Noora Jantunen

CREATING A
CONVINCING VILLAIN
Character design for a video game

Bachelor's thesis

Bachelor of Culture and Arts

Game design

2023

ABSTRACT

Video games have become another way of telling stories, creating worlds and works of art, so it is important to be able to create deep characters that seem convincing and even "real" in their immersive behaviors, feelings, and motivations. This thesis aimed to understand how convincing villains are created, and how this knowledge could be incorporated into video games, and why it matters in the sake of storytelling.

The research aimed to explain how convincing villains are made, and this was implemented by using qualitive methods such as creating a visualization task for a group of volunteers, analysing already existing video game characters, and designing a video game villain as a product. For the theoretical part of the thesis, the fundamentals of villains, human psychology, character design and the relationship between motivational factors and convincingness were studied.

The thesis came to a conclusion, that when designing a convincing villain, especially for a video game, it is crucial that the villain has a solid, well written, researched, and executed background story, that will come through to the audience during the game. The background story will help the players to understand why the villain is behaving like they are, making their goals, motivation, and personality to feel immersive and convincing. It is also crucial to understand the importance of traumas, how they are caused, and how they affect the development of human mind.

If the subject was to be continued, it would be beneficial to gather more data and information to analyse, as well as interview experts in the field of psychology and social development.

Keywords: character design, storytelling, villain, psychology, social development

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1 INTRODUCTION

As long as there have been people, there has been some sort of storytelling; whether it has been through spoken language, written literature or visual art. Humans have a strong desire to tell stories, and one could even argue that it is a fundamental trait of being a human. It is a compassionate way to share information with others, and it creates an emotional impact to the ones receiving the information. But to create this emotional connection between the narrator and the audience, the story needs characters. The characters are the key factors for the story's narrative to get through. The story's plot and immersion will only be as strong and effective as its characters, for they are the ones who create the immersion, and the audience feels compassion for. But how do people create these strong and immersive characters so that the story will benefit from their presence? The objective of this thesis is to study how these immersive characters are made, and what makes them convincing for the audience.

The author of this thesis has a strong desire to understand how human nature works, and how this can be incorporated into character design in video games, and why it matters in the sake of storytelling. The topic was chosen over *how to create good villains* or *how to create interesting villains* because both topics are less objective than studying what makes a villain *convincing*. Convincing is an adjective, which means that something or someone is *"able to make one believe that something is true or right"* (Cambridge Dictionary 2023). When analyzing how to create or design something *good* or *interesting*, one must have an opinion of the subject and then it becomes too subjective. It is more of fact-based research to study what makes something objectively convincing, rather than good or bad. It is a balance of knowledge and analysis, and how they determine the issue at hand. This topic was also chosen because understanding what makes convincing villains will be beneficial for the industry in the long run. For years people have enjoyed different types of storytelling with high quality, complex and interesting characters, whose presence enriches the narration. Understanding more about creating these types of characters will allow designers to deepen the impact their stories have on the players, and therefore hopefully even promote their sales. At the time this was written, video games have become another way

of telling stories, creating worlds and works of art, so it is important to be able to create deep characters that seem convincing and even "real" in their immersive behaviors, feelings, and motivations. Video games are no longer just plotless entertainment like Tetris (Pajitnov 1985) or Pong (Atari 1972). They are ways to tell stories and awaken various emotions in their audiences.

The research, being production-oriented, will be implemented by using qualitative methods such as case studies including analyzing and comparing existing video game characters and creating a visualization task for volunteers. Together with this, a product will be created by designing a video game villain character with a simple illustrated appearance and a detailed background story by using everything learned in the research. The weight of the design will be placed to the backstory of the character, and the visualization of the character will be only created to strengthen the narrative. A background story is the character's history and experiences which have shaped the character into the person they are.

The research will firstly investigate the psychology of a convincing villain, which will cover up the mental side of the villain. This is important to understand, because to be a convincing villain, the mental side is crucial context for the design. It will help to understand the motives of the villain. It is not enough that a villain's appearance – which will also be investigated – is polished and well thought out, because the mentality and personality of the villain must be visible in the physical appearance. The appearance is there to strengthen the character's mental image, helping the audience to understand who, and what this character is, implementing their lore into their design. For the sake of the length of this thesis, it will be narrowed down, and the villains and evilness will be viewed from the Western culture's perspective.

Finally, the conclusion of the research will be reviewed at the end of this thesis. It will critically review the thesis and its process. If done correctly, the research will produce the fundamentals of a convincing villain, and help designers create immersive villains, and avoid false heroes in the process.

2 THE PSYCHOLOGY OF A CONVINCING VILLAIN

To design something, one must understand exactly *what* they are creating. What is it for, what is its purpose, and why is it like it is? That is why it is needed to first make solid research, and in this case, it is analyzing and understanding the psychology of a villain. This research, in this chapter, will be used as the key elements to create the villain. What is a villain, what is its purpose and what makes it a villain. To understand this *"fundamentals of a villain and a video game villain"* will be briefly explained, as well as the "*decent to evilness*" and "*the relationship between motivational factors and convincingness*". Understanding these aspects will deepen the character and make it more immersive, as they help the designers to understand their personality, motives, and goals.

2.1 The fundamentals of a villain and a video game villain

To start, a *villain* is not to be confused with an *antagonist*. A villain is always an antagonist – unless they are the main character of the storyline and not the opposing force – for it is one of the four main types of antagonists – but an antagonist is not always a villain. (MasterClass 2022.) An antagonist, just like a villain, is created for the story to oppose the hero, the protagonist of the story, whether in video games, movies, books, cinema, or in some other form of narrative art. It is inserted into the story to create conflict and reflect what the hero lacks in their demeanor. In these aspects, an antagonist and a villain are very much alike. But unlike a villain, an antagonist does not have to be a *bad person*, or even something *physical* at all. In any kind of storytelling, it can vary from an ideology to pure raw force to even a complex social structure. An antagonist can be a powerful storm, strict schedule, or something abstract that the protagonist cannot physically fight against. For example, it can be argued that nature and the sea itself is the main antagonist in the famous adventure book *Robinson Crusoe* (Defoe 1719). But for a *villain,* this does not apply. A villain must be something concrete, a creature or a person – something that the protagonist can fight physically against, if needed. A villain must have goals, personality, morals, and ideology that differ from the narratives' protagonist, or at least challenge them. (MasterClass 2022.) This way the narration can build up

tension to the climax of the storyline and create depth in the story's protagonist (Misri 2021). Without an antagonist, or a villain, there is no need for a hero either. Therefore, the hero is only as good as the story's villain.

But do villains in general differ from villains in video games? Yes, and no. Just like in any other narration, villains in video games are there to torment and challenge the protagonist. But unlike in other categories, the villain is also there to challenge the player themselves. It is not enough that the protagonist wants to defeat the villain, but the villain must create feelings for the player themselves. As seen in the thesis by Mia Savo (2022) *Players and Villains: Role of Antagonists in Video Games* and in the questionnaire which she held with the total of 624 participants, the highlighted answers she studied reveal that it seemed, that the most memorable villain characters were the ones that made the participants feel strong emotions. Whether they were terrified, frustrated, angry, empathetic, yearning to defeat the villain or felt like they could never be able to defeat such a monster, embodiment of evil, after their first encounter with the villain. (Savo 2022.) From the data she collected, it can be interpreted that a villain's role in video games is to create strong emotions and even stronger desire, determination to see the game's storyline through to witness what happens to the hero and the villain. But the final battle, the last encounter with the villain does not always have to be a moment of triumph or desire to defeat the villain. For example, *The Last of Us Part II* (Naughty Dog 2020) took a twist with their perspective of a final boss battle with the game's villain.

Figure 1. The Last of Us Part II. Ellie on left and Abigail on right (Naughty Dog 2020)

The game *The Last of Us Part II* starts off with the second main character of the *The Last of Us* (Naughty Dog 2013), Ellie (Figure 1), witnessing her foster father Joel Miller's cruel, torturing death in the hands of a new character, Abigail "Abby" Anderson (Figure 1), who is portrayed as the main villain of the game. This sparks a rage-filled want for a revenge, as Ellie travels to find Abby, and kill her for her murderous act. As Joel has been the main protagonist and the playable character of the first game *The Last of Us*, it can be interpreted that the developers wanted to fuel the players with the same rage and desire for revenge which takes over Ellie. Which they indeed achieved, whether intended or not (Taormina 2020). It could even be argued that this happened too intensely. Briefly explained, the story continues with Ellie and her quest to kill Abby, but around the midpoint of the game, Abby becomes the second playable character – right after the moment Abby has killed off one of Ellie's friends traveling with her and having Ellie at gunpoint before the screen fades to black. The narration starts off years before this moment in the storyline, which reveals that Abby is the daughter of a doctor that was killed off by Joel Miller, Ellie's foster father, at the end of *The Last of Us* game. After this, the game's narration returns to the present timeline, where the player continues to play as Abby. During this time, more of Abby's personality, relationships and morals are revealed to the player, portraying her not as a villain, but an actual human being with emotions. This is

also the moment that many players stopped playing the game all together. There was no data nor any questionnaires on how many people stopped playing the game after the character swap on average, but after a small detour on Google or YouTube, the number unofficially seems to be high. This can interpret that the death of Joel Miller in the hands of Abby has turned her to be a villain in the minds of the players, who have portrayed Joel as a main protagonist from the first game – even with his flaws and criminalities like stealing, smuggling, or killing. It seems that *The Last of Us Part II* game's developers were not able to portray Abby as the protagonist of the game due to the opinion of most of the players. One could say that the murder of Joel was too much, an act so unforgivable that nothing could change the perspective of most of the players. But there was more. Not only did the developers take approximately half of the game to reveal that Abby in fact was not a mindless, murderous monster, but in fact a devastated daughter on the journey of avenging the death of her father, the doctor Joel killed. Objectively reviewing this, it seems ironic because Abby was doing exactly like Ellie, avenging her father's death, yet she was the only one seen as a villain. Also, the constant avenging has led the characters into an endless cycle of revenge.

As the player gets back to the present time, to the point where the point of view swapped, it is time for a mid-game battle. Abby, now controlled by the player, battles against Ellie. This creates devastation for the players who have also played the *The Last of Us*, where the whole narration has been around protecting Ellie. It could be interpreted, that the developers wanted to create inner conflict for the players, challenging their point of view of the game. For example, are neither of the characters, Ellie or Abby, villains at all, or are they just tools in the endless cycle of revenge? The battle ends, both characters go their ways, and time passes. The player will once again control Ellie, viewing the storyline from her point of view. Ellie, still suffering from the loss of Joel, decides that she still wants her revenge. She once again leaves for the journey of revenge, fighting her ways to find Abby, and the two fight for the one last time. The final boss battle of the game occurs. This time, the player being Ellie, and the final boss being Abby, who is worn out, tired, covered in sunburns and blisters after severe torture. One

could say that the developers meant this scene to feel just as devastating as the fight earlier when the player was playing as Abby to fight Ellie – that the player should not want to fight against Abby, as they did not want to fight against Ellie. The fight ends, Ellie showing mercy to Abby, letting her go instead of finishing her off. She returns to her home, just to find out that what she had built was destroyed in the temptation of revenge, leaving her with a broken body, and alone in the cruelty of the world around her. But what can be concluded from all of this?

Villains, especially in videogames, need to create strong and a variety of emotions, so the players must be invested to play the game to the very end. If there are no strong emotions that create such desire to see how the storyline ends, the player most likely will not finish the game. This is the reason why it is not enough that a game looks beautiful and is well executed in its visual design. The storyline, and the characters must have depth and create immersion, so the player gets invested in the narrative and wants to play the game from start to the credits. And just like stated before, the ending might not be a glorious triumph filled with adrenaline and dopamine, but a bittersweet, devastating anxiety, just like the developers intended in the *Last of Us Part II*. It also seems that no matter the intensions of the developers, some characters will be interpreted as their first impression. And even though not all villainous acts mean that the character is indeed a villain, they can be seen as one, and not be able to redeem themselves, even with having the same motivations for their actions as their protagonist counterparts. People tend to view the world as black and white, good, and evil, not wanting to see the world and people around them as morally gray. With horrible enough actions, the villain will remain as a villain in the eyes of majority of the population, no matter the motivations or acts of redemption.

2.2   The descent to evilness

"You either die a hero, or you live long enough to see yourself become the villain"
– Harvey Dent (The Dark Knight 2008)

It might not be ideal to quote a fictional character for the sake of scientific accuracy, but the quote of Harvey Dent hits the spot with its bittersweet conclusion. In all its simplicity, it opens the argument that no one is indeed born evil or a villain, but rather shaped into one. And this does not only apply in the fictional universes, but in the real world too. But what makes a person evil? What pushes them off the edge of socially accepted ways and behaviors, and makes them turn to evil deeds?

According to Taina Kuuskorpi (2021) who has a PhD in psychology, people are not born evil, but are rather shaped into becoming one. In the book *Pahat mielessä. Tieteen näkökulmia pahuuteen* (which roughly translates into *Evil in mind. The scientific perspectives into evilness.),* she explains that the reasons which turn people evil are usually sprouting in many places at the same time. These places, in her words, are in social circumstances, cultural environment, mental qualities and in brain activity. She also points out that these reasons do not force people to commit evil acts, or crimes, so rather than calling them reasons, they should be called risks, or even seeds of evil, instead. The more of these seeds of evil are planted in a person, the more risks there are for a person to commit an evil deed. For example, it is not uncommon that the person committing an evil deed, or a criminal act has several issues in their life. These issues can include – but are not limited to – traumatic experiences, mental and/or physical abuse in childhood, severe personality disorders or aggression. (Kuuskorpi 2021.) If a child does not have a safe environment to grow, it could complicate their social development, and possibly cause different kinds of problems in their adulthood, like turning to crime, substance abuse or even abusive behavior. Also, it seems that these problems often come in various combinations. For example, a study made by the psychiatrist, Anu Putkonen found with her research team, that in a group of homicidal criminals with a severe mental illness diagnosis, half of the group had a triple diagnosis, and one in three a double diagnosis. These diagnoses were often a problem with substance usage, personality disorder, and/or a mental disorder. (Kuuskorpi 2021.) Another study of evilness by Rauno Juntumaa (2018), explains that there is a formula to being evil. He explains this in the book *Miksi vihaamme? Yksilön ja yhteisön*

tunteen anatomiaa (which roughly translates into *Why do we hate? The anatomy of individual's and community's emotion*.). The formula can consist of feeling either confused or insignificant, the experience of injustice, feeling humiliated, belief of being miraculously special, and being taught to use violence. These feelings do not necessarily make someone do evil deeds, just like Kuuskorpi (2021) explains in her book, for it depends on the nature of the person. But this formula can be used to understand what <u>might</u> be going inside someone's head when descending to the ways of evil.

As now researched, certain circumstances can push a person to the path of evil. But it should also be taken into consideration if one bad act, a criminal deed, makes a person evil, or even a villain? How bad does the act have to be? Is stealing one item from a store as a child enough to make someone to be seen as evil, or can it be disregarded as foolishness of a still developing, young brain? Or does it have to be something much more horrifying? How is it determined what is evil, and what is not? How much objective evil does one have to create to be called evil, or a villain? Can it be measured, or is it enough that a society decides when enough is enough, and a person is deemed as evil? Evilness can be many things, and it can be measured in different levels. But the act of evil, in the eyes of science, is measured in seven criteria: number of the victims, the cruelty of the act, the length of time, the innocence of the victims, the emotional impact, and the scope of the act (Kuuskorpi 2021). So, using this criteria, one stolen item from a store as a child can hardly be seen as anything evil. Using these criteria, it is easy to understand why Abby, the protagonist from *The Last of Us Part II*, was seen as a villain. Even though Abby had the same motivation and intentions as Ellie, the other protagonist, and her list of evil acts was not greater than Joel's, whom she murdered, she was still seen as a villain, even though Ellie and Joel were not. While they all had a lot of similarities in their actions and their reasons behind them, the emotional impact of her actions was greater than in Ellie's or Joel's acts. The people these two killed in the game were not characters the players had learnt to love or care for. They were flat, impersonal non-playable characters that were viewed as obstacles by the players. Joel, on the other hand, was seen as a loved character; someone the players had grown to care for

during the first game, *The Last of Us.* And Abby took him away from the players, by torturing and finally killing him which increased to cruelty of the act, and finally created a negative emotional impact. These criteria and the reception of the majority of the *The Last of Us Part II* players indeed show that one act, one evil deed can turn a person into a villain in the eyes of society, with no hope of redemption. But can it work the other way around too? It can, just like in Ellie's and in Joel's case, but for the sake of scientific accuracy, it is time to change the *The Last of Us* franchise to something else.

After researching what can make a person evil, it is worth mentioning that sometimes a person is not seen as a villain even if they do criminal deeds. The main protagonist of the game *Assassin's Creed II,* Ezio Auditore da Firenze (Figure 2), can serve as a good example. Ezio is an assassin, a murderer, but he is not seen as a villain at all, and the character is often called one of the greatest video game protagonists, but why?

Figure 2. Ezio Auditore da Firenze from Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood (Ubisoft 2010)

The reason why Ezio has not been considered as a villain, even though he is an assassin and murders people, is because the people he killed were either not known characters by the player, or good people in general. When Ezio became an assassin, it was to avenge his family's execution, which lead him to travel all around Italy to find the ones responsible. His motivation was not to make

innocent suffer, but to avenge the unfair execution of his family members. This creates an interesting contrast, because to get closer to his goals, Ezio must kill off enemy guards to proceed. These guards have not done anything to Ezio or his family, for they are merely trying to make a living. They most probably have families as well, so it could be argued that Ezio is doing the exact same things that was done to his family: executing innocent people. But the game does not implement that the guards are innocent. For example, unlike the guards, random citizen characters are seen as innocent. If the player kills them as Ezio, the game will message out a warning sign, stating that Ezio did not kill innocent civilians. So, the game portrays the guards – innocent or not – as evil just for working for the main antagonist. This helps to justify Ezio's actions for the player, because then the guards are only seen as obstacles and not deep characters with backstories. The case could – and most probably would – be very different if Ezio was to kill a character the players had already bonded with. But because these characters are not introduced and are only viewed as flat enemies, Ezio was not seen as a villain. What also strengthens the idea of Ezio not being a villain is that he only became an assassin to avenge his family, and to destroy the villains controlling Italy. Ezio's actions do not hurt the players, and therefore his actions have no negative emotional impact that would make him look like a villain. Instead, the players are rooting for his success of killing the bad people in power.

2.3   The relationship between motivational factors and convincingness

As shown in the last chapter, what can make a person evil in the eyes of science, this knowledge can be adapted to create a villain's backstory and give it depth and flexibility as a character. This is needed, because without depth, one-dimensional villain characters tend to be boring and not very convincing for the audience. Without the immersive feeling, the audience will most likely not remember them or the game's storyline at all when they finish the game – if they even play the game to the very end. But is it enough? Is it enough that the villain has a backstory that made them evil? Is it enough reason why they are doing evil things? No, and the reason will be described in this chapter. What has been explained in the last segment can only cover the reasons "why" some can descent into the ways of evil, leaping into the darkness, possibly even beyond the

reach of help. But it does not fully explain one of the main aspects a villain must have, which is motivation.

The reason motivation plays such a key role in making a convincing villain character, is that creatures capable of conscious thinking always require some sort of motivation even in their smallest actions, like hunger or thirst. As Nieminen (2017) states in her thesis, an action needs motivation.

"Motivation's roots can be found within the past of a character and is the reason for action. It is the driving force for putting the character in motion." (Nieminen 2017.)

This implies that just like any character, the villain must have a reason, motivation for their actions. For example, it does not sound very convincing, that even after several evil deeds, a villain would wake up in the morning just to decide, that this will be the day that they would destroy all humanity on Earth. Why would the villain want this? What would the villain benefit from such an act? Would they do it just to be evil because they can? In some situations, this might be the cause. For example, a villain that is supposed to be comically random or does not need to be so convincing might not need said motivation behind their actions. But it does mean that the villain will probably not be remembered by the audience, whereas complex characters with well thought motivations will be. (Krawczyk & Novak 2006.) Being able to explain the villain's motivations will make the character more immersive, and therefore make them a more convincing character altogether. By creating a deep backstory for a character, it helps to see what kind of a person the character is. What are their morals and motivations, and how they would react in different situations. For example, placing a character in a scenario where there are no good options to choose may help the designer to find out the character's traits. This can deepen the personality of the character and strengthen their convincingness when creating the storyline. It is also important to understand the motivational and moral background of the villain in the design process because the villain may indeed not even see themselves as a

villain at all. One example of a villain like this is the movie version of the comic book character Thanos from the Marvel universe.

Figure 3. Thanos, the genocidal villain of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (Marvel Studios 2018)

Thanos (Figure 3) – in the *Marvel Cinematic Universe*, not in the comic books – is a genocidal supervillain, who is on the path to destroy half of all life in the universe. Not a lot of his past is opened to the audience, not his relationships, not his social development, mental stability, or such. But one thing that is shined light upon is crucial enough to understand the motivation behind this villain's actions that take place. Thanos, in the early years of his life, witnessed how his home planet Titan suffered from overpopulation and a resource deficit. It is explained that he saw how his people tried to endure the suffering, just to meet their and their planet's doom. Thanos tried to introduce his people with the idea of sacrificing half of the population for the rest of them to survive together with the planet but was seen as insane due to his proposal. As already stated, the planet Titan died with its people, only leaving Thanos alive. In his objectively acknowledged madness, Thanos was convinced, that the same faith would wait for the whole universe, which he would have to save – by killing half of all life in it. He would take on the burden, and he would sacrifice his goodness for the sake of salvation, not understanding that his actions had nothing good in them at all. (Marvel 2023.)

Thanos is an excellent example of how even the most twisted characters in their doings may not understand that they indeed are villains. Just like Thanos, the villains may think that they are doing good, that they are the heroes that will save the people and bring justice and light to the world – even if it means doing horrible, hideous, and evil things. They justify these horrendous acts of evil by convincing themselves that they are the heroes. Thanos did not think of himself as a villain because his motives were not to cause suffering and destruction around him. He wanted to save the universe. He wanted no one to suffer like him, and his people did. He was willing to do anything to stop it from happening. This kind of mentality can also be seen in actual human beings, not only in the fictional world. For example, in the book *Pahat mielessä. Tieteen näkökulmia pahuuteen* (Kuuskorpi 2021), it is proven through interviewing different criminals that they indeed thought that they were doing something good, that they were saving their victims in one way or another. And some of these criminal acts were – even objectively spoken – horrifying and unsettling.

Even though, as stated in the research before, there is motivation behind every action, it does not mean that the intention equals the motivation. To explain this, a fictional example will be used to clarify the statement:

Person A meets with person B, who has lost weight since the last time they met. Person A compliments person B, telling them that they look healthier, and prettier after losing said weight. This upsets person B, who interprets person A's compliment as an insult of their former weight. Person B is offended and perceives person A as a bully, even if person A did not mean this to happen.

Even though person A meant to compliment person B's looks, they offended them. Person A's motivation was to make person B feel better of themselves and congratulate them after their hard work, but unintentionally made them feel offended which was a total turnaround of their original purpose. This kind of misinterpretation can be used in making villain characters, giving them more depth in their design. The villain may start off as a loving character, whose errors unintentionally enrage their surrounding population, turning them against

themselves. They would not see themselves as villains, even if most of the population would. Or, in some cases, the villain just is not a villain at all, and has not done anything to be seen as one.

Figure 4. Ballister Boldheart and Nimona on his shoulders (Annapurna pictures 2023)

For example, the main protagonist named Nimona (Figure 4), of the movie *Nimona* (Annapurna pictures 2023), is a shapeshifting creature that is viewed as a villain. Most of the movie, Nimona is behaving like a typical, comically evil villain character. They want to kill or beat up everyone who gets in their way, and it is never explained why they want to do this. It almost seems like they want to be a villain for the sake of being a villain. Alongside their will to kill everyone, they are seen joking, being cheerful, happy, and laughing – acting like any typical teenager or a young adult. They are also devoted to helping the other main protagonist of the movie, Ballister Boldheart (Figure 4), who is framed of the murder of the queen. Nimona acts as if they only want to help Ballister to have his revenge and kill everyone who has wronged him, but their cheerful and playful character make the audience quickly question their real motives – which are soon revealed.

Figure 5. The many faces of Nimona, the shapeshifter (Annapurna pictures 2023)

As the storyline continues, Nimona is explained to have been an outsider throughout their life. As a shapeshifter (Figure 5), people and other creatures have not seen them as one of their own and neglected them. Until they meet up with a young human girl. The two become friends, and the girl is not afraid of Nimona even after they reveal their true identity alongside their shapeshifting abilities. Everything is well until the girl's home villagers see her with Nimona, who has taken the form of a bear. They soon shapeshift to a human to show that there is no need to worry, that the girl is not in danger. The villagers see Nimona and their powers as a threat, and behave like they are a monster, ready to slay all of them. The villagers attack with pitchforks and torches, not listening to Nimona or their friend. An accident happens, and one of the torches falls, setting the whole village on fire. The blame is set on Nimona, who is now seen not only as a monster, but a vengeful, destructive villain. Nimona never did anything bad to the villagers, the only thing she did was being different.

"They grow up believing that they can be a hero if they drive a sword into the heart of anything different. And I'm the monster?" – Nimona (Nimona 2023)

Nimona sees and understands that Ballister was not the real murderer, or a villain, and wanted to help him prove that he in fact was innocent – just like Nimona was years before. Nimona never intended to hurt anyone, and the accident was not their fault. But since the village had deemed them as a villain, they started behaving like one even if it was not in their true nature. The villagers gave Nimona the motivation to hurt others. It could be interpreted that Nimona gave up on trying to show that they really are a good person, if the society around them was not going to change their views. It is almost as if they gave up since they had nothing to lose anymore and gave the society what they wanted to see: a villain.

3   THE APPEARANCE OF A VILLAIN

In this chapter, the appearance of a villain is explained but narrowed down to the perspective of Western culture for the sake of the length of the research. People generally have a certain type of image in mind after hearing the word "villain", although the appearance differs with every person. The mental image seen may differ due to cultural backgrounds, traumatic experiences or simply because people have been taught or learnt to see certain appearances in a certain way – which in some cases is very problematic and possibly even racist. Typically, villains are portrayed as tall, pale men with sharp and edgy figures – though only sometimes, not always – lurking in the shadows and often bathing in cold, hard light, which accentuate their figures (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Collage of the first images found with Google after searching "villain"

The appearance of the villain will be researched by firstly analyzing the body of a villain, then the colors of the villain, and finally creating a simple villain illustration

assignment for selected volunteers. This assignment will analyze the similarities and differences individuals have when illustrating a villain character based on the same information provided.

3.1 Body

When creating the body of the character, the design should give out some type of guideline to the audience that what kind of character they are observing. This can include – but is not limited to – shape language and the character's body language. The information needed for designing a body will be researched in the next subchapters.

3.1.1 Shape language in character design

Before diving into the shape language of villains, it is first needed to understand shape language in character design in general. Shape language is a way to tell about the character without any words, and to strengthen their personality. The usage of shape language in character design can be categorized into three main shapes which are: circle, square, and triangle (Figure 7).
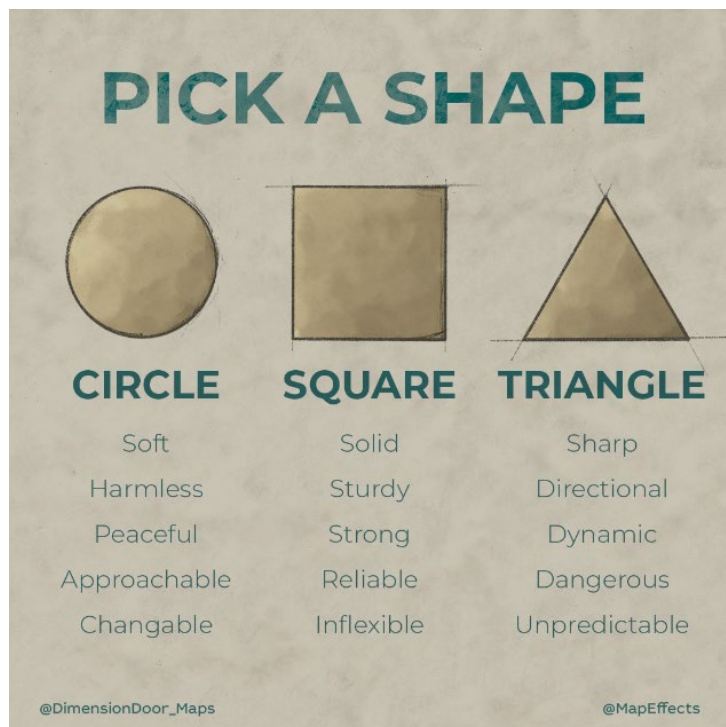

Figure 7. Shape language briefly explained (MapEffects 2023)

The character can either be fully based on one of these shapes or be constructed of their combinations. Depending on which of these shapes are used, it will give out a different implication of the character. For example, circular and organic shapes in a character emphasize harmless and soft character, who is safe to approach. These kinds of characteristics can often be seen in sidekicks or even in main protagonists in visual narratives. Unlike circular shapes, square shapes represent strong, reliable, or even stubborn and static characteristics, and are used, for example, in mentor, professor, or powerful authority figures. The last main shape, the triangle, emphasizes dynamic, dangerous, and unpredictable feelings. This shape is often used in villain designs, because unlike round shapes it gives out an unapproachable appearance, and compared to squares, it is an unstable shape. But it should be kept in mind, that even when triangles are often used in villains and evil characters, it does not automatically mean that the character is evil if they have triangles in their shape design. A knight character may contain spikes in their armor, creating fierce and dynamic outcome without being evil. But it should be remembered that the shape language may influence the audience to feel certain way even if it is not intended. For example, Figure 8 shows how the same character gives out a different feeling when a different shape is used as the base of the design.
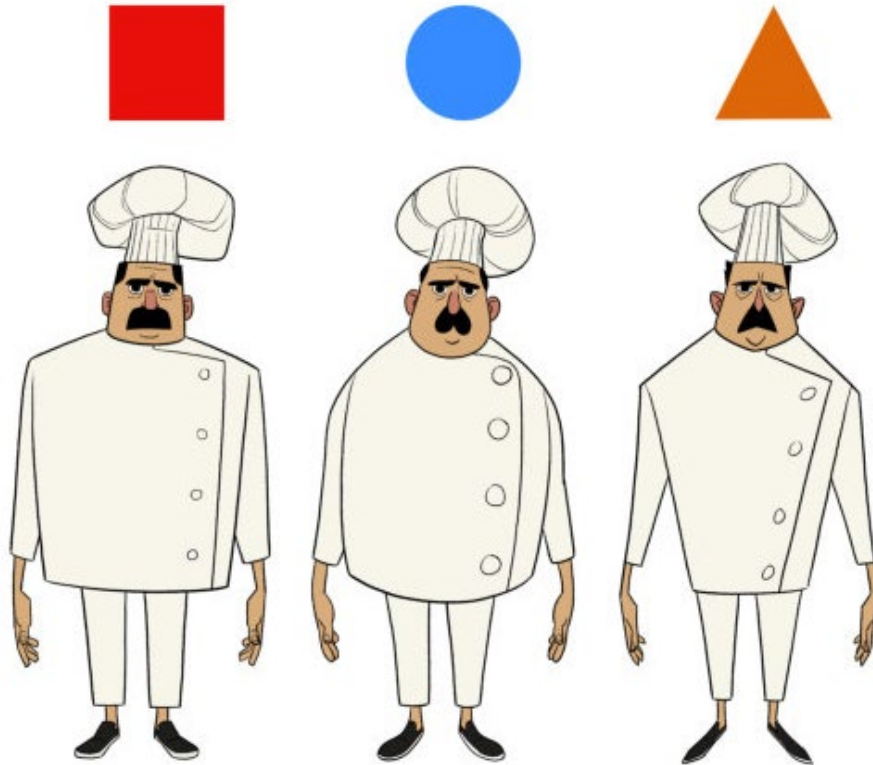
Figure 8. Same character in different shapes (21 Draw 2022)

When looking at Figure 8, the overall shape language is already giving out different feelings of the same character. The square shaped character on the left looks sturdy, strong, and stubborn, giving out the feeling that not many would dare to question this character's decisions, where the middle one looks more approachable with his smooth and curvy lines – even with a frown on his face. The triangular one on the other hand looks the most unapproachable of the three. The pointy and sharp edges of the character give out a rather unpleasant feeling, even a frightening shiver down the spine. This character looks unpredictable, and it would be wise to peek at whatever he is cooking in the corners of his kitchen.

But as stated earlier, the character does not have to only include one of the shapes. When combined, the shapes can give out a rather different and even intriguing outcome to the audience. Square and circular shapes can emphasize a character with soft and strong personality, or a peaceful yet stubborn character, like an elderly person. These combinations can also be used to deceive the audience of the character's true personality or nature. For example – as stated

before – the character may first come off to the audience as a friend or an ally of the protagonist, only to later reveal themselves as the villains of the story. These villains are called twist villains (Figure 9).
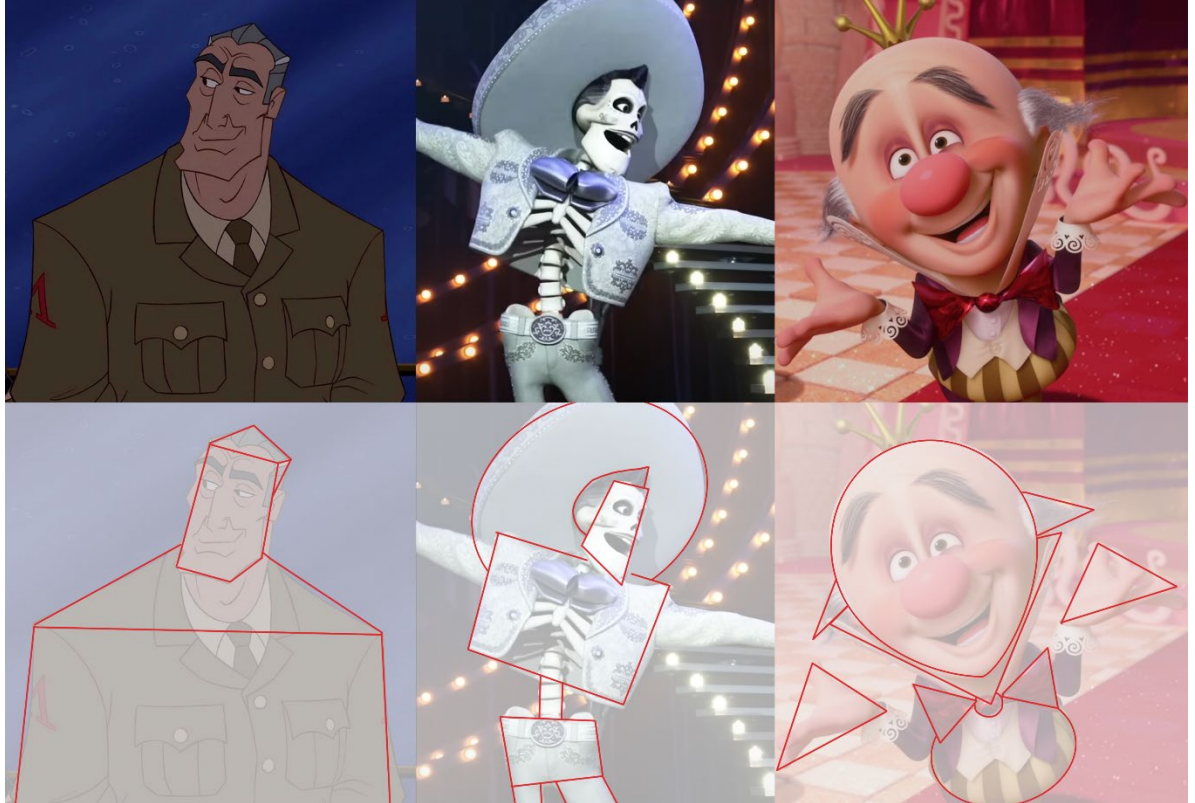

Figure 9. Examples of twist villains and their shape combinations

When combining different shapes, it is important to remember that the design should not be too cluttered. Even with different shapes, the silhouette should stay clean. *"When we choose a shape motif, it reduces clutter and emphasize the things we want to emphasize." – Brent Noll (BaM Animation 2020).*

To conclude, the body should have a clean silhouette, but still maintain some level of detail for an interesting appearance. Having a clean and recognizable silhouette will help to create a recognizable and a unique character (Bam Animation 2020.)

3.1.2 Shape language in villain character design

Like seen in Figure 7 (p. 23), triangular shapes are seen as the most dangerous and unpredictable. For this very reason, triangular shapes are often seen in villain designs either as the main shape, or in some sort of combination of the shapes. Combinations can be used especially when the character is not supposed to be seen as a villain right away, but rather to be revealed as a villain later. Or the character may give out small details of their true personality to the audience right away, even if the said character would not seem suspicious to the other characters around them in their stories. Looking at Figure 10, it is easy to see that the characters positioned on the left side seem more dangerous than the ones on the right. This is because their silhouette includes more sharp edges and triangular shapes.

Figure 10. Collage of villains (L) and heroes (R) and their shape language

It is also worth noting how the characters on the left are posing compared to the characters on the right. The villain characters seem to take more space than the heroes on the right. They also have their fingers opened, revealing their palm,

unlike the heroes who have their hands in relaxed postures. It could interpret that this is to show the power they have on their fingertips, and that they have absolutely nothing to fear, or no one to bow to.

3.2 Colors

When creating a character, it is crucial to choose the right colors to fit the said character. Color consists of hue, saturation, and luminance (Figure 11). If chosen correctly, the color palette can strengthen the character's visual appearance and make it more interesting and appealing. Especially in character design, like in any other artistic design, the psychology of colors is an important aspect to understand.

Figure 11. The three components of color (Canva 2023)

Colors are strong influencers of the human mind, and they can be used to emphasize a certain feeling or feelings. For example, the intense color of red can create a strong feeling of fear or passion, whereas light blue can be seen as soothing and relaxing. Color is a strong tool, so it is important to know how to use it and choose the right color combinations. (Adobe 2023.)

3.2.1 Color symbolism in the eyes of western culture

As already stated, color is a strong tool used in design and should not be taken lightly. To use it correctly, it is needed to understand how the symbolism and meaning of colors differ in different cultures. For example, society in the Western culture has learnt to see white in weddings, whereas in Indian culture the brides wear red. In India, the bride's red symbolizes new beginnings, passion, and prosperity, also representing Durga, the feminine Hindu goddess (Brides 2023). In Western culture, the white represents the bride's purity and innocence. These differences in cultures are crucial to understand and researched for, because of the impact they create. Because of the variety of different symbolisms in cultures, this thesis was narrowed down to view the research from the western culture's perspective – including colors and their meaning.

Figure 12. Color psychology map (London image institute)

Each color has its own meanings and symbolism, which are very briefly explained in Figure 12. Combining these meanings together, they can help to create a mental image or a feeling. For example, if a designer was to create a healer character who uses nature's own remedies, the designer's best choice of colors would be green and brown. Together, these colors would symbolize a trustworthy healer.

3.2.2   Colors in character design

Just like in many cases, the phrase "quantity over quality" fits in character design more than well. It is more important to limit the details and colors in the character design for a clean design (Tiainen 2020). The character does not need to be overfilled with multiple colors, because too many will result in overcomplicated design which will not be pleasing to view or easy to read. Limiting the color palette will not only strengthen the character's visual appearance, but it will also force the designer to really focus on the colors and their symbolism. At best, this will result in harmonic solutions that will be pleasing to the eye and make the appearance of the villain more convincing. For example, comparing the two characters in Figure 13 immediately shows which character's appearance is visually more appealing and interesting. The character's color should have a clear color hierarchy, where one main color is chosen, and the other ones are there to support it. This way the colors will not be competing with each other and will result in a more harmonic color palette. (BaM Animation 2020.) What is also important, is to keep in mind that the character's colors should be in different values. Different values – meaning the different brightness of the colors – will help to keep the colors from mixing with each other up.

Figure 13. Color comparison of the same character

The color choice can also be used to give out the personality of the character. Depending on the character's nature, either cool or warm colors can be used in the design (Figure 14).
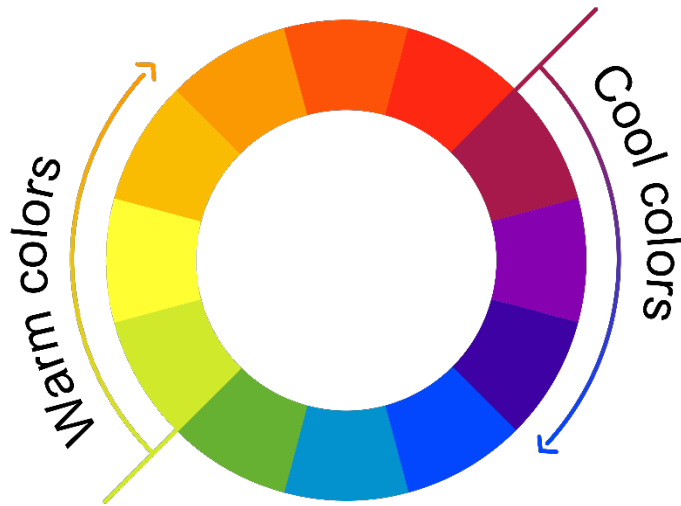

Figure 14. Warm and cool color tones (Adobe Stock 2023)

Cool tones usually symbolize reserved, calculative, and calm personality, whereas warm tones represent comfort and welcoming feelings (Tiainen 2020). In addition, greater contrast between the colors in the design can be created using complementary colors, which are the colors on opposite side of the color wheel, like green and red, or yellow and violet (Figure 15).

Figure 15. Color wheel and complementary (opposite) colors

Where shape was used to emphasize the general feeling of the character, colors are there to tell a story of the character (BaM Animation 2020). But do colors differ in villain design?

3.2.3 Colors in villain design

When looking at villains in character design, they are often portrayed as dark colored figures. Desaturated and dark colors often emphasize danger and mysterious feelings and are often – though not always – used in villain design. These dark colors can be contrasted with saturated colors, which highlights the colored details against the darker tones. For example, the most common color combination for villains is black and red, or black and violet.

The color palette can also be used to hide the villain's true nature, just like in shape language. Whereas dark colors are often used in villain designs, they also – especially in the present day – may have light colors. It is not so uncommon to see villain characters bathing only in the color white. Depending on the storyline, the color choice could narrate the character being a twist villain or implementing that they have some sort of twisted purity agenda.

But overall, the colors in villain design follow the same rules and guides as character design in general. Villains come in many shapes and colors, so there is no one correct way to create the character's appearance.

3.3 Villain illustration assignment: individual similarities and differences

To have a better understanding of how people view villains in general, a small illustration assignment was created. The assignment was to see how different individuals would visualize a villain character after being provided with the exact same information. The task would then show what similarities and differences individuals have when asked to perceive a villain's character. A total of eight volunteers were chosen, and directly asked to participate, and six provided the illustrations. These volunteers were provided with brief information of a fictional villain character, including a short description of their backstory, abilities, and possible motivational factors. Each participant was given the information shown below:

Task – create a visual image of a villain character from the information provided in 60 minutes or less. You may create the image by using digital or traditional art techniques. Coloring is optional but recommended. The art does not have to be a finished product, a simple sketch is enough. Please do not share your artwork with others before all have finished, for it is crucial that others do not influence your mental image of the character described below.

Information: The subject is a male forest elf, with no previous recordings of mental or personality disorders. He has enjoyed a semi-stable childhood with his mother. The subject has no relationship to his father, the village's outcast. The subject was one of the few survivors of an intentional forest fire that destroyed most of his village. The forest was destroyed for crop plantations for foreign elves from the mainland. The subject was severely burned and traumatized by the horrors he witnessed. Due to his relationship with the forest, the subject was able to create a pact with the forest's enraged spirits. The subject's body was altered permanently so he could remain alive and take revenge on the mainland elves.

The same rage burns within the subject as in the forest's spirits. The subject has respiration issues due to a collapsed lung on his left side, which has been replaced with organic matter containing stomata, the same microscopic organs found in leaves.

The subject has been recorded attacking elves near his home forest, quickly expanding his acts to the mainland. Many of the victims have been recorded to suffocate to death. Other recordings are unclear because the calamity has been too severe to research. It seems that the subject can raise elemental – except fire – puppets, and he seems to be attacking anything elf made. It is unclear what his intentions are, but it seems that the subject is trying to massacre any living elf on land. The recordings reveal that every milieu the subject has interacted with, has soon shown to have a thriving nature. The subject has been recorded to physically change, but it is unclear how.

The maximum sixty-minute time limit was given out so the participants would not take too long to finish their illustrations, because it was important that they create the first visual image that came to their minds. The participants' designs (Figure 16) will be called A, B, C, D, E and F for a simpler approach.
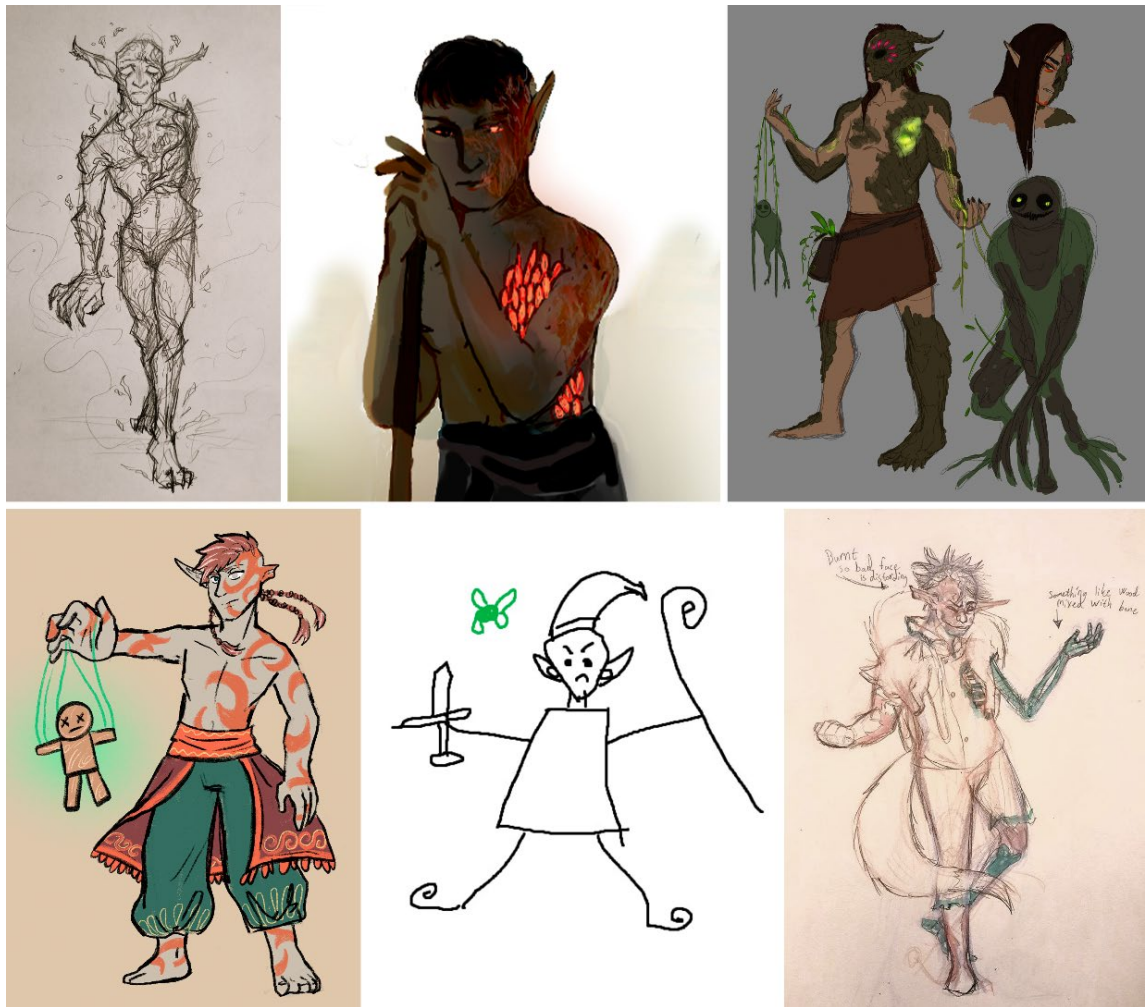
Figure 16. The participants' character designs from top left to bottom right A, B, C, D, E and F

The variety of the results was surprising. It was interesting to see how the participants focused on different parts of the information given in their designs, but all of them still managed to have similarities with each other. Just like the brief information provided, the character had suffered from severe burns in his body, which almost every participant had illustrated in their works, except for design E. Burnt scar tissue can be seen to take up a lot of space in almost all the designs. Also, some variations show that the flames have mutilated the character's face in some way or another: either with losing an eye like in B, C and D, or ears like in C, D and F. The most drastic changes are shown in design A and C, where skin has been fully or partially replaced by plant material after burning from the fire. These two together with design F take more of a monster-like approach on the design, where the character no longer seems to fit the "socially acceptable" appearance.
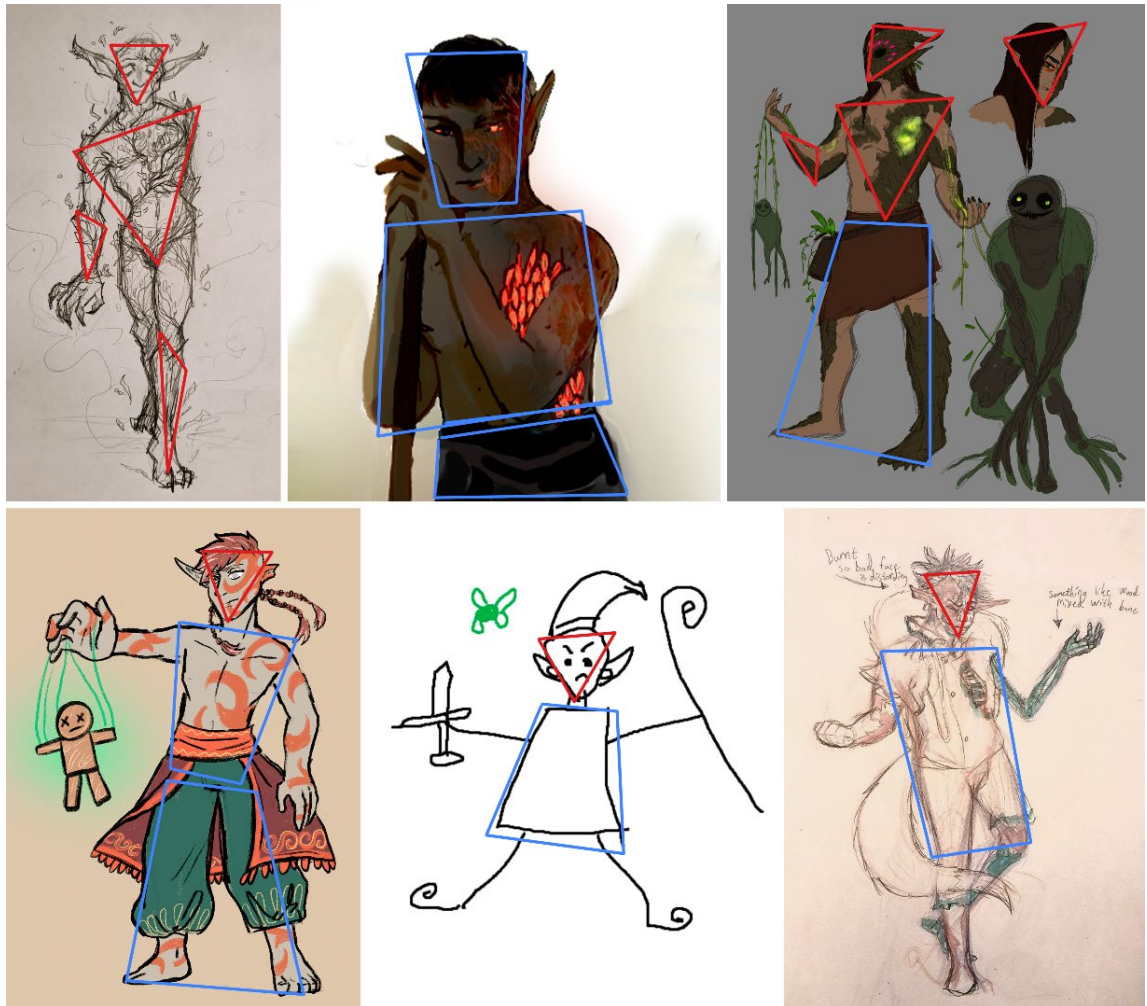
Figure 17. The character designs with their shape language illustrated on top of them

Almost all designs have strong, sharp, and edgy figures, with the greatest exception of design B. Design B has the most rounded and smoothed body structure of all the designs, but it could be due to the participants' art style in general. To have more certainty of this, more participants should have been included in the illustration assignment. The similarities in the shape language of the designs are more visible in Figure 17, where basic shapes are illustrated on top of the designs. The illustrations consist of either triangles, squares, or the combination of the two. What was the most interesting observation while studying the results was that five out of six designs had a triangular shape for the head. As already stated before, triangular shapes emphasize a sense of danger and unpredictable behavior in character design. This was interesting, because five out of six of the volunteers chose a square shape for either the torso or the lower

body, representing stability and reliability. One could interpret that the participants used these choices in their design to represent the former life of the villain, which was described as stable and peaceful. The head area was also one of the most mutilated parts of the body in many of the designs. It could represent the changes the character went through mentally, visually telling the narrative of change of personality through trauma. When discussed with the participants, they were not thinking about these shapes in their designs, making it clear that the shapes represent the sense of danger subconsciously.

When analyzing the designs, it was fascinating to see how the participants viewed the villain themselves. For example, designs A and B are the only designs that show different facial expressions than the other designs. Rather than portraying the character as enraged or with a twisted frown like in C, D, E and F, A and B show the sympathy of the designer towards the character. A's expression represents pain and agony, interpreting the difficulties of breathing that was described in the information provided. It could also represent the emotional trauma the villain has gone through. The facial expression choice is intriguing not only because of its difference to others, but also because of the contrast of the body design. Design A does not only have the most painful expression, but also the body consists only of triangular shapes, making the character distant, dangerous, and repulsive. Design B on the other hand does not have an expression of pain, but apathy with a hint of cold serenity. The design's appearance shape-wise – with only square shapes used – could demonstrate the fact that the character was not born a villain but turned into one due to the circumstances. Designs B, C and D were the only ones involving colors, but they all have the similarities of de-saturated, dull colors. B and C had a darker approach in their color schemes, where D had brighter values, though also dull hues. The color choices in B could represent the burnt forest, with just enough fire to be found raging beneath the ashes, where in C the colors resemble more of a dangerous swamp and mud.

To conclude, the task was a success. It strengthened the statement of how people tend to view villains in general, since many of the same aspects

researched before came up in the designs. These consisted of sharp shapes like triangles and muted, dark colors. Even though the designs were not identical to each other, they still had notable similarities. The task could have been scientifically more accurate – as already stated before – if more participants were gotten into the assignment. This way there could have been more information and data to analyze. In addition, the participants could have been asked to explain their design choices for more accurate interpretation of the designs.

4   ANALYZING VILLAIN CHARACTERS FROM VIDEO GAMES

To get a better understanding of what makes a convincing villain, an analysis of two famous villain characters from known videogames will be made. It will not include whether these characters are inherently "good" or "bad", but only stated whether they seem convincing in their actions, goals, motives, and their appearances. This analysis will be made using everything previously researched in this thesis. It will be analyzed whether these villains are convincing, what traits they have in common, and what traits make them different. Two rather different video game villains – with even more different backgrounds – were chosen to get a better understanding of the villain's convincingness.

4.1   Case study: the villain of Final Fantasy VII franchise – Sephiroth

The villain, Sephiroth (Figure 18), was chosen due to the admiration of this widely known character. Sephiroth from *Final Fantasy VII* (Square Enix 1997) has been one of the most respected and loved video game villains in history, and one could argue that this character is even more famous than the game's protagonist, Cloud Strife. This iconic villain is not only visually remarkable and memorable, but the time and effort that was put into his character design shows in the immersion it creates. The depth of this complex character – which the player can dive deeper into in Final Fantasy VII: Crisis Core (Square Enix 2007) – creates a tense immersion for the player to enjoy while playing the game. It is not a wonder why this villain character keeps coming up in the present day articles discussing *The best villain characters in video games* even when the actual game was published as far back as in 1997. The character will be analyzed using only *Final*

Fantasy VII and *Final Fantasy VII: Crisis Cor*e to narrow down the research, since the character is used in multiple games, and the two chosen games are the origins of the character. *Final Fantasy VII: Crisis Core* will be used in the analysis because it explains Sephiroth's origin story in more detail than in the main game, *Final Fantasy VII*.

Figure 18. Sephiroth from Final Fantasy VII remake (Square Enix 2020)

Starting with the character's appearance, the most noticeable trait of this iconic villain must be his abnormally long silver hair, accompanied with his almost identically long Japanese style sword, katana named Masamune. The unrealistically long sword emphasizes the idea of the character's superhuman strength because a sword so long would need at least two hands to wield, while Sephiroth swings his sword like it would weigh absolutely nothing. Sephiroth has wide shoulders, not only emphasizing his muscular body type, but also the triangular shape in his body design, which gives out a dangerous, unpredictable, and distant feeling of the character (Figure 19). His wide shoulders are also highlighted with even larger shoulder plates, while his lower body is quite narrow compared to the upper body.

The color scheme of Sephiroth is very narrowed down. The character has a pitch-black attire, which is highly contrasted with his pale skin, silver hair, and silver shoulder plates. The only spark of actual color in this character can be seen in his

eyes, which are piercingly turquoise, reflecting the character's backstory which will be discussed later. The figure of the character already feels dangerous and implements power in its design. But what makes Sephiroth such a remarkable character is not only in his visual appearance, but in his storyline.

Figure 19. Sephiroth's shape language

As already stated, the deeper dive into the character Sephiroth happens in the game *Final Fantasy VII: Crisis Core*, though his background is explained in the main game *Final Fantasy VII* also. The information of the character's backstory will be explained by merging the researched information of these two games into one.

Sephiroth was the most powerful and celebrated member of the elite military division SOLDIER, created by Shinra Electric Power Company. He was an adored veteran of the Shinra-Wutai war and used as a propaganda idol to recruit young men into working for Shinra. He was perceived as cold, dry-humored, and distant, but only to strangers and to people he was less close with. But unlike believed, he did have a social life. He had two close friends, Genesis Rhapsodos and Angeal Hewley. It is implied, other than these two, he did not have other

friends before befriending Zack Fair, a former student of Angeal. His friends betrayed Shinra after learning the truth of them being mere scientific experiments for Shinra since birth, leaving Sephiroth behind. Without anyone to turn to, Sephiroth slowly befriended Zack while the two were investigating where Angeal and Genesis had disappeared. Sephiroth is shown to be a caring friend to those close to him, even smiling ever so slightly from time to time. All of this tells the audience that Sephiroth was not indeed born a villain. Before descending to madness and turning evil, he was an honored veteran with feelings. But sadly, it was not meant to last.

As the story goes on, Sephiroth is sent on a mission to the village of Nibelheim with Zack Fair, the main protagonist of *Final Fantasy VII: Crisis Core,* and Cloud Strife, the main protagonist of *Final Fantasy VII.* During the mission, Sephiroth learned the horrible truth about his existence. The party traveled to the Nibelheim mako reactor, which is one of Shinra's reactors that pumps the planet's energy, mako, for Shinra to turn to electricity. In the reactor, countless monsters are seen in incubators filled with mako. Zack turns to Sephiroth, asking what these monsters are. Sephiroth, calmly, but hesitating, states, that average members of SOLDIER, like Zack, are infused with mako but only so little that they are still human. When asked if these creatures are monsters, Sephiroth agrees, explaining that they are the creations of a Shinra scientist called Hojo.

"Abominations spawned by mako energy… That's what monsters are." – *Sephiroth (Final Fantasy VII: Crisis Core 2007)*

Zack, being confused – and inconsiderate – asks what about Sephiroth, who is known to be more powerful than any other member of the SOLDIER division. Sephiroth stares at Zack, speechless, until the realization of his identity strikes him, causing him to almost lose his balance. The way the terrifying realization hits the character sends a shiver down to the spine with its emotional impact, because the player already knows that Sephiroth will become a villain, and this is his origin story. Sephiroth backs up from Zack, shoving him aside, as he starts to talk. In disbelief, he states that he has always known that he was not like the

others, that there was something more to him, something special, but he had no idea that it would be this. He starts to question his humanity, only to be answered by his former friend, Genesis, who appears to the scene. Genesis states, that he in fact is not a human, but a "perfect monster", created from the Jenova project S. Genesis starts to explain to his former friend how he was created from alien genes infused into a human fetus, from a subject named Jenova. The only information Sephiroth has ever had of his parents, has been the name of his mother, "Jenova". So, learning this sends the man to a down spiral. The only thing Sephiroth has ever been able to cling to and find comfort from has turned out to be nothing but an alien monster. Sephiroth leaves the scene, only to lock himself up in the nearby Shinra manor which contains multiple recordings of the Jenova project, of him, and his whole existence.

Sephiroth spends the next seven days in the Shinra manor, learning everything there is about Jenova, slowly drowning in his ever-growing madness. His whole reality collapses, as he reads that he is nothing more than a test subject, raised to become a weapon for Shinra to use. The recordings falsely state that the alien Jenova was a "Cetra", an ancient being that was able to connect with the planet. Sephiroth, blindly believing the recordings is left to think that Shinra, and all of humanity stole the planet from his mother, Jenova. The narration points out, that the lights in the Shinra manor never went off, indicating that Sephiroth kept reading the documents, "like a man possessed", as stated by Zack. And as the seventh day came, Sephiroth had descended into madness so deep, that there was no going back, and one of the greatest villains in video game history was born.

Figure 20. One of the most iconic FFVII scenes where Sephiroth turns evil (Square Enix 2007)

The seventh day of marks as the "Nibelheim incident", where Sephiroth went berserk and massacred the whole village of Nibelheim, burning and killing everyone who opposed him (Figure 20). Sephiroth returns to the Nibelheim mako reactor, where the remains of the alien Jenova remain. Sephiroth is seen talking to the remains, completely insane, believing that the creature in the tank before him is his mother, and he, with her, are next to gods. Zack tries to call out to Sephiroth, but the man is no longer the same. Sephiroth believes that the humans are the cause of his pain, and that together with his "mother", the planet belongs to them, since they are "far superior to humans". Zack engaged into a fight with Sephiroth, losing to him since he is not only a far more genetically modified compared to him, but also trained to be a killing soldier since a very young age. Sephiroth returns to the remains of Jenova, only to be attacked from behind by Cloud Strife, the main protagonist of the *Final Fantasy VII* game. He came to avenge what Sephiroth had done to the village, and his mother, Nibelheim being Cloud's home village. Sephiroth is pierced almost in half, which enrages the usually undefeatable veteran. Left in agony and in his madness, Sephiroth decapitates the remains of Jenova, tightly holding on to the head as he follows Cloud out of the Jenova chamber. In his wrath, he pierces Cloud with his sword, lifting him up in the air like an impaled puppet. Even after the gruesome act, Cloud is able to get on his feet, and uses his strength to throw Sephiroth off the platform to the depths of the reactor, where liquified mako swallows the

madness driven SOLDIER. Cloud collapses, and Sephiroth is thought to be dead – which is not the case.

All of this leads to Sephiroth becoming the main villain in *Final Fantasy VII*, where he is determined to destroy Cloud, Shinra, and take the life essence of the planet to himself, destroying everything in his way. After being tossed into the mako stream below the reactor, Sephiroth had the time to develop his plans and fill himself up with hate and rage. Therefore, it is not a surprise that in *Final Fantasy VII* Sephiroth uses all his powers to torment Cloud in any way he can, resentful that a mere "foot soldier" was able to best him. What makes Sephiroth such a frightening villain is that he is not only physically strong, but the way he mentally tortures Cloud is beyond horrifying. Not only does Sephiroth gaslight Cloud thinking that he is mentally insane, but he also kills his loved ones. Sephiroth keeps proving that there is no act too horrible that he would not commit in his revenge driven madness.

If anything, the background story of Sephiroth is well written, and it helps greatly to understand the character's motives, morals, and goals. It shows that Sephiroth had a reason to go mad, and to become evil. Especially when viewing the backstory with everything learnt in this thesis. As can be read between the lines, Sephiroth did not have many friends growing up, he did not have the support or love from parental figures or from caretakers, and he was trained to be a killing machine since a very young age. These circumstances would already individually have had an enormously negative impact on a child's development, and Sephiroth suffered from all of them. If anything, it is unfathomable that Sephiroth did not go mad earlier. He has been at risk of doing evil deeds throughout his life. It could even be argued that he was so devastated of the reveal of his past, that he developed the earlier mentioned "state of mind of evil", where he was incapable of caring anymore: not about humanity, not about himself, not about anything at all. It is as if he was not able to feel pain or even remorse in his madness. He was following the same formula of evil as described in *Miksi vihaamme? Yksilön ja yhteisön anatomiaa* (Juntumaa 2018). He experienced injustice towards himself, he felt used for being nothing but a tool for Shinra, he

believed that he was special after falsely learning that his mother Jenova was an ancient being of power, and he had been numbed to violence since a very young age due to being basically a weapon for Shinra. Everything Sephiroth experienced can explain why he went mad, and why he was so adamant in his quest to destroy everything. What could have been covered better, though, was his hatred for Cloud that was revealed in *Final Fantasy VII.* It does feel quite petty for him to want to mentally torture Cloud to the brink of insanity. Cloud did try to end his life, and he was the first to injure him so badly, yes, but it still feels rather off. It feels like his obsession to destroy Cloud was unjustified. One would think that a strong, ruthless and merciless man of power would simply just have killed the hero, not torture him even after he got everything he needed from him during the game. His unlimited hate for Shinra on the other hand feels more than convincing since he was their puppet since birth. So why would he hate Cloud so much more? Another thing that could have been explained better was Sephiroth's endgame plan. In the game *Final Fantasy VII*, Sephiroth was trying to take over the planet's life essence and power, and finally use the dying planet as his vessel as he would travel through the cosmos. It explains nothing after that. What would Sephiroth have benefited from this, what would he have gained? It <u>could</u> be interpreted that he wanted to carry on Jenova's legacy, and that he was so insane in that point, that he was too obsessed to think about anything else except Jenova and being her living legacy. But even with these small critiques, Sephiroth still holds the title of being one of the best video game villains. So, it is easy to say that he indeed is a very convincing villain, even with small details left unexplained.

4.2   Case study: the villain of Portal 2 – Wheatley

Wheatley (Figure 21) from the first-person puzzle platform game *Portal 2* (Valve Corporation 2011), was chosen since he is not the average villain that is seen in video games. The character is not as admired and liked as much as the villain of *Portal 1* (Valve Corporation 2007) GLaDOS, the witty, sarcastic, and insulting artificial intelligence, AI, but due to his character development through the game, he was chosen for this analysis. In addition, Wheatley was chosen because the betrayal this villain plays onto the player and the protagonist is something that

has drawn the attention of the players for years. The betrayal was so shocking that it left the gaming community in awe.

Figure 21. Wheatley as a sidekick (R) and Wheatley as a villain (L) (Valve Corporation 2011)

Wheatley did not start out as the villain of the game, but rather as the sidekick. Wheatley's body – all in its simplicity – is just a sphere (Figure 22), which gives out an approachable and safe feeling to the player. Although a bit worn out, Wheatley is mostly clinically white sphere of metal, with a blue light to resemble his eye. White and blue, when used together, can emphasize the feeling of loyalty, trust, and honesty – everything one would expect from a sidekick.
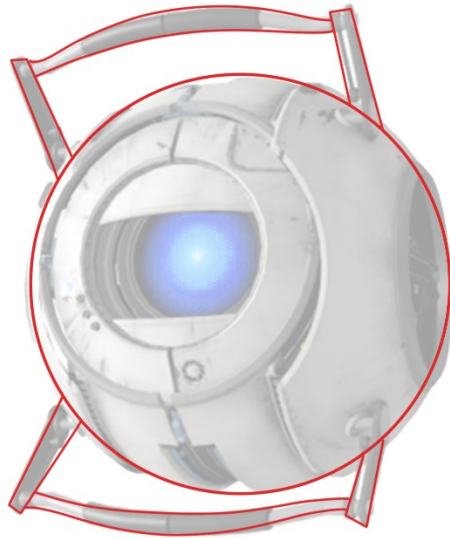
Figure 22. Wheatley's shape language

As previously stated, Wheatley is first introduced to the player as a fellow sidekick. He is heard knocking on the door of the room the player wakes up in, trying to get in. If the player waits enough time, Wheatley is heard even trying to communicate with the main character by using different languages and calling the character a "friend", already making him feel a bit tacky and awkward. After opening the door, Wheatley does not introduce himself right away, but instead starts panicking and promising to get the player out of the room. The player – and most probably the character – is left confused with this yet unnamed character and his motivations. Wheatley dumps the player with rather alarming information, stating that the character most probably has some sort of brain damage, but frantically assuring that there is no need to worry. The character gives out quite a messy outcome of himself, which gives the impression to the player that this character means no harm. It may not necessarily create a stable feeling of trust like his color scheme implements, but at least the player should not feel threatened with his presence. The room the player is in starts to rumble, and Wheatley disappears, soon starting to explain that they need to evacuate. The room is ripped from its foundation, and Wheatley – somehow – moves the room with the player to another location, using the time to explain the situation. Wheatley explains to the player that he was responsible for keeping the residents of the facility they are in alive. He explains in an awkward and rather stressful

voice, that there is no need to worry, but his words and frantic mumbling implements that they are, in fact, dead. It is not stated if the developers intended it, but it is rather obvious that the whole situation must feel humorous to the player, despite the quite gruesome setting of destruction. The game moves on, and Wheatley befriends the protagonist, alongside the player. Wheatley tries to get the protagonist out of the facility, which is the main goal of the game. Being a sidekick to the protagonist, the player learns to trust the goofy sphere, despite his flaws on oddities. And the trust will only strengthen, until a betrayal comes out of nowhere.

The protagonist, alongside the player, gets to the chamber where the alleged villain of the game resides. It is the former villain of the last game, *Portal,* GLaDOS, who has been tormenting the journey of Wheatley and the protagonist throughout the game, insulting them, and threatening to kill them with neurotoxins. The protagonist gets ready to fight, but Wheatley comes to the rescue – by dropping face first to the floor. This very comically weird situation carries on to the point where the protagonist is to change the main core of the villain GLaDOS to Wheatley, so Wheatley can take control of the whole facility, and help the protagonist out of there. Objectively speaking, a very odd "fight" occurs, and Wheatley gets placed into the body of GLaDOS. An elevator is summoned for the protagonist, so she can leave the facility once and for all. But as the glass elevator slowly ascends, Wheatley's joyful laughter turns to more sinister, and unstable laughter. A total turnaround in Wheatley's character occurs, as he suddenly lowers the elevator, forcing the protagonist to stay in the facility, blaming her for only using him to get out, verbally attacking her. Red light emerges from beneath Wheatley, highlighting his betrayal.

Mockingly, Wheatley inserts GLaDOS' artificial intelligence into a potato batter, and the two get into a verbal fight. GLaDOS reveals remembering Wheatley's voice, recognizing him as an intelligence dampening sphere which was created to town down GLaDOS. Wheatley is seen to have an existential crisis, as GLaDOS mockingly screams, that he is a "moron by design". This enrages Wheatley, and he violently throws potato GLaDOS into the elevator with the protagonist, before

hitting it so hard, so many times that it falls into the depths of the facility. The game carries on with GLaDOS and the protagonist so that they can take on Wheatley, get GLaDOS back online, and the protagonist out of the facility. The two carry on in the facility which Wheatley now controls, executing every one of his idiotic ideas, almost destroying the facility in the process.

Wheatley worked well as a villain, and his betrayal was shocking to the players. But was it enough to make him a convincing villain, even though his storyline was enjoyed by the players? While his betrayal truly did awaken various strong emotions, it could be argued that more could have been done to make it seem more convincing. His motives were revealed as GLaDOS started to call him names, stating his stupidity as a fact – which it sadly was. This could have been interpreted in a way, that Wheatly truly wanted to do something correctly, and needed to prove that he was not stupid or a "moron", like he was designed to be. But this did not give enough reason for him to start accusing the protagonist of only using him to get out and attacking her. After some reading of the story, it was stated that Wheatley went mad with power. This could also explain why he was remorseful after he was defeated. But the villain could have been more convincing, if the motives to hurt the protagonist were clearer and more thought out than just "going mad with power". It was true that Wheatley did hardly have any power before, thus making it understandable for going mad after getting it so much and so quickly. But taking into consideration how much he wanted to help the protagonist, the sudden betrayal and change of personality felt unconvincing. It is difficult to analyze the character's motives, because so little is known about Wheatley's past. That could be the reason why Wheatley's betrayal has been so well received, unlike the villain himself.

4.3   Conclusion of the analysis

After analysing these two different characters, it could be said that a convincing and a memorable villain needs strong motivations behind their actions, and an appearance that fits the character. For example, Sephiroth can be constantly found in different video game villain articles, but Wheatley cannot. Instead, Wheatley's betrayal can often be found in the articles reviewing the worst

betrayals in video games. This could mean, that even if the emotional impact of some actions or evil deeds can be great, they alone are not enough to make the villain convincing and immersive. Wheatley, unlike Sephiroth, was lacking reasons for his enragement towards the protagonist who was placed as the scapegoat of his anger. Sephiroth on the other hand, had detailed reasons to act like he did. The storyline explained his social development throughout the plot, which had already made him feel like an outsider. The feeling of never fitting in, been raised into a weapon, and possibly been even monitored his whole life just to hear, that he indeed "was" an outsider, an alien among humans that had stolen power that did not belong to them. Sephiroth was not only given a detailed background and history which made his personality and morals more immersive, but his storyline was also given motives to do the horrible things he did. He was given enough motivation to destroy Shinra, who had taken almost everything away from him, as the hate slowly expanded to all lifeforms on the planet. When comparing the appearance of the two, they could not be more opposite of each other. It is difficult to say whether Wheatley would have been a more convincing villain if his design was different from the one that was designed, since it did fit the narrative of the storyline. Wheatley was not supposed to become evil, as he was created to keep the actual villainous artificial intelligence in control. It is also worth noting that his appearance made the betrayal very shocking. His circular body, and white-blue design was emphasizing trust and loyalty, unlike in Sephiroth's design. Sephiroth's design already stood out as distant, cold, and dangerous, which on the other hand fits his character even before descending to madness and becoming evil. Sephiroth was a soldier, so he was supposed to look threatening.

This knowledge that was gained through analysing these characters can be implemented into designing a villain. It became clear, that a convincing villain indeed needs a detailed background, strong reasons for their motives and an appearance that strengthens it.

5 DESIGNING A VILLAIN

As the research has been done, and there is now an understanding of how a convincing villain is made, it is time to create one. The process will start by creating the background for the character, which will begin with designing the milieu that the character will live in. The milieu will only be explained briefly, so the focus will stay on the character design. After the base of the environment is provided, the design process will continue with creating the background story of the character. Unlike stated in the book *Game development essentials – Game story & character development* (Krawczyk & Novak 2006) that the physiology of the character should be created before the background story, the author of this thesis strongly disagrees with the statement. The author argues that the background of the character may alter the physiology of the character so strongly, that it should be created first. For example, if the character comes from poor circumstances, it is possible that they are shorter than the characters from richer areas due to possible malnutrition suffered in childhood.

This will be crucial to explaining how the character has turned into a villain and help to reveal the motives of their actions and so, make them a convincing villain. The story – if done correctly and with patience – will give the character depth and deepen the immersion as well as the connection with the audience. After the story is written and cleaned up, the process will continue by creating the appearance of the character. It is necessary to create the story first because it will affect the appearance of the character. For example, if the character has lost a limb in a traumatic event before, it will need to show in the design. The credibility of the storyline will suffer if the appearance does not strengthen the narrative, and therefore, it becomes unconvincing. It is also worth mentioning, that when the background story is created first, the lore can be implemented to the character's physical appearance more easily, rather than returning to the character to alter their design to match the written lore.

5.1   Preparations

The preparations to create the character had to be started by creating the milieu. The reason milieu was included in the design is that the character must stay consistent to the world they are in. The character would not be immersive or convincing if they seem to be taken out of context in their own habitat – just like it would seem absurd to see a polar bear in the middle of the Amazon rainforest.

Two ideas stood out during the creative process of the milieu. A futuristic world filled with dirty streets, and little to no organic material for consumption. A dystopian future waiting to happen, lurking in the corner of humanity's path, ready to devour all in its grasp. As an unbiased opinion, this setting is used, and not very original in such brief explanation, but it does have potential. One could argue that it would fit more than well the present time with its criticizing topic – how the nature of planet Earth is suffocating, whilst the population is not doing enough to heal it. This topic has been seen countless times. Even a game as old as Final Fantasy VII (Square Enix 1997) has included this topic in their narration. But this kind of milieu would give out many possibilities for a villain character to emerge from.

The second idea – yet again not so original – was to create a high fantasy realm with different species and cultures. High fantasy is a subgenre of the fantasy genre, but it differs from it by its setting. High fantasy's setting is located on any unearthly place, a planet, a realm, basically anything other than planet Earth. The milieu may include but not limit to magic, epic forces, supernatural or demonic creatures. For example, The Lord of the Rings books (1954-1955) written by J.R.R Tolkien are one of the most known high fantasy stories. (MasterClass 2023.) This setting would be more forgiving than the first idea, which restricts the milieu greatly. In futuristic settings, people, and especially sci-fi fans, have certain ways of imaging it – whether it is neon lights, new technology, clinically clean places or the total opposite of dirt and smoke. People also have a keen idea of what a high fantasy setting should look like, but the range is wider per se. This idea was also taken more seriously, since the author of this thesis has more
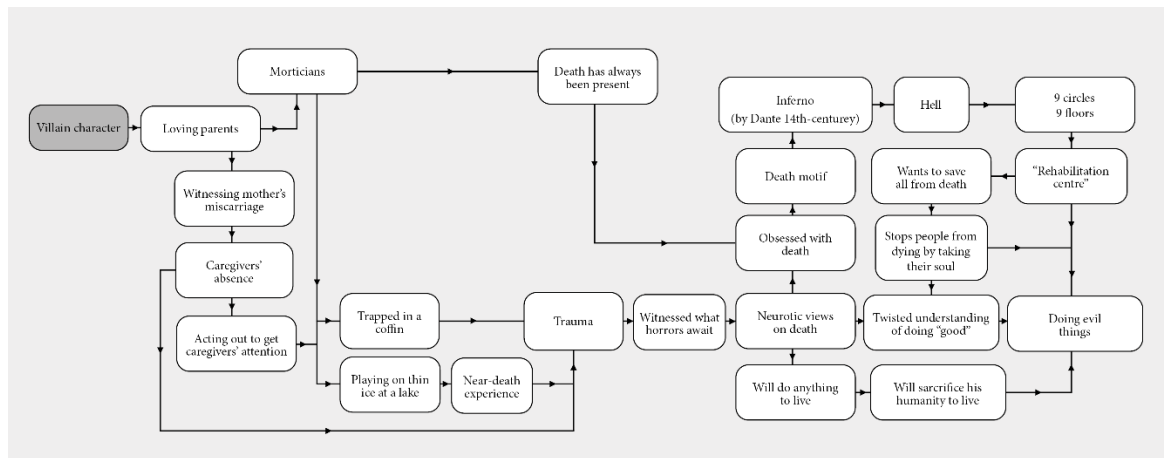
understanding of the subject, even though both settings are personally interesting and intriguing.

But out of the bloom, a third option emerged. This milieu would be something between the first two options. A modern, darker world but with a fictional twist. The idea was to create a fictional counterpart of Earth, but without the limitations of modern-day science. This sudden idea gave the thesis author more confidence than the first two drafts, so the plans were quickly changed. Unlike the first two milieus, this one felt more genuine, passionate and to the author's surprise, it seemed to develop almost effortlessly. As the base of the milieu was thought out, it led to an idea of a "rehabilitation center" which would be what it would seem. A mood board of this setting was created to help to have a stronger image of the environment (Figure 23).

Figure 23. A moodboard of the environment, the "rehabilitation center"

The environment created an idea for a story of a character who is obsessed with death as a concept. A man so obsessed and horrified of dying, that he would do anything in his power to stop it becoming his reality.

Figure 24. Mind map of the character Aion

A mind map of the character was created (Figure 24), and little by little, "Aion" was born. The name Aion was chosen because it is the Greek god of eternity. It was time to create a polished backstory for the character.

5.2 The villain character Aion

Start of the product's written design

Before the game's storyline

Aion was the first-born son to his atheist parents. He was able to live a stable childhood, though death was always present. His parents worked as morticians, owning their own company. As death had become too normalized for his parents, only little of their work life was censored at home. This was seen and heard as endless discussions at the dinner table, documents laying on counters and sometimes even grotesque photographs were left for young Aion to find. Aion, being shy at nature would stay quiet with his ever-growing anxiety, not wanting to alarm his parents who were so at ease at the idea of death. Death was seen as the final rest, and that there would be nothing else after that. This was explained to the boy multiple times, reassuring, that there was no need to fear death. But even if death was not a stranger in their household, it was difficult and stressful for a young child to understand. Aion's parents were not trying to hurt their first-born, as they simply were too numbed to the concept of death themselves. But Aion's life could still be argued as being stable – at least for the moment.

As Aion grew older, his mother became pregnant with his little sister, Stasia (a Greek name meaning resurrection). The news of new life sparked joy in the household, and the unborn baby was ready to be welcomed. Aion was going to become a big brother, and his parents were overly excited and filled with joy. But during the last months of the pregnancy, Aion's mother had a miscarriage, and was forced to give birth to a dead child. The parents were devastated, and for the first time in Aion's eyes, death was not a normal condition. To the parents, it was their wish to prepare their dead child themselves for the funeral, wanting to honor the baby with their own talent as morticians. It was important to them since they did not believe in the afterlife, so this was their way of saying their goodbyes. Without understanding the mental trauma they would cause, the parents wanted Aion to witness the preparation. They wanted the family to go through the pain as one, without understanding that a child so young should not have seen his dead sister. The shy boy was mortified, quietly shutting down into his own mental reality.

As time passed, the mother became depressed, blaming herself for what had happened. She questioned everything she had done: her diet, sleep cycle, everything she could ever think of. This resulted in using all her time to analyze and blame herself, decaying from reality, slowly being unable to work at all. As his wife was not able to continue her work in their business, the father was forced to keep it on running all by himself. He was rarely seen in the household, drowning in hard work. As the parents were only focused on dealing with their own pain, traumas and work, Aion was left alone. The parents who had earlier devoted their life to loving him were gone. The mental absence of his caregivers resulted in Aion's desperation. Trying his best to get any kind of response from his parents, he tried to create gifts, clean, prepare dinner, absolutely anything. He was forced to become his own parent. His parents' relationship started to crack, as the tired husband returned home to see that their child was the only one participating in household work, as his wife was not able to do anything in her pain. Death, that once was so normalized in the family, had suddenly changed the whole reality of young Aion. His father started to lose his temper, resulting in

verbal fights and arguments. Not understanding the new setting at home that was once a safe space, Aion started to act up. As positive engagement had not worked, he tried to get attention by misbehaving, which is often seen in children living in hostile environments. Aion started stealing and hiding items from his parents, having outbursts of rage, and hiding when it was time to go to school. Once while hiding, the little boy was trapped in a coffin which was retained in the family's storehouse. The boy was trapped for hours and hours, as his father was at work, and mother was not able to hear his screams. It was not until late at night when a neighbor had walked near the storehouse and alarmed the boy's mother. Terrified Aion was let out, but the damage had already been done. The boy was terrified of closed spaces and being unable to control things.

As time passed, the problems grew. Aion had become very controlling, not bearing any kind of changes in plans or in his routines. And if his decisions were not honored, he would burst into rage, and act out. During wintertime, at the age of eleven, Aion wanted to go skating at the nearby lake. He was strictly forbidden by his father because the ice was too thin and would not hold. Enraged by this, Aion waited for his father to leave, and left for the lake on his own, his mother too weak and afraid to tell him otherwise. But how much she had hoped she would have told him otherwise. Just like his father had warned him, the ice was too thin, and it did not hold. The ice broke under Aion, and the boy fell. In shock, he screamed as hard as he could. The cold bit into his body, piercing its way into his bones and body. He saw an image of his dead sister, only being able to think that he was going to die, just like she had. Agonizingly slowly his body started to give up, and the sweet embrace of shivering cold dragged him beneath the surface, as everything went black, and the little heart stopped beating – but not for eternity.

Aion's cries were heard, and he was pulled out of the water by a couple who were walking their dog nearby. After getting the boy up, CPR was performed to get the heart beating again. It took time, but Aion was revived and taken to a hospital. Questions about the unconscious and hypothermic boy's health and state rose, especially when the father arrived. The situation at home was

revealed as the father broke down, understanding that they were not in the condition to raise their son anymore. Placing their son's needs before their own, it was agreed that Aion would be located elsewhere to grow, away from the hostile environment that was once his home.

Aion, after recovering in the hospital and being taken into custody, was placed into a religious home. The boy was traumatized by what he had gone through, not being able to comprehend the horrors he witnessed while his heart stopped. He started questioning everything he had learned at home about life, and especially about death. In his experience it was not restful, peaceful, or even unconscious darkness. What he had witnessed was not the nonexistent afterlife, it was far, far worse. As the anxiety grew inside the boy's mentality, his adoptive family introduced him to religion. Suddenly there was an afterlife, and at worst it would be an eternity of pain and agony. Terrified of the thought and reflecting on the horrors he had witnessed, Aion silently started slipping away from the stable path. Aion became obsessed with the concept of death, reading and studying everything about it he could. He also developed neuroses towards the subject, terrified of dying in general. At worst, Aion would beware of anything poisonous, dirty and be calculative of everything he did. The need for control grew stronger, even with the much-needed love given by his adoptive parents.

Without the new, safer environment, it is not certain what would have become of Aion. But what is certain is, that the boy wanted to dedicate his whole life to escaping death, to erase it from existence. He was certain that death would bring unimaginable pain and horrors, and he would do absolutely anything to avoid it. He would do anything to stop people from dying. And he did.

As years went by, Aion – struggling with his neurotic and controlling behavior – studied a large scale of sciences. With all the knowledge he gained, he was able to prototype a machine which would seal a person's soul within, making it impossible for it to move to the afterlife. With correct planning and marketing, the machine was introduced as a "fountain of youth" for investors. And as Aion started to bathe in fame and power, Feden was born. Feden (word combination

of phoenix – an eternal being – and the Garden of Eden) is a company founded by Aion and a rehabilitation center was built under its name. Feden, the rehabilitation center was not truly for rehabilitation. As Aion got more investors for his project and machine, he started selling the idea of a luxury rehabilitation center, where people would come to refresh themselves and get rid of the pain of injured or aging bodies. In reality, it was for sealing the souls of the clients into the machine he had finished building, naming it after his dead sister, Stasia, honoring her as a victim of death.

The rehabilitation center as an extension of Aion's character

The visualization of the rehabilitation center was based on Aion's fixation on death and an everlasting paradise (Figure 23, p.50). As he is mortified by small, closed places, the center is filled with open, bright places, containing numerous plants, natural elements, and open water like in the Garden of Eden. As being fixated in death, and in hell for that matter, the center has nine floors, just like the nine circles of hell in *Divine Comedy* (Alighieri 1321). But unlike in the *Divine Comedy*, where on top of the gates of hell reads "abandon all hope, you who enter here.", at the gates of Feden it reads: "embrace all hope, you who enter here", being the total opposite of hell's gates. Continuing with the same motif, Aion's machine is located at the top of the ninth floor, where he believed that the souls would ascend to eternal life, when in reality, the souls would be sealed into Aion's machine, reflecting hell and eternal damnation. This – again – is the opposite of *Divine Comedy*, where Alighieri wrote that one must descend to the deepest depth of hell to ascend to the heavens. It is also worth noting that the whole rehabilitation center is filled with "no smoking" signs, because Aion is so anxious about dying, he fears that just by being in the same room with a smoker may cause him cancer. Though ironically, the man himself smokes from time to time, representing his inner conflict and hypocrisy.

Storyline in the game

When the story of the game starts, Aion has had years to perfect his machine, and his rehabilitation center, finally being able to work as he pleases. He is at the top of his career, where there is no one to control him, or daring enough to point out his persistent neuroses, like fear of dirt, bacteria, aging, or anything that may lead to death. He systematically rips the souls of the rehabilitation center's clients, basically leaving behind hollow bodies, thus believing that no one indeed has died. Investigators and journalists get interested in the fact that the clients either feel off when they come back, or they don't want to leave the "paradise" at all, permanently moving into Feden. The story's protagonist, the opposing force of Aion, is one of these who see that something about Feden is off. As the protagonist enters Feden to research the facility, Aion does everything in his power to stop him, as he is fearing of losing control. Aion tries to stop the protagonist who persistently ascends the nine floors one by one, trying to hurt him with ways he knows cause horror: by shutting them into closed spaces, trying to drown them, yelling at them through the speakers and even sending guards after them to kill them. Nothing will work, however, and the protagonist fights their way to the top of the building. The two engage in a fight, the protagonist severely injuring Aion. In his desperation he is shocked by the pain, the blood, and the fact that he is about to die. The agonizing panic possesses him, as Aion starts screaming in horror: "No, no- no I will not die-! I will not die-! You will not have me!" He frantically continues to shout that he won't die, as his mental state starts to shatter. Aion drags his dying body to the machine, and plugs himself into the tubes, releasing all the souls he has sealed into it. In his panic driven state, he will not care for others as his only goal is to evade death. The souls rush into his body, mutating it to a monstrous form as Aion sacrifices his humanity to escape death. Fully lost his sanity due to the unimaginable fear he is experiencing and of the souls infiltrating his body, the monster keeps frantically shouting: "I will not die, I will not die!" A final battle between the protagonist and Aion, the false god, takes place. After the battle, the souls rush to the heavens, as Aion is sentenced to the dark abyss, waiting beneath the surface.

End of the product's written design

5.3   The Appearance of Aion

After creating the storyline for the character Aion, it was finally time to create the appearance of the said character. Adobe Photoshop Creative Cloud program was used together with Wacom Cintiq Pro drawing screen. Adobe Photoshop CC was chosen due to the thesis author's familiarity with the program and Wacom Cintiq Pro was chosen over Wacom Intuos Pro, because the drawing screen enables faster working pace for the designer and more ergonomic drawing posture than using a drawing tablet.

The visualization of Aion was started off by using the thumbnailing technique. It is a technique that allows the possibility to create more sketches and character silhouettes in less time than doing detailed sketches. The idea is to create small, undetailed silhouettes to see what works the best for the illustration in progress. The most interesting silhouette was chosen from the thumbnail sketches (Figure 25), and then it was refined into a more detailed version of the sketch.

Figure 25. Thumbnail sketches of Aion

Figure 26. Refined sketch of Aion

Figure 26 was chosen as Aion because it seemed to fit the character the most. Others were considered too, but the design chosen visually explained Aion's character as a neurotic (rubber gloves), distant, and dangerous.
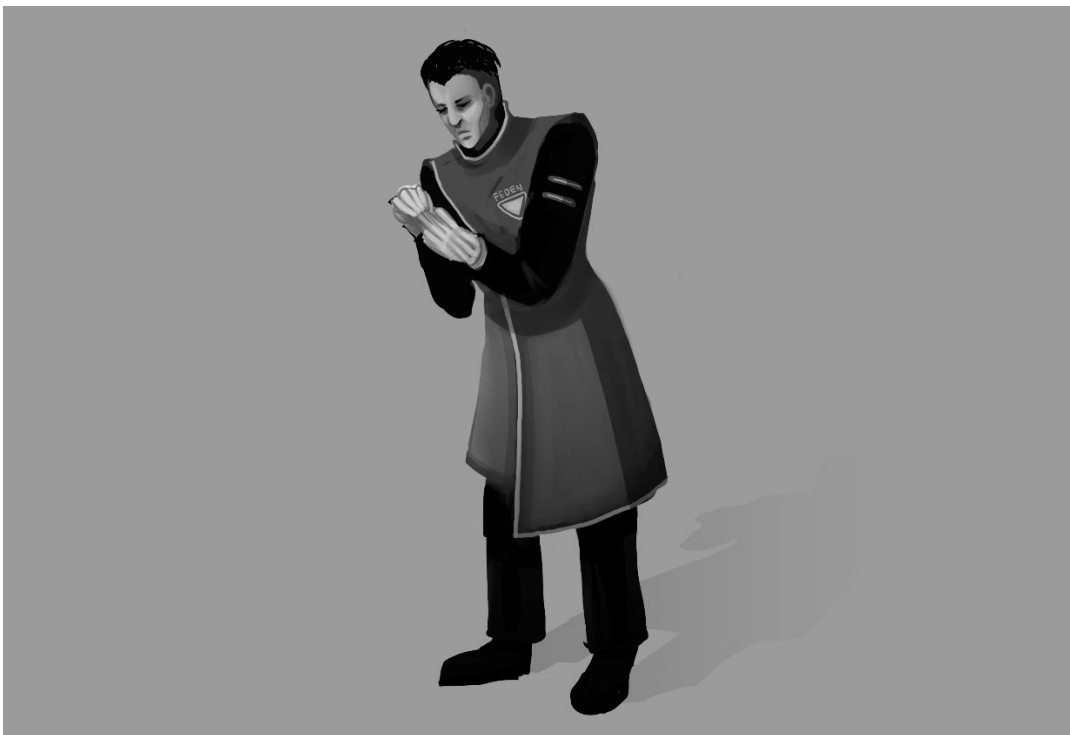
Figure 27. Black and white tones of Aion

After thumbnailing, and refining the sketch to a more detailed version, the illustration was colored in black and white tones (Figure 27), so the values of the design could be monitored throughout the process. After this, colors were experimented with, leading to colorization of the character, adding details, and finally ending with visualization of the villain character (Figure 28).

Figure 28. Colored version of Aion

Everything researched before in the thesis was used in Aion visual image. His colors were narrowed down to a limited color palette, which really made the author think of their choices and the colors' symbolism and meaning. Together with this, the shape language was monitored during the process, making sure that the overall shape language would follow the information gained through the research before.

6   CONCLUSION

Creating a convincing villain is a difficult task, and it takes a lot of effort, time, and research. When creating a convincing villain, it is primarily needed to understand

what the villain is for. After understanding that what kind of opposing force the villain will be, the actual design process can start. When designing a convincing villain, especially for a video game, it is crucial that the villain has a solid, well written, researched, and executed background story, that will come through to the audience during the game. The background story will help the players to understand why the villain is behaving like they are, making their goals, motivation, and personality to feel immersive and convincing. It is also crucial to understand the importance of traumas, how they are caused, and how they affect the development of human mind. The background story is not necessarily there to make the audience feel pity to the villain, but to understand the issues that have made them abandon the lawful ways of society, to see the world from their point of view.

Though already invested in the subject, the author of this thesis learned a fair amount of character design throughout the process. The author had already a strong understanding of character design in general, especially of the psychological and storytelling side of the design process, but the thesis has deepened their understanding of the subject greatly.

The results this thesis has gathered will be useful in the field of game design and can be used as a resource for character design. Creating convincing villains – and convincing characters in general – is crucial for games that want to get their stories told. As already established, characters are needed in stories so the narrative will get through to the audience. With immersive and convincing villains, the audience is more likely to be invested in the story.

The reliability of the results could be argued as trustworthy, though the results could have been tried to improve with more research. To get a better understanding of the fundamentals of a convincing villain, more could have been done through the process. If there would have been more time to use on the research, it could have been enhanced with an additional questionnaire where the author could have gathered more information on which villain has been the most convincing in their actions and motivations. These answers could have

been analysed and compared with each other, and then implemented to the information researched to see how well they fit in this thesis' narrative. Additionally, more people could have been invited to participate in the visualisation of a villain task. To get better results, the assignment could have been shared using different social media platforms where it could have reached a larger audience. Then there could have been more answers to analyse and compare. It would have made the task more difficult, but the variety of the results would have given a more scientifically accurate conclusion of the task. If the research would have wanted to go even further into the subject, psychologists or psychiatrist could have been interviewed to get a wider understanding of the development of human mind and how it affects people in the long run.

The greatest difficulties that were faced during the thesis process, were in the design. Even with all the knowledge and gathered information, it was difficult to create a villain with an interesting enough story to tell. Many, many villain concepts were thought of and casted aside, but at the end, the best one was chosen due to the opportunity of refining the character to be a convincing villain. More time could have been spent on the visual design of the villain, but it was decided, that focusing more on the written side of the design was more important.

If the subject was to be continued, it would be beneficial to create another visualization task for volunteers but get more people to participate in it. Another way to continue the study would be to take the designed character created during this thesis, and give it out to voluntary people to analyse, perhaps even to experts in the field of psychology and social development.

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