NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS

ImagineFX

FUTURE
ISSUE 272

NEW SKETCHBOOK SPECIAL!

Including mystical elves, superhero fan art and concept vehicle designs

+ INTERVIEWS
JENNIFER PARK
BEN MAURO
LOISH

50

TURN OVER FOR MORE

SKETCHES & DOODLES

FEATURING **BRANDON FERNANDES** • ORNELLA GIAUQUE • **REVERIE COLLINS** • RICHARD LUONG • **DAN KELBY** • MATTEO PIANA • **ANDRÉ PELAES DAVID** • MARIANNE PAILLOUX AND MORE!

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Welcome to...

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS ImagineFX



Hello, and welcome to one of our favourite times of year: our sketchbook special!

I'm sure you'll agree there's something deeply satisfying about seeing the doodles, work in progress and explorations of such a diverse bunch of artists.

We, of course, love seeing polished and fully-rendered pieces in all their colourful glory, but getting some insight into daily practice sessions and the evolutions of characters, places and props is a fascinating experience, and we're excited to share them with you here.

This issue is rammed with sketches covering an astounding array of subjects, from whimsical creatures to villainous monsters, hard-surface space craft designs to natural elements, and heroic fan art to cute, Disney-esque characters.

As if that wasn't enough, we also sat down to speak with some of our favourite working artists today, exploring their inspirations and motivations for sketching, and how this process fits into their daily life as artists.

Enjoy the issue!

Rob

Editor
Rob.Redman@futurenet.com

@imaginefxmagazine
@imaginefx
facebook.com/imaginefx
@imaginefxmagazine
imaginefx.creativebloq.com

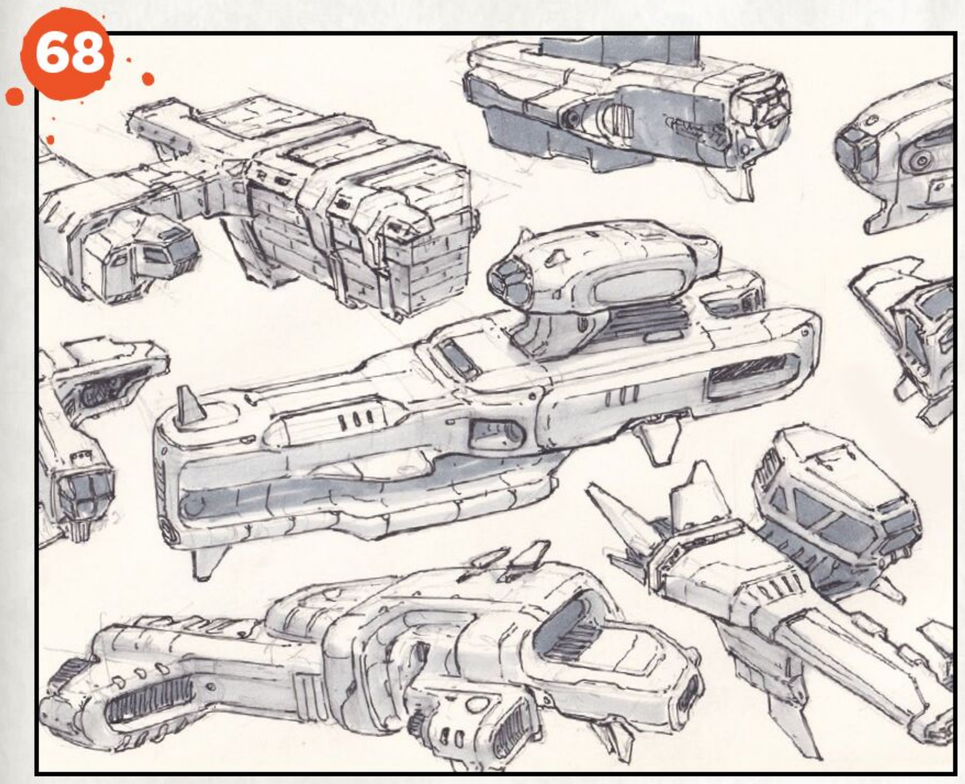
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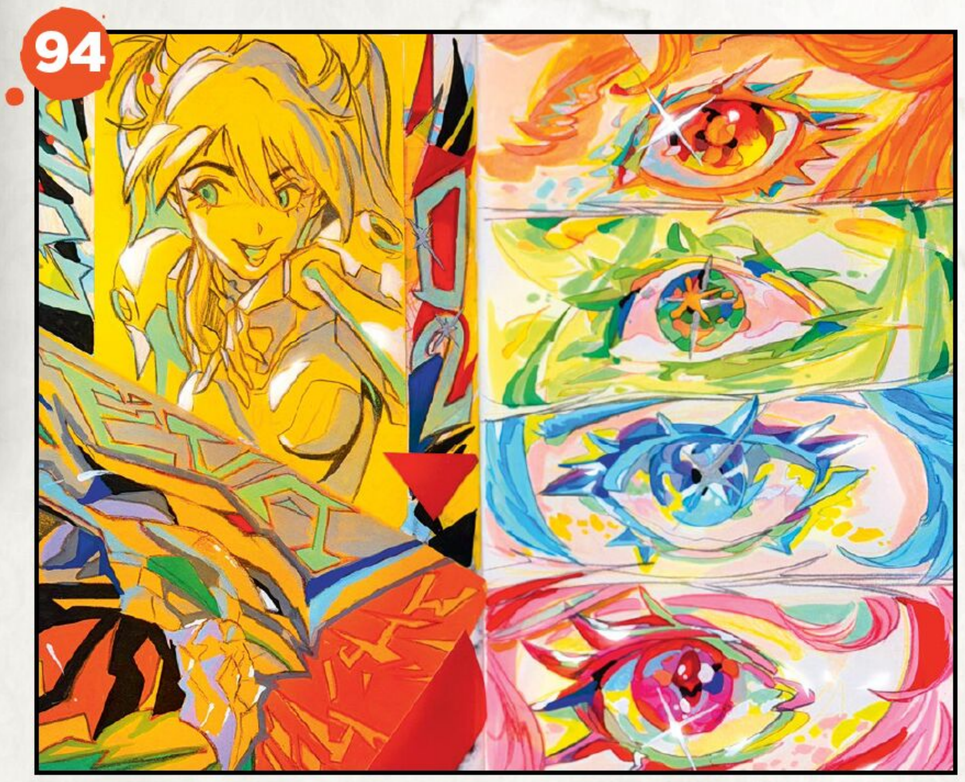
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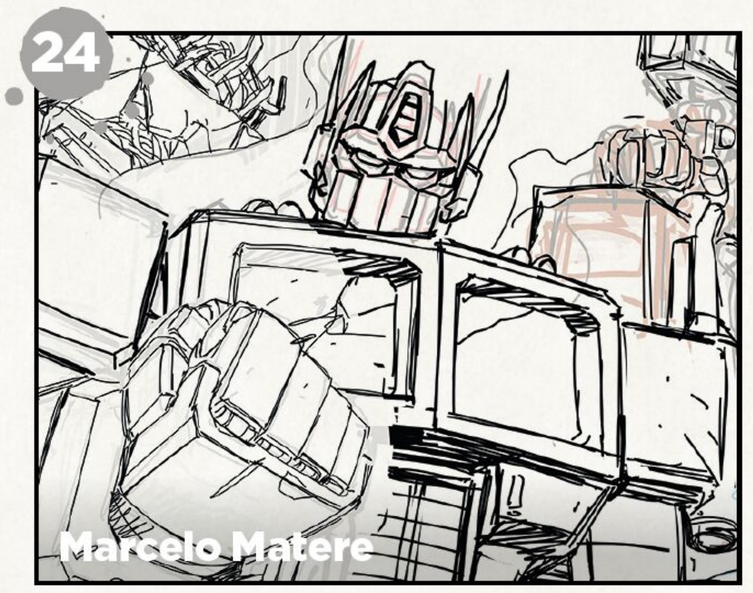
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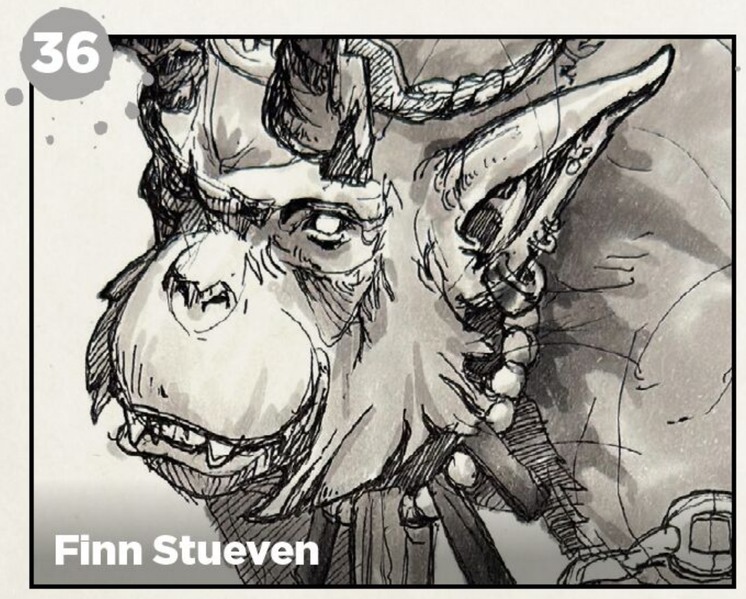








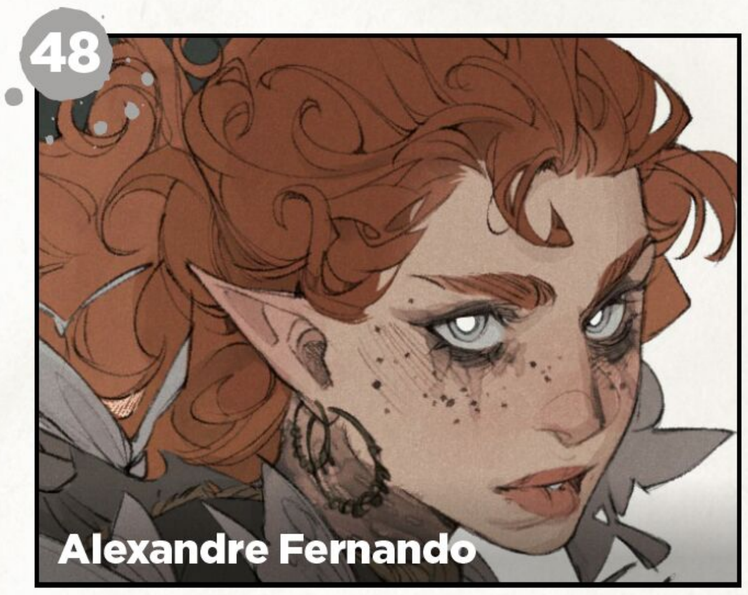






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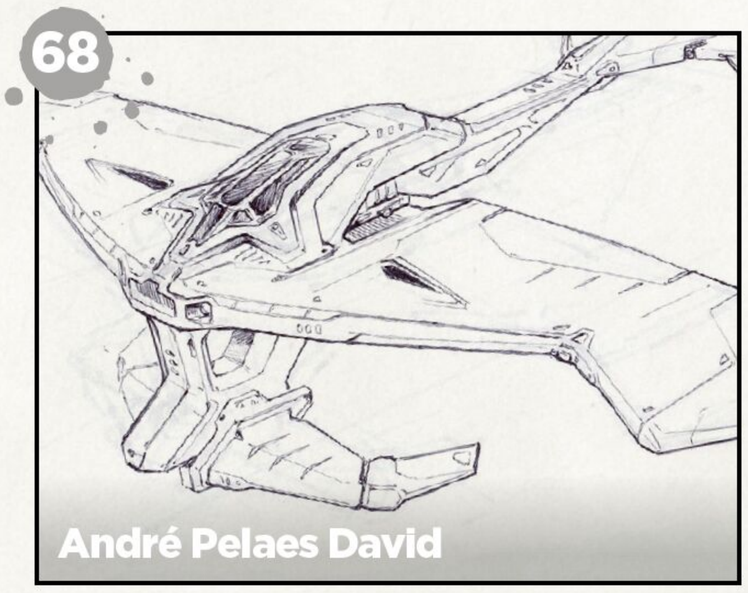




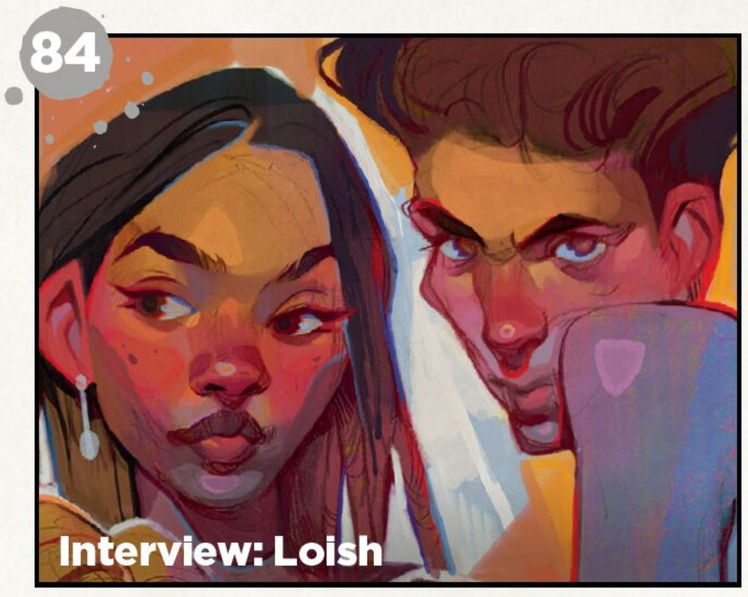


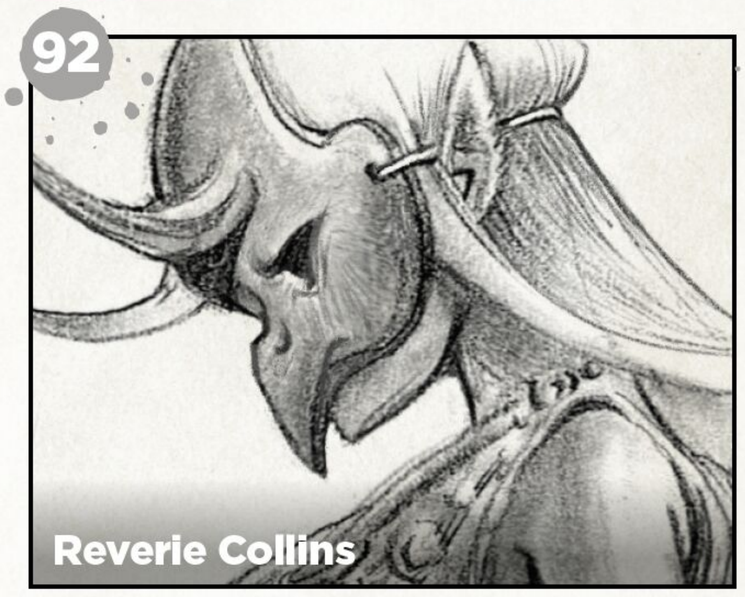


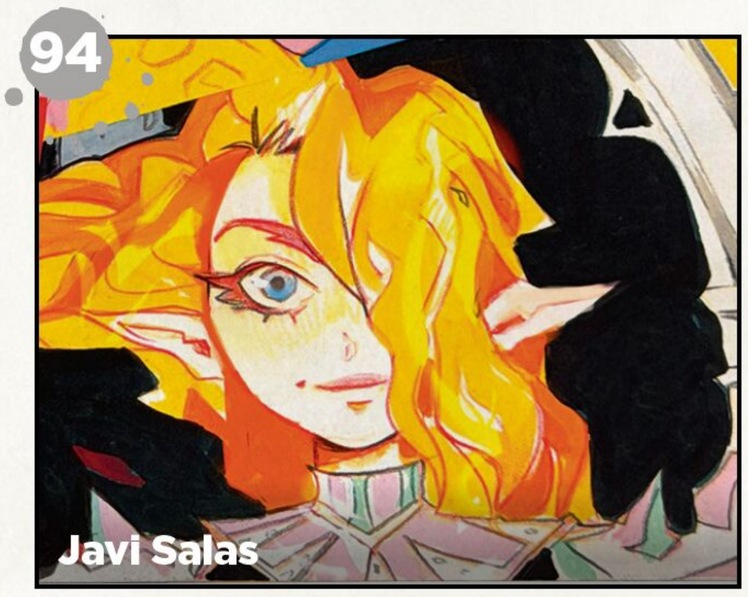












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Master book illustration

Tomek Larek

Drawing on everything from Slavic fantasy gamebooks to American fantasy, Tomek's monochrone pieces leap off the page

Artist PROFILE

Tomek Larek
LOCATION: Poland

Tomek has been working as an illustrator and concept artist for 15 years, creating artwork for games and books. He works for publishers from all around the world, including creating cards for Magic: The Gathering. He always starts off with a piece of paper and pencil before moving the work into Photoshop.
www.artstation.com/tomeklarek



RAVEN THE WITCH

"A character sketch of a witch for a PC game set in a world of Slavic folklore and magic. I wanted to focus attention on the spellbinding gaze of this sorceress."



GIANT FROM THE FOREST

"A sketch for a game set in a Slavic world. The task was to create a primitive giant inhabiting an ancient forest."

BLIND, CALM ORC

"This sketch was created in the mountains of North America after I'd read a book by the author of The Witcher. I focused on the distinctively lit demonic face – one that is simultaneously calm and menacing. It was difficult to capture details in a passport-sized sketchbook."



CHEERFUL MEDIEVAL MONK

"One of the sketches from my tiny sketchbook. I tried to capture the emotions of an aged face; the clothing are just a background to highlight the facial expression."





DWARF-BEETLE

"An illustration sketch for a fantasy gamebook set in a Slavic world. The inspiration came from 17th-century Polish cavalry, known for their feathered wings worn on their backs. Here, the dwarf sports the antennae of a giant beetle instead of wings."

DREAMCATCHER

"A pencil sketch for an illustration commissioned by a children's charity. It depicts a young girl with a massive imaginary friend – a gentle bear so huge that an entire village fits on its back. Everyone would dream of having such a protector."



> "The pencil sketch was the central element, giving the cover an analogue feel"

SHAMAN'S ISLAND

"A sketch for a game cover. This is one of my older pieces where the pencil sketch was the central element of the illustration, giving the cover an analogue feel. This sketch took two full days of work."





POST-PUNK KING

"Another sketch from my travel sketchbook, drawn inside a tent. I played around with combining medieval design elements with technical details. I wanted to capture the king's sadness and melancholy."

Adam Volker

Artist and game designer Adam draws on his love of dark fantasy to inform his creations in both his work and spare time

Artist PROFILE

Adam Volker
LOCATION: Canada



Adam is an artist and video game director working out of Montreal. He spends a lot of time making sword & sworcery stories in alternative art styles. He has worked on Academy Award and Emmy-nominated productions in animation and games for the last 16 years (ish). He has also spoken around the globe about creativity and art, and loves painting and storytelling. He also does some freelance illustration for Magic: The Gathering. Currently, Adam is endeavouring to make meaningful entertainment at Soft Rains Games.
www.artstation.com/volkertron



CHANTERELLE KINGDOM

"I made an indie game a few years back called Stonefly about piloting bug mechs in a giant magical forest. This was a design for a location that never made it into the game."



NIGHT CITY CAB

"Giant cityscapes of neon and concrete have always inspired me. Those places are just on my mind a lot."

KANEDA

"I love Akira, I was exploring ways to draw Kaneda for a painting I later did of him and his bike."



DALIA POSTER

"Every time I ship a game, I make myself and the team a movie-style poster to celebrate. These were the early sketches for the painting of our main character Dalia from Ambrosia Sky."

SKELETONS

"These sketches become Skeleton tokens I made to play with Magic: The Gathering. Sometimes, a sketch has so much life, I make sure to find ways to put it into other projects."

HELLTOWER

"I did a D&D campaign for my friends here in Montreal. Of course, my group ended up going to hell to rescue a friend who had died during the adventure. They climbed down this tower room by room puzzling out different secrets and getting into trouble. I had to draw it."





> "Sometimes, a sketch has so much life that I make sure to find ways to put it into other projects"

Brandon Fernandes

Whether it's elf-like fantasy warriors or video game-inspired brawlers, Brandon's fighters are as tough as they come

Artist PROFILE

Brandon Fernandes

LOCATION: United Arab Emirates



Also known as N3TNINJA, Brandon is a Dubai-based illustrator and concept artist passionate about character art, fantasy and pop culture. His work includes projects for Riot Games, EA/Respawn and Marvel. Outside art, he enjoys Magic: The Gathering, video games and hiking. After work, you'll often find him tucked away in a café corner, drawing.

www.artstation.com/n3tninja



GAYA

"I tried to make a creature that would look like some kind of forest or nature goddess. I added tidbits like specks and textures to make it more divine or cosmic. This was done on my mini sketchbook!"

MANA SENTINEL

"I play a lot of Magic: The Gathering. This was kind of inspired by that; by the race of beings called 'vedalken'. So my head had a creature who had to manage and maintain the strings of mana surrounding its village or habitat."



TRAVELLING MERCHANT

"In a café after work, I tried to come up with an elf mushed up with some current-era gear who roams around and sells things in a post-apocalyptic fantasy world. Randomly, I was practicing Arabic, so I wrote 'n3t-ninja' in Arabic. Apparently it was correct!"

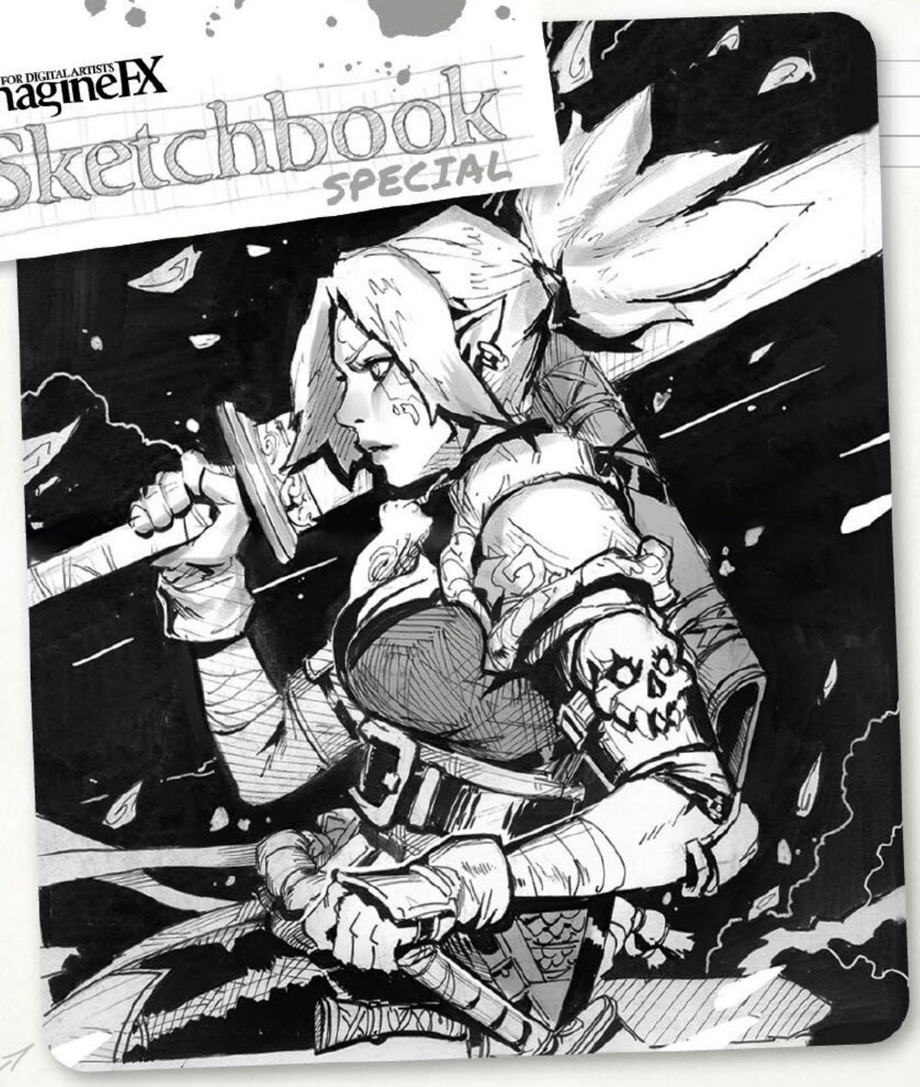
ONI-MUSHA

"Nothing like a fashionable demon hunter who is a demon herself. This was an early sketch for a transformation of one of my original characters that I was working on. It was meant to be more raw, but ended up being something flashy. I included Buddhist prayer beads just to add some kind of protection spell."



ELF WANDERER

"I think this is one of my favourite pieces. I was really happy when this turned out the way it did. It's simple: just an elf wanderer roaming through a thicket. I'm trying to push myself to focus on storytelling."



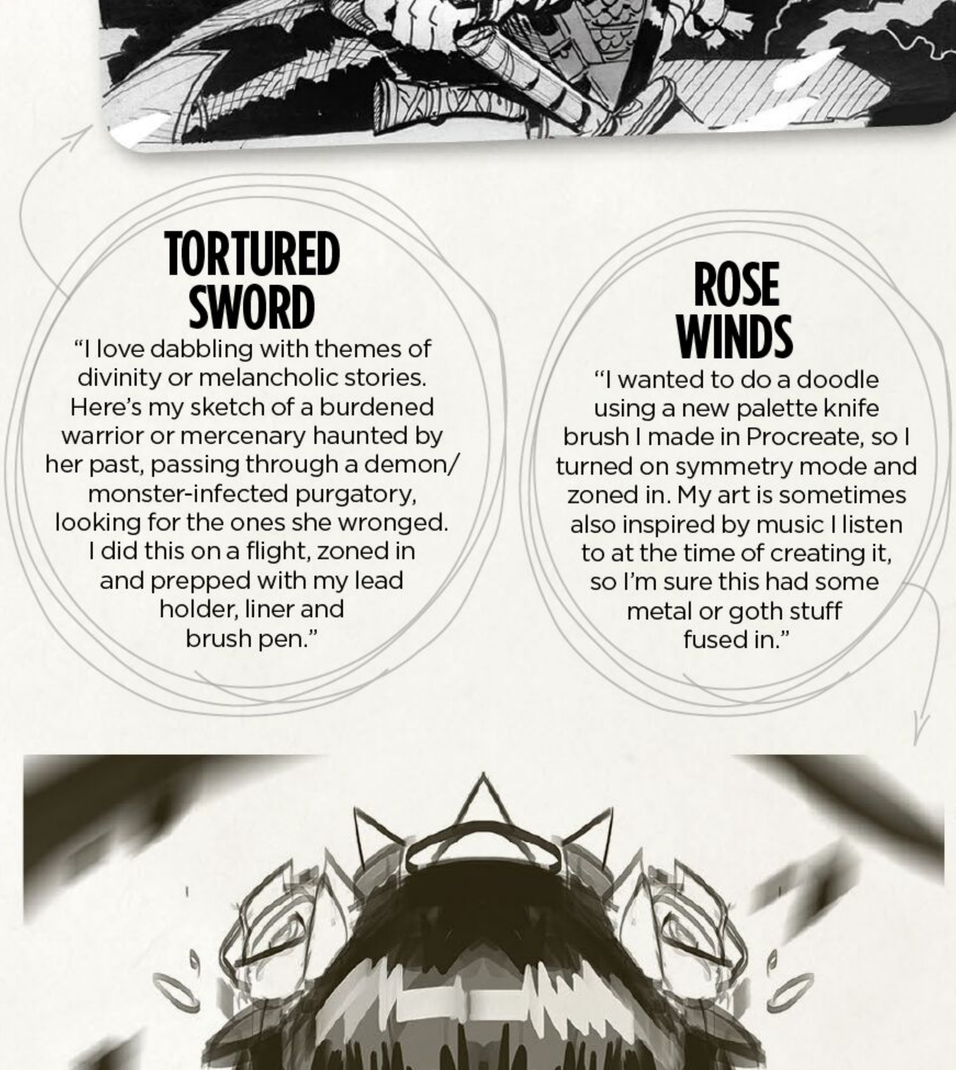
TORTURED SWORD

"I love dabbling with themes of divinity or melancholic stories. Here's my sketch of a burdened warrior or mercenary haunted by her past, passing through a demon/monster-infected purgatory, looking for the ones she wronged. I did this on a flight, zoned in and prepped with my lead holder, liner and brush pen."

ROSE WINDS

"I wanted to do a doodle using a new palette knife brush I made in Procreate, so I turned on symmetry mode and zoned in. My art is sometimes also inspired by music I listen to at the time of creating it, so I'm sure this had some metal or goth stuff fused in."







COSMIC

"I got this idea to draw a comic deity or god of life, awakening engulfed in flames passing through universes. He keeps certain worlds and universes in order because he personally likes them. One of many daydream zone-offs I get."

CRAB GIRL

"Here's a crab girl I did for a Twitch stream weekly art challenge – the topic was crab-superhero. I timed myself for 20-30 minutes and used some references. I liked the outcome! It was a good idea-generation workout!"



ANGELIC-EQUATION

"Here's a sketch I worked on for a prompt for an inktober in the past. These are 20-minute sketches I trained myself between the time I finish work and drive home, something to cool me down after a long 9-5."

> "My art is sometimes inspired by the music I listen to at the time of creating it"



TITAN

"This sketch was inspired by a song from one of my favourite metal composers, Anup Sastry's 'Titan'. I went into my imagination space to a scene where a dimensional mercenary finally comes upon one of the titans of the universe that he was chasing. My brain loves to play out the scenes like a music video while listening to the song in real time. I like how it turned out."



SOULHERDER

"This was inspired by me playing some Mortal Kombat, so I visited some classic designs and just tried to make my own character that harvests souls and manages them. I was trying to get a good line flow for this, so I tried my hand at that while drawing the hair and effects around her."

TRAIL-WALK

"I was planning my original character's story and environment she's in or comes from. I decided to work on a spread sketch, which eventually got to a point where I just jumped into inks and pens over the sketch. So here's my character Anjali, walking on a mountainside forest trail somewhere in north-east India."



Ian Sta.Maria

Drawing on his Filipino heritage, Ian crafts wondrous high fantasy designs that incorporate both cyberpunk and naturalistic themes

Artist PROFILE

Ian Sta.Maria
LOCATION: Denmark



Author/artist of the fantasy books, Dwendes, Dragons, And Other Dwellers of The Deep, Salamangka, its award-winning sequel Salamangka 2, and cyberpunk-themed artbook Makina. With over two decades of experience as a creative in the Philippine advertising industry, Ian now works as a senior concept artist for Lego.
www.instagram.com/takbotikbalang



TRIBAL ELF FANG COLLECTOR

"The Philippines is made up of over 1,000 scattered islands, which means just as many distinct tribes and cultures. So, when writing and designing these Filipino fantasy elves, it was important that each one visually announced where they came from. This particular elf collects the fangs of the monsters it has killed, wearing its kills as both trophy and record."

TRIBAL ELF INSECT EARS

"As other tribes evolved, their ears could have 'magically' inherited insect-like appearances. I wrote a few passages about some tribes communicating by fluttering their ears in different rhythmic patterns."

THE PHILIPPINE DEEP

"My grandma had so many stories about creatures that may have lived in the deepest parts of the Philippine seas. This was one sketch idea I did while waiting at an airport for a story I'd been developing."



> The grass hats and textured robes were inspired by Filipino ancestral tribal royalty





PHANTOM MINSTREL

"Incorporating tribal textured garments and traditional robes, here are more character designs for the stories I've written. The grass hats and textured robes were inspired by Filipino ancestral tribal royalty. We have this Filipino magical bird called the Adarna. The idea here was to visually communicate that this 'minstrel' character is somehow connected to the magical bird's lore."



TRIBAL ELF TUNING EARS

"Some designs pushed the idea further with evolutionary differences. Ears, for example, are not just decorative. the concept was to show them evolving different shapes and functions depending on the tribe, almost like environment and lifestyle shaped the anatomy itself."



FILIPINO ORC

"I am a big fantasy fan and gamer. This was an early attempt on sketching characters for a story. What if the Philippines had their own orc tribes and culture?"



SHAMAN

"Oversized grass hats are common at Filipino provincial festivals. The idea here was to incorporate a tarsier-inspired hat worn by a young shaman. Animals play a huge part in Filipino folklore and tribal stories."

Il Kwang Kim

Specialising in creating warriors both game and movie-inspired and from his own mind, Kim's pencil is indeed mightier than the sword

Artist PROFILE

Il Kwang Kim
LOCATION: South Korea



Il Kwang Kim makes animated films at Studio Mir. He has spent 17 years working in animation. He occasionally works in other fields, but most of his time is spent wrestling with animation at Mir. His most recent project is Paramount's Avatar: The Last Airbender. He is currently working on an animated adaptation of webtoon GOSU.
https://ilkwangkim.artstation.com

RYU AND CHUN-LI

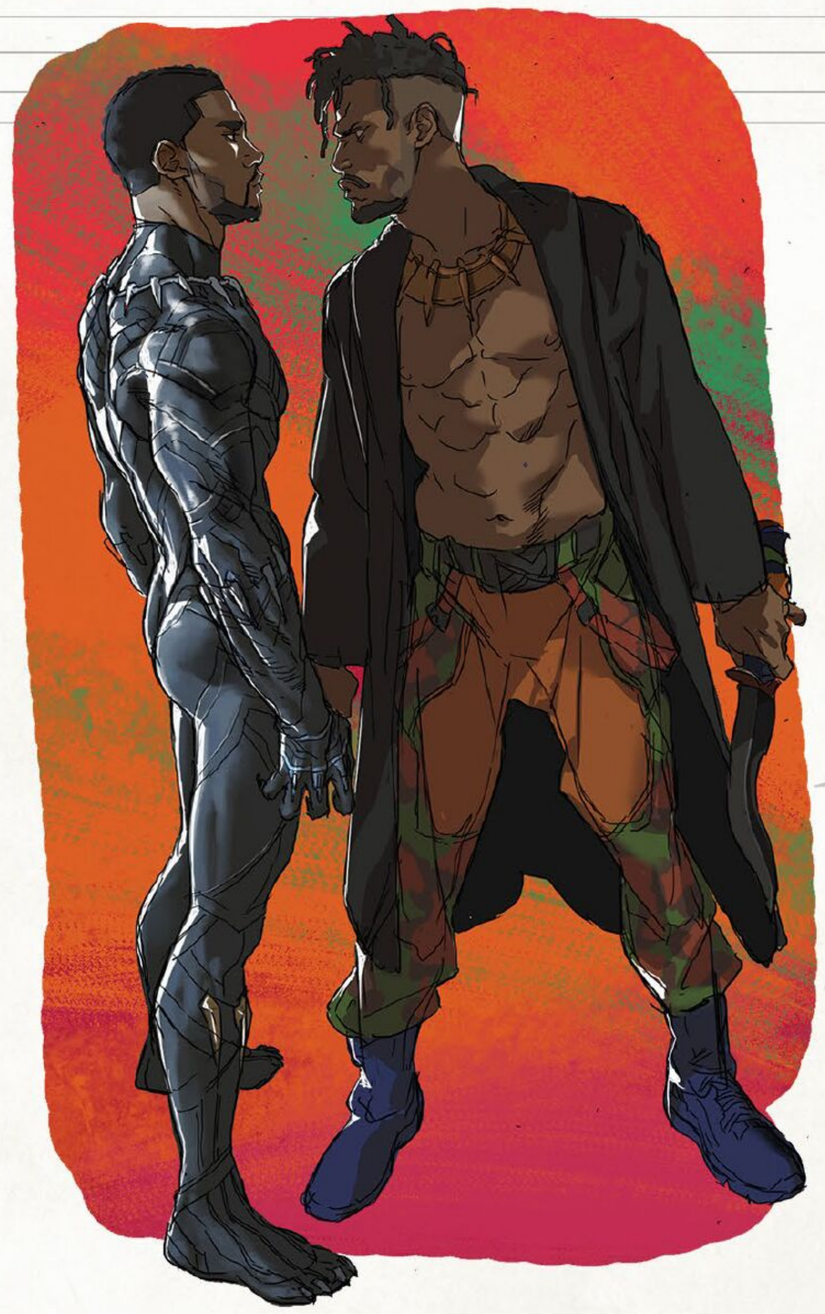
"Street Fighter is another favourite of mine. I like experimenting with different styles. Alberto Mielgo's rendering style was very popular when I drew this, so I mixed some of that influence with my own approach. He is one of my favourite artists."

STREET FIGHTER FAN ART

"Street Fighter actually makes up a fairly large portion of my personal doodles."

OLD MAN 1

"He is not actually an old man, but I put him in this category because he has such an impressive beard."



BLACK PANTHER

"Marvel's Black Panther: Wakanda Forever is another IP I enjoy. I believe this was around the time of the first Black Panther film. Chadwick Boseman's character had such a striking visual presence that I simply had to draw him."

> "Chadwick Boseman's character had such a striking presence"

SWORDSMAN

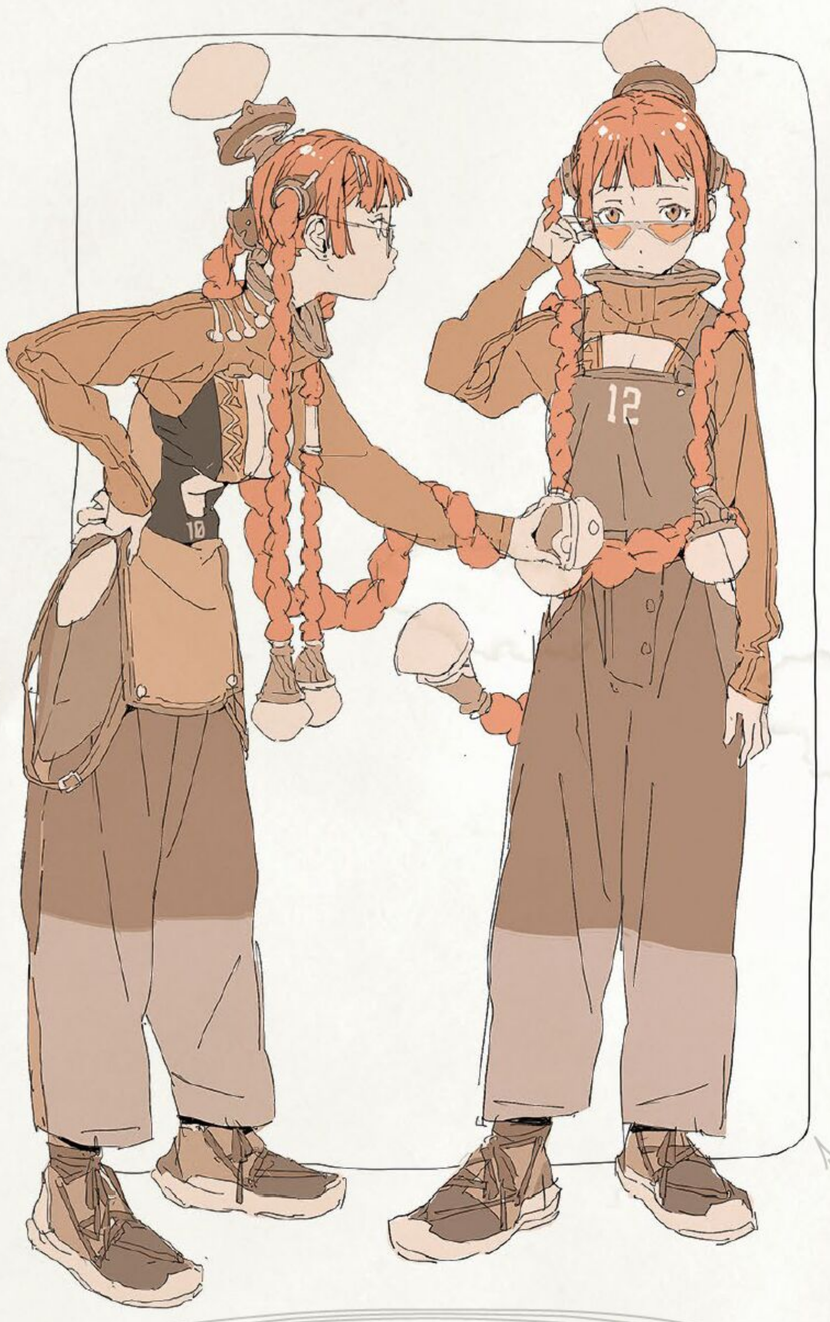
"I remember being inspired by a still from a Chinese film and interpreting it in my own way. As you may notice in my work, I enjoy drawing flowing hair and repeating geometric patterns."

OLD MAN 2

"I enjoy drawing men with impressive beards and faces marked by age, then dressing them up freely with Ottoman-inspired elements and details."







TWINS

"I love mechanical elements, but I also enjoy mixing in unusual materials and forms that seem to have absolutely nothing to do with practical function."

Interview

Jennifer Park

Whether it's animals, humans or something in between, Jennifer's silhouetted subjects leap off the page



Did you have a formal education in art, or are you self-taught?
When I was 15, I went to an art academy in Korea to prepare for an arts high school entrance exam. I didn't end up going to the school, so after that I mostly taught myself. My uncle gave me a tablet for my birthday, and I learned Corel Painter by following a book. That was how I first discovered digital painting. Once I found concept art, I thought, "Oh, this is what I want to do," and kept learning on my own.

How much of a part does sketching play in your workflow, and what does that look like?
Sketching is probably the most natural way for me to express something. I'm not very interested in making every line clean or pretty. I like rough, strong lines that feel a little raw. My sketches can get really messy, but if the emotion or character feels right, I usually prefer that over a polished drawing.

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?
Definitely the second one. I like drawing while following whatever is going through my head at the time. Sometimes I start with a clear image, but often I don't. I just keep sketching until the idea starts to show itself. Sketching feels a little like thinking with my hand.

PACK
"I noticed how wolves' thick winter fur creates its own patterns. I followed those natural flows with my hand and slowly turned them into a character."

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?
I really loved working in visual development for animated films. I grew up watching animation, so ➳

Artist PROFILE

Jennifer Park
LOCATION: South Korea



Jennifer Park is a freelance character designer and concept artist based in South Korea. She works across animation, illustration and games, with a focus on expressive characters, creatures and visual development inspired by animals, nature and everyday observations.
https://hisser.artstation.com

> I love how clothing silhouettes can naturally describe the body

SIDE

"I was flipping through references, picking out shapes I liked from animal side profiles and recombining them in my own way, almost like I was gently stroking the forms."

GIRLS

"These are some of my most recent drawings. Lately, I've been looking at fashion shows and editorials, and I love how clothing silhouettes can naturally describe the body."

HER

"After animals, I probably draw strong and beautiful women the most. To me, confidence is really attractive, and I love showing that through thick and thin lines."



DUO
"I imagined a tribe living in a cold conifer forest full of moss and snow. I also borrowed a little inspiration from the head feathers of California quail."

I was always curious about what happened behind the scenes. Then suddenly I was actually part of that process, sharing ideas with other artists. That was really exciting. Something that I had admired from far away had somehow become part of my real job. I definitely want to keep doing a lot more of that.

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?
I don't usually start with written notes. I look through references, listen to music and try to get into a mood that fits the subject. Then I just start making rough sketches. I work mostly digitally because I like changing brushes depending on the feeling I want. Out of the thumbnails, I keep the ones that feel closest to what I was imagining and use them as a guide.

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?
It changes every time. Sometimes I work directly over the sketch, but I also restart what I'm doing a lot. My line quality can feel different depending on the day. If I look at an old sketch and think, "I can draw this better now," I usually just start again and use the first sketch as reference point.

> **"I mostly work digitally because I like changing brushes depending on the feeling I want"**

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?
I think I do both at the same time. Especially with creatures, when I imagine them, they already feel like they have a real body in my head. I can almost feel where the bones or muscles should be, even if the creature doesn't exist. I love animals and plants and look at them a lot, so that naturally

DOODLE

"My PSD files are always full of random doodles. They're little traces of whatever I wanted to draw that day, or things that appeared while I was daydreaming."

FOX WARRIOR

"This sketch is basically everything I like in one place: chunky shapes, natural animal lines and beautiful clothing with lots of tiny embroidered details."

FOX MINISTER

"In my fantasy world, there's a fox kingdom. This character is a loyal minister of that kingdom. I gave him a royal jacket with cool symbols."

ORANGE CAT

"Orange cats have such bouncy personalities and cute faces that sometimes I want to turn them into something more. This one became a playful little adventurer."







CAT
"I started with a simple thought: what if a cat became an animation-style character? I built it from all the little features I personally find beautiful in cats."

BRAVE ONE
"Whenever I don't feel like drawing, a cat adventurer is always easy to come back to. Somehow, this always brings my drawing energy back."

became part of how I draw. Usually I imagine first, then my hand tries to make it believable through anatomy.

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?
I think I just need to feel comfortable when I work. I have this slightly strange routine where I always prepare both a cup of warm tea and a glass of cold water, dim the room a little and put on a crime or profiling show in the background. I honestly have no idea why this became my setup, but now it feels weird to draw without it. Maybe listening to people very seriously analysing a crime somehow tricks my brain into thinking, "Okay, I should probably focus too."For whatever reason, it works.

> **"I prepare both a cup of warm tea and cold water, dim the room and put on a crime or profiling show"**

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?
One of my recent projects felt really unreal. I got to work with an artist I'd admired for a long time, and even saw my work interpreted through their drawings. During the meetings I was trying really hard to act normal, but after they ended I was basically like, "Wait, did that really just happen?" I still look back at some of the emails and feedback sometimes. Thinking about how I started out teaching myself and somehow got here makes me really proud. I'm also really looking forward to the day when I can finally talk about the project.

Finally, do you have any advice on sketching, or making a career in art generally for those at the beginning of their journey?
I think the most important thing is to stay curious and not lose the fun of it. Getting better technically is important, of course, but if you only think about drawing well, it can get boring pretty quickly. I think it's good to keep asking yourself why you want to draw something in the first place. And the answer doesn't have to be deep. Sometimes "I just think this looks cool" is more than enough.



SOLE WARRIOR

"I imagined a quiet armoured swordsman pulling herself together, almost like he's praying. I like thinking the character already exists and I'm just observing her."

GIRLS

"I was casually looking through Northern European clothing, accessories and mythology and wondered what women from a similar imaginary culture might look like. These sketches came from that simple curiosity."





WARRIOR

"I love warrior themes because I always want to give them a sense of honour and pride. After watching a hare documentary, I learned how surprisingly brave they are."

Marcelo Matere

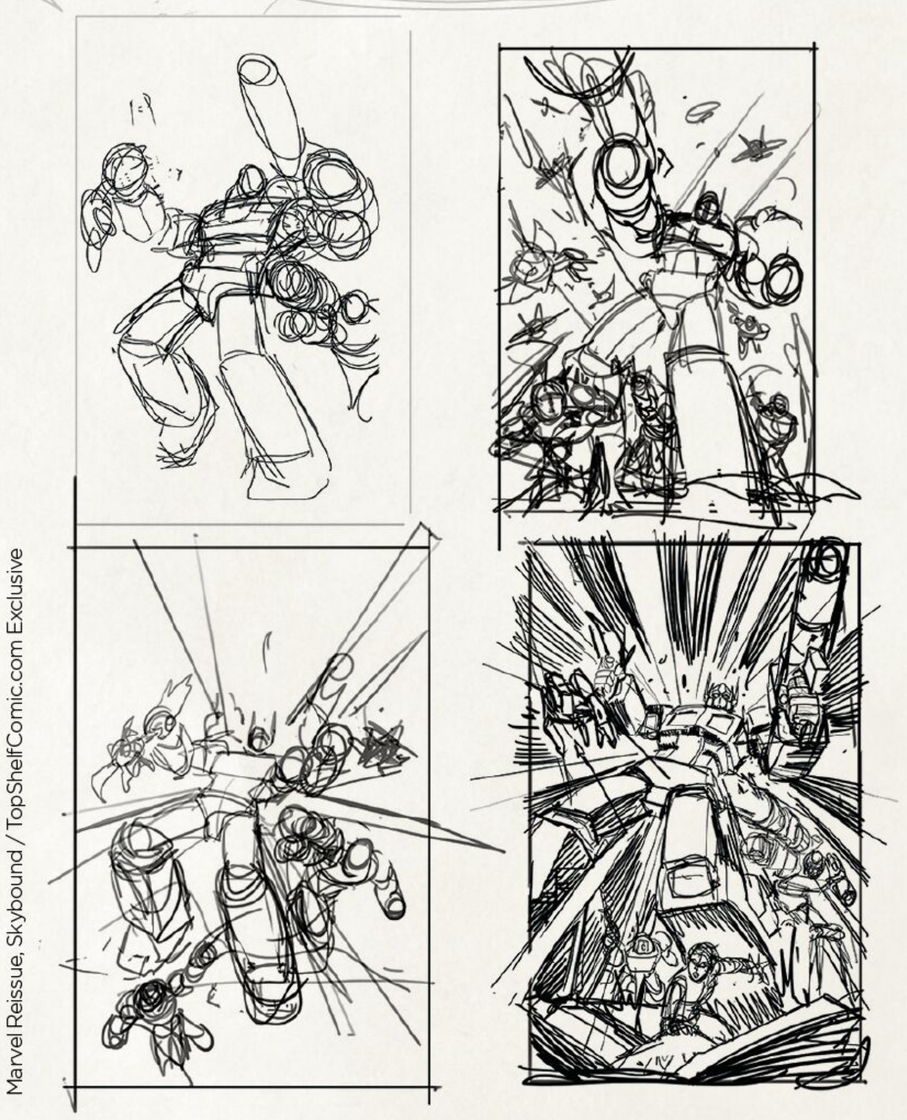
Classic comic book covers from his favourite artists form the basis of Marcelo's stylistic Transformers designs

TRANSFORMERS #1

"This was kind of a special one for me. It was the first time I had the chance to work on a #1 issue of Transformers, so I decided to pay homage directly to the first one, done by Bill Sienkiewicz. I ended up reducing the background for a more graphic treatment, while also showing Megatron's face, the Nemesis from the first cartoon episode shooting the Ark, and Laserbeak fighting the robot version of Gears. I usually like to add colour to help differentiate the characters."

TRANSFORMERS #1, 12TH REPRINT

"I was asked to do a wraparound cover, so I decided to create an action scene as a homage to the classic illustrations on the back of the old Transformers toys, where you would see the transformation sequence of each character."

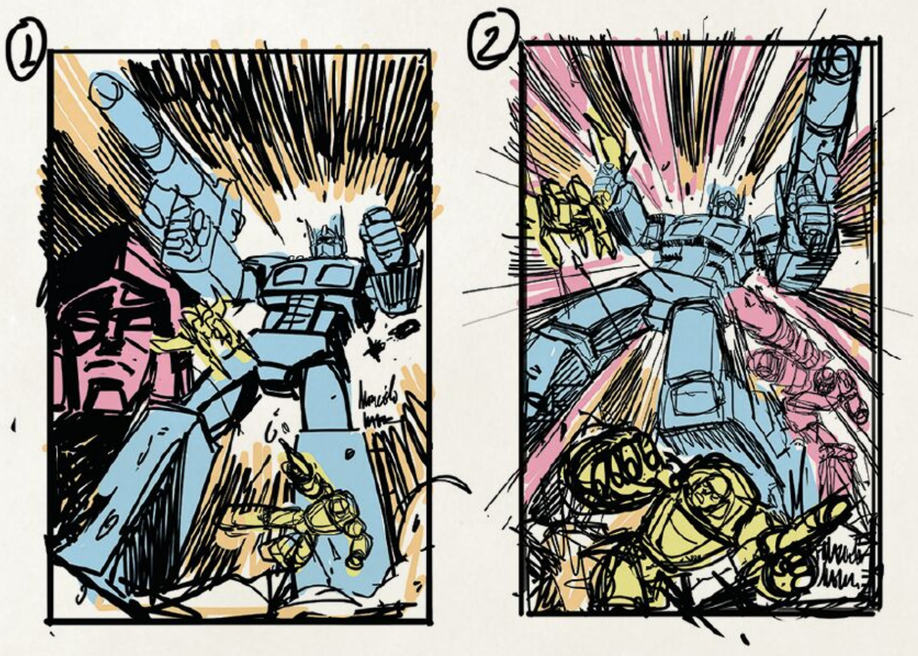


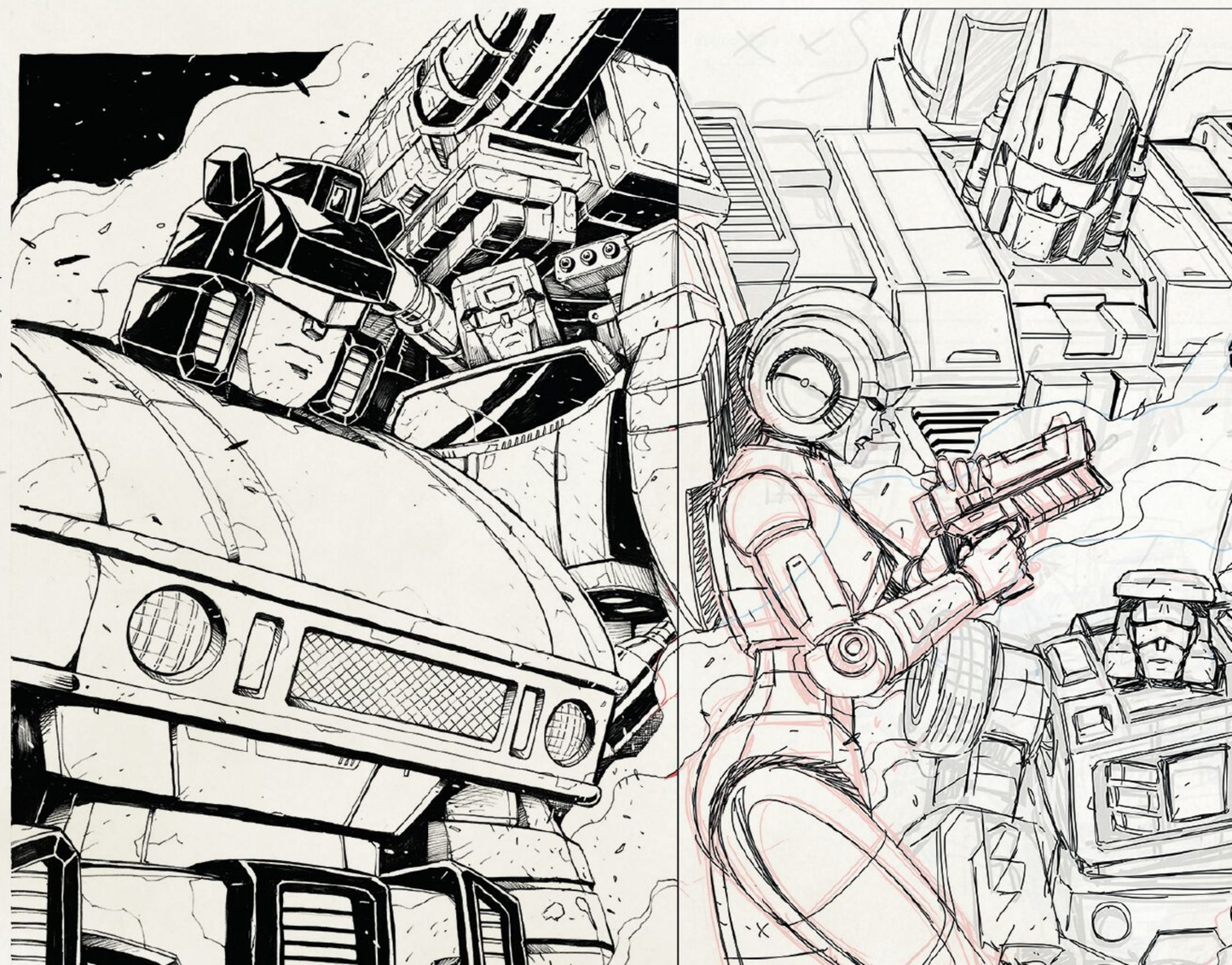
Marvel Reissue, Skybound / TopShelfComic.com Exclusive



Skybound / TopShelfComic.com Exclusive

> "It was the first time I had a chance to work on a first issue of Transformers, so I paid homage to Bill Sienkiewicz"





Skybound / TopShelfComic.com Exclusive

TRANSFORMERS #25, #26, #27, #28, #29 COVERS

"I really enjoyed drawing these five interconnected covers featuring the Autobots. Alex Sinclair needed the full image to make the lighting work. I had one cover inked while continuing to add details to the loose sketch digitally. I sent them to Alex to colour."

Artist PROFILE

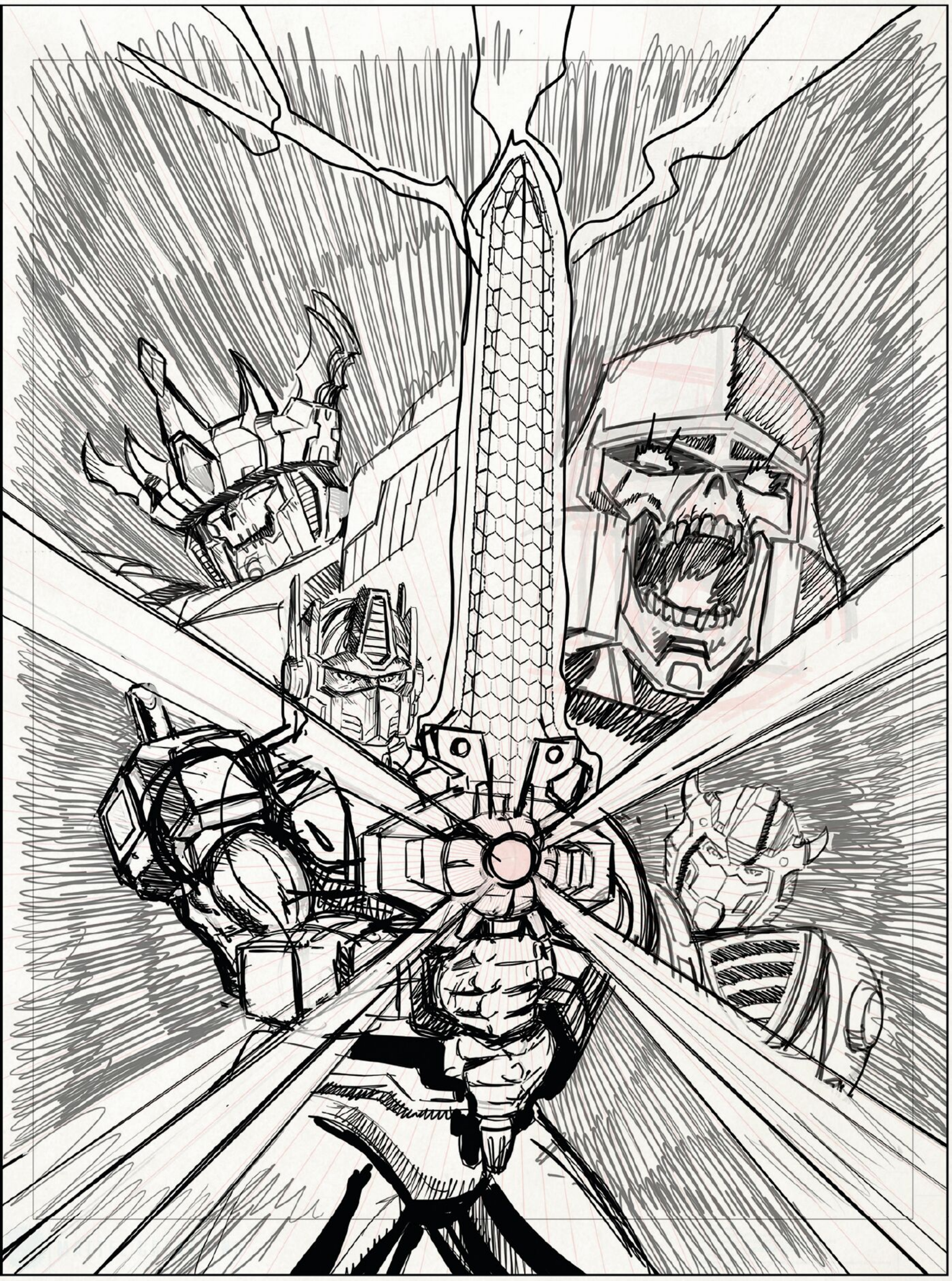
Marcelo Matere

LOCATION: Canada



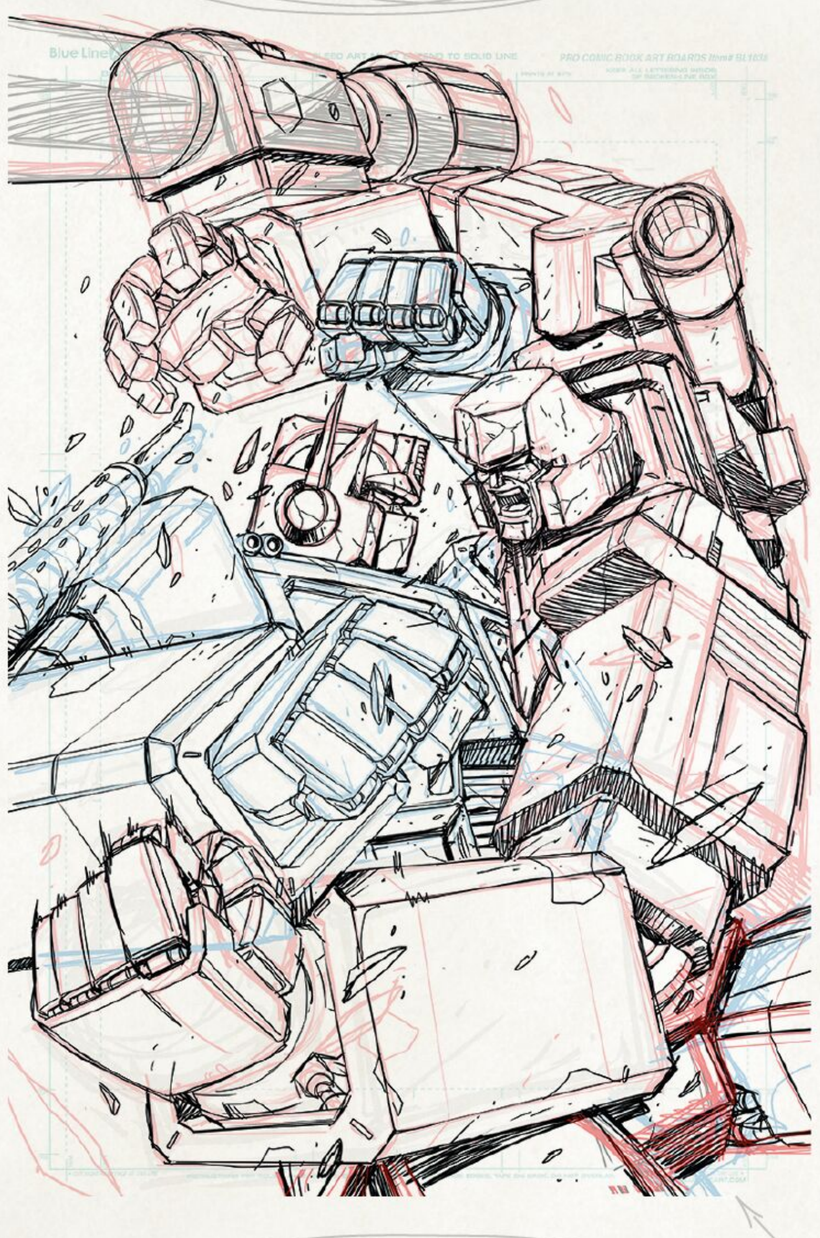
Marcelo is a Canadian-Brazilian illustrator, concept designer and cover artist with over 20 years of experience working with the world's top entertainment brands. Known for dynamic robot illustrations and iconic comic book covers, his work spans toy packaging, storytelling and character design for brands like Transformers, Marvel and Star Wars, with clients such as Hasbro, Disney, Wizards of the Coast, Activision and EA.

https://marcelomatere.com



MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE/ TRANSFORMERS MINICOMICS

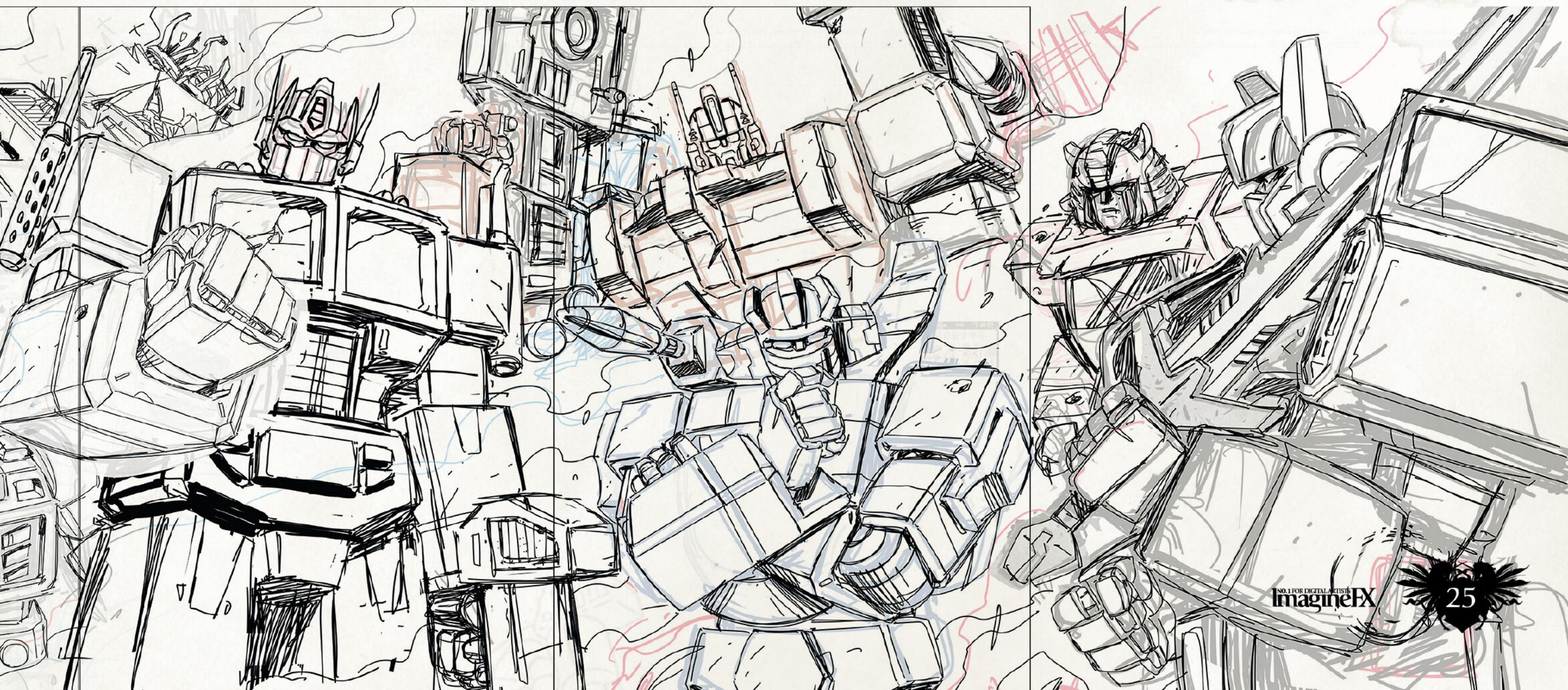
"My first action figure 'collection' was MOTU, so having the chance to work on this was amazing. I even tried to change my style to look more like the old comics, but with a '90s look. I finished these traditionally so I could experiment with pen and brush textures, especially for the action panels, where I tried to incorporate manga references. The cover of issue #2 and page 5 are my favourites."



Marvel Adaptation Reprint, Image / Skybound / TopShelfComic.com Exclusive

TRANSFORMERS: THE MOVIE '86 #1

"I had this idea to show Optimus fighting Megatron. I also tried to make a homage to one of my favourite covers by Jim Lee, X-Men #5: Wolverine vs Omega Red. Sometimes, I need to do several clean-up stages, even changing the colour of the characters. Then comes the final stage, where I print it out, clean it on Bristol board with pencils, and ink it."



Richard Luong

Traditionally using pencil when creating his fan art, Richard draws on his most-loved films and TV for creative inspiration

Artist PROFILE

Richard Luong
LOCATION: US



Also known as Tentacles and Teeth, Richard is a Dallas-based illustrator, designer, concept artist and art director. He began his career at Ritual Entertainment, eventually becoming a freelance artist. He has worked for Marvel, Magic: The Gathering and Dungeons & Dragons, and films such as Hellboy and Logan.
https://bit.ly/4hZtIsA

SKELETOR

"Skeletor is one of my favourite characters to draw. The whole of MOTU has such fun and great character designs."



ALIEN

"The Xenomoprh is one of my all-time favourite creature designs. My aesthetic and love for horror films can largely be attributed to seeing Alien at a young age."



> "My love for horror can be attributed to seeing Alien at a young age"



LILITH

"I love to draw women as confident and intimidating. Lilith has a powerful design that makes her so much fun to draw."



ARCHANGEL

"As a '90s kid, this design was so iconic and represented everything cool in comics at the time."

APOCALYPSE

"My favourite comic villain. I'm so excited for the X-Men to come to the MCU!"

DARKNESS

"Darkness was one of the coolest characters for me when I was a kid. Marc Silvestri was so inspirational and his style and designs made me a fan for life."

WITCHER

"I wanted to infuse personality and attitude into this drawing to mirror Geralt's demeanour in the game."

BAPHOMET

"My take on Baphomet for a tattoo design. I love the challenge of creating a contained composition."

> “I love drawing the symbiote effects and designing the flow”



VENOM

“Work in progress of my favourite character of all time. I love drawing the symbiote effects and designing the flow.”

WEREWOLF

"Digital concept design of an original werewolf miniature."

KNULL

"I wanted to make an homage to the Killing Joke cover by Brian Bolland."

PSYLOCKE

"One of my favourite female comic characters growing up. I always try to make my female characters attractive through confidence and strength."

SHREDDER

"TMNT was a massive influence on me as a child. I was a fan as a kid and still am to this day."

Unleash your creativity with the ultimate digital toolbox

Whatever your next project may be, **Clip Studio Paint** places everything you need to transform imagination into reality right at your fingertips

Animating is my own personal way to relax and take a break from my illustration work. Although direction, editing and animation can be labour intensive, I'm always able to unwind when creating cartoons.

I use Clip Studio Paint to make my frame-by-frame animations on an iPad. I was looking for an app that's similar to my experience of animating on PC, and I found exactly that in Clip Studio Paint. I particularly like the timeline tool logic; it felt very natural and intuitive straight away.

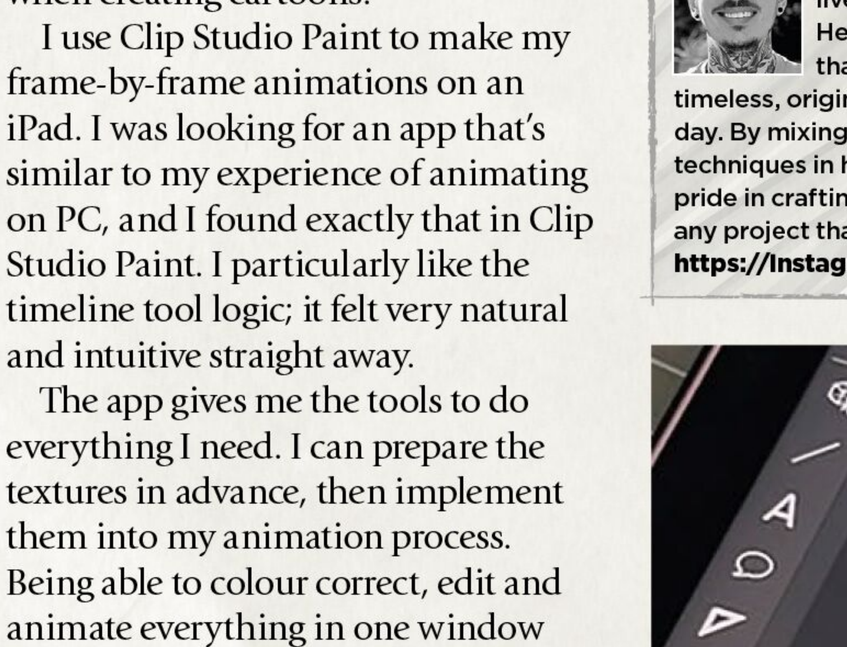
The app gives me the tools to do everything I need. I can prepare the textures in advance, then implement them into my animation process. Being able to colour correct, edit and animate everything in one window is perfect for short cartoons.

Artist PROFILE

Dan Gartman
LOCATION: Canada



Dan is an artist, illustrator and game developer who lives in Calgary, Canada. He adores having a career that allows him to produce timeless, original artwork every single day. By mixing digital and traditional techniques in his workflow, Dan takes pride in crafting fresh, unique art in any project that he takes on.
https://Instagram.com/danygartman



TRADITIONAL SCENES
Dan likes to paint his environments before switching to an iPad.

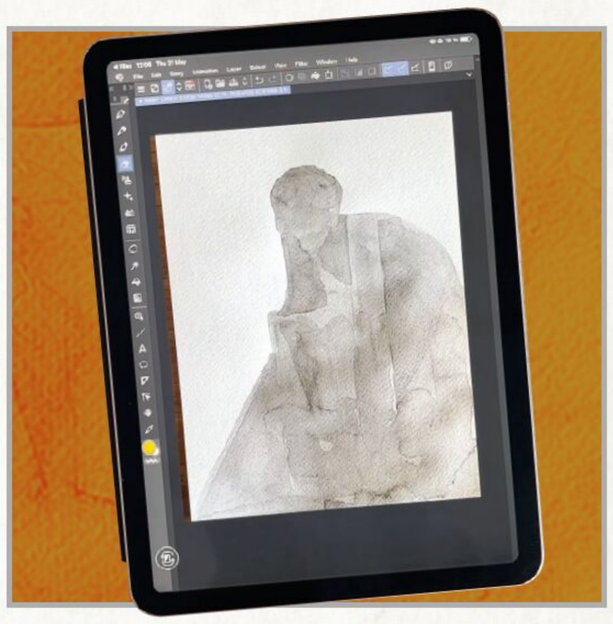
ON A ROLL
"Different animation timelines can be tough to get used to quickly, but Clip Studio Paint just feels natural," Dan says.

HOW I IMPORT... PAINTED TEXTURES TO CLIP STUDIO PAINT



1 Upload and prepare

First I take a photo and open it in the app. Next, I Rasterize the image, and adjust the Saturation and Level Correction to bring the texture out.



2 Create clipping masks

After that, I use Edit>'Convert brightness to opacity' to separate my handmade textures away from the background. That way I can colourise and draw inside any of my textures simply by using clipping masks.



3 Animation-ready edits

Finally, I add the colour and details using Clip Studio Paint's default brushes to prep them for animation. Thanks to the app's flexible tools, my process is so much smoother.



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Ornella Giauque

Full of colour yet rarely out of the ordinary, Ornella's sketches are a result of sitting back and observing the finer details of everyday life



Artist PROFILE

Ornella Giauque

LOCATION: France



Ornella is a French concept artist and illustrator for video games and animation, with a strong love for colourful and bittersweet stories. She likes doodling her own characters, and takes inspiration from her feelings and the things she loves. You'll probably find her drawing with her friends in a park, reading comics or checking niche neocities websites!

www.artstation.com/tny







COZY...

"I started drawing this character a lot. This sketch is just really self-indulgent. Even if I draw as my main job, it's still my favourite hobby. Work and obligations can already be stressful enough, so I try to always draw something I enjoy during the day – even the tiniest sketch does the job!"

BELLE

"I wanted to doodle another design for Belle – she's one of my favourite princesses. I have a soft spot for nerdy characters; I think they're really cute to design!"

SOMETHING ABOUT LOVE

"I really like to draw from my own feelings. I'm not the best when it comes to words or reading the room, but I like to use my art to daydream a bit. The large amount of shojos I've read might be for something here..."

> "I'm not the best when it comes to words, but I like to use my art to daydream"



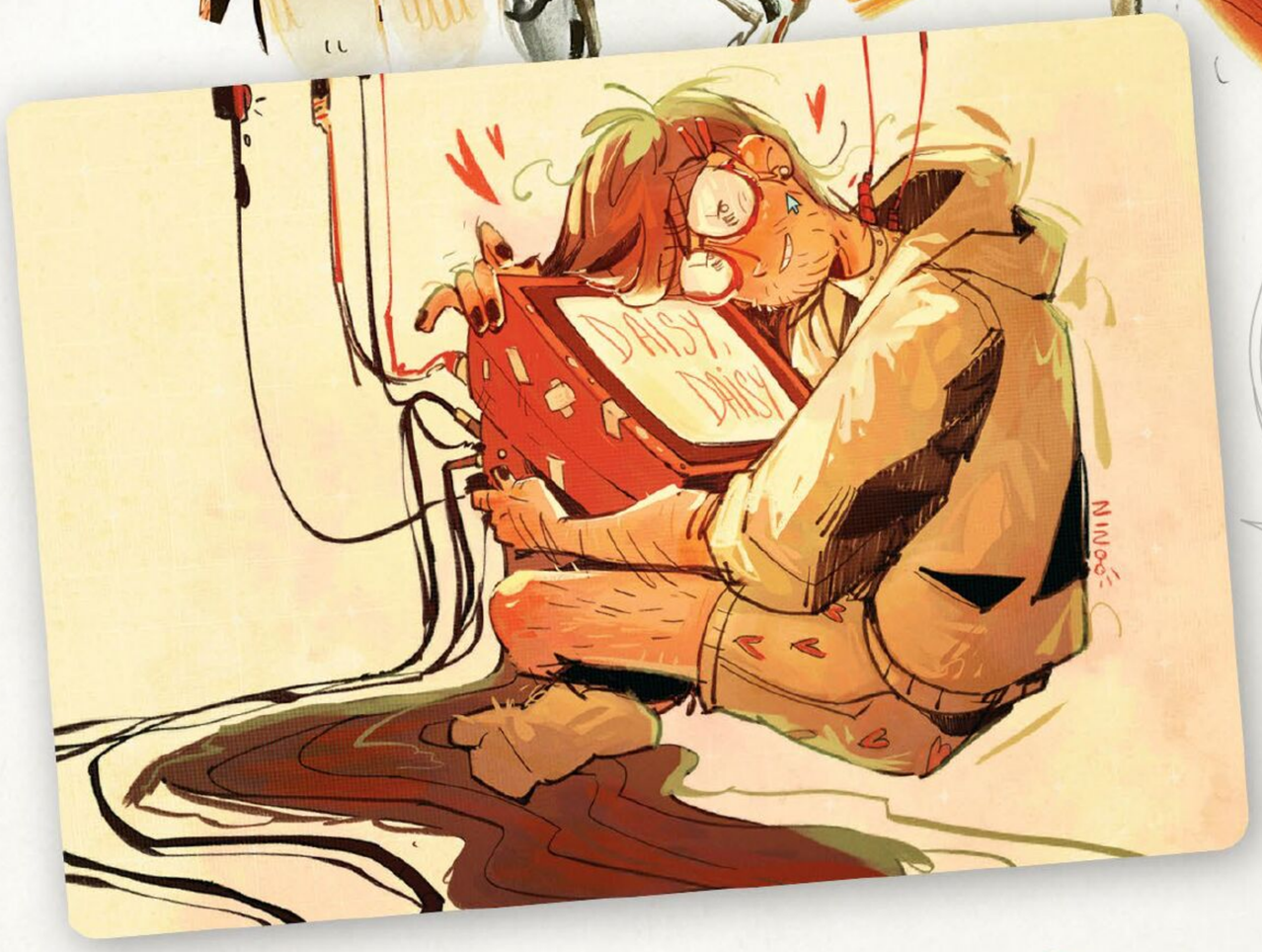


SUMMERTIME MEMORY

"I remember going to my great-grandfather's house during the summer as a child. The village was small, and I'd stay around the house with my Nintendo DS. I used to be bored, but I'd love a break like this again. Nostalgia is a great muse..."

WATERCOLOR AND INK

"Watercolour is so nice to add colours quickly in your sketchbook! I tend to draw a lot with black ink/waterproof markers – adding a splash of watercolour really makes the pages pop!"





DEAR CLAUDE

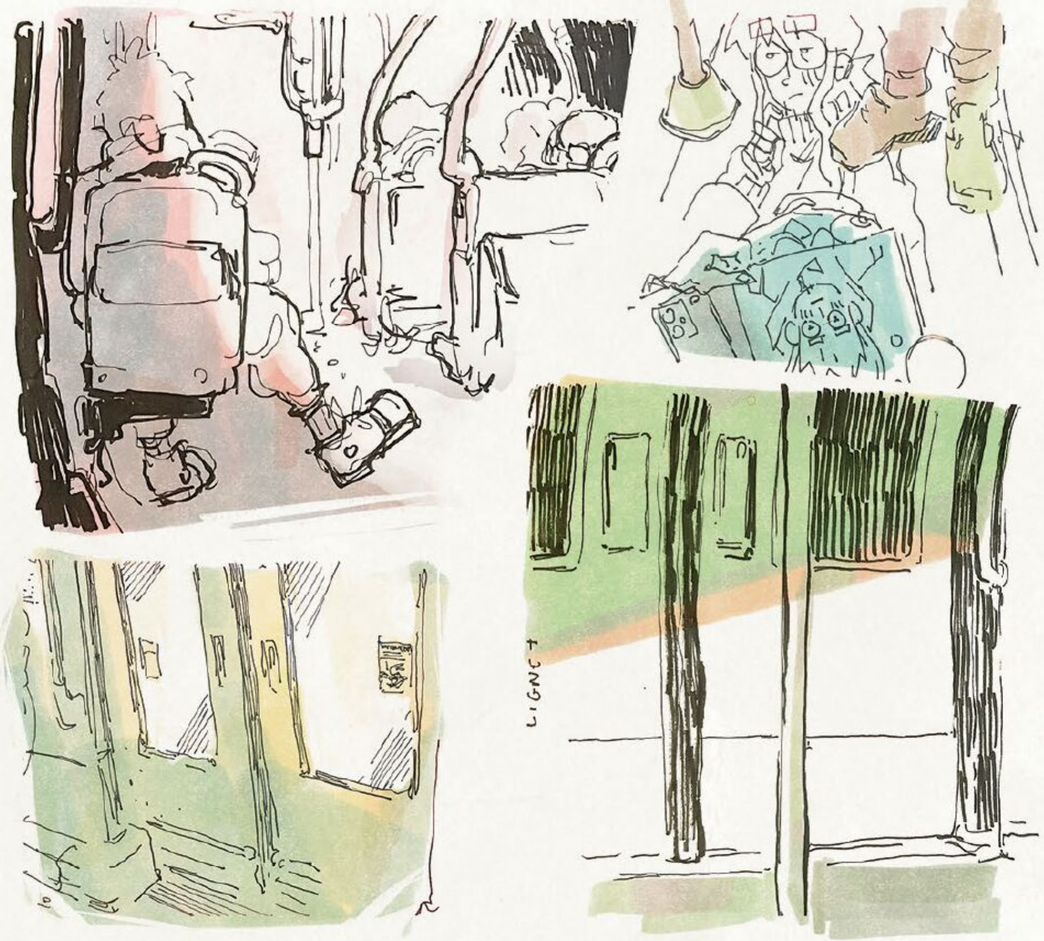
"I doodled this page after a day of work. I was tired, but I really wanted to sketch something I enjoy. I always try to find time to draw for myself – I think it's important to give ourselves the time to draw as a hobby as well!"

YEARN

"I think I was always obsessed with the world inside my computer. I've met lovely people online, visited such wonderful universes in games and indie series and read so many great stories. It's so close, and yet so far away."







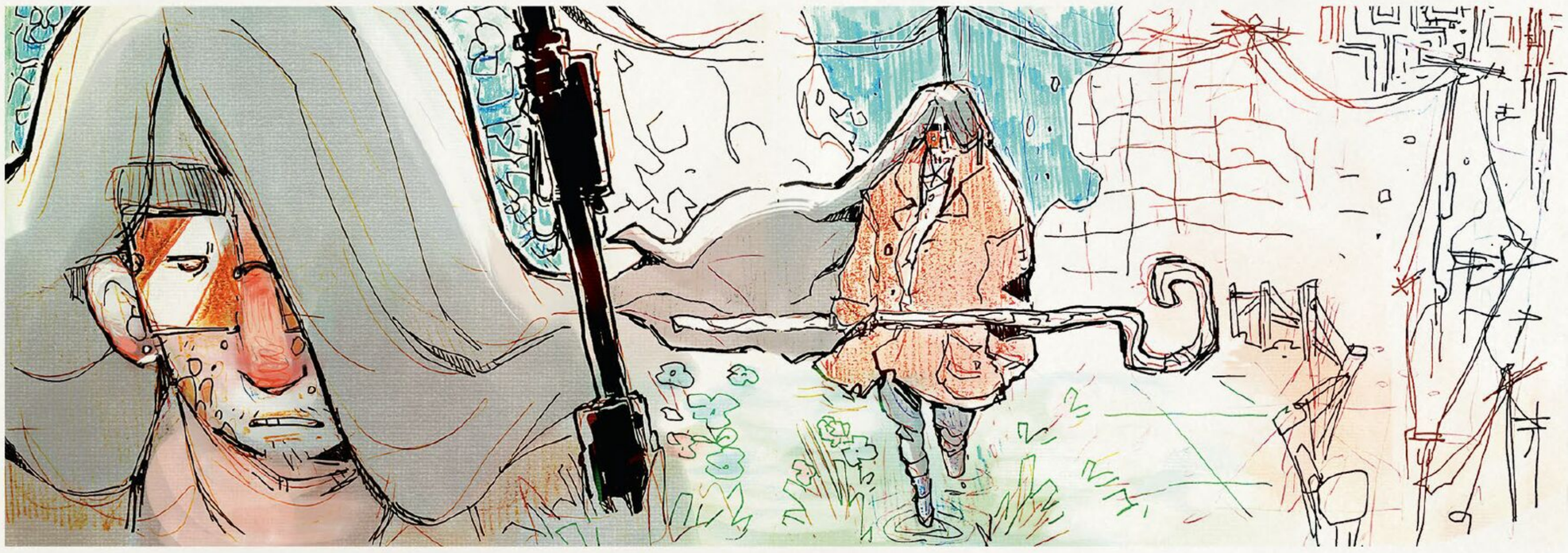
> **“I end up doodling doors or random elements and imagining new illustration ideas”**

PARIS METRO

“I take the Metro pretty often in Paris. Instead of doomscrolling, I doodle in my sketchbook. I can’t sit most of the time, so I end up just doodling the doors or random elements and imagining new illustration ideas!”

FILLING THE VOID

“I discovered landscape-format sketchbooks last year, and I’m obsessed with how spreads can be so wide in them! Filling the space is really relaxing...”



DON’T ERASE!

“I avoid erasing in my sketchbook; I think it helps me relax to accept that I’ll just draw with the flow. It makes me remember the times I’d draw in margins back in middle school. They’re not the best drawings, but they’re fun!”



REALITY MEETS IMAGINATION

"I really recommend drawing your own characters when you do observation drawing! This trick made me enjoy environment drawing a little bit more – it's nice to add context to your characters with some scenery."

SO FASHIONABLE!

"I like to imagine what kind of outfit my own characters would own. Then, I try to think about specific events. What is he wearing in bed? Does he change his clothes, even if he's a shut-in? What would he wear on a date?"

LET'S REST

"At the end of the day, I want to draw simple settings. Stories don't have to be special to be told; sometimes it's just about being extremely tired with a sweet tooth. It's really relatable."

Finn Stueven

This artist's background in concept art shines through, vividly depicting his ferocious beasts looming large in black and white

Artist PROFILE

Finn Stueven
LOCATION: Germany



Finn is an illustrator, concept artist and art instructor. His work ranges from board games and advertisements to custom objects. He believes that the more you know, the more you can draw. His passion is to learn as much as possible while sharing the knowledge.
https://linktr.ee/kugeltisch

NORMAL SIZED BIRDS

"Birds are dinosaurs. Sometimes, we forget what they are. Do not trust birds. As I got older, my excitement for birds also grew. I finally entered my bird-watching years."

VAMPIRE

ENGINE MIND

"The best way to understand is to play. Treating soft surface objects as hard surfaces will open a lot of possibilities."

IMPACT APE

"I doodled directly in ink, slowly building layer after layer. The image started as one arm with shoulder plates, just creating texture. Even the arrow only appeared halfway through the drawing."

WUKONG 1

"Since I can remember, I have loved all interpretations of the Monkey King, from Dragon Ball to League of Legends. Now, I want to bring life to my own versions."

> "Treating soft surface objects as hard surfaces will open a lot of possibilities"

CRAB NIGHTMARE

"This started as a design exercise combing mechanic parts with crabs and shells. But it quickly developed into living creatures somewhere between machine and human."

WINGED BEASTS

"Bridging creature design with human anatomy; I use anatomical invention to test my knowledge. This page started to test myself on all feather groups on a bird wing. I could not resist investing more time and taking it from a bird anatomy study to a creature design."

WUKONG 2

"This is the first sketch for a series of Illustrations featuring classical creatures from folklore around the world."

WEAPONISED FROG

"Here, I was just playing around, drawing what I like. I do a lot of drawings without a use case. Later, I scavenge through my sketchbook and look for the best ideas."

Matthew S. Armstrong

Illustrations tell a story, and Matthew's art has plenty to tell. Here, he talks us through the background behind his work

Artist PROFILE

Matthew S. Armstrong
LOCATION: US



Matthew grew up in Whitefish, Montana, and is an award-winning illustrator, cartoonist and writer whose work spans publishing, animation and video games. He spent nine years with The Walt Disney Company, and likes drawing cats, robots and wizards, and researching forgotten fairy tales.
https://bit.ly/4zJKALg

TOO LIGHT TO FALL

"He was falling, or floating – it was getting harder and harder to tell. Three books held all the magic left in the world. Guess the stratosphere is as good a place to keep them as any. Lintbat fluttered beside him, unbothered, never having weighed enough to fall properly."



THE WEARY AND THE WANTED

"Nestled deep in the Azure Woods sat the Water Wheel Inn, its lamps lit for weary wayfarers, its cellar door bolted for 'reasons'. "Quick, hide here!" is a warm welcome in some establishments. A most fashionable haunting, its guests are blessedly left alone. The kitchen was fully stocked and entirely siege-proof."



SMOKE AND OTHER VANISHING THINGS

"The small gentleman and the wizard sat companionably in the gloaming. They spoke of nothing in particular for hours as the sun set for the very first time."

GRUNGY THE LINT BEAST!!!

"Plays grunge music. Lead singer of the grunge band LINTJAM! He is a massive pile of sentient lint."



> "They spoke of nothing in particular for hours as the sun set for the very first time"

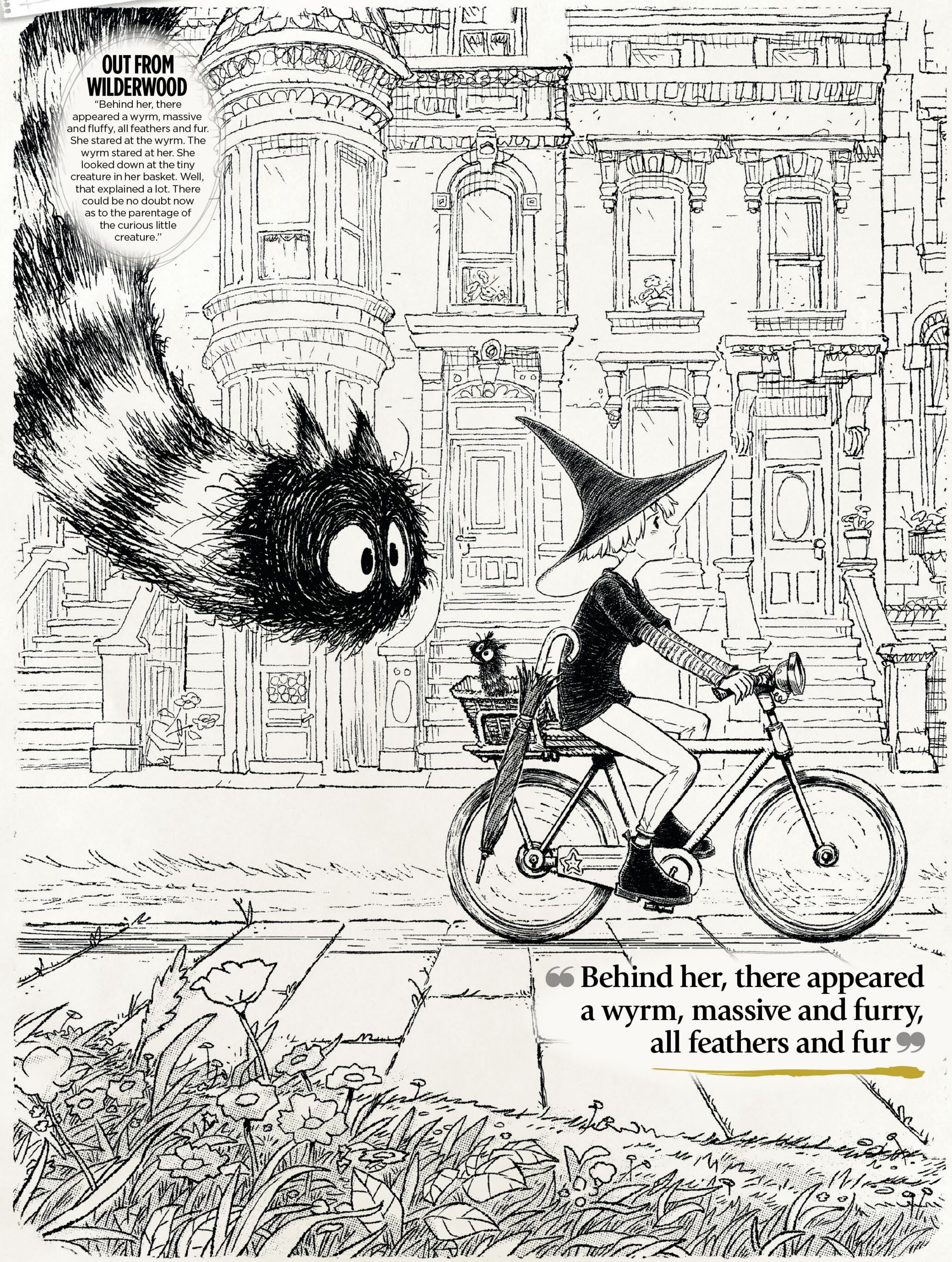


CONSIDERABLY LARGER CURIOSITY

"The great cat had brought them here by a method he declined to explain. The air smelled faintly of scorched arithmetic. If there was an answer, she'd find it here."

OUT FROM WILDERWOOD

"Behind her, there appeared a wyrm, massive and fluffy, all feathers and fur. She stared at the wyrm. The wyrm stared at her. She looked down at the tiny creature in her basket. Well, that explained a lot. There could be no doubt now as to the parentage of the curious little creature."



"Behind her, there appeared a wyrm, massive and furry, all feathers and fur"



A HOME, OR A MAZE

"An apple, freely given!" said the witch, who had forgotten she wasn't a bird. She ate it whole and without ceremony, having long ago dispensed with chewing as an unnecessary courtesy. The little mushroom pouted. He had wanted the apple."



TWO BROTHERS

"Two brothers set out together, as brothers do, each certain he was accompanying the other. The path was a well-kept secret and it had never yet been walked twice in the same direction. They had taken the hidden way to avoid being followed, and were followed only by the hidden way."

UNLIMITED WIZARD POWER

"Metal mage shreds power chords, solos that shatter mountains... neighbours call the cops!"

GAME OVER, DUDE

"The high score was secured. Forever hers, no matter the cost. Never again would she suffer the words Game Over!"

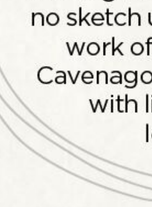


Dan Kelby

In his art, Dan starts off with the basics of posture and dress, adding details minimally before enhancing with colour

Artist PROFILE

Dan Kelby
LOCATION: England



Dan is a character designer and illustrator with a background in animation pre-production for clients including Disney Television Animation, Cartoon Network Studios and BlinkInk. He's happiest when drawing people in his sketchbook, trying to capture their essence through graphic shapes, expressive line work, and clear silhouettes. His dream job would be to sketch around the world for a living.
www.dankelby.com



DIRTY INKS

"I wanted to practice rendering with thick and thin lines here, working directly into Photoshop with no sketch underneath. Studying the work of Shiyoon Kim and Gigi Cavenago and how they both play with line weight has really levelled me up."

BAD NEWS

"I really struggled with the colour on this one and must have tried about five different approaches. I even added a full background, which I then deleted! It taught me a lot about perseverance, which paid off because it's been one of my most popular pieces."



SUMMER

"The recent heatwave in the UK inspired this study from a photo I saw on Pinterest. I'm pleased with the textures, but my favourite part is the line work on the fan!"

“Real life is the best inspiration when it comes to character designs”

SACRIFICE

“This piece started out as stylised life drawing practice, then evolved from there. The line work is a nod to Sergio Toppi’s beautiful textures, which are a big influence. The skull was drawn from the one I have on my desk (just a replica, don’t worry)!”

TOURIST

“Here, I began by blocking out the silhouette, then added lines and extra colour on top. I rarely work this way, but love the result: sometimes I find the usual ‘draw lines first, then add colour’ approach too restrictive.”

STREET CHARACTERS

“Real life is the best inspiration for character designs, so one of my favourite things is to draw everyday people like these. It gives you a brilliant repertoire to pull from when creating your own characters.”

BLUE NOTE

“I love drawing musicians, especially jazz players. They always have such interesting gestures and you can really feel the passion flowing from them, which is the main thing I try to capture.”

JAZZ PLAYERS

"Al Hirschfeld's minimal approach has been a major influence on my style. He was the master at speaking volumes with very few words, which I tried to emulate with these drawings."

EXAGGERATE!

"It's amazing how much mileage you can get out of the human face. What happens when you shrink down or enlarge the eyes? Close or widen the gap between features? Lengthen the chin whilst shrinking the forehead? Try it!"

PUSHING (DIGITAL) PENCILS

"I don't have a huge set of brushes and actually prefer having as few as possible. Sticking with one or two frees my brain up more, allowing me to concentrate on the drawing itself. These were all sketched with a single brush: the Legacy Pencil in Photoshop."

YELLOW GUY

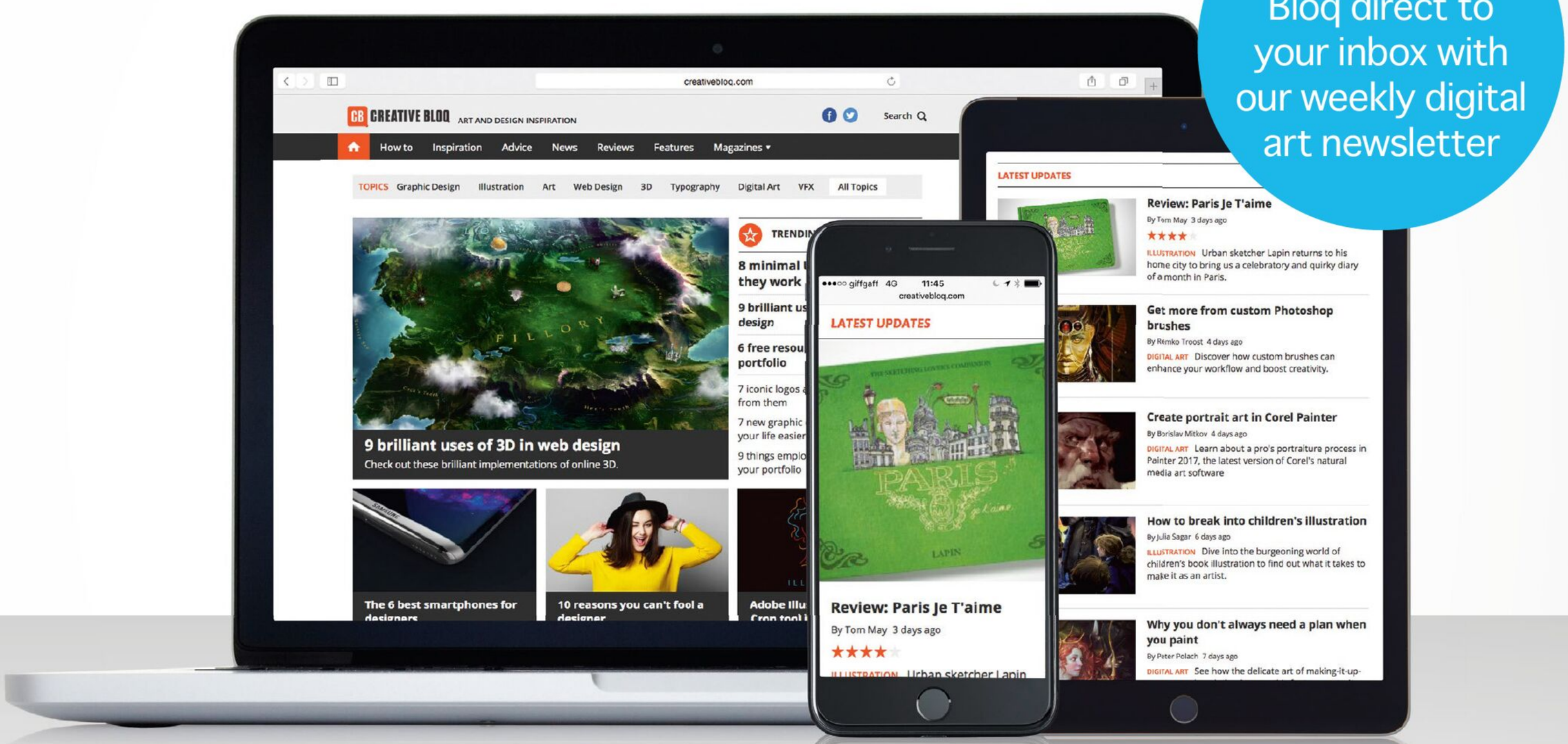
"Procreate has some amazing pencil brushes. By tilting and angling the Apple Pencil, you can yield very natural-looking results with them. I wanted to leave the skin tone blank here and only apply colour to the shadows and clothing."

VROOM

"I love colour in all its forms: pastel shades, reduced palettes, muted schemes. Sometimes you have to dial up the saturation, though!"

> "I wanted to leave the skin tone blank and apply colour to the clothing"

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Michael Guimont

Inspired by both classic animation to his own life, Michael's art explores the more mundane aspects of fantasy characters' lives



GUARDIAN ANGEL

"This is a character from one of my stories. I wanted to draw a light moment with two silly demons lurking over him. I really dig 'good vs evil' settings, such as angels and demons, so I just doodled something for the hell of it."

FAIRY LOVE LIFE

"In my story, Fairytale Things, the Fairy Godmother is pretty bad at doing her job. She only cares about partying and enjoying her life. I thought it would be funny to see how a night out at the tavern could end up for her."



HUNGRY DRAGON

"Each month, there is a contest for giving tips on the software Clip Studio Paint. Since I use this program extensively for my work, and that this month's theme was emulating traditional media, I decided to illustrate a Chinese dragon eating rice!"



QUETZAL STATUE

"This drawing is the first one I finished once I completed my Clip Studio Paint realistic pencil brushes. I recorded the whole process and made a tutorial that I am now selling online. To this day, it is one of my favourites because to me, it looks just like real traditional pencil. I've been drawing with these tools ever since, and I just love to draw ancient stuff!"



Artist PROFILE

Michael Guimont

LOCATION: Canada



Michael is a visual development artist who has worked in the entertainment industry for over 10 years. He loves storytelling and drawing silly things. His influences come from European Bande Dessinée, as well as animated features. He aims to replicate and build from the old-school way of doing concept art with pen and paper, but doing so digitally.

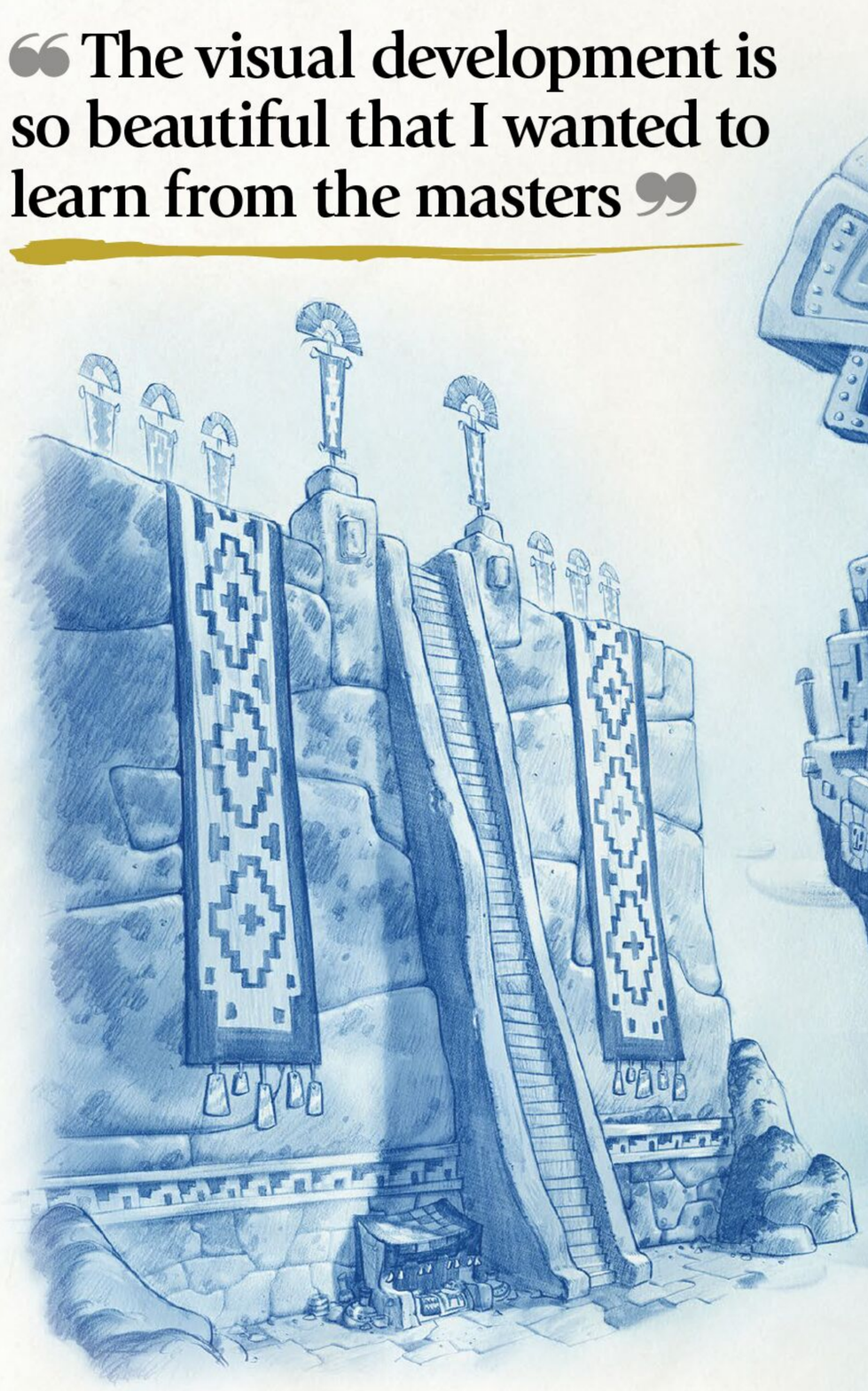
www.artstation.com/michaelguimont

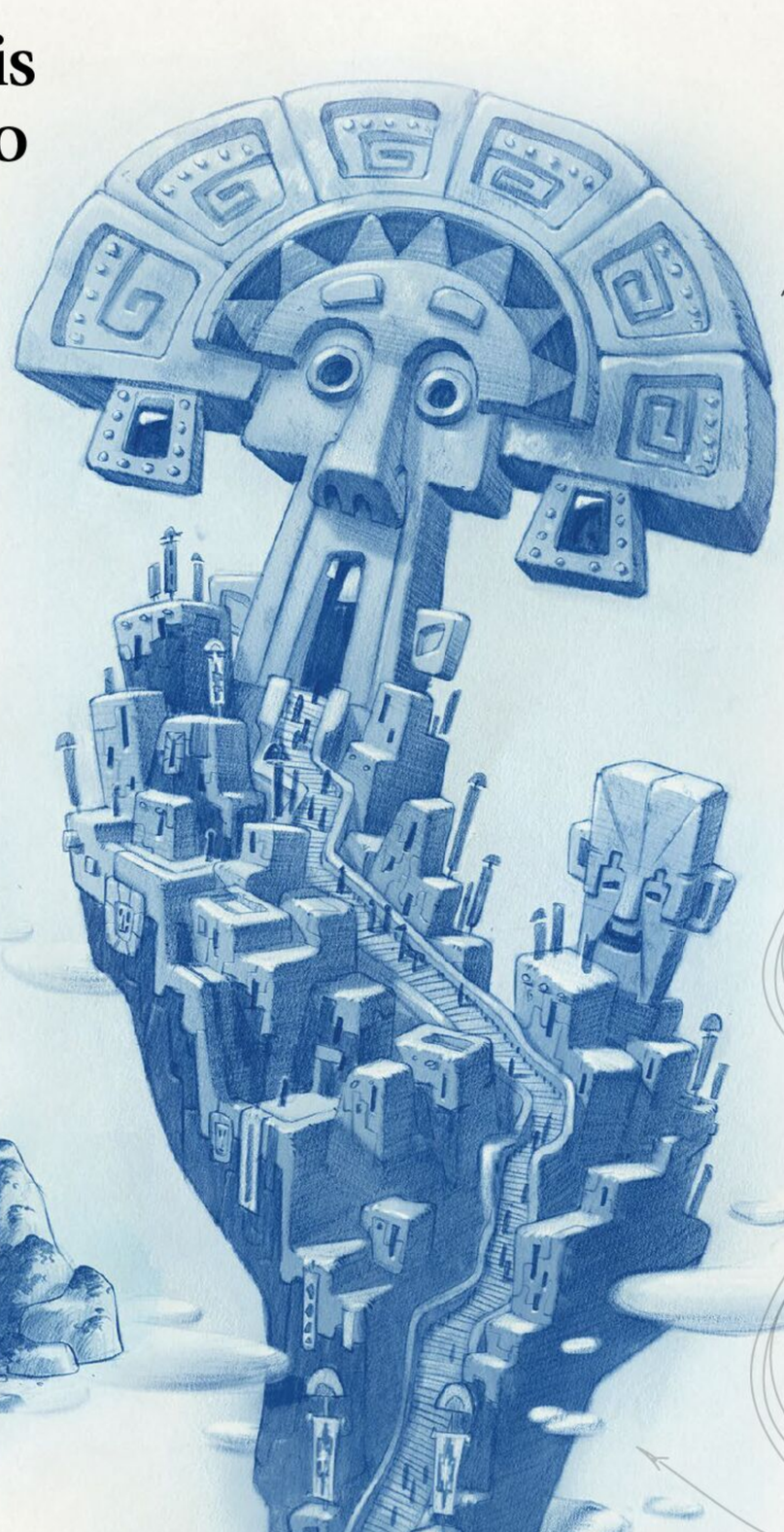


BRAVE LITTLE TAILOR

"One of the goals I had in mind when I created the universe for my story, Fairytale Things, was to be able to change and give a new spin to classic fairy tales. In this case, what if our characters had to give a haircut to the giant, who is having a bad hair day?"

> "The visual development is so beautiful that I wanted to learn from the masters"







CHATONNEAU

"I say Chatonneau sometimes when I talk about my little cats at home. It's kind of a small, cute nickname. In French, 'chat' is cat and 'tonneau' is barrel. The idea didn't go further than that. I wanted to draw a cat in a barrel with the ink brushes I was making."

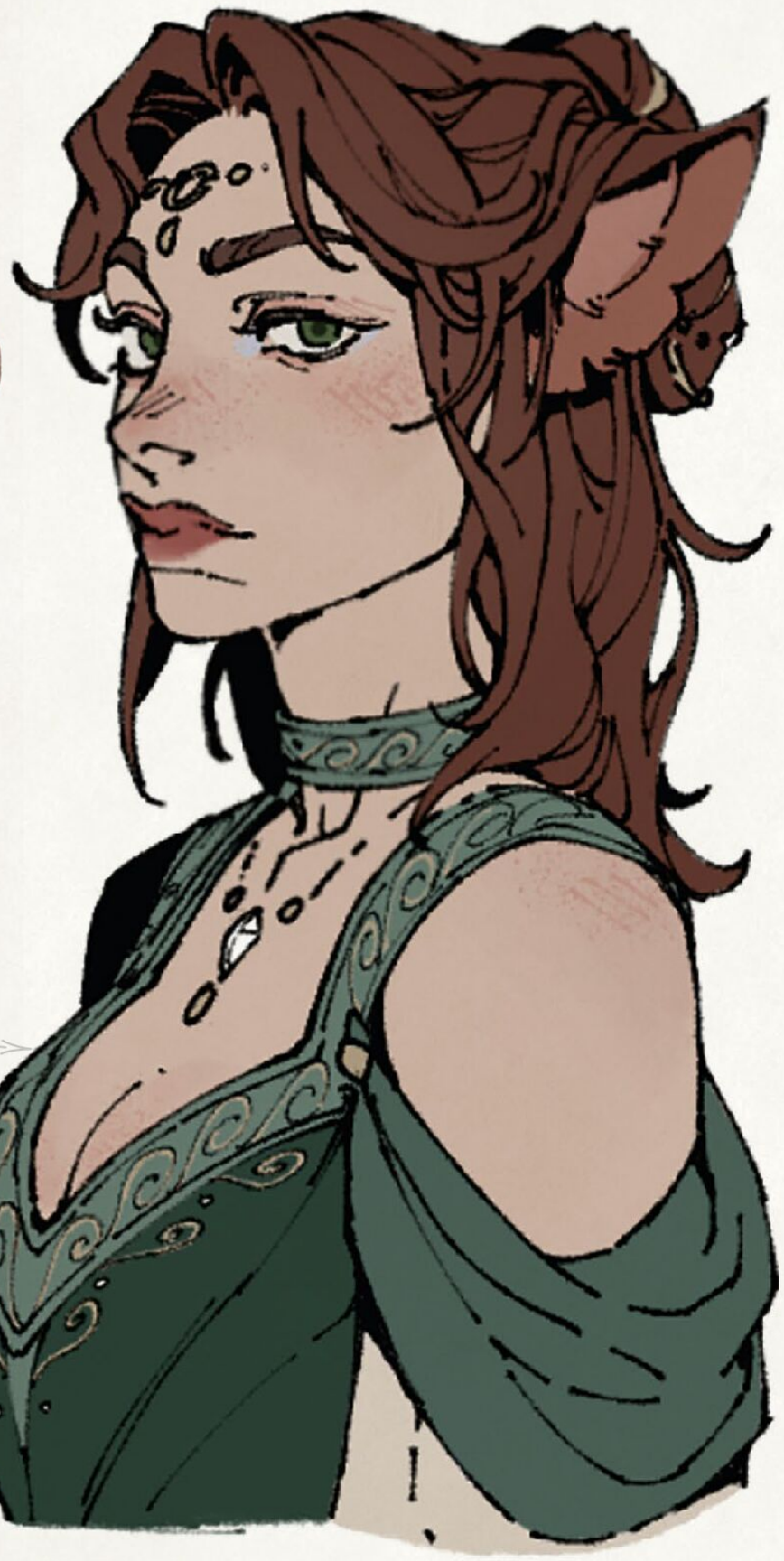
NEW GROOVE CITY STUDY

"One of my favourite Disney movies is The Emperor's New Groove. It's funny, silly and gorgeous! The visual development created for this animated feature is so beautiful that I wanted to learn from the masters. These studies enabled me to do just that!"

Alexandre Fernando

Inspired by multiple influences from both real life and fantasy, this artist creates simple but evocative characters





ARTIFICER

"I don't often do character sheets, as I normally work alone, but I admit it's something I should do more of. This is a design test for a TTRPG player character."

VOICES

"A more illustrative kind of drawing, trying to emphasise texture here. Original character."

MARIE

"Character design doodle and attempt at using a darker ink brush. I tend to prefer pencil textures, but the inky feel calls to me sometimes."



FREESTYLE

"A quick dynamic sketch of a four-armed character. It's fun seeing how additional limbs in a character design affect anatomy and movement."



Artist PROFILE

Alexandre Fernando

LOCATION: Poland



Alex is a comic artist and writer with a STEM background. After debuting his comic work with an online publisher, he made the switch to independent publishing, and recently started dabbling in animation. His art has a range of European style inspirations, with a big focus on facial expressions and anatomy.

www.mmaff.net

TIRED

"A four-armed character I love playing with. This specific design was inspired by a butterfly; insects are a great source of inspiration for character work."

RULER

"Original character snapshot. I'm a big fan of simple but evocative shots in composition and colour. Most of my illustrations in general can be seen as comic panels themselves."

ENTANGLED

"I grew up by the sea and love pulling that theme into my work, even with a bit of a darker or more fantastical twist. Tentacles are very versatile in composition."

BEAST TAMER

"Very rough creature design exploration – it's often more useful for me to see a design in motion first, or compared to other elements of a story, before settling for a static shot."

> "It's often more useful for me to see a design in motion first before settling for a static shot"

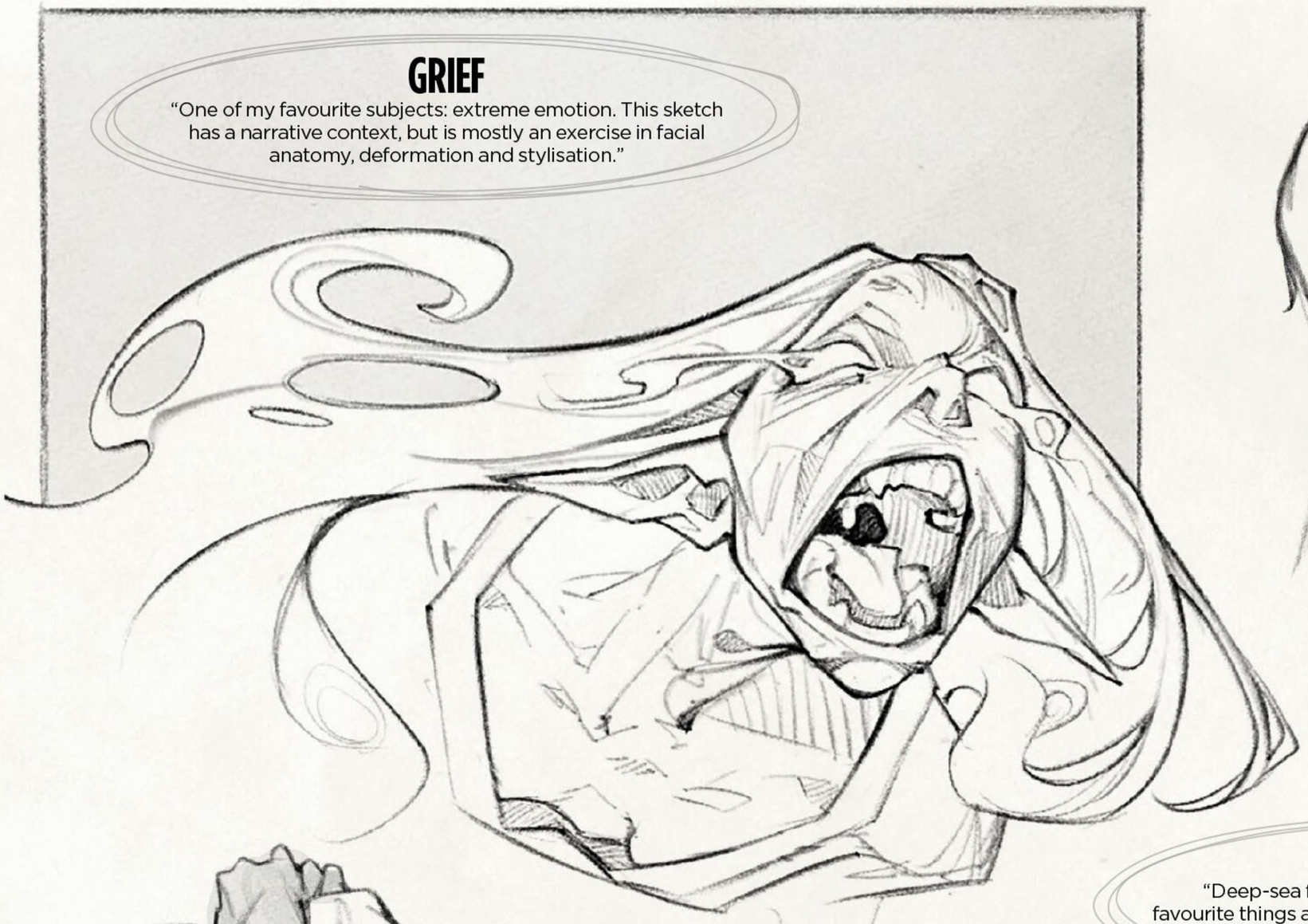
MAR COMO MORADA

"Simple illustration for an original character. I don't often do full-body vertical compositions, but it happens."

"I struggle to stick to a specific line style, and love experimenting – maybe too much"

GRIEF

"One of my favourite subjects: extreme emotion. This sketch has a narrative context, but is mostly an exercise in facial anatomy, deformation and stylisation."





WARM-UP

"Simple headshot with no specific character or theme in mind. I have a lot of fun sculpting hair and features out of a sketch as a warm-up for more targeted work."

FISH

"Deep-sea fish-inspired character design. One of my favourite things about designing a new character is seeing how the design can reflect quirks and traits."



NOISE

"Original character doodle. Body language goes hand in hand with facial expressions for me when it comes to representing a specific emotion – it's fun to play with and explore."





HEAD UP

"Original character doodle I used to test out a different brush/technique. I struggle to stick to a specific line style, and love experimenting, maybe a bit too much."

DUTY

"I love depicting intimate moments between characters, with a range of emotions involved. As a writer, these are often snapshots of bigger scenes or stories."

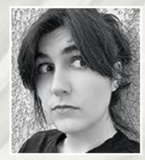


Marianne Pailloux

Combining concept art with action shots and more, Marianne's characterful art aims to tell many a story

Artist PROFILE

Marianne Pailloux
LOCATION: France



Known as LittleLionGhost on social media, Marianne is an illustrator and character concept artist from Corsica. She has been working on personal projects, and opened her own art shop in 2025. She has drawn from her life, and has always loved creating new characters and stories. Sketching is the first thing she does every day to wake up the hands and mind.
https://linktr.ee/LittleLionGhost



DRAGON
"Dragons are by far my favourite thing to draw! I just love how creative you can be with them."





BANG
"This little devil is the character that looks the most like me – on the inside! Here, I was practicing more dynamic poses."



MAX
"A character concept for one of my personal project. He uses a robotic arm that can burst fire. The story takes place in a fantasy post-apocalyptic world."

Sketchbook Marianne Pailloux



MOOD

"This young cowboy is a character from a fantasy western I imagined. What I love with this sketch is the horse's face and how it just matched my own that day. It was a long day!"



PATIENCE IS KEY

"More and more, I enjoy challenging myself by drawing a random idea that pops in my head and try to make it tell a story. Here, I can imagine they've been practicing this spell for a while."



SHEPHERD

"This centaur is one of my oldest characters, and is from a story I've been developing. He's also the only character whose designed didn't change since I first drew him."

> "I enjoy challenging myself by drawing an idea that pops in my head"



BOAR RIDER

"One morning, me and my mum were walking by some swamps when two wild boars crossed in front of us. It sparked an idea and I had to sketch it."

THE SINGER

"Imagining a famous centaur singer in a fantasy world. I thought of the idea after sketching some opera singers for practice."



Interview

Ben Mauro

The world-renowned art director and concept designer, and author of sci-fi graphic novel HUXLEY, says sketching is a key part of his workflow

Did you have a formal education in art, or are you self-taught?
A little of both, I guess. I had formal training, but a lot of growth happened outside school on the job and in personal studies. I started at DigiPen in Seattle studying 3D animation, then moved to ArtCenter College of Design in Pasadena for industrial and entertainment design after I found I enjoyed design and world-building more but just needed more education for that. That gave me a strong foundation in drawing, perspective and industrial design. Working alongside other artists at Weta Workshop and later in games and film taught me a lot also: you learn really fast on the job and even now I feel I'm still learning with every project.

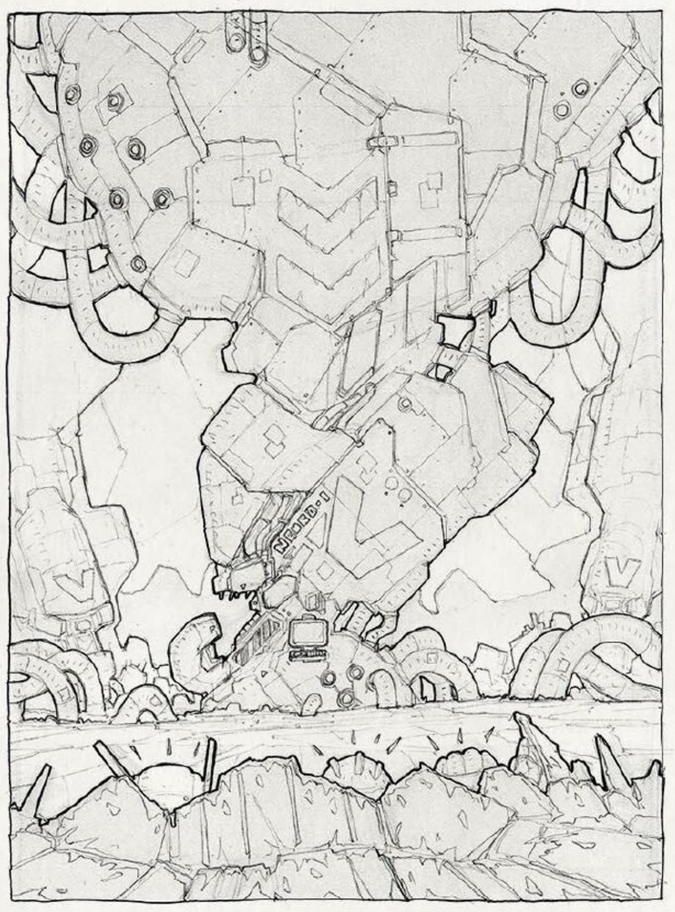
How much of a part does sketching play in your workflow, and what does that look like?
Sketching is usually where I find the idea before it becomes a polished image. I might make tiny compositions to solve a story beat, then explore silhouettes and variations for a character, prop or environment. HUXLEY began with pencil sketches of characters and places, which I developed into the larger world. I use Photoshop and 3D tools like Blender, Unreal and ZBrush every day, but drawing is still the quickest way to test an idea.

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?
Both. Some days I sketch simply to stay loose or investigate an unfamiliar shape. More often I'm trying to answer a question: how would this machine function, what would this creature need to survive, or where should the reader's eye go next? I try not to judge those drawings too quickly: an unfinished idea can become useful later when the right story or project comes along. The main thing I like is that each shape and element came from your imagination in your drawing; it's a pure expression of your idea and voice.

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?
Right now, creating my own graphic novels and books is especially rewarding because I get to make decisions about the story, characters, designs and final pages. HUXLEY grew out of everything I learned working on films and games, and I still love the scale and collaboration of those projects. Games let people move through the world you design and experience it first hand in an interactive way. A comic lets you control the rhythm from panel to panel. Each medium teaches me something that feeds the others and in a lot of ways [they] are pretty connected. For example, mocking up some levels for a game, I am bringing all the skills together to tell stories, create a mood with the visuals, music and allow a player to experience a specific moment in that way. ➳



BLUE FOREST
"Huxley meets Terada in the blue forest. A nice change of setting to draw out more of an organic feel."



BRAIN MACHINE
"Max, Kai and Huxley discovering the brain machine in the old spaceship."

> I use Photoshop and 3D tools… but drawing is still the quickest way to test an idea

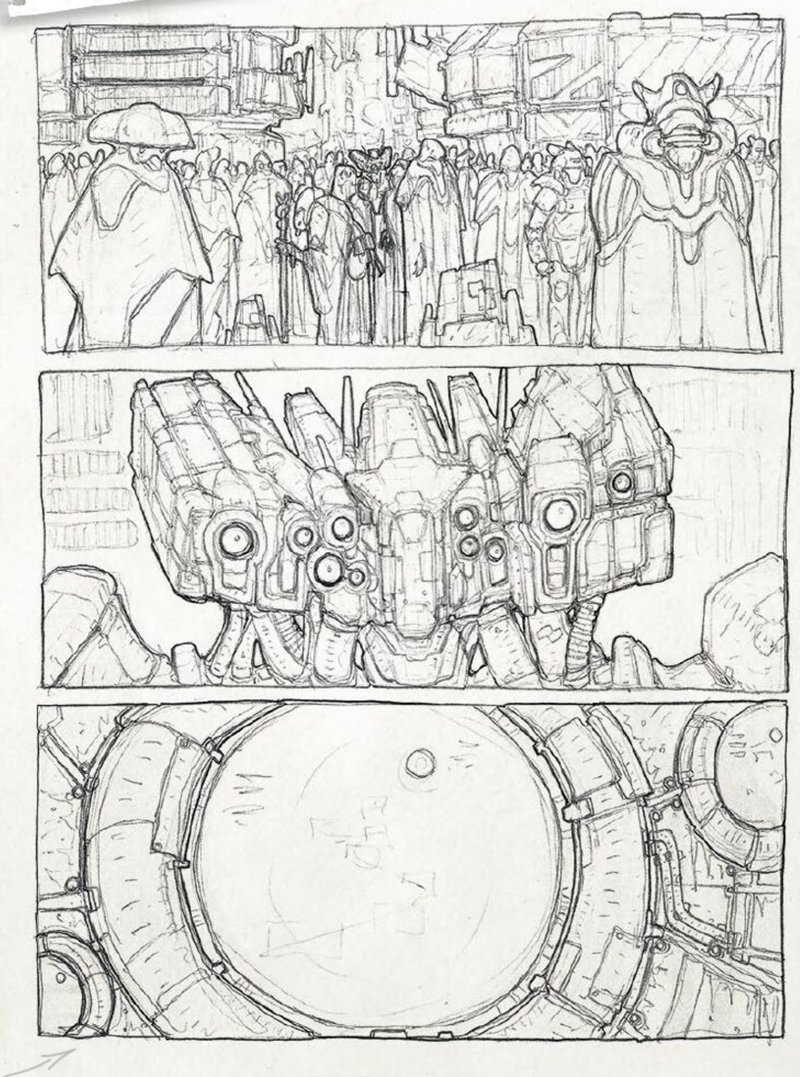
Artist PROFILE

Ben Mauro
LOCATION: US



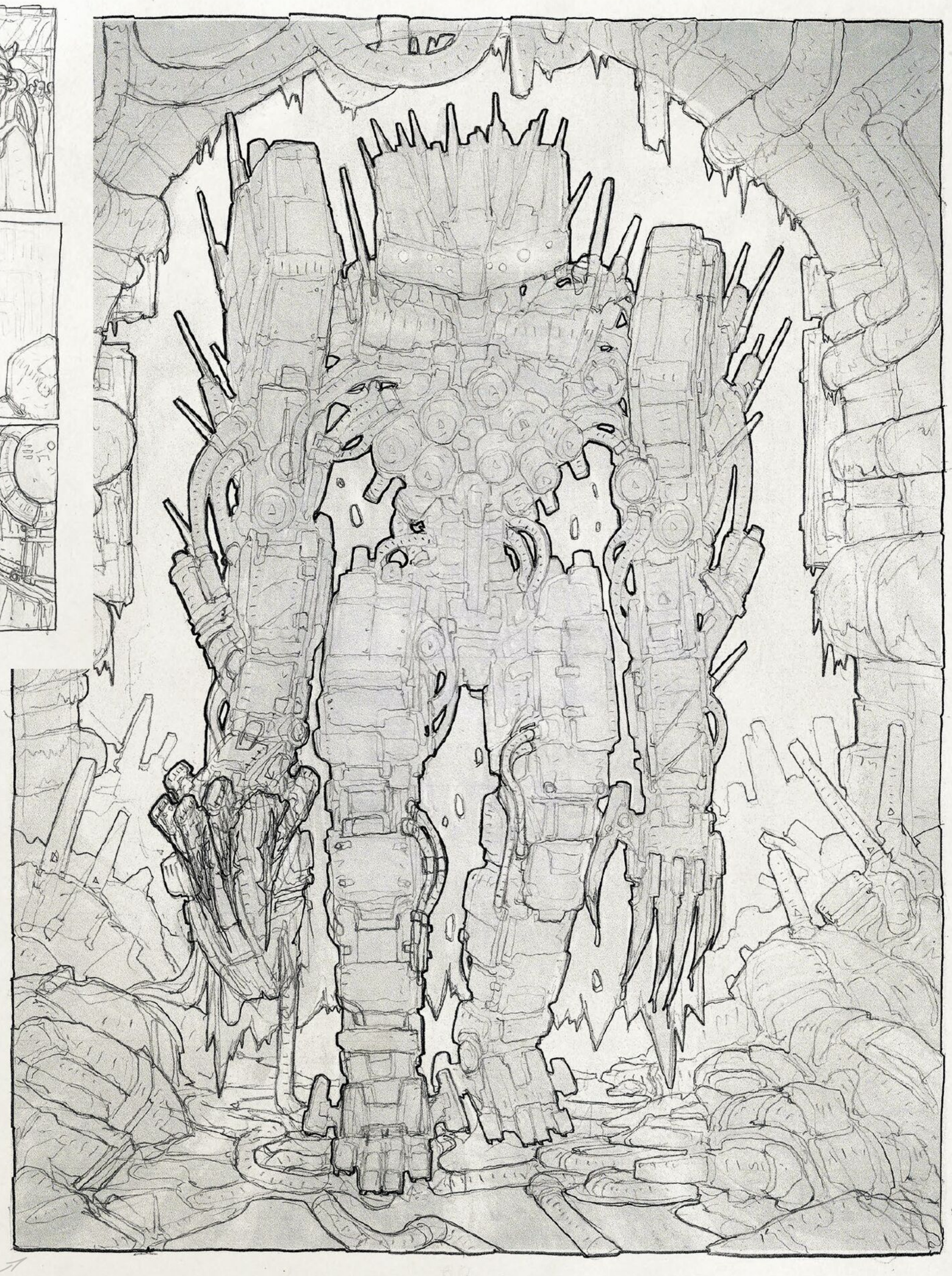
Ben is an art director, senior concept designer and author whose work spans Halo Infinite, Call of Duty, Elysium, The Hobbit and more. He created HUXLEY, an original science-fiction graphic novel series built from his passion for drawing and world-building.
WEB: www.benmaurodesign.com

PRISON
"Our heroes are tricked by Karmak and thrown in prison under the city, to be sold later for scraps."



THE DEMON

"The Demon gets activated before it attacks Karmak in his bar, sensing the energy signal it is tracking. Was really fun to refine the character head for the close-up in the middle panel."



PHANTOM

"Was really fun to detail out the full body of the Demon robot for this page before going into Photoshop and bring it to life in the final painting."

Describe your process for us. Do you make notes first? Work digitally or traditionally?

Usually I begin with a few notes about the story or design problem, then make quick drawings. For HUXLEY I thumbnail pages to test how a scene reads before developing any single image. I work with pencil and paper as well as digitally, then move into Photoshop or a rough 3D blockout when perspective or form needs more work. I do return to earlier drawings. Sometimes a sketch that failed one brief contains the seed of a better idea for another. For some of the new prequel books it is more of a team effort; on HUXLEY: The Oracle, artists Steve Chinhsuan Wang and Nikolas Gekko were responsible for the amazing illustrations in the book. The series is growing and sort of expanding, so each book is its own new challenge, whether it's working alone or with a team helping.

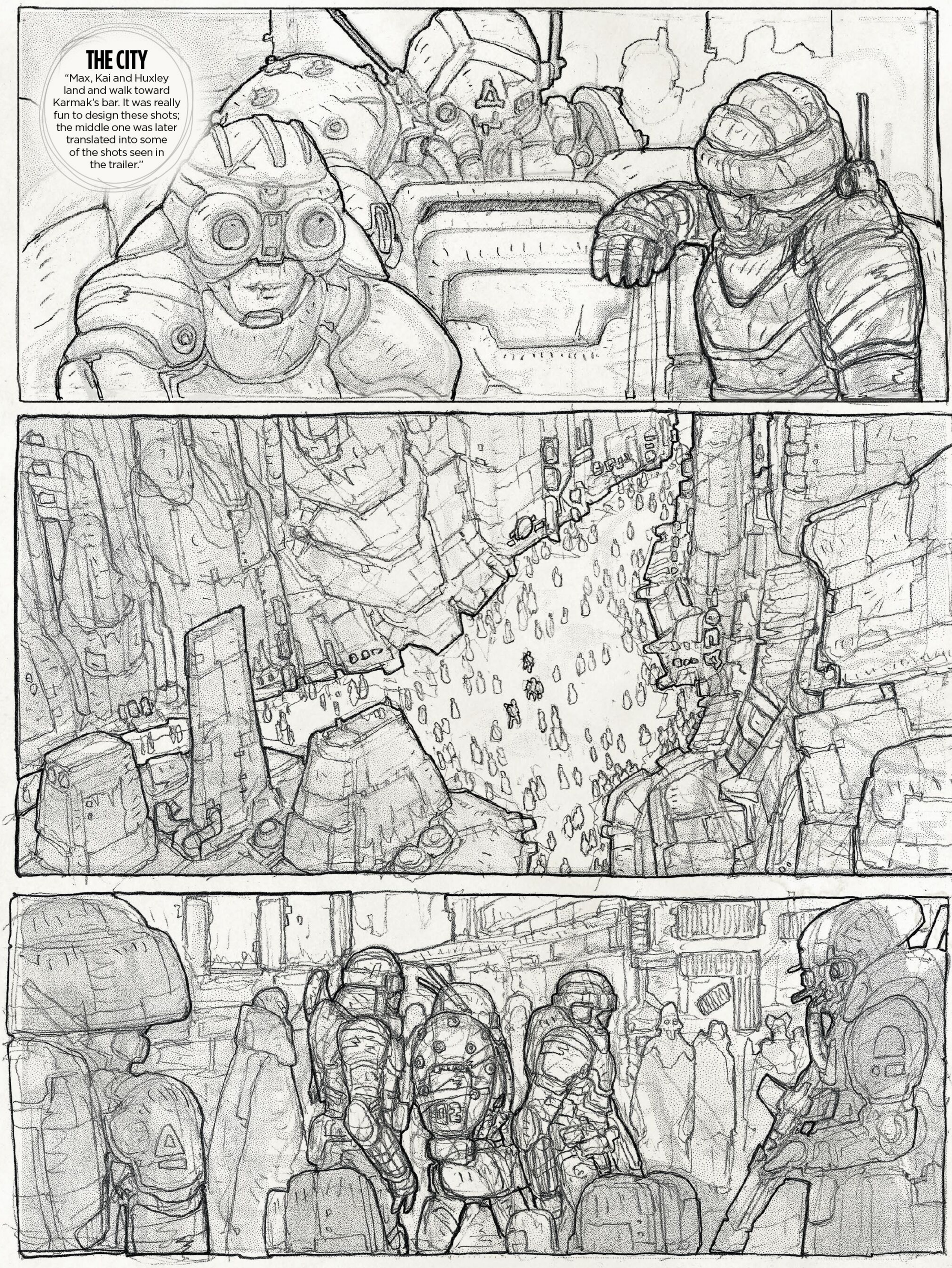
> **Sometimes a sketch that failed one brief contains the seed of a better idea for another**

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?

It depends on the image. Sometimes on the original graphic novel I would try to do 100% of the final drawing on paper and only paint in Photoshop, but later I would sometimes do things more roughly in pencil and do more of the work in Photoshop. A lot of it would usually depend on if I had designed that area in the books or not: if it wasn't designed, I would spend a lot of time creating it in pencil; if I was returning to a location I already designed in the books, I might have a lot of assets I could use to make the illustration digitally without having to redraw everything each time.

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?

I usually start with the role the character or creature has in the story. Is it a predator, a soldier, or something ancient and damaged? That suggests a scale, posture and silhouette. Then I study real anatomy and nature for the logic behind the design. I might take a joint, a pattern of movement or ➳


THE CITY
"Max, Kai and Huxley land and walk toward Karmak's bar. It was really fun to design these shots; the middle one was later translated into some of the shots seen in the trailer."

HUXLEY

"Huxley is hooked up to the memory repair machines to try and unlock the secrets hidden in his damaged circuits."

some unexpected animal detail and push it somewhere unfamiliar. There are also many ways to try and come up with ideas. For example, Copic marker techniques we used in school can sometimes help come up with many ideas and you can refine the ones that already look like an interesting silhouette. There are tools like ZBrush that sort of have a different style to them when I create by the nature of using the tool. For mechanical design or environments, Blender and some CAD tools can be better for that etc. Knowing your strengths and what tools can produce different results can help you pick the best tool to solve the problem.

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?
It changes with the task. When I'm trying to solve a difficult story or design problem, I need room to think. Music or a podcast makes more sense once I'm refining an established direction. Stepping away from the screen, walking my dog and returning with fresh eyes also helps. These days I split my time between HUXLEY and professional projects, so having an environment where I can focus matters more than a fixed daily ritual. A constant supply of coffee helps, too.

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?
A few moments stand out. On Elysium, I saw ideas develop from early conversations into a finished film which taught me a lot about building a world with a team. Working on Halo Infinite was surreal because the original Halo helped set me on this path back in high school. I was obsessed with the games; especially the Forerunner architecture made me want to do level design for games. I think each project was really meaningful to me in some way. I grew up on Lord of the Rings, so working with Peter [Jackson] on The Hobbit was also really special to me. But holding the first printed HUXLEY book after years of work was probably the most meaningful moment. It was a world I had chosen to build and chip away at for many years, and now other people could hold it and read it in bookstores worldwide.



THE BAR
"Was really fun to detail out and define the look of Karmak's bar in the underbelly of this old junky city."

Finally, do you have any advice on sketching, or making a career in art generally for those at the beginning of their journey?
Draw a lot, but give your sketches a purpose toward things you are trying to get better at or learn. Try different silhouettes and different sketching techniques, study perspective and anatomy, do master copies and ask why one version communicates better than another. Learn to develop your own voice and taste; it takes time but is part of the journey. Learn to take criticism without losing the part of an idea that excites you. For a career, make work that shows what you want to design and that you can solve problems with a team. Keep making personal work: it gives you a place to discover what matters to you beyond any brief and helps push your work and ideas further. Most importantly, have fun!

"Draw a lot, but give your sketches a purpose toward things you are trying to get better at or learn"

Damani Hughes

Wielding his Sharpie to capture the inhabitants of the animal kingdom, Damani is a tried-and-tested sketchbook artist

Artist PROFILE

Damani Hughes
LOCATION: US



A freelancer with an illustration background. Storyboard artists and animators are his biggest inspiration. He has always loved the fast, gestural style of animators, and achieved this himself via lots of sketchbook drawings. The value of mileage and muscle memory was one of the best lessons he got from drawing every day.
www.Instagram.com/alembroth



CROCODILES

"Reptiles are one of my favourites to sketch because of their almost serpentine movement, especially in water. I think their shape complements the way I like to draw. It's fun to study how they walk and try to express weight in the way they travel across land."

BIRDS

"I like drawing parrots. They're very expressive and colourful, and it's easy to do a caricature of one."





> "I draw what interests me, share it with others and take lots of inspiration"



FACES

"I use my sketchbook as an opportunity to explore character design. I usually start with faces and exaggerate shapes and proportions to see how many variations I can come up with. Beards and cool hairstyles are always fun, so I draw lots of dwarves and angry samurai."

RANDOM ARTWORK

"I try to fill as much empty space as I can in my daily sketchbooks, and there usually isn't much rhyme or reason to it. I just draw what interests me, share it with others and take lots of inspiration from the amazing artists that I do my best to keep pace with."



TUDOR-STYLE ARCHITECTURE

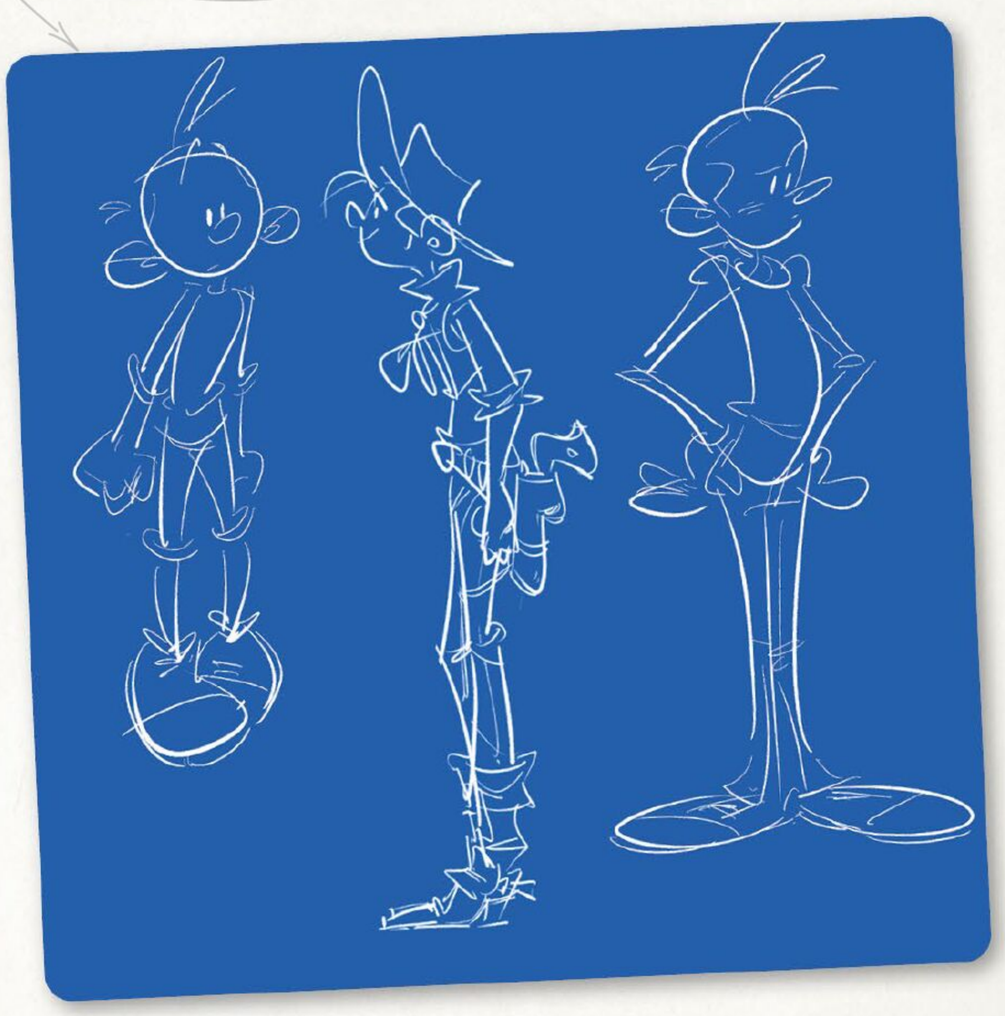
"I'm definitely a noob at this, but I'm a big fan of the fantasy genre, so I'd love to be able to create environments for some of my characters. Thankfully, there are plenty of amazing artists and reference material out there to learn from!"

BANDE DESSINÉE

"I take a lot of inspiration from Franco Belgian-style comics as well. Asterix, Spirou & Fantasio and Gaston are some of my favourites! The linework in Franquin's art is something I study a lot."

SHARPIE SKETCHES

"I've only sketched with Sharpie markers for years now. It's what I do to lessen my fear of making mistakes (no erasing!) and helps make more confident lines. It also keeps me from treating my sketches like masterpieces rather than the exercises they're meant to be."





Matteo Piana

Plenty of research goes into Matteo's black-and-white drawings – he likes to truly understand his subject before depicting them on paper

Artist PROFILE

Matteo Piana
LOCATION: Italy



Matteo is an illustrator, comic artist and concept artist. He has been teaching at various schools and academies for 26 years. His clients include Disney, Lucasfilm, Oxford University Press, Humanoids, Dupuis and many others, with over 250 publications to his credit, ranging from illustrated books and comics to board games. He loves concept art, with a particular passion for environment design.
www.artstation.com/matteoplana

GOBLIN KNIGHT

"When working on grotesque characters, I always learn something new while creating anthropomorphic animals and various costumes, adding objects detached from the subject."

MARAUDER

"When creating new costumes, cultures or technologies, I always base my work on the study of existing cultures, taking various traits and blending them together."

BACK STORY

"I always write a short story – just a few lines – about the characters I design. It helps give the character a backstory and makes it easier to visualise them quickly."

> "I always write a short story – just a few lines – about the characters I design"

BASIC SHAPES

+
STRUCTURES

- MATTEO PIANA -
- ENVIRONMENT CONCEPT
MASTERCLASS -

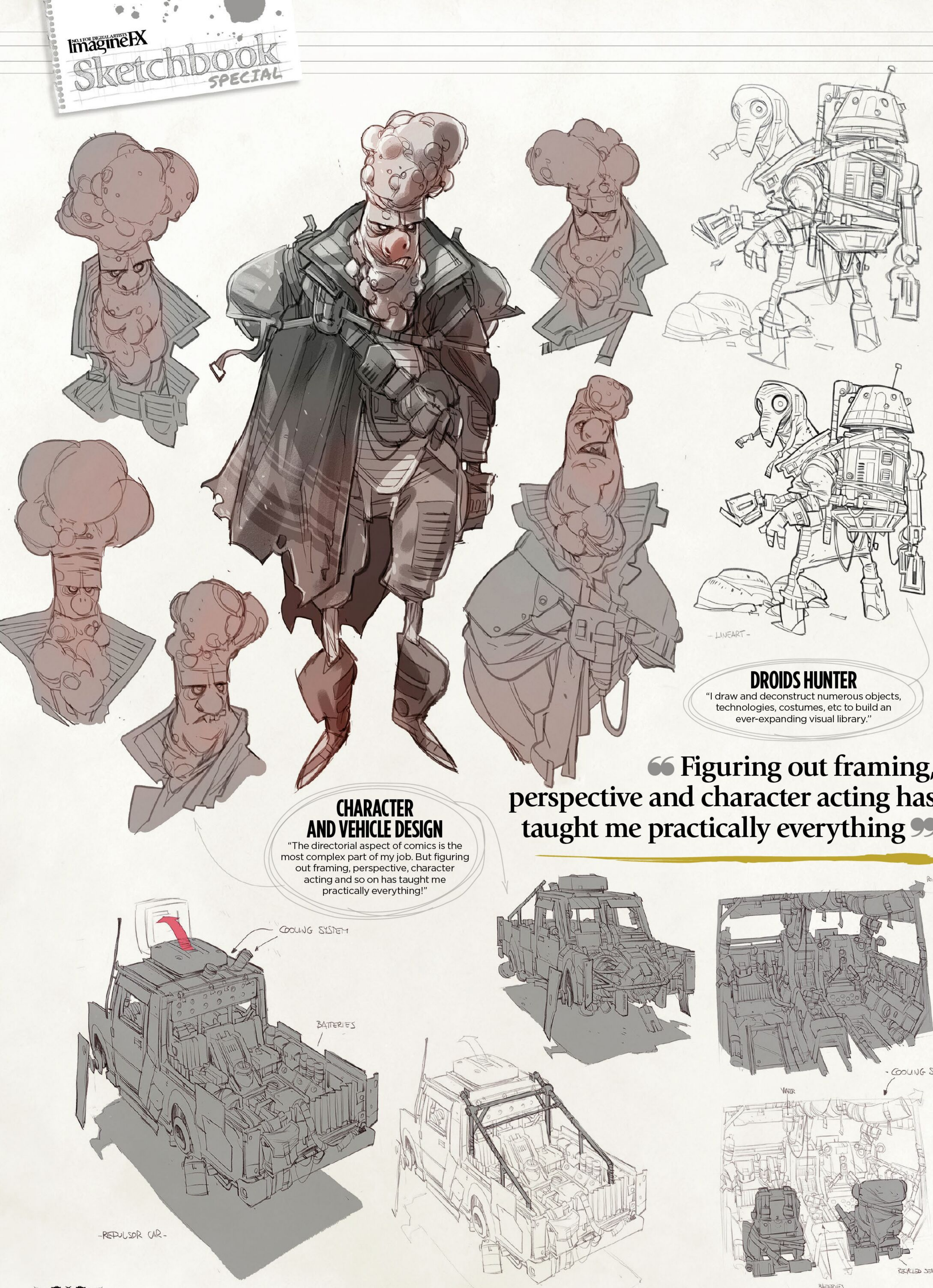
-GATE-

NOT FLAT!

IRON

ENVIRONMENT DESIGN MASTERCLASS

"I love creating environments, technologies and props. Every new setting is an opportunity to expand my knowledge and skills. Drawing new things all the time is the most fun part of my work."



DROIDS HUNTER

"I draw and deconstruct numerous objects, technologies, costumes, etc to build an ever-expanding visual library."

CHARACTER AND VEHICLE DESIGN

"The directorial aspect of comics is the most complex part of my job. But figuring out framing, perspective, character acting and so on has taught me practically everything!"

> **"Figuring out framing, perspective and character acting has taught me practically everything"**

- EDITIONS DUPUIS -
- BIOMECH BEAST - MATTEO PIANA CONCEPT ART
- POWER CELL -
- GIANT SNAKE -
- CREATURE DESIGN -
- GORILLA -
- TIGER -
- BULL -
- DOG -
- LEGS -
- GORILLA -
WRECKING RAY

BIOMECH BEAST

"With characters, I always start with numerous rough gesture sketches to ensure that, above all else, they convey a sense of action or emotion."

- SCAVENGER TRANSPORT -
MATTEO PIANA 625
- EDITIONS DUPUIS -
- A-GRAV VEHICLES -

SCAVENGER TRANSPORT

"The foundation of the work I create (including characters) is perspective. Developing a good sense of spatial perception is the first step toward visualising our subjects on the 'blank page'.Sketching hundreds of objects of all kinds rapidly improves that sense of perception."

GENERATORS
BATTERIES

Dax Gordine

From superherous to childhood whimsy, there are multiple layers to Dax's sketches, infused with life and personality

Artist PROFILE

Dax Gordine
LOCATION: Canada



Dax is an animator, concept artist and illustrator whose vibrant work has brought life to beloved films like Osmosis Jones, Curious George and Eight Crazy Nights, as well as hit video games like Plants vs Zombies: Garden Warfare 2 and 3. He also illustrated Marvel's Giant-Size Little Marvel comic, and created his very own comic series, Forest Folk.
https://daxgordine.com

TEA, ANYONE?

"I love the feel of rough pencil work. Granted, these are digital, but the vibe is the same, and takes me back to my roots in the late '90s at college, training to be an animator."

ADVICE

"I knew I wanted to create a slightly creepy vibe for this project. I am constantly reminded of my youth, my mother reading Beatrix Potter books to us, and the impression those stories left on me. I'm hoping to infuse that into my work here."

> "I look forward to getting back into the design process for the characters"

NPCs

"I am at the tip of the iceberg here, as I've had to move on to a work project for the past couple of months. But I truly look forward to getting back into the design process for all the characters in this world."

Sketchbook Dax Gordine

HEROES?

"These were for a comic strip I did for the Raid Press magazine, Blitz. I wanted to do a more traditional action comic, while being heavily influenced by the incredible Invincible series."

CHANGE-UP

"Sometimes, what you think is the perfect character for the job turns out to be more fun in a different way. Originally, the Cheshire role was given to my cat character, Gus. But I'm now leaning in a new direction to emphasise emotions I always felt when seeing this character on screen."

SEPTEMBER

"I love using geometric shapes that contrast the rough and sometimes chaotic look of the pencils. They are usually used in the background and the shading and contours of the portrait."

André Pelaes David

Finding strength in simplicity, André uses his ballpoint marker to construct vehicles via shapes and proportions

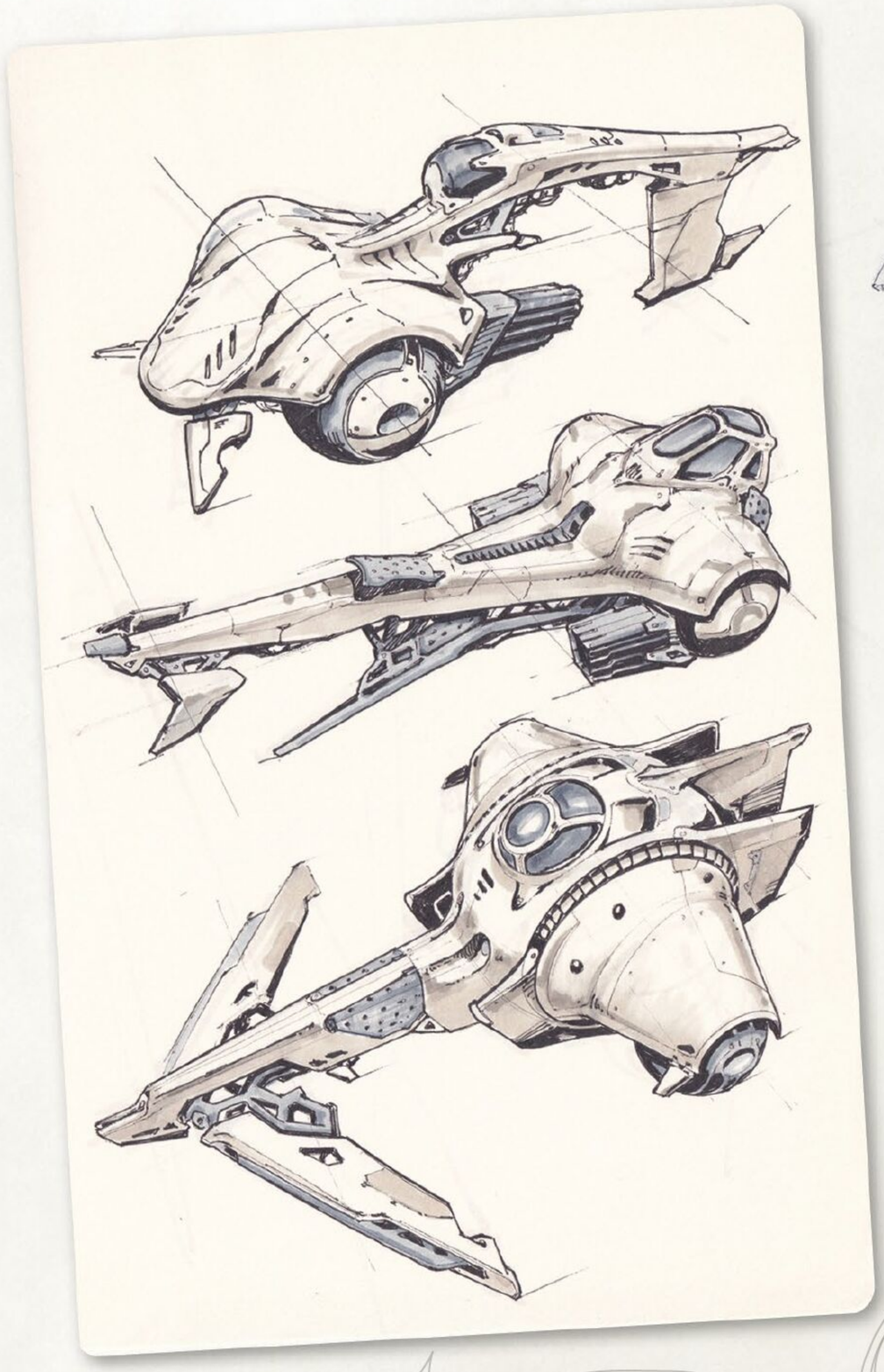
Artist PROFILE

André Pelaes David

LOCATION: Brazil



André has been working as a concept artist for 10 years. He started his artistic career with small graphic design gigs, then got his break after illustrating a book for Disney International Publishing. He has since transitioned to the video game industry and work on many of the AAA titles from the past few years, especially within the FPS genre.
https://bit.ly/4AD8sLJ



QUICK STUDY

"For moments when time is limited, I tend to use a simple marker-to-ballpoint sketch, focusing mainly on building cool shapes and proportions."



RECURRING IDEA

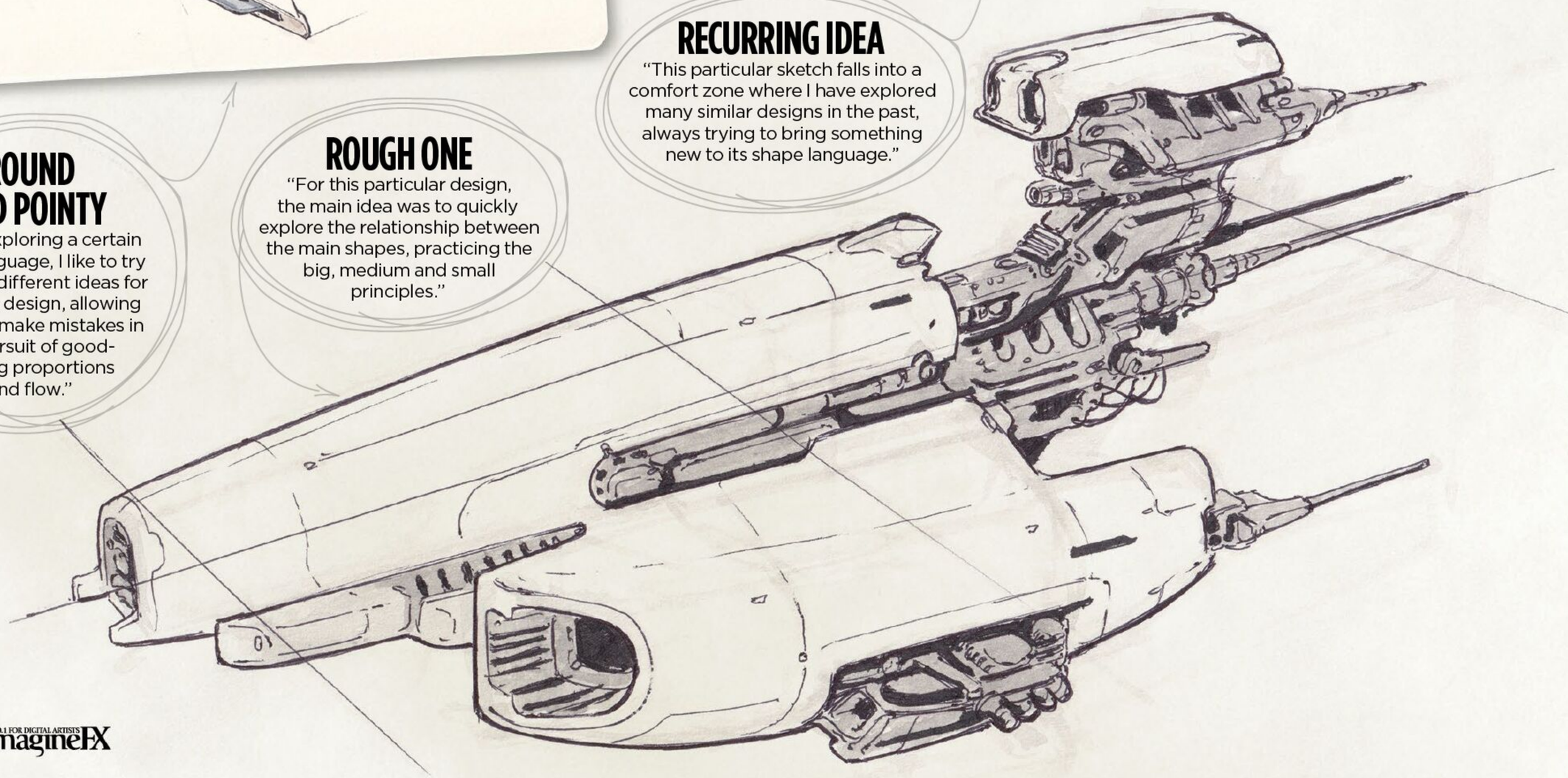
"This particular sketch falls into a comfort zone where I have explored many similar designs in the past, always trying to bring something new to its shape language."

ROUND AND POINTY

"When exploring a certain shape language, I like to try out many different ideas for the same design, allowing myself to make mistakes in the pursuit of good-looking proportions and flow."

ROUGH ONE

"For this particular design, the main idea was to quickly explore the relationship between the main shapes, practicing the big, medium and small principles."



THUMBNAILING
"The very early stages of design exploration, trying out a bunch of different forms, proportions and interesting design features."

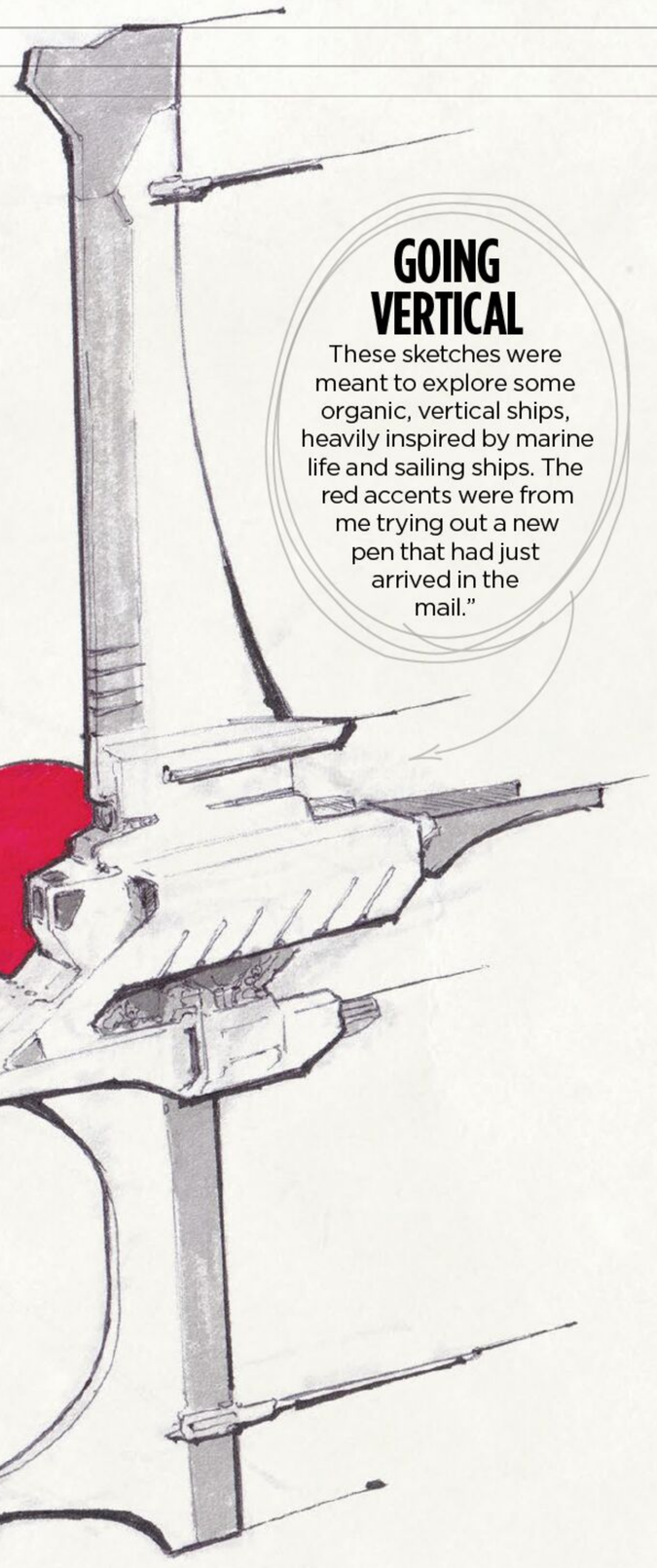
> **"I find inspiration in insects... nature is always a good source of cool shapes and forms"**

INSECTOID
"Finding inspiration in insects for these two. Nature is always a good source of cool shapes and forms."

CLASSIC
"Every now and then, I like to create a more traditionally designed spaceship, inspired by my early 2000s gaming background."







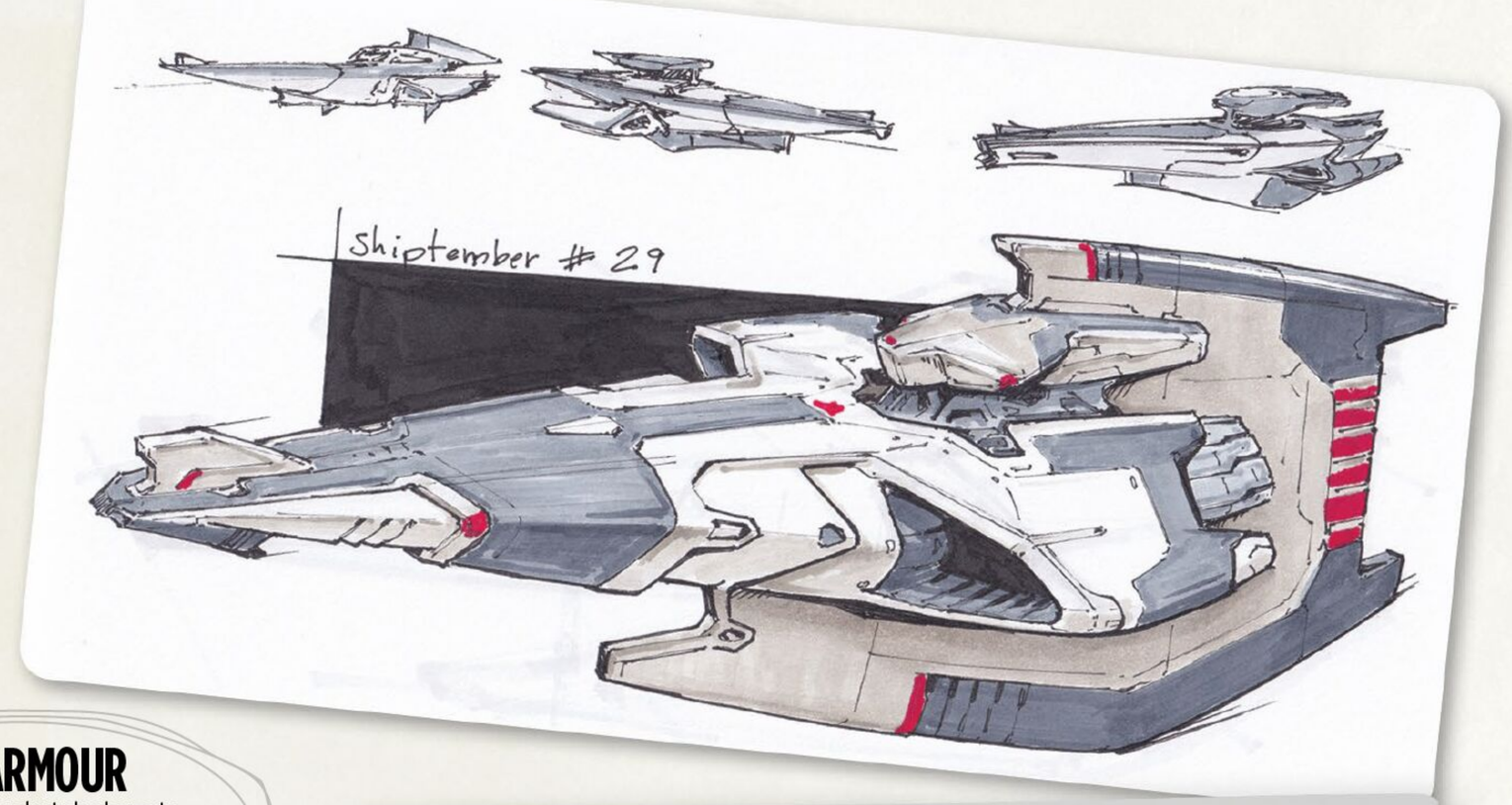
GOING VERTICAL

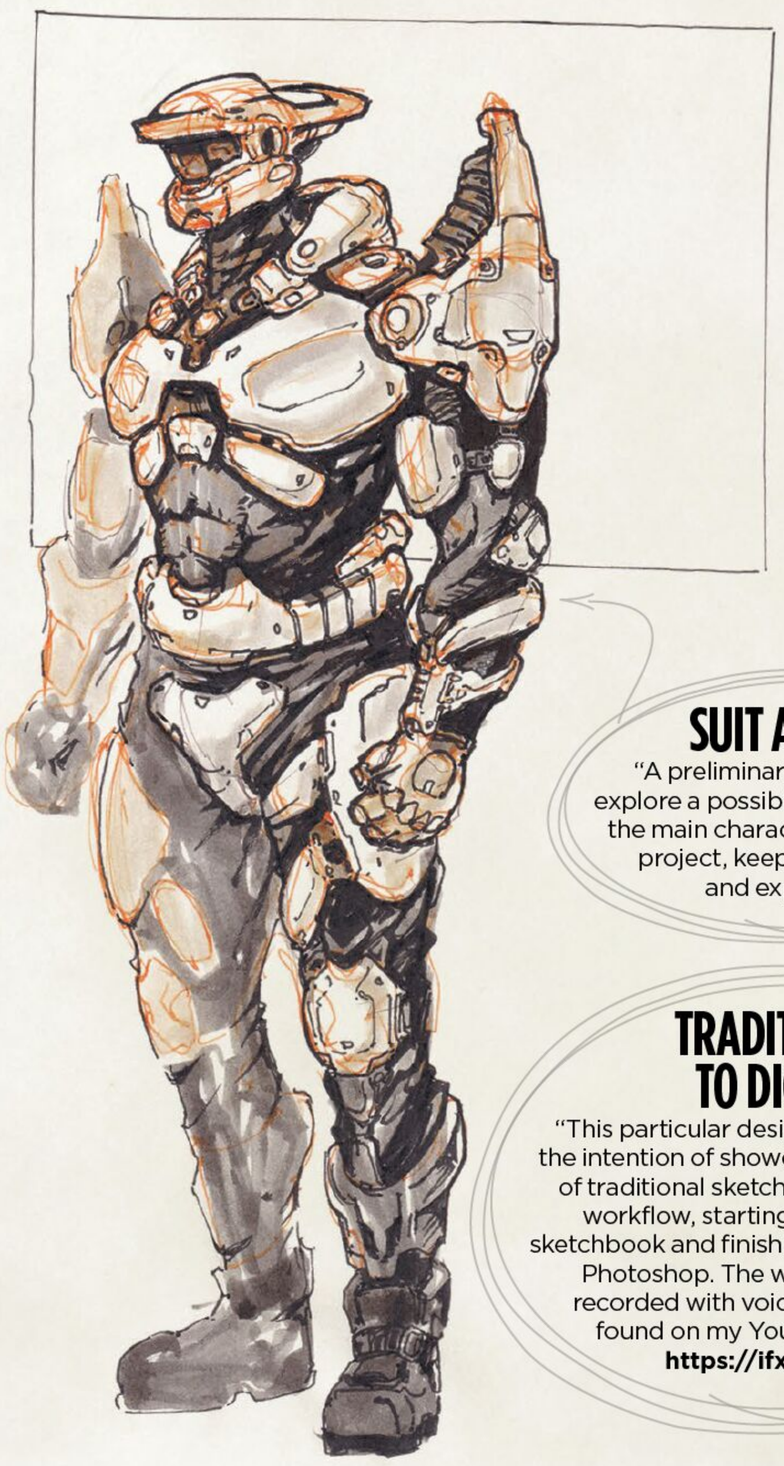
These sketches were meant to explore some organic, vertical ships, heavily inspired by marine life and sailing ships. The red accents were from me trying out a new pen that had just arrived in the mail."

AXIS

"Exploring a design where the ship transitions its form from mainly horizontal in the front portion to mainly vertical at the back, trying to find a good balance and flow."

"The ship transitions its form from mainly horizontal in the front to vertical in the back"



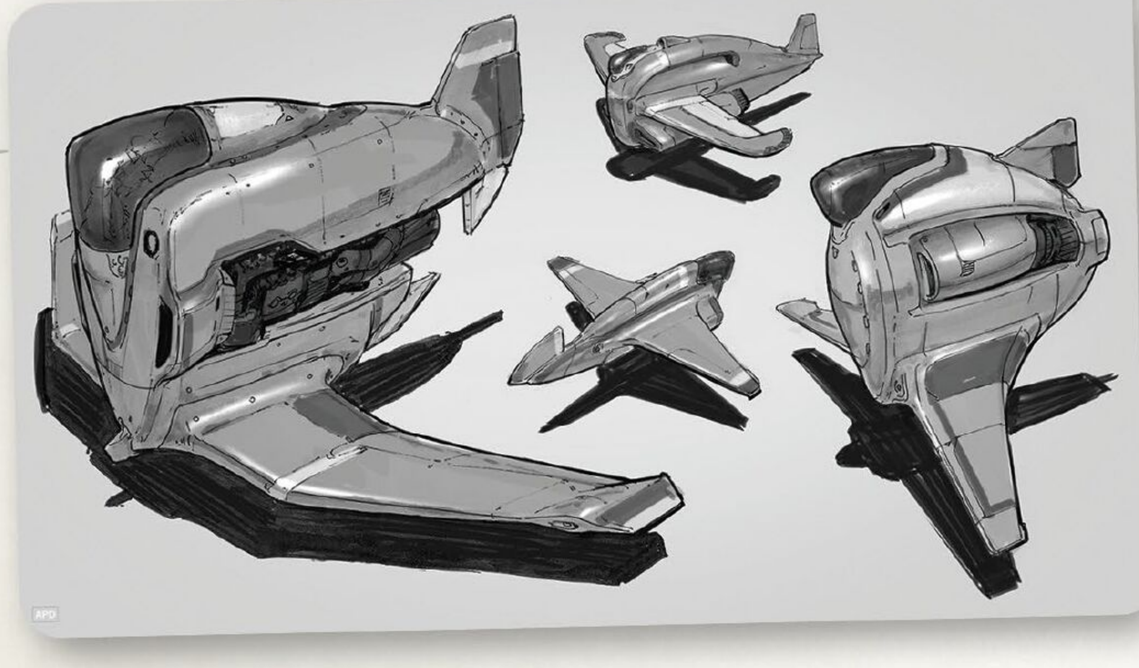


SUIT ARMOUR

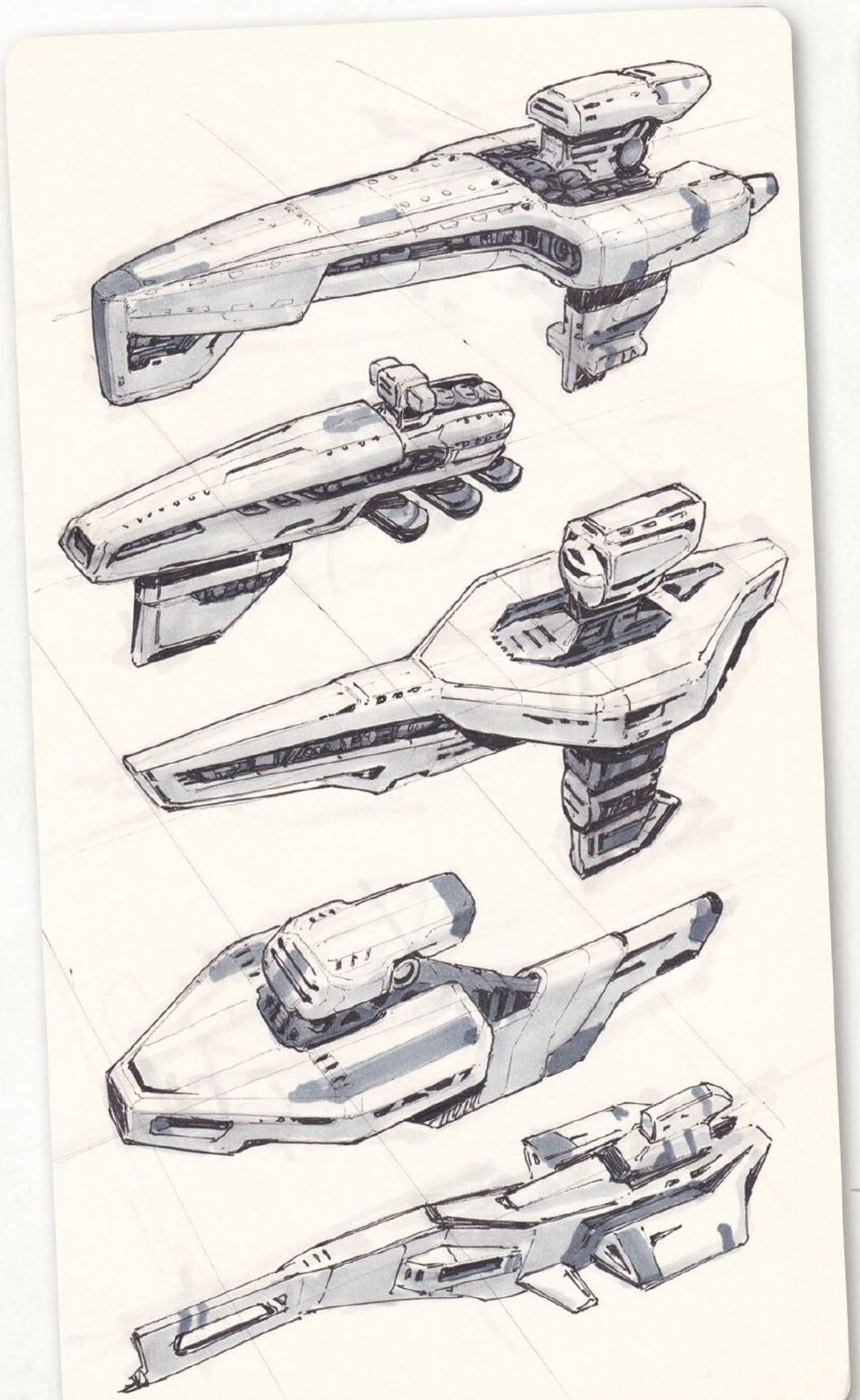
"A preliminary sketch done to explore a possible armour design for the main character of my personal project, keeping it very loose and exploratory."

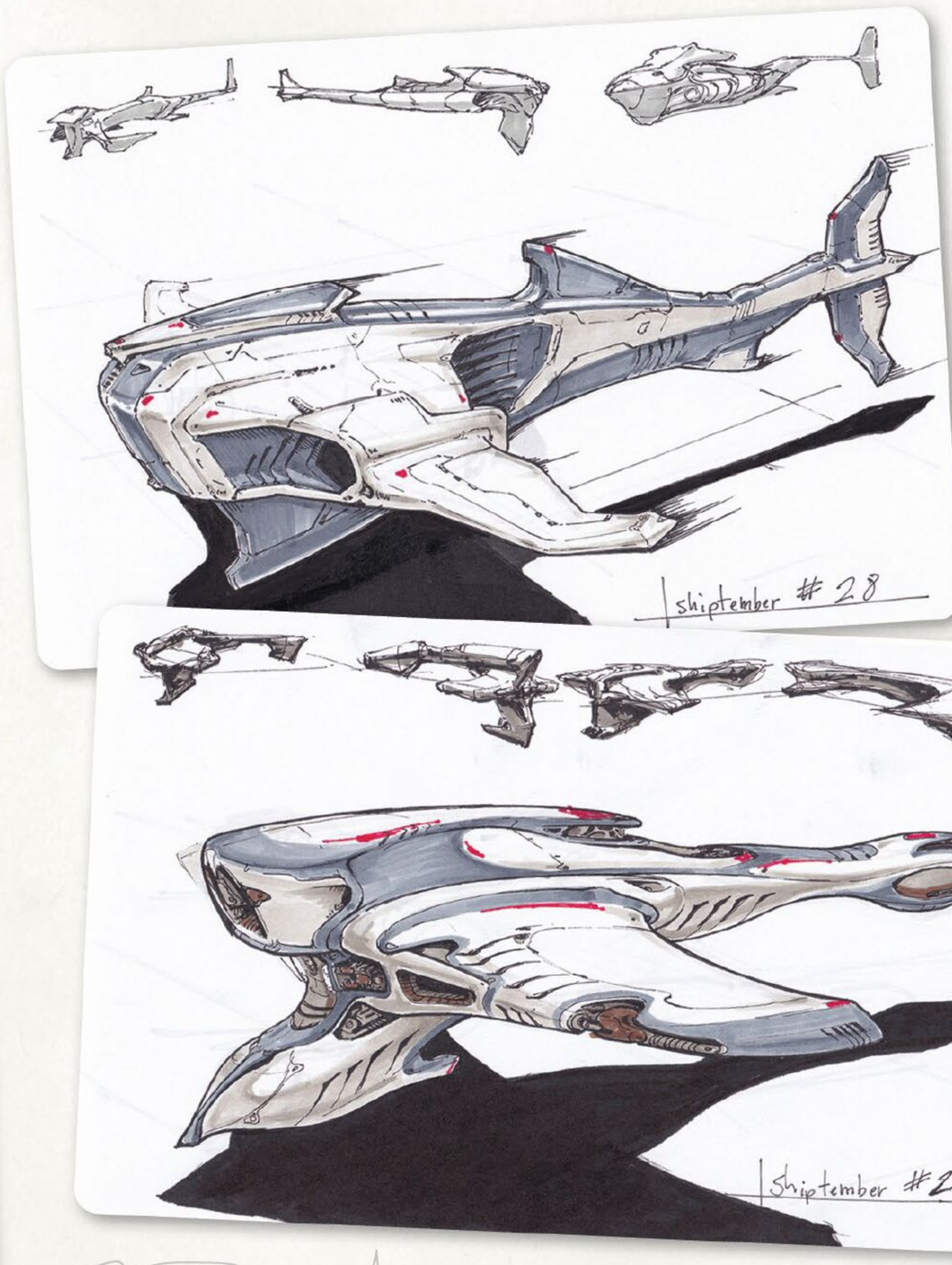
TRADITIONAL TO DIGITAL

"This particular design was created with the intention of showcasing the integration of traditional sketches into a digital-age workflow, starting the design in the sketchbook and finishing the presentation in Photoshop. The whole process was recorded with voice-over and can be found on my YouTube channel at **https://ifxm-andre**."



Sketchbook André Pelaes David





GRAPHICS

"This particular page was used to practice the layout of graphic value break-ups alongside some comfort-zone forms."

FAVOURITE PROCESS

"Gel pen and markers with quick values and light rendering. Doing small thumbnails to explore shapes lets people see the entire design process on a single sheet."

SKETCH TO PAINTING

"Before committing to a full painting, I like to explore value and lighting structures loosely in black-and-white thumbnails."



Aneta Fontner-Dorożyńska

There's an air of classic Disney about Aneta's whimsical, childlike characters, brought to life by traditional pencilwork

Artist PROFILE

Aneta Fontner-Dorożyńska
LOCATION: Poland



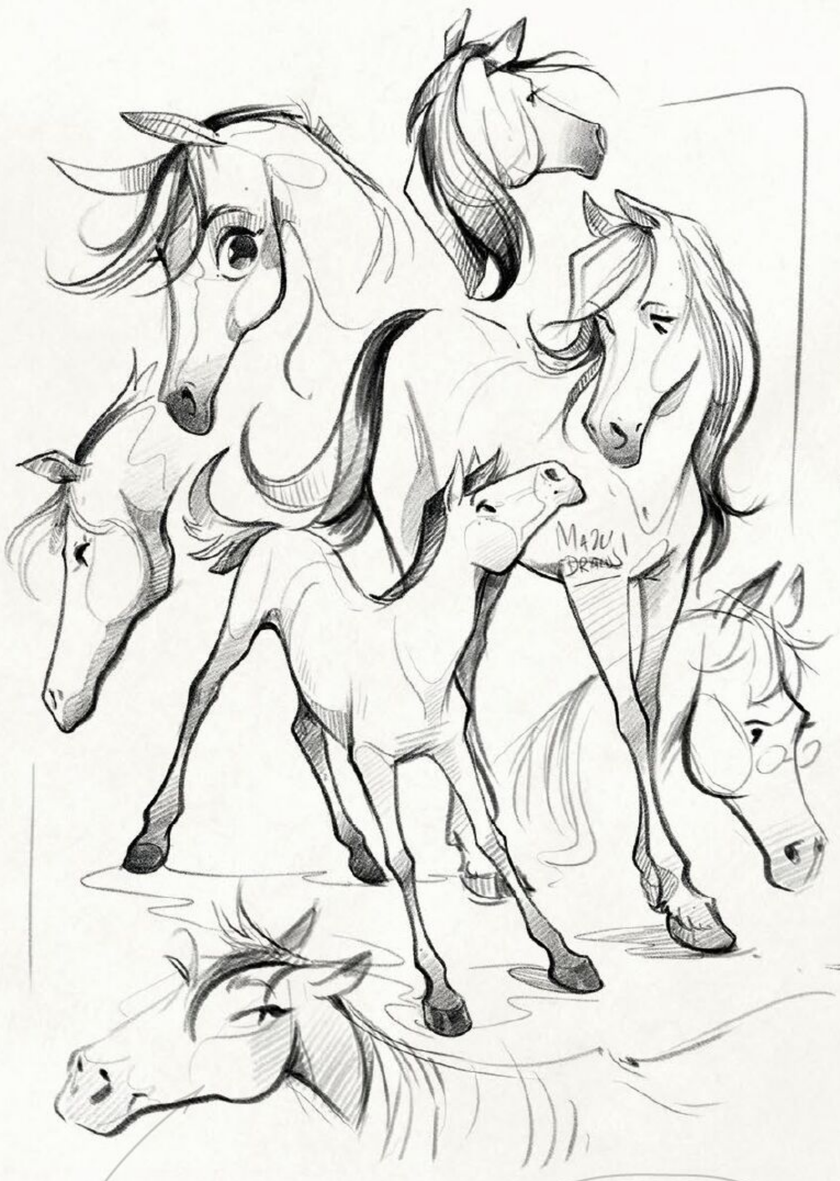
Aneta is a visual storyteller and illustrator who transforms the imagination into expressive and heart-warming characters. Inspired by people, animals and everyday emotions, her work combines warmth, detail and personality. She creates illustrations for various publishing houses, while exploring traditional sketching and digital techniques in order to continuously develop and enhance her artistic practice.
www.Instagram.com/aneta.fontner

FRIENDS
"A sketch made with coloured pencils. Focuses on showing friendship and emotions."

GIRL'S FACE
"A rough sketch to practice the girl's facial expressions."

CHARACTER STUDY
"Early development of a hooded rabbit. The pencil studies in the initial stages focus on establishing silhouettes, testing costume drapery and exploring dynamic movement. This gives the protagonist a sense of weight and purpose."

GRANNY
"An exercise focused on effectively conveying emotions and the emotional dynamics between the characters through facial expressions, body language and subtle interactions."



HORSES DOODLES

"I love drawing horses. I often make practice sketches to better understand their body and anatomy."

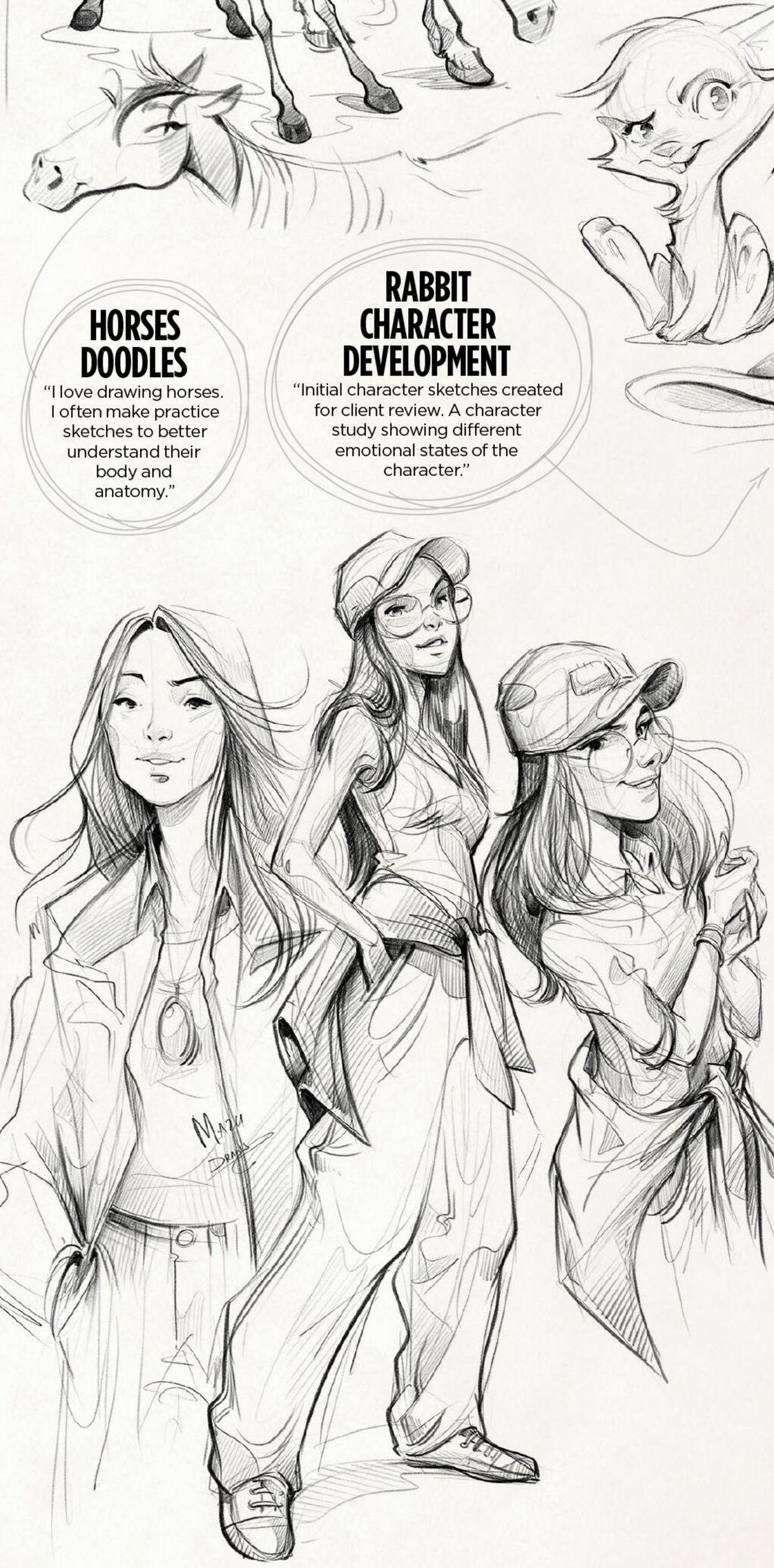


RABBIT CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

"Initial character sketches created for client review. A character study showing different emotional states of the character."



> "I often make practice sketches in order to better understand the body and the anatomy"



WOMAN ROUGH SKETCHES

"Exploring how shifts in posture, clothing folds and expressions have the effect of bringing a character to life."

LITTLE TREASURE

"Testing soft textures and graphite-style shading to capture a quiet, magical moment between. I wanted the light and contrast to carry the emotion without overcrowding the space."





Nashmin Valadi

Focusing on both the elfin and the grotesque, Nashmin uses deft touches of expression in her work

Artist PROFILE

Nashmin Valadi
LOCATION: Italy



Nashmin Valadi is an Iranian illustrator, character designer and concept artist based in Turin, Italy. Holding both bachelor's and master's degrees in painting, her work remains rooted in traditional painterly practice, with a focus on lighting, anatomy and expressive gestures. She creates character-driven worlds shaped by emotion, atmosphere and storytelling.
www.artstation.com/nashminvaladi

CROW QUEEN

"The Crow Queen commands flocks of crows as her eyes, messengers and instruments of magic. Neither wholly benevolent nor cruel, she judges those who seek her help by their nature and past, deciding whether her crows will save, punish or destroy them."

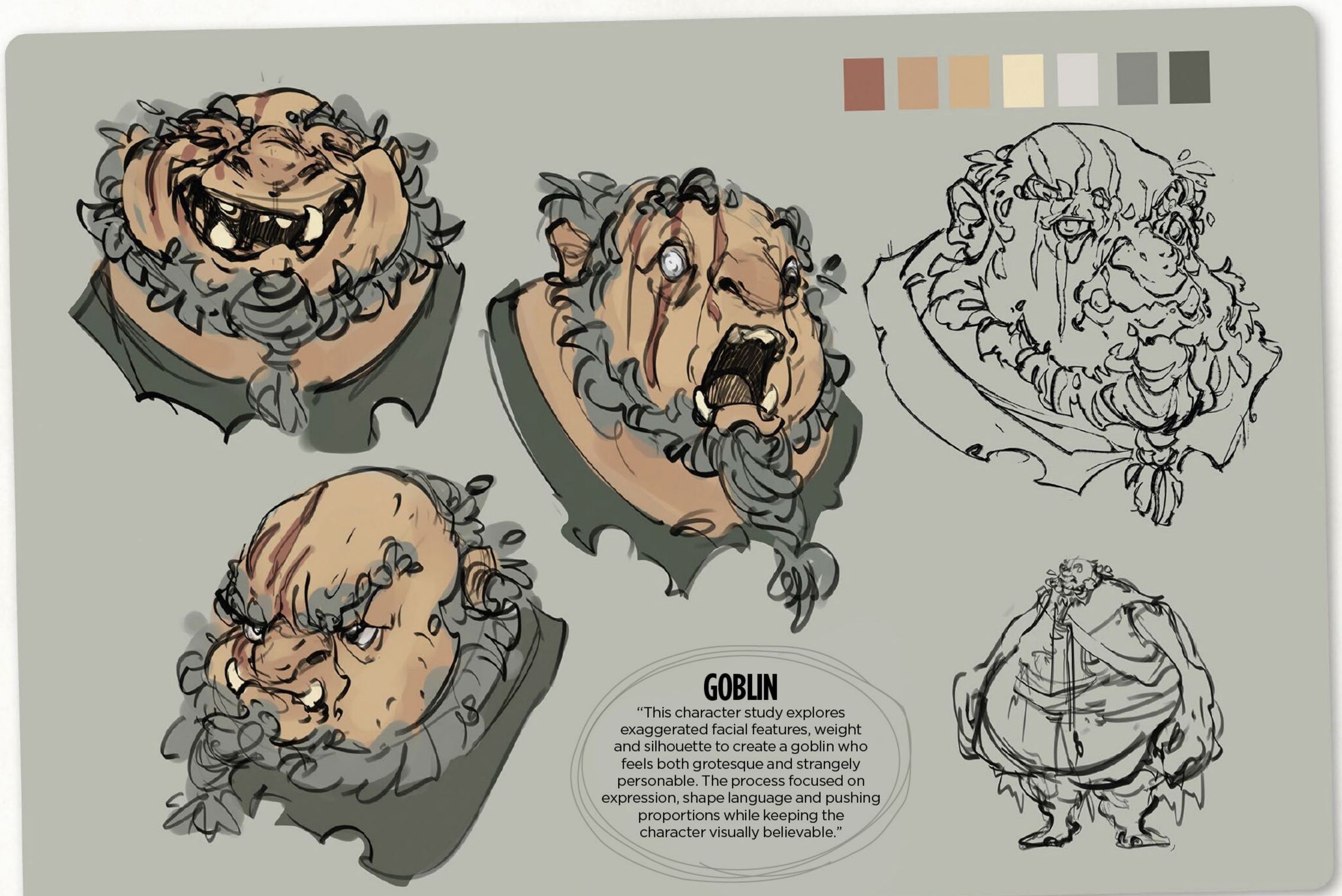
AVIMOR

"Avimor is a nomadic predator whose design evolves with its journeys, incorporating feathers, plants and found cloth. A mammoth tusk becomes both weapon and camouflage perch, while its bird-like movements lure curious prey into a false sense of safety."

PARI

"Pari developed through a series of exploratory sketches focused on movement, silhouette and expressive hands. Her flowing costume and unusual proportions were designed to give her a delicate but slightly unsettling presence, somewhere between elegance, fantasy and strangeness."

"She was designed to have a delicate but slightly unsettling presence"



GOBLIN

"This character study explores exaggerated facial features, weight and silhouette to create a goblin who feels both grotesque and strangely personable. The process focused on expression, shape language and pushing proportions while keeping the character visually believable."

STAGNATION

"Stagnation explores inertia and the fear of allowing life to pass while remaining still. The character is slowly absorbed by nature, reflecting how time and life continue moving around us, even when we stop moving."

PASTORA

"Pastora grew from revisiting my own older work, combining a daily sketch with one of my traditional paintings. The character also became a study of harsh natural sunlight, colour temperature and the vivid cast shadows created outdoors."

Farid Sepehri

Villains and warriors take centre stage in the art of Farid, whose monochrome pieces are steeped in menace and danger

Artist PROFILE

Farid Sepehri
LOCATION: Iran



Farid (also known as Farcool) is a freelance concept artist working across illustration, comics, 2D animation, and character design with a focus on dark fantasy. His passion lies in visual development, dynamic character design, and visual storytelling – building immersive worlds through powerful line work and a personal visual language, refined by years of sketching and exploration.
www.artstation.com/farcool

DARK SOVEREIGN

"A double-page sketchbook spread designed to give this dark lord an imposing presence. I layered fine ink cross-hatching over the skull armour and balanced it with a heavy black background to frame the glowing staff."



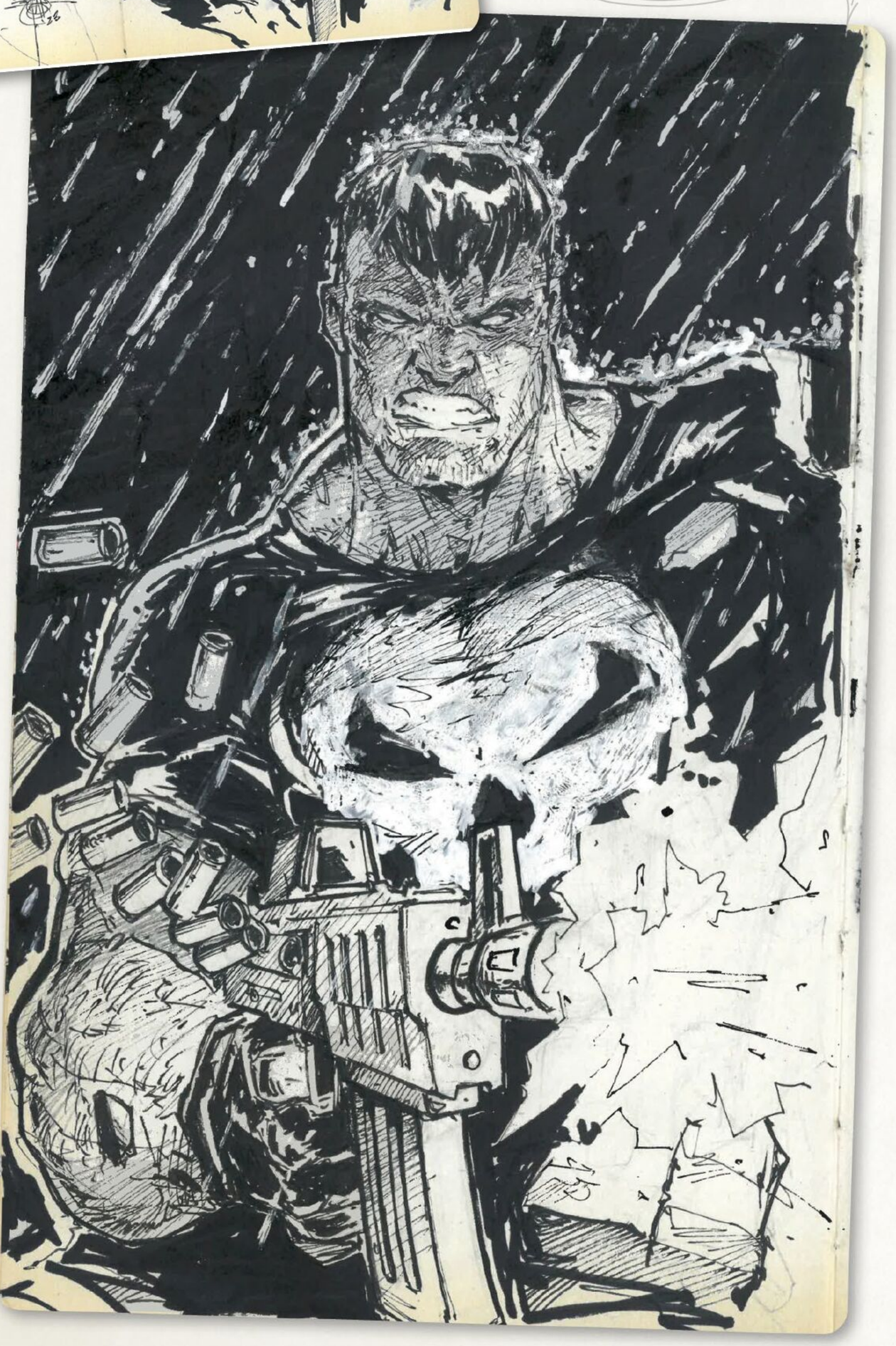
CYBER BRAWLER

"Exploring comic-style explosive movement in my sketchbook. The goal was to contrast the heavy, detailed mechanical gauntlets with fluid, energetic hair flow, using bold black ink shatter-lines to emphasise a powerful superhero landing pose."



RAIN OF BULLETS (PUNISHER)

"This dynamic sketchbook study explores high-contrast comic art, merging action with atmospheric detail. I focused on combining heavy black ink fields with sharp, white rain streaks and an explosive muzzle flash, capturing the raw intensity of the character in battle."



> "Explores high-contrast comic art, merging action with atmospheric detail"

JOKER SMILE

"An expressive character sketch exploring bold shapes, exaggerated proportions and graphic colour. Rather than refining every detail, I focused on preserving the energy of the first pass, where the strongest ideas emerge."





SOUL HARVESTER

"A dark fantasy concept exploring detailed linework and negative space. I focused on building intense texture on the creature's skin with fine pen hatching, making the glowing central skull become the focal point of the page."



WOLVERINE

"A traditional ink study capturing a classic symbiote character in a dynamic, aggressive pose. This sketchbook piece explores the contrast between highly textured body art and fluid, chaotic shadow forms using heavy pen hatching."

ASH BEAST

"This sketch began as a spontaneous ink experiment with no fixed plan. I enjoy letting accidental marks guide the design, refining only the essential shapes until a distinct creature gradually emerges from the chaos."



NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS ImagineFX

Sketchbook SPECIAL



ANCIENT SERPENT KING

"Exploring dense line textures and high-contrast values on traditional sketchbook paper. The goal was to give this reptilian figure an intimidating presence by filling the background with bold, solid black ink strokes."

CHAOS UNLEASHED

"Spontaneous sketchbook exploration of dark creature design. The goal was to maintain maximum energy by contrasting the highly detailed, jagged mouths with fluid, illustrative body lines, creating a monstrous figure that feels unstable and dangerous."

> "The goal was to create a monstrous figure that feels unstable and dangerous"

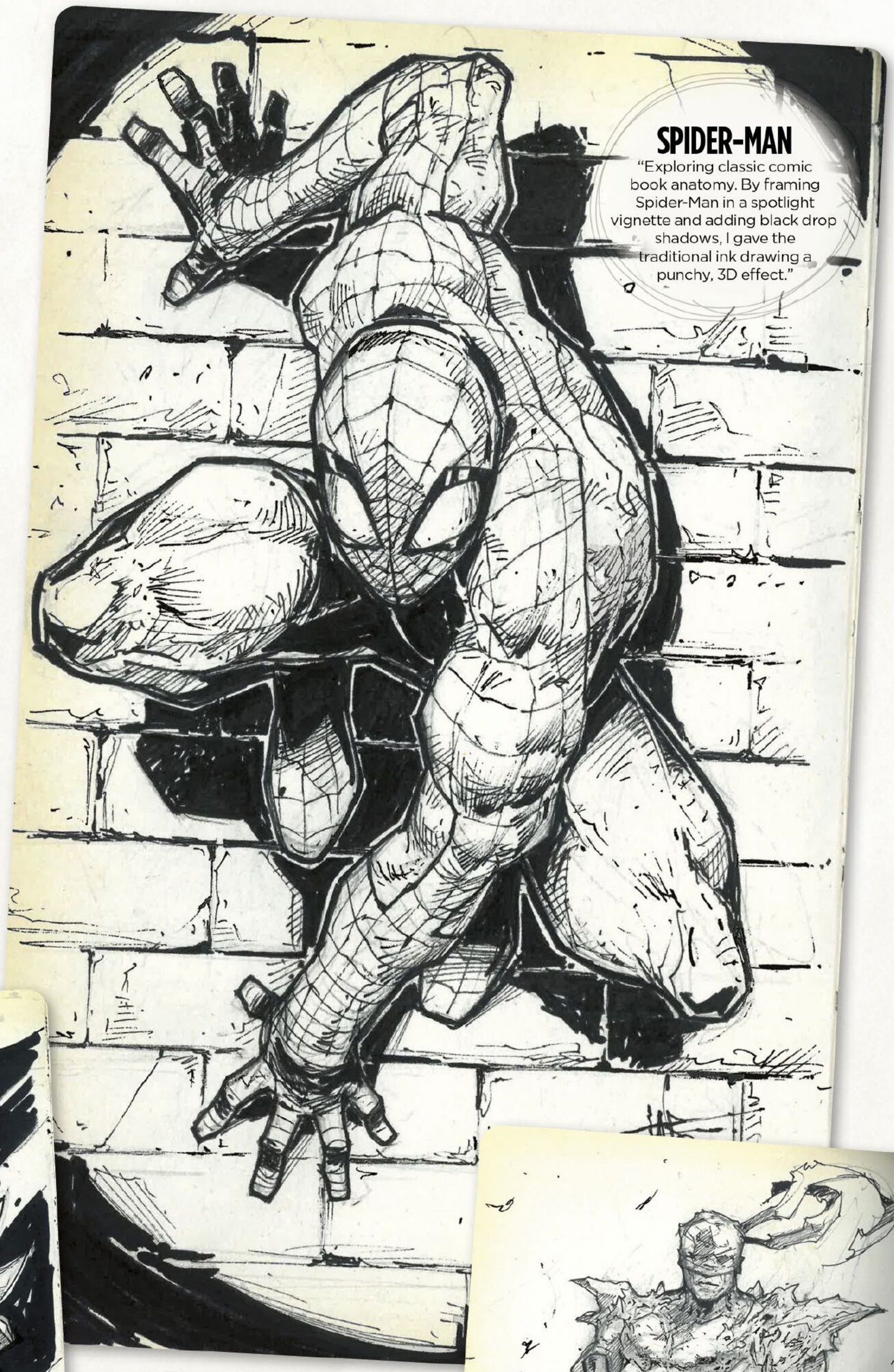
CREEPING INFECTION

"A character study focusing on horror narrative and eerie mood. I used soft digital wash textures combined with sharp pencil details to show a human form being corrupted and controlled by organic, writhing tendrils."



BIOMECHANICAL BEAST

"This practice piece was all about experimenting with unnatural silhouettes and threatening postures. I focused on blending sharp, spiked textures with dark, atmospheric tones to give the monster a dangerous, predatory presence."



SPIDER-MAN

"Exploring classic comic book anatomy. By framing Spider-Man in a spotlight vignette and adding black drop shadows, I gave the traditional ink drawing a punchy, 3D effect."



VENGEFUL WRAITH

"Exploring a classic assassin archetype. I focused on clean linework to define the intricate jagged edges of the gauntlet and weapon, keeping the background abstract to draw attention directly to the figure's menacing silhouette."

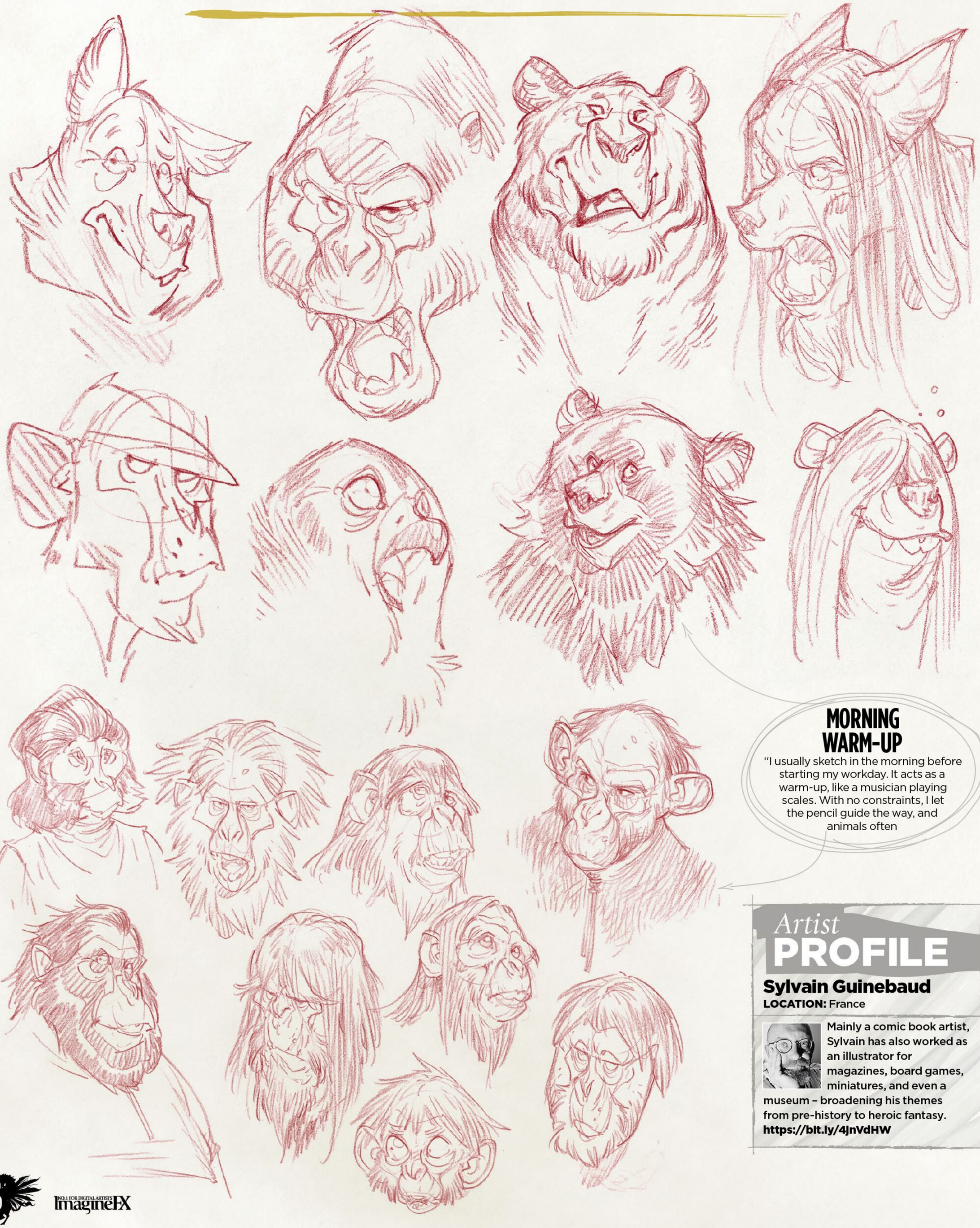
BLADE LORD

"An intricate sketchbook exploration of a masked warrior concept. I focused on balancing fine pencil cross-hatching for anatomical details with high-contrast black ink shadows at the base to anchor the massive sword and powerful pose."



Sylvain Guinebaud

Having illustrated board games and miniatures, Sylvain's background is evident in his expressive character portraits



MORNING WARM-UP

"I usually sketch in the morning before starting my workday. It acts as a warm-up, like a musician playing scales. With no constraints, I let the pencil guide the way, and animals often

Artist PROFILE

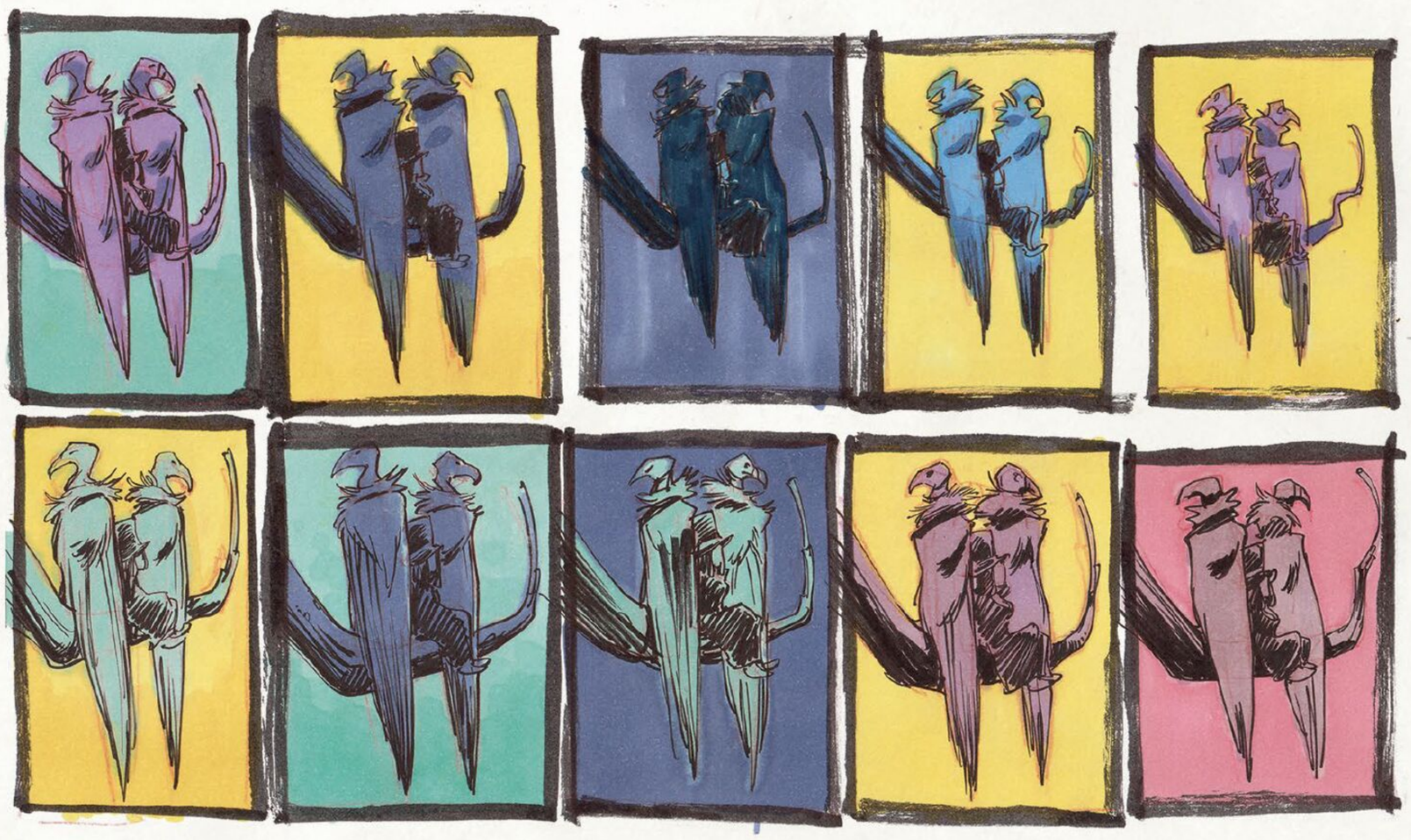
Sylvain Guinebaud

LOCATION: France

Mainly a comic book artist, Sylvain has also worked as an illustrator for magazines, board games, miniatures, and even a museum – broadening his themes from pre-history to heroic fantasy.

https://bit.ly/4JnVdHW

Sketchbook Sylvain Guinebaud



VISUAL THINKING

"Even though it's fun, sketching is a crucial part of my professional work. Like in this illustration for a vulture conservation association: by exploring, testing, and visualising early on, I know exactly where I'm going."

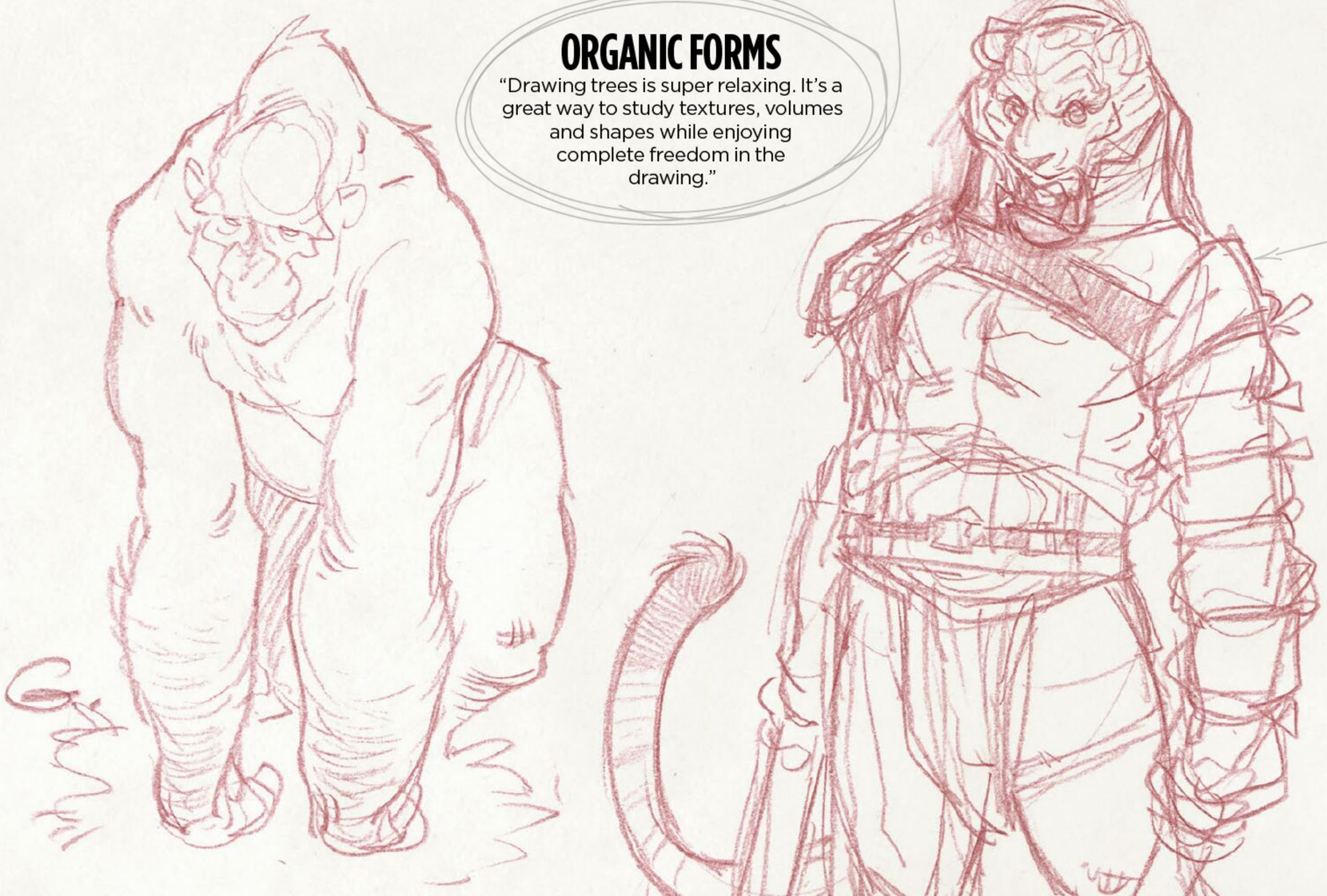
DINOFAN

"Dinosaurs have fascinated me since childhood. Sketching them is a great way to study anatomy and textures, but above all, it's a real pleasure."



ORGANIC FORMS

"Drawing trees is super relaxing. It's a great way to study textures, volumes and shapes while enjoying complete freedom in the drawing."



DIGITAL TRANSITION

"An old sketch from my sketchbook that I used to learn and familiarise myself with the drawing software I now use every day in my professional work."

> "Drawing trees is a great way to study textures, volumes and shapes"

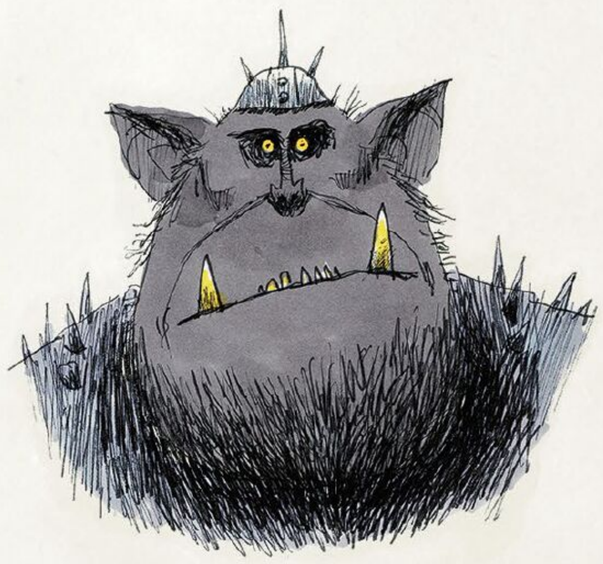
Heidi Marie Smith

Film designer Heidi brings her favourite characters to the page in evocative style, via coloured pencils and chalk to enhance the atmosphere

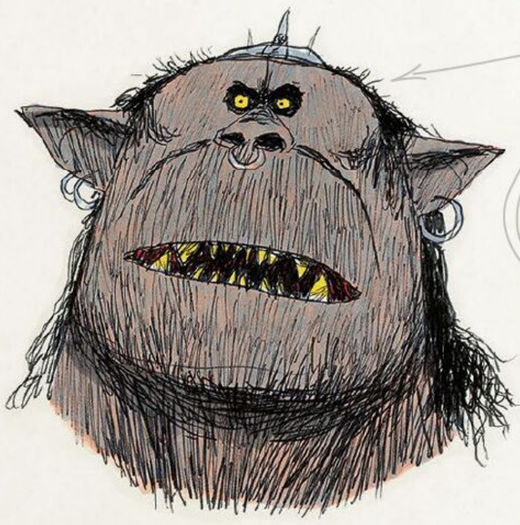


GHOST RIDER

"My inspiration for this digital piece was based on one of my favourite childhood comics, Ghost Rider, Wolverine, Punisher: Hearts of Darkness. I absolutely love the style and textures of the characters in the comic book."







BATTLE DEMONS

"A concept for an army of demons I created with pen and markers. I wanted to show a variety of different faces and personalities for these battle demons."







Artist PROFILE

Heidi Marie Smith

LOCATION: US



Heidi graduated from California Institute of the Arts from the character animation program. She was the character designer on ParaNorman and won the 2012 Annie Award for Outstanding Individual Achievement for Character Design in a Feature Production. She has since worked on several films, including The Wild Robot.

https://bit.ly/4yguUbu

Sketchbook Heidi Marie Smith



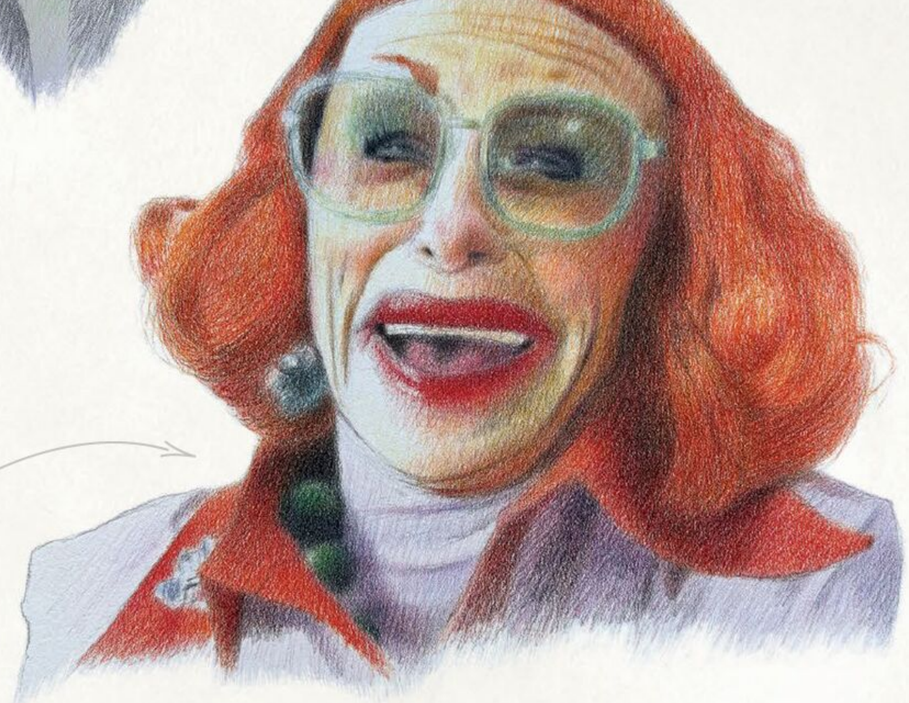
THE CREATURE

"Guillermo del Toro's Frankenstein is a film that deeply resonates with me. The moment I saw the trailer, I was in love. I created this drawing with coloured pencils, and it is one of my favourites."



FALLEN ANGEL

"The Fallen Angel was inspired by a nightmare I had where I saw a tremendous monster with stringy long hair and fingers that resembled the stingers of a scorpion. This piece was created with charcoal pencil."



AUNT GLADYS

"I absolutely love the film Weapons, and the uniquely horrifying character Aunt Gladys brilliantly played by Amy Madigan. I made this drawing with coloured pencils."

DRACULA

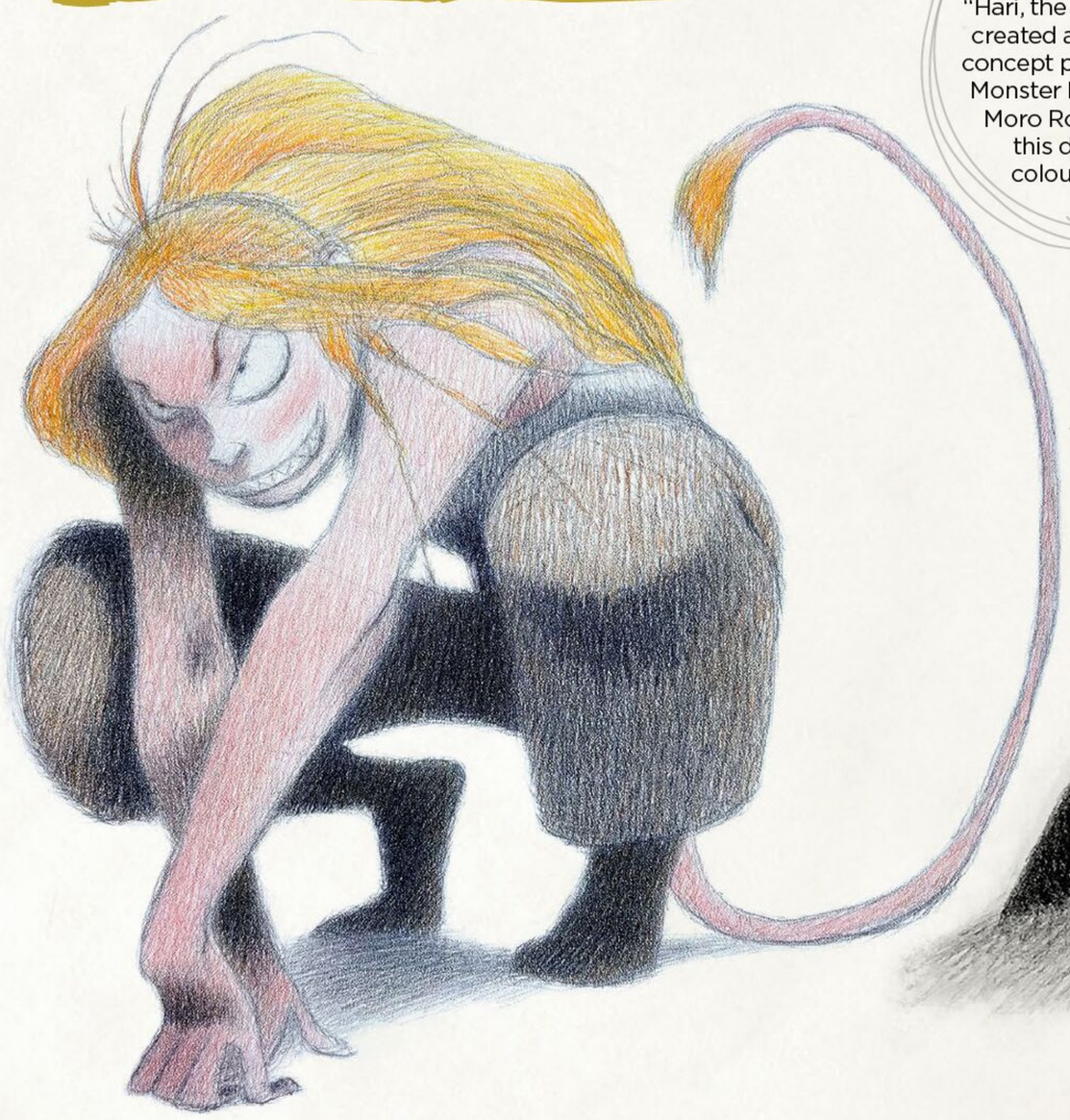
"A monster I have always identified with is Dracula. Some of the characters I created for the film ParaNorman were directly inspired by the 1992 film, Bram Stoker's Dracula. I created this piece with charcoal pencil."



> "I saw a monster with stringy long hair and fingers that resembled a scorpion"

MONSTER GIRL

"Hari, the Monster Girl was created as a promotional concept piece for The Last Monster Hunter, a film by Moro Rogers. I created this drawing with coloured pencils."



Interview

Loish

An artist specialising in character design, we speak to her about her illustration process, how she gets going and her career highlights



REFLECTION

"Speed-painting is always a great way to test out different brushes and textures! It's all about improving efficiency and putting the focus on the colours and vibe, rather than small details."

Did you have a formal education in art, or are you self-taught?
I'd say that it's probably kind of a mix. I did go to animation school, but everything I know about digital art and drawing characters, I taught myself. We didn't get much guidance in skill development outside of animating at my art school. I did learn a lot of really great stuff in animation school, but I taught myself everything I know about using Photoshop to draw, and how to draw the types of characters that I'm known for.

How much of a part does sketching play in your workflow, and what does that look like?
Sketching is a really important part of it. I feel like the sketching phase is the most dynamic and energetic part of the process, and the rest of the process is all about trying to maintain that energy and make sure that it doesn't get lost in the rendering. I also don't really draw clean lines, so I go straight from sketch to colour. In that sense, the sketch is truly the foundation for the art that I create! I also love diving into my sketchbook from time to time. It's the place where I feel that I can be more experimental and free with what I choose to draw.

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?
I think it's a bit of both. I sketch to play with ideas and put my thoughts onto paper, but I also sketch to practice anatomy, expressions and studies of different types of subject matter. Those are two distinctly different types of sketching practice that I do. I think it's good to keep them separate – my ➳

> **"The sketching phase is the most dynamic and energetic part of the process"**



YELLOW SKETCHES
"Painting over my sketches in Procreate is a great way to test different rendering styles."



INK STUDIES
"Brush pens are a great way to capture dynamic lines and shapes."

Artist PROFILE

Loish
LOCATION: The Netherlands



Loish is a digital artist and character designer. She has worked for clients such as Lego, Guerrilla Games and Amazon, and has released three books, all of which were published by 3dtotal and successfully funded through Kickstarter. She is currently focusing on creating personal artwork, as well as creating monthly tutorials and learning content on Patreon.
https://loish.net

idea sketching is very loose and messy, while my practice sketching is a bit more technical.

You've produced work across many mediums, from film and TV to comics and games. Is there one of these that sparks your enthusiasm more than others? If so, why?
It really does depend on the project. I'm not a gamer or an avid comic reader, but I love animation and film, so that medium sparks my interest more than the others. But I love working on a project where we really have time to explore, iterate and push the design. Even though I'm not a gamer, triple A games provided the kinds of projects that had a budget and timeframe that allowed for this kind of exploratory work. I really enjoyed those projects the most!

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?
Most often I work digitally, with the first sketch lines to the final brush strokes all being on the computer. I just

> "I love having time to explore, iterate and push the design"

dive straight into the creative process and my initial sketches get integrated into the painting. I also like drawing in my sketchbook, and sometimes I'll scan something from my sketchbook and use that as a jumping-off point in order to make some paintings. Sometimes, I just want to test out a rendering style, so I'll grab a sketch that I made previously as the primary starting point for it.

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?
I work over the top of a sketch, but sometimes that means I lose sight of the original sketch, as it gets covered up by rendering. So sometimes I'll put a copy of the sketch on my reference board to make sure I don't lose track of the energy and movement in it!





GREYSCALE PORTRAITS

"Playing around with charcoal effects on the iPad! "



COLOUR PORTRAITS

"Experimenting with a new set of polychromos pencils."

COLOURED PENCIL SKETCH ILLUSTRATING

Loish discusses the results of going analogue again by switching from digital drawing to hand-drawn art

I've been experimenting with coloured pencils this year. As a digital artist, it can be frustrating to try digital media – there's no undo button, after all – but there's something incredibly satisfying about finding the middle ground between my pencil sketches and more colourful digital art. I especially love mixing warm and cool tones to create a really vibrant effect. I'm also learning about gradually layering on more and more colour. This is definitely my new favourite medium to sketch in!



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?
I honestly don't really paint those kinds of topics. I wouldn't call myself a fantasy artist. But I'm generally someone who starts with a pose and organises details around it so that the additional elements follow the movement of the pose.

What kind of atmosphere 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 have an effect on your work?
It really helps to be in my studio setting without any distractions. I like having my reference board in my field of vision, and if I'm feeling really activated, a podcast really gets me through. But most of the time, music is what really inspires me. It creates a kind of vibe and mood that I can channel into my art!

What has been the proudest moment in your career? Has there been a time when you've had to do a double take at what you've achieved, given the clients that you've worked with?
It's hard to pinpoint one moment, but there have been a few moments that are very dear to my heart. There was an exhibition of my art at a Dutch museum called Storyworld that was about comics, games and film – I was their opening exhibition and that was a huge moment for me! Last weekend, I also had a huge career highlight, when my art hero Glen Keane bought my books and said that my art was great. Getting that recognition is a really big deal to me!

> "Having a sketchbook on hand where you can doodle is a really good idea"

Finally, do you have any advice on sketching, or making a career in art generally for those at the beginning of their journey?
I think sketching is where it starts, and it gets your creativity going. Having a sketchbook where you can doodle out your ideas is a really good idea. It sounds obvious, but I went through a phase where I only sat down to draw if I was going to create a finished piece, and that's a creativity killer. Set aside time to doodle without the expectation to finish anything, and that will really keep your ideas coming!

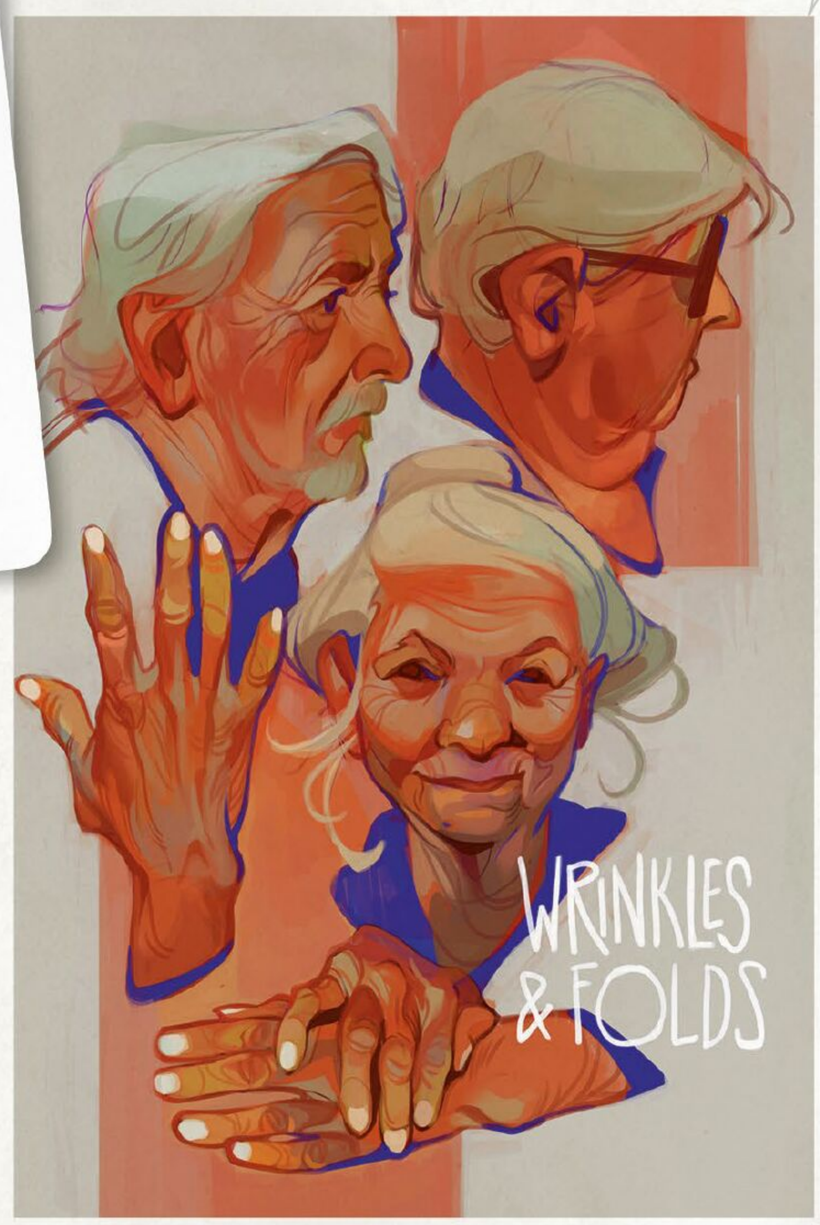
TREE SKETCHES

"Twisty, ancient trees are always so interesting to draw."



WRINKLES AND FOLDS

"Aged faces are often so much more interesting than youthful ones."



WHALE CONCEPTS

"These are some preliminary ideas for a more detailed painting I want to make."

SNOW SPEEDPAINT

"I painted this on the iPad after heavy snowfall in my neighbourhood."



Lander Strijbol

Eastern inspirations are evident in the art of Lander, who switches between traditional and digital media

Artist PROFILE

Lander Strijbol
LOCATION: Belgium



Lander lives in Bruges, Belgium. As an illustrator, he makes stylised illustrations for clients such as Wizards of the Coast, 3dtotal, Hasbro and others. He is also working on visual development for animation projects. In his free time, he likes to go plein-air painting with watercolour and gouache.
www.artstation.com/landerstrijbol



TRADITIONAL VS DIGITAL

"When sketching, I sometimes jump between digital and traditional media. This is a piece that went back and forward between the two. I did a sketch on paper, some colour on the iPad, made some watercolour textures on paper again and then added some more elements digitally. I like to bring the best of both worlds together."



OLD PAPER

"You can sketch on any paper, and I would say the best paper is the paper you use, not the ones that stay untouched. That being said, I do love old paper with some discolouration and stains. Stains can give you small hints for shapes or textures. These are sketches on old toned paper I found."





Sketchbook Lander Strijbol



GO WITH THE FLOW

"You can start a sketch by moving your pencil around and try to create lines with a flowing motion; lines you can turn into something like a dragon, foliage or whatever else you might want."

> "I like to let some of the underpainting peek through in the final result"



FINISH IT LATER

"This is an example of a sketch I really like, even though there are a lot of elements that I would like to change. I like that it has a bit of a story going on and it triggers my imagination. A sketch in your sketchbook does not need to be a finished piece; it can also give you a spark of inspiration for your next work."

NO BRUSH NO PROBLEM

"For me, a sketchbook is also a tool for experimentation and exploration. This example is really messy, but I like the textures and brushwork. I used an old sponge and a toothbrush to create those textures. I intentionally pushed it a bit too far to see what happened and embraced the imperfections of the unusual tools."



ORANGE IS THE NEW BLACK

"When sketching digital, I like to use an underpainting. Most of the time, I use a yellow ochre or orange to create a silhouette. I make sure the silhouette works and then start building the details and colour on top of that. I do like to let some of the underpainting peek through in the final result, just like the old masters used in underpainting."



Reverie Collins

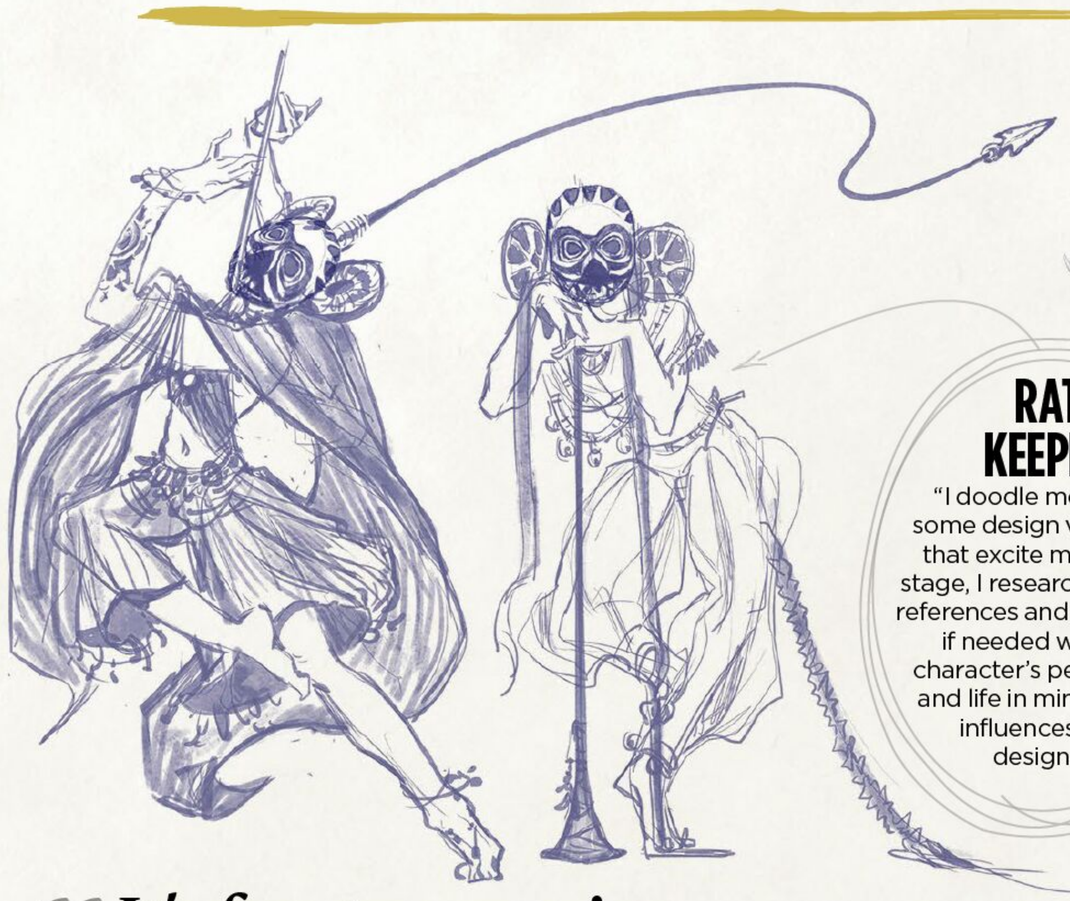
The whimsical designs on show here harp back to nature, merging with the more fantastical to create something truly unique

Artist PROFILE

Reverie Collins
LOCATION: Canada



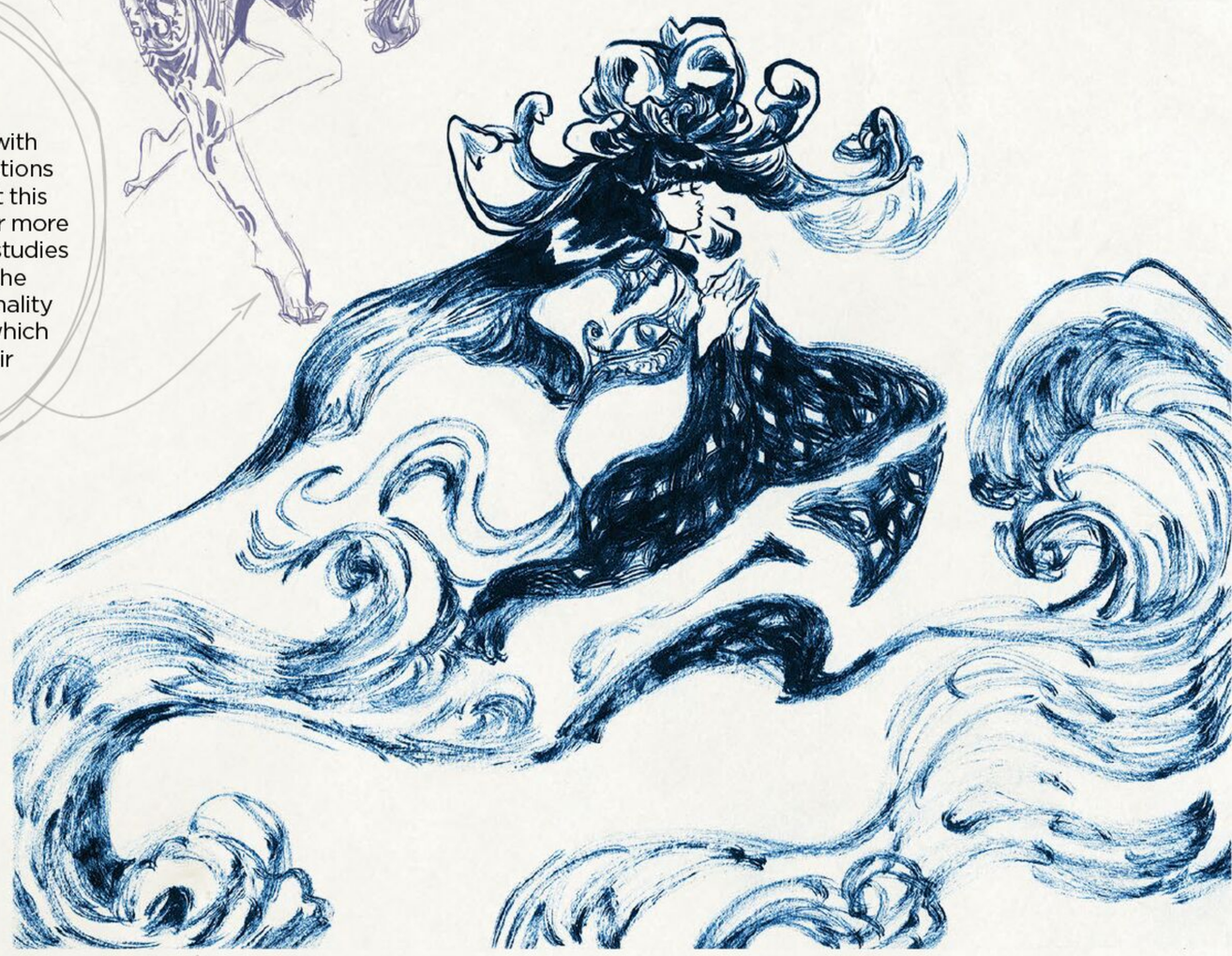
Revi has a background in character design, storyboarding and illustration, while in her free time, she loves to mindlessly doodle anything in nature on paper – if she isn't wandering in the wild barefoot. She hopes that everyone can find the freedom to draw what they truly love instead of what they think will be loved.
www.instagram.com/revitherabbit



RAT KEEPER

"I doodle more with some design variations that excite me. At this stage, I research for more references and do studies if needed with the character's personality and life in mind, which influences their designs."





> "It's fun to surprise yourself and let go of control in your sketchbooks"

SNOW OWL

"I enjoy drawing traditionally the most, as if a special connection is maintained when I feel my pencil and pen gliding on the paper."

TRUST YOUR INSTINCT

"I usually start my doodles with random strokes, without any planning! It's fun to surprise yourself and let go of control in your sketchbooks, which have been my favourite playground and birthplace of almost all my favourite drawings! This piece started with some strokes to test a dying brush pen, and I showed my gratitude by personifying it as a princess who sacrificed herself to the sea for her people."





BE MINDFUL WITH STUDIES

"Time helps you to focus on one or two goals and develop personal shorthands. For example, I have very different goals with these 2-5 minutes figure drawings."

GOLDFISH GIRL

"Sometimes, I could get really nerdy and excited about a project that I couldn't sleep thinking about it!"

BIRDIE LUNCH BREAK

"I'm obsessed with animals and drawing them! I love their instinctual way of living without the burden of human anxieties, existential dread or complex societal rules."

SKY GUARDIAN

"Study for the sake of making your own world and design. You don't need to be good at drawing everything before you allow yourself to draw what you love or what matters to you."

Javi Salas

Depicted in his trademark frenetic style, Javi likes to juxtapose different styles and colours among a cast of regular subjects

Artist PROFILE

Javi Salas
LOCATION: Stockholm



Javi is a full-time doodler who loves art as a way of living in any form. His senses are always open to register smells, images, experiences feelings and that are key to his passion for drawing. He currently works as a senior artist and art director. He is based in Stockholm, and stays fit to both balance his career and keeps his life and brain in check.
www.artstation.com/javiersalas_art



PROTOTYPE_001

"Some loose sketches, perfect to warm up, where I have fun emphasising shapes with one ink."

DOUBLE PAGE TYPE B

"I love rendering my characters in a loose way, and observing the graphic impact they have. Looking at the loose elements and the juxtaposition of everything together is satisfying to me."

> "Looking at the loose elements and juxtaposition is satisfying to me"



Sketchbook Javi Salas



DOUBLE PAGE TYPE Z

"Crowded compositions help me to learn how to balance the colours, layout, movement and how to take the viewer from beginning to end. Here, I kept memories from walks around the city and some travels. I love adding small details like my favourite food and sticky notes, where I can remember places, names and things."

SWISS MOUNTAINS/ TRADITIONAL P1

"I took my sketchbook to a retreat in the mountains, where I was inspired by flowers, roof designs and everything else around me. It was an opening to a series that will evolve into something chaotic and full of colours."





DEMONS/ TRADITIONAL P2

"An evolution from being shy to becoming playful with composition, typography, colours and scales. Anime was my company while doing this."

MILA/ GIRLS NIGHT OUT

"Mila is my fictional OG character. Her edgy, tounge-in-cheek personality is inspiring and gives me tons of ideas about universes where she can be placed."





MULTIVERSE

"I feel way more inclined in this page to play around with edges in an aggressive way. Strong colors can capture a millisecond of attention that can become gold."

DOUBLE PAGE TYPE X

"Friends, places that I love – I gather everything together and play with ideas about how I can create a nice layout where they can co-exist. Different times – sci-fi, retro, modern – all play in the same universe."

> "I play with ideas about how I can create a nice layout where they can co-exist"



MILA POSE

"Let's go dynamic! Mila's universe always helps my brain out with new ideas about dynamic poses, other themes, times and colours."

WITH LOVE...MILA

"My last page is just a collection of feelings and moments where I wait for weeks until I have the right frame to add. The result? Always unpredictable."

SLAY!! MEDIEVA - MILA PROTOTYPE

"As a graphic designer, I enjoy designing fonts, symbols and characters that can translate into one universe together. With edgy colours, my style and some VFX, I find more and more ways to accomplish that."





"Brimstone"/"Zlatá krev" by Callie Hart for Mystery Press, 2026

Next month in...
NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS ImagineFX

MASTER BOOK ILLUSTRATION

Learn to paint realistic and detailed fantasy covers with **Luisa J. Preissler**

Designing the world of Orbitals
Learn how classic retro anime inspired the new video game from Shapefarm

Inside a Disney animator's studio
Tony Bancroft lets us loose around his studio, packed with film memorabilia

Character design masterclass
Piotr Chrzanowski shares techniques for successful art and worldbuilding

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Editorial
Editor **Rob Redman** rob.redman@futurenet.com
Art Editor **Daniel Vincent**
Sub Editors **Steve Wright, Stanley Bull, Phil King**

Contributors
Matthew S. Armstrong, Reverie Collins, André Pelaes David, Brandon Fernandes, Alexandre Fernando, Aneta Fontner-Dorożynska, Ornella Giauque, Dax Gordine, Michael Guimont, Sylvain Guinebaud, Damani Hughes, Dan Kelby, Il Kwang Kim, Tomel Larek, Loish, Richard Luong, Ian Sta.Maria, Marcelo Matere, Ben Mauro, Marianne Pailloux, Marreo Piana, Jennifer Park, Javi Salas, Farid Sepehri, Heidi Marie Smith, Lander Strijbol, Finn Stueven, Nashmin Valadi, Adam Volker

Advertising
UK Group Commercial Director **Clare Dove**
Advertising Director **Matt Johnston**
matthew.johnston@futurenet.com, 01225 442244

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eucomply OÜ Pärnu mnt 139b-14 11317
Tallinn, Estonia
hello@eucompliancepartner.com
+3375690241

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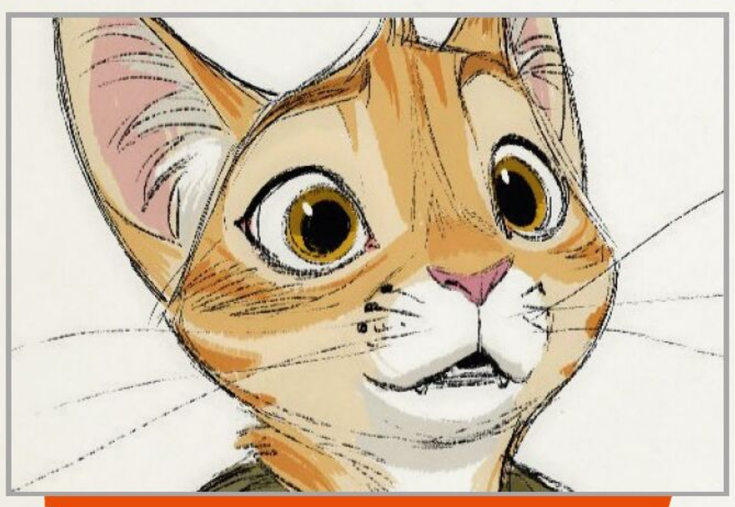








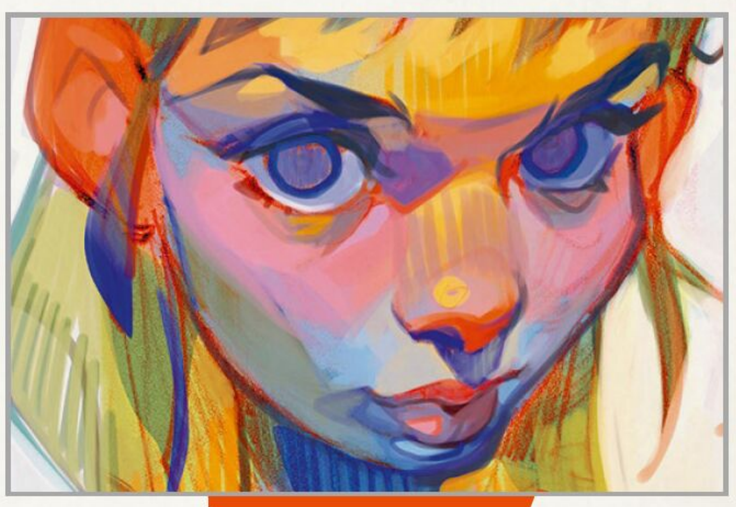
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