all about ruling out the obvious solution. If the goal is to create something new and unique, it's important to get those first ideas drawn and set aside as soon as possible so the unexpected solutions can be explored too. Sometimes the first idea is still the best, but that can only be said with confidence after other ideas have been ruled out.

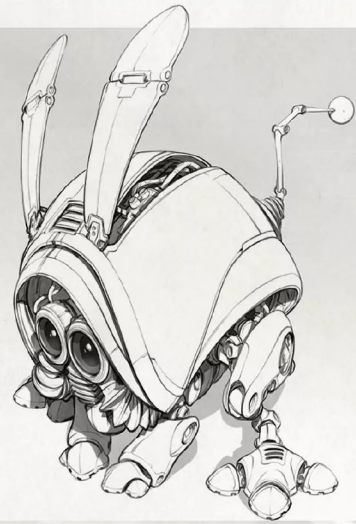
## What piece of advice would you give new artists about using their own sketchbooks?

Other than having a secret messy sketchbook, practise drawing from life for five minutes every day. I wanted to say an hour or so, but that was easy to justify skipping by blaming my busy day. But five minutes? There are no excuses! You can absolutely sketch a plant, your cat, your dog, your hand,



## STAR PUP

"Initially I'd thought about making this pup's expression more heroic to match the fur pattern, but making it look more apprehensive added nuance and interest to the moment."



## MAKING MY OWN LITTLE WORLD

Greg explains why considering the wider setting can help your sketches

When I'm creating designs for a video game or just sketching on my own, I like to create backstories and histories for my characters and settings. Establishing these consistent rules and boundaries within a world makes it easier to come up with new ideas.

Starting with a blank canvas can be intimidating, but having an established context helps to spark solution-oriented thinking and can lead to some creative results. By defining the parameters of the world, I can focus on developing unique, interesting elements that fit within those boundaries.

If a setting is inhabited by purely mechanical creatures, that gives me a great place to start. This approach not only streamlines the creative process, but also ensures a cohesive and well thought-out final product. Whether I'm working on a large-scale project or just doodling for fun, having a framework in place allows me to explore fresh new ideas and push the boundaries of my creativity.

or almost anything nearby.

At first it may feel awkward and meaningless, but over the course of a year or five, it will vastly improve your skills. It's kind of crazy, but as it becomes more effortless, so does drawing more complicated pieces. The by-product is that you fall in love with the strangest things: how the wing of a wasp shimmers, the way a pinecone is constructed, or even how your right pinkie finger has an interesting crook in it. And I love it, because it's an investment made in ourselves, which these days is huge.



# Phil Moss

The forest comes alive in a series of medieval-inspired character creations from the Warhammer artist

## Artist PROFILE

**Phil Moss**

LOCATION: England



Phil is a freelance artist who was previously a staff illustrator and concept artist at Games Workshop. He trained traditionally but enjoyed a decade spent making digital illustration work for tabletop wargames. At the moment, Phil aims to use traditional mediums as much as possible, jumping back on to digital when clients need it, and feels that the two mediums inform each other.

<https://linktr.ee/philmoos>

### GOBLIN CHARACTER SKETCH

"I like to use inks sparingly over a loose sketch. Less is more, so as soon as the idea is believable, I stop."



### ARMING A KNIGHT

"I'd been to see a jousting tournament around the same time I was drawing my tree knights, so I put the two things together into this piece. Lots of detail as a texture is fun, but I tried to keep the overall shapes simple."



### GREEN KNIGHT

"The head on the floor here is me - I imagine I'd lose a fight to this guy! I like the use of detail for texturing, and don't think the antler branches on his helmet would work as well if they were more plainly drawn."



### PORTRAITS IN PROFILE

"These began as idle doodles and led to an obsessive little project of tree people."

### BARBARIAN SKETCHES

"I make pages of ink sketches like these in threes and fours, putting as little info in as I can get away with to make the idea believable. It's a method I use a lot for concept work designing toy soldiers. Details can be looked into once the client and I agree on something that we think is cool. I find drawing with some immediacy allows me to get inspired by something I wasn't expecting to draw."





**FOREST  
WANDERER**

"I often forget that not everything  
needs a sword! I really enjoyed  
drawing this one."

“Immediacy allows  
me to get inspired by  
something I wasn’t  
expecting to draw”

M  
O





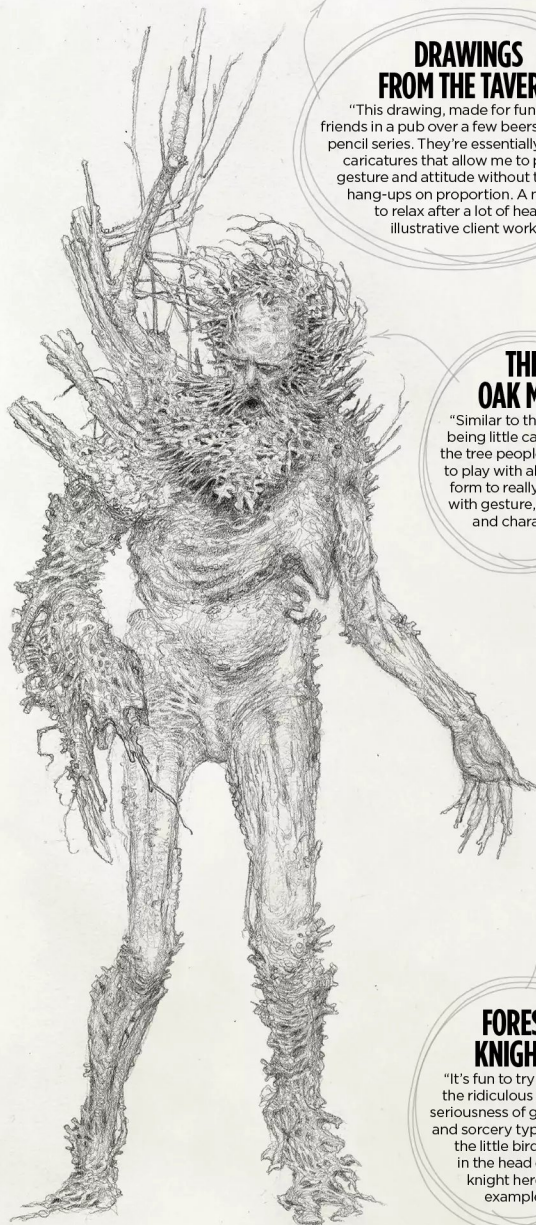
### DRAWINGS FROM THE TAVERN

"This drawing, made for fun among friends in a pub over a few beers, began my pencil series. They're essentially nonsense caricatures that allow me to play with gesture and attitude without too many hang-ups on proportion. A nice way to relax after a lot of heavier illustrative client work."



### DWARF ADVENTURERS

"It's fun to try and give a drawing 'noise'. The lids on a metal tankard clattering, leather scabbards, and wooden barrels banging and slapping as the figures run about."



### THE OAK MAN

"Similar to the goblins being little caricatures, the tree people allow me to play with abstracting form to really have fun with gesture, anatomy and character."



### FOREST KNIGHTS

"It's fun to try and mix the ridiculous with the seriousness of grim sword and sorcery type fantasy; the little bird's nest in the head of one knight here, for example."

“It's such fun to try and mix the ridiculous with the seriousness of sword and sorcery type fantasy”





### DOOM 1490

"I made this illustration for the DOOM 1490 tabletop game by Buer Games. They were totally on board with my idea to focus on the tone and environment more than the characters. It's great working with a client that wants you to play. I stuck relatively close to the initial concept sketch, which helped me avoid getting lost on the twigs and fog."



# Rob Duenas

Revel in the scribbly, colourful chaos of the cartoonist's sketches, including stylised takes on comic favourites

## Artist PROFILE

**Rob Duenas**  
LOCATION: US

Also known as Sketchcraft, Rob is a cartoonist who can't stop drawing, whether it's *Spawn Kills Every Spawn*, *Crash Bandicoot 4: It's About Time*, *Spyro Reignited* or *Berserk Boy*. He began his career on magazines and T-shirts, and now spends his mornings cranking out doodles while secretly working on his next comic project.  
[www.sketchcraft.com](http://www.sketchcraft.com)

### BANE

"I finally finished this old Bane sketch. He has a Ghostbusters-style bat logo because, well, he hates bats. A cleaner, scribbly pass with a tiny Carlos Meglia arm-hair tribute for fun."



### PORTRAIT

"A portrait using only coloured pencil for lines. Pretty results, but painfully slow. My hand protested, so this reminded me why I usually stick to faster pen sketches."



### HEADS

"Quick red and blue pencil head studies with Sharpie lines. I used to hate live caricatures, but slow observation – such as actors, photos, or people-watching – always clears my art block."



### THE MAXX

"In *The Maxx* by Sam Kieth, every line is a jittery, caffeinated scream of purple street gremlin glory."

### LOBO

"Drawn during my *Overwatch* 2 days, when my style felt out of place. The massive bike-gun hybrid and pure scribbly chaos reminded me why I love drawing for myself."

“I hated live caricatures, but slow observation clears away my artist's block”





**GAMBIT**

"Inspired by Jim Lee's 90s X-Men trading cards. I occasionally redraw my favourites in my style. Feathered pencils, quick colour scribbles, and a nod to that impossibly dynamic original artwork."

AFTER JIM LEE  
Sketchbook



# Jennifer Park

Journey into the character designer's fantasy world to greet the animal adventurers and mythical creatures that live within

## Artist PROFILE

**Jennifer Park**

LOCATION: South Korea



Jennifer is a character designer who grew up dreaming of fantastical worlds and drawing the creatures that might live in them. Nature, stories and childhood wonder still shape her work. Through each of her characters, Jennifer tries to capture the feeling of adventure, mystery, and of something just waiting to be discovered. When not creating, she loves wandering through forests, collecting textures and shapes with her eyes, as well as enjoying quieter moments with her favourite music.

[www.artstation.com/hlsr](http://www.artstation.com/hlsr)

### SIDE

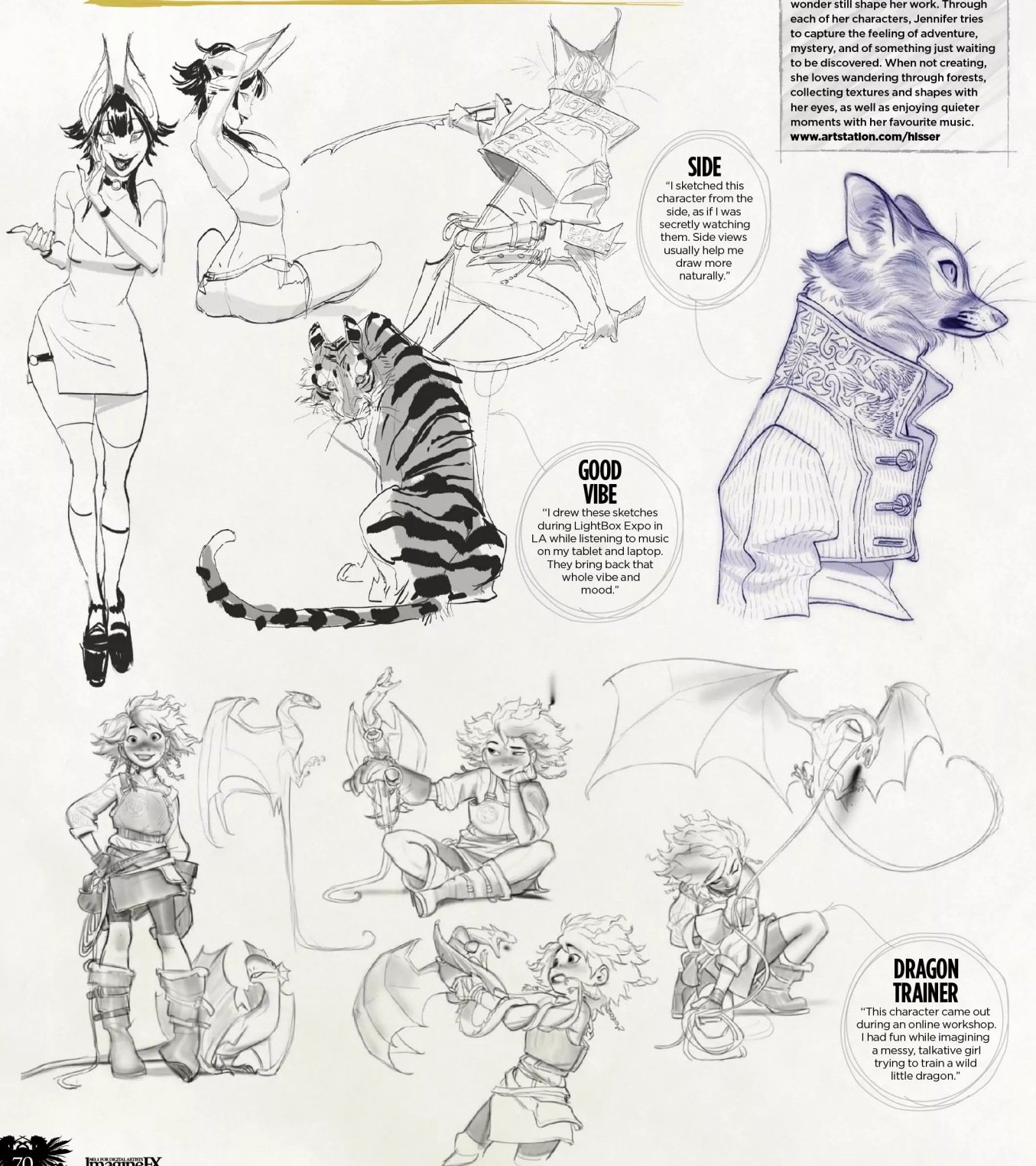
"I sketched this character from the side, as if I was secretly watching them. Side views usually help me draw more naturally."

### GOOD VIBE

"I drew these sketches during LightBox Expo in LA while listening to music on my tablet and laptop. They bring back that whole vibe and mood."

### DRAGON TRAINER

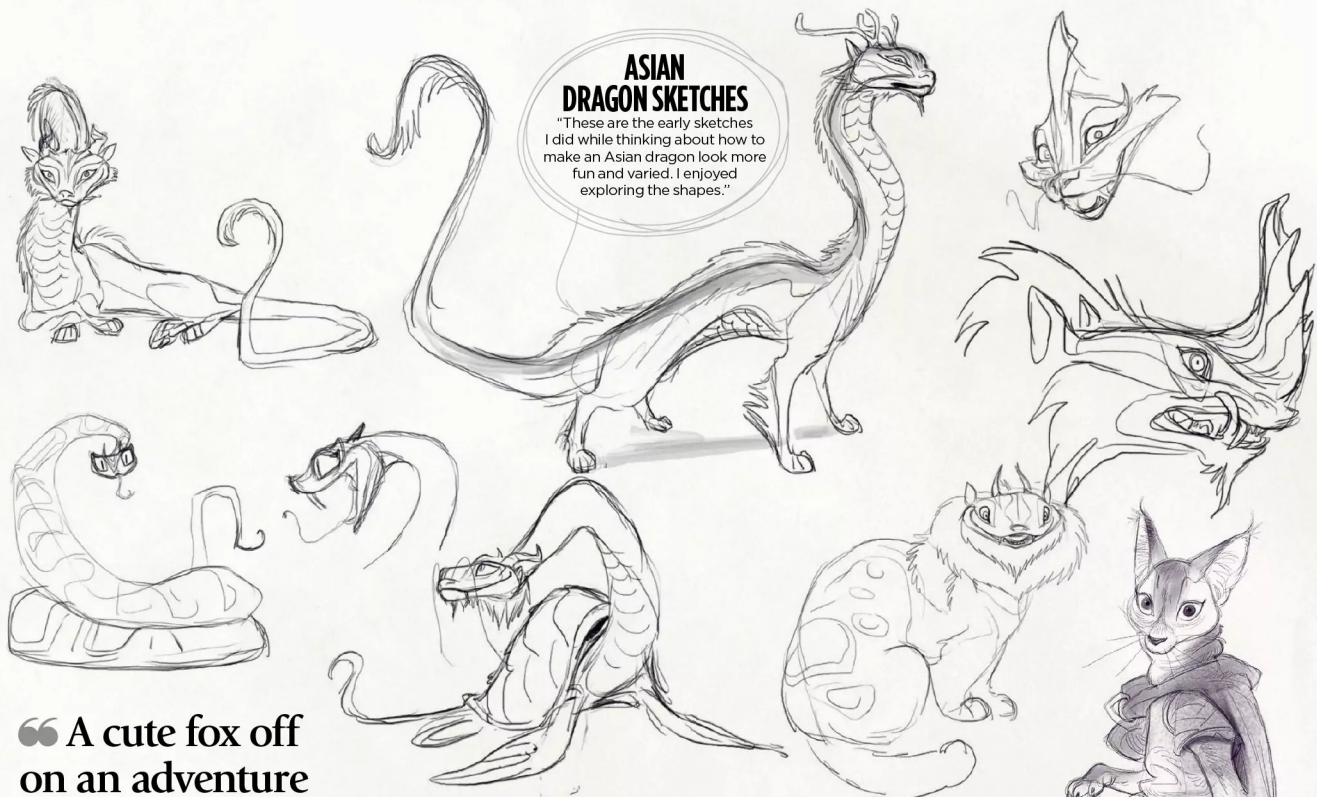
"This character came out during an online workshop. I had fun while imagining a messy, talkative girl trying to train a wild little dragon."





## ASIAN DRAGON SKETCHES

"These are the early sketches I did while thinking about how to make an Asian dragon look more fun and varied. I enjoyed exploring the shapes."



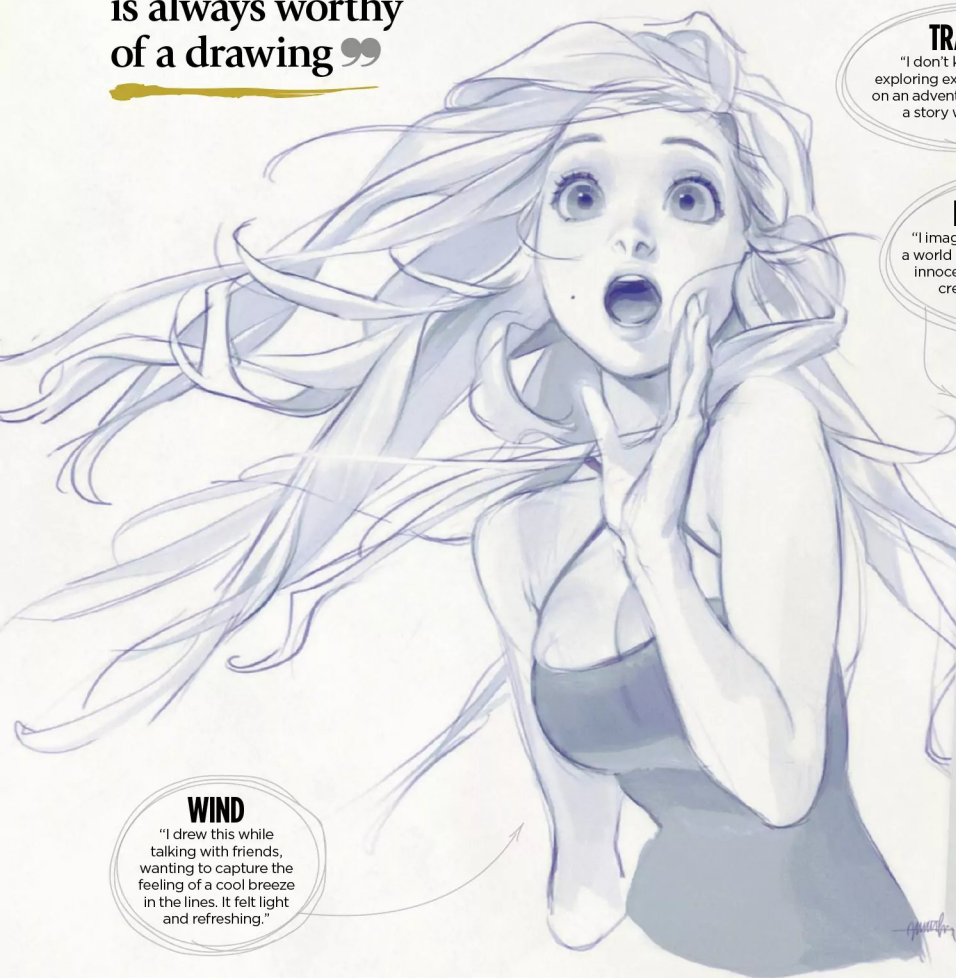
“A cute fox off on an adventure is always worthy of a drawing”

## TRAVELLER

"I don't know what she's exploring exactly, but a cute fox on an adventure always feels like a story worth drawing."

## NYMPH PRINCESS

"I imagined a nymph princess living in a world like The Dark Crystal. She has an innocent face, but there's something creepy and unreadable about her as well."



## WIND

"I drew this while talking with friends, wanting to capture the feeling of a cool breeze in the lines. It felt light and refreshing."





## OTTER DRAGON

"I saw koi fish swimming under lily pads in a small pond. It made me think of a tiny otter dragon swimming around with them."

## FOX KIDS

"I really enjoy drawing fox-human characters. With this, I was imagining what a young fox boy might be doing in his everyday life."

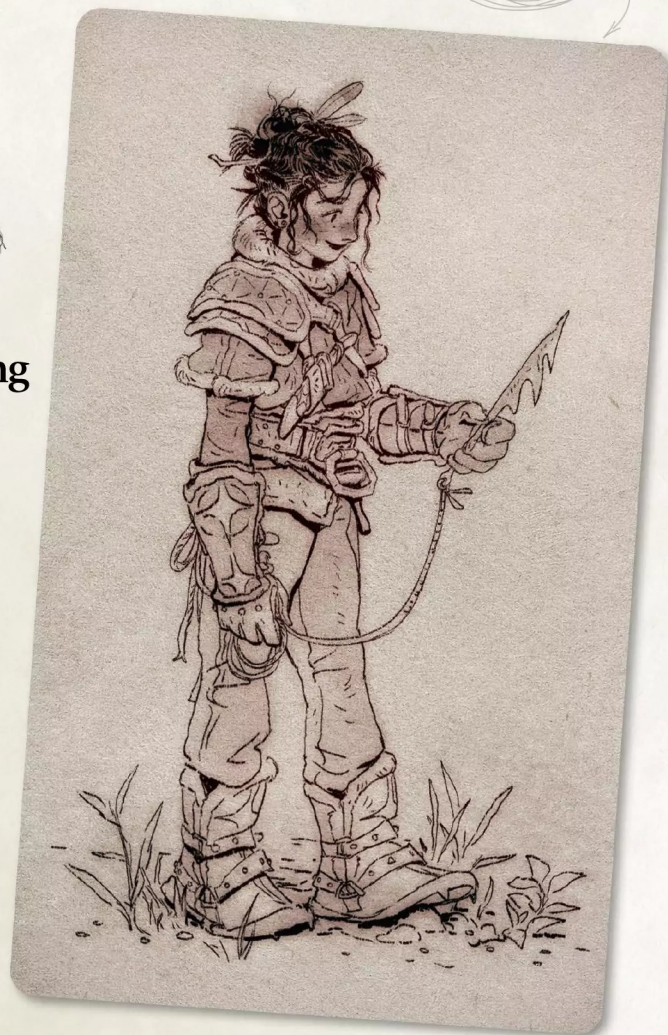
## HUNTER

"A girl hunting for traces of a creature in a quiet field full of grass. She looks like she had a good morning."

“I like drawing characters that look as if they possess secret knowledge”

## DRAGON SHAPES

"I suddenly wondered why there aren't more cute Asian dragons with unique shapes - so I made one myself! It was fun to imagine."







## GOAT PRINCESS

"She's a princess from a goat tribe living in a place like Tibet. I imagined her as someone tough, raised in a harsh mountain environment."

## DRAGON HUNTER

"One day, a cool warrior hunting an evil dragon in a wide desert just popped into my head. I wanted to show her with a ruthless gaze."



## HEY

"This is a fox explorer with a mysterious smile. I like drawing characters that look as if they know something secret."



## SAND WARRIOR

"A loyal and noble warrior wandering across a dry, harsh desert. I wanted to draw someone shaped by the land."





# Corey Shillingford

The stylisation specialist shares his expressive characters and offers some tidbits of insight into his creative process

## Artist PROFILE

**Corey Shillingford**

LOCATION: Canada



Corey studied animation at Sheridan College, where he fell in love with stylised character design. After working on board games, video games, TV and film, he realised true creative ownership comes from independence. With this new-found knowledge, Corey is pursuing indie game development, building stylised worlds and characters with full control of the creative process on his projects. <https://bit.ly/40KI4jr>

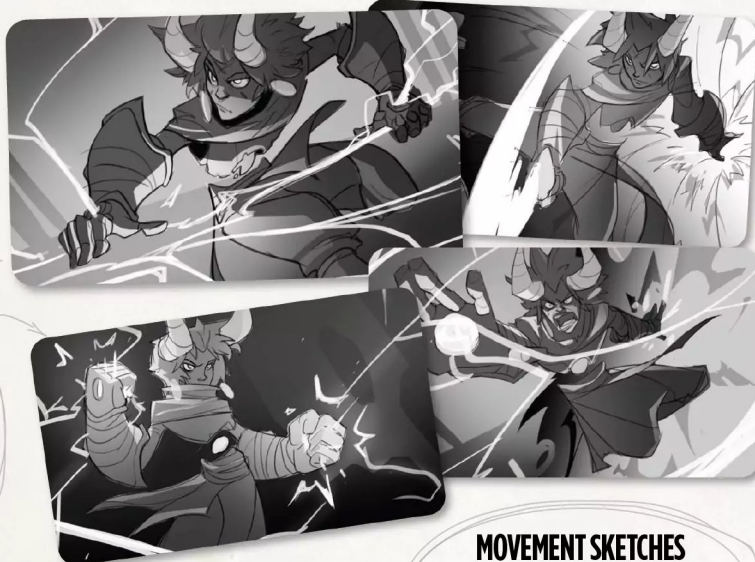
### DAILY PORTRAITS

"A regular challenge that I kept up for a few weeks. It's what really made me fall in love with character concept art. Not all of them will be great, but it's helpful for learning and building confidence."



### KEY ART SKETCHES

"Some quick character key art sketches for my game, where I was trying to get a feel for movement and posing. Just exploring shapes and energy while keeping it loose."



### MOVEMENT SKETCHES

"Coming from an animation background, I like to explore poses early on, it helps bring out personality and catches design issues before I make decisions to lock things down."







## SIDEKICK CHARACTER

"A fun little sidekick. He'd swap out his body parts depending on the situation - kind of like a tinkering, adaptable buddy who's always changing."



## SCULPTOR

"This was a character idea for an earth-elemental boss. I wanted something that felt heavy but brittle, and having this thin old man carrying this giant work of art felt perfect."

## PIRATE CREW

"I love pirates so I thought it would be cool to create my own crew. Starting loose in the early sketch phase is always key so you feel free to discover interesting shapes and personalities."



## ORB ADVENTURES

"One summer I did a daily sketch series about a kid who finds a magical orb that crashes down from the sky. Each drawing pushed the story forward as his powers grew and things got weirder."





# Acky Bright

Sketching is the medium that allows the manga artist to express his work and himself most authentically

## Artist PROFILE

**Acky Bright**

LOCATION: Japan



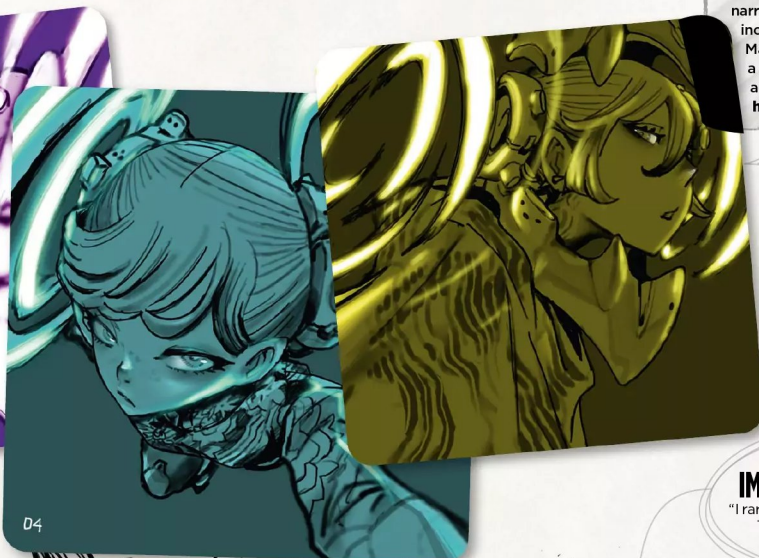
Best known for creating black-and-white artwork and kawaii (cute and cool) characters, Acky's style is influenced by the energy of 90s manga, blending bold brushwork, fine detail and emotional narratives. His past collaborations include the likes of McDonald's, Marvel and DC. To Acky, manga is a borderless language connecting across cultures and generations. <https://bit.ly/4fy5yNK>

## AIRBRUSH ARTWORK

"Sometimes I like to try a different brush than usual as a change of pace. Doing this can bring unexpected results in the final piece."

## IMAGINARY CREATURES

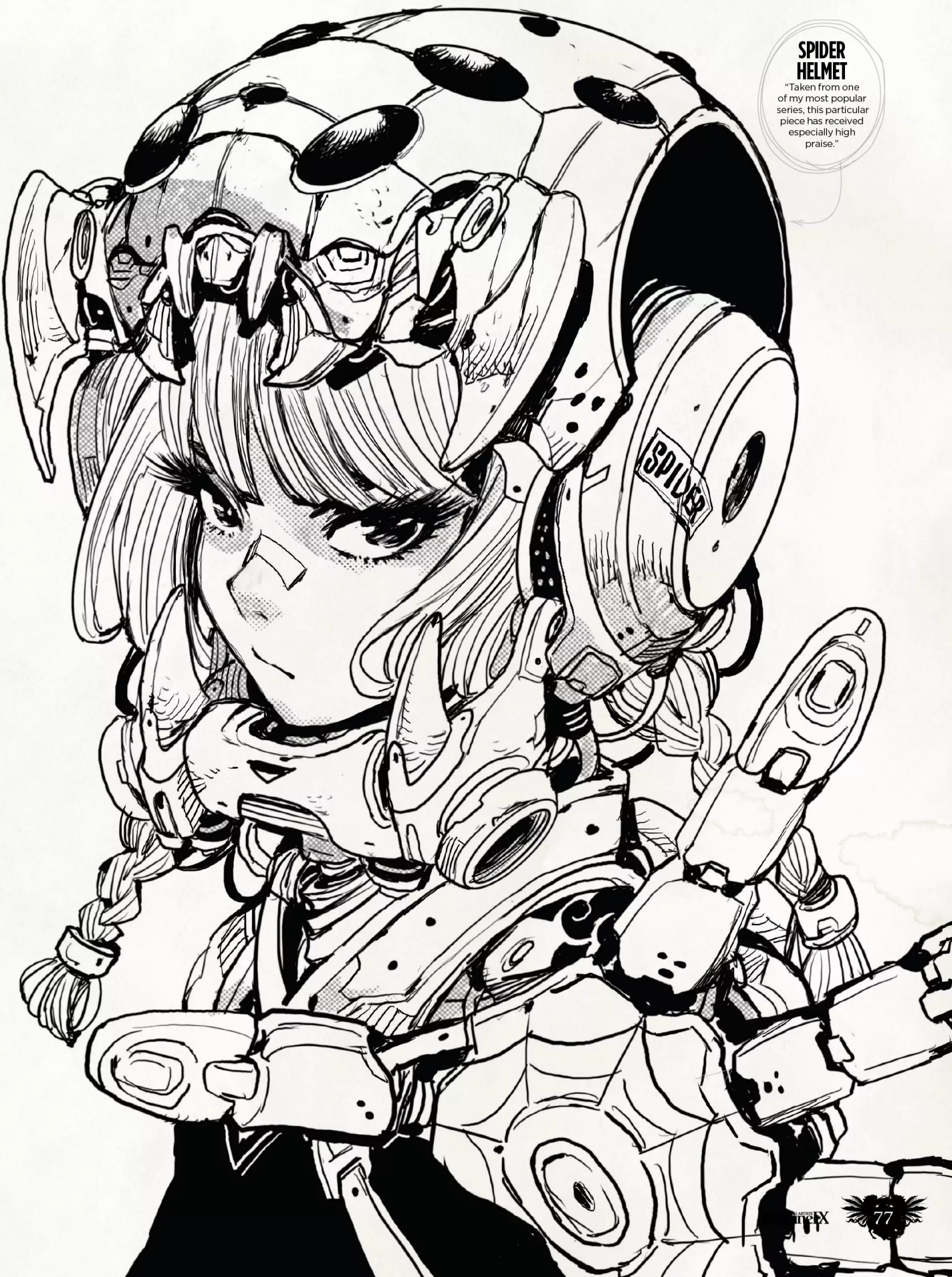
"I rarely draw from photos or videos. These are creatures that live entirely in my head."





**SPIDER  
HELMET**

"Taken from one of my most popular series, this particular piece has received especially high praise."







### BUDDY

"I imagined being able to equip an animal mech as a companion. That's the concept behind this piece."

### SHOGUN GIRL

"Mech-style armour, with the design inspired by traditional Japanese samurai attire."

### PENCIL BRUSH: TEST 1

"I drew this to try out a pencil brush, and decided to add red flowers as an accent."

### PENCIL BRUSH: TEST 2

"Another trial of a pencil brush. I think it suits me and my art very well!"





“Trying a different brush can bring you unexpected results in the final art”

## JUJUTSU SORCERER

“By adding an accent colour to the eyes, it brought a flash of colour to the entire piece.”

## POPULAR PIECE

“Mask Girl is considered my signature series, and this is probably the most well-known artwork.”



## PRODUCT DESIGN

“Thought up as a product concept, this mask was ultimately turned into a physical item.”





# Greg Lambrakis

Hop on board a graphite-fuelled rocket ship and blast off into the stars, where you'll visit an array of spacefaring chaps

## Artist PROFILE

**Greg Lambrakis**

LOCATION: US



Greg works as a concept artist and art director for video games – a role he finds rewarding but also challenging at times. He tries not to overthink his sketchbooks and just lets the drawings happen. As a result, they tend to be filled with silly, escapist fun and strange characters.

[www.artstation.com/gregorythorne](http://www.artstation.com/gregorythorne)



### PILOT

"I combined graphite and digital here. He seems like he could be a cocky pilot, or maybe a grumpy security guard."



### DRAGONLING WIZARD

"If you create concept art or fantasy illustrations, you'll eventually end up sketching some kind of diminutive, dragon-wizard adventurer. It's the rules!"



### POUTY BOY

"Just another random sketch. I get the feeling that this guy wouldn't particularly enjoy interacting with humans."



### BEANIE MUTANT

"An example of how a quick doodle can become a bigger digital sketch."



### CEREBRAL UPGRADE

"A crime boss who's undergone black market surgery to connect his brain to computer augmentations."



### WISE ONE

"Just having fun putting my imagination in the driving seat. Perhaps this character is a wise old sage."





## ALIEN MYSTIC

"Sketched out with graphite. I often doodle weird little guys just for some fun."

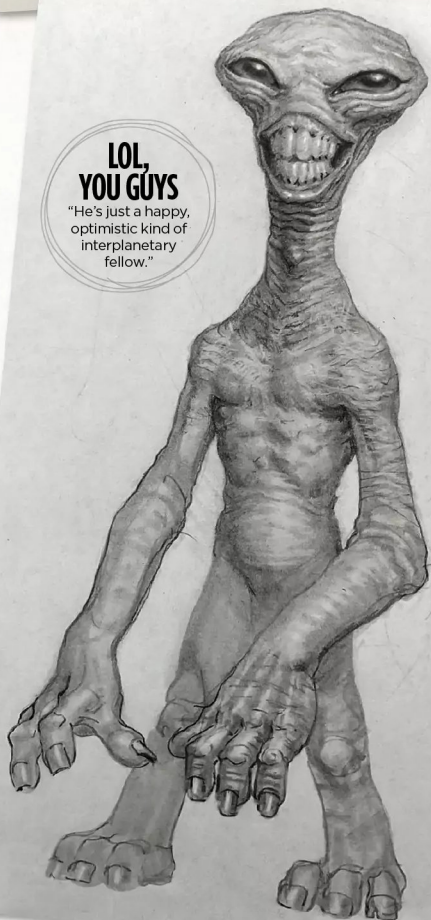


## SIDEKICK

"Every good spacefarer needs a crafty sidekick who can repair a bulkhead and operate the loading bay for them."

## LOL, YOU GUYS

"He's just a happy, optimistic kind of interplanetary fellow."



## WE ALL FLOAT

"This one was an experiment in using powdered graphite diluted in a solvent and applied with a brush."



“I’ll often doodle weird little guys like these in my sketchbook just to have creative some fun”



# Lobón Leal

Spanish and Latin American culture combine with comic style and classic characters in a stunning sketchbook

## Artist PROFILE

**Lobón Leal**

LOCATION: Spain



Lobón is a concept artist and illustrator from the city of Chiclana in the south of Spain. He has earned a degree in fine arts and specialises in both character design and comics. His art is rooted in manga culture and the philosophy of Studio Ghibli. He combines his work as a concept artist for international production companies with his own personal projects at Arriate Studio. [www.artstation.com/lobonleal](http://www.artstation.com/lobonleal)

### BRAWLER

"Sketch of a street fighter who's taking part in a martial arts tournament for women, held on Skull Island. This story was born in my red sketchbook - a notebook that I developed using nothing but red pencil."

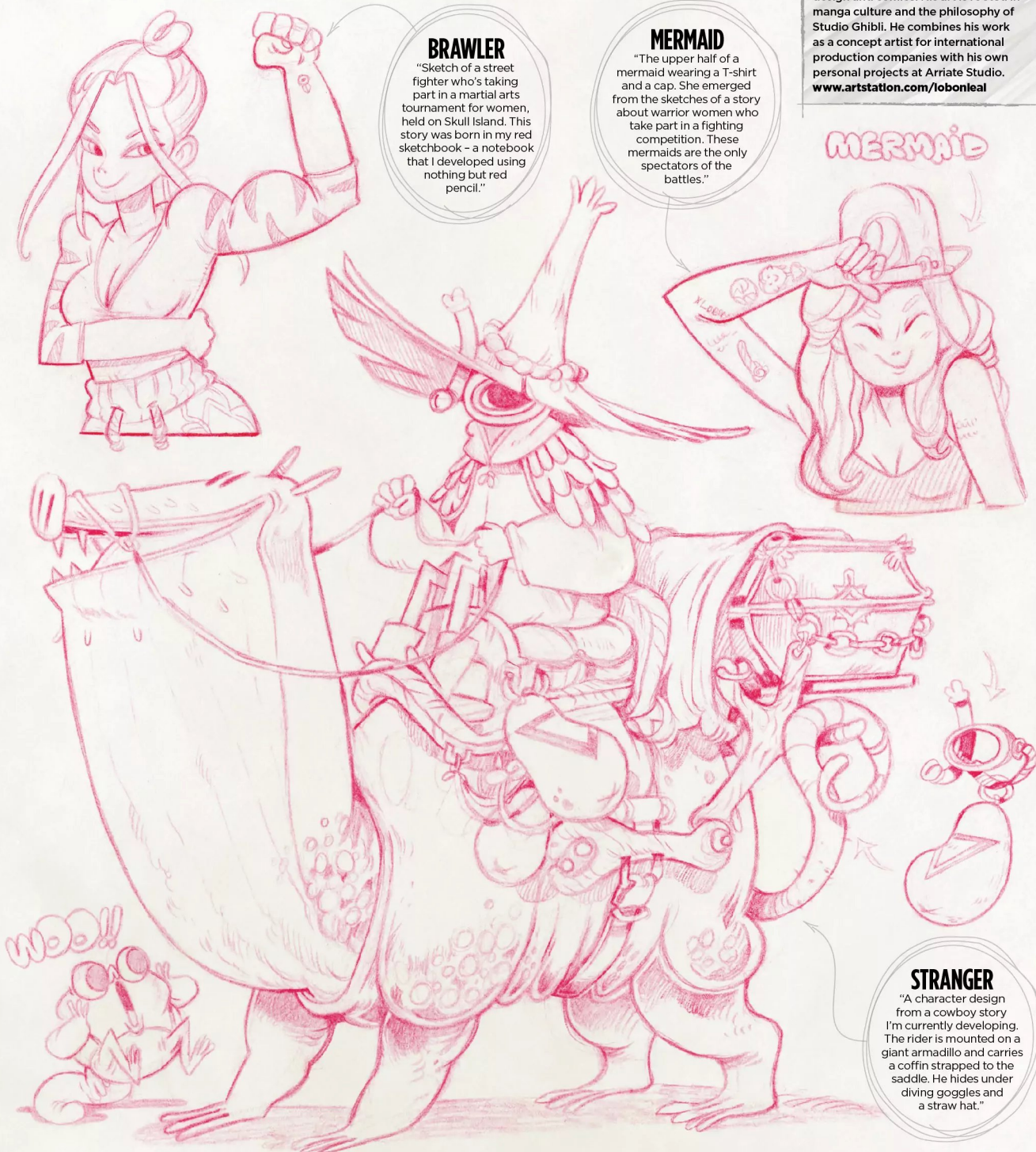
### MERMAID

"The upper half of a mermaid wearing a T-shirt and a cap. She emerged from the sketches of a story about warrior women who take part in a fighting competition. These mermaids are the only spectators of the battles."

### MERMAID

### STRANGER

"A character design from a cowboy story I'm currently developing. The rider is mounted on a giant armadillo and carries a coffin strapped to the saddle. He hides under diving goggles and a straw hat."







## MANOLO CARACOL

"Design of a flamenco venue for a cowboy story. The drawing features Manolo Caracol accompanied by a fire girl dancing flamenco and a guitar-playing cockroach. A tribute to the legendary flamenco singer of the same name."



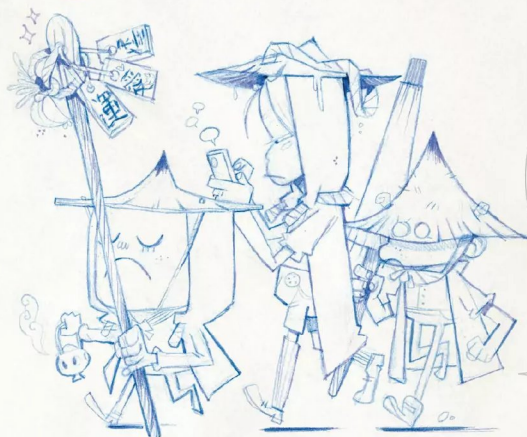
## MANTIS

"This character design is inspired by the Mad Max series. The woman carries a sword made from one of a praying mantis's limbs. I used blue pencil and markers in this design to create different shades of darkness."

## TEAM

"A group of characters inspired by animated series from my childhood. I've used characters including Bulma, one of the Ninja Turtles, the dog from Dash Kappel, and Vicky the Viking."

“This flamenco venue was designed for a cowboy story... A tribute to the legendary singer Manolo Caracol”

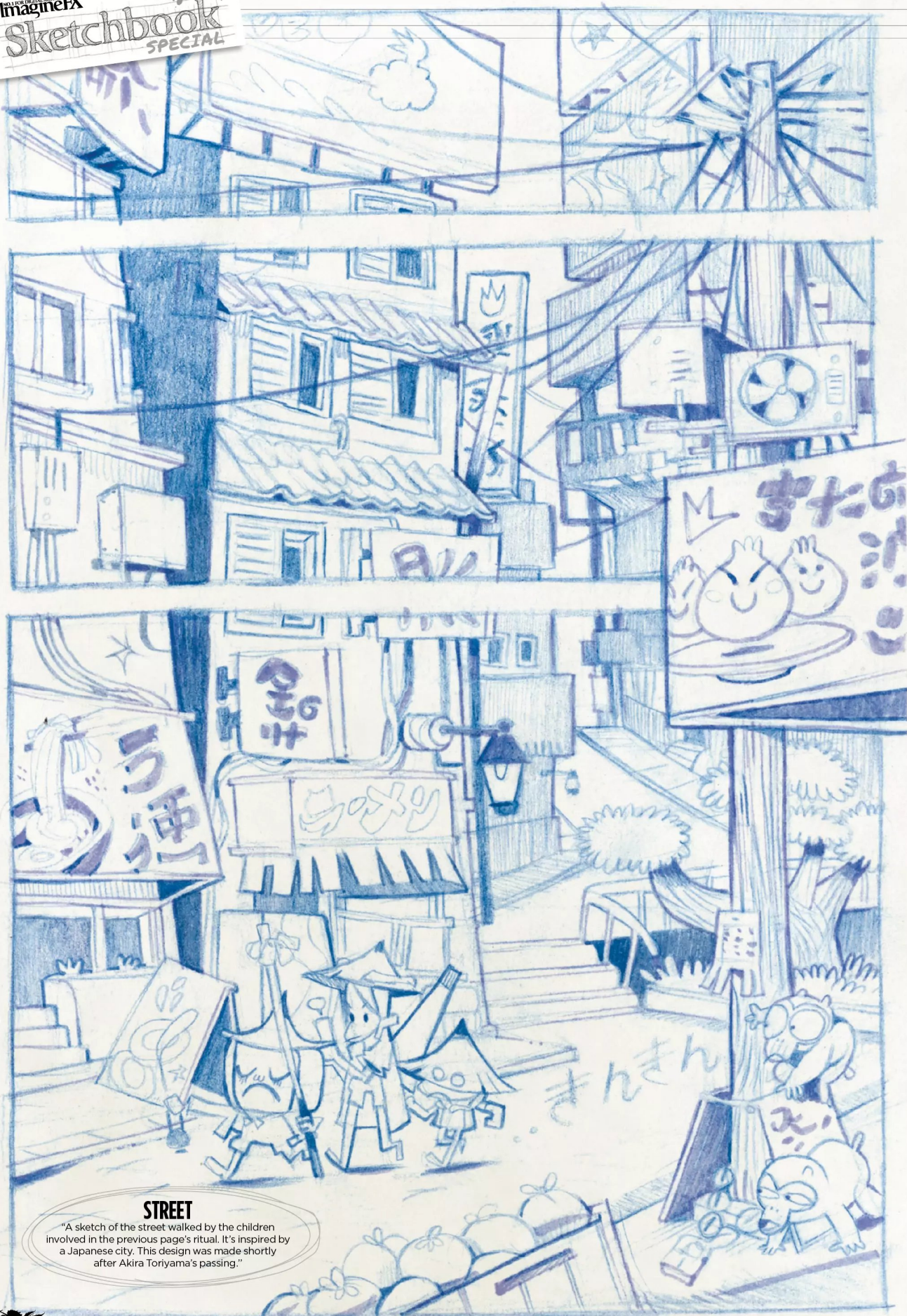


## RITUAL

"This design belongs to the new blue sketchbook I've been working on this year. The drawing depicts three children participating in a ritual, each with a different structure and attitude."







# STREET

"A sketch of the street walked by the children involved in the previous page's ritual. It's inspired by a Japanese city. This design was made shortly after Akira Toriyama's passing."

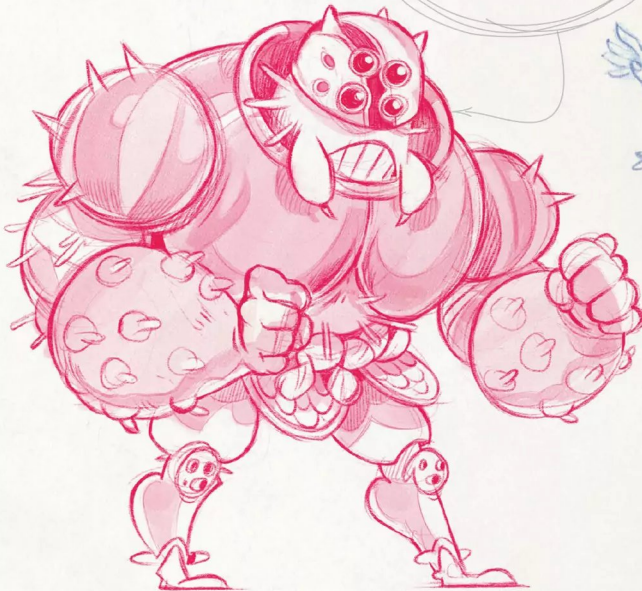


**JOSE CUERVO**

"Inspired by the legendary spirit tequila, this sketch features two old skeletons toasting life. This design was created during the COVID lockdowns."

**WARRIOR**

"Another digital sketch. In this case, it's a character designed by merging various elements including a spider, a banana and a spiked mace. I have a lot of fun designing characters like this in my sketchbook."



“I always have a lot of fun designing characters made from unique combinations”

**COWBOY CACTUS**

"Character design for a cowboy cactus with two water bags on its arms and a bandana over one eye. A potential design for the cowboy story I'm developing."

**SNAKE WOMAN**

"This is a tribute to Salma Hayek's character from the Tarantino movie From Dusk Till Dawn. It's part of a snake woman story I've been developing for the horror comic Malfario for a few years."





# Marcus Williams

The illustrator brings a flash of colour to his sketches as he shares a raft of intriguing character designs

## TIGERSHARK MERMAY

"A shredded mermaid who loves her guitar, as well as her fellow shark."



## SAMURAI LION

"This monochromatic digital sketch features a fierce warrior lion samurai."



## GLASSES AND COLOUR

"A more natural look at a beautiful woman who has an afro and glasses."

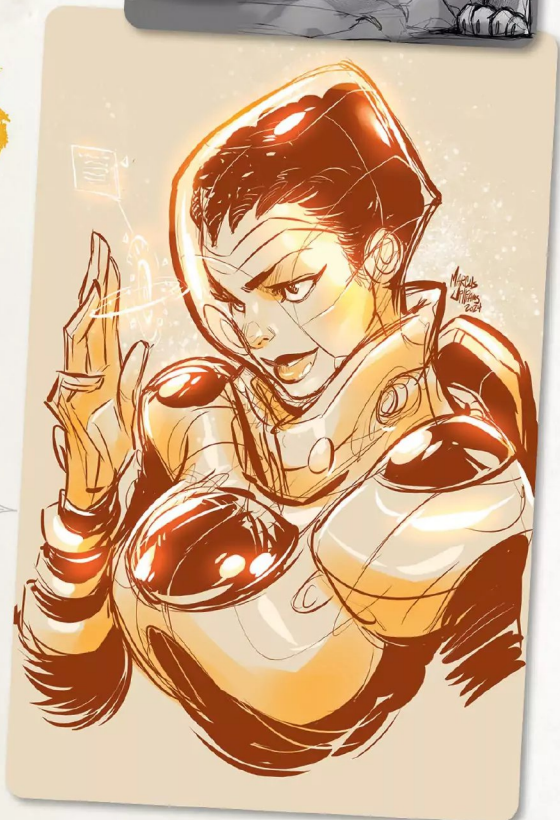


## PINK HOODIE

"A quick, rough digital design. I wanted to explore digital watercolour and sawn-off shotguns."

## ASTRONAUT SKETCH

"My take on what a futuristic astronaut could look like."



## Artist PROFILE

**Marcus Williams**

LOCATION: US



MarcusTheVisual is an Atlanta-based artist who has worked with the likes of Cartoon Network, DC, Marvel and Amazon. The co-creator of comic series Tuskegee Heirs: Flames of Destiny, his latest project Eye Lie Popeye brings the classic character to a new generation. [www.marcusthevisual.com](http://www.marcusthevisual.com)





**CYBER  
GIRL**

"This cyberpunk character takes some feline cues. The eyes make her piercing stare captivating."



Interview

# Alix Hillmer

We discover the secret recipe behind the illustrator's unique style and how she uses her sketchbook as a medium to test out new tools



## GREEN TONES

"A limited colour palette used while focusing on some new character ideas."

## POSH

"Here I wanted to develop an elongated character. Trying out different shapes is something that I'm working towards adding in my work."

**S**crolling through Alix Hillmer's Instagram page, it's not difficult to lose track of time. Predominantly a digital character artist, she melds colourful with creepy in her cartoon creations inspired by monsters, manga and myths. But open her sketchbook and there's more to be found: experiments in traditional mediums and brand new styles. We got the chance to sit down with Alix, who shared her journey, passions and processes with us.

**What got you started as an artist? Was there a desire to tell stories visually, or were you inspired by any other artists' work?**

I've always been into art and wanted to create something colourful and fun. I grew up around art at home. Both of

my parents are artists themselves. We have always had – and they still have – an art studio at home.

I would always sneak sheets of paper and Micron pens from my dad to draw from shoujo manga and Sailor Moon. I loved the characters and the magic of the worlds they were in, so I would create my own characters and stories for them. As I got online, I began to see the work of artists from all over the world. That exposed me to so many different styles and techniques that I wanted to learn myself and replicate within my own artwork.

**“I'd always sneak sheets of paper and pens from my dad to draw shoujo manga”**

I started to take art more seriously as I got into my 20s. After spending a few years in a fine art program in college, I began to gravitate to character design and illustration. I focused on creating fun, engaging characters that, to me, told their own interesting stories. The visual language using shapes, colours, clothing, expressions and settings truly captures me and is always something I continue to work towards.

**You manage to make the dark and creepy bright, cute and colourful. Was this always your intention or has that revealed itself over time?**

I think I've always loved things that are cute and colourful! It's something I love to include in my art. I'm inspired a lot by the early 2000s and the over-the-top feeling of that decade. The darker side of my work is something



## Artist PROFILE

**Alix Hillmer**

LOCATION: US



Alix is an illustrator and character artist who loves to create all things bright, cute, creepy and spooky. Her passion for creatures like witches, monsters and mermaids shines through in her work thanks to vibrant use of colour and a penchant for giving them fun expressions.

WEB: <https://bit.ly/3IYuk3L>

that I intentionally added in as an experiment initially, but over time has become one of my favourite elements to add! I enjoy taking my love for all things cute and colourful, and mixing it in with something more like a campy horror film. There's something fun about combining those two concepts.

**What is your working environment like and how does that inform your art? Do you listen to music, and if so what do you listen to?**

I currently have a studio setup at home that I share with my husband, who likes to game. We didn't do much with it until last year when I made the space more comfortable and creative for me. I added a colourful mural on one wall, new shelving for supplies, hanging up art prints from artists who I enjoy, and getting a standing desk, which helped complete my perfect little art den right at home.

When I want some time out of the house, I like to take my iPad out on the go with Procreate. It's fun to grab a cappuccino at my favourite coffee shop and just doodle while taking in the sights and sounds all around me.

I usually have my noise-cancelling headphones on and like to listen to music, mostly electronic and pop, or anything that has a fun beat to it. I recently got into more fantasy novels, so I've also been listening to a lot of audiobooks! I notice that I begin to sketch up the characters from these stories. So it's more something to listen to during a relaxed sketchbook session and not working on a major project.

**Do you see sketching as a form of practice, or is it more of a place to explore new ideas and concepts before making a commitment to a fully rendered picture?**

I find that sketching, both digitally and traditionally, is more of a ➤➤



### HEADSHOTS

"Some portrait studies from Ahmed Aldoori's 100 Heads challenge. I wanted to focus on the shape language of each of the references."

### FLOWING MERMAIDS

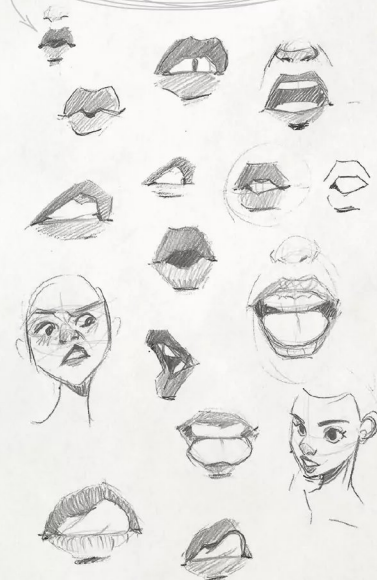
"I love to participate in MerMay when I can and focus on a limited colour palette, this time with pinks. I also tested out a few oil paint brushes in Procreate."





## LIP STUDIES

"Sometimes, doing basic anatomy studies helps me to create more interesting expressions."



➤ meditative exercise for me and can be an unstructured process. It's more where I go if I'm trying out a new technique, doing some fun studies, or playing around with my supplies and tools. If I go into it thinking of a finalised piece, I get stuck and frozen by the pressure of the idea. A lot of my sketches are just random doodles of characters I've done when I have a moment to sit for a bit.

My digital sketches particularly will tend to be where I'm a little more structured. But I'm more experimental with concepts, since I can copy and paste, move pieces around with the Lasso tool, and edit colours at will.

I like to pull random references or drawing challenges and work from there. Sometimes it's various animals or interesting poses that I find. A lot



## FIGURE SKETCHES

"In these little doodles I was playing around with different poses and characters, which is one of the ways I love to warm up! I may also include some sketches of myself, depending on how I'm feeling at the time."

## RED

"One thing I enjoy doing is sticking to a specific area to render in a sketch; in this case the hair. I added a bit more detail than the rest of the sketch."



of these turn into most of my final pieces! With one piece that I recently finished, I started playing around with some floating poses while I was at comic-con. It eventually became a fully rendered piece once I returned home.

**Do you have any visual rules you like to stick to in your work, even in doodles or sketches?**

My biggest thing right now is shape language! I try to get the initial shapes down during the first few lines and sketches. It's all rough and messy, but if the shape of the character's pose, or the composition of the image is there, it's readable to me. I then tend to do a second pass over with more details, making sure not to cover up any of the foundational shapes but reinforce them. Traditionally, that would be with a darker, softer pencil or some ink. Digitally I'd use a new layer on top of the initial sketch at a lower opacity.

If I'm adding colour to a sketch, I like to start off with a main base colour and

then play around with the hue and saturation of different spots. My colour rules tend to be one or two bright and punchy colours, with everything else complementing the main colour. I'll add a touch more variation to hues in areas that I want to focus more on, for example the facial expressions.

**Your art is bright and cheerful, yet also retains darker elements. How do your sketches reflect the tone that you're going for? And how intentional is this?**

Since this is more of an intuitive process for me, I gravitate towards the cheerful things first before I begin to twist them around. I want to play with the expressions, the overall shape of the pose, the movement – all of that.

I try to achieve this by keeping my sketches very rough and loose at the beginning. As I start to get a clearer idea, I'll begin to tighten up my sketch. This is where I'll add in some of the darker and crazier elements to my



“I find that sketching, whether it’s digitally or traditionally, is more of a meditative exercise”



sketches, such as extra arms, fangs, and all sorts of fun, spooky things.

**When drawing, do you have a predefined idea of the world your characters inhabit, or do you focus more on the character and feel?**

It depends on the character that I’m working on or drawing. Most of the time I have some idea of the world or the basic character traits that I reference in my own head. I think the world that a character exists in does play a huge role in who that character is, from their choice of clothing to their attitudes. It’s something I keep in mind as I work.

One group of characters – Valentine, Phoebe and Astrid – are cosmic magic girls from another world. They’re all fishes-out-of-water with magical aura. When I sketch them, their story has them be a bit impassive, less expressive, but also more heroic and benevolent. I like to draw them as classic movie monsters too, where they’re a little more chaotic and more expressive. ➔

## VAMPIRE SCARLETT

“Playing around with different expressions and poses to flesh out a character is a really fun way to fill up a whole page in my sketchbook.”



## RANDOM SKETCH TO FULL ILLUSTRATION

**Alix explains the process she followed for taking a loose character doodle into a completed image**

A lot of my sketch sessions can turn into a full illustration. My piece Creep is a great example. I started this one by putting down a random pose while sketching. I loved the idea of floating like a haunting ghost, and I decided to explore the concept further by making the ghost a mischievous character. I added more detail to strengthen this concept, such as giving her extra bandages and plasters, and a bit of a smirk that makes her seem more scruffy or clumsy.

When I wanted to fully push this sketch on into an illustration, I took the cleaned-up version you can see on the bottom left, and merged it with rougher sketches underneath. I like to try and retain some of my sketch as I move into adding colour and rendering. My colour process mirrors my sketch process. For this piece, I focused on vibrant greens to get a sensation that feels a more creepy and slimy sort of horrifying. The glowing eyes were added to give it a bit more horror on top.



## ALIX'S PLACE FOR EXPERIMENTING

When it comes to traditional sketches, the illustrator loves testing new tools

While I'm primarily a digital artist, I do love to work in my sketchbook. These sessions are more relaxing for me and offer me a break from trying to create a finalised piece. Sometimes I come up with a sketch or character in my sketchbook and will take that sketch to refine digitally. However, most of my traditional sketching is done to play around with new supplies and learning more about traditional mediums. Right now, my favourite traditional tools to use for drawing in my sketchbook are either a 0.7mm mechanical pencil or a Prismacolor Col-Erase pencil.

In these sketches, I was testing out screentones and acrylic ink for the first time! This session, I started with a mechanical pencil and used pens to ink out the lines. I added a bright pop of colour using acrylic ink to get some nice contrast with the black and white ink. The screentones were added to play around with adding in a mid-tone to the high-contrast sketches.



### PINKS

"Sometimes I like to explore new mediums in my sketchbook. It's a way for me to take the pressure off myself and truly play with new supplies."



» Your drawings often lean into visual clichés and you twist them in some fun new way. Can you share your process for this?

This is more instinctual for me! I enjoy playing around with clichés. I think they're instantly readable and easy to understand. For example, it starts with me deciding if I want to draw a witch – something I know visually and easy to put down either on paper or a new canvas in Procreate. As I'm sketching out different poses, I'm asking myself, "What if it's a witch, but they're also grocery shopping?" or, "Do they have a cat with them?" to come up with new scenarios to put this character in.

### POSE STUDY

"My favourite way to warm up is with quick poses using various reference photos."

I do the same thing with character expressions. It's less about drawing a character being happy, sad, or angry, it's more, "This character is staring at their creepy double. Are they really freaked out or slightly amused?"

Are there any characters or styles you haven't yet worked on that you would really love to tackle? If so, who or what would they be?

I really want to get into more of the fantasy archetypes and characters. I'm a big fan of Dungeons & Dragons and have spent far too many hours playing Baldur's Gate 3 as well. Since I've been getting in to fantasy novels at lot more recently, it's a theme that I really want to explore in my artwork!

I want to try and play around with more medieval fashion and costumes from all over the world. It also opens up new creatures and fun magical elements. My main goal with that is to create characters or illustrations that are based on D&D classes.

I'm also into fitness outside my art. I love to run long distances and

powerlift, so I want to start playing around with muscle structure and athleticism, and bringing in some of my feelings and struggles as a gym rat. It sort of brings my two separate passions together in its own way.

What guidance would you give to someone who is just starting out in their art journey?

I want to say work on your passions and really get engaged with them. Find yourself in your artwork, whether that be through using the mediums that you enjoy the most, or the subjects you love to draw above all others.

That isn't to say you shouldn't focus on your fundamental skills and draw out of your comfort zone. I think those are just as important to learn and can add a better foundation to your work.

It's similar to fitness in a way for me – find the art you love to make and really get into it! Discover what your comfort zone is and what you enjoy about your process the most. Then find some time to still work on the things that support it, such as the anatomy, values, the composition and the shape language through studies.

Try to draw consistently, balancing between the two. You don't need to draw every single day – you need your rest days as well – but try to create a schedule that works for you.

“Find yourself in your art, through the mediums you enjoy or subjects you love”





## MONSTER GIRLS

"I'm always going to draw some form of monster girls! These were more to play with different outfits and character traits."

## TWO SIDES

"This is where most of my illustrations end up right before rendering out the details. I try to keep my sketch prominent, even after adding in colour and basic lighting."

## CHICKENS

"A great way to move out of your comfort zone is doing speedy little studies. I love to do these as a way to explore new subjects."

## STARTING OUT SMALL

How drawing quick and easy studies helps Alix defeat the dreaded blank canvas and expands her sketching skill set

One thing I love to do is what I call "mini studies" during a sketch session. If I ever feel intimidated by the blank canvas or screen in front of me, sometimes I'll tackle a small study session. These are meant to be quick, just focusing on getting the shapes down and adding some interesting colours. I try to pick a subject that I don't normally do for these, whether that's a more complex pose, an object or an animal of some form.

For these little chickens, I kept my time short on each one. The goal was to get a basic shape idea for the body. I focused on simplifying the shape first, then adding some basic details for the feathers. When I went to add colour, I tried to keep everything unified between them. The patterns of the feathers were kept simplified with a textured brush and the Lasso tool. I also added a bit of value to enforce some of the roundness.





# Eric Talbot

Pure, unfiltered sketching by the comic artist, who doodles everything from Ninja Turtle anatomy to kooky ghouls

## Artist PROFILE

**Eric Talbot**

LOCATION: US



Eric is best known for his work on the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.

As a member of Mirage Studios, he has worked on the Ninja Turtles comics since the late 1980s. Eric now shares his time between creating covers for comic books, drawing and doodling in his sketchbooks, and working as a tattoo artist in his western Massachusetts.

[www.ericaltalbotart.com](http://www.ericaltalbotart.com)

### NINJA HANDS

"Most of my career has been working on the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, so they of course end up in my sketchbook in various ways, like these hand sketches."



### WAR GOBLIN

"Sometimes I use a sketchbook to work out techniques or ideas for an upcoming project. Often its just for a bit of fun, such as this goblin."



“Sketchbooks are a fast way to work out ideas and techniques. I prefer the look to final art”

### MONSTERS ARE FUN!

"I fill up sketchbooks with odd characters. I lean towards monsters as I just find them more interesting to draw. There's never a plan for where the sketchbook page will end up. Pencil, ink, or paint? Whatever happens, happens."



### MONSTER GIRL

"Toned paper sketchbooks are a favourite of mine. Ink with little touches of colour and highlights give a more finished look. Sketchbooks for me are a fast way to work out ideas and techniques. I usually prefer the look of sketchbook art to final printed work."





## CURSED BACKPACK

"A sketchbook session can sometimes become part of the final printed work. This development sketch ended up being digitally finished for a comic cover. There are no rules in art. Side note: there are times you need to be able to self-edit your work. Cool creepy spider hand didn't work in the final design, so it was removed."



“I see the term ‘sketchbook’ as a type of drawing... they don’t literally need to be in a book”



### GRAPHITE CREATURES

"There's something about a cheap sketchbook that frees you up to just draw. No stress over wasting good paper. Super soft pencils go well with these drawing pads."

### BURDS

"Some sketchbook pages have themes. Usually unplanned, but it happens as you fill up a page. Soft graphite on smooth sketchbook paper also go well together."



### CYBORG BOY

"I usually sketch loosely at first, getting interesting shapes to build on. It's freeing to go in with steel pen nibs and India ink. Colour ink wash and acrylic paint was added too."

### GARDEN THINGS

"I prefer a toned surface to work on, and brown pencil and paper go together well. White highlights add a nice dimension to the sketches. I use this approach quite often."







## ODDVARKS AND CELL PHONES

"These days, soft graphite pencils are my favourite sketching technique. I tend to draw similar shapes when working out a character or idea, tweaking each drawing as I go. Some are more detailed than others."

## STRANGE

"Bizarre stuff can come out from free drawing in a sketchbook after work. No plan, just a flow of ideas. Textured paper is good for smudging."

## INK WASH THINGS

"Quality paper gives you freedom to use whatever tools are at hand, and I use watercolour pads as sketchbooks. I see the term 'sketchbook' as a type of drawing, so it doesn't literally need to be in a book."







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paint anatomy with precision

*An award-winning  
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Top character artist  
Jerry Gaylord opens  
up his workspace  
for you to explore

*Meet a Lucasfilm  
creative director*  
Doug Chiang talks  
about developing  
art for some of the  
world's biggest IPs

*The fantasy secrets  
of a D&D artist*  
Max Dunbar shows  
you his process for  
creating stunning  
characters in pencil

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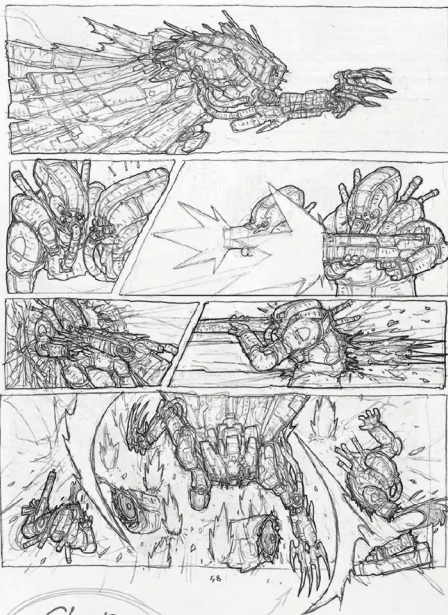
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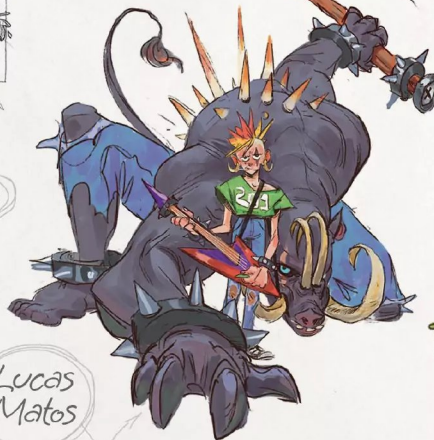
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