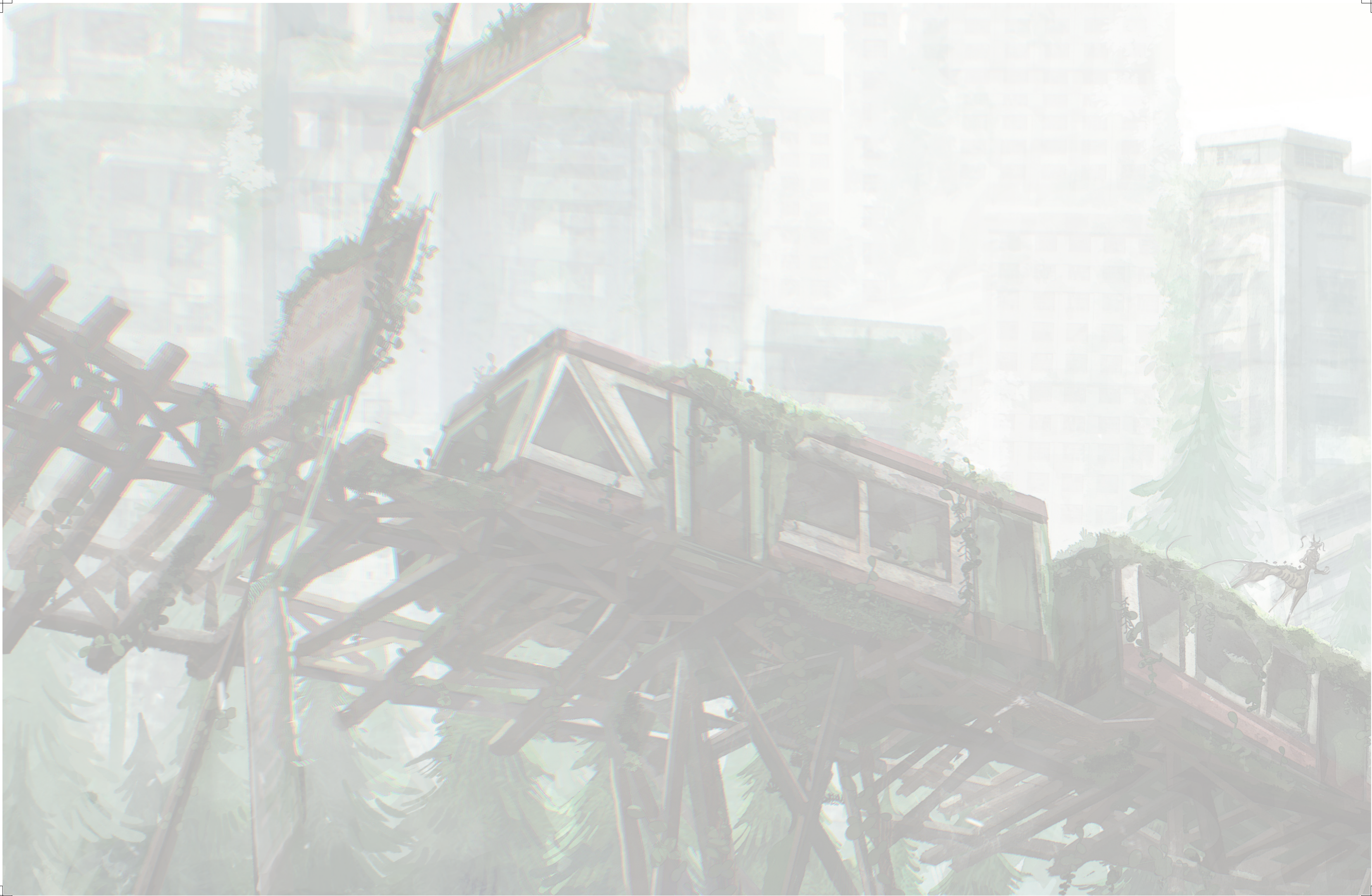


The Making of

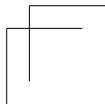
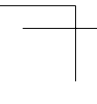
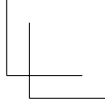
THE LEFT BEHIND

A Process Book of Stella Feng









Where it all begins

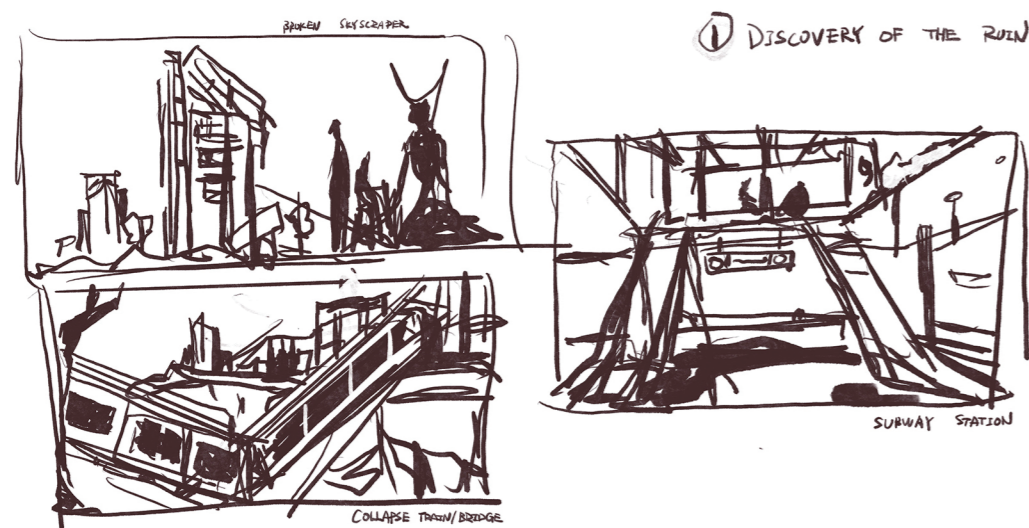
The Left Behind is my first deep dive into science fiction — an area I was once hesitant to explore. For a long time, I thought of myself as someone who could only design for fantasy or historical settings. But a previous project I've worked on opened my eyes to the emotional and visual potential of sci-fi. I began to ask myself: What does my own sci-fi language look like?

I knew I still wanted to hold onto the mystical elements and naturalistic imagery I've always loved. That led me to the aesthetic of the "green apocalypse," a world overtaken by nature — desolate yet alive. Inspired by works like the Nier series and The Last of Us, I was drawn to the quiet beauty of decay, where destruction feels surreal, even gentle.

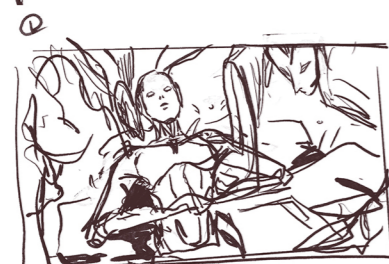
Science fiction is endlessly diverse, and stepping into it has been both challenging and rewarding. With The Left Behind, I've started to carve out a voice of my own within the genre — one that blends the poetic with the mechanical, the ruinous with the radiant.



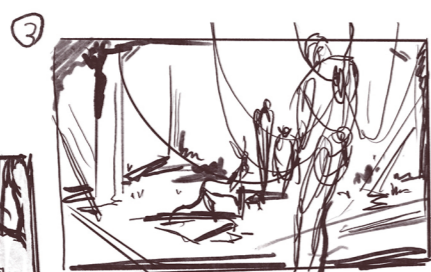
Atomspherical Moodboard: Solarpunk/Green Apocalypse



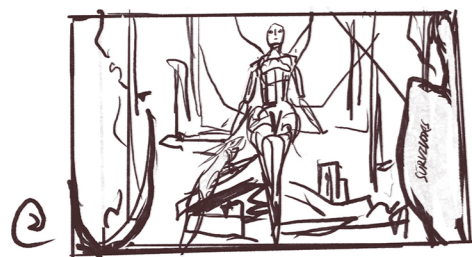
① DISCOVERY OF THE RUIN



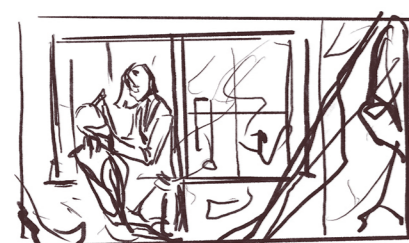
② AWAKENING OF THE BOT



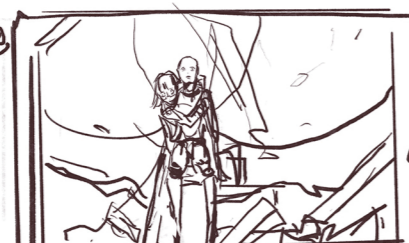
③



④



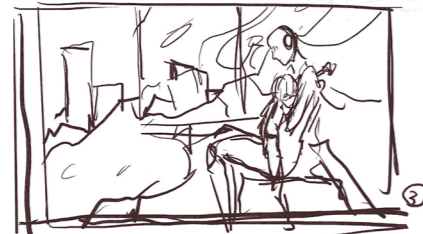
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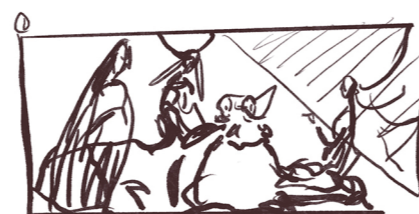
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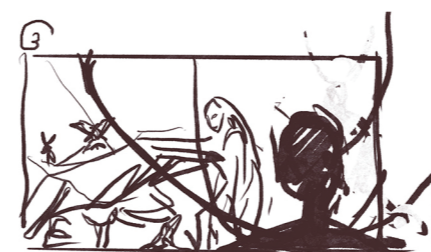
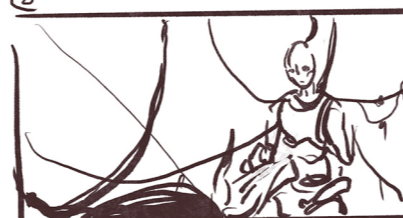
⑦ IMAGE OF THE PAST



⑧



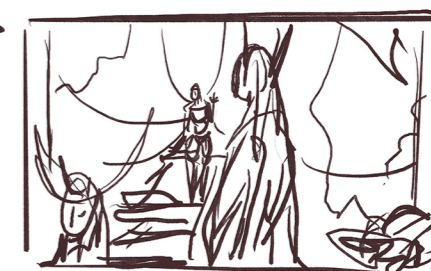
⑨



⑪ THE OFFER TO LEAVE



⑬



⑭

⑮ THE LEFT BEHIND

The very First Draft

The Left Behind draws inspiration from two major sources. The most prominent is *The Poet's Tale* from *Hyperion* by Dan Simmons, which I read over break. The other comes from two of my favorite Vocaloid songs: *Heat Abnormalities* by Iyowa, which shaped the tone of the story, and *The Patchworker* by Millstones, which heavily influenced the character design of *The Left Behind*.

In the earliest draft, the story was even more melancholic. A group of creatures discovers a robot in the ruins, built by a scientist who had her own "eureka moment" during the disaster that reshaped the world. The robot's only purpose is to wait for the final doom. Though the creatures offer it a chance to leave and explore the world, the robot — despite wanting to go — is bound by its programming. In the end, it says goodbye and returns to its eternal wait.

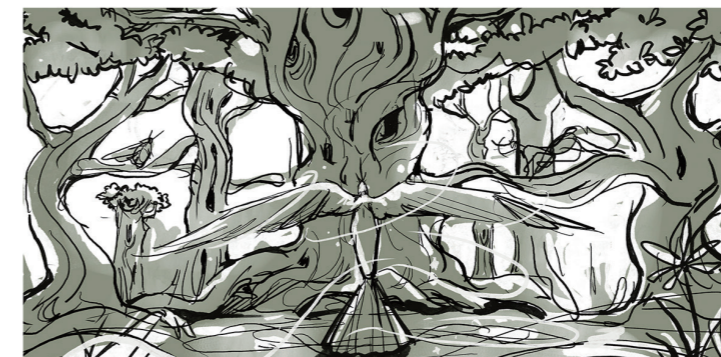
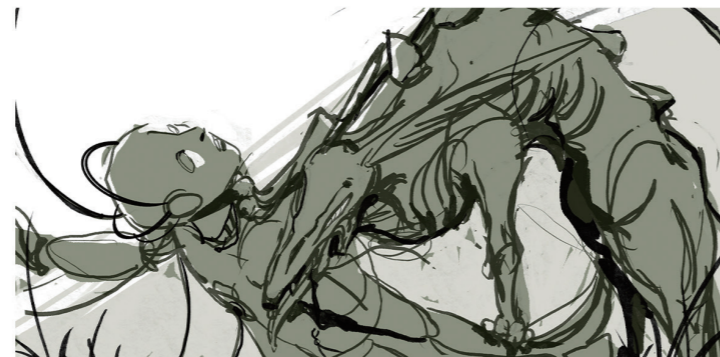
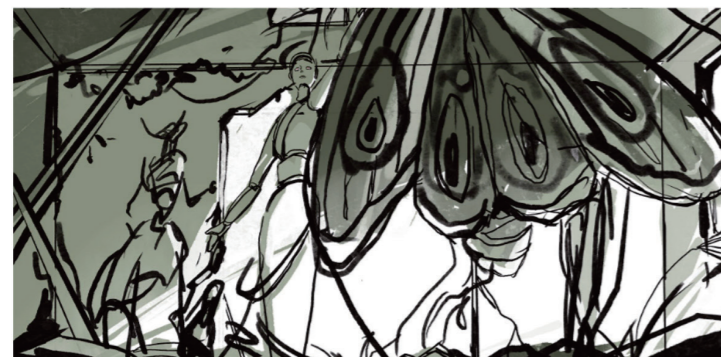
Initial Thumbnails: 5 storybeat



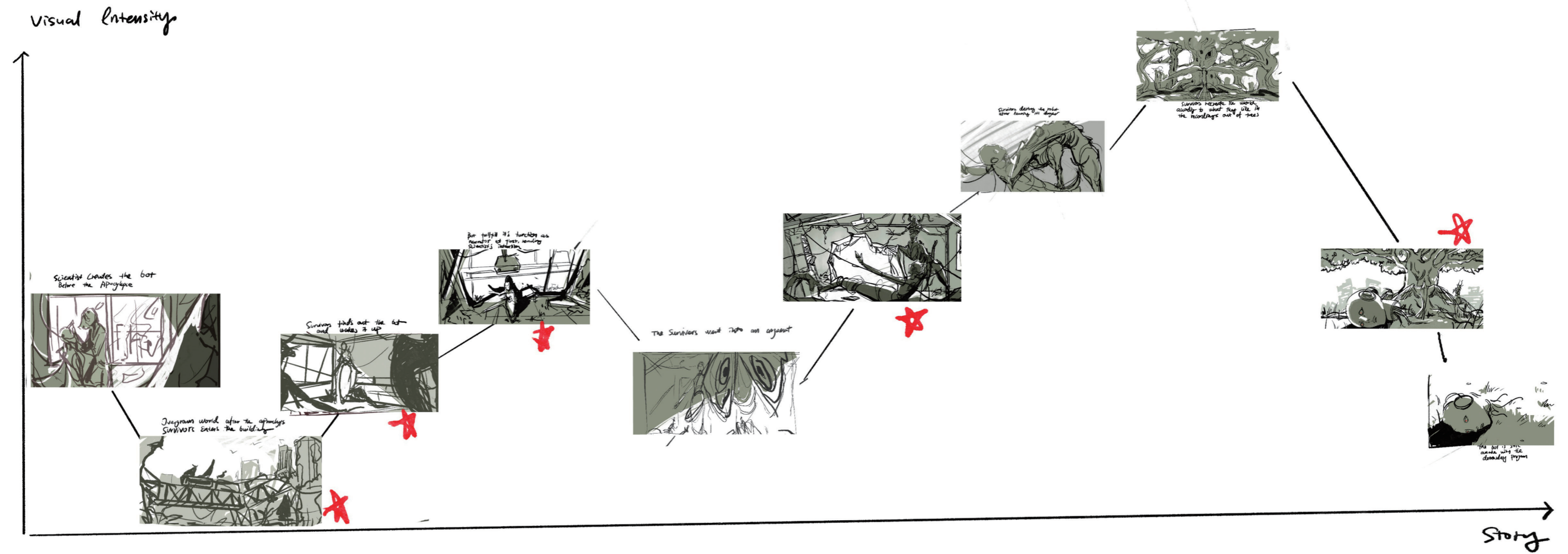
How It Gets to here

I spent around five weeks refining the story. The first draft felt too still — there was no real conflict, and none of the characters changed from beginning to end. One suggestion I received was to reframe the robot's purpose as a positive one: a preserver of history, helping the creatures rebuild human civilization. While this gave the story more movement, something still felt off. I realized the pessimistic core was essential — removing it made the visual language feel disconnected from the narrative.

The breakthrough came when I reimagined the robot not just as a witness to the end, but as the doom itself — an abstract concept made manifest. This shift elevated the conflict between the robot and the survivors from a philosophical tension to a tangible battle, giving the story an open ending that feels haunting and powerful.



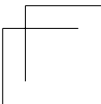
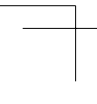
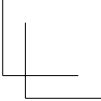
Storybeat Draft: The earlier version



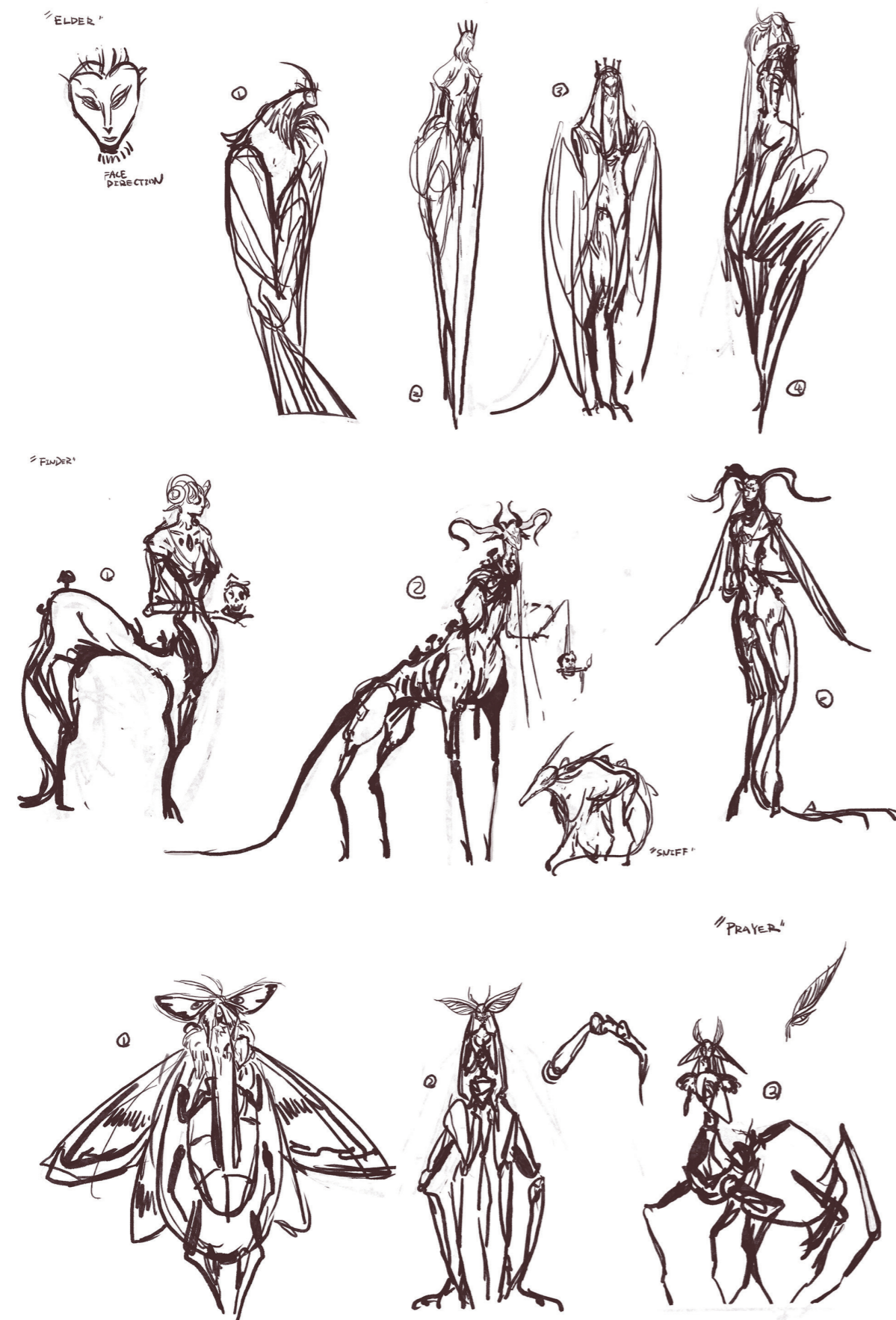
The Visual Intensity Chart of the Story



Color Script of the Story



Early character ideation sketches



Mystical Creatures

In this apocalyptic world, I imagined all remaining inhabitants as metaphorical beings — evolved in a more animalistic, surreal direction. With that in mind, I designed the group of survivors as abstract, otherworldly creatures. Their forms were originally inspired by the three principal gods of Hinduism, a remnant from an earlier version of the story that focused on rebuilding civilization. Sniff the dog was added simply out of personal love for dogs.

Designing non-human characters came with more challenges than I expected. These creatures are harder for audiences to relate to, and their non-bipedal forms made it difficult to choreograph believable movement. Still, it's exactly these unconventional choices that made the survivors feel unique — and deeply rooted in the world I created.



Character Inspirations



"The Elder"

As the leader of the group and the embodiment of creation, The Elder is designed with inspiration from a wise barn owl. It has the most human-like facial features of the team, so I intentionally removed its feet to make it feel more surreal and less grounded in realism. Its movement is focused around the upper body, using expressive wing gestures in place of traditional limbs.

The Elder's color palette went through several iterations — I wanted it to visually merge with the environment, almost like a natural spirit of the land. I eventually settled on colors pulled from the sky and soil, allowing it to camouflage among the ruins.



Color Design



Old color version

Reference sheet: Barn Owl

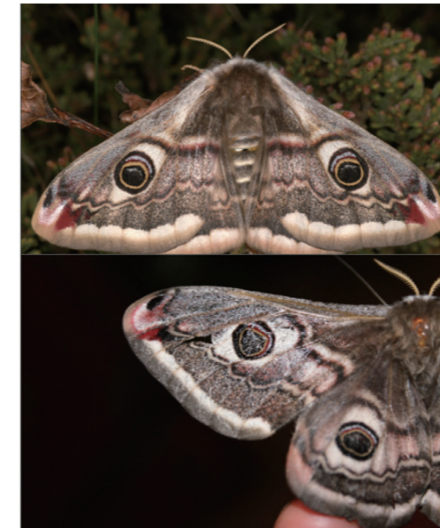


Action pose sketches

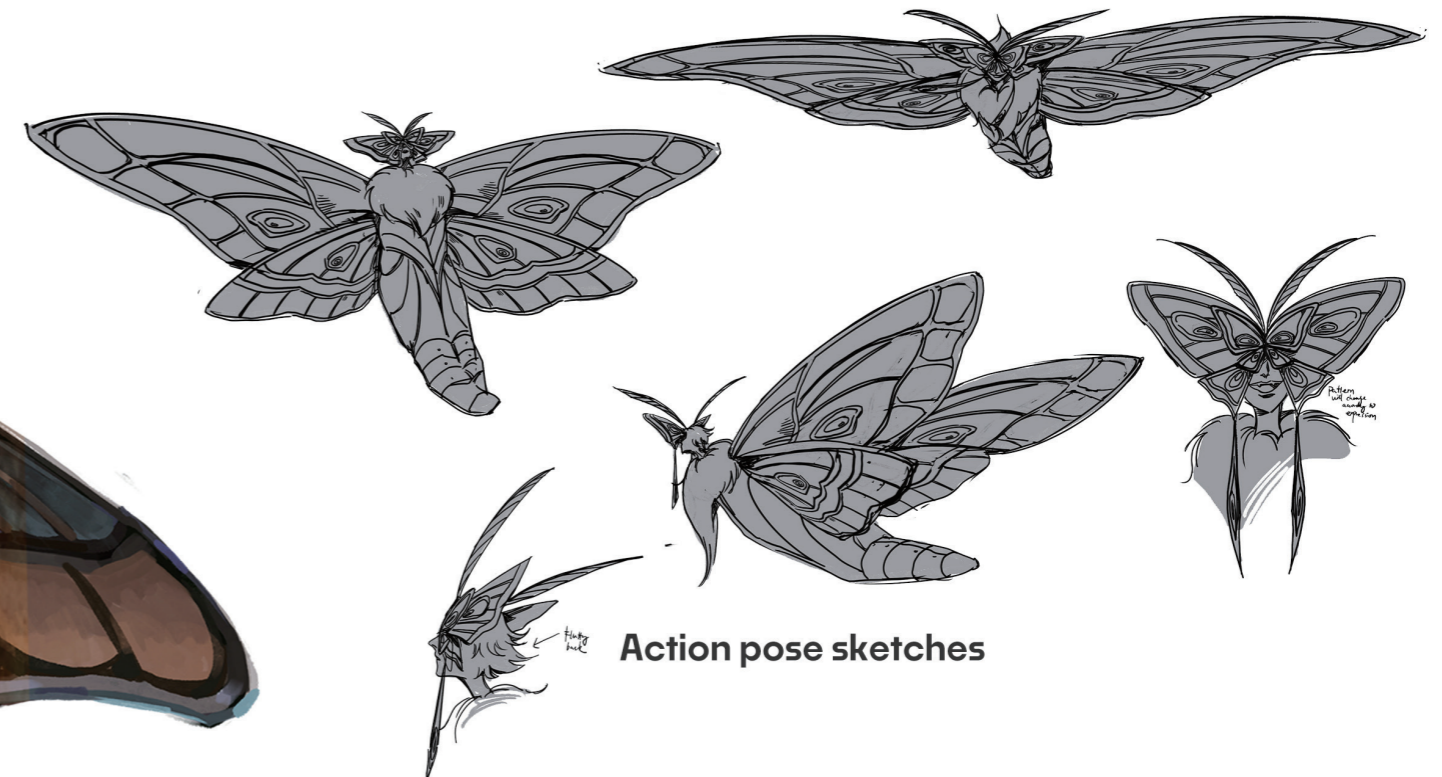
"The Prayer"

Based on the god of preservation, The Prayer merges the delicate form of a moth with the stillness of a cocoon — symbolizing fertility, patience, and rebirth. Its face is partly covered with the wings of an empress moth, with their pattern acting as symbolic "eyes."

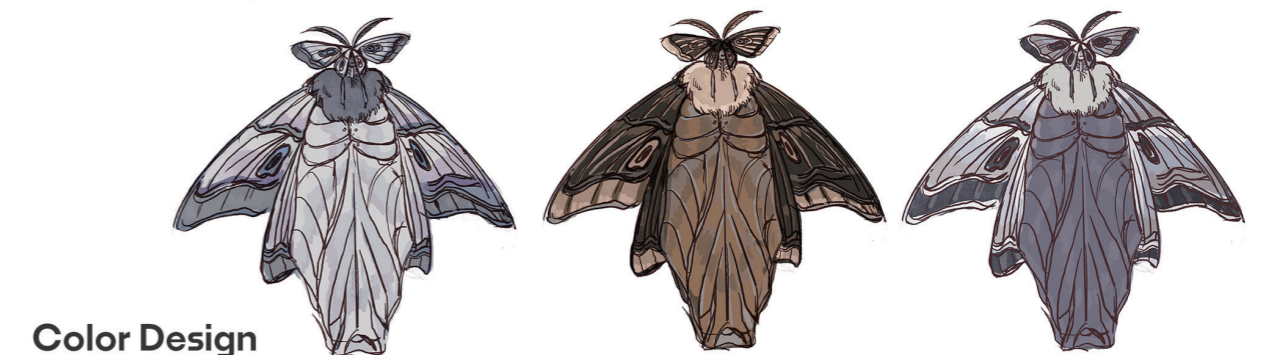
Its body is handleless and footless, making movement design a unique challenge. I focused on expressive bends of its body and fluid wing motions to create a sense of intention and grace in its actions. The rust-inspired base color, paired with glowing, luminescent accents, gives it a presence that feels both fragile and otherworldly — like a warning signal hidden in beauty.



Reference: Empress Moth



Action pose sketches



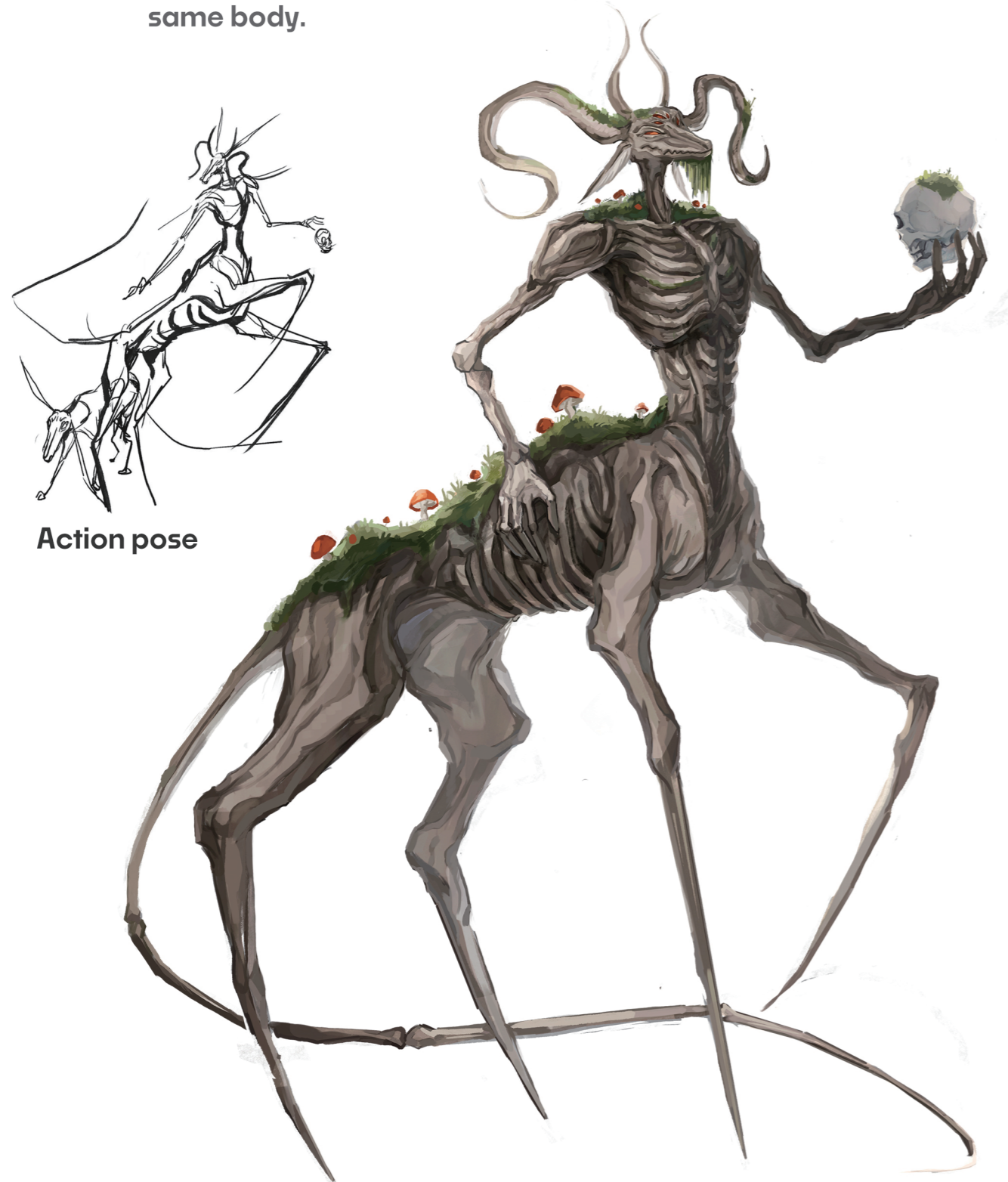
Color Design

"The Finder"

The Finder, inspired by the god of destruction, resembles a moss-covered stag carved from driftwood — grown over with mushrooms and decay. It has the least human-like face of the group, so I gave it the most human-like body: a centaur-esque form that grounds it in physical strength.

It handles the group's dirty work, and its poses often relate to combat. One significant detail in its design is the skull it carries is the skull of the scientist who created The Left Behind, a quiet symbol of a past long gone yet still haunting the present.

Despite its fearsome role, The Finder also serves as the guardian of Sniff, and I wanted to reflect that quiet tenderness in some of its gestures — showing that destruction and care can exist in the same body.



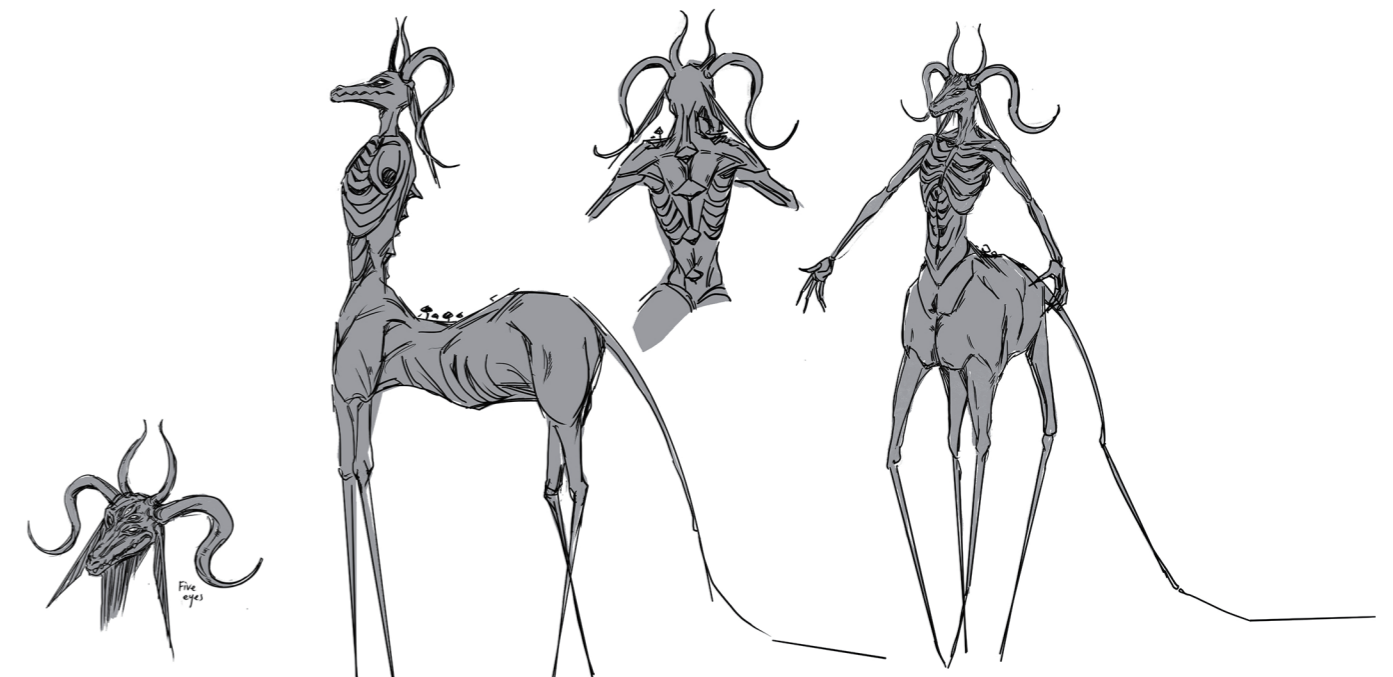
Action pose



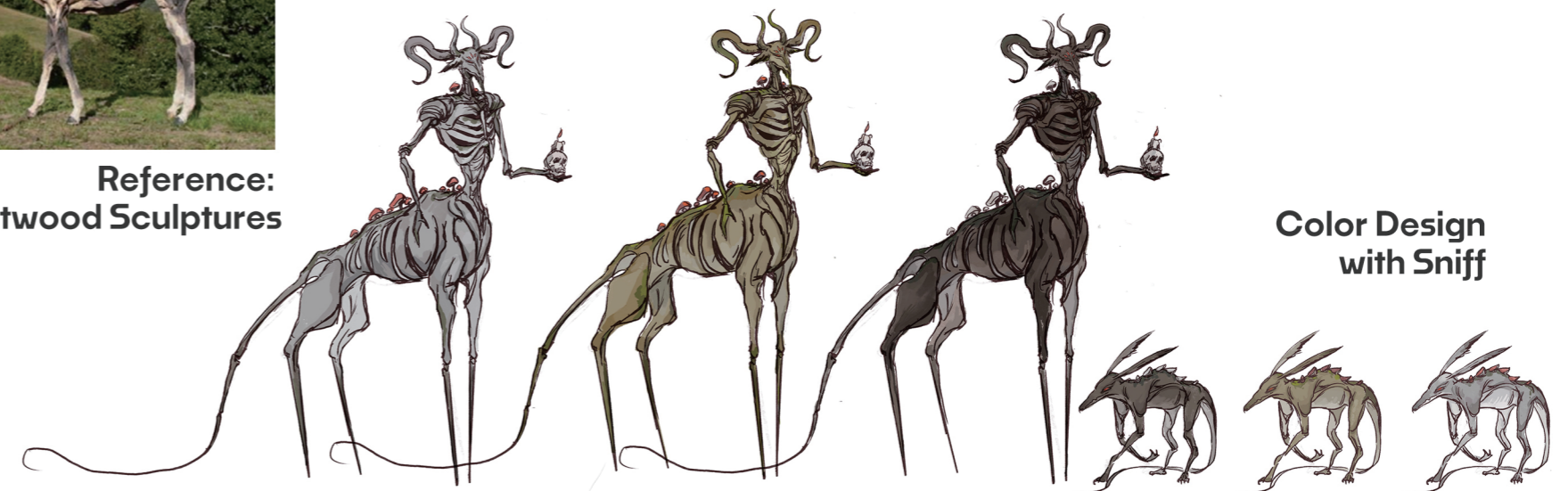
Reference:
Driftwood Sculptures



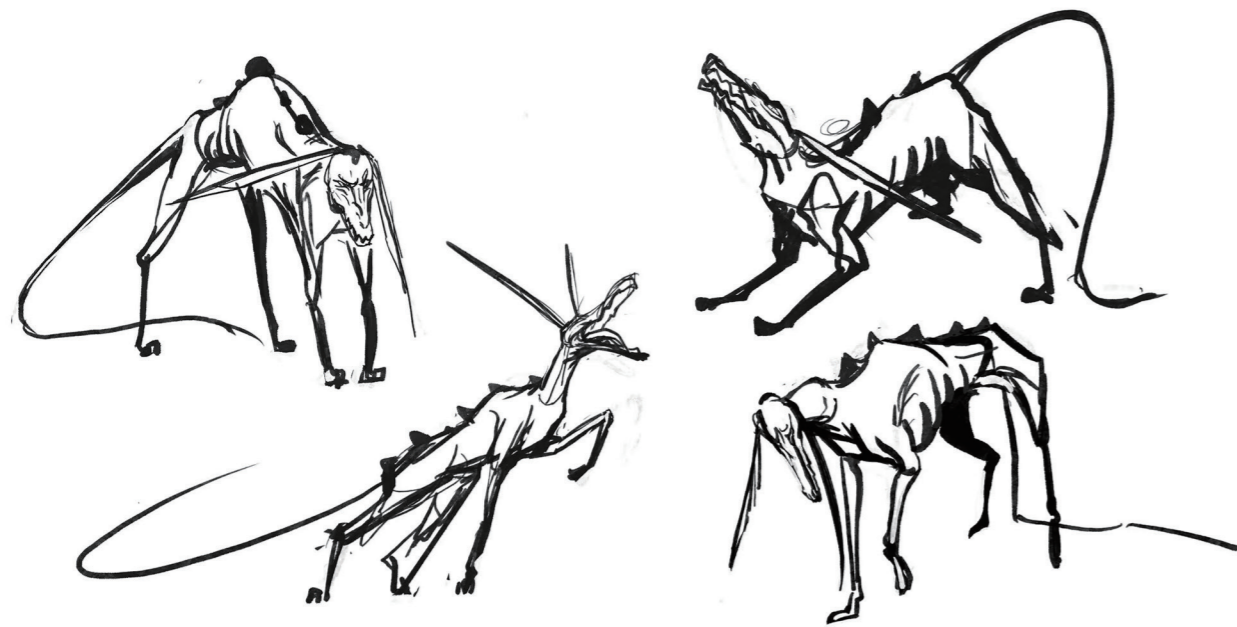
With Sniff



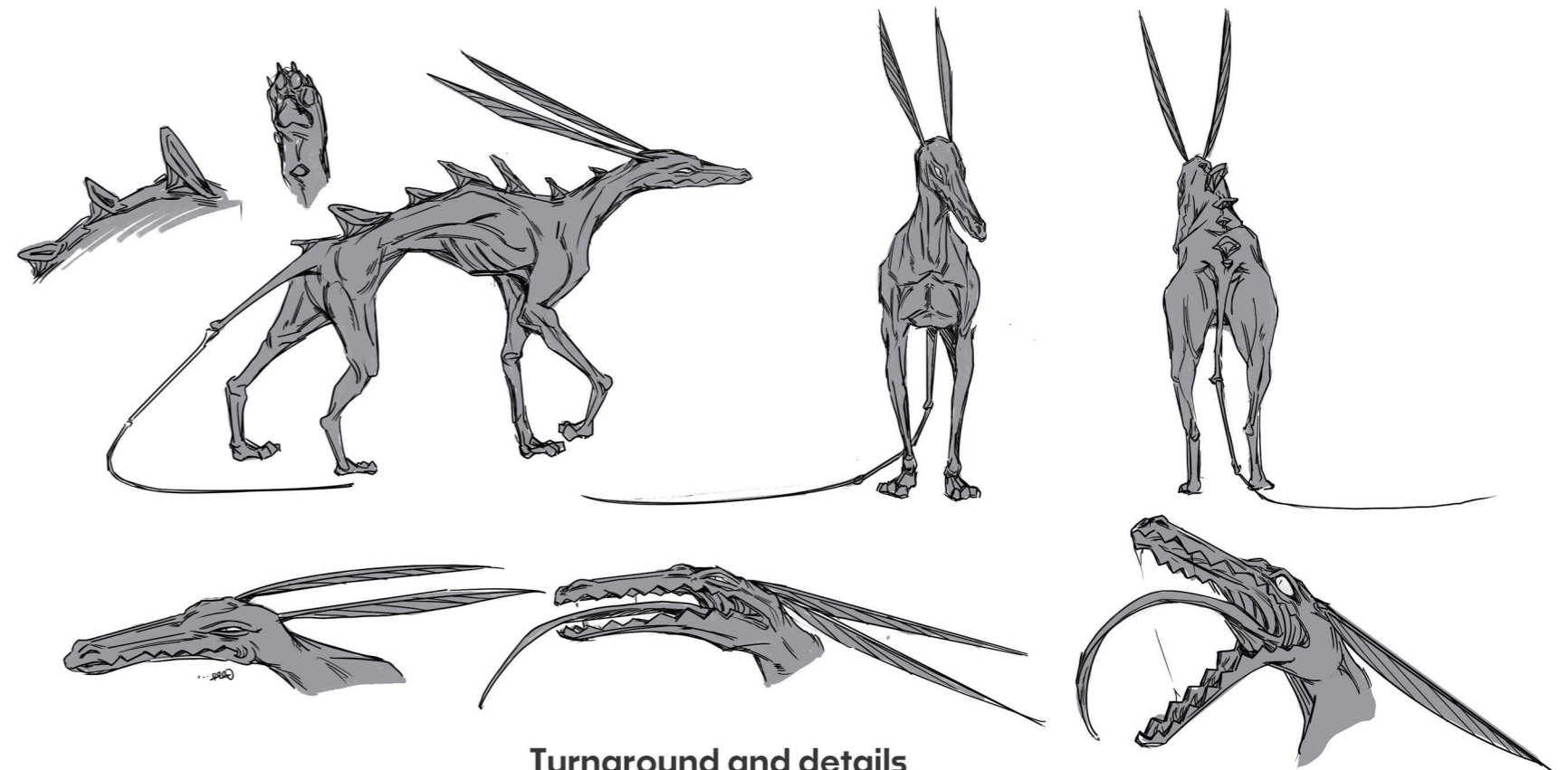
Side, back and quarter view



Color Design
with Sniff



Action poses sketches



Turnaround and details

"/niff"

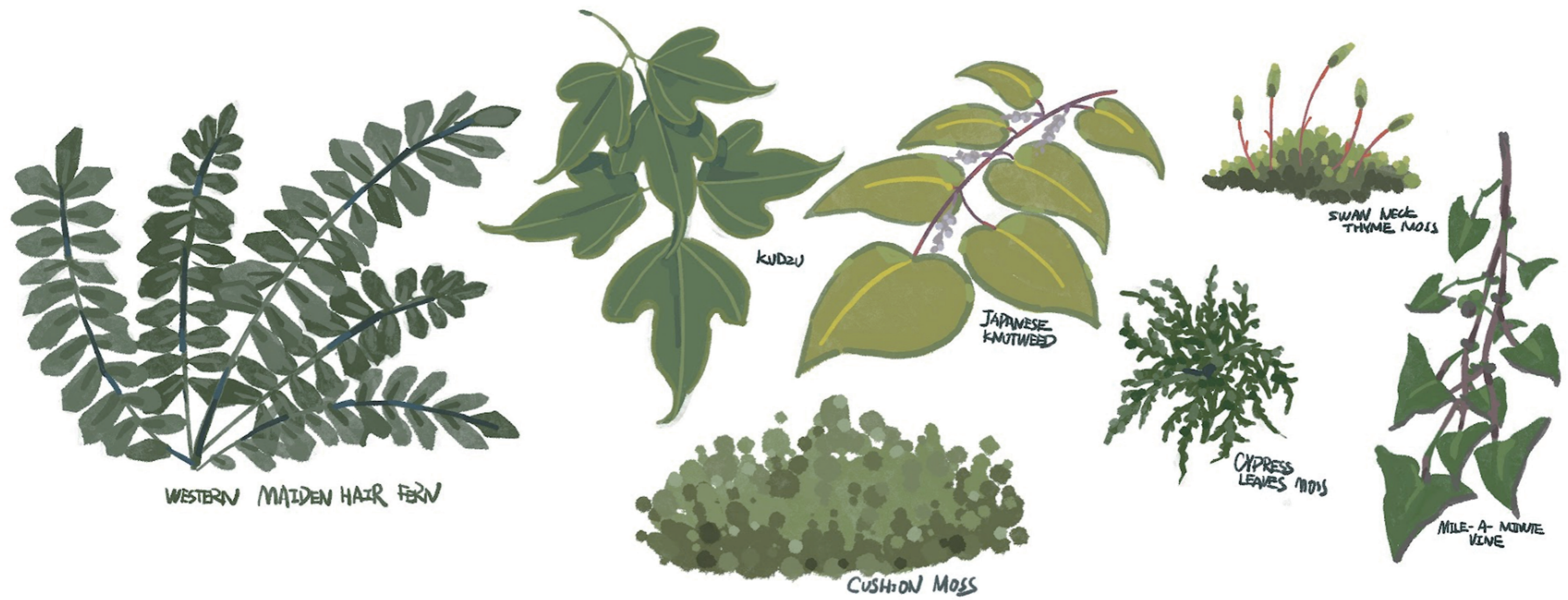
Sniff is my favorite character — a small, traumatized dog adopted by the team. Though timid and wounded by the world, he's fiercely loyal, willing to put himself in danger to protect those he loves.

He was designed as The Finder's companion, sharing similar textures and earthy tones to reflect their bond.

Sniff became essential in helping me understand the team dynamic — how each member would treat him, and how he, in turn, would respond to them. He puts on a show of aggression, but it's only a mask for the fear and sorrow he still carries deep inside.



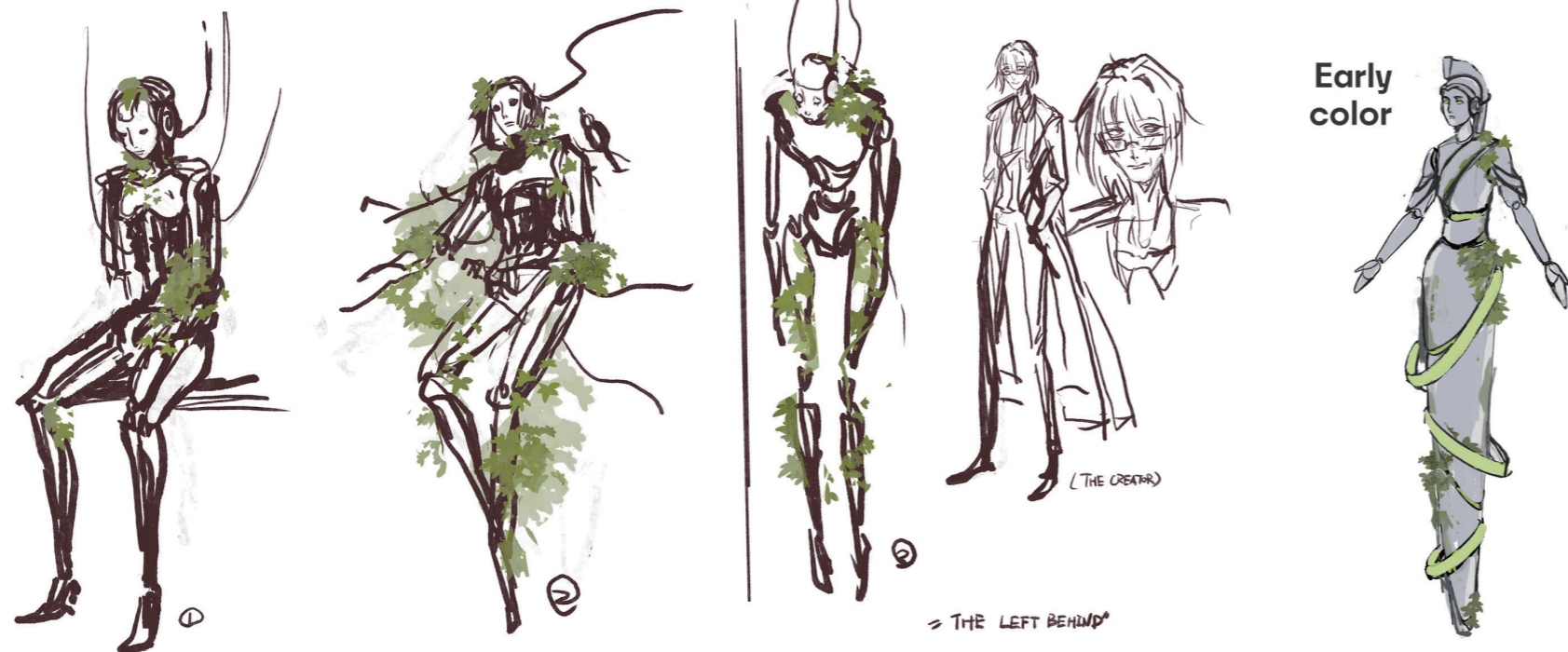
With
The Elder



Types of the Plant appered in the project



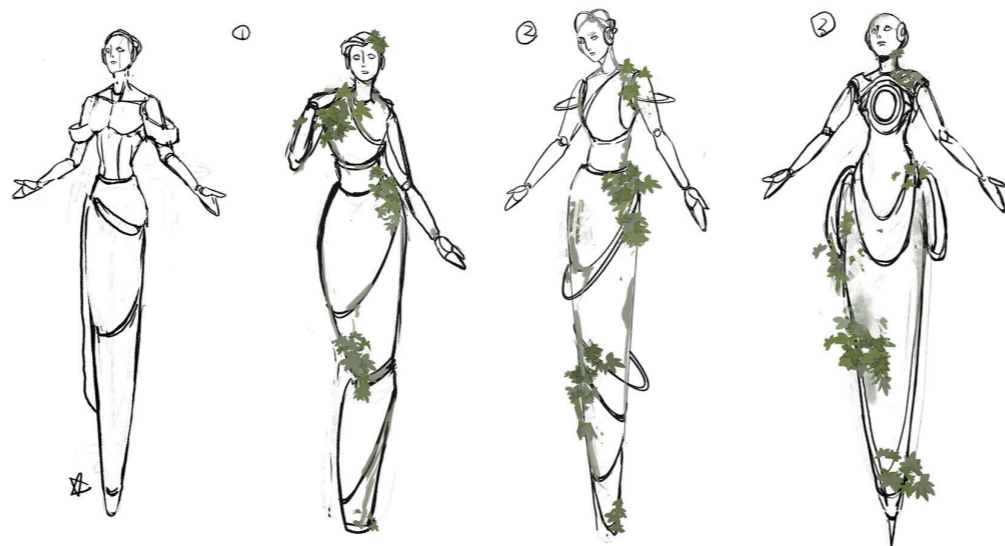
Character Lineup



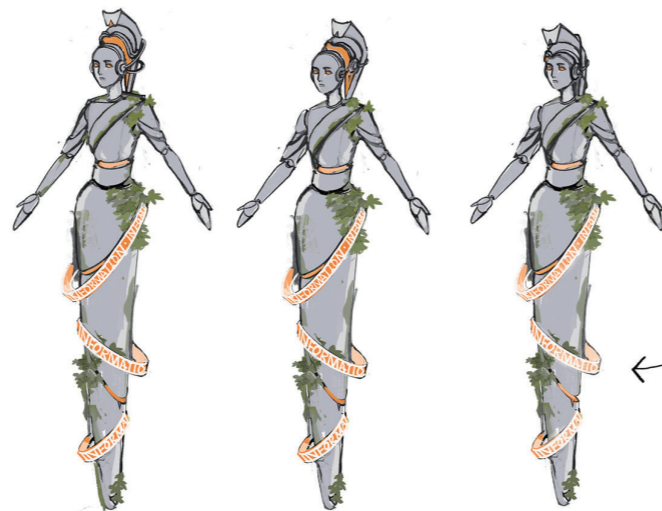
Earliest version of The Left Behind



Reference sheet: Overgrown Statue



Shape Exploartion



Helmet ideations

"The Left Behind"

The Left Behind — the namesake of the story — went through the most design iterations. As the only humanoid figure among surreal, non-human characters, she serves as the story's human anchor, a remnant of civilization and culture.

I envisioned her as a decaying robot, inspired by overgrown Greek statues. Early designs leaned too close to generic androids, but referencing classical sculpture helped break that mold. Her silhouette mirrors ancient female figures: a cylindrical lower body wrapped in newsreels instead of legs, ribbon-like seams across her torso, and a helmet inspired by Britannia — evoking faded elegance.

Due to her immobility, I made her a former receptionist at the research facility — once passive, now burdened with purpose. She glows orange, a color I use to represent the past, tying her to memory and the looming doom she was built to witness. The skull carried by The Finder is that of her creator — the scientist who programmed her — making her existence both a relic and a warning.



The Left Behind Final Design





Value Sketch

Establishing Shot

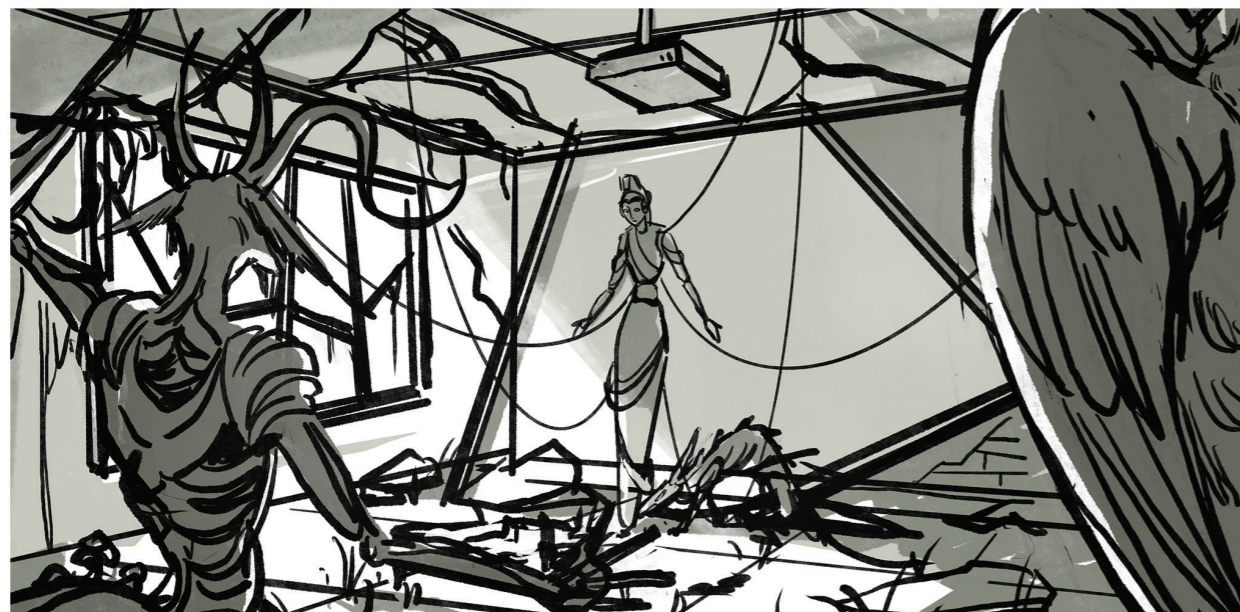
In a post-apocalyptic world, a group of survivors — strange, otherworldly creatures — wander through the ruins of a long-forgotten civilization.

This is the most complex scene in the sequence and sets the foundation for the story. I want the audience to instantly grasp the world's tone and meet the central characters. The curve of the broken train and its track acts as a visual guide, leading the viewer's eye toward the shattered building — where the robot quietly waits.



Color draft



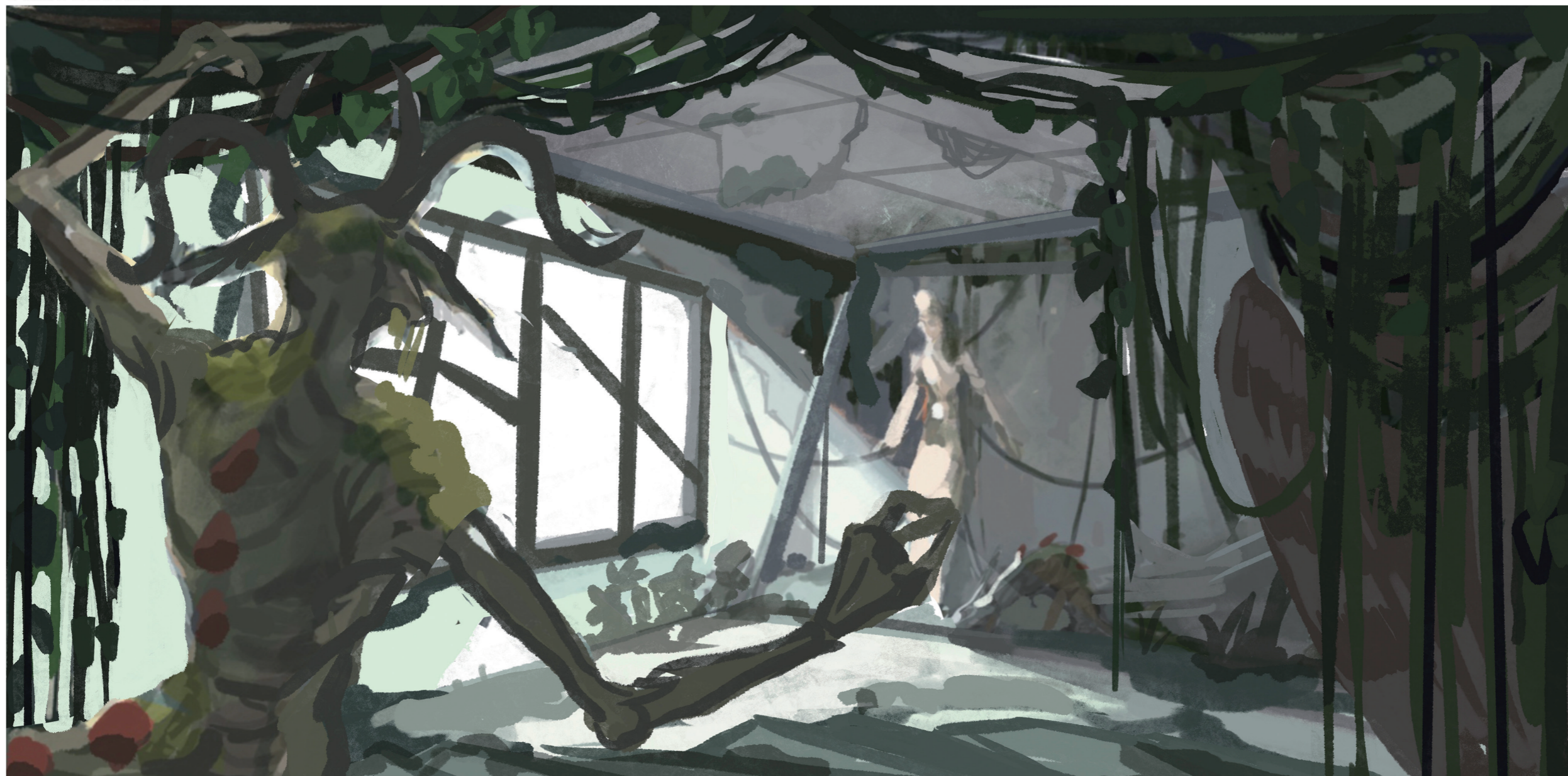


Value Sketch

Discovering the Robot

The survivors find a robot standing in the ruin. They try to wake it up.

This scene underwent the most changes during development. I used foreground vines like a curtain, creating a moment of revelation as the robot is unveiled. In contrast to the shadowed survivors, the robot is illuminated by a beam of light from the window. The background is kept high-key and low-contrast to emphasize the robot's soft glow.



Color draft



Image of the Past



Value Sketch

The robot awakens and calls herself The Left Behind. She begins to recount her past and her mission: to await and welcome the true end of the world.

Illustrating projection is always a challenge. I chose a highly stable composition — focused on vertical and horizontal lines — to ground the unsettling story being revealed. The sweeping curve formed by a wire adds movement and breaks the grid, introducing a subtle organic tension to the scene.



Color draft





Value Sketch

The Projection image

In The Left Behind's memory, the scientist programs the doomsday sequence into her system.

The overall composition of this shot remained consistent from the first draft. The main challenge was rendering the fire — finding the right level of stylization. I chose to use hue rather than strong value contrast in the background to harmonize the color palette while still capturing the intensity of the moment.



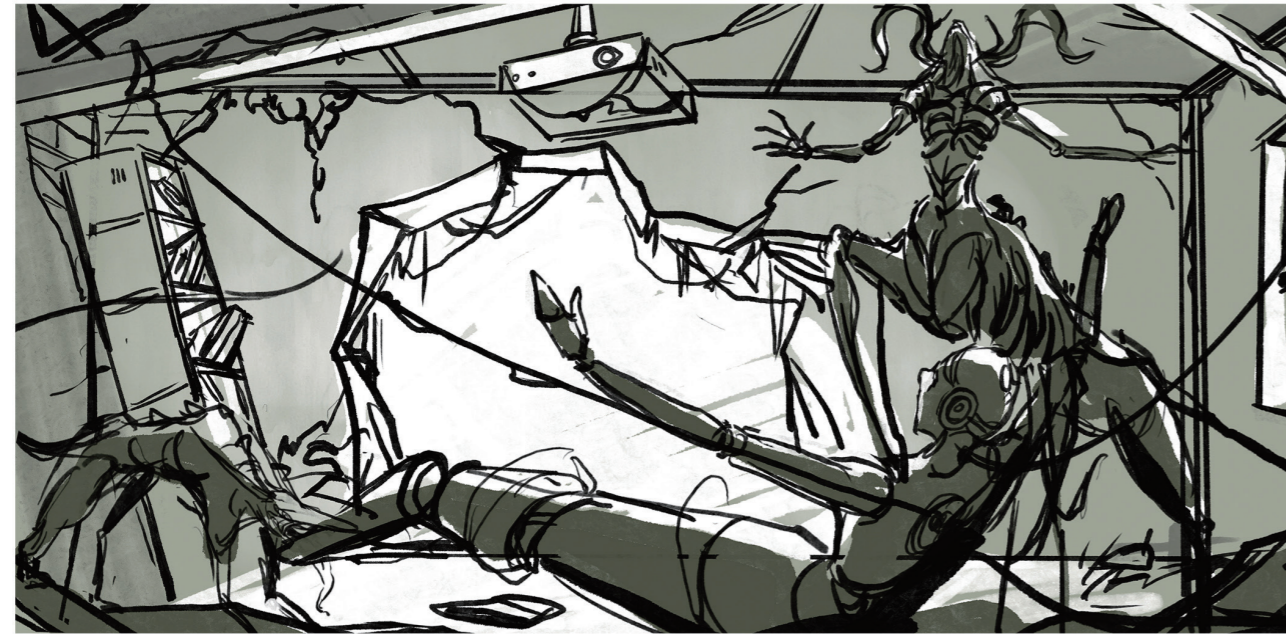
Color draft



Battling the Robot

The survivors destroy the robot after discovering her true purpose.

To contrast the horizontal calmness of scene three, this shot is driven by a strong diagonal composition. The shift in balance disrupts the previously stable visual rhythm, heightening the drama and pushing the scene to its emotional peak.

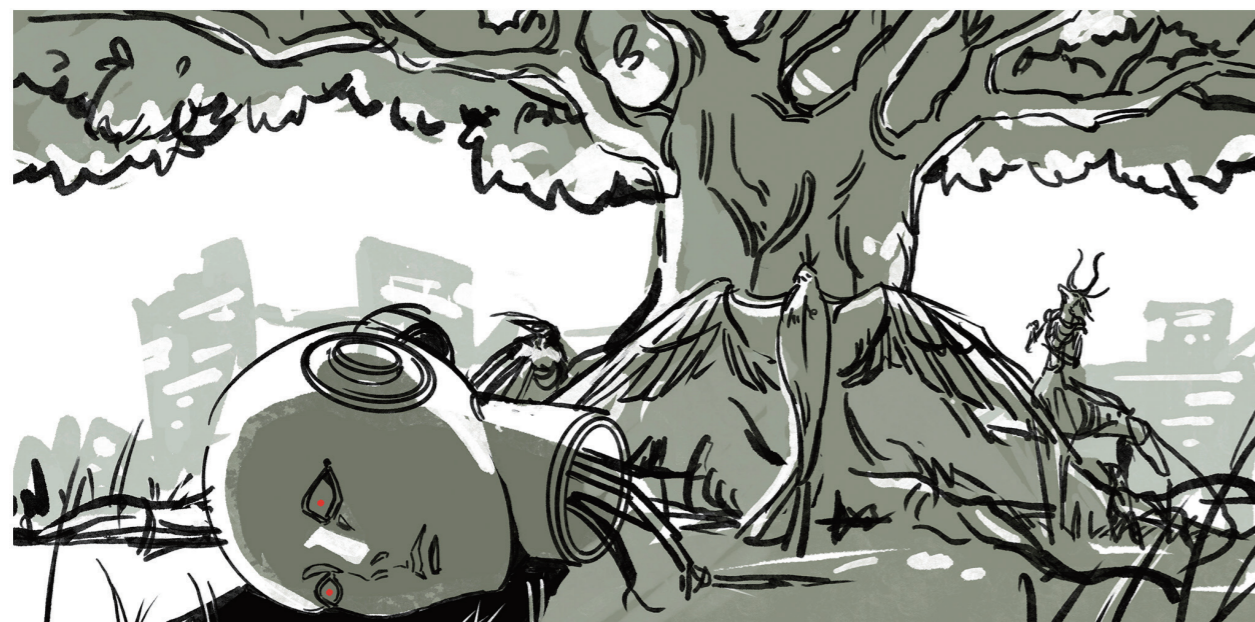


Value Sketch



Color draft





Value Sketch

Happy ending?

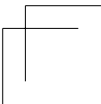
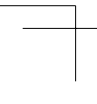
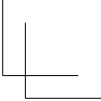
As the survivors celebrate The Left Behind's death, they remain unaware that her doomsday program is still running.

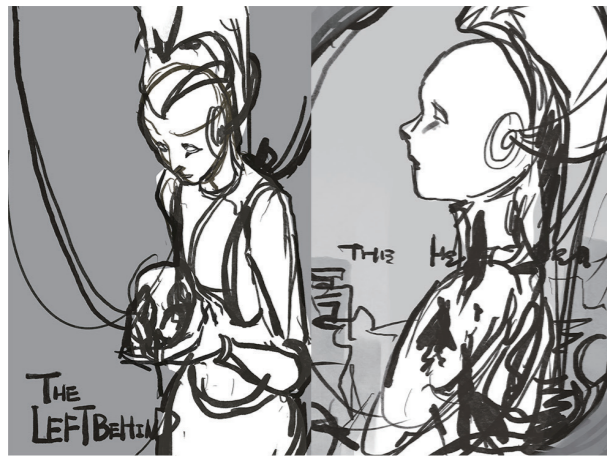
The unsettling tone of this final image echoes the color palette of the opening scene — except for one detail: the red light glowing from the robot's eyes. Everything seems to have returned to normal, but that single unnatural hue quietly signals that something is deeply wrong.



Color draft







The Poster Design

I designed the poster around a simple, iconic portrait: The Left Behind holding the skull of the scientist — her creator. This image felt like the most honest summary of the project's theme and tone. The contrast between her quiet, almost reverent pose and the dark symbolism of the skull reflects the central tension of the story: a being built to serve humanity, now left to fulfill its final, apocalyptic task.

Visually, the poster captures the essence of the world I created — where beauty, ruin, and memory intertwine. It echoes the question at the heart of the story: What remains when civilization ends, and who decides what gets remembered?





Special Thanks:
Bill Perkins, Max Perkins & Gwyn Conaway for your instruction and help along the way
Monster Energy drink and fried chicken

To my Family
Chenxiao "Stella" Feng, 2025.4

