

CREATING CHARACTERS FOR THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY

CHARACTER DESIGN FOR
ANIMATION, ILLUSTRATION
& VIDEO GAMES



KENNETH ANDERSON DEVON CADY-LEE CÉCILE CARRE HOLLIE MENGERT

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FOREWORD

BY JAMES WOODS

Artwork © James Woods

Every artist working at a studio waits for the moment when they are briefed on a project, allowing them to start fruitfully creating work that speaks to the director's vision. It's the exciting time when a character is given context in a story, when your mind starts to spark creative impulses, and when you have the freedom to visually interpret the written words you are given.

WHERE TO BEGIN?

When handed a new brief, my first instincts are to begin by researching the subject matter, whether it is the time, where the story takes place, the visual styles I feel the directors favor, or the anatomy of the character (particularly if they're an animal or otherwise anthropomorphized). I may also start to think about actors I could imagine playing the role.



I'll compile all of this research and inspiration into a mood board, which helps me to organize my thoughts so that I can then intuitively start to draw who I think the character is.

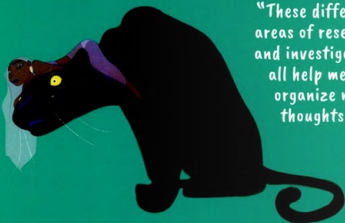
No two design briefs are the same and during my professional career I've had the privilege of working on a range of human, animal, aquatic, and entirely fantastical character designs. I've found the most enjoyment in projects that have a specific visual style as it creates a standard for the team to perform to.

In transitioning from an aspiring designer to having a full-time position at a studio, I have found myself constantly developing as an artist every day and trying to refine my craft. This is a natural habit when you're surrounded by incredibly talented coworkers at a studio that has a legacy to uphold. It can be very daunting to be in those environments, however I try to harness that fear and use it as an incentive to grow and create work that lives next to the artists that I admire.

FINDING YOUR PLACE

One of the most important aspects of working professionally that I think every aspiring artist should understand is knowing that we are all employed to serve the vision of the media that we are designing for. Every crew member is here to support each other and work in synchronicity for the sake of the final image and as such, there is no place for ego or preciousness. Of course, it's important to have pride in the work that you create, but not at the expense of the director's vision. Your role in the process is essentially to adapt and perform to the needs of the production while pushing the visual expectations to create something that excites your directors.

There may be some individuals who fear that this can limit their creativity, and if that is the case, it's important for every artist to find an artistic outlet that fulfills them independently, whether that be through drawing in your spare time or immersing yourself in creative experiences. I personally love to be directed as it gives me focus, productivity, and purpose. However, I always make sure to draw a line between my professional and personal creativity to remain as artistically fertile as possible.



"These different
areas of research
and investigation
all help me to
organize my
thoughts"





"Every production designer
has a different aesthetic
taste, which is important to
be aware of and cater to"



USING REFERENCES

Mary Poppins Returns was such a classic production to work on – each character had a clear purpose, whether hero or villain, and had to be delivered with traditionally animated appeal. For a project like this, I spent a lot of time researching each animal and would generally do a page of small doodles that captured the essence of their forms and attitude before starting to design each individually. Stylistically, a lot of time was spent referencing classic Disney movies, with some opportunities to visit their archives. However, most of the research actually went into the costuming to make sure that it was both period- and class-specific. I feel that the importance of costume design is often something that is overlooked beneath the character design umbrella, yet it's one of the strongest assets a designer can have.

Although *Mary Poppins Returns* had a very clear design goal – paying homage to a pre-established visual style – each project I've worked on has been very different to the next. Every studio generally has a house style to abide by; however, every production designer has a different aesthetic taste, which is important to be aware of and cater to. I had instances at the beginning of my career where I was unaware of the nuances in a specific production designer's aesthetic, and now it's one of

the first areas of research that I address. If your production designer hasn't sent you a visual reference, you can always watch the previous projects they've worked on to get a sense of their general style.

THE AIM? TO ENTERTAIN!

Some of the most enjoyable briefs I've been given have had a very concise vision and requirements, which means I'm able to create without playing guessing games. It's always great when a director is able to clearly communicate what they want and all of the parts of the crew align to produce harmonious visuals. While designing the anthropomorphic animals for Disney's *Mary Poppins Returns*, I knew that my main goal was to produce a world of whimsical, nostalgic, and charming characters that simply aimed to entertain an audience.

James Woods

Character Designer at Walt Disney Animation Studios
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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

In the entertainment industry, designers are briefed to create characters for children, teenagers and adults; in styles ranging from realistic to fantasy, comic to dramatic, and for a variety of different mediums, such as films, books, or video games. Endless combinations of medium, audience, story, marketability, and more have to be taken into account before the character itself can be conceived and created.

This is the challenge faced by professional character designers when called upon for their design skills, creative flair, and limitless imagination. These qualities should come as standard, but great designers also have the ability to transform a list of requirements into a character that not only meets the brief, but often exceeds it and brings something extra to the project. So how does an entertainment company commission a new character? What kind of information goes into their brief, and how does the artist set about untangling the various requests before putting pen to paper?

BEHIND THE SCENES

In the first section of this book, we discover the different kinds of information relevant to three of the entertainment industry's largest sectors - animation, illustration, and video games - when commissioning a new character. Understanding many of the variables the art director, production designers, and others are working with is key to understanding what it is that is being asked of you, the artist - and why.

Professional designer Kenneth Anderson takes us behind the scenes to reveal many of these influences. Having worked as a character designer himself in the animation, illustration, and video game industries, Kenneth is well placed to provide insight into what art directors and production designers are looking for. Not only does he look at several of the aspects an art director might cover when briefing an artist, but he also walks us through his approach to the design process. Kenneth even touches on that all-important final presentation, with tips and advice for submitting your work. Throughout, look out for industry examples and insider tips.

THE TUTORIALS

In the tutorials, Kenneth has swapped hats, taking on the role of art director to commission our three professional artists to create a series of characters for their specialist medium. Devon Cady-Lee takes on video games, Hollie Mengert focuses on illustration, and Cécile Carre tackles animation. Our artists have each been briefed to design the same basic characters, allowing you to compare and contrast how they are briefed and designed depending on the medium.

You are then able to follow each artist through the design process, from their planning and ideas in response to reading the brief, to their initial submission for Kenneth's feedback. Following that stage, you are able to accompany the artists all the way through to their final presentation, including poses, turnarounds, and expressions. In addition to the insight behind the artist's design plans and decisions, you'll also gain plenty of practical advice to use in your own work. Design tips feature ways to enrich your own character design, especially when attempting to meet a brief. Process tips offer advice on working through the commissioning process, thinking ahead and managing your workflow for the most successful and satisfying results.

BONUS BRIEFS

You are encouraged to try any of the tutorial briefs for yourself, or any of the six bonus briefs, also created by Kenneth especially for this book. Covering the same media and with a range of interesting and iconic characters, you will hopefully feel inspired by Devon, Cécile, and Hollie to follow the process for yourself, adjusting it to suit your own workflow. Find out more on page 286.

Ultimately, character design is about creating engaging, believable, and memorable characters, no matter what its purpose and inspiration. With this book, discover new workflows and thought processes, and blend them with your own tried and trusted techniques, to create characters that could one day be destined for the entertainment industry.

VIDEO GAMES

Devon Cady-Lee

ILLUSTRATION

Hollie Mengert

ANIMATION

Cécile Carre

THE ADVENTURER

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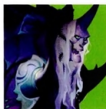
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THE WIZARD

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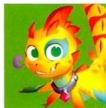
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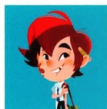
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WHY DO WE NEED CHARACTER BRIEFS?

BY KENNETH ANDERSON

There are several key considerations that most commonly impact on a brief and therefore your workflow and final character. Designing characters without a brief is a bit like traveling to somewhere new without a map - if there is no clear goal of where or what you are aiming for, or some direction on how to get there, the likely result is that you get lost! The same goes for character design - without a defined goal and a clear path to follow, a character design can end up lost.



FOLLOWING DIRECTIONS

There is a difference when following the directions of a character brief as opposed to following a map - unlike the map destination, the end destination of a creative brief is somewhat murky and unknown. The joy of designing is synthesizing all the information to hand and coming up with an appealing visual design solution which is original and inspired.

PROBLEM SOLVING

Before the character designer gets involved, usually all that exists of a character is a character description, a story or a world, and perhaps a vision in someone's mind of what they may look like. The character brief is the starting point, regardless of how simple or complex it might be, outlining and revealing the idea to make manifest the abstract.

Ideally, the brief will inspire the designer to do what they do best - come up with original and appealing visual ideas. Our job as designers is to take that vision and breathe life into it on the page. At its simplest, the brief lays out the problem to be solved and the character designer must bring solutions to that problem. The character brief itself then has one main function - to set the parameters for the designer, marking out any limitations they need to bear in mind while also providing a clear vision of the overall project and desired end result.

COMMON LIMITATIONS

- The media (illustration, games, or animation)
- The client's budget
- The audience
- The character description
- Marketability
- The story
- And many more!

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

A character brief could be as little as a sentence describing a character, or as much as a few pages filling in details about the world the character inhabits, their goals and personality, style, and any number of things which form the context of a project. In general, though, the less exposure a designer has to the project as a whole, the more in-depth the brief will need to be. A designer who has already been working on the same project for some length of time probably does not need explained to them the design direction when they come to designing a new character. However, someone new to the same project would require background information and context, in addition to the character brief itself.

"Limitations can be the catalyst for great and creative design"

FINDING BALANCE

A good brief will balance the limitations inherent in the project against the need for the designer to have creative input. Drawing without limitations leaves the world of options wide open and a designer might struggle to know what to draw! Without knowing the full context of a character brief, it is like drawing in the dark. On the other hand, drawing with too many limitations can stifle creativity and the designer's vision. Neither scenario is ideal, but it is probably better to have more limitations - sometimes limitations can be the catalyst for great and creative design.



WHAT INFLUENCES A BRIEF?

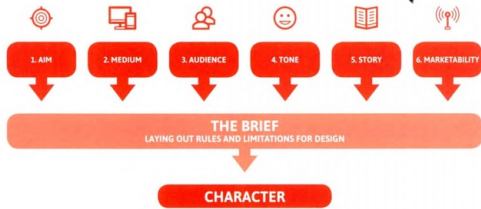
The brief should allow the designer to synthesize all the necessary information into a coherent and unified character design. The different types of information included are fairly universal across the industry, and touch upon several aspects that influence not only your character design, but most aspects of the project itself.

INFORMATION TO CONSIDER

1. The **aim** of the character design
2. The **medium** of the project being realized
3. The target **audience**
4. The desired **tone**
5. The **story** in which the character features
6. Requirements regarding **marketability**

Classic twist

A Dracula design that plays with classic and new ideas of the character.



1. AIM

At its very simplest, the aim of a character design brief is to allow the designer to successfully achieve the desired final outcome, the overall objective. This aim might be simply to design a particular character for a particular context.

CONTEXT

To keep the main aim in focus, the brief would need to elaborate further on the context, covering points such as:

- What kind of **character** is wanted? A human, or an animal, or a monster of some kind?
- What is the **medium** of the end product? An animated show, an illustrated book, or a console game?
- What is the **tone** of the end product? It might be educational, or fast paced and wacky.

DELIVERABLES

The aim will also probably take into account any deliverables - the final tangible pieces of artwork that are required of the designer. For a character brief this might include elements such as:

- Exploration sketches
- Thumbnails
- Color options
- Poses
- Expressions
- Props and costumes
- Turnarounds

Plus whatever else the client may need for their purposes to fully review the submission.

IN THE KNOW...

Assessing time and money

It is important to make sure that the deliverables are clear from the outset so that the quantity of work can be judged and the designer has a comprehensive list of what they need to achieve. This is not only necessary to ensure a deadline is achievable, but is also needed when considering how much you need to charge for your time and output if you are working in a freelance capacity.



Fun but ominous

A character-driven illustration based on the theme of "cursed treasure".

2. MEDIUM

The medium that a character is being designed for is one of the key considerations for the character designer, and the brief should make clear what that final medium is. When designing characters, “medium” refers to broadly defined means of entertainment. The three main mediums we deal with in this book are:



Animation



Illustration



Games

One character...

Three versions of the same basic schoolboy brief, designed for, from left to right, games, animation, and illustration. L-R artwork © Devon Cady-Lee, © Cécile Carre, and © Hollie Mengert



“When designing characters, “medium” refers to broadly defined means of entertainment”

UNIQUE REQUIREMENTS

As a general rule, different mediums will have their own technical requirements and limitations which need to be reflected in their design. It is important to pay attention to the brief to understand what the medium is, and its potential restrictions. If it is not clear from the brief what the medium is, it is better to confirm this with the art director before doing any further work or research.

INDUSTRY EXAMPLES

Crossover

There is a vast overlap in how design works for different mediums, but the style and design conventions linked to the target audience tend to transcend these mediums. Think of the playful characters of Super Mario – it is easy to imagine them as television characters, a transition that has happened. Television characters regularly translate into games. Illustrated books can translate into different mediums, but may require some redesign for their new worlds. Think of Winnie the Pooh and The Gruffalo, whose characters became more animation-friendly in the process.

MEDIUM: Animation

A character designed for an animated TV show or feature film will also have its own set of restrictions and considerations. A traditionally drawn 2D TV show with highly complex character designs will slow down animation and therefore be expensive. Characters need to strike the balance between being simple enough to be practical, while also being able to perform well. A feature film will allow for more complex designs - a 3D feature film even more complex still.

In 3D animation the visuals are not rendered on the fly (yet) as in games so again this allows for much more complexity, though render times will present cost and scheduling issues. A 2D character will just look different stylistically from a 3D one (unless the 3D is being made to look 2D, or less commonly, vice versa) and a designer must design with the final medium in mind.

IN THE KNOW...

2D character creation

Animations were traditionally made by creating many thousands of individual illustrations or frames, each of which featured slight and subtle movements. When put together at an appropriate speed, they created the animation. The simplest example of this would be something like a flip book.

However, more modern forms of 2D animation take a flat illustration of a character and assign a virtual skeleton to its moving parts (called "rigging") which would be controlled digitally. This is a less time consuming approach to 2D animation, but also has its limitations. This has been widely used in children's animation but is also used in animation such as *South Park*.

3D character creation

Although a 3D character would most likely be designed in 2D, the designer will have to bear in mind that their character will be turned into a digital model that will need to twist, bend, and stretch as well as be viewed from multiple angles. This is the kind of animation Pixar are renowned for and allows great versatility in regards to both dynamic camera angles and character movement.

Once a 3D artist has modelled a digital version of the character, the model will need to be rigged. This attaches a virtual skeleton to the virtual model which can act and be animated in a virtual space.



2D v 3D

The basic differences between 2D and 3D rendering show how much more detail can be added to a character that will be created in 3D for the final presentation.





3D variety

Personality-packed monster designs, a variety of which could be translated into 3D.

2D animation

Compare a typical Pixar film for example to Dexter's Laboratory. The complexity that a typical 3D film allows for can be seen clearly in this comparison. Even a simple-looking character in a Pixar feature (e.g. Nemo from *Finding Nemo*) will have a complicated rig allowing for complex facial and whole body acting. Your average children's TV show will have much simpler design choices, which partially reflect the fact that there is less time and budget to create a character on par with Nemo.

3D animation

It is harder to "cheat" design in 3D – a drawing or a plasticine model can easily be twisted and broken at the whim of a traditional animator to suit their needs whereas a 3D design will be limited by the constraints of the rig. A good rig will of course give an animator a huge range of flexibility but again, if it is not built into the rig itself, it might not be an option. 3D, however, does open up the door of texture, materials, lighting, form, and extremely subtle acting that 2D has a hard time with.

INDUSTRY EXAMPLES

Setting the bar

DreamWorks' *Trollhunters*, a 2D animated series, is very close to feature film quality. Larger-than-average budgets and a wealth of skills and experience to draw upon from their feature productions may explain this. When animating in 3D, the most complex scenes are possible – the wildebeest stampede in *The Lion King* was created partly in 3D for a reason!

Digital puppets

Maybe the show is being made in a digital puppet style in 2D animation software such as Toon Boom Animation. This means the characters will be constructed of jointed arms and legs, much like a traditional puppet, and combined with digital "skeletons" to make them move, similar to CG animation.

Puppet-style characters will generally have body and limb construction that allows for easy rotation of elements. Face elements can be swapped in and out from a library of parts. This animation process has its own restrictions but also opens new doors. Cool textures can be explored (within limits) but some styles of design will not work in a puppet style cut-out animation, which favors simple joints. It is worth noting, however, that the boundaries in digital puppets are being pushed all the time.

Stop motion animation

Stop motion has always been popular. Aardman Animations are one of the most recognisable studio using this approach – the process of making physical, durable, and poseable plasticine models which undergo many subtle changes. As each change is made, a photo is taken. Once all the photos are taken and pieced together, it creates an animation.

Stop motion has its own set of rules – do the characters need to be able to stand and hold their own weight or will their models be held up with rigs? How complex will their facial animation need to be? Many stop motion shows involve digitally adding mouths in post-production, as it is often easier and quicker to achieve lip synchronization this way. Again, the character designer must bear all this in mind to some extent.

MEDIUM: Illustration

In many ways print has fewer restrictions than games and animation. The designer doesn't need to worry so much about character complexity, except to the degree that they need to spend more time drawing complex characters than simple ones. There is more flexibility in style, the printed page being a much more liberal medium for experimentation. The designer also doesn't need to consider whether the character being designed will be riggable in 2D or 3D, or worry if extreme actions are possible - they can pose them however they like and even break the "model" should they wish, drawing with less constraint.

The only limits are the ability of the illustrator, the lack of actual movement, and, of course, the time available to the artist. The illustrator is limited to static drawings and so must be able to effectively convey personality, emotion, and posing through one drawing.



"The worlds of comics, illustration, animation, and games are starting to blur"



On the page

Styles not always suited to other mediums are often best suited for illustration.



The charm of illustration

It is difficult to imagine the wonderful energetic drawings of Quentin Blake being translated well into 3D animation. Although possible to some degree, I imagine most of their charm and essence would be lost. 2D would definitely be possible, but in the interest of time and budget his style would need to be constrained and simplified somewhat, which would be a shame! Maurice Sendak's drawings in *Where the Wild Things Are* have been translated into a 3D feature film. While the essence of the designs are still there, it looks and feels like a different world.

MEDIUM: Games

A character designed to function in a game will have different restraints on it than one designed purely for animation – the designer needs to think about their functionality and how they will move in animation cycles such as running, walking, jumping – even dying. They must communicate the health and power levels of a character through their design. I still remember vividly the fear of seeing William Joseph ‘B.J.’ Blazkowicz’s face becoming more and more bruised and battered in *Wolfenstein 3D* as his health deteriorated! There may be restrictions on how much detail or complexity a character can have before slowing down a CPU.

Power levels

Game characters will have considerations other mediums won’t. For example, how might a character look when powered up, or at low health?



TACKLING LIMITATIONS

Hopefully the importance of designing to a particular medium is clear. It can be difficult at first to know how to approach design for each, but with practice and experience it becomes more obvious. The designer must learn to bear these things in mind and to guide themselves. The main things to assess are the limitations of the medium being designed for and how to best solve the character design problem within those limits.

HELPFUL CONSIDERATIONS

- Does my design need to function in three-dimensional space? Or can I keep things flat and one-dimensional?
- Will my design be constructed with plasticine or other stop motion materials? Do I need to consider how it would stand up in the real world?
- How complex can my character be to work effectively in a particular software or game?

VIDEO GAMES

COMPUTER GAMES

GAMES
subtypes

MOBILE PHONE GAMES

INDUSTRY EXAMPLES

Game character evolution

In *Little Big Planet*, the characters are designed to look like small crochet rag dolls, essential to the gameplay dynamic. It might be important to think how a character might change over time as the player upgrades their costume, armor, or weapons, as in *Diablo 3* or *Horizon Zero Dawn*. They may also need to consider how a character can communicate information to the player, such as how they look at 5% health or with a particular power-up engaged.

There are new mediums being created all the time – the worlds of comics, illustration, animation, and games are starting to blur. The limitations of what is possible in any given medium are constantly being pushed. Anyone who has seen an interactive digital comic book will know what I mean! And then, of course, there is virtual reality. These new forms of entertainment will no doubt bring many of the same considerations for the designer, but also a whole host of new ones.

3. AUDIENCE

One of the most important considerations when designing a character is the desired target audience. A character designed for a preschool TV show will need to look extremely different to one designed for a "shoot 'em up" console game. The brief should clearly identify the target audience of the project - without this clarity it is quite easy to go down the wrong track.

AGE

Probably the biggest concern when targeting an audience is age. Different age groups will respond to different design styles. It is worth remembering that when designing for children, both younger and older, you are not just designing for the children but also their guardians, the gatekeepers to what they are able to engage with. Ultimately, parents may have the final say of whether that character you are designing will ever be seen by their kids!

Characters should be aspirational to a degree - making a character slightly older than the audience might be desirable in content for younger age groups. There is probably a reason why Ben from *Ben 10* is ten years old, so he is seen as aspirational to younger audiences.

INDUSTRY EXAMPLES

Admire and aspire

Preschoolers will be more likely drawn to the simple, vibrant color palettes and cuteness of shows like *Pocoyo* and *Go Jetters*, while young teenagers may be drawn toward edgier, cooler designs with a sense of rebelliousness, as found in *Kim Possible* or *Batman: The Animated Series*.

Growing up

A monster character can be designed in several ways depending on the target age group.



YOUNGER: Use vibrant but calm colors, simple shapes, and cuter features

OLDER: Try using more complex shapes combined with edgier, "dangerous" colors

Cute v. cute

Both "cute" designs, but the lower example appears more subversive and could easily appeal to an older audience, including adults.

TRADITIONALLY CUTE



Healthy

Alert

Well-groomed

Approachable and friendly

SUBVERSIVELY CUTE

Limp ear

Ragged, dull appearance

Frazzled expression

Dark outline



GENDER

Another important and very complex area is gender. A reference to gender in a brief isn't intended to divide the audience, but instead gives design direction to the artist. It is important to remember that everyone is different and just because an audience is defined in a brief it does not mean that the end product is for that audience alone, or that it will appeal to all boys or girls respectively. It would be easy to suggest that subject matter identifies the target audience more than the character design. However, never forget that good design has the power to reverse stereotypes, making subjects that might seem obviously targeted at boys appealing to girls, and vice versa.

When a brief defines a gender, it can be interesting to look back at existing examples aimed at that audience. For example, you might consider the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles character designs as more action focused, and that the wacky and slapstick elements might appeal more to boys. Additionally you could look at My Little Pony and Shimmer and Shine which are more widely considered appealing to girls and conclude that cute and elegant characters might appeal more to that demographic.

However, this is also the time to look forward, taking your design in different, unexpected directions. When creating stylized characters, we play with shape and proportion, and often reference reality to produce convincing fictional and fantasy creations. Applying this process to the body type, face shape, and costume of characters usually seen in stereotypical forms can yield fresh, exciting results. These characters could still appeal to the target audience outlined in the brief (and just as importantly, appeal to the art director!).



Binary code

Can the color choices, actions, accessories, and overall feel of a character appeal differently to boys and girls?



INDUSTRY EXAMPLES

Ripping up the rule book

Broad generalisations here do not take everything into consideration. For example look at how *The Powerpuff Girls* combine cute design with dynamic action, or how *Nella the Princess Knight* takes a domain traditionally aimed at girls (princesses), and flips it on its head. Reference to gender in a brief needs to be considered carefully in the greater context of the overall project.

Of course there are also projects that have universal appeal. *Wallace & Gromit*, *Zootopia*, *Gravity Falls*, *Mario Kart*, *Hey Duggee*, *The Incredibles*, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, and *The Jungle Book* are just a few examples of such projects old and new.

THE CLUE'S IN THE BRIEF

As you can see, the issue of audience is complex and not easy to break down into simple rules. It is best to focus on meeting the brief. Animation, game, and toy companies carry out market research to help inform them of what appears popular with certain demographics, and conclusions drawn from that research will be reflected in the brief. We could argue that when it comes to gender, this approach creates a self-fulfilling prophecy, but challenges such as this are exactly the reason why good design constantly evolves and plays a role in breaking down many barriers.

IN THE KNOW...

Don't do it!

A character design brief may cover things to avoid, steering you away from stereotypical ideas such as gendered colors. Take the British-Canadian animation *Bitz & Bob*, whose core concept was to have the main female character engage in engineering-like activities. The flamboyant pink tutu and utilitarian, tough-looking black leather jacket of her costume strike a balance.

"Never forget that good design has the power to reverse stereotypes"



4. TONE

Mention "tone" to a designer and they might think about how much light to dark a particular color or design features. In a way, this is a good metaphor for this other type of tone the designer must consider - the vibe, the overall feel of the end product being produced, and how much darkness to lightness there is. However, this time we are talking about the theme of the story.

"Imagine a dark horror zombie game populated with characters from a chirpy preschool show"

THE INFLUENCE OF TONE

The tone of a project is an important consideration for the designer, setting limits on design choices and stylization. It will radically influence artistic choices such as shape language, color palettes, and how much realism or caricature to inject.

Imagine a dark horror zombie game populated with characters from a chirpy preschool show - suddenly we have gone from something horrific to potentially darkly comedic! We want our zombie world characters to scare and repulse, and we want our preschool characters to be non-threatening and appealing. In each case, their design must reflect that unless the intent is to subvert convention. Compare the cute and colorful characters of *Top Wing* to the almost sepia, monochromatic visual direction and character designs of *The Walking Dead* game. We can see how the design of characters are influenced by and can simultaneously influence, the tone of a project.

Genre can also have a significant impact on tone - think of film noir versus fantasy, romance versus science fiction, and so on. Each genre will have some established visual conventions surrounding them that convey a particular vibe.

IN THE KNOW...

Shape language

We all automatically associate shapes with certain ideas and feelings. For example, something sharp looking is generally considered dangerous and threatening, while rounded shapes look comfortable and approachable. Character designers use this in-built understanding to evoke a variety of feelings towards a character and call this process "shape language."

INDUSTRY EXAMPLES

Identifying context

When reading the brief, consider where the character will appear. Is it destined for a dark and serious crime thriller like the game *Heavy Rain*? Or maybe slapstick comedy like the animated *Mr Bean*? Perhaps it is playful but poignant like *My Neighbor Totoro*. Maybe it is meant to scare the player of a game such as in *Silent Hill*?



SIMPLE:
aimed at
a younger
audience

Bright colors

Rounded shapes

Open pose

Quirky v. realistic

Color, shape and pose are used to communicate the tone of the story and the target audience.

LIFELIKE:
aimed at a
slightly older
audience

nuanced color palette

Menacing posture

Realistic form



INTERPRET THE BRIEF

If getting the correct tone seems obvious, that is because it is – in a nutshell, a character is part of a much bigger picture. A designer must have an eye and feel for the tone of the project to which they are contributing, something which is probably partly subconscious.

A brief must communicate this clearly to ensure the designer matches the vibe of the world they are populating with their character. Sometimes, the designer has to help guide the design to match the tone and the vision in the client's/art director's head. Either way, to know what tone to aim at should be clear from the themes, action, story, and characterization presented in the brief.

“Tone can be subverted, with naively stylized characters aimed at adults as is the case in *South Park*”

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

The tone of a project and target audience go hand in hand. Characters aimed at younger audiences will lean toward the fun and playful end of the spectrum, being rarely too serious or realistic. Gritty, dark designs will be reserved for older consumers. In-between there will be some variance between the two. Tone may also be linked to other demographics such as gender or even culture – some products might be widely popular in one part of the world but not in another (I hear *Shaun the Sheep* is very popular in Japan!).

With all this in mind, tone can be subverted, with naively stylized characters aimed at adults, as is the case in *South Park*. Unsurprisingly, this subversion never happens the other way around – imagine the outrage if a preschool show featured gritty, horrific characters, albeit doing fun playful things! I would argue that this would still be aimed at adults, not children.

Maintaining connection

Pixar's *Coco*, which deals with themes of death within a mostly lighthearted colorful world is aimed predominantly at children. I have no doubt that getting the tone right for this movie would have been a challenge; death is never an easy subject to deal with even at the best of times. Looking at the character designs, we can see that perfect balance of appeal and visual fun. This is combined with the realism and attention to detail needed to make these characters not only entertain, but also emotive and connect with an audience.



Added appeal

Although the proportions are fairly realistic, the bright colors and large eyes allow this character to appear child-friendly while still being cool and dynamic.

INDUSTRY EXAMPLES

Finding the balance

Sometimes the tone is not clear-cut, walking the line between competing vibes. Design choices become more difficult, and striking a balance between different aesthetics becomes key. The game series *Team Fortress* successfully strikes a difficult balance between humor and fun, but also gritty and edgy. *Fortnite* does something similar, their design tones perfect for the game's irreverent attitude and target audience (likely young teens). Likewise, cartoon shows aimed towards more of a pre-teen market might have to feel “cool” while also being child safe and never too dark, such as in the *Rise of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. The design style is edgy and dynamic, but still child-friendly, never straying into realism or grit. The designs suit the playful acting and characterizations. Likewise, *The Amazing World of Gumball* is populated by very cute characters with a manic edge!



5. STORY

Storytelling is the foundation of any character design. Characters do not exist on their own – they exist in a story world. When we think of television shows, films, illustrated books, and even games, they are all vehicles for telling some form of story. Arguably, story is the most important element in character design. Your design might fit the tone and audience, and be the most animation-friendly design ever created, but if it does not fit within the narrative of a project as outlined in the brief, it will never work.

INDUSTRY EXAMPLES

From simple to complex

Stories may be sophisticated in the case of feature films (Pixar's *Coco* being the perfect example), episodic as in television shows, or fairly simple moral truths as in children's books (*The Very Hungry Caterpillar*). In games, the story may be secondary to gameplay or they may be the driving force behind the gameplay, or even a combination of both. The *Uncharted* series of games combines great game mechanics and playability with fantastic storytelling.

Plot progression

Created by 19th century German playwright Gustav Freytag, Freytag's pyramid charts the progress of a successfully crafted story through seven key stages.



CONFLICT & GROWTH

At its most basic, there is a story when there is a character with a goal and an obstacle to that goal that must be overcome by that character. Story in a nutshell, is conflict. Characters are symbiotic with story, their personalities intrinsically linked to their desires, goals, weaknesses, and those conflicts. We can see this clearly in the classic plot structure, in which the personality of character will often change significantly between the beginning and end. The appearance of the character might also change, often due to changing circumstances, and also to offer the audience visual cues as to their state of mind.

IN THE KNOW...

Story first

Always remember – where there is a character, there is a story, and all characters are born out of these stories, no matter how complex or simple they happen to be.

Children's TV

We can see this basic idea in children's TV shows – every episode will deal with conflict that at least one of the characters will need to overcome, or that they must overcome together. In films, the main character will undergo an internal transformation throughout the film – think Woody in *Toy Story* who goes from selfish and jealous, to accepting and heroic.

Games

There is usually an end goal and the character, who the player controls, must improve and adapt over time in order to defeat increasingly difficult challenges to complete the game. This idea can be portrayed through design, my favorite example being the classic game *Fable*. The decisions the player makes affect the morality of the character, which in turn affects the visual design; the character literally grows horns or a halo depending on the player's choices. In addition, as the character grows in strength, they visibly become larger and more muscular, which in turn allows them to wield larger weapons, necessary to defeat increasingly powerful enemies.

Pirates

Long John Silver's story demands a wide selection of moods and facial expressions, from comical to menacing.



STORY BY DESIGN

The job of the designer is to understand the story behind the character, who that character is, and how best to design them to project the story idea. While acting and performance will ultimately tell an audience who they are, design must help to tell that character's story, giving a first impression, hinting at their personality, and suggesting some kind of backstory. A character brief should give a clear idea of who a character is and what challenges and stories they will find themselves in, giving the designer a foundation to start with.

Where to begin...

We can begin to understand the character we are designing, revealing their personality, by asking ourselves a few questions. The answers to these questions will start to form what is known as a "character biography". An in-depth brief might include a character biography, and the designer's job is to synthesize the biography into a character design that best fits their personality and the story of the project being contributed to. Normally, a brief will have some kind of narrative informing it, such as a film or an episodic script written by professional writers. The designer's job is not usually to craft the story itself, but rather reveal some of the character's story through the design.



SYMBOLISM

How is the character's story revealed through their design? The designer can reveal the character's story through symbolism in the character's appearance, costume, and props, as well as their acting.

Appearance

Symbolism plays out through shape language, use of tone and color, and of course, costume. We can use symbolism to suggest ideas to the audience without being explicit. The shapes a character is constructed from will have connotations; rounded shapes suggest playfulness, while sharp, pointed shapes suggest danger. Clothing will also suggest much about a character to the audience. It betrays a character's wealth (or lack of), status, occupation, and culture.

IN THE KNOW...

Story craft

Story craft is a massive subject all on its own and many books have been written about it. I recommend reading some, as knowledge of this area will help inform your design practice.

Visual cues

An interpretation of the characters from Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. Even if you do not already know the story, you can guess who the characters are, their position in society, and relationships from just the costume, pose, and expression of each.



INDUSTRY EXAMPLES

Layered meaning

We can combine shapes to layer meaning – the dragon Toothless from *How to Train Your Dragon* is a good example. The beautiful combination of rounded flowing shapes and sharp pointed details in the wings suggest perfectly its personality: playful but dangerous. Syndrome's hair in *The Incredibles* is reminiscent of fire, giving the audience a clue to his fiery personality! When we look at costume, Merida from Pixar's *Brave* has a costume suggestive of her Scottish princess status – it is also obvious that she does not live in the modern world. Chihiro's costume change in *Spirited Away* could suggest her entrapment in the spirit world. In *The Boxtrolls*, the trolls wear boxes, scavenged from the world above; this says everything about who and what they are as characters and their status in that world.

Acting

Then we have acting, which is breathing life into a character, making them feel as if they are in action and performing. Although technically this is an animator's job, if a character designer cannot make their designs perform, then it can be hard to judge if they are fit for purpose or not. I do not think it is any surprise that Glen Keane, known mostly as an amazing character animator, is also an amazing character designer. As designers we must be able to convey at least some idea of who a character is through their poses and expressions, and not just focus on creating a cool-looking design!

COMPLEX CHARACTERS

So how might we combine all of these ideas into our characters? Posing and expressions will need to hint at their personality and motives.

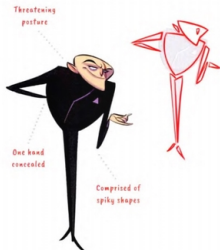
Archetypal Girl Scout

First, imagine a cheerful, happy-go-lucky Girl Scout whose goal is to sell cookies for charity. Approaching the design with this in mind, we may use a shape language that reflects her happy persona, leaning toward softer, rounder shapes. Her pose is open and friendly.



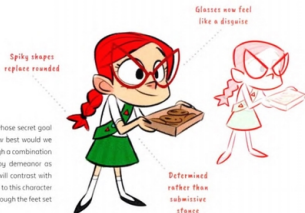
Girl Scout's character + villain's shape language

Finally, imagine a cheerful happy-go-lucky Girl Scout whose secret goal is to rule the world - this is a lot trickier to design! How best would we convey a happy character with a sinister agenda? Through a combination of clever design and acting. Can we convey her happy demeanor as "fake"? Perhaps her costume and its shape language will contrast with her acting, suggesting to the audience that there is more to this character than meets the eye. The posture is now more closed, although the feet set wide apart show determination as opposed to danger.



Archetypal villain

Now imagine an archetypal super-villain, whose goal is to rule the world. Our design choices must again reflect this simple biography alongside any other influences. We can convey "danger" through sharp, triangular shape language, and slightly hunched, closed posture.



6. MARKETABILITY

Perhaps a surprising influence on the design process is the idea of marketability and how well a character might sell. Can toys be made out of these characters? Will vast swathes of young children want to buy lunch boxes and pencil cases featuring these characters? Essentially, will these characters and their world generate money from merchandizing?

Toy design and merchandizing is not necessarily a factor in every character design brief, but it is something to bear in mind, and ties into the idea of context. Will this character I am designing be merchandized and made into a toy down the line? You do not need to take on the role of a toy designer, a specialized profession in itself, but you might be asked to give some thought about how your design might be translated by toy designers into a toy. Of course, as always, a good brief and feedback will make this clear.

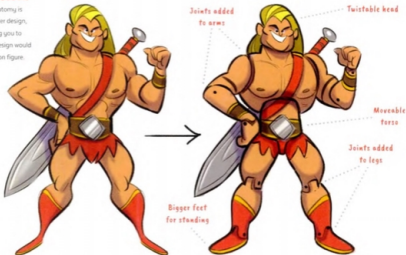
INDUSTRY EXAMPLES

Which came first?

Characters and toys on same level, tend to go hand in hand. Transformers started out life as a toy line before ever becoming a television series. In fact, the series may have been developed as a tool to advertise the toys! Also, consider Lego - this had been a toy for many decades before The Lego Movie ever came about.

Anatomy lesson

A knowledge of anatomy is essential in character design, in this case allowing you to anticipate how a design would function as an action figure.



THE CHILDREN'S MARKET

It is not uncommon for characters in children's TV shows to be designed with the plan for them to be sold as toys. Of course, some shows will be developed without this in mind and, if successful, merchandized later. Wallace & Gromit is a prime example; it started as Nick Park's student film!

Influence on a brief

There may be many considerations to take into account when designing a character. These are just a few examples:

- A character could be designed with interactivity in mind: can this character's hair be brushed?
- Could the character be personalized with changeable accessories?
- An action hero might be designed with the goal of becoming an action toy: will the design translate to a jointed poseable plastic figure?
- Are a character's weapons designed with playability in mind? A character's sword design could end up on toy shelves down the line.
- Maybe a character must transform from one state to another, as is the case with Transformers. How might this function in the design and in the animation to ensure the toy feels like the same character?

MEDIA AND AUDIENCE

We have talked previously about target audience, and, along with the media, this comes into play again.

Animation

An emphasis on merchandise tends to be much more common in animated content aimed at children. I have worked on a number of shows where a key consideration in designing a character was how well it might translate into a real physical toy.

Illustration

Picture books can have merchandise attached to them (think of Gruffalo plushes³ but these seem to be the exception rather than the rule. The designs are probably less influenced by this from the outset, at least in the past.

Games

Games have a unique merchandizing angle – the ability to customize characters. Some games are funded on the model of being free to play, but in order to update a character, acquire special weapons and character “skins”, payment is required. Such is the case in the popular game *Fortnite*.

Transforming shapes

A character might be capable of transforming from one state to another – a basic idea of joints and mechanics could help the designer here.



Playtime

Accessories could include changeable props or costumes for the toy itself, or merchandise for children to play with or wear.



DESIGN MATTERS

Maybe the world of merchandizing makes character-based entertainment sound like a cynical enterprise. Ultimately however, films, games, and TV shows are products that must sell if they are to be produced in the first place. Selling products should not mean that something is poor quality or of no value in and of itself (although sadly that can happen!).

Think of *Toy Story* – it was hugely successful as a film and as a toy franchise (remember the Buzz Lightyear craze?) but the film deserved success on its own merits for the depth of storytelling, charm, and amazing craft that went into it. A good design, whether it has come from a focus on merchandizing or not, will be marketable by virtue of its quality. If it engages the target audience, is visually appealing, and effectively synthesizes an appealing personality, then by that point it isn't far off being a good toy design anyway. And at the end of the day, what kid doesn't love toys?

IN THE KNOW...

Using references

A brief may reference the marketing campaign or merchandise of other established works to guide the designer, so familiarize yourself with this aspect of other projects, as well as their storyline and characters.

THE DESIGN BRIEF PROCESS

BY KENNETH ANDERSON

A character design brief will usually, but not always, come from an art director or production designer. The role of art director is found across the worlds of television, film, games, and illustration, and may be the most logical person to construct and deliver briefs to an artist. Production designers are found mainly in film, including animation.



FLOW OF INFORMATION

Whether you work in-house as a designer – either freelance or permanently – or work remotely, understanding your place in the pipeline is crucial. Not only do you know who your work is coming from and who to contact, but you will have more context when receiving both briefs and feedback.

THE BRIEF ITSELF

Where does a character design brief come from? Usually, but not always, an art director, from the worlds of television, film, games, and illustration, or a production designer, most commonly found on films.

However, this is not always a hard-and-fast rule, and you may find other people contributing to a particular design brief. In animation, this could be a lead artist, an episodic director (if a TV series), the showrunner, or the director themselves. Sometimes producers provide artists with character briefs and can relay information to the designer, but major decisions and design directions are usually handled by an art director/director/showrunner. In games there may be similar roles, plus potentially input from a game designer. In illustration, again an art director is likely to be involved and instrumental in any creative vision.

YOUR MAIN CONTACT

The key consideration to bear in mind is that usually there will be a single point of contact, someone in the know who understands (and maybe even created) the character brief. This person will have solid understanding of the world and medium the character belongs to. Your contact themselves may be synthesizing voices from various sources as mentioned above, plus TV networks, or in the case of games and books, publishers.

And where does an art director take their cues from? In television, a show is usually financed by a TV network or production company who will be at the top of most of the decision making. Films will have a similar set up. Games might be self-financed by a development company, or perhaps funded by a larger games publisher. Picture books will usually be based on an idea that will have been supplied by a writer and then developed further by a book publisher.



IN-HOUSE V. FREELANCE

There are, of course, many differences between working in-house as a character designer and working externally as a freelancer. One of the main differences that will concern the quality of your work is the impact of each on the flow of information.

In-house

When working in-house, the whole production pipeline is visible for a designer to see. The designer will have contact with various people in the studio, all of whom have input into the direction of the project, and who each may have slightly different visions for the project. Feedback will likely come in the form of one-to-one conversations or meetings in a group, and issues can be resolved via email, instant messaging, meetings, and face-to-face chats.

Working in-house allows you more direct contact, not only with the art director or similar, but with others in the team, and sometimes maybe third parties such as an external client.

Freelance

As an external freelancer, working remotely, the designer will usually have one point of contact, which can make the process of receiving feedback clearer and easier. However, it also removes the designer somewhat from the overall design process, and that isolation can mean they are designing without an overview of all the various conversations going on, in real time.

In a way, the designer can feel as if they are not as involved as they would like to be, but sometimes that distance enables them to focus on the design process itself, rather than all the behind-the-scenes of the decision making.

IN THE KNOW...

Talking it out

Any issues that come up can usually be resolved via email, instant messaging, or the good old telephone.

Who influences a brief?

It can be surprising to discover how many different people have an impact on a single character brief.

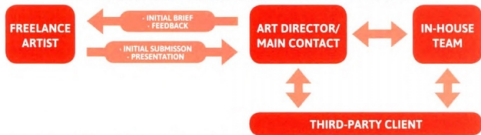
A POTENTIAL IN-HOUSE PIPELINE



In-house v. freelance pipelines

The workflows between in and out of house have some similarities and differences.

A POTENTIAL FREELANCE REMOTE PIPELINE



COLLABORATIVE WORKING

The design process is rarely an individual one done in a bubble - it is a continual process of taking on board ideas and feedback from others and bringing someone else's ideas to life alongside the designer's creative input. This can be challenging sometimes, especially when a designer disagrees with the visual direction a client or employer is pushing them in!

Consider context

It is key to remember that your designs are part of a whole - the context - and that context will be complicated. The designer needs to trust that their ideas will be considered, and that the brief coming to them is clear enough. The employer/client needs to trust the designer to do what they do best - design and create visually appealing solutions to the brief, while taking on board the direction given to them. Furthermore, the designer will need to work with other artists in other departments (such as character rigging teams or 3D-modeling departments) to ensure the designs are fit for purpose, or that enough information is provided to those next down the line.

Different views

Sometimes a designer may disagree with a chosen design direction or feedback - my advice would be to always address feedback and give the client what they want, but do not be afraid to also speak your mind and present an alternative alongside the requested design if you believe it is a better solution. At the same time, consider the experience of those you are working with, be professional and respect their decisions.

IN THE KNOW...

Subjectivity

At the end of the day, design will always have an element of subjectivity. There is no place in the industry for being precious with client work; save that for personal projects.

ANATOMY OF A BRIEF

The brief itself needs to be as clear and as comprehensive as possible. There are certain key facts you need to know about your character and the project, as well as other information about the project and job.

THE MAIN INFORMATION

When you join a project, or have joined an established project part-way through, there is some essential information that you need for an informed design process. As well as your deadline and main point of contact, this can include:

- Is the media TV? Feature film? Games? 2D? 3D? Illustrated books?
- If it is a brief for a game, then a game document outlining the gameplay and game concept will probably be provided. Animated TV shows and films may include a script and an illustrated book will definitely need to have a script provided.
- Who is the target audience?
- What is the story?
- What is the character biography?
- Is there an established design style?
- Are there any special design considerations?

INDUSTRY EXAMPLES

Know your field

Getting more into the intended media and specifics, supplementary information could include previous ideas and concepts, and any references to existing properties, characters, styles, and so on that could be useful. As you have seen throughout this section, referring to other work is a kind of “shorthand” when describing a certain genre, tone, character, or mood. It is a good idea to keep up to date with the latest work in your field.

“Check your schedule to ensure you can realistically meet the deadline”

Sample brief structure

Created for the case studies in this book, including the bonus briefs, this holds much of the information the artist needs to tackle the job. We’ve broken down all the details under headings to illustrate the kind of information you might encounter. In real life, a brief will rarely be this comprehensive, but it’s useful to know what to look out for, and where there may be gaps in the brief that need to be filled before work begins.

1. An overview gives some context to the characters, including their background, personality, and typical story lines.
2. Personality traits that will influence the character design, including how they stand and move.
3. The overall appearance of the character, as well as design considerations including colors, props, and details.
4. Deadlines detailing when the submission is expected. Check your schedule to ensure you can realistically meet the deadline and let the art director know as soon as possible if you have any concerns about it.

IN THE KNOW...

Art direction

Sometimes an art director will even provide some loose sketches drawn by themselves for the designer to reference.

5. Contact details that should be kept to hand. If you are a freelancer, this is an opportunity to confirm your own details, supplying any additional contact information.
6. The art director’s additional notes, which might make connections between the character’s background and potential design choices.
7. Key details of the medium. Before you start any design work you must be clear on exactly what this is. Ask if you’re still unsure.
8. The intended audience, providing further clues to the character design. Often it is not as straightforward as designing for a single audience.
9. Context about the longevity of the character within the story, dimensions of the medium such as screen size, and so on.
10. Specifics about what is expected of the final presentation itself. Read this carefully and make sure you understand what is required.

SAMPLE BRIEF

TO: HollieMenger@IllustrationArtist.com
 FROM: KennyArtDirector@3dtotalFX.com
 SUBJECT: NEW BRIEF Adventure for Book Illustration

1 OVERVIEW

This adventurous character is a young woman from South America filled with a spirit to discover new places and learn new things. Suddenly orphaned and forced to leave her home, she travels to strange and remote lands, often finding herself in testing situations that she must save herself from. Throughout her adventures she

takes on disguises to blend in with her surroundings (both for fun and out of practical necessity for going unnoticed in dangerous areas). She is a strong, agile fighter and has a cunning wit which helps her to escape difficult situations. She travels with her affectionate pet, a small lizard (non-speaking), who provides her with companionship.

2 PERSONALITY

- Independent
- Organized
- Strong-willed
- Open-minded
- Calm
- Bold
- Practical

6 ART DIRECTOR'S NOTES

- Style wise, we need to invoke a sense of playful adventure - loose and energetic and not too serious!
- Each story will involve our character discovering something new about the different places she visits and learning some valuable life lessons.
- In the color palette we would like to connect to her South American roots - think vibrant, warm colors.

3 APPEARANCE

- This character has a clean, well-kept appearance and is dressed in practical attire for traveling. She carries camping equipment and supplies with her, as she loves to sleep under the stars.
- She has not forgotten her South American roots, however, and keeps mementos of her home and family with her at all times.

4 DEADLINES

15th Aug - three or four progressed thumbnails showing a range of possible ideas

25th Sept - Final presentation artwork

5 CONTACT

KennyArtDirector@3dtotalFX.com
 tel: +1-202-555-0149

TECHNICAL BRIEF

7 INDUSTRY: ILLUSTRATED BOOK PUBLISHING

8 AUDIENCE

This project is intended for a family audience and therefore children, parents, and grandparents alike should find the character charismatic and inspiring. Though the book will be aimed at older children, the character should also appeal to adults who may want to read it with them.

9 TECHNICAL SPEC

- 48 pages long, 21 x 15 cm
- The character is featured in a series of books, each one taking her on a different adventure to new places
- We need to see explorations of her in different fun disguises - these should be playful

- 10 • Would like to see her posed in different fun and quirky situations, plus three-quarter front and back views and explorations of her costume

APPROACHING A BRIEF

As you can see, there is a lot of information within a brief that needs to be absorbed, processed, and injected into the character design. It helps to establish an approach that allows you to tackle the brief in an ordered way, to avoid becoming overwhelmed with information.

ASK YOURSELF...

When I first approach a brief, my aim is to understand the overall big-picture context of the briefed character. I want to know:

- What is the aim of the project?
- Is it 3D, 2D, or something else?
- What is the style and the tone of the end product?
- Who is this character and are their personality and story clear?
- What story or stories will the character will be involved in?
- Would it help to request a script or ask questions before I begin?

I then ask myself questions about the brief itself such as:

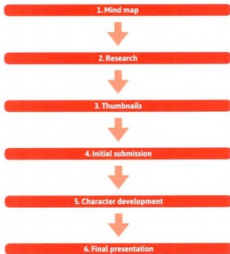
- Do I understand the brief as a whole?
- Is there anything that needs more clarity?
- Are there any obvious limitations to what I can design?
- Are there any obvious requests in the brief that I must pay attention to?

Mind Map

Each artist in the book begins with a mind map.



WORKFLOW STAGES



THE DESIGN PROCESS

Everyone works differently, and the design process can vary depending on personal preference, client preference, or scheduling. The process used in this book is loosely based on my own, and is used by the other featured artists as they design each of their four characters.

1. Mind map

Creating a mind map at the beginning of the design is useful for a variety of reasons:

- It ensures you have noted all the necessary information and prompts in the brief.
- It allows you to add your own notes and early ideas to the brief, grouping them together with other relevant information.
- It creates a quick reference that you can frequently check back to, to stay focused.
- The visual nature of the map (as opposed to a linear list) quickly lets you see connections, contradictions, and themes in your character's personality, story, and appearance.

2. Research

The next stage involves finding suitable inspiration and reference photos, or reading up on information that could be useful for the design. This process will be informed heavily by the brief. I might explore design styles, or anatomy and costume reference - anything potentially relevant to the design. This is important to me for three reasons:

- Research can inspire new ideas I simply would not have come up with otherwise.
- The process of research fills in any gaps in my knowledge of the subject in question.
- It gives me an easy way to break into the design process. I have often tried to start drawing without first doing research, and found myself drawing a blank. It helps to warm up the engine, so to speak, and prepare the mind for the design process.

IN THE KNOW...

Research is unique

There is rarely a right or wrong way to do your research. The three artists in this book, Cécile, Devon, and Hollie, all took different routes for their research, focusing on various aspects of the character.

Styling research

As well as getting to grips with how the adventurer would stand with her backpack, Hollie also wanted to pin down the right hairstyle to suit this active character.

Artwork © Hollie Mengert



Cultural research

Part of Cécile's research is devoted to the South American part of the brief, both for the character's features, and also for traditional souvenirs or accessories. Artwork © Cécile Carré



IN THE KNOW...

Watch it!

If the brief is for an existing project such as a children's TV show, it can help to watch a few episodes to get a feel for the show.

Design research

Devon focussed in on the cultural style of Peru and Argentina, looking at the details of their jewellery and how this could translate to an active character's costume. Artwork © Devon Cady-Lee



3. Thumbnails

Next, I explore ideas in thumbnail sketches, making sure I address all the needs of the brief and stay within any specified limitations. I refer to my reference and the brief throughout the process to ensure I do not stray off track. I am already thinking of a character's personality here – I tend to design characters in action rather than just in standing poses, even at this early stage of the process. I am also thinking about big-picture elements such as shape language and proportion.

IN THE KNOW...

Write now!

With any ideas you came up with during the reference gathering, try to get down quickly while they are fresh in your mind, in words or visuals.

4. Initial Submission

From my thumbnails, I choose the most appropriate, aiming for a variety of options to present to the client. They must be clear enough to be understood, but do not need to be fully fleshed-out ideas at this stage – just enough to convey the general idea of the character design. Small details are not necessary at this point, but the sketches must include enough information to match any specifics laid out in the character brief, and show an understanding of how they will work in context.

During the design process itself, sketches are usually fine at these early stages as long as they are clear and understandable. Don't forget, even sketches must follow the basic design rules, taking into consideration the following:

- Sketches must have clarity of pose and design, so that the art director/client knows exactly what they are meant to represent.
- There must be attention paid to silhouette (the overall outline of a character), again for the sake of clarity but also for readability and for differentiation between characters.
- Shapes within a design must be interesting and unified; there should be some consideration as to their symbolic meaning and shape language.
- Even at this rough stage, the sketches should have visual appeal, looking and feeling "good."



Thumbnails

Drawing thumbnail sketches, as in these examples by Hollie, is a good way to get ideas down on paper quickly and efficiently. Artwork © Hollie Menger



The first submission

Progressed sketches allow Hollie to begin editing down her ideas. Artwork © Hollie Menger



5. Character development

Pose

Facial expressions

Value & color

Costume & props

I take note of any client feedback and move forward. If they liked some of my previous sketches, I build upon what I did adding, subtracting, combining, and exploring further, based on their notes. If none of my thumbnail sketches engage the client, I sketch some fresh ideas, but this scenario is usually quite rare and one I try to avoid.

There can be a bit of a back-and-forth process between exploring ideas and getting feedback. With each step, the aim is to focus the design, getting more and more specific. I will explore pose, facial expressions, value and color, costume and props, and other subtle details. Eventually a design will start to form and solidify!



The development phase

After Hollie gets feedback from the art director, attention to detail can begin, including exploring potential color palettes. Artwork © Hollie Mengert

6. Final presentation

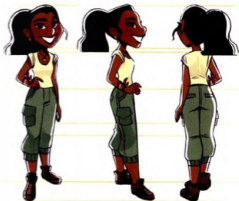
Hero Pose

Turnarounds

Poses

Expressions

When submitting the final design, the brief may have requested supporting designs such as poses, expressions, turnarounds, and possibly a “final art style” hero pose which I would then do, once the overall design is locked in.



Final artwork

Hollie used the hero pose to represent her character in a single image, including their facial expression, stance, costume, and any important props. Artwork © Hollie Mengert

KEY INDUSTRY SKILLS

When approaching a brief, there will be skills and processes key to making your work stand out. Some of these might involve dealing with difficult briefs and embarking upon research, adding originality, finding your style, and creating professional-looking turnarounds.

DIFFICULT BRIEFS

Problematic briefs do come along from time to time, no matter what type of work or client you are dealing with. You want to be able to get to the heart of a character design as quickly as possible, but you may find that there are extra hurdles to overcome.

In my experience, a problematic brief usually falls into one of two categories – it either does not contain enough information, or it contains too much. Either of these can happen whether you are a freelancer working remotely, or a member of the team, based in-house.

Too little information

The doors of this brief are wide open and there is not enough limitation for the designer to make fully informed decisions, and/or not enough clarity of the overall vision of a project. This is like designing in the dark, with too little light to allow the designer to see the problems they have been asked to solve.

Personally, I find this scenario easier to deal with. It has an easy solution – ask questions! Take control and hunt down the kind of information you need to get your work to the next stage.

- If there is not enough information to run with, asking a client or art director for more detail is the logical way to go.
- Try to fill the gaps in knowledge that will help you to get to grips with the problem and start designing.
- If you are still lacking the necessary information, do some limited idea sketching to get the ball rolling.
- After presenting some ideas based on what you do know, you can usually clarify the right direction based on feedback. To paraphrase Rembrandt, start with what you know and the unknown shall reveal itself!

“Communication and experience will make the design process smoother and more rewarding”

Too much information

On the other hand, too much information can also be a problem! Too much information can stifle creativity by constraining the designer, rather than simply guiding or inspiring them. There may be too many rules, considerations, and references to synthesize. Input from different sources can be contradictory rather than helpful. The result is an overwhelmed and confused designer and design process.

This scenario can be tricky to negotiate. Too much information coming at a designer can be a sign that maybe the client is not 100% clear in what they want, and they are having trouble whittling down their ideas.

- It is still best to start by trying to synthesize as much of the information as you can from an overly complex brief, but recognize when the results move from helpful to confusing.
- The solution might be to put most of the information on the back-burner at first. It sounds counterproductive, and you do have to be very careful here, but it is possible to take a complex, overwhelming brief and distill it down into a simple summary and work from there.
- Think of the bigger picture first, and focus on solving the major design problems. By presenting this first you can start to work out the design direction with the art director's help.

IN THE KNOW...

Honesty and experience

At the end of the day the best approach in any situation is always honesty. If something is not clear enough, or there is too much information to work with, be honest and bring the issue up. As the designer, you require certain information to allow you to do your job, and to do it well and to brief. With experience you will know what you need to do a good job and can help others help you to make that possible. Communication and experience will make the design process smoother and more rewarding.

RESEARCH & BRAINSTORMING

Research can sound like a dull part of the design process, especially when you are eager to start drawing! However, there is a lot to be gained from even the most basic research, so it is worth investing some time in it for a number of reasons:

- Without researching a subject we are limited by our own knowledge of it. For example, if I were asked to draw a Viking, without research I will be drawing upon my preconceived and possibly inaccurate notions of what a Viking looks like (horned helmets and all!), ideas that are probably based on other interpretations I have encountered. This leads a designer to drawing by habit, which can lead to stale and uninspired design. Relying on our limited knowledge of a subject is unlikely to produce a unique and original vision. Research can take us outside our comfort zone, break us away from our preconceived visual ideas of a subject, and inspire new ideas that just would not have come to us otherwise.
- A designer needs to bring an air of authenticity and believability to their designs. As character designers, we need the audience to engage with, and believe in, our characters. Relevant research into personalities, costume, posing, and culture is what separates bad design from good. Good design is problem solving, and if we only understand part of a problem and its context, we can only deliver a half-hearted design solution.
- Without research we run the risk of reducing characters to stereotypes, especially when dealing with other cultures. There is a wealth of information out there just waiting to be mined by the designer, so there is no excuse for not doing so.

With all this in mind, we can see why research is an important step in any designer's process. It can lead to originality, authenticity, and new ideas.

Authenticity

Not only does research fill gaps in knowledge, but it also adds authenticity to your characters.



Research on the go

When collecting research material, it is so easy to jump on the internet to search for images or visit stock photo websites. This has its place, but it is well worth getting off the computer too. Museums, galleries, libraries, books, films, travel, observing life from a cafe - this expansion of research will help broaden a designer's horizons. If there is not time or budget to invest in such expansive research, I would recommend the following:

- Always being vigilant for things around you that inspire you or may be useful at some point.
- Perhaps create a digital research folder where you can quickly and easily store interesting things you find.
- Collect observational sketches and inspiring ideas in a sketchbook.

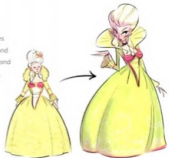
Reality

Research is essential when referencing something that exists in the real world that you are not already familiar with it.



Discovery

Real-world references can be fascinating and inspire new designs and that vital originality.



Make the investment

The key thing is to always be learning, especially about the subject you are designing at hand and be prepared to break away from a quick internet search to find new ideas and inspiration. If you find yourself designing a character that takes you beyond your realm of knowledge, it is important to always invest the time researching the subject.

ADDING ORIGINALITY

There are three main reasons why originality is important in design.

1. The first is a truly practical reason – it will stop you getting into trouble with a disgruntled client or someone else who happens to own a character that you may have borrowed heavily from! Without being original, and using the ideas of others without permission, we are essentially stealing by infringing copyright.
2. Falling short of originality is an indicator of lazy design. I imagine there is an infinite number of original character designs just waiting to be brought to life. There is no need to copy or be derivative, as it is undesirable for everyone when it happens.
3. The ideas of marketability and appeal are important. Audiences crave something original, and publishers and production companies are looking for the next big NEW thing to fulfill this need.

As artists and designers, we are driven to create something original. The more you can generate something new, the more it will satisfy your own artistic drive, the needs of the client and the audience, and the more it will likely stand out in a world already saturated with characters!

Too generic

An unoriginal Frankenstein's monster character, bearing all the original hallmarks exactly as expected.



Balanced

These new spins on the stereotype reference traditional ideas, while finding variations in color, shape, and detail, to offer more original results.



Too far?

Being original for the sake of it results in a version that deviates too far from the popular perception to effectively represent the classic character.

IN THE KNOW...

Copyright

It is worth becoming familiar with the copyright laws of your country, both to protect your own creations, and to understand how or why infringement can take place in the industry.

Back to research

I should say, though, that original for original's sake is not good design. Sometimes the pursuit of originality at the expense of everything else can lead to awful design choices! Of course, some character types will have been done so often that creating truly original visions for them will be difficult (think of Frankenstein's monster or Dracula). Here are some tips for discovering discipline in your design process:

- Do your research and let what you discover inform your design. Without it, we are just rehashing old ideas in the back of our heads.
- Trust in the design process. As a character designer, you hope that you are being hired to bring to life an original idea. But even if it is not, visually, the designer has a responsibility to ensure what they design at least, is.
- Be aware of what else is out there and be sure not to "copy" other designs.
- Self-censor ideas which are too close to something else.
- Explore beyond your first design and keep pushing into new territory, experimenting with shape and form, and put new twists on old ideas.
- Finding your style can go some way toward developing original ideas!

FINDING YOUR STYLE

Style can be difficult to define. I usually think of it in terms of “drawing habits.” A particular artist’s style can usually be identified by the commonalities between their separate pieces of work. Perhaps they have a particular way of simplifying form, or they draw eyes in a certain way. Maybe they are prone to super exaggeration or their work always has a particular tone or mood.

How does style influence a design?

In a sense, style is the foundation of a design. Style could be defined as the “design rules,” rules that a design adheres to. Almost every character in *The Simpsons* features a large overbite for example, while Miyazaki’s characters all bear the mark of his style – sensitively drawn, somewhat exaggerated realism.

Usually it is the art director’s role to figure out a style for a project, and the style must suit the project in question – style is tone and we already know how important tone and considering the needs of a project are when it comes to designing a character.

Three versions

A single character drawn in three different styles.



Flat, simple, 2D
cut-out style



The same character, this time with
subtle dimension and shadow



A dark outline and heavy shadow create
a bolder, stronger looking character

INDUSTRY EXAMPLES

Unique style

Take the work of Peter De Sève and Carter Goodrich. Both these artists have illustrated character-driven covers for *The New Yorker* and have contributed character designs to many big animation studios. Yet, both draw in their own distinctive, instantly recognizable styles.

Transcendent style

Some styles transcend mediums, giving a designer range of another sort. Jonny Duddle’s hand can be found across picture books (*The Pirates Next Door*, *Gigantosaurus*) to character design for feature film (*The Pirates! An Adventure with Scientists*). Or, a designer may have a recognizable style so unique and appealing that they may find themselves inspiring a generation of artists. Think of Frank Frazetta, who redefined fantasy illustration. Mary Blair’s style from the early days of Disney still reverberates through the animation world today. Quentin Blake draws with his trademark charm in everything he does – and why would anyone want him to do anything otherwise? For these legends, their style is also their unique selling point.

Style as a positive attribute

In general, character designers are hired for their style. For example, I tend to draw in quite a lighthearted, comical fashion, and as such I am never asked to design for darker, edgier projects. Most of my work comes from projects aimed at children. There are, of course, exceptions to the rule, and some designers are capable of transcending style in such a way as to work on a variety of projects. However, every designer has their strength and it is likely that their commissions reflect that.



Style as a negative attribute

As important as style is, it can also be limiting for a designer, in two ways:

1. If they can only draw in one set style, they limit their ability to work on varying projects and paint themselves into a corner – pun intended! Their work will only be useful in limited scenarios.
2. If they take on a job with a style out of their comfort zone, trying to break out of their own style and do original work can be tricky. It is important to always have some range in your ability.

Too niche

A very idiosyncratic style like this could be appropriate for a particular project. However, it will have niche appeal across a range of projects.



Showing range

An example of stylistic range. All of these characters were drawn by the same artist, but each has a different finish depending on the project, the brief, the media, and many other variables.



Finding and using your style

Style can be a double-edged sword when it comes to character design – both helpful and challenging. When it comes to working to a brief, especially one requesting a very specific style either, in or out of your comfort zone, it is important to understand your own style. My final advice on style would be:

1. When young and finding your feet, try to design in a way that appeals to you, taking inspiration from your favourite artists.
2. At the same time, pay attention to trends and familiarize yourself with other artists and styles.
3. Be a bit of a style-chameleon, but don't try to draw in every style! Some flexibility in style is always useful, and knowing you are able to adapt makes you more confident when approaching a new brief.

As you grow in experience as a designer, drawing what you love, no doubt a style will emerge in your work without even trying. Run with it, nurture it, and make it your selling point.

CREATING TURNAROUNDS

Turnarounds are a bit of a necessary evil in the worlds of animation and games (in my experience, they are less common in illustration), and it is important for a character designer to produce them effectively. They are not always the most exciting stage of the process to draw, but without a turnaround, there may not be enough information about the character for the artists who come after you in the project pipeline.

Top turnaround tips

Begin creating turnarounds using the character drawing that has been approved by the art director or other contact. In addition to giving careful consideration to whether the character will be 2D or 3D, here are some other key stages as you work through the turnarounds:

- The first job is to get the volumes of the big, main shapes correct.
- Line up important details and forms, making sure they are consistent in size from each angle.
- Note any style conventions that might make accuracy less important.
- Working from general to specific, try to make sure every angle looks good from an aesthetic point of view. The character should look pleasing to the eye from each and every angle.

2D v. 3D characters

It is important to be able to turn a character in space in your head, imagining them from all angles to make drawing them easier.

- In 2D animation, this turnaround will be a drawing reference for animators. It may also form the basis of character puppet rigs.
- In 3D animation and games, a turnaround will be used by modelers as a reference when modeling the character.

Hopefully you can see why turnarounds are so important to get right. Audiences will be seeing your character from a variety of angles, face-on being just one.



How do I look?

Turnarounds offer the chance to explore your character from every angle, allowing you to describe their shape in a way that is meaningful and helpful to the art director and his team.



2D puppet style

Note how the arms and tail are reused across all the angles. This can help make the rig faster and easier to construct.



Rough sketch

Loosely indicating shapes and volumes.

The edges of the shapes should align all the way across



Refined rough sketch

Refining volumes and proportion, and lining up features in more detail.

Check that even the smallest features, such as the eyes, line up



Final version

A professional-looking set of turnarounds helps to elevate a presentation as well as the character design itself.

If the rough drawings are accurate, the final version will be straightforward



IN THE KNOW...

Joined-up thinking

When drawing turnarounds for a 2D puppet, think carefully about how the different body parts will link together.

"The character should look pleasing to the eye from each and every angle"

PRESENTATION & FEEDBACK

BY KENNETH ANDERSON

It can be nerve-racking and exciting when the time comes to present your character in its final form. By this stage, you will have done a lot of liaising already with your contact (whether that is an art director or another member of the team). However, this step is equally as important in terms of the quality of your work and your style of presentation.



HOW TO PRESENT

There are many of elements that make up the presentation process. It differs across companies and designers, but there are some key stages and content that are expected by both sides.

WHO SEES YOUR WORK?

The process of having your work reviewed can vary from job to job, and company to company, according to particular needs. It can also differ depending on whether you work remotely, or are based in-house. There is no one-size-fits-all, but here are the most common scenarios:

Working freelance/remote

Working remotely throws up its own challenges through the process, so as with every stage, communication has to be clear and timely. The most likely scenarios for presenting your work are:

- The designer will usually present their work to the same point of contact they have had throughout the process. This person may then liaise with others in their team before providing feedback.
- The designer may present their work in a meeting (on-site or via Skype) to a group of decision-makers and feedback is given on the spot.
- The feedback is relayed through production staff or someone else.

Working externally, you will certainly find yourself submitting work via email or online cloud storage systems. It depends on the preference of the client/company you are working for, and flexibility on your part is key.

Working in-house

Working in-house increases the chance of you discussing your work-in-progress at any time with the art director or another member of the team. However, at some point their official approval process will take over, so you must be clear on how this works in your situation.

- You might present your work via online digital-pipeline software, uploading finished work and marking tasks as complete.
- You may be asked to email work to the relevant people. Before you hit "send", make sure you know who should receive the email - misdirected emails waste valuable time in a schedule. Also ensure you know how they want the work sent - it could be via a cloud transfer platform, or a link to a location on the company server. Beware of huge attachments!
- Occasionally companies prefer for the work to be presented on a screen or via a print out, in front of others.

PREPARING FOR A PRESENTATION

When it is time to present your ideas, sketches, or designs to an art director there are a few things to bear in mind. Good presentation can make a big difference to how work is received, so go back to the brief for direction about how to present your character, including props, costumes, and turnarounds. If there is no information, it is vague, or you need to ask a question, go back to the person who sent you the brief and ask them how they want the work presented.

Client template/model sheet

Sometimes there will be a requirement to present your illustrations on a particular bespoke model sheet. This might include version numbers, some reference material, episode numbers if it is for a TV show, dates, the name and logo of the production, and so on. The art director will usually make clear if you need to use this, and supply the template.

Clarity

The main consideration, which impacts on everything else, is clarity. There is nothing worse than presenting a page of sketches that are laid out in a messy fashion. Always remember, you are showing this work to other people who must be able to look at it, understand it, and not get lost in a sea of sketches. You will be very familiar with your presentation, while others are viewing it for the first time.

IN THE KNOW...

Show your best

Only present work that you are happy with! If you are having trouble finding a design and are not happy at all with your ideas, present the ones you think are strongest. An art director is not just there to critique and give feedback, but also to guide and help problem-solve a design.

Quality

The sketches must be drawn to a level that is clear for someone other than yourself to understand. When you have worked with the same team over a long period of time, it is sometime acceptable to work in "shorthand." The team are familiar with the quality of your polished work, trust your proven abilities and can visualize it, even through a more relaxed presentation. At any other time, maintain the highest clarity to ensure your intentions and concepts are fully understood.

Monster character



Thumbnail sketches - Version 001

11.25.18

Thumbnails

A page of thumbnail sketches, clearly labeled, including the version number and the submission date.

IN THE KNOW...

Have you done enough?

A designer should know when they have and have not addressed a brief adequately. As you gain experience, you will begin to know whether or not you are submitting a full response to the brief, regardless of whether the result is "correct."



Turnarounds

Factor these into your presentation and make sure they are clearly distinguishable from everything else.

Monster character



Final concept

11.25.18

Hero pose

The final concept, showing a "hero pose" and only two other poses. Notice how breathing space around the illustrations and a choice of only three images ensure it is easy for the viewer to focus on the details as well as the overall impact.

Breathing space

Just as in book or magazine page design, leave breathing space, "white space" around images and groups of images. Never overcrowd a page, as it will be overwhelming for others. Again, this ensures your work is communicated as clearly and effectively as possible.

Numbering

When presenting a number of design options, it always helps to number or label different ideas presented on the same page. This makes it easier for a client or employer to reference particular drawings, both with you and with colleagues. It also ensures there is no miscommunication, leading to you doing further work on the wrong option.

Annotations

Small notes are also useful to clarify ideas or to make clear what your intention is, but do not overdo this. If your drawings don't speak for themselves you are doing something wrong. Notes should be used sparingly, maybe to refer to previous feedback, or to point out problem areas or suggestions that you feel need some emphasis.

Separation

There are no strict rules about how to present the different elements, such as pose, expression, and turnaround, but it might help for clarity to separate turnarounds, poses, expressions, and so on from each other. It isn't uncommon to find a turnaround on the same page as expressions, but use your judgment to decide what is the clearest layout for your submission and client.

PROCESSING FEEDBACK

As designers working to character briefs, we rely on regular feedback. The design process is a back-and-forth one; it is iterative and so depends on feedback to calibrate the design direction and keep things on track.

YOU AND THE FEEDBACK PROCESS

The feedback will be a response to your work from one person, or a collection of different voices rolled into one. As mentioned previously, understanding the production pipeline will help give you more context when reviewing the feedback you receive.

How do you feel?

Getting feedback on your designs can be a nerve-wracking experience at times! There is always the concern that what you have drawn might not be what the art director is looking for. These feelings will subside a bit with experience as you become better at understanding briefs and what other people expect from your designs. However, that nervous feeling never quite goes away! As designers and artists, we take pride in our work and want it to impress – most of us are simply perfectionists.

Believe in the process

The main thing to realize is that being precious over your work is a bad idea. You must expect critique, and even for some of your favorite ideas to be ignored! Hopefully, if we as designers are doing our jobs correctly, there will be something that the client likes and wants to explore further.

On a good day they may love everything you drew and find it hard to make choices to progress a design. On a bad day, maybe nothing hits the nail on the head or the client might not be clear themselves on what they are looking for. It really does depend, and both scenarios are going to happen. Some clients are harder to please than others, and some briefs are much harder to nail than others.

The solution is to believe in the design process – do your best work, focus on the needs of the brief, and listen to feedback. Work in this way and you cannot go far wrong. If you find yourself going in a wrong direction, good feedback should help you get back on the right track.

RECEIVING FEEDBACK

When feedback comes through, the key is to read or listen to it very carefully and make sure you address it fully and adequately. There is nothing worse than providing feedback to a designer and then having to repeat the same feedback for the revisions!

Written feedback

For myself, the best way to receive feedback is via email or as some form of written record. That way, less can be forgotten or missed and that record provides a solid reference point to adhere to. It helps to annotate the feedback with your own notes and form a plan of action:

- If there is a lot of information, pick out each point individually.
- Ensure you understand all the points.
- If there is anything you do not understand, make a list and ask for clarification or examples.
- Identify which changes are most important to the art director.
- Prioritise where you are going to start. For example, you might want to revise a character's shape language or facial expressions before moving onto their costume or props.
- Pay attention to what the art director did like. It is too easy to become blinded by the "negatives", and positive feedback can aid your understanding of the other feedback.
- Go back to the client asap with any questions that arise from the feedback.
- Receiving feedback via email means that, if you are alone, you can vent any frustrations in private. Then put them to the side then get on with the job!

IN THE KNOW...

Listen and learn

Much of the design process is simply about listening properly, understanding what is being said, and working to address issues.

Verbal feedback

When receiving feedback verbally, either over the phone, in a meeting, via Skype, and so on, it can be trickier to organize the information. Writing notes yourself from a conversation can lead to missing details, either because you did not have a chance to write them down, or you later can't translate your own hurried handwriting. A written record will come in handy, so be prepared:

- Have paper and a pen or pencil to hand.
- Write down any questions you want to ask, and revisit the list at the end of the conversation to ensure they have all been covered.
- Ensure you have a copy of your presentation for reference. Even though you know your own work inside-out, it helps to refer to certain details, or be ready if asked any questions.
- Wear earphones and a microphone! Rather than holding the phone with one hand and scribbling with the other, go hands-free to allow yourself the freedom to multitask.
- If the client doesn't offer to put their feedback into a follow-up email, create one yourself. Type up their feedback point-by-point, and sending it to them to ensure you are both on the same page and nothing is forgotten or misinterpreted.
- Go back to the client as soon as possible with any questions that arise from the feedback.

HOW TO APPROACH FEEDBACK

Think of tackling the feedback as an advanced stage of the original brief. You are working toward a set of goals again, this time finessing your character design using the information supplied:

- Take note of any deadline agreed with the art director. If you think you will not be able to make the deadline for any reason, let them know as soon as possible.
- Ensure you know how the revisions are to be submitted. Maybe there were several and the art director would like you to submit the complete presentation to be reviewed again. Alternatively, they may only want to see specific drawings again.
- Starting on revisions, especially if there are many, can feel overwhelming. Work through the written list – sometimes it is only once you begin on the changes that the feedback itself begins to become clearer.
- Go back to your research and early sketches if it helps. However, use the feedback as your starting point and focus on the requests and suggestions made here.
- Consider adding annotations to show where revisions have been made. This will help the art director to assess the work more quickly and have a better understanding of how you have carried out the feedback without playing “spot the difference.”

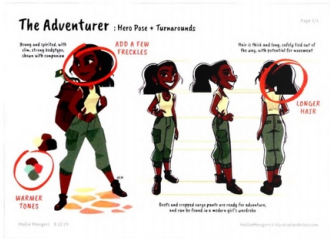
FEEDBACK FROM ART DIRECTOR

- Inject more warmth into costume palette
- Add freckles across bridge of nose
- Make hair longer for even more movement

Processing feedback

Even if all the feedback seems overwhelming at first, breaking it down into a list will help you to make sense of the details and work on revisions.

Artwork © Holle Mengert







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VIDEO GAMES

DEVON CADY-LEE

"Making her a relatable, charismatic human is one of the best ways to appeal to a wider audience"



THE ADVENTURER



THE ADVENTURER CREATIVE BRIEF

TO: DevonCady-Lee@IllustrationArtist.com

FROM: KennyArtDirector@3dtotalFX.com

SUBJECT: NEW BRIEF Adventurer for Video Game



OVERVIEW

This adventurous character is a young woman from South America filled with a spirit to discover new places and learn new things. Suddenly orphaned and forced to leave her home, she travels to strange and remote lands, often finding herself in testing situations that she must save herself from. Throughout her adventures she takes on numerous disguises to blend in with her surroundings and

new communities (this is both for fun and as a practical necessity for going unnoticed in dangerous areas). She is a strong, agile fighter and has a cunning wit which helps her to escape difficult situations. She travels with her affectionate pet, a small lizard (non-speaking), which provides her with companionship.

PERSONALITY

- Independent
- Organized
- Strong-willed
- Open-minded
- Calm
- Bold
- Practical

APPEARANCE

- This character has a clean, well-kept appearance and is dressed in practical attire for traveling. She carries camping equipment and supplies with her, as she loves to sleep under the stars.
- She has not forgotten her South American roots, however, and keeps mementos of her home and family with her at all times.
- This character is in her early twenties and is around 5ft 3in in height. She has long dark hair, her build is slim but strong, and she has an open and friendly face. She has large green eyes and her earlobes are pierced with small gold hoops.
- This character wears different disguises, so your final delivery should include concepts for accessories or variations on your design.

ART DIRECTOR'S NOTES

- The gameplay also involves exploring different terrains and environments - costume exploration should include this.
- Her main costume should be practical and functional, but have a sense of being trendy and current and reflective of her personality.
- Part of the game will involve collecting items and having an inventory - let's explore this function as part of her costume. Does she have a backpack? A side satchel?
- What items might she pick up along the way to aid her? A machete? A grappling hook?

TECHNICAL BRIEF

INDUSTRY: VIDEO GAMES

AUDIENCE

This project is intended for a family audience and therefore children, parents, and grandparents alike should find the character charismatic and inspiring.

TECHNICAL SPEC

- Third-person sandbox adventure game - think *Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild*
- Stylistically fun and engaging gameplay involving puzzle solving and collecting items
- Think about the actions necessary for the game play - running, jumping, climbing, swinging etc.
- Design must work from a top-down angle, viewed from behind (third-person view)
- Though the game is for a next generation console, the characters should be stylized and not super realistic
- Show three-quarter front and back views plus key poses relevant to gameplay. It is important to see this character from the gameplay angle and a version of how they may look on promotional art

ARTIST'S INITIAL NOTES

MIND MAP



CHARACTER DESIGN PLAN

How will I help drive the **narrative** in the character?

This will be driven by her pet interactions and her costume options. Her pet interactions will reveal parts of her personality when she talks to the lizard or uses it as a gameplay function. Having a charismatic pet is a great way to make a character feel more compassionate. Our hero will reveal their dependence, trust, and caring of another being that readily rides with them. Tokens of her family will also hint at her South American heritage.

How will I make the character suitable for the intended **audience**?

As this will be family entertainment, the best approach is something that will appeal to all ages. It needs colorful characters and scenery, and maybe a cute pet, to grab the attention of the youngest. An action-orientated hero who is charismatic and aspirational will help appeal to a teen crowd. For our older players it will still need some attention to detail and nuance that will engage them, particularly in the character's costuming, gameplay elements, and the way she expresses herself. Making her a relatable, charismatic human is one of the best ways to appeal to a wider audience.

How will I meet the **visual** requirements of the character?

I love bright, colorful games and I think this is a great opportunity to make something really stylized. I imagine this whole game could look like a vintage travel poster - wouldn't that be amazing for an exploration game? Characteristics of travel posters is that they are often designed using flat color shapes and soft gradients, so I will pay close attention to how they use values when I start modeling forms. Often they are incredibly vibrant in the way they use color and I want the same energy in this art.

What makes the above design traits suitable for the **media**?

One of the most important parts about having a character ready for games is readability. A simplified art style that makes the characters pop off the background will make her actions easy to follow when she does acrobatic tricks or puzzle solving actions. I don't plan to adhere to anything too realistic, which gives us the chance to make things more exaggerated when they need to be.

IDEAS EXPLORATION

I'll jump into research about South American culture, landscape, and animals first, and explore the best options for making this character feel distinct and appealing.

RESEARCH



Added charm

I spent most of my time looking at South American trinkets, jewelry, and carvings. There are many different cultures and countries within South America, so it was difficult to say which I should draw from. I was particularly interested in the cultural style of Peru and Argentina.

THUMBNAILED

1 Red-eyed flying gecko

For this design I was especially looking at New Caledonian Geckos, the largest known gecko species.



2 Emerald glider

This lizard has a more feisty expression - maybe he's a little bit of a chaos element? The winged look is inspired by the gliding dragon lizards of Indonesia.

PROCESS TIP

Two for one

I will effectively be approaching this as a double process, designing one character for the hero and one for her pet lizard.

3 Umbrella lizard

This one is based on a chameleon lizard, which gives us fun eyes to play with. When anthropomorphized, this could work effectively as a timid or nervous personality.



4 Cool and casual

I like how strong this character feels! The rolled up sleeves would be a nice touch to show she's ready for anything. Her hand casually resting on the knife hand gives her a lot of attitude.



5 Firmly planted

For strong characters I tend to plant them in a pose with their feet apart. I want to give the impression that if you tried to push her, she wouldn't fall over.



6 Traveling light

For this one I tried a more triangular body type. I also tried to think of climbing gear, rope, bags, and other tools one would need for an adventure. However I don't want them to appear bulky so as to hinder her.



7 Symmetrical features

This version has her knife drawn. I like the "T" shape her features make between her eyebrows and nose, as well as her double ponytail hairstyle.

8 Ready for action

This version has her hands ready to take action, wearing a bolo on her puffy-collared shirt. The way she holds her arms and hands to her sides in anticipation, she looks ready to scale the highest wall.

ARTIST'S SELF-EVALUATION

Which thumbnails best drive the **narrative** in your character?

I think both the research sketches and thumbnail **No.6** work well for the narrative. They clearly show the attitude and identity of the character the best, both key features of the brief.

Which are most suited to the intended **audience**?

I think **No.1** (red-eyed flying gecko) is a strong character that could appeal to a younger audience, while **No.4** has the most appeal of the thumbnails as far as personality goes.

Which best meet the **visual** requirements of the character?

Definitely **No.6** fits the criteria the best, in terms of the height, personality, and attitude. Because of the larger head in proportion to her limbs, she feels shorter than the rest of my designs.

Which best meet the needs of the **media**?

No.5 might actually fit the gameplay the best. Not having bulky gear for her hair to collide into simplifies things for the animators - something I'm taking into account at every stage.

"They clearly show the attitude and identity of the character the best, both key features of the brief"

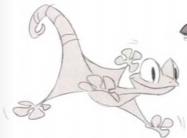
THE INITIAL SUBMISSION

I've progressed and cleaned up my favorite thumbnails as my initial submission to the art director for feedback.



B Standing tall

This one has the most attitude and swagger in my opinion. I like that both characters seem ready for anything. Proportionately, she seems to feel the tallest of the bunch.



A All in one

This one-piece jumpsuit would be a unique design and it definitely has a vintage feel. It doesn't seem like there is a set time period, but I still think this would look cool in a contemporary setting.



DESIGN TIP

Dressed for the part

I think all my clothing choices are practical, allowing for a lot of range of motion, plus robust foot protection, which the brief called for.

C Confident pose

The triangular body shape makes her feel very stable and confident. The hat size feels better for moving around a lot.

D Nimble companion

I felt I needed to include at least one of my lizard pitches to get the idea across of how it would work mechanically in game. It helps to see that it is a nimble, gliding animal.

ART DIRECTOR'S FEEDBACK

TO: DevonCady-Lee@IllustrationArtist.com
FROM: KennyArtDirector@3dtotalFX.com
SUBJECT: INITIAL FEEDBACK Adventurer for Video Game

CHARACTERS

It would have been good to see more options of the main characters - shorter, slightly different body silhouettes, faces etc. However, the design you have looks nice - she looks friendly and athletic. Nice exploration of the interaction with her lizard in a gameplay way! Would work in a fun adventure/puzzle game.

COSTUME

A may be a bit "old fashioned" - need a "trendier" vibe? Would be good to see an option with shorts. I like the top in B or C combined with trousers similar to C. Could you combine the hat and big fringe of A? Don't forget her disguises!

ACCESSORIES AND PROPS

I like the hair in C, it might be cool to try a hairstyle with follow-through as she moves. A could be toned down to work in this way? I like the accessories of A and B - the necklaces best convey a sense of who she is and her heritage. Tie these into real reference material, similar to your jewelry sketches. The brief requested camping equipment so I would err toward C. Perhaps the rolled up camping equipment could lie diagonally across her back, combined with a side satchel? This would add nice asymmetry. The other accessories make sense - she will need a belt for attaching machete, pick etc. Remember she will be seen a lot in game, from above and behind. The design needs to work from this angle and in silhouette, with enough visual appeal and detail to be engaging. Please be sure to explore this moving forward and in the final design!

SHAPE LANGUAGE

Her feet look too large and rounded - this does balance out B's hair though. Make sure the silhouette is clear. The lizard looks good but a bit big, although that might work if stylized further.

ARTIST'S NOTES

Characters

- I'll explore more facial options. I'm glad that her confidence and athleticism show from the start.
- Proportionally she feels a bit tall for her description, so I will have to revisit to fit the brief.
- I am excited to flesh out the lizard for gameplay! It might share her practical and independent nature, but as a foil to her confidence, could be more timid. The scale is important! I'm imagining something monitor sized in order to function for gameplay.

Costume

- I hoped "old fashioned" would feel trendy in its vintage charm; a modern cut and accessory choice will help. I'll recombine some details and revise the top.
- I'll integrate the lizard into her various disguises; her hats will also reoccur as a disguise.

Accessories and props

- Her hair will be tricky, as it needs to feel "long" but not collide with her gear or accessories. Tie it up? Her hat and hair will be what the player sees from behind most often. I will add secondary elements like ribbons to allow for interesting animations.
- Her necklace can't swing around while she moves; the style I've chosen keeps the profile low while adding color. Her bracelets can be stylized, and I will make sure they are still a practical size so they won't need their own animation.
- I'll make her bulkier accessories out of lightweight material. A practical approach! It might be less cumbersome to attach the machete to a belt loop. This will help simplify her design when holding it.

Shape language

- I've taken liberties with her limbs, resulting in the illusion that she is taller than she is. I need to adjust these to make her shorter but not childlike.
- The lizard's position on her back will be important; I'd like it to be visible from the player camera.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

I will now take forward the art director's feedback, and my own notes, to explore the character further through pose, facial expressions, value and color, and costume and props.

POSES

Ziplining

When capturing gameplay, it's important to try and make the action as clear as possible to the designers that will try to execute on it. This idea shows how her lizard can be used for ziplining!



Gliding

This is the first idea that I had for gameplay functionality - that she could use her pet to glide down through the skies to lower areas as she traverses the terrain.

Retrieval

I tried to illustrate how her lizard could help her retrieve hard-to-reach objects. I decided to show this in a small sequence that helps illustrate the mechanic.



FACIAL EXPRESSIONS

PROCESS TIP

Imagine...

Thinking about the gameplay, I try to visualize myself in the character's scenarios to work out their feelings and therefore potential facial expressions (especially those that will be used often).



Confidence

In this expression I was trying to capture her confidence and focus in the face of obstacles, and her enthusiasm to overcome them.

Wonder

I think an expression of discovery, confusion, and wonder is something that will come in handy in an exploring adventure game.



Frustration

I imagine at some point she may become frustrated with something in this game. Even if she won't make this face often, it's important to show her range, as this is what can make her more relatable.



VALUE & COLOR

Value

Since the rendering is going to be pretty flat, the value of each differently colored detail will be the focus, rather than shadow gradients.

DESIGN TIP

Critical contrast

When using color shapes with no shadows, the readability of the game relies on value and hue contrast of each local color. The hierarchy of these colors will be paramount for readability.



Contrasting light hat and dark hair draws focus to the face

Her outfit and figure are defined with very light belt and cuffs

I must complement her skin tone via the value and saturation of her clothes



Unified outfit

This idea was to unify her top and bottom accessories into one colorful jumpsuit. Her jewelry could be agate or ruby with silver. I like the brightness of her pet's eyes.



Darker option

This was the darkest option, and in a lot of ways the most readable. In retrospect, I think her shirt is a little close to blending with her skin tone. I do like that her lizard's color complements her well.



Lighter option

The values are very light on her costume, which I like. Another thing that works for this variation is that her skin color feels more saturated by comparison. I also used this opportunity to make a really tropical-looking lizard.

COSTUME & PROPS

Layers of disguise

For this costume I thought it would be neat for her to dress up as a Peruvian rancher. The mountains of Peru are a harsh place sometimes and the inhabitants need to layer appropriately, providing excellent coverage that could also work as a disguise. Their hats and scarves are especially good at covering the face.



Pet prop

The lizard pet could be considered a prop in this case, albeit a very personable and useful one! I decided to try and combine the cuter aspects of the gecko reference I had, mixed with a little Draco lizard to make it into a gliding reptile.



Tourist trip

Another fun costume idea is that she could dress up as a tourist! A second opportunity for a big hat, but she can also wear some fancy shades. Maybe her lizard friend can camouflage and nestle in the flowers on her hat?

ARTIST'S EVALUATION OF DEVELOPMENT

How has the **narrative** of your character developed?

I think the personality of the character started to solidify toward the end. As the character's personality becomes clearer, it's easier to think like them and make choices like them. The choices that you pretend the character makes affects details like their wardrobe or the way they stand.

How have you developed the bond with the intended **audience**?

I think the hero has the potential to be an aspirational character that young and old will want to engage with. Making her expressive, as well as her pet, will make the audience more empathetic toward them.

Which aspects revealed **visual** developments of the character?

I think the best exploration that started driving things home for me was finally testing what the color could be, because it set the vibrant tone of the game. I should have explored this aspect earlier in the development.

How has the character developed for the intended **media**?

I think this art style is both fun and clear to read. I think capturing the "travel poster" feel will also incite a sense of adventure and wonder that is appropriate for this game genre.

THE FINAL PRESENTATION



HERO POSE

The final pose is an opportunity for me to use an expression I haven't had before, looking at her pet as if she is empathizing with his excitement. Although the green color of her pet pops well against her red shirt, I wanted the pet's eye accents to match her jewelry accents.

TURNAROUNDS



Front

For the final look I tried to achieve a very flat, gouache-like texture. I really wanted the final character to have highly-saturated color.



Back

Here I can clearly show how she will appear from behind. Since this camera angle needs to be readable, I want to illustrate that she carries gear on her back, but not make it look too cumbersome for her to do acrobatic stunts.



Profile

This view clarifies what I was planning for some of the shapes of the head and torso. For readability, I eliminated her arm to clearly show how the belt and loops wrap around her form.

POSES

Flying free

It was important to capture the arc of movement as she uses her pet to glide. For this pose I think it's appropriate to put a little strain on the lizard's face as he tries to hold her up!



Fast paced

I wanted this to feel a little more exhilarating, as she is armed with her machete. Maybe she chops up vegetation that blocks her path as she swings through the canopy on her lizard friend.



Helping hand

There will be plenty of opportunities in the game for the adventurer and lizard to work together like this.



PROCESS TIP

All the right moves

In games, it's important to establish the various ways in which your character moves early on. This way you can test their costume, accessories, and props for practicality at every stage of the process.

FACIAL EXPRESSIONS



Wonderstruck

By opening up and elongating all of her features, the face tells us that she is trying to make sense of whatever it is she has seen.



Tense moment

Showing tension is achieved by scrunching all the features to the center of the face. As a character who is normally level-headed, this expression would be a dramatic contrast to her normally relaxed features.

Consistent features

One thing I try to do is maintain asymmetry in my expressions. If she lifts her left eye brow or pulls the corner of her mouth when she's interested, I will use that again in a different expression for consistency.



DESIGN TIP

Making faces

Using the same asymmetrical movements in different facial expressions not only helps with consistency, but gives you a handy starting point when designing new expressions.

ARTIST'S FINAL EVALUATIONS

My initial thoughts

My first thoughts were about the different ways her costume would incorporate the gear she was also supposed to possess. I was also initially excited by the idea of having a lizard for a pet, since reptiles are some of my favorite animals to draw. I had to strike the right balance of feeling like an authentic character while still being a little larger than life.

How the media affected my approach

When designing characters for a game, the storytelling for the gameplay elements has to be engaging. If the lizard was relegated to simply an accessory, it would not be as memorable or useful and frankly would be a waste of animation budget. By including the pet into the gameplay in interesting ways, it makes the best use of the criteria I needed to fill.

Similar characters in my portfolio

I have made a few character duos like this, and some specifically call out a pet. I knew from previous experience that I needed to make the pet useful and part of the gameplay. Art direction-wise it was a bit of an experiment to try something that felt even flatter than my usual work.

The easiest part of the brief...

The easiest parts are usually the most fun for me, which in this case was creating expressions and interactions between the characters. While they are both ready for action, they may react to the same situations differently, and that's fun for me to figure out.

...and most challenging part

One of the toughest parts was nailing her final costume. There was a necessity in the brief to make her feel like she is carrying a lot of camping and exploring equipment, yet she still had to feel like she could nimbly traverse environments.

The influence of the intended audience

The charisma of the characters was something I wanted to nail, and making the style feel very animated and colorful as well. This lets them appeal to a wider audience, which is necessary when trying to be a family-friendly game.

If I could start this character again

I would probably spend more time exploring options for props again to establish the logistics of her costume. If I were to do this assignment on my own, I would also jump into color first - I think that was key to hitting the right feeling for how I wanted the flat "travel poster" look to come across.



"When designing characters for a game, the storytelling for the gameplay elements has to be engaging"



ART DIRECTOR'S FINAL WORD

"Devon's adventurer has a nice balance of not being too realistic or too stylized, which fits the game well. The character's design is bright and colorful, which alludes to her vibrant personality, and her adorable pet lizard makes for a great ally in the game."





ILLUSTRATION

HOLLIE MENGERT

"I want this character to feel both strong
and vulnerable at the same time"



THE ADVENTURER



THE ADVENTURER CREATIVE BRIEF

TO: HollieMergert@IllustrationArtist.com
FROM: KennyArtDirector@3dtotalFX.com
SUBJECT: NEW BRIEF Adventurer for Book Illustration



OVERVIEW

This adventurous character is a young woman from South America filled with a spirit to discover new places and learn new things. Suddenly orphaned and forced to leave her home, she travels to strange and remote lands, often finding herself in testing situations that she must save herself from. Throughout her adventures she

takes on disguises to blend in with her surroundings (both for fun and out of practical necessity for going unnoticed in dangerous areas). She is a strong, agile fighter and has a cunning wit which helps her to escape difficult situations. She travels with her affectionate pet, a small lizard (non-speaking), who provides her with companionship.

PERSONALITY

- Independent
- Organized
- Strong-willed
- Open-minded
- Calm
- Bold
- Practical

APPEARANCE

- This character has a clean, well-kept appearance and is dressed in practical attire for traveling. She carries camping equipment and supplies with her, as she loves to sleep under the stars.
- She has not forgotten her South American roots, however, and keeps mementos of her home and family with her at all times.
- This character is in her early twenties and is around 5ft 3in in height. She has long dark hair, her build is slim but strong, and she has an open and friendly face. She has large green eyes and her earlobes are pierced with small gold hoops.
- This character wears different disguises, so your final delivery should include ideas for accessories or variations on your design.

ART DIRECTOR'S NOTES

- Style wise, we need to invoke a sense of playful adventure - loose and energetic and not too serious!
- In the color palette we would like to connect to her South American roots - think vibrant, warm colors.
- Each story will involve our character discovering something new about the different places she visits and learning some valuable life lessons.

TECHNICAL BRIEF

INDUSTRY: ILLUSTRATED BOOK PUBLISHING

AUDIENCE

This project is intended for a family audience and therefore children, parents, and grandparents alike should find the character charismatic and inspiring. Though the book will be aimed at older children, the character should also appeal to adults who may want to read it with them.

TECHNICAL SPEC

- 48 pages long, 21 x 15 cm
- The character is featured in a series of books, each one taking her on a different adventure to new places
- We need to see explorations of her in different fun disguises - these should be playful
- Would like to see her posed in different fun and quirky situations, plus three-quarter front and back views and explorations of her costume

ARTIST'S INITIAL NOTES

MIND MAP



CHARACTER DESIGN PLAN

How will I help drive the **narrative** in the character?

I want this character to feel strong and vulnerable at the same time. She can take care of herself, but will carry a wide range of emotions. I'll express vulnerability in her facial features, the way she carries herself, and how she interacts with the things around her. Always on adventures, she won't have many recurring friends to confide in. Her pet lizard will come in handy in quiet moments when she needs someone to talk to, and express her fears and vulnerabilities. In this way we can show character growth throughout a series of books, even while putting her in different circumstances each time.

How will I make the character suitable for the intended **audience**?

Our adventurer is to be designed for a family audience, so needs to feel approachable, interesting, and friendly. Ideally, parents will see this character as a role model for their kids, and kids will look up to her and want to join in on her adventures!

How will I meet the **visual** requirements of the character?

Representing characters from around the globe is so important, especially for a young audience. This character is from South America, and it is very important that we communicate her heritage correctly. To do this, I want to study her heritage and what her facial features should look like. This is a stylized project, so all of her features will be simplified into something more graphic, but the representation will be key to her design.

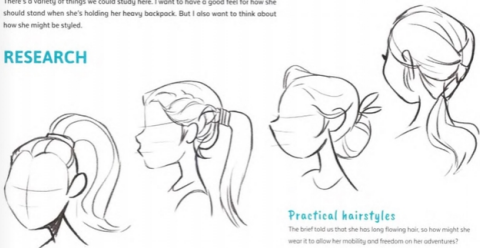
What makes the above design traits suitable for the **media**?

As our adventurer is for a family audience she needs to not look stylized to the point of being unable to carry a serious story line. I won't exaggerate her quite as much as I do other characters, but she does still have to appeal to young kids. Young adult books do not often carry illustration on every page, so she will need to look bold and interesting, primarily for book covers. We can still have lots of fun with her when it comes to color and rendering, even as she's grounded in reality.

IDEAS EXPLORATION

There's a variety of things we could study here. I want to have a good feel for how she should stand when she's holding her heavy backpack. But I also want to think about how she might be styled.

RESEARCH



Practical hairstyles

The brief told us that she has long flowing hair, so how might she wear it to allow her mobility and freedom on her adventures?

THUMBNAILS

1 Too generic

In my initial attempt at the character, I wanted to incorporate her lizard friend and her hiking gear. She is fine for a first attempt, but her personality and facial features are looking a little generic.



2 Bolder features

This looks better to me! I wanted to push her facial features into something bolder. This young woman looks like she can take care of herself.



3 Strong legs

I play with the thickness of her legs and emphasize them. I want this character to feel strong in body and personality!

PROCESS TIP

Offer options

The more variety in design you send to an art director, the better chance you have of finding something they like within the range of options.

4 Interactions

I had a lot of fun with this thumbnail as she leans in to interact with a tropical bird. This thumbnail is starting to feel the right age to me.



5 Youthful approach

To make sure that my designs are not skewing too old, I thought I would do a thumbnail really trying to push this character younger.



6 Size of nose

I like playing with larger noses on female characters. I had fun with these proportions, but she does not look South American to me.



7 Hair up or down?

This thumbnail does not feel quite hiking-ready. But I thought it was worth trying at least one design where our adventurer lets her hair blow in the breeze!

PROCESS TIP

Striking poses

If you look out for pose-ability in your own designs, you will thank yourself down the road when it comes to illustrating them in a variety of scenes.

ARTIST'S SELF-EVALUATION

Which thumbnails best drive the **narrative** in your character?

No.4 feels the most expressive to me in terms of carrying a narrative. As I mentioned before, we want her to feel able to take care of herself but also be emotionally vulnerable. To me, **No.4** seems the most excited for new experiences, which is just what we are looking for in our adventurer!

Which are most suited to the intended **audience**?

This is for a family audience and so has to appeal to both kids and adults. In terms of stylization and detail I think **No.2** does the best job. Hopefully adults would see her as someone their kids could look up to. She seems ready for adventure, but old enough to be responsible.

Which best meet the **visual** requirements of the character?

I like to look for character thumbnails that I feel I have pushed the furthest. In terms of bold features, and pushed proportions and shapes, I like **No.4**

and **No.5** the best. I also try to send art directors a diverse selection of designs. **No.4** has nice round shapes, while **No.5** is very thin and elongated.

Which best meet the needs of **media**?

All of these thumbnails seem suitable for a book. However, I think **No.3**, **No.4**, and **No.5** have the most to offer in terms of shape contrast. I can pose them easily in a variety of action moments.

"This is for a family audience and so has to appeal to both kids and adults"

THE INITIAL SUBMISSION

I've progressed and cleaned up my favorite three thumbnails as my initial submission to the art director for feedback.

A Conveying character

I really enjoy the smirk of this first progressed thumbnail. I'm hoping that the art director will see in her someone capable of taking care of herself, as well as having a sense of fun and adventure.



B Youthful pose

This has less interesting facial features, in my opinion. However, her body shape feels more appropriate for a strong, fit young woman, and her pose shows attitude. Of the three submissions, this looks the most appropriate for the age of the character. I'm hoping her bright shirt will contrast with her darker hiking pants, to help draw focus to her large features and open face.



PROCESS TIP

Simple v. complex

By providing the art director with a variety of design complexity, we can see in more detail what they have in mind for the look and feel of the book.

C Body type

A young hiker of our character's age would be fit, but possibly not have the muscle tone of an older individual. This thumbnail is the youngest looking option, and the most simplified in terms of features.



DESIGN TIP

Early value

I usually add value to the sketches I send to art directors. Sometimes this can help inform the bold shapes you are trying to get into your characters, and make it easier to see the silhouette.

ART DIRECTOR'S FEEDBACK

TO: HollieMengert@IllustrationArtist.com

FROM: KennyArtDirector@3dtotalFX.com

SUBJECT: INITIAL FEEDBACK Adventurer for Book Illustration

COMPANION

We need to see her interacting with her pet lizard to make sure it performs as a character too. It is a kind of loyal companion and someone for her to talk to in alone moments, which can be useful in storytelling. Where does he sit? On her shoulder maybe? Or on top of her head?

FACE & BODY

The body type in **A** is along the right lines – athletic and slim but strong (**C** might be a bit too skinny). Moving forward, I would play around with this and see how best to craft a dynamic silhouette with her body shape. I like all the faces, but for this character I think again **B** is reading well. She feels open and friendly and confident too. Let's try and keep this vibe as you move forward!

HAIRSTYLE

Let's push the hair! Tying it back is good and I think it works, but I think it could be longer and more of a feature – how might it define her silhouette more? It could make for nice follow-through action on dynamic poses.

COSTUME DETAILS

We could also push the costume so that it is a bit more iconic – I know these are rough sketches but something to bear in mind moving forward. How can we convey a bit more adventure? Costume **B** is cool but maybe needs a little something. Maybe boots instead of sports shoes? Perhaps the trousers could be cropped mid-calf? Perhaps try a shirt with sleeves rolled up as a suggestion... Something to bring the adventurer flavor – but you need to keep it modern at the same time!

ARTIST'S NOTES

Companion

- In working on our adventurer character, I didn't focus as much on her loyal lizard companion. But as he is always by her side, he is important to get right.
- For the character development stage, I will incorporate him into each of her poses.
- Sitting the lizard by her side to comfort her when she's upset will also provide visual interest and sweet moments for our readers.

Face & body

- I will move forward with progressed thumbnail No.2 and work from that to incorporate the feedback.
- I plan to keep the face roughly the same, only editing it to make sure that it works from a variety of angles and can handle multiple expressions.

Hairstyle

- In exploring my thumbnails I forgot that the original brief described her hair as "long and flowing." In working to make sure it looked hiking-ready, it became shorter.
- Now it is time to make the hair longer so that she is still true to the brief.
- The art director is very helpful in pointing out that her hair shape is part of her overall silhouette, and can help inform the motion of the character.

Costume details

- Although costume design goes hand-in-hand with designing characters, it can on occasion need its own iteration process to get right.
- Now that we have a body shape and face we like, it is time to dive into the costume more. What would our adventurer need on her journey?

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

I will now take forward the art director's feedback, and my own notes, to explore the character further through pose, facial expressions, value and color, and costume and props.

POSES



The original pose

Both the art director and I liked the pose in the second progressed thumbnail, so I will use it going forward with the design tweaks that have happened since. Her outfit is more adventure-ready now, with longer hair that helps inform her silhouette, and creates a graphic shape.



In repose

Sometimes you need a simple, standard pose to show how the character looks at ease. However, the pose also shows us that our character's lizard friend has a spot on her backpack to cling to while she is traveling.

In action

We need a pose to show our character is full of adventure! I picture her swinging across a wide ravine, her necklace and ponytail trailing behind her. Let's hope her lizard friend is hanging on tightly!



DESIGN TIP

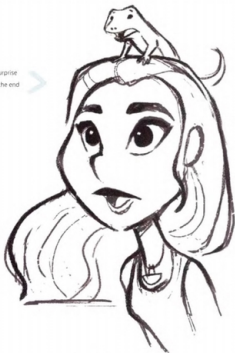
Welcoming stance

Although our character will experience a variety of emotions on her journey, we want poses that make her feel friendly and welcoming to our audience of readers.

FACIAL EXPRESSIONS

Surprise

We need to show that our character has moments of awe and surprise in her adventure-packed story. Also, maybe her hair is down at the end of a long day hiking, while she's camping out under the stars.



Vulnerability

An important part of the brief is to show the adventurer in moments of vulnerability. Discovering new places can be delightful, but will also present new challenges and stresses. Not every adventure is smooth sailing.



DESIGN TIP

Express yourself

The vulnerable facial expression ensures there is extreme diversity between the faces, allowing you to test and show extreme expressions that are like to be needed in the story.

Determination

I wanted to show a moment of determination. Even when this character is knocked down, she rises to the occasion and gets back up again. We need her expressions to also show her stubbornness and tenacity.



VALUE & COLOR

Value

I want the value scheme to feel very natural for this practical and sensible character. There should not be too many dramatic contrasts.

Large, bright eyes
and smile contrast
with hair

Dark hair and
brows suggested
by heritage

Light-colored
shirt brightens
the value scheme

Dark pants and
shoes keep the
figure grounded



Organic palette

I like this natural color scheme for the character. Her ability to disguise herself and blend in to her surroundings, mentioned in the brief, suggests that she wears a lot of earth tones.



Cool palette

With warm skin tones, I wanted to explore a cooler-toned backpack and pants, although the backpack would not blend in as effectively with her environment.



DESIGN TIP

Focal contrast

Although the cool color scheme might not be ideal here, in itself it could be a nice focal point in book illustrations with lots of warm colors.

Warm palette

South American art and textiles are often very warm in color. This palette provides a pop of color with the yellow backpack. To keep everything from feeling too light, the darker pants provide contrast.

COSTUME & PROPS



Backpack reveal

Our poses do not show the back of the backpack, so I provide a close-up study. If the marketing department asks us what the backpack looks like for potential merchandizing, we can show it to them at a variety of angles.



Keepsake fabric

I have added a piece of fabric, handmade by the character's family and tied around her wrist at all times as a memento of home. For a clearer view of the pattern, it is shown flat to allow replication in illustrations later.



Heirloom necklace

The necklace she wears is a family heirloom, maybe passed down from her mother. The shape was inspired by research I did on South American jewelry.



Lizard sidekick

The lizard is much more than a prop, but prop studies are an effective way to get a closer look at him. His cool color scheme would stand out from the warm backpack, keeping him visible.

ARTIST'S EVALUATION OF DEVELOPMENT

How has the **narrative** of your character developed?

Creating and developing poses helped me to imagine this character's story and adventures. It is not until she is in motion that you feel her full potential as an action character. The outfit is practical for how active she will be, with added elements that can swing around to show her speed and movement.

How have you developed the bond with the intended **audience**?

Creating our color schemes has helped me tie her stylized design to reality. The colors are bold enough to draw attention but realistic enough that she could exist in our world. Spending more time on her lizard friend also gave the character another aspect that will appeal to a family audience.

Which aspects revealed **visual** developments of the character?

Her expressions started to show us the briefed character. She looks young and spirited, but also reasonable and capable. In the next phase of color, I will add value contrast to her face to add more interest to her expressions.

How has the character developed for the intended **media**?

All of the development done for this character has made her appropriate for a book series, but the poses are what I would choose to show an art director. We want the director to be able to envision this character as a star of the series, in an eye-catching pose on a book cover. I believe the poses do the best job of letting our audience see just how adventurous she is.

THE FINAL PRESENTATION



HERO POSE

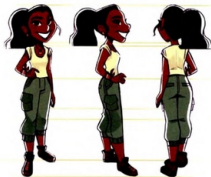
I wanted this pose to showcase our character's readiness. For this she needed her backpack on, her lizard friend at her side, and a strong stance. Were we to show this character in full background for a book, it is easy to imagine her in a number of scenarios, such as standing on a rocky peak with mountains in the distance.



DISGUISE

The brief asks for a disguise for our adventurer. In trying to look beyond the expected I thought it might be a fun scenario if she was trying to befriend a group of wild macaws. To better observe them in their natural habitat she dons similar colors, and adorns her hair with found feathers. She also has a pair of binoculars in order to observe them.

TURNAROUNDS



Front

It was important to show our character's proportions and outfit in an at-ease pose from the front, to show the character in detail.



Profile

A view from the side shows in more detail the shape and profile of the face, as well as props such as the fabric around the wrist. These types of turnaround will make it easier to draw her in action-packed poses later, because we have an excellent understanding of what she looks like from the main angles.

Back

The back view is not ideal when you want emotional impact. However, it is important for design purposes later on to have an understanding of how the costume and hair design of your character appears from the back.



POSES

Action girl

In this pose she is seen being brave and determined, a key aspect of her personality. It also suggests how she would carry herself when running, jumping, and generally moving through her adventure-packed world.



Time out

This pose demonstrates a nice moment at rest for her and her lizard friend. Her expression is open and friendly, which fulfills the brief's description of her.

Good friend

This character would have so much love for the world around her. I wanted to keep this tender moment between her and a tropical bird, as it shows her respect for all living things that she comes across.



FACIAL EXPRESSIONS



Tenacity and independence

There will be nothing in these stories that will make this character give up on her adventures! Therefore, it was important to showcase her determination and strength of spirit.

Awe and surprise

I wanted to keep this moment of awe and surprise for the final presentation. As this character is young, she still can be surprised and fascinated by the world around her.



Worry and doubt

A moment of being unsure of herself seemed important to the initial character brief in order to show her emotional depth. This will also help a young audience member identify with her struggle.



ARTIST'S FINAL EVALUATIONS

My initial thoughts

My initial thoughts on reading the brief were that this character is very complex! As she's not only for a young audience but for family members of all ages, it can feel a little stylistically restricting. However, through experimentation and research I think we arrived at a design that would be suitable for a wide audience. The fact that she needed a disguise, as well as an animal companion, and a variety of meaningful keepsakes, makes the components of her design more robust. The art director's guidance was integral in narrowing down what we needed to make her suit the brief.

How the media affected my approach

Like any other book character I wanted her to come off the page with personality and color! But for the wide audience this also had to be tempered with a more natural color palette. By the end result we have a nice balance of graphic elements that will make the character stand out to a young audience. She is simplified enough to be eye-catching, but her emotional range also makes her capable of carrying a story with twists and turns in it.

Similar characters in my portfolio

This design brief felt similar to design briefs that I have made for comic books. Comic book characters also need to be exaggerated for visual interest while maintaining a dramatic emotional range. The similarities

between these briefs make sense as most comic book characters are also adventurers at heart! Luckily for this character she wouldn't need to be drawn as frequently as a comic book character, which means that I could play with patterns and textures on her design more liberally.

The easiest part of the brief...

As a woman who likes hiking and traveling I could draw on some of my own experiences when outfitting this character, and designing her poses and props. Thinking about what I would want to wear if I was on a long journey made me want to ground her outfit in reality, which suits the brief. Always feel free to draw on your own personal experiences when designing! Chances are if something feels familiar to you, it will feel familiar to the audience as well, which is just what we want.

"Getting a good sense for the tone of the project is really important before setting out to complete a design"

...and most challenging part

This character is from South America, which I have never had the chance to travel to. Since we went in a more stylized direction it was okay for props to not be completely visually accurate to what real-life jewelry and artifacts may look like, but it's not ideal. If this brief became a book project that I was going to be working on over a series of months I would have wanted to get more real life research. That could include; listening to documentaries, traveling to the proper destinations, or taking museum trips. When in doubt about research there's always the internet, however it doesn't do justice to real life travel or study, in terms of accuracy.

The influence of the intended audience

I definitely tried to make the designs more serious for this daytime audience than if I were to be designing for a younger audience. Getting a good sense for the tone of the project is really important before setting out to complete a design. If this character was meant for a picture book rather than a book series I would have approached her in a much more lighthearted and exaggerated way.

If I could start this character again

I think I would have done a focused set of thumbnails that were just a variety of facial features, in addition to my full body thumbnails. Providing a large amount of facial options for the art director gives you as the artist more room to push your designs, and make sure that you've explored a variety of directions.





ART DIRECTOR'S FINAL WORD

"Hollie has created a character with a fitting style for an illustrated book. The design has a lovely loose simplicity to it and the design is clear and to the point. There is no doubt this character is on an adventure. The textured brush marks are a nice touch which would translate nicely into the final printed form."



ANIMATION

CÉCILE CARRE

"Most important, for me, is that she is a believable character, with a real backstory"



THE ADVENTURER



THE ADVENTURER CREATIVE BRIEF

TO: CécileCarre@IllustrationArtist.com

FROM: KennyArtDirector@3dtotalFX.com

SUBJECT: NEW BRIEF Adventurer for Animated Feature Film



OVERVIEW

This character is a young South American woman filled with a spirit to discover new places and learn new things. Suddenly orphaned and forced to leave home, she travels to strange, remote lands, often finding herself in testing situations that she must save herself from. During her adventures she takes on numerous disguises to blend in

with her surroundings and new communities (this is both for fun and out of practical necessity for going unnoticed in dangerous areas). She is a strong, agile fighter and has a cunning wit which helps her to escape difficult situations. She travels with her affectionate pet, a small lizard (non-speaking), who provides her with companionship.

PERSONALITY

- Independent
- Organized
- Strong-willed
- Open-minded
- Calm
- Bold
- Practical

APPEARANCE

- This character has a clean, well-kept appearance and is dressed in practical attire for traveling. She carries camping equipment and supplies with her, as she loves to sleep under the stars.
- She has not forgotten her South American roots, however, and keeps mementos of her home and family with her at all times.
- This character is in her early twenties and is around 5ft 3in in height. She has long dark hair, her build is slim but strong, and she has an open and friendly face. She has large green eyes and her earlobes are pierced with small gold hoops.
- This character wears different disguises, so your final delivery should include concepts for accessories or design variations.

ART DIRECTOR'S NOTES

- She will start a bit unsure and unworldly, but as she experiences new places and challenges she will gain confidence.
- Her main costume should be practical and functional - but also trendy and current!
- The costume should reflect her personality and her adventures. She will adopt her costume along the way while also having an iconic outfit which is uniquely hers.
- Locations will change a lot. Let's create accessories for arctic, jungle, and desert. The location colors will affect her design - they all must work in each situation.
- There will be at least three costume changes when she is in disguise - let's explore this!
- We will need to see her pet and how she carries it and interacts with it. It could sit on her shoulder? Or something more original?

TECHNICAL BRIEF

INDUSTRY: ANIMATED FEATURE FILM

AUDIENCE

This project is intended for a family audience and therefore children, parents, and grandparents alike should find the character charismatic and inspiring. Take the target audience into consideration when designing - it can have some darker themes but overall the style should be family friendly.

TECHNICAL SPEC

- Full 120-minute feature film
- There should be a "hero" pose and a back three-quarter view, as well as some expressions and poses exploring her personality and her in action
- This character is the main protagonist and will be on screen for approximately 70% of the film
- Full 3D stylized animation (along the lines of *The Incredibles*/ *Tangled*)

ARTIST'S INITIAL NOTES

MIND MAP

Practical
Open-minded Organized
Calm Cunning Strong-willed

Sense of being trendy and current

Clean, well-kept

Practical traveling attire
(camping supplies)

Early twenties, 5ft 3in

Long dark hair

Strong, agile fighter

South American roots
(mementos of home)

Earlobes pierced,
small gold hoops

PERSONALITY

Open, friendly face,
large green eyes

APPEARANCE

Different disguises
(accessories or variations
on your design)

Pet, a small lizard

THE ADVENTURER

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

Full 3D stylized animation

Family audience inc. children,
parents, and grandparents

INITIAL IDEAS

A dreamer deep
down? Idealist?

Accessories typical
of a South American
family - necklace?
Scarf? Wristband?

CHARACTER DESIGN PLAN

How will I help drive the **narrative** in the character?

The main character must be charismatic and appealing. But an adventurer can't look too fragile or delicate! Her independent attitude and athletic physique will help. Her outfit must present key elements of an adventurer in a modern way (let's not fall into the old "Indiana Jones" cliché). Practical, neutral clothes that don't draw attention when she travels (sensible sport shoes or boots, neutral colors like khaki, jeans...). Her South American roots must be visible in her features, and in (at least) one accessory that reminds her of her family. I'll give her something typical from her hometown - a pendant dream catcher, colorful headband, braided bracelet, or suchlike. Something to symbolize a promise she made to herself or a dream.

How will I make the character suitable for the intended **audience**?

For a family audience, she must have an appealing Disney-Pixar look - not too realistic, with strong shapes, a recognizable silhouette, and a very expressive face. Most important, for me, is that she is a believable

character, with a real backstory that will make the audience connect with her. To achieve that, I must use some references from real life to make her a very specific character - not a random explorer, or a "Lara Croft."

How will I meet the **visual** requirements of the character?

The character will be on screen for 70% of the film, so I must keep the design very readable - a simple expressive silhouette and face with just enough details (not too loaded). I must also make sure she is recognizable in her different outfits (such as arctic, jungle, and desert) and keep the design and personality consistent.

What makes the above design traits suitable for the **media**?

As a young adventurer, she will have to adapt to different cultures and environments. She will meet various protagonists and will have to find solutions to escape from dangerous situations, using both her physical and social skills. There will be plenty of opportunities for action and emotion, with different types of dialog to please young people as well as adults.

IDEAS EXPLORATION

I want to make sure she is recognizable as a South American woman, so I gathered photo references to find inspiration for her features. I researched typical South American accessories that she could keep as a souvenir such as clothes, colorful fabrics, necklaces, and dream catchers.

RESEARCH



A modern twist

As part of my research, I looked at photographs of backpackers for ideas of modern outfits and accessories for this young traveler!

THUMBNAILED

1 Too slim

She looks very sporty and agile, and her hairstyle is reminiscent of her South American origins (braids, from Peru or Bolivia). She might be a little too thin.



2 Scouting

I like her "boy-scout" attitude, although she might not seem confident and experienced enough.



3 Attitude

I really like her determined attitude and the scarf in her hair (that might be a memento!). Not sure about the wide pants though, as they might be not trendy enough.



4 Too naive

I like the hairstyle and sunglasses. But with the shorts she almost looks like a tourist, and also a bit too naive.

5 All the gear

I like the puffy jacket and camping equipment (she should have some high-tech accessories).



6 Traditional hat

I like the hat that I took from a traditional outfit from Bolivia. But with this outfit and accessories, she looks like a tourist.



7 Front runner

I really like this one - the silhouette, face, and expression. The scarf and necklace could be some mementos.



8 Young face

I like the outfit style - simple, sportswear, but trendy enough. She looks a bit young, though.



9 Not trendy enough?

I really like the silhouette and face here. But I think the outfit is not trendy enough.

10 Too trendy!?

This one might be too trendy and not adventurous enough! But I like the cap, and the little dream catcher as an earring.

ARTIST'S SELF EVALUATION

Which thumbnails best drive the **narrative** in your character?

For me **No.1** is the one whose outfit best meets the narrative constraints for the character - she's sporty and trendy at the same time, with a very discreet touch of South American influence in the hairstyle (even though I could use more accessories to support that part).

Which are most suited to the intended **audience**?

No.3 is the most authentic and also the one who seem to have the strongest character. She is the one the audience is more likely to connect with. She looks smart and determined but with a friendly and amused expression that makes her appealing.

Which best meet the **visual** requirements of the character?

No.7 has a very clear, recognizable silhouette and accessories - the big mass of hair and the (colorful) scarf that she could wear differently according to the weather conditions. The body shape is original but simple and appealing.

Which best meet the needs of the **media**?

Again, **No.7** is the best for the media because of the clear and simple silhouette and the strong, recognizable features and accessories.

THE INITIAL SUBMISSION

As well as cleaning up my favorite three thumbnails, I made changes to some degree on each to bring them further in line with the brief. I decided to also send the art director my thumbnails as reference to see what else I had tried.

A Approachable and practical

I liked the sporty style from No.1 so I started from there and adjusted the proportions and expression to make her more appealing, friendly, and confident. I also changed the jacket and shoes to a more technical style, making her look more like a "professional" than a teenager.



B Added value

I really loved No.7 so I changed very little. I just polished the drawing a bit, and added some values and details to the backpack.



C Streamlined style

I liked the attitude of No.3 – friendly but very confident at the same time. However, but I wasn't too comfortable with the baggy pants and big skater shoes; she looked too much like a rebel. So I adjusted the look to give her straight jogging pants and lighter shoes for a slimmer silhouette and more modern look. I really like this new design.

PROCESS TIP

Costume change

In two of the three submissions, I revised parts of the costume. The costume communicates just as much to the audience as the face and pose, so it's important to find something that works early on in the process.

ART DIRECTOR'S FEEDBACK

TO: CécileCarre@IllustrationArtist.com

FROM: KennyArtDirector@3dtotalFX.com

SUBJECT: INITIAL FEEDBACK: *Adventurer for Animated Film*

FACE & EXPRESSION

I'm particularly drawn to thumbnails **No.4** and **5** - I feel they capture that "openness" and "friendliness" in the face well, while not detracting from her athleticism and independence! Moving forward, it would be good to see more of that friendly attitude coming through. I think the face of **No.4** is along the right lines and the hair of **No.5** is pretty cool.

COSTUME

I also like the costume of **No.5**, although I reckon the big jacket should be a variation on her outfit. For the bottom half, I think the leggings of **No.8** work well - they feel current and on-trend. Could maybe play around with the style and aim for an "activewear" vibe?

HEAD GEAR

The hat of thumbnail **No.10** is cool - again this could be part of her colder climate costume variation, along with the hat of thumbnail **No.6** for in the sun. I also think the headscarf of thumbnail **No.7** is a nice feature, so maybe play around with that further.

PROPS

The bag of thumbnail **No.4** feels about the right size stylistically to make a nice overall character design, but maybe add some rolled-up gear to it? The small satchel of thumbnail **No.6** could be a nice added element, giving some asymmetry and the "adventurer" vibe. The only thing missing here is her pet lizard - if it's small enough it could live in her satchel or perhaps the brim of her summer hat? Something to think about moving forward!

ARTIST'S NOTES

Face & Expression

- I need to keep in mind that she should show openness and friendliness in her attitude and expression.
- I will take these two thumbnails (**No.4** and **No.5**) as a starting point at least for the facial features.
- I will follow the suggestion to use sketch **No.4** for facial features and **No.5** for hairstyle (the braids).

Costume

- For the outfit, the big jacket and the leggings are a good basis - it shows some sportiveness and modernity in the same time.
- Keep an "active and on-trend" mood for the variations of her outfit (in hot and cold climates).

Head gear

- I will use the hat from sketch **No.10** for the colder climate outfit.
- For the sun, I think I would rather go in the direction of **No.7**, since the scarf could be a symbol of her origins that's present on all the variations of her costume (in her hair for hot weather, around her neck for colder climate, and so on).

Props

- I will keep the idea of a backpack, not too big but with clear details that show she often camps outside (like the rolled-up gear from **No.5**, **7**, and **8**).
- Another prop she can always have is the satchel from **No.5**. I like the idea that it is also her lizard's house!

DESIGN TIP

Constant reminder

A prop such as the scarf can be used in different ways to act as continuous reminder of a character's background.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Using the Art director's feedback, plus my notes, I develop the character further through pose, facial expressions, value and color, and various costume and props.

POSES

Three-quarter pose

This could be the three-quarter hero pose that establishes the character. It displays her friendliness and openness very clearly. She wears her summer outfit with her colorful scarf around her neck, and her relationship with the pet lizard is established.



In action

She often goes running, wearing her headphones and leggings, as part of her training to stay in good shape for any eventuality. Even when exercising, she is never separated from her lucky charm necklace - a dream catcher from her grandma.



Cold climate

She is not afraid of facing very cold climates, as she is very well equipped with modern high-tech clothing. We can imagine her hiking and discovering beautiful landscapes in this pose.



Interaction

Here she is having a break with her small lizard, opening her satchel to let him out for some fresh air. It's an effective way to see her interacting with another character.

FACIAL EXPRESSIONS

Enthused

She is inherently a very enthusiastic character, and is amazed at the variety of spectacles nature can offer. Her adventures ensure a steady supply of these delights.



Surprised

She has seen danger coming, and we can easily read both surprise and fear in her expression. However, this character knows what to do in this kind of situation!

DESIGN TIP

Facial extremes

Each of these expressions puts the facial features to work, moving the brows, eyes, mouths and chin to give an accurate idea of how flexible and versatile this design is.

Angered

Here she is clearly annoyed by something. In our character's world, she has probably witnessed some kind of injustice and will have to intervene.



VALUE & COLOR

The lighter value of green eyes contrasts with the dark hair

Dark hair and skin suggested by heritage

Pants mid-toned, to be pastel or bright

Lighter toned top allows scarf around neck to pop

Value

Since she is from South America, I want her to have a rich dark skin, with almost black hair. To contrast with this, I will have her wear some pastel or vivid colors that also reflect her origins and enthusiastic nature.



Soft and bright palette

Here she wears a green shorts with a white tank top, and a very colorful scarf featuring the traditional colors of South America. I really like the contrast between the natural colors of her outfit and the vivid colors of her scarf. Also, the white of her top complements the warm brown of her skin.



Textile message

Although the denim textile has the same relaxed, robust feel as the khaki green shorts, the sense of travel and adventure that khaki communicates, and her credibility as a seasoned traveler is lost.

DESIGN TIP

Skin tones

We lose some of her distinctive South American roots with the paler complexion - something that was a key part of the brief.



Inverted palette

I inverted the color of her top and shorts, but I don't like the result that much. I think the scarf doesn't stand out clearly enough, although the purple on the tips of the scarf and on the shoes really help each other to pop.

COSTUME & PROPS

Cold conditions

This would be her cold mountain outfit - a snug woolen hat, faux fur coat, and large moon boots. A pair of hiking sticks further emphasizes the activity of an all-terrain adventure, and could be used for other things on her adventures.



Warm weather

Her summer outfit is tailored toward warm weather, while sunglasses are also a useful disguise. The scarf worn on her head is the same one she keeps as a memento of her homeland. Flip-flops suggest more even terrain - maybe a town or village.



Casual incognito

This is her more regular outfit in which she feels confident and comfortable. In leggings and a hoodie she can adapt to a lot of situations and stay agile, while keeping a low profile. It's also an outfit that much of the audience will easily relate to.



Lizard sidekick

The lizard companion travels in her satchel, so is never far away when she needs companionship. It looks as if he could easily pop his head out of the bag at any time.

ARTIST'S EVALUATION OF DEVELOPMENT

How has the narrative of your character developed?

I think we can read in her expressions and attitude that she is an adventurous, optimistic woman, who can be amazed by a lot of things. However she is also sensible, calm, and serious enough to maintain her lifestyle. She is fit and healthy, and can readily adapt to a number of situations.

How have you developed the bond with the intended audience?

I think details about her origins can really help to make her appealing and relatable to any audience. Her colorful scarf with South American patterns, and dream-catcher necklace allow us to see her background at all times. The very modern outfits she wears also helps the connection with the audience. The sports shoes, leggings, and padded jacket will be familiar to the audience and give her more credibility.

Which aspects revealed visual developments of the character?

She has a very recognizable silhouette with her two black braids, and her big green eyes are striking and unusual. Accessories such as the colorful scarf and satchel would be with her throughout the film and give her a consistent, strong visual identity.

How has the character developed for the intended media?

I tried to keep a good balance between an appealing and expressive design and avoiding anything too stereotypical. The multiple outfit variations make her adaptable to any kind of environment she encounters throughout the film, while helping her retain her identity. This also makes her a more realistic character with whom the audience can connect.

THE FINAL PRESENTATION

HERO POSE

For the final presentation, I chose the first color version with the white top and green shorts. This is a good balance that maintains a high level of contrast and harmony (desaturated colors for the outfit and saturated colors for the scarf). The khaki shorts are a good color code for adventure, sport, and nature!



TURNAROUNDS



Front

I chose a very simple standing pose for the turnarounds, and used the summer outfit to help us best understand the volumes and proportion of her anatomy.



Three-quarter front

Animation calls for the character to be seen from several angles. We begin to get a better idea of the structure of her face and the strength of the legs.



Profile

In profile, our character has distinctive features that make her unique and memorable. Knitted at the back, the scarf around her neck adds to the overall profile, the knotted flash of color revealed by her braided hair.



POSES

Low-profile training

As she would rather keep a low profile, a discrete palette of black and white doesn't draw attention so is the best choice when training in a city environment. The bright red and pink accessories add a dynamic, relatable edge, enforcing the idea of her being a trendy and high-tech character.



Serious hiker

Again, the vivid color used for the padded jacket sells the idea that she takes her activities seriously and uses high-quality, technical apparel. She wears the same black leggings, and I chose cooler, more receding colors for her backpack and hat that contrast well with the jacket. The white of her sweater makes her tanned skin stand out.



Color contrasts

I like how the purple contrasts with her green eyes; it is also a color that adds a sense of warmth and intimacy for me, very appropriate for these kinds of moments when she is alone with her lizard pet.



FACIAL EXPRESSIONS

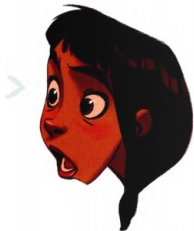


Personality and polish

The original sketch I did was a very true reflection of the character's personality, so I just made a cleaner drawing and applied the correct colors to it.

Stretch and volume

I use the shadows and highlights to give a better understanding of the volumes and contours of her face. This expression also shows how much I can stretch her face to allow for a variety of expressions.



Squash and intensity

The red on her cheeks can be used to emphasize the intensity of an emotion. Here, the red sits in two bold stripes to help communicate anger. This expression also shows how much I can squash her face, so the art director has a sense of both the stretch and squash for dynamic range.

ARTIST'S FINAL EVALUATIONS

My initial thoughts

I love drawing feminine characters so I was very happy with the brief. Also she has a nice, strong personality that makes you want to draw a very appealing and memorable character, although it is not easy to stay away from the stereotypes.

How the media affected my approach

Because she is a very actual character, I needed to find some very actual references, particularly for the clothes (finding some specific elements or props that the audience could identify and connect with), to really feel that she is part of our world in our present and not in a kind of disconnected imaginary world.



Similar characters in my portfolio

I really like drawing young female characters in my personal work. And most of the time I try to let them have this kind of strong and confident personality so I confess I was in my comfort zone with this. But the new part was the specificity of this character - her origins, and the fact that she is very real (I tend to work on more fantastic characters).

The easiest part of the brief...

I love working on expressions and attitudes so that part was the simplest, particularly with such an easy character - in terms of her anatomy she is very classic.

...and most challenging part

The most challenging part for me is always in finding good references. It is possibly the most important step when working on a character design, because it is the specificity of the references you will use that will tell the backstory of your character and her personality. You have to help the audience to set the character in the right place, at the right time, with the right tone. And unfortunately I tend to be too lazy on that step and too much in a hurry to draw. But character design is storytelling, and storytelling is so much more than visual!

The influence of the intended audience

Because the movie is intended to a wide audience, I need references that will touch this wide audience, so they need to be recognizable and obvious enough for all ages. But if it's too obvious I risk falling into the cliché of the stereotype, and being disconnected from the audience as much as if I am too specific. So the goal is to find the right balance between specificity and stereotype.

If I could start this character again

Now all that said, I think that I didn't spend enough time on the research for references, and that my character could have had more specific facial features. Right now I can barely notice the South American influence on the design. Thankfully there are the accessories! But if I knew the South American culture better, I think I could have thought of more unusual accessories than a colorful scarf and a dream catcher!

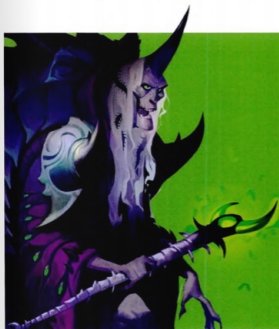
"The goal is to find the right balance between specificity and stereotype"



ART DIRECTOR'S FINAL WORD

"Cecile's design oozes charm and appeal, successfully conveying our character. The design of the adventurer's face allows for plenty of emotion and animation, which is essential to the character and the narrative. It's easy to imagine this design translating into a high-end 3D feature, and this character going on some epic adventures!"

THE WIZARD



VIDEO GAMES

DEVON CADY-LEE

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ILLUSTRATION

HOLLIE MENGERT

PAGE 138



ANIMATION

CÉCILE CARRE

PAGE 156



VIDEO GAMES

DEVON CADY-LEE

"His transformational state should have a dramatic impact on how threatening he appears"



THE WIZARD



THE WIZARD CREATIVE BRIEF

TO: DevonCody-Lee@IllustrationArtist.com
FROM: KennyArtDirector@3dtotalFX.com
SUBJECT: NEW BRIEF Wizard for Video Game



OVERVIEW

This character is the villain in the project and it should be clear from the outset through his appearance, movements, and expression that he is a sinister character who cannot be trusted under any circumstances. It is part of the narrative of this project that the

character has a limp and therefore needs a cane to assist his walking; this cane will double as a magical staff at the climax of the narrative. The wizard's presence should create a creeping, uneasy feeling in the audience.

ART DIRECTOR'S NOTES

- Our wizard character attacks the player with powerful dark magic!
- He will have two states: full magic and "recharging." We need to explore how he looks in these two states - perhaps in one he looks like a normal old man; the other, more visibly powerful, glowing eyes, can levitate and so on. (When he is in his recharging state, the player can best inflict damage on him!)
- This character is the final boss and the design should reflect that - he must feel indestructible and dangerous! The wizard should also have a weak point (his leg?), which the player needs to attack.
- Visually he should read as a "wizard," however let's see if there is a way to bring something unique to the trope. This might be achieved through his costume, ethnicity, or something else.

PERSONALITY

- Deceptive
- Arrogant
- Conniving
- Easily angered
- Sneaky
- Smart

APPEARANCE

- The character should be dressed in purple.
- He has an ancient and wizened appearance, with many wrinkles and hair sprouting from his ears.
- He should be slightly stooped in posture. He walks with a limp so there should be some suggestion of leg deformity or damage and you should include the walking cane/magic staff in your design.
- He has dark shadows around his eyes and stained, wonky teeth.

TECHNICAL BRIEF

INDUSTRY: VIDEO GAME

AUDIENCE

Teenage and adult audience (12 years+)

TECHNICAL SPEC

- Fun 3D action platform game for next-generation consoles
- Stylistically channeling a Ratchet & Clank/Earthworm Jim vibe - also the fantasy art of Laurel D. Austin
- Single player/multiplayer
- Would like a "hero" pose and back views, plus some poses and exploration of his two different power states

ARTIST'S INITIAL NOTES

MIND MAP



CHARACTER DESIGN PLAN

How will I help drive the **narrative** in the character?

An inherent part of this character is his deceptive nature. I'd like to push this concept to see how it changes his silhouette, maybe giving him an entirely different anatomy. Since he uses dark magic of some kind, I was thinking it would be something that might mutate or change the wizard into his final form.

How will I make the character suitable for the intended **audience**?

The cited inspirations are stylized games, which will be fun to play with. A wider range of expression and exoggeration is available to me. However, since this game is for next-gen consoles, I'd also like to experiment with detailed textures and lighting.

How will I meet the **visual** requirements of the character?

Giving him a staff will help identify him as a wizard, which I think may be a good candidate for the "weak spot" - the source of power he needs. His transformational state should have a dramatic impact on how threatening he appears, but he must also seem at least a little threatening pre-transformation as well.

What makes the above design traits suitable for the **media**?

The fun thing about video game bosses is that you can give them really fun expressions, gimmicks, and special effects, since video games are often given a bigger budget and longer time frame to produce. Serving as a type of finale, and performing on next-gen consoles, I don't feel constrained by normal considerations for game art. My job is to inspire something really fun and challenging for the players.

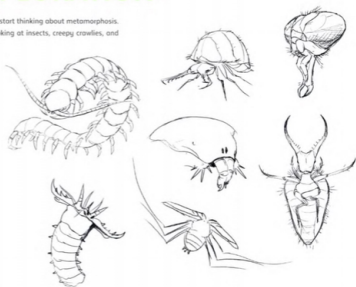
IDEAS EXPLORATION

When I think about transformation, I start thinking about metamorphosis. This sets me on the path to start looking at insects, creepy crawlies, and other invertebrates for inspiration.

RESEARCH

Deceptive critters

Since "deception" is a theme from the brief, I studied invertebrates that tend to trap, poison, or ambush their prey. Some of the designs are from antlions, bobbit worms, and centipedes.



THUMBNAILED



1 All in the eye

Since I'm not beholden to realism, I want to see what sort of distortion I could get away with. I like the drama of his hair covering one eye.

2 Moving mustache

This guy seems more dastardly with his gross centipede mustache. Looking at him, the narrowness of his shoulders implies he has a smaller body.



3 Pinching pain

Pincers are growing out of this guy's head! Maybe his hair is so long and unkempt that it covers his eyes until his final reveal.



PROCESS TIP

Focus on personality

Most of my thumbnails are devoted to capturing the character's face. Even at this early stage, I know I want all of the personality traits to be captured in his caricature. I also spent some time thinking about his transformation.



4 Goofy but grim

This guy might be a little goofy looking, but I do like the stylization of his hair and the growths he has coming out of his forehead.



5 Extreme profile

My favorite head of the bunch! In profile I really like the way in which the ridge of his nose sticks out so far, and his eyes feel really sunken.

Hunched...



Transforms...



True form
(mutated by
dark magic)

6 Transformation overview

I wanted to start thinking about his transformation early, changing his silhouette dramatically.

ARTIST'S SELF EVALUATION

Which thumbnails best drive the **narrative** in your character?

The expression on **No.5** is my favorite and the most appealing to me - I can more easily imagine how this face would express itself. Thumbnail **No.6** illustrating his transformation is directly addressing his narrative from a vulnerable looking, hunched figure, into a monster.

Which are most suited to the intended **audience**?

I think teenagers appreciate a certain level of seriousness in their art style, and **No.3** has the most narrative to it. Adults will appreciate some stylistic callbacks to the 90s when they played their favorite boss battle games.

Which best meet the **visual** requirements of the character?

I think **No.5** and **No.6** are strong candidates for what could end up being this character. His transformation thumbnail illustrates how his posture and silhouette can change dramatically for his final confrontation.

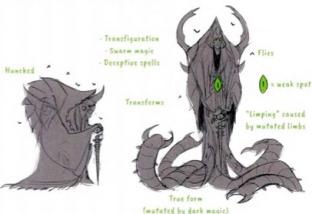
Which best meet the needs of the **media**?

The thumbnail that explains the wizard's transformation hits the major concerns I have for this character visually. Figuring out the extent of change from one extreme to the other shows other developers the technical hurdles that are possible.

"Adults will appreciate some stylistic callbacks to the 90s when they played their favorite boss battle games"

THE INITIAL SUBMISSION

I felt it was necessary to include a pitch for the wizard's transformation at this early stage. It shows what kind of magic he has, how he "deceives" the player, and it also manages expectations of how much work will be needed to complete the character.



A Sharp shapes

Because of the appealing triangular shapes and expressive potential, I had to include this one in the submission. His crooked shaped mouth is growing on me.

B Vile but different body

The centipede-stache made it in because I think he's the vile and conniving one in this group. However, if this one is picked I might try a different body silhouette for him.



C Abstract view

I had to include this more exaggerated portrait to offer a style that went even further into abstraction. I still think his forehead growths are a very cool detail.

ART DIRECTOR'S FEEDBACK

TO: DevonCady-Lee@IllustrationArtist.com
FROM: KennyArtDirector@3dtotalFX.com
SUBJECT: INITIAL FEEDBACK Wizard for Video Game

TRANSFORMATION

Really cool ideas here - I like the original take on the concept. I think the transformation could be clearer as in a greater contrast between the two states - him hunched and then powered up. For visual clarity, turn up the hunch factor! Also, let's push the wizard's silhouette into full magic mode and emphasize those spiky bits? I like how he could maybe roll up into his hunched form, similar to a scorpion's tail curling up, or a hedgehog rolling into a ball.

LIMP AND STAFF

I would double check the brief and make sure we are hitting the key descriptive points - however, I think your interpretation of the limp is a good one! I like the creepy-crawly influences and I can imagine this guy being a great boss in a game. Perhaps, though, in full magic mode he can use his staff more like wielding it rather than as a cane. I imagine he can only sustain this form for a short period.

HEAD

The heads are cool - I really like **No.5**. I would continue in this direction - but again maybe with a bigger contrast in the head between the before and after? Worth exploring that more. Perhaps his hood is up in his hunched mode? I like the back of the head design on **No.3**. I wonder if those insect horns sprout when he is in full magic mode? The flies are great - they will add a lot of visual cool factor!

COLOR

Moving forward it will be interesting to see how you use color to emphasize the two states. It will also need to be used to suggest the dark magic.

ARTIST'S NOTES

Transformation

- Push transformation to create more contrast between the two silhouettes to for extra impact and drama.
- Emphasize the spikes further - both me and the art director like the spikes a lot.
- Carapace-like protective body should look as if it can coil and curl up.

Limp and staff

- Emphasize the importance of his cane to lean on for support, pre-transformation.
- Push the invertebrate predator theme further.
- Include poses where, when transformed, he is wielding the staff like a wand to show how this key action would look.

Head

- Add transforming details to the face or head area.
- Explore further the hood design of the cloak.
- Incorporate the flies circling the head into magic spell casting.

Color

- Include some color changes for each of the two transformation states.
- Find a color that contrasts effectively with his very dark and purple palette.
- The introduction of color could be an indication to the player of his magic intensifying.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

I will now take forward the art director's feedback, and my own notes, to explore the character further through pose, facial expressions, value and color, and costume and props.

POSES

Pre-transformation

It was necessary to show what his pose would look like pre-transformation. I imagine that his robe covers much of his body but his limbs could actually be long and lanky.



Attack mode

I wanted a profile shot of what it would look like when he attacked the player with magic. In this instance he could be firing a magic bolt or sending his creepy-crawly minions to attack.

Spiral effect

In this pose I tried to draw the wizard channeling his power into his staff, maybe for a charged attack against the player. I use the twisting nature of the centipedes to give it a spiraling feel.



FACIAL EXPRESSIONS



Focus on the mouth

Every arrogant villain needs a good evil laugh! Pulling up the corners of his lips makes his terrifyingly large mouth more apparent and really showcases his bad teeth.

DESIGN TIP

Shocking effect

Because the proportions of the wizard's face are based on reality, the extra wide, super-stretched open mouth is all the more horrifying.

Anger

I imagined a scenario where something didn't go his way, so he becomes both surprised and angry. Imagining what the character might say in that moment helps sculpt the shape of his mouth.



Tension rising

I imagine this could be the face he makes when he is on the tipping point of being angered. I try to express tension in his teeth and squinting brow.

VALUE & COLOR

Value

I am really starting to clarify the tentacle shapes and shadows, and how they could move in space. Also, I like the idea that his anatomy is still obscured and kept in the dark by his robes.

The shapes and shadows of the tentacles add drama and weight



The lighter hair and shoulders draw the viewer's eye toward the face

The staff appears light against the darkness of the robes



Scarlet tentacles

This version is more highly saturated than the other two examples. I was referring to some intensely red centipedes that appear in nature for the tentacles.

Deathly decomposition

I think this green makes him feel sickly. This color scheme almost feels necrotic and might imply that he is more of a necromancer, communicating with the dead.



Cold extremities

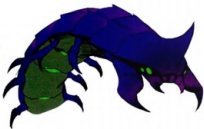
This scheme is cooler in color overall, but it does bring attention to his head better by providing an isolated area of bright purple.



COSTUME & PROPS

Supersized centipedes

The swarming giant centipedes that grow out from beneath the wizard's cloak add movement and detail to the transformed silhouette. I want them to feel threatening and predatory.



Simplified staff

I tried to make the wizard's staff feel organic, as if it was once a creature, or at least part of a creature. I ended up with a simpler design than planned to ensure it's still readable as part of the game.



Sinister jewelry

The aim of the jewelry is for it to feel a little bit like insect eggs. These may not be visible unless he opens up his robe and reveals his chest to the player somehow. Could this be his potential weak spot?

ARTIST'S EVALUATION OF DEVELOPMENT

How has the **narrative** of your character developed?

I like how his magic theme is fitting the character. There's not much creepier than swarming bugs. Revealing this character should be akin to rolling over a log to uncover all of the creepy crawlies hiding under it! I like that the wizard's magic has a physical effect on his body, it is more dramatic for me than just FX.

How have you developed the bond with the intended **audience**?

Grossly detailed things appeal more to teens than younger children, while his exaggerated features still make him somewhat humorous and charismatic. I want to evoke a classic evil mage character for older audiences.

Which aspects revealed **visual** developments of the character?

I understand how the wizard can interact with his centipede tentacles. They ended up appearing as if they had their own watchdog-like sentience, which I think works well for being creepy. I can use them to accentuate dramatic, twisting movements in his poses.

How has the character developed for the intended **media**?

I can already imagine how his dark magic and biting tentacles could provide gameplay potential for the designers. Players would have to dodge the tentacle attacks while interrupting the wizard's cast animation so he doesn't have a chance to fire magic spells from his staff.

THE FINAL PRESENTATION

HERO POSE

I spent extra time rendering the texture details on the front view. Since this character is mainly one single color, layering can be expressed through contrasts in texture.



TURNAROUNDS



Front

I felt as if there needed to be at least one view from head-on, just to make sense of what's going on under his big, gross robe. This will help the designers understand how the volume of the figure is formed, and how the robe might move.



PROCESS TIP

What lies beneath

The bug tentacles can be seen clearly in the hero pose, so I cut them off in the front and back turnarounds so as not to obstruct the view of the other costume details.



Three-quarter back

The back view also offered a chance to point in the texture details of his costume that aren't visible in other views.

Back

Call-outs like these are useful for the production artist to refer to when creating assets. They can trace this image directly and use it as a template for their 3D model.



POSES

Pre-reveal

This pose shows the character as he is before transforming into his final form. He leans heavily on his staff with a grin on his face. In this phase he has no monstrous centipedes writhing around and his spikes are much smaller.



Post-reveal

Now transformed, centipede-like streaks of magic show that he's channeling his power. Maybe his weak spot is actually his necklace, and his staff is merely a diversion.

Casting magic

For this cast animation, I wanted to give him a really evil smile, as if he can't wait to use his transformed power. The spiraling of his magic FX is designed to be similar to his twisting tentacles.



FACIAL EXPRESSIONS

Bright eye

The bright green really emphasizes his popped eye. In this expression he looks as if he might have just snapped and is about to react! The hair obscuring some of our view of the face ensures we can't see exactly how he is feeling - yet.



Mixed reaction

This is a complex expression. Parts of his face, such as his eyes and mouth, are opening in surprise, but I still want to show tension in his brow and lip shape to convey his anger.



Evil laughter

When he pulls his jaw down to laugh, it stretches the skin taut against his neck where the tendons strain, and contracts his cheeks. This makes him appear especially ghoulish.



DESIGN TIP

Tooth decay

Now that color has been added, we can work out exactly what his teeth will look like. The dirty gray has little contrast with the other colors in the face - the opposite of the pearly whites we are so used to seeing on our heroes!

ARTIST'S FINAL EVALUATIONS

My initial thoughts

The first thing I tried to imagine were the possibilities of his magic and what he could do. I wanted it to feel like it fit him thematically. Swarming creepy crawlies could mean he's cold and calculating like an insect, or that he has a powerful need to consume. It has attributes of both proliferation and consumption.

How the media affected my approach

As a boss character I tried to go all out with this design and not worry too much about the complexities of rigging at this point. This would be a challenging character to animate, but would make for an impressive adversary and could also headline in a cinematic trailer. This level of detail and lighting will take advantage of next-gen console graphics.

Similar characters in my portfolio

I have designed similar characters before, maybe with tentacles or magic. However, they usually did not get the budget of a final boss, which allows for more freedom. I needed to make sure this character still felt like a magic character and not too alien or sci-fi.

The easiest part of the brief...

The easiest part to nail ended up being the personality of the character and coming up with different expressions for him. I was fortunate enough to have a clear idea of the type of villain I wanted and his description helped a lot to inform my designs.

...and most challenging part

The most challenging part was organizing the details against the shapes. I wanted a good amount of detail, but since he is relatively monochromatic I needed to find small spots to sneak in color or texture changes, which were crucial to make him more readable. In a sense I wanted him to feel amorphous and shape-changing, but it still had to be clear for the other designers to make use of my work.

The influence of the intended audience

Making work for teens and adults, I don't have to worry so much about scaring them. There are certain images and levels of detail that would be disturbing for a very young audience, but that wasn't an issue here. I was able to make some pretty gross drawings!

If I could start this character again

I think I would reduce the number of appendages he has. Maybe three, or even just two, tentacles? It would have been better if I organized his shapes from the beginning, rather than figuring it out as I went along.



“As a boss character I tried to go all out with this design and not worry too much about the complexities of rigging...”



ART DIRECTOR'S FINAL WORD

"Have to love this original take on the brief, the insect influence really conveying this character's creepiness to create an awesome game boss. Devon's rendering is perfect for visualizing how the wizard will look when fully realized in 3D, the colors and details enhancing the character's nature. Love the glowing green bugs circling him!"



ILLUSTRATION

HOLLIE MENGERT

"The books are for an older audience so I want him to be less stylized than usual"



THE WIZARD



TO: HollieMenger@IllustrationArtist.com

FROM: KennyArtDirector@3dtotalFX.com

SUBJECT: NEW BRIEF Wizard for Book Illustration



OVERVIEW

This character is the villain in the project and it should be clear from his appearance, movements, and expression that he is a sinister character who cannot be trusted. It is part of the narrative of this project that the character has a limp and therefore needs a cane

to assist his walking; this cane will double as a magical staff at the climax of the narrative. His presence should create a creeping, uneasy feeling in the audience.

PERSONALITY

- Deceptive
- Arrogant
- Conniving
- Easily angered
- Sneaky
- Smart

ART DIRECTOR'S NOTES

- The wizard's dominant color is purple - I would like to see a couple of options of suitable accent colors that will suit his character description but also bring something unique to him.

APPEARANCE

- This character should be dressed in purple.
- He has an ancient and wizened appearance, with many wrinkles and hair sprouting from his ears.
- He should be slightly stooped in posture. He walks with a limp so there should be some suggestion of leg deformity or damage and you should include the walking cane/magic staff in your design.
- He has dark shadows around his eyes and stained, wonky teeth.

**"His presence
should create a
creeping, uneasy
feeling in the
audience"**

TECHNICAL BRIEF

INDUSTRY: ILLUSTRATED BOOK PUBLISHING

AUDIENCE

This project is intended for a teenage and adult audience (12 years+)

TECHNICAL SPEC

- 300 pages long, 25 x 20 cm
- This is a fantasy novel with an illustrated cover and chapter pages throughout
- This is a one-off book and not part of a series
- Our wizard character is the main villain and will appear on the cover, and on four of ten chapter pages
- We are aiming for a fantasy style, reminiscent of Claire Wendling/Alan Lee
- The level of detail in the design can be complex given the illustrated nature of the book
- The internal drawings will be black line art, while the cover will be painted in full color - the design should work well in both forms
- Would like to see some interesting and relevant poses of the character, casting magic, in repose, angry!

ARTIST'S INITIAL NOTES

MIND MAP



CHARACTER DESIGN PLAN

How will I help drive the **narrative** in the character?

The most important thing to communicate is that this is a villain, with the sense of unease that the art director asked for. I will keep my shapes sharp and crisp, and the face gaunt and spooky. My biggest challenge will be to make this character threatening, while aged and stooped. When I play with my thumbnails I will try a number of statures and body proportions that make him seem unfriendly and secretive, in addition to being old.

How will I make the character suitable for the intended **audience**?

The books are for an older audience so I want him to be less stylized than usual. He must be taken seriously by the readers and feel threatening to the main character. I will avoid large eyes, oversized heads, and extremely bright colors i.e. things that make illustrated children's books friendly.

How will I meet the **visual** requirements of the character?

I want to keep some of the details of my rough line work, and keep my shapes very sharp as opposed to round and friendly. He should have very little softness and a dark value scheme. The brief has requested that a lot of his palette should be purple. Keeping this in mind, I'll make his colors

desaturated, with shadowy earth-tone accents. We can also play up his level of detail. In very stylized characters, details like nostrils, facial creases, and under-eye circles can make them unappealing. But, for an older villain these types of facial nuances are exactly what we want to exaggerate.

What makes the above design traits suitable for the **media**?

As the wizard will only be used for the cover and in black-and-white sketched chapter openers, it is okay to get slightly more complicated with his color scheme as it won't need to be repeated often. Details like small patterns and clothing folds will be a great addition to this character.

DESIGN TIP

Animal inspiration

Sometimes when I want human characters to seem eerie, I try to think outside the box about design elements to use. The wizard could appear owl-like; owls have an aged look and piercing gaze. Playing with a beaky nose and prominent brows may give more of a unique look to the wizard than if we were only to draw on people for inspiration.

IDEAS EXPLORATION

I don't want to get too caught up in exploring facial features yet, but I do want to have a better understanding of where the folds are on an aged male character's face. Since I don't have much experience in designing bearded characters, I took the opportunity to study the way beards grow, and the variety of shapes that they have.

RESEARCH

Aging skin

Researching wrinkle patterns and formation will be important later when we are trying to make this character look old.



THUMBNAILS

1 Simple start

My first thumbnail is a little too stylized for the audience of this character. However, I enjoy his simplified cloak shape.



2 Facial shape

This looks more appropriately hunched for the description in the brief. But I feel like his rounded facial features do not quite look villainous enough.



3 Forming character

I feel like this thumbnail is finally headed in the right direction. He looks formidable and capable of defending himself.

4 Posture

Although this figure isn't properly hunched like the description, I think his shape could be worked into something more interesting in the long run.



DESIGN TIP

Assessing silhouettes

Sometimes when I am looking at thumbnails, I evaluate them by looking at them at a very small size to assess the silhouettes more clearly.



5 Throwaway

This is what I call a throwaway sketch! It came out of my pencil and was worth trying, but it is not near close enough to the brief to consider developing further.



6 Covered up

This thumbnail starts to border more on the vampire side. He is overly covered; if we were to show him to the art director we might do it in a different pose that showed more of his anatomy shapes and inner outfit.

7 Limiting posture

The posture here feels nice and crooked. However, his hunch is so extreme that he may be hard to pose in a variety of ways that seem threatening.



8 The right direction

There's something I find spooky about this thumbnail. Since unsettling is what we're going for, I think he's a great option to clean up and show to the art director.



PROCESS TIP

Testing ideas early

The thumbnails really helped me to explore visual options that work and don't work. This way I can start to hone in my ideas without going crazy attempting a variety of proportions and facial features.

ARTIST'S SELF-EVALUATION

Which thumbnails best drive the **narrative** in your character?

I think **No. 4** and **No. 8** are the best options for a character that is both spooky and able to be a threat to the hero of our story. We want a villain that can also carry a narrative.

Which are most suited to the intended **audience**?

No. 8 seems the most adult to me, in terms of having realistic proportions. We want to put a villain on the cover of this book that won't skew too far to a young audience, and will tell the viewer that danger awaits inside the book. **No. 8** with a few more studies and some enhanced details seems capable of being a good fit for the design brief.

Which best meet the **visual** requirements of the character?

No. 7 and **No. 8** are the most hunched, as described in the brief. We don't want to show the art director anything too at-odds with the artistic brief

that we've been given. However, work could be done on thumbnails **No. 3** and **No. 4** to exaggerate their hunch and proportions, to make them closer to our visual target.

Which best meet the needs of **media**?

There is such a range of characters to be found in books that any of the above thumbnails might work. However, for our brief I feel that **No. 4** and **No. 8** would be the most eye-catching in terms of silhouette. This tells me immediately what's reading well. If a design doesn't stand out from a distance, then the odds are that it's not the right design.

"We want a villain that can also carry a narrative"

THE INITIAL SUBMISSION

I've progressed and cleaned up my favorite three thumbnails as my initial submission to the art director for feedback.

A Adding drama

With some cloak adjustments to make his look more iconic, version **No.3** appears more detailed. His face is still fairly exaggerated in proportion and features. To add to his silhouette, I've added some trim around the top of his cloak. This is something that could be played up from multiple angles. I have kept his hair loose and messy, which will hopefully help him appear wilder and more threatening.



B Conveying character

The initial thumbnail (**No.4**) that this option is based on looked more military-related to me in terms of his costume. To make him more accurate to the brief I've given him a tattered cloak and long robes. In his value scheme I have given him white hair to show his age, but it is possible that this makes him more kind-looking than we might want.



PROCESS TIP

Considering value

Even at this early stage, prior to adding color, it is important to consider value as a key component in the narrative.

C All in the details

I gave option **No.8** more details underneath his cloak so that he didn't feel so blank in design. Little details like an eye belt buckle and a tunic give him more of a specific look than if his cloak was plainer. I'm hoping that the dark value scheme combined with his beady eyes will seem nice and spooky to our art director.



ART DIRECTOR'S FEEDBACK

TO: HollieMengert@IllustrationArtist.com
FROM: KennyArtDirector@3dtotalFX.com
SUBJECT: INITIAL FEEDBACK Wizard for Book Illustration

HEIGHT

I would play around with his height, in this case shortening him, I'm not sure being as tall as he is here is the right way to go for this narrative... The wizard's intimidation factor will come strongly from his acting, visual appearance, and magic, rather than his stature.

EYES

The pupil-less eyes could work (maybe he is blind but sees through magic?) but let's make sure the eyes are capable of being emotive still. At present, his eyes feel a bit too small and hard to read, so they need to be adopted to allow the reader to make eye-contact and read his mood.

STAFF

I think the staff of **No.2** is along the right lines but moving forward, let's make it much more iconic - it should look pretty awesome, intimidating, maybe gnarled, etc. - it should reflect his sinister nature. I like it being bigger than he is - if you were to shorten the character but keep the staff taller than him it could be an interesting contrast.

"The wizard's intimidation factor will come strongly from his acting, visual appearance, and magic..."

ARTIST'S NOTES

Height

- After the art director's notes here and looking at my three submitted thumbnails I realized that making the design shorter would also help exaggerate the character's hunch, which is a key trait.
- Moving forward I will make sure that the design I choose to work from feels shorter and more hunched.
- The brief mentioned that our character is old but didn't specify height, so it's absolutely worth trying a variety of heights before settling on a final design.

Eyes

- Great point! My thinking was that beady eyes would be concerning, but the art director is right in saying that they would have a hard time emoting.
- I want to move forward with aged light eyes that seem eerie, but that are also capable of expressing different emotions.

DESIGN TIP

Expressive eyes

Eyes are incredibly important to get right in a character as they are vital when drawing convincing expressions.

Staff

- Time to do more staff explorations! It needs to function as a cane but feel a little more special.
- Shortening the character and lengthening the staff will also make for a more dynamic silhouette.
- I want to keep away from the staff feeling too much like a walking stick.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

I will now take forward the art director's feedback, and my own notes, to explore the character further through pose, facial expressions, value and color, and costume and props.

POSES

Original pose

Our wizard has changed a lot from the original thumbnails. I have shortened him and made his proportions more realistic. This version is a standard sketch of our aged wizard, with a shifty expression.



In action

As this villain needs to feel threatening to the story, I created a powerful spell-casting moment. Here we can show our character as powerful and menacing.



DESIGN TIP

Important prop

Some props only appear at certain points in a story. Here, the staff is present from the beginning of the design process as a source of magic and stability.

In repose

This character is deceptive in nature, so I wanted to create a moment where he appears at rest. Maybe it's the moment before he summons his magical power.

FACIAL EXPRESSIONS

Creating intensity

I wanted to pick an expression of intensity for our villain character. He looks down at those around him, he is cunning and capable of harm and he knows it! I want to hammer home the intensity of his gaze by making sure that his whole iris shows.



Establishing the profile

I took an opportunity to show this character in profile. We want his hood to be a distinct shape, so that on the occasion that his face is covered, he would still be recognizable to the viewer.



Open expression

A moment of gleeful triumph. This is not a character the reader will want to see happy, but every villain has a moment of triumph (if only briefly).



VALUE & COLOR

Pale tone of face and hands will be the brightest values

Pale skin allows great contrast with dark staff and facial features

Value

Though every character needs different areas of contrast, I wanted to push the dark nature of the wizard in his value scheme.

The cape is lightened and defined with a paler trim



Organic palette

An earth-tone color palette seemed like an appropriate choice for this somber character. A desaturated reddish-purple fulfills the brief's request for a purple robe.

The inner cape from head to toe is the darkest

PROCESS TIP

Local color

As we are only worried about local color for these initial color studies, the character will appear brighter when we introduce lighting in his final rendering.



Lighter lining

I wanted to up the contrast by pushing a lighter lining on the inside of his robe. It is an interesting color scheme but perhaps not quite right for a villain.

Purple lining

Still playing with the purple request, I try it as the inner cape color, and also as an accent color, with a more muted green as his main color read.



COSTUME & PROPS



Bag of potential

In a pouch that hangs from his belt (often covered by his cloak) he keeps a variety of items to aid himself. Everything from healing potions, to poisons, to a pocketbook of spells.

Symbolic scarf

I wanted to do a small focus illustration on the sash that the wizard wears around his waist. I imagine it to be hand painted with magical symbols.



Gold ring

The gold ring is a well-known iconic prop in fantasy fiction but something that we will only get an occasional glimpse of.



Iconic staff

The most important prop of all, the wizard's staff! His trusty walking stick and deadly weapon rolled into one. He has wrapped it with some dyed leather - perhaps sometimes he hangs charms and herbs from it to get more power.

ARTIST'S EVALUATION OF DEVELOPMENT

How has the **narrative** of your character developed?

Creating the poses was the best way to drive this character closer to the narrative. The challenge being that this is not just a wizard, but an aged wizard. Taking the time to put this character in poses of rest, in addition to threatening poses, helped to communicate his age.

How have you developed the bond with the intended **audience**?

As the audience of these book is older and more general, I found that muting the color palette helped in making this character seem more serious. Once I got a feel for the tone of the story though exploring color, I was able to carry it over into the character's moody expressions.

Which aspects revealed **visual** developments of the character?

Not until we see him casting spells can the audience see his full potential as a villain. As an artist it was incredibly helpful for me to draw his design in motion, to test that it worked. I had originally drawn long, pointed sleeves with tassels on the end. However, when posing him, they got in the way of his shape design and would potentially be incredibly inconvenient for him.

How has the character developed for the intended **media**?

As this character is meant specifically for book covers, I think the more expressive the pose, the more suitable for the brief. Book covers for general audiences tend to be action-packed and full of intrigue. Our wizard character needs to look as threatening as possible when showcased on the front of a book.

THE FINAL PRESENTATION



HERO POSE

For our hero (or in this case villain) pose I wanted to showcase our wizard not in the full swing of anger, but in a quiet, threatening, restful moment. As unease was one of the keywords of the brief, a lurking pose seemed appropriate. I took this opportunity to work more detail into his aged hands, and give him some backlighting.

HEM

TURNAROUNDS



Three-quarter front

Showing the full hunch of our character in a variety of angles seemed like a good way of informing his final design. I like to start with a three-quarter view to avoid making his design look flat.



Profile

This profile angle allows us to get a sense for how much his cloak trails behind him when he walks. It also helps us see exactly the way his cloak trim falls and curves.

Back

Seeing our wizard from the back helps us understand the full extent of his hunched posture.



DESIGN TIP

Looks can deceive

If your first view of the wizard was from the back you may perceive him as non-threatening. This helps add to his deceptive nature.

POSES



Suspicious body language

The mix of his stooped posture and intense gaze helps communicate to the viewer that this is not a character to be trusted.

Ready to strike

We want to show that the wizard is arrogant and easily angered, so it is important to have a powerful, vengeful pose in his final presentation.



Gathering strength

The brief suggested we show the wizard not only spell casting, but in repose. I imagine that our aged character needs time to regain his strength, especially after an angry outburst. As mentioned previously, this pose could also create a false sense of trust in the viewer.

FACIAL EXPRESSIONS



Color details

This intense expression is a great way to showcase some of our color choices in the face. Even though our design has changed quite a bit from the initial thumbnails, we can still see the owl influence that we discussed at the beginning.

Emotional range

A surprised expression helps communicate that a powerful villain can still be caught off guard. Even when designing a villain, it's best to show a range of emotions beyond anger and vengeance.



Sinister smile

A smile helps show the wizard's stained, uneven teeth and his maniacal nature. This character is dark and wouldn't experience happiness in a way that would sit well with the reader.

DESIGN TIP

Simple frame

We can see here that the trim added to the cloak helps to further define and frame the face.

ARTIST'S FINAL EVALUATIONS

My initial thoughts

On reading the brief I realized that in children's literature, I am not usually asked to create aged characters. This brought me out of my normal comfort zone of designing things that are young and cute. However, there are a lot of fun things to play with visually when depicting age. Studying wrinkles and beards, as well as the look of older skin tones, was all helpful in informing the way I approached this character.

How the media affected my approach

I was able to add lots of texture to help communicate wrinkles and hair in this character. The use of texture and loose brushstrokes is something I would avoid if I was designing for other types of media.

Similar characters in my portfolio

My only experience with bearded characters was in designing for a much younger audience, where the shapes could be more exaggerated and the faces more friendly. The fact that this character was not only old but deceptive, conniving, and smart made me approach this brief completely differently. I couldn't lean on any design features that might make him appear to be humorous or bungling.

The easiest part of the brief...

The easiest part of the brief for me to approach was the cloak design. I have an interest in fashion history that lent itself well to creating sweeping cloak shapes. Since the brief asked for the face of the character to be more detailed, the cloak also provided a nice area of blank rest for the viewer - it kept the wizard from becoming too busy-looking in his design.

...and most challenging part

In literature I usually work on stories with an overall positive vibe, and a sense of optimism. I'm not sure I would be an art director's first choice for this brief given the upbeat work in my portfolio. However, we all have encountered hardships in our lives, and people who have treated us less than nicely. I tried to think of traits in people I have encountered in my life that I have found threatening or uneasy to be around, and this helped shaped the wizard's design, and in the end served the purpose of the brief.

"The family audience kept me more focused on making a design that was scary but not uncomfortable to look at"

The influence of the intended audience

Knowing that the audience of this character could still encompass children, I allowed myself to lighten up on his design. Were this for an all-adult audience I might have tried a more decrepit, ill-looking wizard with more anatomical details. The family audience kept me more focused on making a design that was scary but not uncomfortable to look at.

If I could start this character again

If I were to start this brief over again I might try rendering the wizard in only detailed black and white sketches for the most part. As the brief asked for color it felt very important to experiment with different palettes. However, I find that if a publisher is looking for more of a serious tone for a story, black-and-white can go a long way in looking interesting but communicating a more somber mood.





ART DIRECTOR'S FINAL WORD

"This design is fitting for fantasy illustration, the style being just about right for a teenage audience ready for more serious and complex stories with a darker edge. Hollie has retained an elegant simplicity in the shapes and forms, and the pose alludes to his character while leaving room for ambiguity as to his intentions!"





ANIMATION

CÉCILE CARRE

"I have to keep proportions close to realistic but can play with caricatures and exaggerations"



THE WIZARD



TO: CécileCarre@IllustrationArtist.com

FROM: KennyArtDirector@3dtotalFX.com

SUBJECT: NEW BRIEF Wizard for Animated Feature Film



OVERVIEW

This character is the villain in the project and it should be clear from his appearance, movements, and expression that he is a sinister character who cannot be trusted. It is part of the narrative of this project that the character has a limp and therefore needs a cane

to assist his walking; this cane will double as a magical staff at the climax of the narrative. His presence should create a creeping, uneasy feeling in the audience.

ART DIRECTOR'S NOTES

- Our character is the main antagonist so will feature heavily in the film, especially toward the film climax when he does battle with the protagonist.
- This character doesn't venture far from his sinister lair, so his appearance should reflect that through color, etc. However he does appear as an apparition at times throughout the film - we need to see how this might look.
- Although his look should say "wizard," let's bring something unique to this trope through his costume. Let's explore something other than a cloak!
- Similarly, let's also do something not stereotypical for a "wizard."
- Would like to see explorations of his magic powers - they should reflect his sinister nature.
- Along with his staff let's explore a couple of other props he might use. Perhaps he has some kind of sinister musical instrument - an evil-looking harp? Something different and unexpected!
- Let's use his limp wisely to give him a feeling of vulnerability to counteract his sinister demeanor.

PERSONALITY

- Deceptive
- Sneaky
- Easily angered
- Conning
- Amagant
- Smart

APPEARANCE

- The character should be dressed in purple.
- He has an ancient and wizened appearance, with many wrinkles and hair sprouting from his ears.
- He should be slightly stooped in posture. He walks with a limp so there should be some suggestion of leg deformity or damage and you should include the walking cane /magic staff in your design.
- He has dark shadows around his eyes and stained, wonky teeth.

TECHNICAL BRIEF

INDUSTRY: ANIMATED FEATURE FILM

AUDIENCE

A teenage and adult audience (12 years+)

TECHNICAL SPEC

- 140-minute epic fantasy feature
- CG animation with a large budget
- The design should be stylized realism - along the lines of Epic
- Let's see a "hero" pose, a three-quarter back view, plus some poses and key expressions

ARTIST'S INITIAL NOTES

MIND MAP



CHARACTER DESIGN PLAN

How will you help drive the **narrative** in your character?

I will play carefully with the visual codes of "villain" and "wizard" to avoid stereotypes. I need to keep some – the stoop, cane, creepy and sickly appearance, and the dark outfit, but can add originality to his outfit and accessories. An original hat? Furs or reptile skin? A creepy pet (snake, rat, frog, cat)? An instrument (an inaudible whistle to call his pet or cast a spell)?

How will I make the character suitable for the intended **audience**?

He must have an unhealthy and repulsive appearance. This might come from colors (a pale yellowish skin tone and grayish teeth, for instance). Or it could come from textures (greasy hair, wet skin, animal skin). I see him with a constantly cruel and amused expression. I keep in mind two references that work for me as a creepy-cruel character – Tim Burton's Penguin from *Batman Returns* and The Joker (also from *Batman*, which is a really good source of excellent super-villains!). Since the audience is teenage and adult, we can allow ourselves something really scary and/or disgusting!

How will I meet the **visual** requirements of the character?

With the artistic direction of "stylized realism," I have to keep proportions close to realistic but can play with caricatures and exaggerations. I can allow myself to use some details, and play with the textures and visual effects. One of the big challenges here is to find a solution for the look of the magical powers and the way the character would appear and disappear. He could be followed by a greenish, unhealthy mist that would forecast his apparition. Or he could appear as a characteristic shape in the smoke of a fire, or his image could appear in the flames. These solutions could be more or less appropriate depending on the context of the apparition.

What makes the above design traits suitable for the **media**?

For a large budget CG animation, we can really have fun with some interesting visual effects. This is very convenient when you have to design a wizard and his magical powers. The CG animation media offers a large palette of visual effects such as particle effects, smoke, fire, and mist that can be used to design the "magic."

IDEAS EXPLORATION

I wanted to study older faces and wrinkles to get inspiration for the villain's face. I also needed some references to gather ideas for a wizard's outfit. The other research I did was focused on the musical instrument and visual effects.

RESEARCH

Unique cloak

I wanted to find a design that would not be the stereotypical cloak, so I researched garment designs from the ancient Celts and middle ages.



THUMBNAILED



1 Hairstyle

I like the hairstyle, half Rastafarian, half snake. All the thumbnails will feature some kind of cane or staff.



2 Pagan influence

Wearing furs and a horned skull, he takes on a druid feel, especially with the long robe.

3 The birds

Here I tried some "bird-like" accessories, with feathers on the hat and the eagle stick. His profile is reminiscent of a turtle, with that beak-like mouth.



4 Dark & damp

This thumbnail comes directly from a dirty, humid cave. He is literally moldy, with mushrooms growing on his back and up his cane.





5 Oh rats!

A variation on the previous idea. This time, he lives with rats, talks to them, wears their fur, and is even starting to look like a rat.

6 Opened up

Here, again, I used the "bird" influences, but in a more exuberant way (it could contain more color!) with an open posture. The silhouette is a bit vulture-like.



7 Statement collar

This costume is inspired by the flamboyant outfits of the Renaissance period, including an oversized ruff.



8 Aging skin

With all his wrinkles and sagging skin, he almost looks as if he is melting. His faithful snake is, of course, present.

ARTIST'S SELF EVALUATION

Which thumbnails best drive the **narrative** in your character?

No. 2 is the most recognizable as a wizard. The cane, hat, and long robes tell the story of someone with power, and the gnarled hands and pointed face with a long, sharp nose hint at a villainous character. The fur he wears could be a trophy, or demonstrates his status, while the skull-like headpiece is creepy and sinister. The overall effect inspires fear and even respect.

Which are most suited to the intended **audience**?

The most interesting characters for me are **No. 4**, **No. 5**, and **No. 6**. All three have a very strong and clear identity - "moldy," "rats," and "vulture." In particular mold and rodents form the basis of fears and phobias in all ages, including adults, and have connotations of decay and dirt. The vulture is not only a bird of prey, but one closely associated with death and impending doom, so is the perfect creature on which to base a frightening character. Therefore these thumbnails are also the scariest or most disgusting, and this extra visual layer will work for this slightly older audience.

Which best meet the **visual** requirements of the character?

Again, **No. 2** meets the requirement best, with the most realistic proportions and classic silhouette. We can easily imagine him suddenly appearing in a fireplace, or casting his long, ominous shadow across a scene. He appears to be tall, but his stoop is emphasized by the fur he is wearing, giving him a hunched appearance. His fingers almost curl around the top of the cane, as older arthritic hands would do.

Which best meet the needs of **media**?

There are some interesting opportunities in **No. 4** to play with texture and disgust. Rather than being a static part of his costume, the mold and mushrooms will have grown on his clothes and cane, and will still be alive even when he is out in fresh air. This almost makes them another character and part of the animation themselves! But also in **No. 2**, **No. 5**, and **No. 6**, the feathers and fur offer more opportunities with light, giving the wizard's costume a more complex texture to play with.

THE INITIAL SUBMISSION

I've cleaned up and added detail to my favorite three thumbnails as part of my initial submission to the art director for feedback. I decided to also send the art director my thumbnails as reference to see what else I had tried.



A Adding details

I worked from thumbnail No. 2 to make it clearer - this was one of my favorite silhouettes and I was keen to explore it further. It was also very consistent with the ideas of "villain" and "wizard," so I developed the hands and facial features even further to emphasize the qualities.



B Feathers, claws, and beaks

I liked the silhouette and pose of No. 7 but it didn't look that much like a wizard. I added a bit of No. 3 and No. 6 to push more in the direction of the bird-like vulture aspect. Dark feathers now trim the whole costume, and one of the feet has become a clawed vulture foot. Even the pants finish around the legs in a similar way to the feathers of a bird. The staff is also inspired by a bird.

PROCESS TIP

Animated angles

Animation means taking the character's costume, posture, and details into account from every angle, and at this stage already I've already begun to consider those details.

C Mix and match

I really liked the silhouette of No. 5 with the rats and the idea of No. 4 with the rotten aspect so I created a blend of these. The mushrooms grow over the fur cape and on the staff, with the rat perched on the shoulder and rat tails appearing from the hem. This is a much messier, uncleaner version of our wizard, which correlates perfectly to the idea of decay.



ART DIRECTOR'S FEEDBACK

TO: CécileCarre@IllustrationArtist.com

FROM: KennyArtDirector@3dtotalFX.com

SUBJECT: INITIAL FEEDBACK Wizard for Animated Film

PUSH THE CHARACTER

I love the double hair plaits/horns from **No.1**, I think that is worth pursuing further. There is something I really like about the shapes and silhouette of **No.3** – the face feels cool but I wonder if it could be pushed a bit more “evil” like **No.1** and **2**. It might be a tiny bit “goofy” just now? I would push this a bit more to make sure he reads as a villain rather than a joker/jester type – he could be both, but we need to emphasize the evil side! Sketches **No.1** and **2** are closest in this regard, but we could probably dial up the hunch and evil attitude a bit more so he really feels like he is leaning onto his staff.

SILHOUETTE

I do like the almost Venetian costume elements; I wonder if you can take those shapes as they make for great silhouettes and push them further without them reading as too “fancy.” Combined with some other elements such as furs it could potentially create a unique wizard costume idea?

RATS

I like the animal furs of **No.2** – perhaps the animal’s half-rotten head is visible somewhere (too much?). That said, I like the rats in **No.5!** They could accomplish the same goal. Perhaps there are lots of rats running up and down his costume?

LEGS

I like the suggestion of the difference between the legs in **No.6** – something like that would be good to carry through, making it obvious he has a twisted, deformed leg. Avoiding long wizard robes is probably a good idea so that the leg is clearly visible!

ARTIST'S NOTES

Push the character

- I need to be very careful with the expression of the character to really have him look like a villain.
- I will keep going in the direction of **No.1** and **2**.
- Probably keep the “double hair plaits” from **No.1** that the Art Director liked.

Silhouette

- I will keep some patterns or cut from the Venetian costume references I have.
- To avoid him looking too fancy, I’ll use very dark colors and add some more “dirty” and “raw” accessories such as the fur.

Rats

- I love the idea of having rats (alive) actually living in his fur cloak made of rats fur.
- I agree that having dead animals visible (like a rotten head) would be too much.
- But I think I will keep the rat’s tail visible at the bottom of the cloak as a (very tasteful) “decoration.”

Legs

- I will keep his legs visible to clearly show his fake leg, and push the design of this element.
- I liked the idea of him having a “bird leg” sculpted that related to his bird-head-stick.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

I will now take forward the Art director's feedback, and my own notes, to explore the character further through pose, facial expressions, value and color, and costume and props.

POSES

In action

The wizard is exploding with anger, casting a deadly spell with his stick. This could show how he can use his stick as a weapon, lunging with the bird head out in front.



Open gestures

This is the three-quarter hero pose - he has a dynamic, arrogant attitude. He appears to be delivering a long, villainous monologue, punctuated with a diabolical laugh. This pose also allows us to fully see his costume.



Posture

We can see his stooped posture here. While he was leaving, he suddenly heard something that made him react in surprise - did he hear or see something? Maybe provocations that he couldn't let pass...



Walking

He is walking with his stick, with a sinister smile and conniving expression on his face. The hand on his chin suggests that he is deep in thought, probably about evil plans!



FACIAL EXPRESSIONS

Irritation

This expression shows irritation, something that a villainous character would feel frequently, especially leading up to anger. Both the eyes and mouth have become mean, narrow slits and the lower eyelids are prominent.



Rage

Stretching the face allows the eyes and mouth to open to their full capacity as he shouts in anger. This could be while casting a spell, delivering the words with rage and venom. The whole head appears larger and more frightening.

Conniving

The eyes hooded by the brow and looking upward toward the viewer give a sense of deceit and an attempt to hide his true intentions. At this angle the nose becomes more prominent, and combined with the intense eyes and "smile," it's a confident and deceptive expression.



VALUE & COLOR

Value

Because he is very old, his hair is fully white, and his skin is only slightly darker. His cloak is made of gray fur so that his very dark costume can contrast against it. The staff and false leg are also bold and dark, the carved bird's head standing out.



Completely white hair, and the lightest area of the whole character

Sickly skin can be very pale yet still contrast against the hair



Made from gray rats, the cape provides a mid-tone backdrop to the costume

The dark costume stands out from the shadows beneath the cape

Warm palette

According to the brief, his main color should be a shade of purple, but here I want to push it toward a dark red and his cloak toward a brown-gray. Red is also the color of the light that comes from his stick and from the stone he wears around his neck. This palette might be too warm, though.



Cool palette

I tried to emphasize the fact that he spends so much time in the dark that he almost has the look of a vampire – white skin, red eyes, with colder colors. I use a more pinker shade of purple and a darker gray for the fur. But I think he is a bit too close to Dracula, which is not the look I wanted for this character.

DESIGN TIP

Highlight color

Choosing a color for the highlights adds to the otherworldly feel of this character. In this case, the stone around the neck also takes on the color, helping it to pop.

Shade and light

This version is a good compromise – I keep the idea of a very dark purple costume with a gray fur, and choose a green stone and light to contrast with the almost complementary purple. The green highlights add an eerie quality to the drawing.

COSTUME & PROPS



Sinister cloak

As suggested by the art director, some live rats are living in the cloak. They sleep or jump around from time to time, and at the bottom of the cloak we can see the tails of the rats used to make it.

Magic staff

The head of the stick is inspired by a vulture's head. With a twisted neck and narrow eyes from which the light of the spells come out, it is as sinister-looking as its owner.



Special effects

When a spell is cast with the stick, a luminescent vapor slowly comes from the eyes (1), and grows in a spiral-like vortex above the head (2). The vortex finally forms a long, strong ray of light shooting straight out from the stick when directed at the unfortunate victim (3).

ARTIST'S EVALUATION OF DEVELOPMENT

How has the **narrative** of your character developed?

The wizard now really has the attitude of a villain in the poses and expressions I used, looking sneaky and arrogant. As for the creepiness, it is clearly visible with the stooped silhouette, the "vulture" appearance, and the presence of the live and dead rats.

How have you developed the bond with the intended **audience**?

His cadaver-like colors (dull, grayish skin and teeth) make him repulsive, showing that he is unhealthy and spends most of his time inside in a dark cave full of rats. The design of the cloak, with its rat-fur body and rat-tail trim also helps to sell that repulsive look to the audience.

Which aspects revealed **visual** developments of the character?

I think this design has the right amount of realism (in proportions) and stylization - his facial features and body structure allow me to make him very expressive and push really far for the caricature of the creepy villain.

How has the character developed for the intended **media**?

The fur cloak, long greasy hair, shiny stone around his neck, and the light and vapor coming out of his stick are interesting elements to play with in animation. They will all be constantly moving and changing in the light. Bright, interesting contrasts of textures, colors, and light will make this character's presence on screen very interesting.

THE FINAL PRESENTATION

HERO POSE

I started from the color version No.3 that I liked the most, and added some details of light and texture here and there. We can now clearly understand that the costume is made of a mix of purple velvet and dark gold, and his stick is a very dark wood. Shining a green-gray light on him heightened the creepy, eerie sensation.



TURNAROUNDS





Profile

I chose a very still, standing pose that allows us to see all the parts of his costume, from his hairstyle to his cloak of rats, discovering his fake bird leg sculpted in a dark wood. We can also see some rats playing and climbing in his cloak, along his hunched back.

Three-quarter front

This angle gives more information on the volumes and contours used to create this character. Here we can see how precarious he appears to be on his feet, with the staff acting as a third leg.



Front

His vicious smile reflects perfectly his villainous personality. The strange twisted hair and fur cope radiate out from his body to make his presence all the more scary.

DESIGN TIP

Costume drama

The character and costume work well together - the costume emphasizes the body shape and extends the hunch all the way to the ground for a dramatic, frightening effect.

POSES

In action

I polished the initial sketch, adjusting the proportions to make it consistent with the design I came up with (the head in the sketch was too big compared to the body, for instance). In this pose we can also understand how his sticks works and where the green light comes from when used to cast a spell.



Hair and accessories

This pose allows us to really understand his hairstyle, which looks like the horns of a ram. His accessories are made of gold, leather, and precious stones - where did he get them?



Supporting cast

We could imagine the rats are like pets and are a reflection of his moods. When he is calm they are quiet, when he walks they become agitated, and when he is angry they become excited and jump out of the cloak.

FACIAL EXPRESSIONS

Color details

Color is used to emphasize his unhealthy state and appearance - his teeth are tinged yellow, his skin gray, and his white hair green (perhaps mossy from his damp dwellings).



Aging features

His lower eyelids are purple, and his eyes red and bloodshot with rage. We can also see a lot of age spots around his eyes that emphasize his advanced state of decay.

Facial lines

The shadows really help to show the volumes and the structure of his face, where the wrinkles are when he is frowning or smiling.



ARTIST'S FINAL EVALUATIONS

My initial thoughts

I thought it was a good challenge to work on a repulsive villain, since I am more used to cute and appealing characters! Although he has obvious features for a villain (sinister, sneaky, arrogant), the constraints were numerous enough to narrow the exploration - the cane, the stooped posture, the leg deformity, the purple color, and so on. The more constraints I have as a designer, and the easier it is for me to find original ideas and solutions, and avoid the stereotypes.

My initial thoughts

When making a design for CG animation, you have to go very deep in the details of the design and think about all the textures - What will the hair look like? The skin? The fabric of the costume? The fur? I have to answer all these questions to give all the information the following teams will need (the modelers, the texturers, and so on). And I also need to be very consistent in terms of volumes and structures because it is harder to cheat on a CG design than on a drawing.

Similar characters in my portfolio

I had designed some villains or sorcerers before (in personal work mostly), so I already had some good references in mind that I could use again (like costumes, unhealthy looks, villains' attitudes, and expressions). And since I already had a chance to "pour out" all the stereotypes I had in mind for this kind of character, I could go deeper in the research to find more interesting and original ideas.

The easiest part of the brief...

For me, I would say the easiest part is always the personality and the expressivity, because I am also an animator and have more references in mind (for expressions, posing). I can play with a range of subtleties.

...and most challenging part

The most challenging part for me was to find a proper costume that would answer all the constraints of the brief - finding the right style among a lot of references to make it look like a wizard costume, but not too fancy, using the purple.

The influence of the intended audience

For a villain, I need to pay attention to the target audience to know how far I can go in the repulsive and cruel aspect of him.

If I could start this character again

I think I would try to make him even more dirty, sinister, and repulsive. He is a bit too clean!



"The most challenging part for me was to find a proper costume that would answer all the constraints of the brief"



ART DIRECTOR'S FINAL WORD

"This design immediately reads as a villain, with his poses, shape design, and color palette all re-enforcing that idea. There is the perfect balance here of detail, the design never becoming overwhelmed and the textures leading the eye and adding visual interest. Cécile has made this guy a bit creepy which is perfect!"



THE DRAGON



VIDEO GAMES

DEVON CADY-LEE

PAGE 176



ILLUSTRATION

HOLLIE MENGERT

PAGE 194



ANIMATION

CÉCILE CARRE

PAGE 212



VIDEO GAMES

DEVON CADY-LEE

"Keeping the character simple and vibrant
for a young audience is key"



THE DRAGON



THE DRAGON CREATIVE BRIEF

TO: DevonCady-Lee@IllustrationArtist.com

FROM: KennyArtDirector@3dtotalFX.com

SUBJECT: NEW BRIEF Dragon for Video Game



OVERVIEW

This dragon (name TBC) is a hero in a children's story set in medieval times. Set in a northern European country, she lives alone in a cave, outside the kingdom's fortress. The people of the kingdom treat her with fear and disdain, but this young female character actually has

a friendly and approachable personality. She breathes smoke and occasionally fire when she feels frightened, which does not help her relationship with the villagers. But when she believes her friends are in danger she does not hesitate to take risks to help them.

ART DIRECTOR'S NOTES

- Despite the in-game character being simple and iconic, the design of the dragon must also work as a more illustrated design for the game's user-interface menus and promotional materials.
- Perhaps our dragon could have an iconic accessory or design feature which complements her design - a cute marking or a neck scarf?
- Her special skill is breathing short bursts of fire when her power bar is full.
- To make the character's fire power stand out, her color design should complement it. However her fire doesn't need to be traditionally fire-colored.
- Color-wise the character should stand out.

PERSONALITY

- Playful
- Excitable
- Open
- Heroic
- Friendly
- Fearless

APPEARANCE

- This character walks on all fours, and has a tail and wings.
- She can fly, but as a young character she can be clumsy when taking off and landing.

TECHNICAL BRIEF

INDUSTRY: VIDEO GAMES

AUDIENCE

The primary audience is young so you should design the character for school-age children, keeping in mind that parents and other adults are the secondary audience who need to be kept interested in the character.

TECHNICAL SPEC

- A cute and playful casual side scrolling platform game designed for tablets and touch interaction
- Aimed at 5-to-8-year-olds
- The style will be simple 2D characters with some 3D background elements - the characters will be 2D sprites and relatively small on screen so the design will need to be clear even at a small scale
- Gameplay involves our dragon character flying left to right, avoiding obstacles and the king's misguided knights, while trying to rescue her friends
- Would like to see a "hero" pose plus some poses relevant to the gameplay (running, flying, jumping, fire breathing, and so on)

ARTIST'S INITIAL NOTES

MIND MAP



CHARACTER DESIGN PLAN

How will I help drive the **narrative** in the character?

This might depend on the story I develop behind a costume element. Maybe she can wear an accessory that tells the player something about her past? I will also use her facial expressions and responses to situations to develop her attitude and personality. Any opportunity to show the character's reaction to a situation or another character helps to define the way she thinks.

How will I make the character suitable for the intended **audience**?

Keeping the character simple and vibrant for a young audience is key. The character needs to be designed in such a way that a child could perceive this dragon as a friend, or even a pet! I want to design the perfect companion that a child would feel safe around, and that could act as their playmate.

How will I meet the **visual** requirements of the character?

Sticking to primary colors might work, as they are easily iconic and capture the attention of youngsters. I'll ensure the face allows for some expressive range that will let them be more empathetic.

What makes the above design traits suitable for the **media**?

I will try to design everything so that it's visible in profile. Since the majority of the game seems to be flying through obstacle-laden levels, the character will need to be able to change direction quickly in response to the touch screen interface.

"I will try to design everything so that it's visible in profile"

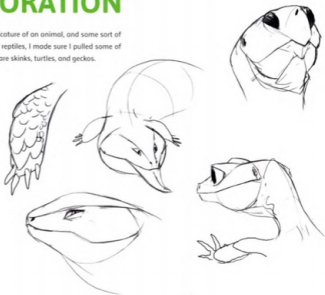
IDEAS EXPLORATION

I wanted to make something that felt like a caricature of an animal, and some sort of pet reptile seemed to fit the bill. As a keeper of reptiles, I made sure I pulled some of their features into my designs. Referenced here are skinks, turtles, and geckos.

RESEARCH

Added charm

It was a good exercise to simplify the reptiles' forms, not only for readability but also to make them feel more charming to a wider audience. In my opinion reptiles are already amazing, but we often modify their features to be more expressive when turning them into characters because as humans, we tend to anthropomorphize them.



THUMBNAILS



1 Fire or water

Although the brief asked for fire effects, I wanted to experiment with an aquatic idea as well. She could attack with bubbles or jets of water.



2 The "red baron"

I tried to explore different tones; this one was goofier than the others. Maybe a little inspired by the fighter pilot "Red Baron".

3 Youthful approach

This one feels more like a classic dinosaur cartoon. It's also a lot more expressive in an anthropomorphic, childlike way.



4 Energetic

I really liked the personality of this one. Overeager and snappy – a little ball of mayhem ready to wreck villages.



5 Pet dragon

This version was closely based on my pet leopard gecko! I'll always seize the opportunity to draw my pets as characters.



6 Prehistoric vibes

I thought one could be a little more like the prehistoric flying reptile pterosaurs, with a head crest and a rudder-like tail. The chest is also more prominent on this thumbnail.

ARTIST'S SELF-EVALUATION

Which thumbnails best drive the **narrative** in your character?

No.2, **No.4**, and **No.5** seem to have the best sense of narrative, and I can see that mostly because of their props. These are also the most expressive faces, needed for communicating the mood of the story and connecting with the audience.

Which are most suited to the intended **audience**?

The neonatal proportions of **No.3** and **No.5** would probably grab the attention of younger players. **No.3** looks like a feisty pet, and **No.5** could fit in an animated cartoon style.

Which best meet the **visual** requirements of the character?

I think **No.5** could work well, because it is the most childlike and expressive of the bunch, the extra-large eyes emphasizing both qualities well. I like the bolder, flowing silhouette of **No.1** and **No.6** as well.

Which best meet the needs of the **media**?

No.5 and **No.1** seem to have the strongest silhouette in profile for me. I think these designs work the best for the side-scrolling nature of the game where this view is predominant throughout.

"These are also the most expressive faces, needed for communicating the mood of the story"

THE INITIAL SUBMISSION

I've progressed and cleaned up my favorite thumbnails as my initial submission to the art director for feedback along with the thumbnails.

A Unconventional shape

Shape-wise, this is the most interesting to me personally, because it feels like the least conventional dragon.



DESIGN TIP

Changing faces

All three faces would be appealing to children, but are still very different from each other, giving the art director a variety of facial styles as well as body shapes.



B Built for speed

I like the shapes on this one - they make her body feel very aerodynamic. Could be too fast for this game!



C Facial expression

This one is the most childlike, and probably the most child-friendly in terms of the audience. The inclusion of human-like eyebrows makes a big difference in terms of expression.

ART DIRECTOR'S FEEDBACK

TO: DevonCady-Lee@IllustrationArtist.com

FROM: KennyArtDirector@3dtotalFX.com

SUBJECT: INITIAL FEEDBACK Dragon for Video Game

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Love the dragon thumbnails! They are all cool. But I think **No.1**, **No. 2**, and **No. 6** best suit the brief. It's tricky but I think **No.6** probably works best overall - it's very cute. However, I would maybe add some exposed teeth or something to make it feel just a little bit more "dangerous."

SMALL-SCALE DETAIL

For the in-game character we will need to simplify the design somewhat so that it reads clearly at a small scale, both when still and moving.

SMOKE TRAILS

It would be nice to see a smoke trail coming off the dragon as she flies in-game - what kind of smoke and fire does she produce? Let's try conceptualizing that ideal!

SPECIAL FEATURES

I think the scarf on **No.2** is fun, but perhaps explore other options that might fit the brief. Think about which accessory might best suit the character and tell the audience something about them. A cute marking on the dragon's body might make more sense as a design feature.

"Think about which accessory might best suit the character and tell the audience something about them"

ARTIST'S NOTES

First impressions

- I like features from all of the designs the art director picked. I'm pretty sure I can see them working together on one design.
- I thought of a few more unique characteristics I could throw in that I will need to explore further.
- I like the idea of having exposed teeth, so I will try to include some fangs to give them a slightly sketchier look.

Small-scale detail

- The details of the character may need to be simplified in the final drawing.
- I'll use bold color markings to make the design clear at a small scale, emphasizing features that are more important, like the face.
- I will decrease other features that might not be as important to the narrative, like the legs.

Smoke trails

- I think the smoke FX should be reserved for some sort of gameplay function.
- I will include smoke in either the casting FX pass, or the marketing artwork to explore how it might look.

Special features

- I think whatever object is placed around her neck should have some sort of story tied to it, like a gift from a friend she is trying to rescue.
- I will also plan on making some asymmetrical markings, to play with the idea that only one side of the character will be visible at a time as this is a side-scrolling game.

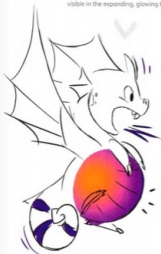
CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

I will now take forward the art director's feedback, and my own notes, to explore the character further through pose, facial expressions, value and color, and costume and props.

POSES

Fire from her belly

The character's attack stance has her rearing up like a seahorse, visibly inhaling. Most of the FX would be visible in the expanding, glowing belly.



Fire from her tail

This option has the fire starting in the dragon's gecko-like tail. The tail inflates with energy, and the fire passes through her body, the belly compressing like a concertina, and expels without her needing to rear up in preparation.



PROCESS TIP

Building up

I proposed two different ways the dragon's attack animation could work, focusing on how their FX might appear and how the silhouette would change. At this point in the process I want the art director to have choices. These could work very quickly for a fast animation, or be incrementally increased to imply a "charge" attack.



Fire's out

Once the fire is expelled, the dragon's whole body deflates as she squeezes the fireball out through her mouth. I imagine some sort of secondary animation of her features squeezing closed like a bellows.

FACIAL EXPRESSIONS



Stretched

I really like this expression, because it shows the character's enthusiasm. I've stylized her mouth to work in profile as a solid shape.



Determined

This could be the face she makes when she is doing something particularly difficult. Maybe when she is low on health or getting a speed boost.



Squash

I tried to imagine the face she'd make when she gets hit by an enemy of some kind. She doesn't get scared, but she does get annoyed!

VALUE & COLOR

Value

Overall, her colors will dictate her values in grayscale, but I do want to make sure her eyes are given enough space and contrast to be very visible. This is a good step to separate color shapes.

The whites of the eyes ground her in reality and add focus

The striped tail is instantly visible and recognizable

The two-tone wings add to her individuality



Super simple

This is a darker color combination, but any glowing effects would be extra visible and show up well on a darker scheme.



Warm palette

I am a big fan of this color combination. Complementary colors are at play here to provide impact, and I like the simplicity of yellow.



Twist on tradition

The color scheme in this version has a sort of tropical reptile feeling. It looks great, but might not work on scenery that is mostly green, such as a medieval forest setting.

DESIGN TIP

Prop ideas

One of my ideas was the ring around her neck. I tried a few props (see opposite page) but chose this to add to my color explorations. My idea is that the friend she was trying to save was a prince of giants; he gave her his ring to wear as a collar. Maybe all her friends are creatures captured by the kingdom.

COSTUME & PROPS

Smart bow tie

For some reason a bow tie is a characteristic of being upbeat and chipper. It harkens back to old cartoons and stage performers.

Tied with a ribbon

A ribbon is a more traditionally feminine touch. I like the rounded fins on this design - they feel like paddles rather than wings.

Ring collar

For this idea, she could wear a giant ring as a collar (I also incorporated this particular accessory into my color palette tests). My dorsal shapes are particularly sharp and may not work for a child-friendly design.

Cowboy influence

In my opinion, a handkerchief casually tied around the neck makes the character feel scrappier. I do like the snaggleteeth for this design as well.

ARTIST'S EVALUATION OF DEVELOPMENT

How has the **narrative** of your character developed?

I think the story in my head that I've created for her jewelry-collar is an interesting idea. It adds another layer to the character to have a friend that liked her enough to give her a ring. Balancing her spiky shapes to both feel a little fierce but not entirely threatening is a challenge.

How have you developed the bond with the intended **audience**?

I think the expressive features of this design lend themselves the best to being empathetic to young children. When kids see the dragon respond in a way that they might also respond, it helps to make the dragon relatable, even if it's really a scaly beast.

Which aspects revealed **visual** developments of the character?

I instinctively chose highly saturated colors, and I think that's the right move for a children's game. I am noticing the impact that the silhouette has in profile, and features like claws and spikes also have a considerable impact on readability.

How has the character developed for the intended **media**?

When I design patterns and shapes, I want to make sure they work in profile. I try to avoid too many circumstances of limbs overlapping the visibility of objects behind them, although the wings make that difficult. I like making the character feel like it could fluidly move through the air, following the player's finger on the screen as it gets dragged about.

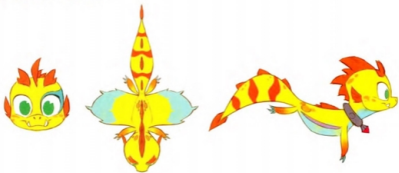
THE FINAL PRESENTATION

HERO POSE

For the final design I wanted the dragon to be a primary color so she would really stand out, while matching her happy and adventurous spirit, so she ended up being bright yellow. I also wanted to give her an eyepatch, which I think added some personality and uniqueness to the design. Because the character is side-scrolling, it would only be visible when she changed directions!



TURNAROUNDS



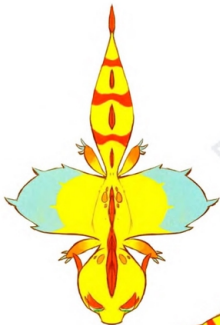
Front

The front view of the face is to highlight the asymmetry of the eyes. I thought about doing the teeth as well, but then the tooth would only be visible from one side and I felt it was important to see them, no matter which way the character was facing.



Top

This top view is mostly to show off the silhouette of the wings. I imagine these look similar to the real flying lizards of Southeast Asia.



Profile

This would be the profile view that would be seen most of the time, with the wings cut to show just the body for modeling. I keep in mind the different masses of the tail, body, and head, and how they would move with one another when the character flies.



POSES

Stretch and puff

I was a fan of this seahorse puff-up animation, so I took this one to finish. I tried to exaggerate the mouth further, using the 2D camera and cartoonish distortion to my advantage.



Ready, set, fire!

For the firing animation, I updated the anatomy of the wings, and I also decided on a color for the FX. A hot magenta color provides great contrast to her yellow body.



Prepare to land

I felt I needed an image to show how she might look when landed. With stubby limbs, she drags her hindquarters on the ground like a lizard, folding up her wings behind her.



FACIAL EXPRESSIONS

Dragon down!

Probably one of the most important expressions in the game, indicating that the player has suffered damage. Her face can squash and scrunch, and her frill might expand as if to show that she has been disturbed and ruffled.



Low health

I thought if her health was low, she could change her posture and expression to convey this information to the player. Maybe her frill sinks, she lowers her brow, and her lip tightens.

DESIGN TIP

Solid silhouette

Since the character is 2D, expressions are more stylized. In this example, the mouth appears open but the silhouette isn't broken.



Excited

This could be the expression she has when she completes a task, showing her blue tongue.

ARTIST'S FINAL EVALUATIONS

My initial thoughts

When I first read the brief, my initial thought was that the character had to look interesting in motion and be able to change direction quickly in response to a touch-based interface. Making a character look interesting in profile was my first priority. I also wanted to minimize the emphasis on the legs, since this character would be seen flying all the time and the legs would primarily be used for secondary animation.

How the media affected my approach

The 2D nature of the gameplay meant certain limitations in terms of what animations would look the clearest for the player. A sprite game also needs to be efficiently designed to make the best use out of art assets. I made sure everything worked in profile, and that the character worked at a small scale.

Similar characters in my portfolio

I have worked on many games and many dragons, of all varieties and for all types of audiences. Dragons are a popular subject in video games, but I find the most unique ones are the games where you can actually play as the dragon!

The easiest part of the brief...

I think my favorite part was being able to personify one of my pet lizards as a game character, and in the end this is what I gravitated to in my inspiration. It was far easier to create a personality based on something I had already done by anthropomorphizing my pet gecko! Even her color was modeled very closely to my reference.

...and most challenging part

Creating a dragon that felt unique was difficult. Dragons are popular beasts that have been represented many times in popular media, and for many different types of audiences. While they are also the most malleable mythical animals to play with, they are also one of the most identifiable.

The influence of the intended audience

In the end I decided to pull back on the mischievous tone of the character and make them fun and bright, to better fit the narrative and give them a more unique personality.

If I could start this character again

I wanted her to appear positive in the face of adversity, to contrast her "vilified" reputation by the kingdom. I should have done this earlier with more explorations in that direction, but I am happy with the final design.

"I think my favorite part was being able to personify one of my pet lizards as a game character"





ART DIRECTOR'S FINAL WORD

"This dragon design is super cute and original, the bright colors being appealing to the target audience and working well in contrast to the suggested game world. It isn't hard to imagine flying Devon's character through the game, avoiding obstacles and breathing bursts of fire."



ILLUSTRATION

HOLLIE MENGERT

"Making a dragon fierce but sympathetic at the same time may sound contradictory..."



THE DRAGON



TO: HollieMenger@IllustrationArtist.com

FROM: KennyArtDirector@3dtotalFX.com

SUBJECT: NEW BRIEF Dragon for Book Illustration



OVERVIEW

This dragon character is a hero in a children's story set in medieval times, in a northern European country. The dragon lives alone in a cave, outside the kingdom's fortress. The people of the kingdom treat her with fear and disdain, but this young female character actually

has a friendly and approachable personality. She breathes smoke and occasionally fire when she feels frightened, which does not help her relationship with the villagers. However, when she believes her friends are in danger she does not hesitate to take risks to help them.

PERSONALITY

- Playful
- Excitable
- Open
- Heroic
- Friendly
- Fearless

APPEARANCE

- This character walks on all fours, and has a tail and wings.
- She can fly, but as a young character she can be clumsy when taking off and landing.

ART DIRECTOR'S NOTES

- The story sees our dragon go from feared to loved and lonely, to content (despite a series of clumsy mishaps involving fire sneezes and bad landings) after the dragon saves the villagers from a freezing winter.
- The design should not be scary, but think of ways in which the dragon may be misinterpreted by the villagers.
- While the dragon will walk on all fours, there should be an element of anthropomorphism in her actions and expressions.
- Stylistically, the designs should reflect the target audience and convey a sense of naivety and charm to match the nature of our young character.
- Think about how the dragon may interact with her surroundings in an endearing way.

"Think about
how the dragon
may interact
with her
surroundings
in an endearing
way"

TECHNICAL BRIEF

INDUSTRY: ILLUSTRATED BOOK PUBLISHING

AUDIENCE

The primary audience is young, so you should design the character for school-age children, keeping in mind that parents and other adults are the secondary audience who need to be kept interested in the character.

TECHNICAL SPEC

- 32 pages long, 28 x 22.5 cm
- Target age is 5-8-year-olds
- This book is a one-off publication
- Would like to see a three-quarter front and back view plus some key expressions and poses

ARTIST'S INITIAL NOTES

MIND MAP



CHARACTER DESIGN PLAN

How will I help drive the **narrative** in the character?

The brief has our character misunderstood by others, but she needs to be sympathetic to our reader, who will love her enough to follow her to a happy ending. I will play with a variety of facial features for my initial designs, keeping in mind that she is sweet at heart, but can appear fierce. Making a dragon fierce but sympathetic at the same time may sound contradictory, but there are a few things we can do in our art to make this come across. By surrounding our character with round, soft, silly, exaggerated villagers, and a gentle-looking world, we can communicate the feeling that she's a threat to the village while keeping her sympathetic to our young audience.

How will I make the character suitable for the intended **audience**?

This character is meant for a young audience. This is a great time to push the designs in a very stylized graphic direction. Giving our dragon appealing features will help it appear sympathetic to the reader, and keep younger children from being frightened. I like to add details to my more simplified characters with fun texture and colors that pop off the page to keep children interested. We won't worry about color for the first part of the process but I will keep in mind fun visuals that will make our dragon interesting: expressive ears, different shaped scales, big eyes, and so on.

How will I meet the **visual** requirements of the character?

Scales, wings, and teeth will help our creature protect herself, but she can still have appealing features that are familiar. Maybe her head is a little dog-like? Paws would make her seem friendlier. At this point in the process I get out my references and study real-life creatures to inspire my design.

What makes the above design traits suitable for the **media**?

Illustrations allow us to push our own reality, and a fictional land is fun! I might push my dragon's look more for a book than if she was for 3D animation. For children, her colors will be brighter than they would be in nature to help her pop from the page and keep the readers' focus. Children want a character they can identify with, even if she's a different species.

DESIGN TIP

Mythology v. reality

I still ground mythological characters in reality. How will she function? Where will I put the wings to balance the body? How would the head be shaped to be aerodynamic? What defense mechanisms would she need to survive in the wild? Even stylized designs need to be grounded in functionality.

IDEAS EXPLORATION

What better way to make a creature relatable than to study man's best friend? Dog studies help inspire the body structure and posture of my dragon, which can be seen throughout all the thumbnails.

RESEARCH



Mix and match

A greyhound is a good example of a creature that is graceful, sturdy, and dynamic. Bats' wings are a wonderful jumping-off point for a dragon's wings, and a horse's head will help me to understand the facial structure, including the nostrils and snout.

THUMBNAILS

1 Grounded

I started off with a friendly, more feminine take on a traditional English dragon. She is the most lizard-like of the bunch. However, she lacks wings, which the brief asked for, so time to keep exploring.



2 Cuddly

I wanted to push the cuddly and approachable nature of this character with a more condensed body shape.



3 Added strength

In this version I wanted the character to seem physically stronger, but still friendly and curious.



4 Less dragon, more...

I decided to commit less to traditional "dragon anatomy". What if the character was more dog- or horse-like?





5 Chilling out

I simplified the facial features and forearms. Maybe she walks on four legs, but can also perch on two when she is more relaxed.



6 Goofy!

This thumbnail makes me laugh. I wanted her to look as harmless as possible. However, it's not quite right for the story as she does not look very intelligent!



7 Animal haunches

I thought I would try a version that felt a bit more like a cat or a greyhound, shown in the way her haunches are positioned when sitting.

8 Agile and fun

This final thumbnail is based on canine anatomy but with a few tweaks. I think this character could be very agile, in addition to being clumsy and excited.



DESIGN TIP

Proportion v. believability

You will want to push proportions in a stylized character to make them interesting, but also retain balance to make it believable. This can lead to tough decisions!

ARTIST'S SELF-EVALUATION

Which thumbnails best drive the **narrative** in your character?

I want to identify the design most compelling to a young audience, but that could also express fierceness. This versatility of personality already knocks thumbnails **No.2** and **No.6** out of the running, as I cannot imagine them frightening even the most nervous knight. At this point I think thumbnails **No.3** and **No.8** seem the most capable of being intimidating, with their feline eyes and elongated faces.

Which are most suited to the intended **audience**?

I wanted to simplify these designs. Younger audiences can show interest in complexity, but keeping things simple is more inviting, and lends itself to aspects that marketing might take in to account: Could the design be a toy or a plush that a child would want to hug if they saw it on a poster? Lovability is important if the character is going to be sympathetic and inspiring to young kids. Looking at the thumbnails, I feel that **No.4** is the most sympathetic.

Which best meet the **visual** requirements of the character?

In addition to having an emotional range, our dragon needs to be able to fly and breathe fire. She needs to be lovable but also believable as a cave-dwelling dragon. **No.5** seems the most balanced in terms of body versus wing size.

Which best meet the needs of **media**?

At this point, any of the designs chosen would work for illustration. However, where can we create visual interest on the page within a design to keep a reader entertained even after the reading is over? I love taking moments of texture and pattern within a simple shape to keep things visually interesting. This is a great opportunity to dive into each thumbnail to see where we can create even more interest.

THE INITIAL SUBMISSION

I've progressed and cleaned up my favorite three thumbnails as my initial submission to the art director for feedback.

A Perfectly lovable

The first design I submit to the art director needs to be a clear fit for the story. I added some texture and black-and-white values to thumbnail **No.4** so that the art director can infer the change in texture and color if that design is finalized. This is my personal favorite of the batch so I really want her to be lovable.

PROCESS TIP

Visualizing scale

In isolation, a character can lose its sense of scale. Our dragon should feel large in this story, so in the second option, I created a knight for comparison. She may not be frightening on her own, but she would be to this pint-sized knight, and we want the art director to see this.



B Introducing variety

We want to make sure that every option shown to the art director displays versatility. We made sure that the proportions were pushed and pulled in the thumbnails, and now it is time to show more contrast in our progressed sketches. This option would feature different scales to the first.



C Show versatility

Since we played with a variety of animals in our research it seems like a good idea to try something fluffier! A fuzzy chest and feathered wings also help to further differentiate this design from the first two. This way, the art director can see that we have tried something different. If he likes the idea, but not the design, this treatment can be applied to other designs during finalization of the character.



ART DIRECTOR'S FEEDBACK

TO: HollieMengert@IllustrationArtist.com

FROM: KennyArtDirector@3dtotalFX.com

SUBJECT: INITIAL FEEDBACK Dragon for Book Illustration

CANINE INFLUENCE

I like the idea of her being more dog-like. It differentiates her and plays into the story somewhat, as long as we bear in mind there must be a reason why the villagers are fearful of her. Maybe she has large horns and/or claws? Just something to suggest she could in fact be dangerous. If you explore that, let's keep it very subtle as we do not want to lose her charm or make her scary.

PROPORTIONS

I like the big front "paws" of **A**. Can we match her rear feet to those? Maybe the wings should be just a tad larger so she can "fly" - but overall, I think this is a good direction. I like the cute little horns here!

LEGS

I would think about how she could potentially behave, so are there moments when she is sitting with her front legs more like arms? These may be times where she is not strictly walking on all fours.

SILHOUETTE

The silhouette of **B** is quite cute, but I think it could be pushed a bit. The tail maybe needs something to tie the design together - maybe the tail tip is of a similar shape to her ears and wings? I like the shape of her front arms, which might be worth mirroring in the rear legs. I would also experiment a bit with her neck length - could it be a tiny bit shorter?

ARTIST'S NOTES

Canine influence

- In keeping my designs friendly, I lost some of the brief: she needs to feel threatening to the village.
- I will keep her rounded shapes and friendly face but focus more on her claws and horns. When she expresses herself breathing fire, she will have teeth.

Proportions

- The art director is correct - the first option does not seem capable of flight, with her small wings. I can increase her wing size so that she looks flight-ready and luckily this won't affect her friendliness.
- Perhaps the dragon could even play with her wings in other ways. Maybe she hides under them when she's scared, or lets birds perch on the top of them, as she is a gentle giant.

Legs

- Walking on all fours for a lead character can be a tough when you want to communicate emotion.
- There are ways to avoid a humanoid character; perhaps she behaves similarly to a dog, allowing children to identify emotions such as sad (ears back), happy (tail wagging), and angry (snarling).
- Since this book is already very exaggerated, I think it is a great time to bend the rules. Maybe she walks on all fours but sits up on two legs, as the art director suggests.
- These are all things I will keep in mind when I go to draw her poses.

Silhouette

- Time to iterate! I'm so glad that the art director likes the first option! I think we can have a lot of fun with her.

PROCESS TIP

Collaboration

Changing a design that we like shouldn't be an uncomfortable process. No design is perfect right out of the box. It takes careful iteration and idea collaboration with the art director to make it the strongest possible choice!

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

I will now take forward the art director's feedback, and my own notes, to explore the character further through pose, facial expressions, value and color, and costume and props.

POSES

In flight

With bigger wings to show her flight ability, it would be fun to show at least one pose where she is flying. As a young character, she is not quite a master of flight, but enjoys it. Maybe she kicks up her back feet and stretches out her large front feet to help her land.



Sitting

Since the art director suggested that she is not always on all legs, I want to show that I listened to his feedback and include a pose of her sitting upright in my next round of designs.

PROCESS TIP

Emphasizing change

The legs and wings featured greatly in the art director's feedback, so I have made sure that the amended versions play a large role in the poses.

Interaction

I wanted to showcase our dragon's gentle nature, as her personality is integral to the story telling. I imagine that although the humans are frightened of her, the animals who live near her cave trust her. Birds gladly perch on her wings, much as they would with other large, gentle animals such as elephants, water buffalo, and rhinos.



FACIAL EXPRESSIONS

Open features

We need to show that this character can be caught off guard and frightened. Giving her fears and vulnerabilities will make her even more relatable to our young readers.



Optimism

This character also has optimism! She will have hope and happiness in our story as well as struggles, which we can evoke subtly in her expression.



Drama

Since her ability to breathe fire is part of what makes her threatening, we want to show this to our art director. Maybe since she is young, it can sometimes catch her by surprise.



PROCESS TIP

Character nuances

The fire-breathing is fun, but also allows us to show the character expressing emotion while performing a key action, a powerful way to discover and show nuances in a character.

VALUE & COLOR

Value

We want to make sure that our dragon does not become too dark, using a variety of values to make her interesting. Her paws and wings would be tougher and more leathery, so probably darker in value.

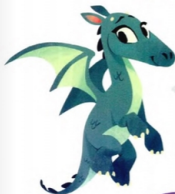
Dark spines add subtle definition to the shape, keeping it friendly



Nose could be soft and light like that of a horse

Light chest and tummy are reminiscent of plush toys

Darker paws and wings show they are tougher and more leathery

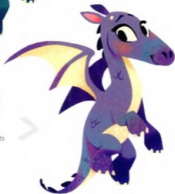


Gentle palette

My first instinct for our dragon is a gentle palette, such as a calming blue-green with sea-foam green accents. I add different hues of color throughout the body to make sure that she does not feel too monotone.

"Feminine" palette

I want to try a more feminine color scheme. Maybe she also has rosy cheeks, and a blue shimmer over parts of her face and body.



Traditional palette

This palette evokes a classic European-looking dragon. Not only does the green work nicely to make her more traditional, but from a practical standpoint, it would help her to blend in to green hillsides and foliage.



DESIGN TIP

Texture

Animals have many textures on their bodies that provide a great opportunity to add variations of value and color, making a character more appealing to the audience.

COSTUME & PROPS

Simplification

What do rocks and flowers look like in our dragon's world? If she's stylized and colorful, she needs a world that reflects that. I am going to make background elements more simplified than would normally be seen in nature.



Multi-tasking friend

This character is lonely, but she needs something or someone to express those and other feelings to. Therefore, I've introduced this little bird as a friend. Having a small friend will not only be a fun addition to the illustrations, but it will also help to emphasize the dragon's scale.

DESIGN TIP

Wild v. tame

There are fewer costumes and props to explore when creating a creature character, especially a wild animal rather than a domestic pet. However, this is an opportunity to explore what their home and natural surroundings would look like.

PROCESS TIP

Cohesive coloring

When illustrating children's books, I often feel that characters only come alive when they receive color, so this is a great time to take the rest of our sketches to color. This way, our various drawings will appear cohesive and ready for the final presentation.

ARTIST'S EVALUATION OF DEVELOPMENT

How has the **narrative** of your character developed?

After the art director's feedback, I increased the dragon's wing size and accentuated her claws. Testing a variety of expressions has helped me find some of her fierceness. She is not scary, but she has an element of unpredictability now in her inability to control her fire-breathing, which makes her a closer match to the initial brief.

How have you developed the bond with the intended **audience**?

Exploring poses revealed more of this character's fun personality! Showing clumsiness during flight and her gentle treatment of other creatures makes her a great fit for a young audience. She is not only a better role model for children and their relationship with nature, but is also a suitable choice for parents.

Which aspects revealed **visual** developments of the character?

Our dragon now has everything the brief requested. She has an open, expressive face, a playful nature, and is shown to be excitable and clumsy through her posing and expressions.

How has the character developed for the intended **media**?

A strong value scheme and the right colors make the character pop. Our dragon is finally starting to look like a children's book character. With some added texture and lighting, she will be ready to present in a book pitch, to a sales team, or to an audience.

THE FINAL PRESENTATION

HERO POSE

For our hero image, I wanted to showcase two aspects in particular. I wanted this pose to look friendly and vulnerable, so that the viewers know she is not a monster, but is instead our hero. I also wanted to pick a pose that was not so clumsy that she looks incapable of carrying a whole story line. Our hero image shows her happy and in flight, ready to take on any trouble that she might encounter during her story.



TURNAROUNDS



Three-quarter front

I picked a three-quarter view as the start of my dragon turnaround. Three-quarter views are effective as they don't flatten the character, which allows us here to show how the chest is shaped in more detail than if we were to show her just in profile.

Front

This front view is important for our character because her face is distinctively long and narrow. Although she loses some dimension from the front, it is an important angle to show her eye placement and the angle at which her front legs are placed.



Three-quarter back

A back three-quarter view helps the art department understand her wing placement and the curve of her tail. We also get a clear view of the spikes that run from head to tail.



DESIGN TIP

Back detail

If a character has elaborate designs on their back, this is an effective angle to showcase them.

POSES



In a flap!

This flight pose not only shows our dragon's mobility in flight, but also some of her clumsiness. It was important in this pose to make sure she didn't look too mature or noble, neither of which would fit to her character description.

Anthropomorphism

Although the brief requests that the character needs to walk on all fours, it is important to show that she also has some more anthropomorphic qualities, such as sitting up, and perhaps gesturing with her large front feet.



Interaction

This gentle moment helps to fulfill the brief's request that this character is well-meaning and kind. The birds that encounter her see her for the kind creature she truly is.



PROCESS TIP

Tell a story

Poses are an opportunity to introduce more facial expressions to suggest a story, such as the look of worry on the face of the sitting dragon.

FACIAL EXPRESSIONS

Wide-eyed

Color has helped define this surprised expression, which shows her looking vulnerable and also revealing her teeth. I made her tongue pink and soft-looking like a dog's; a more lizard-like tongue might have made her more frightening to young children.



Think pink

This gentle expression shows that our character has feelings and heart. Not only does the pink on her snout make her seem slightly more horse-like, it also gives us the ability to introduce pink to the dragon's cheeks if we need her to blush or look embarrassed.



DESIGN TIP

Fiery red

The fierce red of the fire creates a striking contrast to the dragon's mild green coloring, further accentuating how surprising and frightening the fire-breathing must be for her and the other characters.



On fire!

Here is our not-so-fearsome girl! I like to think that she was trying to breathe on something covered in ice to make it thaw, but set it on fire by mistake! Maybe once she gets her fire-breathing under control she can use it to help the villagers gently toast marshmallows...



ARTIST'S FINAL EVALUATIONS

My initial thoughts

My first thoughts on reading the brief were that it might be difficult to make a character for young children that could also be portrayed as fearsome in her own world. In trying to work around this and encompass both ideas in my designs I had to look beyond what I find to be "literally" scary, to what could be perceived as threatening to an uninformed villager. People usually fear what they don't understand. Making our dragon unsure of herself helped to communicate her vulnerability to the audience while also making her a little unpredictable in her behavior, which is the perfect thing to frighten a medieval villager.

How the media affected my approach

I approached this character very differently, knowing that it's for a young audience, than I would if I were designing for a young adult audience or a general audience. This meant that I worked with flat graphic shapes rather than trying my designs to realism. I spent more time in this design trying to find fun texture changes and scale patterns, and making my brushstrokes during the color process very textured, as this helps illustrations in children's books appear lively and friendly.

Similar characters in my portfolio

I've done a variety of work for children's literature, designing animals that feel friendly and vulnerable. The difference here is that our creature was mythological, and meant to have a fierce component in addition to her

vulnerability. Mammals like bears are a bit easier to make feel soft and friendly because they naturally have round shapes to play off of. With the dragon character I needed to keep a balance of round and pointy shapes. This was initially a challenge, but became a fun way to provide contrast within the character's silhouette.

The easiest part of the brief...

My favorite thing to do in art is to create lovable animal characters with personality. Drawing on dogs as inspiration really helped me fulfill the friendly/lovable aspect of the brief.

...and most challenging part

The most challenging part for me was adhering to the brief that the dragon needed to seem traditional to northern Europe. There have been so many traditional-looking dragons in books and popular media that I really wanted to avoid having this character look familiar or generic. I had to put away a lot of ideas that would have turned our character away from being a dragon and into looking more like a monster. But character design is all about creating within briefs. If I had pushed the design into less of a traditional dragon, she may not have been the right fit for the story.

"It's a great idea as an artist to continue to push your designs past your comfort zone, into uncharted territory"

The influence of the intended audience

It was really important to me to create a character that would appeal to kids and also help them learn valuable lessons. I think we've all had experience of being shy or unsure of ourselves. Our dragon can help kids learn confidence and bravery in a story setting that takes them away from the stresses of everyday life.

If I could start this character again

After developing a design over a period of time I often feel like I could have pushed things further! It's a great idea as an artist to continue to push your designs past your comfort zone, into uncharted territory. However, I feel like the design we ended up with, though it could be pushed more, is appropriate to the brief and the art director's feedback.





ART DIRECTOR'S FINAL WORD

"This cute dragon strikes a good balance of playful charm, perfect for the target audience. It is also a unique design unlike other dragons out there. We can really sense this little character's friendly attitude coming through, while Hollie's final rendering style just adds to the charm."



ANIMATION

CÉCILE CARRE

*"She is a heroic dragon... but can look delicate
and small when lonely or threatened"*



THE DRAGON



TO: CécileCarre@IllustrationArtist.com

FROM: KennyArtDirector@3dtotalFX.com

SUBJECT: NEW BRIEF Dragon for Animated Feature Film



OVERVIEW

This dragon (name TBC) is a hero in a children's story set in medieval times. Set in a northern European country, she lives alone in a cave, outside the kingdom's fortress. The people of the kingdom treat her with fear and disdain, but this young female character actually has

a friendly and approachable personality. She breathes smoke and occasionally fire when she feels frightened, which does not help her relationship with the villagers. But when she believes her friends are in danger she does not hesitate to take risks to help them.

ART DIRECTOR'S NOTES

- The film focuses on our dragon rescuing her newfound young human friends, while avoiding the misguided king and his knights who think she is out to do them harm.
- The design should reflect the film's lighthearted but comedic nature. While stylistically cartoony and fun, in nature it should not be too simplistic.
- Let's find a unique shape language and silhouette for the dragon that serves the character well - both friendly and appealing but ambiguous enough for the king and his people to fear her.
- Pay close attention to the texturing and detailing within the design - the character will be without a costume so these elements will be crucial for visual interest. Maybe we can add unique scale patterns?
- The dragon's color should work well within the world. The human world will be dominated by grays, browns, and reds, while the dragon's world will feature more natural greens, blues, and browns.
- The dragon's fire will be an important story element - special attention should be paid to how it will look. It doesn't necessarily need to be "fire"-colored!

PERSONALITY

- Playful
- Excitable
- Open
- Heroic
- Friendly
- Fearless

APPEARANCE

- This character walks on all fours, and has a tail and wings.
- She can fly, but as a young character she can be clumsy when taking off and landing.

TECHNICAL BRIEF

INDUSTRY: ANIMATED FEATURE FILM

AUDIENCE

The primary audience is young so you should design the character for school-age children, keeping in mind that parents and other adults are the secondary audience who need to be kept interested in the character.

TECHNICAL SPEC

- CG animated feature film at 90 minutes runtime
- The design should reflect the target audience (young children, 5-8-year-olds) while broadly appealing for parents, etc. - it should not be too naive in style!
- The story transitions through several different key environments - the dragon world, human world, and misty forest realm. This is worth bearing in mind as the design should stand out visually and function in each realm
- Would like to see a finished hero pose, a back three-quarter view, and some key poses and expressions

ARTIST'S INITIAL NOTES

MIND MAP



TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

Cartoony but not simplistic
CG animated feature film
Target audience children 5–8 year olds, and appealing for parents

INITIAL IDEAS

Lonely Shy Like a child among strangers

CHARACTER DESIGN PLAN

How will I help drive the narrative in the character?

The personality of the character must be clearly visible in her silhouette, color, and attitude, as she has no costume or accessories. She is young so the shapes should stay round and dynamic, and the proportions cute. She is a heroic dragon (appearing big and impressive to humans), but can look delicate and small when lonely or threatened. Her main feature is that she is playful and friendly, so let's try to find colors that reflect that aspect (vibrant, sparkling). We must see her as a young, clumsy little girl in her attitude, who takes things very seriously, whether it is danger, courage, or friendship.

How will I make the character suitable for the intended audience?

The audience must feel empathy for the character – she must be appealing, likable, but not perfect. She has some flaws like any of us, and can be shy, or overly proud sometimes. She must feel very familiar so that the kids should want her as a friend and the adults should recognize their

own child in some of her behavior. Also, we can be inspired by some pets' characteristics to make her even more likable and familiar, in the way she expresses feelings such as tenderness, joy, and fear.

How will I meet the visual requirements of the character?

The design is made for a CG animated feature film, meaning that the drawings must be solid and consistent, and work in volume in order to be modeled digitally. We can play with details like texture and patterns (for the skin, for instance). The style must be cartoony but not too naive; we must find a middle ground between simple and efficient shapes, and some realistic details in terms of rendering (anatomy, scales, texture...). She must be expressive and funny in an authentic and relatable way for the audience.

What makes the above design traits suitable for the media?

The CG technique will allow us to play with realistic features such as texture, lighting, FX, and 3D camera movement, which is very convenient when your main character is a dragon that can fly and breathe fire!

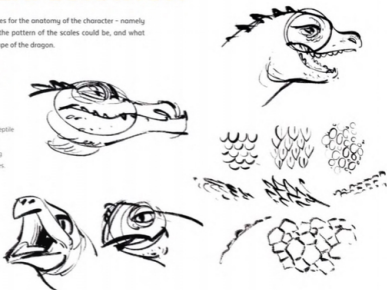
IDEAS EXPLORATION

I tried to find some references for the anatomy of the character - namely how the wings work, what the pattern of the scales could be, and what animal could inspire the shape of the dragon.

RESEARCH

Mix and match

Here I have some examples of reptile and dinosaur heads, and body shapes. At this stage I'm looking for references to create the scales.



THUMBNAILS



- 1 Classic**
A rather classic silhouette for a cartoony dragon. I like her open expression and attitude.



- 2 Croc-inspired**
The body shape is inspired by a crocodile, but with the long neck, the proportions seem kind of weird.



- 3 Too kind?**
This one looks really kind, maybe a bit too much, like a cow. But I imagine her rather like a shy but curious bear.



- 4 Turtle meets cat**
The head shape is inspired by a turtle, but the attitude would be more cat-like.



- 5 Too sleek?**
The general body shape is inspired by a lizard. But I am afraid she is too slender and "willowy" to be seen as a young dragon.

6 Cute croc

This one is really cute! Also inspired by a crocodile, but the proportions work better and I love her playful expression. I am not sure about the big horns, though, as they make her look too old.



7 Frilled collar

I am not sure about the pony-like silhouette, but I like the idea of a kind of collar (between the triceratops and the frilled-neck lizard from Australia). That would be very useful for the expressiveness.

8 Komodo inspired

I really like this silhouette too, inspired by a dinosaur and a Komodo dragon. But she might not look scary enough.



9 Too young

This one might actually be a cuter version of No.4. But I am afraid she looks too young and not scary enough.



10 Weirdo!

A bit of fun to finish with!

ARTIST'S SELF EVALUATION

Which thumbnails best drive the **narrative** in your character?

No.1 is probably the most obvious and classic thumbnail to tell the narrative of the character. Her attitude shows that she is young, enthusiastic, and playful, but we can also easily imagine her scaring the villagers.

Which are most suited to the intended **audience**?

Because the audience is very young, they need a very clear, simple, and appealing design. For that I would pick **No.6**, which in my opinion is the cutest and the one with the most potential for expressiveness.

Which best meet the visual requirements of the **character**?

No.3, **6**, and **8** are maybe the ones which have the best proportion of "cartoony" and consistent qualities. They have simple and recognizable silhouettes and a lot of potential for expressiveness.

Which best meets the needs of **media**?

Again, **No.6** and **8** are the ones that best meet the needs of the media. These dragons are cute, expressive, and very simple in shape, all of which makes them appealing.

"Her attitude shows that she is young, enthusiastic, and playful"

THE INITIAL SUBMISSION

I've chosen my favorite three thumbnails and progressed them with some minor tweaks, and submitted them to the art director for feedback. I decided to also send the art director my thumbnails as reference to see what else I had tried.

A Added collar

I started with the silhouette from **No.3** that I found very friendly, but I changed the horns (she looked too much like a cow), and used instead tiny little pointed horns more suitable for a young dragon. I also added the "collar-floppy-ears" from **No.7**, which could allow for a lot of expressiveness and cuteness.

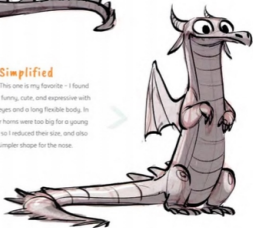


B Funny face

For this one I stayed very close to **No.8**, which I found very funny. But since it looked too much like a dinosaur, I added little floppy ears and also made her tail thinner.

C Simplified

This one is my favorite - I found her very funny, cute, and expressive with her big eyes and a long flexible body. In **No.6** her horns were too big for a young dragon, so I reduced their size, and also used a simpler shape for the nose.



DESIGN TIP

Proportions

When creating young animal characters, they are often a mix of rounded and more delicate shapes. Even with their "puppy fat," young animals will often have a smaller, thinner tail, and in this case horns, in comparison to the rest of their shape.

ART DIRECTOR'S FEEDBACK

TO: CécileCarre@IllustrationArtist.com

FROM: KennyArtDirector@3dtotalFX.com

SUBJECT: INITIAL FEEDBACK Dragon for Animated Film

SHAPE LANGUAGE

No.9 feels like she is young enough to fit the brief, but with enough elements to feel dangerous and scary. I also think it hits all the necessary style targets. The shape language is working – the roundness combined with the sharp flourishes really drive home the idea that she is playful and friendly but has the potential to look frightening and be misunderstood.

CANINE INFLUENCE

No.5 also has something about it I like. Again it looks friendly but could be misconstrued as dangerous. The head shape is cool, almost dog-like with the hanging ear-type bits, which is great for conveying that idea of who she is. I think her body also might lend itself for more dynamic action; however, I think overall this one feels a bit older than the dragon should be. Perhaps there is a magic sweet spot between **No.5** and **No.9** that would fit the bill?

MIXED MESSAGES

I love the idea of **No.7** where the frill fans out and turns her from playful and gentle-looking to something dangerous. I think that is worth pursuing – those floppy “dog ear” frills could open when she is spooked, scaring the villagers by accident?

SILHOUETTE

So overall I would explore synthesizing the cute factor and shape language of **No.9** (I think the head shape is a great starting point) with a bit more of **No.5**'s body type (just enough to make her a bit more agile, but not too much that it ages her). Try that floppy-eared puppy look of **No.5** and **No.7** but combined with **No.7**'s frill action.

ARTIST'S NOTES

Shape language

• My dragons might all seem too old for the pitch except for **No.9** because she has a very rounded silhouette and large head. So I think this one is a good starting point for my design moving forward.

Canine influence

- It's mentioned a few times in this feedback that the hanging ears bring a dog-like look to the design that makes her look very friendly. So I think I will keep that idea moving forward.
- I will also bring more of the flexibility of **No.5** to her body.

Mixed messages

- I agree with the art director; I could combine the idea of the frill fanning out that makes the dragon so expressive, with the “floppy dog ears” (when they are at rest). This way she can be both very cute and frightening!

Silhouette

- This is a very good synthesis of what I am planning to do for the final design now!

PROCESS TIP

Mixing ideas

Someone with a more objective view of your work will much more easily be able to take details from different sketches and suggest new and often surprising ways to combine them. Their objectivity allows them to look at your work in a new light, unhindered by the knowledge of the thought process and logic of the design, so don't be afraid when the art director does this. It's all part of the process!

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

I will now take forward the art director's feedback, and my own notes, to explore the character further through pose, facial expressions, value and color, and costume and props.

POSES

Walking

This is a good pose to show how she might walk (probably a mix of crocodile, dog, and cat). She has a playful attitude, smiling with a touch of shyness.



Curious

She is looking close at something small, and appears curious and amused (it could be her human friend, for instance). The open wings add to the feeling of enthusiasm.



Scary and scared

This is how she would fly. She looks very agitated and angry, spitting smoke and fire. However, her little legs folded back show a bit of fear and clumsiness in this young dragon.



Offended

She is showing her back but giving a sideways glance. Because she is very proud, she might have been offended by something or someone, and is waiting for a reaction (an apology, maybe!).



PROCESS TIP

Personality and pose

So much of a character's personality can be shown in a pose. In animation there will be a clear narrative and the character should also be able to communicate with the audience through simple poses. These will be useful for marketing, where static print or digital images are used.

FACIAL EXPRESSIONS



Anger

When she is angry at someone, she can be very dangerous and scary. Her pupils become narrow slits and she fans out her frill to make herself appear bigger.



Suspicion

Here she is suspicious - she doesn't know who she can trust and if she should be friendly or aggressive. This expression also shows how she can squash her face.

Pride

This is her "proud" expression, glancing sideways and down, chin up, with a bit of disdain. We can also view the head from beneath to show more about the volumes of the face.



PROCESS TIP

Character nuances

Stretch and squash affect a character's face as well as their body, so this is a good point in the design process to explore how versatile the face can really be and how this ties in with a character's personality.



Laughter

If the dragon could laugh, this would be her expression. She is amused with very open features, and her frill ripples playfully, as opposed to fanning aggressively.

VALUE & COLOR

High contrast between the dark pupils and whites of the eyes highlights the face

I hint at the scales, but prefer to explore patterns and textures using color

Value

With the gray tones I mainly work on clarifying the shapes and volumes worked out while creating the poses and expressions.

Lighter chest and tummy extends down the tail, drawing the eye

Details such as the horns, spines, and fan are accented in darker tones



Traditional palette

Because she is the main character, I want to keep a very simple color palette (two main colors) to make her easily identifiable in any environment. Here I try a light green with the complementary red. She looks a bit like a mix of parrot and lizard!



Changing palette

I like yellow for a dragon, as it is original. This color expresses joy, which is very suitable for a young dragon. The purple would be her adult color and the little spots would multiply when she grows older.

DESIGN TIP

Growing up

Considering how a character's appearance might change as they age is useful when designing. At some point we may meet older or younger characters of the same species, so being able to assign certain visual characteristics that evolve over time creates a richer design.

Cool palette

I tried some colder colors – purple and blue. However, I am afraid this combination doesn't match her warm, playful personality.



COSTUME & PROPS

Scale sizes

As the film is computer generated, we can play with a variation of textures to enrich the design. She could, for instance, have very tiny (almost invisible) flat scales on her face (like snake skin) and bigger detached and rounded scales on her body (like fish scales).



Bat-like wings

Her wings are inspired by bat wings; I tried to simplify the shape as much as possible to make it more cartoony than realistic to maintain the right tone for a kids' movie.



Fire and smoke

When she is angry, she fans out her frill and spits fire through her nose. She has not mastered her powers (a little clumsy), and she would often cough smoke after.



ARTIST'S EVALUATION OF DEVELOPMENT

How has the narrative of your character developed?

The yellow color best suits her playful character. Her rounded shapes, cute little horns, and floppy ear-frills make her clearly look like a young dragon.

How have you developed the bond with the intended audience?

Her attitudes are very familiar to those of the audience. She walks like a cat, acts like a dog, and reacts to situations as little children would (sometimes playful and curious, sometimes vulnerable or even proud). This way, the audience can feel empathy for the character.

Which aspects revealed visual developments of the character?

I think she has the right amount of detail to be interesting as a CG character but doesn't border on too realistic for a kids' movie. The constraints of the brief are respected - she is a four-legged dragon with a tail and wings,

with a unique color and shape! It was important to ensure the various components of the brief were met.

How has the character developed for the intended media?

The design is cartoony and expressive enough to add comedy, but is not naive or simplistic. It allows for some subtleties in the facial expression, with plenty of stretch and squash, and versatile use of the fan and ears. This will all be key to the acting.

DESIGN TIP

Audience bonding

Following the rules when designing for younger children, the dragon is deliberately recognizable with her simple shape and colors. This bold simplicity will allow young children to follow and get attached to her easily.

THE FINAL PRESENTATION

HERO POSE

I pushed the saturation of my chosen color palette to ensure the character stands out from various backgrounds, and added more lighting details and reflections to show the textures of the scales on her body.



TURNAROUNDS



Front

I chose a sitting pose, with wings open, to allow us to see most of the character's anatomy. We can clearly see her friendly, curious smile, which reflects her personality well.



Three-quarter front

This view shows both the top and underneath of the wings for a more dimensional feel, and the volumes of the face can be easily read from this angle. The lighter chest that sweeps all the way down the tail is visible, and even at this angle, the silhouette is still simple and recognizable enough for younger children.



Profile

The face is striking from this angle as we can see how big the beak-inspired overbite is. We can also see how the fan hangs down the back of the neck when lowered, and the full length and slenderness of the tail.



POSES

**Innocent curiosity**

I slightly changed the original pose, tilting the head to give her a “curious dog” attitude. The young character’s curiosity will resonate with the younger audience, while parents will see much of their children and pets in the pose.

**Playtime!**

Here again I changed the attitude from the rough sketch. I kept the “clummy-flying” pose, but instead of having her angry, she is “laughing” and playing. Having explored the character more, this felt more consistent with her other traits.

Charming sparkle

Here I kept the intention from the rough and worked on the colors, lighting, and texture. The scales reflecting the sunlight bring a sparkling look to the skin that is charming, despite the sulky pose and closed wings! Details of the back and tail are clearest here.

FACIAL EXPRESSIONS



A warning

As she is a young dragon, we can see she has very few teeth when she screams. However, she is already able to scare with her green eyes and fan both flashing in anger.



Sulking eyes

With eyelids lowered we can see clearly that the purple accent color extends to the upper and lower lids, making the green eyes pop even more.

Delighted smile

This time we see the inside of her mouth as she wears a happy expression, smiling at the audience. The pink tongue and gums help make her relatable.

PROCESS TIP

Consistency

It's important to ensure a narrative is adhered to once introduced, using the presentation to show how else key features will manifest. In this case, the purple spots around the eyes are consistent with the purple marks on the body - when she is an adult all of her scales will be completely purple.



Color details

The little horns and frill are the only fully purple elements of her body, but she is starting to develop little purple spots here and there, seen here around the eyes.



ARTIST'S FINAL EVALUATIONS

My initial thoughts

I thought, "It will be a lot of fun to design a dragon!" I love fantastic creatures, and thought it would be very interesting to play with the contradiction of a cute-scary dragon.

How the media affected my approach

The fact that the design is made for a cartoon/funny movie implied that I had to focus more on very simple silhouettes and shapes rather than a big amount of details, or on designing something realistic. It is more about creating original and powerful language than something subtle.

Similar characters in my portfolio

I have drawn a lot of dragons before but only for myself, never for a brief. So it was interesting here to have some constraints. It helped me move a bit out of my comfort zone and discover a more original design than what I usually tend to do.

The easiest part of the brief...

As usual, creating the expressions and poses to fit the personality of the character was the most fun, and the easiest part. I love to play with acting so was very at home with this aspect.

...and most challenging part

The most challenging part was to find a unique shape for a dragon. Because we have so many references in mind with all the dragons we have seen in animated movies, it is hard to find something that has never been done before but which is still readable as "a dragon." But it is also a very fun challenge - gathering together references of various animals and trying weird mixes...

The influence of the intended audience

Because the target audience is young kids, I needed the design to be very simple and appealing, and the attitude of the dragon very familiar to what the audience is used to. Hence the "cat walk" and "curious dog," both of which are familiar to most children.

If I could start this character again

I think I could have found a simpler shape for the dragon, something even more cartoony and more adapted to a young kids audience. Something with more contrast in the proportions, such as a much bigger head or tiny wings. I feel like I didn't play enough with these elements.



"It is hard to find something that has never been done before but which is still readable as 'a dragon'"



ART DIRECTOR'S FINAL WORD

"This dragon design balances cuteness with an element of danger, the spiky shape language of her wings, claws, and tail complementing the rounded forms of the body, head, and eyes. Cecile manages to suggest the necessary ambiguity of character. The colors will be appealing to the audience while also working well within the world of the film."

THE SCHOOLBOY



VIDEO GAMES

DEVON CADY-LEE

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ILLUSTRATION

HOLLIE MENGERT

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ANIMATION

CÉCILE CARRE

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VIDEO GAMES

DEVON CADY-LEE

*"I love depicting a hero who enjoys being bad!
He's an anti-establishment underdog..."*



THE SCHOOLBOY



TO: DevonCady-Lee@IllustrationArtist.com
FROM: KennyArtDirector@3dtotalFX.com
SUBJECT: NEW BRIEF Schoolboy for Video Game



OVERVIEW

A naughty schoolboy character that engages in wild escapades and pranks, and is always in trouble of some sort. He is energetic, crafty in his ability to avoid punishment, but never so badly behaved as to be cast as a villain.

ART DIRECTOR'S NOTES

- The character must collect candy for energy as he runs away from a variety of angry teachers.
- Actions will include running, jumping, crashing, and so on.
- His expressions should be clear and visible so we can see his cheeky personality coming through during the gameplay.
- Power ups might include him riding a skateboard for a short time, or dropping banana skins and so on.

PERSONALITY

- Cheeky
- Silly
- Disruptive
- Confident
- Fierce
- Occasionally rude

APPEARANCE

- Scruffy appearance, frequently wearing a school uniform (must feature a white shirt and tie) with wild, unkempt hair.
- This character often has muddy marks on him, scratches and scrapes, and rips in his clothing.
- Blue features heavily in the color script for this project.

"The character will be viewed from a high angle, with him running toward the 'camera', so his face will be visible at all times"

TECHNICAL BRIEF

INDUSTRY: VIDEO GAME

AUDIENCE

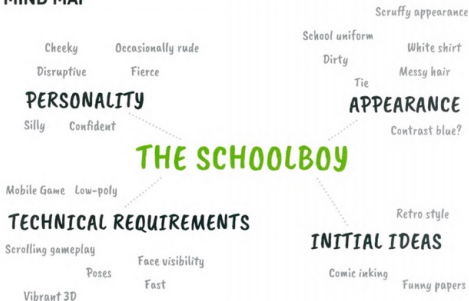
Children within the 9-12 year age bracket

TECHNICAL SPEC

- Mobile casual game to be viewed on relatively small screens
- Single-player, endless scrolling gameplay progressively getting faster and more intense! (Think Temple Run)
- Simple but fun and vibrant 3D style - it should be relatively low-poly design
- The character will be viewed from a high angle, with him running toward the "camera," so his face will be visible at all times
- The in-game character will be simple for clarity but the menus will feature a more elaborate style
- Would like to see a hero pose plus poses exploring the gameplay and character

ARTIST'S INITIAL NOTES

MIND MAP



CHARACTER DESIGN PLAN

How will I help drive the **narrative** in the character?

I like that the prompt is for a mischievous character - I love depicting a hero who enjoys being bad! He's an anti-establishment underdog in a way, so I'll do my best to show how much of a disruptive force he is. I'm thinking of making his hair have the silhouette of an explosion!

How will I make the character suitable for the intended **audience**?

Fortunately the character itself is a young schoolkid, so that will make it easier to connect with an audience of children. I think using the appeal of comic strips in the art style would be a neat way to make this look like something a youngster might be exposed to readily.

How will I meet the **visual** requirements of the character?

A callout for color was that the character would often be on a backdrop of blue, which could be the school colors. I will make sure to use a vivid, warm color to contrast against the environment. Since this style is asking for something very simplified, I will need to be economical with smaller details like scrapes and dirt.

What makes the above design traits suitable for the **media**?

I think this concept lends itself to a very clear art style to view on a small device, such as a mobile phone. Easy-to-read shapes, bold colors, and comic-style outlines should make details appear very clearly.

IDEAS EXPLORATION

These were studies of references I looked at. Whenever I haven't drawn something before, I'll look up references and practice it, breaking it down for myself.

RESEARCH

Uniform approach

I never wore a schoolboy outfit myself, so I needed to do research on how they are tailored. I was taking notes of different pattern and layering combinations, as well as the length of the ties.



THUMBNAILS



1 Vintage comic book

I was compelled to draw in a style that felt like a traditionally drawn comic from another era. Bill Keane, Bill Watterson, and Hank Ketcham were all inspirations for mischievous boy characters.



2 Adding asymmetry

I liked the idea that he had crooked or buck teeth. It added to the asymmetry I was trying to achieve in his details. To show that he's a bit of a rowdy mess I tried to find ways to add scars, scratches, and dirt.

3 Black out

I knew I wanted to incorporate solid black somehow into the stylization, so I experimented with different amounts of black. Black hair certainly adds a lot of definition.



4 Body ratio

Here's a version that explores the head-to-body ratio, and the exploration of a unibrow! The dental braces would need to be carefully drawn to stay readable at a small scale.





5 Hair and teeth

Some of these thumbnails are drawn from memories of being in school. Messy, overgrown bowl cuts and gap teeth were in abundance back then!



6 High hair!

I like the puffy hair this one has - it really adds some height. I felt like I had done a caricature of Conan O'Brien as a youngster, with his iconic red quiff!

7 Groomed imperfection

I like the way I balanced details to tell a story in this thumbnail. I think what I like is that he seems like a very charismatic and properly groomed kid, but at the same time his toothpick and adhesive bandage tell a scrappier story.



8 Boom crack!

BOOM! I stylized the hairdo of this character to explode in all directions. Between his hairstyle and his cracked tooth, he really looks like a highly disruptive force.



ARTIST'S SELF-EVALUATION

Which thumbnails best drive the **narrative** in your character?

I like what **No.8** is doing in terms of silhouette, depicting an easily read energetic and chaotic character. I also like the narrative of **No.7** - I like how slick he looks with more than a hint of mischievousness.

Which are most suited to the intended **audience**?

I think the clarity of **No.7** and **No.8** are best suited for the intended audience (9-12 year olds). The large mass of hair can work as a bright detail for the character, and they have a lot of charisma with the mischievous look in their eyes.

Which best meet the **visual** requirements of the character?

I think to capture the caricature of a young troublemaker, **No.8** and **No.6** work really well for me. I like the detail of an adhesive bandage on the forehead like **No.3** - I think this scales down well as a detail, important for characters in games.

Which best meet the needs of **media**?

I would say that the best candidates are the ones that read the best at a small scale and have good contrast potential. For that reason I choose **No.7** and **No.8** as having most potential because I think their hairstyles would scale down well.

"The large mass of hair can work as a bright detail for the character"

THE INITIAL SUBMISSION

I've progressed and cleaned up my favorite three thumbnails as my initial submission to the art director for feedback. I'll also include my original thumbnails in case there is anything of interest there also.



A Hair raising

I had to include this version for the hair. This hairstyle, perhaps simplified in the next pass, would read well on a small screen without losing impact or character.

B On the run

This version goes into the submission because it's a chance to show a little bit of the character in motion. I also think the mischievous nature of this character shines through.



C Stark contrast

I just really like the iconic, clean look of this character. The solid blacks of his eyes, eyebrows, and tie really make for an attractive spotting of contrast.

ART DIRECTOR'S FEEDBACK

TO: DevonCady-Lee@IllustrationArtist.com
FROM: KennyArtDirector@3dtotalFX.com
SUBJECT: INITIAL FEEDBACK Schoolboy for Video Game

PROPORTIONS

Some fun ideas here ~ I think, though, we need to consider the needs of the brief a bit more. Would be great to see more body exploration, especially with regard to proportion. I imagine it might work quite well to have a largeish head-to-body ratio? This would allow for clear expressions and so on. Worth exploring.

HEAD AND HAIR

Out of the head sketches, I think thumbnail **No.6** and submission **B** might be working best and worth exploring further. **No.6**'s hair might lend itself to a cool silhouette ~ maybe bring in some of the side-shaven head as in submission **A**? And amp up the cheeky factor a bit. Remember this design needs to work in a simple 3D model and probably fairly small on screen.

COSTUME

Costume-wise we are pretty limited in what we can do! I'm drawn toward something like the shorts on submission **B**. Maybe get some asymmetry in there to convey the idea of his chaotic nature. His costume will need to be designed to take into account the final proportions of the character from the top-down, front-on angle so it's readable. Remember, however, there needs to be a "res-ed up" version also for the user interface.

PROPS

I think the idea of him wearing sneakers/running shoes works best. It is a running game after all! Remember to explore the idea of him powering up and using a skateboard, too. What will he look like in power-up mode? What changes?

ARTIST'S NOTES

Proportions

- Increase the size of the head in relation to the body.
- Make sure small details have enough space (tweaking the head size will help, giving the facial features a lot more space).
- Make use of hand-drawn line 1X to bring clarity to the character's features.

Head and hair

- Explore the "explosion" hair silhouette further, including the shaved sides.
- Combine haircuts into a new look.
- Increase further the readability for a small screen ~ will mean simplifying some elements.

Costume

- Make sure to have a large, close-up version of the character for the user interface.
- Include shorts in final version.
- Explore asymmetry further and play up throughout costume for an even more chaotic effect.

Props

- Use running shoes as props ~ could affect his power/speed in the game.
- Include animations that include the skateboard. How does he pose when riding it?
- Consider ideas to illustrate the powered-up state.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

I will now take forward the art director's feedback, and my own notes, to explore the character further through pose, facial expressions, value and color, and costume and props.

POSE



Running

This pose shows what he would look like for most of the game, running toward the camera. I imagine he'd have a skipping step that kept him just above the ground at all times.



Jumping

Whoa! I wanted to capture the pose of him jumping over an obstacle. This could be a banana peel, chains, wet floors, and so on, that the player would need to react to.



On his skateboard

When the schoolboy gets his speed buff, he starts riding his skateboard and moving extra fast. I like the idea of streak effects following him as he weaves and turns.

PROCESS TIP

Buff v. debuff

At this stage it's useful to begin building in effects that indicate speed, power levels, and so on. It's easier to integrate them into your design sooner rather than later.

FACIAL EXPRESSIONS

Stretch

I'm a fan of the simple bean-shaped mouth and the fact that you can see the tongue. The exclamation marks are classic comic cartoon. Everything is open and stretched.



Squash

In a game, it's useful to know when you're getting hit! This radiating halo effect, combined with maybe a camera hiccup, should be enough to signify to the player that they are getting bumped.



DESIGN TIP

Perfect fit

The extra graphics used to emphasize the facial expression, such as the exclamation marks, are designed to sit close to the head, visible without impinging on any surrounding or background features.

Sketchy

Drawing the stars out in a sketchy, freehand style to create this dizzy expression is evocative of the sketches on loose-leaf paper you might see in school.



VALUE & COLOR

Value

I like that we're using bold black for this style. It's an easy way to separate the character from other elements in the game. In a colorful, busy environment, the main character and details that need to be highlighted could be the only art that makes use of black in order to isolate them.

The solid black tie will emphasize the schoolboy's movement.

Bold, solid black outline allows him to "pop" from the background.



Black creates maximum contrast to draw the viewer's eye to the face.

White roles flash into view as he runs and jumps, possibly helping to indicate his speed.



Saturation focus

These colors concentrate all the saturation into his hair and backpack, while the rest of the character stays monochromatic. He looks pretty destructive!



Complementary colors

This one uses complementary colors of yellow and purple. Realistic colors aren't that important for this character, so I chose a neon yellow!

Pop of neon

The darker skin tone and black hair would make this version pop from a light background. I like the neon backpack - it adds to the lively, dynamic character.

COSTUME & PROPS

Candy

I started looking at different candy packaging back in the research stage. This is an example of candy that might be picked up during the course of the game for points.



Skateboard

The schoolboy's skateboard is what gives him a speed buff. Any object that the schoolboy can interact with could be outlined in black as well.



DESIGN TIP

No glow area

On objects that can be picked up, I make sure the glow effects don't have a border, allowing them to be differentiated from the character's own outline.



Banana skins

This banana could be used by the schoolboy himself to throw off people chasing him, or it could be a slipper obstacle in the school cafeteria level.

ARTIST'S EVALUATION OF DEVELOPMENT

How has the **narrative** of your character developed?

A lot of the narrative for me has evolved with how I've depicted the character's expressions. Finding different faces for him to use when interacting with gameplay mechanics has helped flesh out the character in my mind. As his hairstyle developed into what it is, I think the silhouette is really important for selling him as a troublemaker.

How have you developed the bond with the intended **audience**?

While experimenting with expressions and FX, I think I've used a few examples that will really feel like comic-strip reactions and I think that will be fun for the family audience. All ages can relate to a comic-strip style because the look is recognizable across multiple generations.

Which aspects revealed **visual** developments of the character?

When I decided to commit to using blacks, this made a pretty big impact on how the art style could mimic a comic book strip. I was really able to draw attention and contrast to his face, and play with elements like his black tie reading flat and graphic.

How has the character developed for the intended **media**?

I was concerned that different objects and effects may read too similarly together. It's a concern of mine that the player can separate the objects the character can interact with from the environment, because the fast nature of the game will make observation critical. I had to create a hierarchy of character, interactable objects, and FX.

THE FINAL PRESENTATION

HERO POSE

For the final pass, I had to decide how the line art would affect the marketing image. I sort of used it to emphasize the shapes and motion with thick to thin marks. I also tried solid black eyes and ground shadow, and used complementary colors and simple white to create his color scheme. Changing his adhesive bandage to a more cartoonish patch felt right, since the bandage was not as readable at a small scale. I also heavily reduced the detail I had planned for the sneakers.



TURNAROUNDS



Front

This position shows the length of his tie when relaxed, but I imagine it stretches when active to accentuate movement. It also contrasts the characterful asymmetry of the face and head with the more practical, symmetrical body.



Back

The back will rarely be seen but this angle makes the backpack a little clearer. This angle is useful for designers to understand the overall build of the character, and for planning marketing and merchandizing.



Profile

This angle is important to show off the crest of hair he has. It's almost like a fat mohawk, cute and rebellious at the same time. Again the backpack, shoes, and outfit can be viewed.

POSES



Sk8er boi

I made sure to add some warm orange to the skateboard details to stand out against the environment. This was a great opportunity to draw him with his tongue sticking out, as if he's trying to show off his skills.

Front runner

I imagine his tie swings back and forth with every step, a simple but very effective way to illustrate motion and speed.



PROCESS TIP

Consistent features

When using asymmetrical characteristics, I try to make sure they are consistent throughout the process. In this case, he has a tendency to open his mouth more on his right side.



High jump!

Using the little sweat drops shows that he's exerting himself, adding to the movement and even risk of this leap. His body is so short that I imagine he really has to lunge into his jumps.

FACIAL EXPRESSIONS

Red alert

This will be his "alert" face! Whenever the player needs to dodge or react to something quickly, this face will turn on and warn them to take action.



Ouch!

I imagine this is the face he could make when he isn't able to dodge something in time. I can really show off the braces on his teeth on this one, and the halo effect looks extra effective above the fiery, spiky hair.



Dazed & confused

Maybe after he bumps into an object, he gets a dizzy debuff that disorients or slows down his movement.

ARTIST'S FINAL EVALUATIONS

My initial thoughts

I didn't have a lot of experience with the style but when I read the brief I knew I wanted to revisit classic funny cartoons as a style reference. If the whole game could be art directed in that fashion with fun animation, I think it would be really fun.

How the media affected my approach

I ended up making the proportions quite exaggerated and simplified, especially after designing the low-poly version of the character. This led me to making the head larger and the details far fewer. I have worked with this sort of caricature in the past, but not really with a schoolboy character, so it was a fun challenge.

Similar characters in my portfolio

I don't think I've ever drawn a character quite like this before, so I used it as an opportunity to experiment. This style was rather new to me, but I've always been drawn to the classic comic-strip style because it's so expressive and legible. In the end I think it worked well for this medium.

The easiest part of the brief...

I think because I had a clear style direction in my head, it was easy to make decisions based on what I thought was the right way to go. I really wanted the game to look and feel like a classic newspaper comic, so the attitude and the details could be tailored to fit that tone.

...and most challenging part

I think the hardest part was nailing the caricature, and the type of kid that would be the hero. Part of this was how it could really be a multitude of shapes and arrangements, and I think many would work. In the end I chose something that I felt happy with, but it would have been nice to go back and explore all the different kid faces some more.

The influence of the intended audience

I think making a relatable young boy was the key here. A spirited young character that's entertaining to watch as he makes trouble paired with easy-to-follow gameplay can be pretty engaging. Making the violent aspects light-hearted will make sure it stays family-friendly.

If I could start this character again

I also think if I could revisit this, I would do some more style passes. This was a particularly brief assignment to try and explore a new style in, so I would definitely spend more time trying to find what fit the character and the environment. Normally the art direction for the environment could be designed alongside the character to provide the best comparison but that wasn't an option this time.

"I really wanted the game to look and feel like a classic newspaper comic, so the attitude and the details could be tailored to fit that tone"





ART DIRECTOR'S FINAL WORD

"This character's silhouette really suits the small-screen game format, making him instantly recognizable. It also suggests his cheeky personality and the nature of the gameplay. Devon's costume design sells the schoolboy status and his lack of care, while his sneakers are fitting for a game of chase."



ILLUSTRATION

HOLLIE MENGERT

"This character is a little messy, so we can also get a little messy in our sketching and rendering"



THE SCHOOLBOY



TO: HollieMenger@IllustrationArtist.com

FROM: KennyArtDirector@3dtotalFX.com

SUBJECT: NEW BRIEF Schoolboy for Book Illustration



OVERVIEW

A naughty schoolboy character that engages in wild escapades and pranks, and is always in trouble of some sort. He is energetic and crafty in his ability to avoid punishment. However, he is never so badly behaved as to be cast as a villain.

PERSONALITY

- Cheeky
- Disruptive
- Fierce
- Silly
- Confident
- Occasionally rude

APPEARANCE

- Scruffy appearance and frequently wearing a school uniform (must feature a white shirt and tie) with wild, unkempt hair.
- This character often has muddy marks on him, scratches and scrapes, and rips in his clothing.
- Blue features heavily in the color script for this project.

**"He is energetic
and crafty
in his ability
to avoid
punishment"**

ART DIRECTOR'S NOTES

- Our character learns through his escapades how to negotiate with those around him.
- He always maintains his sense of mischievous fun.

TECHNICAL BRIEF

INDUSTRY: ILLUSTRATED BOOK PUBLISHING

AUDIENCE

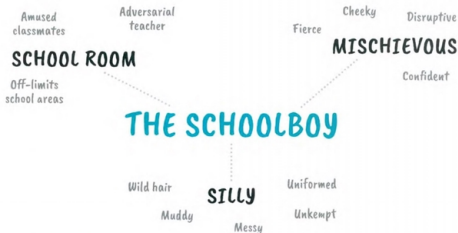
Schoolchildren within the 9-12 year age bracket

TECHNICAL SPEC

- 230 pages long, 21 x 15 cm
- The book is written with illustrations on every second page
- The book would be the first in a series of twelve, each featuring a different misadventure
- Stylistically, the character should reflect his personality – think sketchy, maybe a bit scribbly (think Ronald Searle/Quentin Blake?) while still maintaining clarity of design!
- The internal illustrations will be black-and-white line drawings, while we need to see him in color for the cover art
- He will be around a similar age to those of the target audience
- Would like to see a "hero" image, plus some key expressions and poses

ARTIST'S INITIAL NOTES

MIND MAP



CHARACTER DESIGN PLAN

How will I help drive the **narrative** in the character?

Who doesn't love a roguish character? The schoolboy needs to stay lovable and cool, despite his bad behavior and questionable decisions. I want to keep him youthful and naive-looking, while also giving him a sense of fun. There are several different ways I can communicate this, mostly from props he plays with and the way he interacts with others. A variety of poses and expressions will help to show the different sides of his personality.

How will I make the character suitable for the intended **audience**?

He needs to connect with a young audience, so a sense of exaggeration and pushed shapes will keep him graphic and interesting. He also needs to have an edge, so as not to skew too young and innocent to readers. He'll wear a school uniform as briefed, but I'll play with accessorizing his costume to give him an edge, which also fits his rule-breaking character. Things like hoodies, sneakers, and his schoolbag can be exaggerated to make him seem a little older and well-prepared for his school adventures.

How will I meet the **visual** requirements of the character?

The proposed story sounds full of hijinks and trickery. I want to make sure the character designs don't come across as too tidy or "buttoned up."

I want to exaggerate the shapes to be wild and unkempt. We can play with our design rules a bit more here too. For example, his hair shape will be a defining feature, but as he is wild and messy it's not imperative to always have the shape be the same. If he's running, angry, or tired it wilts or gets spikier accordingly. We can play with the rules, just as our character does.

What makes the above design traits suitable for the **media**?

With our character being mischievous and comedic, and the audience being youthful, there's lots of opportunity to go crazy with this character! We can get bolder and more outrageous with color. Style in children's books can be influenced by the characters we are learning about. This character is a little messy, so we can also get a little messy in our sketching and rendering.

PROCESS TIP

Cohesive style

In books, the style used to render a character can also be applied throughout the text and layout. In this case, a messy, sketchy style.

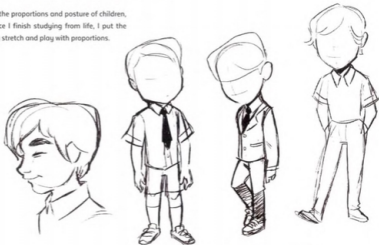
IDEAS EXPLORATION

In this case, I wanted to study the proportions and posture of children, and their school uniforms. Once I finish studying from life, I put the research away in order to really stretch and play with proportions.

RESEARCH

Anatomy study

There are lots of things to research when creating a human character; studying anatomy is incredibly helpful. It's hard to push and pull proportions if you do not have a solid understanding of how real anatomy feels.



THUMBNAILS

1 Focus first

I wanted to sketch loosely here and try to push proportions, so I put outfit explorations on hold. Sometimes you need to focus on one aspect of design at a time. Here I chose body and hair shape.



PROCESS TIP

Audience perception

Sometimes the publisher may push you in a more realistic direction to begin with if they think the audience is a little too mature for something exaggerated.

2 Developing the face

Keeping the big head and small body of No.1, I wanted to try a different treatment on the face, with more rounded features, and thicker ankles for the legs.

DESIGN TIP

Try it all!

Thumbnails are a time to get all the ideas out there, even ones that have been done before, so use this time to try them out.



3 Costume cues

For this sketch, I started to explore a bit more attitude. I liked the idea of his shirt in a constant state of being untucked. This character cannot NOT be messy!

4 Back to reality

Even though pushing proportions is fun, it's always worth trying a few designs more grounded in reality. In this case, I think the character doesn't feel quite fun enough.





5 Adding volume

I thought it might be fun to push the character's shape more with a hooded jacket. This is not regulation school uniform, which also fits our troublemaker.



6 Shape change

The "It wasn't me!" moment. Maybe our character could be gangly and clumsy, with big feet?



7 Experiment

Always try different body types, especially if the character brief is fairly open. You may find something unexpected you didn't know would work.



8 New hairstyle

I think this thumbnail looks a little too old for our schoolboy. But I do like the idea of him having shaggy, unkempt hair.

9 Introducing props

The slingshot is probably a cliché, and I think he might need some more depth, but he still is mischievous enough to show to our art director as an option.



DESIGN TIP

Attention grabbing

When you're designing a character that might appear on the cover of a book, that character needs "shelf appeal" - the ability to grab the attention of passers-by.

ARTIST'S SELF-EVALUATION

Which thumbnails best drive the **narrative** in your character?

Our schoolboy should be likable while also mischievous. In terms of a drawing showing both of those traits I think **No.3** communicates this best. He's got attitude but doesn't look so dark that his intentions aren't in the right place. It could do a good job of driving the story forward and showing a range of emotions along the way.

Which are most suited to the intended **audience**?

As far as a character that suits a younger audience while also feeling slightly edgy, I think **No.5** is my favorite. We want kids to think this character is cool but with the ability to grow and change. **No.5** has a sense of style.

Which best meet the **visual** requirements of the character?

No.9 definitely does the best job of instantly looking like a little troublemaker, but it doesn't show the most nuance needed to create a range of expressions to tell the story. I'll pick a few other thumbnails to

round out the options that we show the art director. I pushed proportions too far in my first two thumbnails, making them appear too young with the oversized heads. We want to find a nice middle ground of young but not childish-looking.

Which best meet the needs of **media**?

No.3, **No.5**, and **No.9** are the most interesting from a shape perspective. Part of creating interesting book characters is creating silhouettes that make them stand out.

"We want kids to think this character is cool"

THE INITIAL SUBMISSION

I've progressed and cleaned up my favorite three thumbnails as my initial submission to the art director for feedback.

A Early version

I cleaned up thumbnail **No.1** and added value to clearly show the art director some of the contrast that will take place in this design.



B Costume conflict

I really love the idea of thumbnail **No.5**. I imagine that in a classroom full of well-behaved students **No.5** would do the best job of standing out with his hood and pointy hair shape. The only problem is that it may not reveal his school uniform enough to be an instant "schoolboy" read.



PROCESS TIP

Director's decision

The school uniform could be pushed more, but at this stage we can let the art director decide which direction he feels is best from a character and story perspective before doing any further development work on it.

C Keep it casual

I've kept most of the initial **No.9** thumbnail, adding more mess to his uniform when creating his value scheme. A black top with tan pants is another variation of a school uniform that will be a nice value option, if the white shirt and dark pants prove to have too much contrast.

ART DIRECTOR'S FEEDBACK

TO: HollieMengert@IllustrationArtist.com

FROM: KennyArtDirector@3dtataFX.com

SUBJECT: INITIAL FEEDBACK Schoolboy for Book Illustration

HAIRSTYLE

I think the hair in **A** is cool, I like how big it is, even compared to the already large head. I would just make the hair a bit messier and more unkempt looking, a bit like **C**. But please keep the overall shape of **A** as it's a lot of fun. Maybe, just an idea, he has a pencil or something sticking out of his hair to add to the messy vibe and emphasize this feature?

DETAILS

Let's get some more dirt and grime in there! So is his face a little dirty? The ripped pants could be more obvious moving forward. And maybe he has a tooth missing or something to give him a cheeky grin.

PROPORTIONS

It might be worth playing with the proportions, as at the moment the head is the same height as the body. Maybe play with shortening the legs or something? Purely for visual appeal.

LINWORK

Definitely loosen up the lines as you move forward to introduce a sense of boisterous energy into the style, while keeping your own design style in there.

"I would just make the hair a bit messier and more unkempt looking"

ARTIST'S NOTES

Hairstyle

- This is why feedback is a good thing. In this case I can push the hair design further, but it definitely helps to have someone to bounce ideas off.
- I love the art director's idea of putting a pencil in his hair. Not only is it a fun prop for the character to play with, it makes him seem ready for anything!

Details

- Time to get messier! I think the idea of a missing tooth is great. It will add asymmetry to the design.
- So often in the media, kids are portrayed as looking very perfect, clean, and tidy. I like that with this character we can have fun with little flaws. We all go through awkward stages growing up, why not work them into our designs?

Proportions

- It's never a great idea to have proportions be distributed evenly. By shortening the legs or the torso we can get more rhythm into our proportions.
- Moving forward I will make sure that the body and head don't feel so even that the proportions become uninteresting.

Linework

- I think sometimes when we like a design and clean it up to submit it, can lose some of its initial appeal.
- From now on I will try to stay looser in my linework and rendering style so that the character doesn't seem too crisp. A nice reminder of my original design plan: get messy!

DESIGN TIP

Character appeal

Appeal is important in a character, and varying the proportions creates a more interesting shape that draws the reader in.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

I will now take forward the art director's feedback, and my own notes, to explore the character further through pose, facial expressions, value and color, and costume and props.

POSES

In action

This first pose shows excitement in a "wait up!" moment. He is on the go and ready to join his friends in some hijinks. Moments like this are useful to show how messy he can be, with tie flopping back and uniform shirt askew. I've added the pencil as suggested by the art director.



Apprehensive

It is important to show that this character is not a villain, which is why we also need poses that show our art director and audience his vulnerability. This pose has our character caught in a moment of regret or uncertainty. Maybe a prank went wrong, or he has hurt someone's feelings.



DESIGN TIP

Little moments

For authentic development purposes, we want to illustrate the characters in the day-to-day moments of a story, as well as the more dramatic scenes.

Narrative

I imagine that our schoolboy throws everything down when he enters a classroom like a whirlwind of energy. Naturally when class is over, he has to walk around picking everything up.

FACIAL EXPRESSIONS

Head and body

We need at least one expression to show that glint in his eye when he gets an idea. Often, I find that shoulders and even hands can be helpful to put into expressions. When our faces emote, it always affects the way we stand and carry ourselves.



Stretch

Yikes! Here I imagine that the teacher is coming down the hallway, and our schoolboy is caught red-handed.

DESIGN TIP

Imagined scenario

When creating any facial expression, I always try to imagine a situation to which character is reacting for more realistic and appealing results.



Squash

Every character in their own story journey has a moment of sadness or disappointment. We need to know how our character will emote in every emotional story point.

VALUE & COLOR

Contrast of missing tooth ensures detail is not missed

Dark tie and pants contrast with the white shirt

Darker hair contrasts with face and shows scruffy style

The pencil will be a bold color to stand out from the hair

Value

Since our schoolboy is in a uniform, this costume will provide most of our value contrast, with dark pants and a light shirt.



Warm and cool mix

I think warm red hair and freckles might be a fun, loud read for our character. Since his facial tones are so warm, I offset them with cool colors in his uniform and shoes.



Dark and bright mix

What if our character had dark hair? It gives him more of a moody vibe. I pick bright colors for his bag and tie so that he still pops off the page.



DESIGN TIP

Uniform colors

Switching the value and colors of the uniform to introduce light pants and a dark shirt means that our character is not as easily recognizable as a schoolboy. A combination of light shirt and dark bottoms is a far more common combination and makes the character faster for the viewer to understand.

Uniform flip

Staying with the freckled route, we could give our schoolboy a mop of blonde hair. I wanted to try a version of his uniform flipped, where the pants are tan and the shirt is dark.



COSTUME & PROPS



Matching proportions

This character is visually bold, with large head and hands, and angular limbs. We want the world he lives in to match these characteristics, so I make his bag look angular and full.



Personalized notebook

Our schoolboy needs a notebook to jot down his master plans, notes to friends, and doodles, to make himself laugh during class. He has labeled it as "Top Secret" to avoid confusion with any other student's notebook.



Used pencil

The pencil behind his ear is always at the ready. It's thick and chunky to fill his hand, but probably short and uneven from overuse.

Revealing joke

What prankster is complete without a whoopee cushion? Not only does he always keep one in his bag, but he has drawn a face on it to make it even more humorous.



ARTIST'S EVALUATION OF DEVELOPMENT

How has the **narrative** of your character developed?

Creating the different expressions and poses allows you to imagine how the character might react to other characters and events, or be motivated to change. These poses and vulnerable moments help our character become more than a sketch; now our schoolboy is a personality with different dimensions.

How have you developed the bond with the intended **audience**?

It is easy to get caught up in poses and forget the world in which the character needs to exist. Prop explorations remind us that our character is a trickster; props like whoopee cushions and secret notebooks will be fun for a young audience. Maybe our character can get away with more than a regular student, making his story an escape for our audience.

Which aspects revealed **visual** developments of the character?

Children are attracted to bold shapes and bright colors, so hopefully when they see our schoolboy with boisterous red hair and a messy face, they will want to know more about him and read about his adventures. There is so much work to do in the design process before color, but color is often what pulls things together.

How has the character developed for the intended **media**?

You can push design when working in books! In illustration you get the opportunity to play with textures and patterns that are not always an option for animation. The freckles and striped tie would be hard to draw in a series of animation frames. But in a book, we can go crazy with patterns to create visual interest on every page.

THE FINAL PRESENTATION



HERO POSE

I thought that fiery red hair was the best choice for our trickster schoolboy, and wanted a pose that showed appeal and innocence with just a hint of the trouble he gets into. With his schoolbag and pencil behind his ear, he is ready for both class and mischief-making!

TURNAROUNDS



Front

For this turnaround I wanted our character in a neutral pose to make his proportions obvious, but with his face showing some of his cheeky personality.



Three-quarter front

Showing our character from the front and side will help other members of book team (layout artists, sales teams, art directors) to understand the asymmetry in the design and let them clearly understand the character's details.



Profile

I usually avoid a straight-on profile view for characters, as it can feel very flat. But in the context of a turn around, it gives a sense for how much the nose projects, how the tie hangs, and the weight of the bag.

PROCESS TIP

Extra angles

Turnarounds aren't always necessary in the book illustration process, but they can be a very helpful tool for the artist to understand their character's proportions from a variety of angles.

POSES

Dynamic

For this character, I didn't want to clean my sketch lines up so much that they lost their movement. Keeping our schoolboy a bit more loose when rendering helps the images to have more of a loose, sketchbook feel, which is fitting for our character's story and the art director's brief.



Making a connection

I like that this pose creates a connection with the reader. Our target audience will be schoolchildren themselves, who will no doubt identify with making messes and having to clean them up.



Uncertainty

This pose will help our audience understand the range of personality that the schoolboy has. He may be mischievous, but he also has compassion and understanding when he takes the time to observe things.

FACIAL EXPRESSIONS

DESIGN TIP

Anticipating moods

Through understanding the behaviors of a character, you can create expressions that also reflect the potential outcome of those actions, both positive and negative.



Mischievous

With the character brief mentioning the schoolboy's mischievous nature several times, I think it is necessary to include a shot of our character scheming. What plans is he coming up with that might make his time in class more interesting?



Surprised

I like this expression in particular because it shows our character's facial range. When picking expressions to show a director or an art team, I like to show them a range of emotions.



Downhearted

Even class clowns can have moments of vulnerability and sadness. The brief describes this character as "cheeky" and "disruptive" so during the course of the story he will naturally experience disappointment upon getting into trouble or schemes going wrong.

ARTIST'S FINAL EVALUATIONS

My initial thoughts

On my first read through the brief I was delighted to explore a character that was chaotic but good at the same time. It's fun to be able to play with the design of a character who gets into trouble but stays lovable. In addition to that, the fact that the setting for this character is in a classroom is wonderful! I love story scenarios that allow me to draw on real-life experience to influence my design work. Who among us doesn't have vivid memories of getting into trouble in school?

How the media affected my approach

Because we're designing for children's literature I felt empowered to keep my designs loose and free. Maintaining my sketch lines in the color phase was a stylistic choice on my part to help this character seem more unkempt but still fun! Rendering styles can vary wildly when working in publishing. I always find it's worth trying something new if it fits a certain story brief.

Similar characters in my portfolio

I have designed several different human characters on different projects in the past few years. As a female artist I am usually asked to design young girl characters directed at a female audience. Designing a mischievous young boy was a fun change from some of the other projects I've worked on. I felt that the component of "messiness" in the story and the character brief allowed me to design in a looser way than I usually do when I sit down

to sketch. Never be afraid to get messy when you're drawing. Things don't have to be completely cleaned up to communicate an idea or emotion. This brief was great for reminding me to keep my sketches lively.

The easiest part of the brief...

The school aspect of the brief was the most fun for me to play with. When designing props for this character I was reminded of what my school supplies looked like growing up, and the way that my brother and I would doodle on notebooks and binders to make them our own. It was easy to imagine what this character needed to carry with him each day, as I remember getting my book bag ready for class every morning. In this way, the brief had a fun nostalgia element to it.

...and most challenging part

It was difficult communicating the correct balance of mischief to hero. It's easy to push things so far that the character could communicate as a school bully or villain of the story. When sketching different poses I was constantly reminding myself that this schoolboy who plays pranks is also the character we need to connect with the most. Hopefully by giving a range of poses and expressions, the audience will be able to see both his best traits and his flaws.

"I tried to pick colors that stood out, but that were also grounded in reality"

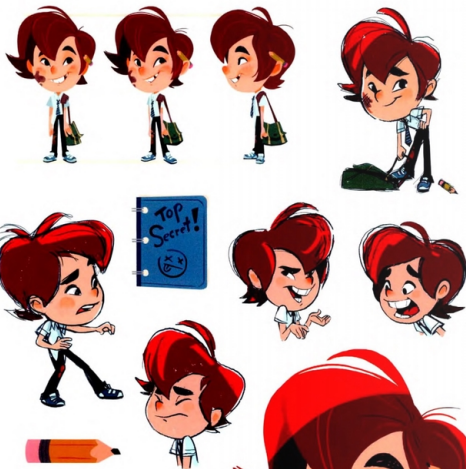
The influence of the intended audience

Knowing that this character was meant for a slightly older audience of children, it was incredibly important to follow the brief correctly. I tried to stay away from super-rounded body shapes and overly large eyes. I chose colors that stood out, but that were also grounded in reality. What we ended up with is a nice balance of soft and hard, colorful and subdued.

If I could start this character again

If I were to start this brief over again I would do a focused set of studies that were just about uniform, in addition to my initial thumbnails. The uniform that we ended up with does communicate schoolwear, but I think there would be room to play with more of a variety of uniform components and colors. Sometimes costume designs get so involved that they take place outside the realm of the character's design. If I were to take this particular character through a series of books I would try to evolve his clothing and style for each book to help show not only the passage of time but also his character growth.





ART DIRECTOR'S FINAL WORD

"This design reads as 'cheeky school kid' while still being endearing and not misconstrued as a bad kid! We know from his smile, costume and overall appearance that he has been up to some mischief and Hollie's design is just the right tone for appealing to the target age group. The shirt color can be changed easily."





ANIMATION

CÉCILE CARRE

"He is energetic, crafty, and cheeky, which will affect his outfit throughout"



THE SCHOOLBOY



THE SCHOOLBOY CREATIVE BRIEF

TO: CécileCarre@IllustrationArtist.com

FROM: KennyArtDirector@3dtotalFX.com

SUBJECT: NEW BRIEF: Schoolboy for Animated Feature Film



OVERVIEW

A naughty school boy character that engages in wild escapades and pranks, and is always in trouble of some sort. He is energetic and

crafty in his ability to avoid punishment, but never so badly behaved as to be cast as a villain.

ART DIRECTOR'S NOTES

- The boy is a fish out of water, a working-class American kid who in a twist of fate finds himself in the poshest private school in the whole of England!
- While he should be cheeky and disruptive, there also needs to be something endearing and appealing about him.
- Best to avoid too much blue in his color design - especially to emphasize his fish-out-of-water status.
- Think about accessories he may have that reflect his personality - a slingshot may be too obvious, but what about a remote control prank tarantula?

PERSONALITY

- Cheeky
- Disruptive
- Fierce
- Silly
- Confident
- Occasionally rude

APPEARANCE

- Scruffy appearance, frequently wearing a school uniform (must feature a white shirt and tie) with wild, unkempt hair.
- This character often has muddy marks on him, scratches and scrapes, and rips in his clothing.
- Blue features heavily in the color script for this project.

TECHNICAL BRIEF

INDUSTRY: ANIMATED FEATURE FILM

AUDIENCE

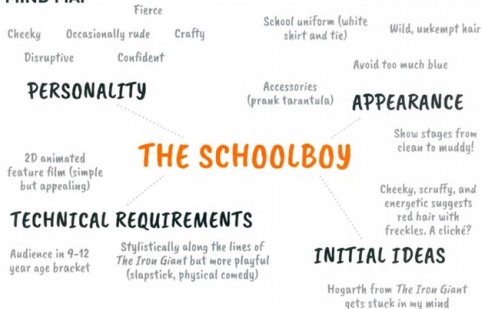
Schoolchildren within the 9-12 year age bracket

TECHNICAL SPEC

- 90 minute, 2D traditionally animated feature film
- Stylistically along the lines of *The Iron Giant* but less serious and more playful in tone
- The film will be of a slapstick nature in places with physical comedy
- The design should be simple enough to accommodate the traditional drawn medium but complex enough to sustain audience engagement throughout and appeal to the target audience
- The boy will go from clean with semi-combed hair (against his will of course) to muddy and scratched as the film progresses and he finds himself in various scrapes and situations. We need to see the stages of this in the design
- Would like to see a "hero" pose and a three-quarter back view, plus some poses which fully express his personality

ARTIST'S INITIAL NOTES

MIND MAP



CHARACTER DESIGN PLAN

How will I help drive the narrative in the character?

The accessories and clothes will illustrate the main features – cheeky and disruptive. How does he wear his constraining uniform? How should he comb (or not) his hair. He is energetic, crafty, and cheeky, which will affect his outfit throughout. He will never wear his tie properly and his shirt won't stay white for long. I'll explore his evolution from scruffy with unkempt hair, to muddy marks, scrapes, and rips. I should not make him too small or weak (he is fierce and confident). I don't want him to be too imposing either – he is not a bully, but more cunning. As a "fish out of water", he has to stand out – red curly hair, freckles, a scar maybe. His attitude and expression should reflect his character and his reaction to his situation.

How will I make the character suitable for the intended audience?

Although cheeky, he should still be likable. The challenge is to make the audience feel empathy for him by also showing his sensitivity, fears, and joys – universal feelings any child can relate to. The choice of accessories

must be something familiar to a child. The "remote control prank tarantula" might be a good idea but I am afraid it might be too high-tech. Maybe just a fake plastic spider attached to a string or something he could have made himself from an everyday life object (let's not forget he is crafty...).

How will I meet the visual requirements of the character?

Because the design is made for traditional animation, I must be very careful with not using too many details that might be heavy to animate for the main character. I should then focus on the essential and necessary features we need to describe his personality. Also, because it is a slapstick comedy, the design must be very expressive and a bit more cartoony than *The Iron Giant*'s semi-realistic style, maybe.

What makes the above design traits suitable for the media?

The traditional animation media is very adapted for this kind of audience (9-12 years old) and for a comedy – this is an opportunity to play with lines and shapes to make the character really expressive and funny.

IDEAS EXPLORATION

I used references for English school uniforms, including all the components commonly found in the uniform. I also explored different types of faces from photos and actors.

RESEARCH

Anatomy study

Starting from real life is a good way to avoid getting into a design too "standard" or clichéd. I also found some references of possible accessories the character could use as a prank.



THUMBNAILS

1 Too dreamy

I like the dreamy attitude he has, but he might look too kind for this character's profile.



2 Cunning

This one has a more "crazy" and dynamic attitude. His eyes also make him look more cunning.



4 Natural curls

I tried a different type with curly hair, but he looks a bit too nice and neat. I would need to develop his outfit further for this one to work.



3 Trying shorts!

I tried a uniform with shorts here, but it looks a bit too old-fashioned. I do like his face and expression, though.



5 Baggy pants

The clearly mischievous attitude combined with a uniform too big for him makes him look like a small jester.



6 Too old

If he is playing a game of cards, he would definitely be cheating! This one might look too old, though.



7 Scruffy style

Always sneaking, preparing a bad shot. The tie has been removed and stuffed into the pant pocket, and the shirt sleeves are rolled up.



8 Old-fashioned

I like his face and attitude, but the haircut might look a bit too old-fashioned.

9 Sharp suit

I like his confident attitude and proportions, but he looks too neat and slick to fit this character description.



11 New hairstyle

I tried a different silhouette with the too-big jacket, keeping the pants slim-fitting. I think this hairstyle works well.



10 Head boy!

He would never be "head boy" so this feels wrong!

12 Sweater weather

Maybe the more realistic uniform would be this one - a simple sweater instead of a jacket? But with the "Justin Bieber" haircut, he might look a bit too romantic.

DESIGN TIP

Audience perception

The proportions are important when designing a young character. He would easily begin to look more like a young man in a suit, so by keeping the head bigger, the hair voluminous to indicate youth, and the face rounded, the younger age is retained.

ARTIST'S SELF EVALUATION

Which thumbnails best drive the **narrative** in your character?

No. 7 features all the characteristics to describe the narrative, including the messy uniform and sneaky, cunning attitude. Even his stance, leaning up against a wall with one foot up, tells us that he's laid-back and a bit rebellious.

Which are most suited to the intended **audience**?

I think **No. 2** is the most appealing and engaging due to his expression and attitude. However in contrast to **No. 7**, he might be a bit too upbeat and naive. **No. 9** is also a good fit for his very clear silhouette and mischievous attitude. The shape language contains a lot of angles, hinting at a sharp brain, and the firm stance communicates confidence. There should be a good middle ground between these to get the right mix for the brief.

Which best meet the **visual** requirements of the character?

Because it is a traditional animation movie, we need a simple design with few details, a dynamic silhouette, and a very expressive face for the cartoony moments. According to these criteria, the best are number **No. 2**, **No. 4**, **No. 8**, and **No. 9**.

Which best meet the needs of the **media**?

As well as meeting the visual requirements, **No. 2**, **No. 4**, **No. 8**, and **No. 9** are a great fit for animation. In particular, a strong, confident, and characteristically messy silhouette will move through the animation well, keeping the focus on him whatever he is doing.

THE INITIAL SUBMISSION

I've progressed my favorite three thumbnails and cleaned them up for my initial submission to the Art director for feedback. I decided to also send the art director my thumbnails as reference to see what else I had tried.

A Fish out of water

I liked the attitude of **No.7**, preparing some mysterious plans with his tie tucked into his pocket. I emphasized his mischievous smile, and added a bit of mess to his hair (using **No.1's** hair). This pose also shows that he is a lonely child (the "fish out of water" part of the brief), spending a lot of time observing his surroundings rather than participating in them.



DESIGN TIP

Setting the scene

Imagining how your character is interacting (or not, as in this case) with other characters can help to create a more realistic pose. Thinking about how your character is viewing their surroundings and what they might be thinking based on the brief can inform their stance and facial expression.



B Outdoor pursuits

For this one, I stayed very close to **No.2**, which I like a lot with its dynamic silhouette and oversized costume. I made his outfit messier, with some dirt on his clothes and face, to illustrate that he is more at home playing outdoors, rather than sitting in a classroom.

C Out of proportion

I started with the silhouette of **No.9**, and mixed it with rough **No.4's** hairstyle, and a bit of **No.6's** outfit. I like the contrasting proportions in this silhouette, with the large round face with skinny legs and the decisive, confident posture. I think it could also use some detail, so add the asymmetric pants (one leg pushed up), loose collar (the top button is unfastened), and the sweater half tucked into the pants.



ART DIRECTOR'S FEEDBACK

TO: CécileCarre@IllustrationArtist.com

FROM: KennyArtDirector@3dtotalFX.com

SUBJECT: INITIAL FEEDBACK Schoolboy for Animated Film

BACKGROUND

I love thumbnails **No.2** and **No.5** and I think it's because his jacket and clothes feel a little bit too big for him. This suggests it might be a hand-me-down from an older brother, which also suggests something about his socio-economic status. Although not mentioned in the brief it does hint at his world beyond his school life, which is important in feature animation, so we should keep this. Of course, no doubt he ends the day with his jacket stuffed half into his school bag, and his tie missing!

COSTUME AND PROPS

I love how he wears his tie in **No.7**! This costume reads school kid and rebel, which is good. This is how he probably ends up at the end of the day, shirt half out of his pants too, and unbuttoned at the top. It would be great to see him with a school bag – I imagine he might drag it along the ground behind him rather than carry it on his back. Or he might even kick it along in front of him like a football (until all his jokes and pranks fall out and he has to stuff them all back in before a teacher sees...).

PROPORTIONS

No.5, **No.9**, and **No.10** feel about the right age – just in the early teens so he has not quite grown into his body yet. The other sketches might feel a bit too old; ages 12-13 or around there is a good age to aim for.

HAIR

It might be cool to have the hair combed to the side, but with a big tuft sticking up at the back as if a parent tried in vain to make him look neat. I like the head of **No.4** – the hair could be a bit messier, and lowering the age would also bring it back to the brief. I think red hair would suggest his fiery nature, but I would just be careful to avoid looking too much like the triplets from *Brave*. So perhaps it is worth exploring another color option?

ARTIST'S NOTES

Background

- The "too big" aspect of his clothes is definitely a characteristic I want to keep for the final design.
- As the art director says, I like the idea that the oversized clothes might also suggest a background story for the character. I think it also makes him more touching and cute, and the audience will feel empathy for him.

Costume and props

- I need to develop these ideas for using costume and accessories to show his personality.
- I will work on the ideas with the shirt, tie, and school bag when I create poses to develop the character.

Proportions

- I have to be careful of not making him look too old, something I was already wary of at thumbnail stage, so it's interesting that the art director has also picked up on it.
- To keep the character at the correct age, I need to focus on maintaining the appropriate proportions. The head should not too small compared to the body, and the eyes should be placed further down the face. Both of these are classic techniques for drawing a younger face.

Hair

- I think I will keep the idea of red hair to make him really stand out from the crowd, and forget about curly hair.
- I like how I can play with different steps of "mess" – from well-combed to sticky and untidy – with straight, medium-length hair. I like the idea of there always being a big tuft sticking up at the back (whether combed or not). This would show how rebellious he is, and how impossible it is to make him fit the mold.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

With the art director's feedback, and my own notes, I'll now develop and explore the character further through pose, facial expressions, value and color, and costume and props.

POSES



Neutral pose

I start with a three-quarter "hero pose", arms crossed, mischievous smile, with his full costume and props - the uniform, tie, and school bag.

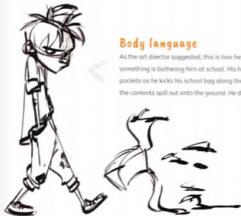
Back view

Here, he has been taken by surprise while hidden behind a tree, shooting paper bullets through his pen-blowpipe. This is also the first opportunity to see the back of the character.



Body language

As the art director suggested, this is how he behaves when something is bothering him at school. His hands are in his pockets as he kicks his school bag along the ground, letting the contents spill out onto the ground. He doesn't care!



Squashed body

His favorite prank is a simple fake spider attached to a string. It always works and he is already laughing in anticipation of the terror it will bring to the classroom.

PROCESS TIP

Posing for variation

The poses created at this point allow me to explore the character at different angles and positions, including squashed.

FACIAL EXPRESSIONS



Squash

He has been caught out doing something naughty and is pretending to pull a guilty face, squashing his features together.



Stretched

He spent the day outside playing in the rain and is now freezing. The look of distress combined with the flat hair give him a very different look, showing a more vulnerable side to his personality.



DESIGN TIP

Stretch and squash

The variety of expressions explore how this character's face responds to being stretched and squashed into a number of reactions, vital for animation.

Disappointment

His teacher has accused him of playing during class and he is acting innocently with a forced smile. However, his tousled hair contradicts him - his unruly hair will always give him away!

VALUE & COLOR

Value

I am being careful here to make all the elements (shirt, jacket, pants, and bag) clearly readable by choosing contrasting gray tones.

Vital props such as the spider and blowpipe contrast with the background

Contrasting striped sole and laces echo striped tie

Classic colors

I try here some classic colors for the uniform, using deep blue, black, and red. However, I am afraid the black and blue don't contrast strongly enough. I also think his chestnut hair is too common a color for this particular lead character.

Turned-up contrast

To add more contrast, I tried a deeper blue with brown-beige pants (my research showed that this color is commonly used in school uniforms). I also brought more vivid colors with a red and gold striped tie and a blue shirt. I like this mix of colors a lot, and it really pops with his now much redder hair.

Cold and mean

I tried a variant with strawberry-blond hair, but now he looks too "upper class" and mean (maybe it is the "Draco Malfoy" effect?). I also find this mix of colors a bit cold with the red missing.



Classic striped tie breaks the uniformity of the flat-colored clothes

Shadows emphasize the zigzag folds of the baggy pants



COSTUME & PROPS



Scrappy satchel

He has the classic scrappy old leather shoulder bag with a broken buckle and loose stitching (thanks to him kicking it around the floor). We can see he collects branches to build some mysterious toys, but what else is in there?



Practical jokes

Also coming from his bag is crumpled paper, a paper plane, paper bullets, and a handmade "pen-blowpipe" (his favorite weapon). Of course, we also have the plastic spider.



Totally innocent

This is how he looks when he is trying to appear well-behaved, with his shirt and tie properly fixed, and tidy hair. However, we know that the tuft of hair sticking up at the back is there to remind us that he will always be a rebel at heart.



Natural hairstyle

This is how his hair would appear for most of the film - naturally untidy and wild, which will be emphasized further by the fiery red color.

ARTIST'S EVALUATION OF DEVELOPMENT

How has the **narrative** of your character developed?

The narrative is supported by his uniform and how he wears it (too big, always messy and dirty), as well as his messy hairstyle. The props have developed, with handmade pranks and games giving more insight into who he is. His range of facial expressions and moods have also widened - we have seen him be mischievous, full of energy, playful, sneaky, and spontaneous.

How have you developed the bond with the intended **audience**?

I think what make this character suitable for the audience are the elements that make him so familiar to everyone. We all know kids with handmade toys and pranks, a mess at the bottom of their school bag, the graffitied ruler, and so on. Both children and adults will recognize it in themselves, while parents will also see it in their own children.

Which aspects revealed **visual** developments of the character?

The cartoony/semi-realistic graphic style with a few more details allowed me to play with lines of action and simple shapes to obtain very expressive and dynamic poses. The high-contrast colors (red and blue) and strong shapes (spiky hair, triangular face, thin body) make him a simple, appealing design that anyone can easily identify with and remember.

How has the character developed for the intended **media**?

I tried to use as few details as possible, knowing that every line is more work for the traditional animator. I think I managed to express who this character is using a minimum of details.

THE FINAL PRESENTATION

HERO POSE

Although I thought the most successful color palette was the second one, I had to revise it because I discovered, by reading the brief again, that the shirt was supposed to be white and that I was supposed to avoid the blue color. However, I think it is fine to keep a dark blue for the jacket because it is a very common color for a uniform.



TURNAROUNDS



Front

I chose a very casual standing pose to clearly show the different elements of both the design and the proportions. The asymmetry of every feature, from head to toe, speaks volumes about his personality.



Three-quarter front

From this angle we begin to see more of the volumes in his face, with the very childlike small chin. Styling the outfit with the pushed-up sleeve and pant leg shows how skinny the limbs are - he's a scrappy kid!

Profile

We get a sense of how the oversized uniform hangs from his skinny frame, adding to the messy appearance. The upturned nose and long neck give him an inquisitive look, and we can see that someone is obviously trying to keep his hair short and neat.



POSES



Caught!

This pose is one that could make the audience feel empathy for the character as he is caught red-handed. His posture is quite open, even though his back is to us, making him more vulnerable.



Ready to run

This pose represents the essence of our character – he enjoys playing pranks on others. I emphasized the amused expression on his face during the coloring process, and it's easy to see how hard he is gripping his satchel, ready to spring to his feet and run at any moment!



Sulking

This is the perfect pose to show a typical sulking kid. When doing the colored version, I clarified the contents of his bag as they fly out – a mixture of accessories for school and general mess. The bogginess of the shirt is also well illustrated here.

FACIAL EXPRESSIONS



Wide-eyed shock

I adjusted the proportions to really make the character design consistent. In the sketch, the eyes were too small and the ear too big, which aged the character too much. This expression still shows how much the face can stretch.

Extreme remorse

While creating the color version, I try to simplify the line work as much as I can, while still revealing the expression. I also try to push the expression as much as possible, moving the mouth up and left.



DESIGN TIP

Cheek colors

The colors used on a face can communicate so much about how that character is feeling. As well as blushing in embarrassment, they may have become paler through shock or illness, slightly blue with cold, or their face may even be in shadow if they are trying to hide.



Embarrassed flush

To emphasize the shame he could feel I added extra pink to his cheeks – we're all familiar with that burning sensation! We can also see more details of the squashed face – the forehead plays a role in coming right down, creating creases between the eyes.

ARTIST'S FINAL EVALUATIONS

My initial thoughts

While reading the brief I thought that it would be a lot of fun to draw this character because the tone is comedic and the style cartoony, meaning I can push the expressiveness and the dynamism really far.

How the media affected my approach

When designing for a 2D animation movie, I know I have to be careful with the level of details, so I have to be very artificial and only use the elements that are necessary to describe the character. It is a very good exercise to be forced to make those choices and keep the design simple.

Similar characters in my portfolio

I have drawn children before for personal work and illustration but I never had such a specific brief. But I am used to this kind of character and to this graphic style so I was in a comfort zone. I could mix my knowledge and experience from both to tackle this particular brief.

The easiest part of the brief...

The easiest part to nail for me is to play with the attitude and expression to show his personality. I love to put the characters I draw in various situations then try to find the most expressive and dynamic pose.

...and most challenging part

For me the most challenging was to find some props that would make this character unique, original, and likable, beside his annoying character. Finding toys and pranks that the audience could relate to but that were not too clichéd was a challenge.

The influence of the intended audience

Knowing the audience is 9-12 years old children, I needed to use my memory and go back to that time when I myself was at school. I wanted to find ideas to make the attitude and props genuine and in which the children could recognize themselves. They should be thinking things such as "Oh that is exactly what I do!" or "I hate boys like that!"

If I could start this character again

I think I could have found a more original design - the facial features are a bit too common and standard. I also think that I could have pushed way further the design when he is all muddy, full of scratches and scrapes. I kept him too clean!

"I love to put the characters I draw in various situations then try to find the most expressive and dynamic pose"





ART DIRECTOR'S FINAL WORD

"The clothing choices made by Cecile not only tell us exactly where this kid should be (school!) but also cleverly reflect his situation: his loose baggy trousers and trendy trainers contrast with the formality of his blazer and tie. His unkempt red hair could allude to his fierce and cheeky nature, and his posing and attitude re-enforce that."

WORKFLOW STAGES

1. MIND MAP



2. RESEARCH



3. THUMBNAILS



4. INITIAL SUBMISSION



5. CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT



6. FINAL PRESENTATION



TRY IT NOW: **BONUS BRIEFS**

BY KENNETH ANDERSON

Now that you have seen in depth the different approaches and thought processes of our designers, you might be feeling inspired to take on a brief yourself. In addition to the four characters you have seen already, we've created another six, divided among the different media. Pick one and progress through the workflow stages. Ask a fellow illustrator (maybe a friend or colleague) to act as art director, giving you some feedback part of the way through the process as I did for Devon, Hollie, and Cécile. Don't forget that a crucial stage of the workflow is to have fun and enjoy the process throughout!

THE ROBOT

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THE ROBOT CREATIVE BRIEF

TO: S.Ketcher@FreelanceArtist.com

FROM: KenngArtDirector@3dtotalFX.com

SUBJECT: NEW BRIEF Robot for Indie Console Game



OVERVIEW

This character is a cute futuristic robot in an indie console game. Trapped on a hostile alien spaceship, our character's goal is to escape each level and ultimately reach an escape pod to seek sanctuary elsewhere. The player must control our robot hero to solve puzzles

and negotiate environments by moving blocks, building ramps, and unlocking new tools that it can use to its advantage! The robot is not a violent character by any means and so conflict is only resolved through escape or trapping enemies.

PERSONALITY

- Amicable
- Childlike
- Naive
- Comical
- Nervous
- Cheerful

APPEARANCE

- The robot is cute in appearance and should be very appealing. It will need a "face" of some kind to emote with and connect to the audience.
- Our character has tracks which it maneuvers around on and arms or some kind of leverage capabilities for interacting with the game world.
- The robot is futuristic in design, rather than having an old, metallic, clunky feel. It can be colorful but there should be a hint of the mechanics underneath its shell.
- Use of lights in the robot's design should emphasize its different states such as low health, power ups, and level completion.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

- The gameplay function of our robot will heavily influence its design. How will it lift and place blocks? Move items around the gameplay area?
- The game world is quirky and fun but with an element of comical danger. Our robot

never dies as such, but it can be caught by enemies and needs to respawn. This world should input into the desired design.

- We will need to be careful to really distinguish our character design from other well-known robot characters.

TECHNICAL BRIEF

INDUSTRY: INDIE CONSOLE GAME

AUDIENCE

The game is aimed at a general audience, intended for casual and group play, ideally family orientated. As such the character should be appealing to a broad range of people, aiming for a cute, fun style to support this!

TECHNICAL SPEC

- The game is a 3D platformer, played from a third-person point of view
- The game has a limited budget so the style will need to reflect those constraints
- To allow the game to function well over online gameplay, simplicity will be key
- As we will mostly view this character from behind, careful attention should be paid to this angle of design
- The game will use real-world physics such as gravity, weight, pushing and pulling, and so on



THE TALKING DOG CREATIVE BRIEF

TO: S.Ketcher@FreelanceArtist.com

FROM: KennyArtDirector@SdtotatFX.com

SUBJECT: NEW BRIEF Talking Dog for Video Game



OVERVIEW

This character is the main character (hero) in a comedic narrative. The story is set in modern-day USA, in an ordinary-looking suburb, where our dog belongs to a young family. The only person in the game to know of his ability to talk is his best friend, an eight-year-old girl

(the daughter of the family). He is humorous in both his speech and physicality. This is also a very active character with an excellent nose for tracking down danger he can smell trouble (and sausages) from miles afar.

PERSONALITY

- Bright
- Friendly
- Funny
- Not very smart
- Hyperactive

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

- The dog will offer comic relief - his design should reflect this purpose in a friendly and fun way.
- He will be comedic and enthusiastic if a problem is solved correctly; how might he respond if a problem is not solved?

APPEARANCE

- A particularly waggly tail, and a face that can demonstrate complex emotions while still being identifiable as a dog.
- His tongue often lolls out of his mouth and he moves with a light, bouncy motion.
- No dog breed has been selected for this character yet. However the following breeds must not be used: schnauzer, greyhound, poodle, chihuahua, bulldog, husky/Alaskan malamute.
- The dog will need to stand out clearly against the simplicity of the rest of the visuals.

TECHNICAL BRIEF

INDUSTRY: VIDEO GAMES

AUDIENCE

The primary audience is children (5-8 years), although the character should also appeal to older children. Therefore the character's personality and expressions should be clearly intelligible. The secondary audience is parents and guardians, so the design should be sophisticated enough to hold an adult's attention.

TECHNICAL SPEC

- Educational point-and-click game/touch-interactive game with high definition visuals
- Single player and multiplayer
- The characters will help teach basic Math and English through fun interactive game play
- The characters won't be directly controlled by the user, but instead respond to the user's actions
- 2D vector animation style, very simple and stylized
- Any menu/splash art will be in the same style as the in-game characters so they should be detailed and engaging enough for this purpose
- Would like to see a "hero" pose, a back three-quarter view plus any other relevant expressions and poses



THE ALIEN CREATIVE BRIEF

TO: S.Ketcher@FreelanceArtist.com

FROM: KennyArtDirector@3dtotalFX.com

SUBJECT: NEW BRIEF Alien for Children's Picture Book



OVERVIEW

Our alien character is visiting Earth on vacation! While exploring the local park it quickly encounters Lilly, a curious girl who isn't at all afraid of this little alien creature. Lilly soon shows the alien all the sights of the park - the lake and the ducks, the flower beds, and the

fun playtime activities. Our little alien is soon whizzing down the slide and swinging on the swing set. At the end of an adventurous day, the alien takes off back home with a new pen friend from another planet.

PERSONALITY

- Friendly
- Inquisitive
- Naive
- Silly
- Brave
- Impulsive
- Adventurous

APPEARANCE

- As the book should appeal to younger audiences, this alien character should not feel threatening or in any way scary. It should be instantly likable!
- Our alien should be cute, but not too cute. "Ugly cute", perhaps with three (or more) eyes or some unusual physical features.
- Our little alien needs a space suit - we want to be clear that it is from outer space and not just a monster or something else! What form it takes should be explored but nothing too obvious; avoid domes over its head.
- Try some color schemes that avoid the stereotypical alien green!

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

- Lets play with the style - being a book it can be somewhat experimental and isn't limited by any technical requirements other than printing.
- Think about how the alien character might contrast with the human one. Is it larger or smaller than Lilly? Perhaps it even has something in common with Lilly - similar color of hair?
- Fun and friendly are the key vibes to convey in this character!

TECHNICAL BRIEF

INDUSTRY: ILLUSTRATED BOOK PUBLISHING

AUDIENCE

This book is to be aimed at a young audience in the age range of 3-5 years. However, it will most likely be read alongside a guardian. The book should also be considered suitable for an international audience, as it could potentially be translated to be sold in other markets.

TECHNICAL SPEC

- 32 pages long, 29 x 0.5 x 24.5 cm
- The character design itself should work as a plush toy that comes with the book
- The style should be quirky and fun with bright, bold colors where suitable
- The print size is fairly large, so ensure the character has a good balance of details for visual interest



THE MERMAN CREATIVE BRIEF

TO: S.Ketcher@FreelanceArtist.com
FROM: KennyArtDirector@3dtotalFX.com
SUBJECT: NEW BRIEF Merman for Illustrated Fantasy Book



OVERVIEW

Our book follows the story of a merman, the last of his kind, and his adventures negotiating everyday life in Victorian England. He is able to transform into human form but can only stay out of the water between sunrise and sunset. While out exploring the mainland one

day, he falls in love with a feisty but friendly young woman. They spend time getting to know each other but he struggles with his secret and tries to hide it from her. She grows suspicious, eventually following him one evening as he returns to the sea.

PERSONALITY

- Kind
- Passionate
- Longing
- Anxious
- Melancholy
- Secretive

APPEARANCE

- He is a youthful adult in his early twenties.
- He is tall and athletic but has no mustache, beard, or any hair on his face and body at all!
- While in the form of a merman, he has a long fish-like tail. When in human form, he looks like a normal human being, but subtle things give a clue to his true form - slightly webbed hands (he hides them with gloves!) and subtle lines on his neck (gills, which he hides with his clothing).
- In human form he dons fancy Victorian clothing: a top hat, tailored suit, gloves, and possibly a cane.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

- The main character should feel charismatic and non-threatening but with a hint of the conflict within regarding hiding his secret.
- His design should also suggest to the audience something of his merman nature. This should, however, be subtle and not just in the physical attributes noted above.
- Style wise, something with a traditional feel should be explored - a watercolor vibe might work perfectly.

TECHNICAL BRIEF

INDUSTRY: ILLUSTRATED BOOK PUBLISHING

AUDIENCE

The audience for this book will be young teens. It is a fantasy-romance book with a hint of melancholy! The focus therefore will be on the unfolding drama and the character's choices and actions on a deeper level.

TECHNICAL SPEC

- 100 pages long, 19 x 23.5 cm
- The illustrations will complement the text of each page and so will be full-page size
- We need to see him both in merman form and human form. His design must allow him to be recognizable as the same character in each form, while remaining specific to each environment.
- There are no technical restrictions on style, so this should be taken advantage of



TO: S.Ketcher@FreelanceArtist.com

FROM: KennyArtDirector@3dtotalFX.com

SUBJECT: NEW BRIEF Pirate for Animated Feature Film



OVERVIEW

Our pirate character is the villain of this project - the most fearsome pirate ever known to sail the seven seas! He commands a crew entirely composed of misfits - ghosts, zombies, and cursed sailors. The pirate himself is also cursed, doomed to sail the seas forever. If he sets foot on land he faces instant disintegration. This restriction

hinders his plans to rule the world, and leads to his *raison d'être* - treasure. But not just any treasure will do - he seeks a very special treasure with magical properties that will allow him to walk on land. And when he is able to walk on land - the whole world will be his for the taking!

PERSONALITY

- Eccentric
- Ambitious
- Fearless
- Villainous
- Domineering
- Egocentric
- Angry

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

- The style should reflect the oddball nature of the story - nothing too serious! Think fun, a bit wacky.
- Although this character is the villain, the style and nature of the story means he can't be too scary. A bit of gross is fine, though!
- Pirate characters have been done to death, so some exploration will be needed to find a truly unique design direction.

APPEARANCE

- He wears typical pirate attire but still needs to look unique - his oversized captain's coat trails behind him on the ground.
- He is big, bulky, and barrel chested.
- No beard, but he does sport a rather long mustache which he likes to fashion into crazy zigzag shapes.
- He has a cursed pet parrot which lives in his hat - it is really half parrot/half skeleton!
- He is very old, a bit past his sell-by date, because the curse keeps him alive. His appearance should reflect this, while not making him look weak or feeble.

TECHNICAL BRIEF

INDUSTRY: ANIMATED FEATURE FILM

AUDIENCE

The primary audience is young, so you should design the character for school-age children. Bear in mind that parents and other adults are the secondary audience, and they also need to be kept interested in the character.

TECHNICAL SPEC

- 2D animated feature film at 75 minutes runtime
- The film will be animated in a modern 2D animation style
- Because it is a 2D film, the designs can't be overly complicated - efficiency and ease of animation must be considered!
- Due to being a feature film, ensure there is enough attention paid to the face design for character emotion and acting



TO: S.Ketcher@FreelanceArtist.com

FROM: KennyArtDirector@3dtotalFX.com

SUBJECT: NEW BRIEF Warrior for Stop Motion Animated Feature Film



OVERVIEW

The film follows our warrior hero as she finds herself tasked with the impossible - defeat the incredible giant ogre of the Forbidden Valley! He has been awakened after centuries of deep sleep, hungry and angry, and it's all thanks to our character. She accidentally broke the spell that bound him, waking him from his eternal slumber.

At first our hero doesn't have the skills or aptitude to take on such a huge task and must seek the aid of wizards, weapons masters, and magical creatures. Eventually, with the aid of her flying horse, a magical sword, and her new-found skills, she overcomes her fears, subdues the ogre forever, and saves her world from being destroyed!

PERSONALITY

- Tenacious
- Determined
- Happy-go-lucky
- Uncertain
- Kind
- Naive

APPEARANCE

- Her appearance will change slightly between the start and end of the film as she acquires accessories. These may include magical protection charms or special armor. Her normal day-to-day attire consists of tunic and boots made of animal hides, which don't quite fit her properly.
- She is a young teen, on the cusp of adulthood. As such, she hasn't quite gotten used to her body (she grew taller pretty fast) and looks a bit awkward at times. However, she is a natural athlete and as time goes on becomes more in tune with her natural abilities.
- She has shorter hair, with multicolored braids, but is not necessarily "tomboyish."
- While she is athletic, our character should not feel physically powerful, especially at the start of the film.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

- Stylistically, we need something that works with stop motion in mind. So the feet have to be large enough to support the puppet's weight, and so on.
- Her design should reflect her inner state of mind. At the start, her lack of aptitude will be reflected in her awkward clothing. As the

film progresses she will take more pride in her costume, and her new armor will reflect new inner confidence about herself.

- Her color palette could also transition throughout the film, from muddy browns and grays to shiny gold or silver, suggesting the "polishing" of her inner self.

TECHNICAL BRIEF

INDUSTRY: ANIMATED FEATURE FILM

AUDIENCE

This project will be aimed at teenagers. As such it doesn't necessarily need to appeal to guardians and so we don't necessarily need to be so "family friendly" with the design. Although not exclusively, it is created with girls in mind.

TECHNICAL SPEC

- 90 minutes run time
- The film is stop motion, so the characters will be constructed with armatures and real clothing. Features like hands will be crafted from clay
- Pay particular attention to the face design but don't feel limited by the medium - complex shapes can easily be achieved with 3D printing and face swaps
- The costume needs to be designed to allow for maximum range of movement. There will be a lot of action sequences, so nothing too restrictive

GLOSSARY

2D

A flat physical or digital image that can only be viewed on one plane.

3D MODELING

The process of creating a digital object in digital space that you can view from all angles. A 3D model can also be animated digitally and perform as an actor in a digital space.

ANIMATION CYCLES

An animation cycle is made from a sequence of 2D images or drawings (often called frames) that when stitched together show a character or scene moving.

ANTHROPOMORPHIC

Anthropomorphic describes the human-like attributes of a non-human character or entity. For example, a four legged animal walking on two legs has anthropomorphic attributes.



ART DIRECTOR

A senior member of an art team responsible for setting the art style and overseeing the visual development of a project.

AUDIENCE

The audience refers to the people viewing a form of media. In the context of this book, that would be those watching an animation, playing a video game, or reading an illustrated book.

BOSS CHARACTER

The main opponent in a computer game that must be defeated in order to progress in the game.

BRAINSTORMING

The process of writing down your initial thoughts and ideas so that they can be recalled and utilized throughout a process.

BRIEF

A brief is the written document used to direct the designs of the artist working on a project.

CHARACTER BIOGRAPHY

A character biography is a document providing details about events that have happened in a character's life, whether fact or fiction, which can be used to add believability to a character design.

DELIVERABLES

Deliverables are the specific visual elements requested by an art director when they provide the brief. The deliverable requested will most likely differ depending on the requirements of the project.

FREELANCE ARTIST

A self-employed artist providing professional services on commission. They often work remotely, out of house, a situation which can sometimes make the briefing, review, feedback, and development process slower.

FREYTAG'S PYRAMID

A theoretical description of what makes a narrative dramatic and engaging.

FUNCTIONALITY

When used in the context of character design, functionality refers to how practical the design is in the context of its final use. This is more relevant in the animation and video games industry.

FX

FX is a shorthand way of describing special effects, which are digitally created elements to simulate things like fire, smoke, or glows, and other fantastical events.

HERO POSE

A hero pose is an image of a character design that is posed in a way that shows the major elements of their design, as well as demonstrating some of their personality. This is usually for the benefit of the art director.

IN-HOUSE ARTIST

An in-house artist works at a studio with the rest of the team. Working in-house can make the briefing, review, feedback, and development process faster.

LOW POLY

3D models are made of a mesh consisting of lots of small shapes called polys. When a 3D model is low poly it means it is simpler and less detailed, but it is also easier to animate in a computer game, as it requires less computing power.

MEDIA / MEDIUM

The collective word to describe the output of the character designs. In the context of this book the media are books, computer games and animations.

MERCHANDISE

The collective term used to describe physical products created for sale based on the characters and world from (in this case) books, computer games, and animations.

MIND MAP

A mind map is similar to a brainstorm, however in a mind map ideas are generally linked together to create associations and themes.

MODEL SHEETS

Model sheets show a character from multiple angles or in different scenarios.

NARRATIVE

The narrative refers to the story that is being told or implied in a design.



Artwork © Devon Cady-Lee

POST-PRODUCTION

A term to describe work done on a visual project after the core elements and assets have been created. This might include image edits or corrections as well as the addition of effects.

POWER-UP

A casual and non-technical term used to describe the process of rejuvenating a character within a computer game.

PRODUCTION PIPELINE

The production pipeline collectively defines all the elements of the creation of a visual product.

PROPS

Props are small, non-character based environmental elements within a computer game.

RENDERED ON THE FLY

Rendering is the process of turning all the digital information within modeling software into a visual image, which for detailed models can take a long time. Rendering on the fly means that the visual image is created quickly; this will mean that the model and elements will need to be low in detail and complexity.

RIG / RIGGABLE

To rig something means to provide an image or a 3D model with a digital bone structure that can be controlled and moved to meet the project requirements.

SHAPE LANGUAGE

Is a way of describing associations we automatically make with certain shapes. For example, sharp or pointy shapes seem more dangerous, whereas curved or rounded shapes feel friendly. Character designers use this knowledge to make us feel certain ways about their character designs.

SIDE SCROLLING

A term to describe a computer game that is viewed from a side-on angle, where the character generally travels from left to right.

SILHOUETTE

A silhouette describes the filled outline of a character's shape. In character design this is important as the audience needs to be able to understand a character in various media at a glance.

SPLASH ART

An image used in video games to show the player's character selection. Splash art usually depicts a high-quality render of the character in action.

SPRITE

A sprite is a two-dimensional graphic that creates part of a video game scene or interface, and can be either animated or static. For example, sprites can be used to represent characters, props, icons, or effects like muzzle flashes. You will likely have seen sprites in classic roleplaying games or pixel games that do not contain 3D models.

STOP MOTION ANIMATION

Stop motion animation is created by combining lots of images or photographs to form an animation sequence. The best example of this is a flick book.

STORY CRAFT

In the context of character design, story craft refers to a designer's ability to add to elements of the narrative with features and accessories of the design for their character.

SYNTHESIZING

The act of combining the needs of several different sources to create a single original character brief.

THREE-QUARTER FRONT / BACK VIEW

This is a commonly requested selection of angles at which an art director would like to see a character design. This provides them with enough visual information to assess the design functionality.

THUMBNAILS

Small and loose sketches of characters are called thumbnails. They are an effective way to explore a number of ideas without being too preoccupied with details.

TOPE

The tone describes the overall feel and mood of a project.

TURNAROUND

An art director will often want to see a selection of images showing a character design from multiple angles so they can assess its functionality; this is called a turnaround. Additionally, if a character is to be created in 3D, a turnaround will help the 3D artist create the digital model.

VALUE

A technical term used in art to describe the lightness or darkness of a color. Value is often depicted in a development image in a variety of gray tones.

VIRTUAL REALITY

Virtual reality is where a 3D world can be viewed through a headset with a digital display inside it. The headset allows you to move and look around to see the world from multiple angles.



Artwork © Hollie Mengert

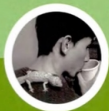
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A former engineer, Cécile studied animation at Gobelins and CalArts. Still at school, she entered the animation industry as a freelance visual development artist for commercials and feature film, and as a children's book illustrator. After graduation in 2019, Cécile was hired to work on the Netflix film *Klaus*, by Sergio Pablos, as a storyboard artist and 2D animator.



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Hollie Mengert is an illustrator and character designer who loves to bring characters to life, and smiles to others, through her work. In addition to video game animation and character design, Hollie is a passionate children's book artist - one of the books she's illustrated, *Unicorn (and Horse)*, was named one of the best picture books of 2018.



CUSTOMER
REVIEW

"Great book!
Full of good
and interesting
information.
The chosen
artists are
amazing!"





**FEATURED
ARTISTS INCLUDE:**

- KENNETH ANDERSON
- RIZO GARCIA
- LUIS GADEA
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- SHAUN BRYANT
- MAX GRECKE

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CHARACTER DESIGN QUARTERLY

Character Design Quarterly (CDQ) is an exciting print magazine for illustrators, artists, animators and character art enthusiasts. Releasing four times a year, the magazine offers inspirational and educational articles, tutorials and interviews from top industry professionals specifically geared to helping artists hone their character design skills.



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inspiration I
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Working in the video game and animation industries, Kenneth does a variety of jobs from character design and feature animation to concept art and visual development.

DEVON CADY-LEE

Devon is a freelance character designer, concept artist, and visual consultant. In the past, he has worked for companies such as Riot Games and Blizzard.

CÉCILE CARRE

Cécile studied animation at Gobelins and CalArts. She works in the animation industry as a freelance visual development artist, storyboard artist, and 2D animator.

HOLLIE MENGERT

As an illustrator, character designer, and video game animator, Hollie has had the opportunity to work on children's books, games, comics, and more.



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FOREWORD BY JAMES WOODS

CHARACTER DESIGNER AT
WALT DISNEY ANIMATION STUDIOS

