

THE ART OF



PATH OF
EXILE



A TEN-YEAR VISUAL JOURNEY: FROM INCEPTION TO ACT TEN

ERIK OLOFSSON

DYNAMITE®

THE ART OF

PATH OF
EXILE

The title logo is highly detailed and ornate. It features the words "PATH OF" in a smaller, black, serif font above the word "EXILE" in a much larger, bold, black, serif font. The letters are set against a light, parchment-like background with red, blood-like splatters. The entire text is framed by a golden, gothic-style border. At the top, there are three circular medallions containing portraits of characters. The bottom of the logo is decorated with intricate, golden, gothic scrollwork and flourishes. The logo is set against a dark, atmospheric background of a sunset or sunrise over a mountain range.

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THE ART OF



Wraeclast

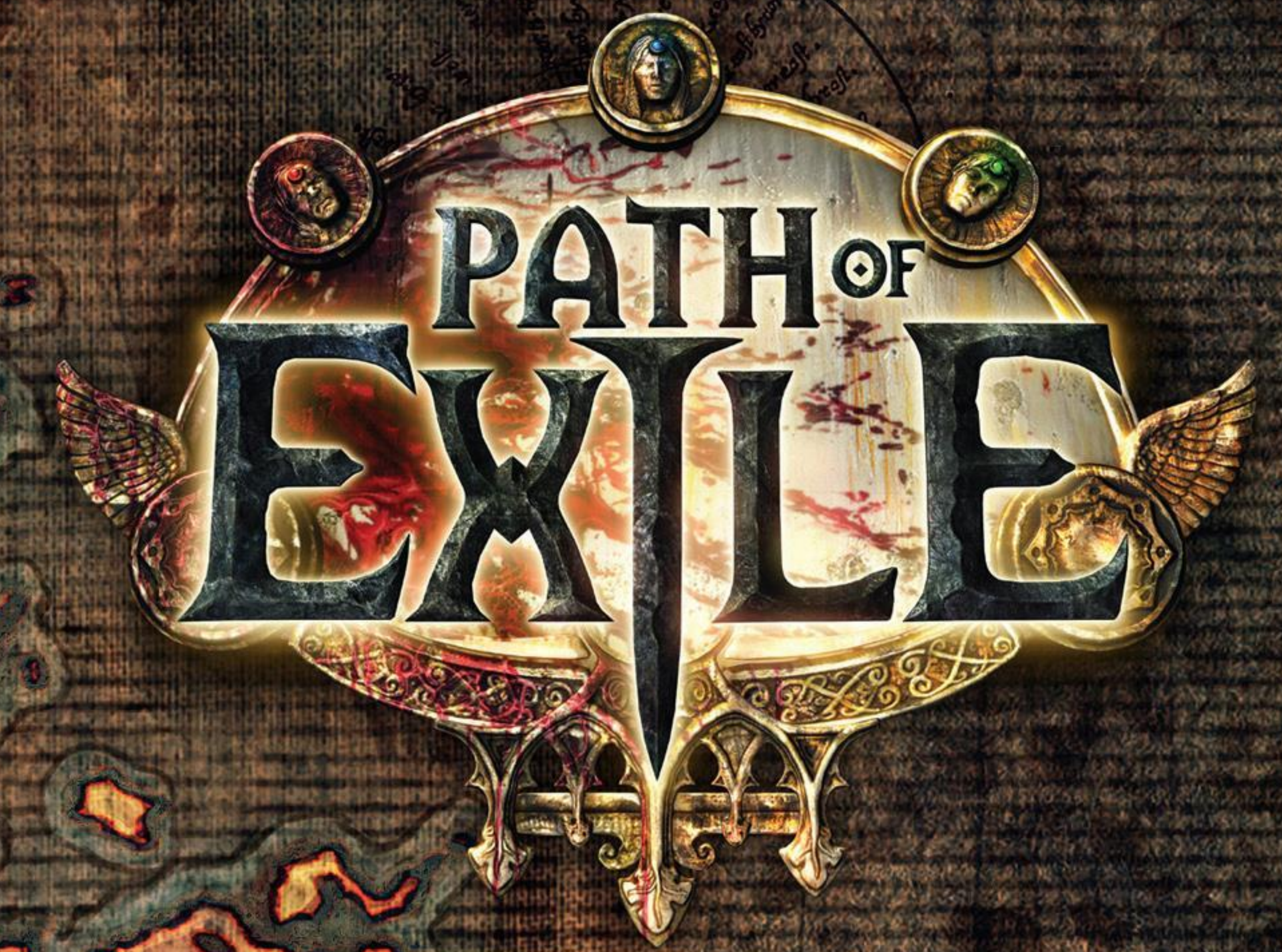


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FROM INCEPTION TO THE FALL OF ORIATH

There are many stages to crafting *Path of Exile's* visuals, but this book focuses specifically on concept art, which establishes the look and feel of all the assets that ultimately make it through the game development pipeline and into the game.

Path of Exile's art team started out small, with a single concept artist toiling in a garage in New Zealand. As Grinding Gear Games' Lead Artist and one of the co-founders, I worked alone for over a year, before the first 3D artist was hired in mid-2007. Though 3D modelers, animators and an effects artist were recruited to handle our growing art demands, I was *Path of Exile's* sole concept artist until the company hired Max Schulz in 2011.

Max's tenure was followed by the hiring of Filippo Valsecchi for the game's Closed Beta period in 2012. Filippo's time at GGG helped guide the visual design of many of *POE's* first unique items, including *Belly of the Beast*, *Rise of the Phoenix*, and *Soul Taker*.

We expanded the concept art team substantially during our Open Beta in 2013, bringing on Eunyoung Jeon, Campbell Crawford and George Lovesy. These three helped shape the visuals of our first expansion, *Sacrifice of the Vaal*, which launched in March of 2014. We grew the team to five for our next two expansions, hiring Shaun Brown and Jason Hong. *Forsaken Masters* launched in August of 2014, and *The Awakening* followed in July of 2015.

Eunyoung Jeon left the company shortly before the release of *The Awakening*, but the team continued to grow as two additional artists joined in late 2015, Jaan-Paul van Eeden and Qingyi Li. Our current team of six concept artists created the visuals for the subsequent two expansions, *Ascendancy* in March of 2016, and *Atlas of Worlds* that September. Their work appears in 2017's expansion, *The Fall of Oriath*.

Over the last decade, Grinding Gear Games' art department has become the largest of any game studio in New Zealand; from a single Art Director in a garage to a fully-fledged team of international specialists.

This book features a hand picked selection of artworks from the above concept artists, in visual exploration of the history of the game. It was very hard to decide what would make the cut, as the volume and quality of concept art that has been created for *Path of Exile* is astounding.

ERIK OLOFSSON
Auckland, New Zealand



ONE WITH NOTHING

Even when *Path of Exile* was just a few notes jotted on a white board, we knew how we wanted it to begin. Our goal was to really drive home a feeling of vulnerability and frailty, of the player cast ashore with no possessions or any real plan for survival. We wanted players to delight in the feeling of steady growth, going from extreme weakness to tremendous power.

Our initial ideas for the game's title were either *One With Nothing* or *Dark Shore*. The former was particularly alluring, because it abbreviated as "OWN." *One With Nothing* proved to be quite divisive though, with about half of sampled opinions strongly for it, and the remainder strongly against.

In the end of course, we decided on *Path of Exile*, which seemed to best capture the full scope of the game's ambitions. We then arrived at the name "Wraeclast" for the game's central location, a hostile and forbidding continent distinct from the exile's homeland of Oriath. Wraeclast literally means "Path of Exile" in Old English.

Wraeclast is a massive island located relatively close to a smaller neighbor, drawing an obvious parallel to Australia and New Zealand. This comparison helped guide the artwork of *PoE*'s outdoor environments, especially the vegetation found in Acts 1 and 2. For example, New Zealand's native Toitō grass can be seen clinging to the sand and outcroppings of The Ledge.





PURE INT
"WITCH"



NEUTRAL
"ADVENTURER"

INT/DEX
NPC?



DYE

INT/STR







■ HIGH LEVEL PLAYER CHARACTERS

The images on this spread served multiple purposes—concept art for items, establishing the overall look of high level characters in the game, and as promotion material printed on banners. The banners were featured at the 2011 PAX Prime Expo.













GETTING INTO THE THICK OF IT

Moving from Act 1 to Act 2 involves a radical change in scenery. Gone are the bleak shores and jagged cliffs of Wraeclast's coast, as players move farther into the island's interior. We wanted the forests of Act 2 to feel verdant and lush, but filled with creeping menace. Its denizens include bandits, spiders, hulking beasts, and hordes of ferocious apes.

Interestingly, the forest was the first environment we started to build in the early years of development. One of its signature inhabitants, the Bandit, was the very first monster we created and enabled. Along these lines, the Bandit Triad was the first major quest mechanic we designed. The quest, ultimately titled Deal With the Bandits, presents players with a difficult choice that has permanent consequences. Deal With the Bandits is especially compelling because it follows "The Rule of Three," a narrative theme common in folklore, games and books.

The second tile set we developed was a dungeon featuring the remnants of the Vaal civilization. It is remarkable how well this tile set still stands up against more modern design, considering it was built mostly in 2007. We were able to create more modern, realistic and detailed Vaal ruins for *The Fall of Oriath* by using 3D scans of real temple ruins in Cambodia.

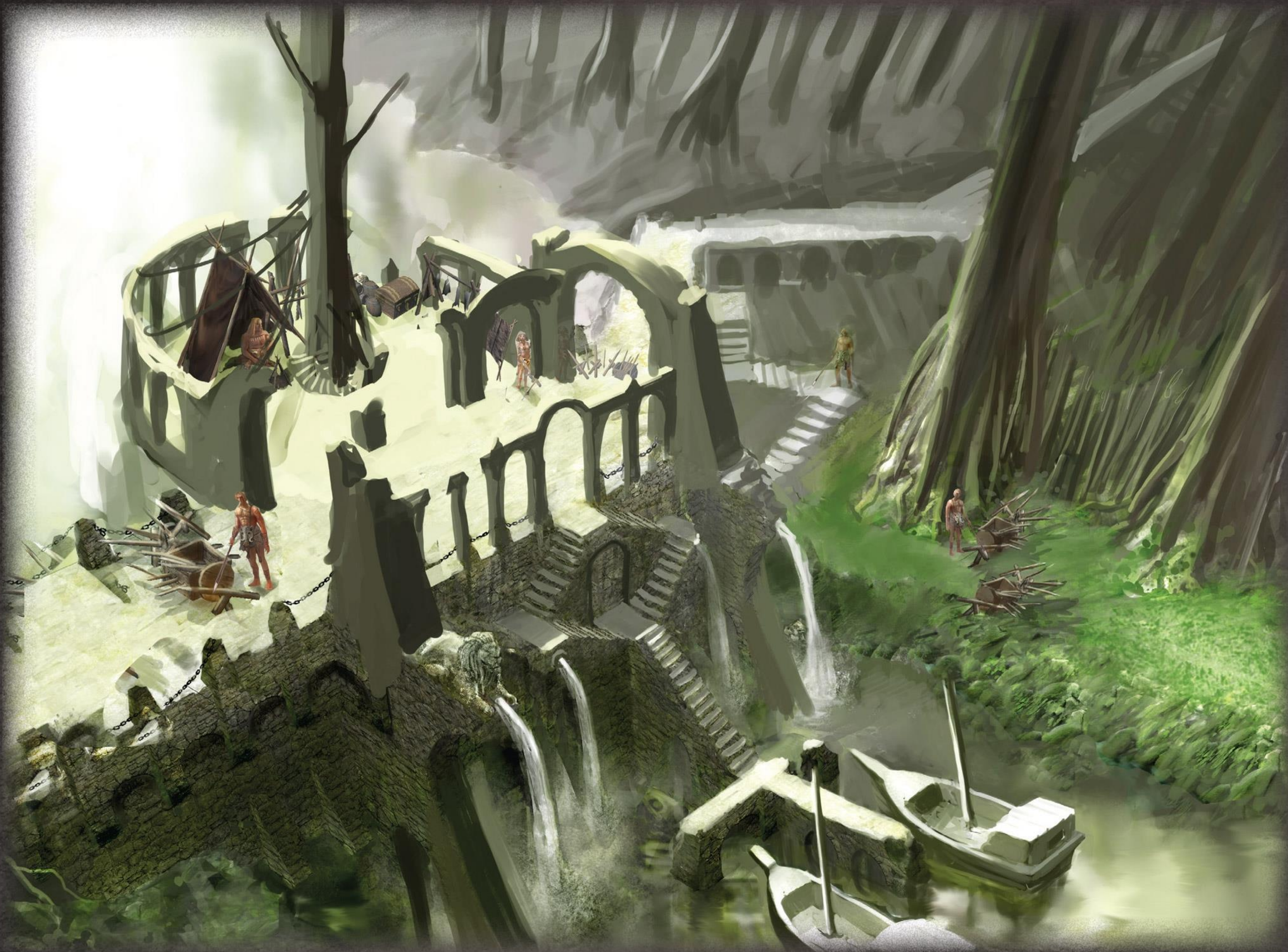


ACT 2 DEVELOPMENT

Due to the long development of the game, the oldest characters and concept art were often repurposed several times. The Act 2 encampment was initially meant to feature a fur trader, and Silk was called Ilifer Blackfinger. We intended to have a roaming trader a player would encounter out in the wilds, but for various reasons he was never made.











ROOT SPIDER

The Root Spider was initially meant to only emerge beneath trees. It was later changed to the Devourer, a freely-moving monster with more threatening gameplay.

ROOT SPIDER

RANGED "ROOT" ATTACK
THAT GETS WEAKER FURTHER
AWAY.







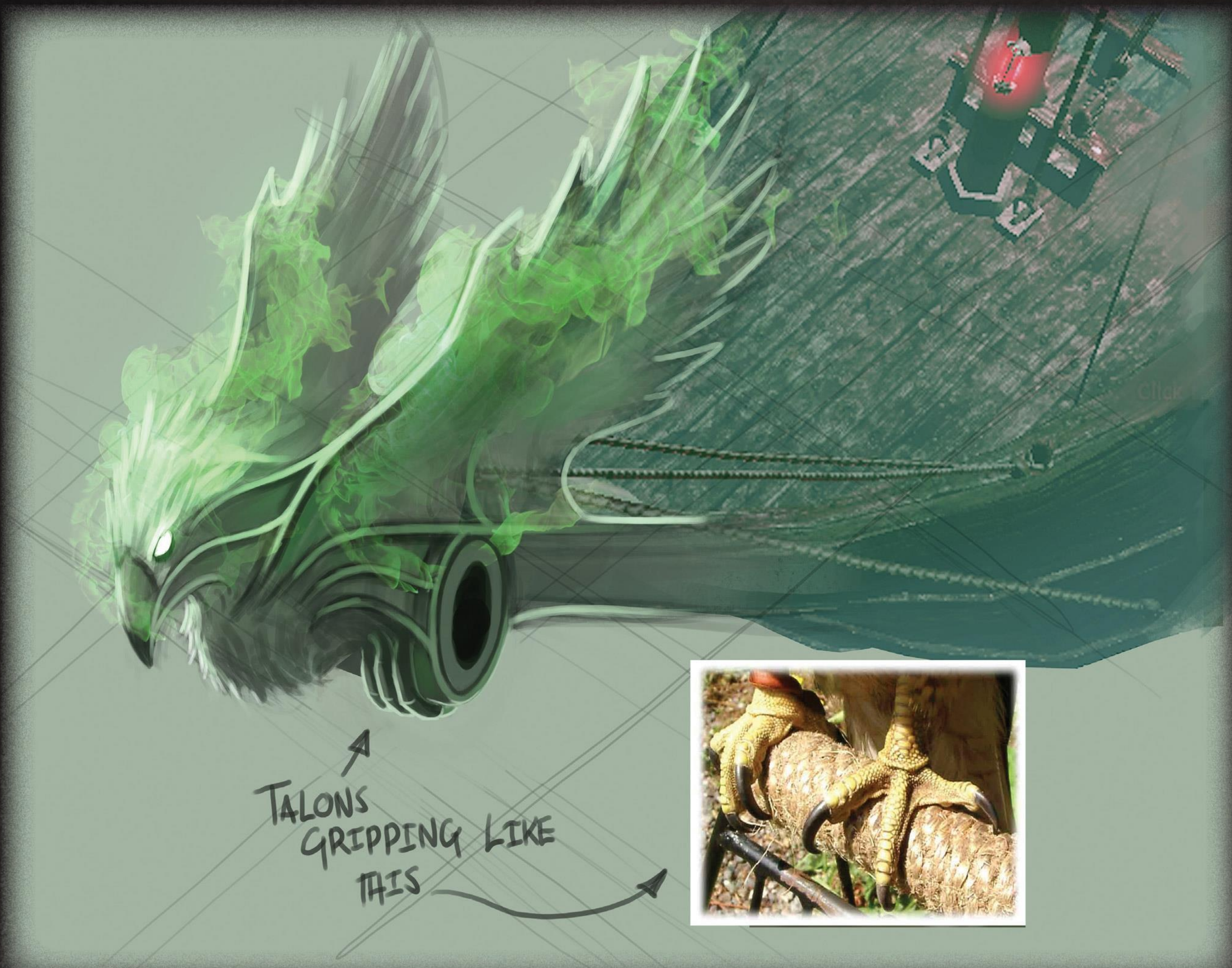


SLAYING YOUR NEMESIS

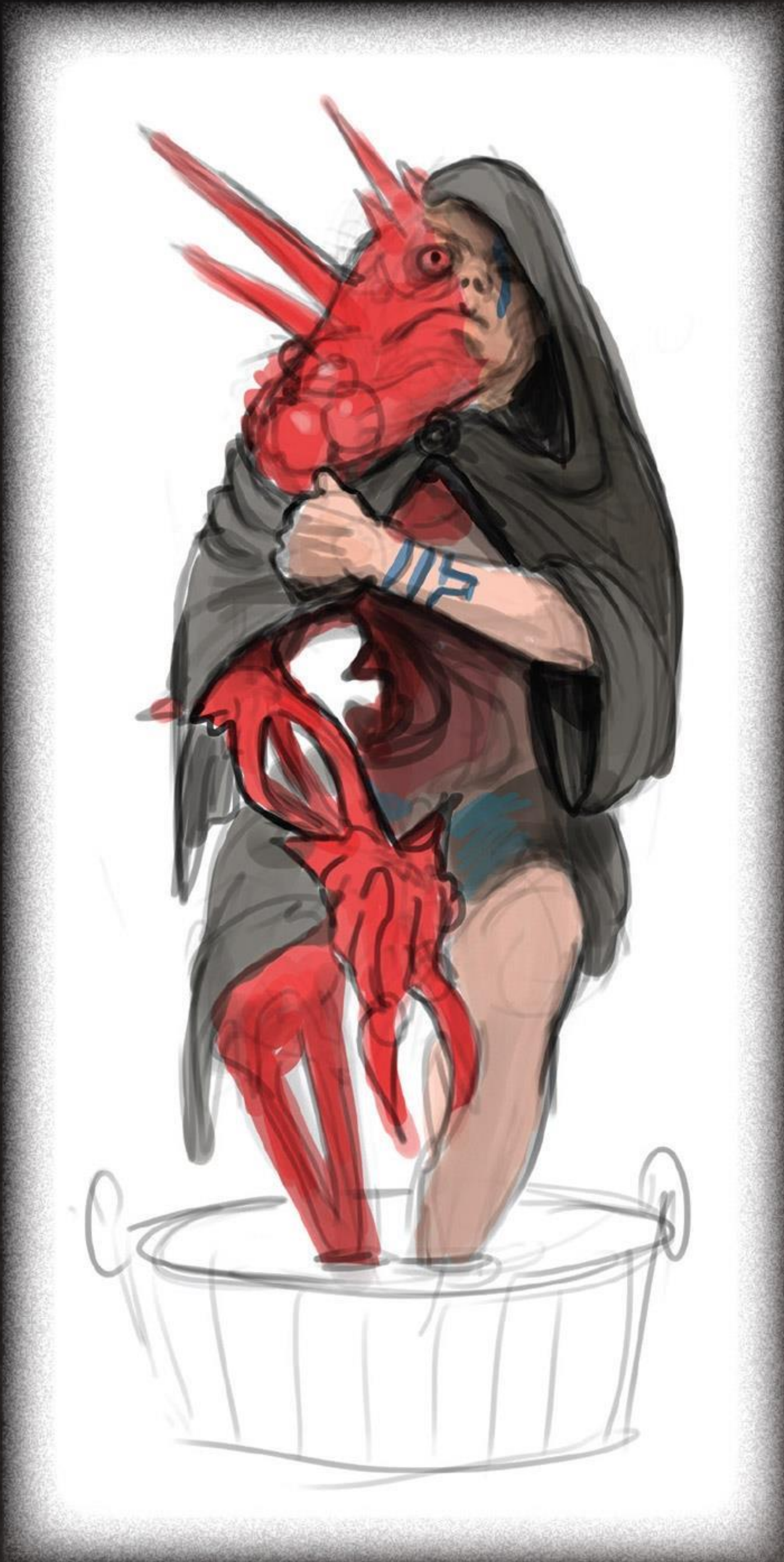
Act 3 ramped up the horror and epic scale of the game. In the Closed Beta, the journey ended at Piety and her nightmarish experiments in the Lunaris Temple. The full release of the game introduced the towering Sceptre of God, with its climactic battle against Dominus. Dominus was the game's central villain at that point, so this conclusion made for an excellent revenge narrative.

By the time we completed work on Act 3, our overall team had grown to 22 people, occupying two offices in Titirangi. The full release of the game was a cathartic culmination of more than seven years of development, but we couldn't rest on our laurels. We had multiple expansions already planned, and our goals for *Sacrifice of the Vaal* and *Forsaken Masters* were uncharted territory.









MAX SCHULZ

HOW DID YOU GET YOUR TRAINING AS AN ARTIST? DID YOU ALWAYS INTEND TO WORK IN VIDEO GAMES?

I started doing art quite early on as a kid and was constantly encouraged by people around me. That really helped me to evolve further until I had my first watercolor and acrylics classes around 10. I fell in love with being able to create worlds in my mind and bringing them to life, which led me to concentrate on art. I then decided after two years in a design-oriented higher education school to start an apprenticeship in a medium-sized game studio in Germany. During that time I learned a lot about game production, but I also tried to evolve my art and design in the evenings by hanging around in nerdy forums where people were talking about how to get the most out of a brushstroke. After I graduated as a media designer I felt confident enough to contact the guys at GGG, and they were very happy to adopt me into the family.

WHAT ELEMENTS IN *PATH OF EXILE* ARE YOU RESPONSIBLE FOR?

I started off by having the chance to rework the user interface for *PoE*. It was quite a challenge as there was a high level of complexity involved in the system behind each stat, so making it so that the player could easily get statistics and information on the fly took some revisions, especially as *PoE* was evolving at a rapid pace during that time. At the same time I also started on first environment and assets for new and existing levels in Act 1 and 2. Level transitions were an important asset to design as they had to spark curiosity within the player. I also got the chance to work on a few creature designs, which surely was the most fun, as Erik was open to have me spend some time on exploring some crazy ideas.

CAN YOU TALK ABOUT YOUR WORK PROCESS A BIT, AND DESCRIBE HOW MUCH TIME YOU SPEND CREATING THESE IMAGES?

This depends on the work. Some tasks are done in a few hours, especially since we had a really quick feedback loop within the company. We were able to test out changes in the engine quite easily. In general I would think from first sketch to finished concept for, let's say, an important piece of architecture, it takes around three days. Then the modeler would need to look it over, start building it, and put it in



the engine. I usually begin with some rough black and white sketching after getting briefed and inspired by some references. Once I have laid out a few good versions of what I think will work best, I'd go into a feedback discussion with Erik and sometimes do some changes, like trying out color variations and elaborating further on the design and detail. Depending on the complexity, I would paint some additional orthographic views, so the modelers have an easier job transporting the vision.

WHAT WERE THE INSPIRATIONS FOR THE DESIGN OF THE MARAMOA CHARACTER?

With Maramoa, we dug into Maori cultural influences as well as our lore for the Karui. We wanted her to be an independent and strong character—she took charge of her own life by deciding to exile herself—and we wanted the visuals to reflect this. She was supposed to illustrate a rough but cultured nature. To further emphasize her connection with nature we went with a jade green and gold color scheme. The pounamu (jade) in Maori culture symbolizes pride and prestige, and her gold reflects Maramoa's honest heart.

DID YOU RUN INTO ANY PROBLEMS WITH THE DESIGN, AND HOW DID YOU SOLVE THEM?

The main challenge with any good character design is, how well does it read from a distance, and is it iconic enough to be immediately recognizable? Aside from that we had some technical guidelines in terms of animations to keep in mind. Since Maramoa only has an idle animation, we were pretty free when it came to designing her clothing.

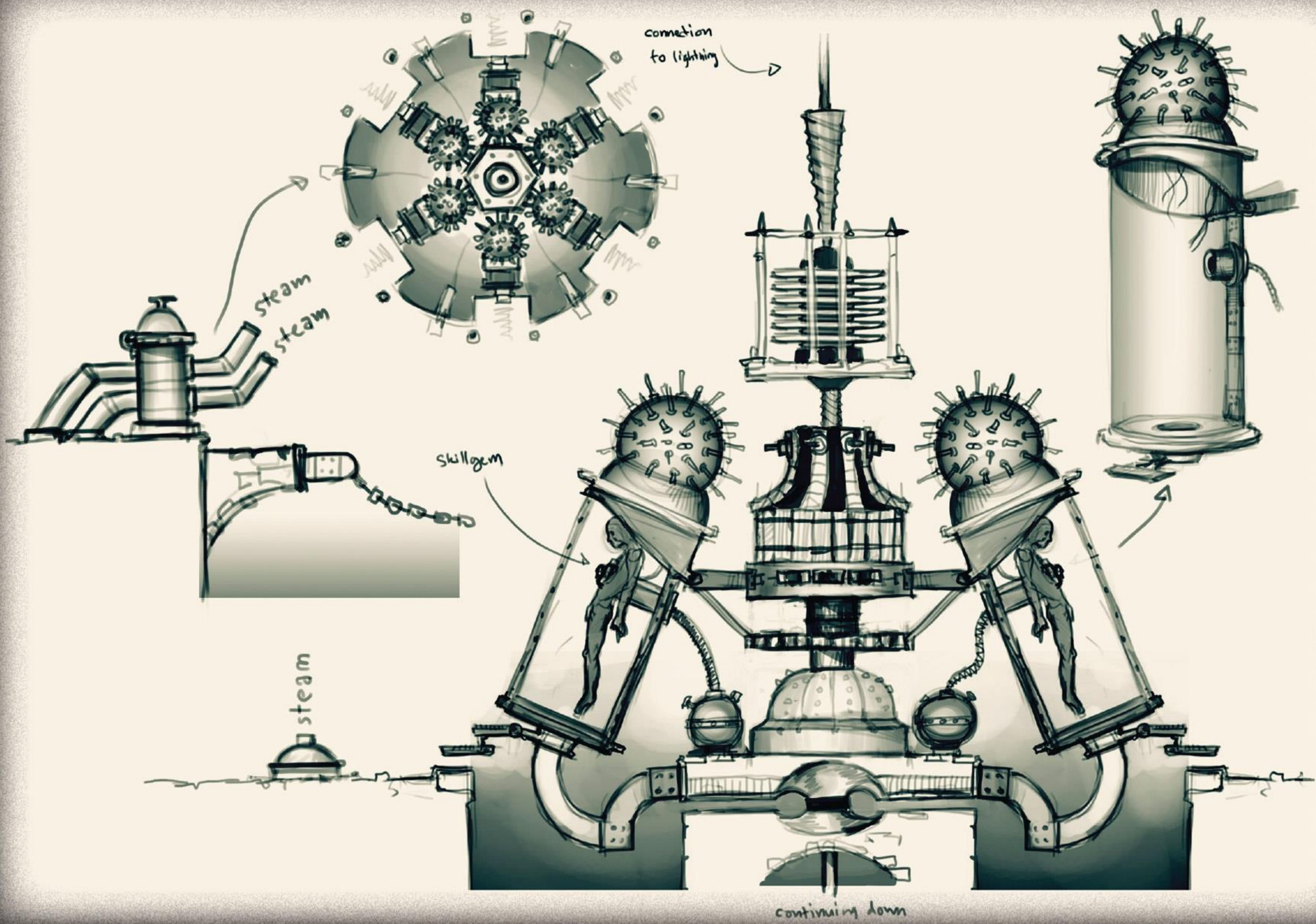
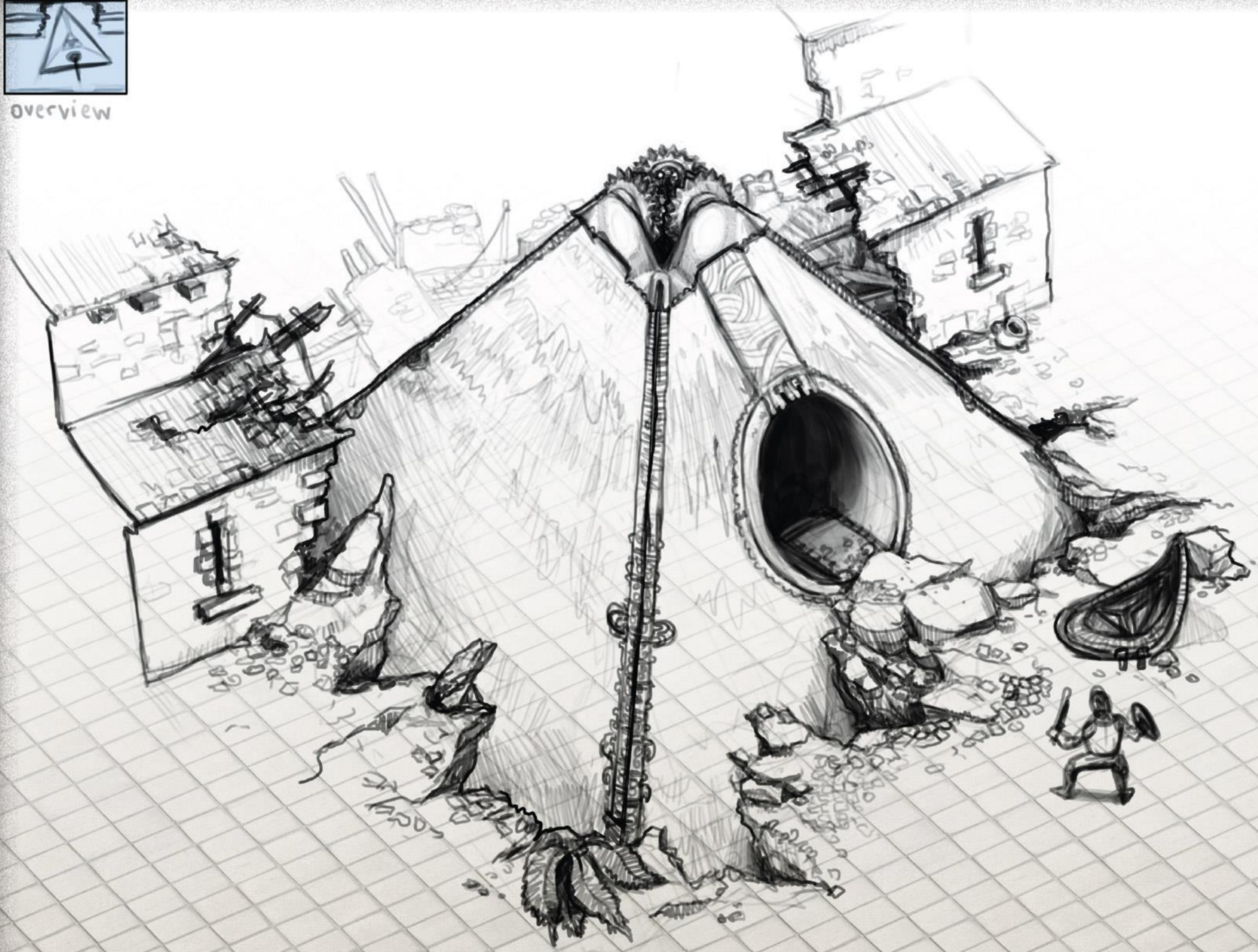
DO YOU ALWAYS KNOW WHEN A DESIGN IS COMPLETE?

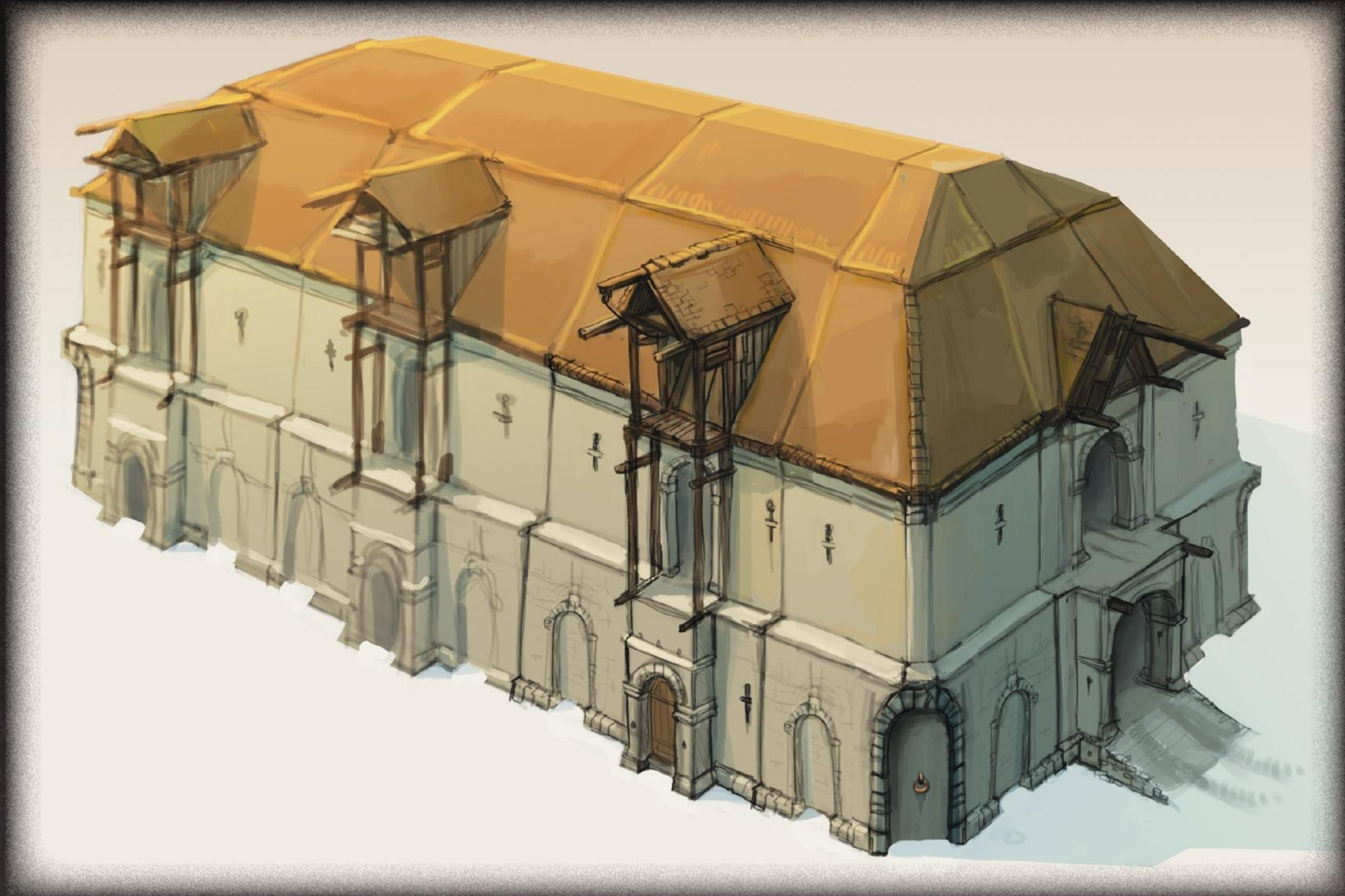
I never feel like anything I do is ever complete. Just an hour after something is officially in the game, I already feel an urge to fix some parts that I only then realize aren't as perfect as they could be. It's even worse when we're talking longer term. Seeing my old designs five years later brings me a lot of nostalgia. What I did was neat at the time, but I feel an urge to rework it all.

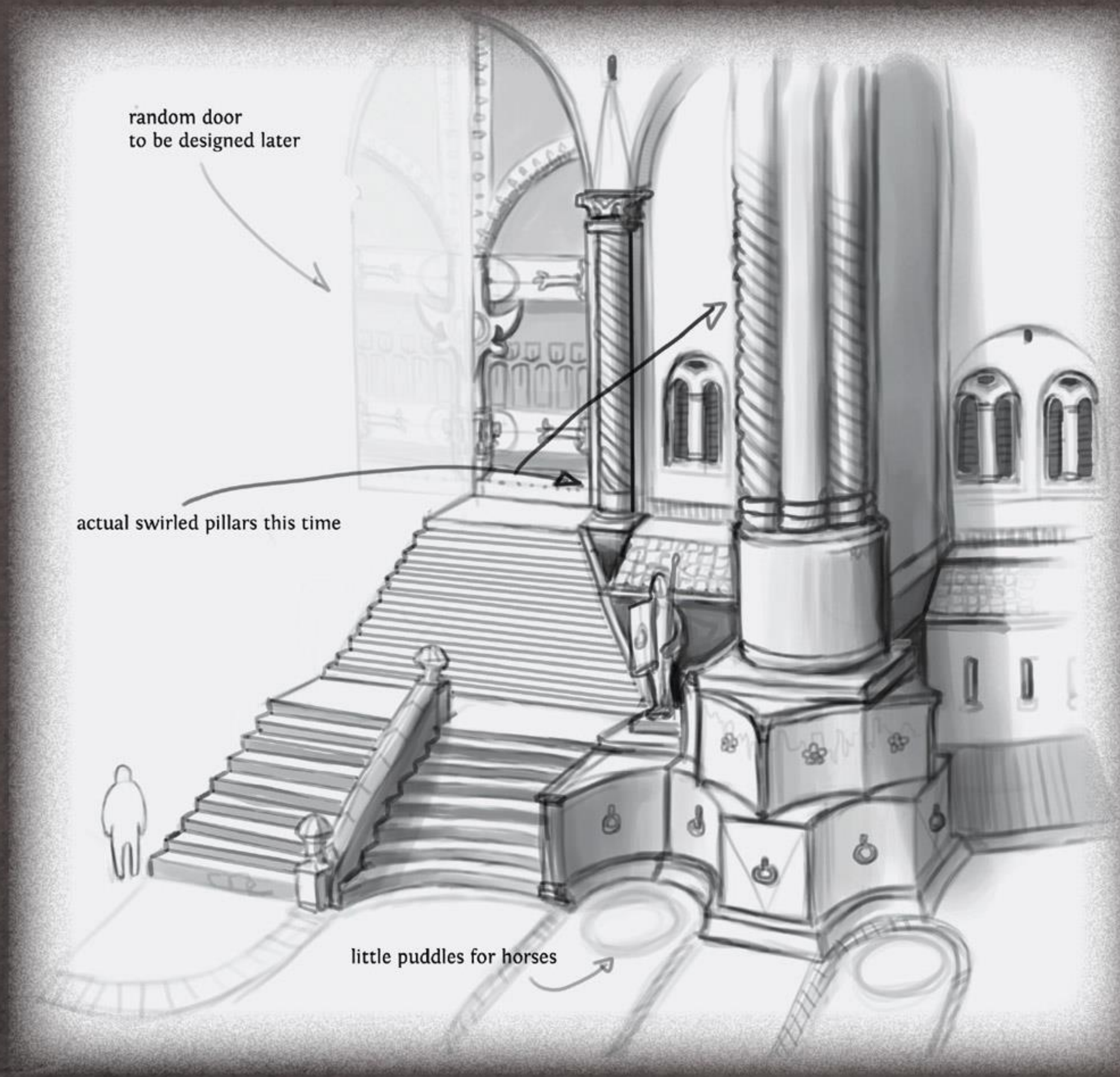
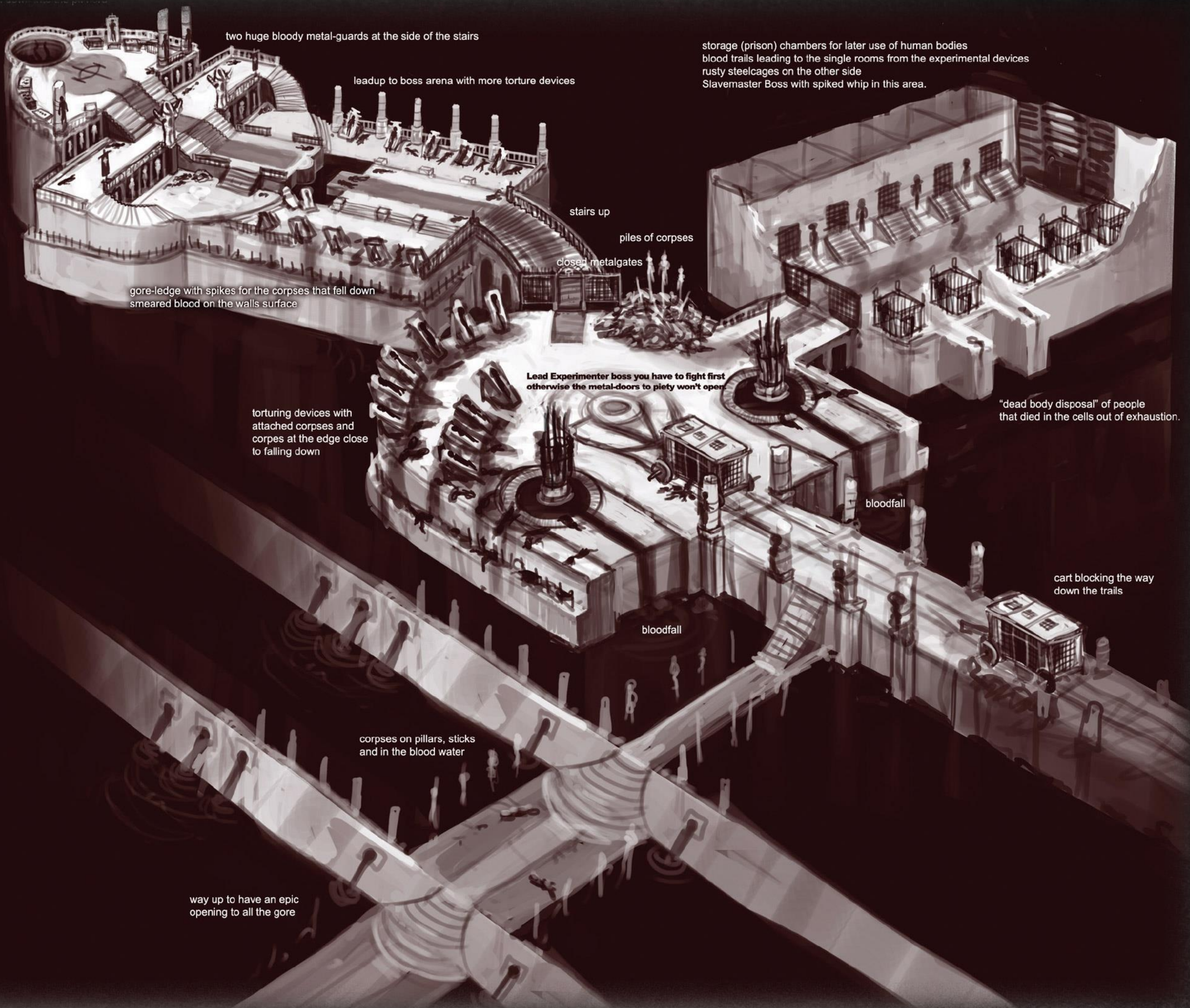


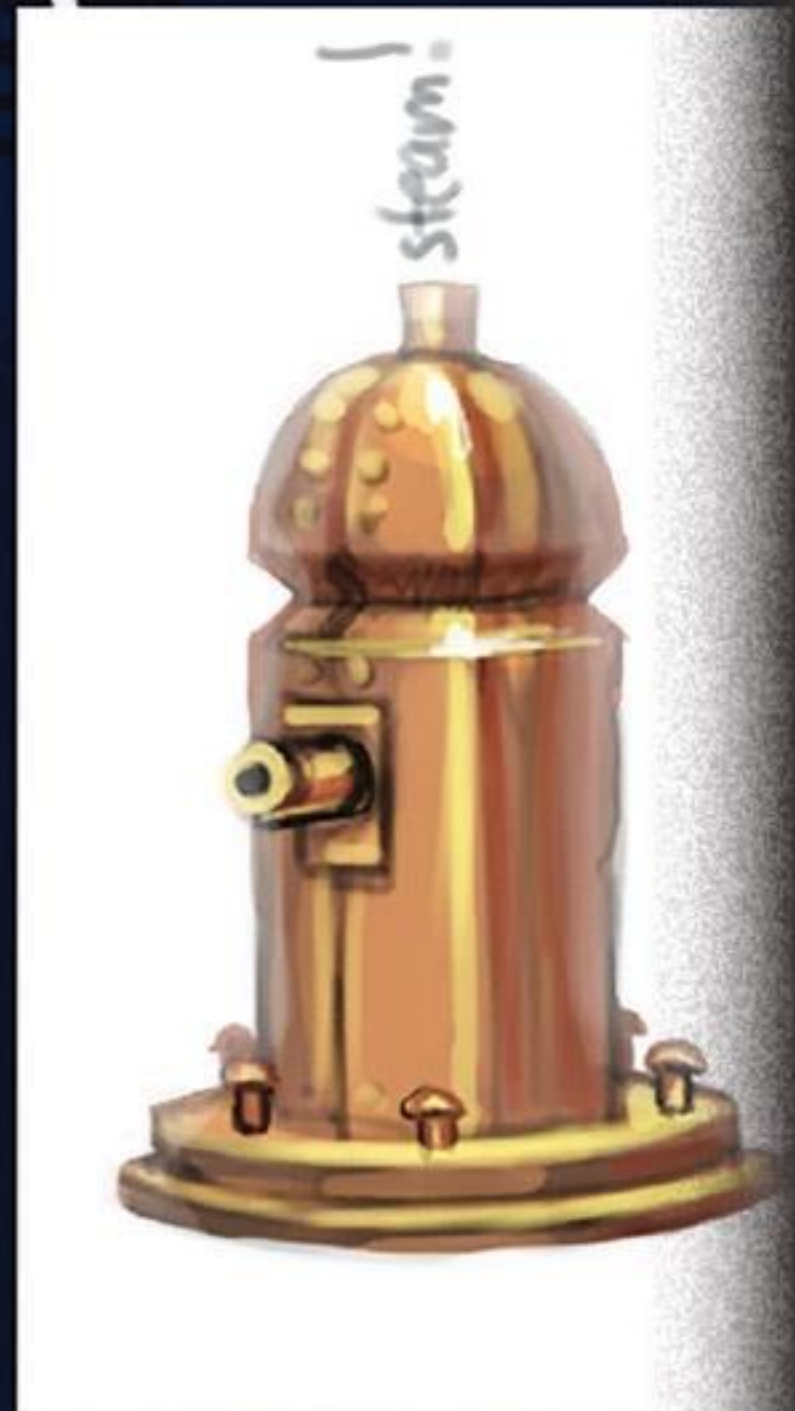


overview

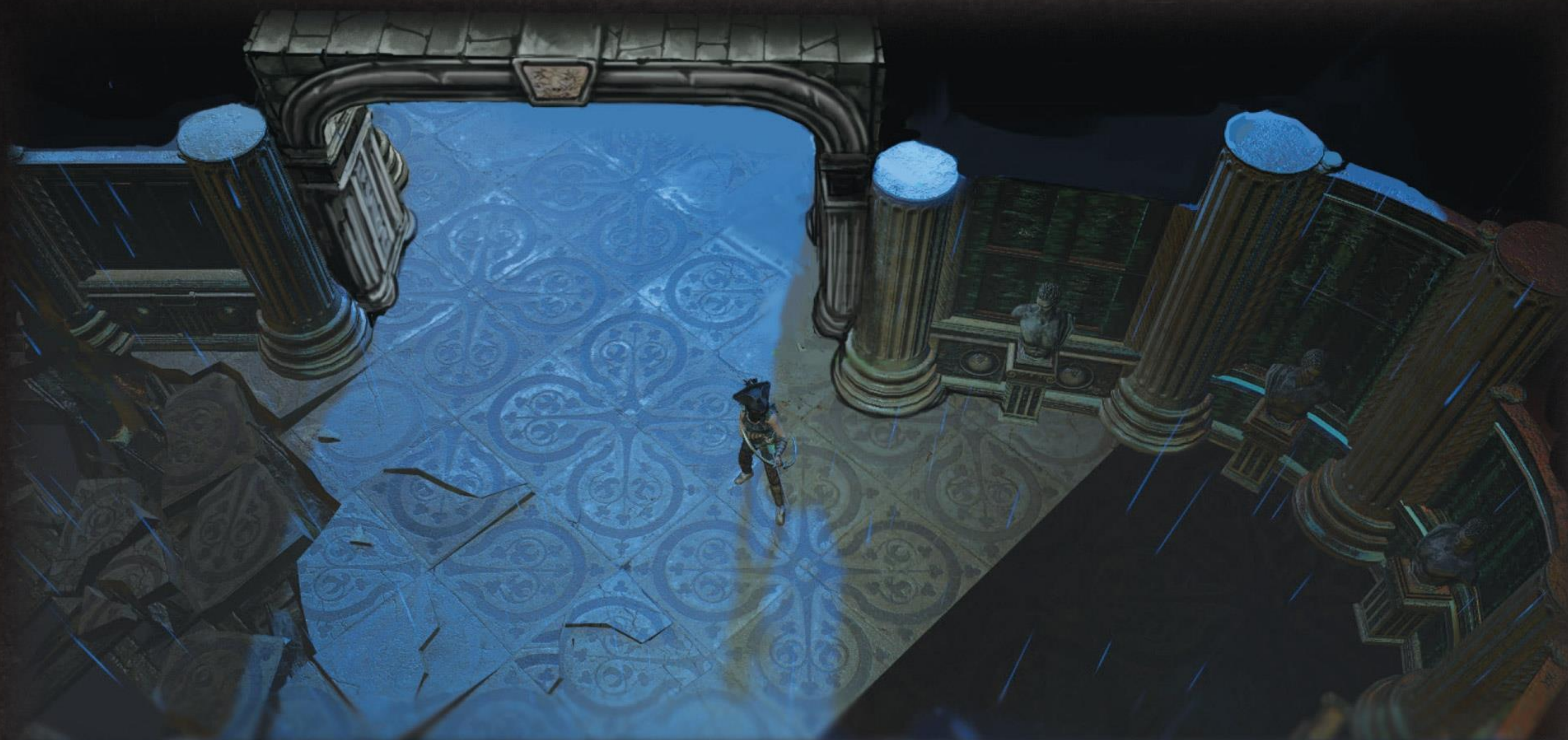




















head from behind.
helmet keeps gear safe!

self-detomator!



sticks to the ground
as an explosive trap.

Pressure Plate
used to press out
minions



spitter

BACKSIDE HAS CREATURES VAGINAL EXIT WHICH DROPS SMALLER CREATURE (RIGHT).







SURVIVORS
PACK



FIGHTERS
BUCKLER



MARK OF
THE WARRIOR



CHAMPIONS
GIFT



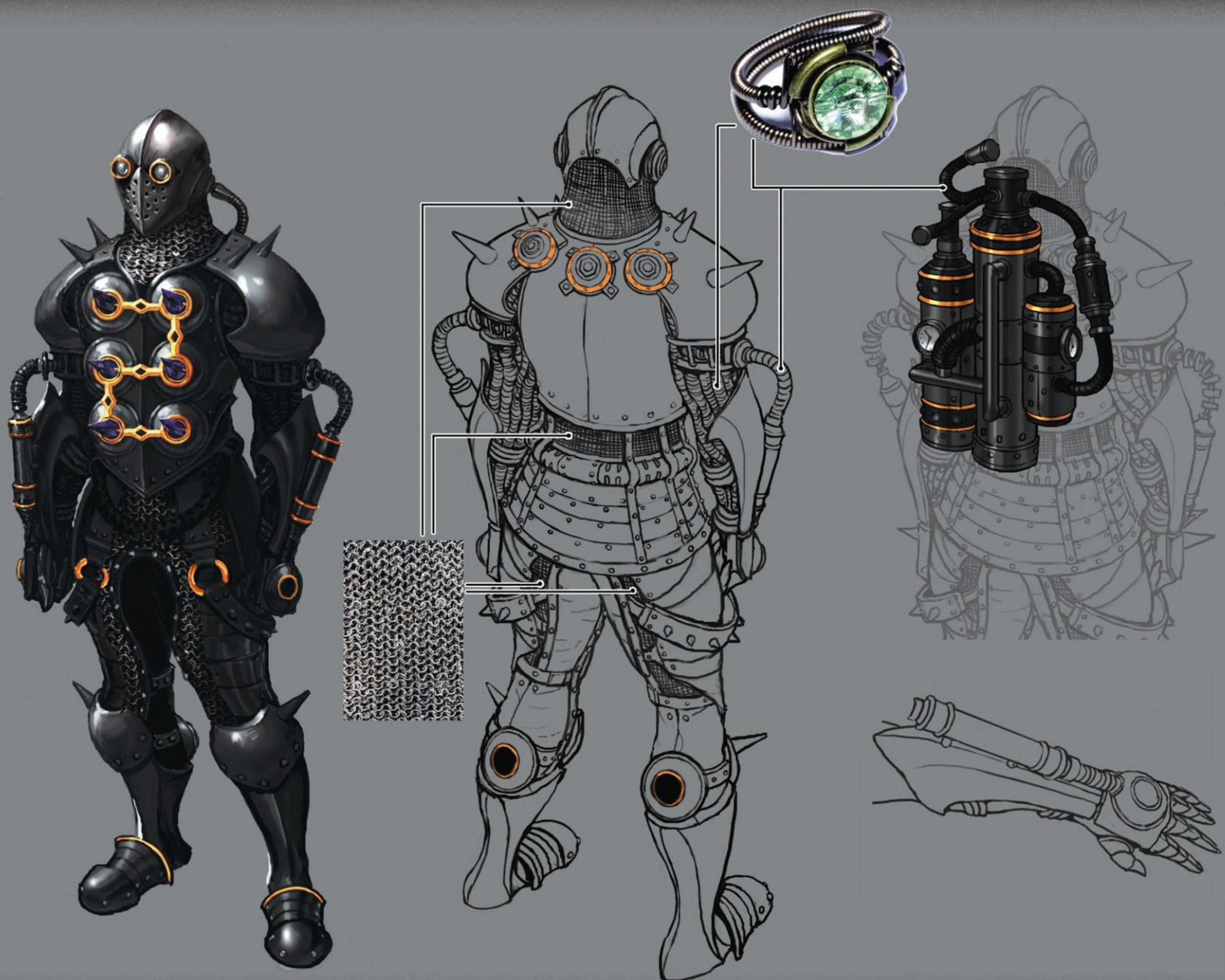
CONQUERORS
SPIRIT



CURSE OF
DOMINUS













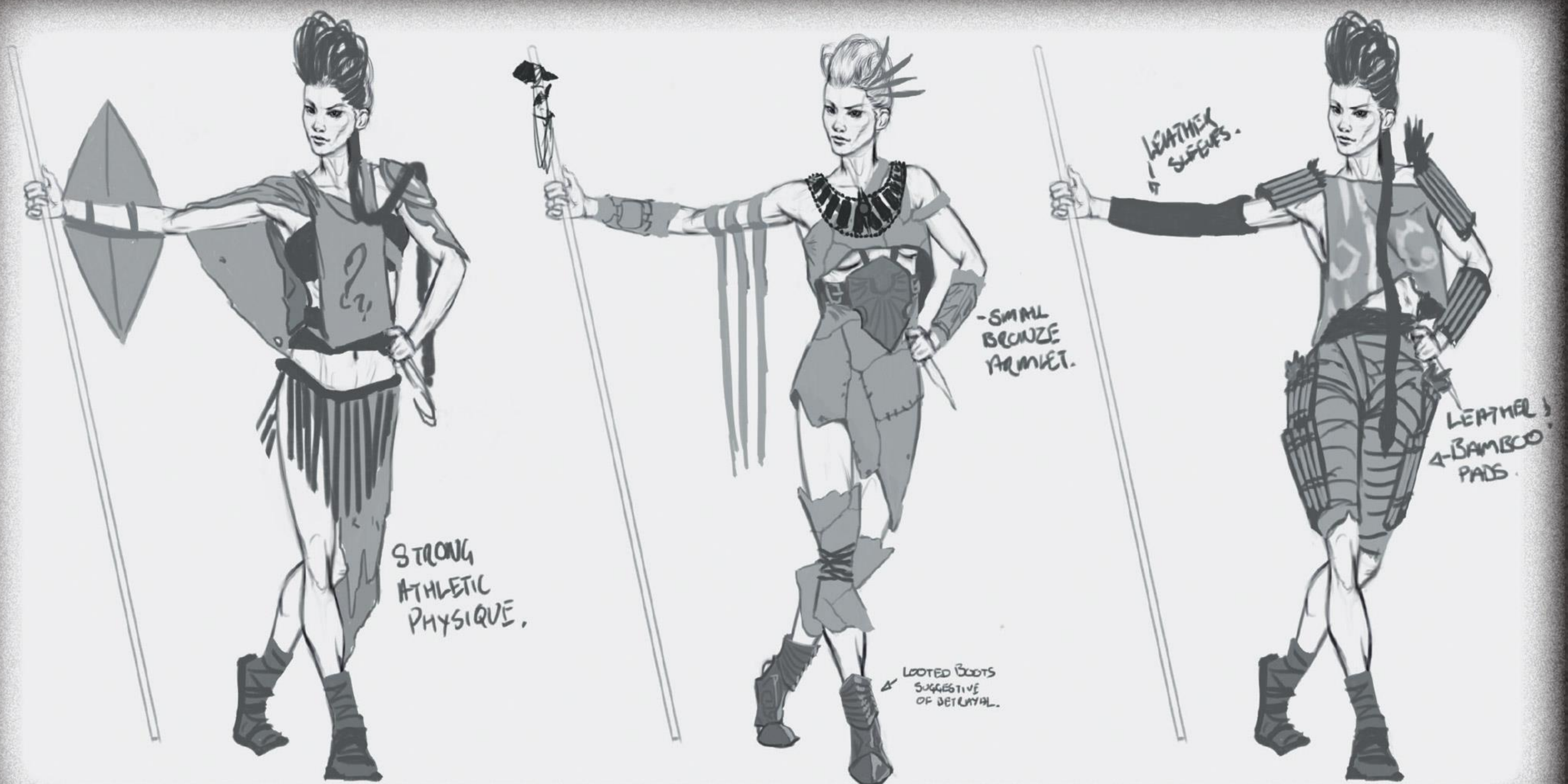




📖 THE AWAKENING

Act 4 presented the challenge of continuing the storyline after the defeat of its main antagonist. With the fall of Dominus, the story transitioned from vengeance to heroism. Players ventured deep into the depths of Mount Veruso to confront and destroy an ancient evil threatening all of Wraeclast. Along the way, they encountered many familiar names from the game's backstory and item lore. Few things matched the excitement of facing famous opponents like Kaom, Daresso, and Malachai in combat.

There is a powerful Lovecraftian influence pervading the art style of Act 4. From the ghastly Knitted Horrors prowling the Dried Lake, to the hideous, pocked Highgate Miners, the journey to the act's climactic showdown unfolds a horror show unmatched by any prior areas. The Belly of the Beast is a zone straight out of the nightmares of Lovecraft, replete with thousands of gazing eyeballs and an arena covered in blood, tentacles, and viscera.













BROKEN BOTTLE

IDEALLY THE WEIGHT WOULD DRAG THE ARMS, AND THE DEAD DOWN. SO HE WOULD WALK AROUND KINDA SLOUCHED, BUT WHEN HE ATTACKS/FOLLOWS PLAYER HE WOULD LIFT HIS HEAD, THEN HIS HANDS.

FOLDED & STAKED WRISTS



THIS GHOST, WILL HAVE HAD HER ARM CHAINED TO HER OTHER ARM, AND HER LEGS BOUND IN AN "IRON BOOT" IDEALLY SHE WILL FLOAT AROUND, LOP SIDED AS HER ARMS AND CHAINS DRAG HER DOWN. SHE WILL USE THIS AS A WEAPON.

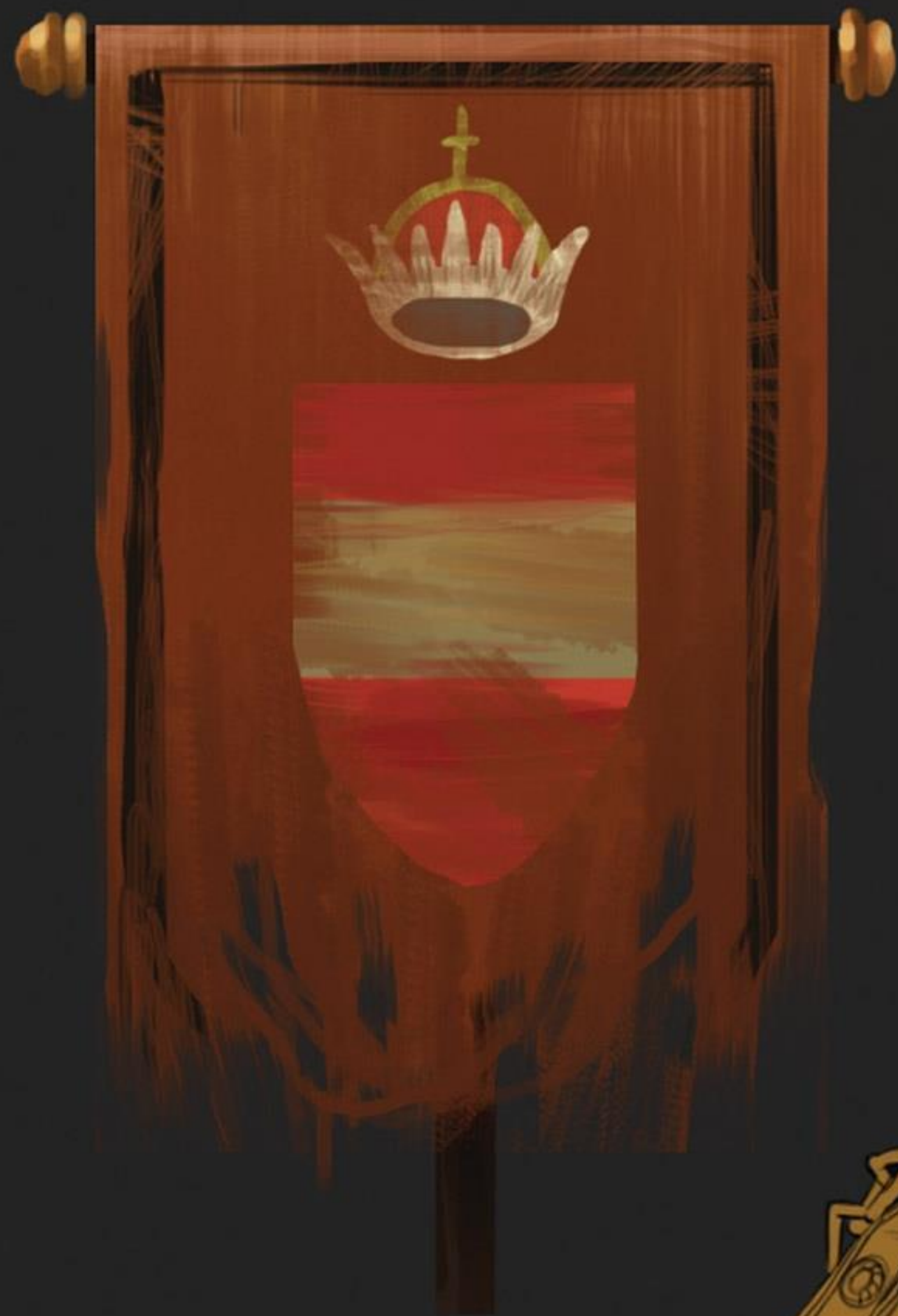
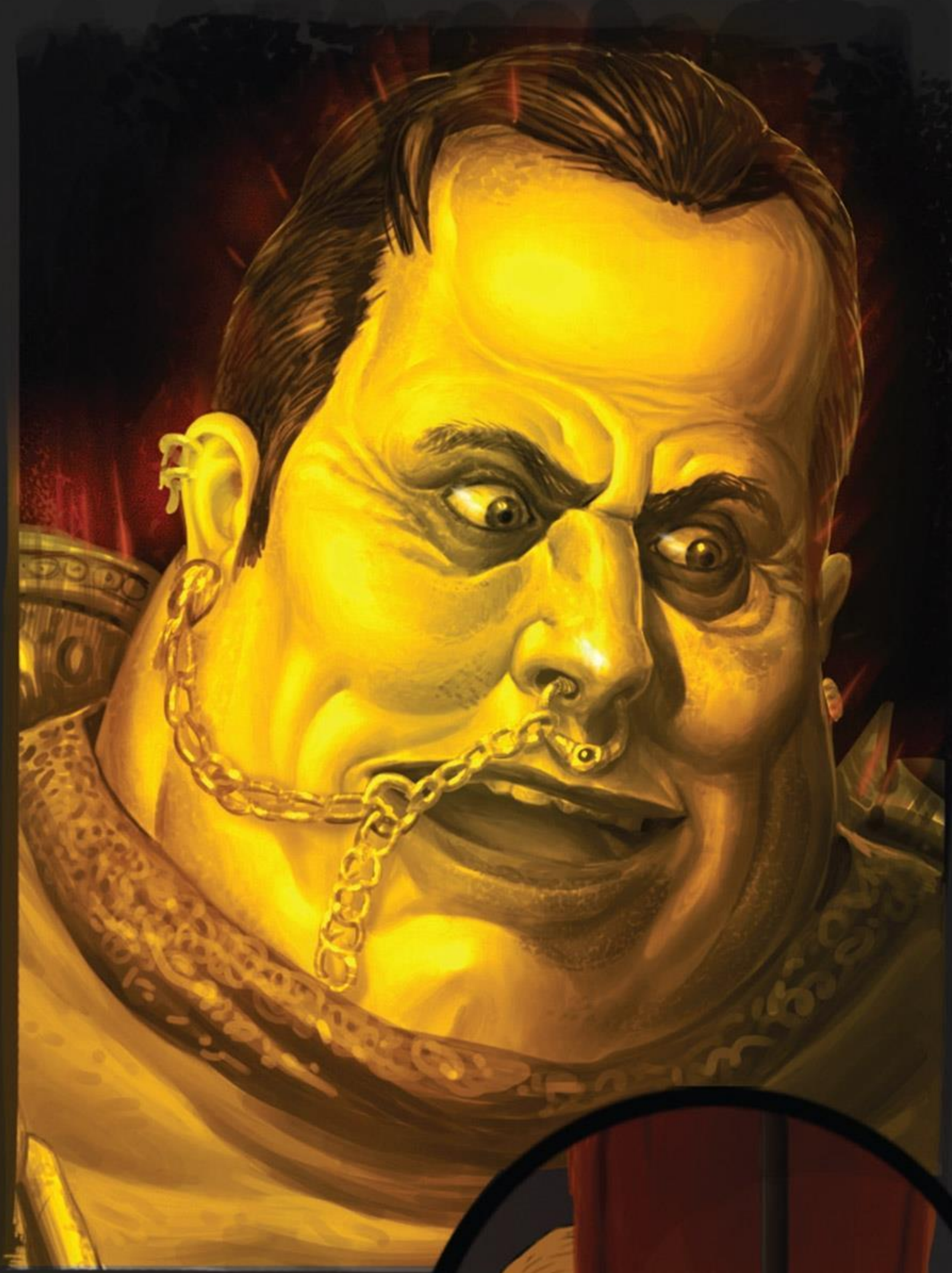
ALTERNATE DESIGN



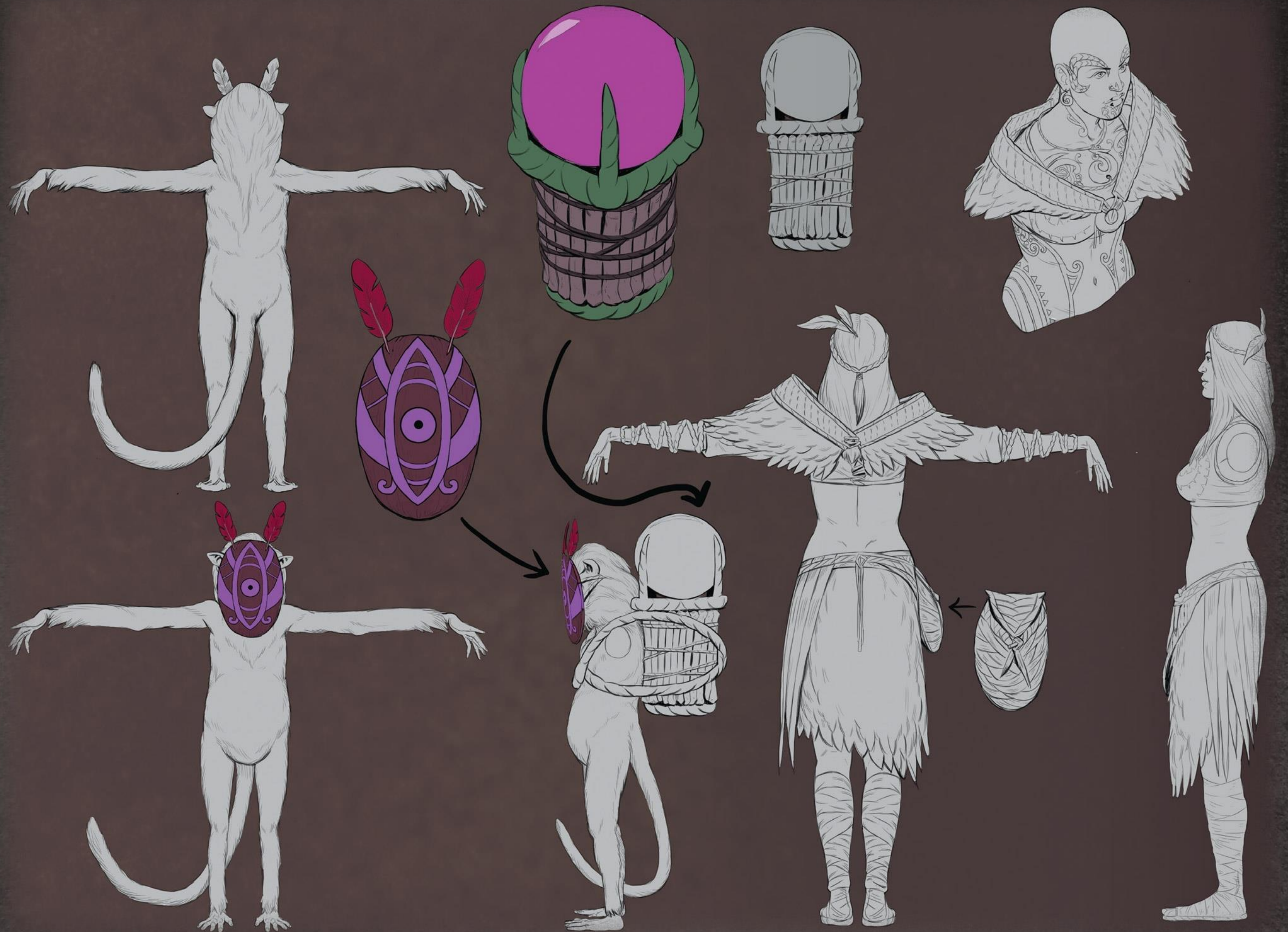
THE PUPPET: THIS GUY WILL BE ANGLED FORWARD AND APPEAR TO BE SUSPENDED FROM THE CEILING. HIS ARMS ARE CAGED AND COULD BE USED AS WEAPONS. I SEE HIM HOVERING AROUND HEAD HEIGHT AND USING BOTH HANDS TO VIOLENTLY GRAB AND STRIKE WHILST GOING IN FOR A BITE. MUCH LIKE A ZOMBIE.



THE FINAL DESIGN HERE MAY BE HARD TO ANIMATE WITHOUT IT LOOKING TO SILLY. I SEE HER SLOUCHED OVER HER CAGE, AND THEN VIOLENTLY SWINGING ACROSS AND UPWARDS LIKE A BACKHAND, FOLLOWING THROUGH AND SCREAMING.









WHEN DID YOU KNOW YOU WANTED TO CREATE ART FOR A LIVING?

I fell asleep during classes a lot when I was young, so I started making up heroes and drawing in my textbooks to avoid it. Eventually drawing and I became inseparable. I also attended art university and lost lots of money making my own comic books and trying to sell them at comic conventions.

WHAT ELEMENTS IN PATH OF EXILE ARE YOU RESPONSIBLE FOR?

I have worked on non-player characters, monsters, environmental concepts, web images, promotion images and icons. A little bit of everything.

CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR PROCESS FOR US A BIT?

At Grinding Gear Games, I usually did many concepts at once—three to four at a time. While I was waiting for the art director's feedback of task A, I would do idea sketches for task B. Then when the feedback for task A arrived, I would send the idea sketches of task B and start fixing task A according to the feedback. I liked this process because it kept my mind fresh.

HOW MANY HOURS DO YOU TYPICALLY SPEND CREATING EACH PIECE OF ART?

The number of hours taken to create a piece of art varies enormously. For icons, I can do many in one day, but it can take months to complete promotional illustrations.

WHAT WAS YOUR INSPIRATION FOR THE DESIGN OF THE LEO CHARACTER?

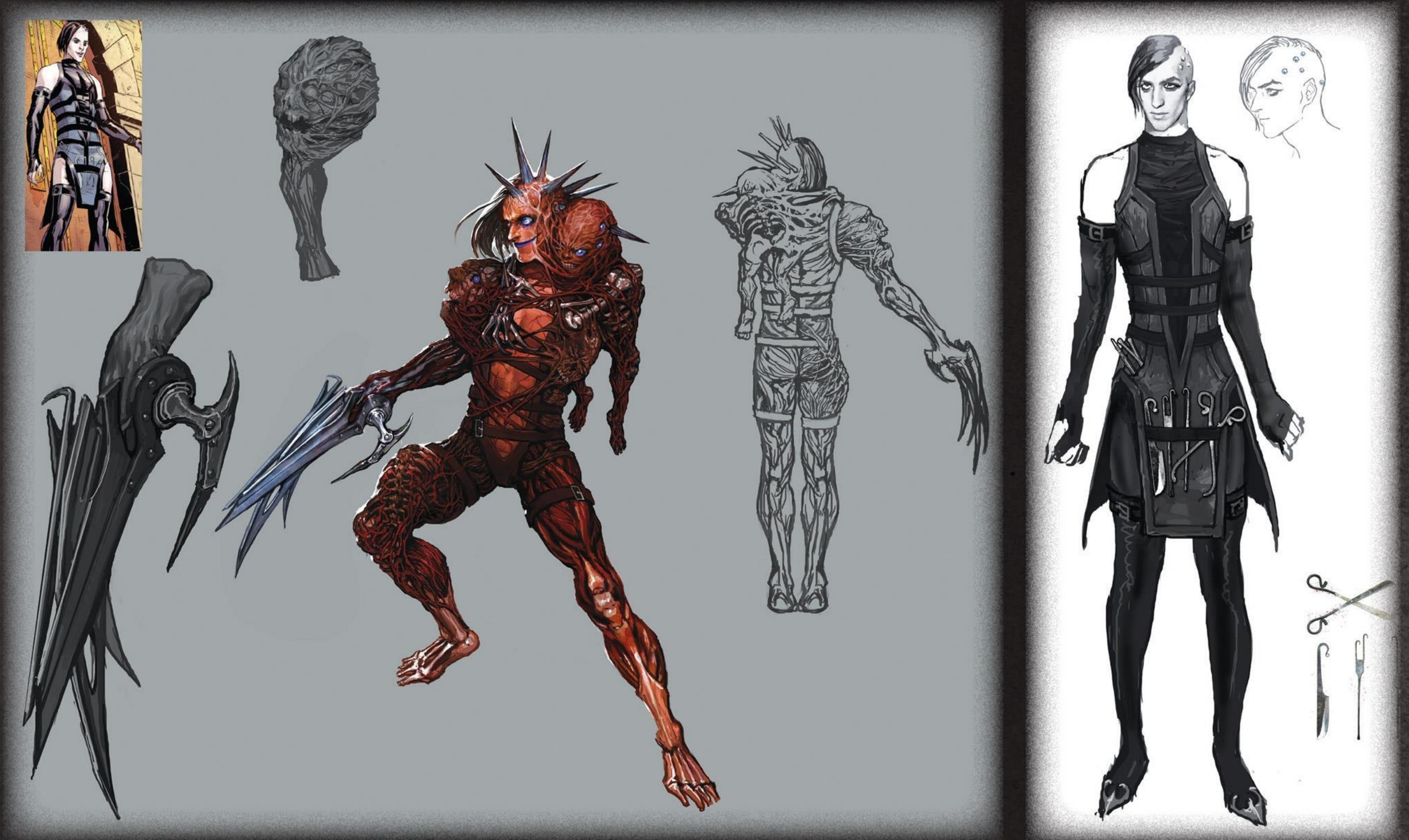
I wanted to create a character that is bitter and sly, more of a villain than a hero. If someone is making people fight, he would find happiness in other people's pain. That's Leo's personality, as I imagined it.

WAS THERE ANYTHING PARTICULARLY DIFFICULT OR CHALLENGING ABOUT THIS DESIGN?

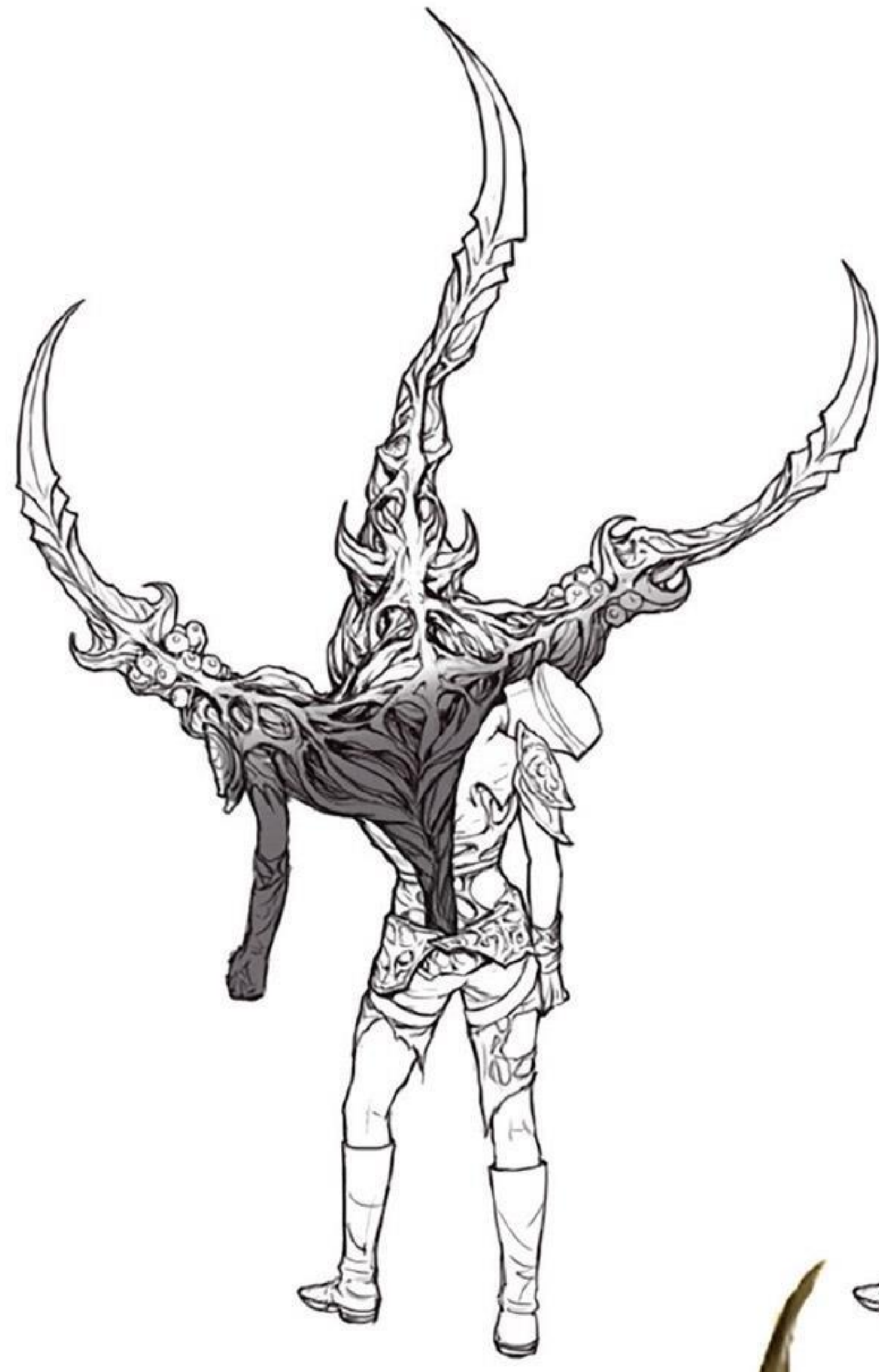
I don't remember much about designing Leo, but I do remember lots of painful moments designing others, so I guess it was fairly easy. I actually enjoy Leo's features and redrew it outside of work for fun.

DO YOU EVER FEEL THE URGE TO GO BACK AND CHANGE AN OLD OR EXISTING DESIGN AFTERWARDS?

All the time! I do change my old drawings from time to time. I actually asked to redraw my *PoE* concepts. When looking at old drawings I often find mistakes. I hope that means I've improved.













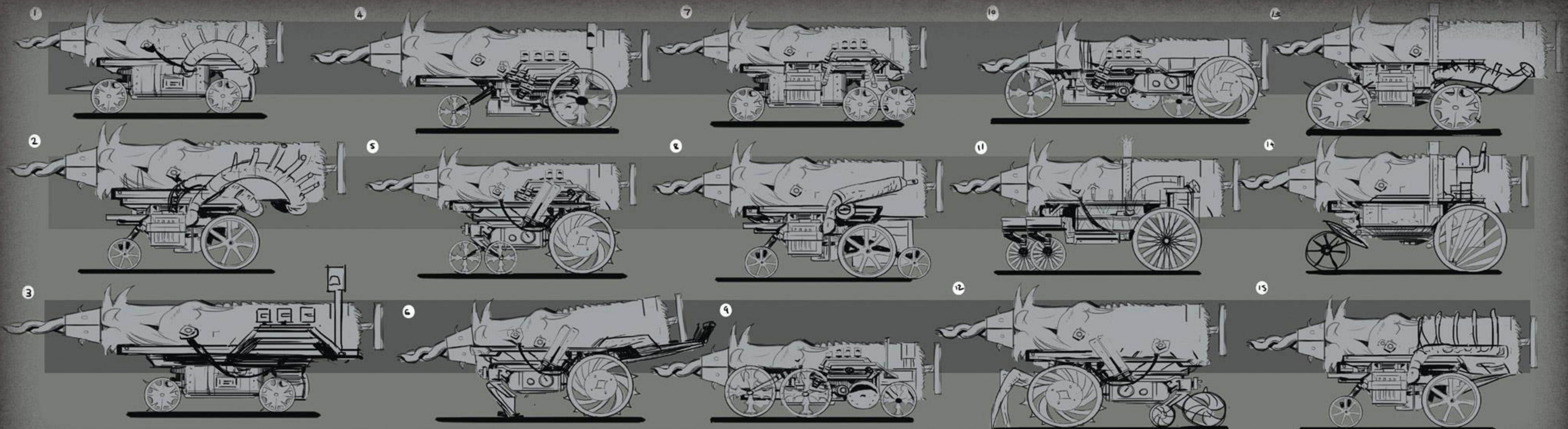


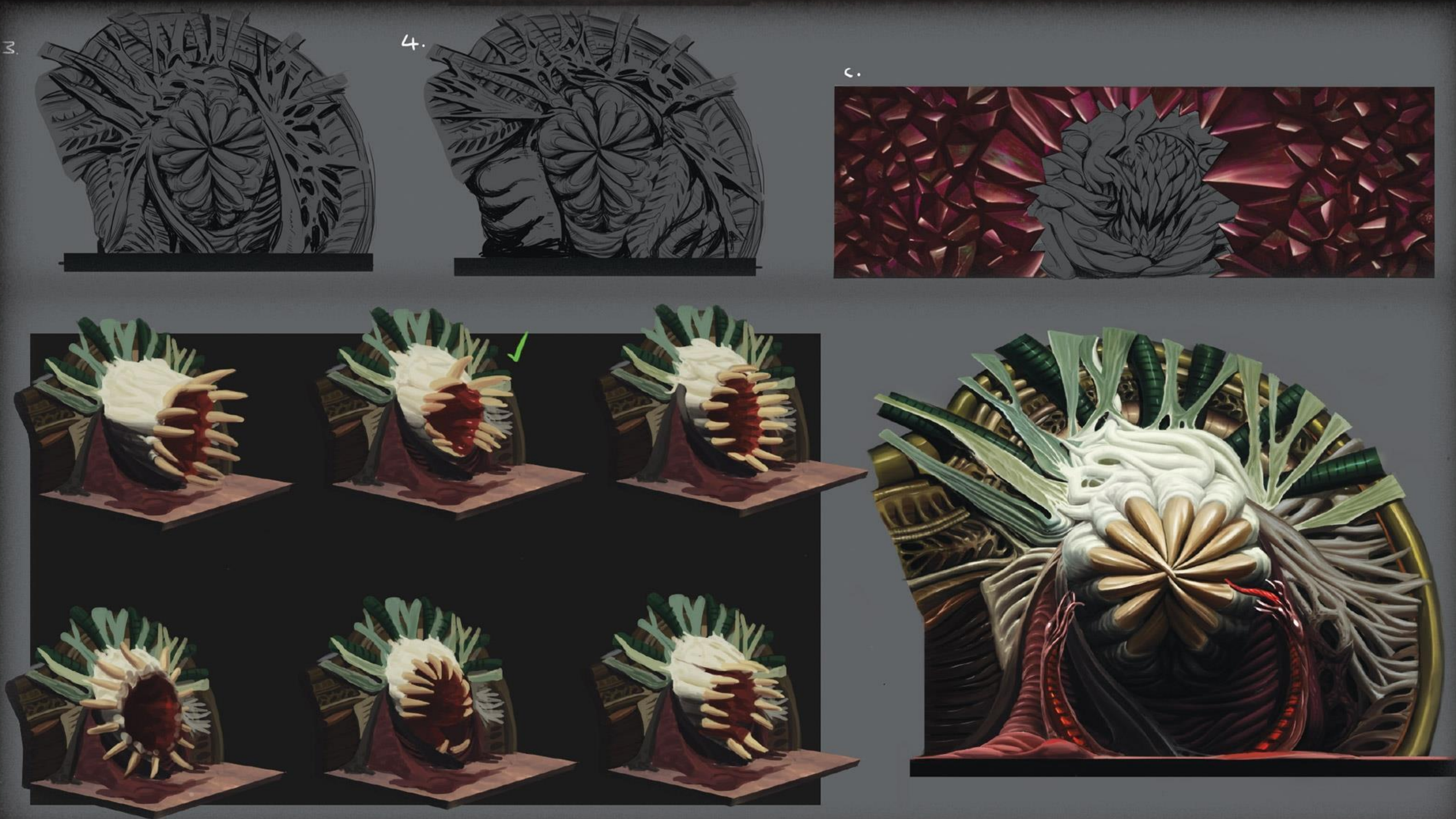




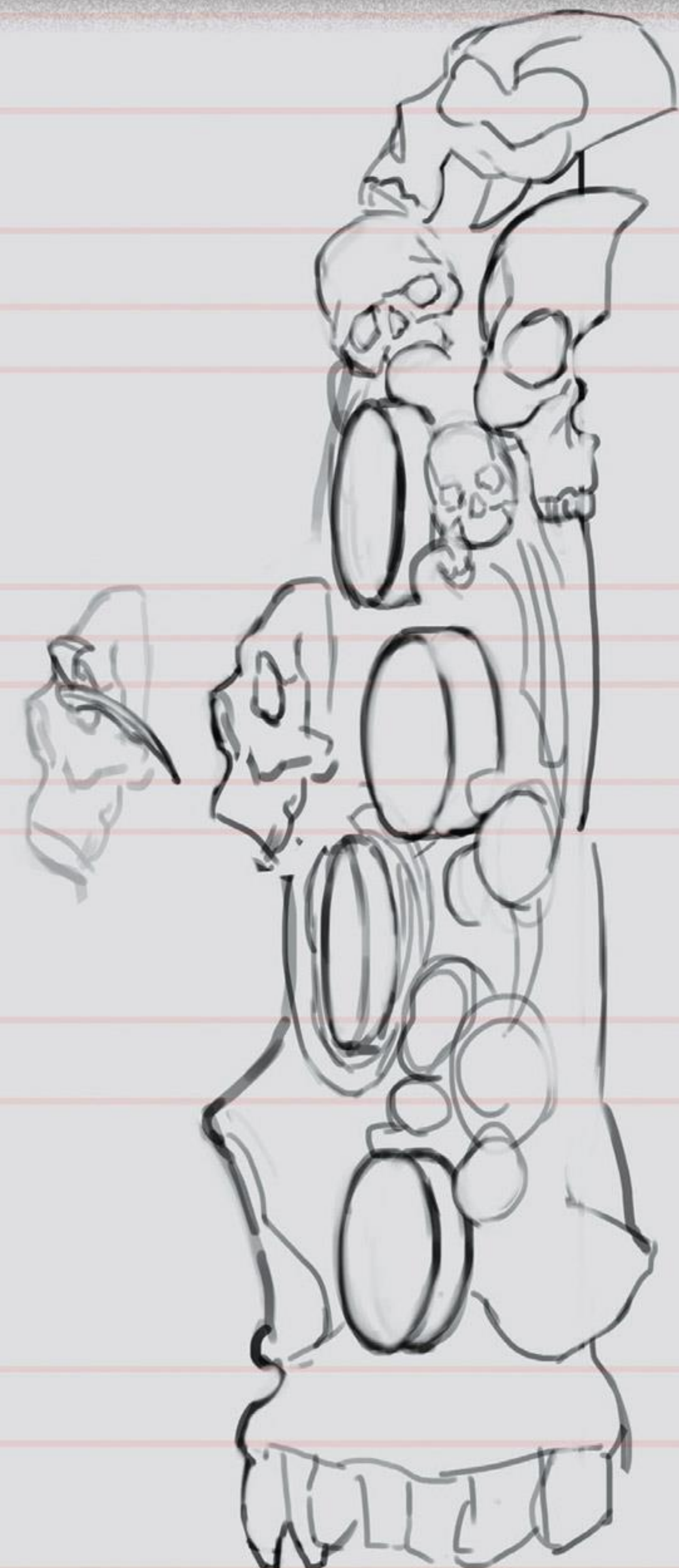


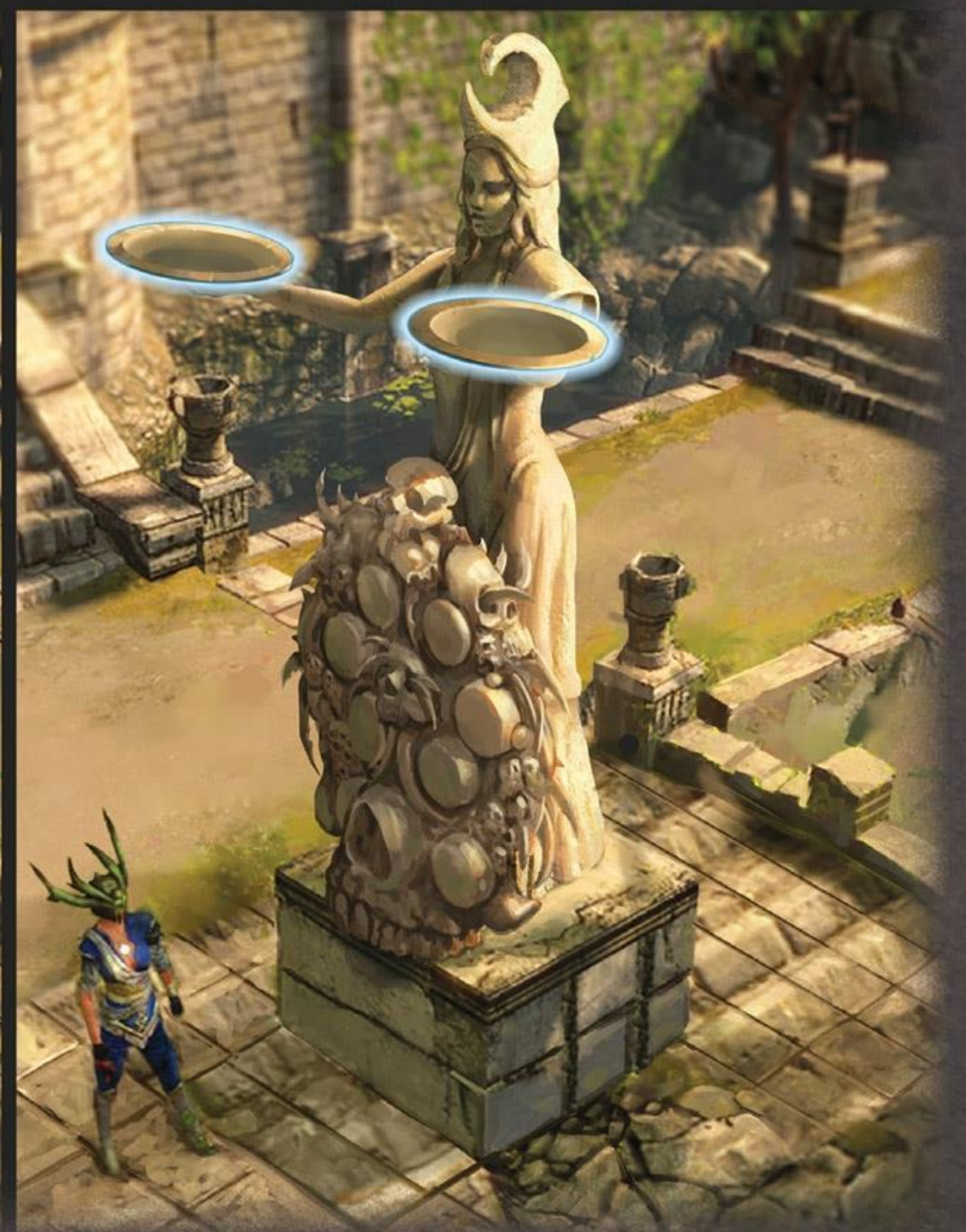
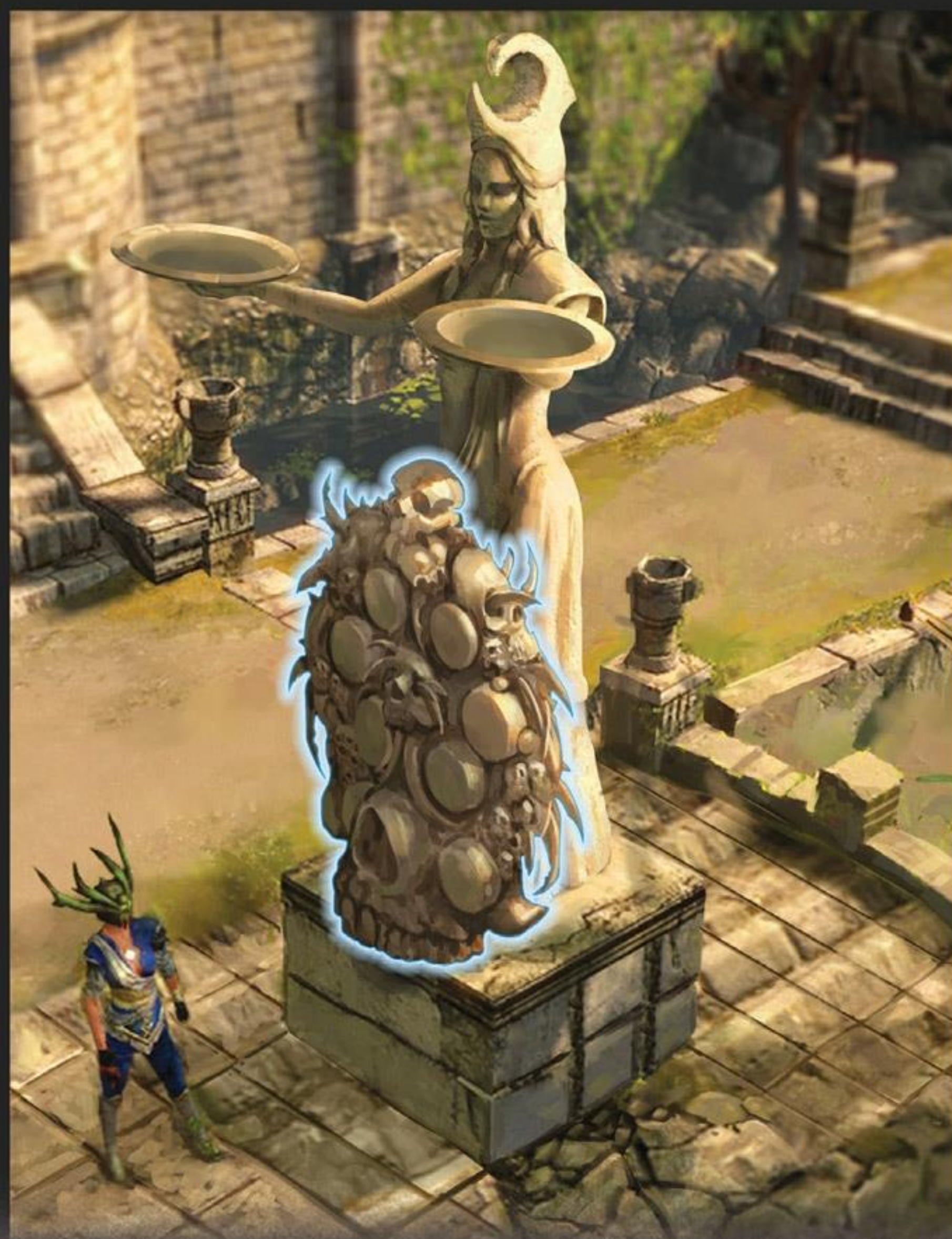






gargoyles



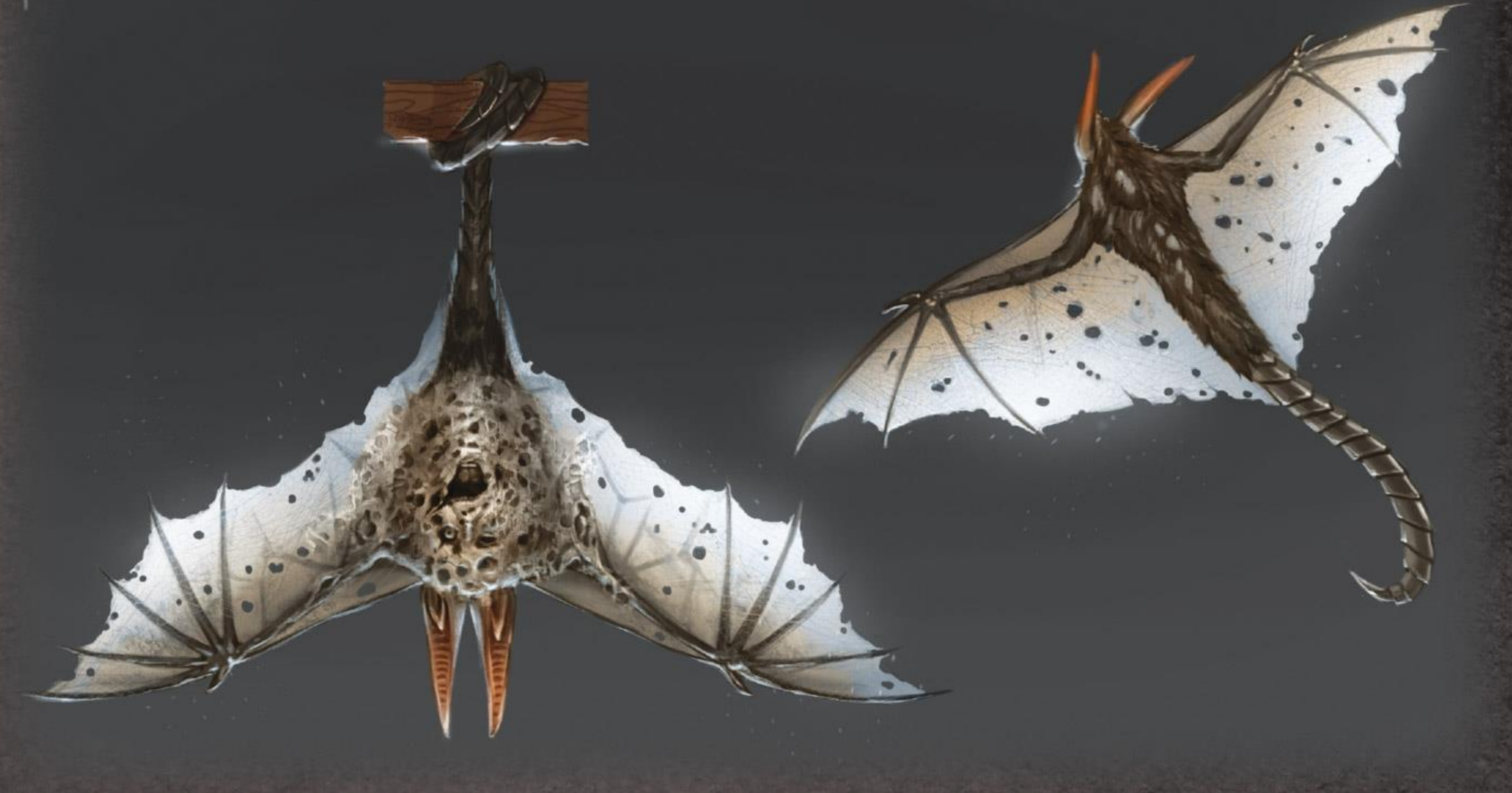
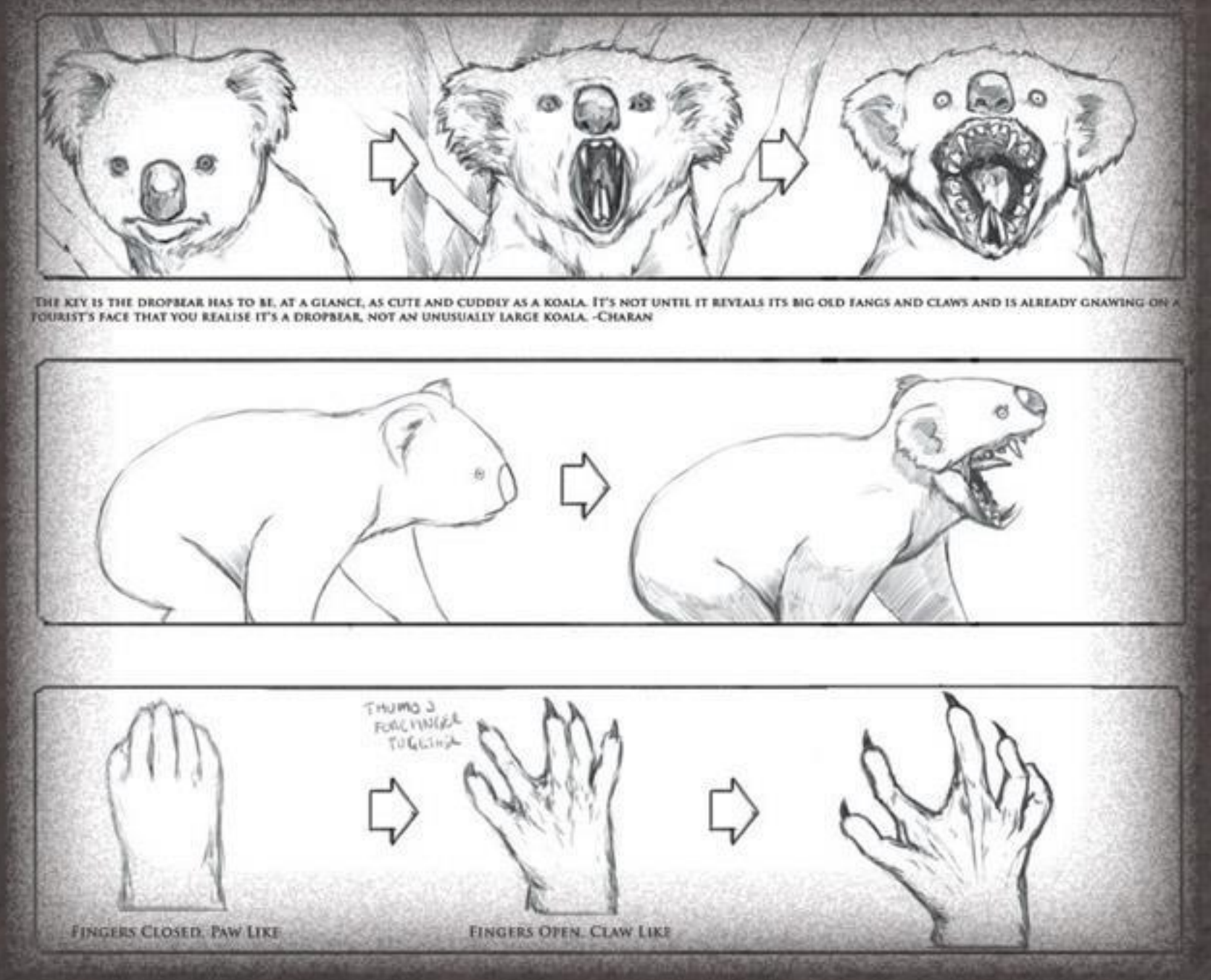








SOUND BAT. RANGED MONSTER.

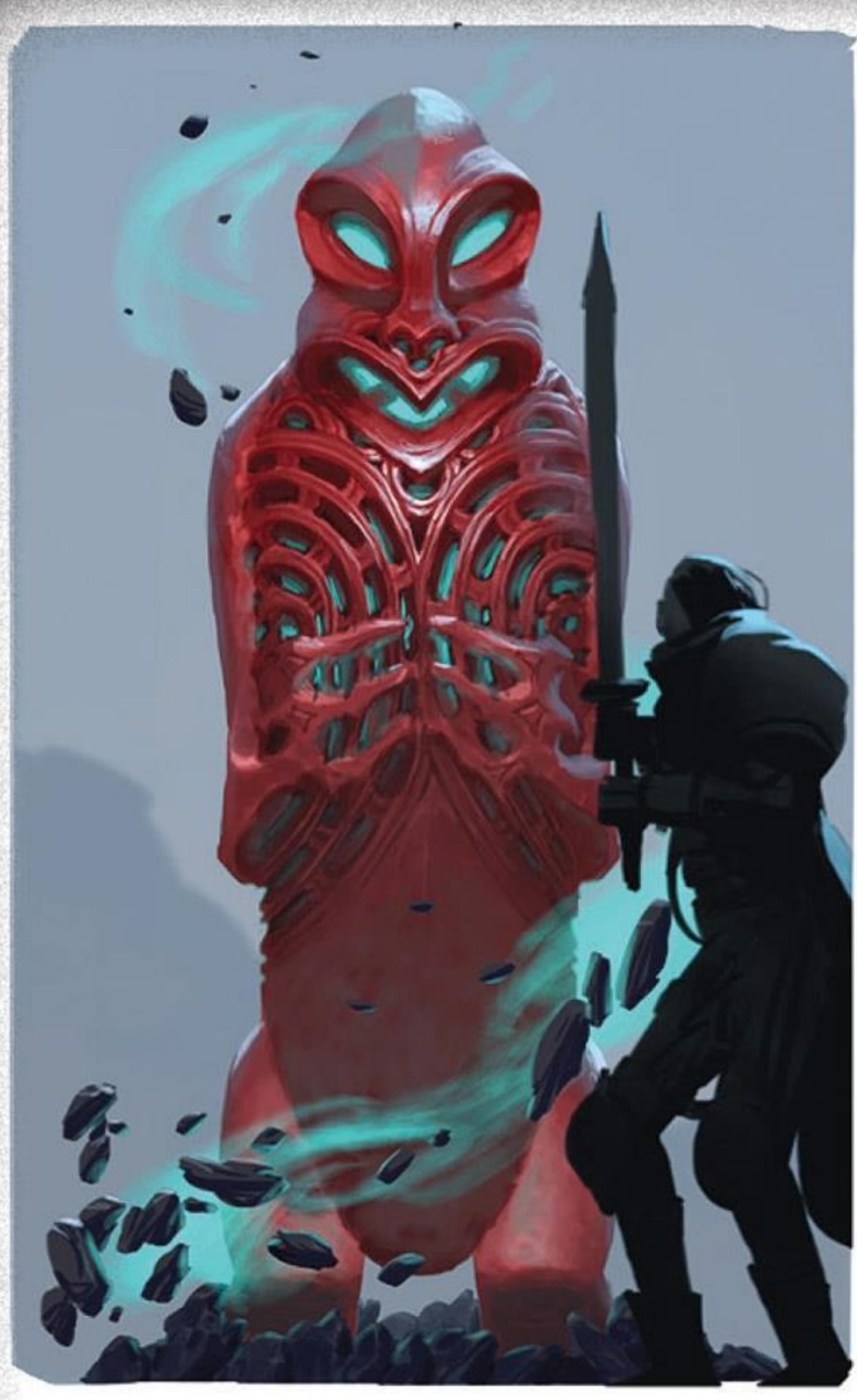
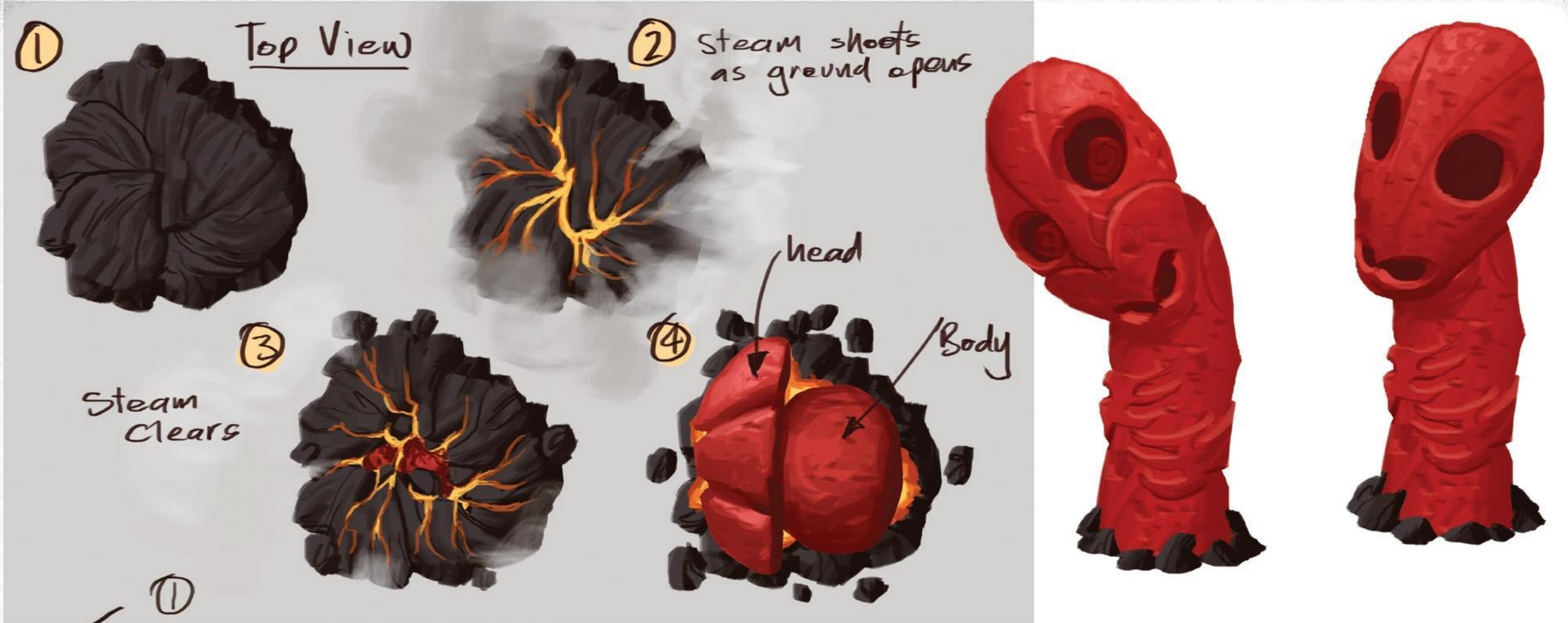


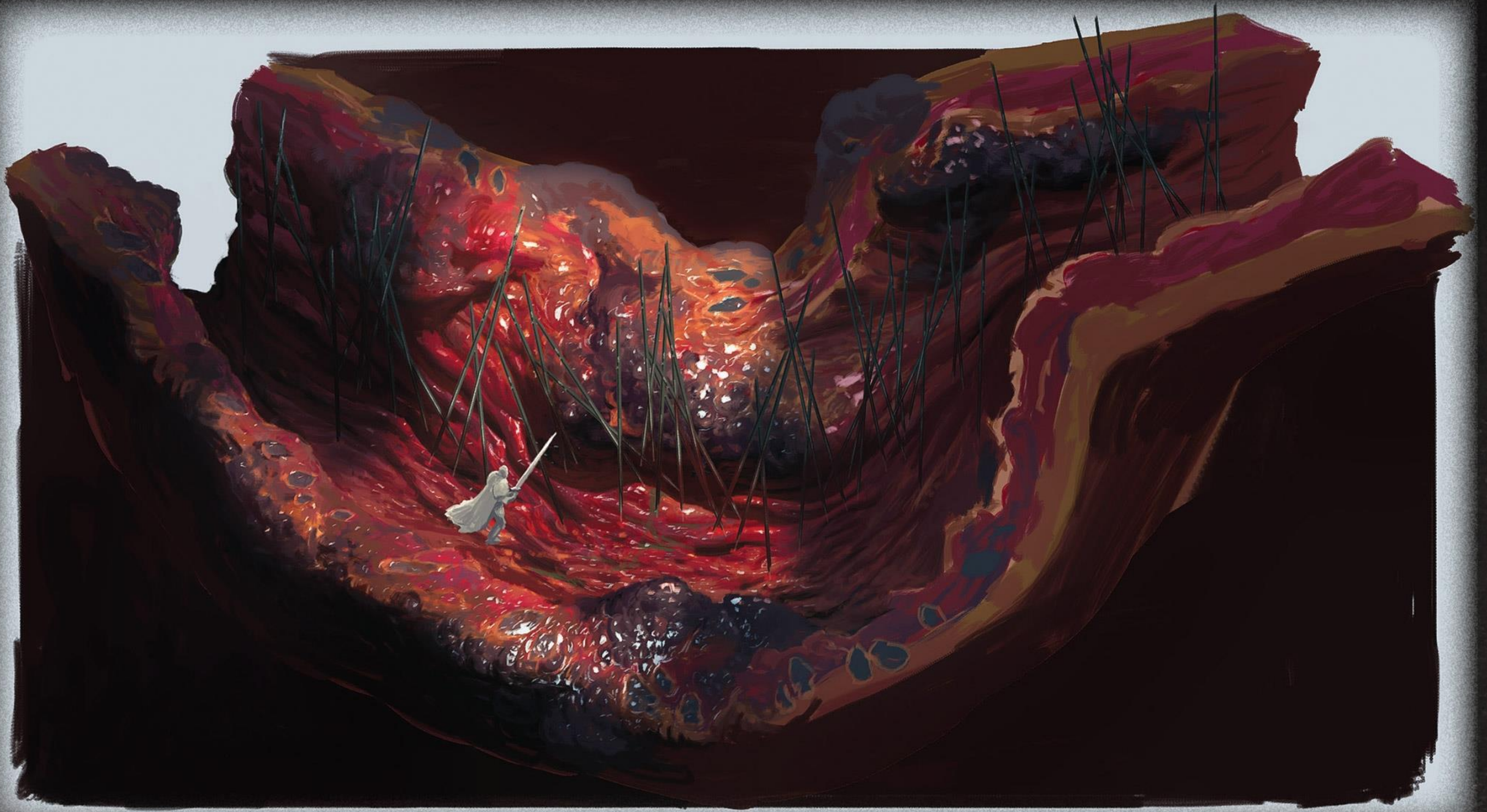


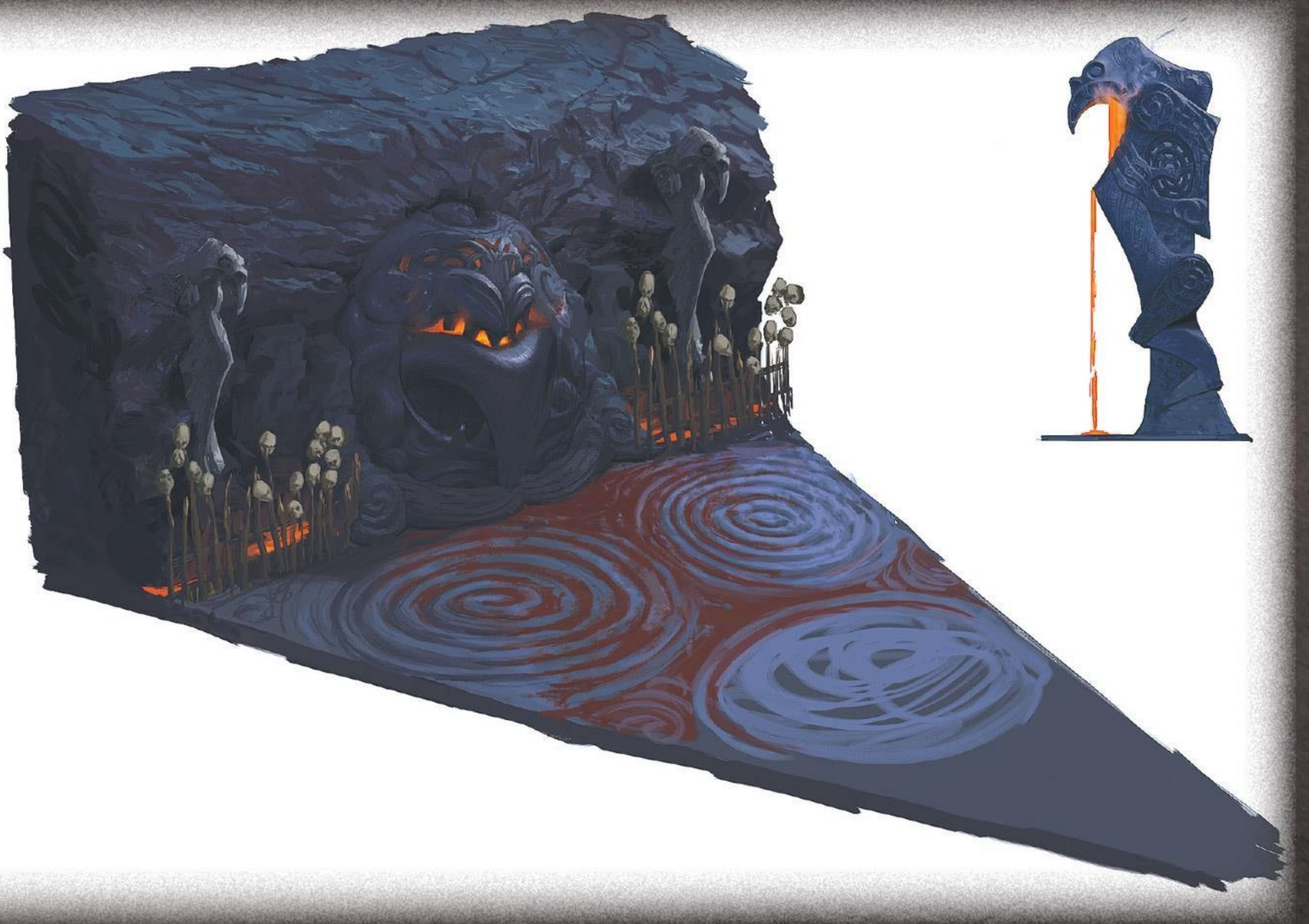














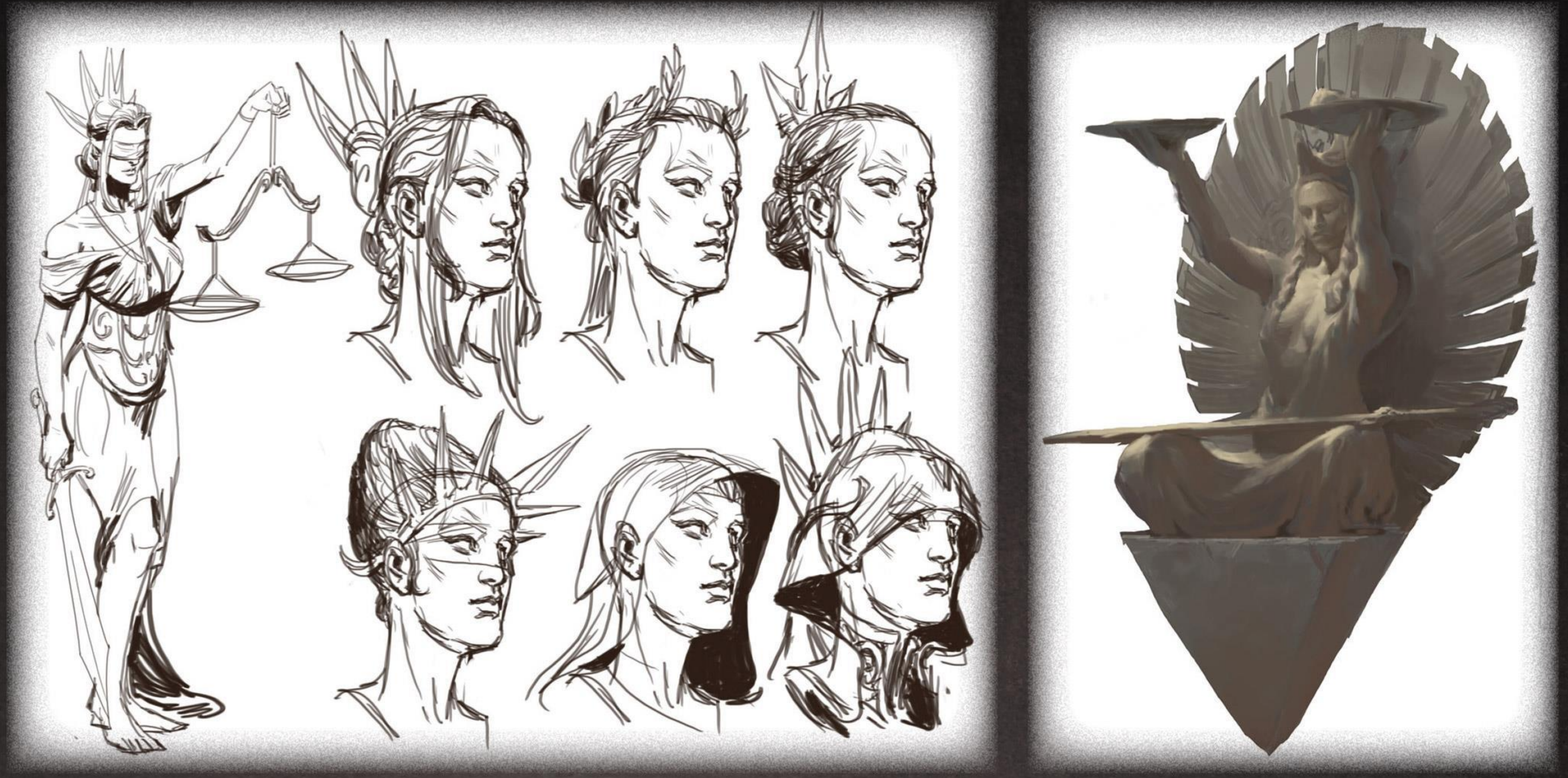


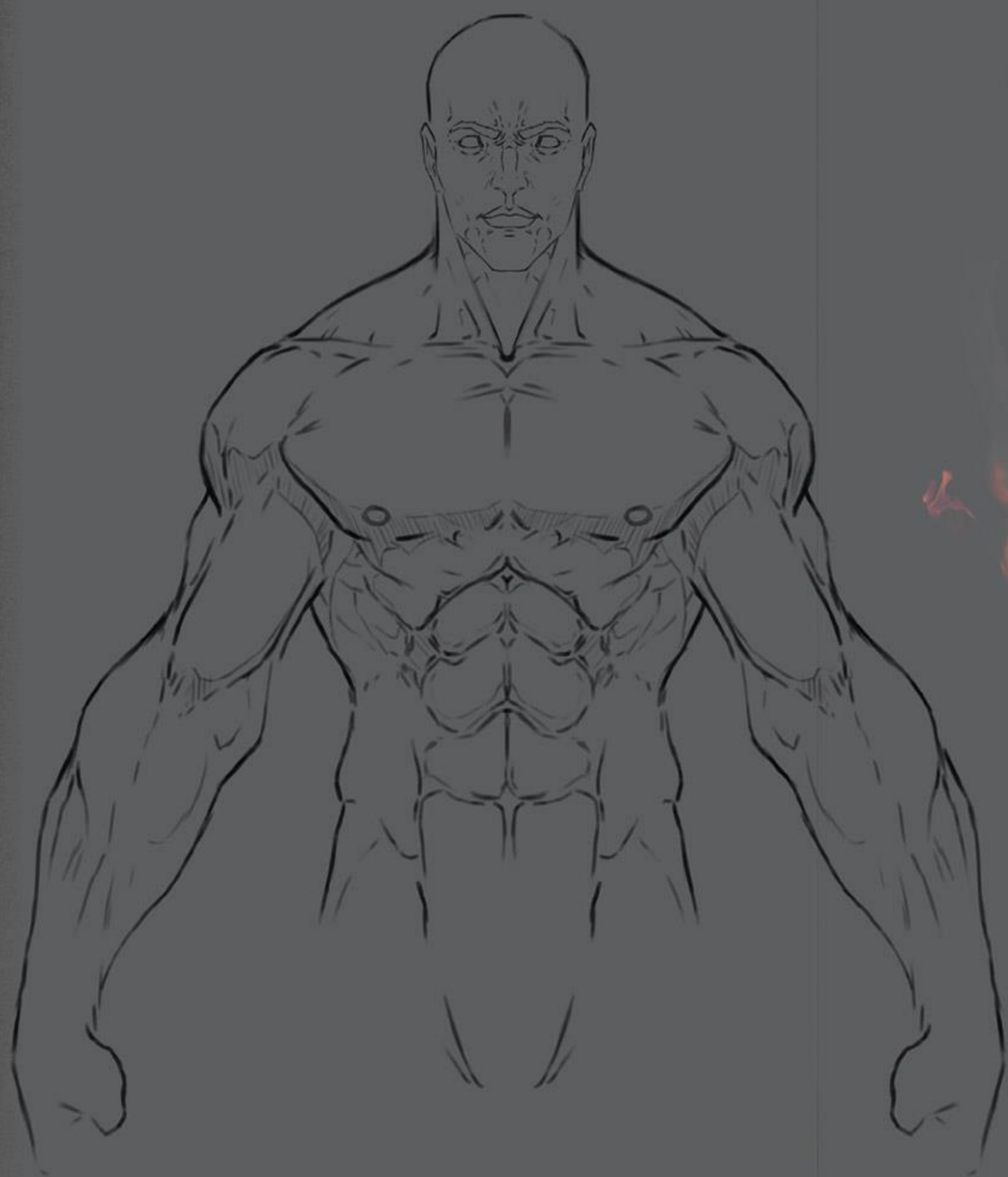










































📖 CLOSING THE LOOP

Act 5 allows players to root out the tyrannical Templars of Oriath and emancipate their long-oppressed Karui captives. Though this seems like an act of benevolence, things quickly become more complicated. The Karui slaves, long the victims of Templar oppression, turn on the innocent citizens of Oriath in a tide of indiscriminate slaughter. The player is forced to question the consequences of their actions as they play through the act.

Act 5 concludes with defeat at the hands of Kitava, forcing the player to return to Wraecclast. Their journey there takes them back through the four previous acts, now altered from the events of the earlier playthrough. A final rematch with Kitava in Act 10 brings the storyline to a climactic end.

The Fall of Oriath introduced a second set of five acts and completely removed the Cruel and Merciless difficulty levels. Instead, the player experiences a single continuous path that reaches all the way to the end game.

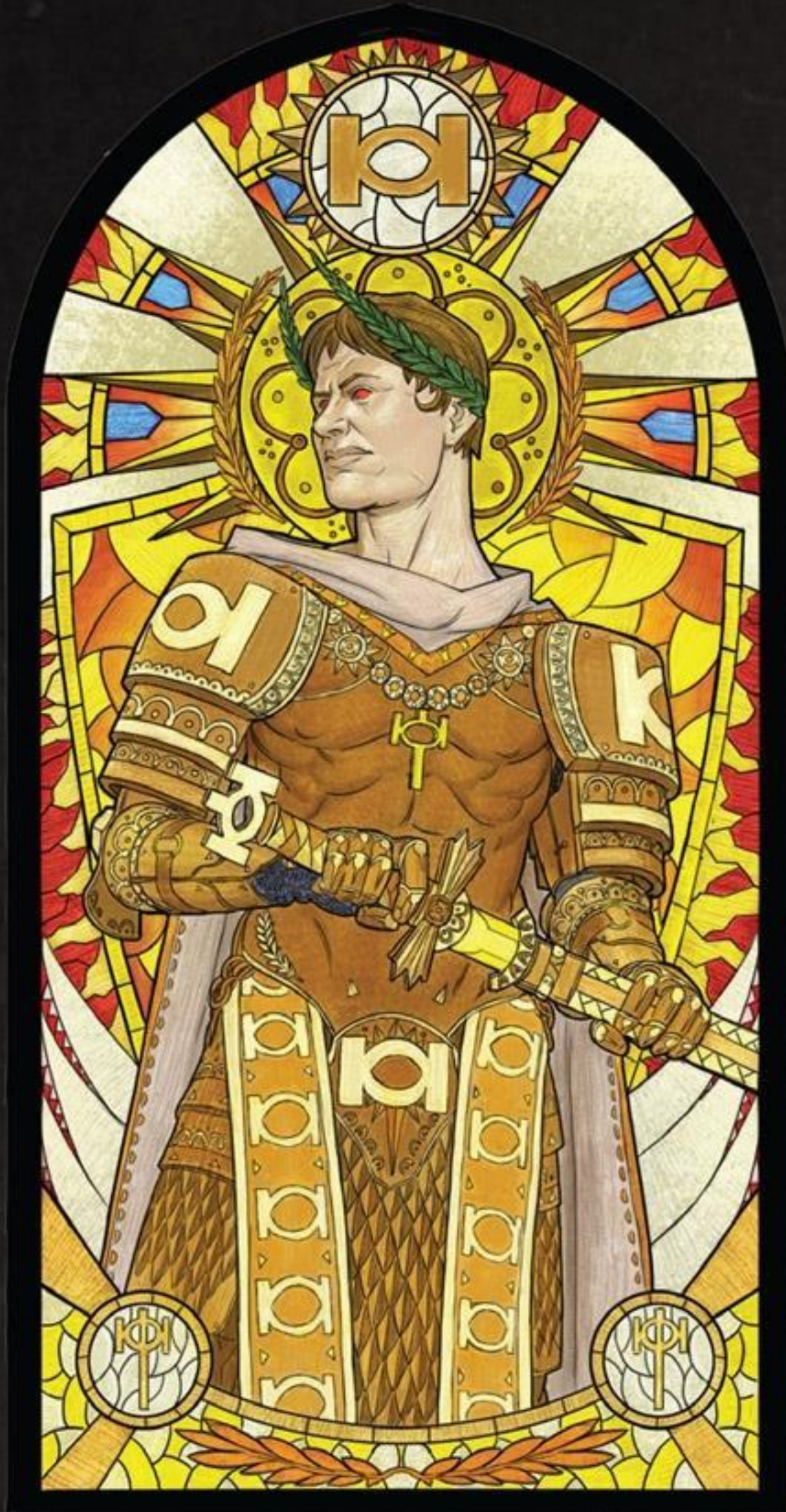


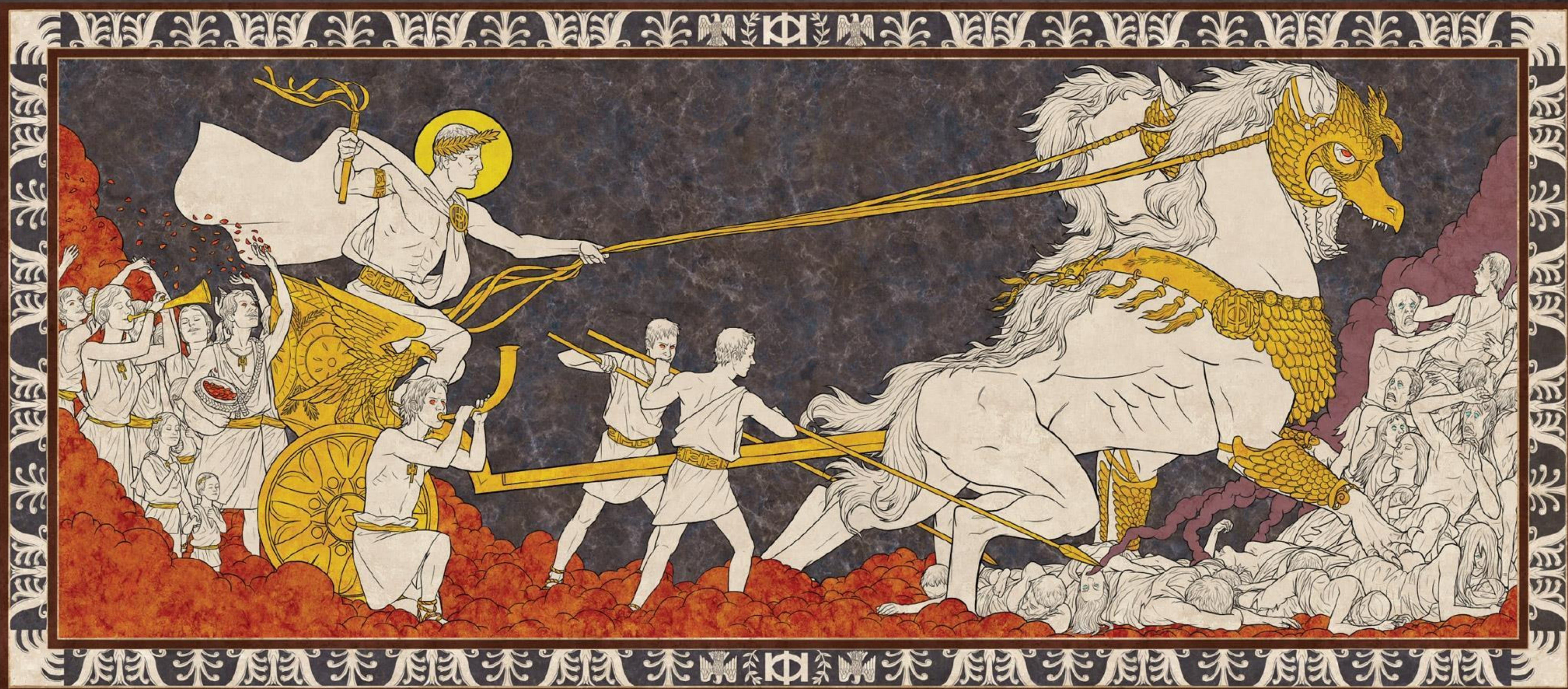


THE RISE OF INNOCENCE

“On that day, two were born of their mother’s womb. Innocence, with eyes burning red. Sin, with eyes of clearest blue.”



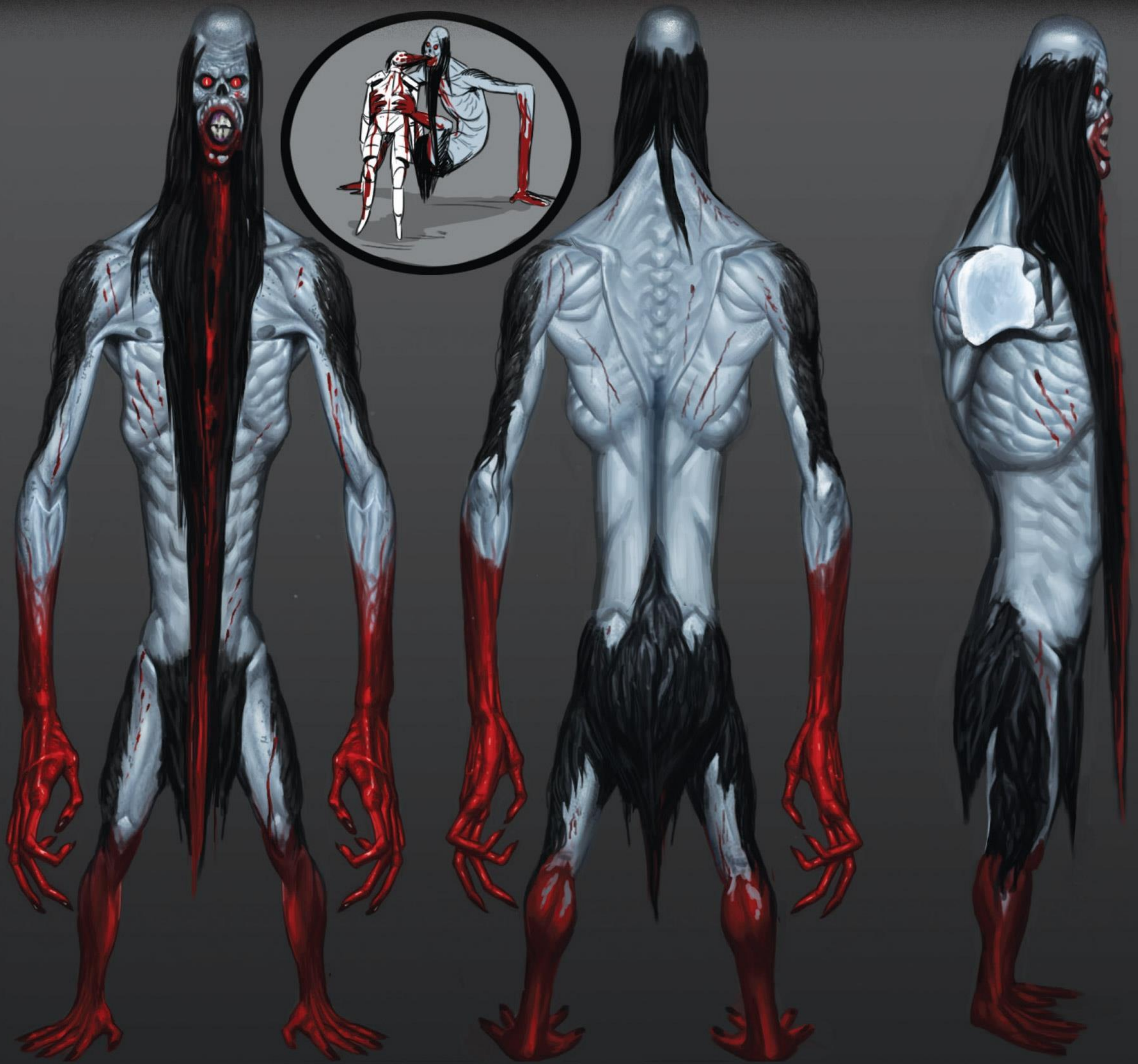


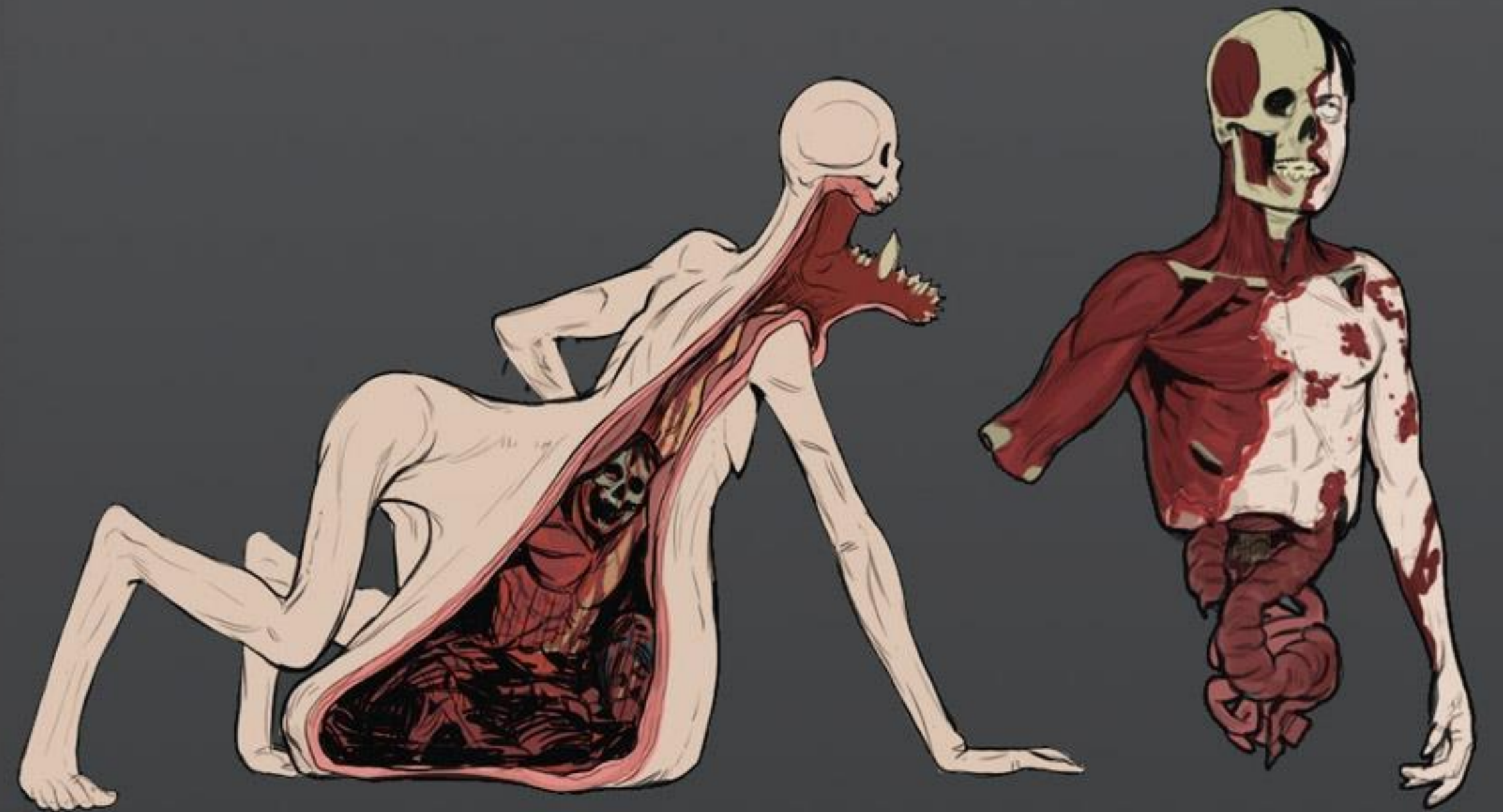




























TEMPLE WARD AND SORORIS MEDICUS

Creating a look for the Oriathan Templars was an exciting but daunting task. They have a big role in the game, since they're featured both in the patch 3.0 character creation scene update and throughout Act 5. There was a lot of anticipation building up to their appearance in the game, so we didn't want to betray expectations.



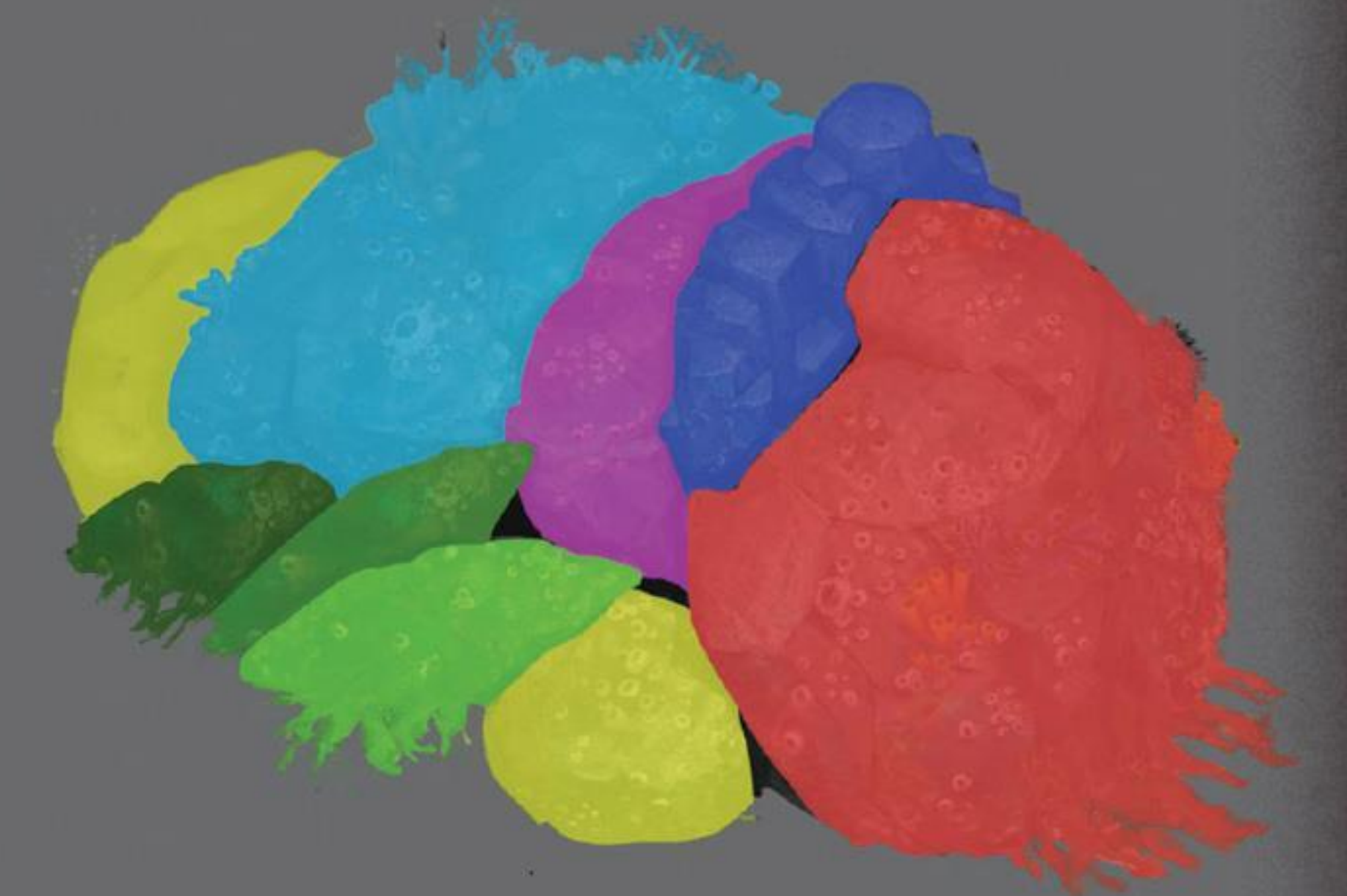
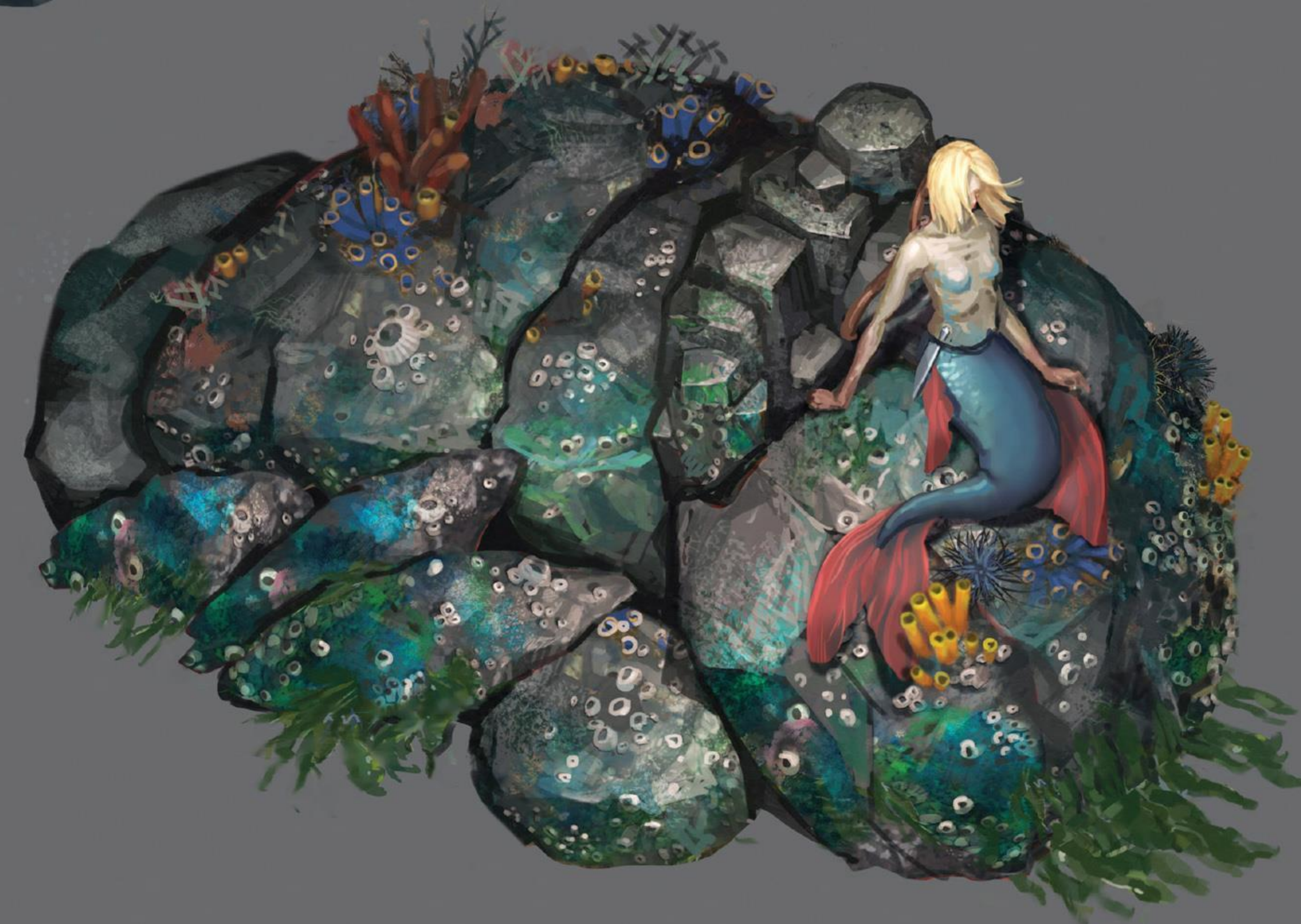




SHAMBLER STATUE

Players first venturing into Act 3 encounter what has become one of *Path of Exile's* signature monsters: classical stone statues come to life. In the four years since those were designed, we have gained the capabilities needed to make a much more advanced and complicated version.



















THE ART OF



PATH OF
EXILE

The title 'PATH OF EXILE' is rendered in a highly stylized, gothic font. The letters are dark with a metallic, weathered texture and are set against a light, parchment-like background that is splattered with red blood. The text is framed by ornate, golden-brown decorative elements, including circular medallions with faces and winged figures. The overall aesthetic is dark and dramatic.

GRINDING GEAR GAMES



The logo for Grinding Gear Games, featuring three interlocking gears. The words 'GRINDING', 'GEAR', and 'GAMES' are written across the gears from left to right.



THE ART OF PATH OF EXILE

Dynamite Entertainment and Grinding Gear Games are proud to present *The Art of Path of Exile*, a visual history from the online action role-playing game's initial development through the ten subsequent acts. With behind-the-scenes concept art for characters and creatures, expansive vistas of vividly colorful environments, this all-encompassing retrospective gives millions of fans an insider's perspective of *Path of Exile's* dark fantasy world.

