

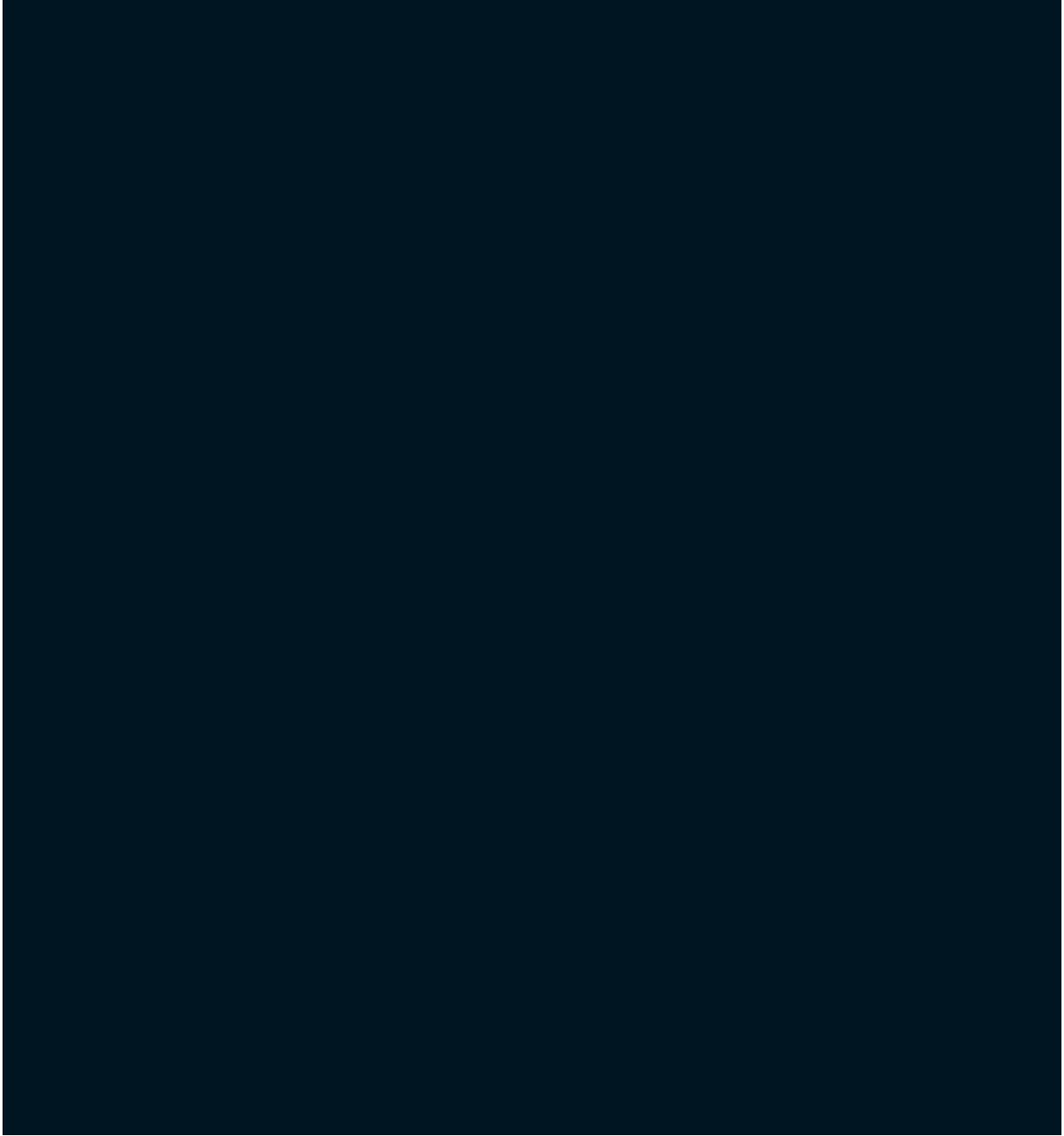


THE ART OF  
**LOVE DEATH+ROBOTS**







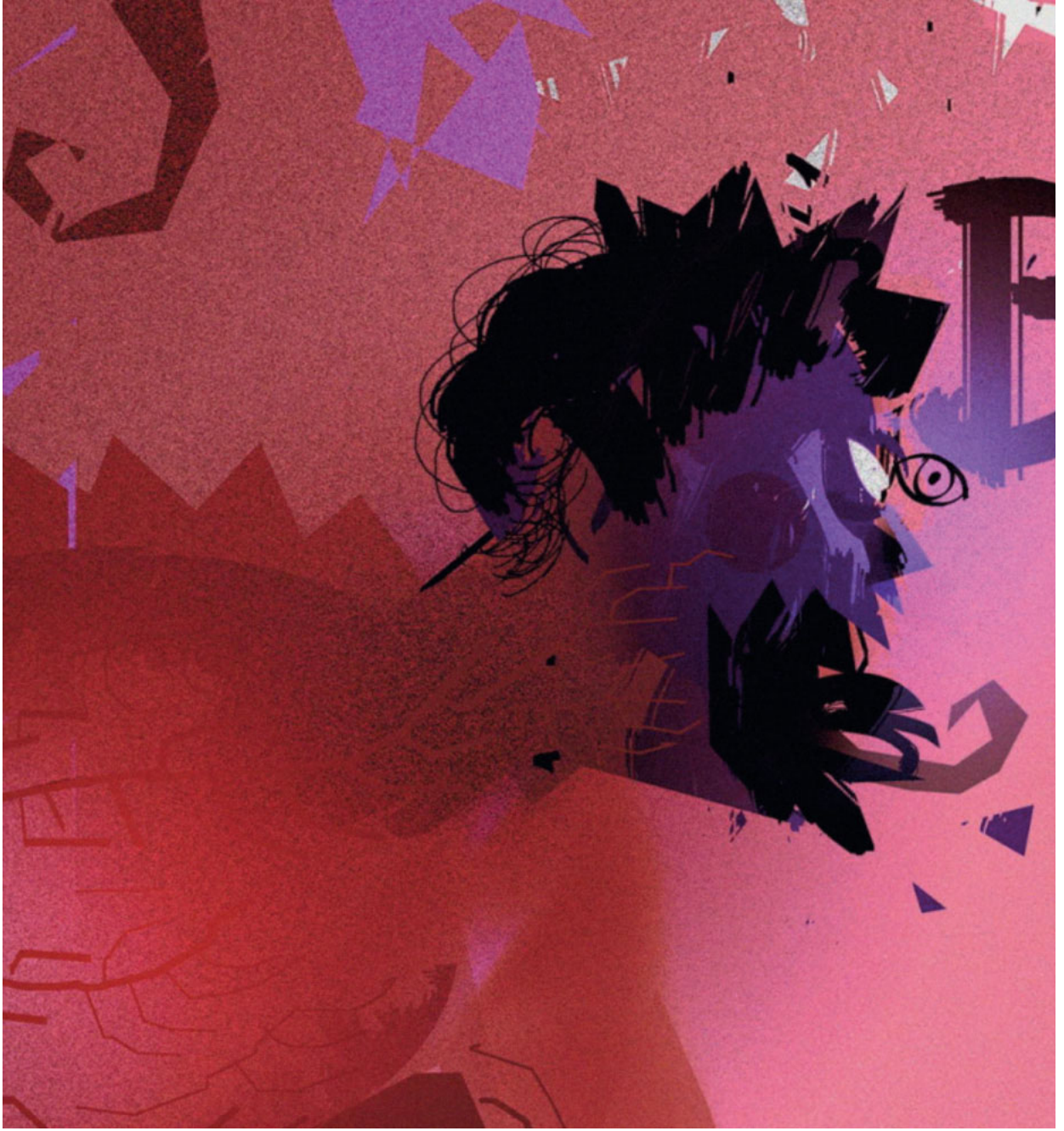


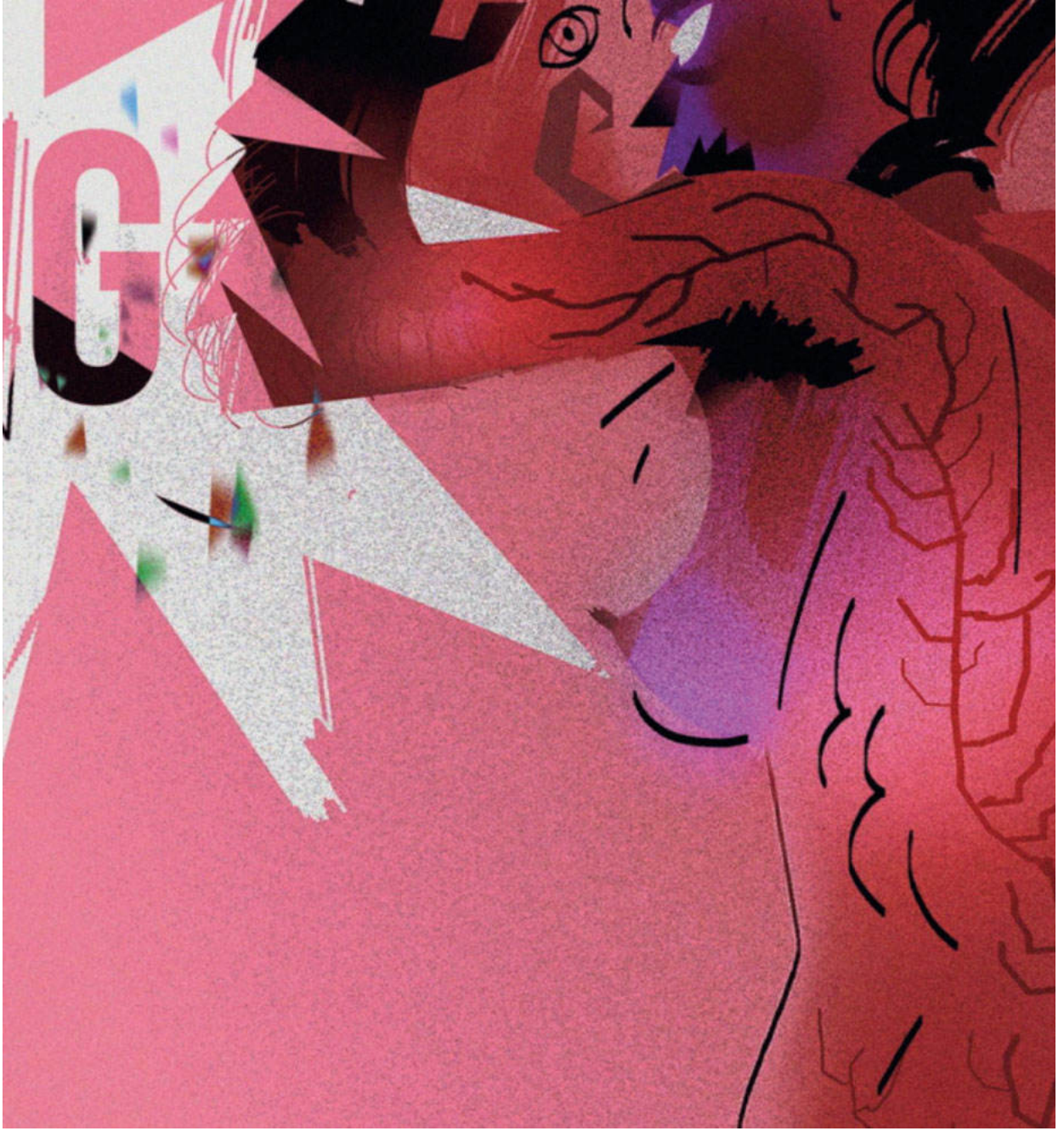
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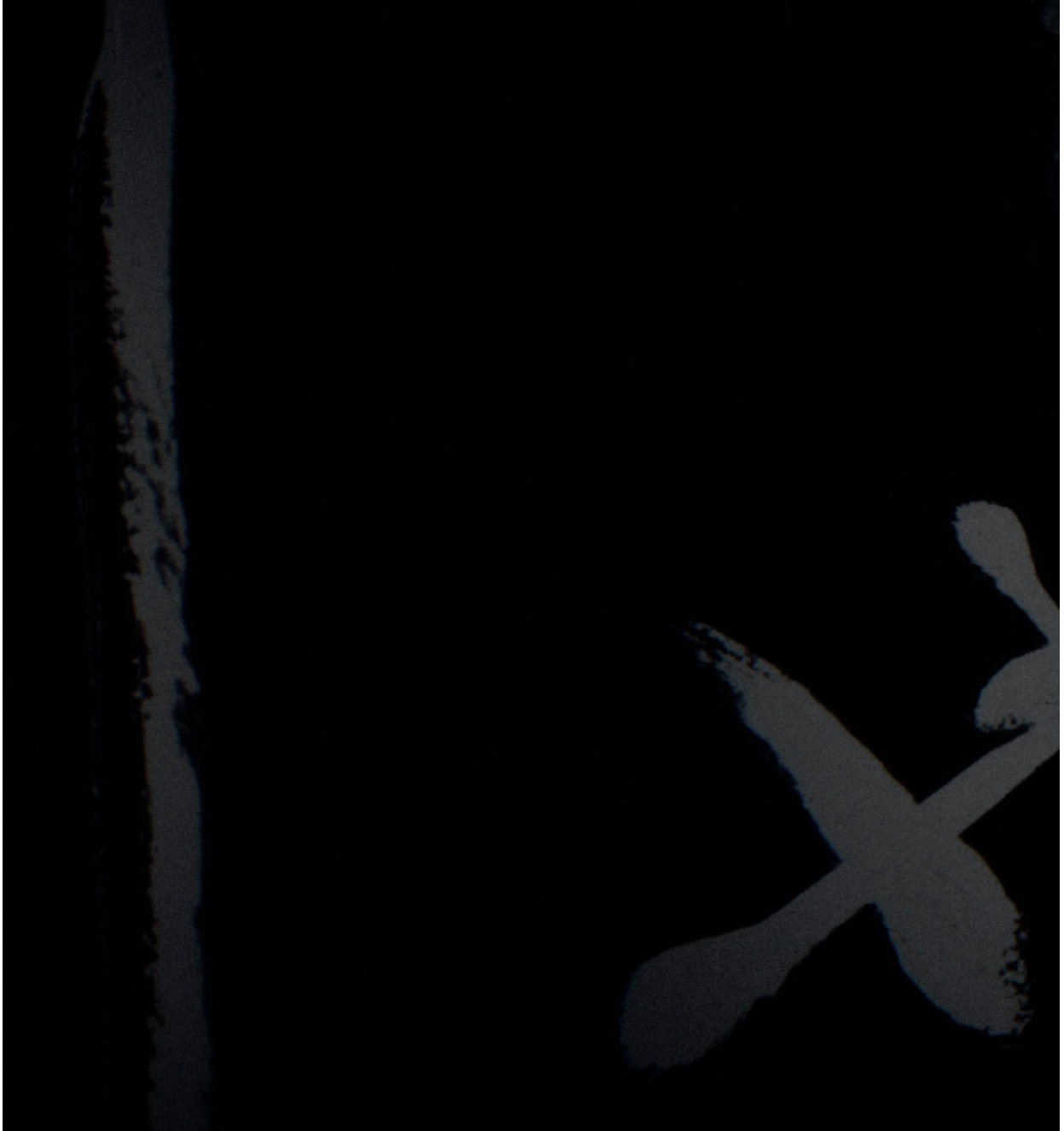


WRITTEN BY RAMIN ZAHEDI

**TITAN BOOKS**









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## FOREWORD

As an author, you're pretty sure you know your work.

You've written it, after all. You created the story, put in the characters, gave them things to say and do, and have set them on a path that often leads to their redemption, or ruin, or sometimes both, in sequence or simultaneously. You are the author. You are the god of that tiny pocket universe. You let them be light and cute every faller square. You know your work.

But then, sometimes, someone comes around and asks to borrow your work. Say, for a new Netflix animated series that they decide to call *Love, Death + Robots*. They tell you they want to give the story to some artists and filmmakers they know and see what direction it takes there in. You're intrigued (and also, they toss some money your way, which is nice), and you decide, what the heck, let's find out where it goes.

Then some time later, you're in your house, firing up the large-screen TV that maybe you bought with some of that Netflix money, and LED screens draw the Internet into your living room. You watch the episode that those artists and filmmakers have made from the story you wrote. And then suddenly you have an epiphany:

You don't actually know your work at all.

Or maybe it's more accurate to say that once you did, but now, as photons blast that image off the screen and down into your eyeballs, you're getting a whole new view of the now-not-so-tiny, now-not-pocket universe you wrote up. The world you created has changed, gotten wider, more colorful, more visceral. Maybe not

more real—the images plumb the various depths of the fantastic, so 'realist' isn't necessarily the metric you're looking for—but certainly more present. More abiding. More tangible. More more.

And as you watch this version of your work—created in collaboration with so many incredibly talented artists, animators, and filmmakers—the one that is new and wild and in so many ways unexpected, something happens. You forget you were the god of this little universe at all. You sit and take it in and, for just a moment, you get a privilege writers never get, but that audience always do.

You get a chance to be a witness to the world you made.

It is, simply, an amazing thing. And, when done right, a hell of a lot of fun. LED-R did it right.

The book you have in your hands is a record of these transformations. It's about the alchemy of turning words into art, and through that art, bringing new worlds to millions of people who get to experience them for the very first time. It's real work from real people. As you thumb through the pages, I hope you sense some of what I felt when these same artists took my words and made something else with them: Excitement. Wonder. Appreciation. Nervousness.

More

John Scalzi, September 7, 2021

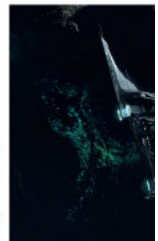
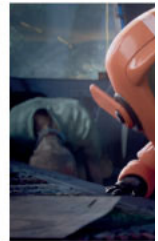


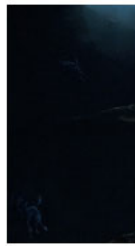
## INTRODUCTION

The story of how Tim Miller, David Fincher, and the team at Blue Sky were able to make a groundbreaking animated adult anthology after knocking on Hollywood's doors for over a decade most give hope to aspiring filmmakers and artists all over the world. When their dream project, *Love, Death & Robots*, premiered on Netflix in March 2019, it reintroduced adult animation to audiences worldwide while bringing together the talents of indie studios from around the globe with the pro team at Miller's own Blue Sky in Culver City, California.

Miller—who also knows for directing movies such as *Deadpool* (2016) and *Terminator: Dark Fate* (2019), as well as producing the *Justice League* (2017) and *Wonder Woman* (2019)—says the origins of *Love, Death & Robots* go back more than fifteen years to when he first met Fincher. “David came down to do a project and I had the idea to do a way to tell the ‘Terminator’ story in animation, so we decided to bring projects together, and that’s how we made our anthology based on the 1981 movie *Heavy Metal*. That film had a big influence over when I was young. I have to watch it as an animator

**THIS SPREAD** / The anthology *Love, Death & Robots* consists of seven changing bits of genres, tones, and animation styles that make each episode a unique experience.





or [Bismark](#), but [I was](#) [interested](#) in [doing](#) [James](#) [Barber](#) [cartoons](#).

[I](#) [was](#) [the](#) [animation](#) [for](#) [which](#) [I](#) [was](#) [like](#) [the](#) [Cat](#) [in](#) [the](#) [Hat](#) [2012](#) [I](#) [had](#)

[was](#) [down](#) [in](#) [the](#) [middle](#) [of](#) [the](#) [world](#) [and](#) [I](#) [was](#) [in](#) [the](#) [middle](#) [of](#) [the](#) [world](#).

Fischer says, "I loved the work at Blue and thought they had done a great job of incubating talent at the studio. Tim ran the place in a way that inspired the artists, and they wanted to do animation that hadn't been done before. While we tried to set up

Henry Metal, we worked together on projects like the titles for The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo (2011). Eventually, Tim, Kevin Eastman,

and I took Henry Metal to every studio in town—at least twice. Of course, this was all years before Netflix because what it is today."

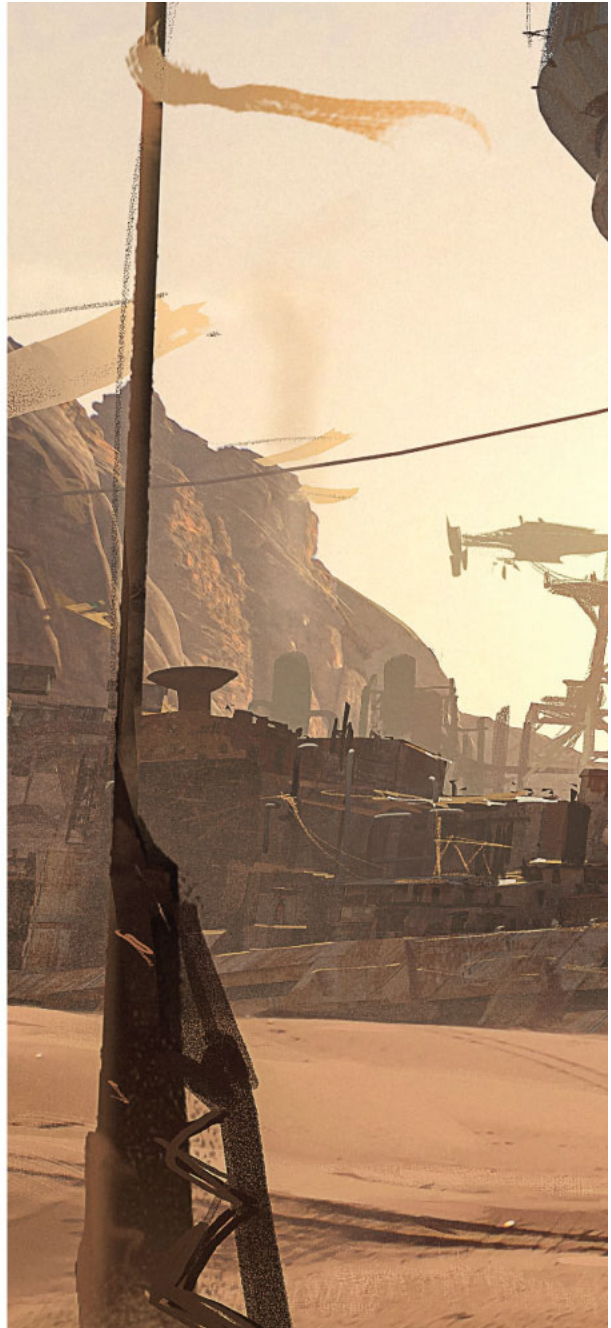
Although Miller and Fischer had directors like James Cameron and Zack Snyder on board, they couldn't get the project set up at a studio. "We had the best pitch for a project I've ever done, with tons of amazing artwork. But people were afraid because it was R-rated," says Miller. "They wouldn't take a risk on something that hadn't been done before."

The tide finally turned when Miller hit box-office gold with

the blockbuster Deadpool in 2016. Fischer calls job, much, now we're going to use your money Henry Metal made? There were some complexities the Henry Metal business, but the desire to do an animated. At a meeting with Netflix, Miller played to show the kind of quality the animation was built on taking risks, and they were willing with [Netflix](#) [the](#) [critical](#) [step](#) [was](#) [picking](#) [the](#) [correct](#)

assembling the ideal talent to tackle each episode. From the start, Miller had a pretty clear idea of the types of stories Love, Death + Robots would contain. He explains, "I read a lot. I'm the kind of dork who will read the back of a cereal box if there's nothing else around. But there are so many interesting authors out there."

One of the writers Miller contacted was British author Neal Asher, who penned *Snow in the Desert*, *Masses' Rats*, and *Bad Travelling*, which Fischer would direct. "I wrote to Neal and asked whether he had any other stories like *Snow in the Desert*, which I'd stumbled across, and he sent me fifty short stories," recalls Miller. Similarly, "Markus Klaus, the writer of *Shipbuilders* and *Lucky 13*, sent me a bunch of stories—I love his *Frivolous* novels too! There are great stories everywhere, like Harlan Ellison's *Life Hack*, which I first read in *Epic* magazine back in the '80s and remembered loving Ken Stacey's illustrations. Then there are authors like John Scalzi (*Three Robots*, *When the Yogurt Took Over*, *Alternate Histories*, *Automated Customer Service*), whom I've loved for years and who writes both comedy and hard sci-fi brilliantly."







A COLLECTION OF VISIONARIES

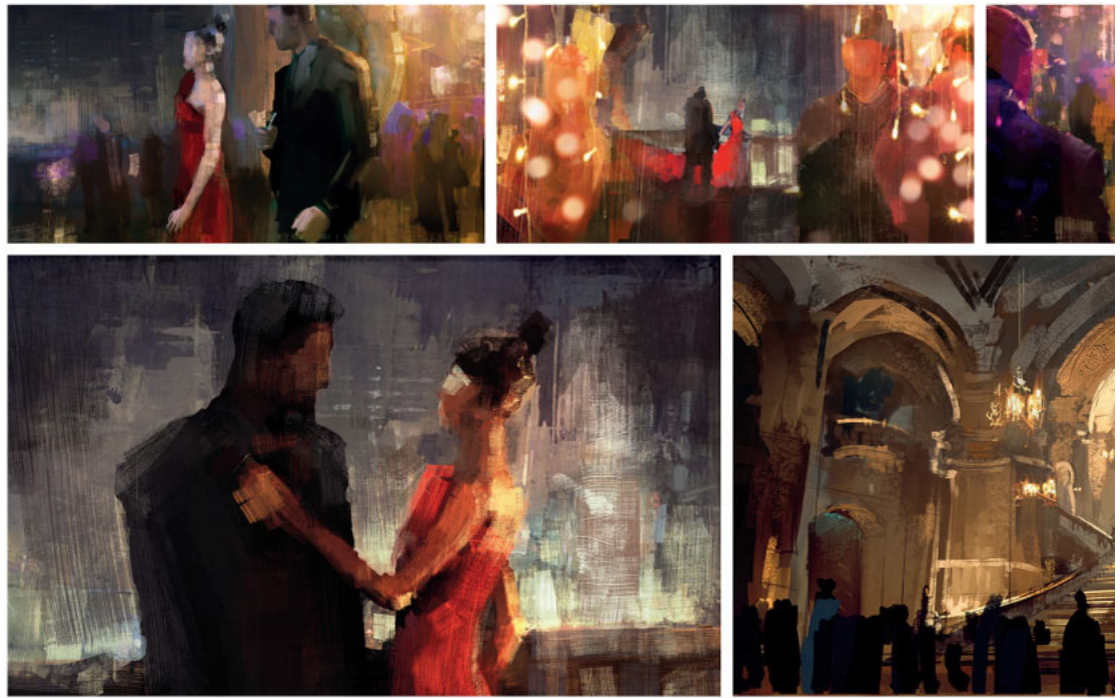
Oscar®-nominated and Emmy®-winning director Jennifer Yuh Nelson—who directed DreamWorks' Kung Fu Panda sequels and HBO's Spenser—joined the Love, Death + Robots team to serve as Volume Two's supervising director. She heard about the project from Miller over a lunch set by a mutual friend. "I wasn't available to work on Volume One, but when Tim called about Volume Two, I jumped on board! I had spent my whole career wanting to do adult animation while trying to square as much religious and family entertainment as possible without transmitting the kids!"

Yuh Nelson, who directed Pop Squad and Kill Team Kill, loved working with the different producers and directors on the

anthology. "You get to see their faces light up because they're getting a chance to create something they'd never be allowed to do anywhere else," she explains. "Sometimes, people wish the episodes were longer, but the short nature of the anthology means they can exist as pure, concentrated doses of insanity that don't have to be liked by everyone."

Supervising producer Victoria Howard came on board when executive producer Jennifer Miller invited her to join the show. "I was so excited when I found out the kind of stories they wanted to tell and how much it reflected the spirit of Heavy Metal [magazine]. I grew up watching Star Trek, Star Wars, and Alien, and all of those

genres I love are represented by our show." Howard—who has worked on shows such as F and Dickel-Hennessy—has nothing but praise for animating the show. "When we set out to create a community that could learn from each other about the work," she explains. "It was a concept we had explored. Moving sets and getting to be hearing from them, was exciting. People workbooks often, and getting a glimpse into their lives and could have been special in many ways. The creative interest should meet, second only to creating amazing anim



A DETAILED SELECTION PROCESS

Picking the correct stories and matching them with the right directors and studios is key to the show's success. Yuh Nelson says, "Each director has a specialty, something they do beautifully, and we try to match a story with them. And we have an entire wall filled with stories we've found and love to choose from."

Each season goes through dozens of permutations. "A lot depends on the alchemy of stories," says Victoria Howard. "You start by picking the ones you love and then winnow it down from there. Then we figure out which company is best to produce each episode; there are many layers to this puzzle."

"I love that I work on a show where I had to read an email saying, 'I think we have too many AI-apocalypse stories—we might want to change it up a little!'" Yuh Nelson laughs.

Tim Miller always wanted the show to have an eclectic mix of stories, styles, and directors. "I like sci-fi and fantasy best, but horror, comedy, and drama are equally important to have in the mix. All of our stories need action, scope, and heart," he notes. "We

also try to find stories that work on-is. It's important to us that we honor the original intentions of the authors."

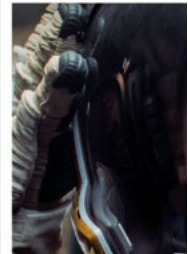
Since Miller knew most of the boutique studios working in the game cinematic industry, he asked them to collaborate with Blue. "They were our competitors, but we're on friendly terms with all of them. We knew they wanted to create beautiful work, just as we did. Most of these companies aren't large enough to do features, but they could easily handle episodes of our anthology series."

The show's visual effects supervisor Jimmie Desjoux, who has been with Blue for twenty years, welcomed the opportunity to collaborate with these other companies. "I was a musician when I was younger, and I love the hand dynamic," says the French-born VFX veteran. "My job is to make sure all the work hits the quality bar of the show and looks unique. We love variety, and it's important to have each story feel special. We try to gently push everyone outside their comfort zones to try new things. That's when the magic happens!"

Desjoux believes the show's legacy will be the ways they've proven that animation can tell adult stories when we discussed adult animation, people thought it was just for women in bikinis, riding dragons—nonsense, he substance. But we all know there are tons of stories we

themes that aren't X-rated or hyperviolent. We can tell about the human experience, like *The Drowned Giant*, which deal with life, death, and our place in the universe.

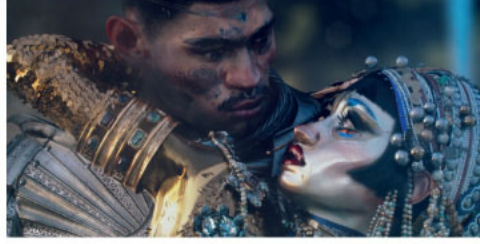
Looking back at what they've done so far, Miller the level of passion and pride all the studios have been show and how excited they are to work on something as them to be so creative. "I don't think you can find more with more personal investment from the people working all over LDR as an opportunity to do their best work happy to provide the opportunity. Like us, they want to be a love letter to the art of animation and the beauty of form storytelling."

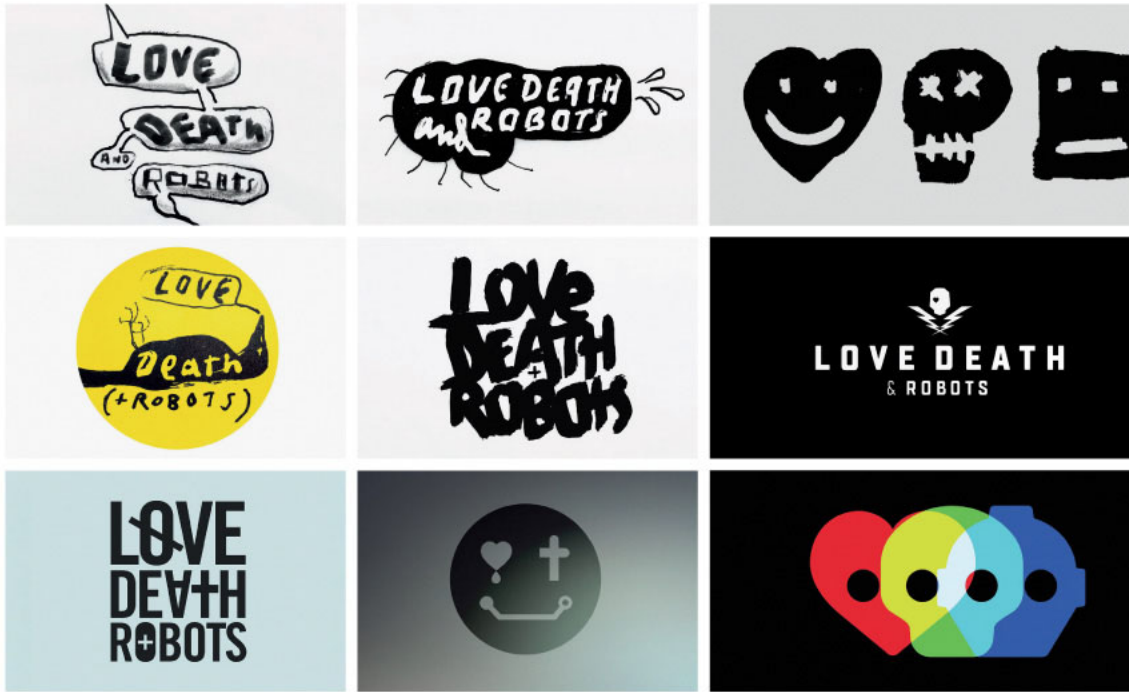




**PREVIOUS PAGE** / The search for the right  
 actor to play the character was  
 long, but collaborating with the  
 director to bring the character  
 to life.

**THIS PAGE** / The character's design  
 was inspired by the character  
 of the character's design.





ON BRANDING, TITLES + ICONOGRAPHY

Blair had found its stories and creative partners. Now they needed to craft an identity for the series. The short-form structure offered a unique opportunity for the branding and design team, led by executive producer and creative director/designer Jennifer Miller. "Our anthology is a collection of many different genres and a celebration of the art form," explains Miller. "Our goal was

to have the branding reflect the wild ride from story to story and the first task was choosing a title for the show, and Jennifer and Tim Miller spent months searching for the perfect name.

"Every morning over breakfast, we discussed titles while digging

through art magazines and books for ideas," she recalls. "We even hired a mental vet specialist to feed in all kinds of strange lists from books, movies, the periodic table, songs, etc. We got back fun, thought-provoking, and sometimes strange titles, though none of them quite worked. Ultimately we landed on Love, Death + Robots because we thought that is all anyone really needs."

"To connect with audiences around the globe, our goal was always to create a visual language—one that anyone in the world could read and understand without translation," says Neil Kollerhouse, the acclaimed designer behind some of the industry's most iconic posters. Kollerhouse developed the final logo incorporating three

unique icons that would stand in for the show's title. According to Kollerhouse, finalizing the core for "Death" and "Robots" was no easy task. "A skull and a robot head, and we needed to create a synergy of animation. In the end, I think the overall graphic worked well."

Illustrator and storyboard artist Jarrod Paritt created the icons that introduced each episode. "I developed these cool explorations of the logo and aesthetic," he says. "I love boiling things down to so I made a page of symbols from the elements of



were unique to each episode. Then I tried to pack that information into one digestible image."

"These icons are supposed to offer clues, foreshadowing what you are about to see," adds Jennifer Miller. "It's a nice machine of ideas where the viewer can guess he sure what will turn up."

The titles were black and white to offer visual relief between the punch of colorful stories. "This concept rippled out to other areas as well and became a cohesive growth," explains Miller.

"Black and white, with a bit of electric color that slips your eyeballs. The first volume was done with Day-Glo stamps, while the second featured a yellow that vibrates with energy on the screen."

Blair also found inspiration in the work of artist and activist Banksy. "We are truly a team of artists from around the world,"

says Jennifer Miller. "So we wanted our own mark to have the right tone and edge. He's an artist who is a statement. We wanted to disrupt the animation something with attitude, something we could be proud of."

Ultimately, the show's branding is meant to reflect each episode's unique tone and content. "It's happening in our climate, politics, global health and raising interesting questions about the work we do. We hope our show is becoming a part of the conversation and a whole lot of robots that get love and death and a whole lot of robots that

concludes. "Tim is a sci-fi nerd, but he's a poet who believes in the future of humanity. I hope it hope comes through loud and clear."

ANIMATION 101

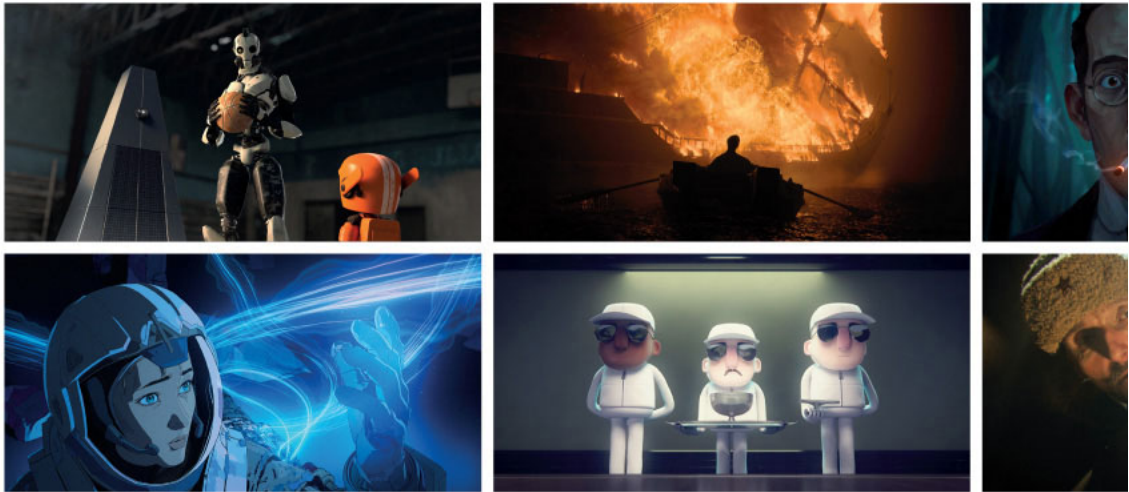
One of the significant aspects of *Love, Death & Robots* is that it offers up a buffet of the visual styles and technologies available in animation today. Each episode uses a form of animation—2D, stylized CG, realistic motion capture, or classic stop motion—to tell its story in the most exciting way possible.

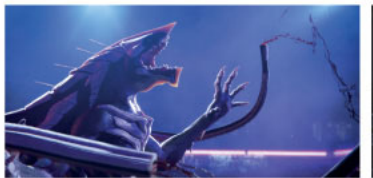
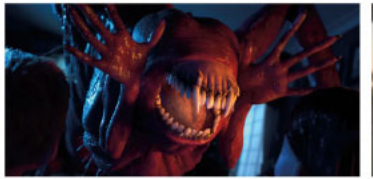
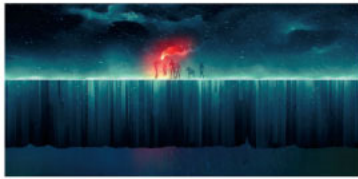
Despite the variety of formats, all the animation teams used a similar process to create each episode. Jerome Desprez, series VFX supervisor, explains, “Each short begins with the story. Tim [Miller] has read hundreds of stories, but each one must fit within

the broader canvas of each volume. We need the right mix of action, humor, comedy, and fantasy. Once we feel there’s a good balance, we move forward with the scripts.”

As each script develops, the team decides which animation style, studio, and director are the best fit. Then it’s time to focus on visual concepts. “This is where we do some world-building,” says Desprez. “Sometimes, the chosen studio will tackle all of this, but we often help with the visual style of the project. Design is a crucial step in the process to get right.”

**THIS SPREAD** / Thousands of hours of work are poured into creating the final animated images, with each episode taking approximately a year to complete.





The next step involves building 3D character models. Despain continues, "If it's CGI, they have to create digital models. If it's stop motion, it's a sculpt of the characters. If it's 2D, it's model sheets and illustrations. Then it's time to "rig" the characters so that animators can get to work. At the same time, sets and props are built. Whether it's digital sets for CGI or real sets for a stop-motion project like *All Through the House*."

Storyboards and animatics are produced in parallel. "Nothing is linear," says Despain. "Storyboard artists are working feverishly, and editors are creating a story reel from those drawings. Temp voice and music tracks are added to the reel so that everyone can evaluate the overall timing and flow of the story."

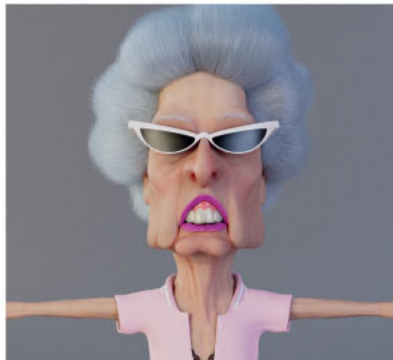
Later, the audio team adds sound effects and final voices after the casting and recording sessions. Eventually, the storyboards are replaced by digital animatic shots. "The animation is very primitive at this stage, but over time, these rough shots become ever more finished animatics."

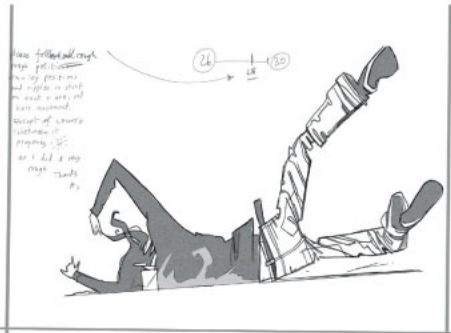
Lighting is next. "The art of cinematography is crucial to the process and can be a character itself," says Despain. "Every frame needs to be beautiful. CGI needs lots of computer power to calculate each image; on average, between one and fifteen hours to be rendered. For 2D animation, the process is different—with animation first, then color and final polish."

For more on why it's so hard to make a hit film, see

www.fox.com/animation/behind-the-scenes. "There are a lot of different ways to make a hit film, and they are all different. One of the most important things is to have a good story. The accuracy of the dialog also has a big impact on the animation. It's not just about the animation itself. Once the animation is complete, they normally will focus on the final shot."

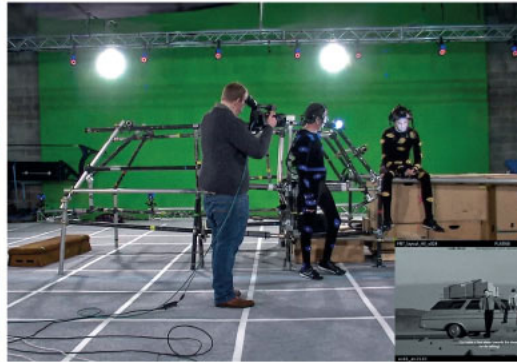
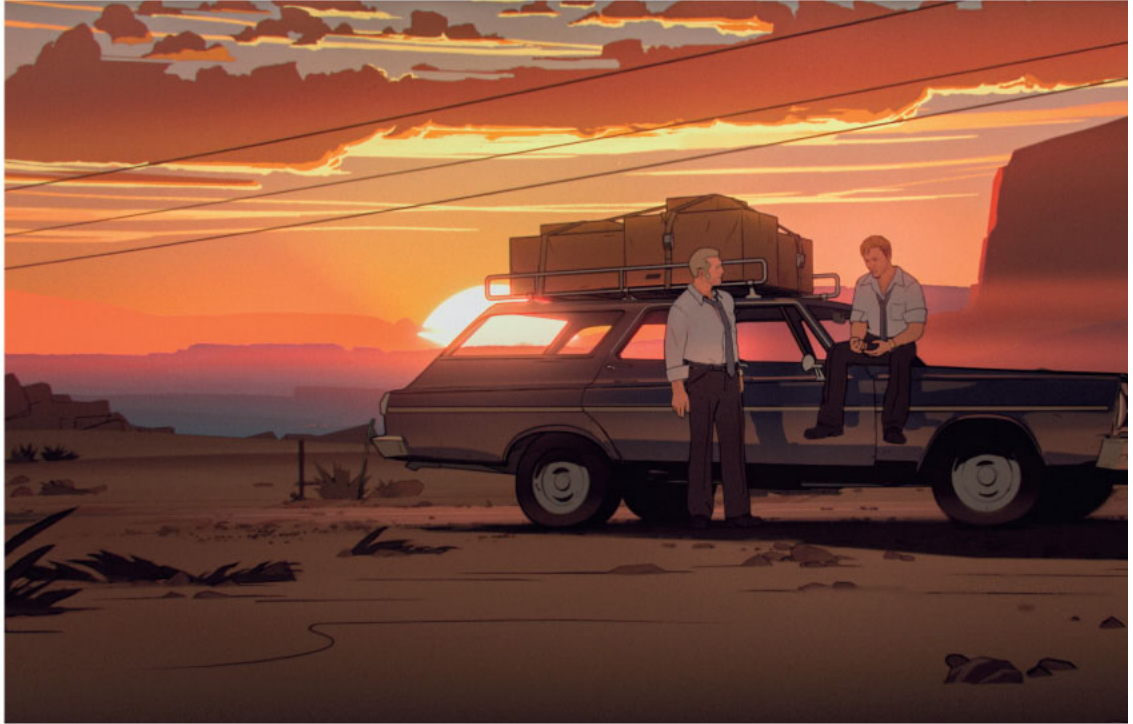
A final pass of compositing is needed for every project, whether 2D, stop motion, or CGI. The artists add things like smoke, glass, and film grain while fine-tuning major VFX elements. Finally, everything goes through a color check. "We need to make sure everything is consistent," notes Des





Follow silhouette of all these rough please, as these are positions and lines that favour some ego and its too complicated to detail according to this









VOLUME

01



### THrEE ROBoTS

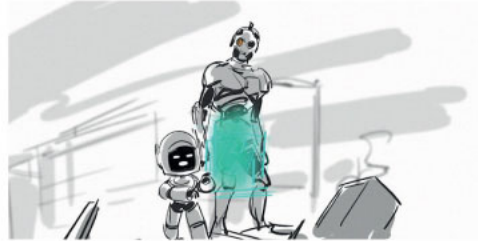
Charmant robot was the R2-D2 and WALL-E have been a lot of  
psychoanalytic. And his story "Three Robots," like his  
was a lot of a man's to make a story and human commentary  
about the futility of humanity in a post-apocalyptic world. Show  
creator Tim Miller loved the way you could be a robot but he  
wonder how you could be the robot vs. Fate and technology (2010)

Spanish studio Headline Animation—led by Victor Malabado  
and Alfredo Torres—accepted the challenge of bringing the story  
to life. "We had established a great relationship with the Blue

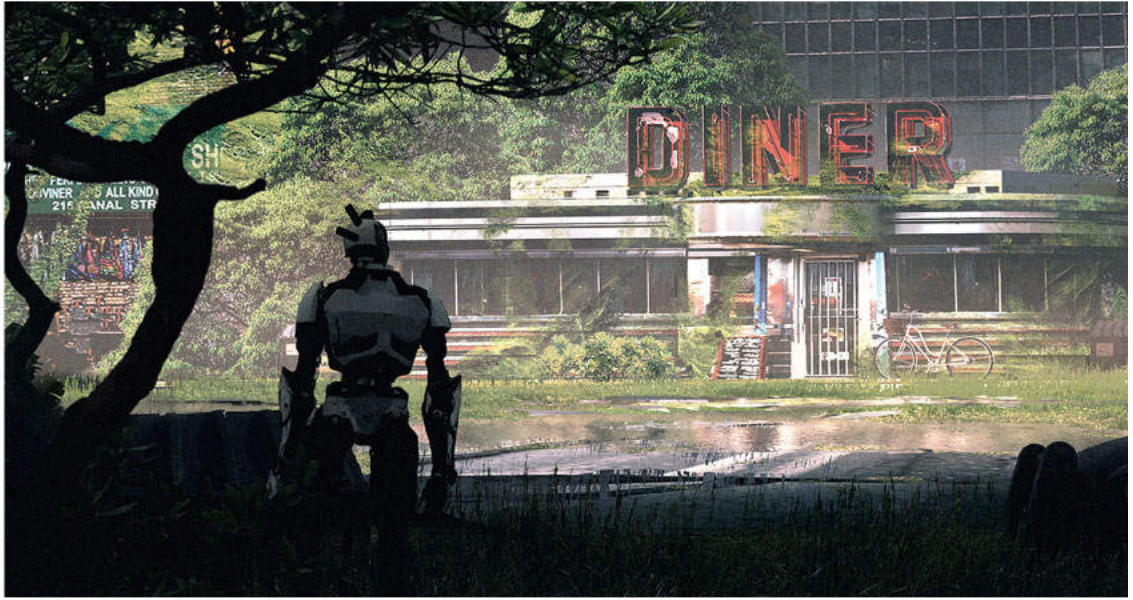
team while working on When the Yagot Took Over and Alternate  
Histories," says Malabado. "And as we were wrapping these  
episodes, they showed us Three Robots... It was the last short of  
Vikare One put into production, so we knew the schedule would be  
tough, but the concept was so cool that we couldn't say no."

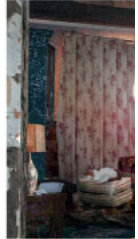
Torres adds, "We loved the idea of making something that felt  
like an indie sci-fi movie. Simply following three friends counting  
down the time as they stare a city. We wanted to explore the chemistry  
between them and make people fall in love with the characters."

THrEE ROBoTS (clockwise from the top left)  
Storyboarding by Victor Malabado  
and Alfredo Torres









The directors wanted the main characters—designed by Seattle-based Flow Studio—to have an easy, friendly appeal. “We wanted the feel of the film to be like a low-budget comic, filled by a small crew. How would they film a conversation between close friends at a diner—only the friends are robots? We wanted grounded and realistic camera work and stayed away from flashy effects.”

Maldonado and Torres, who had worked together on Spanish movies such as *Nectar* (2007) and Guillermo del Toro’s Netflix series *Trollhunters*, knew the project would have its share of visual challenges. “Of our three shorts in the anthology, this was the most complex,” says Maldonado. “We needed to create three very different characters with distinct looks and personalities.”

“The voice actors played a crucial part in defining each robot,” Torres explains. “Josh Brener as K-VRC, Guy Anthony Williams as XBOY #000, and Chris Parson as the cat. During development,

we used the voice of an online reader app as a placeholder for our ‘Pyramid Robot.’ When we heard Brener and Williams having a conversation with a lifelike, chatty reading app, it added a whole new level of comedy!”

VFX supervisor Jerome Desjardis says, “The work the *Headless* team did on *Three Robots* expanded upon the original story, which all took place in one room. It was always funny, but Maldonado and Torres’ idea to have the robots acting as post-apocalyptic tourists made it visually stunning.”

The *Headless* duo believes that, of their three episodes, *Three Robots* was the easiest to film. “It has a classic comedy set-up, and people seem to enjoy it,” says Maldonado. So much so that *Blair* decided to do a sequel for *Volume Three*, in which the three machines continue to explore the apocalypse with comedic commentary.







**THE DARK KNIGHT RISES** The location used to create the image of the original Dark Knight world has been made available to the public.







## BEYOND THE aQUILA rIFT

Writer Alanuar Reynolds' gripping tale 'Beyond the Aquila Rift' centers on a space traveler who encounters an old lover after his spaceship runs light-years off course. To animate this complex story, Blur tapped co-directors Léon Bielek, Dominique Boidin, Rishi Kanyan, and Maxime Lacroix, along with producer Celia Digaud of Paris-based Unit Image.

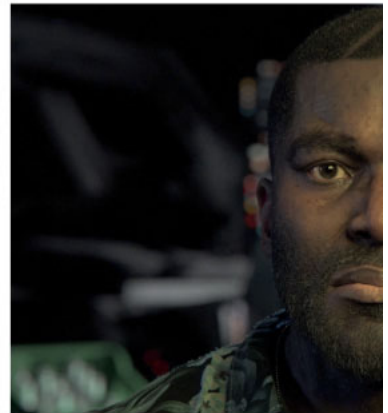
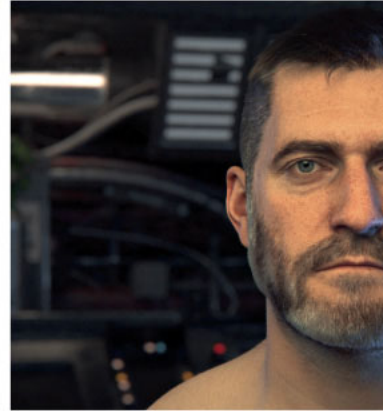
One of the main areas of focus for the Unit team was the facial animation for the lead characters. As Digaud explains, "There are many subtle emotions in this story, and it was important to

have a process that allowed us to capture these complex feelings. The overall shots of Gotta were crucial, as they would take the audience through a range of emotions—first touched by Geta's emotion, then horrified when they see Thom's reality. The sex scene was also a challenge, as these kinds of scenes in full CG require very detailed and sensitive work."

Lacroix agrees the sex scene was a huge challenge. "Such complicated physical interactions are rarely done in CG, so we took it very seriously. I especially love the last shot of the

**BLUR** (Production) with Peter Austin  
Blade and Paul Cohen (Script) with  
the Blender team (Art) with Project  
Aquila Rift (in the future)





sequence where Thom thinks he's in control, but Gena scratches his back, suggesting that Thom isn't in control after all."

"I love the final twist of the story," says Dillard. "It's a great ending that takes the audience by surprise. And the complex relationship that evolved between Thom and Gena is surprisingly moving."

Classic films such as the Alien saga were a massive inspiration for Luster and his team. "I've had a passion for

anatomics since I was a kid and enjoyed the design process.

Getting a chance to ask questions like, "What kind of bar would you build in space?" Something with a spectacular view of a beautifully colored orb, of course."

Fans paying close attention to Gena's reflection in a glass bottle as she and Thom sit at the bar will get a clue to her true form. Likewise, her shadow on the wall when she reveals that he is experiencing a simulation foreshadows the reveal.

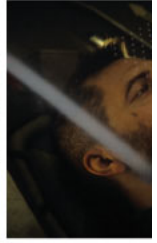
"I loved my pa  
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**THIS BREAKS** / Concept art for the bridge.  
Lower Blue Green added on location.  
Lenses also having hundreds of light  
sources all night.







## ICE AGE

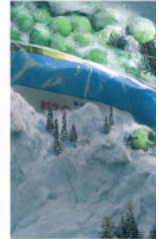
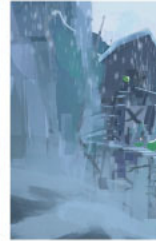
A young couple is surprised to discover an ancient civilization inside an old refrigerator. That's the premise of Michael Swanwick's unusual short story, which inspired the hybrid live-action/CG episode Ice Age, directed by series creator Tim Miller. The episode stars Mary Elizabeth Winstead and Tophic Grace, with the VFX show produced by Atomic Fiction (Mysteria) and Digic Pictures (Dodge).

Miller is attracted to stories mixing fantasy and the mundane, like Volume Two's The Drowned Giant. "Thematically, they both

deal with unknown worlds intruding unexpectedly on our own. Who doesn't want to believe they could find a door to another world in an old fridge?"

"I remember my father debanking the idea I got excited about as a kid, like ancient astronauts," Miller says. "He'd scoff, 'Well, if that actually happened, it would be on the front page of every newspaper.' He's right, of course, but the shelves of his library were stuffed with sci-fi and fantasy fiction because he was a dreamer, too."

**THIS SPREAD** Concept art for the episode. See also inside Book and Card's art portfolios for Age and Life Week, as the daily episodes that include both live-action and CG-animated sequences.



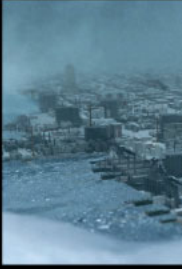
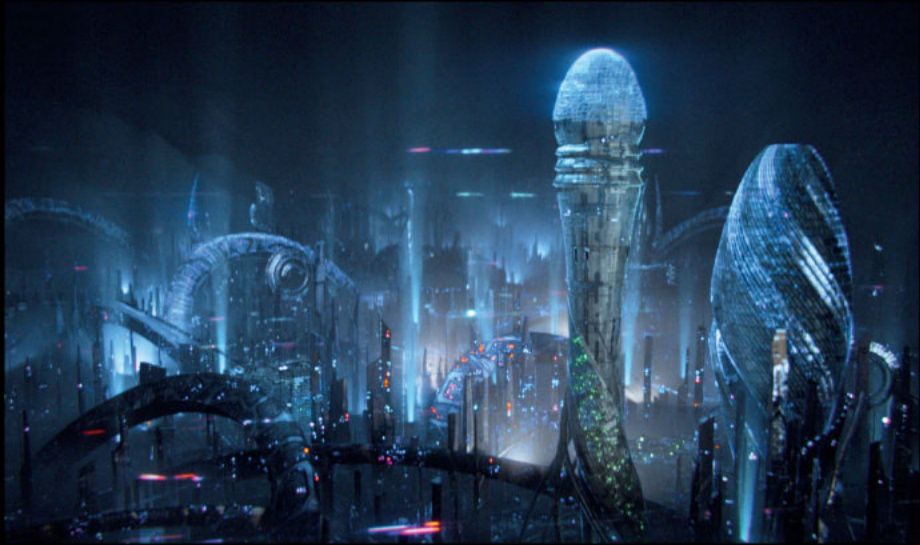
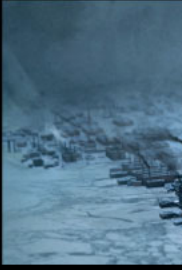


Despain says the team at Digi did a fantastic job of picking up the assignment and working closely with Miller, who was shooting in Budapest at the time. One of the most challenging effects was the time-lapse sequences inside the bridge. "The entire set needed to change in small increments," says Despain. "This episode is fun

to watch frame-by-frame because they added lots of clever details in those time-lapse scenes. The design of the futuristic cities was also a challenge, as they needed to be both spectacular and absurd. It wouldn't have been possible without the great collaboration between the different companies around the world."

**THIS WEEK** / Film rolled up with *Avatar*, *Fast Five* and *Edge of Tomorrow* in design and create the episode's time-lapse sequences.







**THIS SPREAD** is the fantasy land made for  
Harrison, Johnson and their fight for survival as a  
new cycle of life and death begins.





## SONNIE'S EDGE

When *Sonnie's Edge* premiered in 2019, it was an immediate fan favorite because of its unique visuals and surprising ending. The short, adapted by Philip Gelat from Peter Hamilton's story, is set in a dystopian cyberpunk-fueled future where *Sonnie* (Helen Sadler) and her engineered cyber-beast compete in gruesome death matches for entertainment.

"I joined the studio from South Africa back in 2012," says director Dave Wilton. "Eventually became creative director at Blue when Tim left to do *Deadpool*. Tim suggested I consider directing

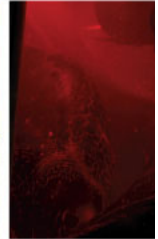
*Sonnie's Edge* for LD+R, and so I read it, loved it, and was hooked!"

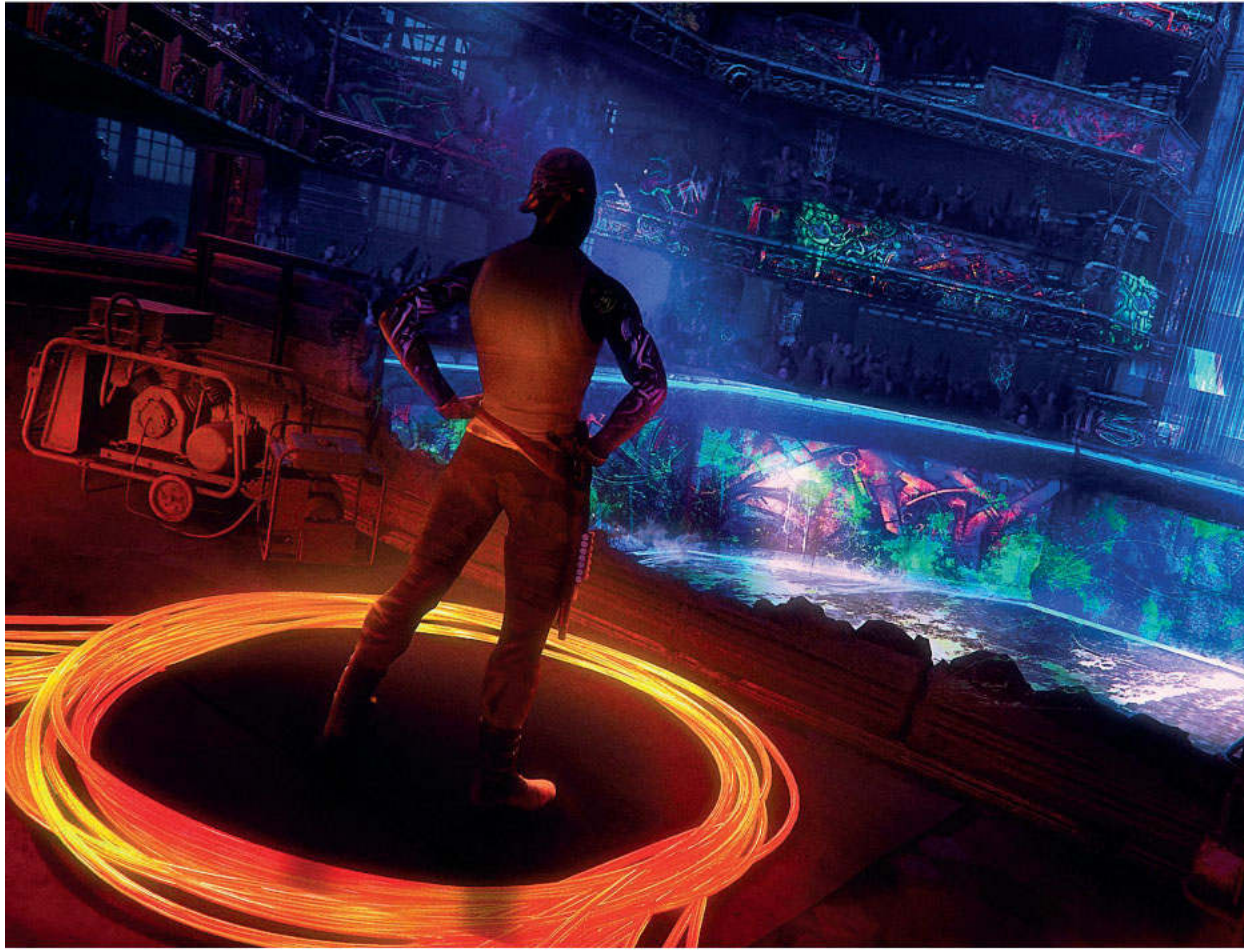
Wilton—who also directed the 2020 *Vin Diesel* movie *Bloodshot*—loves the work of Hamilton. "The first series of his I read was the *Night's Dawn* trilogy," he recalls. "It's fabulous—'Affinity Link' was a part of that world, too. I love any story that finds a way for the audience to experience story revolutions with the characters—and that is the case in *Sonnie's*."

The director modified the creator's designs beyond the original story because he wanted something more engineered. "The

**THIS SPREAD** / The creator's setting

visual and character designs here inspired numerous creative decisions and the outcome.





story had design seams—the base-covered and metallic—that remained, but we fixed them up,” says Wilson.

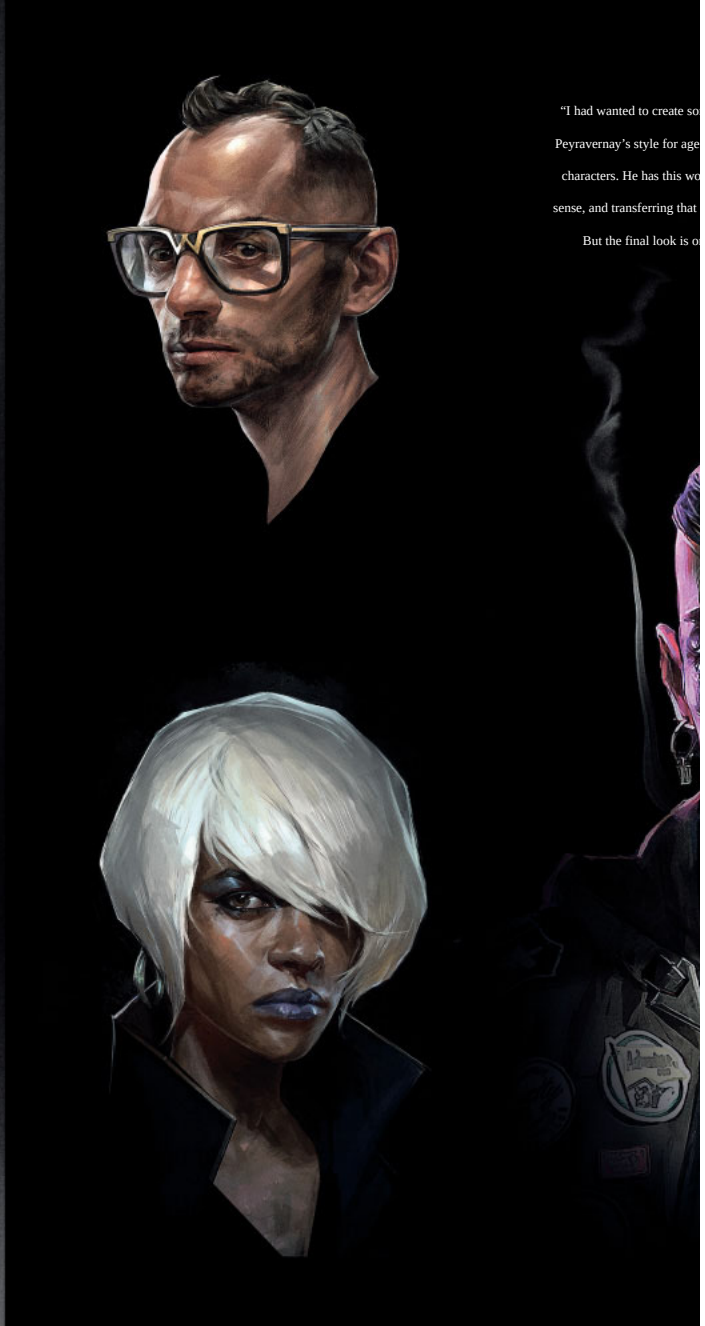
Sonic’s backstory also went through some transformations.

“In the original story, Sonic is attacked, beaten, and his

consciousness forced into Klaws’ form. It made her covered and feared, but her story was more complex. The short was twenty-five pages, though, with only fifteen minutes, we had to streamline it.”

The making of Sonic’s Edge had some memorable moments.

Wilson remembers actress Helen Sadler preparing down three Obi-wan jitters in the second booth to suit her liquid-filled, unamped-shell lines. “It was amazing!”



"I had wanted to create so  
Peyravernay's style for age  
characters. He has this wo  
sense, and transferring that  
But the final look is o

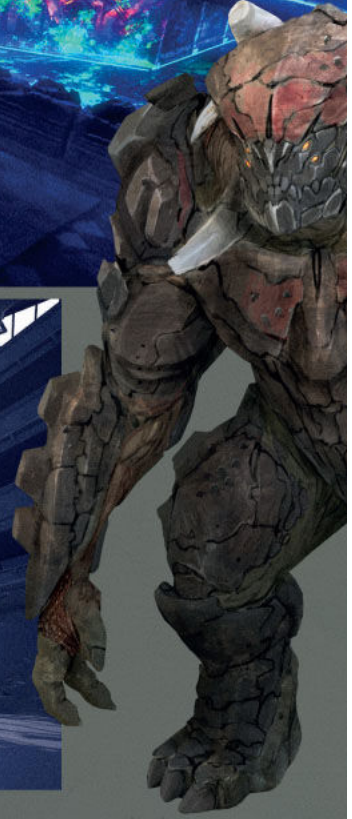
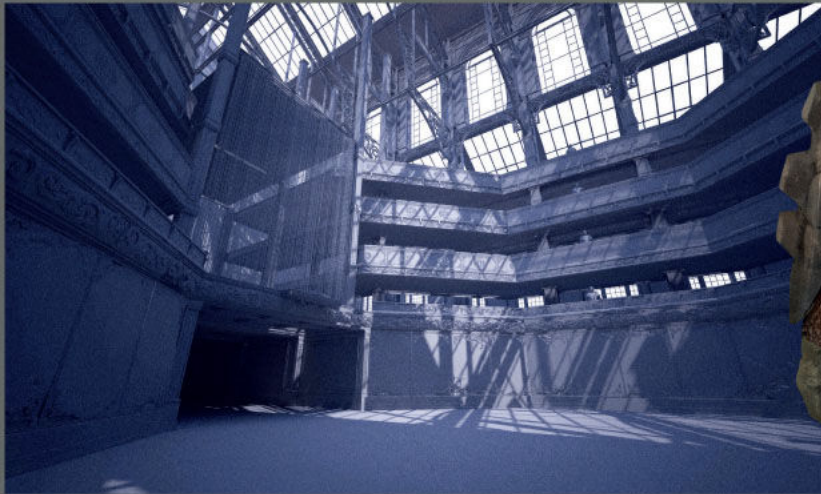
THIS SPREAD / Artists: Peter Dinklage and CG Supervisor: Chris

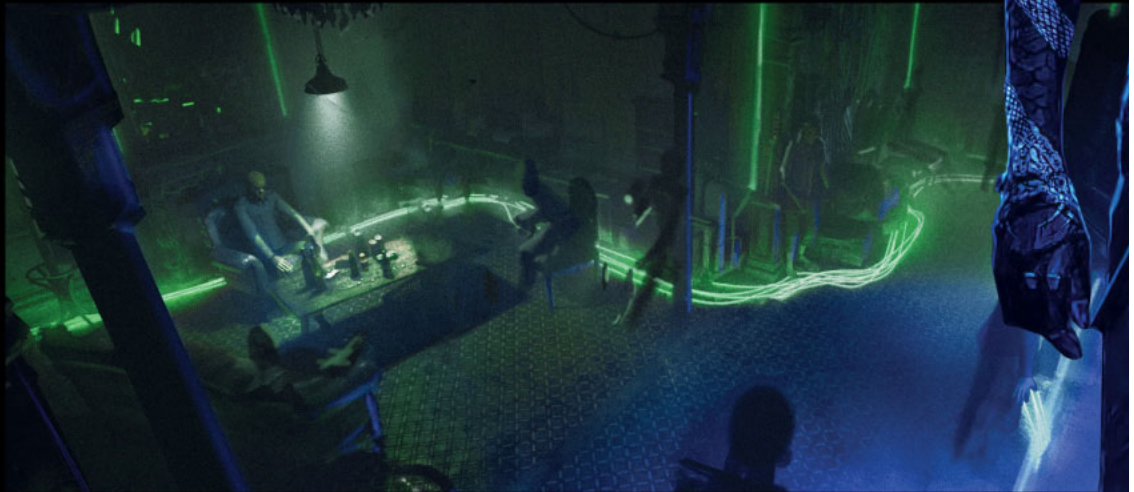
Robinson created characters that were emblematic for their

respective film and gritty physicality.













## WHEN THE YoGURT TOoK OvEr

One of the first volume's most unusual shorts was John Scalzi's story about a yogurt culture that becomes sentient and decides to rule the world. Blue tapped the brilliant Barcelona-based duo of Vicent Mallorens and Alfredo Torres (Headless Animation) to helm one of the more canny entries in the anthology. The team also worked on *Alternate Histories* and *Three Robots*.

"We fell in love with the short story by Scalzi. It had such a delightful and absurd premise," says Torres. "We wanted to juxtapose the surreal aspects of the story with a serious, design

fitting approach. The pitch we made to Blue was "The most stupid idea done in the most serious way." Explaining how a yogurt takes over the world in five minutes was a challenge, but a great exercise in condensed narrative."

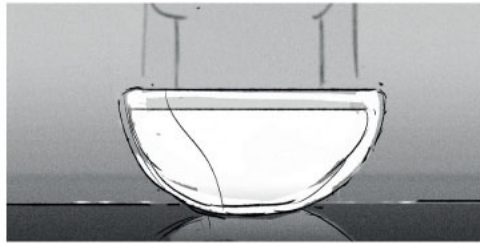
Mallorens and Torres studied David Fincher's features and iconic sci-fi movies such as 2001: A Space Odyssey for inspiration.

"These were films with a very clinical, clean, detached approach, with clear composition," says Mallorens.

One challenge the duo faced was adding production value to

**BELOW** Director Vicent Mallorens and Alfredo Torres talked about the story, stage of the production process, working with the script by John Scalzi.





**THIS SPREAD** / The animators first faced the  
uncommon challenge of giving personality  
to inanimate objects—then made it the focus  
of a story filled with laughter.  
Maggie Orr, *Director*









something relatively minimal and straightforward. "We had very basic, clean environments and Muppet-like characters that are all drawn with different rigs," Torres notes. "We didn't know if it would look too silly and cheap, and, of course, creating the look of a sentient yogurt is never easy!"

The duo produced the film with Sevilla-based animation and

VFX house Blow Studio over fourteen months while working on *Three Robots* simultaneously.

For *Middheads*, it was a particular thrill to have voice actor Maurice LaMarche narrate the project. "He is the voice of 'The Brain' from *Pinky and The Brain*, and when John Scalzi suggested him, we thought he would be perfect!"

"I think it's the  
don't like h



## THE SECRET WaR

Lieutenant Zakharen and his Red Army squadron burn down a bundle of ghazals deep inside the Siberian forest in *The Secret War*, based on David W. Ammons's story. Budapest-based director Benito Zorkiczy directed the episode, with Karelly Parkhallo as art director and animation from the team at DigiC Pictures.

For Zorkiczy and the DigiC team—producers of some of the best game cinematics and trailers of the past decade—the episode's length was a challenge. The main inspiration for the director was the story's setting. "The most but magnificent beauty

of the Siberian landscapes attracted and repelled me at the same time," Zorkiczy notes. "We only needed to enhance the look and feel a little to bring it in the direction of fantasy. In addition, we tried to suggest this was all happening during World War II by adding details such as the crashed plane for our camp setting."

Zorkiczy considered the look of the characters to be critical.

"We tried to be a balance between stylized and not-stylized. And in terms of animation style, it was clear that stop-motion animation was the way to go. Of course, with the numerous ghazals, we used

**THIS SPREAD** The team at DigiC Pictures drew on their experience creating game cinematics to build the life-like world of *The Secret War*.





keyframe animation but still made them fit into our realistic style.”

A major challenge was balancing the realistic elements with more exaggerated visuals. “We had to determine the degree of reality along guidelines set by our director,” says Perkhlich. “The design of the ghouls required us to create entirely new beings that felt unique and horrific.”

Designing how the ghouls moved was another challenge, says

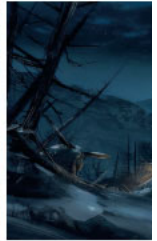
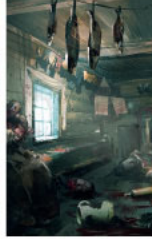
Perkhlich. “They needed to climb from the ground, run fast, climb trees and walls, and had very sharp claws to tear their prey apart.

We had to do a lot of experimentation with motion, which affected the design, then we’d test more. For us, this project was an exciting adventure, and we learned a lot.”

“This was a  
a game intro;



04206 The great beauty of the Snow.  
The snow and the mountains were brought  
to life by the artist's imagination.



BELOW: (Clockwise from top left) Concept art for the ghostly, skeletal creatures that inhabit the dark, twisted world of the game. The creatures are designed to be terrifying and grotesque, with a focus on their skeletal structure and dark, twisted forms.



**PREVIOUS SPREADS** / *Prince of Persia*, *Shadow of Mordor*, *Assassin's Creed*

*Signs* and *Uncharted* received an *Artistic Award for Outstanding*

*Animated Effects* on *The Secret War*. *Assassin's Creed* received *Best*

*Visuals* and *Best Game* at the *Game Awards*.

See these spreads online at [www.ign.com](#).







## SUCKER OF SOULS

An homage to noir horror, *Sucker of Souls* is based on Ken Kesey's vampire story, published in the 2015 *SNAFU: Survival of the Fittest* collection. The Emmy®-winning episode tells the story of an eclectic group of mercenaries encountering an ancient vampire. The short was directed by Owen Sullivan, with animation produced by Studio La Cachette in Paris.

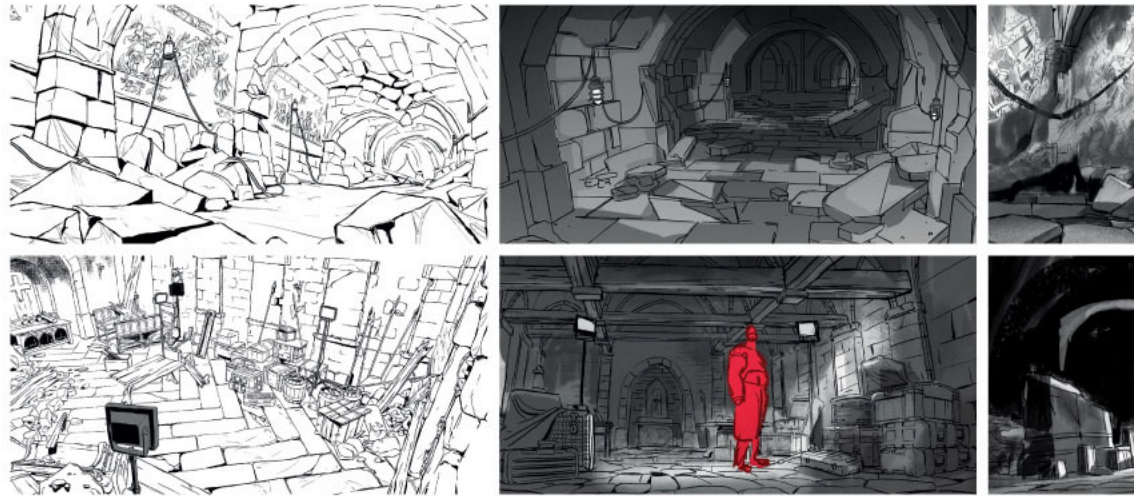
Sullivan, an acclaimed storyboard artist and animation director, has worked on a wide range of projects, including *The Legend of Korra* and *Batman: The Killing Joke* (2016). He has always been a massive fan

of horror, so he was the perfect fit to direct the episode.

"We had a small team in the U.S., but we worked primarily with Studio La Cachette," notes Sullivan. Working with Sullivan were Studio La Cachette's co-founders—character design supervisor Julien Chérog, animation supervisor Ulysse Malençon, and design artist Christophe Bouchette, a veteran team whose credits include *Gravity Falls* and *Primal*.

Eventually, they would be more than twenty animators working to deliver the short. "The script was inspiring," says Chérog. "We look for

**ILLUSTRATION** Owen Sullivan  
 Storyboard artist and character design supervisor Julien Chérog  
 Animation supervisor Ulysse Malençon  
 Design artist Christophe Bouchette





myriad papers with various sketches, and the concept of a mad

'and asking' simple things a group of soldiers within, instead

with dark horns, beautiful armor, and his armor of gold, was amazing"

Sullivan says he initially thought about "going full Gothic,"

referring to the 1970s-era Italian horror genre. "We never got there,

but the overall color palette of the project still has that inspiration.

In the end, we went with a retro John Carpenter feel—dark, gritty,

and a lot of gore. Each scene feels almost monochromatic, with

contrasting splashes of color (usually blood only). And once we

started seeing the painted backgrounds from La Cachette, it all

took on an '80s cartoon vibe in the best possible way. Watching the

short makes me feel like a kid!"

Drawing the book-end version of Ochoala proved a bit of a

challenge. "It was my design concept, and I couldn't do it," Sullivan

admits. "Luckily, La Cachette's Ulysses Malanoguer was there to

help pull us through!"

"The final 2D animation was all Studio La Cachette

Sullivan continues. "I had been wowed by their anim

Katana, which is incredibly dynamic and beautiful. So

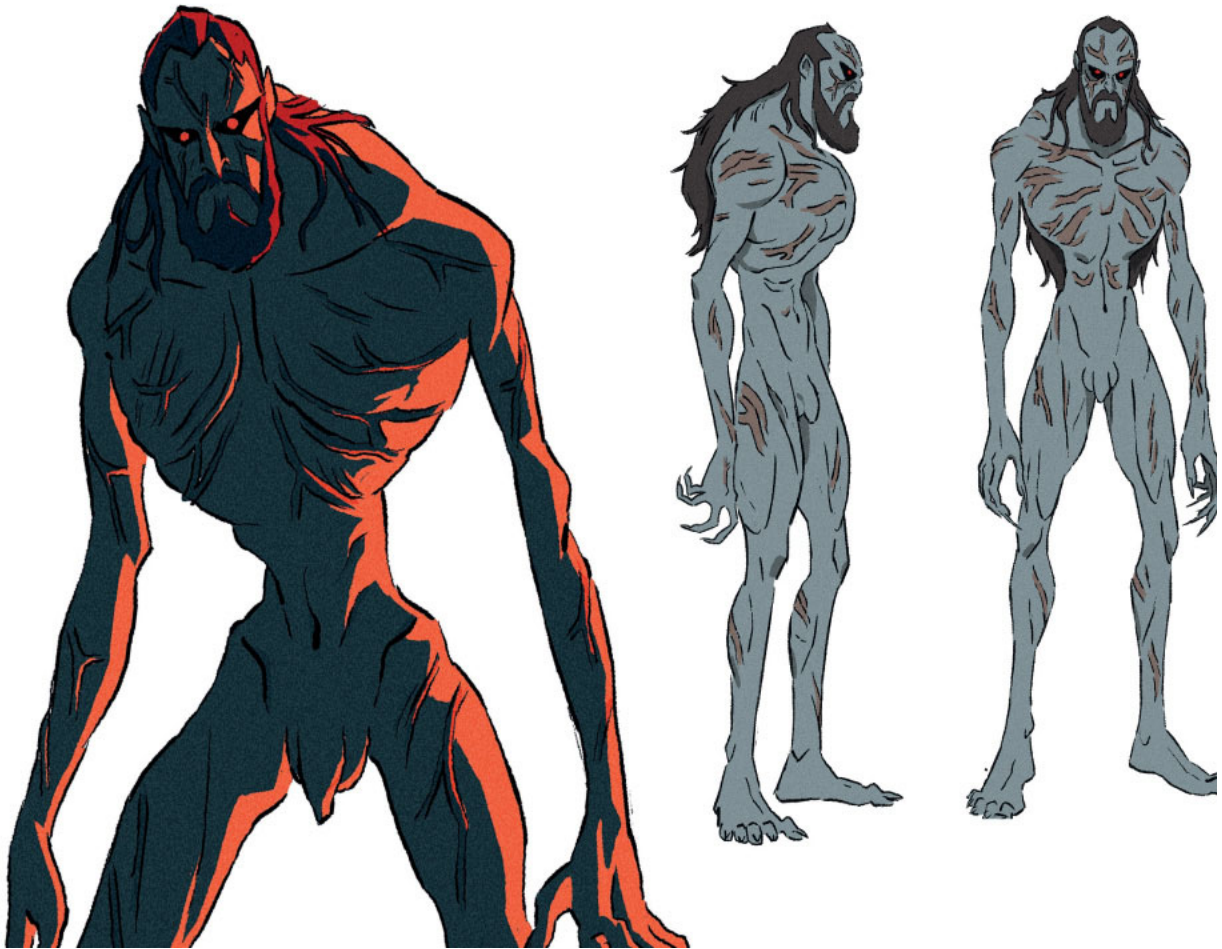
inspiring, I drew a lot of inspiration from it and worked

strongly of the animation team."

Chiang points out that the 2D-animated style is q

different from the CG-animated shorts in the anthology

dynamism in those other shorts pushed us to do some



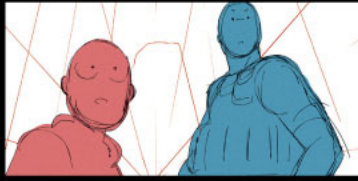
the movies that inspired us in the '90s. But even so, we didn't use any CG, even for the trickiest shots, making our short the only fully 2D-crafted episode of the series."

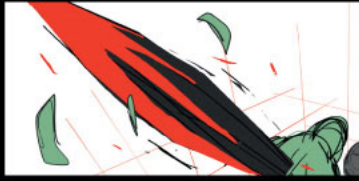
"The character of Simon, who gets gruesomely sliced in half by Doctora, was designed to look like my childhood friend Jeremy," admits the director. "I wasn't mad at him or anything; I just thought he'd get a laugh out of it," he jokes. "I hope his mother never sees the film, though!"

"The quality of Owen's storyboards was the strength of this episode, and we tried to do them justice."

**JULIEN CHHENG**  
CHARACTER DESIGN SUPERVISOR









## THE WITNESS

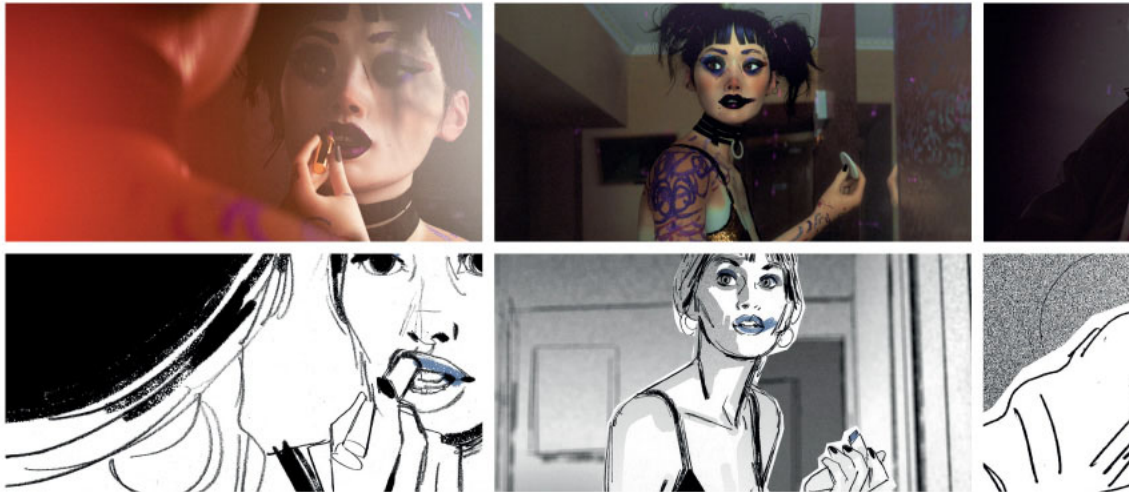
Spanish artist and animation veteran Alberto Mielgo wrote and directed *The Witness*, the cyclical episode about a dancer who accidentally becomes an eyewitness to the murder of a woman in a building across the street. The film was a standout in *Visioneers One* and went on to win three Emmys® (Outstanding Short Form Animation, Production Design, and Character Animation).

"*Love, Death + Robots* allowed me to explore areas of animation I don't often get a chance to visit," says Mielgo. "I had worked at big studios on family-friendly movies and TV shows such

as 2010's *TRON: Uprising* and *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* (2018), so I was ready for a change. When I heard from the guys at Blue about *LD+R*, I knew I wanted to be involved."

"I keep folders of photographs that spark my interest, and I go through them before I start a project for inspiration," he explains. "I found a photograph that I had taken in Berlin and another in Hong Kong. The Berlin photo was the interior of a room, but you could see buildings outside through the window. It reminded me of Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954), which is

**THIS SPREAD** Animation Supervisor David  
Pete worked on Outstanding Individual  
Achievement in Animation Emmy® for his  
work on *The Witness*.





also about a character witnessing a murder from a window. The Hong Kong photo was a street view, and together these images became the inspiration for 'The Witness.'

Meligo lives to get as many multi-world references for his projects as possible. "I went to Hong Kong and shot the backgrounds with my camera, just as you would scout locations

for a live-action movie. I spent time finding all the shots and camera angles, then used the photographs as references for the paintings we did for the shot. Next, I did a pass of the storyboard."

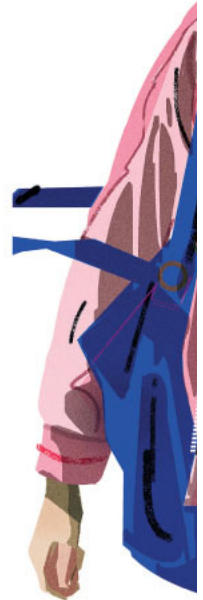
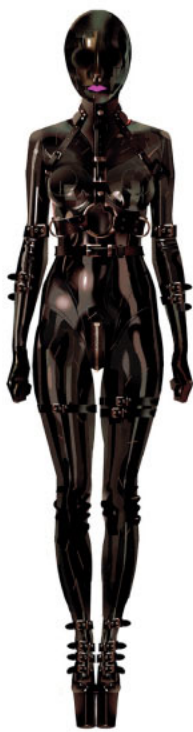
"Albert's storyboards are amazing," remarks screenwriter supervising director Gabriele Pennacchio. "When he began using editing software to move the camera around his paintings, he

developed his unique sensibility and style. From there, animation as a medium for adults."

While Meligo and his team at Madrid have CG models such as Nike, Maya, and Arnold, the 1990s. "It's the same basic concept of characters painted images, just like Bambi (1942)."

Setting up a studio in Madrid and staffing up was a significant challenge for Miraga. "I was used to working as an art director at big studios, where there is a smooth pipeline in place, like a big cookie factory," he explains. "But the only way I could produce *The Wifems* was to create a studio out of thin air."

The Wifems was a unique project for Miraga. He recalls, "I wrote the script to explore new facets of animation for adults. Before *Love, Death & Robots*, there weren't many opportunities for sophisticated, adult themes. For me, this show represents everything Disney would never do. Disney is very good at doing Disney, but this kind of animation is completely different."



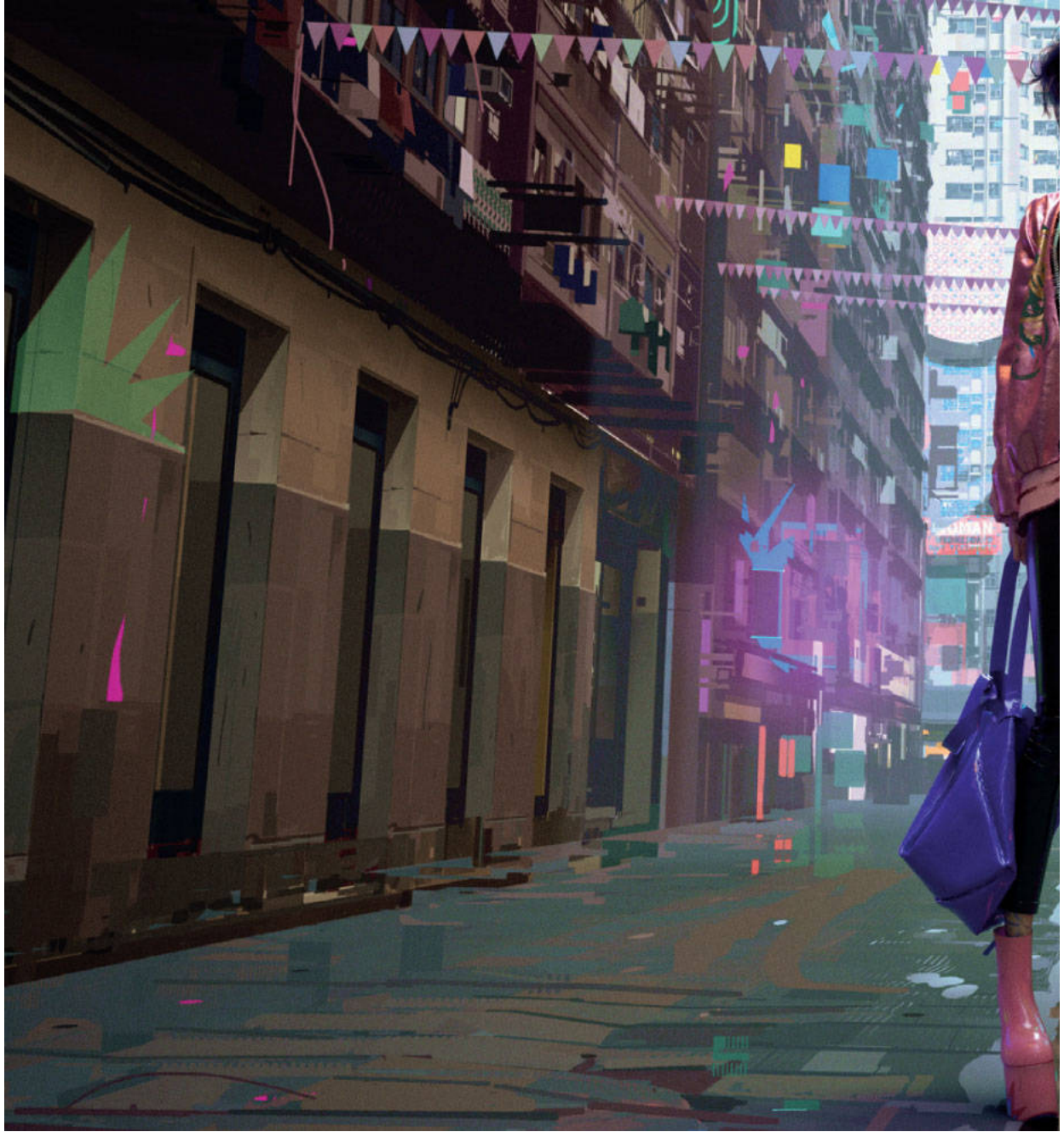






THIS SPREAD / Chinese design photographs  
and signs in Hong Kong and Berlin were the  
inspiration for the building when background  
of the spread.







"If y  
they can  
lo



**THIS SPREAD** With an anthropomorphic narrative, *Blade Runner* depicts the alien character of The Nexus as a form of the future.



## SUITS

A community of farmers on an alien world band together, using handmade armored mechs, to defend their land and families from swarms of insectoid aliens. That's the premise behind Steven Lewis's short story "Suits," which inspired one of the most ambitious episodes in Volume One, directed by Blair's Frank Babson.

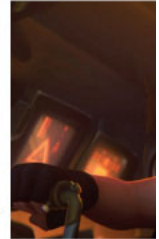
The episode has a noir-styled aesthetic that Blair's used with which allowed for more to experiment with the look and characters. "We usually don't have time to explore the more valuable aspects of our characters, but the focus of family and being a good neighbor inspired

us to push the emotional aspects of the story as well as the action. We wanted the story foundation to be a sense of community so we could see how character-driven people join forces to save each other."

The director also points out that the reveal at the end of the episode was a late addition: "In the original story, you learned that the creatures come every year—a cyclical event, like locusts, that the farmers have to handle. We wanted the audience to feel there was a larger story beyond the one we were telling."

Babson was thrilled with the character designs. "Our art

THIS SPREAD: Exploring the bright colors and industrial designs, directed Frank Babson's short stories were designed to look up the highest body masses of the whole series.











director, Mike Hill, reached out to Berlin-based Kaminon Design Studios, and the first concept they did for Hank was exactly what I had in mind. He was the base for everyone else. I wanted the monsters to be all teeth and no eyes, like *Alien*," he says.

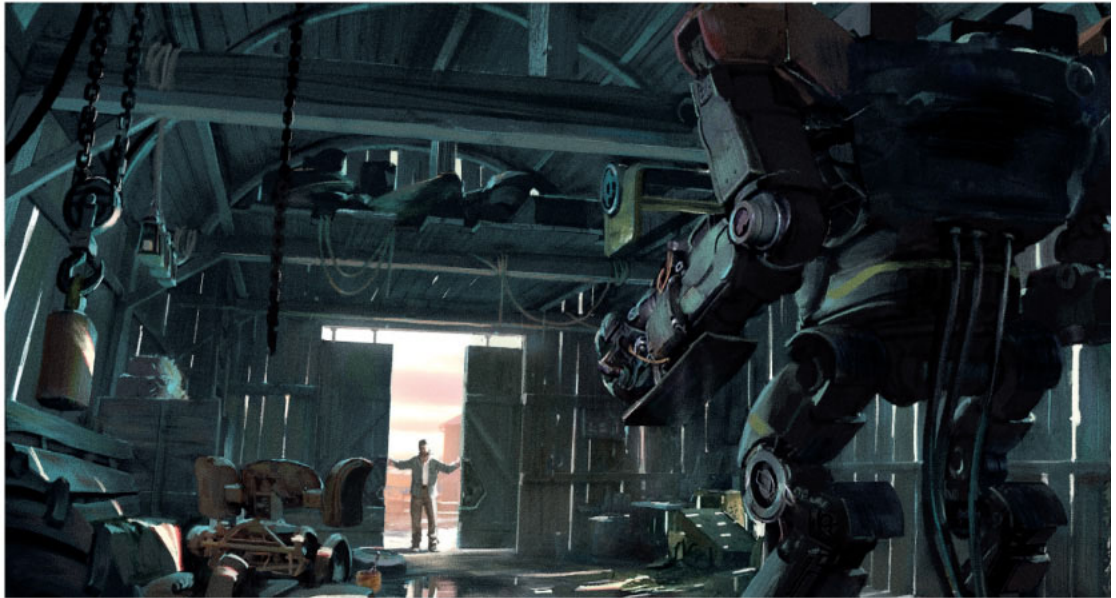
"You can't read what they're thinking, which makes them more terrifying," Balaban explains. "For the cows and chickens, we stole them from Eibar's library, having been done for Jeff Fowler's 2004 short *Gopher Bunko*. We reworked the style to be a mix of *Happy Tree Friends* and *Starship Troopers* (1997)."

Animation supervisor Hubert David loved the contrast of the colorful and light animation style with the darker tone of the story.

"It's an original mix," he says. "There are some dark elements to the story, but also comic relief. Just when you least expect it, a chicken joke breaks things up."

The team had fun animating the chickens and cows in the background. Eagle-eyed fans will notice chickens in all sorts of unsuspected places throughout the short. They can even be seen eating the remains of the aliens in one scene.

**THIS SPREAD** / *Alien* had a wide range of inspiration for its visuals, including *Chicken Run*, *Alien*, *Attack the Block*, and the studio's own *Chick'n-robot* short, *Gopher Bunko*.









## GOoD HUNTING

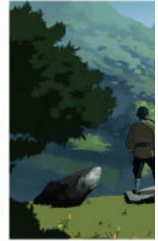
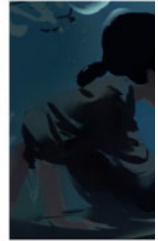
Sometimes posting your late-night drawings on social media can lead to fantastic opportunities. Animation veteran Oliver Thomas, who directed *Good Hunting*, was contacted after sharing his sketches on Facebook. His *Heavy Metal*-inspired designs caught the attention of Volume One supervising director Gabriele Pennacchio.

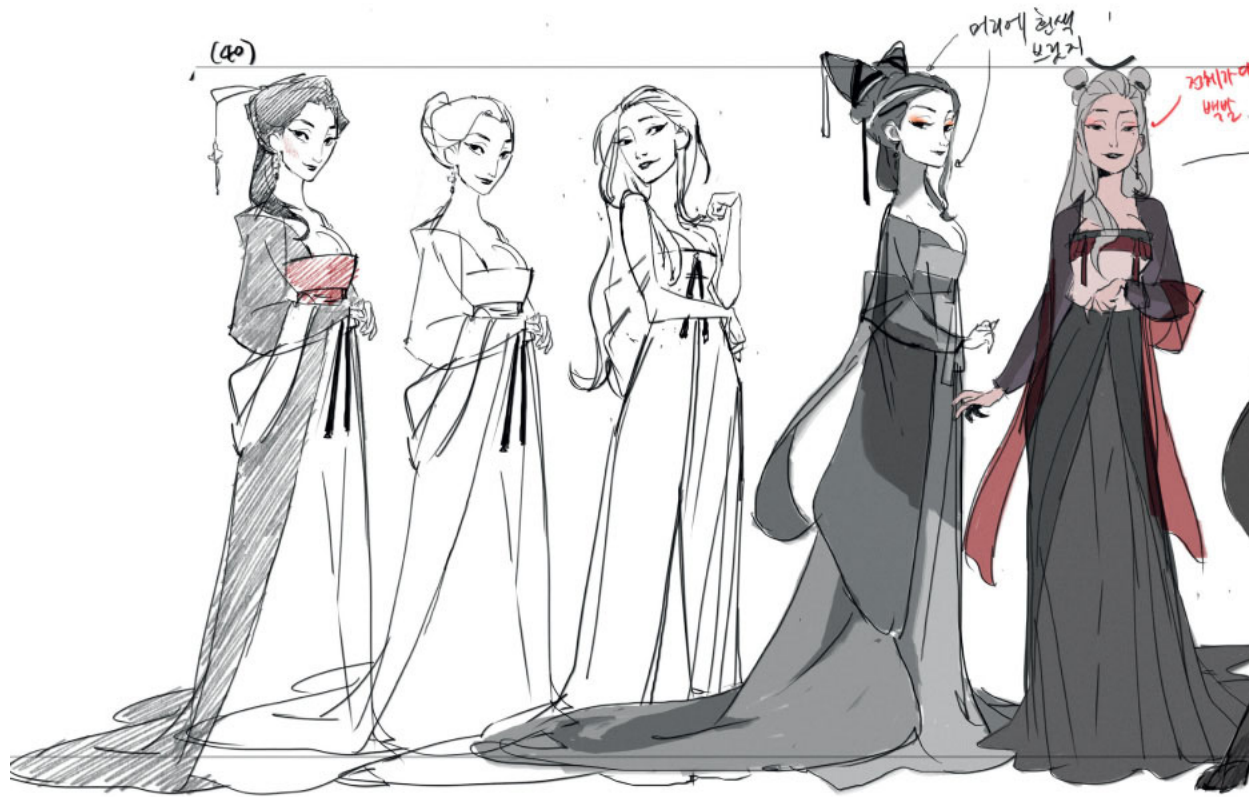
"Gabriele asked me to pitch an episode to show creator Tim Miller," says Thomas, who has storyboarded on features such as *Sonic the Hedgehog* (2020) and *How to Train Your Dragon* (2015). "I

was fascinated with *Heavy Metal* magazine in my teens, so I was super stoked but a little terrified, because I didn't have any fully developed stories in that genre."

Eventually, he was asked to direct *Good Hunting*, an adaptation of Ken Liu's tale of a Huiji jiang—a shapenibbling fox spirit—set in a steampunk version of early-20th-century Hong Kong. "Immediately, my mind was working with the possibilities of this incredible tale that was exciting both as a story and visually," he recalls.

**ILLUSTRATION** The episode's steampunk background design mixed classic and futuristic elements, including a flying robot.





"The Japanese graphic artist Tadahito Uemura was an early inspiration for the look, as was a black-and-white animated short by Julien Bisson called *Yang Yang*. Working with [Korea's] Red Dog Culture House, we eventually found a style that felt right and fit their team of great designers, layout artists, and background painters."

Thomas wanted to marry the lighting design of a classic Disney feature with the team's realistic backgrounds. "We did this by first creating eighty black-and-white thumbnail lighting

keys, trying to simplify the values into big shapes," says Red Dog Culture House CEO and supervising director Ki-Yang Bae. "These would serve the dramatic storytelling by drawing the eye to the most important parts of the frame. Then we did a color script that retained that strong design and lighting."

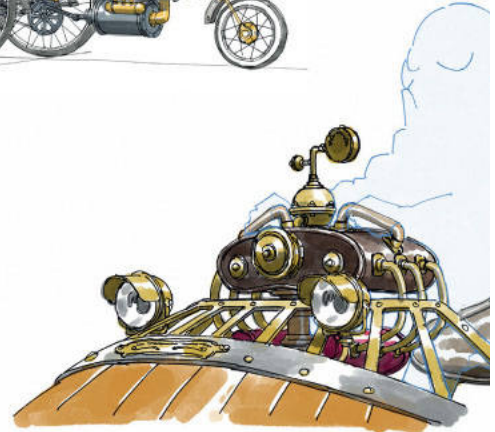
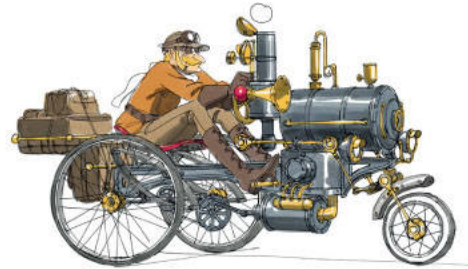
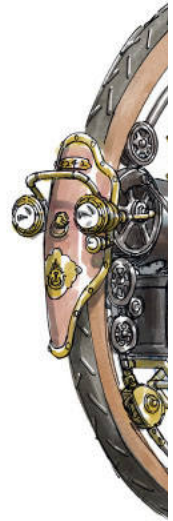
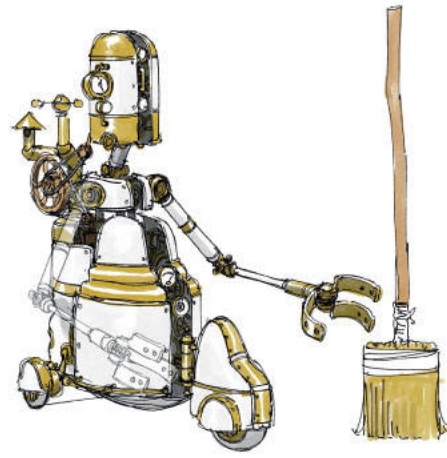
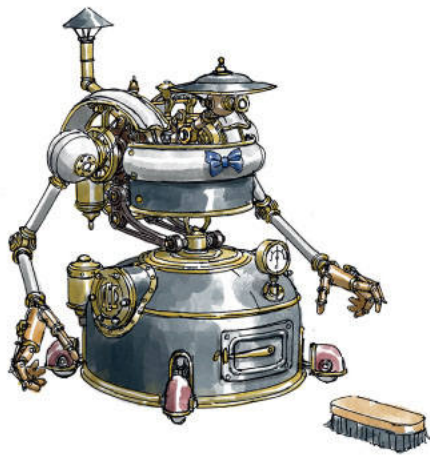
Thomas' background as a 2D animator helped the collaboration with Red Dog. He explains, "My storyboards are very animated, often drawn at three or four drawings per second, and they could organically evolve into actual rough animation."

"I used this opportunity to consider my best branding and designing as I went. This gave me my temperance. I'm a bit of a control freak, so the fun at once was exhilarating!"

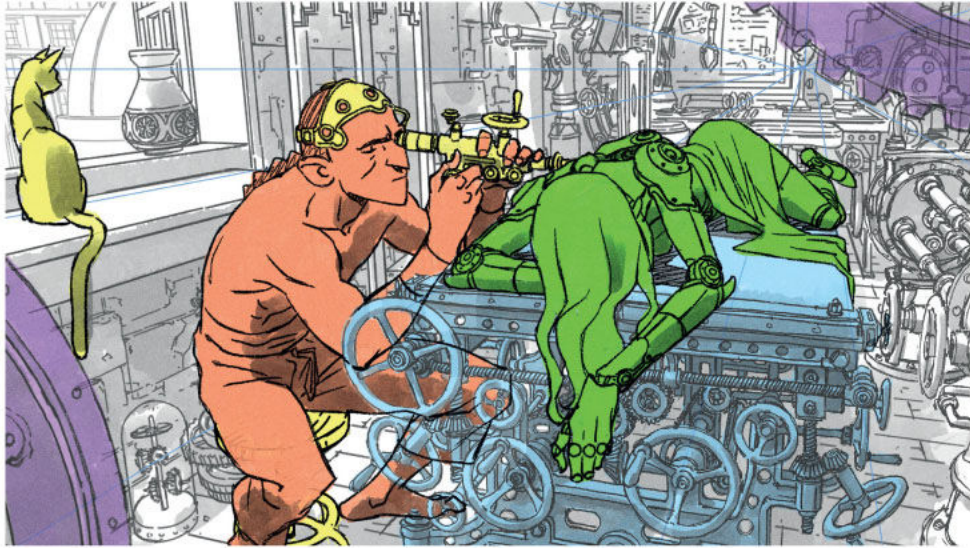
The episode also won an Outstanding Intro in Animation Emmy® for background designer Dong's Ear points out, "Animation production is individuals that people realize, taking creative license, talented people and bringing them together."



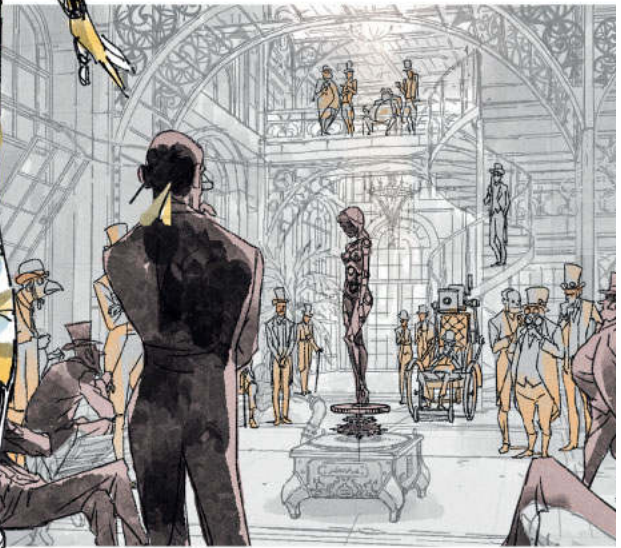
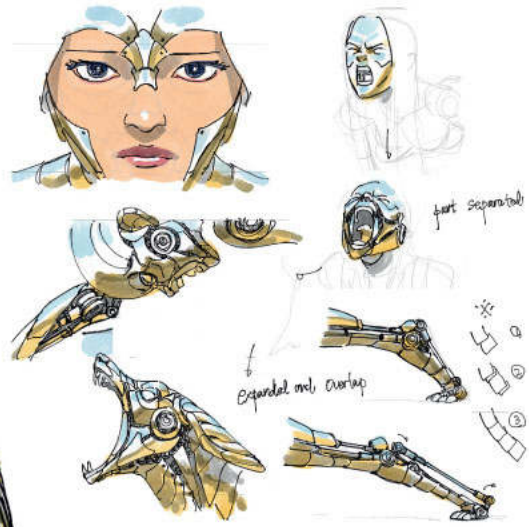
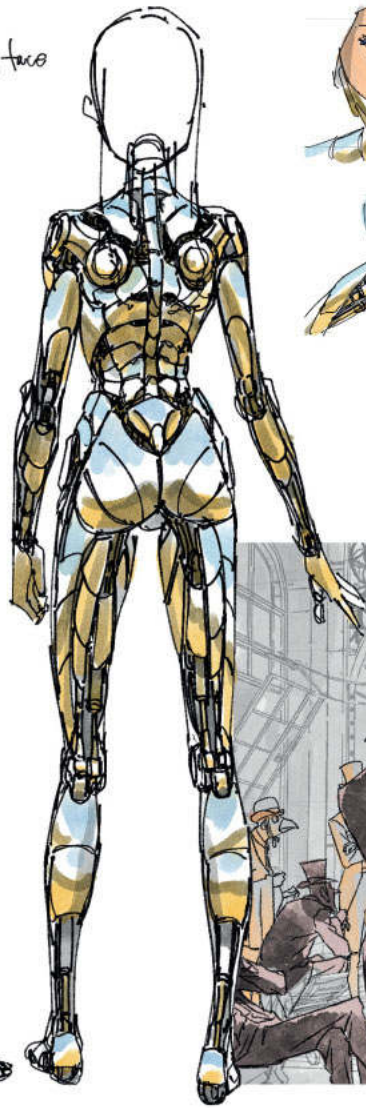
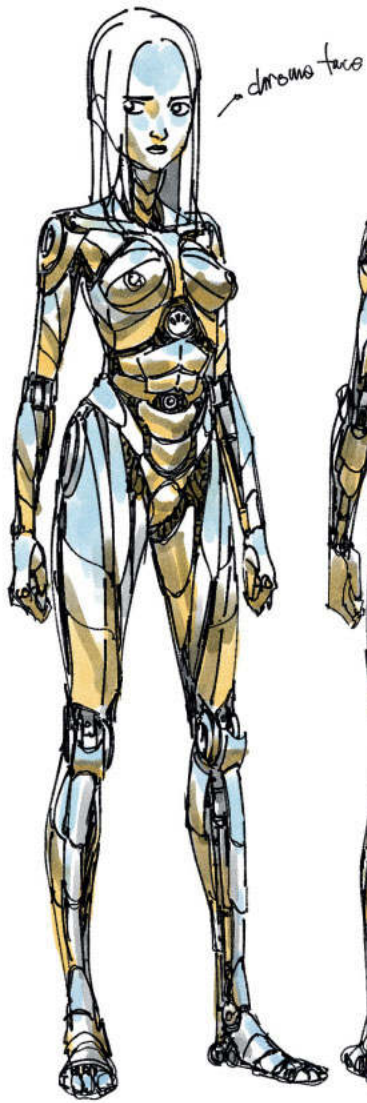








**THIS SPREAD** / The scenes in Brad Pitt's *Dead Dog* feature  
the characters' complex world with intricate detail and the





## THE DUMP

The tale of an old man named Lijó Dave, his wash mason Otis, and their alliance to defend their home from a greedy health inspector (voiced by Gary Cole), *The Dump* was directed by animation veteran Javier Reus Gracia and produced by Carlos Tschentscher with Madrid-based studio Able & Baker. It is an adaptation of a story by Joe R. Lansdale.

Gracia—best known as the director of the Oscar-nominated 2009 short *The Lady and the Keeper*—is a storyboard artist for movies such as *The Grinch* (2018) and *Mission: The Rise of Gru*

(2022). He welcomed the chance to do something completely different from the family projects he's worked on over the past decade.

One of Gracia's goals was to capture the beauty in the ugliness of the older man's world. "There is something about Dave's POV that is appealing, even though he is kind of crazy," explains the director. "He's a happy guy, living in conditions most would find depressing. Scared and unloved, dirt under his fingernails, he is a man who finds peace amidst the junk others have tossed aside."

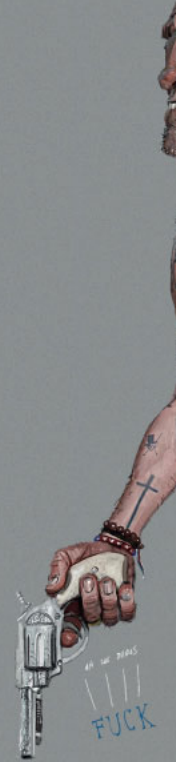
**ILLUSTRATION** Javier Reus Gracia  
The main storyboard, which established the tone and style for the story, took three weeks to complete.





"The thought of being able to work on an adult animated project in the U.S., which had never happened on this level, was very appealing to me."

JAVIER RECIO GRACIA  
DIRECTOR



Among the sources of inspiration for Gracia were the films of David Fincher. "I love the way he shoots his movies. He can find beauty in things that are rotten inside. For example, in *Selma* (1955), the boxer's inventor is that first murder scene looks as if you touched anything, you could pick up a disease. But at the same

time, it's beautiful." A significant task for the AEM & Baker team was developing the trash texture. "This creature would have a look that was unique but challenging to create. Fortunately, one of our technical directors made a handful of software tools to help us."

Gracia storyboarded everything himself. "When working on children's animation, I couldn't wait. It was quite a shift for me. For instance, we got 10 anatomy rigs, we had to look at photos of real people, checking to see those on the studio's computer





WILSON: The director and his team were looking for a world that was 90% realistic and 10% exaggerated. They wanted to shape the characters individually but still have a common thread to them.







## SHAPE-SHIFTErS

The way of two American soldiers, Decker and Salinski, who are

fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan—until they happen to see each other.

Based on a story by Mark Helprin, the script was directed by Mikael

Chen, supervising director Gabriele Pennacchietti.

Pennacchietti has worked at DreamWorks on films such as *The Croods* (2013) and *How to Train Your Dragon* (2010), and when he read Helprin's story, he felt it had huge potential. "I felt very strongly about the themes of father in the story, and the mix of humor with reality was fascinating."

Visually, he aimed for a realistic look, with a hint of stylized design for the characters. For the animation, that meant working with real actors on a motion-capture stage. Pennacchietti studied a wide variety of movies, illustrations, and comic books for werewolf designs. The final results looked 80% lupine and 20% human. He adds, "Having taught animal anatomy at DreamWorks, I had an advantage in creating the creatures."

Blue CG supervisor Darren Butler did lots of research and development for the environments. The team watched films set

**BELOW** From left to right: the scene,

the motion-capture stage, and the final

render. The scene was shot in the

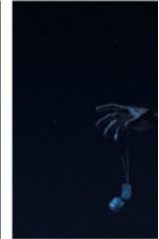
studio's motion-capture stage.

**RIGHT** It's a rough 80 percent of the CG team

in Afghanistan was used to help visualize

the complex environments and the final

render scenes.





in Afghanistan and collected war photography. In particular, the documentary *Restrepo* (2010) helped give Pennacchia and Burke insights into the soldiers' lives.

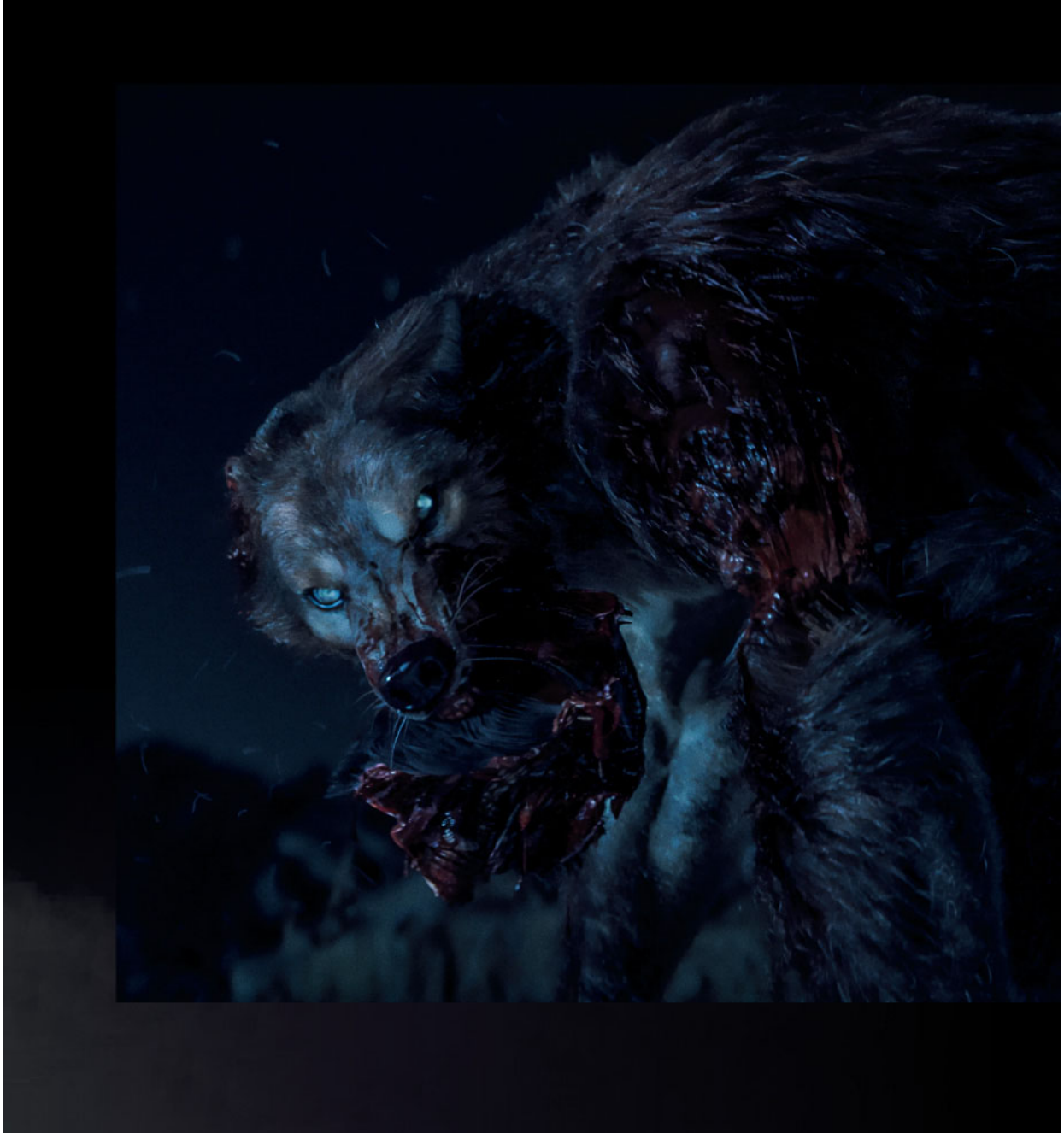
Burke points out that having a visual target is just half the battle. "The other half is understanding how to apply that in CIC," he explains. "So a group of us went into the Sierra Nevada mountains camp

and took hundreds of photos in all kinds of conditions. We even got a chance to shoot a full-on night sight, using a crew member's dog for reference of how much night-vision affects far or on an animal. We also did photo-Lidar scans of the actors, facial animation captures, and landscape photos sometimes to help deal in the lack of *Shape-O-Mat*."

Planning for dramatic sunset light was another big

challenge, recalls Burke. "We started with strong story! Buckle up, Corcoran, who had experience as a light of the *Kangaroo* movies. Then, working with two teams (one led by Philip J. Simon, who did the effects above *Deadwood*) we were able to finance the actors to cover to the team of animators, who added their magic of









THE PRICE: A character depicting a mission scene from the movie, featuring a character in a desert town.

THE PRICE: A character depicting a mission scene from the movie, featuring a character in a desert town.

THE PRICE: A character depicting a mission scene from the movie, featuring a character in a desert town.



## FISH NIGHT

When their car breaks down in the desert, two traveling salesman have a surreal experience in Joe R. Lansdale's story "Fish Night." Damian Nenow directed the short, which was produced by Artur Zima and the team at Warsaw-based animation studio Platige Image.

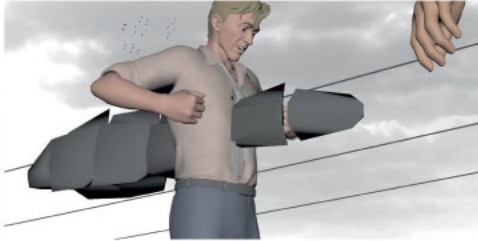
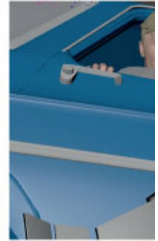
Founded in 1997, the Polish studio has created several beautiful shorts, including Tomasz Baginski's Oscar-nominated *The Cathedral* (2002) and Nenow's acclaimed *Paths of Han* (2010). It's also delivered cinematics for games like *The Witcher* trilogy and

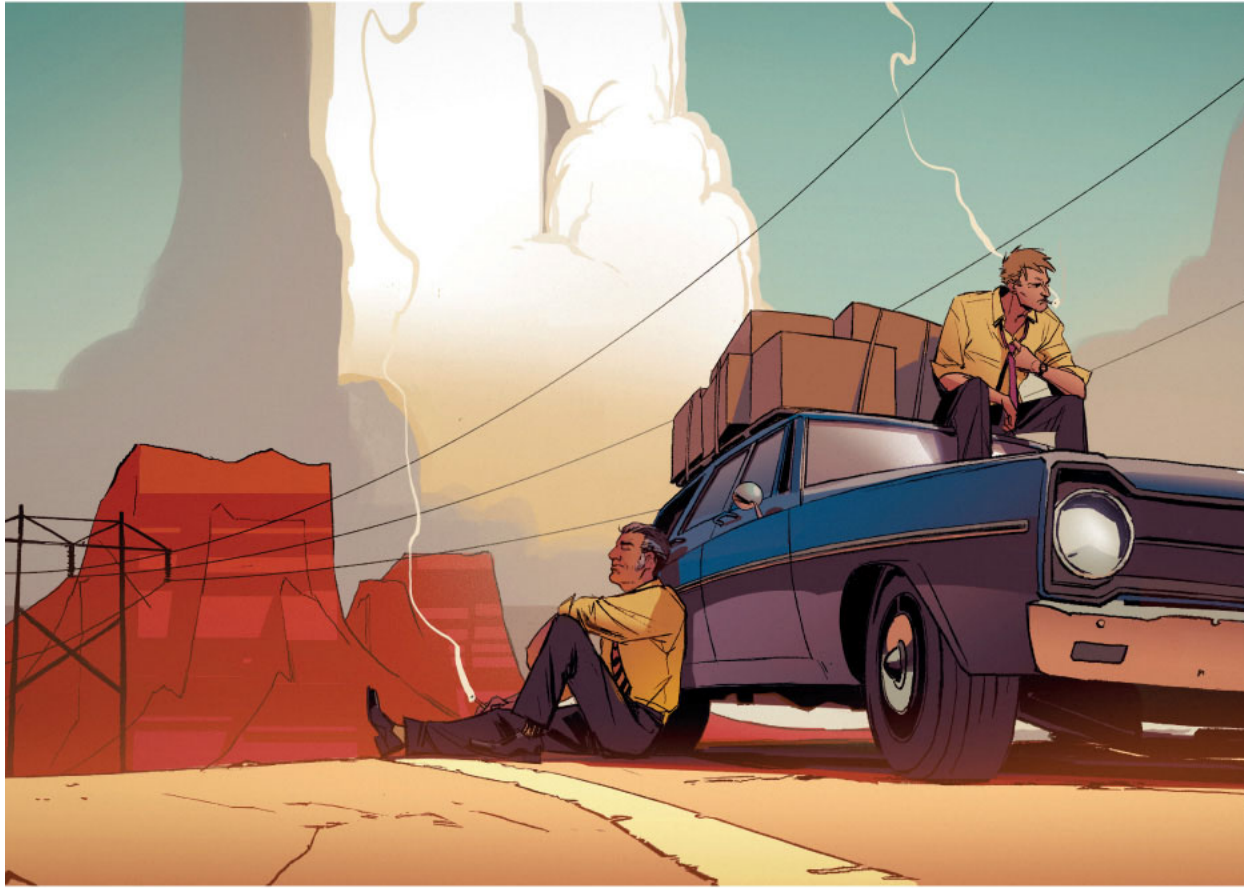
VFX for films such as *Wonder Woman* (2017).

"This beautiful story explores relatively complex relationships and emotions," Nenow points out. "The story's symbolic meaning—a philosophical mixture of Daoist, Zen, and Buddhist spirituality, and a '70s vibe—was very emotional for me. Both Joe Lansdale's original story and the script by Philip Gelan were very moving."

Producer Zima adds, "I have always found magical realism. And when I read 'Fish Night' for the first time, I found it to be an inspiring blend of emotion driving the two characters' actions. I knew

**HEART** | *Fish Night* and *Wonder Woman* were influenced by modern digital illustrations from artists such as Clark Watson, the *Studio Ghibli* team, and Greg Miller.





travels what visual style would be best to illustrate their journey."

Nesrow's earlier work informed that visual style. "I wanted to continue the unique, comic-book-styled 3D look we established in *Palms of Hate*. The art director, Rafal Wojasik, and I were also influenced by modern digital illustrations from artists such as Gino Monetti, the Hamada brothers, and Sergi Bernal."

"This story has enormous potential for interpretation," Nesrow

explains. "It's very symbolic and could easily slide into existential themes that are a staple of Polish cinema, where my artistic roots lie. Yet this story is also bright and magical."

The producers knew this short would be different from the other projects Platige had worked on before. "We felt a great deal

of ownership in this film, even though it was not

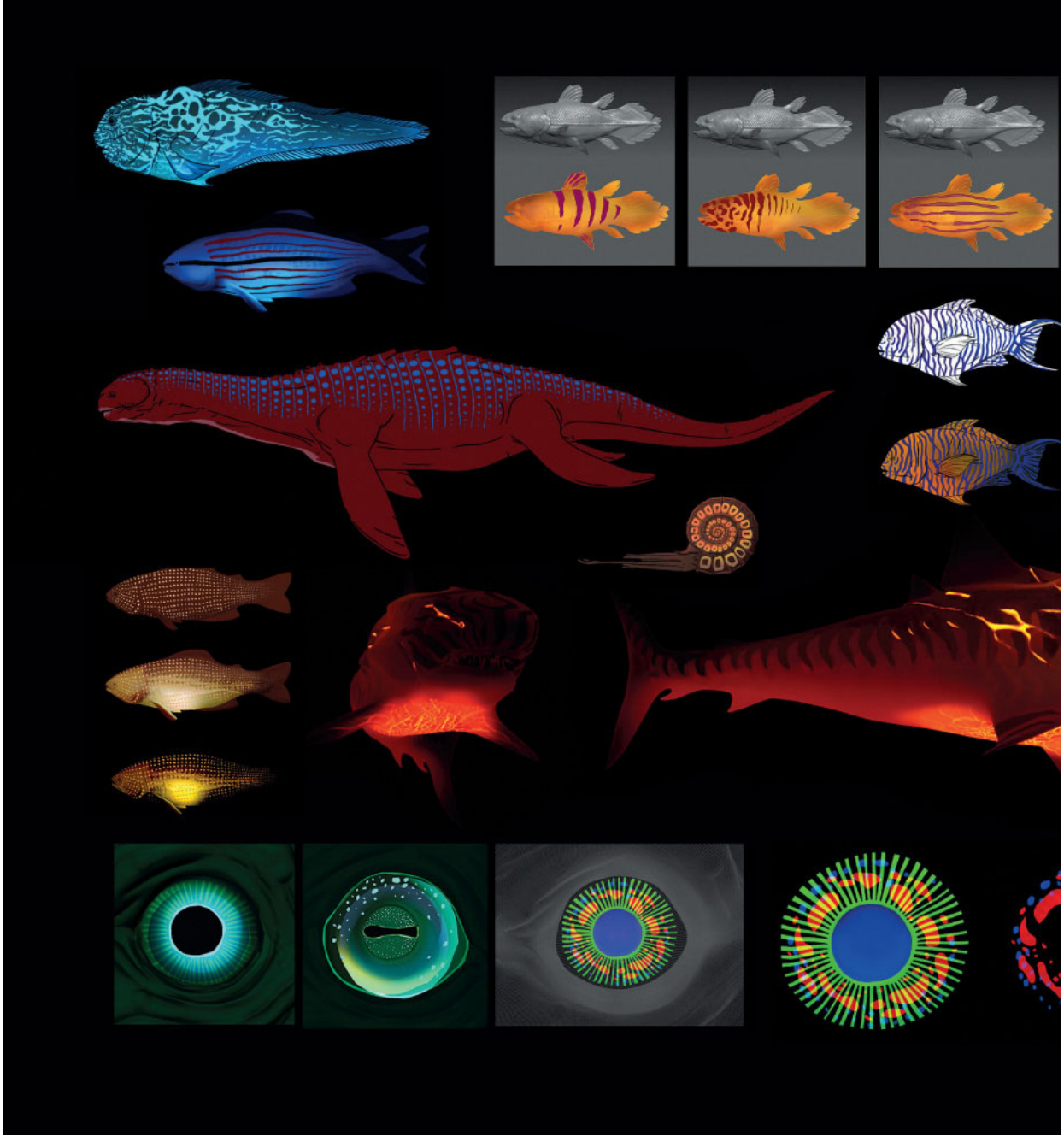
Zec's. "Them being in charge just made it easier to understand the process."

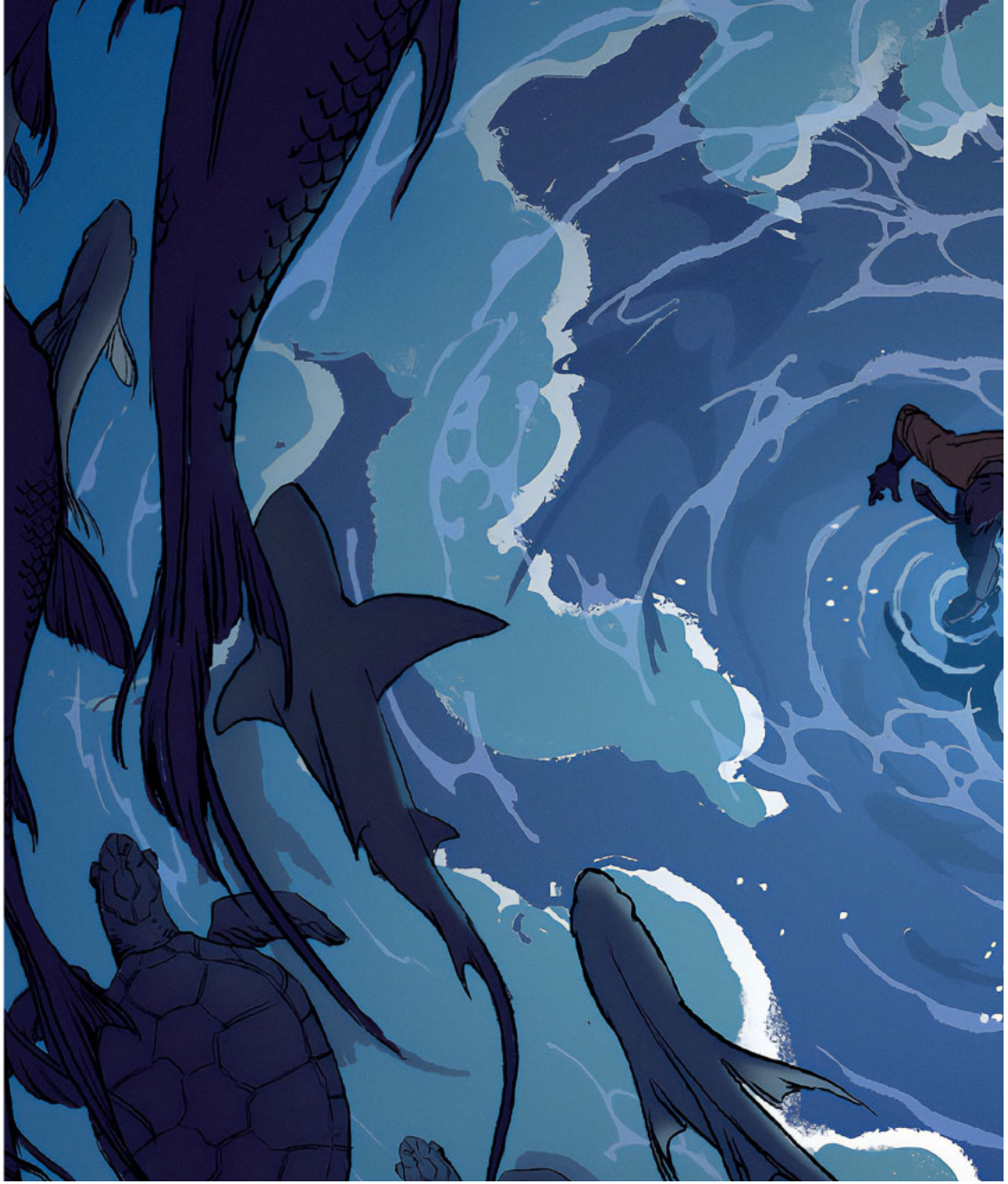
Zec adds, "When I picked the *Fish Night* project for Platige, Tim said that he'd been interested himself, but I am glad I picked it first!"



THESE IMAGES REPRESENT  
THE ART OF LOVE, DEATH + ROBOTS  
THE ART OF LOVE, DEATH + ROBOTS  
THE ART OF LOVE, DEATH + ROBOTS  
THE ART OF LOVE, DEATH + ROBOTS











## HELpING HAND

Helping Hand in Volume One is a tightly-plotted story about a stranded astronaut who must use her brain and her body—parts of it, anyway—to survive, based on a short story by Claudine Griggs.

Director Jun Yu loved the contained nature of Griggs' original story. "The film is very focused, a single location and a single character through which we experience the story." The director worked with the brilliant team at Glasgow-based Axis Animation to bring it to life.

One of the exciting aspects of the story for Yu was that it

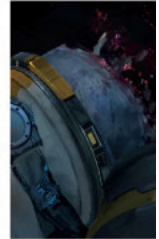
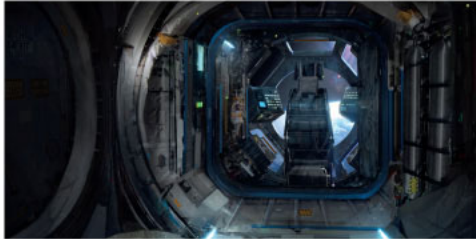
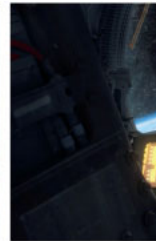
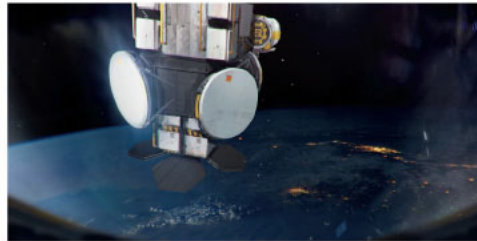
could have been set on any dangerous frontier at any point in history.

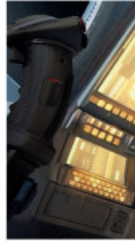
"The universe decided that today, everything will go wrong for the main character, Alexandra Stephens," says Yu. "She is the type of character who will never give up, even when all hope appears lost."

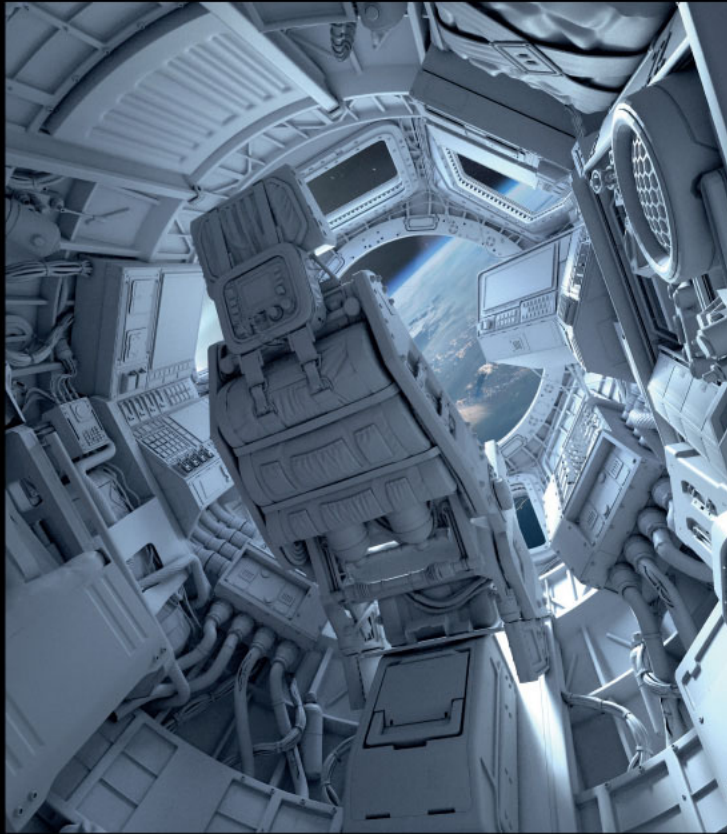
Yu explains, "We wanted things to feel realistic rather than fantastical so that Alex's story felt relatable. She's an everyday maintenance tech in a working-class grid set against the awe-inspiring backdrop of Earth orbit."

After actress Elyse Cardon was cast, she was digitally

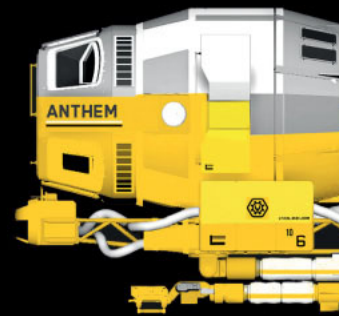
RENDERED FOR THE MOVIE  
generated and the model then re-  
aligned to the position of the sun and Earth's  
atmosphere to create the different shots.







**ORBITAL  
MAINTENANCE**



learned to create Alexandria. She performed the whole shoot in the motion-capture volume, and that data was given to the Acis artists, who added an incredible amount of detail.

"Acis' lighting experts and compositors shaped the cinematic look of the film as our editor worked tirelessly over seven months to craft the film," says Yen. "The whole team expressed the same grit and determination that Alexandria did."

Acis Animation executive producer Caleb Buschard adds,

"We pushed ourselves to achieve the best digital human possible using new 3D-scanning and performance-capture techniques. We also created a special 'Planet Earth' tool that allowed us to break clouds, locations, and the sun position in every shot."

"The positive reaction to Love, Death & Robots had a huge impact on the animation industry," Yen reflects. "It has opened up so many new opportunities for animated storytelling. Being a part of this new era was a privilege."

**THIS BREAK** / The collaborative partnership between Acis Studios and Blue Sky, through its partners Fox and Disney as the Fall Green and Winter's Run.



**GOOD NEWS**  
ALEXANDRIA STEPHENS  
CONTRACTED MISSION  
PROTOCOL 008678



**BAD NEWS**  
ALEXANDRIA STEPHENS  
MISSION OVERRUN  
PROTOCOL 008678



**LOCK**  
IMPORTANT  
OBSERVE COMPANY  
PROTOCOL 008678  
KEEP LIMBS CLEAR



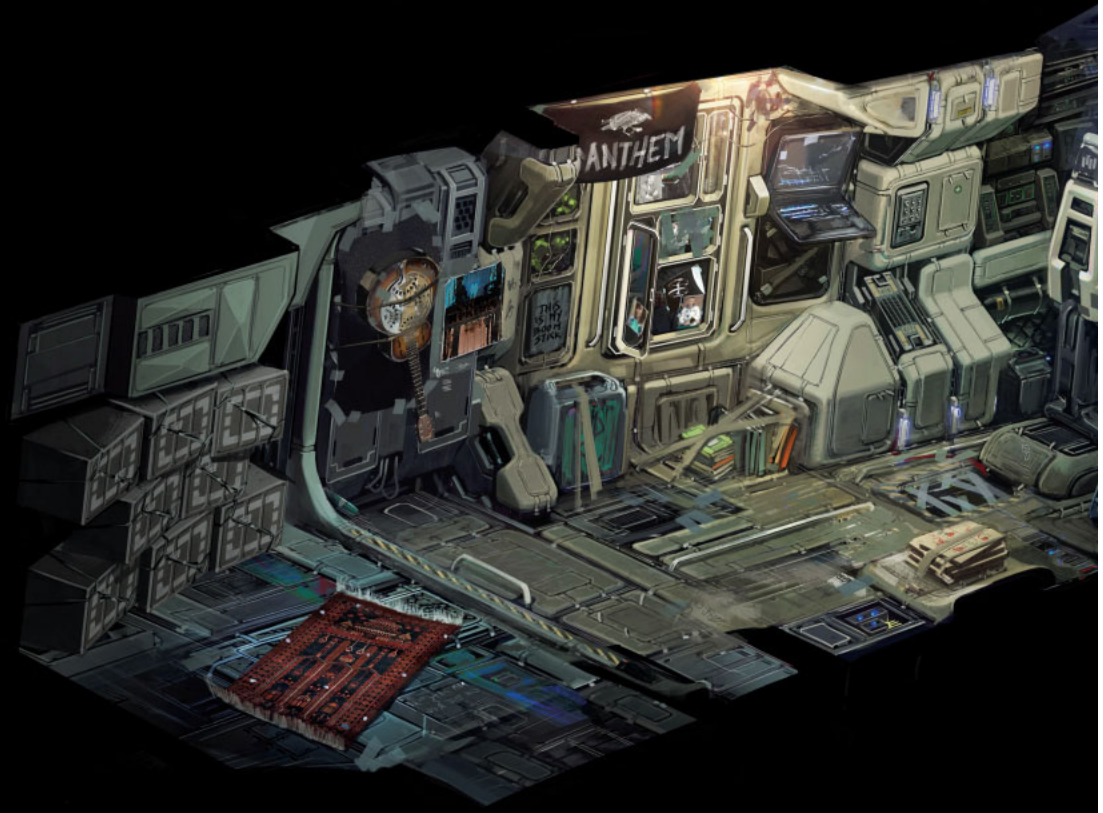
**DANGER**  
MIND YOUR FINGERS  
OBSERVE COMPANY  
PROTOCOL 008678



ORBITAL MAG KIT

**01**

TOOL KIT









## ALTErNATE HISTORIES

John Scalzi's story about a "Multiversity" app asks us to explore an infinite variety of timelines—like the many ways Adolf Hitler could have died. Maybe suffocated in gelatin, crushed by a meteor, or even screwed to death by four Vietnamese prostitutes...

The possibilities are endless.

Exploring them was, once again, the Barcelona-based duo of Victor Maldonado and Alfredo Torres (Headless Animation).

The Hitler sketch provided them the opportunity to cut loose and venture into unfamiliar territory. "Having the chance

to poke fun at Hitler with violence and sex with a Saturday-morning cartoon approach was loads of fun," says Maldonado. "We looked at lots of 2D animation from some of our favorite artists for inspiration."

"But we didn't want to make a 100% meme," Maldonado notes.

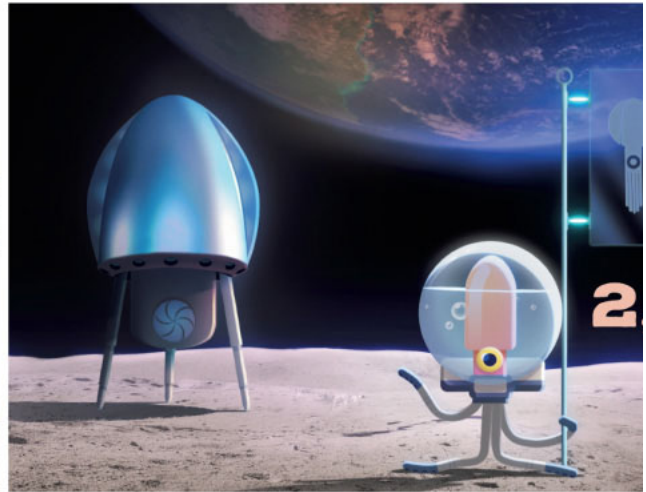
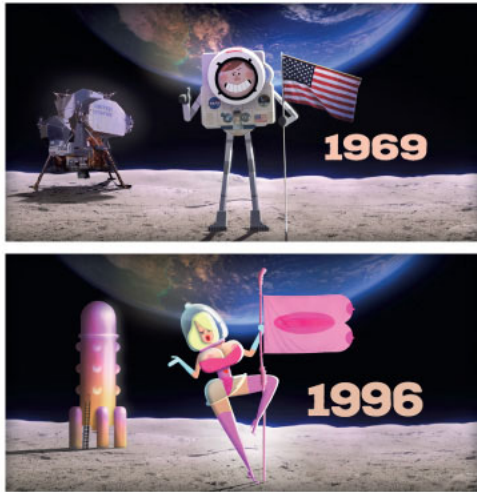
"We thought it could be a cool idea to offer a contemporary take on

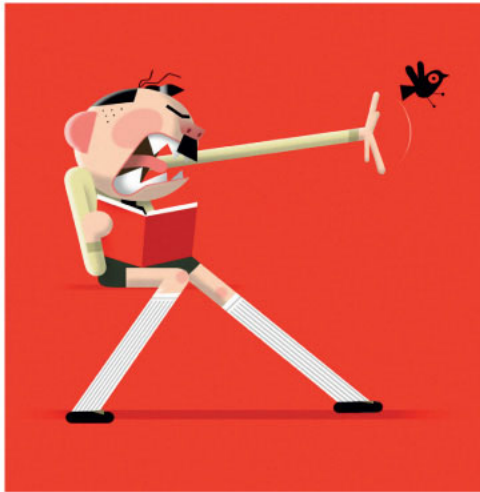
"2D-animated space—using After Effects for animation. Our favorite

bit of design for the Hitler character was to put him in bedframes,

which made the whole concept even more ridiculous."

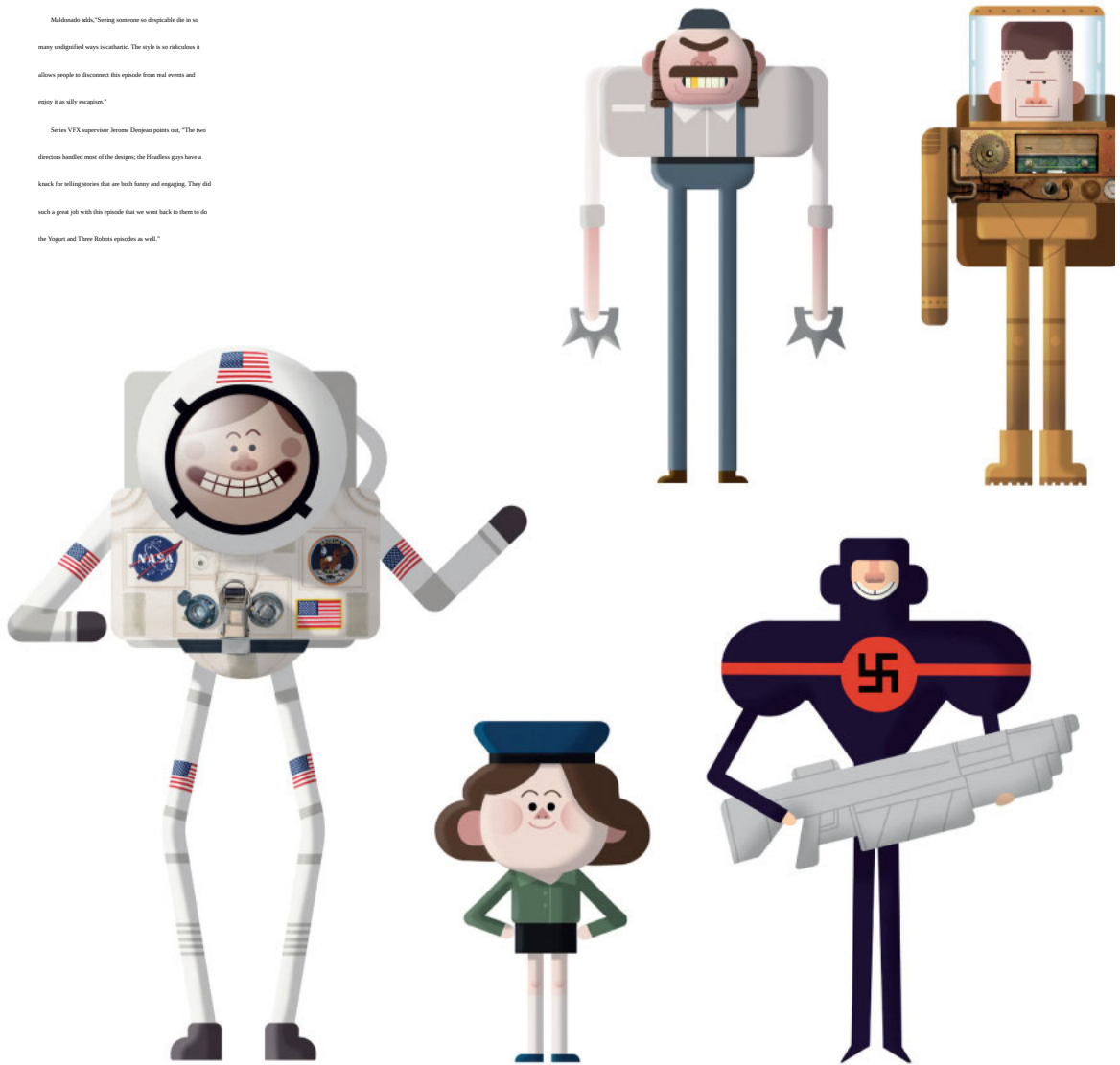
**THIS SPREAD** / Director Maldonado and Torres used a classic cartoon approach, mixed with an Eastern European animation touch and backgrounds based on stock photos.

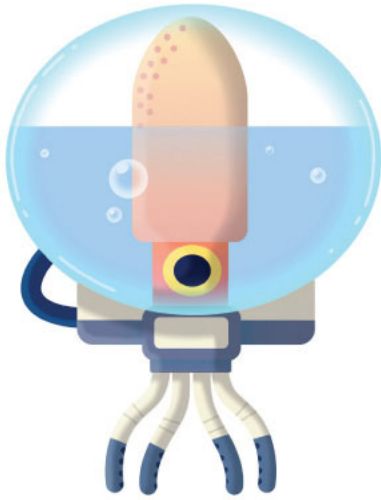




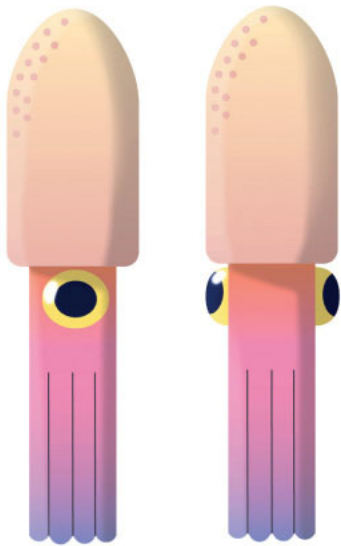
Maldonado adds, "Seeing someone so despicable die in so many undignified ways is cathartic. The style is so ridiculous it allows people to disconnect this episode from real events and enjoy it as a silly exception."

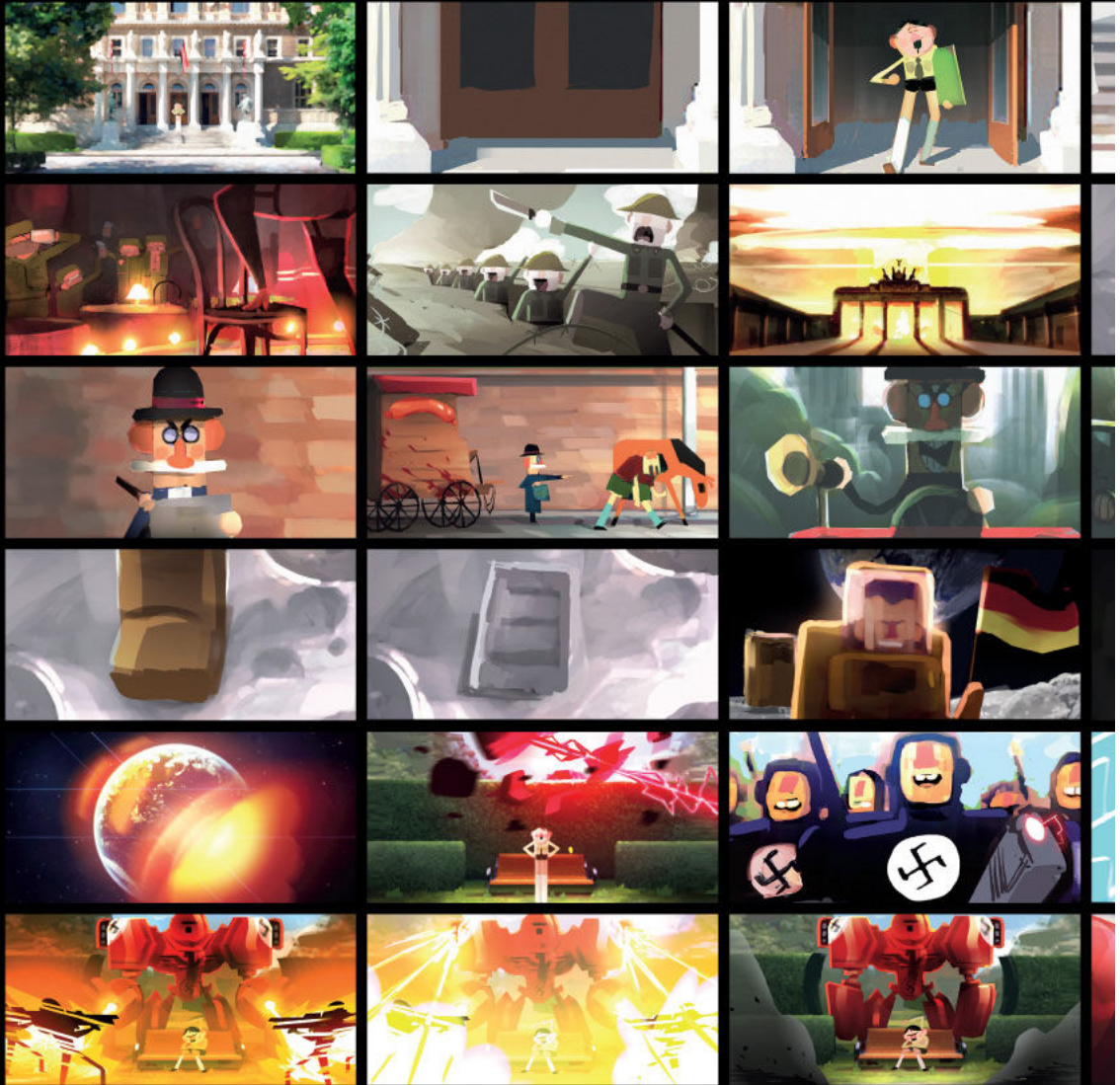
Series VFX supervisor Jerome Desjardins points out, "The two directors handled most of the designs; the Headless guys have a knack for writing stories that are both funny and engaging. They did such a great job with this episode that we went back to them to do the 'Sigart and Three Robots' episodes as well."





STU









## LUCKY 13

Humanity's mastery of antipersonnel technology gets a poignant twist in 'Lucky Thirteen,' a story by Mark Klein. Directed by Sam Pittman. Inspired by Jerome Chen and executive produced by Mandy Takemura, this episode centers on a nuclear pilot, Colby (played by Sam Worthington), who gets a combat dropship in which the last two crews have died.

Chen—who also directed 'Vikings' in 'Valhalla Hall'—inspired —is an Oscar-nominated VFX industry veteran who has worked on films like 'Star Wars' (1999) and 'Suicide Squad' (2016).

"It's a lot of military adventure stories, and I loved the tone at the end of this one, where the ship seems to take the hell to come to light."

"The challenge was in connecting the relationship between Colby and the dropship. We used the ship's security camera to give Lucky 13 a point of view," says Chen. "And we added a scanning LIDAR effect whose sound effects were like a hearing beam, so the ship felt like a living thing."

For visual reference, a touchstone was Ridley Scott's 'Black Hawk Down' (2001). "Scott establishes an iconic style for any genre

THIS SPREAD: Jerome Chen and the designers team embraced and added features to take the futuristic technology in Lucky 13 and grounded it in real world.





he teaches," says Chen. "Black Hawk Down" is cinematography by

Shawna Edwards. It was our goal."

Chen moves on to the technology used in the film.

"The Lucky 13 display is a space-based version of the Deputy V-22."

Project weapons are all from the movie, but the tanks

look high-tech. The M2 Browning 50-caliber machine gun designed in

1933 looks right at home in a top-mounted turret on Lucky 13."

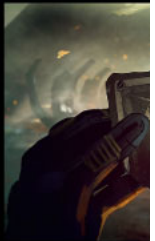
A message of Colby bonding with Lucky 13 during a series of

missions is one of Chen's favorite scenes. "Rob

makes the sequence so compelling. And the end

also a favorite. In the solution of Santos's part

engineer her transition from sadness to hope for t



“Because the st  
space and on alien  
staging of the acti  
for







THIS SPREAD: Kellan Lutz's powerful performance was pivotal in closing the bond between Gilly and Lucky 13.





## BLINDSPOT

Russian director Vasily Shaikin's anime-inspired X-Men

generated a lot of attention when released online in 2016. It also caught the attention of the Love, Death + Robots team, so they reached out to Shaikin to ask if he'd contribute to the anthology.

Supervising director Gabriele Pennacchietti recalls, "I loved the way he was blending anime influences with western animation, particularly Don Bluth's animation and design, but there are also nods to both Akira (1988) and Dragon's Lair. I found his style fresh and his storytelling equally original, and Blindspot became the first

short to be greenlit for the series."

The St. Petersburg-based artist said "yes" immediately. "I love 'bitch films' and thought it could be interesting if the robbers were underlying robbers pulling off something like a high-tech train robbery."

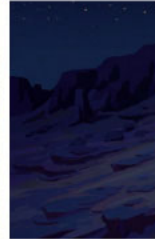
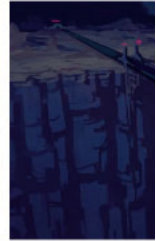
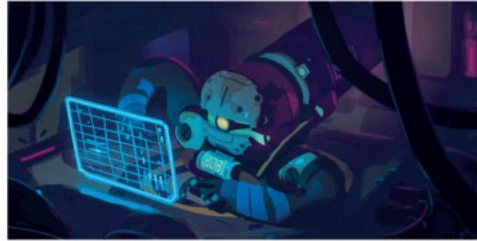
Written and directed by Shaikin, Blindspot follows a band of cyborg thieves—Lionel, Kiki, Sui, and Rook—who attack an armored conveyer in a remote wasteland. The animation process Shaikin and animator director Elton Viki developed together was

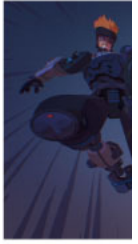
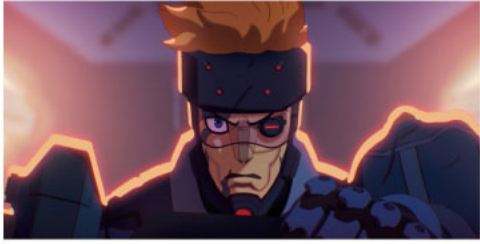
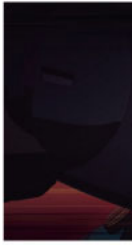
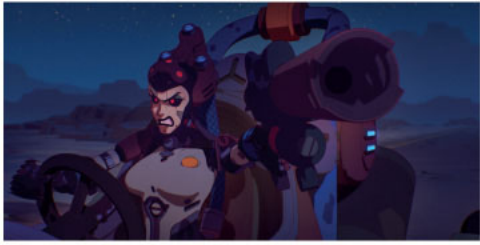
THIS SPREAD: From left, drawing the world;

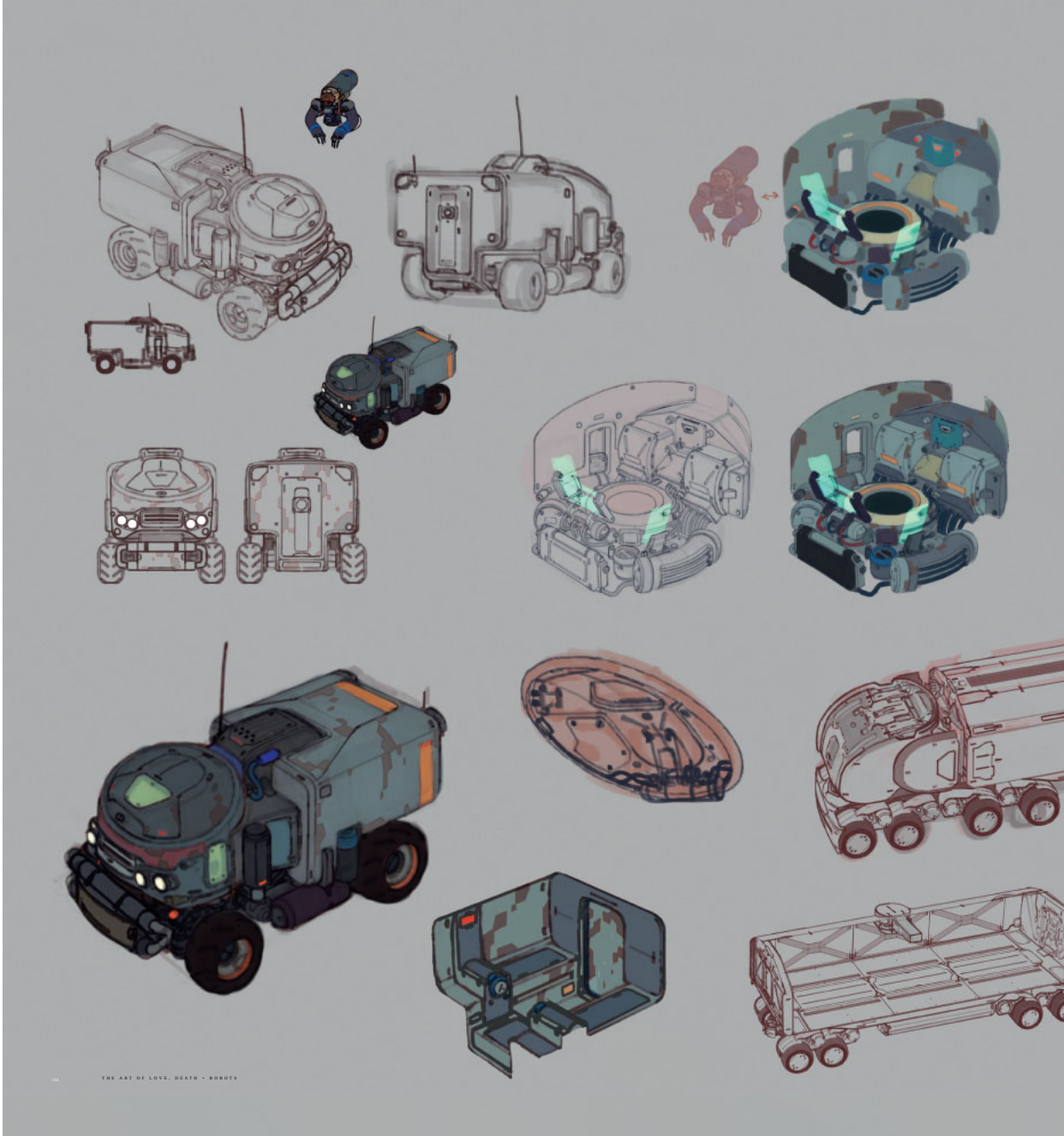
drawing a robot; Shaikin;

developing a unique aesthetic; drawing the

landscape; and the robots.













"First, we animate the entire movie in 3D."  
"Then we paint over it, adding 2D special effect  
and much more. Each frame is processed manu-  
ally style unique. We were constantly working to  
refine and the story throughout the process."

THIS SPREAD: Character designs for the Jaeger crew  
by Bryan Hitch, Rick, and Dan.



## ZIMA BLUE

Love, Death + Robots sought out talented artists worldwide, one of whom was Vancouver-based animator Robert Valley. The *Zima Blue* episode he directed was produced by Chris Spillit, who worked with Valley on the 2016 Oscar®-nominated short *Four Ciders and Cigarettes* and the *Gorillaz* music videos.

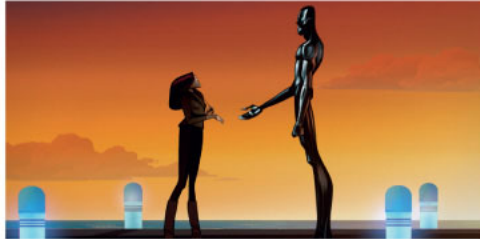
The team at Blue thought Valley would be great for adapting Alastair Reynolds' story about a reclusive artist who we learn is a sentient robot evolved from a swimming pool cleaning bot. "I couldn't help but draw thumbnail sketches on the script margins

the first time I read it," recalls the artist. "Some of them even made their way into the final design."

Producer Chris Spillit says, "*Zima Blue* had such a beautiful, philosophical tone to it—the story of an artist's search for meaning." Valley—who has worked on animated shows such as *Evil*

*Flux* and *TRON: Uprising*—really wanted to go with a non-white cast of characters. "I wanted to think of Miles Davis as inspiration. It was important to have a highly reflective skin surface with lots of shadow and bright highlights."

**THIS SPREAD** Valley was inspired by Alastair Reynolds' work on *Plague*, *Reckless* and *Miles Davis* for the design of the sentient protagonist Zima Blue. He incorporated references including how the designs go with the black tones that characterize the style of his work with *Cartoon*.



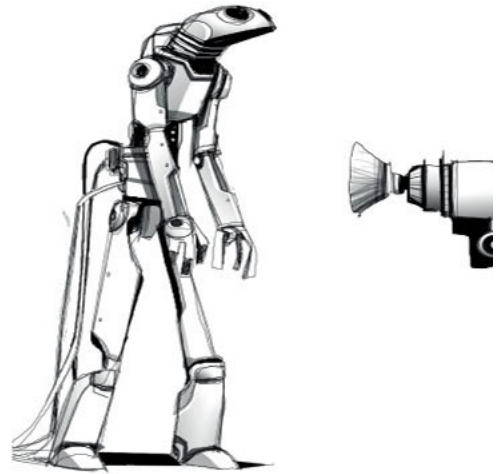
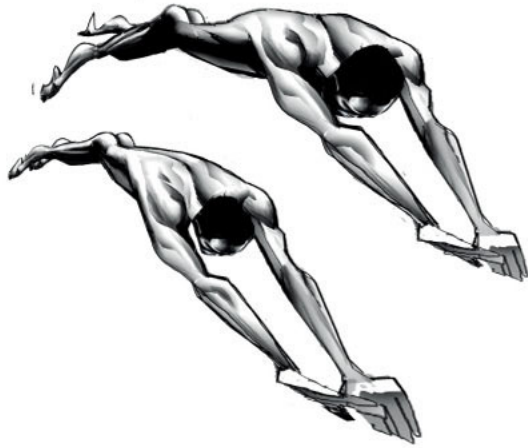
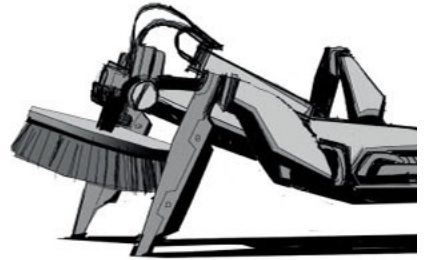
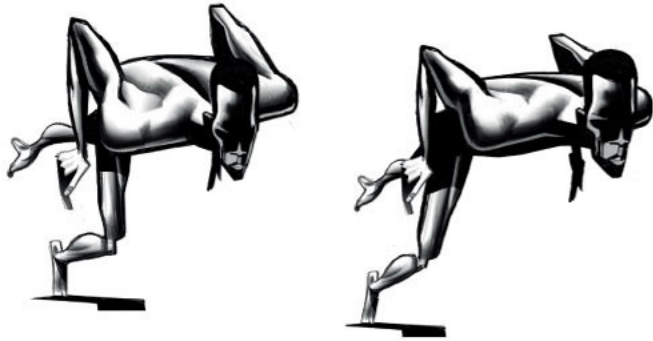


"I am not interested in feature films. I love five- or ten-minute shorts that leave an imprint on you."

**ROBERT VALLEY**  
DIRECTOR









Valley's passion for short-form storytelling dates  
 his time in school. "I love five- or ten-minute shorts  
 impact on you. I remember I was so impressed by  
 his work on *Blue Bird* that I drove down to L.A. to  
 him, and showed him what I had been doing in anim  
 Valley shorts. "The success of *Love, Death*  
 been fantastic for those who love animation and  
 audience. It has opened doors and led to new opp

**BACK SPREAD:** This color script illustrates the  
 script's working pages. One day images and only  
 in the script sequence to the *Blue Bird* storyboard  
 their own.







VOLUME

02



## AUTOMATED CUSTOMER SERVICE

Automated Customer Service was directed by Francesco Giusti. Van

Die Meulen, David Nicolas, and Laurent Nicolas—collectively known as

Mini Department. The film's title may come on a lark between the

elderly couples of a retirement community and her robot vacuum.

Scalzi's original story was minimalist, which meant lots

of effort went into creating the episode's visual comedy. "During

a road trip across the US, we passed through a small town named

San City, Arizona. It was a retirement community, and anyone under

fifty-five was not welcome!" Van Die Meulen remembers. "We

pitched the idea of a senior Utopia to Elia and imagined an elderly

society, living out their days pampered by robots."

"We like to ground our work in documentary research to

exaggerate reality," Van Die Meulen explains. So the directors tried

to imagine a paradise for the elderly, but found it hard to beat the

elaborate existing communities in places like Arizona and Florida.

"To stylize that world, we had the help of many talented artists,

such as painter Cynthia Galacio, sculptor Patrick Bannana, and

designers Villa Avea and Agnès Studio, to name a few."

THIS SPREAD features character design for the

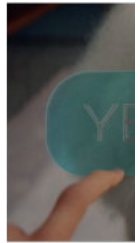
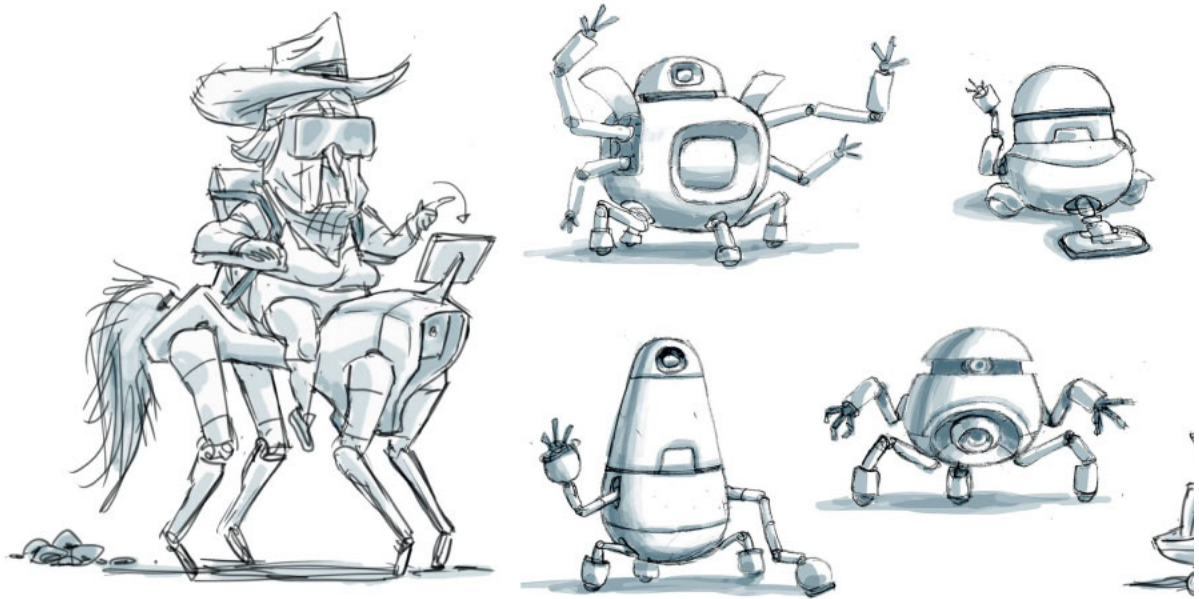
community's elderly residents, created

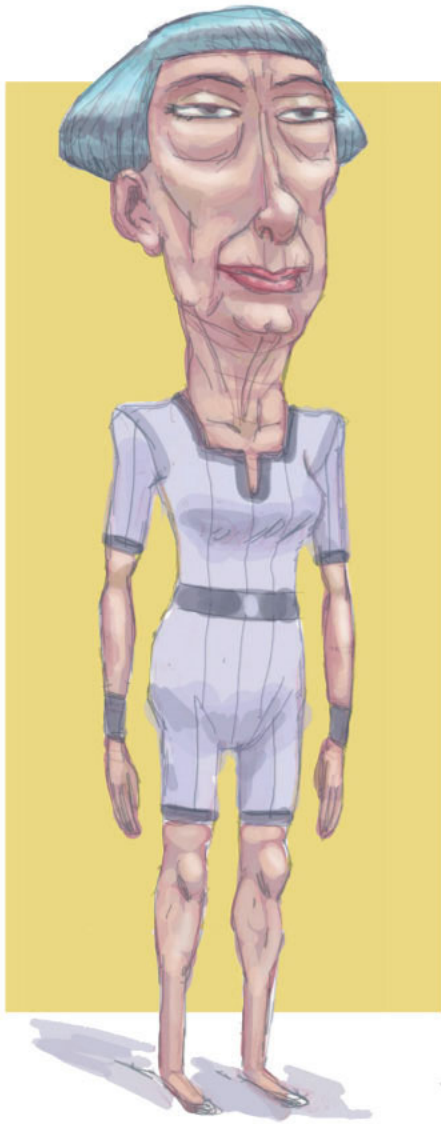
at the digital sculpture studio for Street

Designs—read more on page 100.

Illustration by the character design



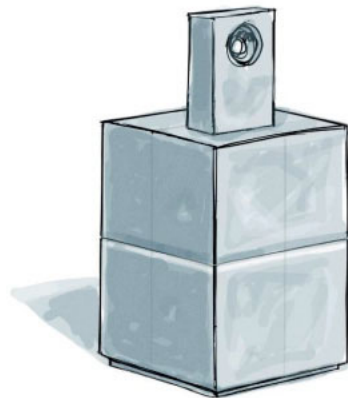
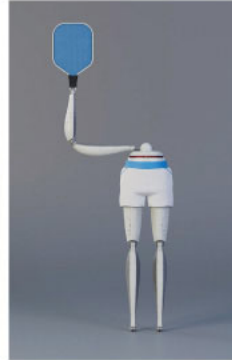
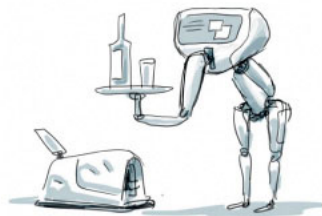


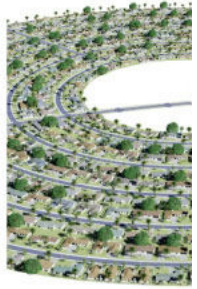




"We wanted to approach this classic story of a machine rebellion against humans from an original angle; out of all the common man could face, John brilliantly chose a vacuum cleaner as the enemy." Van Der Meer says. "The quirky battle inevitably leads to an epic 'fall and fold' climax, which we believe is a first in the history of science fiction!"

**THIS SPEAKS** / The *Robot Vacuum* was designed as a study of humanoid machines to calculate the aesthetic consequences of the future.







## ICE

Vancouver-based artist Robert Valley and Passion Pictures producer Cam Spiller—from Volume One's Zima Blue—were asked to produce Ice for Volume Two. The episode is based on Rich Larson's story, which first appeared in *Clarkesworld* magazine in 2015. It is set in a future where many humans are "modded" for enhanced strength and endurance. In the Emmy®-winning episode, two brothers—one modded and one normal—put their lives at risk in a dangerous race.

This new assignment was quite different from Valley's first

episode. "While Zima was an exercise in restraint, Ice was all about dynamic action. The voiceover performances from Archer Macbridge as Sologdyck and Sebastian Knift as Fletcher were very intense and gave us a great base for the animation."

Valley, Spiller, and Emmy®-winning director Patricia Breen discussed the visual style at length. Valley felt strongly about the diversity of the characters. "Sometimes my kid watches shows on TV where we see white characters in the lead roles, and only the secondary characters are racially diverse. In Ice, I wanted

ILLUSTRATION BY ROBERT VALLEY

ROBERT VALLEY'S CHARACTER DESIGN





the kid to look like northern-Candian last ch  
Speller, in particular, loved the relat  
two brothers. The younger, muddled brother  
place in the new world while his older, nor  
"That difficult dynamic felt very real, and  
Fletcher would risk both their lives to give  
to prove himself. I was also excited to see  
would do with something more action-orient  
naked it!"





ASHAMED OF HIS KINNY-ASS BODY HAS A HABIT OF CROSSING ARMS

FLETCHER IS TH YOU WOULD LIK OUT WITH ... UNLESS YOU WE HIS BROTHER.

SOME FUTURISTIC EQUIVALENT TO A BASEBALL HAT TO MAKE HIM MORE RECOGNIZABLE



His face was a that the baby sharp cheekbones netstar jawline were still refl half-lit tunnel like a cats.



BUTTHURT EXPRESSION

# FLETCHER AND SEDGEWICK







**THE WRECK** From Robert Valley and  
Damon Lindbergh. The image is a still  
from the episode "The Wreck" of the  
series "The Expanse".





## POp SQUaD

When *Love, Death & Robots* supervising director Jennifer Yuh Nelson

first met "Pop SquaD", she knew she had to direct it. The cartoon

is by Hugo-Boss-winning writer Paolo Tassin. It's a sci-fi series on

a morally-conflicted detective (Nolan North) who must enforce

population control by hunting down illegally-born children.

The story asks questions about the trajectory of human

civilization. "As we live longer through medical advances, what will

that mean for us? What is the cost?" says Yuh Nelson.

The director is a fan of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) and

the 1929 classic *Metropolis*. "These design elements complemented

the noir feel of the original story and fit the concept of characters

who are very old and whose tastes have stopped evolving.

"But she also would be involved in the characterizing, because

there's half human conversation function," says Yuh Nelson.

"I'm not really sure how accurate Nolan North's *Empty of Home*,

Michael Keaton's *John Wick* or *John Wick: Chapter 2* performances. Our

supervising animators, Harry Lindell, was one of the great people

substantiated in the show. The way you can get a very interesting

**BLIND SPOTS** - The director's approach

about the dark, dystopian world

Director's design choices, from the character

"unpleasant" of the

**KEY TAKEAWAYS** - The director's approach

to the dark, dystopian world

Director's design choices, from the character

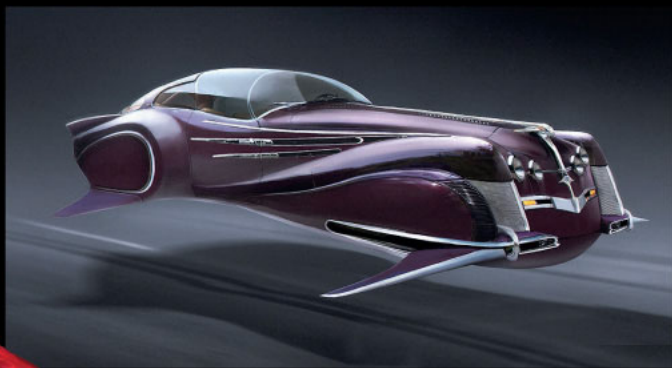
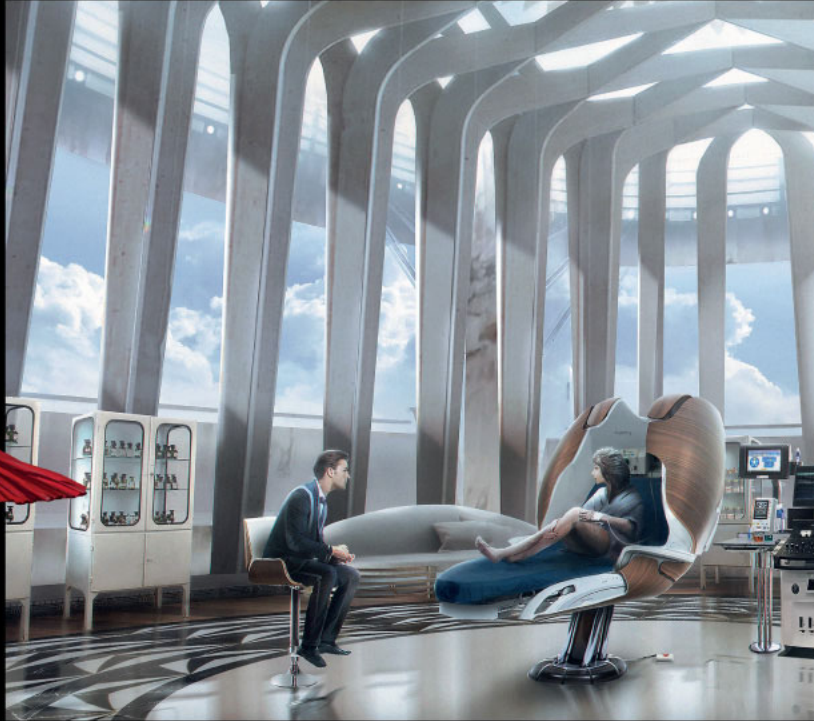
"unpleasant" of the

Director's approach to the dark





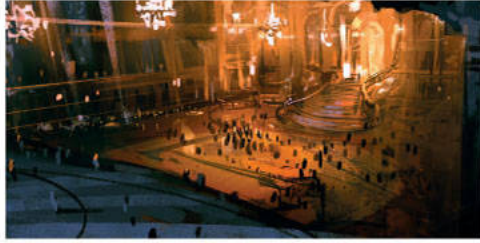




Producer/Visual Effects Supervisor, "The production  
children, and the fact that they're in a world that's  
if you're under the spot, it's a very hard time to  
potential for way to take the story to the next level.  
"Our main inspiration was Jennifer's story.  
Lafelle: "They were simple but expressive, but  
amazing artist who knew exactly what she wanted  
I kept going back to Jennifer's story and for me  
There were also challenges for the character  
as designer Nicolas Collings explains: "Finding  
the daughter was particularly tricky—creating a  
are explored but still have an aesthetic that feels  
audience can connect with them on an emotional



ABOVE The rich, detailed world above the clouds inhabited by the story's wealthy elite leads to dark corners in the story, revealing reality of the lower city. Concept by Sam Briggs.



ABOVE: Frigo offers a window to a cinematic scene in the abandoned and overgrown village when he discovers the so-called "child in a cave."



THIS SPREAD / Director Fabrice Du Welz was drawn to Poe Dameron by the combination of his own interest with the character of D. Leece.





## SNOW IN THE DESERT

French studio Unit Image was behind *Western One's* Beyond the Aquila Rift and returned for *Western Two's* Emmy®-winning *Snow in the Desert*. Neal Asher's story follows an immortal man named Snow, pursued by ruthless bounty hunters. The episode was produced by Calix Digeon and directed by Léon Dierolle, Dominique Bouthin, Binni Kopyeva, and Maxime Laube.

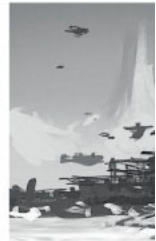
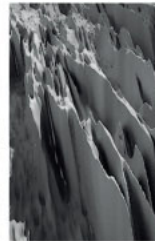
"This story is a classic showdown between hero and villain, with a unique visual style that mixes the motifs of Western film with sci-fi," says Laube. "We pushed the art direction to evoke the

sun-baked American plains and designed our characters to feel right at home in them."

The Unit Image team scanned their favorite Western movies for inspiration: "We thought of *Snow* as a lone cowboy," says Laube. "His planet is so scorching hot that everything is designed to protect the inhabitants from the heat."

"We worked particularly hard on the big action scenes," Laube notes. "The editing was fast-paced to add impact and show just how brutal the bounty hunters are. *Hardy's* reveal was also

**THIS SPREAD** Artist sketches and illustrations illustrate the episode's desert landscape of *Snow's* world, where water is precious and the wastes of technology are in high demand.









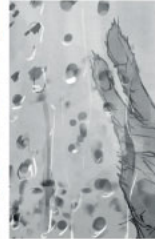
challenging, because we need to protect the story  
nature, but also show off the beauty of her cyber

Then there was the victory arc scene. "The  
session was quite strange," says Laine. "We wa  
to him passionately, but because of COVID had  
could barely touch. But thanks to our great actor  
them coming together in a moving and emotional

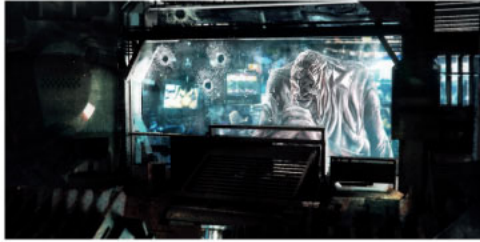
"I loved Hiral's attitude and the reveal of  
is. Star and Snow are bonded by the same intent  
them to find love," says Dillard.



**THIS SPREAD** | Laine developed the story and the  
ambitions of her work with those of a traditional work



**THIS SPREAD** Visual Effects and Design team illustrate the world and landscapes and other elements of the cinematic world of Star Wars: Episode IX: The Rise of Skywalker.





## THE TALL GRASS

For R. L. Llewellyn's haunting tale about a man who's overcome with  
visions from another dimension, we brought life to the war-torn  
Chicago-based Axis Animation, led by producer Christian Ellingsworth  
and directed by longtime DreamWorks Animation veteran Simon Otto.

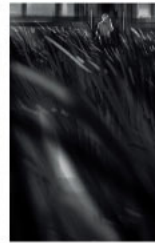
"Jennifer Yuh Nelson gave me a few stories to read, and I was  
immediately drawn to the moody feeling of 'The Tall Grass,'" says  
Otto. "I loved the way the story slowly builds the tension and drops  
the reader into a waking nightmare."

Ellingsworth, who also worked on the first volume's *Helping*

Hand episode, adds, "It's a horror novel, so I was drawn into this  
story. There's a surprising shift from a dreary state of calm into  
violent horror. It's that shocking perspective shift on one's life that  
can change at a moment's notice."

Otto was previously head of character animation on the  
acclaimed *How to Train Your Dragon* trilogy and wasn't interested  
in hyper-realistic animation. "Throughout my career, I always loved  
the work of visual development artists. Luckily, technology is at a  
point that allows us to bring paintings to life. The team at Axis had

**THIS SPREAD** / Artists Simon Otto and  
Richard Wright created paintings based  
on storyboard designs by Tom Nelson and  
Michael Pearce.





developed some amazing techniques that enabled the story to feel like a moving illustration.”

Otto and Ellsworth credit art director Bruce Seth and painter

Richard Wright for handling most of the key frames and matte

paintings as well as VFX supervisor Georg Sebastian Drescher and

head of animation Rishabh Chandra. “This is a story I would never

have been able to tell at DreamWorks,” says Otto

and the spirit of filmmaking, which was a

adult live-action film.”



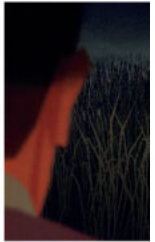
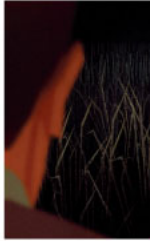
**OPPOSITE** / According to Director James Gray, the actor  
 (character's physical resemblance to Brad Pitt) is  
 (character's name) was greatly considered.



"We pushed for a stylized naturalistic painted look, embracing visible brushstrokes and avoiding subsurface rendering techniques."

**CHRISTIAN ILLINGWORTH**  
PRODUCER





**SECRET** Designs for the wooden chair structure that holds the skulls in the hall game. The red and orange colors were chosen for the wooden chair made in a game.





## ALL THROUGH THE HOUSE

On Christmas Eve, a young brother and sister encounter a non-jolly Santa Claus in the anthology's first stop-motion project, All Through the House. The episode was directed by Eliza Dear and produced by Alex Halley and the team at London's Blink Industries.

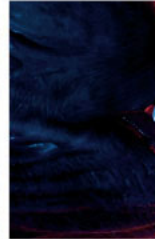
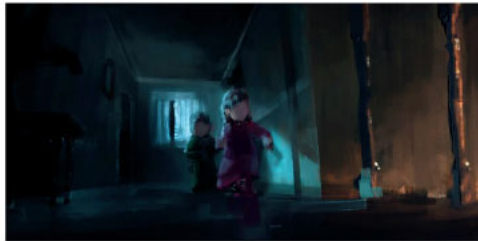
"We often see stop-motion animation used to tell warm, comforting stories like the Rankin/Bass Santa Claus Is Comin' to Town (1970), which we referred to in this film," Dear explains. "So, when the story turns from sweet to horror, it's all the more shocking. There's a legacy of fantastic stop-motion creature special

effects left by filmmakers like Ray Harryhausen and Phil Tippett, and I wanted our monster to honor that. Stop motion is a great technique for bringing uncanny creatures to life. There's a tactile quality to puppets that feels real because it is."

Dear also finds inspiration in live-action. "I looked at family features like Home Alone (1990) and Jumanji (1995)," he says. "I wanted to lean into that nostalgia and create something familiar. Then, when things go terribly wrong, I referenced films like Alien (1979) or the lighting in The Thing (1982)."

**ALLIANCE** Stop-motion animation legend  
Bill Mumoy on *How to Build a Better Boy*  
Director's cut: *How to Build a Better Boy*  
The House

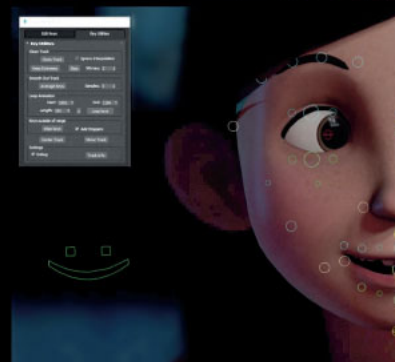
**ALLIANCE** Eliza Dear on her project, *All Through the House*  
Director's cut: *All Through the House*  
Director's special





"We were developing and refining the technique while making the film, which has risks. But this time, it paid off!"

ELLIOT DEAR  
DIRECTOR





The Billy puppet stood 8.3 inches high, while the Santa Monster was a stop-motion puppet. The size of the sets varied from 4 feet square, and the largest was over 16 feet square.

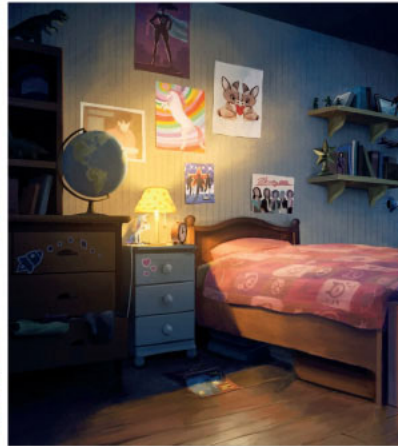
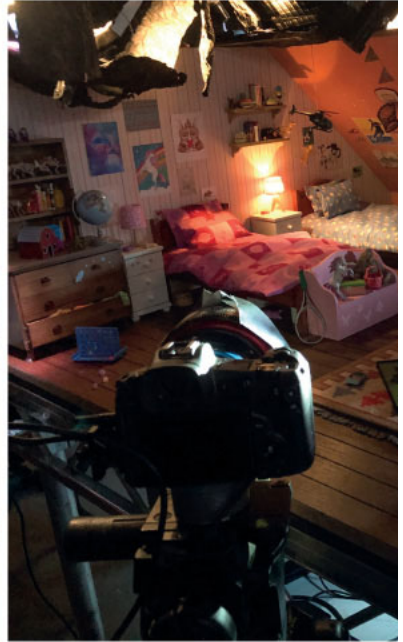
The stop-motion footage was augmented by CGI. "The human puppets had tracking markers. The ones at Storyline in Ohio tracked and they post-processed. They also augmented the chest and a tongue. The snow is also CGI, as is the cut from the creature's mouth.

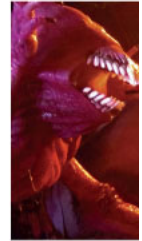
"In addition to the usual problem-solving of stop-motion, added complications as we kept the artists safe," Dear says. "We wanted to design the situation, and everyone on the team to produce amazing footage.

"When you're on a stop-motion shoot, you really work in the studio. The pandemic lockdowns are difficult to do," Dear explains. "You might see a guy with a camera making a tiny shot, or someone else put on another session. Almost every day, I think, 'Wow, a



DEAR: 2. One of the character designs for Santa's stop-motion footage.





**THIS SPREAD** The featured programs led to follow with Covid safety regulations during the six-week shooting period.



## LIFE HUTCH

This short, character-focused film is based on Harlan Ellison's story about a combat pilot (played by Michael B. Jordan) who seeks refuge in an automated shelter after crash landing on a faraway planet. Ellison is a legend in the sci-fi genre, having published more than 1,700 short stories, novellas, screenplays, comic book scripts, teleplays, and essays. The film was directed by Blair Aiken, produced by Samantha Bristow, and art directed by Alamy Andrews.

"We wanted designs to feel familiar and realistic, and all

of our references were current-day military hardware," explains Bristow. "For Terra's ship, we replaced the aspects of a fighter jet operating in the atmosphere with concepts that would function in zero gravity. For instance, engines that can swivel to apply thrust in whatever direction. Oddly enough, the alien ship was based on a virus—a decision made before the pandemic hit, so it was purely coincidental. I just wanted the design to evoke a negative reaction from the audience."

The cuts between the live-action and CG versions of Michael

**THIS SPREAD AND NEXT** | The film team looked for technology in life itself as a basis for their machine-based and biological interpretations of nature's wildest behavior.





R. Jordan was especially challenging. "The team worked incredibly

hard to make these cars seamless, and I'm so proud of how it

turned out," Dearden says.

"We have very talented artists at Pixar photorealistic human

and always difficult to achieve, especially when working with an

actor like Michael, whose face is so familiar. We went through

many iterations with the model, animation, and lighting to get as

close to the live-action shots as possible," recalls Beatty.

"The non-linear nature of the story meant cutting between

the tension-filled close-ups of Inverse struggling to survive

and the huge scope of a space battle," he says. "This allowed us

the opportunity to focus on performance, and Michael gave us

great material."

Compositing supervisor Nisar Ashik Kurikkal's fa

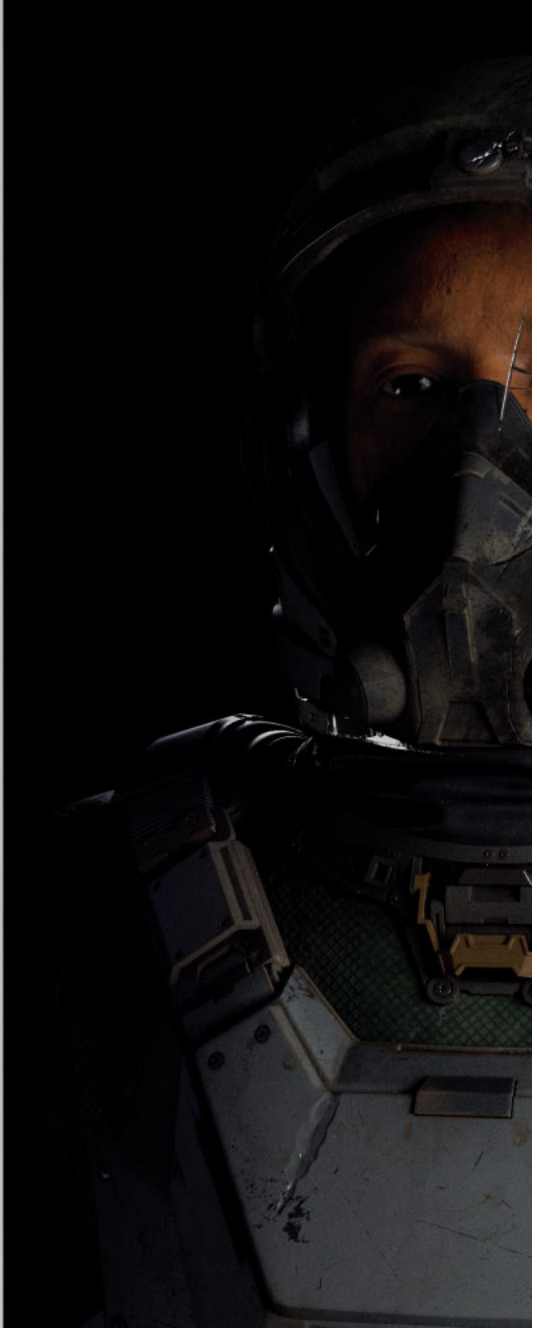
element was the design of the maintenance robot. "The

ball machine and part removing animal—the green m

shooting snakes from its legs, single eye amplify the

is built for anything moving."



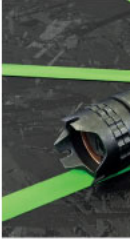




THIS SPREAD: Alex Giblin and Juan Pablo Brittas were responsible for the look of the concept designs in *Love, Death & Robots*.



"I still jump  
comes down c





## THE DROWNED GIANT

J.G. Ballard's 1964 short story "The Drowned Giant" significantly impacted Tim Miller when he first read it as a teenager. "My dad had a huge library, and in it I found a collection of stories by Ballard called *Chromopolis and Other Stories*. I particularly liked "The Drowned Giant" because Ballard did not attempt to explain where the giant came from or how he died, leaving it to the reader to fill in the blanks."

LD-R wasn't able to secure the rights from the Ballard estate for *Vikings One*, but eventually, Miller was able to convince

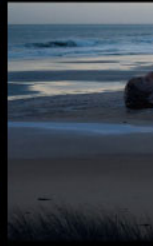
Ballard's daughters that he would treat the story with tremendous respect. He wrote the screenplay adaptation himself, keeping very true to the original story.

For the narrator, who bears witness in the story unfold, Miller wanted British actor Steven Pacey. "He is a wonderful actor who I first became aware of from his reading of Joe Abercrombie's *First Law* series," he explains. "Steven was perfect for the learned British scientist but versatile enough to play the American conductor in *The Tall Grass* episode."

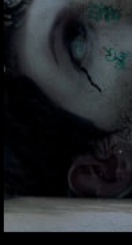
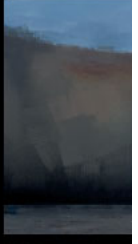
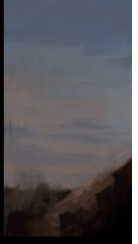
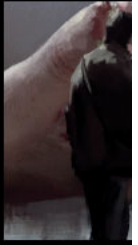
**THIS SPREAD** From *Vikings One* depicts the narrator's expanded encounter with a drowned giant that has washed up on a beach on the shores of a small English fishing town.

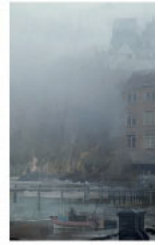






**THIS SPREAD** | The camera even behind the episode sought to linger on each scene and moment  
rather than jump to emphasize the extraordinary arrival of the body on the shore.





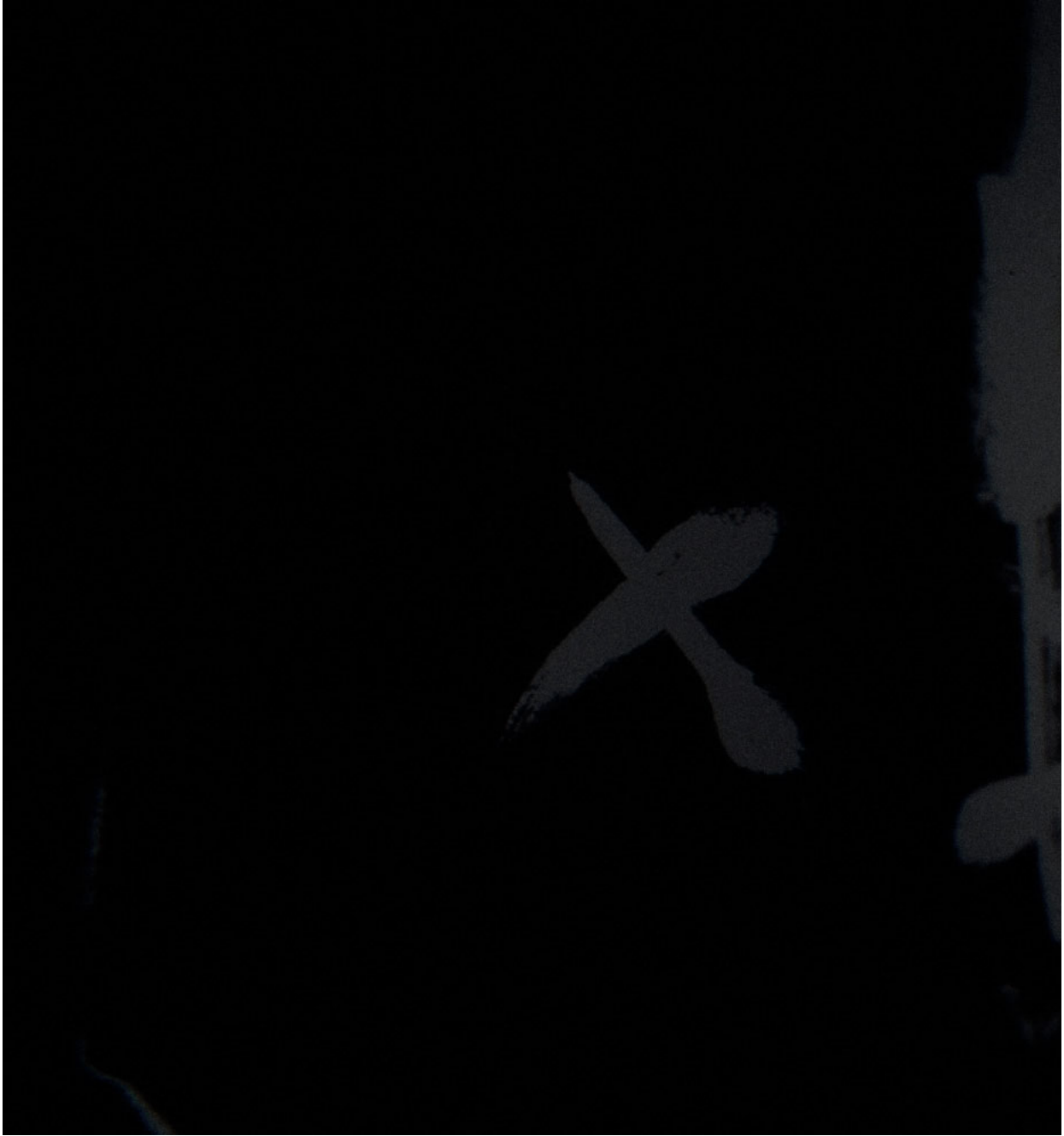


Storyline artist Dan Milligan—whose work includes *Black Panther* (2018) and *Starman: Dark Star* (2019)—sketches Miller's deep connection to the story made the assignment even more meaningful. "I love the general nature of the story, and our wonderful advantage of the deep respect. The lesson and camera moves had to be very basic so that the guest would seem even more remarkable."

**LEFT** | The glass's blue tint helps share the message on the movie's broader ship, which is named *Blackfish* as an homage to the story's author.

"Fincher was reviewing episodes with us one day, and Jennifer's hyper-vision *Kill Team Kill* played right before *The Drowned Giant*," recalls Miller. "It was a natural moment for us both—not only the cognitive dissonance from the clash of tones, but because it was exactly the kind of mad juxtaposition of styles we hoped could happen when we started making the show."

"I designed the reflection of the talks about the when discussing topics, the





VOLUME

03



## BAD TRaVELLING

A crew of sailors fights for their lives after a giant crab-like  
shaped creature aboard their ship. *Bad Travelling* was directed  
by series executive producer David Fincher. There were several  
reasons this story appealed to the Oscar®-nominated master of  
*Fight Club* (1999) and *Man on the Moon* (2000).

Fincher liked the *And Then There Were None* (1939) aspect  
of the story, referring to the famous Agatha Christie mystery in  
which characters are killed one by one. Also, "I'd never done—*ever*  
will do—a film that takes place on the open sea, except in

animation. I've seen *Waterworld* (1995) and heard stories about  
making *Titanic* (1997)," he jokes.

Ready TV and cinematic games both provided inspiration  
for the episode's visuals—think *Rogue Drunkin* or *Gordon Willis*  
shooting *Discovery's Deadliest Catch*. CG supervisor Colin James  
claims working with Fincher was a masterclass in lighting.

"Our lighting team didn't come from live-action backgrounds,"

James says. "So each review with Fincher was a valuable  
learning experience."

**THIS SPREAD** Visual development and  
character design that brings to light  
the dark and horrific tone of the story.





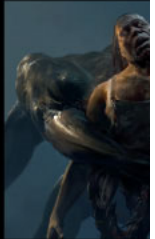
Second unit director Aaron Wicklin says, "Fincher has a precise vision, but at the same time, he's collaborative and excited about the process." Animation director Hubert Dassin adds, "We knew it was Fincher's first animated project, and we wanted everything to be polished and perfect."

Real Travelling's fantastic design work was by Taik Siga Studio in China, led by Xu Tianhua. "You'll notice that the sailors have these weird, sunken eyes in skull-like faces. And the creature

designs was horrific," the director recalls. "The alien thugspod was the size of a Range Rover. When it moves across the boat, we wanted it to sound like a crowd not being backed apart by a machine."

Fincher chose to use motion-capture because of its directable nature. "We had a very talented group of actors, but that's not to say that there's not like 5,000 hours of hand animation on top of it to make it work perfectly."

"Fincher pushes cinematic war to the limit. He keeps it cinematic and keeps it cinematic."





"A perfect line reading for me is often 80% the way  
I hear it and 20% 'Holy shit, who would say it like  
that?' I don't know any director who isn't looking to be  
surprised. Surprised as in, 'Why didn't I think of that?'"

DAVID FINCHER  
DIRECTOR



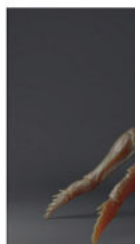
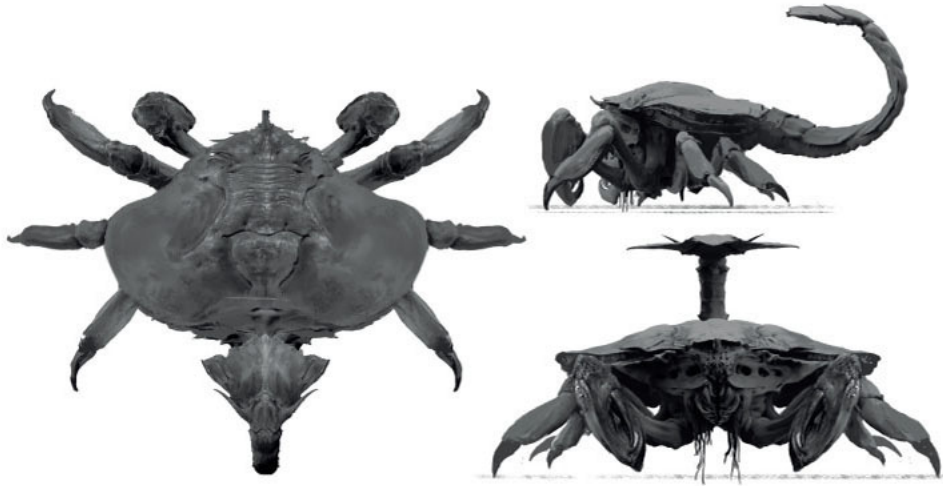
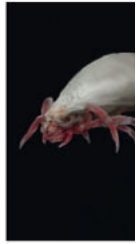
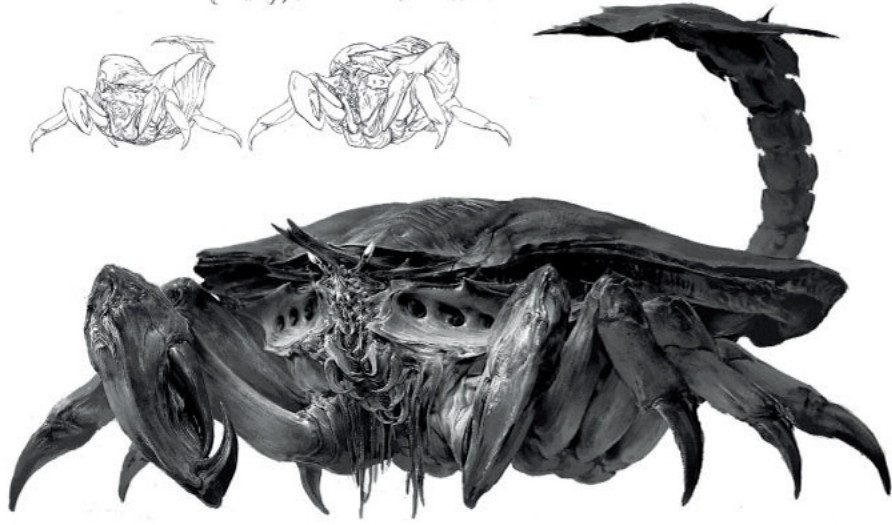
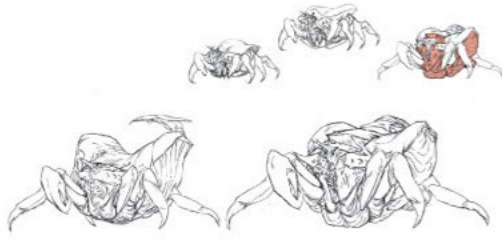


FIGURE 10-10 The scorpion's head and pincers.







## SWARM

Dr. Simon Arisiel learns the horrific truth behind a race of insect-like aliens called the Swarm. Series creator and executive producer Tim Miller tackles the complex, cautionary tale from Bruce Sterling, with Jessica Ambrose producing.

"The many alien creatures in the film made Swarm very interesting for the Blue character modeling team," says character supervisor Nicolas Collings. "The team used real animals as inspiration for the look of the creatures, especially deep-sea bioluminescent fish, jellyfish, and lobsters."

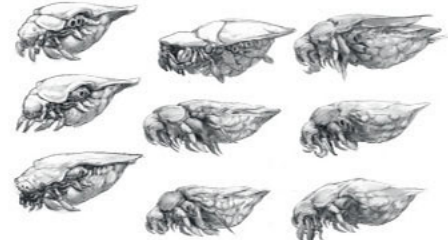
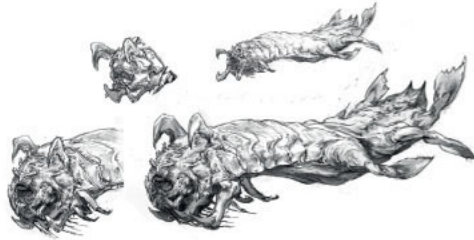
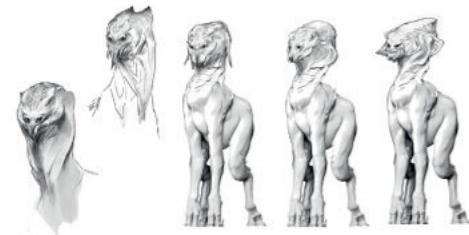
Tacti Sign Studio again handled the concept development.

Artist Xu Tianhua relates, "The alien nature of creatures who evolved in zero gravity made it difficult to find a reference. But in the end, we found creatures in our world to spark our imagination.

For the design of the human characters, we pushed the proportions of body and face, but still kept it grounded."

The project's lighting lead artist, Art Sapan adds, "There are so many alien underwater plants, rocks, and creatures, it was difficult to limit ourselves—we wanted to keep creating more. It was

**THIS SPREAD** / The artists were inspired by real-world underwater plants, rocks, and creatures as they set out to create the Swarm's fantastical, imagined alien world.

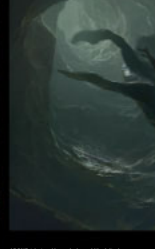
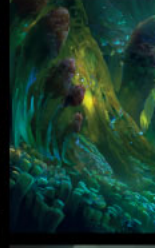
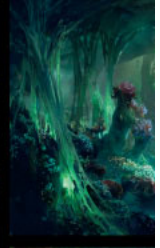
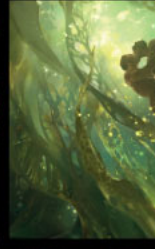




almost too much creative freedom, the wide spectrum of visual options and ideas made it hard to choose when to stop. We ended up doing so many different variations that this alien world felt far more rich and varied than I could have imagined when we started."

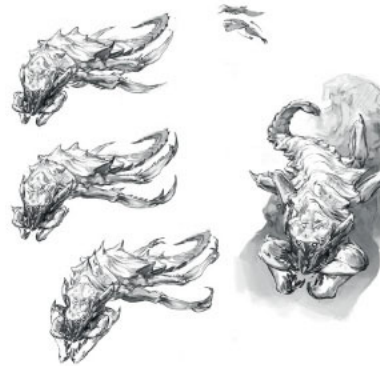
"I love Bruce Sterling's brilliant novel, Schismatrix , which is the philosophical, political and technological backdrop of Swarm ."

**TIM MILLER**  
DIRECTOR



ARTIST: ANDREW ANDREWS, MILO JELINEK, AND PAUL SCHAFFER  
ANDREW ANDREWS AND MILO JELINEK PROVIDED ART CONCEPTS TO ASSIST IN CRAFTING THE VISUAL LANGUAGE FOR THE FILM.









## KILL TEAM KILL

Director Jennifer Yuh Nelson and producer Charles Swearingen worked with the talented team at Titmouse in Los Angeles to create the hyper-violent but darkly humorous Kill Team Kill. The story by Justin Chaitin centers on an elite group of soldiers hunted by a CIA experiment gone awfully, awfully wrong.

Antonio Capobianco, the creative director at Titmouse and an director of the episode, jokes that his team was quite similar to the soldiers in the story: "We were a team of extreme specialists—but with less muscle and fewer guns," he laughs. "And just look at the

result: an actual knock-knock sandwich! Every single team member came to it with serious passion."

Animation director Doug Brubaker loves Kill Team Kill's mix of humor, drama, and action, taking inspiration from classics such as Starship Troopers (1997) and Predator (1987). Paul Lauby designed the soldiers and led the department. "Paul has such a deep understanding of world-out anatomy, it's like he's got Schwarzenegger in his brain controlling his hand," says Brubaker. "His design was a high bar for our animators—all those fucking veins and patches!"

RECAP: Inspired by "The action flicks," Paul Capobianco's character designs helped drive the production forward through the episode.





KTK BEAR IDEATION v09



SIZE COMP (PAUL'S ART)

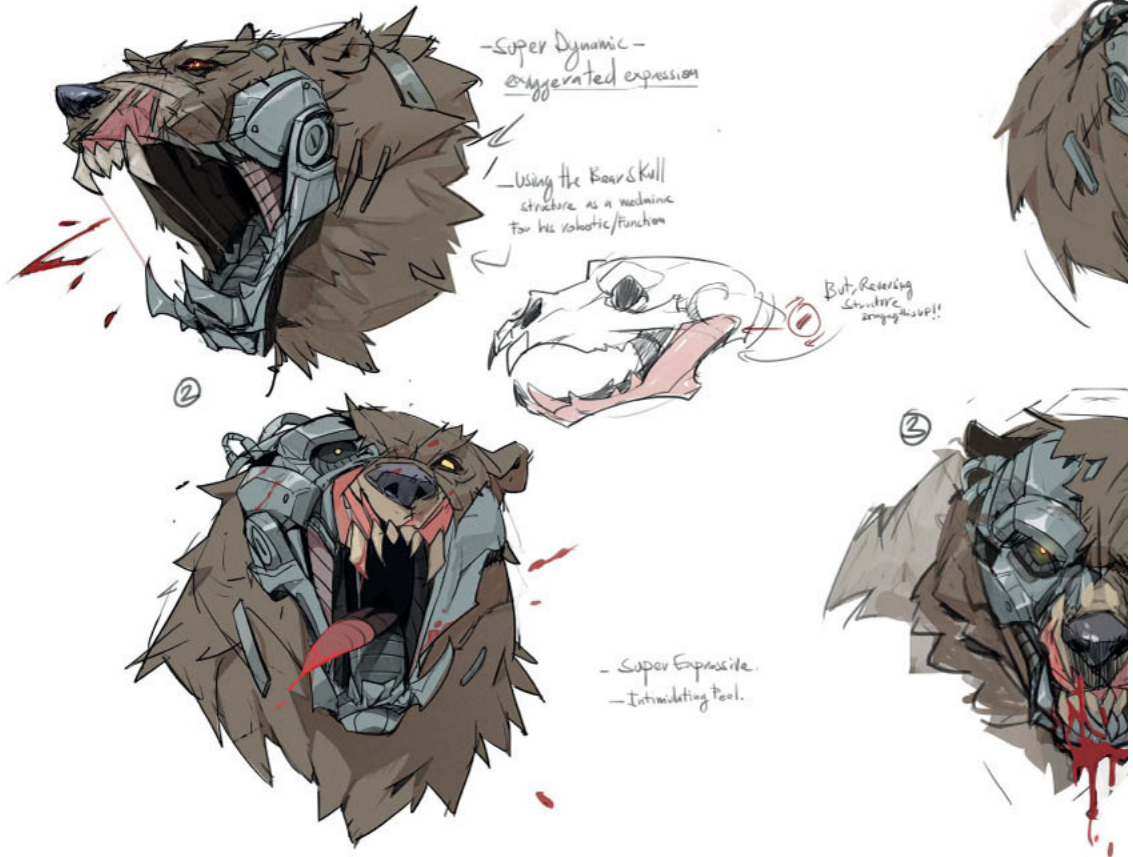
ALTERNATE PLATE  
OPTIONS - "CYBERPUNK"

"T"

"Simon Bisley and Tarino Literature were references for  
herf anatomy, and Verhoeven, Ridley Scott, and James Cameron  
for the sci-fi action/ature vibe," adds Brooks. "I had a big  
reference library of war movies for poses, effects, and tone—  
licks like Lone Survivor (2013) and Platoon (1986)."  
According to the animation director, the most challenging

moments were the subtle performances. "The amount of pencil  
work required to get those poses right was insane," he says.  
"Animators Diego Peral and Alejandro Guerrero did  
incredible work with the quieter moments of dialogue, establishing  
the personalities of these characters through subtle movements  
and gestures."

Director Jennifer Yuh Nelson adds, "It's all  
our first recording session with Gabo Luna and I  
asking Seth to imagine throwing that pie stream  
to make his dialogue sound more authentic!"  
Brooks laughs. "If you look closely at that  
weapon change, it's pretty dramatic between





NIELSON



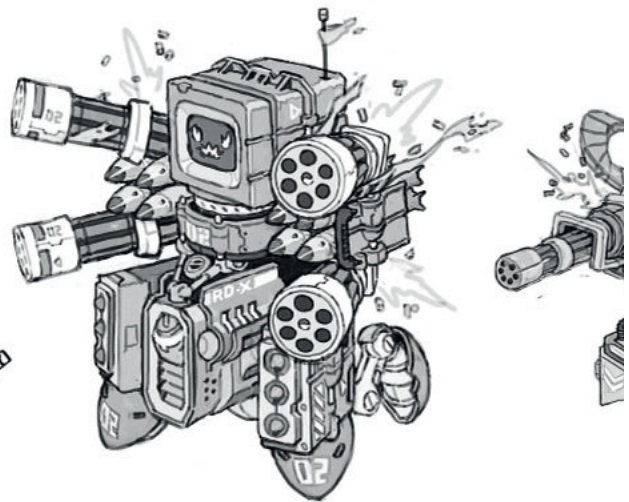
Fuck  
Fuck  
Fuck

PRIVATE COOTE



Fuck  
He!

PRIVATE POLLEN





## IN VAULTED HALLS ENTOMBED

Tobin's former of Alan Downer's military terrorism thriller, the

L.D. Ryan brought back director James Chen, producer Doug Chaffin, and the team of Sony Pictures Imageworks.

"When I first read the script, I saw an interesting creative opportunity to journey from the realistic mountains of Afghanistan into an underground world of Lovecraftian horror," says Chen.

With his VFX background, Chen's goal was to create a grounded, realistic CGI film. "We heavily researched the kit and weapons of Army Special Forces, and I had excellent technical

advice from two former S.F. soldiers," Chen recalls.

The story was inspired by Chuck Vander's cinematography in *Alien* (1979) as well as Roman Vishniac's work in *Eye* (2014) and Roger Dodson's *Black Mirror* (2017). "We collected stills from those films and used them as touchstones for the look of the show," says Chen.

"The underground city fits into the lore of the series's

Lovecraftian world. The camera was designed for gobs and not humans," he explains. "The immense size of the airway emphasizes the insignificance of humans in the world of these elder gods."

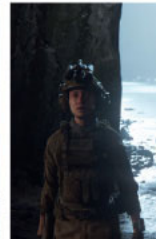
THIS SPREAD: From top (clockwise):

performance by Ben Wang; a

Christina Hendricks, and the character

through an underground hallway in the

series's Lovecraftian world.









"The story's bound god follows Lovcraft's of a pseudo arthropod form with an octopus he wings," Chen notes. "We added multiple eyes to beneath his slick and shined skin."

Chen loves the climactic scene inside the bound god with the two lead characters. "The as Caulfield will be the hero, but he succumbs to G amount," Chen says. "It's Harper who steps into bound god and saves humanity."



**THIS SPREAD** Chen wanted the creature scale of the to feel like he became a bound god in a place where he's surrounded by things.



## THE VEry PULSE of THE MACHINE

Emily Deschanel, best known for the award-winning sci-fi show *Andromeda* (2013), directed the adaptation of Michael Swazwick's "The Very Pulse of the Machine's" Mackenzie Davis—The Martian (2015) and Terminator: Dark Fate (2019)—voiced the lead character, Marba Kivelson, an injured astronaut stranded on Jupiter's moon Io.

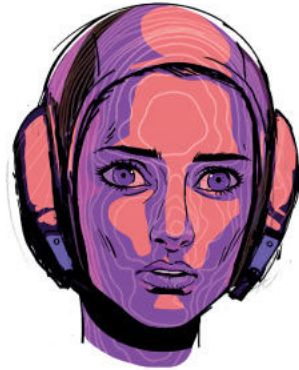
"I knew how I wanted the film to look; a surreal, hypnotic experience of color and light as the astronaut's journey turns into a surrealist meditation on life, death, and consciousness," Deschanel says. "The art style I felt worked best was the 'Ligeia Clairs'

style of Franco-Belgian comics, inspired by the work of Jean "Maurice" Gossez."

Japan's Polygon Pictures, led by producer Shidō Shōta, was chosen to produce the film. Using concept art from Wardellicht, the team created a style that was a blend of Franco-Belgian comics and Japanese anime. "Polygon has a lot of experience in non-photorealistic rendering styles," says Shōta. "Still, we needed to find a balance that felt like illustration in motion but didn't overwhelm the audience with too much information."

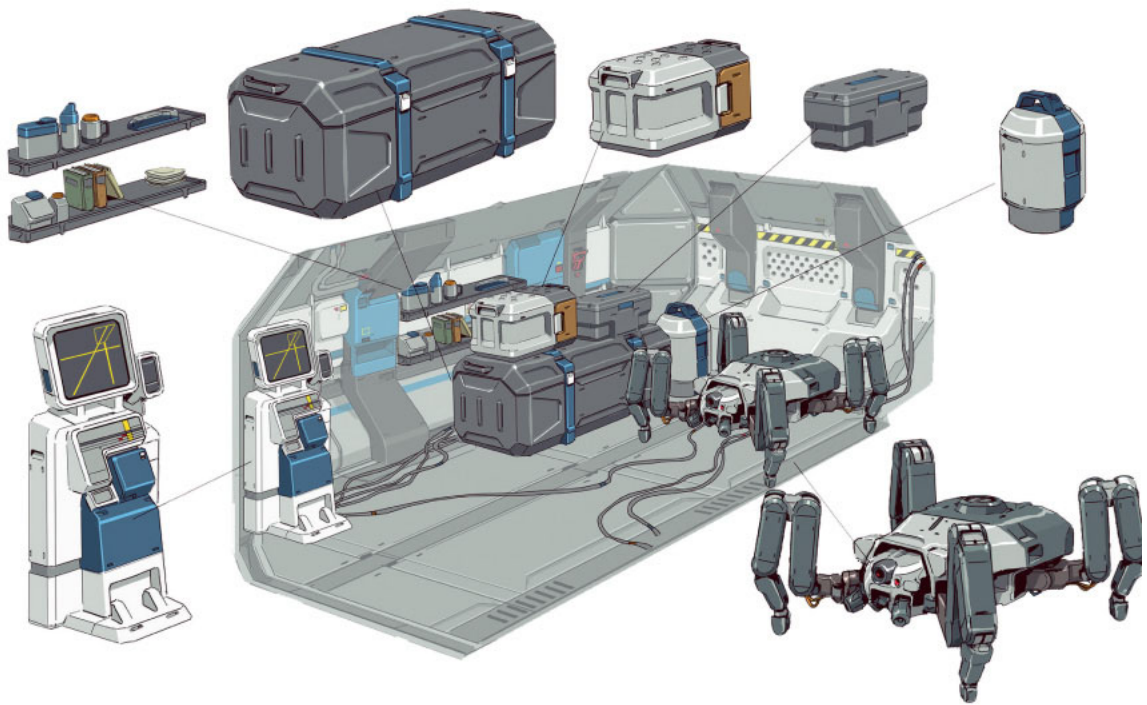
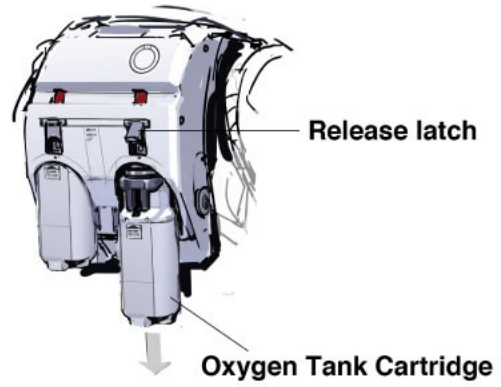
**ILLUSTRATION** Digital paintings were rendered using Blender and Unreal Engine 4.

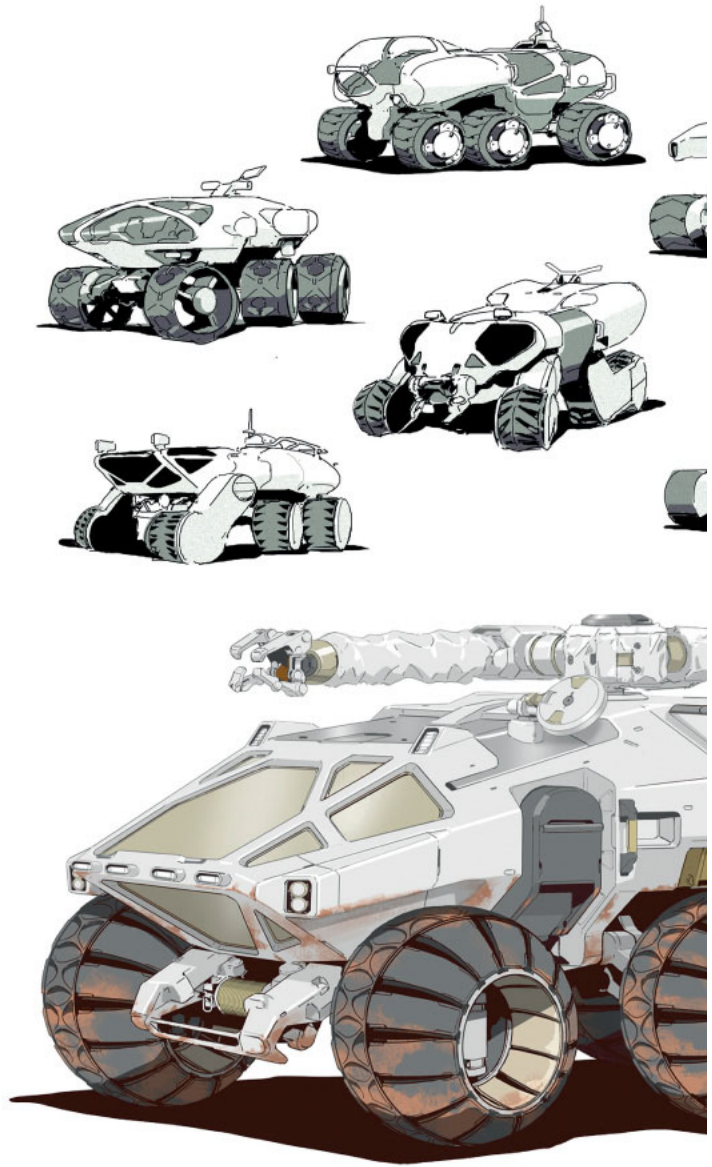




"To enhance the difficulty of Marsha's journey, we added more gravity than the small moon of Io would have," Dean explains. "We needed to feel Marsha's struggle, and we used extensive video reference to find the right balance for Marsha's performance."

"We decided to use sulfur yellow as the surface or 'normal' world," Dean says. "When sulfur burns, it glows a purple-blue, which we used for the color palette of Io's consciousness. This visually communicated the change in Marsha's perspective as she learns the shocking truth about Io."









"Just because  
mean it



**THIS SPREAD** Philippe Perrier was asked what his  
other, colorful illustrations and designs do for us. CC.



## JIBARO

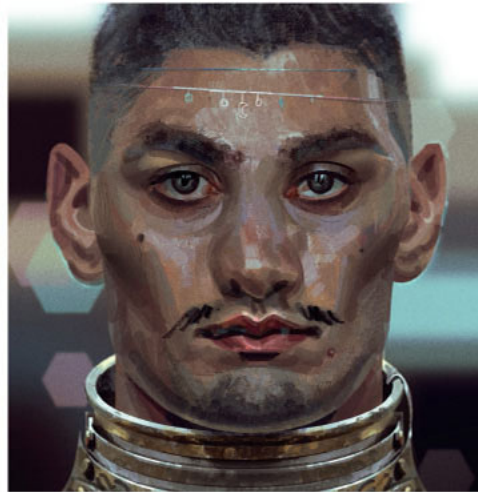
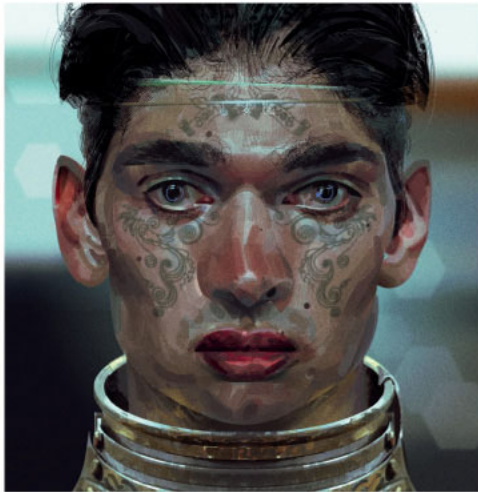
Spanish artist Alberto Mielgo tells the haunting story of a deaf knight and the seductive water atom who bewitches him. Mielgo, who wrote and directed the episode, was eager to try something entirely different after his Emmy-8-winning episode from Volume One, The Witness. Produced by Sergio Jimenez, the animation was done by Mielgo's studio, Pinkman.cc, in Madrid.

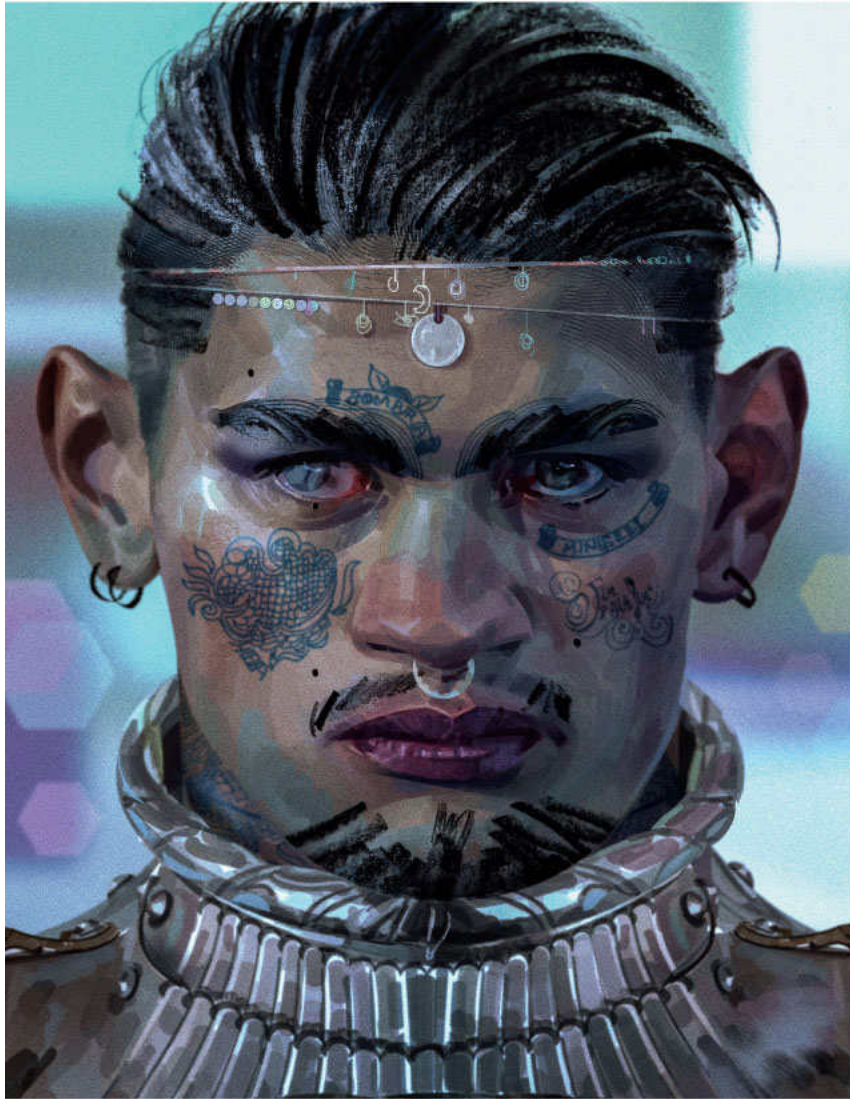
"There's a beautiful concept, a nice relationship between the knight and the atom, who are both characters," Mielgo says. "There's a great and subtle thread in how the characters play around medieval."

"This piece is an homage to nature," he explains. "I prepared for this project by exploring America's West Coast. In the fall of 2020, the world was in full pandemic mode. So I rented a van and drove north to capture the early autumn colors, just as the green is falling. I spent weeks collecting visual references and getting lost in several forests. I was trying to make every shot feel like a painting in a museum."

Mielgo also dove deep into historical references when designing the clothes and armor. "We found some incredible

**THIS SPREAD** The character designs were done by artist-director Alberto Mielgo, who wanted to explore the medieval atom. Mielgo drew a new range of inspirations.



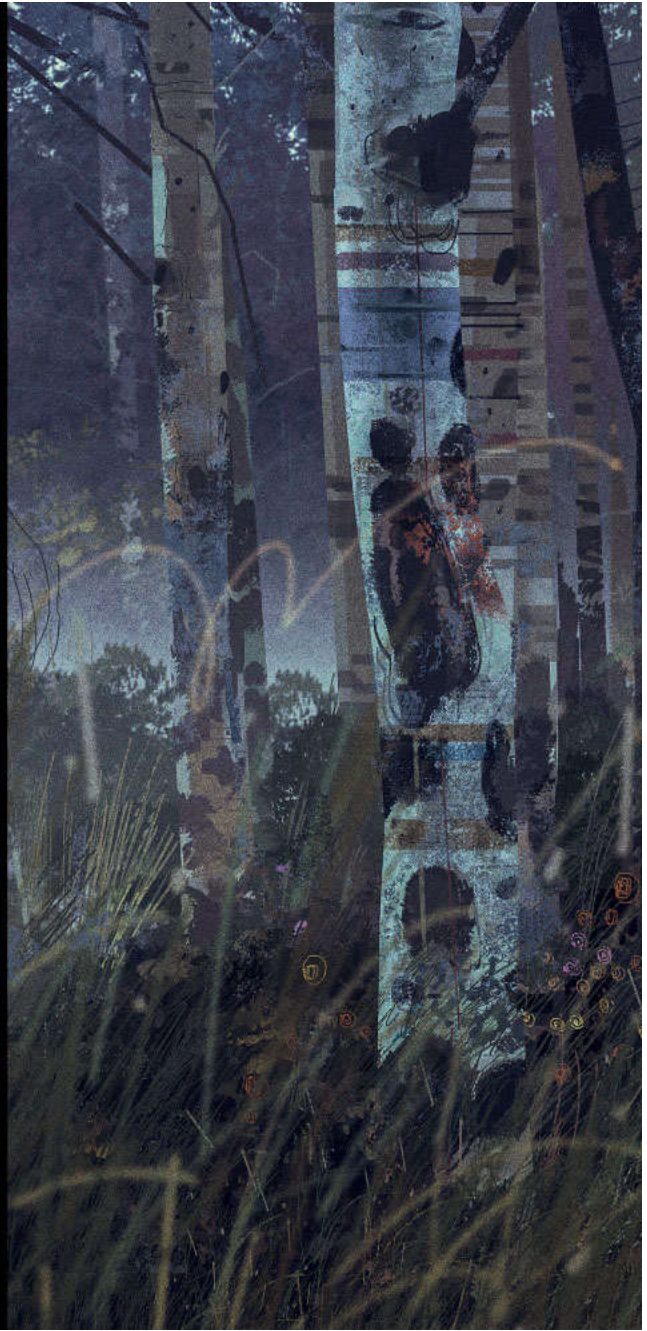


"I was trying to make every shot a painting."

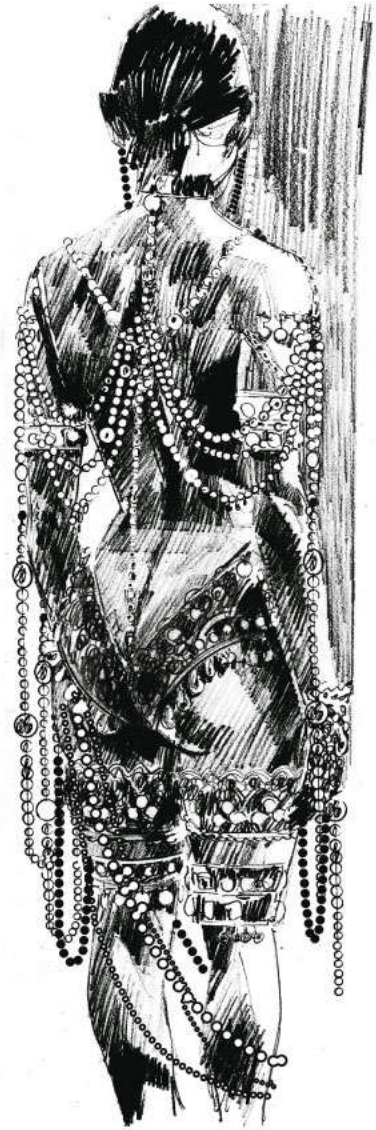
ALBERTO MIELGO  
DIRECTOR

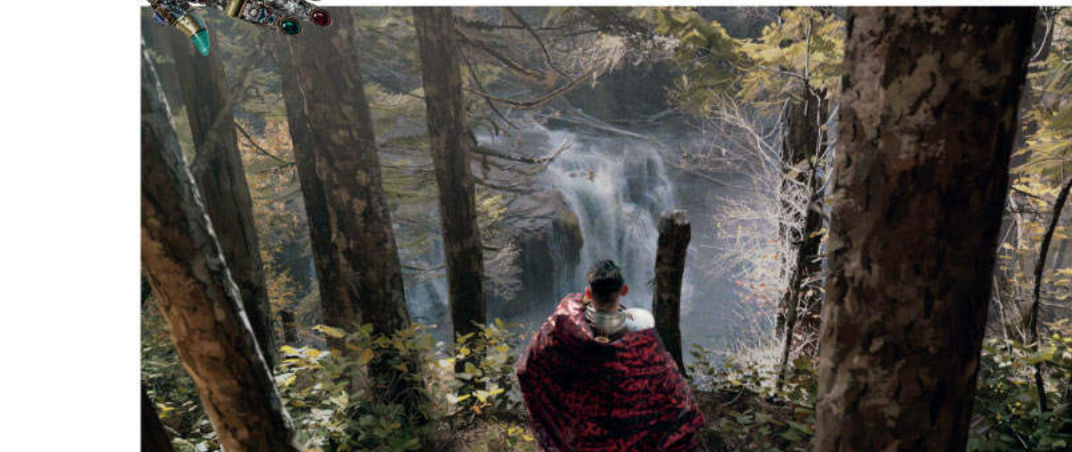


RIGHT: To find inspiration for the king's armor, Mielgo studied Renaissance-era art design and construction in woodcuts.









Renaissance rock armor in masseter. And our 1  
and jewelry were based on folkloric designs from  
in North Africa and India."

"These inspirations helped Mirga differentiate  
from the usual siren archetype. "She's not based  
mythology, not a typical siren who hypnotizes a  
beautiful sailor," the director says. "She drives a  
escape films, who can't hear her but is captivated."

"I consider this story to be very personal, as  
biggest achievement visually," Mirga adds. "In  
way, both the siren and the deaf knight are aspe

**THIS SPREAD** | Inspiration for the film's design came from  
armor, jewelry, and motifs, inspired by folkloric and  
of different regions in North Africa and India.



### THrEE ROBoTS: EXIT STRATEGIES

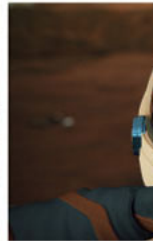
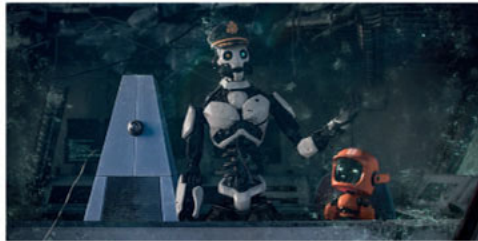
John Scalzi returns to post-apocalyptic Earth for this follow-up to Volume One's *Three Robots*. This time, our heroes explore the last bastions of humanity.

"John Scalzi is very connected to the zeitgeist and makes jokes at everyone's expense—from diet-paste survivalism and yacht-club tech bros to the government and Elon Musk types," says director Patrick Osborne, who is best known for writing and directing the Oscar-winning short *Frost* (2014) and the Oscar-nominated *Paul* (2016).

Spire's Blue Studio produced the episode, continuing their work from Volume One. "I loved the naturalistic animation they did in the original short," Osborne adds.

"I storyboarded most of the episode myself because it's just quicker that way. Then, we brought on Martin Roldánowski, Arnold Poon, and James Park to flesh out the visuals," the director explains. "We looked at real versions of nearly everything in the short because—sorry though—they all exist today! Except for the Mars rocket design, which are all on the billboard drawing board!"

**THIS SPREAD** Features Patrick Osborne, expanded the world and characters, illustrated by Brandon Robinson for Volume One.





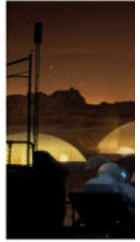
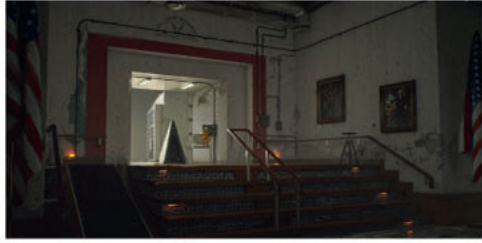


"I also hired a comedy graphic artist named Daniel Spinner Levine, who works for people like John Oliver. He created T-shirts, posters, and all kinds of funny visual jokes to use on set drawing—we had a lot of fun with this. And since we use digital assistants for everything these days, it wasn't much of a stretch

to conceptualize a machine-like Set-type of assistant for the Sea Swat scene."

On the topic of automated assistants, one surprise for the team was that the software used in Volume One for the voice of 11-45-G, the pyramid-shaped robot, had now become obsolete.

"Just a little lesson that shows even robots will be victims of a relentless march of time!" jokes Chikara. "At least it gives you a bit of hope for those robots who started a The show is funny but a bit dark, so it was kind of an on that."



**THIS SPREAD** / Creative designers and illustrators created original artwork of and references for the interior spaces, EXTERIOR, and characters for the film.





## MaSON'S rATS

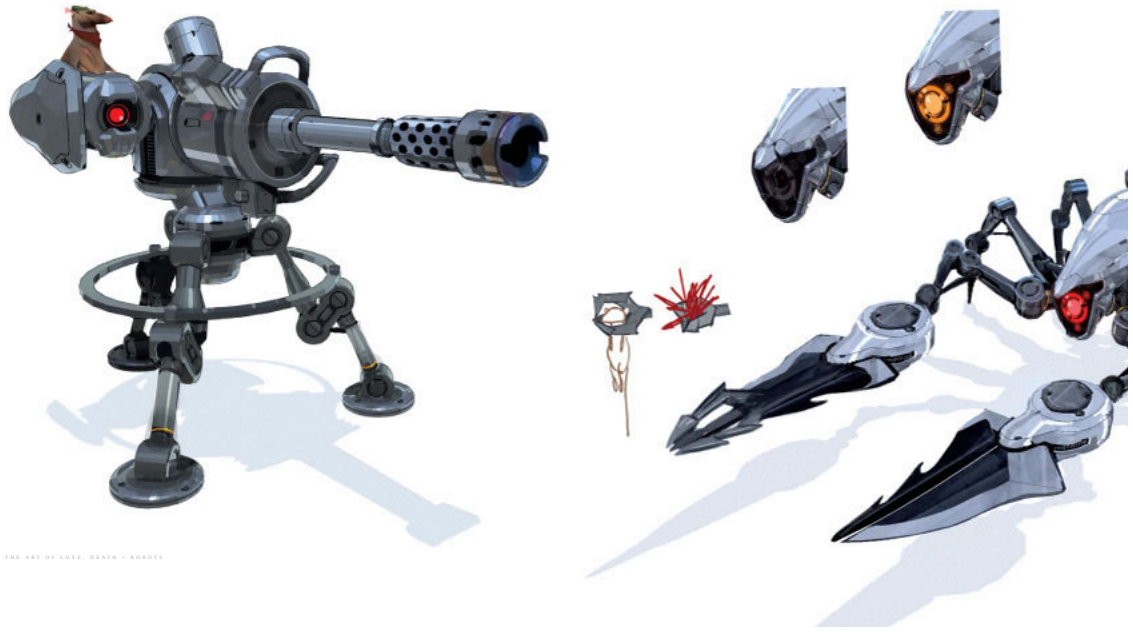
In Neal Asher's story "MaSON's RATS," a cosmopolitan farmer  
unleashes a apocalypse via robot-killing death machines—  
but has a sudden change of heart as the body count rises. The  
L.D-10 team again partnered with Scotland's Aisle Studios to handle  
production, with Carlos Stevens directing and Brian Selt as the  
art director.

When Stevens first read the script, he felt the tone could  
be like the Coen brothers' film crossed with Spielberg's Saving  
Private Ryan (1998). "Sounds like fun, right? American Regionalism

also influenced me; the tenacity of the artistic movement's  
depiction of farm life in the early 1900s drew me in. No bells, just  
the simple rhythm of agricultural life."

Stevens relates, "My grandpa was a hermit who lived in a  
ghost town in the middle of nowhere and was locked in a constant  
battle with all the rattensnakes, snakes, and desert animals  
around his home. So I can appreciate the feelings of MaSON—a  
man coming to terms with the animals on his land and recognizing  
they're more friend than foe."

MaSON is a trademark of the  
character of the FOX and DCU.

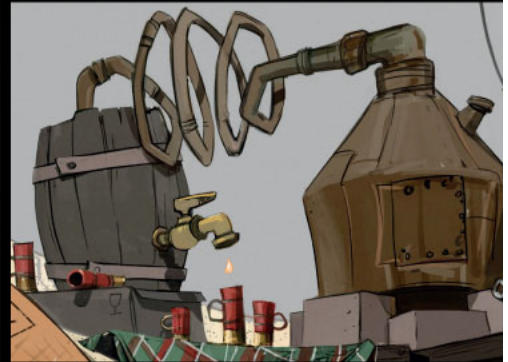


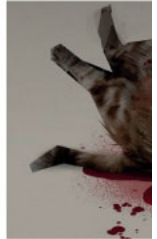


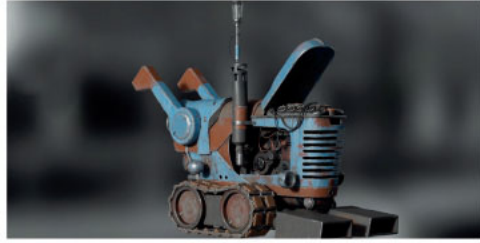
"The juxtaposition of stylized 3D animation and the extreme violence in this battle between technology and evolution was fascinating to me."

CARLOS STEVENS  
DIRECTOR









Solo, the art director on *Helping Hand* and *loved the quirky story and felt it had a lot of his loved engineering cars too!* he admits. "It's a fine narrative deserves its aesthetic voice, and Mason Solo adds, "Of all the things I've learned or managed might be that there's surprisingly little of a real car!"





## NIGHT OF THE MINI DEAD

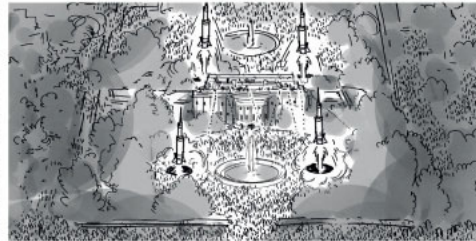
An army of the miniature undead wreaks havoc in this tilt-shift zombie apocalypse. L.A.-based BUCK handled the production, which was led by directors Andy Lyon and Robert Bink, who loved the idea of the brief episode's simple premise.

"This is a tiny-sized take of the biggest event in human history," Bink explains. "There are tons of limitations for a short drawn entirely in tilt-shift, most of the work in the narrative filmmaker's toolbox are still kinds. When the whole story takes place through a 4000mm lens, you have to think of new ways to tell the story."

"The fact that zombie films are such a well-known trope means the audience's brain fills in the gaps for us, because they've seen this concept many times before. So we could expand upon the themes of apocalyptic battles and gloss over the details," Lyon notes. "Eventually, what was at first a narrative handicap became an exciting new perspective on overly familiar events."

Bink knew to start this miniature zombie invasion? "Honestly, we're in a crazy old cemetery just like... right," says Lyon. "I mean, everyone can relate to that—we just added a Satanic twist. Then things get

BUCK  
The production of the episode by  
the Bink brothers.





going to the ultra-violet, image-shoot further away than I could from  
everywhere it occurs. The biggest challenge is how to focus the  
eye on the almost always tiny but often important narrative points of  
each gig."

His opinion: "The East Coast is a hachure with the rest of the  
country pointing, where photography, much photography and custom

shots. And we did a large amount of 2D animation to get the timing  
and choreography right."

"The most important is the bottom line, but that is  
just an image (not speak in the volume, and I don't mean "I love  
you." "I'll be here for you, it can be kind of over the top,"  
over the small stuff?"

"We wanted  
awkly









## FINAL THOUGHTS & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I don't think you could find many projects with more significant personal investments of time, passion, energy, and love from the people working on them than this show. It feels wonderful to allow artists to do their best work on films they believe in. It feels fantastic to have writers so excited about seeing their stories brought to life. This whole idea began with Fischer and I wanting to create a collection of animated stories that pushed the boundaries of art and story and brought animators together to make things we couldn't imagine. I am humbled by what they have achieved.

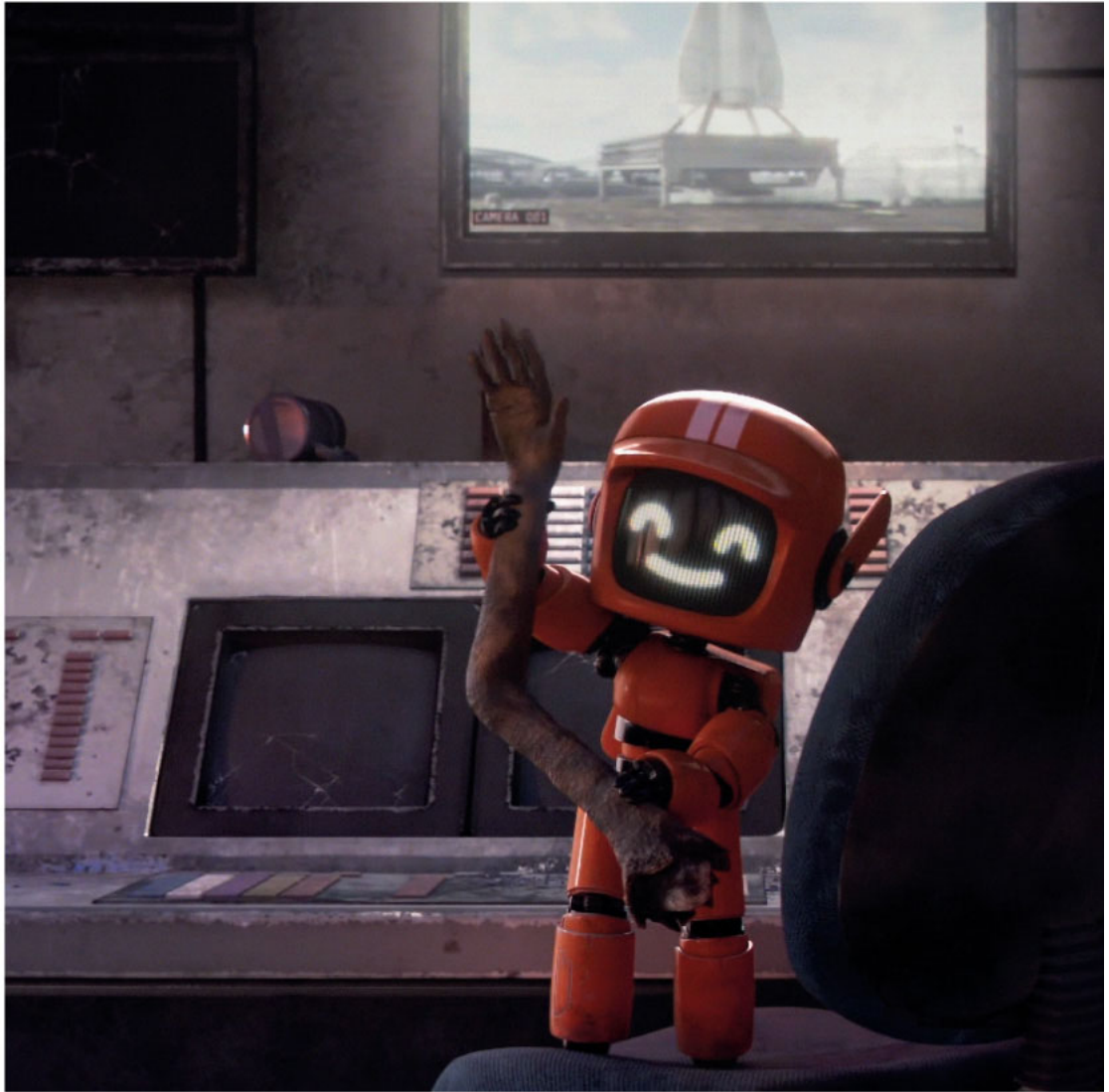
The LID-R team here at Blue has become a real family, and we're so grateful for all the dedication they've shown putting the show together. Without them, we couldn't have sent this love letter from the global animation community out into the world.

And to all the fans of our show around the world, thank you so fucking much for watching! I feel like we're just getting warmed up.

TIM MILLER

I would like to thank everyone at Blue Studios, Netflix, and Titan Books, who were unbelievably generous and kind with their time. It was a true honor to get a unique insider's look at the making of Love, Death + Robots. I am forever grateful to robot masters Tim and Jennifer Miller, David Fischer, Jennifer Yuh Nelson, and Victoria L. Howard, for all the time you spent on Zoom with me for this project. A huge tip of the hat to the amazing Jerome Desnoes, who was my special guide through this universe, as well as Stella Levy, who patiently set up all the interviews, and Adam Hall and Peter Rosenzweig, who provided the images. I am also hugely indebted to all the artists, directors, producers, and VFX gnomes who shared their insights about their work on the series. Thank you to my excellent editor at Titan, the fantastic Stephanie Heisterkamp. I wish you all the best in your new venture! Also, a big tip of the hat to the brilliant Natasha MacKenzie for her beautiful design and creative eye. And thank you, to Baylen, for your support through the years. Finally, a big thanks to my eight-year-old nephew buddy Gianni, who watched me type away as he patiently waited for me to all day long.

RAMIN ZAHEED













#### AUTHOR BIO

Ramin Zahed is an LA-based author and journalist who specializes in animation, VFX, pop culture, and indie film. The Editor in Chief of Animation Magazine, he has written for Variety, The Hollywood Reporter, Sight and Sound, and more. Among his recent books are *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse: The Art of the Movie*, *The Art of Captain Underpants: The First Epic Movie*, *Star Wars: The Force Awakens: Boss Baby*, and *J.K. Rowling's Wizarding World: The Filmmaker's Edition, Vol. 2*.

THE ART OF LOVE, DEATH + ROBOTS

Standard Edition ISBN: 9781789098648  
E-Book ISBN: 9781803360812  
Limited Edition ISBN: 9781803360171

Published by Titan Books  
A division of Titan Publishing Group Ltd.  
144 Southwark St. London SE1 0UP

First edition: JULY 2022  
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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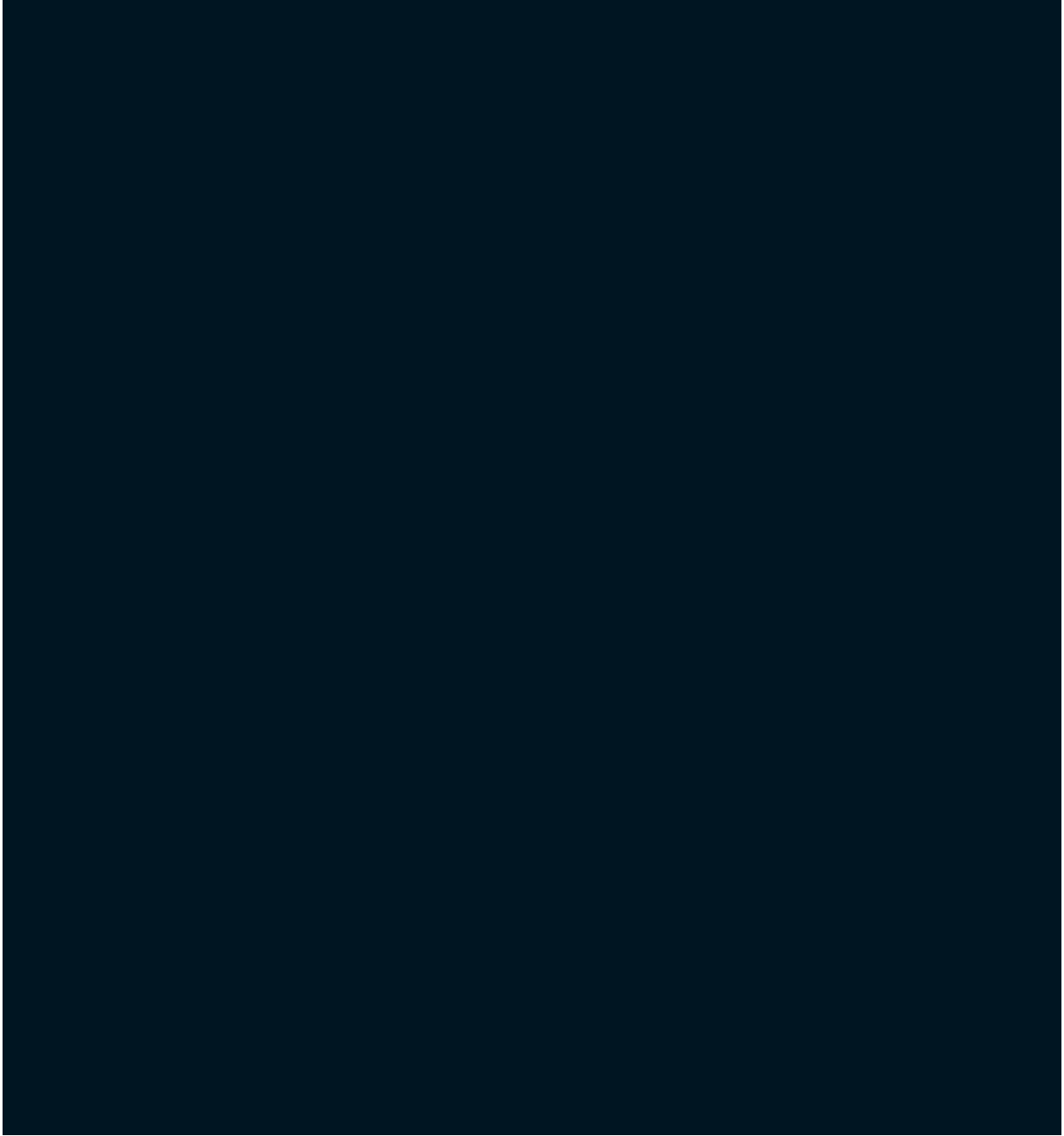
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ISBN: 9781789098648



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