

Julia Räsä

**CONCEPT ART CREATION
METHODOLOGIES**
Visual Development of “Rock Boy”

Bachelor’s thesis
Degree programme in Game Design

2018



South-Eastern Finland
University of Applied Sciences

Author	Degree	Time
Julia Rässa	Bachelor of Culture and Arts	April 2018
Title Concept Art creation methodologies Visual Development of “Rock Boy”		37 pages 45 pages of appendices
Commissioned by South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences		
Supervisor Sarah-Jane Leavey, Lecturer		
<p data-bbox="147 653 1466 982">Abstract</p> <p data-bbox="147 726 1466 982">Concept art is often mistakenly referred to as art that is created using the same principles as when creating 2D art assets or illustrations, despite concept art at its core being based in design. The objective of this thesis was to define what common design methods are used by modern game industry professionals to create concept art. Throughout the thesis, common methods of concept development were established, and then supported through their practical implementation in the production of concept art for the case project “Rock Boy”.</p> <p data-bbox="147 1020 1466 1234">The thesis content was based on the insight of interviewed concept artists. The answers were subject to parallel analysis and as a result the author identified the major concept art creation methods. The main issues discussed were the role of storytelling in the process, reference use, research, and photo bashing. The Thesis also discusses how a game project’s subject matter and art style reflects on the type of methods used when creating concept art.</p> <p data-bbox="147 1272 1466 1455">The final product was a concept art portfolio consisting of six distinct environment pieces, five character designs, as well sketches made during the development. Secondly, this thesis provides two concept art creation tools; the Median Approach and the Outlying Approach. These two approaches were designed to make concept art creation easier to learn, teach, and implement.</p> <p data-bbox="147 1493 1466 1745">The final product and research accumulated valuable knowledge on what the profession of a concept artist entails, and what are its defining elements and peculiarities. This thesis should not be taken as a full guide to concept art creation as it is limited in its scope; it mostly discusses concept art in terms of the game industry and deals with very specific design questions. A more in-depth research would require more time, resources, additional interviewees, and a new line of refined questions. Despite that, this thesis holds as a solid foundation for future research in this area.</p>		
<p data-bbox="147 1789 1466 1822">Keywords</p> <p data-bbox="147 1860 1466 1890">concept art, visual development, game design, design</p>		

CONTENTS

GLOSSARY

1	INTRODUCTION	5
2	CONCEPT ART	6
2.1	History of Concept Art.....	6
2.2	Illustration and Concept Art	7
2.3	Concept Art Fundamentals	8
3	CREATION METHODOLOGIES.....	10
3.1	Analysis of Interviews	10
3.2	Median Approach and Outlying Approach	11
4	PRODUCTION.....	12
4.1	Median Approach and Environment Art	12
4.2	Outlying Approach and Character Art	20
4.3	Revision of Methodologies.....	29
5	CONCLUSION.....	33
	REFERENCES	35
	LIST OF FIGURES	37

APPENDICES

- Appendix 1 Petersen-Jessen's Interview
- Appendix 2 Ural's Interview
- Appendix 3 Assinen's Interview
- Appendix 4 Nyström's Interview
- Appendix 5 6 story conflicts
- Appendix 6 8 ½ Character Archetypes
- Appendix 7 Final environment art
- Appendix 8 Final character art
- Appendix 9 Character costume iterations
- Appendix 10 Character hair iterations

GLOSSARY

AAA game	Classification term used for video games produced and distributed by major publishers with the highest development budgets and levels of promotion.
GDD	A game design document that expresses the vision of a game project, describes the game's mechanics and presents a plan for implementation.
Indie	Independent video game developer; either an individual or small team who operate independently from publishers.
Lasso Tool	A tool for selecting and cutting precise areas of an image by drawing or tracing the selection outline.
Match Color	A Photoshop tool that alters the colors in an image to match those from another image or another layer in that same image.
Mood board	A type of collage consisting of images fonts, colors, and textures based on a set topic that helps define the style of the project.
Photo bashing	A technique used in the creation of realistic concept art and illustration in a fast manner by combining several photos or reference images to create an artwork.
Unsharp Mask	A sharpening tool and is used to make images sharper and help emphasize texture and detail.

1 INTRODUCTION

The motivation of this thesis comes from the author's aim to deepen their knowledge on the systematic process of creating concept art. One of the reasons the author chose this project is to strengthen their portfolio and their employability in the design related market. The result of the project is five distinctive character designs and six environment pieces.

Concept art is a communication tool that aims to link an idea to production. It can be either based on real-life historical subjects, an artist's original interpretation of events or be of purely fictional nature and not based on anything pre-existing. Concept art can be created as a base for multiple entertainment industry products such as a game, film or animation. As a concept artist, one may end up dealing with a great deal of responsibility, defining a game's emotional content and at the same time lifting the stress off of the other artists by giving them clear and precise concept designs to expand upon.

This thesis aims to dissect the common grounds of creating concept art for games and what steps in what order should be taken to start the pre-production process and successfully finish it. In this thesis, we will take a closer look at the creation process based on the author's personal fictional story. The methodologies developed during this project are based on interviews conducted with game industry professionals that are directly involved in concept art creation, or have been in the past. Here the author tries to replicate the professional experience of creating concept art and tries to understand how concept art is able to convey ideas with or without the use of a few words.

In this thesis, it is also discussed how illustration, despite having many similarities with concept art, exists to serve a completely different purpose in the game production pipeline. Additionally, it will be defined why the "Concept Artist" is a separate position in development of any project and how it ensures that time will not be wasted by the whole art department.

2 CONCEPT ART

Upon exploring the definition of concept art (Appendix 1-4), several game industry professionals described it independently from each other primarily as a visual communication tool within the game development team. Despite the connotation of concept art having a heavy visual emphasis, its aesthetical functions are placed secondary in favour to its design aspects that help bring necessary visual information to a player when developing a game. Other thoughts that echoed through the interviews included that concept art is expected to deal with a fair amount of gameplay problem solving through visual cues (Foertsch 2017).

In contrast to concept art, illustration is defined by its high quality, visual appeal and use as marketing material to the masses. It takes more time to complete when tasked with individual pieces. (Appendix 1-4.)

2.1 History of Concept Art

Concept art has a varied area of implementation including games, films, animations and innovation in product design. Concept artists have been in demand since those areas of the entertainment industry needed a dedicated person to work on bringing visual ideas forward. (Lilly 2015.)

Although “concept art” was coined as early as 1930’s by Disney during the production of Snow White (Ghez 2015), the term sometimes still suffers from misconception and is confused with “conceptual art”, which is part of the performance art umbrella. Unless an individual is connected to the entertainment sector, it is more likely that they would recognize the profession as being akin to an “illustrator”, “graphic designer” and “fine artist”. It seems that the term concept art has gone into more common use since the rise of the digital era, with easy access to the Internet and information about this subject available through search engines. Besides, providing an easy access to the definition of this term, the Internet has supported the spread of early visual development of entertainment

industry products. In modern times the term concept art is more commonplace and more easily recognized and categorized by the audience.

There are three major factors that have brought attention to this art form; these are art books, comic conventions and events, and of course the social media platforms of individual artists and franchises. Self-promotion has become extremely popular with companies and artists releasing half-finished pieces of art in order to get fans excited about their upcoming products. (Lilly 2015.)

Art books have become an unintentional educational medium for creative industry students by giving them an idea of the design process, iteration and amount of work behind the development of an animation, game or film. Comic conventions in particular, due to their rising popularity, have attracted a wide audience to all sorts of newer types of art forms that have come into being during the digital age and are now easily distributed. (Ballesteros 2017.)

2.2 Illustration and Concept Art

In brief the key difference between illustration and concept art has been defined as illustration's need to be visually appealing and concept art's need to be visually informative. Those qualities are not to be mutually exclusive in both disciplines but their core functions are fundamentally different.

A concept artist, when placed side by side with an illustrator, can be differentiated by their ability to shape a user experience for the player and have an in depth understanding of design, as well as ability to provide multiple visual solutions. Despite the versatility of concept art types, ranging from concept art portraying the core idea and ideological meaning of the game, to character and object concepts, the concept artist is expected to shape a sort of blueprint for the game development team of how those concepts visually work within the game and how to create particular game assets. Usually, a concept artist works closely with the development team and their work is not necessarily ever revealed to the larger public. (Lilly 2015.)

Ideally, a concept artist should be able to produce art that is communicative on a level that it is readable not only by the development team but also all possible colleagues. In the situation of a pitch presentation, a concept artist's task may fall very close to the illustration category since its function falls in the middle of the communicative and appealing spectra of art, since the audience and/or the judges are often individuals outside of the development team's core.

Other opinions on the difference between illustration and concept art included them both being visual products that are meant to be marketed and consumed but by two different groups; for concept art it being members of the game development team, and for illustration it being the end users. In this sense, concept art and illustration are part of the same pipeline where concept art is simply the design process that deals with answering visual questions and can deviate substantially in technical form and quality, while illustration is the final product of that process. Most commonly, these two parts of the same pipeline are completed by different individuals because each step holds its own challenges and need for different skill sets. However, as previously mentioned, a concept artist and illustrator do in fact share commonalities and the base skills for both professions requires a strong knowledge of art fundamentals. (Appendix 1-4.)

2.3 Concept Art Fundamentals

Being a concept artist encompasses the ability to produce a variety of visual ideas. The fundament of successfully creating concept art lies in being aware of the world around oneself and incorporating what one observed and analysed into new original designs. Being a concept artist is a constant process requiring the regular renewal of one's visual library, so ensuring that once a concept artist starts a project, they are able to recall interesting visuals to combine or have an idea for a starting point of their visual research. (Ballesteros 2017.) That being said, it is natural for a concept artist to have a great interest in media such as games, cinema, comic books, books, and also be fascinated by culture in general (Appendix 1). A visual library does not stand on its own though; the artist should always understand the subject matter of what they see through literature, travel,

meeting people and gathering new experiences. Otherwise, the designs might convey meanings that do not fit in the context of our world. If possible, it is advisable for a concept artist to have extensively studied subjects outside of art such as history, social-economics or even engineering. The key aspect is to expand one's framework of knowledge on how things relate to each other (Appendix 3). Even if the world being portrayed is fantastical, it has to retain ties to reality.

The expectation of professional concept artists includes having a solid grasp of illustration fundamentals such as the use of colour, light and composition, brushwork and sketching techniques as well as the skill to convey a story without words and portray characters or environments dynamically (Lilly 2015).

Moreover, the defining factor of whether one is able to continue working as a concept artist was regarded by some as practicing those skills and the desire to learn new techniques, which can prove to be difficult since it requires one to break their current way of creating art and being self-critical (Appendix 3,4). It is also greatly beneficial for a concept artist to be cross-disciplinary in the medium they work in such as for instance being able not only to paint in 2D, but also being adept in traditional sculpting, 3D modelling, or photography (Appendix 2).

Some of the artists interviewed held the view that one should uphold their habit of honing one's art skills until they are at the level of being comfortable enough with their craft that they do not have to stop and think about the methods they are using. Being able to simply focus on the substance of the work at hand is an advantage, since one's art skills are not worth much in the concept art profession without the ability to create symbolically and culturally unique design pieces (Appendix 1). The visual design choices made by a concept artist should hold information, be explanatory and have a clear function in the context of the game world being designed for (Appendix 4).

Although it is correct to assume that concept art is a flexible art medium where finely polished images and primitive sketches can communicate the same amount of information, the end goal of any concept art piece is to bring the idea

to life and the way an artist decides to go about it is not of key importance. As previously determined, a concept artist is not the same as an illustrator, but an illustrator can easily make concept art if they take key details of what sparks interest in a person and bring these into a design (Appendix 1).

3 CREATION METHODOLOGIES

Upon reviewing literature it was found that there are numerous ways one can perfect their art and design skills but there was little to no theoretical consensus on what is the foundation of a concept artist's workflow and what their key steps in the process are. Therefore, in this thesis the work methods of several contemporary concept artists were cross-analysed and disassembled to their core disciplinary components.

3.1 Analysis of Interviews

For the purpose of understanding what the modern concept artists position entails, the author interviewed four different game industry professionals; Tatu Petersen-Jessen, Halil Ural, Ville Assinen, and Veli Nyström. Before making any concrete conclusions based on the answers given by the interviewees, each participant's individual answers were analysed on the nature of concept art. Each personal approach showed some similarities with one another as well as there being one very unique method. However, the individual approaches concluded for most part to correspond with the individual needs of the companies the interviewees were working for.

For example, Petersen-Jessen's and Nyström's step by step approaches to concept art development seemed to resemble each other's the most out of the persons interviewed, since both start their work by defining the main questions about the world, characters and main conflict within the game, and only consequentially start the ideation process. Assinen's approach differs greatly from the others by starting immediately with reference gathering and research. Taking into account that Assinen works at Remedy, a Finnish AAA company that focuses on maintaining a realistic art style, his approach is completely

appropriate for the task at hand. Ural's approach, in regards to reference, is closest to Nyström's since he also uses references later on in his process.

3.2 Median Approach and Outlying Approach

When trying to find the median step-by-step approach of the four professionals interviewed, it became clear that the structure of the ideation process almost always contains the following stages in the order presented here:

Step 1: A pre-existing story is provided on which the visual concepts are to be based or at least a short description.

Step 2: A writing stage that breaks the main story premise into smaller narratives/story beats or keywords that would support the subject.

Step 3: Trying to establish a picture of what kind of story the game development team or the singular artist wants to tell.

Step 4: Doing research and collecting references.

Step 5: Making a tonal sketch and then continuing by using the photo bashing technique whilst not defining any artwork as a final design, instead focusing on the general impact of the image.

Step 6: Building upon the ideas that were selected by the artist themselves while being aware of current trends and the market, trying to create original content that has not been done before.

Additionally to the six steps, the Median Approach's primary focus is on design, research and fundamental art skills. Photo bashing is favourable but should be avoided if the style of the project is non-realistic. When presenting work, one should do extensive self-editing of design variations before showing work to the client.

Similarly to the Median Approach, the Outlying Approach was also established as consisting of six steps:

Step 1: A story is not defined yet. The artist asks questions about the world, characters and the main conflict as well as keeping in mind certain limitations this project will have. Not all questions have to be answered immediately. In a project with a big team the core idea will not be complete until various people have worked on it from different angles.

Step 2: Establishment of visual rules such as colour coding objects, symbolism etc. The key aspect of this step is making sure the story is reflected in each individual object of the world.

Step 3: A loose sketching phase using traditional methods and the speed-painting technique.

Step 4: Gathering references after the initial sketching stage is completed, so as not to get too attached to any reference at the beginning, as this may be restrictive.

Step 5: Seeing which concepts the development team prefers or alternatively, getting feedback on early iterations.

Step 6: Giving yourself time to solve visual problems and continuing analysing the story and ideas. Adding more storytelling to the illustrations.

The main focus for the Outlying Approach should be storytelling, speed-painting and any other unique techniques the artist finds comfortable. When presenting work one does not have to extensively self-edit.

4 PRODUCTION

Since the Median Approach was largely based on photo-bashing, it was chosen to be practically implemented when creating environment art since it is best suited for architecture, nature and object creation.

4.1 Median Approach and Environment Art

According to the first step of the Median Approach, the author based their concept art projects on a personal story draft titled "Rock Boy". The logline is: "After years of travel, a young man returns to his home settlement only to find that he is the last one that still speaks the language of the rocks."

For the second stage of the Median Approach a full synopsis of the “Rock Boy” was written and then its structure broken down into story beats using Joseph Campbell's "Hero's Journey" model (Figure 1).



Figure 1. The 12 stages of The Hero's Journey (Yeretsky 2012)

The breakdown helped to narrow the scope of the unique environments where the key events of the story take place.

Next, the picture of the type of story that was about to be told was established. The original story was planned to revolve around the subjects of pacifism and cultural assimilation relating to the example of one individual. In addition, the story deals with issues of self-loathing and isolation, and aims to examine the worst-case scenarios of not accepting oneself. Despite the tragic storyline, the intention was not to create a gritty setting and present it as authentic as many history-based stories do. The visualization of this story was designed to be colourful and the characters are not demonized for their misguided choices.

While doing research for the environment in the story, a few historical inaccuracies were found in the original draft and thus the summary had to be

edited. Despite following the Median Approach of establishing the story first, it became evident that sometimes editing the story during the development process is inevitable.

The subject matter of the environment art for the most part was the 9th century shores of Ladoga Lake, which at that time would have been settled mostly by early Karelians (Korela), Sami and Norsemen. This short description dictated for most part the architecture and also the landscapes, fauna and flora.

After gathering an appropriate amount of references, a mood board was created (Figure 2) out of the images that fit the subject. The mood board was comprised of paintings depicting the historical period and photos depicting that exact area's nature.



Figure 2. Environment mood board (Rässa 2018)

Prior to photo bashing, the painting process started with making a grey scale sketch (Figure 3) by freehand painting and using the Lasso tool to block out shapes (Feghali 2018).

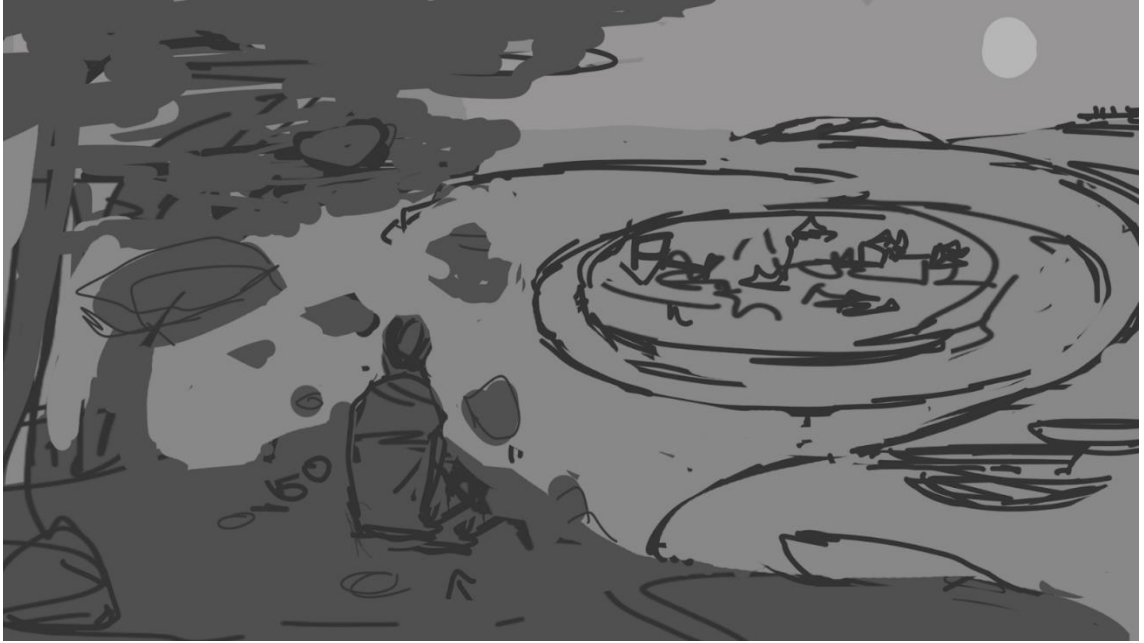


Figure 3. Grey scale sketch (Rässa 2018)

After defining the idea, focus was shifted more towards the composition of the image and adding depth through the use of one point perspective. The main focus of the image is decided at this stage and the silhouette is clarified. Before proceeding to photo bashing, a number of photos were prepared for and placed on to the canvas. Using the Lasso Tool the photo parts that were most appropriate for the initial concept sketch were copied into the background. After experimenting with different kinds of blending modes between the photo layers the composition was finally taking form (Figure 4). When none of the blending modes worked a soft brush was taken and used for erasing unneeded parts and smoothing one photo into the other (Feghali 2018).



Figure 4. Initial photo bashed composition (Rässa 2018)

Once the photo parts were set it was important to harmonize them among each other through colour and value adjustments. One of the ways that some overlapping photos were harmonized was through the use of Match Color function in Photoshop that made them belong to the same colour world. (Kuciara 2018).

Using the same principles, the next step was moving on to the central area of the composition and experimenting with the Levels settings of the image. Once all the photo objects had been placed it was time to establish the colour palette. One of the ways the colour of the atmosphere was adjusted through the making of a gradient layer and putting it in a Soft Light blending mode. The lighting conditions were adjusted during the whole painting process, but in the next stage the main light source was finally established using another adjustment layer. After boosting the light levels in some areas and using a layer mask to paint shadows in other areas, the saturation was decreased in the distance to reflect the effect of atmosphere in the landscape as observed in real life, and the cool tones in the shadows were boosted using the Levels tool. By decreasing the saturation in the faraway landscape and increasing it in the foreground it creates a sense of depth (Figure 5). It also helps define the floating rocks when they are up against a less saturated background. (Aleksander et al. 2011.)



Figure 5. Colour corrected version (Rässa 2018)

Before finalizing the painting, the final step of the Median Approach is to research current visual trends in the game industry; this helped define a niche for the project, and based off that knowledge original content was created.

Video game trends are defined by two key concepts: theme and genre. Depending on that theme/genre certain art styles are applied. At the moment the top most prevalent styles among major AAA developers are either a Realistic style or Stylized animation influenced style (Safadi 2018). The outlier styles are usually picked up by Independent Games developers who are usually not as experienced or do not have the means for costly graphics. Indie styles for the most part can be categorized into the Old Graphics Systems (pixel, vector and cel shading), the Manga/Anime style and the Western Comic style. (Towell 2015)

The overall theme of the Thesis project was described as Nature, Historical, Elves and Fantasy. To give examples of how this theme is portrayed in different styles, the 'Witcher' series represents the Realistic style, Nine Parchments demonstrates the Stylized approach and finally as an example for the Old Graphics Systems – in this case pixel art, Superbrothers: Sword & Sworcery EP. (Figure 6)

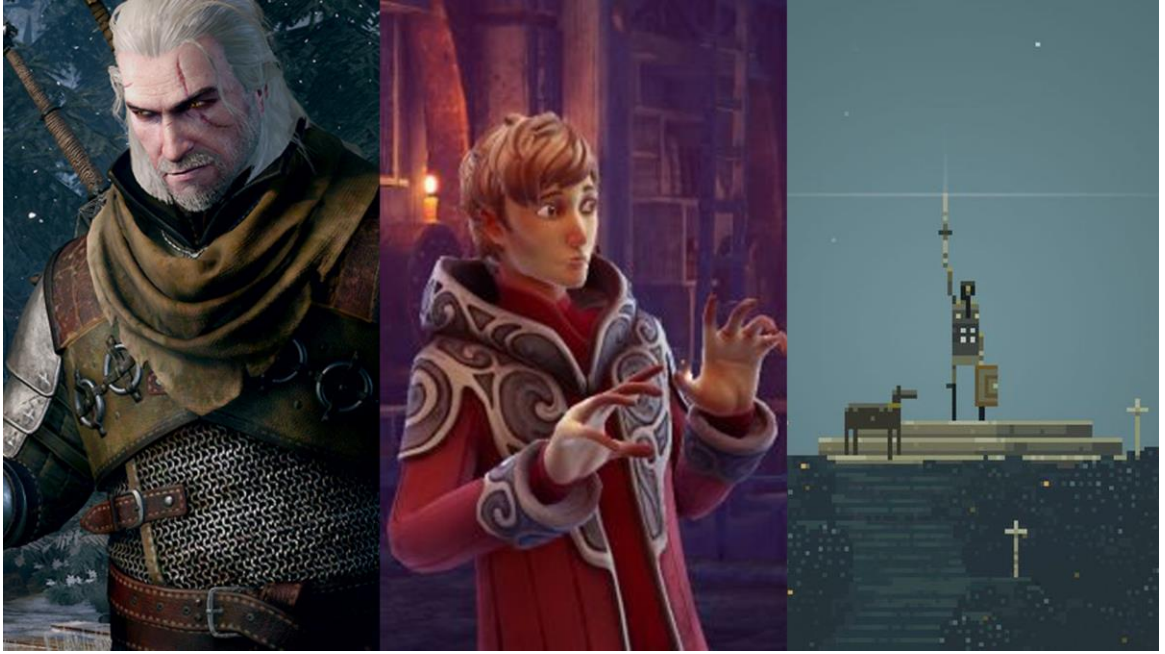


Figure 6.a. The Witcher 3, b. Nine Parchments, c. Superbrothers: Sword & Sworcery EP (CD Projekt Red 2015 Frozenbyte 2017 Capybara Games, Superbrothers 2011)

The author's own style lies somewhere in the area of the Stylized approach, and as an example of where to lead their concept art a note from Edouard Caplain's work on *Life is Strange* was taken. *Life is Strange* is distinct for maintaining highly realistic forms while using simple stylized textures. Caplain's stylistic choices were motivated by making sure the audience pays more attention to the story than how realistic the characters are. (Caplain 2016)

When studying visual trends, the on-going 80's-90's aesthetics were brought to light (Figure 7). This trend has been flooding the media due to the Thirty Year Cycle phenomena that recycles trends and is largely based on the nostalgia of current industry professionals. (Ellis 2017) What was important to establish at this stage was if this particular visual trend would still be current for at least the next year. After brief examination of the graphic trends predicted for 2018, it became clear that many of the current Thirty Year Cycle aesthetics are still alive, but quite possibly will be following a more 90's bias in the next years. (Cann 2018)

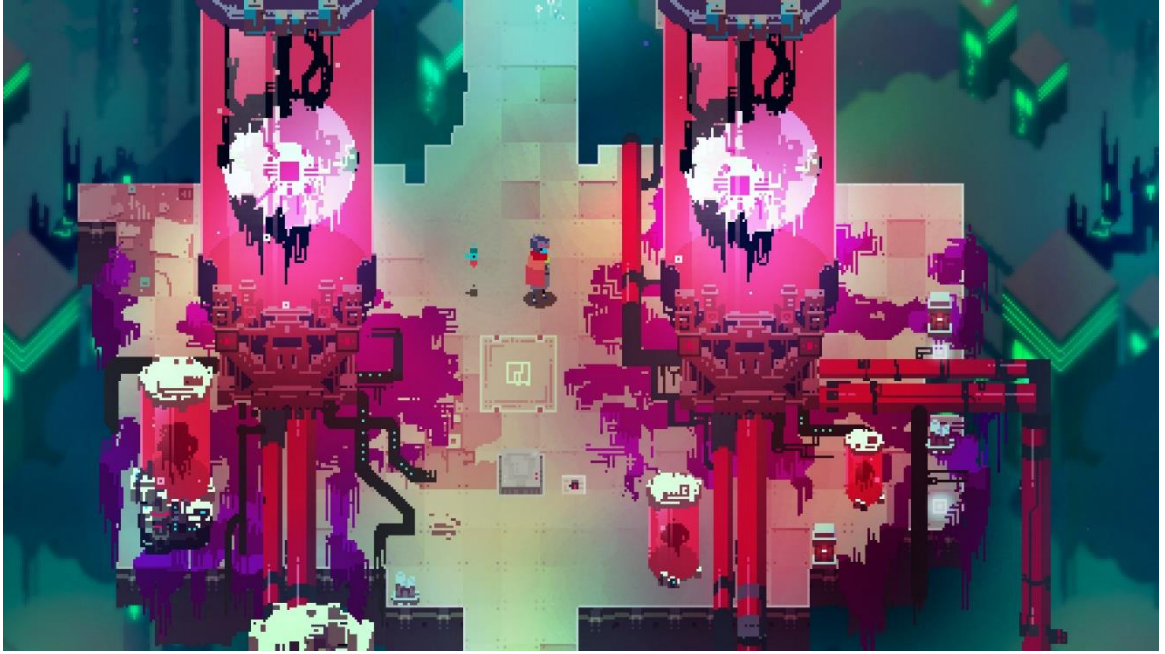


Figure 7. Hyper Light Drifter screenshot (Heart Machine 2016)

It was decided to continue editing the image while having a concrete idea of the outcome in mind. At this point the idea of keeping solid photo pieces in the image was abandoned and the initial artwork was over painted to mask the photographic material. When the overall form of the painting was deemed satisfactory, it was finished off by using Photoshop's Unsharp Mask function to further emphasize the key details (Aleksander et al. 2011). (Figure 8)

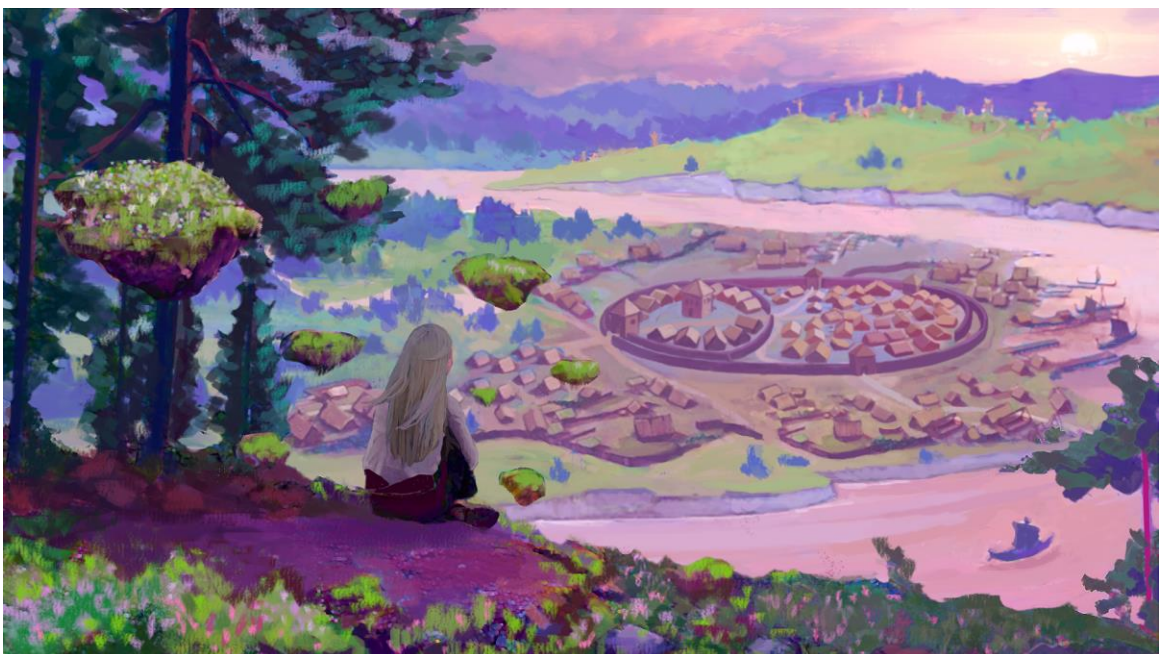


Figure 8. Final environment painting (Rässa 2018)

4.2 Outlying Approach and Character Art

The Outlying Approach was used when creating character art because of its more freeform and intuitive aspects that help explore the subject matter along the way of development.

Firstly, the story's characters were briefly defined by descriptions of their personality, motivations, possible story arcs, professions and special abilities, as well as their Jungian archetypes (e.g. mentor, sidekick etc). (Appendix 6.)

The main conflict of the story was established as Man vs. Society, but also has a lot parallels with the Man vs. Himself conflict model. The reason for the duality of the conflict is caused by the protagonist struggling to lead their society to peace while also struggling to stay true to their own culture and beliefs and not giving in to assimilation. (Appendix 5.)

Since "Rock Boy" is a theoretical game project, it is hard to define what the limitations in style would be. If this was a project had serious future plans the limitations would be easily defined by such factors as time, budget and the skills of the game development team. It would be impossible to continue further visual development without defining limitations since it could lead to vague unsuitable solutions. For the purpose of the concept art project, optimistic estimates of what this game could be were defined. Thus the project was planned as a stylized 3D game that is heavily story based and has an episodic structure. The character designs needed to be simple in clothing and shape, but be distinct in facial features.

One of the defining features of the project's character cast is that nearly every one of them is from a different ethnic group. The supporting characters also feature different nationalities and mixed heritages. Although, none of these ethnic groups are fictional, for many viewers the visual cues might be confusing if they do not have first-hand knowledge of the culture and art of the respective groups. For this reason it was decided to implement a colour coding system, similar to that of Avatar: The Last Airbender, along with other culturally significant symbols.

Since the visuals of the world are planned to be non-realistic and not necessarily representative of the realistic dyeing capabilities of 9th century Northern Europe, it was easy to pick colours for each nation that would not overlap.

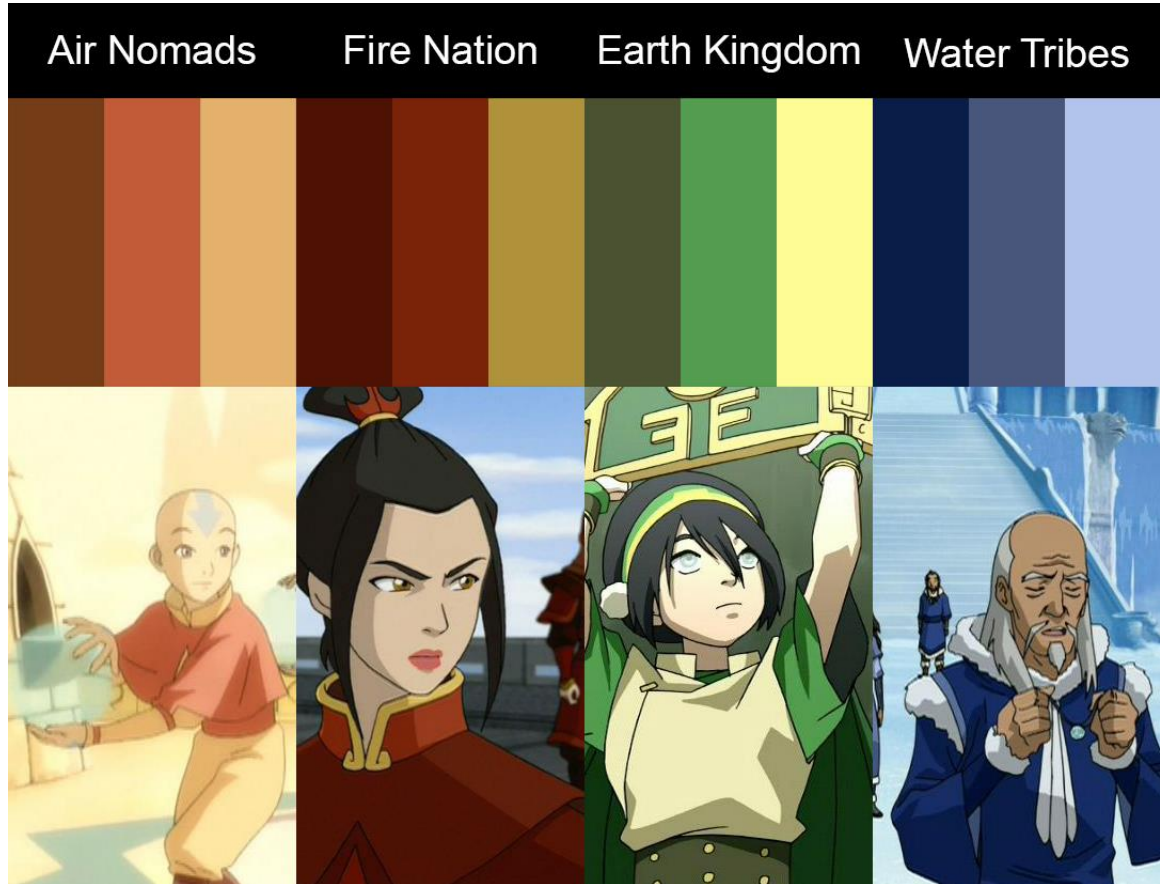


Figure 9. Colour coding in Avatar: The Last Airbender (Rässa 2018)

The major ethnic groups presented in the story are the Norsemen, the Scandinavian settlers called Rhos, the Finno-Ugric Korela, the refugee Slavic Ilmen Slovene, and the nearly assimilated semi-legendary Chude people who were grounded in Sami culture in the context of the story. Other nationalities in the region include refugee Veps, merchants of Gotlandic, Arabic, Bulghar, and Frisian ancestry, and a few low-class Curonians.

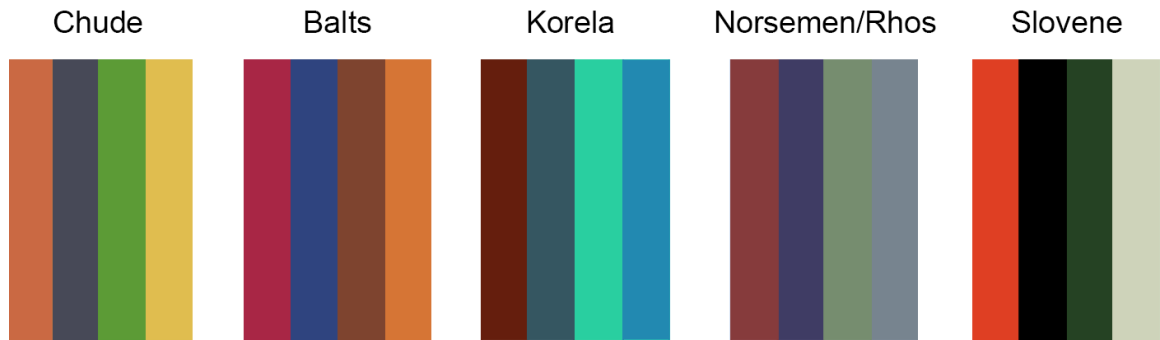


Figure 10. Colour palettes of ethnic groups in “Rock Boy” (Rässa 2018)

The Chude wear brick red, greyish blue, green and yellow. Baltic people usually feature brown, orange or rosewood combined with intense blue in their costumes. The Korela colours are burgundy, woad blue, jade and light blue. The Rhos and the Norse share the same colour palette of a pale wine red, indigo, grey and muddy green. The Slovene colours are bright red, black, dark green and beige. All other ethnic groups may have a mixed colour scheme or feature colours that are not normally found in any of the other group's clothing. Permic groups will most likely feature bright pink colours and Ugrians will have a lot of gold in their accessories.

For most part the three major characters in the project the Norse king Eirikr, the Chudic Shontas and the Slovene Yarena all stay true to their ethnic colour palettes. The other two characters, the Chudic Neyola and the Curonian Gabiya, have a more complex colour palette due to their ambiguous alliances and mixed origins. For example, Neyola as a priestess who has become accustomed to life in the settlement and has close ties to Norse society dresses in a colour typical of a Norse priestess, which is predominantly grey as it was associated with magic (Figure 11). Besides the yellowish jewellery, Neyola features no colours in her design that ties her to her roots which is meant to show her neutrality in the story's main conflict. Gabiya as a Curonian tends to wear a lot of browns and rosewood, but having lived a large part of her life under the Norse influence she came to adorn a muddy green shirt.



Figure 11. Character colour palettes (Rässa 2018)

To further explain the use of colour and symbol, the Slovene character Yarena will serve as an example. Yarena dresses up in feminine attire by Slovene standards, but her clothing also hints at her profession as a glass smith and merchant, who traditionally are regarded as masculine in the society of the 9th century. Her body is made up of ovals and many of the possessions she has refrain this roundish shape. Although presented as an antagonist her design is meant at first glance to express relative harmlessness and perhaps naivety (Dahlig and Murai 2015). Her initial clothing designs, like most Slavic clothes feature diamond shapes, which represent her persistence, and her strive for power and fortune.

It was decided not to start with sketches in grey scale since they often distract from the mood of the character as a whole (Figure 12). Its use was not completely disregard however, as the value composition was checked in order to see how the designs would look in grey scale since tonal value helps emphasize the most important details on the character (Dahlig and Murai 2015).



Figure 12. Initial character sketches (Rässa 2018)

The gathering of references was found to be the most intuitive stage (Figure 13). After making initial sketches it felt natural to look up references of actual northern Slavic garments for details and the cuts of the dresses.



Figure 13.a. Arkhangelsk Oblast dress, b. Ryazan Governorate dress, c. Voronezh Governorate dress (Svoimi Rukami Club 2017 Vinogradova, Voronova 2017)

When analysing the basic form of what makes a northeastern Slavic costume, it became apparent that layering of clothes and hiding the waistline was popular unlike contemporary clothing. The waist could be emphasized by an apron, but clearly not coincidentally. Shirtsleeves were typically puffy. Concerning headwear, this usually consisted of a highly decorated frontal piece topped off with a simple headscarf. Patterns were usually displayed on the hems of the skirt and sleeves. For most part the patterns consist of diamonds, triangles, rectangles, and flowers. Colour-wise, red was ever present and often the dominant colour. Consequently, some of those elements were added to the initial sketches, and therefore the scope of designs were expanded by giving them slightly more variance. (Figure 14) (Pankina 2013.)



Figure 14. Costume design iteration (Rässa 2018)

Besides the clothing designs, time was reserved for the exploration of suitable hairstyles for the character. Her facial features and hair texture had been designed prior to this project, allowing different hairstyle designs to be directly painted over the finished headshot (Figure 15). Peer reviews were used to assist in helping to pick the best designs. Initially, the author's peers were attracted to the 4th haircut, but once they learned of the character's backstory and that she is a villain, they were more in favour of the 5th haircut since it was perceived as inherently more evil because of the perfect tight braiding.

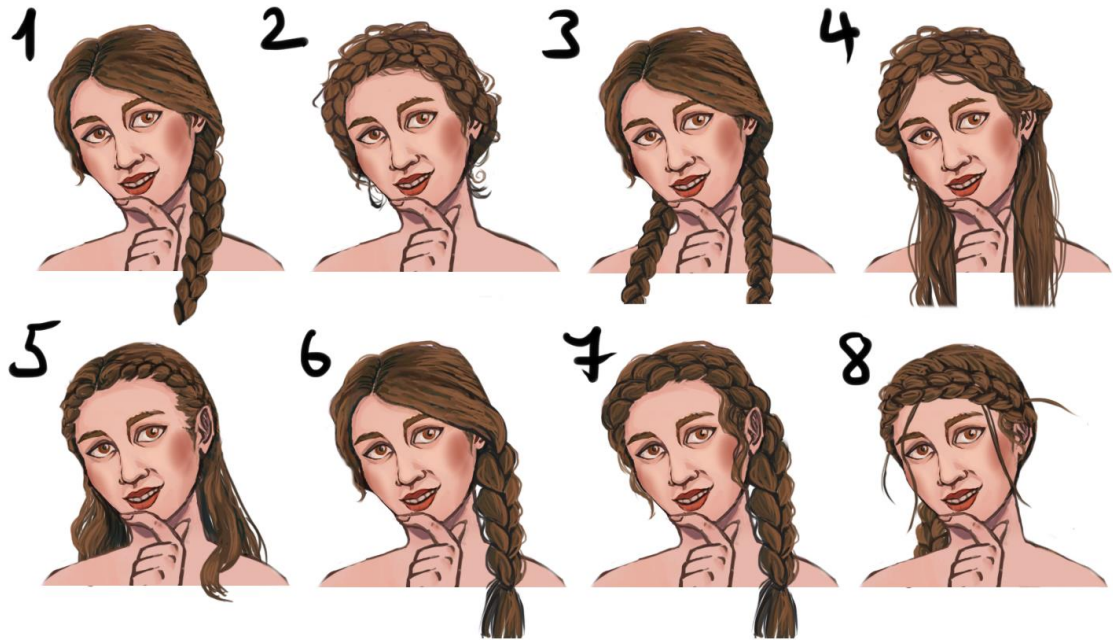


Figure 15. Hair design variation (Rässa 2018)

Multiple designs were offered for peer review and based on the feedback and the author's own opinion on the subject matter, it was decided on two favourites for the costumes, with mild variation, and several hairstyles. In the end, it was chosen to work with the concept where the character has a plain braid and a more conservative dress style with the apron being tucked away. As someone who strives for power and relative independence in their field of work, Yara has chosen an outfit that is relatively hard to criticize by more conservative individuals in her community. Yet she pays close attention to maintaining her femininity and appeal through keeping her clothing articles neat and using makeup. The floral embroidery on the top of her outer dress is meant to drag the viewer's gaze to her chest. The apron and braided hair are there for practical reasons due to her profession as a glass smith. She wears boots instead of birch sandals indicating her wealth. Her headscarf is more often worn as a scarf.



Figure 16. Final hair and costume designs (Rässa 2018)

For the final illustration of the character Yarena, the question of how to pose the character was brought up. In the story, Yarena is characterized as having an innocent, attractive demeanour, while her main goal in the story is marrying the protagonist for the possible status it may bring her. From the poses shown in Figure 17 the twelfth was chosen for its more subtle appeal. The weight is placed on the right leg for a slightly more dynamic look.

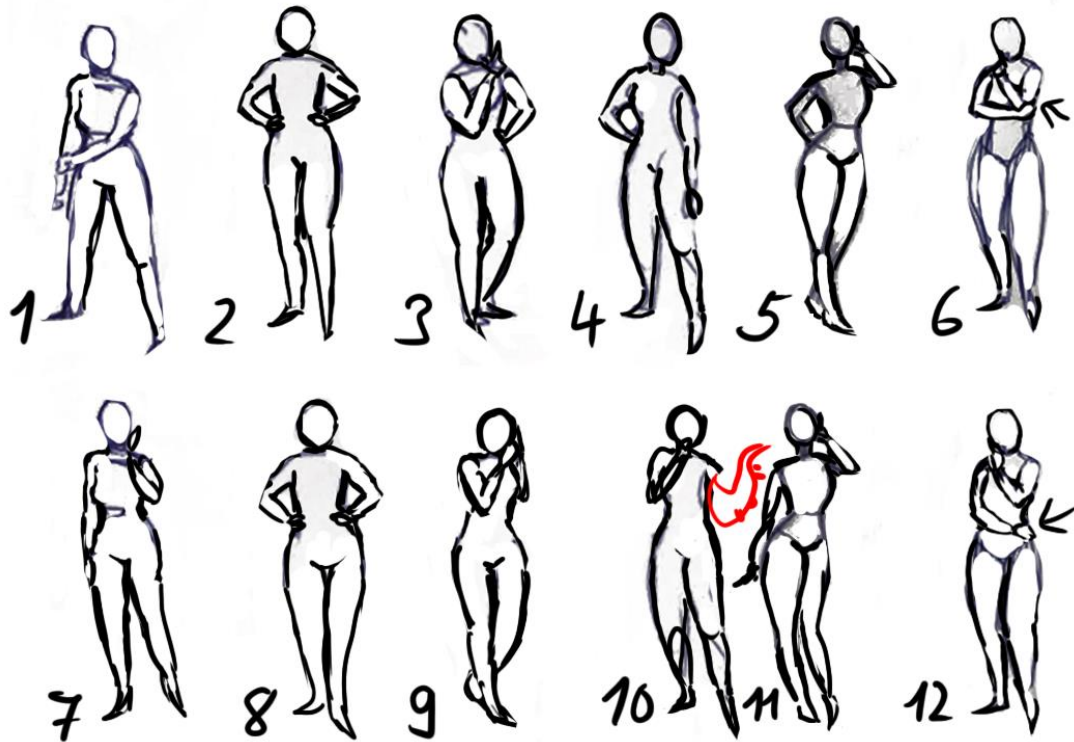


Figure 17. Character pose exploration (Rässa 2018)

To an extent Yara's character design is the prime example of how appearances can be deceptive, by understanding the use of these visual cues concept artists have an advantage when depicting the character before they get the opportunity to act or say anything in the game. When analysing the finished illustration of Yara it came to attention that she had very few details indicating her profession. Because glassmaking doesn't require any special clothing the best way to tie her to her profession was to give her a glass bead necklace. Other final edits of the character included adding more embroidery with floral and diamond motives, as well making her apron and sleeves puffier to regain the Slavic styled silhouette and emphasize her body type and personality. (Figure 18)



Figure 18. Yarena's final design edits (Rässa 2018)

4.3 Revision of Methodologies

When using the Median Approach 70% of the time was used solely on research and 30% on producing the art itself.

When working with a ready-made story and basing one's designs on that, it is expected to do more editing of the story since during the research phase one may find themselves finding inconsistencies in the story line based on the visual world that is being researched, especially if it is a historical setting.

It was also determined that making loose grey scale sketches of the image before photo bashing should only serve the purpose of establishing the lighting in the scene. The photo bashing process may end up taking you in a completely different direction from your normal approach and the outcome of the image may be more creative than expected. Later in the process it is always handy to check the initial grey scale rendering, not only for its lighting reference, but also for the initial composition since often its simplicity deciphers the more complex end result. During the painting process the amount of details and objects in the scene may increase and distort the initial composition, therefore it is good to make a new sketch on top and reorganize the crucial elements.

It has become very clear during this process that it is crucial to decide whether the style of the game should be realistic, semi-realistic or cartoony, since this will dictate how the reference images will be used in the process of photo bashing and to what varying degree the photos will act as guidelines for the paintings or will be the main elements the image is composed off. It was also found that it is best to study the current market and trends in synergy with the process of choosing an art style.

After the style of the project is chosen, the artist should use painting methods that reflect the style in concept art. If the artist chooses to purely photo bash without over-painting in a realistic style, they should keep up a certain consistency in their photorealism. It is of course possible to paint in details freehand on the photos, but there is a possibility that it will feel out of place and will confuse the other artists that need to make final assets based on the concepts. If photo bashing is taking a lot of time then one needs to consider if the photo material is not being simplified enough, and if one is working too much to preserve the level of fidelity of the whole image in line with the raw photo materials. As previously stated,

concept art exists to save time; anything else is not acceptable and destroys the integral meaning of this discipline.

Unless the style of the historical project is realistic, there is no real reason to fully repaint the photo bashed objects, in fact one may argue that good photography might as well act as references for 3D modellers on its own. If the style is not realistic then all historical objects should be repainted to fit it in with the overall style and visual continuity of the game world.

One of the difficult aspects of this approach is knowing when to stop editing and remembering that none of the images are set designs, meaning that all finishing touches will be done consciously after studying the market. Often an artist may already have confidence in their approach and a clear vision of what they're aiming for, so it is hard to take time out to reflect on what they are doing, however this is necessary and part of the order presented in the approach guidelines.

Upon further inspection of the subject it was established that concept art for environments is usually made loose so that other artists, such 3D modellers and level designer, can build upon it when creating in-game levels. When working with photo bashed images, it is also quite hard to keep them 'loose' or 'open' for future edits since they can be considered complete at any point. Concept art for characters on the other hand, still stands as something that should be well-defined and easy to turn into a final model.

In conclusion, photo bashing is a good starting point, but should not be used as a substitute to concept art itself and maybe cause more design problems than solve them. In the end it is best to avoid pure photo bashing and leaving raw photo elements in the end image - all photos used should be painted over, unless used for texturing. Photo bashing may also negatively reflect on the iteration process and in the hands of an inexperienced artist may take up too much time because of its high fidelity detail. All things considered, the Median Approach was followed from the first step to the sixth, with the final addition of a seventh step. The new revised Median Approach is now as follows:

Step 1: A pre-existing story is provided on which the visual concepts are to be based or at least a short description (the story may and will change in the research phase).

Step 2: A writing stage that breaks the main story premise into smaller narratives/story beats or keywords that would support the subject.

Step 3: Trying to establish the picture of what kind of story the game development team or the singular artist wants to tell.

Step 4: Doing research and collecting references.

Step 5: Define the style of the project and whether the story will be based in the real world or a fantastical one. Based on this decide if photo bashing is needed.

Step 6: Making a grey scale sketch (to define lighting and composition) and then continuing by using the photo bashing technique whilst not defining any artwork as a final design, instead focusing on the general impact of the image.

Step 7: Building upon the ideas that were selected while being aware of current trends and the market, trying to create original content that has not been done before.

Despite being an approach comprised of vastly different, outlying methods, the Outlying Approach proved to be very easy and intuitive to follow and requires almost no changes. The only aspect that needs revising is the fact that just like in the Median Approach the visual style of the project needs to be predetermined. During the process of creating characters, it was noted that the designs were out of line in style with the environment art done previously. With small adjustments the character art was synchronized with the original style of the environment, but the underlying fact is the style needs to be established early on in the Outlying Approach. Therefore, it was decided to break some of the initial ideas of Step 1. into two steps.

When creating characters it is greatly beneficial to get an outsider's insight on how they perceive the character. The artist may have their own associations with the visual cues they use in character creation but they may often find that those visual cues may be read in a completely different way by people from another

background. It is especially important to have peer review during the first stages of character development when a big emphasis is brought upon posing the character and deciding on the body type. Costume design should also not be overlooked, since searching costume references takes time and a lot of iteration therefore to minimize the amount of work it is best to establish the silhouette's that are unsuitable early on in the process with the help of peer review. The newly revised Outlying Approach follows as such:

Step 1: A story is not defined yet. The artist asks questions about the world, characters and the main conflict as well as keeping in mind certain limitations this project will have. Not all questions have to be answered immediately.

Step 2: Based on the limitations this project will have, select a visual style or define the style of previous visual development for the same project and continue working in that style.

Step 3: Establishment of visual rules such as colour coding objects, symbolism, shape language etc. The key aspect of this step is making sure the story reflects in each individual object of the world.

Step 4: A loose sketching phase using traditional methods and the speed-painting technique.

Step 5: Seeing which concepts the development team prefers or alternatively, getting feedback.

Step 6: Gathering references after the initial sketching stage is completed, so as to not get too attached to any of the references in the beginning, as it might be restrictive.

Step 7: Giving yourself time to solve visual problems and continuing analysing the story and ideas. Adding more storytelling to the illustrations. Getting final feedback and deciding on the final design.

5 CONCLUSION

This thesis was successful within its narrow scope and initial goal of defining the common methods of concept art development. The thesis addressed relevant subjects of concept art as a profession and where it stands a concrete discipline in the game development pipeline. This thesis was able to accumulate valuable

insight of contemporary concept artists that was the base for founding the theoretical step-by-step approaches of concept art development. The approaches have been tested and perfected throughout the visual development of “Rock Boy” to ensure their relevance and are available to use for future use to anyone starting out with learning concept art as a profession within the game industry. The two approaches developed in the course of this thesis are in no way absolute or ideal and may need alterations depending on the project. More extensive testing and variety of projects would be needed to form a complete guideline for concept art creation and would require research beyond the scope of this thesis.

To be exact, the result of this thesis were concept development approaches; Median Approach and Outlying Approach that have been tailored respectively for environment and character creation. The result of working with the Median and Outlying approaches were six environment pieces (Appendix 7, 62-67), five character designs (Appendix 8, 68-72) and their numerous costume (Appendix 9, 73-78) and hair design iterations (Appendix 10, 79-82). Due to the limited development time and experimental structure of the Median Approach, the final environment art had a noticeable disparity in detail and style.

The Median Approach helped emphasize the importance of understanding the visual style, theme and genre of the game project at hand when choosing the art development techniques to work with since it will significantly alter the final outcome of the concept art pieces and by extension the essence of the game. On the other end, the Outlying Approach made it particularly clear the importance of outsider involvement in the character development process since it is directly connected to how humans culturally and socially see each other through visual cues.

REFERENCES

Aleksander, Nikolai and Tilbury, Richard. (2011). *Beginner's guide to digital painting in Photoshop*. 3Dtotal Pub.

Ballesteros, P. (2017). *What Is Concept Art?*. [online] Lynda.com - from LinkedIn. Available at: <https://www.lynda.com/Art-Illustration-tutorials/Welcome/504803/612751-4.html> [Accessed 15 Oct. 2017].

Caplain, E. (2016). *The Artist behind Life is Strange*. [online] 80.lv. Available at: <https://80.lv/articles/life-is-strange-concept-artist-talks-about-art/> [Accessed 13 Feb. 2018].

Dahlig, M. and Murai, W. (2015). *Beginner's guide to digital painting in photoshop: Characters*. 3dtotal Publ.

Ellis, L. (2017). *Stranger Things, IT and the Upside Down of Nostalgia*. [video] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Radg-Kn0jLs> [Accessed 1 Feb. 2018].

Feghali, W. (2018). *Introduction To Matte Painting - Digital Painting Basics - Concept Art Tutorial*. [video] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LYJHIAIrls> [Accessed 25 Jan. 2018].

Foertsch, G. (2017). *The Art of Pre-Production*. [video] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s2u4jhpZkTQ&t=266s> [Accessed 29 Mar. 2018].

Ghez, D. (2015). *They drew as they pleased*. San Francisco, Calif.: Chronicle Books LLC.

Jones Cann, M. (2018). *10 inspirational graphic design trends for 2018*. [online] 99designs. Available at: <https://99designs.com/blog/trends/graphic-design-trends-2018/> [Accessed 6 Feb. 2018].

Kuciara, M. (2018). *Concept Illustration Techniques - Photobashing*. [video] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gag18ScKQdM> [Accessed 25 Jan. 2018].

Lilly, E. (2015). *The big bad world of concept art for video games*. 1st ed. Design Studio Press.

Pankina, E. (2013). *Особенности национального русского костюма (translated: unique features of the Russian national costume)*. [online] Matrony.ru. Available at: <http://www.matrony.ru/osobennosti-nacionalnogo-russkogo-kostyuma/> [Accessed 6 Apr. 2018].

Safadi, S. (2018). *Shaddy Safadi Concept Studio*. [online] Shaddyconceptart.com. Available at: <http://www.shaddyconceptart.com/> [Accessed 13 Feb. 2018]

Towell, J. (2015). *Who needs photorealism? Gaming's most amazing art styles exposed*. [online] gamesradar. Available at: <http://www.gamesradar.com/gamings-most-amazing-art-styles-exposed/> [Accessed 13 Feb. 2018].

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. The 12 stages of The Hero's Journey. Yeretsky, K. 2012. Copyright TED-Ed, 2012. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hhk4N9A0oCA> [Accessed 7 March 2018]

Figure 2. Environment mood board. Räsä, J 2018.

Figure 3. Greyscale sketch. Räsä, J 2018.

Figure 4. Initial photo bashed composition. Räsä, J 2018.

Figure 5. Colour corrected version. Räsä, J 2018.

Figure 6a. Witcher, copyright CD Projekt Red. 2015. Available at: <https://www.zavvi.com/games-ps4/the-witcher-3-wild-hunt-game-of-the-year-edition/11328666.html> [Accessed 18 May 2018].

Figure 6b. Nine Parchments, copyright Frozenbyte. 2017. Available at: <https://www.rockpapershotgun.com/2017/12/20/verdict-nine-parchments/> [Accessed 18 May 2018].

Figure 6c. Superbrothers: Sword & Sworcery EP, copyright Capybara Games, Superbrothers. 2011. Available at: <https://www.polygon.com/gaming/2012/3/5/2847060/sword-sworcery-sells-350k> [Accessed 18 May 2018].

Figure 7. Hyper Light Drifter screenshot. Heart Machine 2016. Copyright Heart Machine 2016. Available at: http://store.steampowered.com/app/257850/Hyper_Light_Drifter/ [Accessed 7 March 2018]

Figure 8. Final environment painting. Räsä, J 2018.

Figure 9. Colour coding in Avatar: The Last Airbender. Räsä, J. 2018. Avatar: The Last Airbender characters copyright Viacom 2018. Original images available

at: <https://www.toonzone.net/color-coding-how-avatar-the-last-airbender-uses-color-part-1/> [Accessed 29 March 2018]

Figure 10. Colour palettes of ethnic groups in “Rock Boy”. Räsä, J 2018.

Figure 11. Character colour palettes. Räsä, J 2018.

Figure 12. Initial character sketches. Räsä, J 2018.

Figure 13a. Arkhangelsk Oblast dress, copyright Svoimi Rukami Club. 2018. Available at: <http://svoimi-rukami-club.ru/%D1%84%D0%BE%D1%82%D0%BE-%D1%80%D1%83%D1%81%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8%D0%B9-%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%BD%D1%8B%D0%B9-%D1%81%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%84%D0%B0%D0%BD/> [Accessed 14 March 2018]

Figure 13b. Ryazan Governorate dress, copyright Vinogradova, N., Voronova, G. 2017. Available at: <http://slavyanskaya-kultura.ru/slavic/russkii-narodnyi-kostyum/russkii-narodnyi-kostyum-7980.html> [Accessed 14 March 2018]

Figure 13c. Voronezh Governorate dress, copyright Vinogradova, N., Voronova, G. 2017. Available at: <http://slavyanskaya-kultura.ru/slavic/russkii-narodnyi-kostyum/russkii-narodnyi-kostyum-7980.html> [Accessed 14 March 2018]

Figure 14. Costume design iteration. Räsä, J 2018.

Figure 15. Hair design variation. Räsä, J 2018.

Figure 16. Final hair and costume designs. Räsä, J 2018.

Figure 17. Character pose exploration. Räsä, J 2018.

Figure 18. Yarena’s final design edits. Räsä, J 2018.

1 TATU PETERSEN-JESSEN "CONCEPT ART CREATION FOR A STORY" ASSESSMENT INTERVIEW

Interviewee: Tatu Petersen-Jessen

Interviewer: Julia Rässä

Date and Time: 25/11/2017 14:17

Location: Kouvola, XAMK, Kasarminmäki Campus.

Audio file information: Live recording of Tatu's interview 30 mins.

Julia: Let's start with some basic info; what is your educational background?

Tatu: My educational background is such that I'm a university dropout so to say. I did study like art related studies in secondary high or secondary upper school; Helsinki senior secondary school for visual arts so the Torkkelin Kuvataidelukio. After that I went to... I did apply to taideteollinen korkeakoulu so the University of Arts and Design but I didn't get in so I ended up starting to studies in EVTEK Institute of Art and Design there I studied 3D visualization and animation. After that I ended up getting a job in the game industry and mobile games were booming back then so I thought that that was a good place to stay so from 2004 onwards I've been full-time employed in the game industry.

Julia: To specify how long have you exactly been the in the game industry since then?

Tatu: From 2004 onwards in games uninterruptedly full-time employed, but before that on and off in the new media and advertising and mobile industry altogether I've been around 20 years.

Julia: So am I correct to say that you have done concept art before or worked somewhere in that area as an art director or maybe illustrator?

Tatu: Yeah I've done pretty much everything and my background is very generalist in that field of art.

Julia: Okay. In that case I would like to move on to our general topic about concept art. What is your personal definition of concept art?

Tatu: So for me concept art is always about the function it's always trying to convey how something works or something is it's more of a communication tool for example where illustration can be just a beautiful visual while concept art is always communication tool first and foremost.

Julia: In that case I think you answered the 4th question which was what is the difference between illustration and concept art?

Tatu: I think that's pretty much the difference between the two. Illustration doesn't necessarily need to be a communication tool, it can just illustrate. There's a lot of similarities but for me concept art is always about communication rather than the visual appeal.

Julia: Could you expand in a slightly different direction why do you think Concept Artist is listed as a separate position by employees instead of being the same as Illustrator?

Tatu: I think it probably comes from that as a concept artist you really need to understand what needs to be communicated it's targeted at user experience design and design in general, you have to have a lot more deeper understanding about what you're doing but like with illustration you sometimes just pick up the words from the design and you illustrate; with concept depends on what kind of a concept art. If it's high concept trying to convey for example in game design the whole idea and the deepest meaning of the game or if it's like a concept art for a character or concept art for the game world object. Those are all little bit different things but still like very much instructions on how to make those things they're communicating with the team, the outsiders, the insiders and to yourself as well what needs to be done. And if you think about the Illustration and Concept Artist as a job position, Concept Artist kind of needs to have more of general design frame of mind than an illustrator.

Julia: So you think that's what they're trying to communicate when they list Concept Artist as a very specific position?

Tatu: Yeah. Cause it's kind of a mixture of design and art.

Julia: Could you describe how illustration, storytelling and design skills play a role in your process?

Tatu: For me... Like I'm a pretty bad illustrator, I don't even try to do something that would be commercially polished enough, it would be commercially ready and could be presented to the customers so for me it's all about storytelling and design; it's all about making sure that the story beats and pieces are conveyed to that artists and illustrators that are actually then going to make the final asset. So like for me - my process is that the storytelling is everything.

Julia: Leave it to the other people to do the polished product. Basically.

Tatu: Yeah that how it is. I will never be that best artist or I've never been the best artist so like what works for me best is to work through other people *laughter*. Not trying to be overly humble about my own skills but it's about when you concentrate so much on the storytelling and designed and leading people and leading the vision it all always means that you have less time for the actual craft and actually practicing, so if you think about that you have artists and writers who for 8 hours a day or 9 hours a day they only draw so they get so much more practice than you do. When you're sitting in the meetings for half of the day and you're trying to talk to other people and convey the message so like when you work as an art director it can often be that you have 2 hours a week time to draw at work so... *laughter*

Julia: What steps can you take as an amateur to transition to professional status as a Concept Artist?

Tatu: I think it sometimes can be as boring as just like practice, practice, practice - that's what it is to some extent but once you get to that level of being comfortable with your craft so that you don't have to think about how you draw, one important thing for if you want to go into concept art is that you start more and more think about what you draw rather than how you draw it. It's something

that I say to artists all the time; all artists, even illustrators, even 3D artist, everybody, that you should always pay more attention to the substance than the technical quality. So it doesn't matter how well you draw something if what you draw is generic. You always have to think about more of like... When you make a character or make an environment you have to think about what's the history behind that environment or character, what is the story behind that and that's what makes a good concept artist. Somebody that is a good Illustrator can become a good Concept Artist when they can just start thinking about substance rather than the technical quality.

Julia: Yeah, thank you, that's very good insight. So the next question is more about the technical things. How do you feel about photo bashing? Speed-painting? Or maybe some other techniques you can think of?

Tatu: I think I'm not very much of a purist in that sense and I photo bash all the time. I think, especially for concept art it's not meant to be usually presented to end consumers, it's about communication - it's a communication tool so whatever gets you to the end result fastest that get you can get message through - I think is okay. So if you're fast with your pen it's probably better to scribble it out; if you're faster by just photo bashing things together and you can be faster that way that's totally okay. Sometimes you come by concept artists that are only good at photo bashing and that somewhat limits their ability to work outside realistic console quality games. So you might have really great concept artists that have been working their whole careers with the photo realistic games on they're stuck to that cause their process that's all about photo bashing. So then if they would have to do a cartoony game it would be much harder because they don't have the skills to needed to do totally imaginary stuff - they're stuck with the photographs. But whatever works for you fast that's okay. I do a lot of photo bashing because sometimes it's easier to Google search for images, get bits and pieces from there, just bash together and you get a concept together much faster.

Julia: If you're still grounding the concept art somewhere in the real world.

Tatu: Yeah, yeah. One thing about photo bashing is though and about storytelling that you have to really understand the photos you're using. You're always using something from the real world, you're always anchoring your images to the real world as well, so if you just take something that looks cool and put it totally out of place without understanding the cultural meaning of the object or some symbols or texts they can be really really off sometimes if you don't understand the images you're using. There's a danger to that as well.

Julia: Follow up! Do you ever start paintings as grayscale in your process or would you say it's more of a good exercise to do from time to time?

Tatu: I do that very rarely. But maybe I should do it more.

Julia: Yeah that's understandable. So the next question is: are there any good qualities/skills/habits that a concept artist should have that are not directly related to drawing and painting and all those illustration skills?

Tatu: For me personally like having a good appetite for other media such as cinema, comic books, books in general, infusing yourself with culture. The more you have culture infused in yourself that easier it is to be imaginative. So I

would say that just consuming a lot of culture would be my number one thing that everybody should be doing if they want to create something good.

Julia: The next question is more about clients. Do you self-edit from your original ideas before showing the client to choose only a few options for development or do you show all the ideas?

Tatu: I think it comes from my time when I was working more with advertising that you always get the feeling that if you have three options the client will always choose the crappy one so from those times onwards I have had the motto of never putting an option out there that you couldn't live with. So if I have three options those three options have to be equally good. So that it doesn't matter what the customer chooses. Quite often as well just pick the one that I think is the best one and I just say that this is the one, but of course if you are more working with clients that need to have those different options you have to always make sure that you're going to live with all those options because the client will choose the crappiest one. I don't know what's the black magic behind it but that's how it is.

Julia: *Sighing* yeah you're not going to let people hurt themselves *laughter* when you're partially responsible for that.

Tatu: Yeah and because then you have to like sign it and put that in your portfolio and people come asking like "Why did you do that?" Like it's not an excuse if you didn't manage to sell the best option to the client so you have to have all the options you present to client need to be presentable and something you'd be willing to put in your portfolio as well.

Julia: So in a way you could say by being able to sell the best thing to the client is also part of your job of making a name for yourself as a particular specialist?

Tatu: Yeah. One thing about if you're selling concept art and concepts, as concepts are by definition, by my definition at least, all about communication so if your concept art is failing at its job to communicate the vision then you kind of already failed because that didn't get chosen. So that's how I see it. Never put forward a concept art that you wouldn't want the final game or final product having that in it.

Julia: Hm, yeah, sounds like a very good tip.

Tatu: Sometimes easier said than done.

Julia: Are you usually given a ready-made story or game concept to work from and if so how do you approach it? What's the process of your ideation?

Tatu: I've been in a situation where we have a story and also been in situations where there's absolutely no story and it falls heavily on the artists to create the story but if I'm given the freedom to come up with the story I always start by asking the questions about the world, about the characters, about the main conflict. Depending on if we're making a game or what kind of a game we're making, what kind of storytelling means we have; all those like play into the what kind of stories we can tell. Once I have like some kind of big picture of what kind of story we want to tell then it goes really into just like finding out the different narratives that have to be visualized. I might just like do a really really artificial thing like just decide that, okay, the main protagonist or the player character has

this theme core of blue and everything that is blue is kind of linked to that character or the antagonist or the enemy is all about red and that's the colour spectrum they have. I try to set these kind of very artificial rules to myself so that it starts to make sense in the visual storytelling. I think Angry Birds is a good example where the storytelling is everywhere. When you are in the Bird Island it's all about feathers, there's feathers everywhere, there's feathers on the rocks, the palm trees have the leaves look like feathers, their buildings, the architecture resemble feathers in many ways. And then when you go to Pig Island it's all about snouts. They put like their snout imprints on everything that they do like if you find something that is made by pigs they always have snout pictures on them. And they have like advanced tools so they can make much more. They're really really bad builders but they have advanced tools so they have nails, they have bolts and they are able to weld, whereas the birds are only about like nature and they only built from things they found like driftwood. So like and that's where were you start telling the stories like you infuse it into all the environments, infused it into all the characters. Where it comes from is that you write down the main premise of the story and it can be a very very simple premise and then you start to make like this small narratives from it and small things. Okay, if this is the world how would that reflect into this one chair in the corner of that room and you put it in play with everything you create for the world that's how I approach the storytelling.

Julia: During the design process do you mostly rely on your visual library or use a lot of references?

Tatu: I use a lot of references and why I use a lot of references is that how I feel is that either you choose your references or your subconsciousness will choose the references for you. Anyways you're going to be filtering from what you have experienced in the past, there's nothing you create on paper will be unique in that sense that it's always somehow filtered from things you've seen in the past so that's how that's why I often rather choose the references and have the reference is there in the visible visual form because otherwise I always end up in that kind of situation that I start drawing and my drawing starts to resemble something too familiar. It might take me a week to realize that I've been drawing some character from some movie that I saw as a kid. But it was my subconscious that pushed that on the surface when I was trying to draw it. So that's why I would always go for references and also careful with choosing the references, sometimes mix and match the references but like if I need to draw a clock I would choose probably ten clocks and maybe make a new one based on like something from each one of them or if I need to make the cultural anchoring I might choose 'the clock' from somewhere so it's not like a mixture of the different references but it's exactly like that clock and that's something I do a lot when if I want to do intentional pop culture references for example I might just pick something that was in some 90's movie that was really important to me and I might put it there as a gag that there's this really recognizable object from a movie in an interesting new context. I like to do those a lot and I think there's no shame in that. Some people might feel that everything should come from the artist from within but I don't believe in that. Maybe because I'm such a bad artist. That's how I feel.

Julia: How do you keep yourself "artistically" in shape? Are there some regular drawing exercises or habits you would suggest?

Tatu: Really recommend that never let go of the pen, always keep on sketching, keep on doodling. I every now and then try to reserve myself a little bit of time, unfortunately often my expectation of quality and my skills as an artist need so much more time because I don't have the habit, I don't draw 8 hours a day. I have a lot of unfinished doodles in my iPad Procreate that I just like finished up the face and the body is just a sketch and those will never end up in my portfolio but it's like for myself to assure that I still have it. If nothing else I always try to reserve some time in for example Christmas holidays, summer holidays that I at least have few days. If I have like more than two weeks of holiday I'll try to reserve enough time to do one illustration or one 3D model or something so just like to get that practice but if possible I would also recommend for people to reserve some time during their work weeks to practice something new, practice drawing, practice their imagination and also the technical side.

2 HALIL URAL "CONCEPT ART CREATION FOR A STORY" ASSESSMENT INTERVIEW

Interviewee: Halil Ural

Interviewer: Julia Rässä

Date and Time: 25/11/2017 15:52

Location: Kouvola, XAMK, Kasarminmäki Campus.

Audio file information: Live recording of Halil's interview 18 mins.

Julia: Let's start with some basic info; what is your educational background?

Halil: I'm born in Istanbul and my educational background starts from the high school where I took a painting class; it was a specified high school that's for Fine Arts education so I was in the painting section there for 4 years. Then after graduating from high school I moved to college which is based on graphic design so I have a master's degree on the graphic design in Marmara University of Fine Arts also.

Julia: How long have you been in the game industry?

Halil: My first game industry commission was as a freelance artist it was around 2004 and it was for I an indie game developer NG:DEV.TEAM they were doing this game called Gunlord and I did some cover art and some concept art for that. So from 2004... We're in 2017. So it's like 13 years.

Julia: Moving on to the main subject of this interview; what is your personal definition of concept art?

Halil: Concept art for me is like that I wouldn't call it art actually, it's mostly design after all. You're designing it's like you're building an information, you become an architect of information of what needs to be done as a product so it's like the pre-work of a product. So the concept artist is like selling your idea to the producer. It became a popular term because nowadays it has been pacing on the internet. Back in the early years of game industry or movie industry not many of these concept arts were revealed to the public so it was not even called concept art maybe more of a design aspect thing.

Julia: What is the difference between illustration and concept art? Why do you think Concept Artist is listed as a separate position by employees instead of being the same as Illustrator?

Halil: Because I think that concept art is more of a niche term because it's focused on selling an idea or letting the designer or producer know how to move forward with the design and production, but illustration is for the end user, is for the customer and it's designed to be consumed, it's not the direct from the concept art; it's an indirect way of consuming happening in the production. But in illustration it's mostly something you see... Actually, they're both selling an idea, but one of them is selling the idea to the producer, other one is selling the idea to the customer, basically, the consumer.

Julia: Could you describe how illustration, storytelling and design skills play a role in your process when creating concept art?

Halil: In creating concept art I think it's very important that you're trying to market, and the thing that you're trying to market is your idea so it's like it should be emotionally impacting to the person who's going to consume it. You have to know about storytelling and design which is actually the most important aspect. Also in the case of storytelling it will create the build-up of the emotion that you can actually design the way it should be appealing to the end user. I think that's how it works in concept art.

Julia: What steps can you take as an amateur to transition to professional status as a concept artist? Your take and advices.

Halil: I think what makes you professional is you are getting paid for it basically. But for the transition I think you have to be aware of what the market is out there you, also have to follow the trends, that's how you get professional positions. You have to follow the demand what's going in the market because if your style or what you're doing is not fulfilling the demand it doesn't work, you don't land the job. So you have to be original but you also have to follow what's current, you really have to balance it like there's a thin line.

Julia: Between being..?

Halil: Being original but then the market is not very original because everybody is doing the same thing in my opinion.

Julia: What is your stance on photo bashing? Speed-painting? And maybe any other techniques you can think of?

Halil: Whatever works. I'm a purist myself, I don't use photo bash in my approach it's because of my technical choices or maybe my technical skills, I don't know. The thing is in terms of creating something original you cannot rely on photos only because I see lots of concept art out there that has been photo bashed: the picture's amazing; the composition is amazing but the most beautiful part of it is the photo bashed part because the part is realistic in a way it kind of makes me feel like I'm getting tricked. Also the speed painting is actually is like a really important skill that you have to show initial sketches of what you're thinking about. Yeah, so I think photo bashing and speed-painting is good for the initial stage but for the final product especially if you're making marketable illustrations you should get it toned down. But on the other end concept art if it's not the end product it's completely fine.

Julia: Follow up! Do you ever start paintings as grayscale in your process or would you say it's more of a good exercise to do from time to time?

Halil: I start usually from grayscale but I keep changing the values during the colouring phase if needed.

Julia: Are there any good qualities/skills/habits that a concept artist should have that are not directly related to drawing and painting?

Halil: Well I think it's like exploration, doing something different, thinking outside the box but these are really cliché stuff. I can guess most artists are already doing that so I think it's like using something maybe adding a cross-discipline to your artistic skills to some other way that will have synergy to your

art. If you are a painter or something completely different you can do something completely different but have synergy like sculpting for instance. Maybe taking photo photography so it will increase your cinematography skills.

Julia Can I do a follow-up question? Are there maybe habits or skills that you pride yourself on that help you with your design process or illustration?

Halil: I'm a 2D artist but I also practice some 3D art I also sometimes make clay sculptures and also like to take photos but only for myself I never reveal them; some personal stuff.

Julia: Do you self-edit from your original ideas from your original ideas before showing the client to choose only a few options for development or do you show all the ideas?

Halil: See it's actually depends on the client's opinion because some clients ask my original ideas and some don't. There's a correlation; he budget of the client increases - the freedom of your ideas decreases. If the budget is low they're just asking for any things that you can come up with, going more experimental. I think it should be the other way around but I don't know why but it works in that way. I usually in my cases that I self-edit my ideas to some extent but not completely. I still have some original bits here and there but it's like a toned down version of my original idea, but the initial feelings are always there, I'm really careful about that.

Julia: Follow up question; do you show a lot of different options to the client usually?

Halil: The thing is too many options only gives you an indecisive client so it's like you have really cherry pick your options, really pick the best ones. For example I have plenty of ideas sometimes I have to fuse two ideas into each other to generate an idea which is between them so I will reduce the amount of options.

Julia: Are you usually given a readymade story or game concept to work from and if so how do you approach it? What's the process of your ideation?

Halil: Usually it's already an existing IP so I have to develop an idea or something over that so I have to get as much resources and references on the story as possible to get the things right and build information upon that story to approach it on the ideation part. Because they want to see something original but at same time they want their IP to be there so it shouldn't deviate too much from their original idea.

Julia: During the design process do you mostly rely on your visual library or use lot of references?

Halil: I usually start with my own visual library but my own visual library comes from actually references so it's like I memorize stuff which are visual references already. So if there's a topic that I don't know how to draw, for instance the client asks for a horse riding a bicycle then I have to look for the references for it. Other than that it's like an initial phase for the silhouettes and everything is purely for my visual library, but like I said if I don't know how to draw it then after the like nailing down the silhouette I just start to correct the silhouette by looking at the references.

Julia: How do you keep yourself "artistically" in shape? Are there some regular drawing exercises or habits you would suggest?

Halil: Well I usually try to do as much life drawing as possible because I usually work on characters and all the characters have anatomy after all. Most of the characters in the market are humanoid characters so you need to have really good knowledge of human anatomy. I also do landscape painting time to time, make real gouache paintings in my sketchbook, it's very helpful for nailing down the colour keys of the daylight and stuff like that. That's what I do for keeping myself artistically in shape and also I do some movie frame studies for like cinematic composition knowledge.

Julia: Can I ask one more follow up? Do you often use traditional media in that case for studies?

Halil: Depends, I do digital drawing for the movie stills, but for outdoor sketches or figure drawing it's mostly traditional.

3 VILLE ASSINEN

"CONCEPT ART CREATION FOR A STORY" ASSESSMENT INTERVIEW

Interviewee: Ville Assinen

Interviewer: Julia Rässä

Date and Time: 26/11/2017 15:10

Location: Kouvola, XAMK, Kasarminmäki Campus.

Audio file information: Live recording of Ville's interview 31 mins.

Julia: What is your educational background?

Ville: After college which I went in Lahti have studied carpentry and product design, those are the schools that contributed most to my learning and my skills; especially my studies of industrial design and product design. Also I have done ceramics and all sorts of things outside of games like real world products and things like that. On my own, of course, we all in the field tend to study. I'm really interested in architecture and art history, well, it's part of the curriculum but I think condensed that's pretty much where I have got my formal education; in Lahti Institute of Design and in another school in Lahti - it's more for the crafts and real world materials.

Julia: So for college you went to a regular college?

Ville: Regular college. Like maybe it was the time in my life that you know I have to get the college out of the way and eventually I did a little bit of drawing on the side, not so much, it was later when I really started to practice more and I think it's most often the case - the more you do it, the more you learn of the things you want to do and get interested and you know it carries you into places unknown beforehand. It's like a self-guiding process.

Julia: How long have you been in the game industry?

Ville: I've been working with games a little bit more than 5 years now, and been doing story driven AAA games at Remedy mostly, and also been involved in mobile games, and trying out some VR stuff as well, but mostly it's these AAA story games.

Julia: What is your personal definition of concept art?

Ville: Well I think concept art its production art, it's a tool in the team - a communication tool that's what it is mostly. It has like a broad range of like different things in it, on the other end there are like really technical sketches and gameplay problem-solving, and in the other end maybe there is marketing art which are the most like polished and finalized images that stand on their own right. But it's a communication tool - that's the foremost thing.

Julia: What is the difference between illustration and concept art? Why do you think Concept Artist is listed as a separate position by employees instead of being the same as Illustrator?

Ville: Well usually illustrators the work they do and what they got hired for are individual pieces or like multiple pieces within the same order or product and they usually are made so that they can be presented as big prints. It's more on the marketing and the appeal has to be really good on the illustration and I think more time is spent on those. With concept art it's much more about working with the team, and developing the product, and the designs in it, and small problem solving, and smaller tasks. Illustration is more like the art, while concept artists rely more on the design.

Julia: Could you describe how illustration, storytelling and design skills play a role in your process?

Ville: Well illustration, storytelling, design skills; they do play a role. Sometimes more, sometimes less, depending on the task and which part of the game art pipeline are we going up at that time. Illustration and fine art skills like core skills, fundamentals - they all play really big role in making like an aesthetically pleasing fitting choices on whatever I'm designing at the time. Storytelling; it's well you can have games without almost any story like just functional more like Tetris type of thing. Even Tetris has some mood and story in it with the illustrations and the music. But anyway yeah, storytelling depending what's the task at hand it's more or less there all the time anyway. Design skills I think are the most important, most crucial in the process, you will always have some sort of gameplay problem or game flow visual problem like player guide or some kind of ability or like a relating to the game design - then the design skills are important. The ability to think in 3 dimensions, to draw and test out different solutions to the problem before committing further. Really fundamental thing that all this storytelling an illustration can be applied to this as well. But usually the process: you have the problem, you do the research, gather reference, try to understand like what are we after here, then doing sketches and then in the very end if there's time or need for another illustration and then you can also put more storytelling into that.

Julia: What steps can you take as an amateur to transition to professional status?

Ville: Well the biggest and the most important thing is practice of course. Practice and study. It's sometimes the most difficult thing is to go out of the comfort zone and learn new things. Things you know relate to the subject that you want to learn but they are new and it's always difficult and trying to get interested and excited in learning, I think that'll go a long way. Professional or amateur; words like these once you break them down can mean so many different things but I think to be working as a professional in any company you have to usually have a wide set of skills and you could be able to tackle many kinds of visual problems, like let's say from environments to characters to other game design things. The wider your skillset is the more likely it is that you can work like professionally in a game company. But then again if you are a good illustrator and want to do stuff for games then outside of game studios you can work as a freelancer and then again you might get an order of some like a marketing concepts which are more like illustrations. Then you are not directly working with the game but you're contributing with your work and you will get like a brief for

that. So that counters the point I made earlier, but that's how it is because there are so many different cases and people have different skills and needs. Practice, it's the grind that sharpens the axe in the end. The more you can learn from outside of your own comfort zone, it just expands your skillset. I think that's a good place to start.

Julia: What is your stance on photo bashing? Speed-painting?

Ville: Well, both of those that you just mentioned are sketching techniques and image building techniques. I think speed painting it's a really ambiguous term I think; there's just painting if you ask me, or like quicker or slower. But I guess it's like the thing that you want to have something sketched out efficiently so you can see if it's something you want to continue with or not. Using any means necessary I think it's the way to go: photos, 3D, any mixed media, collage, whatever you feel like I think. I have no other stands but to try all of those things out. You can try checking online tutorials find many different tricks ending up doing the same thing and just trying those things out they will expand your skill set and give you more tools to work. I personally use a lot of photos as back plays or blending parts of them using as texture overlay. I find it really helpful, also speed-painting, brushes, also do that. Depends on the time frame and what we want out of it - the part of the process and what resources I have at hand.

Julia: Can I have a follow up question to this? Do you use 3D to assist you in painting?

Ville: Sometimes. Especially in 3D games like making those 3D block outs you can then look at your design from different angles where the player perspective might be and how does it looks from front and side and stands out from the environment. Then in the end when you make more out of that to take a render and make an image of the impression of how it's going to be seen in the product from the player's view. You can also give that 3D mesh to the modellers, environment artist and they can use it for scale reference. 3D, like I said there's no way around it - it's here to stay.

Julia: Follow up! Do you ever start paintings as grayscale in your process or would you say it's more of a good exercise to do from time to time?

Ville: I use grayscale sometimes to start with, but certainly it's a very good exercise. It's the same with line, colour, value, tone. You can and should practice each individually to understand what they do and why.

Julia: Are there any good qualities/skills/habits that a concept artist should have that are not directly related to drawing and painting?

Ville: I think like curiosity that's a really important thing to learn again. All the most talented concept artists I met they have some things in common and one thing is that they extensively studied many things like outside of art like history, even social-economics, like engineering, the list can go on. The key thing is to try expanding your framework of knowledge of how things relate to each other; cultural things. All of that relates to drawing and painting. Think like you have a child's mind - be curious and playful. That's a good place to be I think.

Julia: Do you self-edit from your original ideas from your original ideas before showing the client to choose only a few options for development or do you show all the ideas?

Ville: It depends so much on the client if you're working really closely and you know each other as well and you know what the client is after and all that is clear then I think it's safer to show them even the crappiest sketches. It's fine. But maybe sometimes things are more political and you control more what you show to get rid of any extra hassle. Sometimes it's more marketing on behalf of the ideas and sometimes it's 'here is all of the nonsense and brilliant ideas' then client can even participate in the process.

Julia: Do you usually try to push your favourites in a more convenient light?

Ville: Sometimes it can happen if I really believe that this would be the best option to go with then I might give it some little extra than the other ideas but it depends how much and sometimes maybe my favourite is not exactly the thing that will actually fit best into the product. Putting your own preferences aside at times is quite important.

Julia: Are you usually given a ready-made story or game concept to work from and if so how do you approach it? What's the process of your ideation?

Ville: In games like there's usually some sort of structure in the team: there's a creative director, there's maybe a bit of game design, there's art, animation and whatnot, but thinking about the story and the game concept - that's the highest level thing there is and it's usually established very early on in the process. And once that has been formulated or sort of stated then that's like the anchor to make the research and reference. In my experience from games is that it is more teamwork and nothing is really ready until like various people have worked on those core ideas that other ideas are built upon. So I think the key is to be involved in the process and try to understand like what the creative director wants, what the game designers want and what we want this project to be and then research; that's like I think the first step. Looking what's out there, market, what people are working on, what's been done before, looking at the story, analysing the ideas. Just trying to understand, wrap your head around the problem and that usually takes some time like letting these ideas incubate and bloom eventually. But yeah it's a process the whole game design and the concept art is there to help give something tangible for everyone else to rally around. Maybe you can write a sentence and describe some things but what does it actually look like and feel like that's unsure in the very first steps usually. Usually try to find the underlying needs and problems like what do we actually want and then trying to in-depth sort of understand it rather than looking at superficial things and then starting to build something on top usually. It's a slow process; there's the 'blue skies' phase, very early, you just do whatever is cool and try to throw as many darts at the board as possible and see what fits and then you scoop the not so good ideas away and see what's left and then build more - it's an iterative process.

Julia: During the design process do you mostly rely on your visual library or use a lot of references?

Ville: Well in most cases I always check up some reference. Some cases if I'm familiar with the subject and I'm confident that this is good or good enough for the task at hand then I don't need the reference and I can just do something. But I think the research part and the referencing it's really important because you want to expose yourself to all these different visual ideas and sometimes referencing means looking for a type of material, mechanical function of things or some cultural references. It so much depends on the project at hand. Is it like an in-game design related thing on the character, in the environment, in the user interface or is it going to be cinematic; what is the usage. I look up references on things I'm not so familiar with. That's the thread that goes along the process.

Julia: Just seems like a general thing you'd like to do when you don't know about some specific topic.

Ville: Yeah of course. It's like the more you do and the more you study and reference things the more you also understand and notice the things that you actually don't know about and then you know how to look for that information. The internet is a great place for that.

Julia: How do you keep yourself "artistically" in shape? Are there some regular drawing exercises or habits you would suggest?

Ville: I usually have one or two sketchbooks, one at home and one at my workplace at the desk if there's some time or I have make some visual notes, I do some sketches. I use that and I think it's a good thing; carrying a sketchbook around and finding time to draw. I think that's really useful at least for me and also trying out new things like visual or graphic design wise. Just expanding your skill set. Like recently I did some calligraphy and different type of lettering; it was really fun getting into that and to learn about typography more than the basics from school. It all adds up. Anything visual you do - it sticks. The more hard you make it on yourself - sometimes you learn the more. So trying to be inquisitive. Like getting into all sorts of visual fields.

Julia: So you would suggest getting into different media?

Ville: Trying different media, yeah. I had this 3 month stretch when I started digital painting. I started to do one sketch or speed-painting a day, I got all the way up to 100 and something - school and work just overwhelmed, I couldn't continue but do these sort of things like a sketch a day. I think that's a very good idea and will help. I think self-critical evaluation that's something that definitely drives progress and will also drive you insane if you are too critical so just be merciful on yourself and then the balance out the criticism - that's a thing to think about maybe. Now my work is taking most of my time and I do images there, write a lot of things, 3D, sketches, block outs, just pencil sketches, mood paintings, all sorts of things. In that regard I feel like I don't have to actively practice in my own time so much but in never hurts. I do it. Some things interest me, I get into them and try to understand them and learn, then something new comes and I move on.

4 VELI NYSTRÖM

"CONCEPT ART CREATION FOR A STORY" ASSESSMENT INTERVIEW

Interviewee: Veli Nyström

Interviewer: Julia Rässa

Date and Time: 07/01/2018 time unknown.

Location: Tampere, Finland, online.

Audio file information: Survey interview taken by Veli.

1. What is your educational background?

Bachelor of Culture and Arts, graduated in 2016 from the media programme in Tampere University of Applied Sciences.

2. How long have you been in the game industry?

I did my first freelance gigs for games in 2012 as well as my internship as a 2D artist. It wasn't fulltime or anything like that though, small jobs here and there on the side of studies but it was the first touch to the industry for me. In 2015 I got hired for a fulltime job and since then I've been doing it as my profession, currently as a freelancer.

3. What is your personal definition of concept art?

Concept art how I see it is something used to visualize ideas and solve the problems when trying to find out how a subject should look like. It doesn't need to be too refined as long as the point comes through to the team, and in the end the design should act as a guideline for the team who will continue from that. So providing different possible solutions and refining the design of the subject, making it as easy as possible for other people to take it further from that when it goes forward in the pipeline.

4. What is the difference between illustration and concept art? Why do you think Concept Artist is listed as a separate position by employees instead of being the same as Illustrator?

In my mind illustration is something that can stand alone as it is or be accompanied by text or other elements, it's an image that should look appealing and thus be refined enough because it will be showed to the public. Concept art is not necessarily ever shown to other people than the team working on the project, and it can range from really fast scribbles with notes to paint-overs of 3D scenes and all the way to quite refined images as well, but its main purpose is to find answers to visual questions and provide information so it can be taken to further in the pipeline to 3D modellers, texturing and animation.

If you would take a game as an example, I would consider the cover art or a splash screen as illustration in which everything is combined and composed (characters, environment, props etc.) to create a single image that stands out. Concept art instead would be part of the process of designing those actual

subjects, how a character should look like, what he or she is wearing and why, what is the personality or status of the character and how do we represent those things with the design and other questions like that.

The positions are usually separate because the purpose of the work is so different and so are the challenges. As a concept artist you need to be able to provide a lot of options and interesting ideas, illustration is more about being able to make a polished image that can be shown to the public.

At this point I want to mention that this is quite a stark division between the roles, just to keep it simple. There is a lot of overlapping what comes to the requirements and especially the understanding of art fundamentals and principles is something that both areas benefit from. What makes it a bit more complex as well is that illustration and concept art both can be divided to smaller segments which have different needs, the required skills for a character concept artist and an environment concept artist can be quite different. Sometimes these areas can collide a bit what comes to the task, for example if you're working on images for a pitch presentation you might need to spend time with the design and solve some of those issues but the end result should look appealing enough to be presented to people outside the team also.

5. Could you describe how illustration, storytelling and design skills play a role in your process?

I think the most important part is to ask questions, what it actually is that you want to portray and what is the feeling you want to get. After having those answers, I try to follow them and make decisions that play to that. It really is a mix of things, from colour choices to shape language, what kind of subject matter and materials are used in the image, what is the lighting and the camera position, where do you draw most of the attention and how you do that. It's important to be aware of what you're actually trying to achieve, I've done a lot of works in which I've noticed a bit too late that the idea was somehow lost during the process or not clear enough in the beginning. Even if the image or design might look alright in the end, it could be much more interesting and work better if I had asked myself those questions in the start.

6. What steps can you take as an amateur to transition to professional status?

I would say that the most important part is just drawing and painting as much as you can and soaking in information. Fundamentals are super important and you can never practice or study those too much. It's important to be critical of your own work as well, that way you can pinpoint your own weaknesses so you can work on them and improve.

Also understanding the different jobs and their requirements is important, so you can practice the right things for you and build your portfolio accordingly. It is possible to work in different fields simultaneously like illustration and concept art, but a good thing to remember is that when someone is looking for an illustrator, they don't necessarily care about prop designs you might have done or the other way around, so you'd want to show them the work that fits what they're looking

for. Same goes for style, if you're applying for a job in a studio that creates realistic games, something along those lines is what they want to see, so being aware of the needs of the client is very important. It sounds self-evident but I know it from myself being interested in many different areas that a portfolio might easily get cluttered and too all-over-the-place, instead of having clear sections from which the possible employer can easily see if you fit the job or not.

The last thing is to just be active and if you can, go to events and meet people who are interested in the same thing. You can learn a lot from meeting and talking with people, and getting feedback from professionals is very valuable because they can see and point out things you might not see yourself and they know what kind of skills are required and good to have. I've noticed that being active on social media and pushing out work in a regular manner has been the best way of marketing for me, especially if you decide to go freelance it's a good thing to remind people that you exist and showing new work is a nice way of doing that. There are a lot of online communities and challenges from time to time as well and those can be great learning experiences as well as work as a mean of getting your work noticed.

7. What is your stance on photo bashing? Speed-painting? Grayscale?

I think it's all about knowing what is the purpose of the image and also what kind of project you're working on, plus realizing the time restrictions. Photo bashing is completely fine as a technique and if you're working on a project with a realistic style then it makes complete sense to aim for that in the design as well.

What comes to speed painting, as an exercise doing them is a great way for figuring out different workflows and trying out tools you don't usually try, also just testing yourself how well you manage to capture the idea in a certain time limit.

That being said, I think that how well you can do those things depends on your understanding and skill what comes to the art fundamentals. That's what matters the most in my opinion, and that's also the reason why you can often see the difference in the quality between beginners and industry veterans, even if both are using the same tools. Photo bashing can be very appealing, especially when you see it being done by experienced artists it can easily seem somehow effortless and fast but the reason why those artists can make it work like that, is because they have a lot of hours behind them with practice and studying.

I would try to stay away from working fast just for the sake of working fast, speed will come with experience, knowledge and confidence in your workflow which takes time to build. It's good to be aware that tight time restrictions are a common thing in the field, but I feel especially when you're focusing on learning it's better to spend more time on the images and getting things right instead of worrying about the speed.

Usually I start in grayscale, just so I don't have to worry about the colours yet and I can focus on the value structure and lighting. When I have the base composition and main elements down in grayscale, after that I start adding colour. Depends

on the piece but that is the usual workflow. It's a good way to check the composition and lighting beforehand, where you want to draw the attention and have more or less contrast etc. Colours can do that as well or amplify the focal point but yeah, most of the time you can see it already in black & white if it's gonna work or not. There are exceptions and images that do not necessarily follow that rule as well, if you have a certain type of colour scheme or mood in mind it might be easier to get it with colours straight away.

8. Are there any good qualities/skills/habits that a concept artist should have that are not directly related to drawing and painting?

Hmmm, that's a good question. I think being interested about a lot of things or having the ability to become interested is a good one, you might need to work with several different things as a concept artist so finding that interest in even seemingly boring subjects makes it easier for yourself.

Another thing I'd say which is a bit similar, is to be observant and pay attention to why certain things work and how they work as well. You need to do a lot of thinking when you're concepting and it's important to know why you're making the choices you are making. Functionality of design goes with that too, it might be more obvious in mechanical subjects like machines but applies to so many other things too, how does this thing actually work and what parts does it need to have, what parts are moving and when it will be animated do those elements have the space to move or not and how do I solve it. Educating yourself about similar subjects that you want to work on can help a lot, it doesn't mean that you have to understand all the engineering or technicalities behind it, it's more about creating the illusion that it could work and knowing more about the subject can make a design much more credible. I'll put it this way that the more you know about cars or medieval armour, the more credible designs of those subjects you'll be able to make, most likely.

Communication skills are important, usually you are working with other people so being comfortable in that sort of environment, getting feedback, bouncing ideas back and forth and so on is a part of it.

As the last one I can come up with at the moment is to be familiar with the area that you are working in. Whether it's games, movies or something else that you want to work with, it's good to know what is out there, what kind of process it takes to develop those projects and it helps with the communication part too, when you understand the terms, references and meanings related to the topic.

9. Do you self-edit from your original ideas from your original ideas before showing the client to choose only a few options for development or do you show all the ideas?

Usually I do self-edit, almost always there are some sketches that I won't show. They might be variations of another idea that I will show or just something that I tried but couldn't get to work or didn't like in the end. It depends on the project, the communication and how clear it is to me as well, sometimes it requires a bit more back and forth with the client to find the right approach. Often when I'm not

too sure about the subject or the description myself, I send as much stuff as I can so we can discuss it and find a good way to go about it.

10. Are you usually given a readymade story or game concept to work from and if so how do you approach it? What's the process of your ideation?

There is pretty much always some sort of description or a title, but how precise it is varies a lot. Sometimes it's just a title and other times it might be a longer description which has a lot of story around it as well, maybe reference images of that project or something else attached as well to illustrate what kind of thing the client is after. The context of the project is very important and the design or the illustration needs to fit that particular project.

Most of the time I start just by thinking and writing notes about the subject, trying to come up with keywords and ideas that would support the subject, keeping the project itself in mind. In question 5 I covered quite a bit of that, so again asking those questions and finding the means to reflect the answers in a visual form. After I've thought about it and written something down, I start to sketch and see where that takes me, keeping it loose and focusing on the big picture at that point.

Usually I get reference after the sketching phase, because I don't want to get too attached to any reference in the beginning as it might make me restrict myself. I don't want to waste too much time with details or so when starting either, it's more about the general impact at that point and everything can be tweaked, refined and detailed later on when moving forward with the task.

11. During the design process do you mostly rely on your visual library or use a lot of references?

Echoing the previous answer, I try to be as free as I can especially in the beginning, so working without gathered reference and keeping it somewhat abstract just so the main impact is there and I can focus on that. Once again it depends on the subject, with some subjects I feel more confident so I might not look at reference at all, and other subjects might be so strange to me that after or during the sketching phase I'll need to have reference images to make it work. Nowadays I try to gather and look at some reference images no matter what though, because even if the subject is somewhat familiar to me there are usually so many subtleties and small things I wouldn't think or know of otherwise, and if it makes the work better in the end it's worth it. And usually reference images can provide much more information and ideas than that, even if you don't end up using a certain reference in one work, something from it can stick in your mind and you might find a use for that later.

I feel that it depends quite a bit on the subject itself as well, if you're designing an alien or a demon from another realm of existence and compare it to let's say a historically accurate or close to that character from a certain period of time in place X, the latter one already by definition requires you to gather reference. Of course you can use reference images for an alien or a demon as well and it might improve the design a lot, but it is not a requirement in the same way. Inspiration

can be found in strange places too, so I try to keep up a reference library of images that I like for one reason or another that I can browse through from time to time. It might be so that the subject matter of an image doesn't interest me at all, but the lighting, colours, shapes or something else is great, just that there is something interesting about it to me.

12. How do you keep yourself "artistically" in shape? Are there some regular drawing exercises or habits you would suggest?

I try to draw and paint regularly outside of work, just to keep the habit and my mind occupied and active. Working both from imagination and doing studies, I feel it keeps the creativity fuelled but you're learning and reminding yourself of the fundamentals at the same time. Reading, traveling, playing games and watching movies can be great for that purpose as well, to be exposed to new ideas and have something to find inspiration from.

I don't really have a set routine or anything like that, but one tool I could recommend is a website (<https://line-of-action.com/>) which imitates model drawing sessions with photos. Of course if you can attend model drawing class all the better, but that is a nice alternative and as it has the timer built in it forces you to work within the time limit. Other than drawing and painting, studying art theory and the fundamentals is something you can never go wrong with I feel, and the more you practice the faster you'll improve.

As this is the end of the interview, I just want to mention that this is how I feel about the topic and I'm still learning about it. There might be other possibly better and much clearer opinions and answers out there, but it was interesting for me to think about the subject and try to put it to words. It proved to be quite difficult but I hope there's something to get out of the answers. Thank you for the interview and all the best!

6 Types of Story Conflict



Person vs Person

Character conflicts, whether between heroes and villains or sparring lovers.



Person vs Society

A character is victimised by society, e.g. Hester's public shaming in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*.



Person vs Nature

E.g. when two lovers are separated by a hurricane in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston.



Person vs Technology

Characters face the ominous results of science moving beyond our control. E.g. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.



Person vs Self

Conflict between a character and their inner struggle. E.g. Rodion's violent fantasies in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*.



Person vs Supernatural

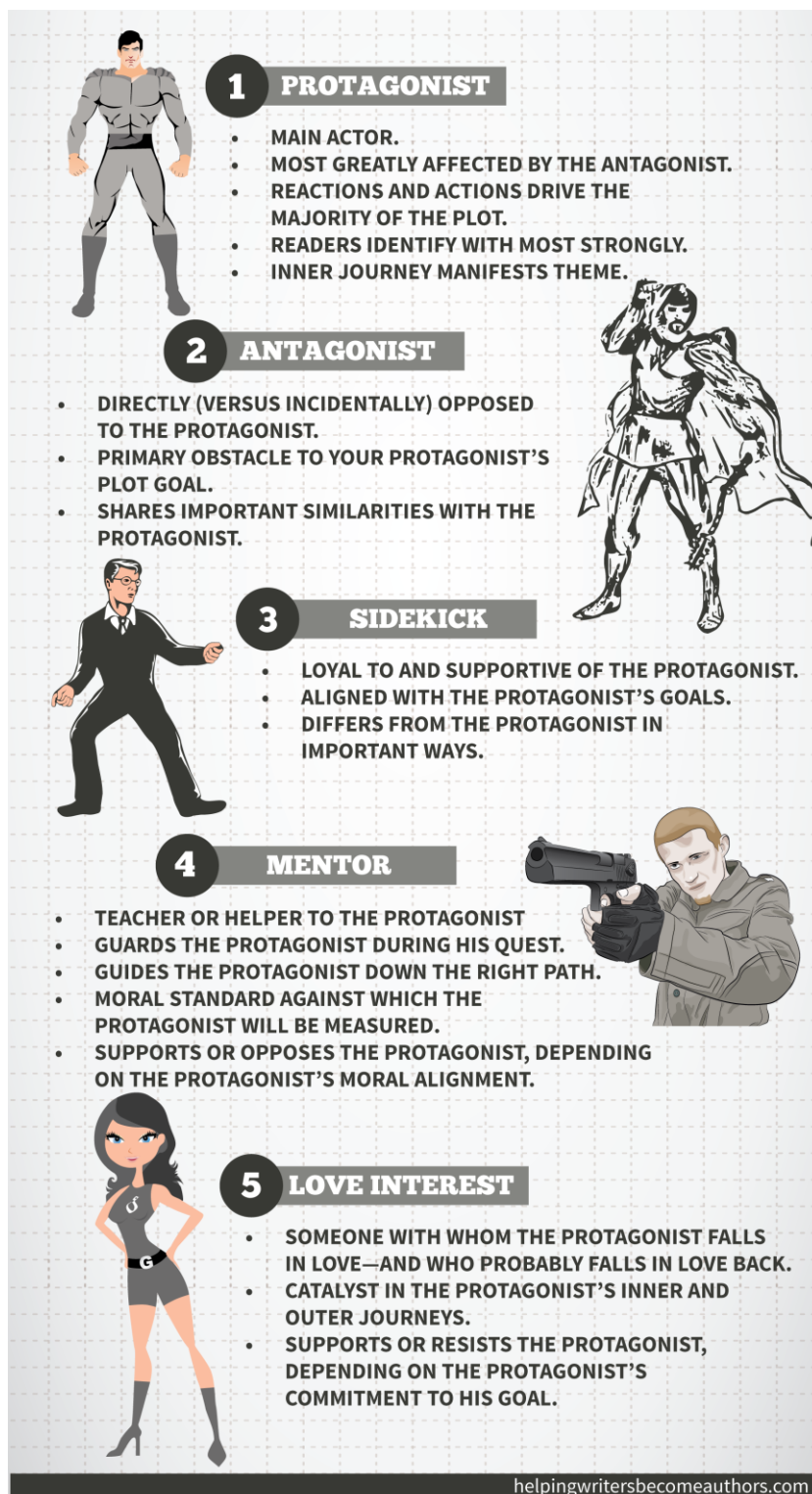
The source of conflict is supernatural, e.g. the shape-shifting 'It' that terrorises children in Stephen King's novel of the same name.

www.nownovel.com

Now Novel. (n.d.). *6 Story Conflicts Possible in Your Book* | Now Novel. [online]

Available at: <https://www.nownovel.com/blog/kind-conflicts-possible-story/>

[Accessed 9 Feb. 2018].



1 PROTAGONIST

- MAIN ACTOR.
- MOST GREATLY AFFECTED BY THE ANTAGONIST.
- REACTIONS AND ACTIONS DRIVE THE MAJORITY OF THE PLOT.
- READERS IDENTIFY WITH MOST STRONGLY.
- INNER JOURNEY MANIFESTS THEME.

2 ANTAGONIST

- DIRECTLY (VERSUS INCIDENTALLY) OPPOSED TO THE PROTAGONIST.
- PRIMARY OBSTACLE TO YOUR PROTAGONIST'S PLOT GOAL.
- SHARES IMPORTANT SIMILARITIES WITH THE PROTAGONIST.

3 SIDEKICK

- LOYAL TO AND SUPPORTIVE OF THE PROTAGONIST.
- ALIGNED WITH THE PROTAGONIST'S GOALS.
- DIFFERS FROM THE PROTAGONIST IN IMPORTANT WAYS.

4 MENTOR

- TEACHER OR HELPER TO THE PROTAGONIST
- GUARDS THE PROTAGONIST DURING HIS QUEST.
- GUIDES THE PROTAGONIST DOWN THE RIGHT PATH.
- MORAL STANDARD AGAINST WHICH THE PROTAGONIST WILL BE MEASURED.
- SUPPORTS OR OPPOSES THE PROTAGONIST, DEPENDING ON THE PROTAGONIST'S MORAL ALIGNMENT.

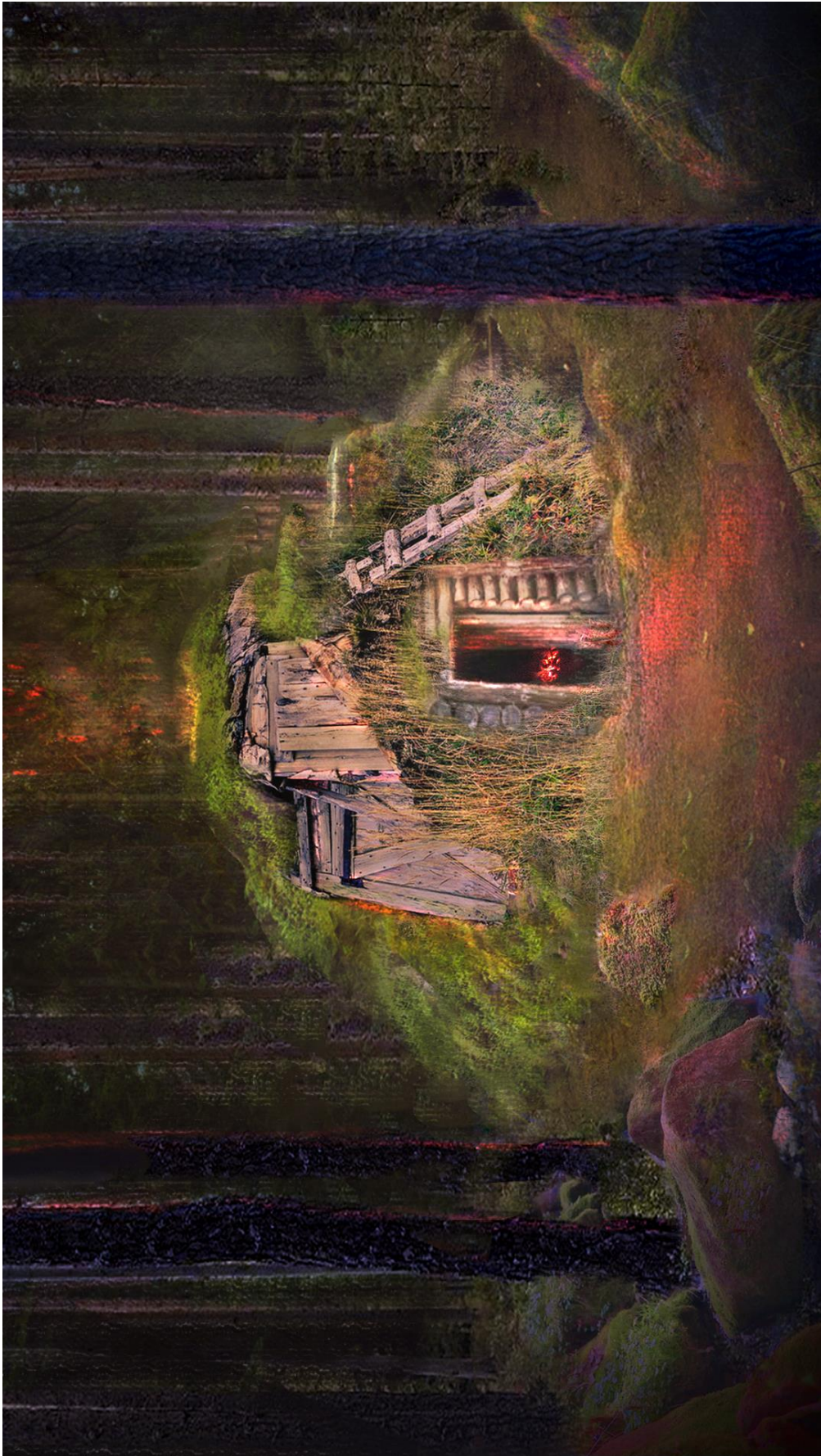
5 LOVE INTEREST

- SOMEONE WITH WHOM THE PROTAGONIST FALLS IN LOVE—AND WHO PROBABLY FALLS IN LOVE BACK.
- CATALYST IN THE PROTAGONIST'S INNER AND OUTER JOURNEYS.
- SUPPORTS OR RESISTS THE PROTAGONIST, DEPENDING ON THE PROTAGONIST'S COMMITMENT TO HIS GOAL.

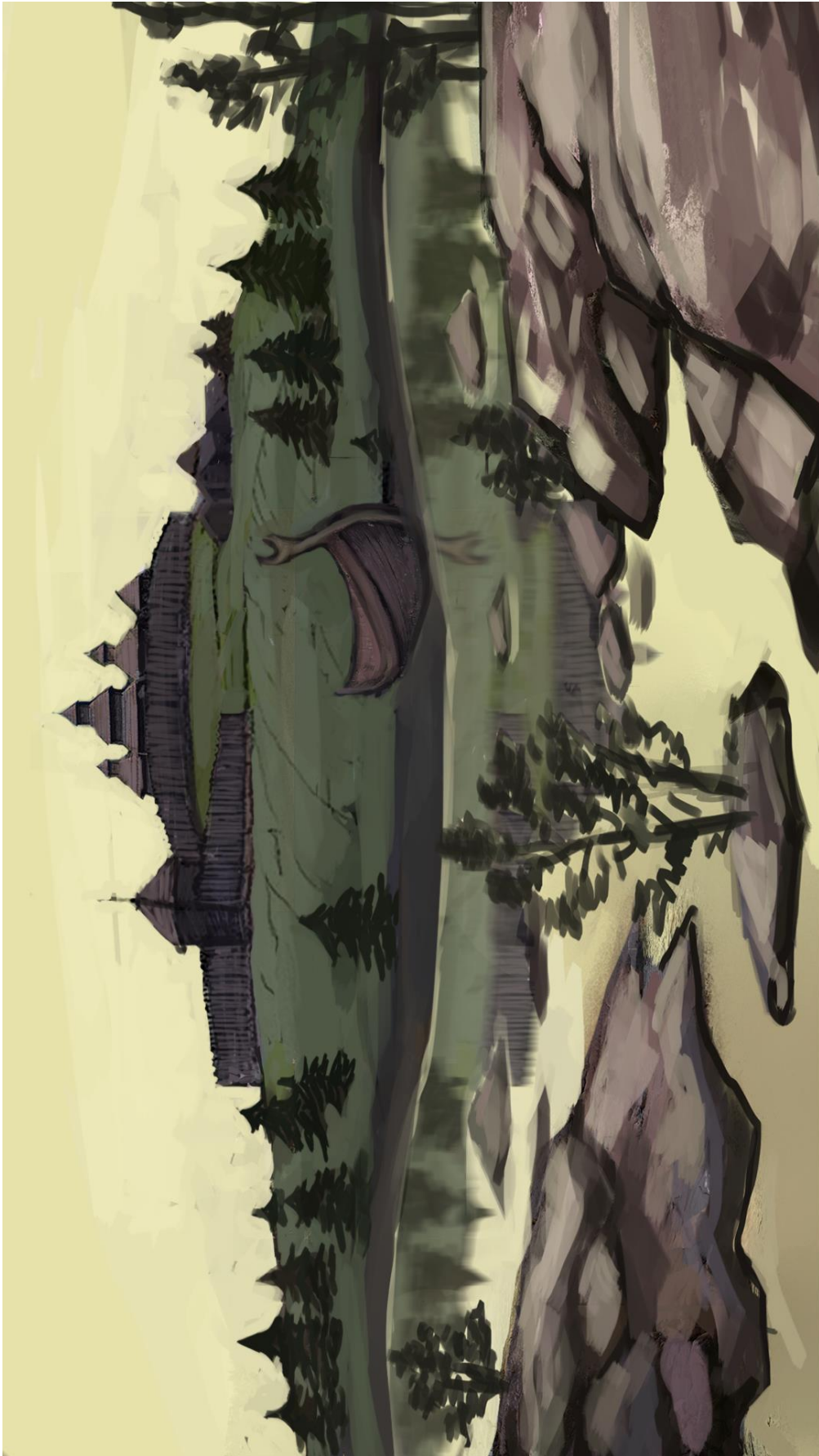
helpingwritersbecomeauthors.com

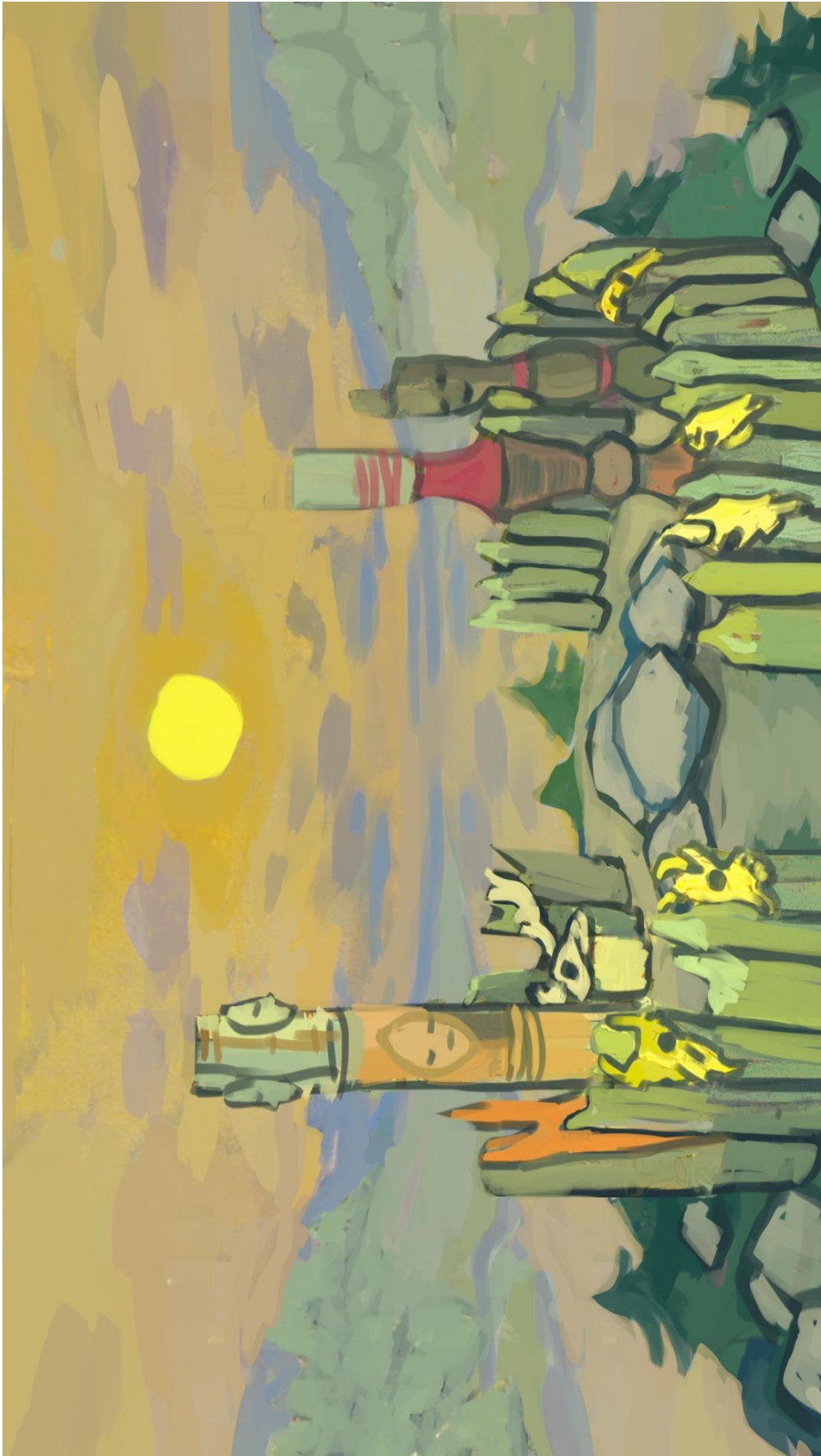
Weiland, K. (2013). 8 ½ Character Archetypes You Should Be Writing. [online] Helping Writers Become Authors. Available at: <https://www.helpingwritersbecomeauthors.com/8-%C2%BD-character-archetypes-writing/> [Accessed 28 Mar. 2018].















Shontas & Rocks



Gabiya



Neyola



Eirikr



Yarena



















