



Character Design Illustration and Animation



Justin Ciemian jciemian@umd.edu
Science, Discovery and the Universe Bioengineering

Introduction

I have always admired the artistry that goes into designing characters in visual media like films and video games, as well as the effort put in to bring them to life through animation. I have designed characters in the past, but never completely, and it is a skill I have always wanted to improve upon. In this independent project, I will make an effort to legitimize my creative process by fully rendering three character ideas of my own design, documenting my design process and references, and creating a short animation featuring each of the characters' combat capabilities.

Process

With this project, my goal is to create three characters. I intend to use each character as a focus on different areas of study in illustration and animation. One will be entirely human, one will be humanoid but mainly composed of organic reference material, and one will be primarily inorganic with one distinct humanoid element. After each character is conceptualized, I will use a drawing tablet and photoshop to create a character sketch or sketches, then a "complete" illustration of each character. The plan was to then create animations for each character, but due to time constraints and underestimation, none of which are at any sort of finished state, so they had to be removed from the scope of the project. In finishing the project, I realize that I have neglected to name any of the characters, so they will be referred to as (cloak), (crab), and (urn) for the time being, signifying major aspects of their design.

Results and Image Gallery

The design for (cloak) emerged from a gameplay concept in which a character can position and control gravity wells to influence projectiles and other characters. (cloak) is a special operative of a large corporation who practices espionage and assassination at the will of the higher-ups. In doing so, she has been entrusted with a suit which augments her physical capabilities, two robots which can provide gravity wells at will, and prototype gauntlets which can project bolts of concentrated energy. As the human character, the main challenge in designing her was portraying the human form in a similar style to the other two designs, as well as clothing, although clothing was mainly circumvented due to her costume consisting

of a skin-tight suit and a flowy cloak.



The inspiration for (crab) came from a book in which an aquatic civilization used selectively bred creatures to advance in the absence of fire. (crab) uses a suit constructed of biological parts, most notably the two creatures which serve as his arms.



In creating (crab), I wanted to create a heavily weaponized, heavily armored character without falling into the convention of muscle or metal armor, and I wanted to sharpen my ability to combine biological references with man-made references. As well as crustaceans and mollusks, his design was influenced by samurai armor in popular culture. This is because it has a distinct style and is usually shown to be made primarily of wood, another bulky organic material.



(urn) I designed several years ago based on the archetype of a "long-range grapppler". It was inspired by a common trope in video games in which an enemy consists of a head and two large hands floating beside it, often made of inorganic material. The design also draws heavily from my interpretation of Mayan and Aztec art and mythology. (urn) is a small serpent-like creature piloting an ancient artifact made from clay and chains which gives the user full control of the hands and legs connected to the urn. In this rendering, I wanted to exercise conveying a mischievous personality in design and practice or learn techniques to depict inorganic materials including clay, rock, and metal.

Conclusions

As it turns out, the process of creating images which can be considered finished, not to mention animations, is a time-consuming process. Though I enjoyed creating the characters and attempting to animate them, my time management, especially in the beginning of the project, was simply not up to the task. With practice, I hope to improve in both speed and quality of work, but I understand that it won't happen overnight.

Future Plans

I hope to use these characters or an updated version as a foundation for a roster in a platform fighting game akin to the Smash Bros. series. I plan to continue to create characters and further animate them as inspiration strikes. I was registered to take a class on digital animation, but it was cancelled this spring, so if it comes back in the future, I hope to take it.

Acknowledgments to Dr. Peel and the SDU staff for their cooperation and encouragement throughout this process.