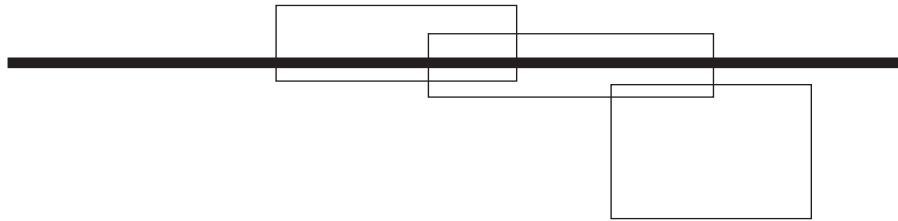


CREATIVE CHARACTER DESIGN

BRYAN
TILLMAN



f
Focal Press



Creative Character Design

Bryan Tillman



AMSTERDAM • BOSTON • HEIDELBERG • LONDON
NEW YORK • OXFORD • PARIS • SAN DIEGO
SAN FRANCISCO • SINGAPORE • SYDNEY • TOKYO

Focal Press is an imprint of Elsevier



Focal Press is an imprint of Elsevier
225 Wyman Street, Waltham, MA 02451, USA
The Boulevard, Langford Lane, Kidlington, Oxford, OX5 1GB, UK

Copyright © 2011 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. Details on how to seek permission, further information about the Publisher's permissions policies and our arrangements with organizations such as the Copyright Clearance Center and the Copyright Licensing Agency, can be found at our website: www.elsevier.com/permissions.

This book and the individual contributions contained in it are protected under copyright by the Publisher (other than as may be noted herein).

Notices

Knowledge and best practice in this field are constantly changing. As new research and experience broaden our understanding, changes in research methods, professional practices, or medical treatment may become necessary.

Practitioners and researchers must always rely on their own experience and knowledge in evaluating and using any information, methods, compounds, or experiments described herein. In using such information or methods they should be mindful of their own safety and the safety of others, including parties for whom they have a professional responsibility.

To the fullest extent of the law, neither the Publisher nor the authors, contributors, or editors, assume any liability for any injury and/or damage to persons or property as a matter of products liability, negligence or otherwise, or from any use or operation of any methods, products, instructions, or ideas contained in the material herein.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Tillman, Bryan.

Creative character design / Bryan Tillman.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-240-81495-7 (pbk.)

1. Characters and characteristics in art. 2. Cartoon characters. 3. Video game characters.
4. Graphic arts—Technique. 5. Animation (Cinematography) 6. Computer animation. I. Title.
NC825.C43T55 2011

741.5'1—dc22

2011009770

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

For information on all Focal Press publications
visit our website at www.elsevierdirect.com

11 12 13 14 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in the United States of America

Working together to grow
libraries in developing countries

www.elsevier.com | www.bookaid.org | www.sabre.org

ELSEVIER

BOOK AID
International

Sabre Foundation

I would like to dedicate this book to my wife for always being my rock, to my children for being the motivation to do everything I do, and to my parents for being true teachers. Thank you all. I love you all very much.

Table of Contents

Credits	vii
Foreword	ix
Chapter 1: What Makes For Good Character Design?	1
Chapter 2: Why Archetypes Are Important	11
What are archetypes?	
Why are they important?	
Which archetypes are used the most?	
Chapter 3: The Most Important Part of Character Design	25
Why is story important for character design?	
How can the story affect the design?	
Does the design service the story?	
Chapter 4: Can You Still Be Original Anymore?	43
Is it still possible to be original?	
What is the difference between original and originality?	
How important is it to have originality?	
Chapter 5: Shapes and Silhouettes	67
What are the shapes telling us?	
What is "form follows function?"	
What makes a good silhouette?	
Chapter 6: Reference, Reference, and Reference—Oh My!	85
Why are references important?	
How can you use references and not feel like you are copying?	
Chapter 7: Aesthetics—Just What You've Been Waiting For	103
Getting to know your audience?	
Why is color important?	
What does "the devil is in the details" mean?	

Chapter 8: The WOW Factor	123
What is the WOW factor?	
Why is it important?	
How will it affect my character design?	
Chapter 9: Putting It All Together	133
What tools and techniques are helpful in character design?	
What is a model sheet?	
How do other artists do it?	
Gallery	175
Helpful Websites	223
Key Terms	225
Index	227
Character Design Template	T1

Credits

The art in this book was provided by the members of Kaiser Studio Productions. <http://www.kaiserstudio.net>.

Kaiser Studio Productions consists of:

Bryan "Kaiser" Tillman
Crystal Tillman
Elvin Hernandez
Alex Buffalo
Enrique Rivera
Jerald Lewis
Kenneth Hill II
Kevin Martin
Danny Araya
Jonathan Stuart

Also guest illustrations by:

Chris Lie
www.caravanstudio.com

Sam Ellis
<http://manofmisle.blogspot.com>

Foreword

CHARACTER BIO:

Name:

Bryan "Kaiser" Tillman

Age:

30, as of this writing

Height:

6 feet, 2 inches or 6 feet, 8 inches (including Afro)

Weight:

220 pounds

Build:

Fit, mesomorph

Nationality:

German-American

Birthplace:

Ft. Hood, Texas

Alignment:

Lawful good (with a touch of chaos)

Weapons:

His Afro, a pencil, an ink pen, and anything ninja

Favorite Saying:

"You FAIL!"

BIOGRAPHY

How can I write this without making it sound like Bryan paid me to write it? He didn't, really; he just asked. My answer? "Absolutely!"

Bryan lives his life with passion. He deeply loves his wife, really loves his kids, and sure as hell loves his craft. In the time that I have known him, I have watched Bryan put all of himself into everything he does. Outside of being

a great husband and father and fulfilling the requirements of his day job, Bryan has attended every major convention I know of; designed, developed, and released an excellent fantasy card RPG; and managed to get his own convention up and running in the Washington, D.C., area. He is like some kind of mad comics superhero.

The passion that Bryan has for his craft, Sequential Art, is second to none. It is that passion that is the origin of this book you hold in your hands. You see for years we have been squabbling amongst ourselves about the hollow materials that have been hitting the shelves or being released in theatres, but Bryan has been telling the masses. Why? Because he is passionate about it, so passionate that he wants you to learn how to do it right. (Okay, so I know that is improper grammar, but I think you get the point.)

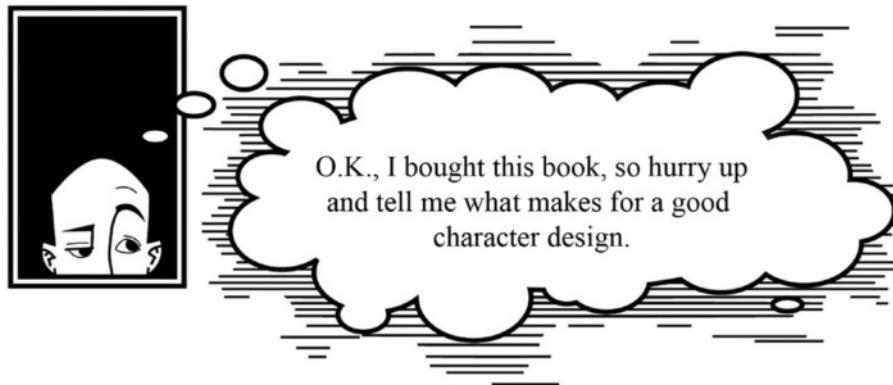
This book is the pathway to success in the media and entertainment industries. When you look at the stories you like today, the movies you love, and the games you like to play, for the most part, the reasons you like them are unfolded here. Take this book. Read it. Listen to it. Apply it with the passion that Bryan has, and someday, when you are at the top of the mountain, remember the passion that Bryan "Kaiser" Tillman had, the passion that helped you build your foundation to success.

Alexander Buffalo

Chapter 1

What Makes For Good Character Design?

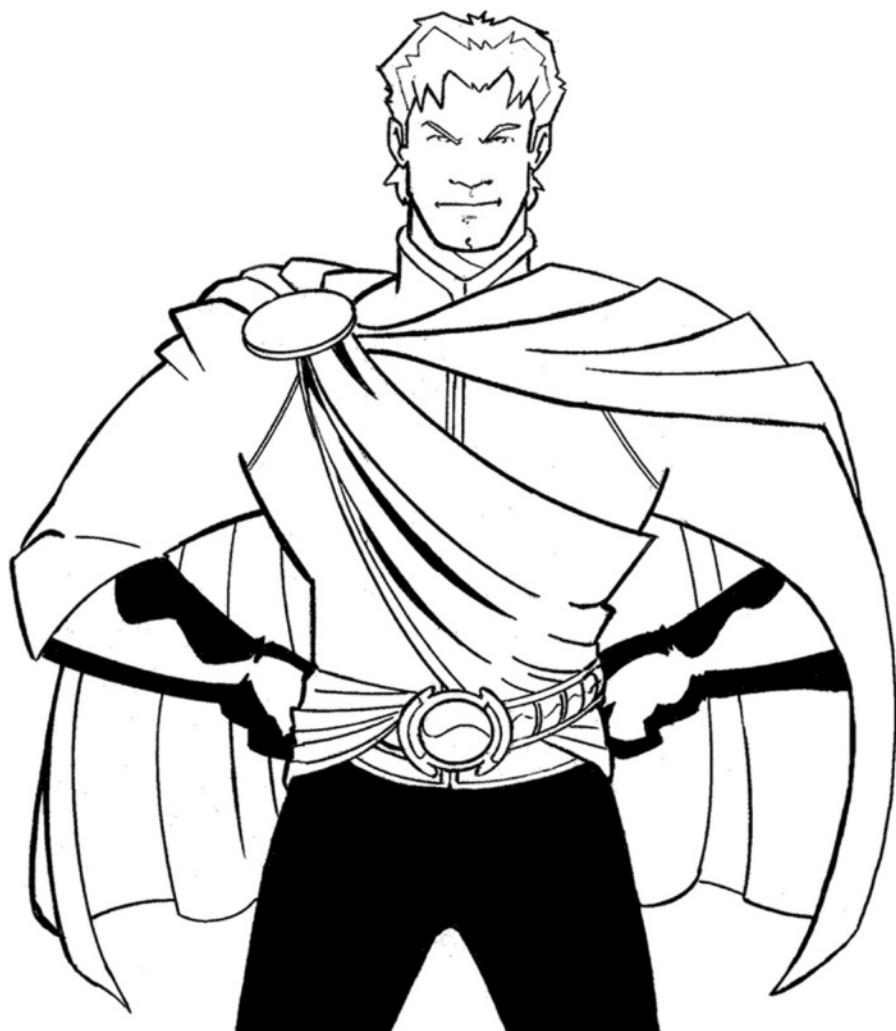
You are probably thinking to yourself:



Well, I hate to have to tell you, but you are just going to have to read the whole book to find out. Sorry. One thing I have learned in my years as a teacher is that the quick answer won't teach you anything in the long run. It is like cramming for a test. You know everything you need to know for the test, but then you forget everything the very next day. So I'm not going to do you that disservice, but what I will do if you are in such a hurry is give you a brief overview of what this book is all about. So, sit back, relax, and enjoy this fast-paced high-octane summary of creative character design. Are you all strapped in and have your helmet on? Great! Here we go.

When most people think about characters or character design, the first thing that comes to mind is:

I need to have a hero.



I need to have a bad guy.



I need to have a beautiful woman.



This is pretty much standard, but I know some of you are now yelling at the book:

"Hey, my hero is a Ninja!"

or

"My bad guy is a situation, not an actual person!"

or

"My villain is a woman!"

Yes, you are allowed to have these variations. It has just been my experience that, when given the task of creating characters, the preceding three are the most common. As you continue reading the book, we will get into variations of the initial thought process of character design. However, for the sake of this introduction, we are going to stick with these core principles.

The first pieces in good character design are these core principles, known as *archetypes*. Archetypes represent the personality and character traits that we as humans identify with. There are many different archetypes, but there are a common few that keep reoccurring in all types of stories. They are needed in order to propel a story forward, and it is the personal story of each character that makes for good character development.

Story is the second piece in good character design. Even though it is the second thing mentioned, it is the most important. If you are willing to put in the time and effort to develop each character—their back-story and personality traits—before you start drawing, you will have a stronger and more well-rounded character design. The thing that you as the character designer must remember is that the characters are *always* in service to the story—not now, nor will it ever be, the other way around.

I am sure that your blood is starting to boil, and you are asking:

"Wait a minute! I've created characters without a story before."

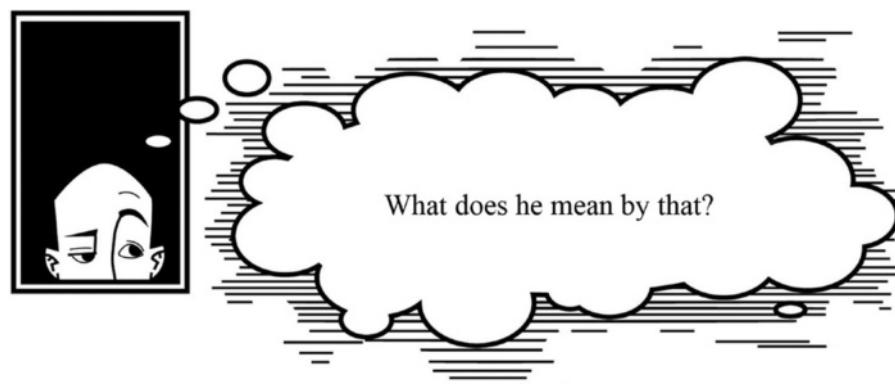
Yes, it is possible to draw a character without a story, and people do it all the time. The problem is, when you do that, and you want to keep the character, you always have to go back and create the story for that character. I don't know about you, but whenever I created the design of a character without writing his or her back-story first, the design of the character always changed once I wrote it. Has that ever happened to you? If you answered yes (which all of you should have), what you were subject to was:

The character is *always* in service to the story.

The third thing we are going to talk about is the idea of being original. When you are writing your back-story, it will be impossible to ignore the things around you. Whether you want it or not, every day you are being influenced by the things you see, hear, and do. That is why it is so hard to come up with an original idea. I'm not saying that it is impossible, but it is really hard to do. Have you ever heard this before?

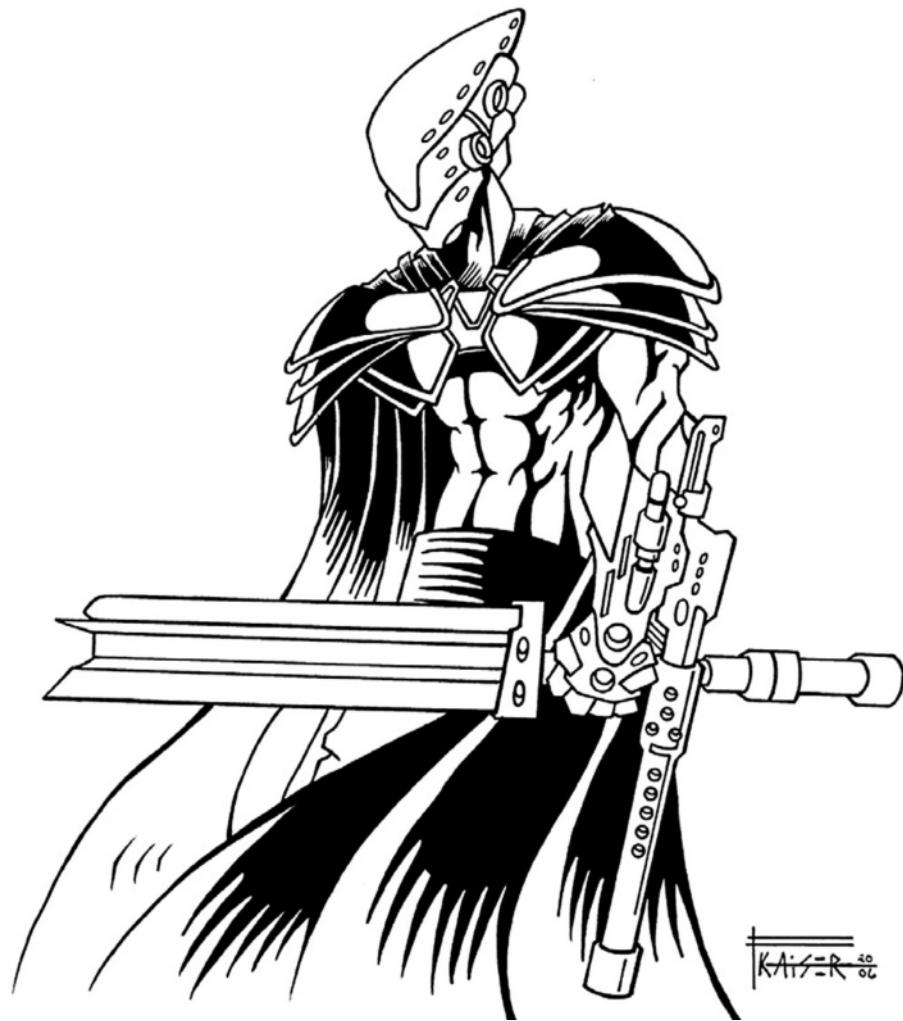
"Oh, that story sounds great. It reminds me of the other story."

If that has happened to you, don't get discouraged. It's perfectly okay. The only thing you need to remember is that you bring some form of originality to the table.



Well, you are just going to have to read the chapter on originality to find that one out.

Moving right along, the fourth subject in the book is shapes. That's right—shapes. Shapes play a big role in character design. They can tell a story about the character visually. How is that possible, you ask? Well, every shape has a meaning behind it. If you are thinking in terms of a basic square, circle, or triangle, it might not make too much sense, but when you start tweaking these shapes, they tell a story. What do you think this character is all about?



Did you notice you were coming up with a story based on the armor, the helmet, and the weapons? All of those have distinctive shapes that were chosen to tell a story about this character visually. Shapes also give us the means to talk about silhouettes and functionality, which we will talk about in depth later in another chapter.

The fifth subject—reference—is one of my favorites. The topic of using reference is what plagues my students the most. Here are some of the most common statements I hear when talking about reference:

“I already know how to draw a tree, so I don’t need reference.”

“I couldn’t find exactly what I was looking for, so I just made it up.”

“Isn’t using reference cheating?”

Here are my responses to the three statements above.

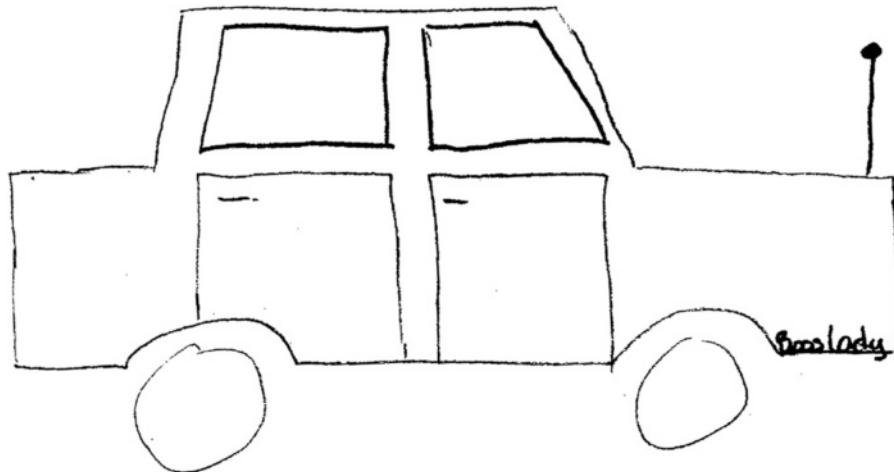
“Yeah, you do.”

“You have got to be kidding me.”

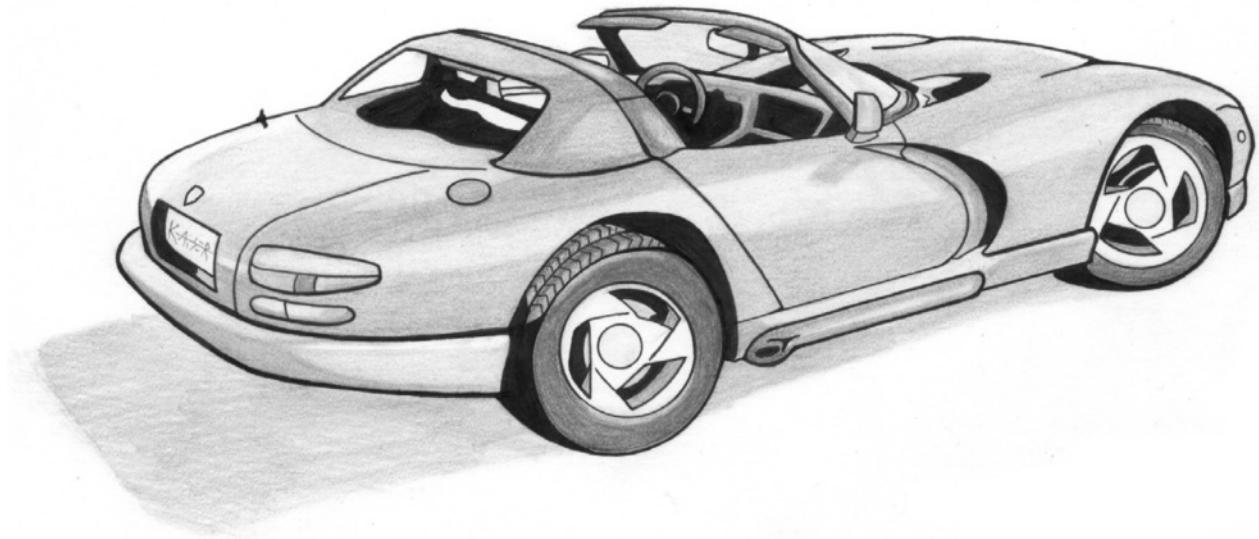
“Let’s see. All of the pros use reference, so … no! Now stop being stupid!

I know the last statement might have been a bit harsh, but let me explain. It is one thing to use reference, and it is another thing to let the reference use you. Don’t copy your reference! If you are going to do that, then you might as well just take a photograph and save yourself some time. Reference is very important to character designers and, well, artists in general.

You might think you know how to draw everything in the world, but trust me—you don't. Here is an example: Ask somebody to draw a car, and see what that person comes up with. Anyone can draw something that resembles a car—for example:



Now ask somebody to draw a Dodge Viper.



There are two ways the drawing will be accurate. One is that the artist is a Dodge Viper fanatic and eats, sleeps, and dreams Dodge Vipers, and the other is that the artist got the proper reference before creating the drawing.

From that we move on to number six: aesthetic. This is the one that the majority of all character designers go after first. The aesthetic is the look of the character. Since we are mainly talking about a visual medium, this is a very important subject. The way a character looks determines whether the viewer likes, dislikes, connects with, sympathizes with, or anything else. There are many things to consider when thinking about aesthetic—for example:

What style should be used when creating this character?

What colors should be used?

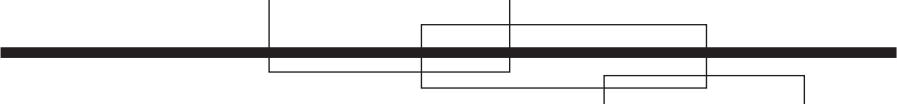
What medium is this character going to be used for?

Who is the character's audience?

These are some of the questions that need to be answered before you get to the final piece. If any of these questions are answered after the final design is created, then I can guarantee you that changes will be made to your design. This is extremely important to the success of your character design, and we will cover it in full detail in a later chapter. (I know you want to look. Go ahead, I'll wait. Just make sure you come back.)

Welcome back! Okay, let's finish this up with a brief summary of the final subject. The last subject deals with something I like to call the WOW factor. Every design needs to have this. Every designer wants this in his or her designs. What is the WOW factor, you ask? Well, I'm not going to tell you yet. You will have to read the entire book to fully understand it.

There is one thing, however, that I *will* tell you: Once you've read this book, you will have the knowledge to create eye-popping, jaw-dropping character designs. So what are you waiting for? Go on to the next chapter!



Chapter 2

Why Archetypes Are Important

I should warn you that the next two chapters aren't going to have as much art as all the other chapters, but these two chapters are the most important in this entire book. So—and this is very important—*don't take these two chapters lightly!* I just want to make sure you understand what I just said, so I am going to say it again. **DON'T TAKE THESE TWO CHAPTERS LIGHTLY!**

As mentioned in Chapter 1, certain traits are evident in all characters. These traits, called archetypes, allow us to categorize them into specific groups. An archetype is considered to be the original mold or model of a person, trait, or behavior that we as humans wish to copy or emulate. It is the *ideal* example of a character. Archetypes encompass both the good and evil spectrums.

A wide variety of archetypes can be found throughout history, from the works of Shakespeare all the way back to the teachings of Plato. You can spend some time in the library researching archetypes throughout history, but we are going to focus on a specific grouping of archetype. Today, the most prevalent archetypes used are set forth by the Swiss psychologist Carl Jung. Jung, a colleague of Sigmund Freud, studied the idea of the conscious and unconscious mind. He believed that multiple reoccurring innate ideas defined specific characters. It is these reoccurring ideas that we as humans grasp onto in order to define people we encounter in our everyday lives, as well as characters in fictional works. These basic archetypes exist in all literature. The Jungian archetypes are pretty self-evident, but once you become more familiar with the various archetypes and what they mean, they become much more recognizable and thus make character development easier as well.

Jung developed a plethora of archetypes and their meanings, however we will focus only on those most commonly used in storytelling today:

- The hero
- The shadow
- The fool
- The anima/animus
- The mentor
- The trickster

When dealing with character design, always remember that the character exists as a result of the story. The story will dictate that you need a *hero*. The hero is defined as someone who is very brave, selfless, and willing to help others no matter what the cost.

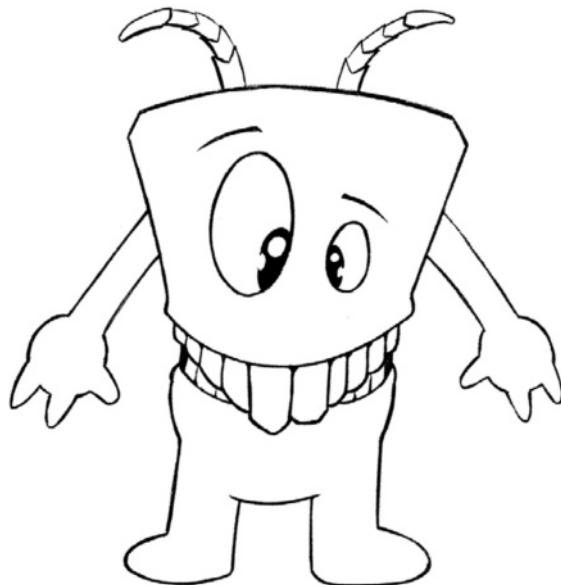


Now that we have established the hero, we are going to need an enemy for that person to interact with in the story. We are going to need to establish the shadow character. The shadow character is the one who is connected the most with our instinctual animal past. He or she is perceived as ruthless, mysterious, disagreeable, and evil.



Now that we have a good guy and a bad guy (or gal), we should be able to tell a great story, right? Well, just because you have the two main characters, it doesn't mean that your story is going to be great. You might be able to tell a compelling story with only two people, but that rarely happens. With that in mind, you are going to need a cast of supporting characters to help push the main characters through the story. This leads us to our next character: the fool.

The fool character is the one who goes through the story in a confused state and inevitably gets everyone into undesirable situations.



The fool is in the story to test the main character. How that character deals with the actions of the fool tells us a lot about that person—for example:

We are following the shadow character, who is followed by the fool character. The fool character flips the switch to the doomsday device early, and now the whole five-month plan goes down the drain. In response to the fool's action, the shadow character destroys the fool character in a fit of rage. This then proves just how unforgiving and ruthless the shadow character is.

Or, if the same situation happens and the shadow character doesn't act in a fit of rage but instead tries to fix the problem and still uses the fool character. This would show that the shadow character still has some form of humanity and morality. Therefore, the fool adds depth to the story and provides a window into the soul of the main character. No matter how annoying the fool may get, he or she provides the information we need to fully understand the story.

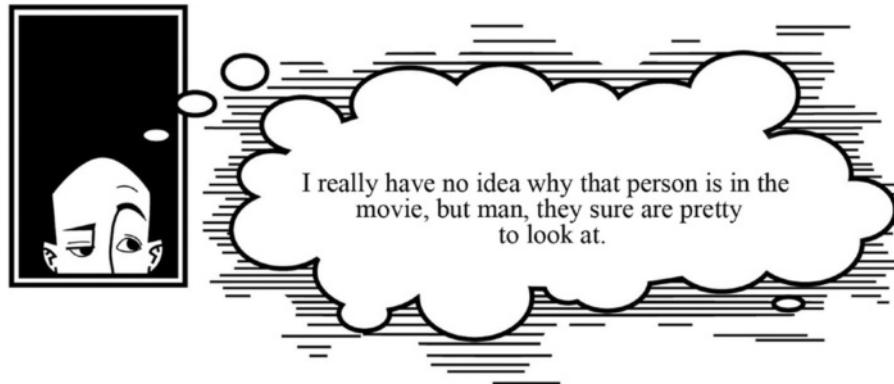
From the fool character we move on to something a little bit more interesting: the *anima/animus*. The anima is the female counterpart to the male, and the animus is the male counterpart to the female. This character embodies the male and female urges.



Since I mentioned that there is a counterpart to the female:



These characters represent our sexual desires bundled into one character. In other words, the anima or animus represents the love interest in the story. The love interest doesn't have to be just for the main characters; he or she could be for you, the viewer. How many times have you seen a movie or read a comic and thought to yourself:



The anima/animus characters exist to draw you into the story. If you or the main character is attracted to the anima or animus character and something happens to that character, it will evoke a wide range of emotions from within. This is another technique to keep you immersed in the story.

Once the main character is emotionally connected to another character—generally the anima or animus—the *mentor* then appears. The mentor is relevant because he or she has the profound knowledge that the protagonist needs even he or she doesn't want to hear it.



The mentor plays a key role in making the protagonist realize his or her full potential and is often portrayed as an old man or woman. This is because most cultures associate age with having wisdom. The mentor takes on many of the characteristics of a parent. I'll bet that if you think back on your childhood, you can recall that often what your parents told you didn't make any sense, but now that you are older and wiser, you realize they only had your best interests in mind. Remember when I said that the mentor is "often" portrayed as an old man or woman? Well there are many instances where the mentor character is the same age or younger than the main character.

This leaves us with one final character: the *trickster*. The trickster character is the one that is constantly pushing for change.



The trickster can either be on the side of good or the side of evil. In both situations, the trickster is trying to move the story toward his or her favor or benefit. Just like in the illustration, they are just like puppet masters. The trickster causes doubt to creep into the main character's mind, making that character change the way he or she was going to handle a certain situation. Generally, in the end, it is the trickster's actions that make the main character the type of person he or she is at the end of the story. The trickster is vital to any story because he or she is generally the toughest mental test that the main character has to overcome before the main character can physically and mentally overcome his or her antagonist.

So these are the basic character archetypes, but they don't always fit into their stereotypical roles. Take, for instance, the hero and shadow characters. For the most part, these characters are central to the story, but is the hero always the main focus of the story? In this day and age, that isn't always the case. In fact, more and more stories focus on the villain/shadow. That is why the story will focus on the *protagonist*—the main character of the story. Then you also have the *antagonist*, who stands in opposition to the protagonist.

What I am trying to say is that when most people think of a story, they go straight for the hero as the protagonist. That just isn't always the case. If the story is about an evil dictator trying to take over the world, then the antagonist would be the patriot hero standing in the dictator's way of world domination. So, as you can see when you write a story, you need both a protagonist and an antagonist.

I know I have given you examples of each kind of archetype, but I don't know if you understand exactly what each archetype looks like, so, I am going to give you some examples from a very popular movie series: George Lucas' *Star Wars*. I hope that if you are reading this book you have seen all six *Star Wars* movies. If you haven't seen them, hopefully you know a little about them. If you don't know anything about them, you should go watch them. Otherwise this part of the chapter isn't going to help you understand archetypes either.

In all six *Star Wars* movies, I think it is pretty obvious who the hero character is. Luke Skywalker is the true embodiment of the hero character. He stays on the path of good the whole time. Even when he was wandering down the dark path to find out more about his father, his morals and actions were always pure at heart.

He would also put himself in harm's way to help his friends. Even against the wise words of Yoda, Luke went to sky city to help his friends. One of the best

examples of why Luke is the hero character, is when he defeats Darth Vader (UHHHHH, hope I didn't spoil that for you!), but still tried to save him. Luke wanted to give him the ability to start over and come to the good side.

The one, the only, true bad guy, Darth Vader, is our shadow character. Darth Vader is ruled by emotions. He believes in survival of the fittest. That goes back to the primitive animalistic nature of humans. This becomes very evident in the third movie, where Anakin Skywalker fully turns into Darth Vader. From that movie on we see that Darth Vader acts on the impulses of his emotions, which makes him very susceptible to the influences of the trickster in *Star Wars*.

Only one character in *Star Wars* can justifiably wear the crown of fool, and that is Jar Jar Binks. That character was able to get under everyone's skin. He would always run into something, drop an important device, or flick some switch that would put the entire cast at risk. Jar Jar was the one character whom everyone had to tolerate. He would change the conditions with almost every step he made, making everybody around him adjust to a new situation.

I know there are characters who fill both of these roles, but the character that both the cast of the movie and the viewers would consider the anima is Princess Leia. If you don't know why this is so, Google her character, and I'm sure you'll understand.

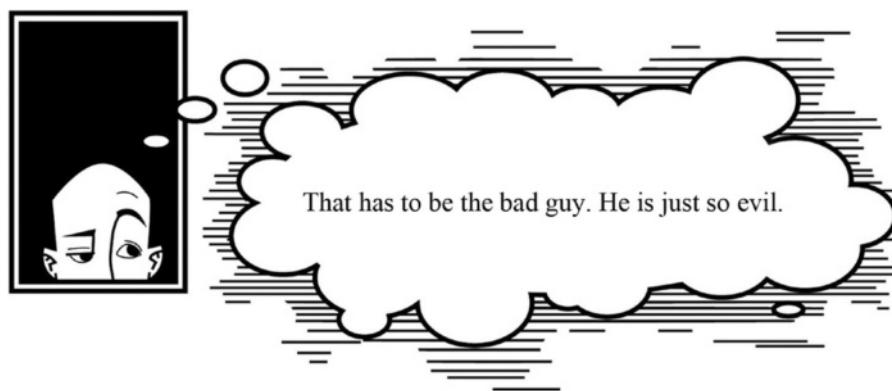
Now, depending on who you want to go with, two characters could be considered the mentor: Obi Wan Kenobi and Yoda. I am going to go with Yoda because he seems to be the one who plays the part of the mentor in most of the movies. Yoda is a good example of the mentor character because he is the one everyone goes to when they need advice. He also always seems to have the right answer, even if he gives it to you in a backward sentence structure.

The trickster character is one many people would argue over, but if you watch all the movies, you will see that Senator Palpatine/The Emperor is the trickster character. He has a really easy time playing the trickster character because he is literally two different characters. So while he is telling everyone what to do, as the senator he is able to manipulate the outcome of every meeting so it will be to the empire's benefit. He is also able to control young Anakin Skywalker and make him join the dark side without even knowing that he was already slowly turning to the darkside.

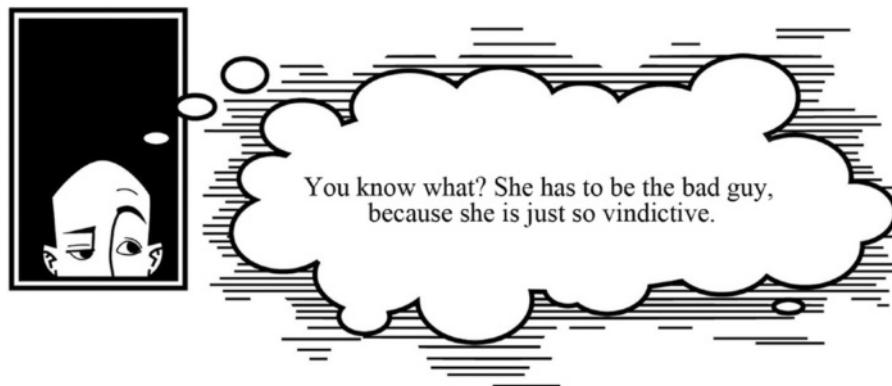
I hope this helped you to understand archetypes a little better. Now I must point out that any single character can have multiple archetypal traits.

Combining archetypes can create more complex and interesting characters, but it can also confuse viewers and readers and make events and plotlines hard to follow. In general, a character designer wants to make sure that the archetypes stay clear and singular solely for the purpose of clarity. This way the viewer or reader won't get confused and lose the magic of the story trying to figure out who is who.

Certain types of stories lend themselves to this blurred archetypal character form. These characters fall mostly into mystery and suspense stories, sometimes even horror. By keeping the character archetypes blurred and confusing, the viewer is pulled into the story, trying to figure out "whodunit." Have you ever watched a movie or read a book and thought:



Just to have that thought changed completely as soon as the story moves on:

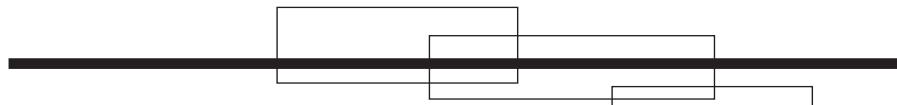


You were just successfully drawn into the story because you were trying to figure out who did what to whom and why. The blurred archetypal characters forced you to become more involved in the story in order to answer questions raised by this intentional blurring of the archetypal lines.

We are almost done with the chapter on archetypes. The last thing I want to mention is that archetypes can change at any time. A good guy becoming a bad guy within the course of a book or movie is possible. Even the fool character can become the hero. You need to accomplish this change over the course of the story, not all at once. Your Super Boy Scout hero can't go from saving the day on one comic page to becoming a sadistic mass murderer on the next. All that will happen is that you will lose your reader.

All of this talk about archetypes and how they affect the story makes me want to get to the next chapter and delve into the character's story. Come on, let's go oh wait, before we do that, it is time for some homework. What's that? You thought you weren't going to get any homework after the first official chapter of the book? HAHAHAHAHA funny. What I want you to do is look at your favorite movie, comic, or cartoon and identify the various archetypes represented within those stories. Once you have identified who you think they are, write them down, and then ask yourself why you believe they are archetypes.

I'll be waiting for you in the next chapter.



Chapter 3

The Most Important Part of Character Design

Did you do your homework assignment? Great! Now it's time for a pop quiz! (Bet you didn't see that coming.)

Define the following archetypes:

- The hero
- The shadow
- The mentor
- The fool
- The trickster
- The anima/animus

Hopefully, you were able to define these archetypes without referring back to Chapter 2. Now that you have committed that information to memory, let's move on.

It is now time to talk about the most important part of character design: story and storytelling. You probably are tired of hearing that, but it is very important and essential to good character design! Everything can and will always point back to the story. No matter what character you look at, you must try to figure out the story behind that character. It is human nature to try to pinpoint which category of archetype a character fits under.

I challenge you to look at any character and not try to label that character a good guy, a villain, a monster, a sex symbol, and so on. It is nearly impossible—unless you are not at all interested in what you are looking at. In that case, the aesthetic is all wrong for you, and, well, that's another chapter in this book.

Take a look at this character. Stare at it for a couple of minutes.

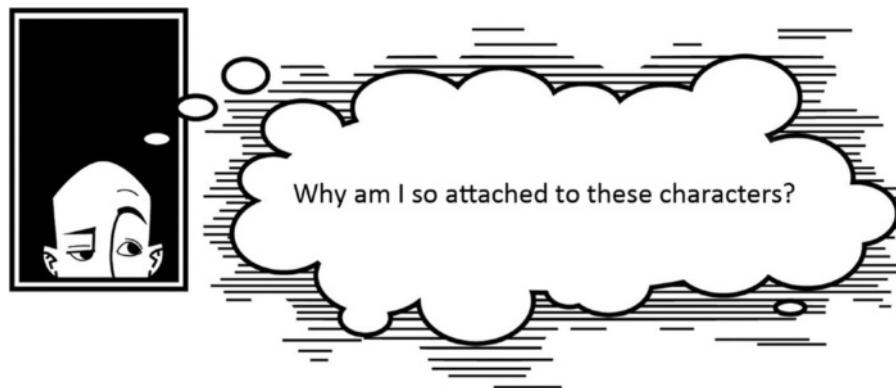


Did you find yourself trying to figure out if this is the hero, the trickster, or any of the other archetypes? Or did you find yourself trying to figure out what his back-story is, what makes him tick, or why he does the things he does? Why do you think that is?

-
- A. Because, we just got done talking about archetypes, and this chapter is about story.
 - B. Because that's what I told you were going to be doing.
 - C. Because, as human beings, we are very inquisitive and want to know as much as possible.

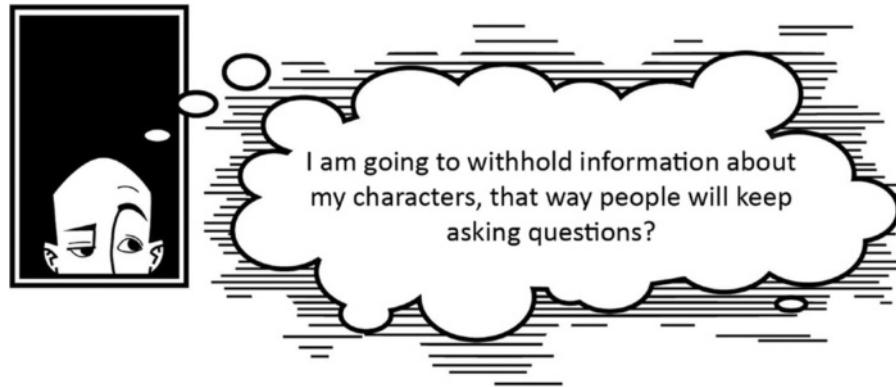
If you answered C, then you are on the right track. The main reason we become engaged with a character is that we generally want to know as much as possible about a person. Science established a long time ago that it is people's nature to be inquisitive. If we weren't inquisitive, we would never have had so many advances in science, the works of Shakespeare, or perhaps even discovered the new world.

This is even more evident when dealing with characters like elves, people with super powers, people in history, or any character who has captured your interest. Most character designers and storytellers use this to their advantage. How many times have you felt compelled to watch an entire TV series or read an entire book or comic series, only to ask yourself:



The answer, once you finally break away from how pretty the character or characters look, is that the designer or storyteller has given you something, be it information or an illustration, that is causing you to ask questions that remain unanswered. So you stick with the character or characters and hope that your questions will be answered.

Now you might be thinking this to yourself:



Be forewarned, however, that withholding information is a double-edged sword. For example, if you have been withholding a certain nugget of information about your character—for example, the ability to conjure up dragons at will—that is probably going to be a cool revelation, and no one should get upset.

On the other hand, let's say you have a character whose past is a mystery, but throughout the story we keep learning more and more about his past. This is what keeps the character interesting. Not knowing exactly who the character is adds intrigue and mystery to both the character and the design. But now say you go ahead and reveal everything about this character—where he's from to what makes him what he is, and well let's face it, all these revelations don't live up to the hype you have created, and this is going to make the audience pretty mad. You built up all of this expectation only to end with a big letdown. If this happens, you just lost your readers because they are no longer invested in the story.

Therefore, you have to be very careful about how and when you answer the popular questions that most people will ask you. What questions are they going to ask? Simple:

- Who?
- What?
- When?
- Where?
- Why?
- How?

I told you it was simple, but if you can answer these six questions with conviction, people will accept your character's story. Now that doesn't guarantee that you will have a good, compelling, and intriguing story, only that you will

have a complete, basic story that gives readers just enough information to make them want to know more about your character and what happens next.

Let's try it out. Let's make up a character's story right now, on the spot, and answer the six important questions.

Who?: Who is the character in question? Who are we talking about in this character summary?

I am going to create a hero character. His name is going to be the Golden Grasshopper. His real name will be ... Chuck Johnson.

What?: What does this character do in the story?

Let's see. ... The Golden Grasshopper is a superhero who fights crime with his superhuman jumping abilities that are amplified by the sun. Yeah, that sounds good.

When?: When does this story take place?

I am going to say that this story takes place in 1942.

Where?: Where does the story take place?

Since it is a beautiful city, I am going to say the story takes place in Savannah, Georgia.

Why?: Why is the character motivated to do what he does in the story?

This is where the meat and potatoes of this character's story are going to come from. So let's see. ... I think I got something. Chuck Johnson always was a good person. He would do everything in his power to help his fellow citizens. He even joined the military to protect and serve his country.

Tragedy hit Chuck when he grew ill after being exposed to a new form of biological weapon. While Chuck was in the hospital, all he did was read superhero comics. He dreamed of a world where he could be a superhero just like the ones in the comics. When the doctors told Chuck he had only a short time to live, he made a request. He wanted to feel the warmth of the sun one last time. The doctors were more than happy to grant his wish.

As the doctors were wheeling Chuck outside, he began to feel strange. His body felt different, stronger, and healthier. Once Chuck was outside and completely engulfed by the sun, he felt a surge of energy shoot through his body. He jumped out of his wheelchair and, to everyone's amazement, leapt 18 feet into the air. Once the doctors were able to get

Chuck back into the hospital and run some tests, they determined that it was a medical miracle. Chuck was completely healed.

The doctors wanted to make sure that the lab results weren't wrong, so they retested them again and again. What they found out was that Chuck's blood had mutated, and it was this mutation that allowed him to jump so high. It was at that moment that Chuck vowed to be the superhero he dreamed about. He vowed to be the pillar of justice in a time of war. He vowed to become the Golden Grasshopper.

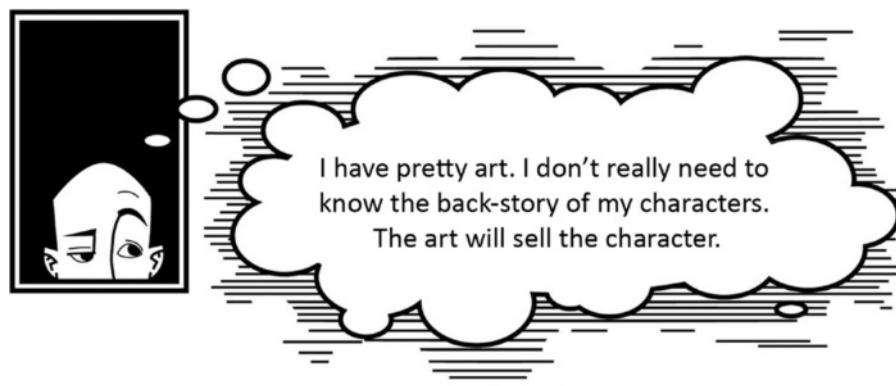
The "why" is basically the back-story to your character. You want to make sure that you know what your character's back-story is. That will determine what your character says and does and even how he or she dresses.

How?: How does your character do what he does? Sometimes this question can be answered in the why question.

So Chuck Johnson is able to fight as the Golden Grasshopper because of his contact with an experimental biological weapon in the military. As a result of the contact with the biological weapon, his blood has mutated, allowing him to jump to extreme heights.

There you go—an on-the-spot description of a character we just made up. You don't have to believe me, but we did just make that character up. Now I am not saying that this is the best character story, but if you wanted to, you could tell someone else—someone who hasn't read this chapter of the book—about the Golden Grasshopper and convince that person that you know all about this character. Of course, we both know that we don't know *everything* about this character. Right? Right! But thanks to the six questions, we have a good understanding of what the Golden Grasshopper is all about.

You might be thinking to yourself:



Wrong! Well, maybe you would get lucky and never really have to talk about your character to anyone, but chances are that after someone sees your wonderful art, that person is going to want to know more about the character. In all my years in this business I have yet to come across a character design that was so visually pleasing that the story wasn't even necessary. Almost always, when the visuals of a character design stop someone in his or her tracks, the next set of questions is about the character's story. The only time that doesn't happen is when the art deals with a character that has already been established—for example, Spider-man or Batman. Everyone knows their story already. So, yeah, you really do need to know the back-story of your characters.

I actually have an example of when the art wasn't enough. I was at a convention with my studio, and a young man came to my table and wanted to pitch his characters for a comic book. His work was absolutely stunning, and I was instantly hooked. I asked the artist to tell me about his characters, but he couldn't answer the six questions. Needless to say, I passed on this artist's fantastic art because I had no idea what motivated the characters, and since he was trying to get them into a comic book, that information was absolutely imperative.

So as you can see, being able to answer the six questions is pertinent to any good character design. Now I have to admit that I too have created characters without thinking of a story first. I never said that you couldn't create characters without starting with the story, but if you start with the story, it makes things a lot easier in the long run.

Have you ever created a character on a whim and really liked what you came up with? Of course, you have. We all have. At that point you probably decided to keep going with the design of your character. As you started thinking more and more about your character, did things start to change about your character design? It has happened to me, so I am pretty sure it has happened to you as well. What was happening at that point was that your character design was talking to you, telling you about itself. Have you ever found yourself saying this about your character, "Oh, he would never do that" or "She wouldn't say something like that. She just isn't that kind of person"? If so, it means that you are immersed in your character's story, and the more you know about your character's back-story, the easier it will be to create the final design. So why don't we go ahead and do that now.

Following is a development worksheet that I give to my Character and Object Design class. This worksheet will help you to better understand your character. Many different character development worksheets are available,

and for the most part they are all trying to get to one final product, so a lot of them have the same information. If you manage to find one that has something on it that yours doesn't, go ahead and add it to the one you use. This character development worksheet is detailed enough to provide a good description of the character you are creating. Yes, I know there are those that are more detailed than this one, and if you want to use one of those that is fine as well. The more information you know about your character the better. Here, I break down what each section is asking and then I am going to answer all the questions for our Golden Grasshopper character.

BASIC STATISTICS

Name:

What is your character's name?

Alias:

Does your character go by a different name in your story?

Age:

What is the character's current age?

Height:

How tall is your character?

Weight:

How much does your character weigh?

Sex:

Is your character a male or a female?

Race:

Is your character Caucasian, African-American, Elvin, Dwarven, etc?

Eye Color:

What is the color of your character's eyes?

Hair Color:

What is the color of your character's hair?

Glasses or Contact Lenses:

Does your character wear glasses, contact lenses, or neither?

Nationality:

What is your character's nationality?

Skin Color:

What is the color of your character's skin?

Shape of Face:

Is your character's face round, square, triangle, oval, etc?

DISTINGUISHING FEATURES**Clothing:**

How does your character dress? High fashion, sloppy, professional, or casual?

Mannerisms:

What unique gestures and movements set your character apart from other characters?

Habits:

What habits, good or bad, does your character have? Smoking, drinking, pencil tapping, cleanliness, etc?

Health:

What is your character's current health?

Hobbies:

Does your character have any favorite hobbies? Basketball, video games, sniffing glue, etc?

Favorite Sayings:

Does your character have a favorite saying?

Voice:

What does your character's voice sound like? Rasp, sexy, soft, etc?

Walking Style:

How does your character walk? Heroic, sneaky, nervous, etc?

Disabilities:

Does your character have any disabilities, physical or mental?

Character's Greatest Flaw:

What is the one negative thing that stands out above all the rest?

Character's Best Quality:

What is the biggest thing that makes your character great?

SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

Hometown:

Where is your character originally from?

Current Residence:

Where does your character currently live?

Occupation:

What does your character do for a living?

Income:

How much money does your character make?

Talents/Skills:

Does your character have any talents or skills that might be useful in the story?

Family Status:

Does your character have any siblings, parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc, and what is his relationship with them like?

Character as a Child:

What was your character's status as a child? Child prodigy, school dropout, petty thief, etc? Why did your character have that status?

Character as an Adult:

What was your character's status as an adult? King, beggar, genius, ninja master, etc? Why did your character have that status?

ATTRIBUTES AND ATTITUDES

Educational Background:

What is your character's highest level of education?

Intelligence Level:

What is your character's IQ?

Character's Goals:

What is one short-term goal and one long-term goal that your character wants to accomplish in his/her lifetime?

Self-esteem:

When your character looks in the mirror, how does he/she see himself/herself, physically and mentally?

Confidence:

Is your character overconfident, not confident at all, or of average confidence?

Emotional State:

Is your character ruled by emotion or logic or both?

EMOTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS**Introvert or Extrovert:**

Is your character an introvert or an extrovert?

How does your character deal with

- sadness?
- anger?
- conflict?
- change?
- loss?

What would your character like to change about his or her life?

Is there anything your character would change about his/her life if he/she could?

Motivation:

What makes your character get out of bed in the morning?

Fear:

Is your character afraid of anything?

Happiness:

What makes your character happy?

Relationships:

How is your character with relationships—social, emotional, physical, etc?

SPIRITUAL CHARACTERISTICS

Does your character believe in God?

Does your character have a strong connection to his/her faith?

Does your character live his/her life according to the laws of his/her faith?

CHARACTER'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE STORY

Archetype:

Is your character the hero, the mentor, the shadow, or one of the other archetypes?

Environment:

Does the environment affect your character physically or mentally? Does it affect the way he/she dresses?

Timeline:

Describe five important events that led up to your character's storyline. What five events in your character's back-story led up to the current story that will be presented to the audience?

So there you have it! Now I will use this character development worksheet for the Golden Grasshopper.

BASIC STATISTICS

Name:

Chuck Johnson

Alias:

The Golden Grasshopper

Age:

35 years old

Height:

6 feet tall

Weight:

197 pounds

Sex:

Male

Race:

Caucasian

Eye Color:

Baby Blue

Hair Color:

Brown; military haircut

Glasses or Contact Lenses:

Neither

Nationality:

American

Skin Color:

A nice California tan

Shape of Face:

His face is that of a hero. He has a square jaw with a butt chin, and it is always cleanshaven.

DISTINGUISHING FEATURES

Dress:

Chuck is meticulous about his clothes. His military background doesn't allow him to let himself go, so he is always in khaki pants and a button-down shirt. As the Golden Grasshopper he wears the traditional military boots with long brown pants. He wears a black short-sleeve t-shirt. He has a golden chest plate, golden forearm bracelets, and a golden half-mask that resembles a grasshopper's head. He also wears black gloves so he doesn't leave fingerprints.

Mannerisms:

Chuck often cracks his neck as a result of an injury sustained during a secret military mission.

Habits:

Chuck has no bad habits. He is the ideal person.

Health:

Now that he has recovered from his illness as a result of his exposure to the biological weapon, he is enjoying perfect health.

Hobbies:

Chuck loves to play chess. He is always trying to stay two steps ahead of his opponent. Chuck also loves all types of music. Music puts his mind at ease.

Favorite Sayings:

"Holy crap! I didn't know I could do that, too."

Voice:

Chuck's voice is calm and respectful. As the Golden Grasshopper his voice is deep and mysterious.

Walking Style:

He walks very heroically, with his head up and chest out.

Disabilities:

He has mutated blood that is affected by the sun.

Flaws:

Chuck believes that he isn't doing enough to help humanity.

Best Quality:

Chuck's best quality is that he values life over all other things.

SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

Hometown:

San Diego, California

Current Residence:

Savannah, Georgia

Occupation:

Superhero

Income:

Since the government funds the Golden Grasshopper, he is able to afford anything he wants.

Talents/Skills:

Except for the skills he learned in the military, Chuck doesn't have any other special skills or talents.

Family Status:

Chuck is a family man. He enjoys a great relationship with his parents. They don't know that Chuck is the Golden Grasshopper. He is also very close to his younger sister and is helping her and her infant son since her husband left her. She also doesn't know that he is the Golden Grasshopper.

Status as a Child:

He was just an ordinary kid.

Status as an Adult:

As an adult, Chuck Johnson is the Golden Grasshopper, the defender of justice.

ATTRIBUTES AND ATTITUDES

Educational Background:

Chuck graduated from high school.

Intelligence Level:

Chuck's IQ is 109.

Goals:

His short-term goal is to figure out what he is capable of doing with the new powers he has. His long-term goal is to uphold justice, stop all evil, and bring peace to all.

Self-esteem:

Chuck sees himself as a superhero who isn't doing enough with his gifts.

Confidence:

Even though he thinks he isn't doing as much as he could now, he is very confident that one day he will.

Emotion:

Chuck is a very logical man, but in certain life-threatening situations his emotions take over completely.

EMOTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Introvert or Extrovert:

Chuck is an extrovert.

Chuck deals with sadness by immersing himself in music.

Chuck is quick to throw his fists when he gets angry, but it takes a lot to make him angry.

Chuck deals with each conflict very logically. He always thinks before he acts.

Chuck thinks change is good. If it wasn't for change, he would be dead now.

Chuck deals with loss like most people. He reflects on what he lost and hopefully is able to move on in time.

Goals:

Chuck is completely happy with the way his life is now. The change already happened, so now he has to make the best of the hand he has been dealt. He plans to put his powers to good use, not just for himself but for everyone.

Motivation:

Chuck always wanted to be a superhero. That is why he joined the military. Now that he has super powers, his main motivation is ultimately to create peace for everyone to enjoy.

Fear:

Chuck's biggest fear is failure. Now that he has been granted this gift, he doesn't want to fail the people who depend on him.

Happiness:

Knowing that he is making the world a better place puts a smile on Chuck's face every day.

Relationships:

Being the family man that he is, Chuck is really good with people. Everyone seems to like him. If there is someone whom he can't get along with, that generally means that person is evil at heart.

SPIRITUAL CHARACTERISTICS

Does your character believe in a supreme being? If so, whom?

Chuck believes in God. Does your character have a strong connection to his/her faith?

Chuck's moral compass is directly connected to his faith. That is what kept him humble in his time of sickness and is the main reason he believes he has been blessed with these powers.

Does your character live his/her life according to the laws of his/her faith?

Chuck is not a religious fanatic. He believes in God and tries his hardest to live by his commands.

CHARACTER'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE STORY

Archetype:

Chuck is without a doubt a hero type.

Environment:

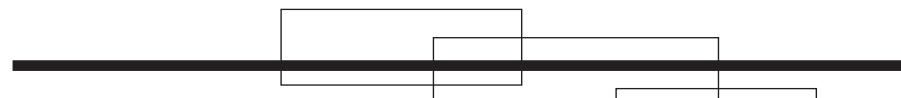
The environment is the main reason why Chuck is the Golden Grasshopper. Without the sun he would still be sick. The sun is the source of the Golden Grasshopper's power. The government designed his armor to act like mini solar panels so he won't lose his powers on overcast days.

Timeline:

The story takes place in 1942. The following five events led up to Chuck's storyline:

- Chuck Johnston was one of the few soldiers who were inducted into the special military detail. He would be the military's secret weapon against the enemy.
- Chuck was exposed to an experiment biological weapon that was being used by the enemy on a special mission. When he came into contact with the weapon, he became ill and had to be transported to the hospital.
- The doctors at the hospital worked hard to find out what Chuck had and how to cure it. It was here that Chuck rekindled his passion for comic books. As he read them, he dreamed of the day that he too could be like one of the superheroes in the comics.
- Chuck was told that what he had was incurable and that he only had a short time to live.
- Chuck asked if he could go outside to feel the sun on his body one last time. When the sun's rays hit him, he started to feel different, stronger, and healthier. He felt a surge of energy shoot through his body, and he was able to get out of his wheelchair and jump 18 feet into the air. Once the doctors were able to get Chuck back into the hospital, and run some tests, they determined that it was a medical miracle. Chuck was completely healed, and a short time later he decided to protect and serve as the Golden Grasshopper.

Phew! That was intense. I don't know about you, but I feel pretty darn good about the development of this character. I am sure that after watching and reading the development of the Golden Grasshopper, you are just itching to get started on your own character. Well, go right ahead. You can download my character template at <http://www.kaiserstudio.net/charactertemplate.doc>, or you can use the character template at the back of the book. Your homework is going to be to fill out the character sheet anyway, so you might as well get started. I will see you in the next chapter.



Chapter 4

Can You Still Be Original Anymore?

Did you have fun with your homework? I sure hope you did, because if you didn't have fun creating the story for your character, then I think it is fair to say that character design might not be for you. If you did have fun, I have a question for you. Did you find yourself trying to come up with a completely original story? You know, one that no one has ever read before. If you were indeed trying to come up with something original, did you have a hard time doing it? I have a good feeling the answer is yes. Do you want to know why that is?

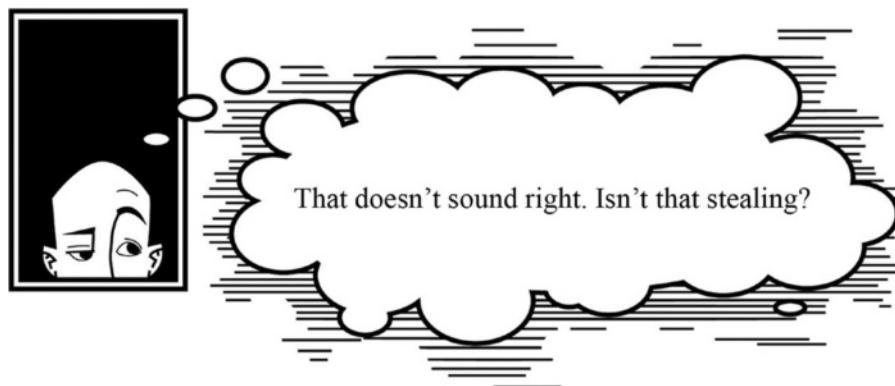
To be *original*, you have to come up with something no one has ever done before. The reason it is so hard to be original is because humanity has been on this planet for quite some time, and during that time a huge number of ideas have been thought of and brought to fruition. Those creations are what inspired generations of people such as artists, architects, actors, writers, musicians, and many others to create the great things they did. So if you look throughout history, you will see that most, if not all, ideas have already seen the light of day.

Now I am not saying that there will never be an original idea ever again (I just hope I am around to witness it), but I'm just saying it is going to be extremely difficult. So you shouldn't be obsessed with creating anything, let alone a character, with the assumption that it absolutely has to be an original concept.

During my years as an instructor and lecturer, I have often asked my audience, "What is an original idea that you have seen in your lifetime?" So far, no one has been able to come up with anything original. So then I pose the question "What do you think was an original idea?" I heard some good thoughts, but for the most part what people thought was original could be traced back to something that had already been created. For example, an audience member at the San Diego Comic Con brought up comics. Well, first you have to look at what comics are. They are a series of images that tell a story. You can go straight back to the time of the caveman and look at prehistoric cave paintings, and there you go—the first visual narrative! That's right—a comic.

While we are on the subject of cavemen, do you know what a genuine original idea was? The wheel! Many other inventions started with that one. Can you imagine what our world would be like if the wheel had never been invented? It would be interesting, but that is a different topic altogether, so let's get back to talking about originality.

As I said before, it is hard to be original. So my advice is to make sure you have some form of originality in everything you create. It is a lot easier to obtain originality than to be original. All "originality" means is that you have taken something that already exists and added your own super-awesome twist to it. Now I know what some of you might be thinking:



Well, let me tell you something that I was told a while back. Once upon a time there was a very smart and wise individual who said, "A smart man borrows and a genius steals." (Please don't take that the wrong way and steal your best friend's TV. That's not the point.) What this means is that we are all inspired by the things around us. If we like something, we want to see it again and again. That is why, when we are in the creative mode, we generally pull all of our inspiration from the things we think are cool. What lets us get away with "stealing" those cool things that already exist is that we add our own twist and give them originality.

Here is a little scenario of what might happen to you as an artist to put this idea of originality to the test. Let's say you are working at your art desk and you get a phone call. Somebody would like you to develop the next big character for his or her company. You are very excited about this opportunity, and you ask what the character should look like. All you get back from the

caller is that the company is looking for a "fire person." You say "fine" and hang up the phone. A couple of hours later you've developed this:



The company is thrilled with what you came up with, and asks you to design another character. The conversation goes something like this: "We loved your character design so much that we want to make another story. The new story is going to be about another fire person, but it should be different from the first one—just as cool, but different. Do you understand?" Now you are sitting at your desk and thinking, "What can I do for this character?" After a while, you come up with this:



By now you are feeling pretty good about your ability to design fire people, even though you would rather not have to do it again for a while. Well, Murphy's Law prevails, and you get a call from a different company.

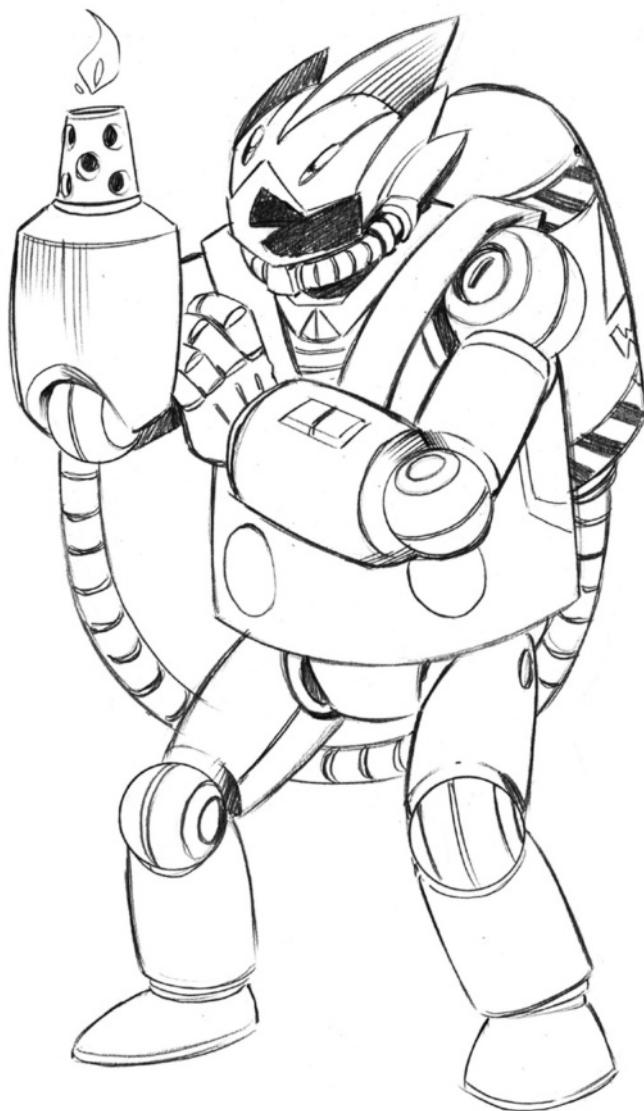
They loved what you did for the other company, and they want a fire person, too. So, with much dismay, you get to work and develop this:



Now after the third fire person, you start thinking to yourself that this is getting a little old and hopefully no one will want a fire person for at least a couple of years. Later, when the phone rings, you have this sinking feeling that someone is going to ask you to draw another fire person. Well, you were right. You drag yourself to your drawing table and come up with this:



As you finish your last fire person, you realize that there seems to be a fire person epidemic and you are the main reason why. But then you remind yourself that the money is good, so you are going to keep designing fire people if that is what everyone wants to see. So since you know someone else is going to want one and you want to beat that person to the punch, you go ahead and design this:



So now you are the fire person king or queen, and no one doubts your fire person design skills. You think to yourself that you will design one last fire person and then retire. You sit at your drawing table and draw this as your final goodbye to the creation of fire people:



I hope this story made you realize that even with a very simple description like "fire person," you can come up with many different designs. Not to mention you were also able to take what you already drew and build on it. You were able to put your own twist on a character design over and over again. Were you able to see that? If you did that's great. If you didn't, then I am going to have to try harder and tell you the story of Jim and the toaster.



There once was a man named Jim. Jim was a normal man who loved eating bread. One day, while looking at his loaf of bread, he thought to himself, "There has to be a better way to have hot bread without having to wait for the oven to heat up and having to bake the bread."



So Jim sat in his living room and thought and thought and thought. He sat in that chair for hours and then ...



he had a great idea. "I will invent a toaster—a small, ovenlike box that once plugged into the wall will be able to heat up my bread in a matter of moments. This is going to be awesome!" Jim thought to himself.



So day in and day out, Jim worked on his invention. He had never worked so hard on anything in his life, but he knew this was going to be one of the best things he ever did.



One day while Jim was taking a break from working on what he thought was going to be the greatest thing since sliced bread, he received some very frustrating news.



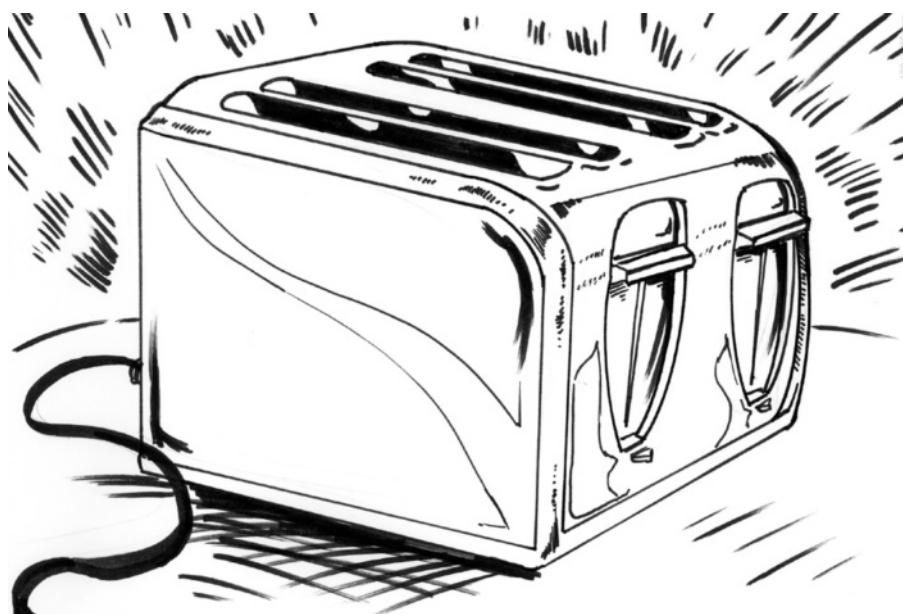
Someone had already invented the toaster and had sold the idea to Macy's! All that time and effort for nothing! Jim was beside himself.



Needless to say, Jim was very mad. He had some choice words for Macy's and the newspaper he was reading. Once he calmed down, however, he started thinking about how he could still make something out of all the work he had put into his toaster idea.



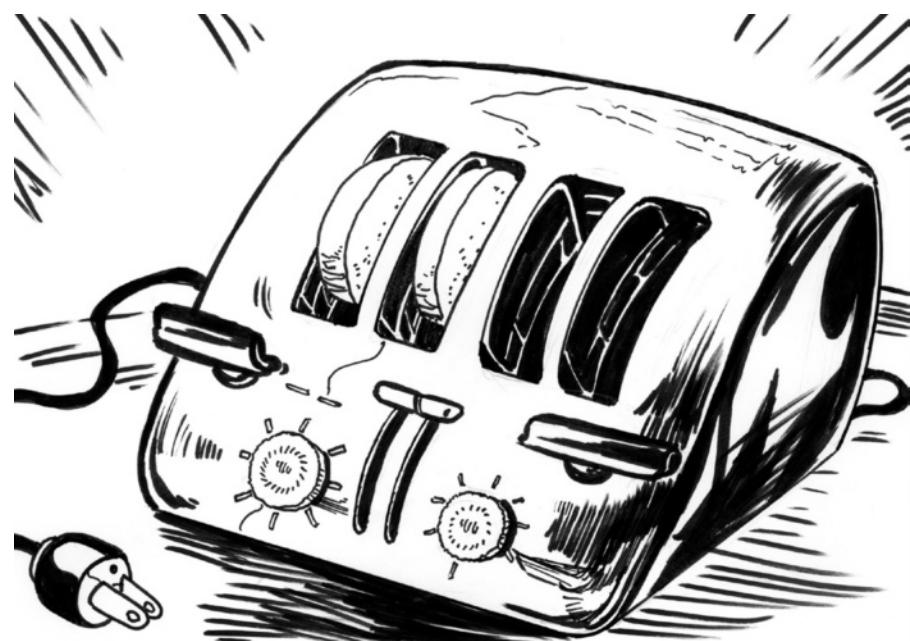
Then it hit him: "I've got it! I didn't waste all my time working on the toaster. I will just modify it and create ...



the double toaster!!!"



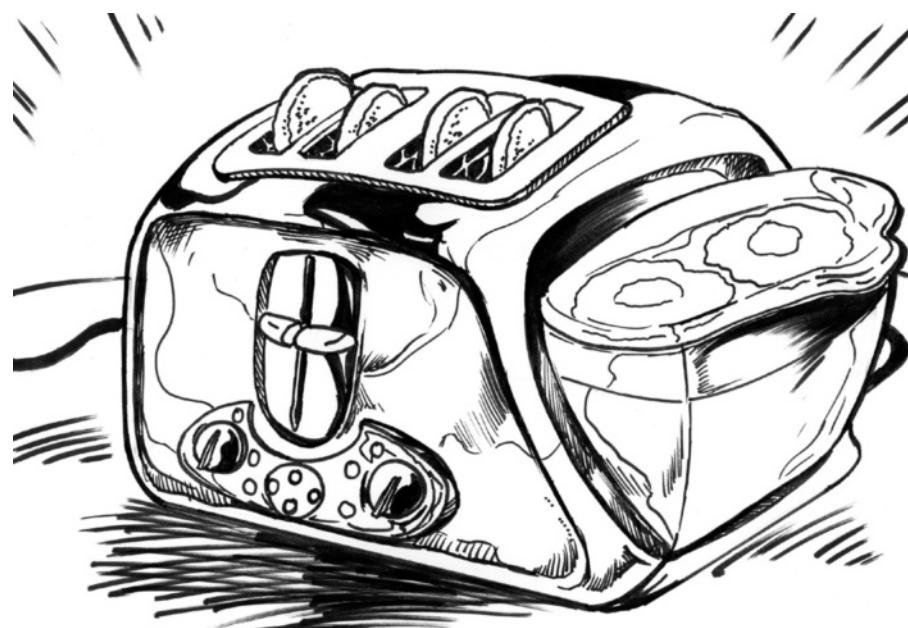
After Jim introduced his double toaster, someone else thought he had an idea and used Jim's creation to create ...



the double muffin toaster!



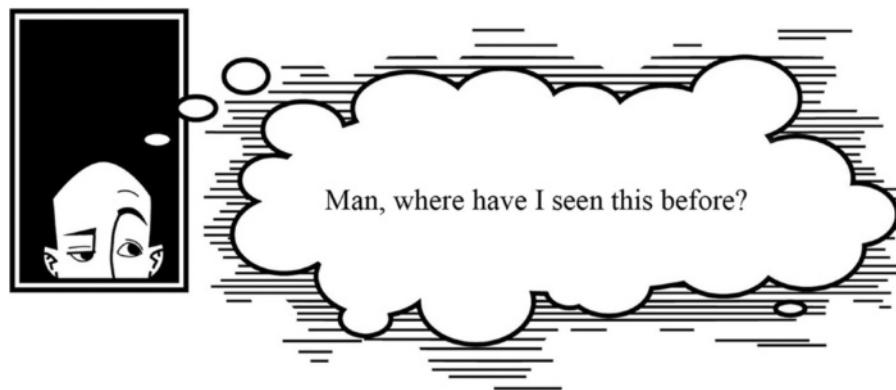
Then, after the double muffin toaster was on the market, somebody thought they had a great idea on how to capitalize on what had already been created and produced ...



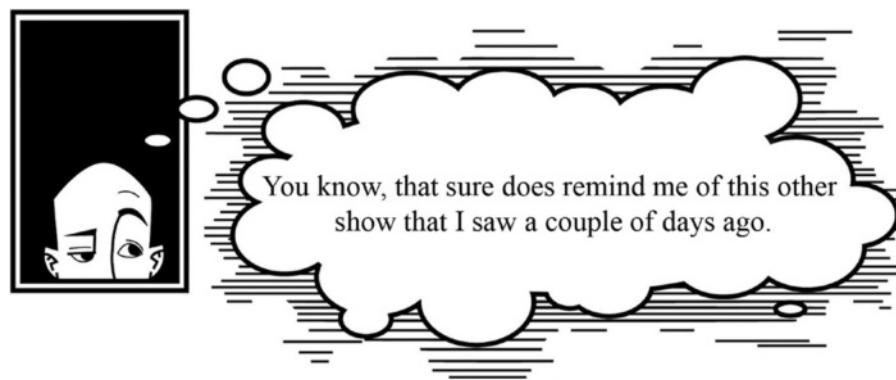
the muffin and egg toaster!

Now do you see how adding your own twist to something that already exists is something that many people do? Why wouldn't you take something that you like and try to make it better? Did you notice the other important message in this story? If not, read it again and see if you can find it. Go ahead, I'll wait.

Wow, you're back already? Did you figure it out? Well, in case you didn't, I'll tell you and if you already know what I am going to say then I am just going to validate what you already know. At the beginning of the story Jim had this great idea and started working on it right away, but before he could get it finished, someone else completed the invention and sold it to a major company. What does that tell us? It tells us that there are many great ideas out there in the universe and even more people grabbing at those ideas. Have you ever heard the saying "Great minds think alike?" It's true, and you might take it as a compliment—until you are working on a project for a long time, only to have someone come out with the finished product before you do. That doesn't mean you should just give up. Not at all! It just means that once you have a good idea, you have to hit the ground running and finish your project to the best of your ability as fast as you can. I mean think about it, how many times have you thought:



or



Here is a little story about an experience I had with one of my students. I gave the class a simple assignment to draw the most bad%\$#@& character they could think of. Knowing how easy it would be for them to just look around and copy something they liked, I told them the character had to be an original creation. That threw a monkey wrench into a lot of people's plans, but alas the students went off to create their characters and present them the next class.

The next day, the class started and things were going just fine. The students presented their characters in front of the class. Some were good, and some were not so good. For the most part, however, they all showed evidence of originality. Then came the student who was going to change all that. With confidence he strolled to the front of the class. He gave us a description of the character's back-story and finally revealed the character.

When he showed the class his character, the silence was deafening. Then the rest of the class started looking around at one another and started whispering, "I have seen that character somewhere before."

The problem was, they couldn't remember exactly where they had seen it, so they didn't say anything. It was up to me to let the student know that this character had been done before. He insisted that it was completely original. Now, with what you have already read in this chapter, you should know that the student's claims weren't going to bode very well with me.

I proceeded to tell him how a female winged demon with a tail had been done by many artists in a multitude of stories. Even after I told him where to find them, he refused to acknowledge that anyone had created this character before. So I took it one step further and told him that he should have done some research first because that character also appears in various types of mythology.

At this point, the tension in the room was so thick you could cut it with a knife. The final straw came when he admitted that the character was not original, but the weapon that he had created was completely original and that no one had ever seen anything like it. I had to tell him that he was wrong yet again. The weapon he had drawn had indeed been created before. Known as a *sai*, peasants in Okinawa, Japan, used it as both a weapon and a farming tool. (Most people are familiar with it in the hands of Raphael from the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.)

The moral of this story is, an original idea is very hard to come by, and even if you are just putting your own twist on a previous creation, make sure you

get it down on paper fast and post it somewhere with a copyright because someone out there is probably working on the same thing. Also, always make sure you research the subject matter you are working on (this is covered in Chapter 6). It is really hard to put your own twist on something if you don't know what already exists.

I hope that after reading this chapter you completely understand the difference between being original and having originality. I feel your head nodding, so why don't we put that knowledge to the test. Take five characters you enjoy looking at and put your own twist on them. See what you can come up with, and try to have some fun with it. Try not to overthink things. See you in the next chapter.

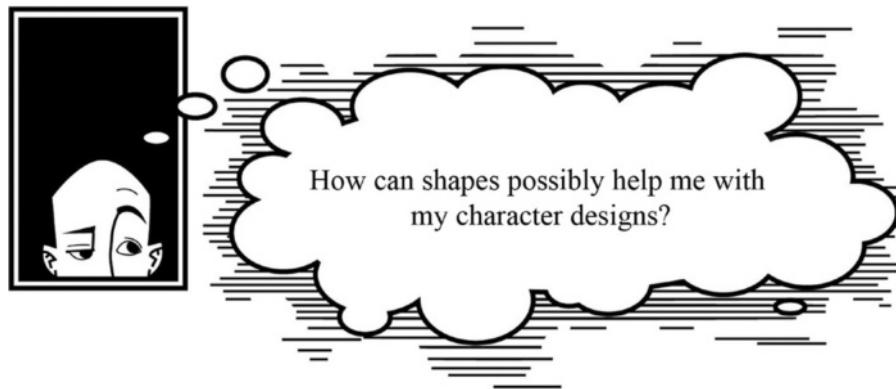


Chapter 5

Shapes and Silhouettes

Did you have fun with the last assignment? Hopefully you didn't overthink it and make it harder than it had to be. In any case, I'll bet while you were applying your personal twist to the characters you picked, you were happy to know that professionals do the same thing all the time.

Let's move on to something a little different. Now I want to talk about shapes. I'm sure you already knew that because the title of this chapter mentions shapes. I know what you are thinking:



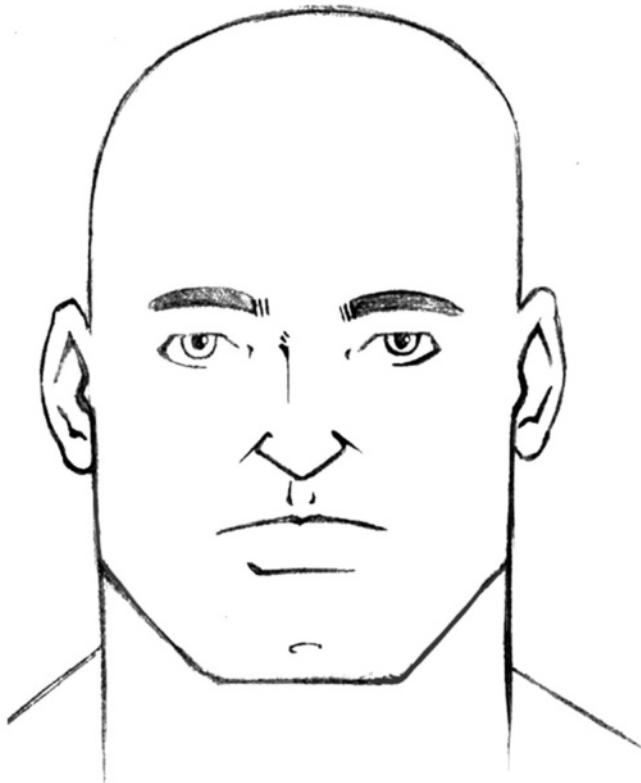
Well, I'm glad you asked that question (if you didn't, you should have). Shapes are what we fundamentally use to define what certain things are and what they possibly can be used for. If you don't believe me, look at it this way. If cavemen had decided that a square was better for mobility and movement, we would be using squares on our cars instead circles. Luckily for us, they decided to go with the circle. But as long as we are talking about squares, let's look at one.



So what do you see here? I hope you see a square, but what does this shape tell you about itself? If this shape was the dominate shape in your character, what would it say about the character? Any ideas? Generally, when we look at a square, certain terms should come to mind:

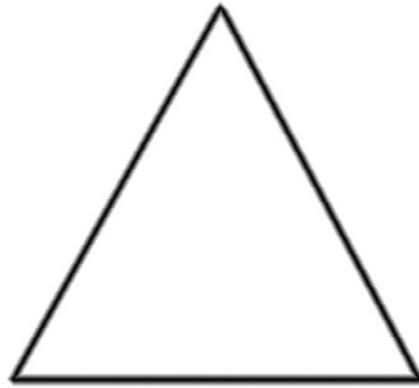
- Stability
- Trust
- Honesty
- Order
- Conformity
- Security
- Equality
- Masculinity

These are the most common things people think about when they see a square shape. It is important to know this kind of information when making characters because you don't want them to suggest something they are not.



Here is an example of a square shape being used in character design. This character has a so-called square jaw. Now that you know some of the meanings behind a square, do you see any of them in this character?

At this point you are probably going through all the shapes you know and trying to figure out the meanings behind them. Or you might be trying to figure out if this works with any other shapes. Let's try it.



What do you see here? That's right, it's a triangle. What do you think the triangle is trying to convey? Once again, generally speaking, a triangle conveys the following:

- Action
- Aggression
- Energy
- Sneakiness
- Conflict
- Tension

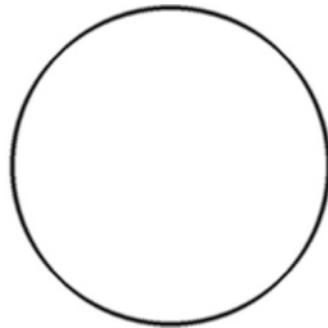
I don't know how many triangle people or character designs you have seen, but the triangle shape is present in people's faces.



Do you see the triangle shape in his face? What did you think about the character when you saw him? Did it match up with some of the meanings that were mentioned earlier?

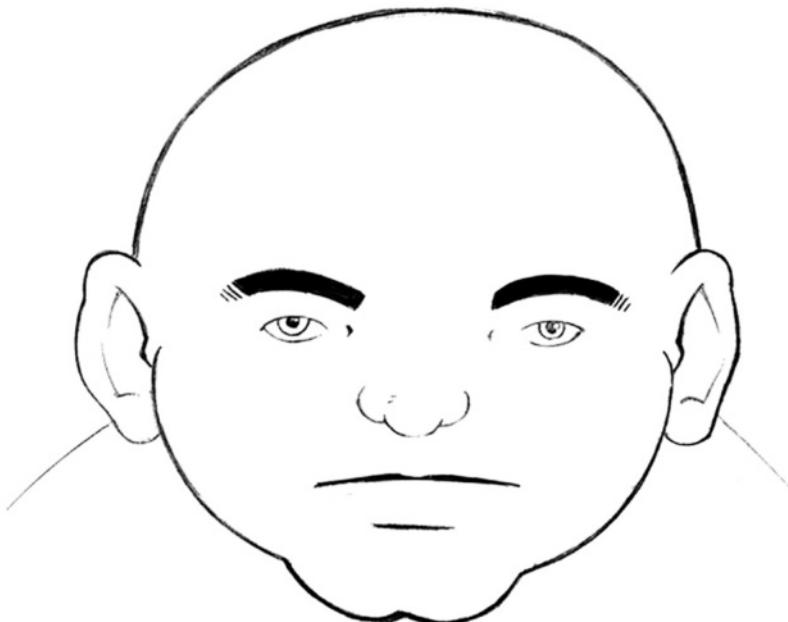
Let's do one more for good measure.

What do you see here?



Can you think of some of the meanings behind a circle? What do you think a circle could possibly be telling us about itself? If it could talk, it might tell you that a circle can be viewed as

- Completeness
- Gracefulness
- Playfulness
- Comforting
- Unity
- Protection
- Childlike



Do you see the circle shape in this character's face? Do you see any of the meanings in this character?

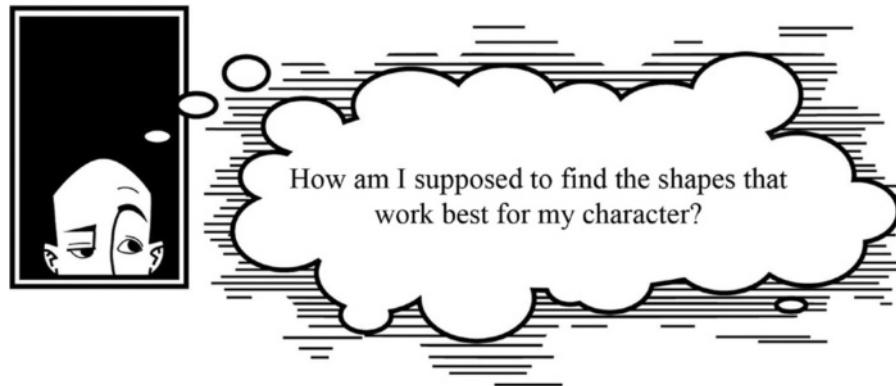
Some students have told me that these meanings aren't really the focus of a character. That is fine, but you have to know that, depending on what shapes you use, you might be telling a different story with your character designs than you think you are. So it's a good idea to remember the meanings behind different shapes for future reference. Trust me; you'll be glad you did.

Shapes don't just play a role in a character's face but in their body as well.



When you were looking at the character on the previous page, were you trying to figure out which meanings were being represented? Was it harder to do than with faces? When you start embellishing the shapes to make them more interesting, you must always keep in mind what the basic shapes are saying. No matter what else you do to the basic shape, it will always be the most prominent feature. So, for example, if you have rounded triangles like the previous character, most people will interpret that as a form of protection that allows the character to be aggressive. So you have both a protection meaning from a circle and an aggression meaning from a triangle. Cool how that worked out, huh?

At this point you might be asking yourself this question:

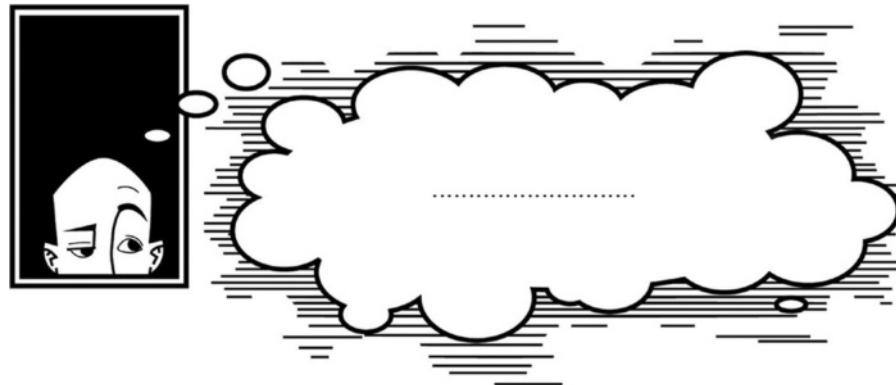


Well, as long as you know what you are trying to say about your character, you will know what basic shape to use for your character. You are probably going to want to augment some of those shapes to make them cooler looking. The best way to do that is to use a silhouette.

A silhouette is an outline of a character that is filled in with black. It kind of looks like a shadow.



Silhouettes are important in character design for one reason: recognizability. If you can create a character with a combination of shapes that is completely recognizable when it is in complete shadow, then you are doing something right. That will always hold true as long as you don't break the "form follows function" rule. (Don't worry, we are going to talk about that a little later in this chapter.) Try to think of some characters that have good silhouettes.



I'm sure you were able to think of some good ones like Batman or the Simpsons, but I have one that trumps them all. This character has the best silhouette of all time. Interested in knowing who it is? I'll give you some clues:

*This character is a he.
He likes dogs.*

Any thoughts? You still need some help, don't you?

*He doesn't wear a shirt.
He is represented by three circles.*

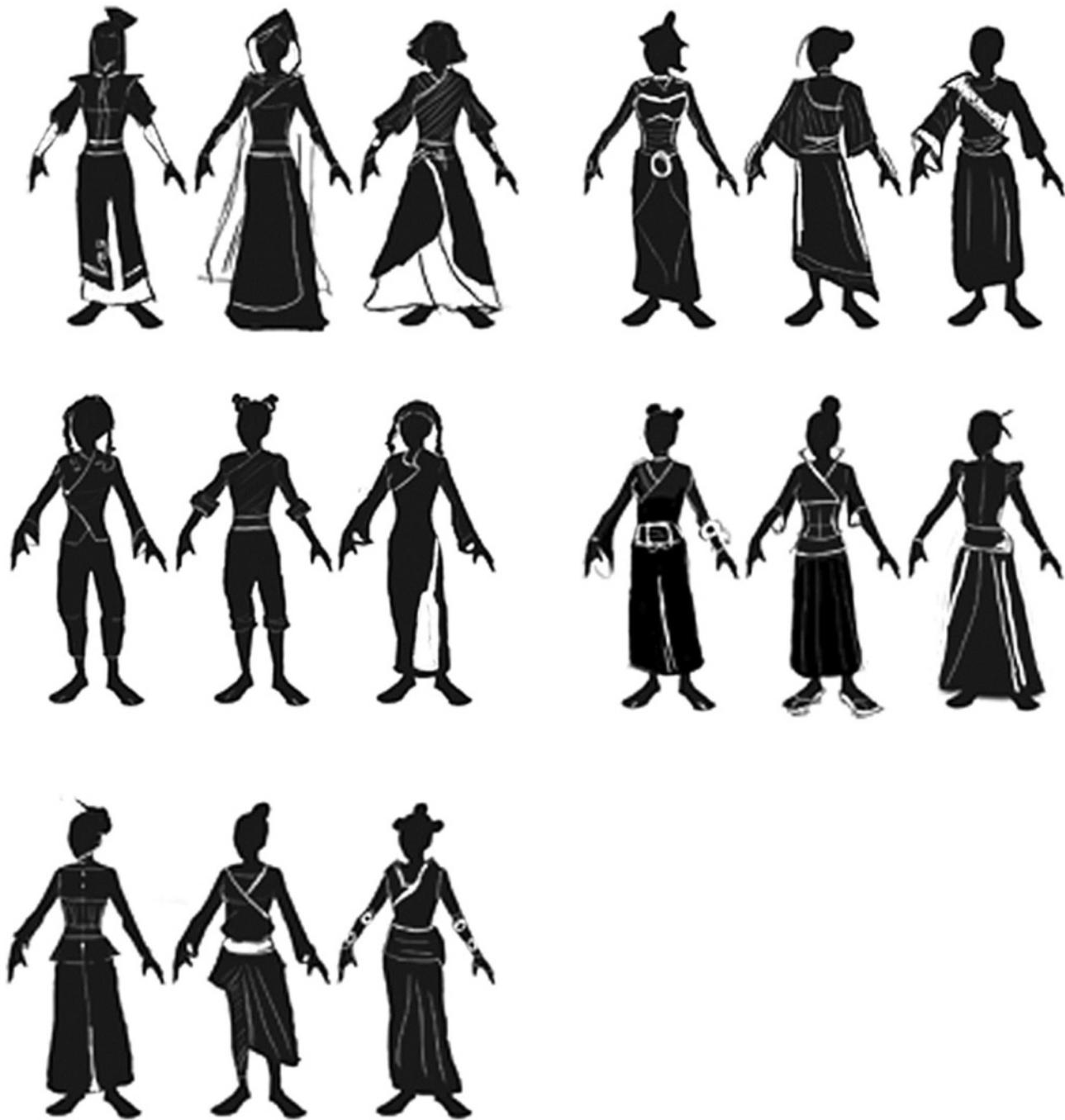
How about now? Still nothing? Okay, here is one last clue:

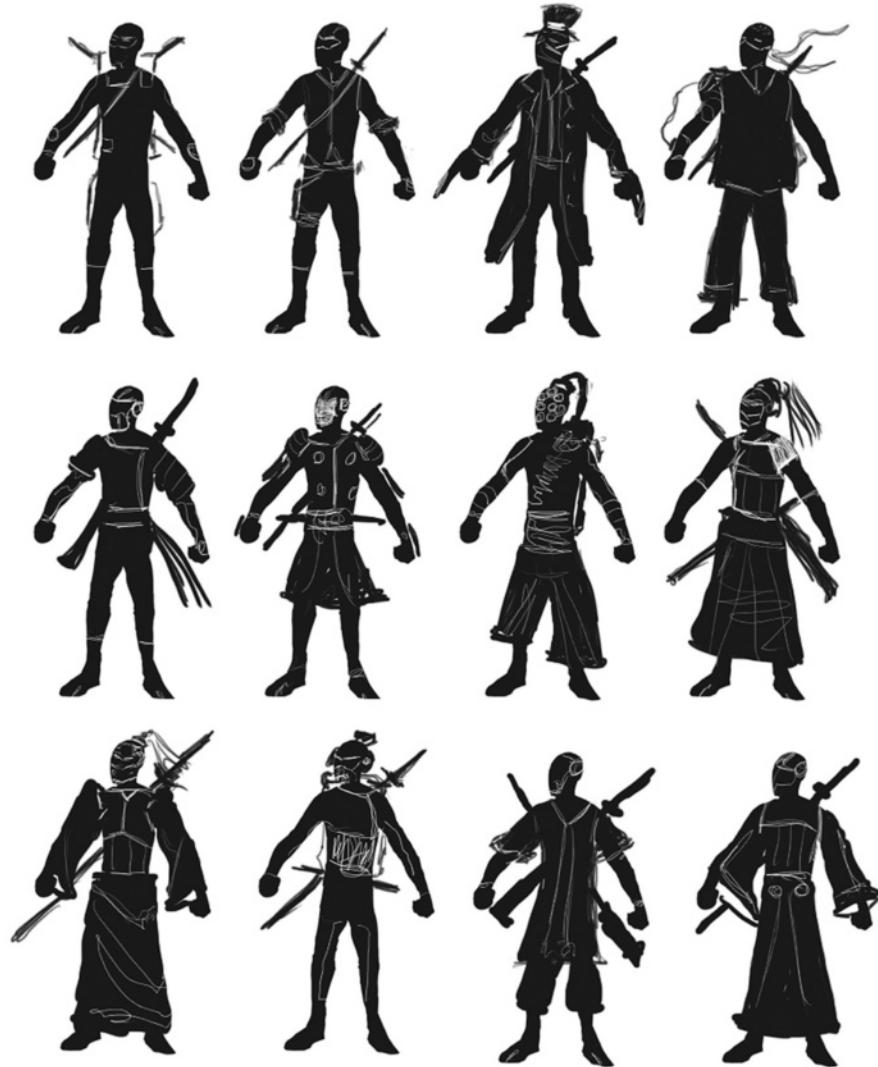
He lives in a magical kingdom.

I hope you know the answer by now. If for some reason you still couldn't figure it out, ask someone who has little kids who has the best silhouette in the world. Give them all the same clues, and I'll bet they'll be able to tell you who it is.

Once you figure out who the character with the best silhouette is you should be able to see how much a strong silhouette can help with recognition. Using a silhouette is also a very good starting point for character design. With a silhouette you can make multiple designs in a very short amount of time because you aren't really focusing on the finer details of the character.

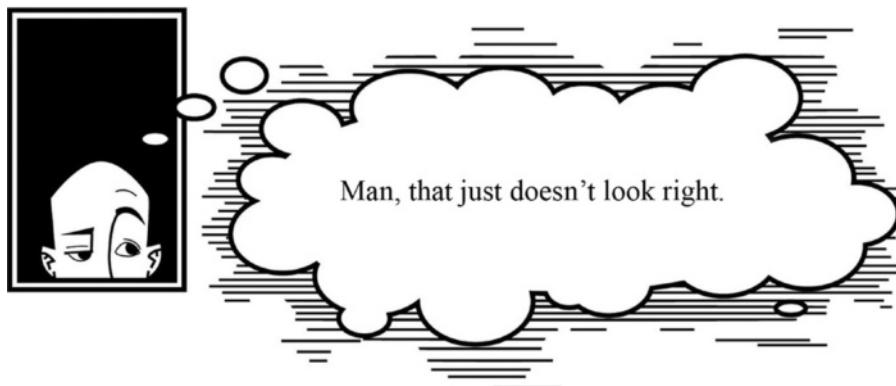
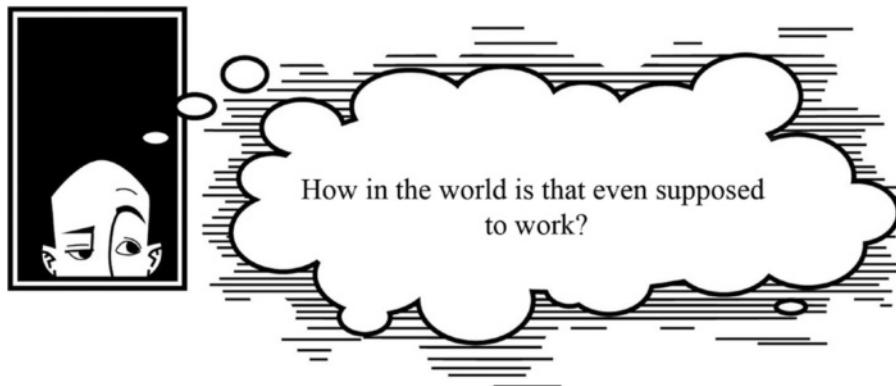
(If you insist on putting details in your silhouettes, you can use a few white lines to help you.) Here are some examples of using silhouettes and white lines:





Try not to overdo it because you want to concentrate more on the shapes you are going to use and the functionality of the character. Remember what I said about form follows function? What that all boils down to is that no matter how cool your design looks, it should always look like it would work. I have to say that artists not following this rule is one of my biggest pet peeves.

You have probably seen character designs that you liked visually, only to think this after further examination:



As a character designer, you never want to hear that question asked about your designs. Why, you ask? Elementary, my dear Watson! If a person has to ask that question about your design, it is going to pull that person out of the story you created and destroy any allure that you might have had for your character. You don't want that to happen, do you? I didn't think so. Just in case you still don't know what I am talking about, I would like to show you. Let me give you some examples using three different form follows function items:

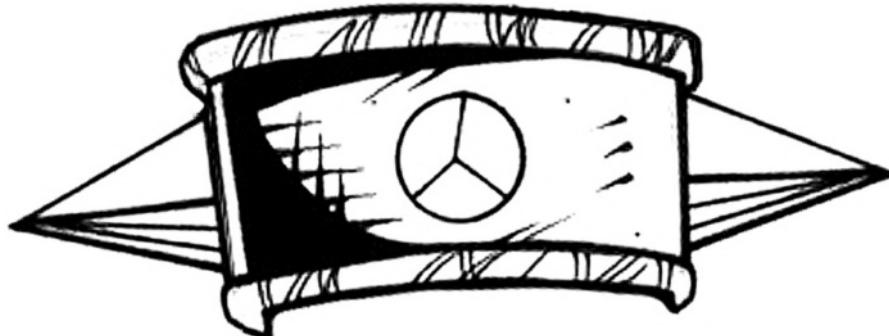
Spiked arm bracelets

Four arms mutations

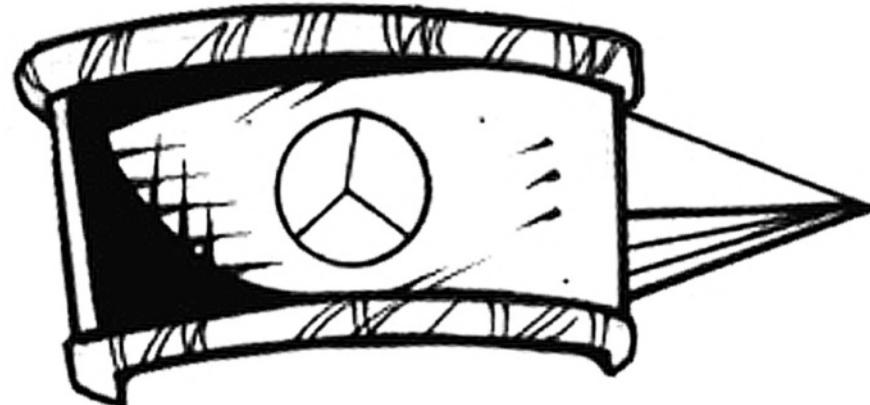
Robots

In the 1990s, character designers seemed to use spiked arm bracelets a lot. The whole idea behind the bracelets is actually pretty cool. A character has

spikes around his biceps, and every time he flexes, you see spikes. It makes for a very intimidating look. The biggest problem that most young designers have is that they put spikes all around the bracelet, like so:

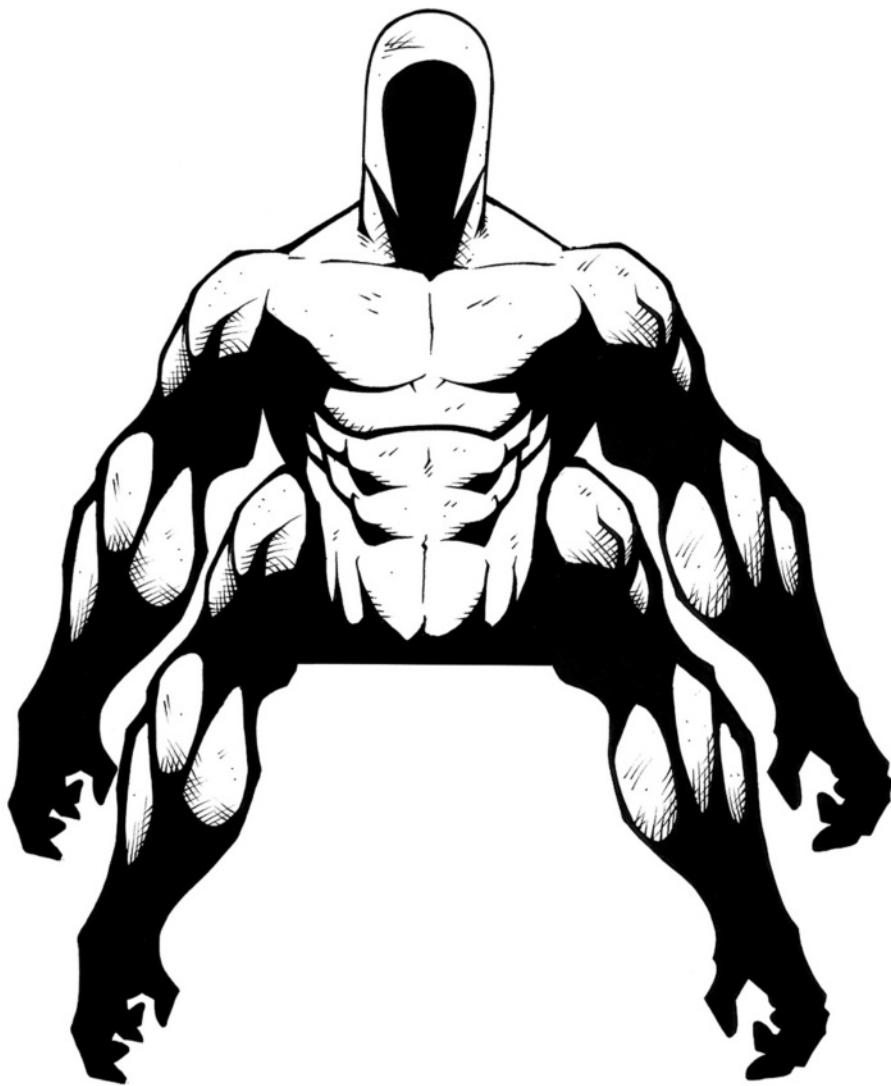


If you don't see why that is a bad idea, let me tell you why it is a bad idea. If the bracelet has spikes all the way around, every time a character puts his or her arms down, he or she is going to get stabbed! This is a design flaw, and it doesn't follow the form follows function rule. So if you are going to have spiked arm bracelets, you want to make sure there aren't any spikes on the inner part, like so:



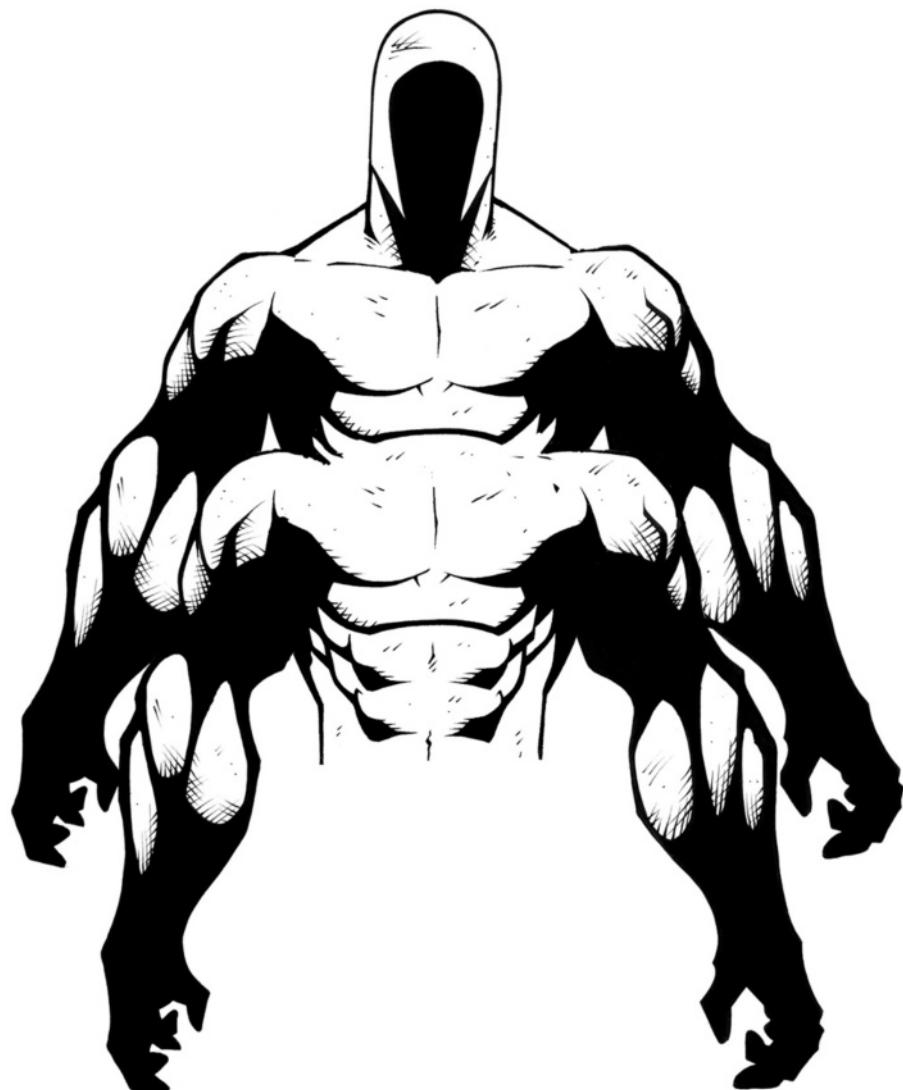
I know it's a simple solution, but it's the solution to the problem. Why don't we look at something a bit more challenging: the four arm mutation. Everyone wants to create a character who can hold more weapons than a normal human, so naturally the character is given more arms. It's not a bad

idea, but when designers try to attach extra limbs to a human body without thinking about the form follows function rule, they get into trouble. This is what I generally see when students and young character designers approach this design challenge:



As cool as this might look, there is a big problem with this character. Because this character does not conform to the normal human skeletal system, it doesn't follow the form follows function rule. As it appears now, it can't move the second pair of arms.

If you don't believe me, look at a picture of a human skeleton. Notice that the arm is a ball and socket. The head of the humerus fits into the socket of the scapula, which allows the arm to rotate. The scapula has the acromion process and the coracoids process where muscles attach to help move the arm. Then there is the clavicle, the suprasternal notch, and the sternum, which all have muscles attached to them. And let's not forget the rib cage, to which muscles are also attached. All of these things are required for an arm to be capable of movement. If we just slap on a couple of more arms, there would be too many other vital parts missing. So how can we fix this design problem? It's simple, actually. We just have to double up on everything that is needed to make the arms work. In short, we need another torso, kind of like this:



I know it looks a little funky, but it's what we need for this character to actually work. Not all design choices can follow the form follows function rule. Sometimes you need to know when to walk away from a design you have created.

Another character design where people can forget about the functionality of a character is an angel. Most designers just put wings on the shoulders or coming out of the back. You know from the arms example that this wouldn't work. The wings need to be part of the skeletal structure to function, and without elongating the body, that just isn't possible.

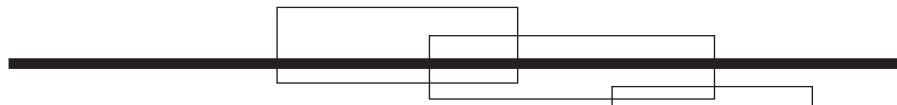
The last thing I want to talk about is robots. I know that robots are probably the coolest of the three examples, but they are the easiest to screw up as well. Robots are basically big moving shapes. For these shapes to move, all the parts have to work together. Remember the toy where you put the square block in the square hole and the star shape in the star hole? That's pretty much the same way robots work. The shapes have to work with one another for the robot character to be believable. You can't force a star shape into a square hole unless you break it. Robots, at their core, are the epitome of form follows function. Or at least they should be.



Do you see how the shapes on this robot character interlock? They are working together to form a believable character design.

I hope you can now see how form follows function is supposed to work. It is simple when you think about it. Whether you are designing angels, cops, robots, ninjas, or anything else that you can think of, just remember that whatever you create has to look like it would work.

That's my soapbox when it comes to shapes. Now, on to your homework! Go ahead and design a character and then change the primary shapes in your character. See if that changes anything about your character. You might discover that simply changing the shapes gives your character the story you were looking for. I will see you in the next chapter.



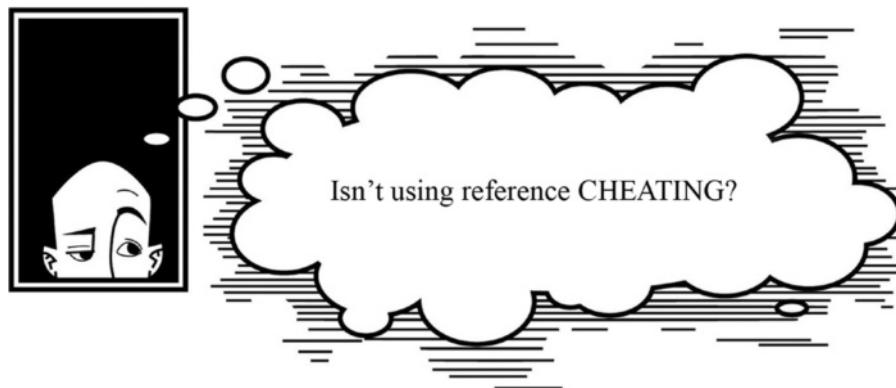
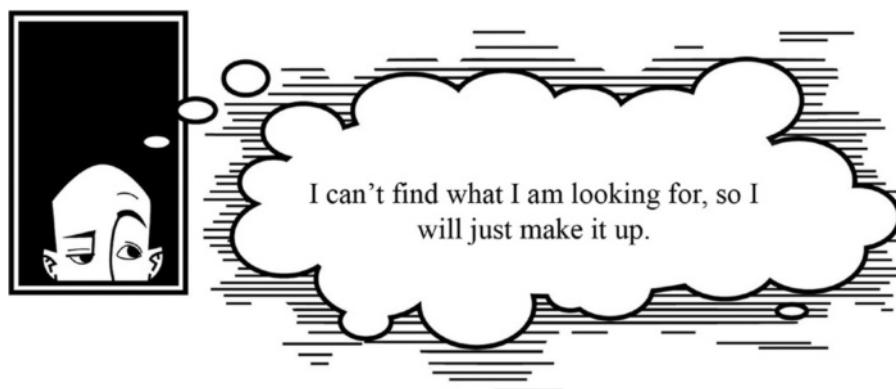
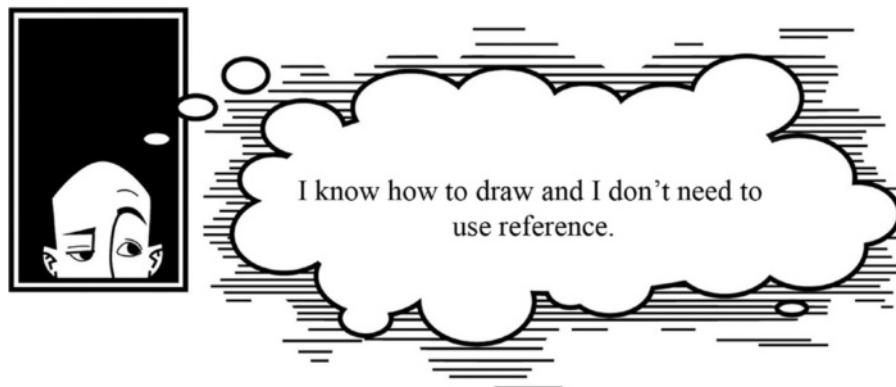
Chapter 6

Reference, Reference, and Reference—Oh My!

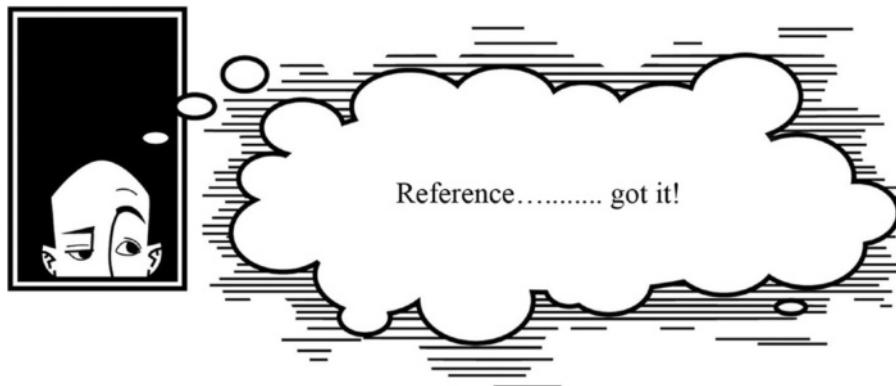
Since you're here, apparently I haven't scared you off yet. Did you do your homework? I will just have to take your word for it, because there is still more to be told about character design. So let's move on, shall we? The next thing we are going to talk about is reference. *Reference* is defined as "an act or instance of referring." I don't know about you, but when the definition of a word uses the word to explain its meaning, I don't think that's much help. Reference for character designers can be defined as "the ability to observe from life or from a photograph to ensure that what is being portrayed is visually correct."

To clarify that definition a bit, I'll give you an example. Say you have designed your main character, and his sidekick is a bobcat. To ensure that your portrayal of a bobcat is correct, you would need a reference. To obtain a good reference, you could go about it a couple of ways. You could go to the zoo and draw or take pictures of a live bobcat. Or if by chance you have wild bobcats in your backyard, you could draw or take pictures of them. Or—and this is what most of my students do—you can just go on the Internet and do a Google search for "bobcat" and use other people's photographs and drawings.

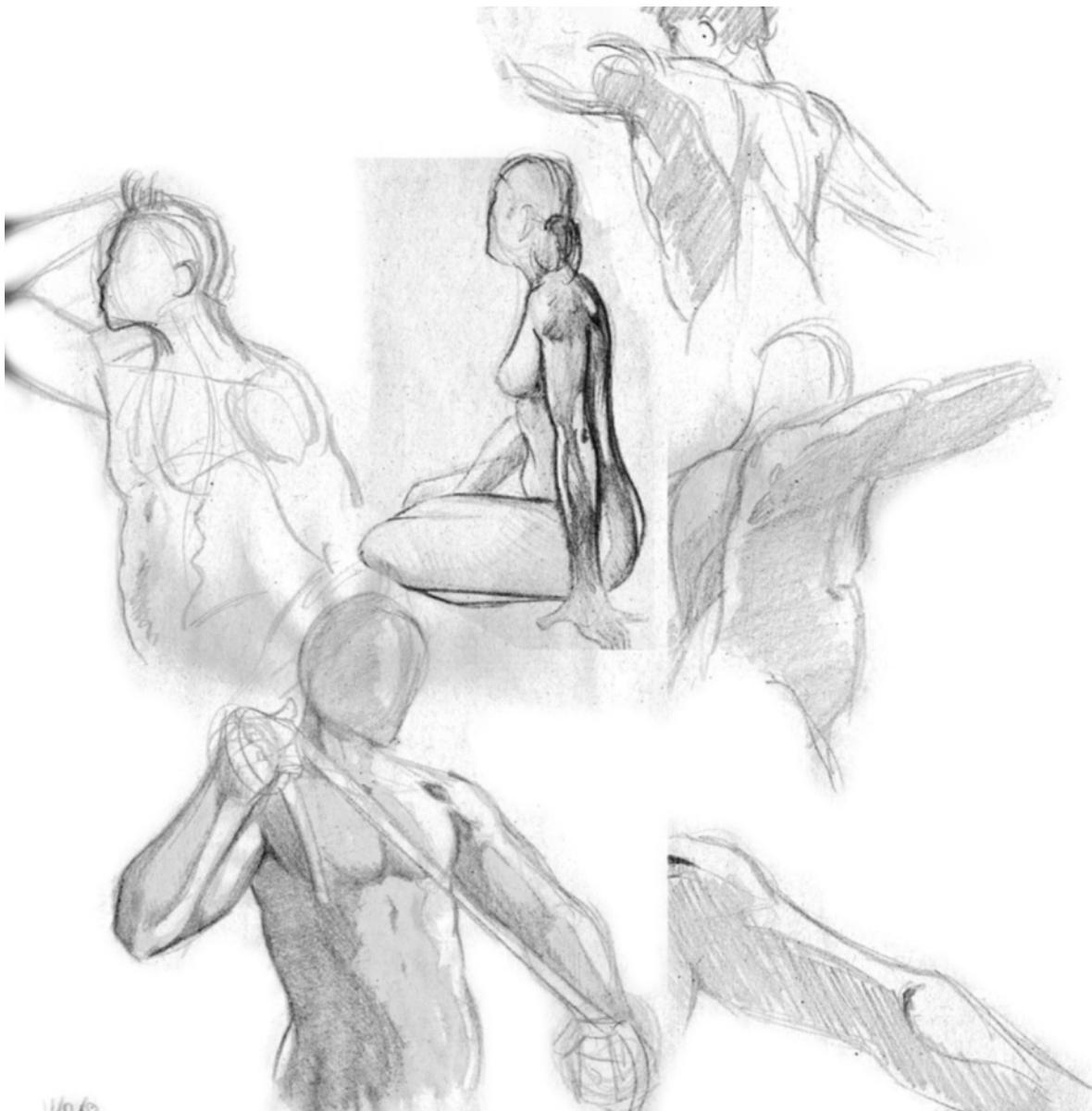
When I start teaching the topic of references, some students get these crazy ideas in their heads:



Did you have some of the same thoughts? If you did, you need to get them out of your head right now! It doesn't matter how much you think you know how to draw, you can always use references. If you can't find exactly what you are looking for, keep looking; it's out there—I promise. And using reference is definitely not cheating. All professional character designers use reference. Just watch the special features of most animated movies, and you will see the artists—the “pros”—using reference! Whether you are revamping old characters or creating brand new ones, references are vital because you have to make sure that everything on your character is accurate.



Drawing people is a great example of what I'm talking about. A large majority of character designs involve some form of the human body. The best ways you can ensure that your designs are correct is with reference and practice—and then probably more reference. The best source of practice and references will always be life drawing. What's that you say? Life drawing isn't the same as reference? Au contraire, young grasshopper. When you draw from life, you are referencing the real world around you. You have to look at what you are drawing to make sure that what you are drawing is correct. To prove my point, here are some sketches from a life drawing session.

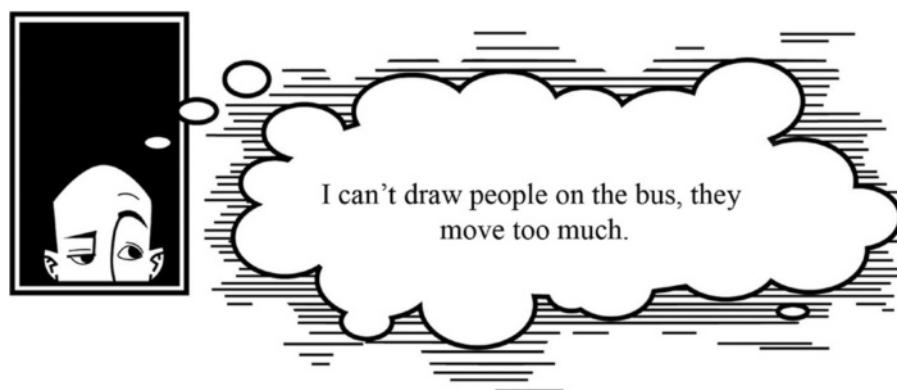


I realize not everyone can take a life drawing class and draw people in the nude. It makes some people a bit uncomfortable, and, let's face it, you would have to pay to get into a life drawing session anyway. So what's the next best thing? Wait! NO! NO! NO, don't go there! I'm talking about drawing the people around you. Everywhere you go, there are people you can draw—on the bus, at school, at the bowling alley, the friends playing video games with you. The reference you need is all around you. (I personally like drawing people on the Metro train.)



See, everything you need is walking, talking, and living lives right in front of you. And once you understand human anatomy, you should probably learn to draw people with their clothes on. (Let's face it. How many characters have you created in the past that walk around living out their lives naked? Exactly.)

At this point, I bet you have this thought running through your head.



Well, that might be true, but you have to try. Drawing people who are moving gives you practice at remembering what it was that you were looking at. It is a good skill to have. After you draw for a while, you will notice that you are able to fill in the gaps, but that will only happen if you practice.

Another great skill you will learn by drawing people on the bus or walking around in the mall is gesture drawing. Gesture drawing is a form of quick drawing that allows you to focus on the motion, the energy, and the mood of what you are drawing. These drawings will make you draw faster so you can capture the energy and mood of the people in motion. If you can become proficient in gesture drawing, your character designs have less of a chance of becoming stiff and lifeless.

If you are still intimidated about drawing strangers on the bus or in the park, I know someone with whom you will always feel comfortable and who will always be at your beck and call. This individual will pose any way you like for as long as you want. And the best part is, this person won't complain. Are you ready for this great resource? It's you! That's right, you. You are the best model you will ever have. You will always be there, and you know exactly what you are looking for. Here are some examples of me being my own model.





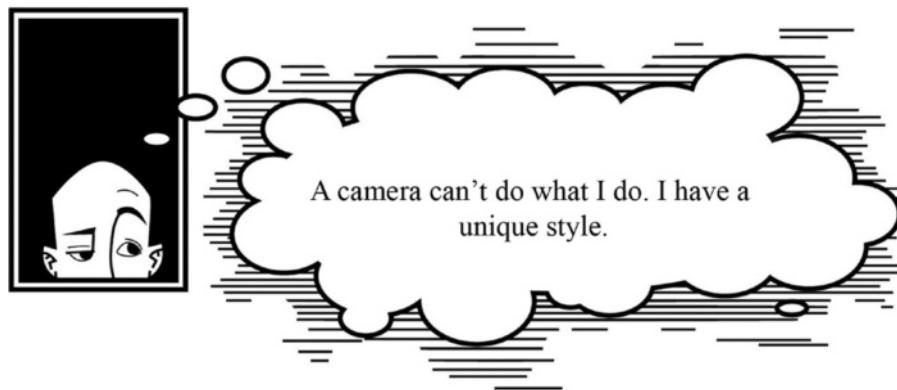
The best way to draw your entire body is to use a full-length mirror. They aren't too expensive; 10 to 12 bucks tops. Drawing yourself can also teach you how to remember what you see because, believe me, as great a model as you might be, you are still going to move.

With yourself as the model, you can pretty much have any type of reference pose you want. Of course, it will be hard to hold still while you are drawing, so you might want to get one of your friends to take a picture of you posing. That is called photo reference, and it's a great tool to have in your artistic arsenal. You can take a camera with you wherever you go, and thanks to the iPod touch and iPad, viewing your photographs couldn't be easier. The Internet is also a great resource for photo references. You can download millions of pictures that other people have taken.

Being able to get any person to hold any pose for an infinite amount of time is invaluable, but there is a downside to photo references. Can you guess what it is? What? Wait... no, the camera isn't perfect. There is a problem with photo reference. The problem with photo reference is that the camera makes all the choices for you. The camera's job is to take the 3D world we live in and make a 2D representation of it. Just in case you didn't know it,

if you draw at all, that is your job and if you are going to rely solely on how the camera stylistically flattens out the world, then you can just use the camera instead of real life, right?

I am sure that at this moment you are thinking to yourself:



Yes, you are unique in every artistic way, but if you let the camera dictate what and how you are going to draw, then the camera is the artist and not you. Let me give you an example.

I once had a student who turned in a final project that looked absolutely amazing. The details, the story, and the color were spectacular. Once I got past the outer beauty, however, I realized that the perspective was completely off. When I mentioned it to the student, his explanation was "That is what the picture looked like." I in turn said that it doesn't matter, it still isn't right. This student was a slave to his photographs. He was able to make the picture look really good, but the camera had warped the perspective, and the student had just drawn what he saw in the photo, neglecting to work out the perspective and making sure it was correct.

It's fine to use a photo as a reference, but you still have to use what you have seen in the real world. The best way to combat being a slave to your reference is to do a butt load of life drawing. When it comes to reference, the best one will always be life drawing. By doing a lot of life drawing, you will be able to build your visual library, which will allow you to fill in the gaps that the camera might miss or distort.

Here are some examples of how you can use reference without being a slave to them. The idea is to use what you need and be creative with the rest. For example, here is a headshot of me screaming.



I was able to use this image as a reference in a comic sequence. The following two panels for that sequence show the same guy screaming, but you can see that I used only what I needed and then created what wasn't there—for example, turning the head in the second panel.



Here is another example of me in a more action-oriented pose and the final image I used for a card for the TCG Dark Legacy.





In the next example, I am posing for a character illustration. Notice how the pose is similar but not exactly the same. The character pose needed both arms to be straight out, but I have to say that gun was pretty heavy!



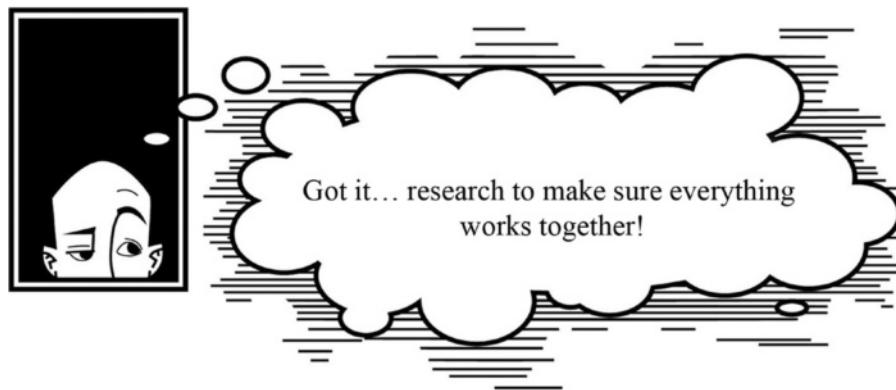


Is this starting to make sense? I hope so. Reference is a great tool for all artists, and you shouldn't be afraid of it. Just make sure the final product is your own creation and not be a slave to your reference.

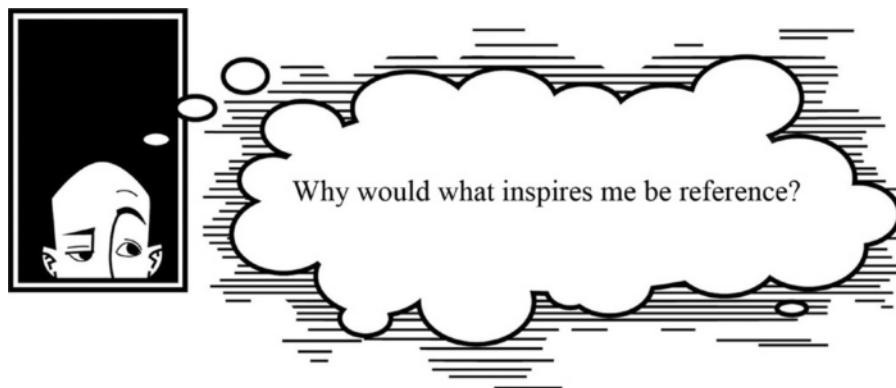
Another type of reference that people use all the time but don't know they are using is research. I'm not talking about the kinds of references you use when you write a term paper and cite your sources. I mean the research you need to do for a specific character. Let's say you have a character who is based in the 1940s. You would have to research the fashions, the cars, the buildings,

and so on of that era. It might sound like an awful lot of work for just one character, but it is incumbent upon you to produce something that is absolutely authentic. And the only way you can do that is with research.

The same thing holds true when you draw characters with special abilities. For instance, if your character is a parkour specialist, then you would have to research how a person who has mastered parkour moves. You could go to a studio that teaches parkour and do a bunch of life drawings, but we already talked about the problem of people in motion. So it would be a lot easier to go online and look at videos and photos of people performing parkour, right?



There is one final type of reference I want to discuss. This type of reference is often not considered a true reference at all. I understand why, but I think that it is another strong type of reference. It's *inspiration*. You are probably thinking something like this:



Well, in my humble opinion—and this is only an opinion—when artists are looking for good references, they often get lost in the cool stuff. I don't know about you, but for me, when I am looking for reference and get side tracked by the cool stuff, it tends to be other artists' drawings and paintings, but, again, you can't be a victim to your references. If you draw your own character based solely on other artists' work, you are assuming that they did all the necessary research and that their drawings are correct. This comes under the category of DTA: *don't trust anyone*. In our case, it stands for *don't trust artists*. You never want to assume that the other artist did all the work he or she should have. When you do your own research, you *know* it is right.

Have you ever found an image on a poster or online that inspired you to start drawing something similar? I know I have. When I attended the San Diego Comic Convention, I saw a mural for Marvel comics with a drawing of a female Viking. (I think it was supposed to be a female Thor.) It looked so awesome that I took a picture of it. When I got back to my hotel room, I printed out a couple of images of Vikings from the computer. It turned out that Vikings didn't have horns on their helmets. (It had something to do with sailing and rigging and stuff getting caught on the horns.) Who knew?

So it happens to everyone. You have to remember that just because it looks cool, it doesn't mean it is correct. That is why I went back to the hotel and printed my own Viking reference, and for three other reasons. One, I needed more Viking reference. Two, I wanted to make sure that the inspirational image was correct. Three, I didn't want to be a slave to the inspirational reference image.

I hope you are now convinced that reference is a very useful and powerful tool to have at your fingertips. Just make sure you don't fall victim to the reference and become a slave to it. Got it? GOOD!

It's homework time! This time, I want you to make two different drawings of the same character: a sheriff in the Wild West. One drawing should just be from the top of your head, using no reference at all. For the other one, I want you to use all four types of references discussed in this chapter. Afterward, compare the drawings and see if there are any differences. Have fun and I'll see you in the next chapter.



Chapter 7

Aesthetics—Just What You've Been Waiting For

How did your assignment go? Did you notice anything in particular about your drawings? I hope it has encouraged you to use reference a lot more. I am not going to waste any more time. We are going to jump right into aesthetics. I know we discussed aesthetics briefly when we talked about shapes, but that was mostly about structure. Now we are going to get to the meat and potatoes.

Aesthetics is defined as "the philosophy dealing with the nature of beauty, art, and taste." Hopefully, you can understand why all of these are important to character design. The aesthetic is the first thing the viewer will notice about your character design. No matter what anyone wants to tell you, human beings are attracted to things that look visually appealing. (That's why it's called love at first sight.) Oh come on, you know it's true, and it is no different with character designs. When they see an attractive character, people want to know more about it.

There is no cookie cutter formula that will always make your character appealing to everyone on the planet. People's tastes vary widely, and there is something out there for everyone. You just have to find it. So how can you get the most bang for your buck when it comes to the aesthetics of your characters?

The first thing you have to think about is your audience. If you are creating the character only for yourself, then all you have to worry about is what you like. But if you are trying to reach other people, you have to consider the preferences of the other people who will see your character design. You have to answer two important questions:

1. What is the age group that you are aiming for with your character design?
2. What genre is your character going to be in?

These are the two most important considerations because the aesthetics of your character design depend on your answers.

Let's talk about the age factor first. You will have to do some research to see what the target age group is watching, playing, and reading. This is called "knowing your target audience." Do you know what 0- to 4-year-olds are watching on TV? Do you know why they aren't watching the same programs as 5- to 8-year-olds or 14- to 18+-year-olds? You might think you know, but do you really know? Before you answer that question, I'll tell you what I think about the different age groups, and we'll see if you had the same ideas.

I am going to break down the age groups as follows. (This may vary from person to person, but this is generally what I go by.)

Ages 0–4 Characters have really big heads and eyes, short bodies, bright colors, and simple shapes.

Ages 5–8 Characters still have big heads but less so than characters for the 0–4 age group. Their eyes are smaller, the colors are a bit more muted, and the shapes are more intricate.

Ages 9–13 Characters are pulling away from the simplistic. They resemble more believable proportions. The colors are more realistic and have a lot more details.

Ages 14–18+ Characters resemble the real world. They are properly proportioned. The colors are more complicated, and they have the most amount of detail.

Why is this important and why should you care? It's important because it directly influences the design. You don't want to give the viewers too much information if they can't process it. For example, look at what a 4-year-old is watching and then look at what a 14-year-old is watching. Do you notice that the 14-year-old's program has a lot more to look at? There is more they have to process. This is because the older you get, the more information your brain can process. I'm sure that there are cases where that isn't true, but that is the general rule.

Another reason you really want to know your target audience is because you don't want to market a character to the wrong age group. Imagine being the artist who has this great idea about a bloodthirsty mercenary who specializes in killing demons and monsters, and his main quest is to hunt down and kill the devil. It's graphic, gory, and violent, and it even has a little sex in it. Then somebody asks you what age group you plan on marketing this character to, and you reply, "I was thinking 5- to 8-year-olds." Would you let your 5-year-old watch something like this? I know I wouldn't. So you want to make sure that your character is going to fit in with the age group you have in mind.

Since we are all visual people, I am going to give you examples of characters placed in the different age groups. First, we are going to look at a character in the 0- to 4-year-old group.



As you can see, this character is very simplistic. There isn't a lot of information to process, just the basics. If we break this character down, you will see that the character is only two heads tall, with the largest part of the character being its head. The idea behind the big head and big eyes is to make the character cute and less threatening. Also, if you look at the lines that were used to define the character, they are very minimalistic. Finally, notice that the colors are very basic—basic in the sense that they are all part of the basic color wheel. There are no shades or tints to any of the colors here. As character designers, we would choose these colors because they are what the age group is learning about.

If you don't believe me, I'll tell you that as a newly minted father, I can tell you out of experience when my child and I are discussing colors, we stick to red, blue, yellow, and so on. Even though I am an artist, I wouldn't tell my 2-year-old that the color isn't really red but burgundy. That would come later if he develops an interest in art.

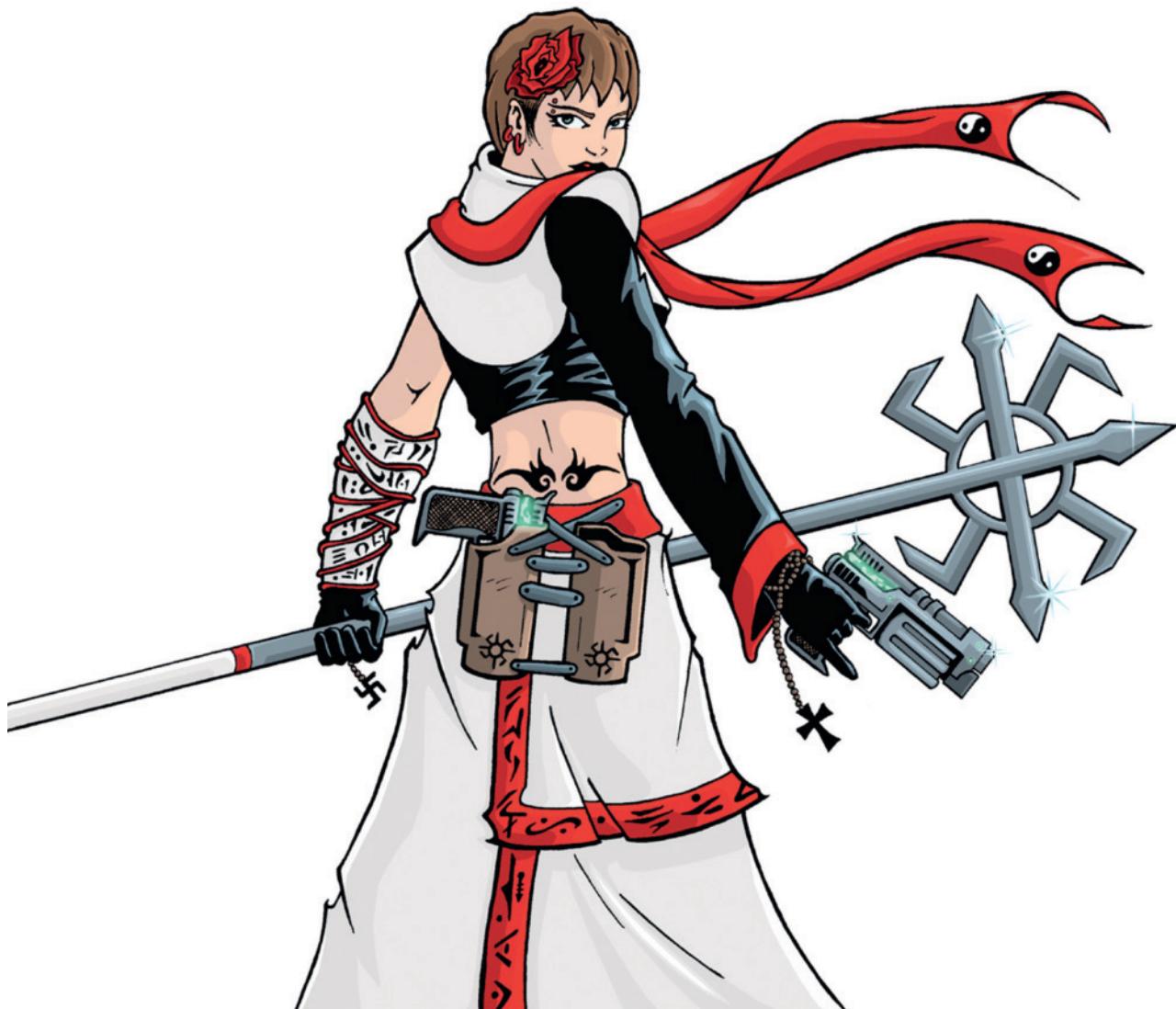
Which brings us to the 5- to 8-year-old group.



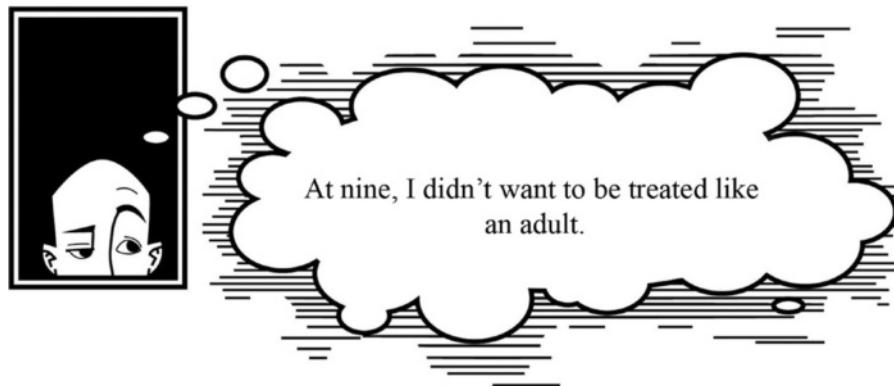
As you can see, the character design has changed a bit. Not by leaps and bounds, but enough to be noticeable. Let's break it down. The head size has become a bit more realistic. Although the character still has a big head compared to the body, it's about three heads high. The line that defines the

character is still pretty minimal. The details have become a bit more evident. So we get to see a few more things that define who the character is. The colors are also a bit more advanced and require more of an understanding of color theory. We are getting deeper into what and who the character is.

Now we'll look at the 9- to 13-year-old group. Everything changes in this age group. Kids this age are finding out about the world around them, and they are curious about everything. At this point they should have the mental capacity to understand and comprehend what is put in front of them. So let's see what a character would look like in this age group.



Do you see how the design has changed to accommodate a more mature level? The line detail and color have become more sophisticated. This is because most artists designing for this age group understand that these kids are well on their way to becoming adults. And you can bet your bottom dollar that this age group doesn't want to be treated like kids anymore. Some of you might be thinking:



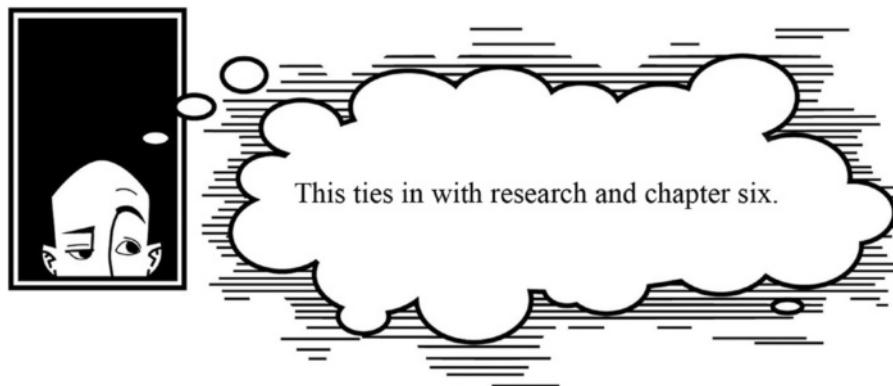
I'm afraid I have to disagree with you. How many 9- to 13-year-olds have you heard say, "I'm not a kid anymore?" I never said they were adults, just that they didn't want to be kids anymore. With that in mind, it is fairly easy to design for this age group because you can design stuff the same as you would for the 14- to 18+-year-olds. Here, let me show you.



Do you see how similar the designs are? At this age people have a fairly decent grasp on what is going on around them. So they want what they are looking at, whether it is fantasy, sci-fi, horror, or whatever, to be rooted in reality as much as possible. There are always exceptions, but as a general rule, you can count on this being true.

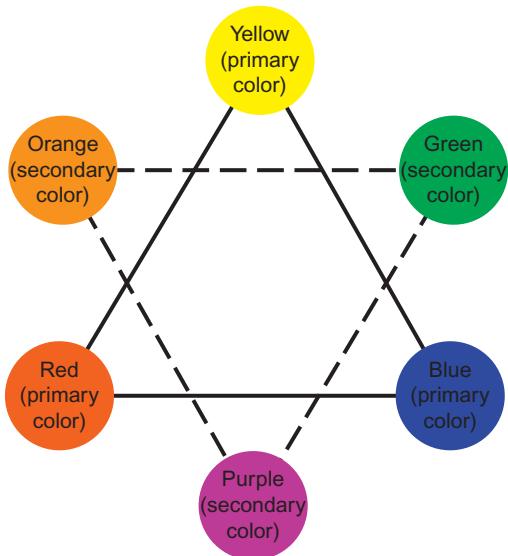
So the most important piece of information to obtain from this discussion is that every age group wants to be able to relate to what they are looking at, and as designers one of the big things to relate to is the way a character looks. That is why the younger ages are modeled with childlike proportions and the older age groups want something more adult.

Let's talk briefly about genre. The thing you have to remember is that each genre has very specific qualities that fans of that specific genre want to see every time. So if you are going to be doing a fantasy story, your characters must have some mystical qualities about them. They probably also have to fight dragons, orcs, and goblins. If you are doing a western story, your characters have to be willing to get on a horse and wear a cowboy hat. Once again, there are always going to be exceptions, but genres are based off generalizations. So make sure you know the subject matter of the genre in which you are going to place your characters.



As we continue to look at aesthetics, one of the most important features is color. Color says a lot about a character and his story. It also affects whether a person will have a connection to a certain character. People tend to gravitate toward other people who like the same things they do. Color is one of the things that people tend to gravitate to, it is a mnemonic device that easily works, which you will see later. So it is very important to know the meanings of the colors you use.

First things first; we have to look at the basic color wheel, and then I will convince you that color tells a story about your character.



The color wheel shows the primary, secondary, and complementary colors. Complementary colors are directly across from each other, so red is the complementary color of green, and blue is the complementary color of orange, and so on. I'm telling you this because, well, it isn't labeled on the color wheel and I didn't want you to be confused about what complementary colors are. Now here are the colors that we are going to be looking at in depth:

Red
Yellow
Blue
Purple
Green
Orange
Black
White

Basically we are going to talk about the color wheel plus black and white. I know there are many more colors in our world, but these are the main colors that we as character designers use.

The first thing we have to do is find out what each color says to people.



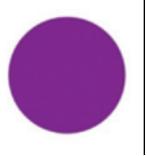
The color red generally evokes feelings of *action, confidence, courage, vitality, energy, war, danger, strength, power, determination, passion, desire, anger, and love*.



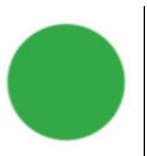
The color yellow generally evokes feelings of *wisdom, joy, happiness, intellect, caution, decay, sickness, jealousy, cowardliness, comfort, liveliness, optimism, and feeling overwhelmed*.



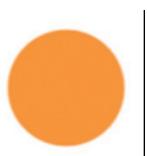
The color blue generally evokes feelings of *trust, loyalty, wisdom, confidence, intelligence, faith, truth, health, healing, tranquility, understanding, softness, knowledge, power, integrity, seriousness, honor, coldness, and sadness*.



The color purple generally evokes feelings of *power, nobility, elegance, sophistication, artificial luxury, mystery, royalty, magic, ambition, wealth, extravagance, wisdom, dignity, independence, and creativity*.



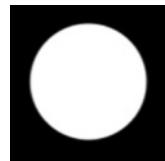
The color green generally evokes feelings of *nature, growth, harmony, freshness, fertility, safety, money, durability, luxury, optimism, well-being, relaxation, optimism, honesty, envy, youth, and sickness*.



The color orange generally evokes feelings of *cheerfulness, enthusiasm, creativity, fascination, happiness, determination, attraction, success, encouragement, prestige, illumination, and wisdom*.

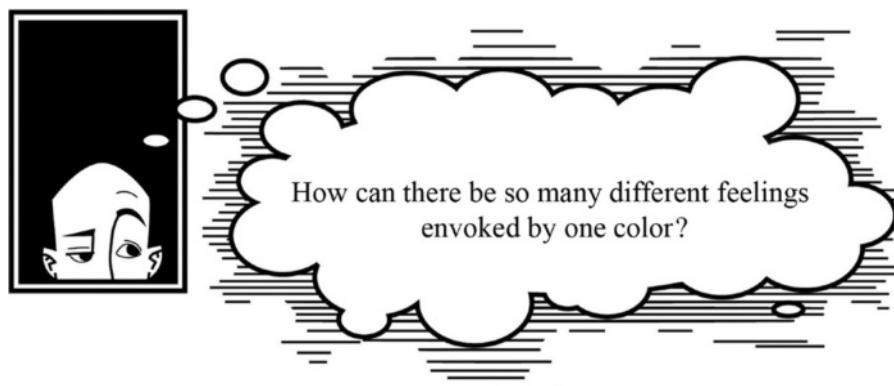


The color black generally evokes the feeling of *power, elegance, formality, death, evil, mystery, fear, grief, sophistication, strength, depression, and mourning*.



The color white generally evokes the feeling of *cleanliness, purity, newness, virginity, peace, innocence, simplicity, sterility, light, goodness, and perfection*.

So as you can see, there are many different feelings associated with each color. At this point, you might be asking yourself this question.



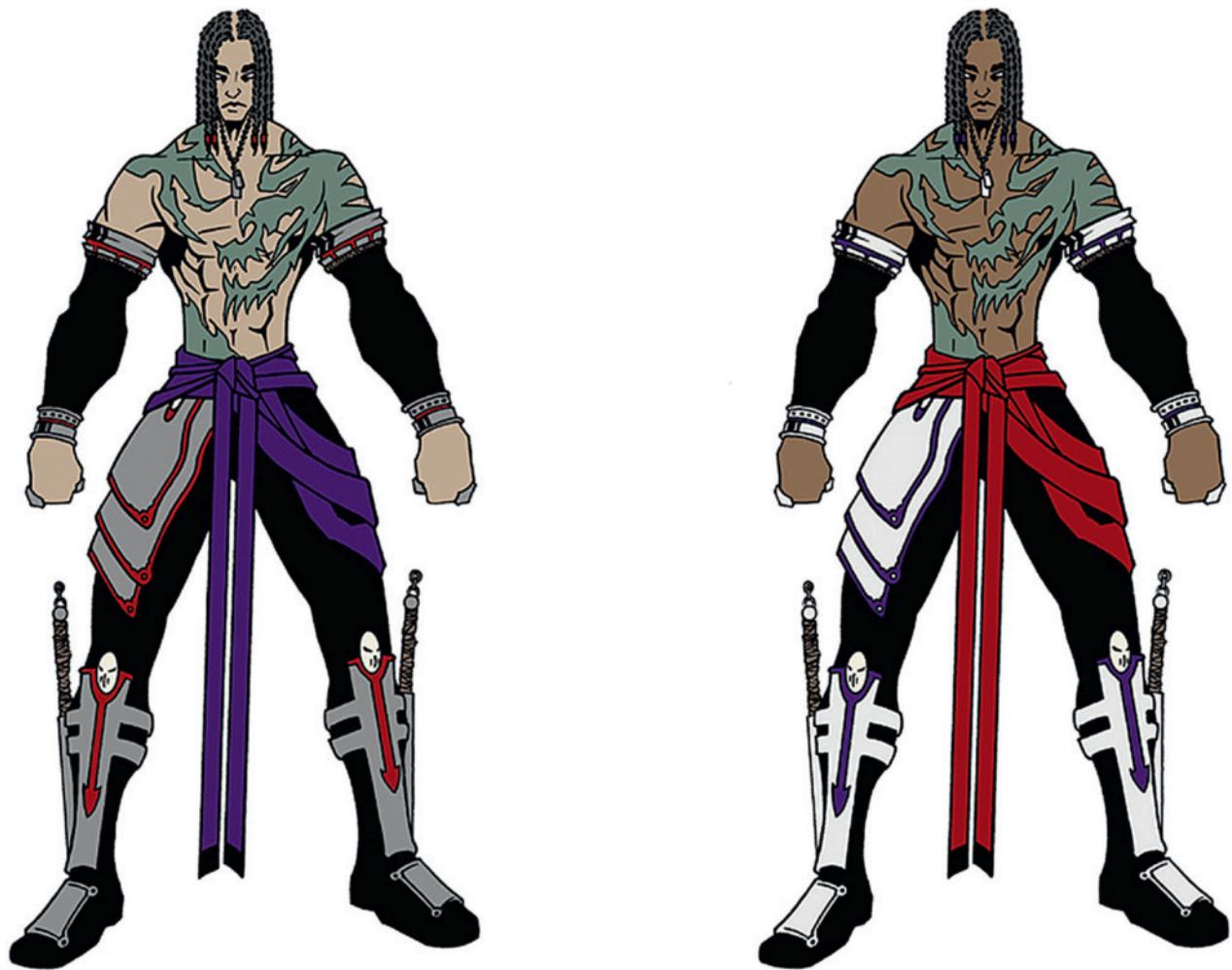
Each color has many tints and shades, and that is where the different feelings come from.



Notice how a different tint or shade applied to the base color changes what the color is saying about itself. The darker red conveys more anger and rage, whereas the lighter red conveys a softer, loving side. I have to mention that if you change the color on a character, it will tell a different story about your character. Here is an example.



Do you see how keeping the same character but changing the colors creates a completely new character? This example using a character that is predominately white and one that is predominately black is pretty obvious, but I guarantee it works with all colors. Here is an example.



Did you see the difference? Are you getting a sense of the character being a bit different? These two are subtle, but the differences are still there. What do you think about the next two?



Did the character change? Did his story change? What if you look at all four? Are you starting to see that color has an impact on the story of the character? I have one more set of this character to show you.



I hope these examples helped you to understand the importance of the colors you choose. If you don't put considerable thought into your colors, you could end up with a character that doesn't match the story. Let's look at how characters like Marvel's Spider-man and Hasbro's Snake Eyes and Storm Shadow have colors that match their stories.

With Spider-man, the predominant colors are red and blue. If you look at the colors and the feelings they evoke, you should be able to place some of them on Spider-man's character. If not I am going to break it down for you. Remember we said that blue means loyalty, intelligence, sadness, and power; among other things Spider-man is very loyal to his family and friends, and most of all to New York City. Spider-man is intelligent because Peter Parker is proclaimed to be a scientific genius. He has power because of his spider strength, but the big one is sadness. If I were to pick a primary reason as to why they picked blue I would say it is to represent sadness. Spider-man's life is constantly overshadowed by the death of his Uncle Ben. He became a crime fighter because he believes his uncle's death was his fault.

Let's talk about red. Red means passion, love, courage, confidence, and energy. Spider-man is very passionate about what he does. He believes he can clean up the streets of New York, and let's face it, you have to be pretty passionate to put yourself into the situations he puts himself in. He loves his family and will do anything to keep them safe. Spider-man has confidence in what he can and can't do. It actually borders on being extremely cocky, but it fits with who he is. Finally, if any character has loads of energy, it would be Spider-man. He jumps, flips, swings, and fights—everywhere and anywhere.

See how everything comes together so nicely? You might think this is all just coincidence, but even if Steve Ditko, the designer, didn't do it deliberately, it was still in his subconscious.

Before we discuss Storm Shadow and Snake Eyes, I want to tell you that these two came up at a lecture I gave. An audience member asked me why the colors for Storm Shadow and Snake Eyes were reversed, since Storm Shadow is the bad guy and is wearing white, and Snake Eyes, the good guy, is wearing black. I was glad somebody asked that question because I was able to relate it back directly to both of the characters' stories.

If you look at Snake Eyes, you will notice two things: he is supposed to be a ninja, and he is supposed to be a commando in a military Special Forces unit. So most likely you would wear black for both jobs so you could sneak around undetected, right? Right! That right there would be good enough to suffice for why Snake Eyes wears black. If we were to dig a bit deeper into the character's back-story, however, we would discover another reason why he wears black. Snake Eyes is mourning the death of his ninja master, Hard Master, and as we saw, one of black's meanings is mourning. Now what about Storm Shadow?

We said that white means purity, peace, innocence, goodness, and perfection and is usually associated with the good guy. But when you think about Storm Shadow, these feelings probably don't come to mind. So we have to go back to the character's story to find out why this color is appropriate for him. We learn that Storm Shadow was framed for the death of Hard Master. He devoted much of his life to proving his innocence. Also, Storm Shadow constantly strives for perfection. Finally, Storm Shadow always believes that he is doing the right thing, so he feels his motives are pure.

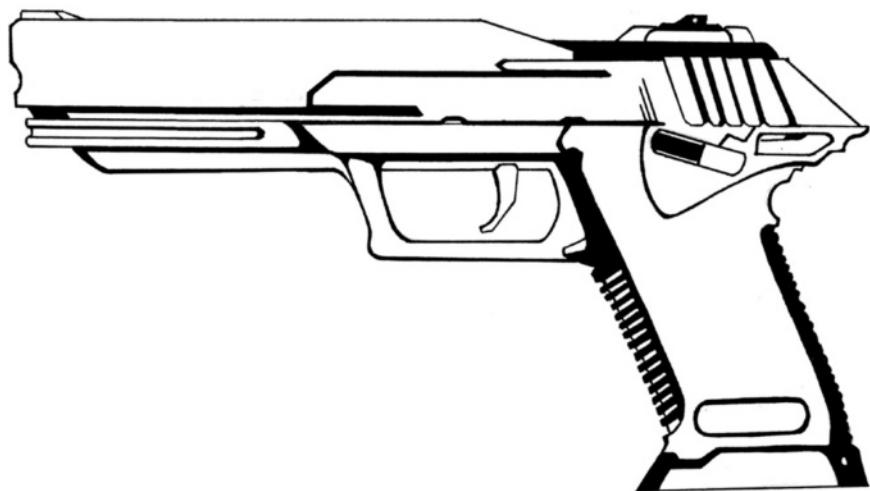
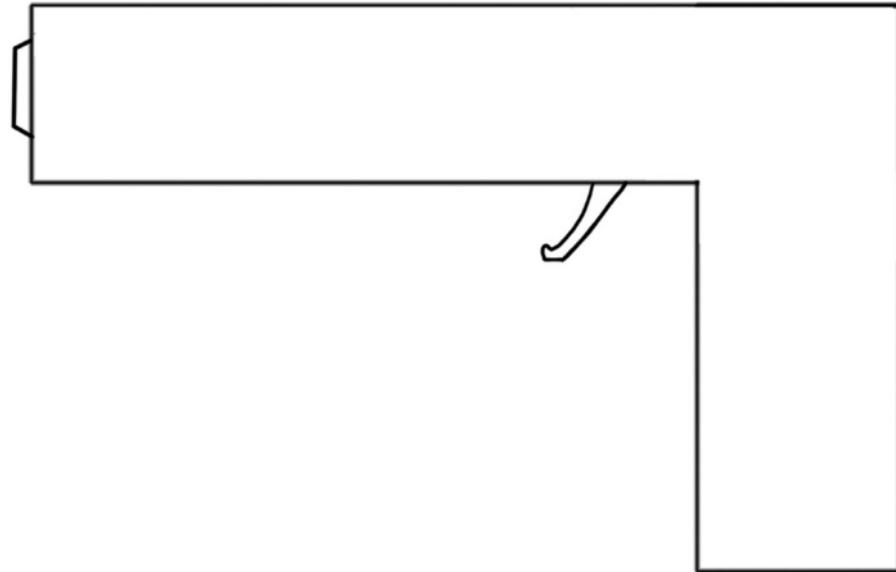
So there you have it! Color can change everything about your character. Just make sure the colors you choose for your characters are saying what you want them to say. The best way to make sure is to ask other people what they think your character is all about. If it lines up with what you had in mind, great! If it doesn't, it's back to the drawing board.

When it comes to aesthetics, another important thing to keep in mind is detail. Detail can make or break a character design. Knowing how much detail to put in your character designs will make the difference between a believable character or one that couldn't possibly exist. There is a saying in the artistic world: The devil is in the details.

What that means is there is a fine line between having too much detail and not having enough. You must always remember that your personal style and the age group of your audience will influence how much detail you need. Even if the age group is in the lowest category, that shouldn't be an excuse to draw unrecognizable and lazy characters or props.

Students often say to me, and I quote, "Oh, that is just my style, and that is why there is a minimal amount of detail." The problem with that statement is that *style* isn't an excuse. Style is how you perceive the world around you and are able to put it on paper. If we can't tell the difference between your drawings of a gun and a toaster with a handle, it isn't your style; you just don't know how to draw a gun.

I once had a professor who used to say that "L" is the most dangerous letter in the alphabet. It's not a style. It's like reference—the more you draw it, the more it will be engraved in your brain and you will be able to call upon it at any time. That's right, I just made reference to Chapter six. If you don't remember what we talked about there go back and read it again. It is all about reference. But seriously let me show you what I am talking about.



The preceding two drawings can both be classified as guns. We accept them as guns even if one of them is only the letter "L" with a trigger. But which one do you think is more believable? It won't always be the one that has more details. Depending on your target age group, there must be a balance between realistic and stylistic. Don't get lazy and use the target age group as an excuse to be overly simplistic.

So how much detail is the right amount? The only way to be sure is by trial and error. There is no magic formula. It's a shame, I know, but what are you going do? What I always recommend to my students is that you should show your work to someone who knows nothing about art and your craft. A good person for this is an accountant. Why, you ask?

You probably know that the people in your social circle are only going to give you compliments, and that's not going to help you become a better character designer or artist in general. Thus, somebody who is completely foreign to your craft will at least tell you the truth. The good, the bad, and all the things you didn't want to hear about your beloved masterpiece. Another good person to show your character designs to is someone who doesn't like you. That person will gladly tell you why your work is awful—in excruciating detail—and then it is up to you to take what was said in that verbal bashing and use it to make your designs better.

I am a practitioner of this method of critique. My wife always says she knows nothing about art, so I use her to critique my work. She doesn't hesitate to tell me how awful something is, but, after I swallow my pride, I take a step back, look at my work, and use her remarks to make it better. Believability is the name of the game, and it is very important that it is obtained at all cost. So try this. Show your work to people who will be honest about it. It will make your creations stronger, and that is worth the ego beating.

I know we covered a lot in this chapter, but I hope it's sinking in because it is now time for your homework. I want you to finish a full character design in color. Based on the shapes and the colors you used, write about the character's back-story. Once you have done that, show your character design to three other people and see if they get the same story you did.

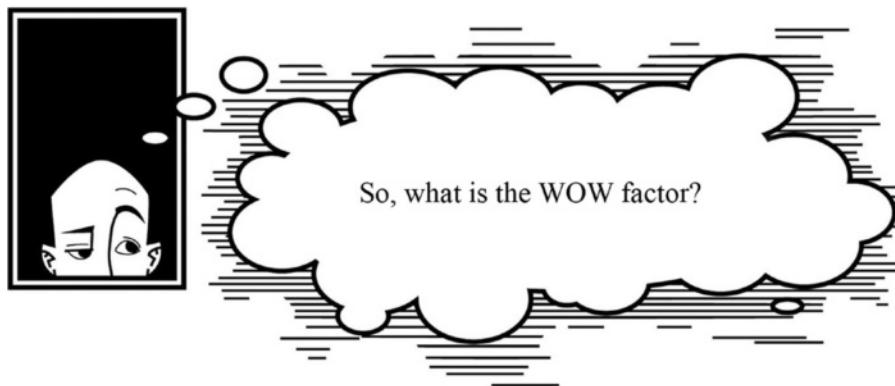
See you in the next chapter. We are getting close to the end. Crazy, huh?

Chapter 8

The WOW Factor

How did your homework assignment go? Did you show your work to people you didn't know or didn't particularly like? It's kind of a different experience, isn't it? I hope you will continue to request feedback from people outside your comfort zone. It will make you a better artist in the end. Now let's talk about the WOW factor.

The WOW factor is something every character designer and artist tries to achieve. For years I have emphasized to my students that the WOW factor will put their art on a pedestal. Often, however, like with originality, people try way too hard to achieve the WOW factor.



I'm glad you asked! The WOW factor is that one thing about your character design that stops people in their tracks when they see it and makes them say, "WOW, that's cool!"

Can you think of any popular character designs that evoke that kind of response from you? What particular aspect of the design made you feel that way?

Most likely, it had something to do with the colors, the silhouette, the aesthetics, or something that you just thought was cool. These are all good reasons, and I want you to think about it for a few minutes. Think about some of the features we covered in this book, and decide if any of them would make you say, "WOW, that's cool!"

Do you think you would feel this way no matter what character design had this particular feature? Before you say, "Of course," I should tell you that in my experience only a very small percentage would benefit from a different character's WOW factor. Do you know why that is?

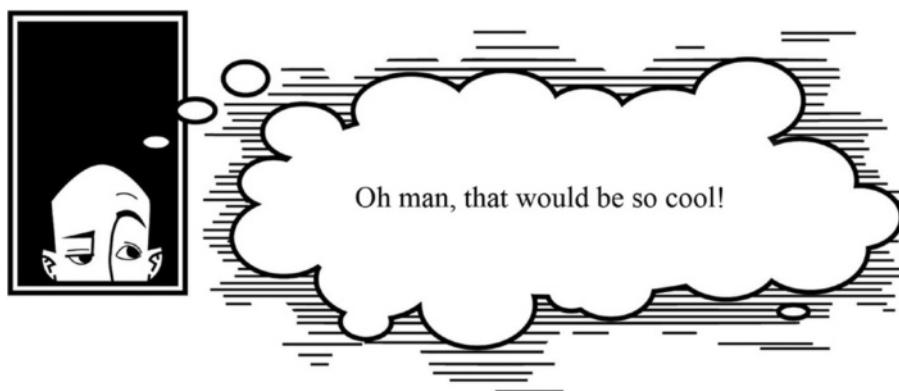
I hope you're not going to be like a lot of my students and just wait until I give you the answer. Fine. Normally, taking a different character's WOW factor and adding it to yours doesn't work because each character was created with a unique design in mind. Once you start adding someone else's vision of a character to your character design, it doesn't feel like your design anymore; unless... you don't have your story finished!

Before I go on, you do have your character's story finalized, don't you? Please tell me you finished your story. You shouldn't even be thinking about the WOW factor until you know exactly what your story is. If you haven't finished your story, you need to go back to Chapter 3 and finish it. You can come back after that is done. Don't worry, I won't go anywhere. I'll wait.

You're still here? I guess your character's story *is* finished. You have to understand that this is the icing on the cake. You can't expect people to be happy with just the icing. (I suppose there are people like my son, who are perfectly content to eat just the icing, but after the sugar crash, they'll be looking for the cake.)

We are still trying to figure out why one person's WOW factor isn't good for another character. Let's use some popular characters as examples.

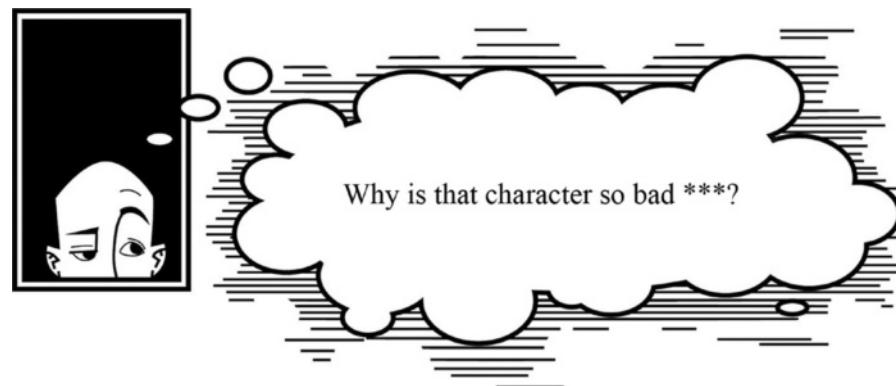
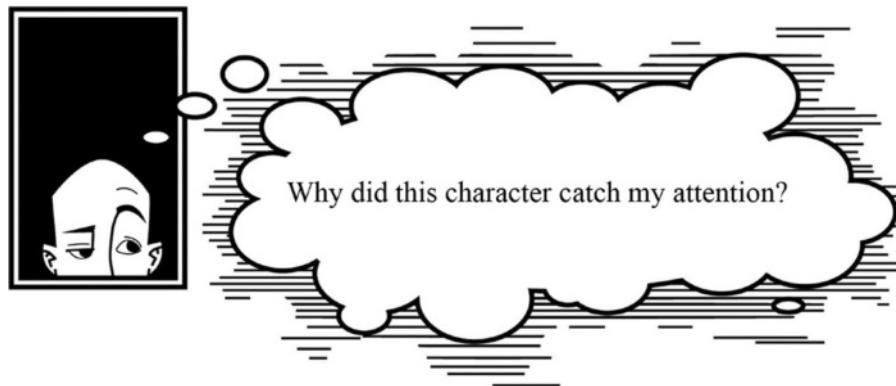
If we were to give Spider-man the Batmobile, would that make Spider-man a stronger character design? Would Superman's character design look better if he carried a He-man sword? Would Hordak be any more bad @#\$ if he was wearing Cobra Commander's helmet? I am sure some of you are thinking:



Well, as cool as it might seem, the problem is that these characters already have a strong story, and the minute you start adding someone else's story, it breaks the consistency that has already been established.

I have had students show me comics, movies, cartoons, and games where the creators have done what I just told you not to do. What my students fail to realize, however, is that what they are showing me appears only in one issue or episode. The only time it might be used for subsequent issues or episodes is when the creators have a very specific storyline planned for the character. Whether it is one issue or a full storyline, in the end both characters' stories go their separate ways, and with that separation the WOW factor would go back to its rightful owner.

So it's not necessarily a good idea to use someone else's story. Let's just say it plainly: The WOW factor is the ability to make a character design so appealing that it will pull people right out of a conversation they're in the middle of. Has that ever happened to you? It's happened to me—usually when I am watching trailers for upcoming movies. I find myself asking:



It generally boils down to a good story that was executed well within the character design. Sometimes it deals with aesthetics, and we all know that aesthetics is dictated by the story of the character design.

Once the movie is over, and I am done being entertained and inspired by other people's character designs, I go to the drawing board. I try to create characters that would be just as inspiring to others, like the way the ones in the trailers were for me. After a while I come up with characters like this:







While I am creating these characters, I try to keep one thing in mind: Will a kid get his butt kicked if he is wearing the costume that my character is wearing?

You might laugh, but this is a very important question to ask yourself. Little kids can be downright mean, and you don't want them to beat up the kid who is wearing your character's costume, do you? You wouldn't want that on your conscience. In all seriousness, you want to think about your fan base. You want to make sure that your characters will look cool if people cosplay as them at a convention. For instance, seeing a grown man wearing a Robin costume just isn't cool at all.

There is one last thing that you can do to obtain the WOW factor, and that's making your character as awesome as possible. I know I have already given you a bunch of rules and guidelines to follow. But if you really want to obtain the WOW factor, you are allowed to break one of them. You only get one, though, because when somebody asks you "Why did you do that?", you can only say "Because it's awesome!" once before people start to question the solidarity of your character. So don't make it a point to break the rules, but if something in your story breaks the rules, it's forgivable.

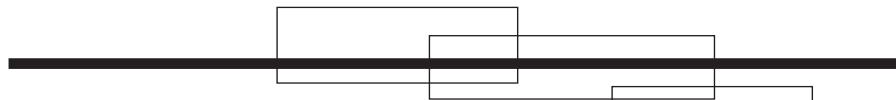
Make sure that last part is ingrained in your memory: If your story breaks the rules, then and only then is it forgivable—once. So when you create a character like this:



you have to be prepared with a believable story to explain how the character has huge metallic wings coming out of his back.

I hope you now understand what the WOW factor is and how you can achieve it for your own character designs. The best way to make sure you do understand it is to try it out yourself. So your homework is to design a character that has the WOW factor. Once again, you have to show it to a couple of people and observe their reaction. Only then will you know if your character really has the WOW factor. Good luck!

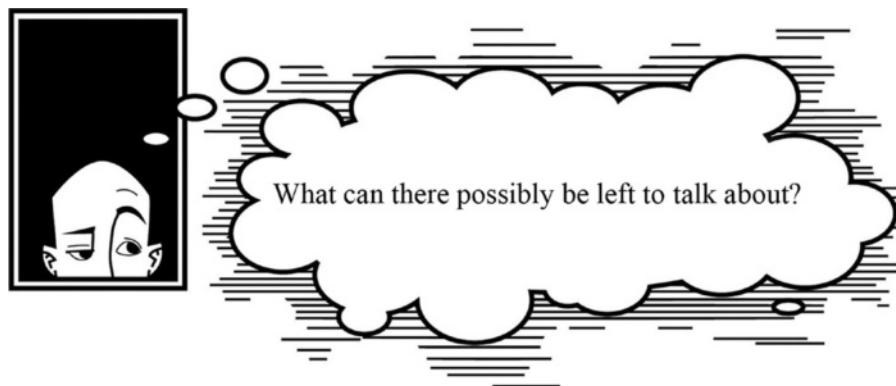
I will see you in the next chapter—the last one!



Chapter 9

Putting It All Together

Hello again and welcome to the last chapter. Did you do your homework? Were you able to achieve the WOW factor with your character? If you spent all of your time trying to figure out how to give your character the WOW factor, I bet you had a really hard time finishing your character. If you let the story guide you to the WOW factor, I am sure you didn't even have to try. It just came out, didn't it. I hope you understand how powerful the WOW factor can be. I have a feeling that you might be thinking about this:

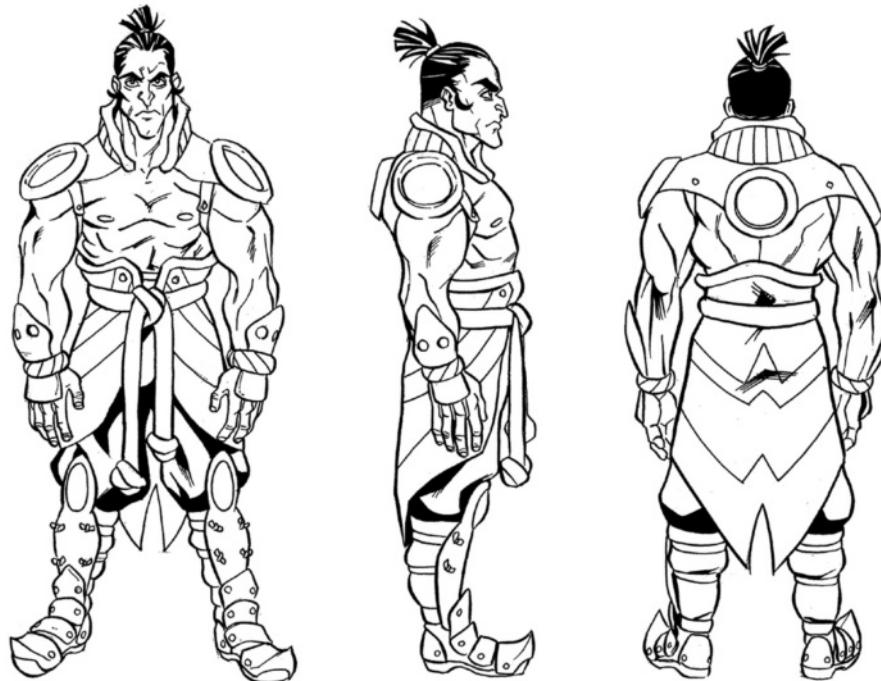


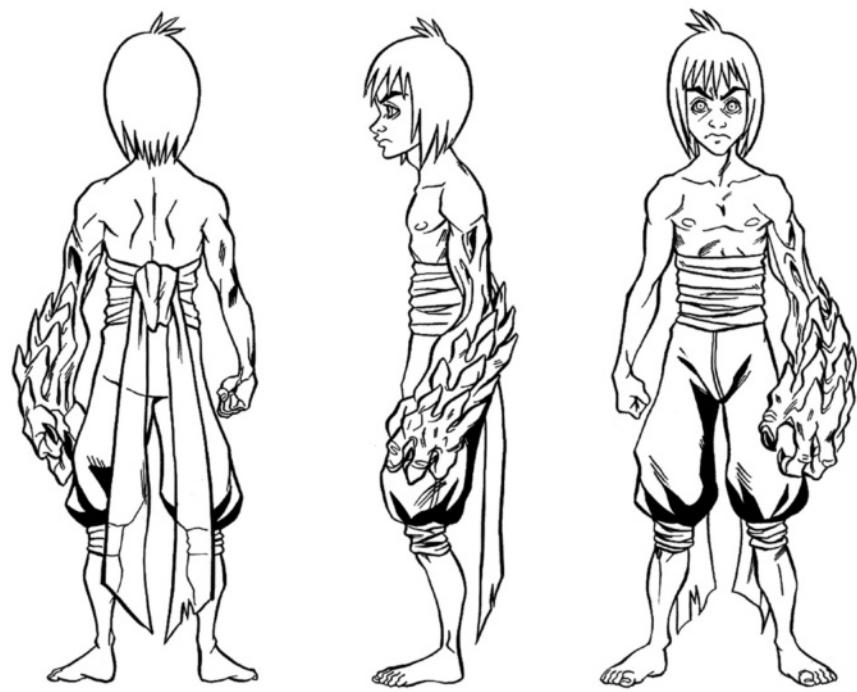
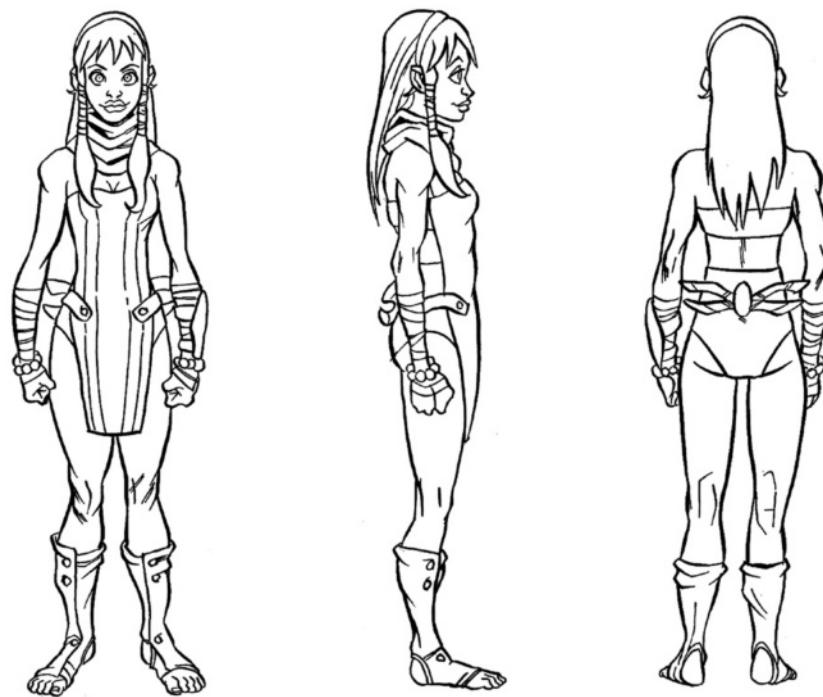
I know how you feel. We talked about a lot of things in this book. We talked about archetypes, story, shapes, silhouettes, colors, details, age groups, originality, references, and the WOW factor. What's left to talk about in character design? There is a lot more that we could talk about on the subject of making a stronger character design, but I think that is for another book. What I want to talk about in this chapter is putting it all together.

By now you should have a good understanding of what is required to make strong character designs. But what do you do with them once you have them?

There are a couple of things you'll have to know how to do once you become a full-time character designer.

As a full-time character designer it isn't enough to be able to create fantastic character designs. You will also have to be able to turn them in space. This is known as a *turnaround*. Many media arts companies use turnarounds to ensure that when you draw the character you know what it looks like from the front, the side and the back. There are three types of turnarounds: three-point, "T," and five-point. I would say that the three-point turnaround is the industry standard for video games, animation, and comics, so why don't we start with that. Here are some examples of a three-point turnaround.

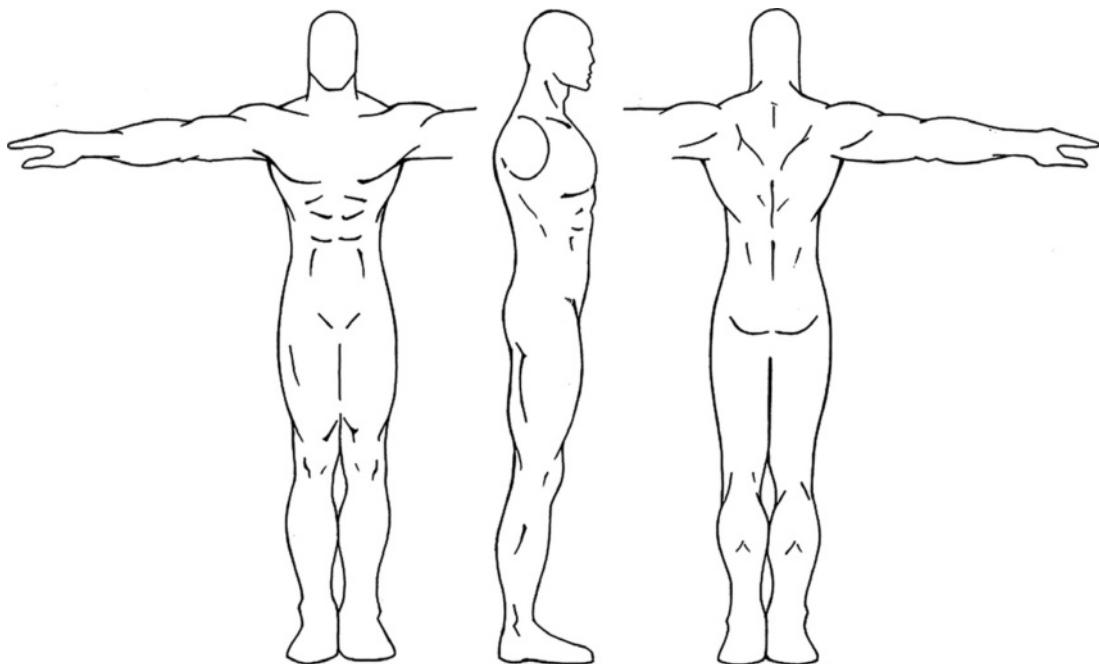




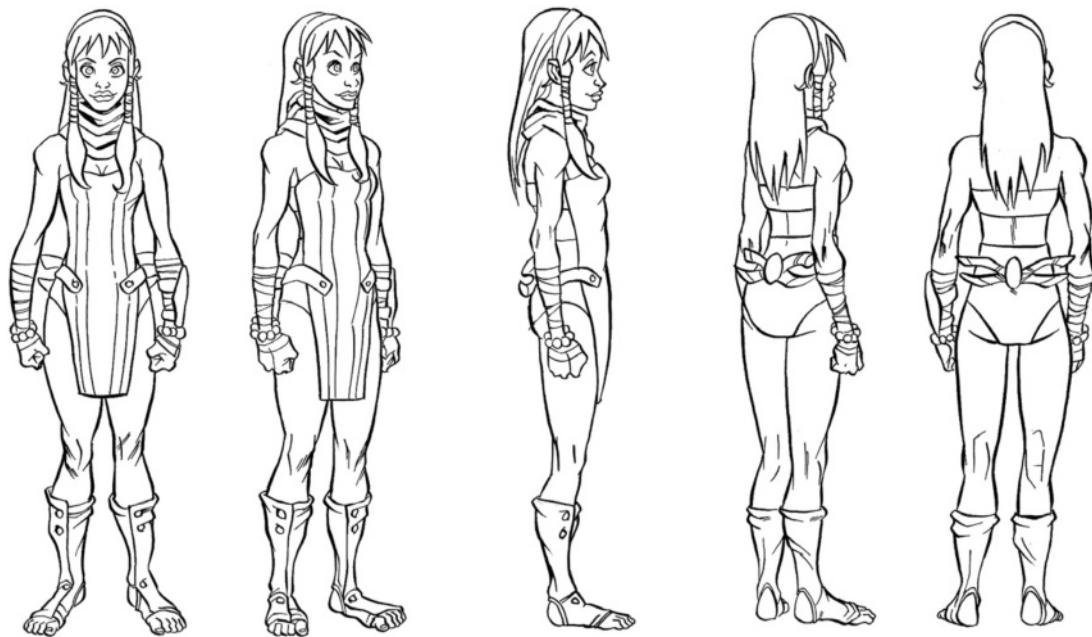
As you can see, having a three-point turnaround at your disposal is very helpful. You don't have to try to guess what the back of your character looks like because there it is.

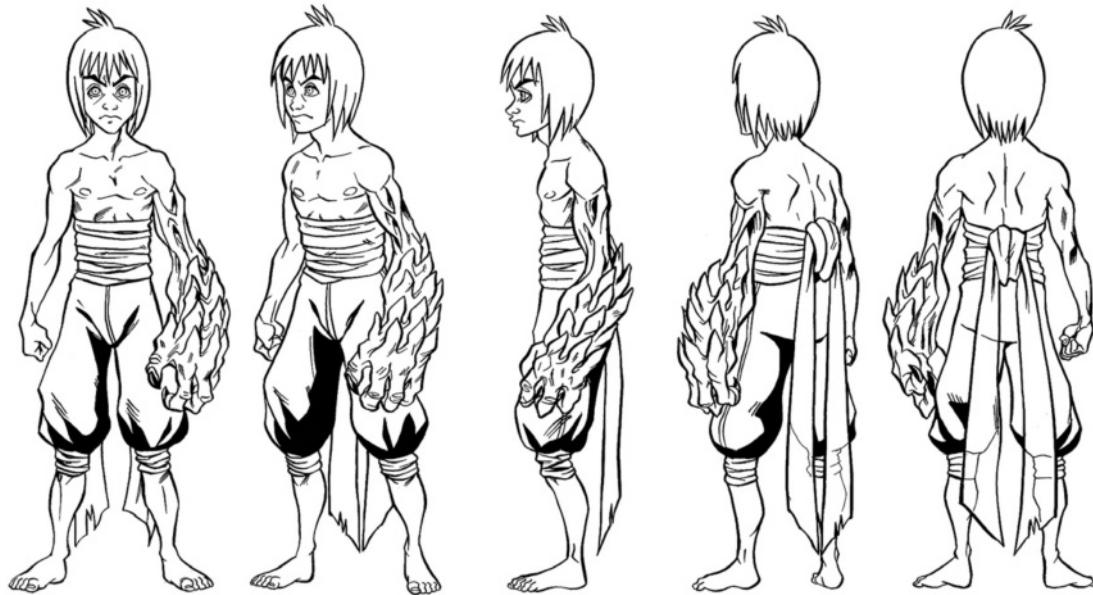
You might have seen three-point turnarounds that look a bit different from these. In some cases, the arm might be missing from the side view. Some character designers believe that not having the arm lets you see the side of the character better. I don't agree. If you really need to see the side, you can pull the arm back so you can see both the arm and the side.

You can also use what is called a three-point "T" turn. This is frequently used by the video game industry because it makes it easier to model in 3D. Here is an example of a "T" turn.



The final type of turnaround is the five-point turnaround, and it is the most informative. The five-point turnaround is more difficult to draw because of the $\frac{3}{4}$ front and the $\frac{3}{4}$ back pose. They are hard to get correct, but once you do, you will have a better idea of how your character turns in space. Here are some examples of a five-point turnaround.





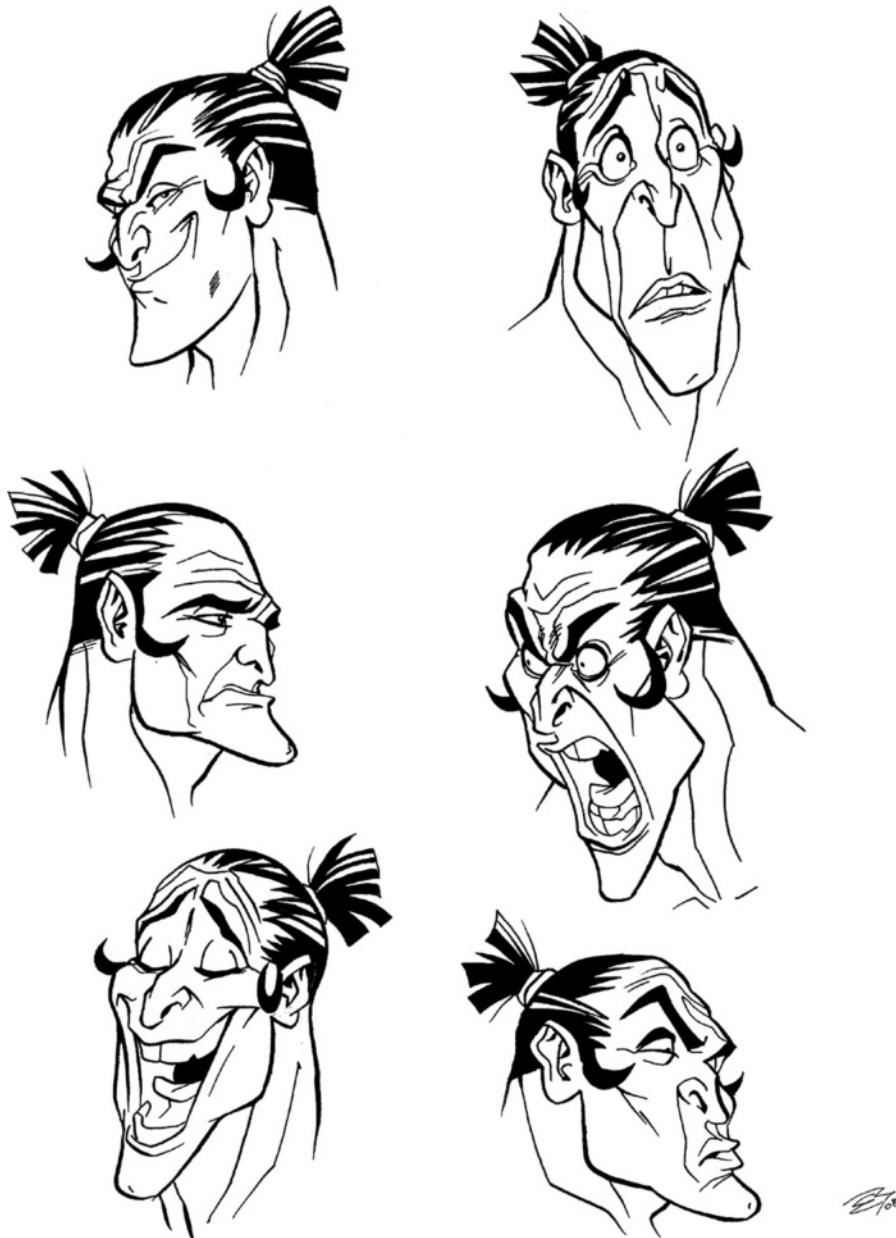
The five-point turnaround is primarily used in animation studios, where it is important to know exactly what the character will look like in all positions. In animation, characters are often seen from several angles. The five-point turnaround is important with asymmetrical characters like the demon-armed boy. His left side doesn't look exactly the same as his right side.

Once you have a strong five-point turnaround, you should be able to draw your character in an array of different poses. These poses are called action poses, but don't let the name confuse you. Just because it says "action" doesn't mean your character has to be punching and kicking (although let's face it, we all want to draw our characters doing stuff like that). They could be sitting, sleeping, waiting for the bus, watching TV, and so on. Here are some action poses of the characters in the preceding turnarounds and as I mentioned earlier we all like to draw them punching and kicking, so here are some genuine "action" poses.

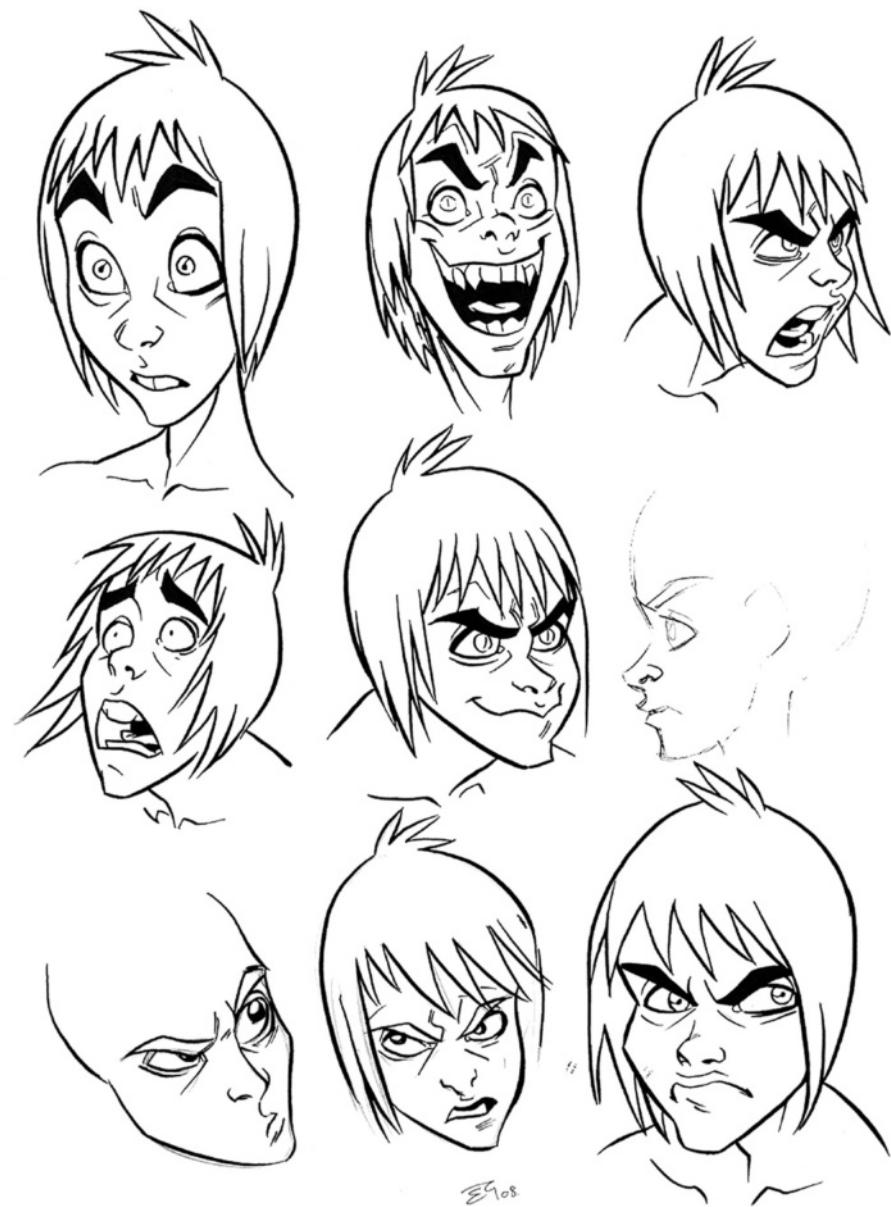




Another thing you want to do is make sure the character's face stays consistent. By drawing facial expressions you will be able to do just that. It might seem like an easy thing to do, but making sure everything stays the same is a lot harder than you might think. Facial expressions also help us to get to know the visual moods of the character. Here are some examples.



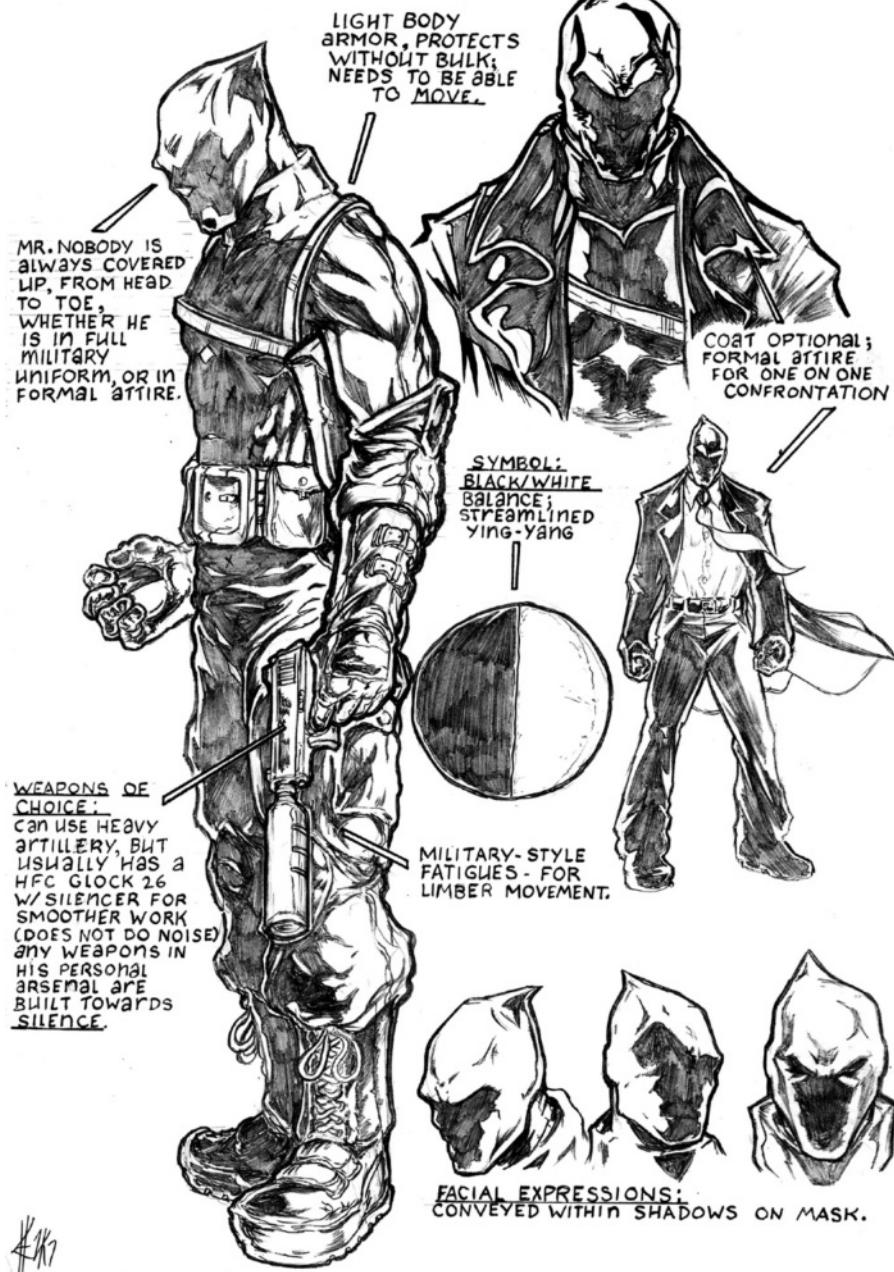




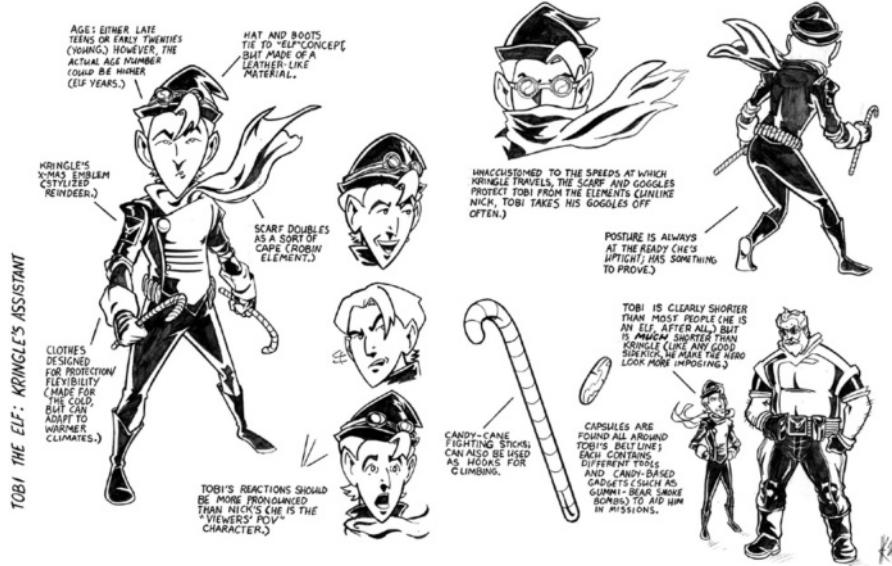
Once you have this down to a science, you won't have any problems drawing your character over and over again. The only problem with that is, at some point you might have to show somebody else how to draw your character. There are two ways to supply enough information about your characters so others can draw them even if you aren't around. The two ways are either with a model sheet and/or a style sheet.

I want to start with the model sheet. A model sheet is a combination of the turnaround, facial expressions, head turns, action poses, and descriptions of anything about the character's appearance that is important for every artist to know. Now, not all of the things listed will be on a model sheet. The character designer gets to pick and choose what is most important for the other artists. Sometimes the character designer will make two or three model sheets for each character. This is where you would have control of how much needs to be done. Just remember that if you don't give them the information about the super-secret laser earrings, then no one will know about them and they won't draw them on the character. Here are some examples of different model sheets.

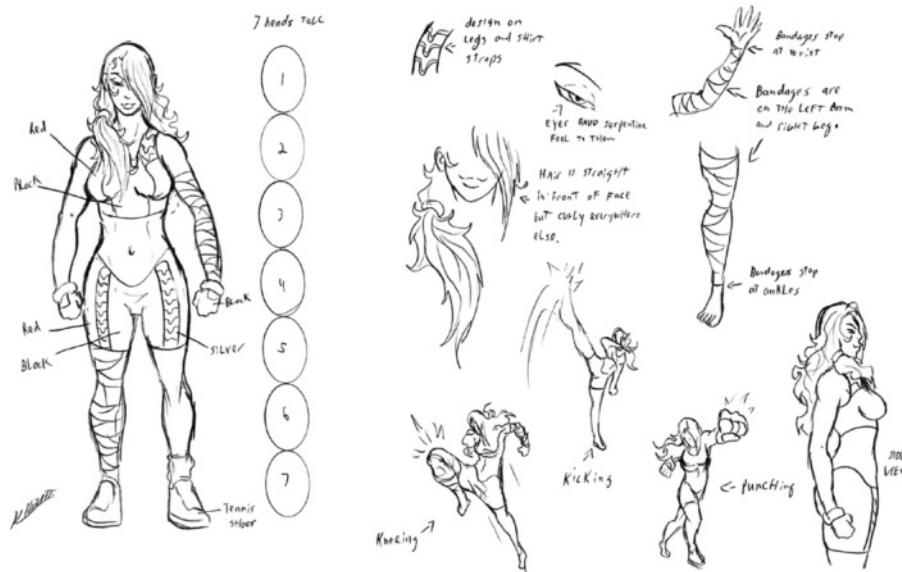
MR. NOBODY of the KARMA GESTAPO







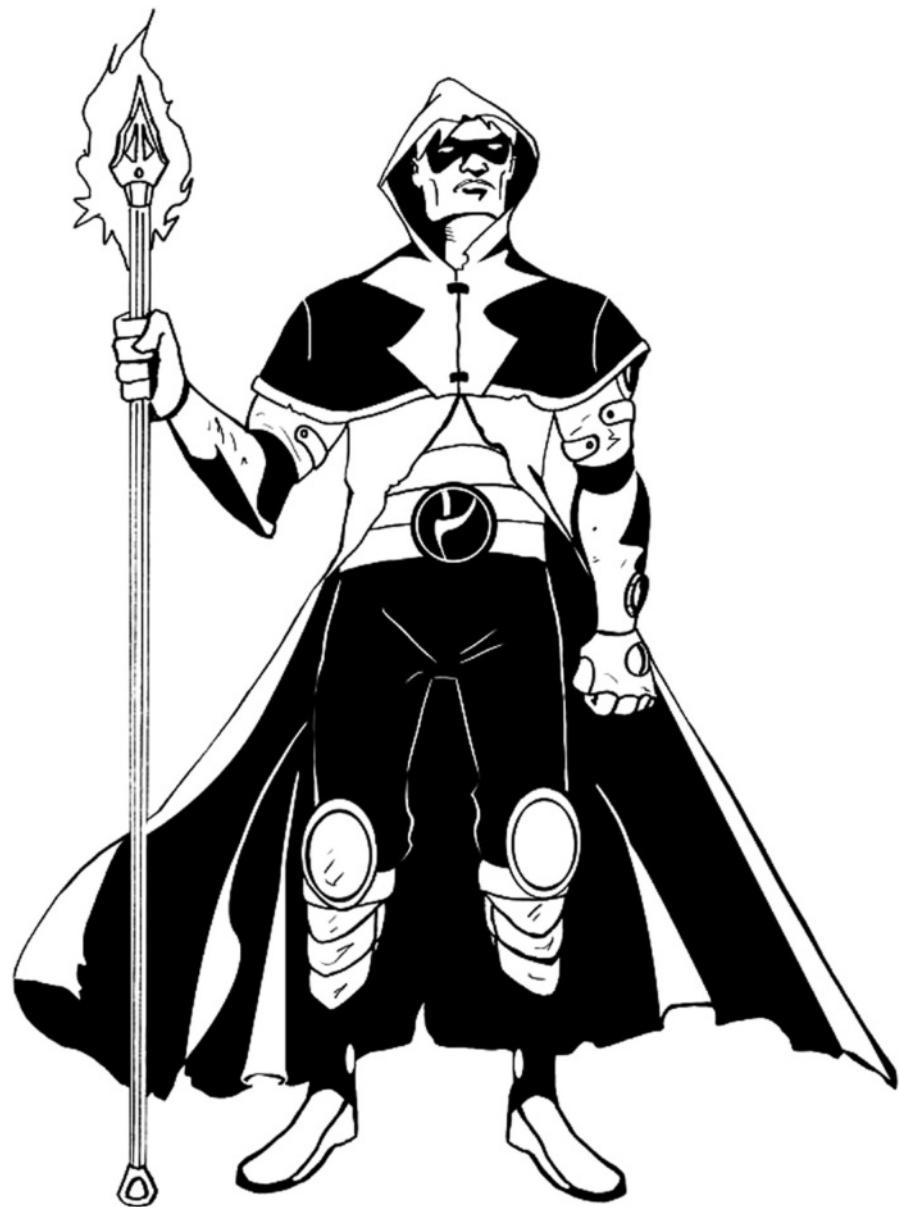
Style sheets are a bit different from model sheets. A style sheet breaks the character down to its most simplistic form so that other artists know exactly how tall a character is, what shape a character is based on, where the nose goes in relation to the eyes, and so on. It's like a blueprint for building a house. With a style sheet there should be no reason whatsoever why another artist shouldn't be able to draw your character and stay on model. What that means is that the drawing from a different artist should look the same as the character designer's drawing. Style sheets are used very heavily in animation. Here are some examples of style sheets.





Once you have all of this information at your fingertips, your characters will always be able to stay on model, whether it is for comics, animation, illustration, or video games. There is only one other thing that must be done to make sure you and other artists know what your character is all about. That is to make sure your story is on point. I know we already talked about this in Chapter 3, but I want to make sure you understand that story is and forever will be the most important part of character design. It always comes back to the story!

To test the idea of story and its importance to character design, I asked some friends—ranging from animation professors, to comic pencilers, to animators, and finally to students—to do two drawings. The drawings were based off the same character. I gave them two different descriptions: one with the absolute minimum amount of story possible and one that was a detailed description of the character. I gave them the minimum description first so it wouldn't influence the other design. The assignment was to draw a 35-year-old male superhero. This is what they came up with from the minimum description.



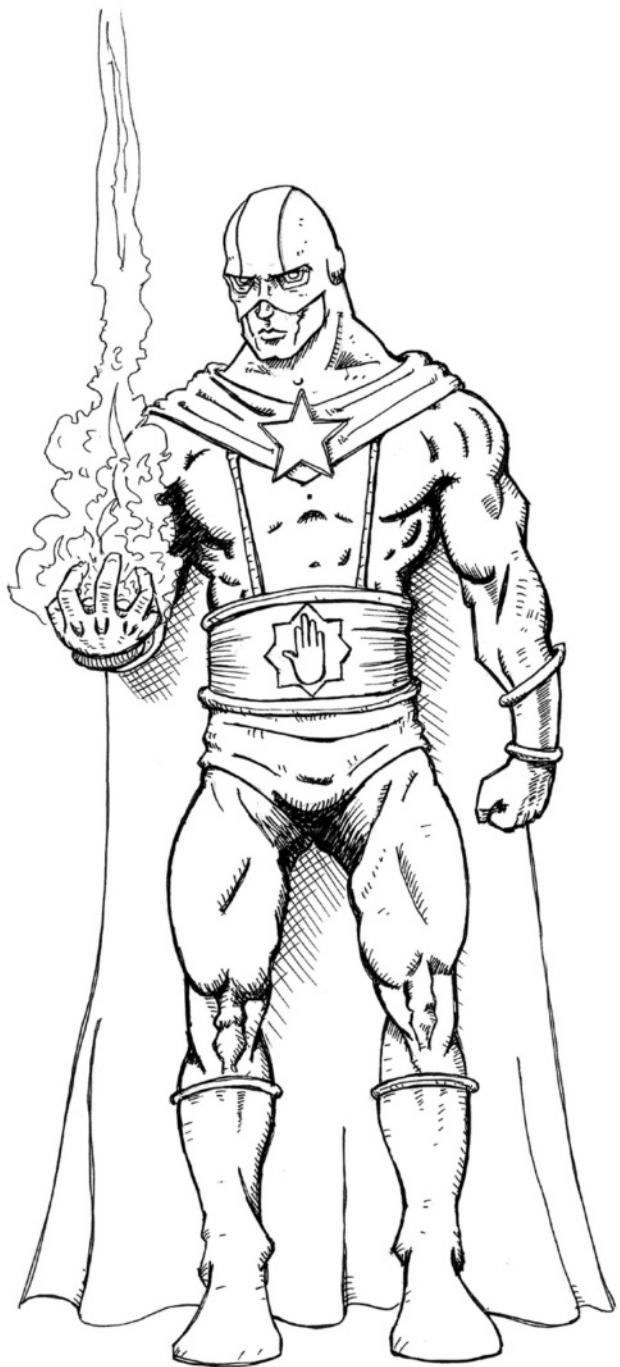


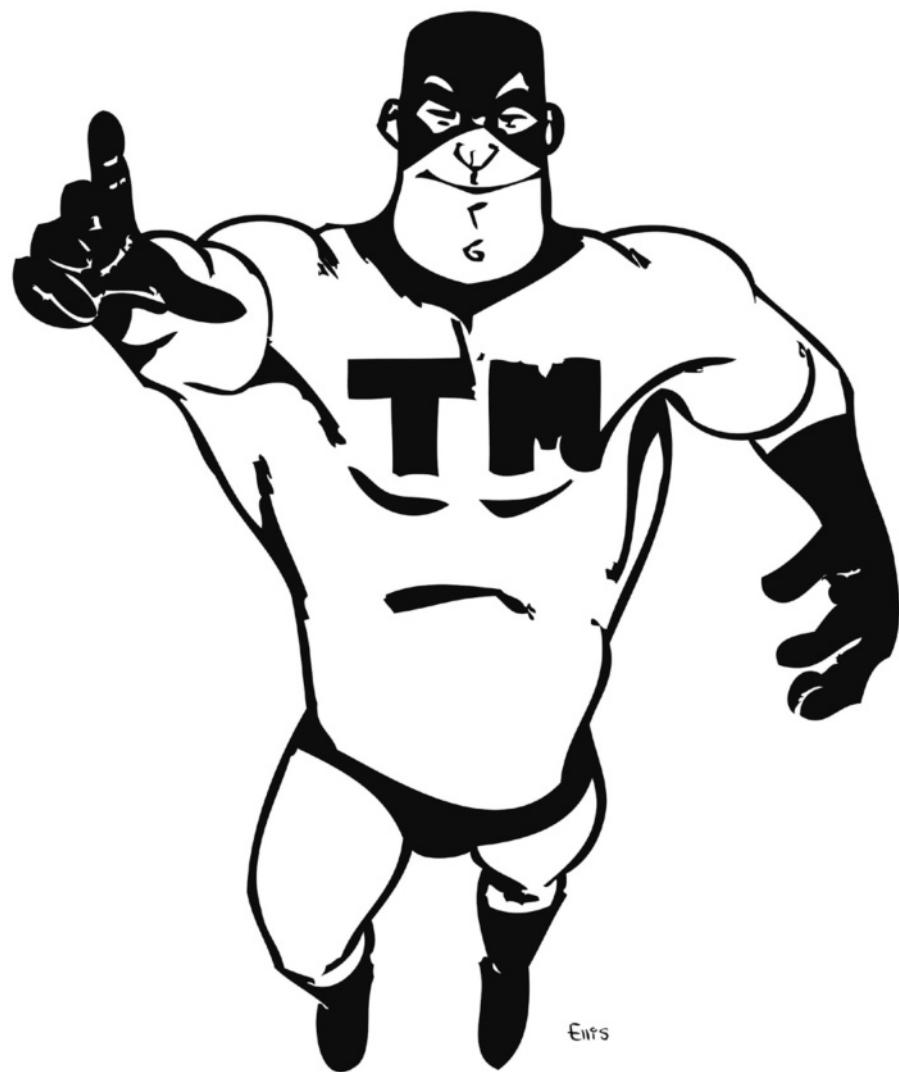














As you can see, there is quite a wide array of characters. That isn't a problem unless you are trying to get a specific look for your character, which most character designers are.

Once they were all done with the first drawing, I gave all the artists the more fleshed-out description for the Golden Grasshopper. This is what I gave them.

BASIC STATISTICS

Name:
Chuck Johnson

Alias:
The Golden Grasshopper

Age:
35 years old

Height:
6 feet tall

Weight:
197 pounds

Sex:
Male

Race:
Caucasian

Eye Color:
Baby Blue

Hair Color:
Brown hair cut into a military style

Glasses or Contact Lenses:
Neither

Nationality:
American

Skin Color:
California tan

Shape of Face:
A hero's face. Square jaw with a butt chin; always clean shaven.

Distinguishing Features

Clothing:

Chuck is meticulous about his clothes. His military background doesn't allow him to let himself go. He is always in khaki pants and a button-down shirt.

As the Golden Grasshopper he wears the traditional military boots with long brown pants. He wears a black short-sleeve t-shirt. He has a golden chest plate, golden forearm bracelets, and a golden half-mask that resembles a grasshopper's head. He also wears black gloves so that his identity can't be lifted from his fingerprints.

Mannerisms:

The most memorable mannerism Chuck Johnson has is that he cracks his neck often as a result of an injury sustained during a secret military mission.

Habits:

Chuck has no bad habits. He is the ideal person.

Health:

Now that he is cured from whatever the biological weapon was doing to him, he is back to perfect health.

Hobbies:

Chuck loves to play chess. He is always trying to stay two steps ahead of his opponent. Chuck also loves all music. Music puts his mind at ease.

Favorite Sayings:

Holy crap! I didn't know I could do that, too.

Voice:

As Chuck Johnson his voice is subtle and well mannered.

As the Golden Grasshopper his voice is deep and mysterious.

Walking Style:

He walks very heroically, with his head up and chest out.

Disabilities:

He has mutated blood that is affected by the sun.

Character's Greatest Flaw:

Chuck believes that he isn't doing enough to help humanity.

Character's Best Quality:

Chuck's best quality is that he values life over all other things.

SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

Hometown:

San Diego, California

Current Residence:

Savannah, Georgia

Occupation:

Superhero

Income:

Since the government funds the Golden Grasshopper, he is able to afford anything he wants.

Talents/Skills:

Except for the skills he received in the military, Chuck doesn't have any other special skills or talents.

Family Status:

Chuck is a family man. Both of his parents are still alive. They have a great relationship. They are unaware that Chuck is the Golden Grasshopper.

Chuck also has a younger sister whom he is very close with. He has been helping her since her husband walked out on her and their six month old baby. She also doesn't know that he is the Golden Grasshopper.

Character Status as a Child:

He was just an ordinary kid who was the older brother to his sister.

Character Status as an Adult:

As an adult Chuck Johnson is the Golden Grasshopper, the protector of justice.

ATTRIBUTES AND ATTITUDES

Educational Background:

Chuck finished high school

Intelligence Level:

Chuck's IQ is 109. He is an average man.

Character's Goals in Life:

His short-term goal is to figure out what he is capable of doing with his new powers.

His long-term goal is to uphold justice, stop all evil, and bring peace to all.

How Character Sees Himself/Herself:

Chuck sees himself as a superhero who isn't doing enough with his gifts.

Confidence Level:

Even though he doubts the amount of good he is doing right now is enough, he is very confident that one day he will.

Emotions:

Chuck is a very logical man, but in certain life-threatening situations his emotions take over completely.

EMOTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Introvert or Extrovert:

Extrovert

How does the character deal with:

- Sadness?

Chuck deals with his sadness by immersing himself in music.

- Anger?

Chuck is quick to throw his fists when he gets angry, but it takes a lot to make him angry.

- Conflict?

Chuck deals with each conflict very logically. He always thinks before he acts.

- Change?

Chuck thinks change is good. If it wasn't for change, Chuck would be dead now.

- Loss?

Chuck deals with loss just like most people. He reflects on what he lost and hopefully is able to move on in time.

What would the character like to change about his/her life?

Chuck is completely happy with the way his life is now. The change already happened, so now he has to make the best of the new hand he was dealt, and he plans to make the best of it, not just for him but for everyone.

What motivates the character?

Chuck always wanted to be a superhero. That is why he joined the military. Now that he has super powers, his main motive is ultimately to create peace for everyone to enjoy.

What frightens the character?

Chuck's biggest fear is failure. Now that he has been granted this gift, he doesn't want to fail all those people who now depend on him to keep them safe.

What makes this character happy?

Knowing that he is making the world a better place puts a smile on his face every day.

Relationships:

Being the family man that he is, Chuck is really good with people. Everyone seems to like him. If there is someone he can't get along with, that generally means that person is evil at heart.

SPIRITUALITY

Does the character believe in God?

Chuck believes in God.

How strong is the character's faith?

Chuck's moral compass is directly related to his faith. That is what kept him humble in his time of sickness and the main reason he believes he has been blessed with these powers.

Is the character ruled by his/her faith?

Chuck is not a religious fanatic. He believes in God and tries his hardest to live by his commands.

HOW THE CHARACTER IS INVOLVED IN THE STORY

Archetype:

Chuck is without a doubt a hero type.

Environment:

The environment is the main reason why Chuck is the Golden Grasshopper.

Without the sun he would still be sick. The sun is the source of the Golden Grasshopper's power. He is now like a walking solar panel. That is why the government made his armor to act like mini solar panels so when the sun is less abundant the Golden Grasshopper won't lose his super powers.

TIMELINE

Time Period:

1942

Describe five important events that led up to this character's storyline.

- Chuck Johnston was one of the few soldiers who were inducted into the special military detail. He would be the military's secret weapon against the enemy.
- Chuck was exposed to an experiment biological weapon that was being used by the enemy on a covert special mission. As soon as he came into contact with the weapon, he fell ill and needed to be transported to the hospital.
- Chuck was taken to the hospital, where the doctors worked hard to determine what Chuck had and how to cure it. It was here that Chuck rekindled his passion for comic books. As he read comics, he dreamed of the day that he too could be like one of the superheroes in the comic pages and always be the one to save the day.
- Chuck was told that what he had was incurable and that he only had a few more days to live.
- Chuck made a last request to be taken outside so he could feel the warmth of the sun before he died. The doctors granted him this request. When the sun's rays hit him, Chuck started to feel strange. He felt different, stronger, and healthier. He felt a surge of energy shoot through his body and was able to get out of his wheelchair. To everyone's amazement, Chuck jumped over 18 feet into the air. Once the doctors were able to get Chuck back into the hospital they ran more tests and decided it was a medical miracle. Chuck Johnson was completely healed. It was shortly thereafter that Chuck decided to protect and serve as the Golden Grasshopper.

Here are the designs they came up with.



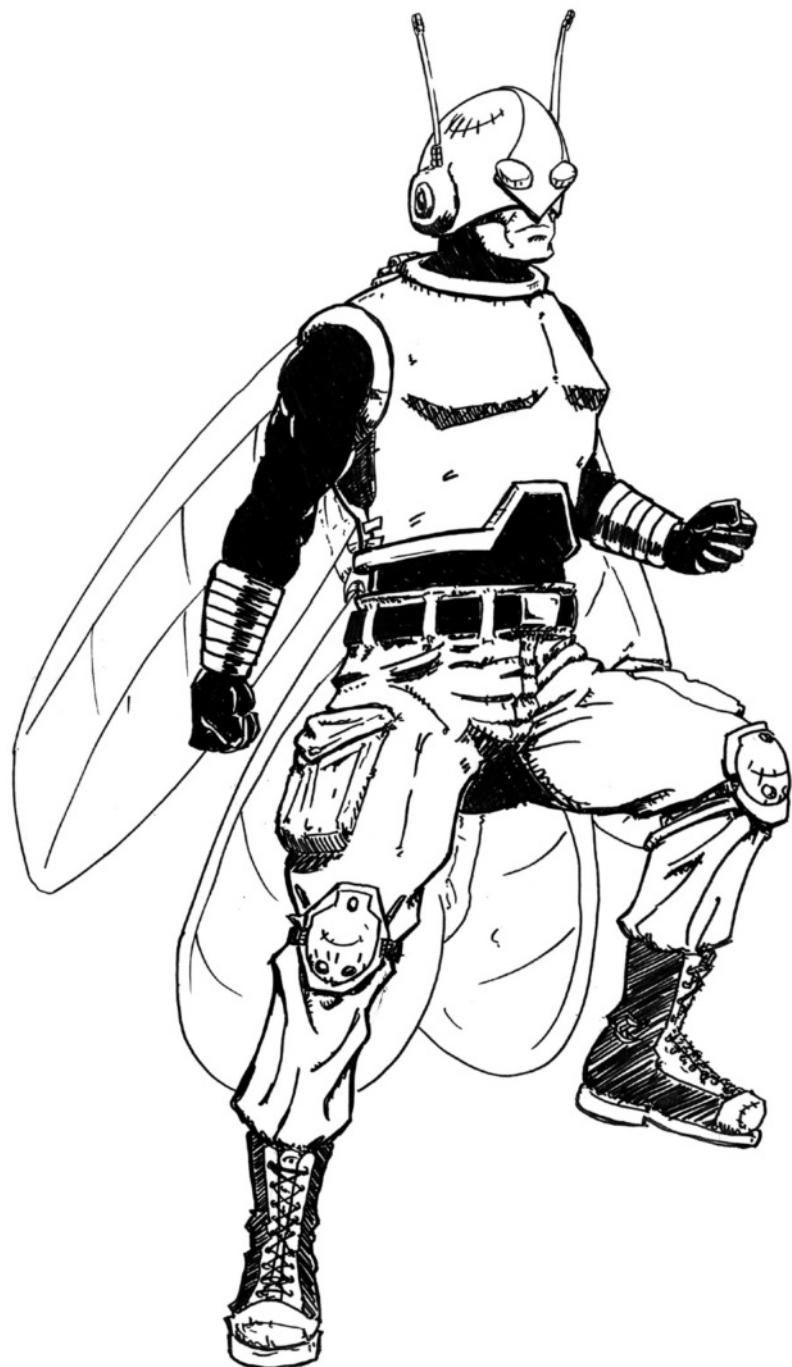


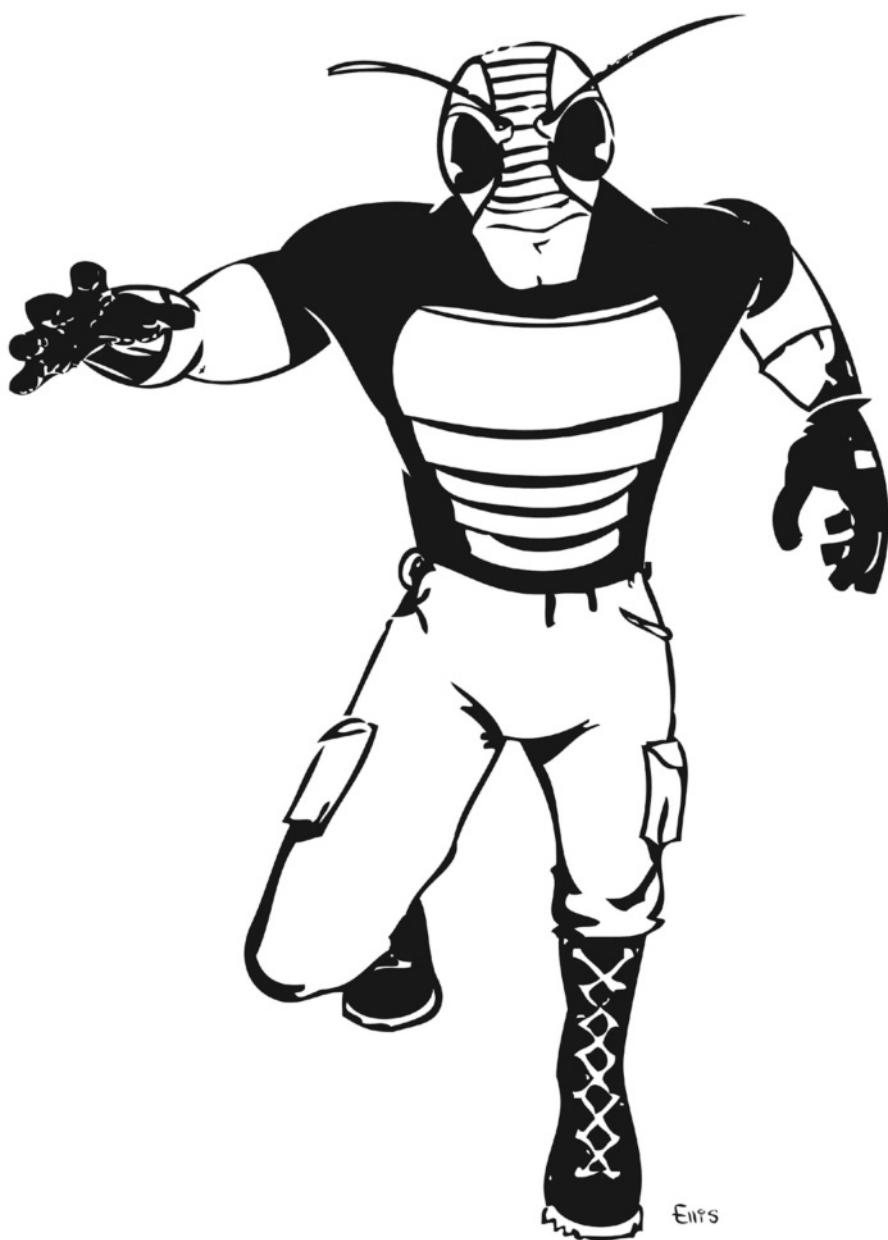






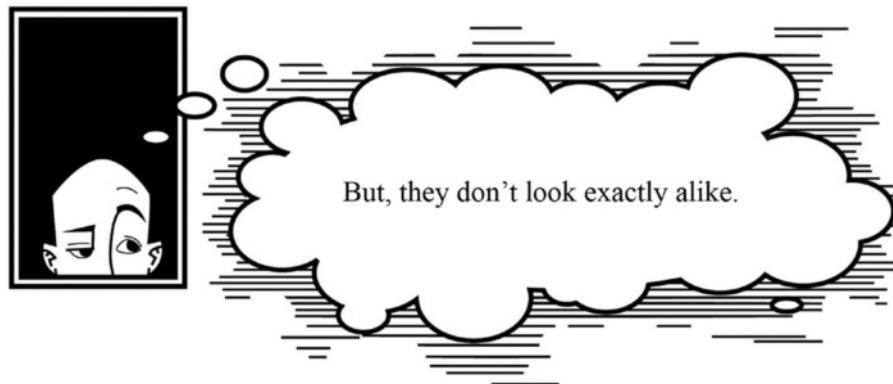








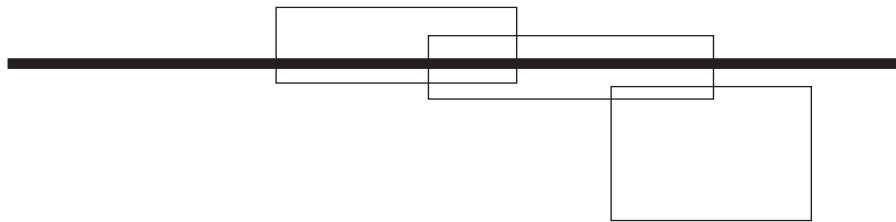
Did you notice that when the artists worked with the simple description they went off in wildly different directions? They were forced to come up with their own stories because with character design, story drives everything, and when left to our own devices, we will pick and choose from what we know. What I am trying to prove here is that with a concrete story, character designers will be able to draw something remarkably close to what the story dictates. You might be saying to yourself right now:



You know what? They probably never will. Do you want to know why? We talked about it in Chapter 5. Every artist puts his or her own unique twist to the story. They try to add their own form of originality to the character. When they do that, they are trying to create the WOW factor at the same time. The lesson here is, when different artists draw the same character based off the same story, the character designs will be quite similar.

Well, we made it to the end of the book. I hope you learned a few things about character design. Now it is time for your homework. You didn't think you were going to get away that easy, did you? Your homework assignment is to go forth and create characters you can be proud of. Have fun and always remember one thing:





Gallery

I want to congratulate you on getting to the end of this book. There was a lot of information to digest! Now that you have all the information you need to create sound character designs, I would like to show you some of the designs that were created in my studio.



KAI SER STUDIO PRODUCTION S

I would like you to look at each design and compare it to the information you read in this book and see how well the designs followed the rules that were presented. Once again, congratulations on finishing the book, and I hope you learned something and enjoyed yourself at the same time.

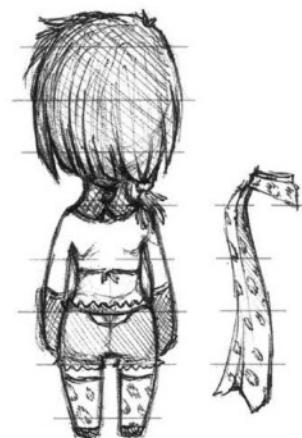
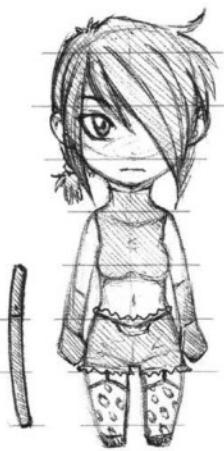
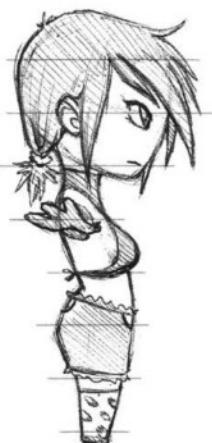
OLIVER



CRAVIN



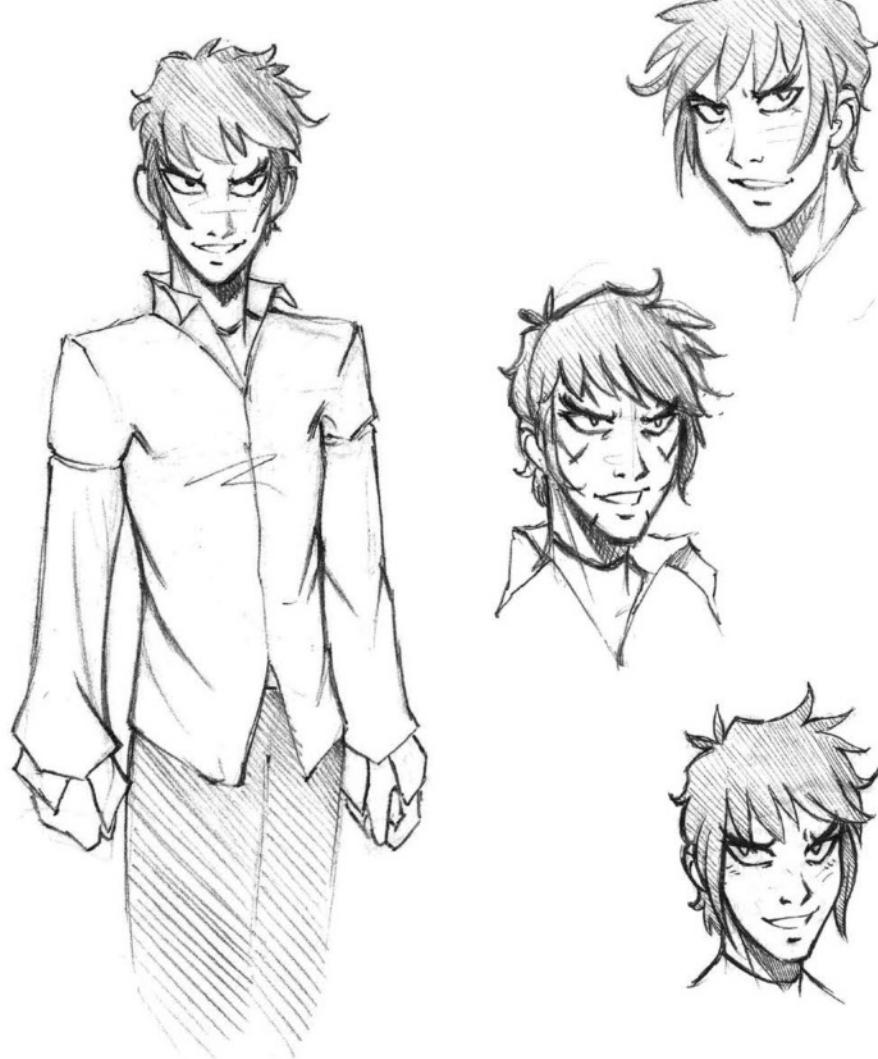
JOCELYN



ZORZEL



MAMON



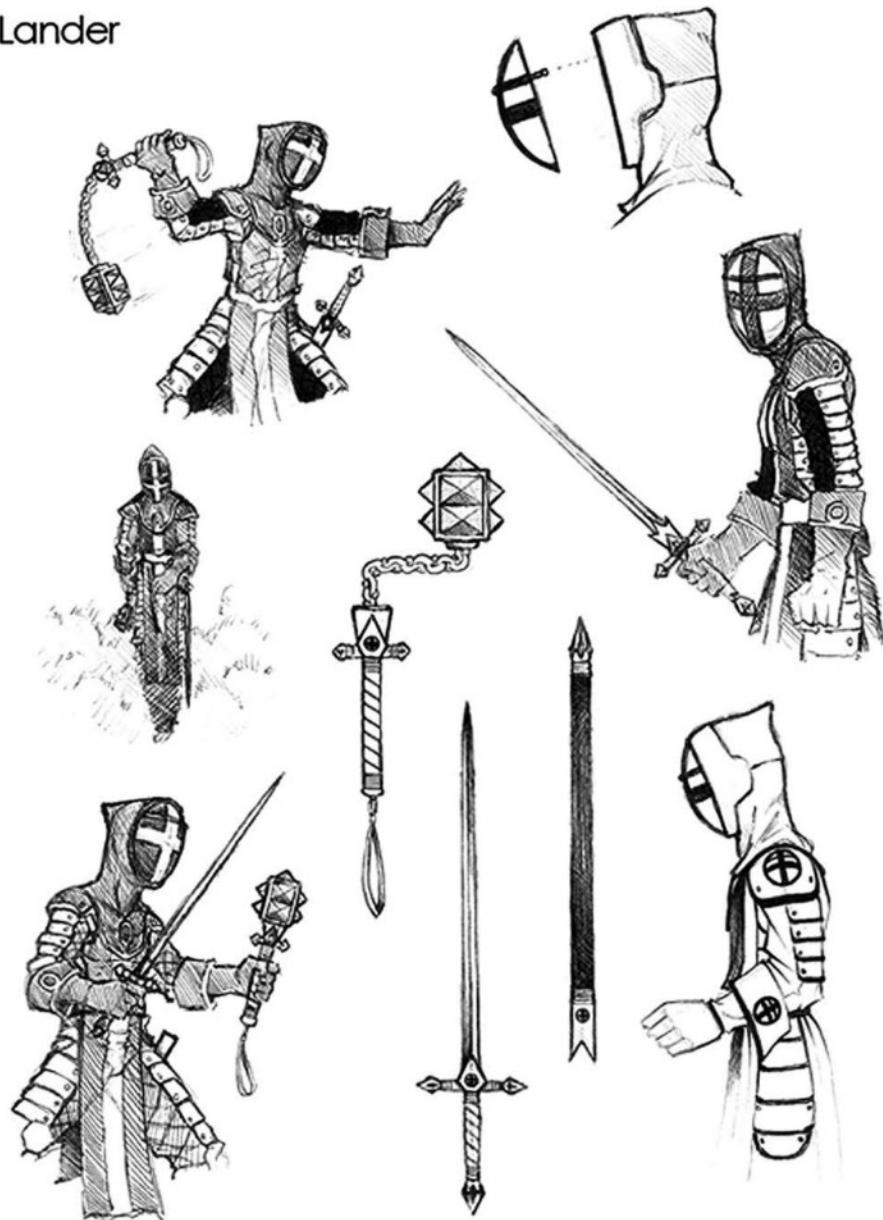
LUCIEL



STAP D'LAMBS



Lander



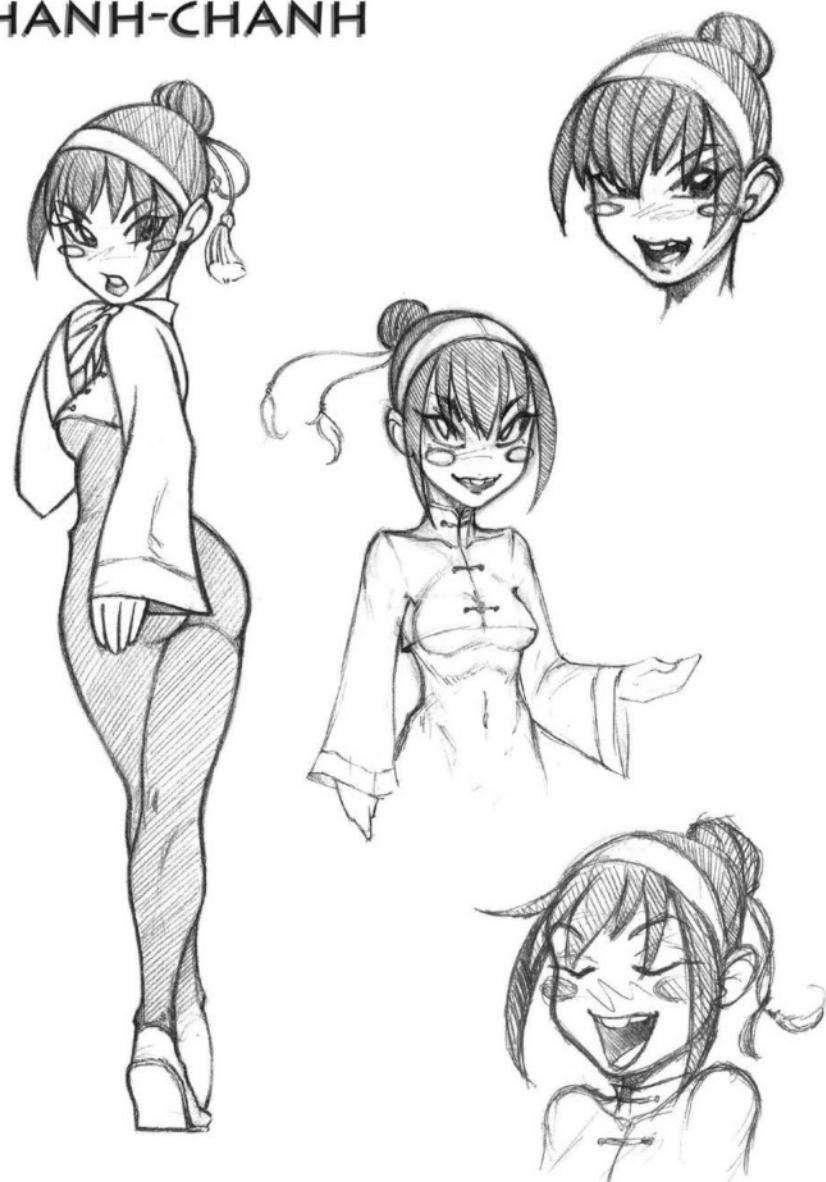
Vic Vertigo & Bethany Bedlam



IR8



CHANH-CHANH



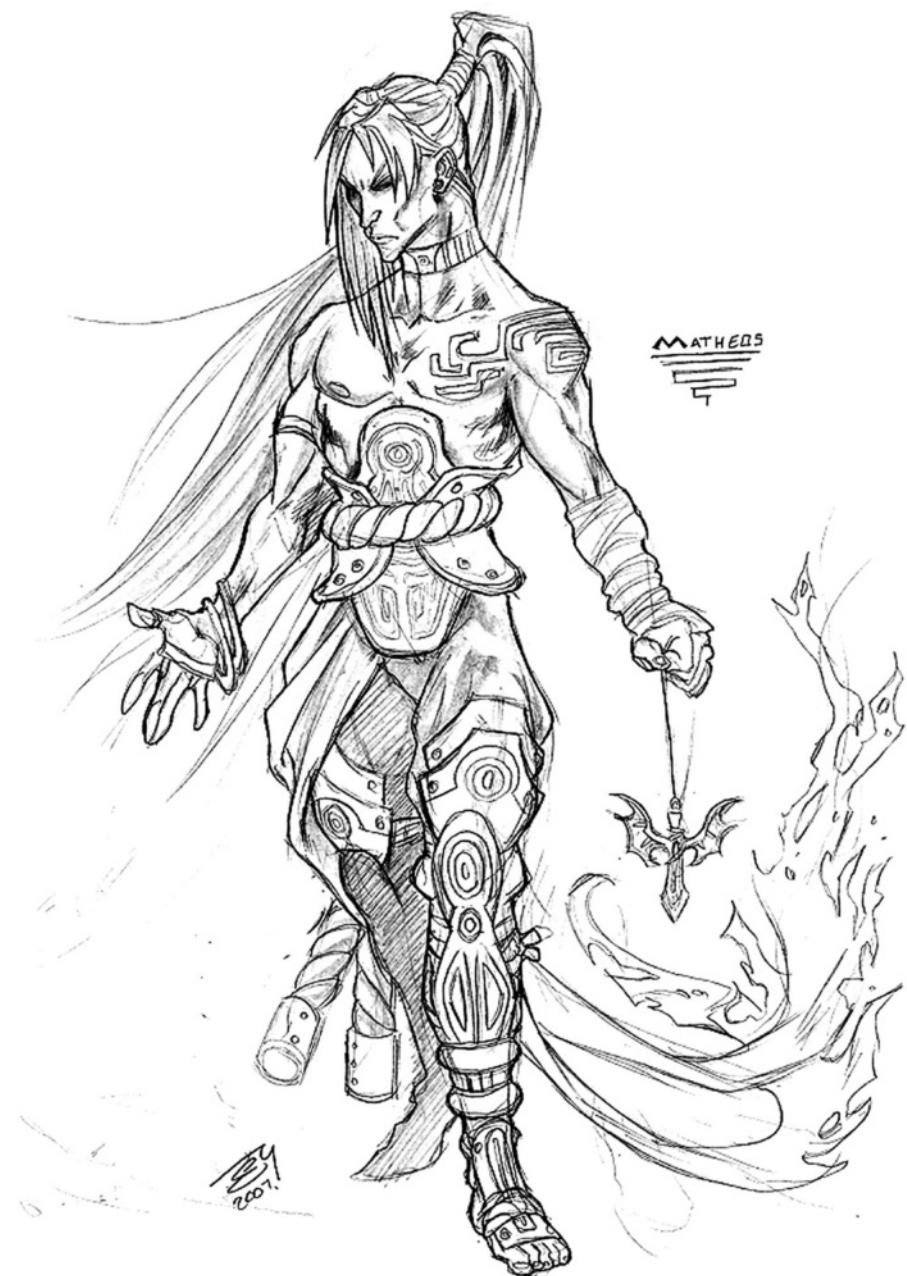
MELON PAN









































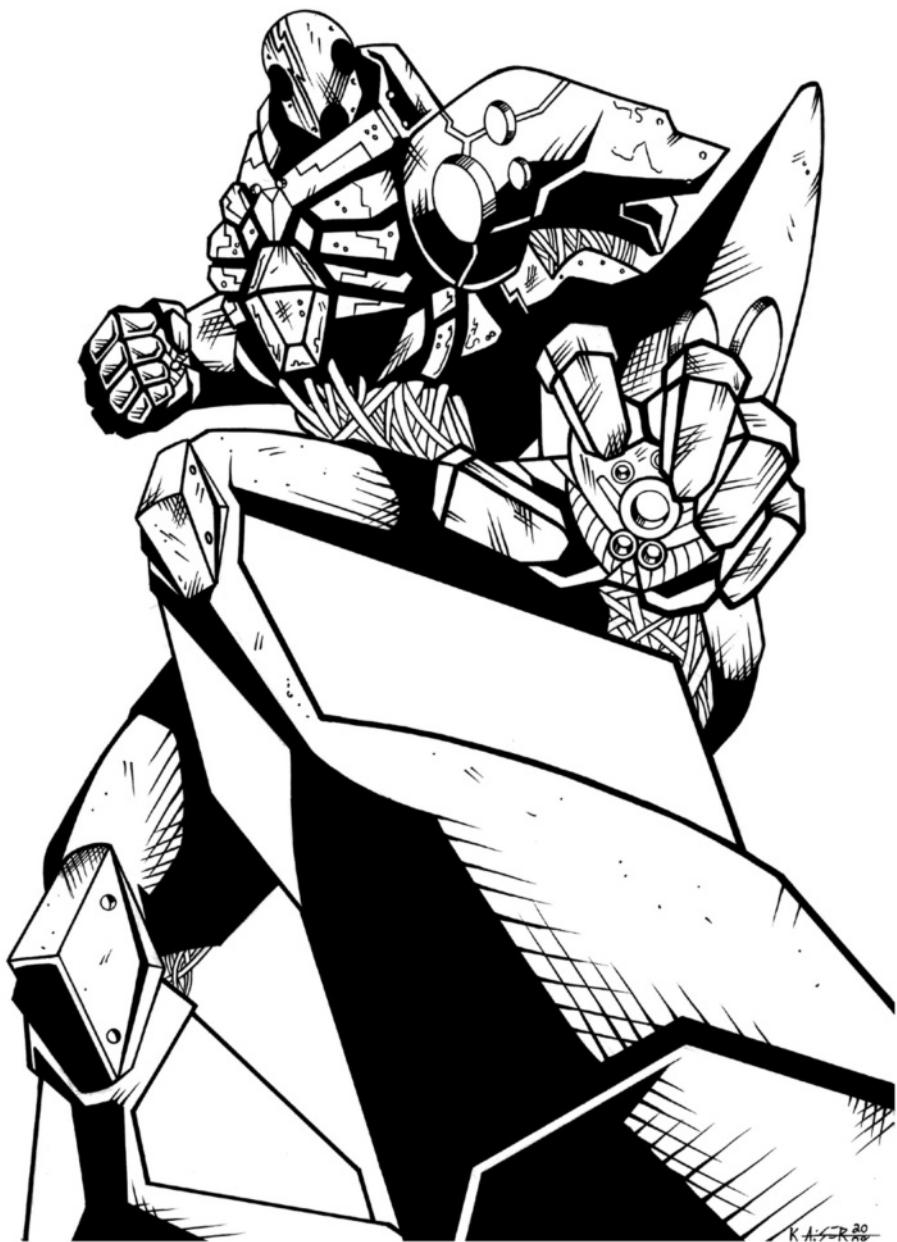






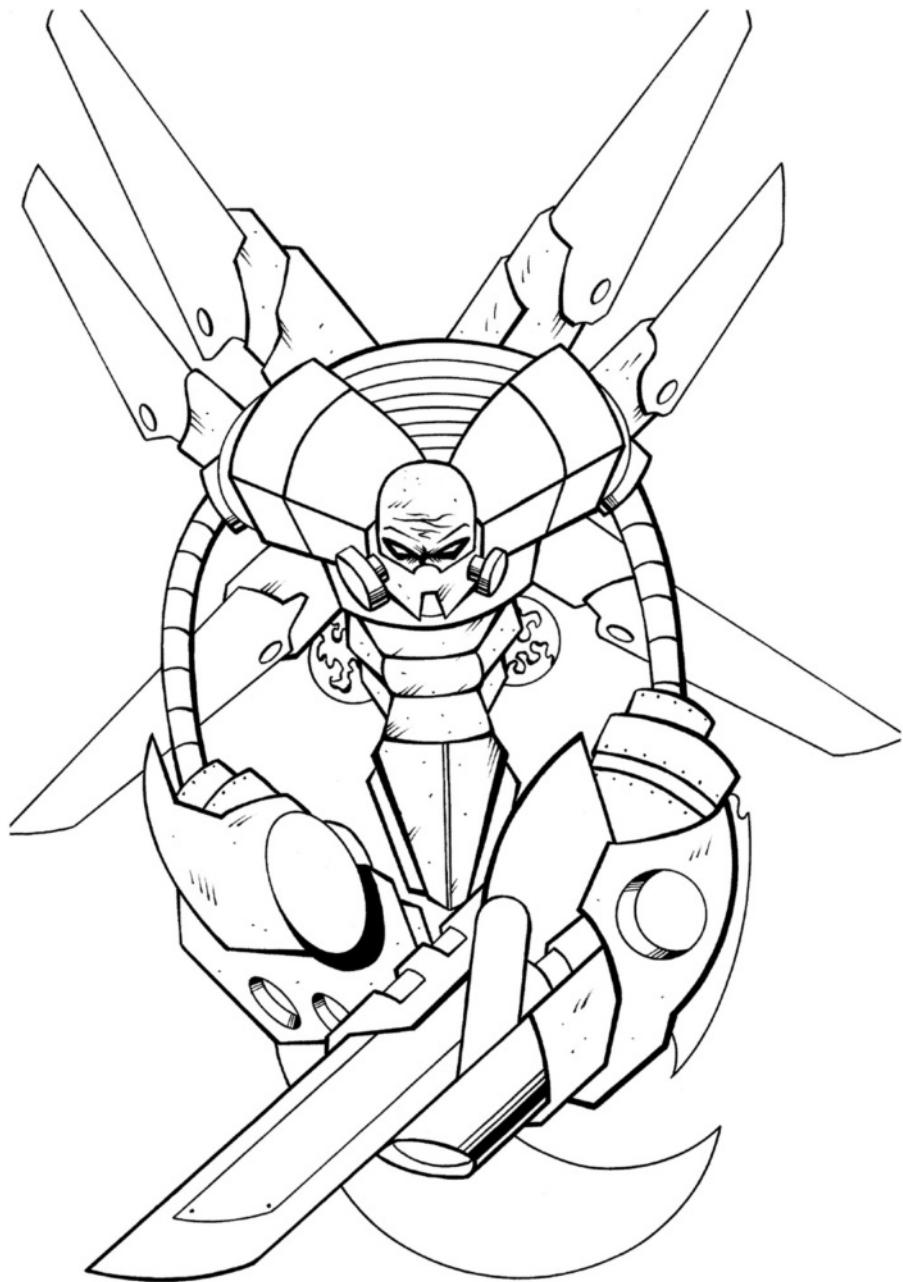




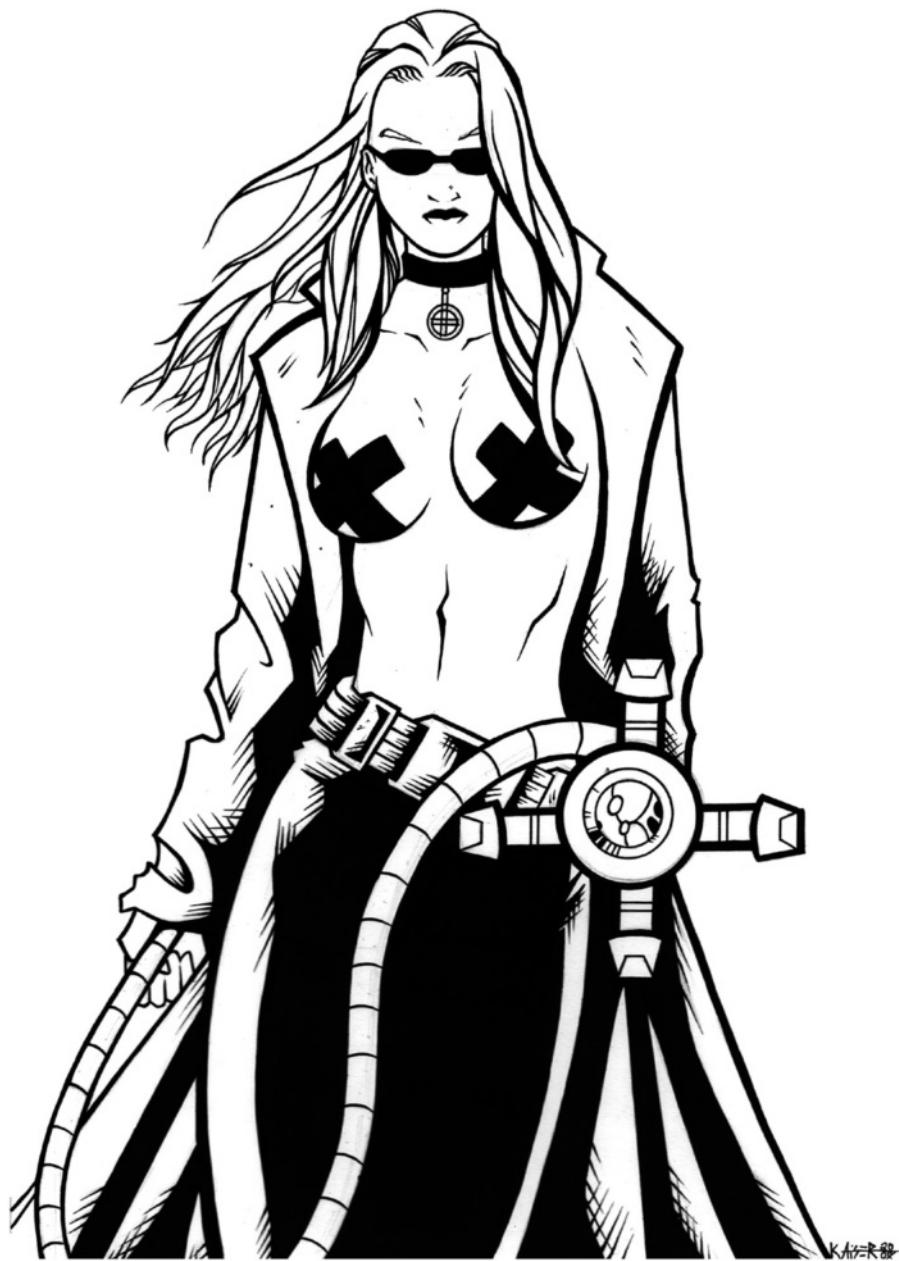




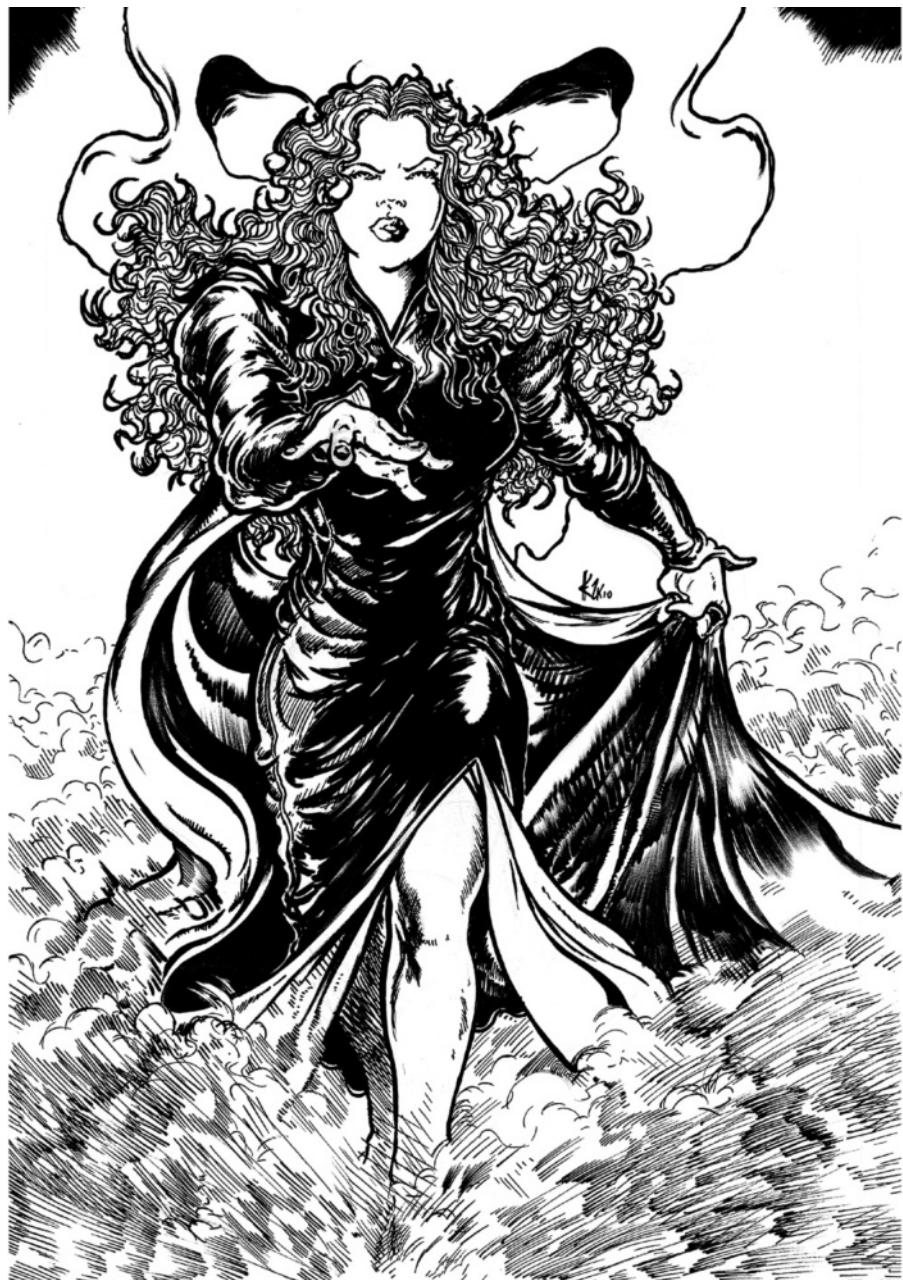




















Helpful Websites

<http://www.levelup.phpbb3now.com>

Level Up is a new forum that was created to be a place where students and semiprofessional artists can post their work and receive a proper critique so they can continue to grow as artists—to Level Up, if you will.

<http://www.deviantart.com>

This is an artist community on the web. Here you will find all types of artists, from professionals to beginners. It is a great place to network and get your work seen by a lot of people.

<http://www.characterdesigns.com>

This website has a lot of good photo sets for reference. There is also a forum that is primarily for character designers.

<http://www.conceptart.org>

This is an artist community on the web. Here you will find all types of illustrators, painters, and 3D artists. The artists on this forum range in skill from professional to beginner. It is a great place to network and get your work seen by a lot of people.

<http://designlesson.blogspot.com/>

This blog is great for learning practical anatomy and construction of the human body. It is very detailed and easy to follow.

<http://www.cghub.com>

This is an artist community on the web. Here you will find all types of illustrators, painters, and 3D artists. The artists on this forum range in skill from professional to beginner. It is a great place to network and get your work seen by a lot of people.

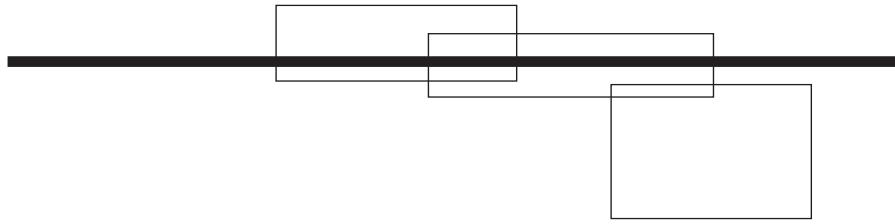
<http://www.posemaniacs.com>

Pose Maniacs is a blog that tries to supports all artists, including art students and people who study illustrations and mangas by uploading a variety of poses for sketching. It also introduces other FLASH training tools for drawing.

<http://www.marvel.com>

<http://www.dccomics.com>

Some of the most influential character designs can be found at these two websites. They are a must for all character designers.



Key Terms

Aesthetics The philosophy dealing with the nature of beauty, art, and taste!

Archetype An archetype is considered to be the original mold, or model of a person, trait, or behavior, that we as humans wish to copy or emulate.

Model Sheet A model sheet is a combination of the turnaround, facial expressions, head turns, action poses, and descriptions of anything about the character's appearance that is important for every artist to know.

Original The ability to come up with something that no one has ever done before.

Originality The ability to add your own twist to something that already exists.

Reference The ability to observe from life or from a photograph to ensure that what is being portrayed is visually correct.

Silhouette An outline of a character that is filled in with black.

Index

A

action poses, 139
aesthetics
defined, 103
overview, 9
WOW factor, 126
age groups, 104
anima characters, 15, 17, 21
animus characters, 15, 17
antagonists, 20
archetypes, 4, 11, 23
attitudes, 34–35, 39, 160
attributes, 34–35, 39, 160
audiences, 103–104

B

black color, 114, 119
blue color, 112–113, 119
blurred archetypal characters, 22, 23
body shapes, 73, 74

C

CG Hub Website, 223
Character Designs Website, 223
character development worksheets, 31–32
characteristics
emotional, 35, 39–40, 160–161
social, 34, 38–39, 159–160
spiritual, 35, 40, 161–162
characters
aesthetics of, 9
anima, 15, 17, 21
animus, 15, 17
archetypes, 4
attributes and attitudes of, 34–35, 39, 160
blurred archetypal, 22, 23
clothing of, 33
color of, 110
emotional characteristics of, 35, 39–40, 160–161
features of, 37–38

fool, 14, 21
hero, 12, 20–21
involvement in story, 36, 40–41, 162
mentor, 17–18, 19, 21
shadow, 13, 14, 21
shapes of, 6
social characteristics of, 34, 38–39, 159–160
spiritual characteristics of, 35, 40, 161–162
statistics about, 32–33, 36–37, 157–159
story of, 5
trading characteristics of, 125
trickster, 19, 20, 21
using references to design, 7
circle shapes, 72
clothing, 33
colors
black, 114, 119
blue, 112–113, 119
and characters, 110
color wheel, 111
complementary, 111
green, 113
importance of, 120
orange, 113–114
purple, 113
red, 112, 119
of Spider-man, 119
tints and shades of, 115, 116, 117, 118
white, 114, 120
yellow, 112
complementary colors, 111
Concept Art Website, 223
criticism, accepting, 122

D

DC Comics Website, 224
Design Lessons blog, 223
details, 120, 121, 122

Deviant Art Website, 223

d

drawing

gestures, 90

oneself, 90–92

people, 87–89, 90, 93

e

emotional characteristics, 35, 39–40, 160–161

f

faces

circular, 72

facial expressions, 141

squared, 68–69

triangular, 70, 71

five-point turnarounds, 136, 138

fool characters, 14, 21

form follows function rule, 79–84

g

genres, 110

gestures, drawing, 90

green color, 113

h

hero characters, 12, 20–21

how question, 30

i

inspiration, 100

j

Jung, Carl, 11, 12

Jungian archetypes, 11

l

Level Up forum, 223

life drawing, 87–89, 90, 93

m

mannerisms, 33

Marvel Comics Website, 224

mentor characters, 17–18, 19, 21

model sheets, 144

o

orange color, 113–114

originality, 43, 44

p

people, drawing, 90

picture references, 85, 92–93

Pose Maniacs blog, 223

poses, 139

protagonists, 20

purple color, 113

r

red color, 112, 119

references

based on other drawings, 101

defined, 85

examples of, 85, 93–99

gesture drawing, 90

importance of, 87

inspiration, 100

life drawing, 87–89, 90, 93

of oneself, 90–92

overview, 7, 8

of people, 90

from pictures, 85, 92–93

researching for, 99–100

researching for references, 99–100

robots, 83

s

shades, 115, 116, 117, 118

shadow characters, 13, 14, 21

shapes

of bodies, 73, 74

circles, 72

overview, 6, 67–68

squares, 68–69

triangles, 70, 71

silhouettes, 75–78, 75f

Snake Eyes, 119

social characteristics, 34, 38–39,

159–160

Spider-man

changing aesthetics of, 125

colors of, 119

spiritual characteristics, 35, 40, 161–162
square shapes, 68–69
Star Wars, 20
statistics about characters, 32–33, 36–37, 157–159
Storm Shadow, 119, 120
story
 versus art, 30, 31
 characters involvement in, 36, 40–41, 162
 importance of, 148, 173
 overview, 5, 25
storytelling, 25
style, 120–121
style sheets, 147

T

"T" turn, 136
target audiences, 104
three-point turnarounds, 134, 136
tints, 115, 116, 117, 118
triangle shapes, 70, 71
trickster characters, 19, 20, 21
turnarounds
 five-point, 136, 138
 overview, 134

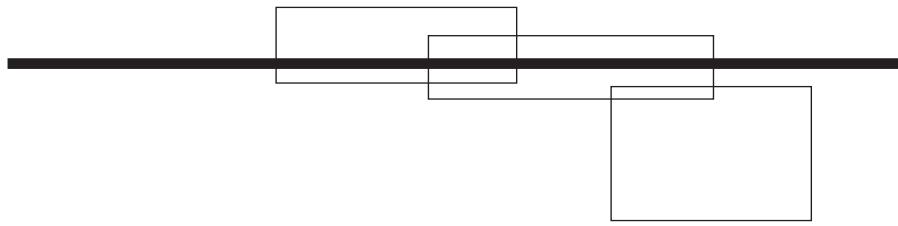
"T" turn, 136
three-point, 134, 136, 136

W

Websites
 CG Hub, 223
 Character Designs, 223
 Concept Art, 223
 DC Comics, 224
 Design Lessons blog, 223
 Deviant Art, 223
 Level Up forum, 223
 Marvel Comics, 224
 Pose Maniacs blog, 223
what question, 29
when question, 29
where question, 29
white color, 114, 120
who question, 29
why question, 29, 30
WOW factor, 9, 123, 124, 125, 126, 130, 131

Y

yellow color, 112



Character Design Template

BASIC STATISTICS

Name:

Alias:

Age:

Height:

Weight:

Sex:

Race:

Eye Color:

Hair Color:

Glasses or Contact Lenses:

Nationality:

Skin Color:

Shape of Face:

Distinguishing Features:

Clothes: How does he/she dress?

Mannerisms:

Habits:

Health:

Hobbies:

Favorite Sayings:

Sound of Voice:

Walking Style:

Disabilities:

Character's Greatest Flaw:

Character's Best Quality:

SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

Hometown:

Current Residence:

Occupation:

Income:

Talents/Skills:

Family Status:

Character Status as a Child:

Character Status as an Adult:

ATTRIBUTES AND ATTITUDES

Educational Background:

Intelligence Level:

Character's Goals in Life:

How does character see himself/herself?

How confident is the character?

Does the character seem ruled by emotion?

EMOTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Introvert or Extrovert:

How does the character deal with:

- Sadness?

- Anger?

- Conflict?

- Change?

- Loss?

What would the character like to change about his/her life?

What motivates the character?

What frightens the character?

What makes this character happy?

Relationship skills:

SPIRITUAL CHARACTERISTICS

Does the character believe in God?

How strong are the character's spiritual beliefs?

Is the character ruled by his or her spiritual beliefs?

CHARACTER'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE STORY

What is the character's archetype?

How is the character affected by his or her environment?

TIMELINE

Time period:

Describe five important background events that led up to the character's storyline.