

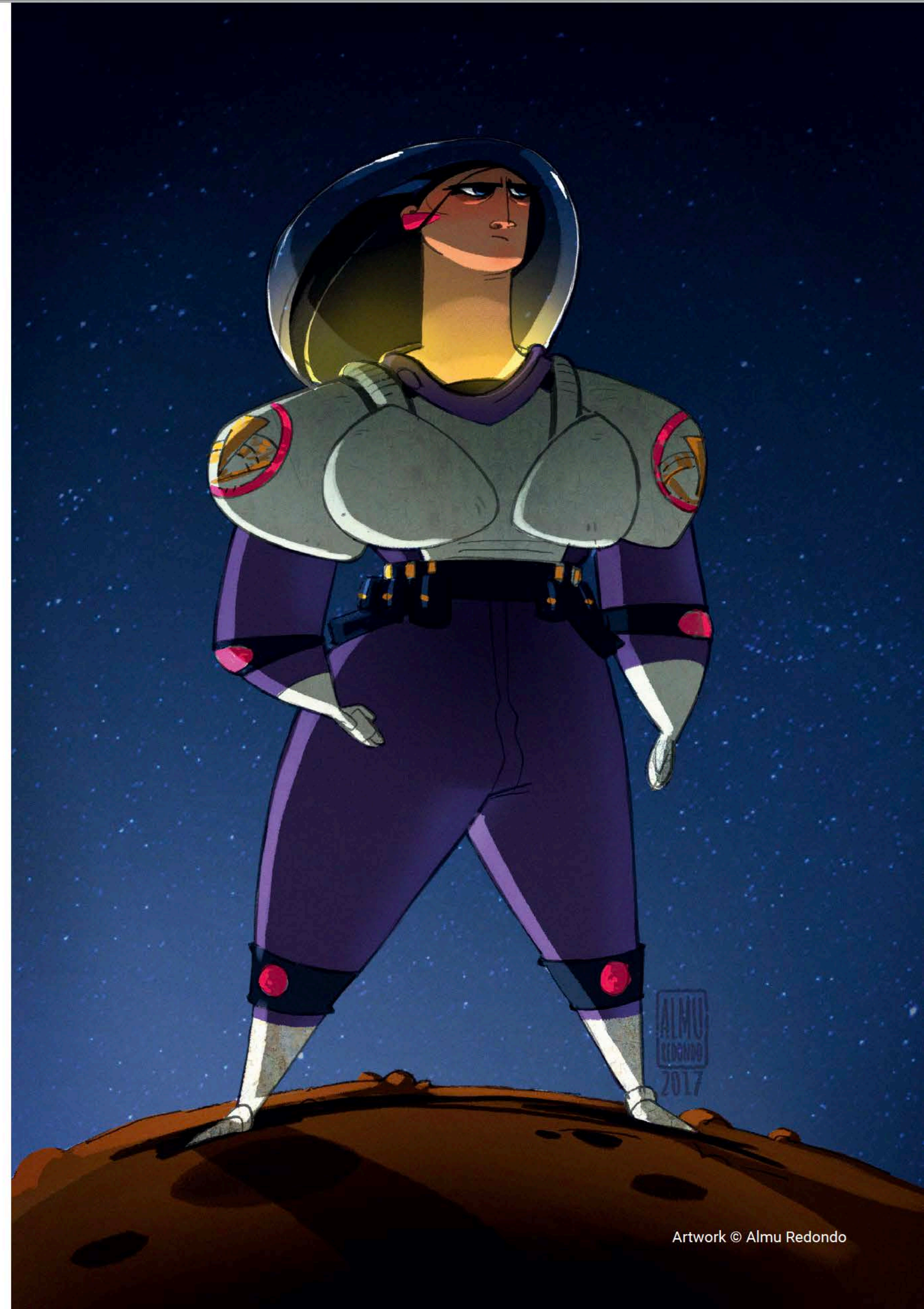
Drifting free in space

“She just wants to connect, with anyone. Almost a year of drifting free in the Pariah asteroid belt, and not one commuter... until now. The transmission alarm sounds, waking her. She lurches from her captain’s chair and peers at the forward screen, then her comms. Is she seeing this correct? She rubs sleep from her eyes and runs her hands through long, black hair, tying it up out of her face. “Another mining class?” she smiles, beams. “Finally!” She stands and pulls up the zip of her mining uniform, the Corps Mining logo half-torn from her breast. Trousers hang slightly loose from malnutrition. Barefoot had been the choice footwear option for months. She breathes in and tries to look casual as she gives the order to open video transmission. The forward screen connects. It’s like staring at a mirror.”

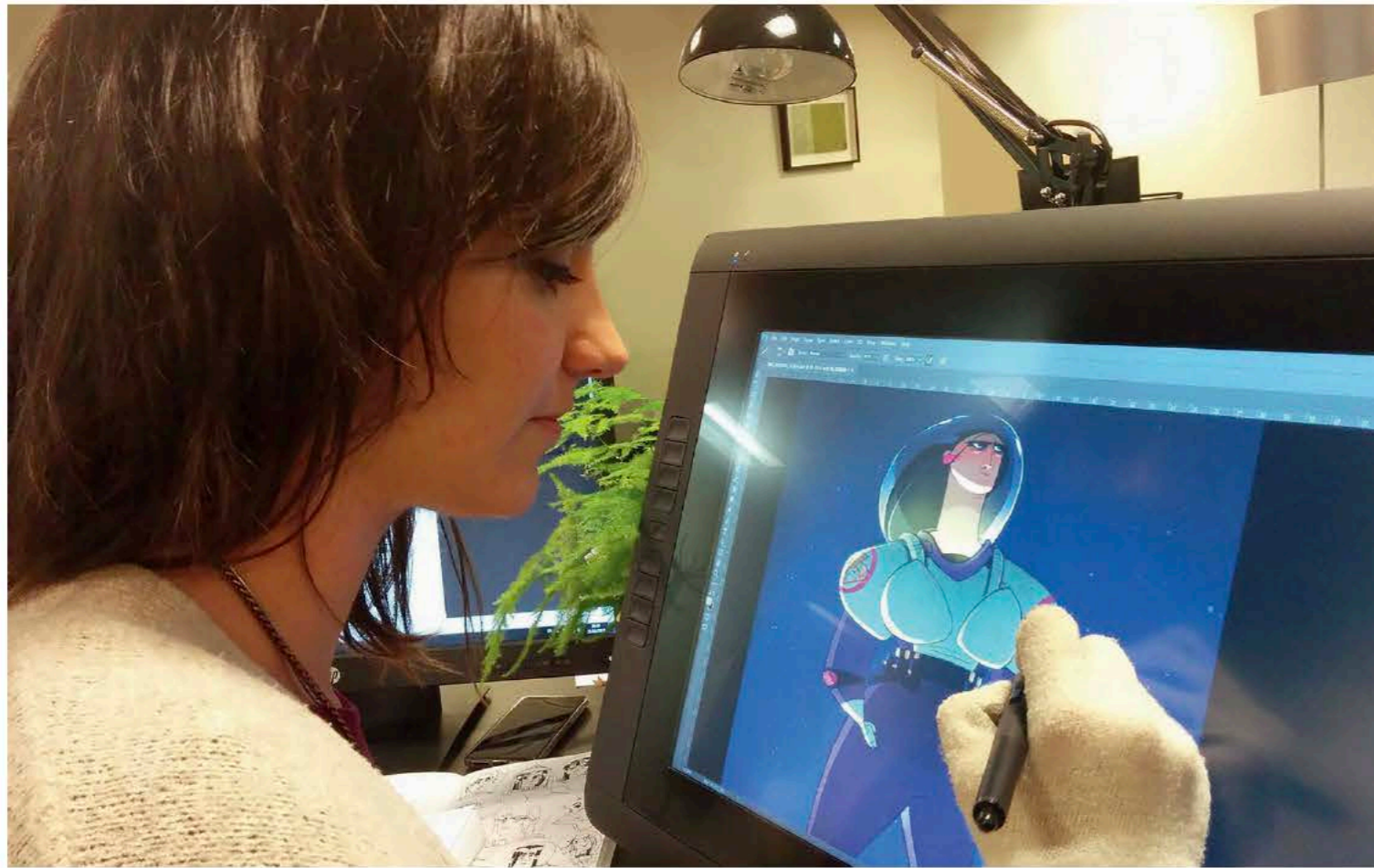
By **Almu Redondo**

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Narrative by Adam J. Smith | adamjsmithauthor.blogspot.co.uk



Artwork © Almu Redondo



In this tutorial you will encounter one of the most challenging and exciting scenarios for a character designer: to design from a narrative brief! This is the best opportunity to bring extra depth to your characters through the use of subtleties, several layers of psyche, and some fascinating back stories.

For this reason, every small detail counts and the challenge to make a solid, relatable, and “living” character is the most difficult but interesting part of it.

To help you achieve this, I recommend you print and hang by your desk the wonderful Walt Stanchfield mantra: “Draw ideas, not things; action, not poses; gestures, not anatomical

structures.” To communicate the greatest amount of story and personality, with the fewest number of lines, should be your objective, and this is what we will aim to do in this tutorial. I will go through different techniques that will help you achieve this, starting with rough maps of ideas and thumbnails in pencil, going through ink drawings and digital retouches, to the final color and presentation in Photoshop. Are you ready? Let’s dive in!

Extracting from the brief

To start with, and to get you into the creative mindset, highlight the main words from the brief. Start writing or creating thumbnails of the ideas, sensations, or feelings these concepts create in you.

Those first minutes with the text are fundamental, so read through it with a notebook by your side to catch the first ideas and thumbnails that come to mind.

It also helps a lot, if possible, to capture your initial ideas while relaxed (in your favorite café for example) and to read the text slowly. The best ideas come in this state of relaxed attention.

In this case, I choose three keywords from the narrative: “miner,” “captain,” and “space.” From these keywords are several concepts that I want to associate with them (which I note in purple) and thoughts of how I would translate those ideas into practical visual concepts for the design (which I note in green).

Below: A diagram showing the most important concepts drawn from the brief and its interpretation



ALPHA STATE

Picasso said, “Inspiration exists, but it has to find you working.” What if we could actually switch inspiration on and focus it every time that we need to? Actually, studies of our brain waves have found we can!

It has been shown that our brain has five frequency states and one of them, the Alpha state, is the best one for creative work. When our brain is relaxed, it is also more focused. The amazing news is that we can trigger this state of mind with music, meditation, or breathing (and coffee always helps!). I practice this every day and it makes me considerably more effective, productive, and creative. I encourage you to research it and get the most out of it!

SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)

This is an exercise I have borrowed from my past experience as an architectural designer, which is used for urban planning projects. In this exercise you create a "SWOT board" where you identify the internal and external qualities of the design that are potentially helpful and harmful. In this sense, the internal elements are based on the details in the narrative and are character-specific, while the external elements are caused by the wider context the design will be viewed in.

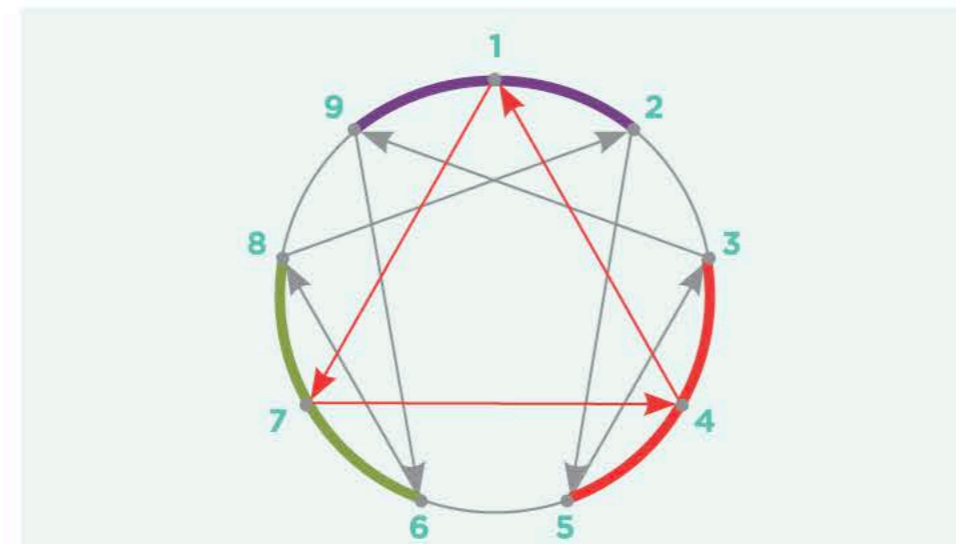
Through evaluating the internal-helpful characteristics of the design, you will locate its strengths, and by finding the internal-harmful elements you will learn where the design may have some weaknesses. By looking at the external-helpful facets, you can identify the opportunities that the design presents, and from the external-harmful aspects you can identify the possible threats to the design's success.

The four categories of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats created by this exercise can be referred back to and will keep your ideas clear throughout the design process. This in turn enables you to commit to that key concept that will be the soul of your design.

Psychology

You can use an extremely interesting technique used by actors and

	HELPFUL	HARMFUL
EXTERNAL ORIGIN	STRENGTHS COMMANDER HERO POSITIVE PERSONALITY REAL GROUNDED	WEAKNESSES SITUATION NOT VERY ATTRACTIVE DELICATE BALANCE BETWEEN FEMALE AND STRONG TYPE
INTERNAL ORIGIN	OPPORTUNITIES UNUSUAL STRONG FEMALE CREATE A "REAL" CHARACTER CONTRAST BETWEEN HER SITUATION & HER PERSONALITY	THREATS FALL INTO STANDARD "CUTE" CHARACTER MAKE A "BORING" CHARACTER WITH NO APPEAL



THE ENNEAGRAM	
1 PERFECTIONIST reformer, judge, critic Fear: anger	5 THINKER observer, investigator Fear: uselessness
2 HELPER connector, manipulator, nurturer Fear: own needs	6 LOYALIST skeptic, questioner Fear: deviance
3 ACHIEVER performer, status-seeker Fear: worthlessness, failure	7 ENTHUSIAST adventurer Fear: pain
4 ROMANTIC artist, individualist Fear: ordinariness	8 CHALLENGER leader, maverick Fear: conflict
	9 PEACE MAKER mediator. Fear: conflict

psychologists to define the personality of their roles or clients. This technique uses the "Enneagram." The theory states that every person can be classified by one of nine personality types (although everyone has a little of each personality trait), and each type has a main "fear" and a main "passion" that determines our actions and reactions to the world.

The Enneagram technique also theorizes that each one of us has a hero and a demon side; we can be the brightest hero when we are at our best, or we can be the worst villain when we are under the most stressful levels of our personality. Fascinating, right?

You can learn more about this theory and how Enneagrams work at www.enneagraminstitute.com. This theory is incredibly helpful for character designers determining the character's story arc and inner conflicts. For this character I select personality type six, the Loyalist, and list her strengths and weaknesses based on this.

Borrowing from reality

A very helpful trick to bring extra personality to your character is sketching real people in cafés and bars. Try to capture the personality and essence of your subjects in quick, simple sketches. This practice will help you drag ideas from reality to use as a base for your character design.

6

PERSONALITY TRAITS OF A LOYALIST CHARACTER

<p>STRENGTHS HEALTHY LEVELS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ STRATEGIST ▶ SELF-AFFIRMING ▶ APPEALING ▶ RELIABLE ▶ TRUSTWORTHY ▶ SACRIFICING ▶ CREATOR OF STABILITY ▶ STRONG BELIEFS ▶ DEVOTED & LOYAL TO A CAUSE 	<p>WEAKNESSES UNHEALTHY LEVELS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ STUCK IN DOUBT ▶ ENDLESS QUESTIONING ▶ OVER-ANALYSIS ▶ FOCUS ON FAILURES ▶ FEEL PERSECUTED ▶ SKEPTIC ▶ ANXIOUS ▶ SARCASTIC ▶ BELLIGERENT ▶ BLAMING OTHERS
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Sometimes just the position of an arm, or the expression on a face, can be the trigger for inspiration. This will then bring a solid foundation to your design.

Opposite page (top): SWOT grids show the pros and cons of the brief

Opposite page (middle and bottom): SWOT grids show the pros and cons of the brief

Top: The strengths and weaknesses of this character based on her loyalist personality type

Above: Go out and sketch real people and distill their essence

Embracing contrasts

Now it is time to look at the construction of the character. Your design will need to have contrast, not only in the basic shapes and volumes, but also from the inside-out. Often, the most successful characters (especially in animation) are those where the physical appearance is highly contrasted, or sometimes even opposite, from the personality. For example, the character Tyrion Lannister is described in George R. R. Martin's books as small, ugly, and almost repulsive, but he has the most attractive and seductive personality of the whole saga. Arya Stark on the other hand is a cute-looking little girl who hides a dangerous personality within.

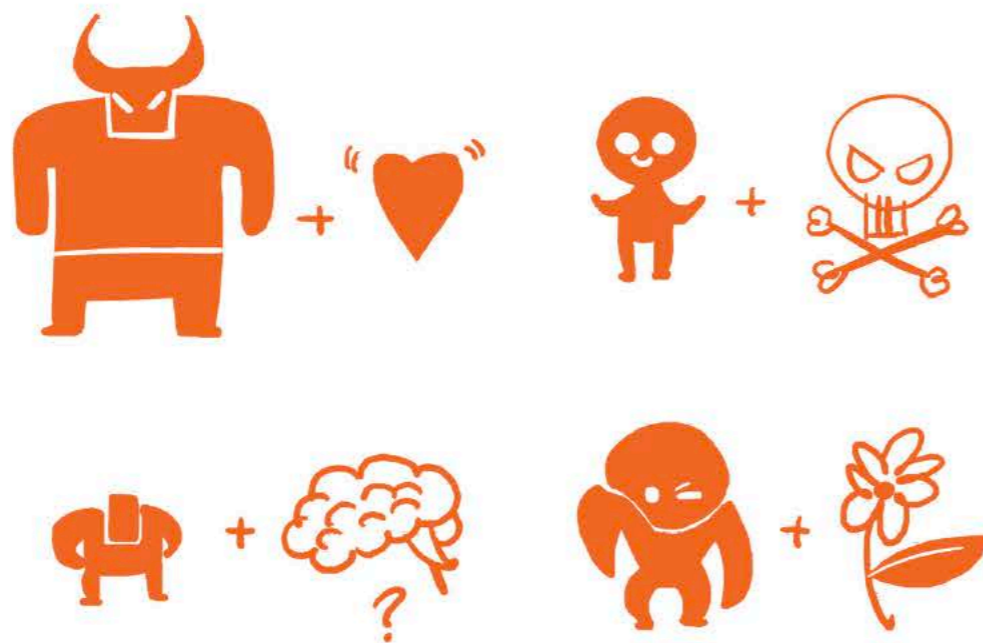
Contrasts between appearance and personality is an extremely interesting idea to play with. In this case, I explore creating a large, strong body that will contain a tender personality encapsulating a righteous heart.

Intelligent exaggeration

Cartoonish exaggeration can be your best tool to create mind-bending characters full of feeling and story. However, it can look poor if the exaggeration is done without a clear purpose, sense of story, or direction. That is why it is important to have a clear understanding of the story, personality, and world of your character before you begin to manipulate the character's shapes and volumes.

For this character you could explore broad shoulders and strong arms, square shapes and straight lines. Balance them with some angles and triangles to get the feeling of strength, authority, and security that this character should exude.

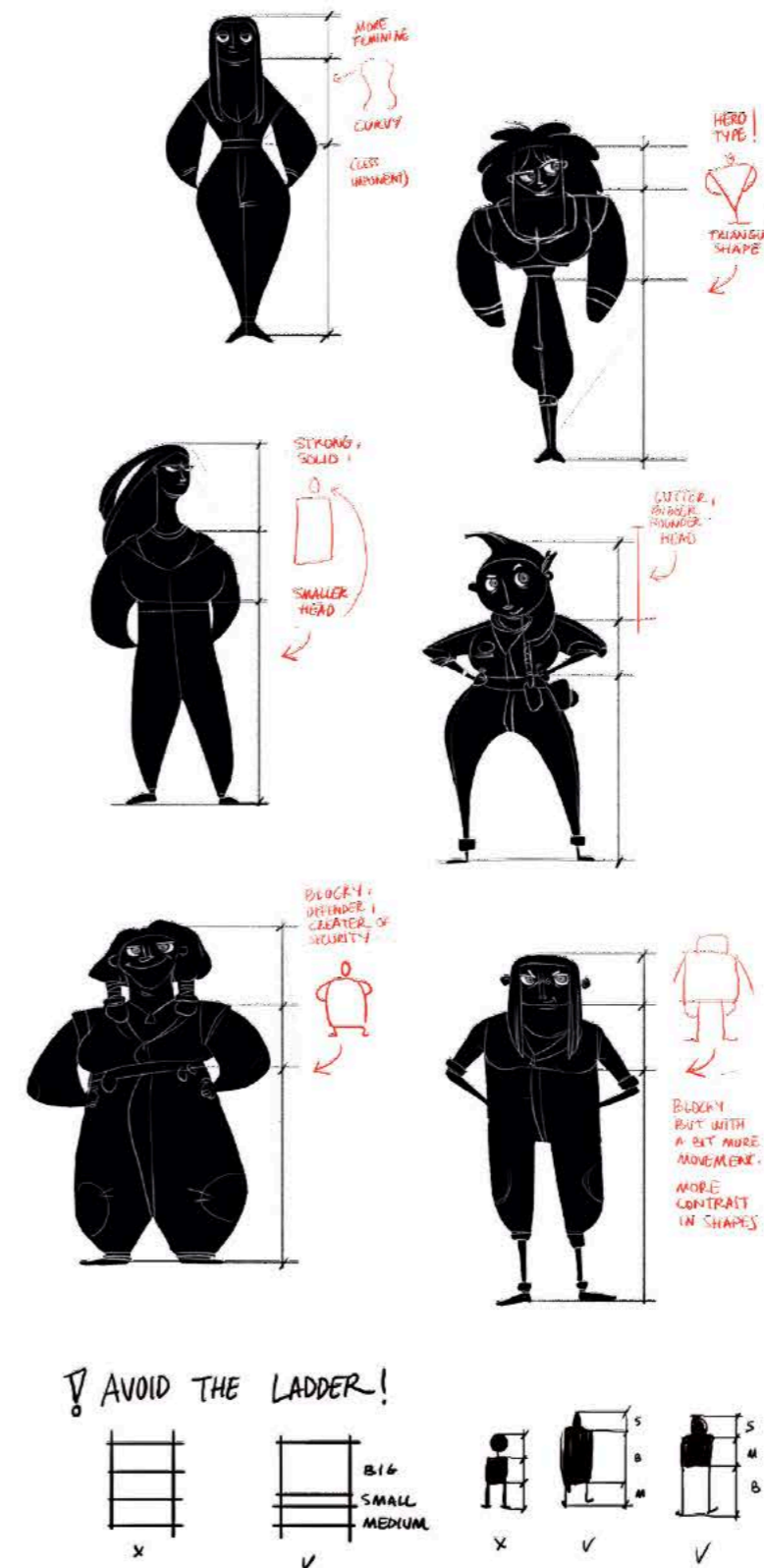
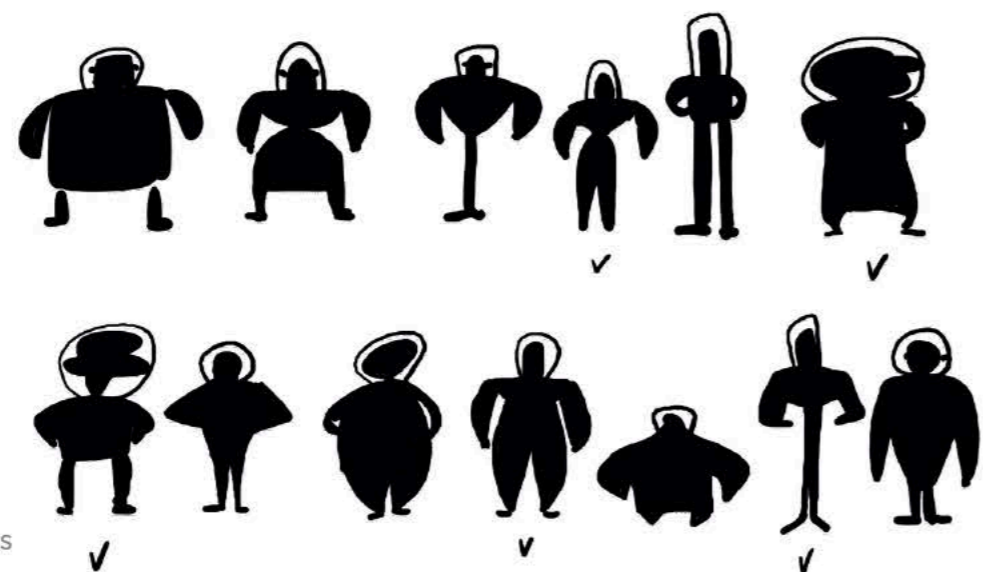
However, keep in mind the key concept for the design. From these experiments choose a few that have the best contrast of shapes to develop the concept.



Top: Create dynamic and interesting contrasts between the physical appearance of your character and their interior self

Bottom: Apply intelligent exaggeration to your shapes that reinforce the story

Opposite page: Generate rough silhouettes with interesting proportions between the head, torso, and legs



Proportions

Proportions, and relative proportions, will help you most when defining an appealing character imbued with personality, and enable you to get the style of the character.

Keep in mind that one of the most important ways to achieve good proportions is to avoid "the ladder."

The ladder is an even distribution of the different body parts (generally the head, torso, and legs) which looks quite uninteresting.

Sometimes inspiration will not come, so instead you have to generate random distributions and then fill these in with the three main body parts later. Relativity is a key factor in adding

SWITCH TOOLS AND SWITCH OFTEN

You will find that there are many times when it is extremely beneficial to switch between traditional and digital tools throughout the design process. Each one of them has strengths that you can use to your benefit when designing.

While the pencil gives you a nice balance between freedom and commitment, ideal for the first stages of the design process, ink will force you to slow down and commit to each line you make. This makes your drawings purposeful and meaningful.

Finally, working digitally gives you the complete freedom needed to work in an intuitive way, and generate amazing clean and finessed pieces. Different techniques can help shape and tune your brain when working – so use them!

personality through proportions. For example, if you want to create the impression of a big head, the next part of the body – the chest – should be shorter so the head will look relatively bigger.

The same approach can be applied with exaggeratedly long legs and a short chest, or a big, hero-type chest and shorter legs.

Complex vs. simple designs

The need for complexity or simplicity of style is often determined by the kind of production the design is to be used for. Animation usually requires simple, clear characters to save time and make the production posing of them efficient, especially if it is a 2D animation.

More complex characters are only usually affordable in videogames. Often in these types of projects the character animation is minimal or in loops, and the need to quickly read the acting silhouette is less.

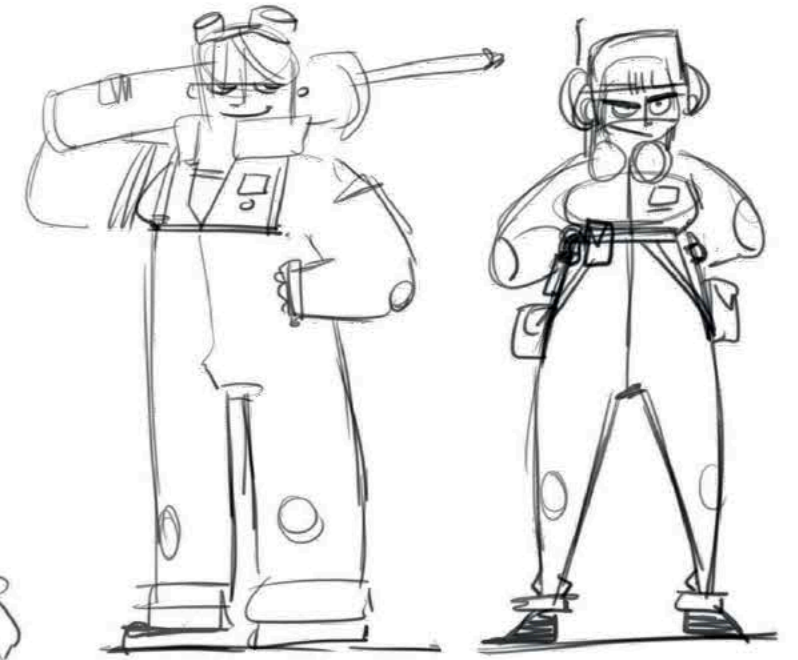
In this case, I explore some more design concepts, but they are not successful. I have a hard time focusing on the face and the actions of the character in these designs, so continue exploring alternative ideas.

Soft and straight lines

Angular lines, straight, broken, or spiky lines; these can evoke different emotions from more flowing and soft lines. This can be an extremely useful technique for character designers. You can combine different types of lines to create straighter, more righteous characters or friendlier, more rounded ones. The type of line that is most prevalent and the quantity of other line types that are used can be the difference between a mean and dangerous character, and a highly sensual, natural character.

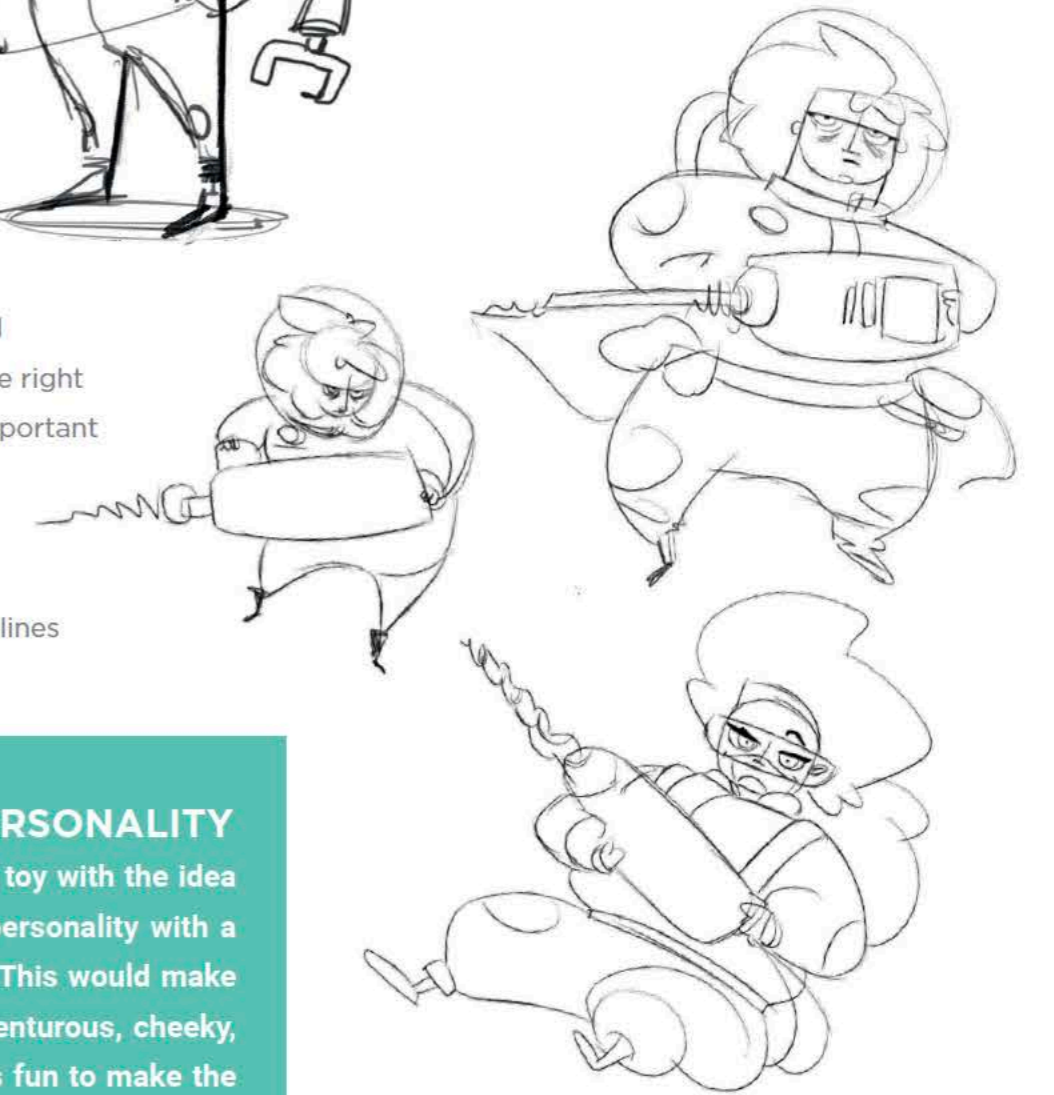


“Combine different types of lines to create straighter, more righteous characters or friendlier, more rounded ones”



Opposite page: Check for clarity and readability in your design. Getting the right amount of detail for the project is important

This page: Explore the difference between a character dominated by rounded lines and others by straight lines



THE CHARACTER’S PERSONALITY
 For a long time in the process I toy with the idea of contrasting the character’s personality with a more spicy Indiana Jones feel. This would make the character appear more adventurous, cheeky, and playful. However, while it is fun to make the drawings, I do not get the depth of the character that I distilled from the brief, so sadly I put this idea aside. Nevertheless, this adventurous idea is always my favorite personality to explore!

Facial construction

To give your character expression you could apply a highly interesting concept from caricature drawing. This helps many artists learn what areas to exaggerate in a face and how manipulating features can tell a story.

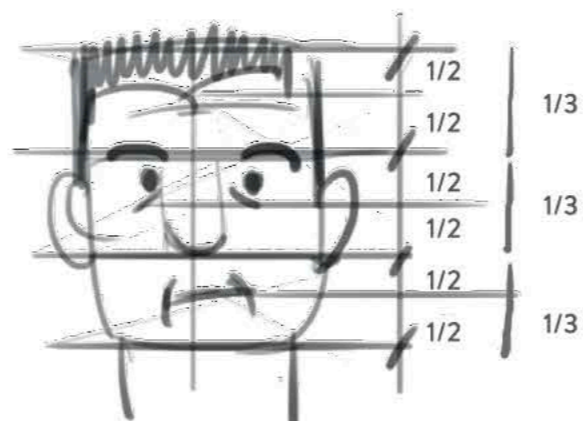
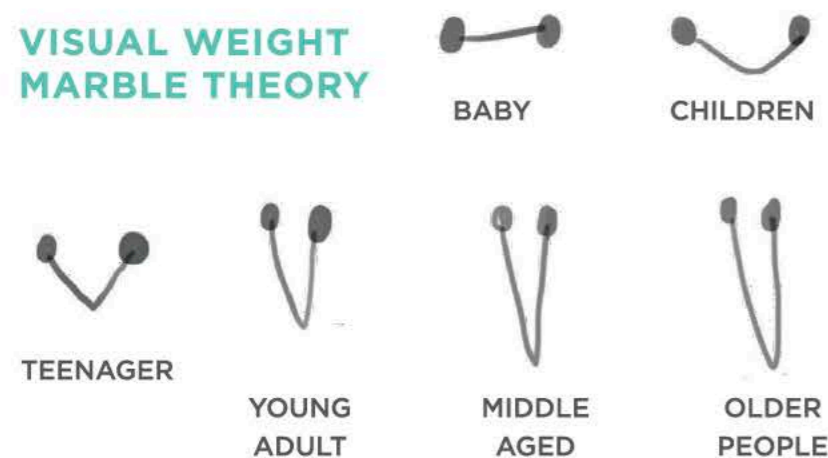
Start from a base of the "perfect" face, with it divided into thirds

and half-divisions. The perfect face does not exist in real life, but through comparison you can see when a nose is longer than normal, and what emotion and personality that offers. Furthermore, you can imagine a triangle in the face by mentally drawing a string between both eyes. The string pulls down in the middle to form a deeper triangle as we get older which

brings the eyes closer together. This is a trick that you can use to your benefit to bring maturity or wisdom to your characters.

You can even use this method to make your characters appear more appealing by giving them wider spaced eyes like a child, or make them more mean-looking with eyes brought close together.

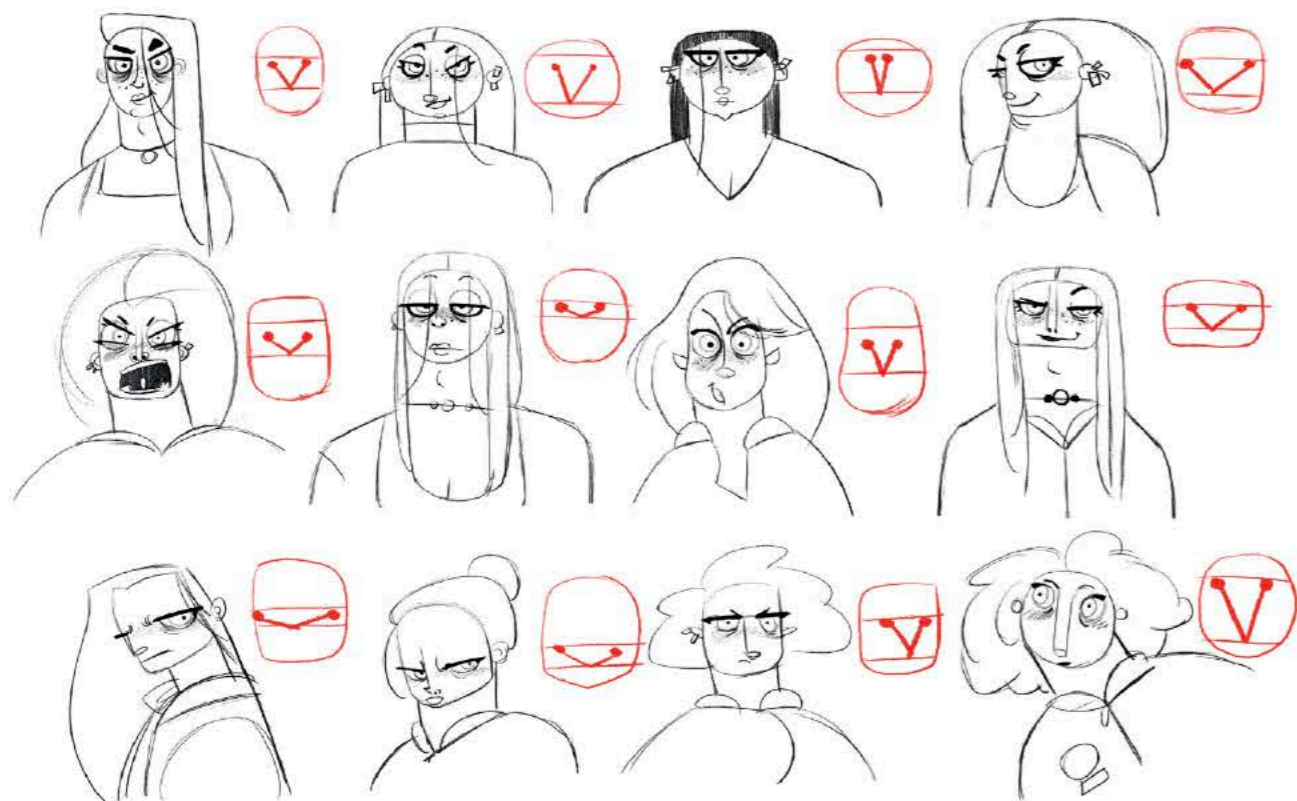
VISUAL WEIGHT MARBLE THEORY



THE "PERFECT" HUMAN FACE

This page: Avoid trying to draw the perfect human face and instead inject personality with imperfections

Opposite page: Apply body language concepts to create the correct sensations and actions within your characters



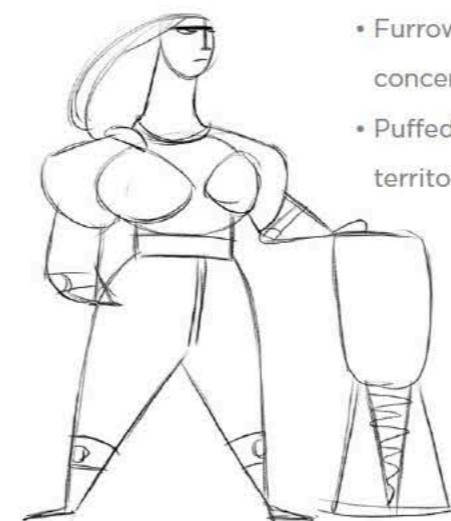
Body language

For learning about the many meanings behind human body language, I highly recommend What Every Body is Saying by Joe Navarro. With this information you can create high contrasts in the evolution of your character's body language throughout the narrative.

You can see here how the character's body language might change as the story unfolds. At the beginning of this character's mission (top-left) she is positive and confident with her chin up, and an inflated chest. She stands tall in a power position with her feet spread, shoulders pulled back, a fixed gaze, and open forehead. This all suggests that she is a character with strength, ease, power, and authority.

By contrast, in the final pose (bottom-right) her shoulders are lowered and hunched forward. She is looking down to the floor with low eyebrows and a small mouth. This suggests she is feeling troubled or doubtful, with strong worried thoughts and a sense of unease.

- Leaning forward - accessible
- Wider stance - even more authoritarian
- Furrowed forehead - anxiety, concentration, distressed
- Puffed up chest - territory dominance



- Wide stance - authoritarian
- Ventral front - confident
- Clear, raised eyebrows - positive
- Smiley eyes - happy, positive



- Closed fists - intensity
- Forward - ready to act
- Lower eyebrows - intense conflict
- Arms akimbo - intense authority and territorial dominance

- Shoulders hunched - low confidence, negative emotions
- Leg touching, "pacifying" discomfort - anxiety
- Ventral denial - trouble



USING HAIR IN DESIGN

As the master animator Glen Keane says, the hair is an extension of a character's personality. The design and movement of the hair can tell the audience as much about a character as the face or hands.

In the case of this character design, the hair shows the most blunt, honest, and fluid side of her. It creates big, simple gestures by either floating in the air, or falling down to cover her face when she has deep and insightful moments. It can act like a curtain to hide her from the world while she is lost in thought, but it is also practical, unkempt, and natural. It suggests she has been isolated for so long that she has forgotten to take care of herself and simply allows her hair to grow disheveled.



Acting and gesture

In general terms this character has an air of quiet authority. She is not explosive, but thoughtful. How would she react in a conflict? With quiet and peaceful security, an analytical thought process and a Zen-like approach I think. She keeps her nerve and her presence evokes respect in others.

She is a strategist, decisive, the first one in line, and protective. Once there is a clear sense of who the character is as a person, it is possible to theoretically cast an actor to give you an extra

dimension of reality and help make the design more solid.

For this character, I imagine a personality that's somewhere between Ripley in *Alien* for her fearless commitment, Sarah Connor from *Terminator* for her strength, and Brienne of Tarth from *Game of Thrones* for her fortitude.

You can show this development by creating drawings that are looser, and closer to animation roughs, with no need for them to be "on model." This will keep the energy and essence of the narrative

moment, and the drawings can be cleaned later if needed.

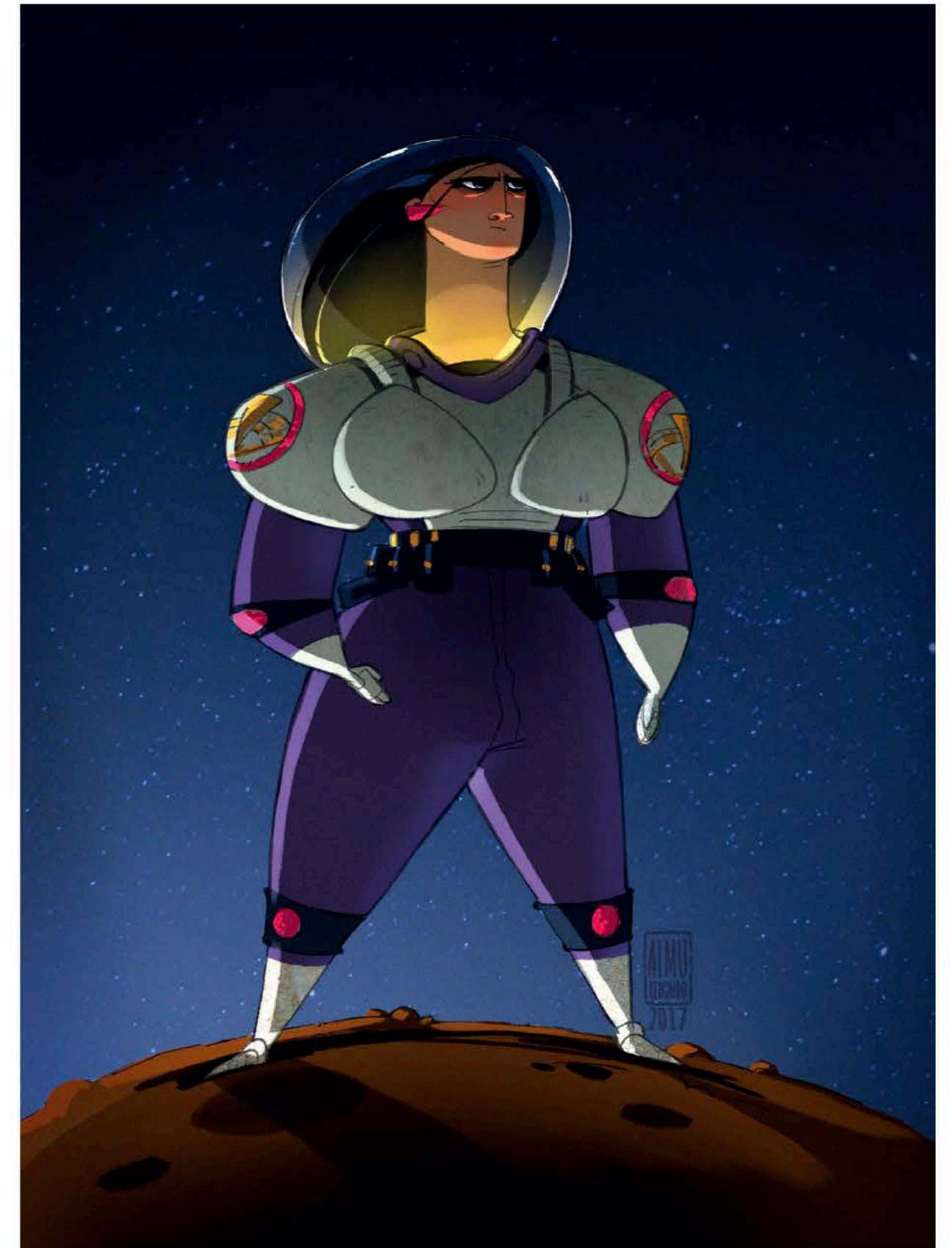
Final design

Often, the smaller, rougher thumbnail in the corner of a sketchbook (or even on a napkin) can hold the best design and balance of proportions. This is the case for me with this character design. So, taking the final line drawing, I adapt it to the proportions of this tiny sketch (right). It is important to choose the most appealing final pose or one that tells a lot of the story. In this case, I choose a very heroic

Far left: Cast an imaginary actor to help create an extra dimension and more believability

Near left: Fine tune your final image to get the best pose and design

Right: Final image © Almu Redondo



pose, before she becomes isolated in the asteroid belt station.

Final color

The choice of colors was clear to me in this design from the very beginning. A very quiet character with a deep emotional dimension

demands cold colors, unlike a vibrant red which would show the real strength of her on the inside.

For this contrast a cold palette of blues and purples (a color associated with high positions in society) will be suitable. To

compensate for her internal depth, and give the color palette a final punch, an occasional red-pink touch helps to balance the color harmony. To finish, add some simple lighting and final texture to bring the design to a semi-finish that could be shown to the client.