GDC

Creating Compelling Characters

Richard Lyons (Naughty Dog), Claire Hummel (Campo Santo), Laurel Austin (Blizzard), Simon Stafsnes Anderson (D-Pad Studio)

GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE® | FEB 27–MAR 3, 2017 | EXPO: MAR 1–3, 2017 #GDC17

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Creating Compelling Characters

Richard Lyons
Concept Artist, Naughty Dog

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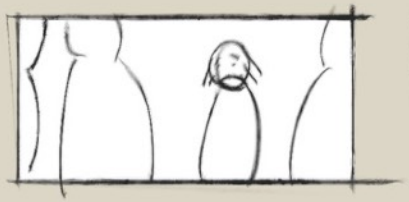
Story Points

1.Starts at new school	2.Picked on by bullies	3.Ostracized by her peers	4.Physically assaulted by bullies	5.Revenge with telekinetic powers
Hopeful, nervous, excited	Intimidated, worried, trapped	Lonley, with drawn	Scared, in pain, intimidated	Empowered, posesed, focused
				

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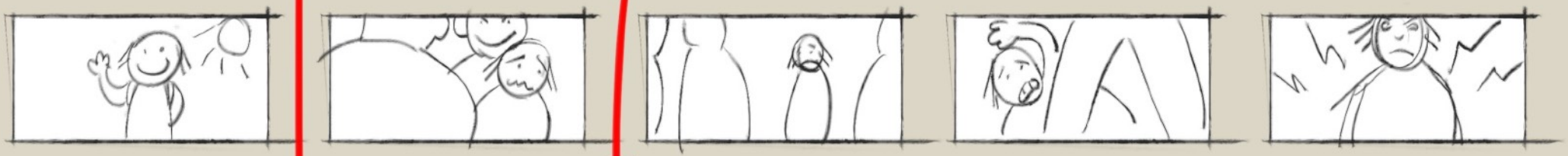

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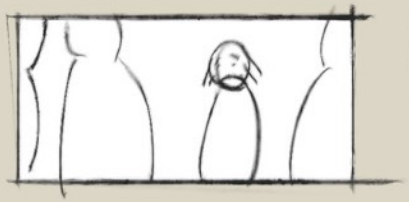
				

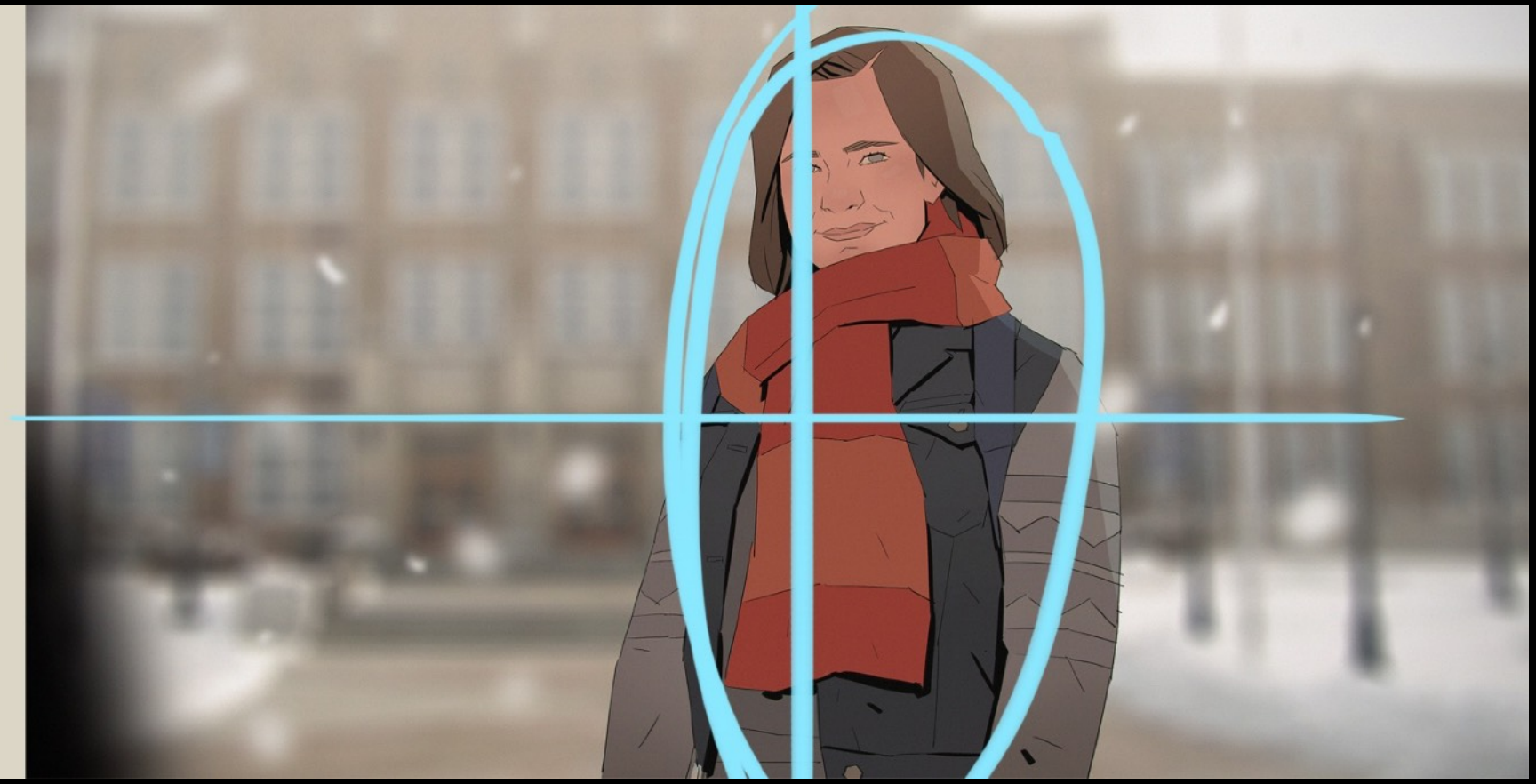
1.Starts at new school

Hopeful, nervous, excited

1.Starts at new school

Hopeful, nervous, excited

-Center frame
-Medium shot
-Chest height camera



2.Picked on by bullies

Intimidated, worried, trapped

2.Picked on by bullies

Intimidated, worried, trapped

-Trapped in the right of the frame
-bully taking up most of the shot
-Chest height camera

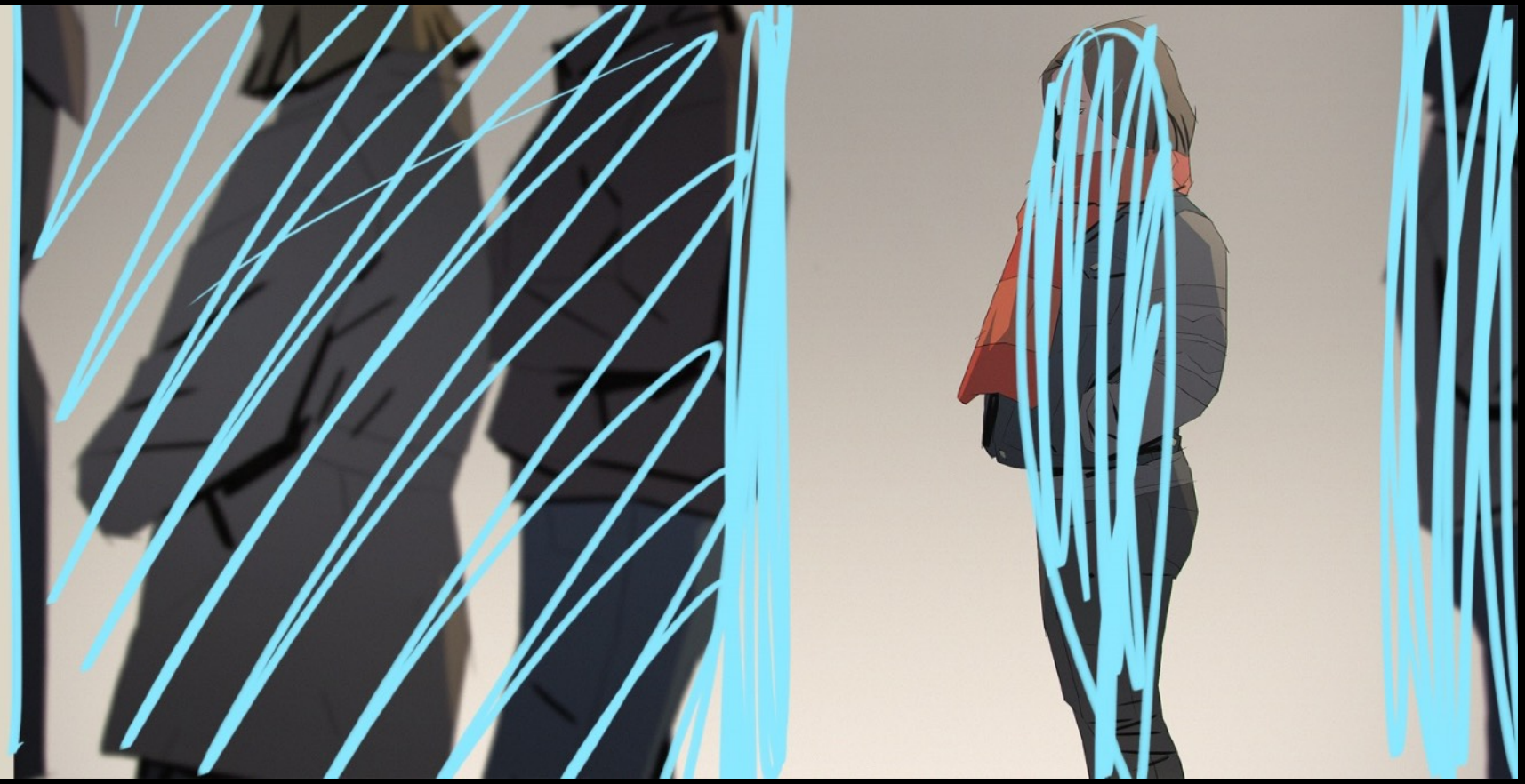
3.Ostracized by her peers

Lonley, with drawn

3.Ostracized by her peers

Lonley, with drawn

- contrasting space creates a fragile feel
- cropping out the NPCs and pulling focus



4.Physically assaulted by bullies

Scared, in pain, intimidated

4.Physically assaulted by bullies

Scared, in pain, intimidated

- Pressured in one side of the frame, silouette crossing into our view of her face
-Tight camera brings focus on her feelings

5.Revenge with telekinetic powers

Empowered, posesed, focused

5.Revenge with telekinetic powers

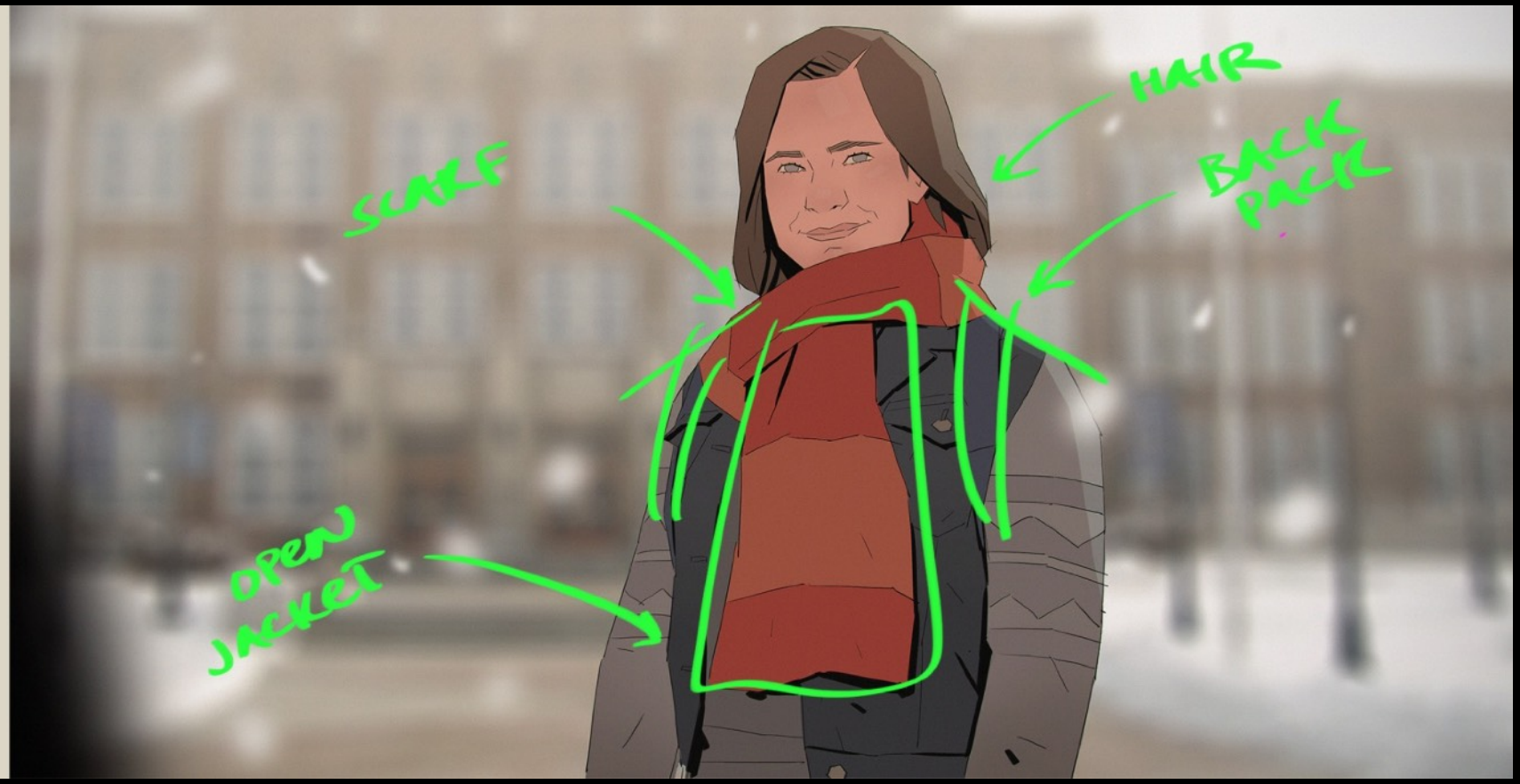
Empowered, posesed, focused

- Center of frame
-Fills the frame
-Camera is looking up at her givning us the view of the victim

1.Starts at new school

Hopeful, nervous, excited

-Center frame
-Medium shot
-Chest height camera



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Lonley, with drawn

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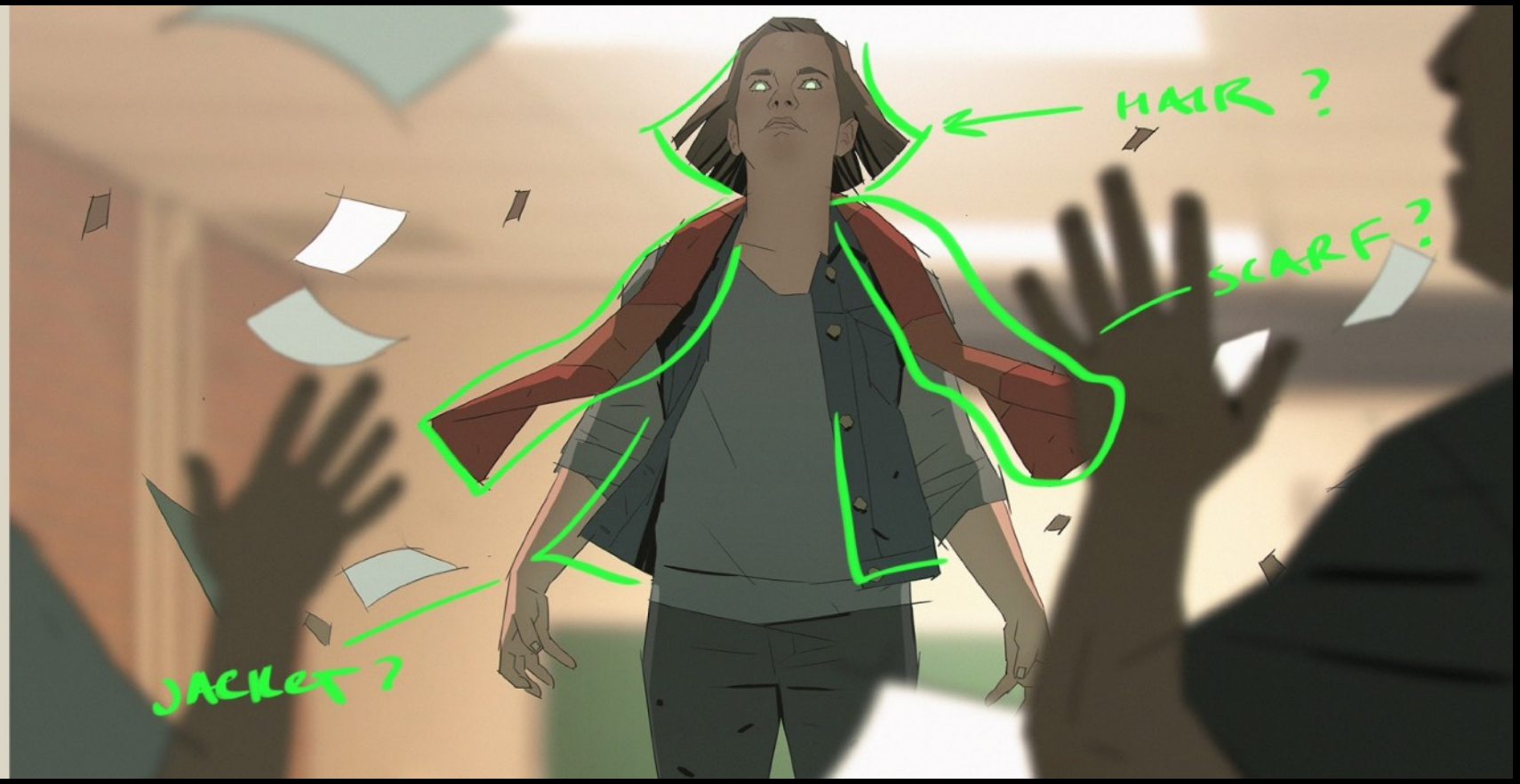

1.Plot your story beats

Story Points

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1. Plot your story beats

2. Gather Ref and create line up.

Story Points

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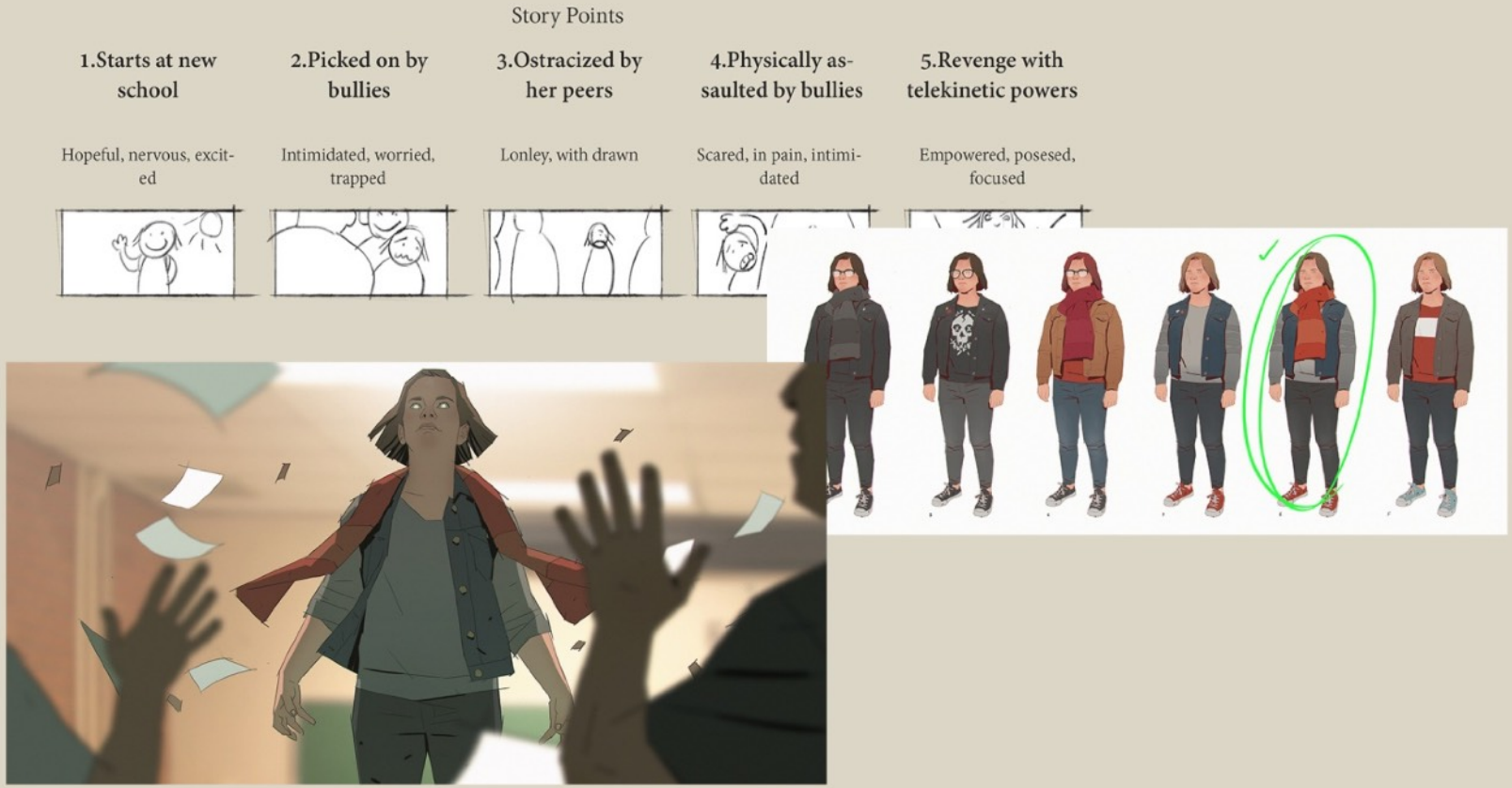
1.Plot your story beats

2.Gather Ref and create line up.

3.Present your character ideas in a cinematic context.



Creating Compelling Characters

Claire Hummel
Art Director, Campo Santo

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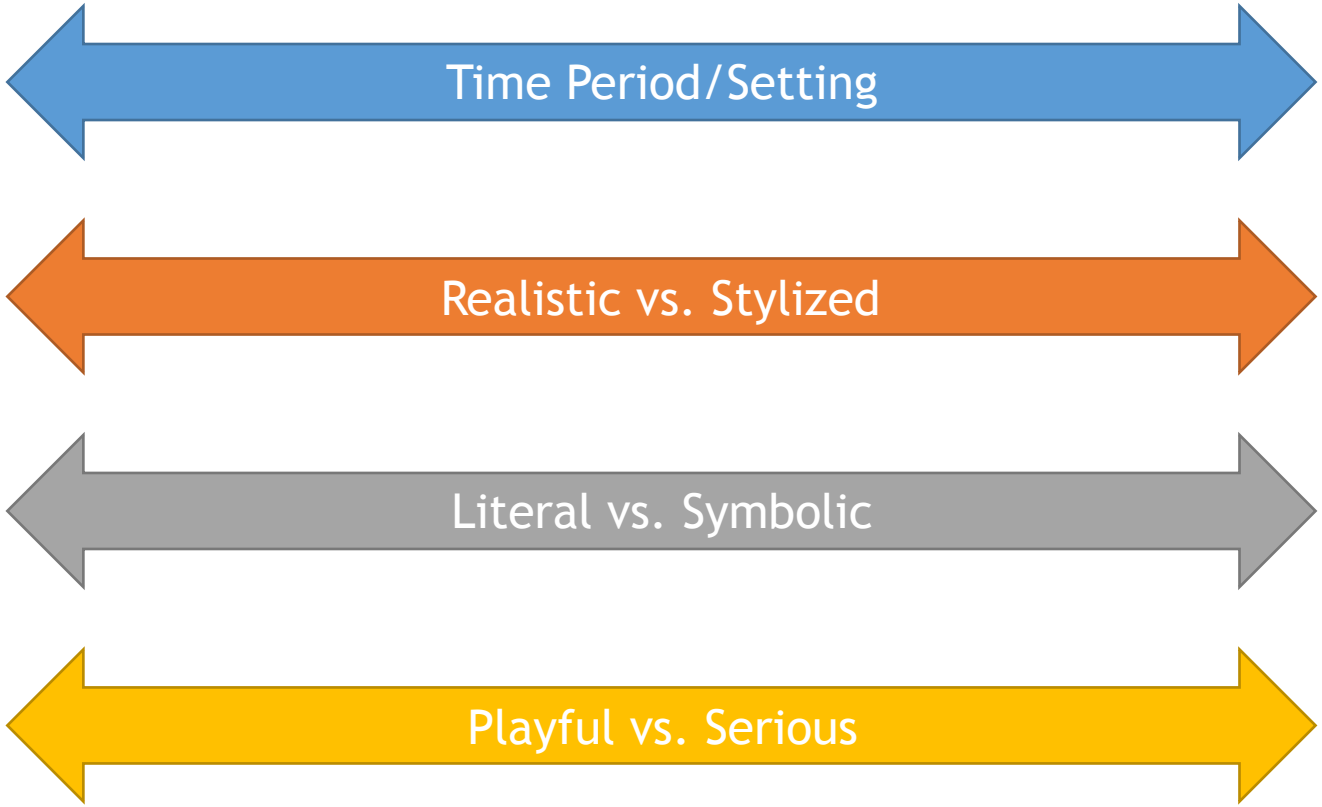
Visual Narrative

Through Character & Costume Design

Determining your Setting / Universe

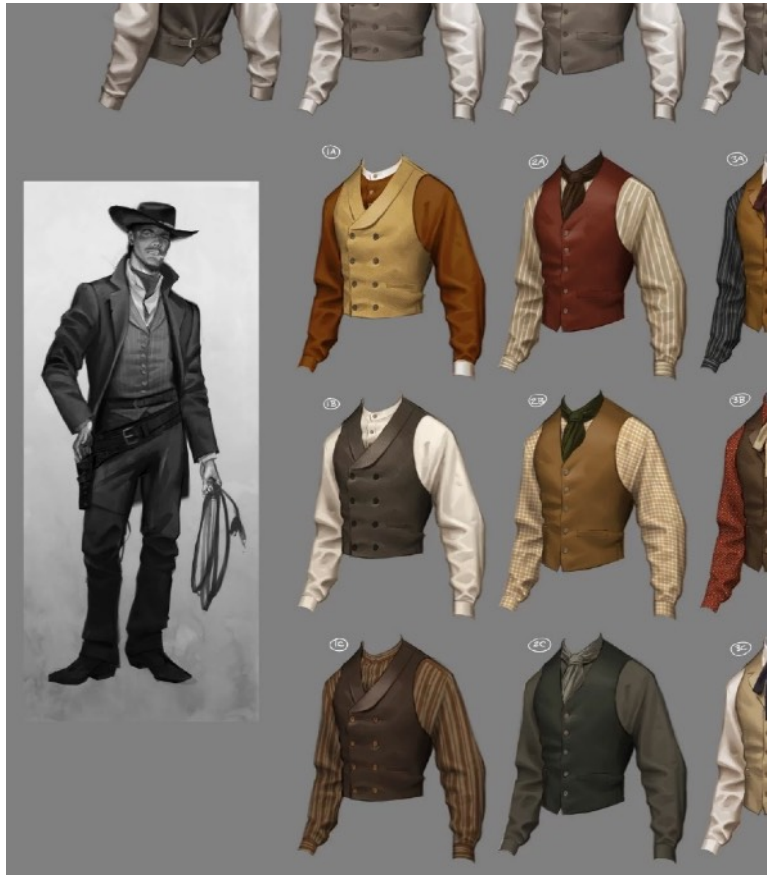
Step 1:

Determining your Setting / Universe

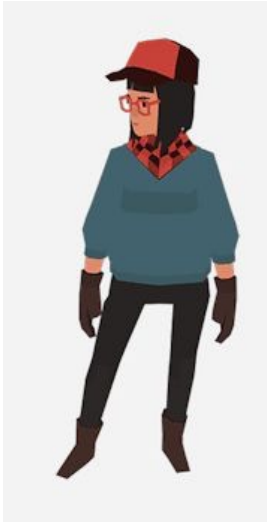


Time period/setting

Realistic Vs. Stylized



Literal Vs. Symbolic



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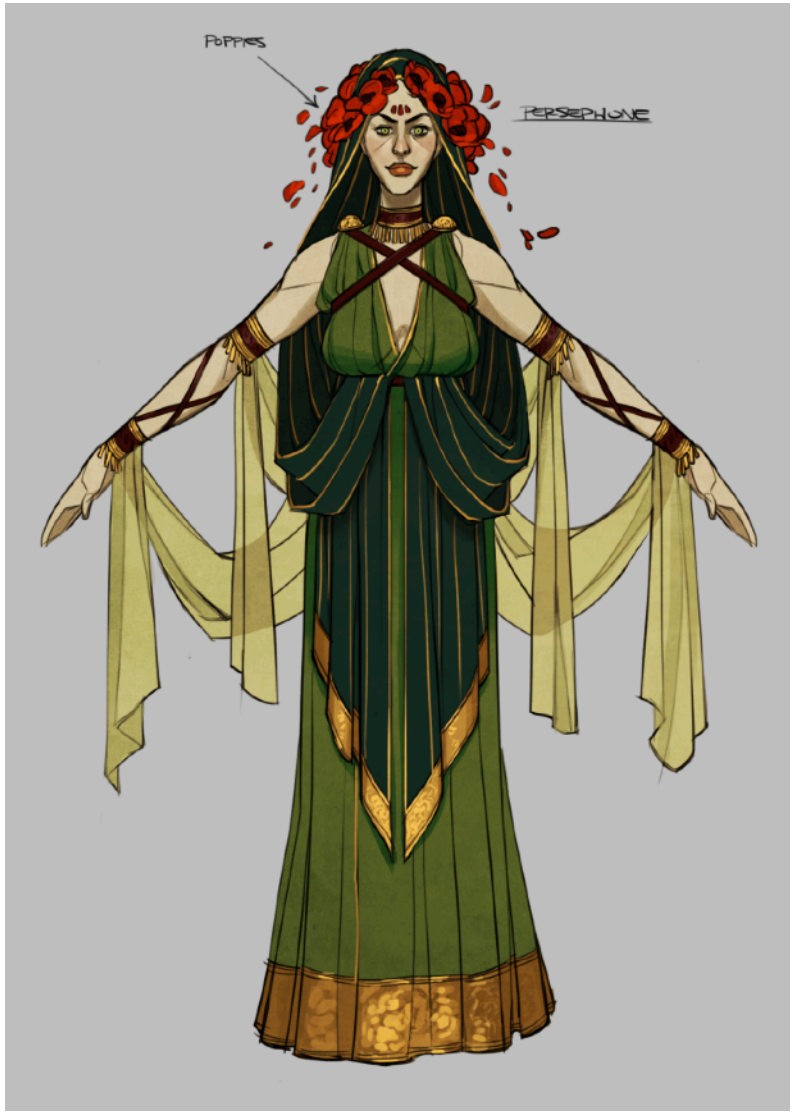

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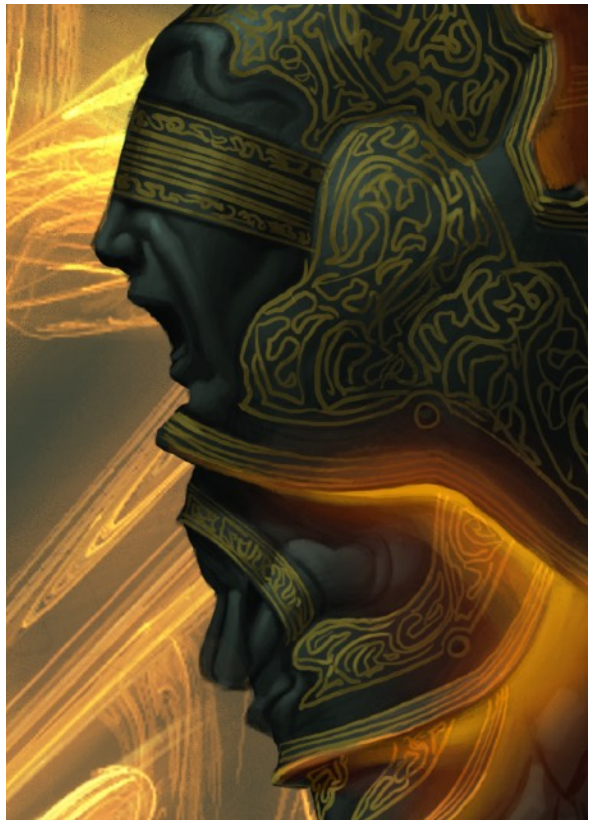


Playful vs. Serious

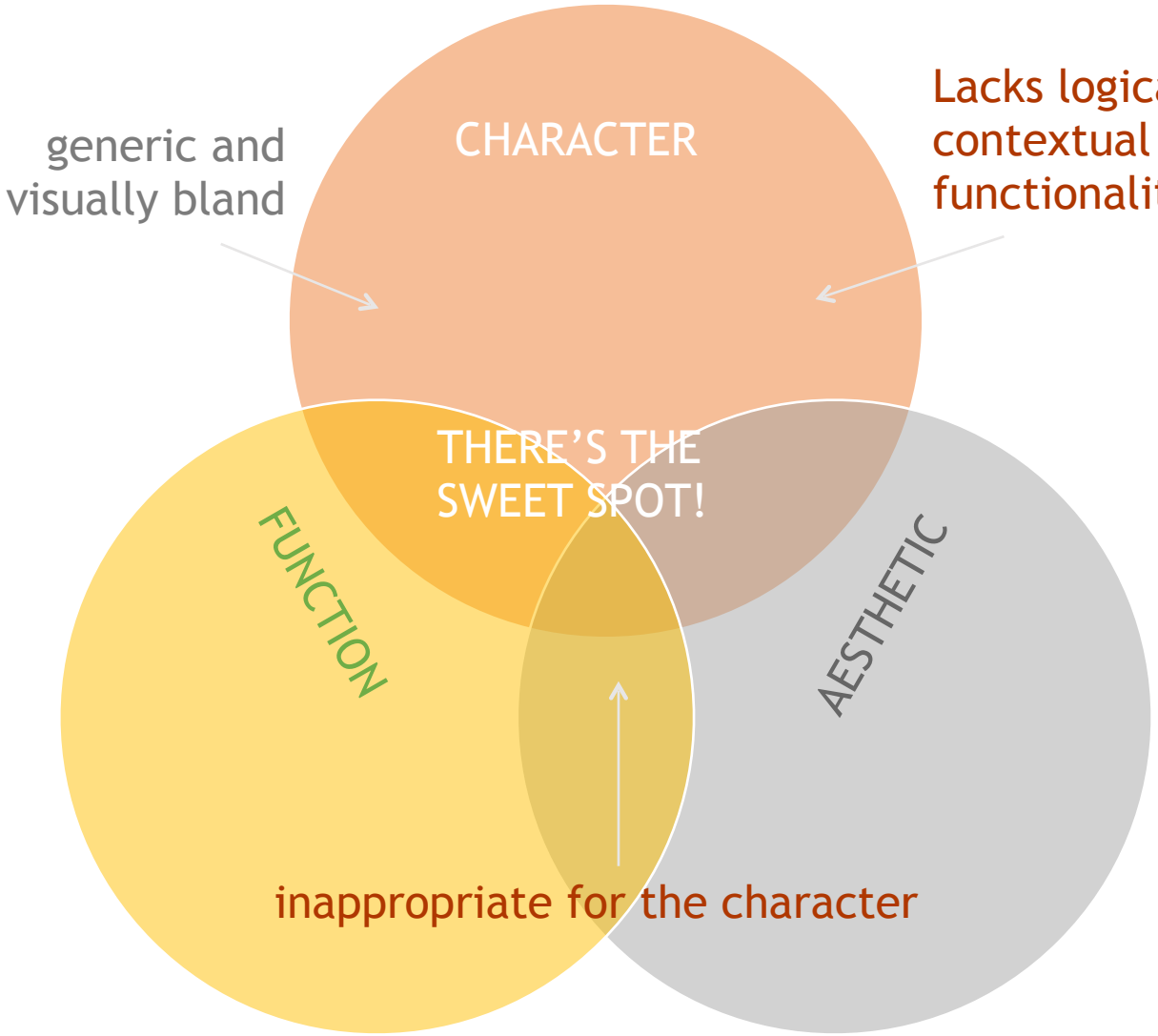
Playful vs. Serious

Step 2:

Claire's three tenets of character & costume design

Things to keep in mind:

- CHARACTER
  - Who is wearing this costume?
- FUNCTION
  - Why are they wearing this costume, or what is the purpose of the costume?
- AESTHETIC
  - What is the key visual statement of the costume?


generic and visually bland
CHARACTER
Lacks logical/ contextual functionality
THERE'S THE SWEET SPOT!
FUNCTION
AESTHETIC
inappropriate for the character

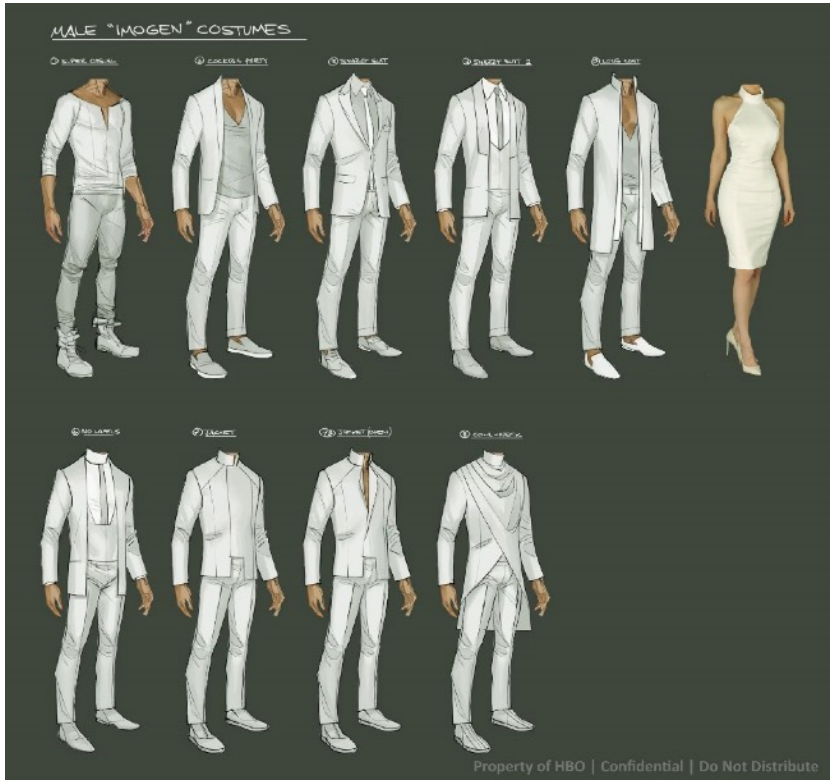
CHaracter

- Who is wearing this costume?
- Personality/Attitude
- Taste
- Body Type
- Current Situation

CHaracter

Function

- Why are they wearing this costume?
- Cultural/Societal Background
- Purpose (uniform, formal wear, mucking about, etc.)

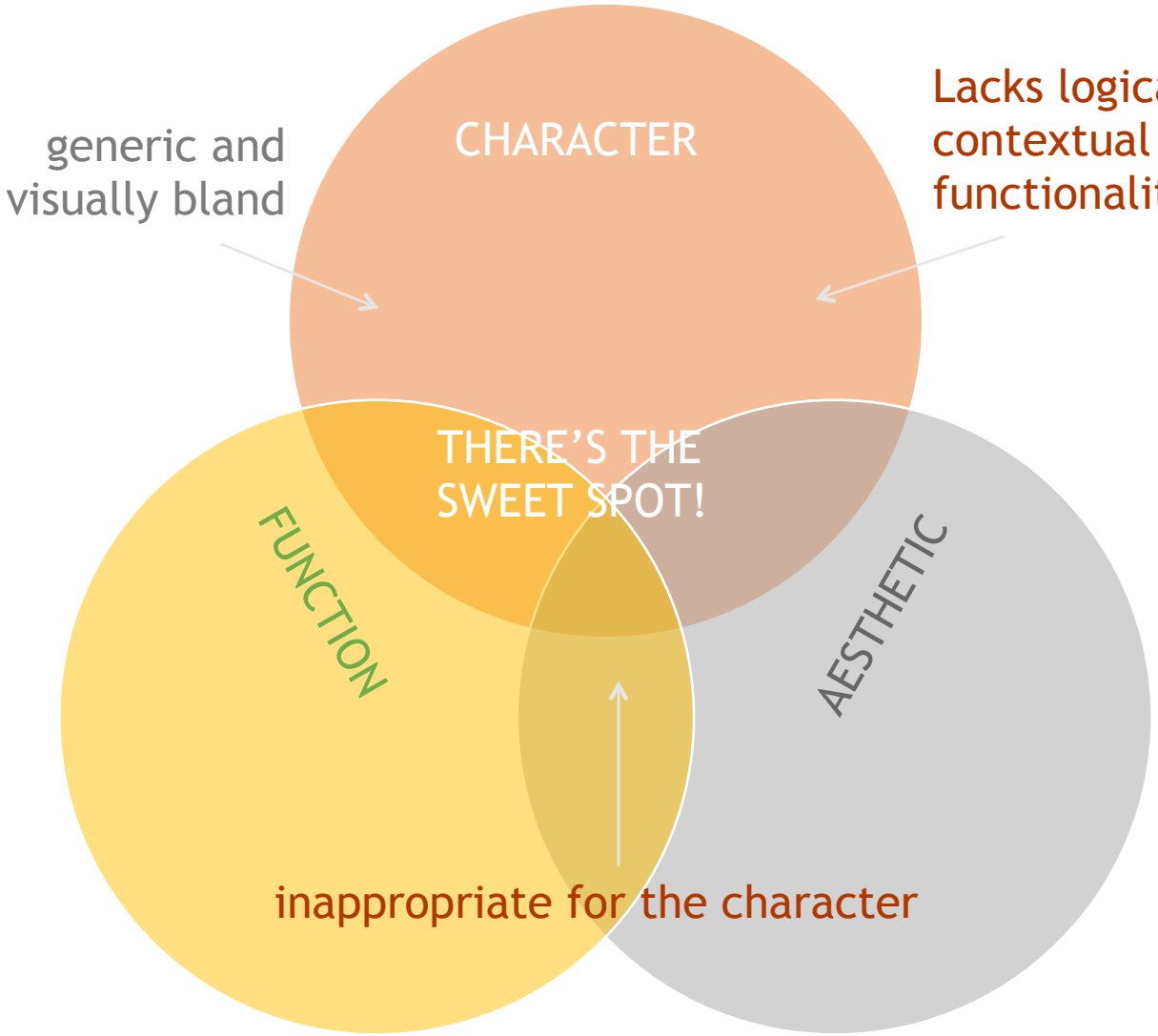


Function

Function

Aesthetic

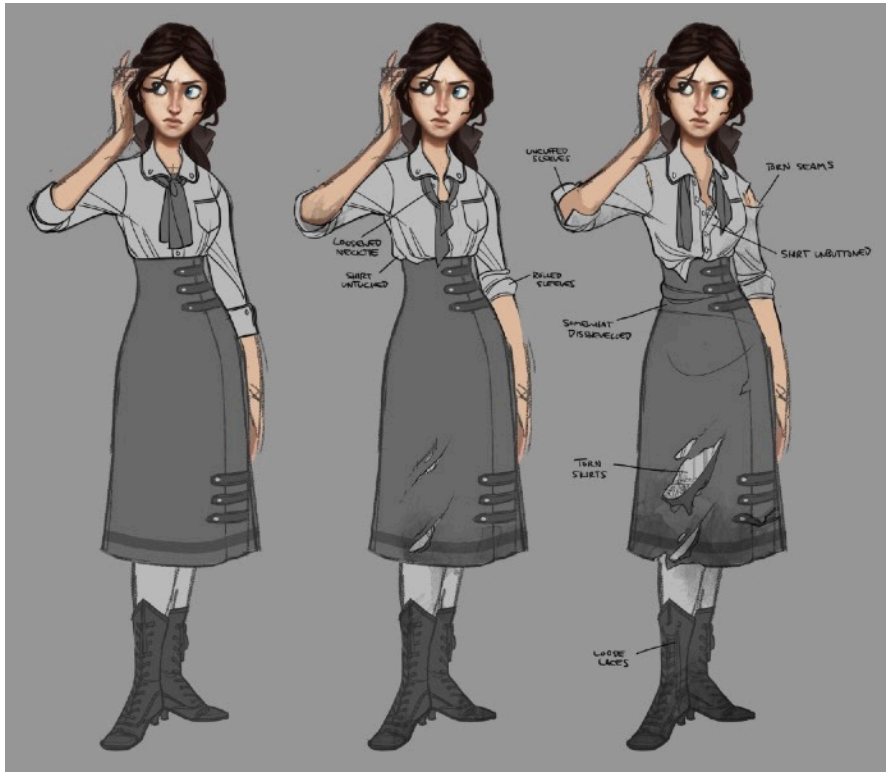
- What is the key visual statement of this costume?
- Color blocking
- Shape language
- Visual symbolism


generic and visually bland
CHARACTER
Lacks logical/ contextual functionality
THERE'S THE SWEET SPOT!
FUNCTION
AESTHETIC
inappropriate for the character

In other words,
Do this:

Not this:

Okay, what about when we need to actually put this stuff in a game?



Research & Reference

Step 3:

I ♥♥
JOHN
HANCOCK!

Research & Reference

- Sketch
- Research
- Study
- Integrate
- Evolve

Creating Compelling Characters

Laurel Austin
Principal Artist, Blizzard Entertainment

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Expressive Faces

For Concept Art and Illustration

Laurel Austin

Principal Artist at Blizzard Entertainment

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HEROES OF WARCRAFT
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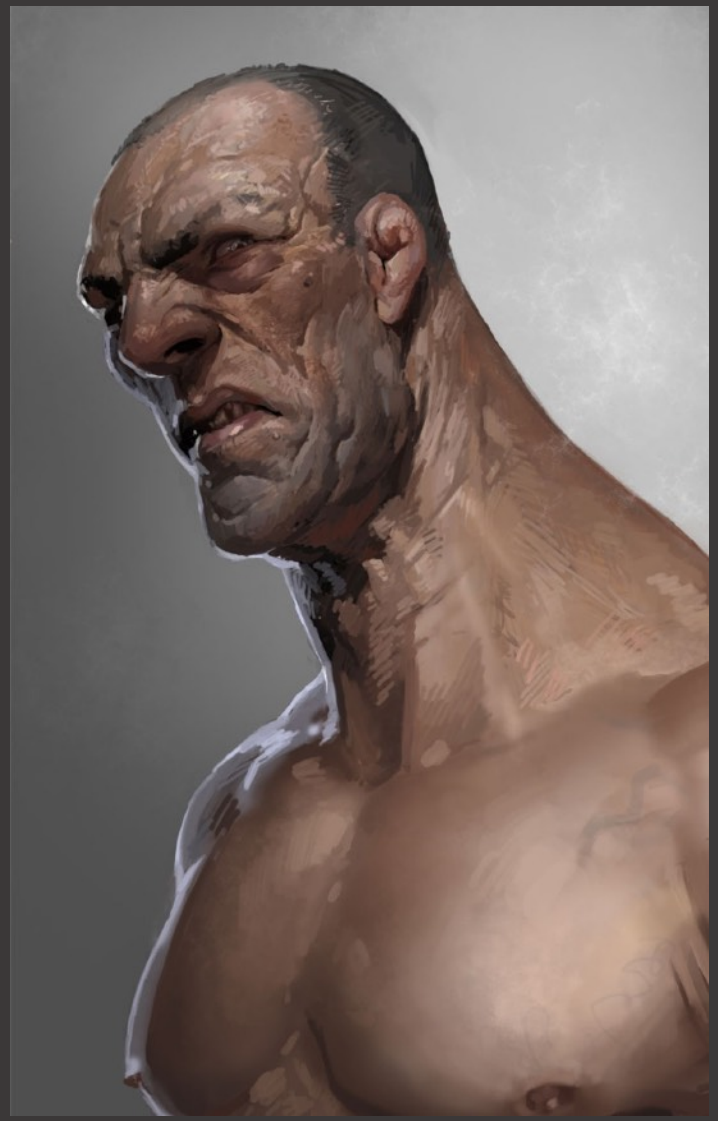

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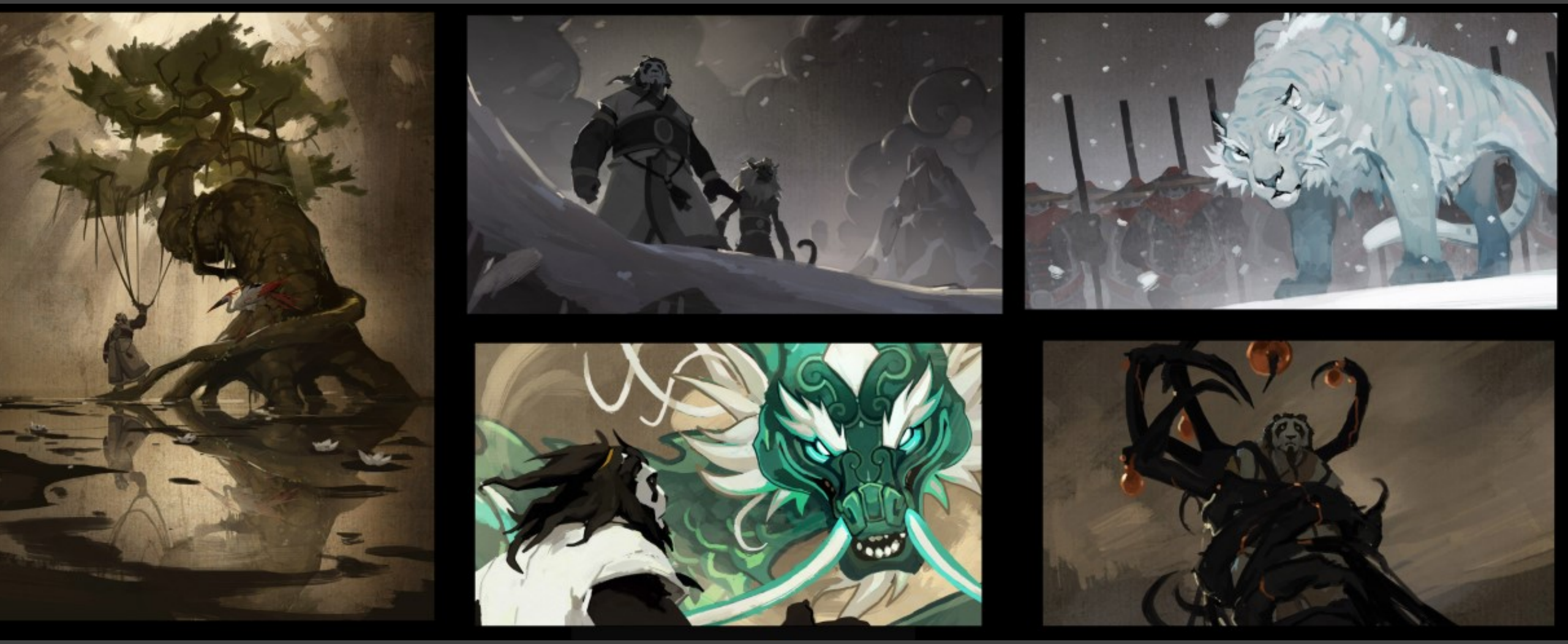

Burdens of Shaohao

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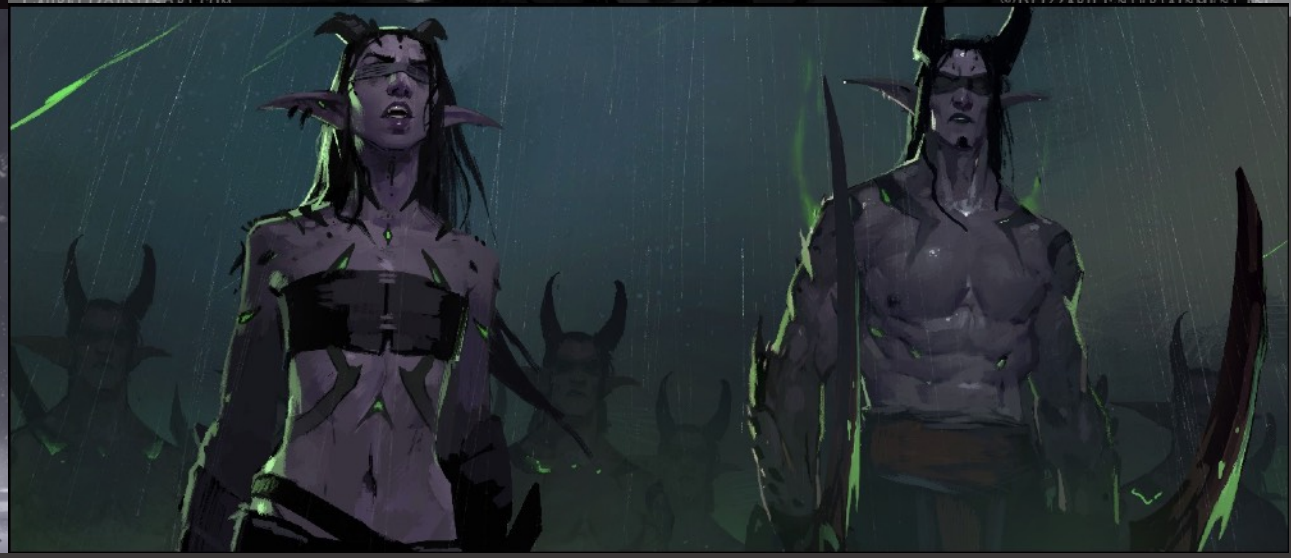

Lords of War / Harbingers

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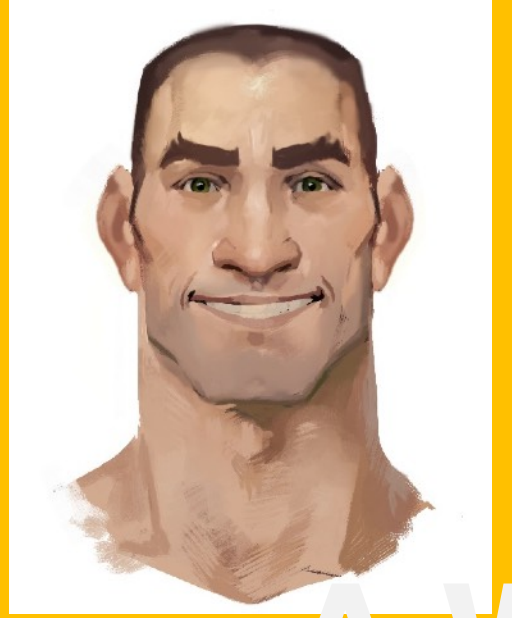
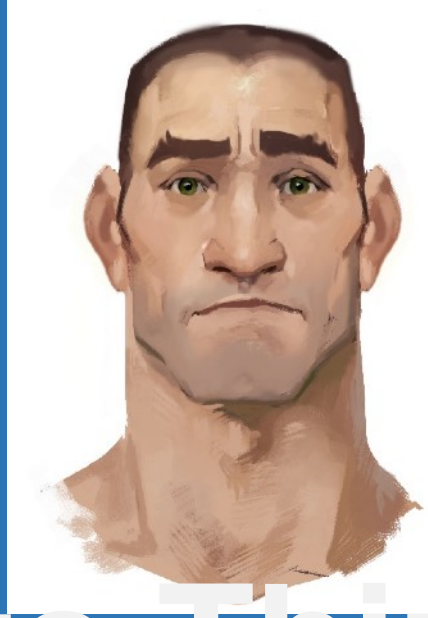
Still from Lords of War, Episode 3: Durotan

A Way to Think about Expressions

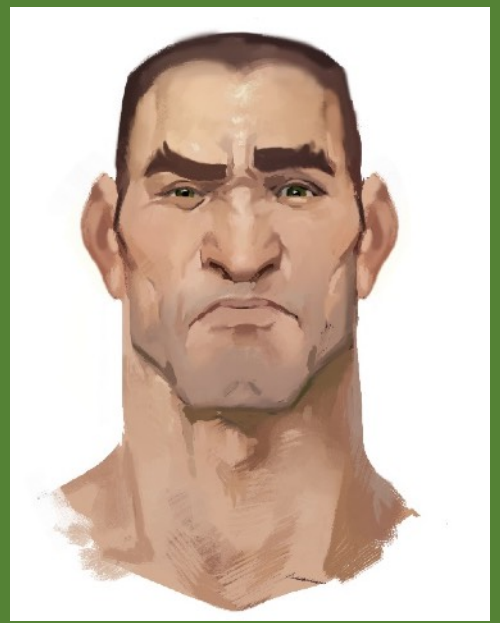


Happiness

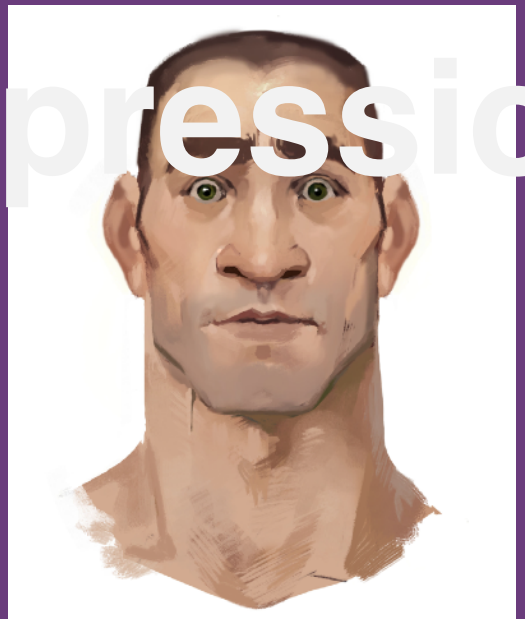


Sadness

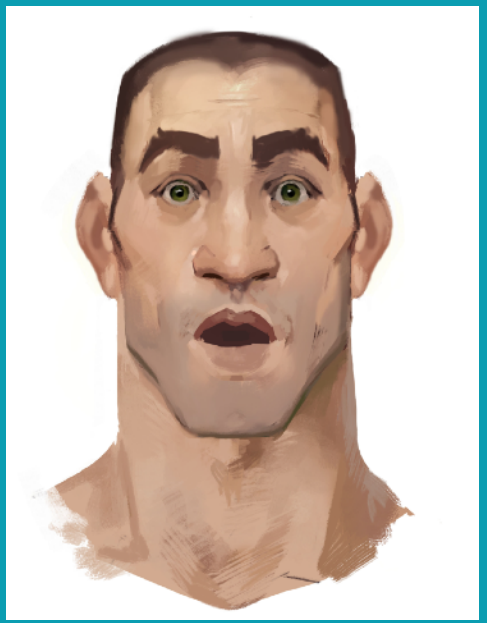
Anger



Disgust



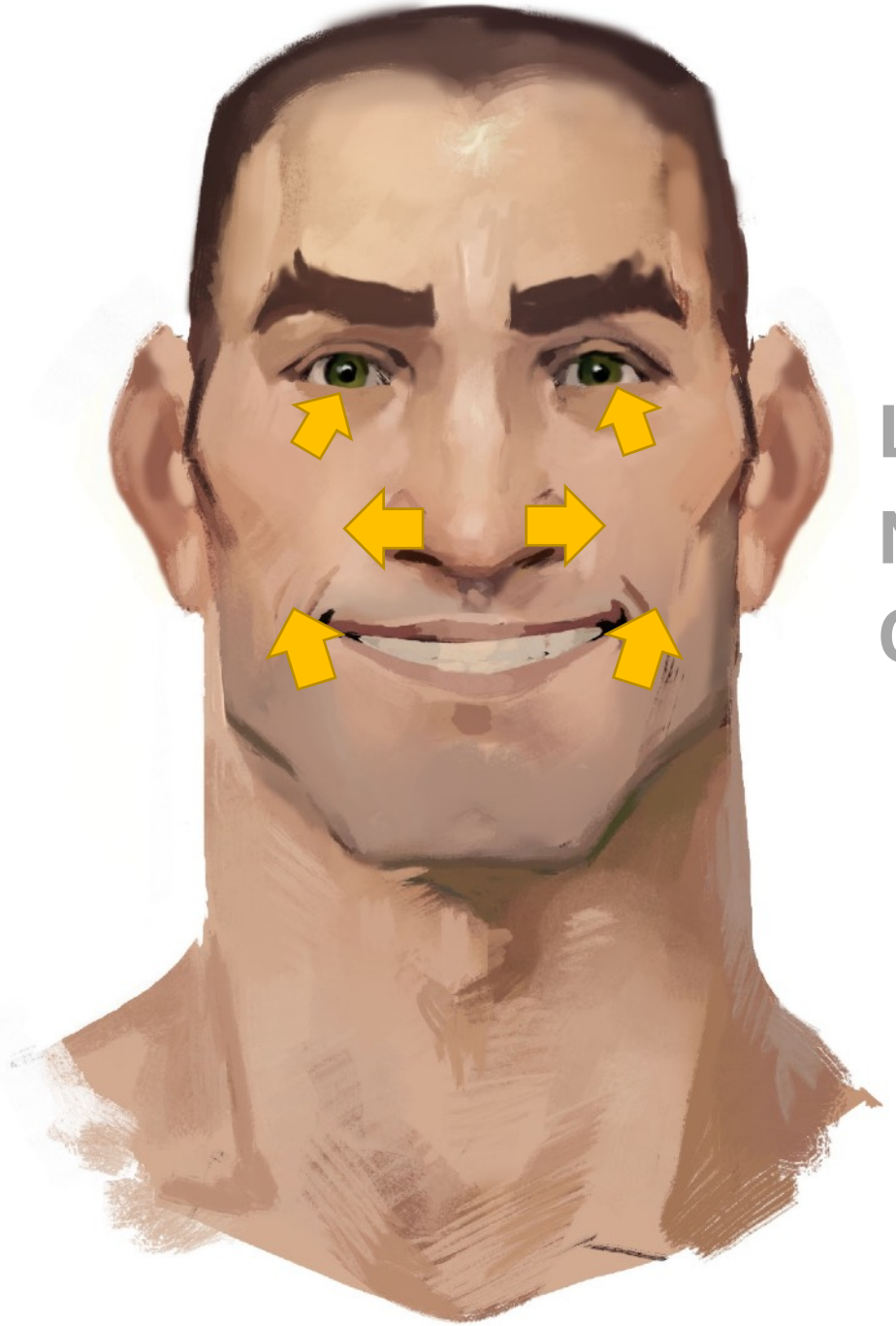
Fear



Surprise

Happiness

Mild



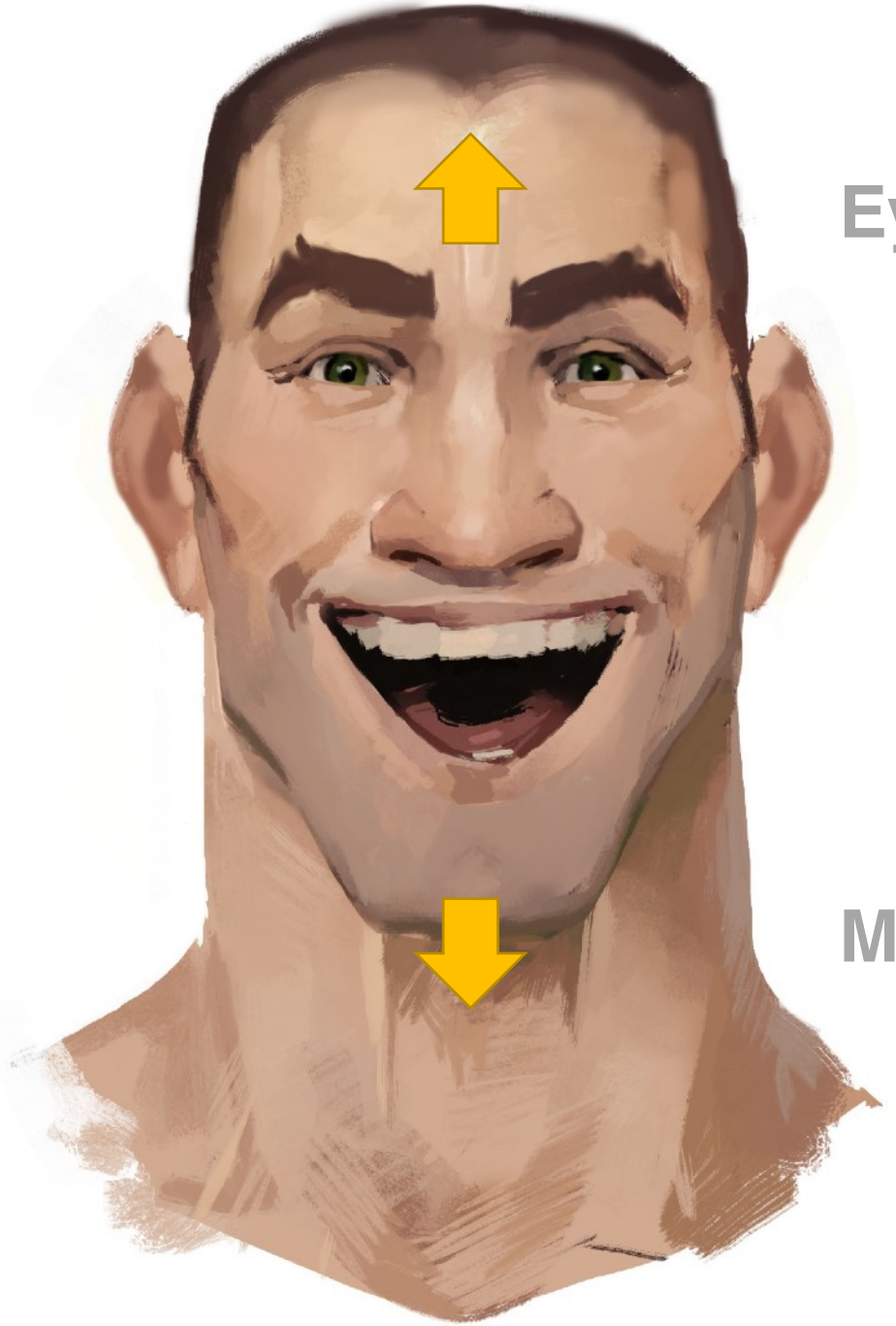
Lower eyelids raise

Nostrils flare

Corners of mouth

Happiness

Intensified

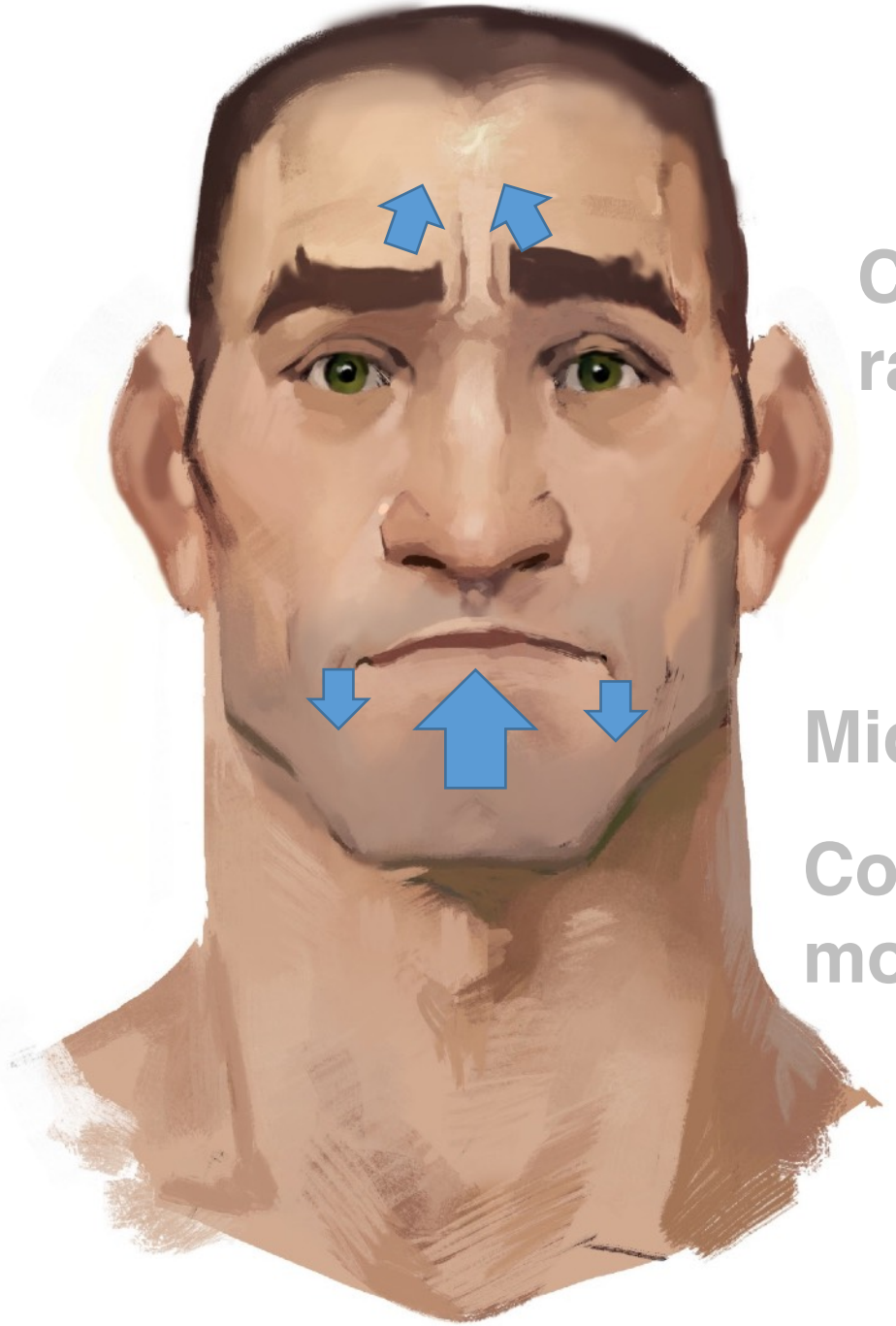


Eyebrows up

Mouth Opens

Sadness

Mild



Center of eyebrows raise and contract

Middle lip moves UP

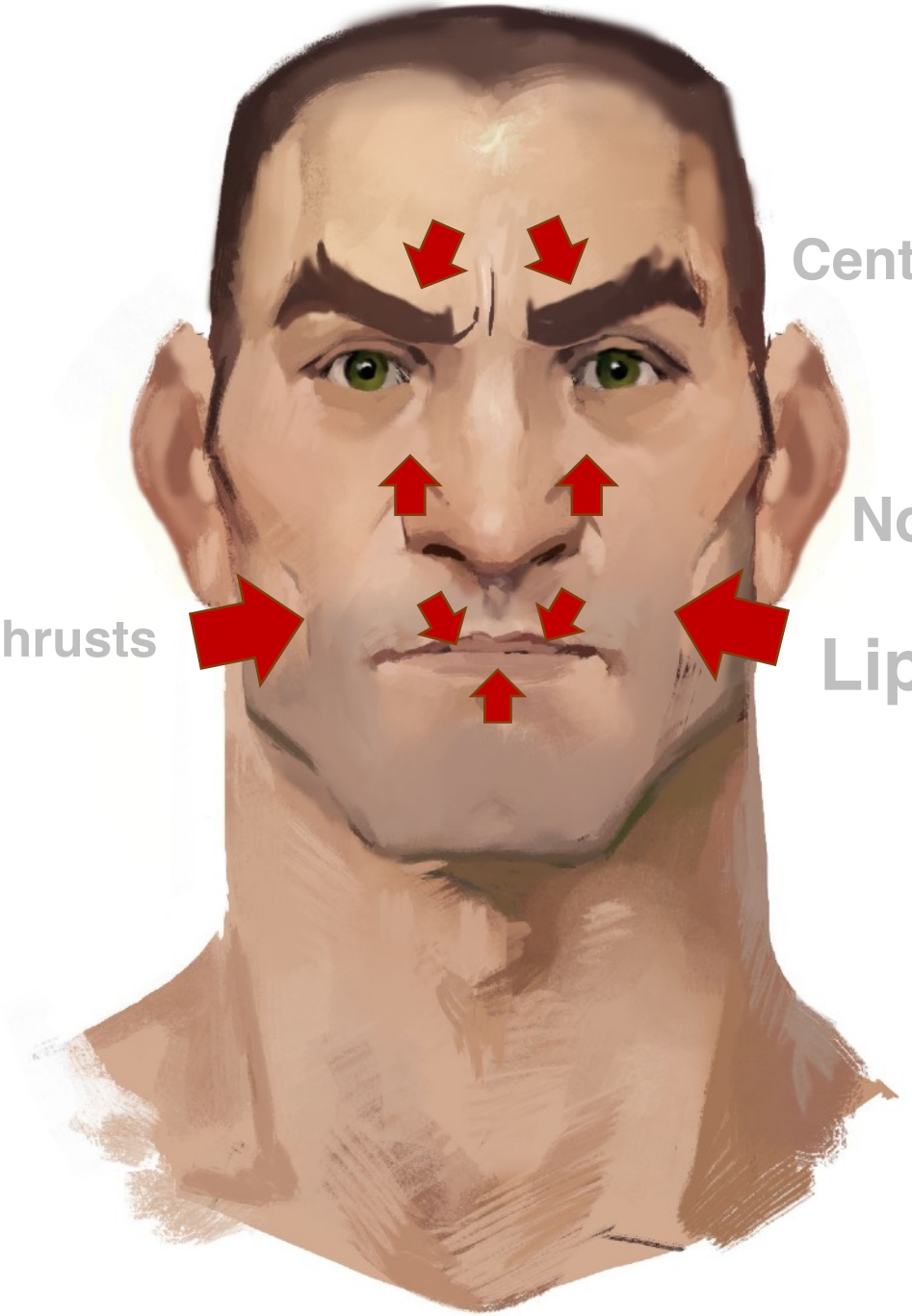
Corners of mouth move down

Sadness

Intensified Mild

Anger

Mild



Center of eyebrows lower

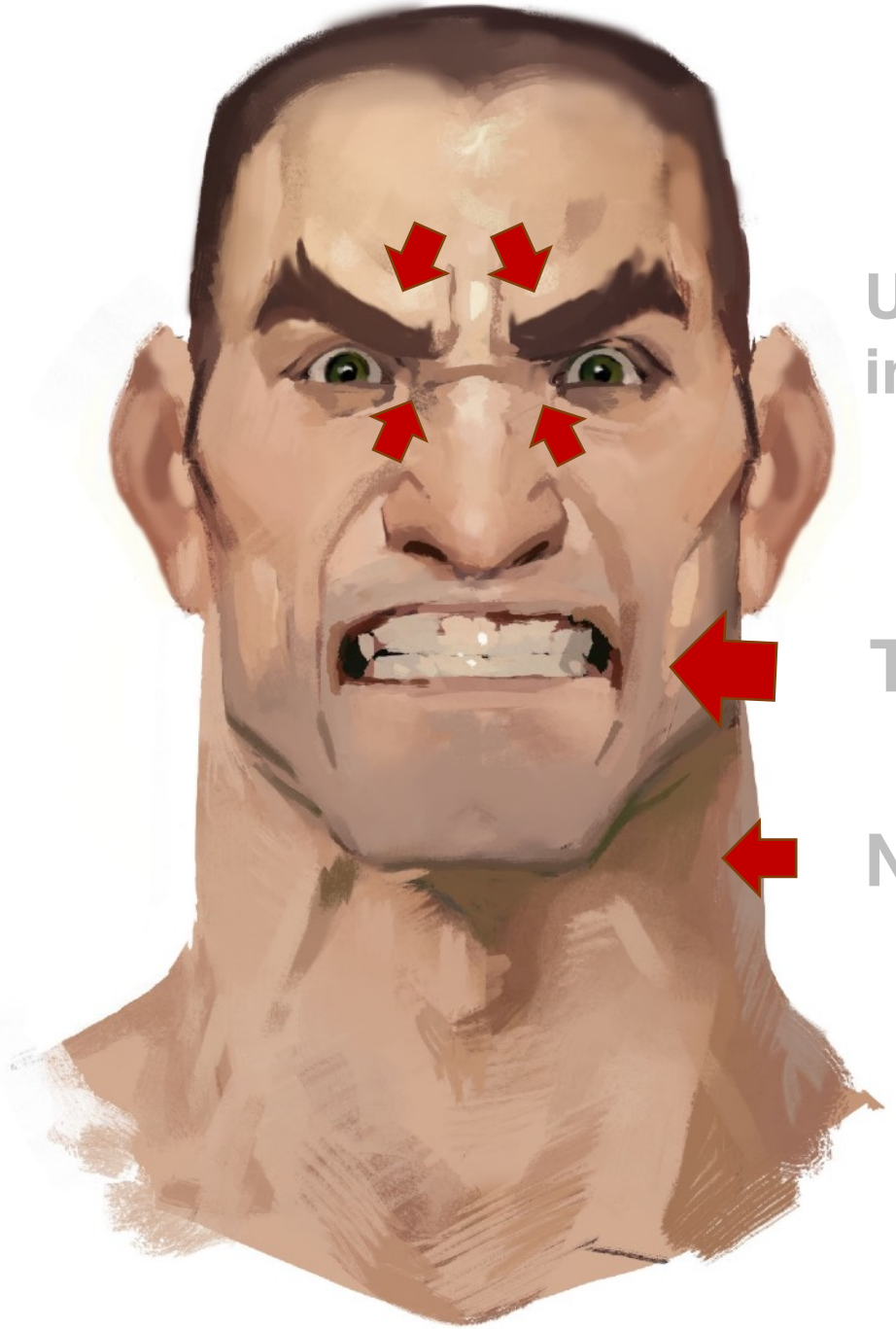
Nostrils move upward

Lips purse

Jaw clenches and thrusts forward

Anger

Intensified Mild



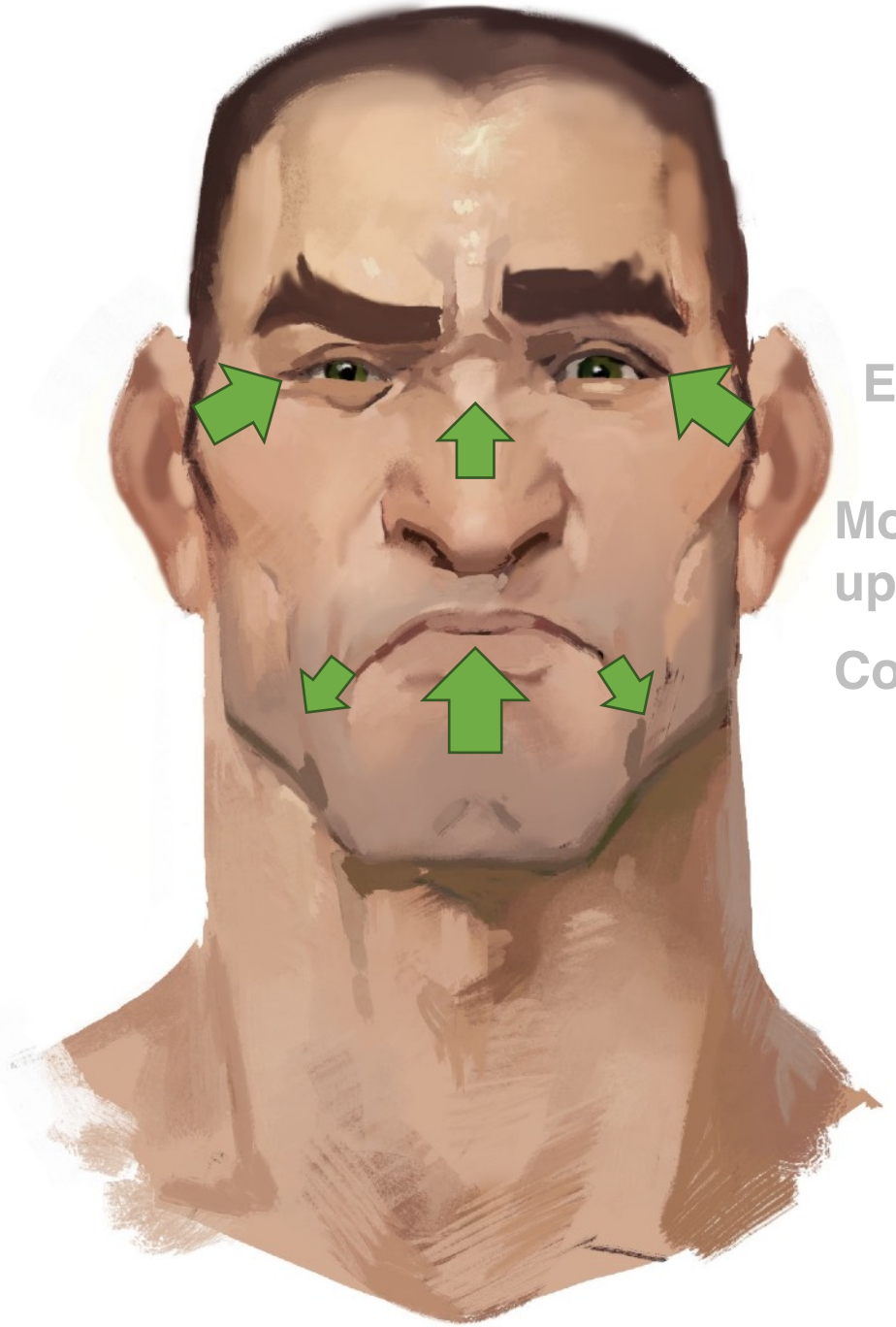
Upper face tension increases

Teeth bare

Neck tenses

Disgust

Mild



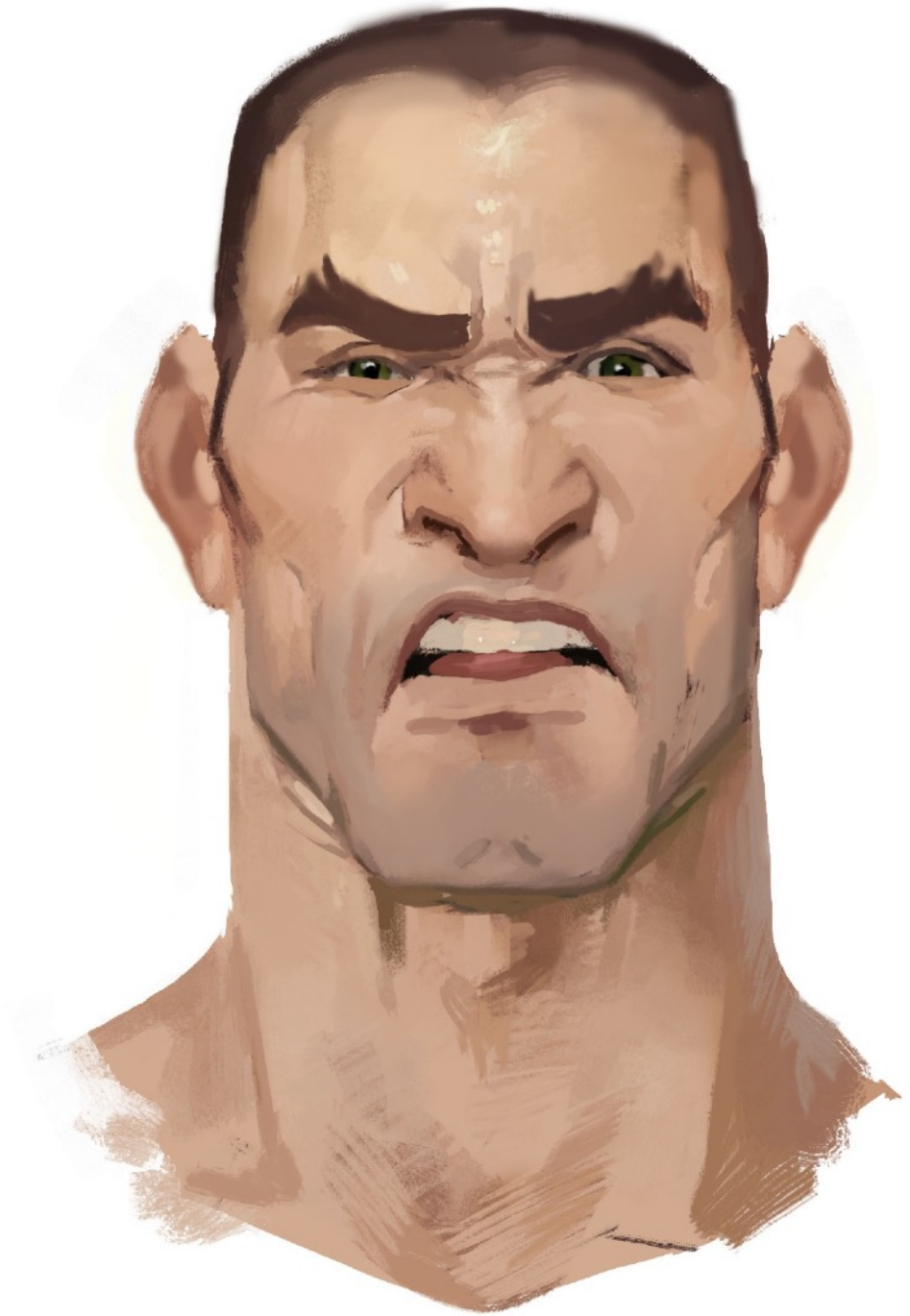
Eyes squint

Mouth and nose squish upwards

Corners of mouth move down

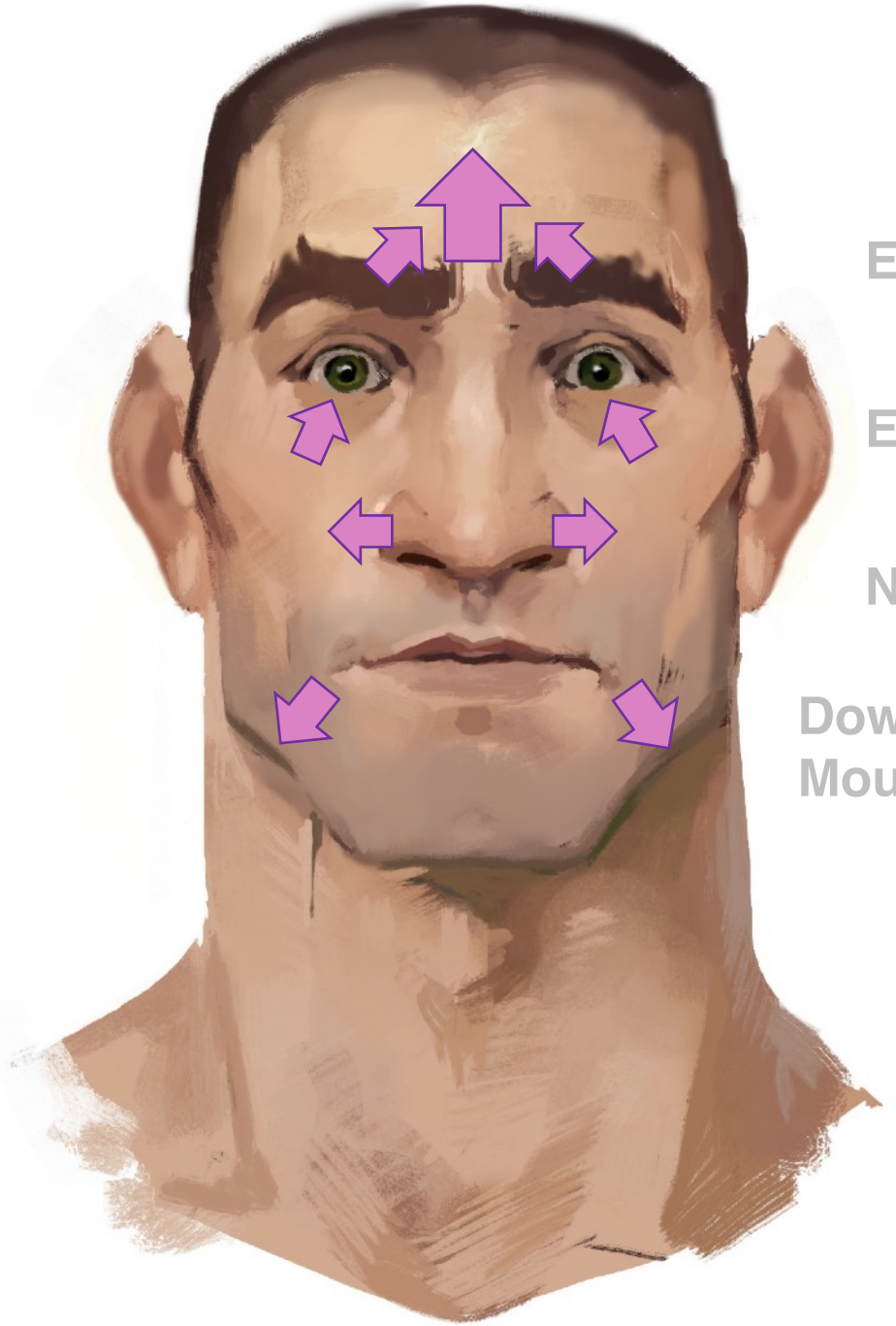
Disgust

Intensified



Fear

Mild



Eyebrows move up and inwards

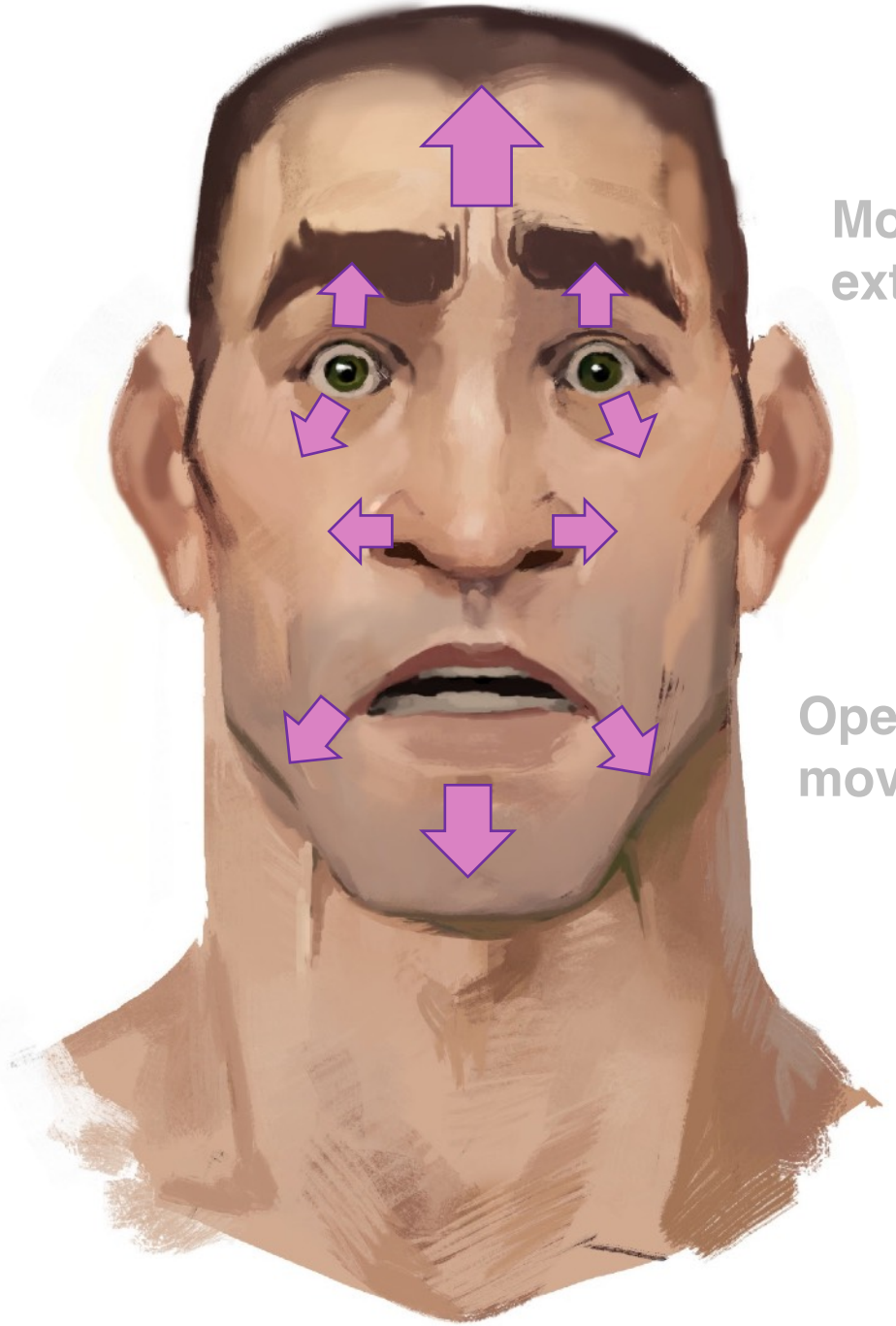
Eyes widen

Nostrils flare

Downward movement of
Mouth corners

Fear

Intensified

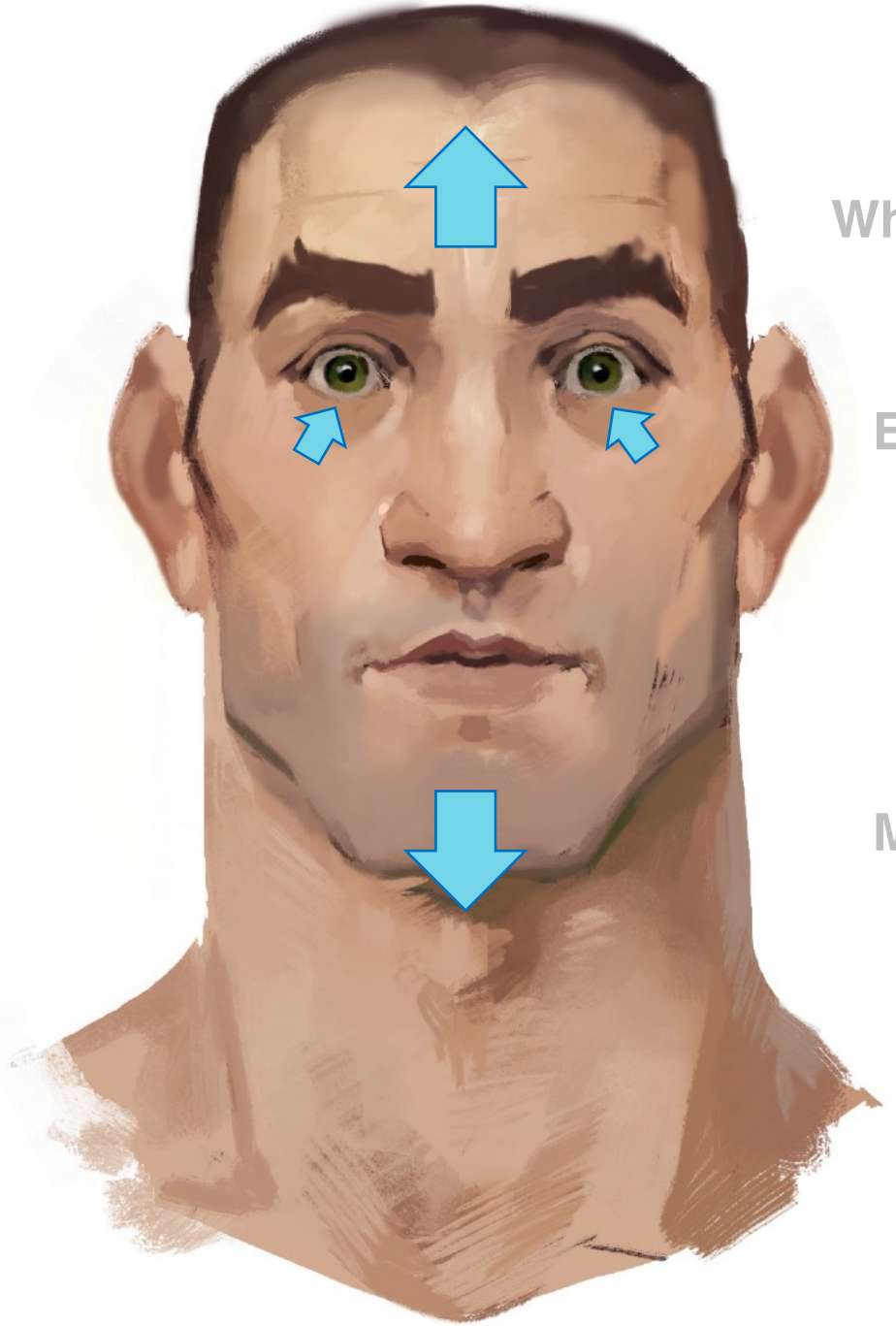


Movement becomes more extreme

Open mouth and downward movement of corners

Surprise

Mild



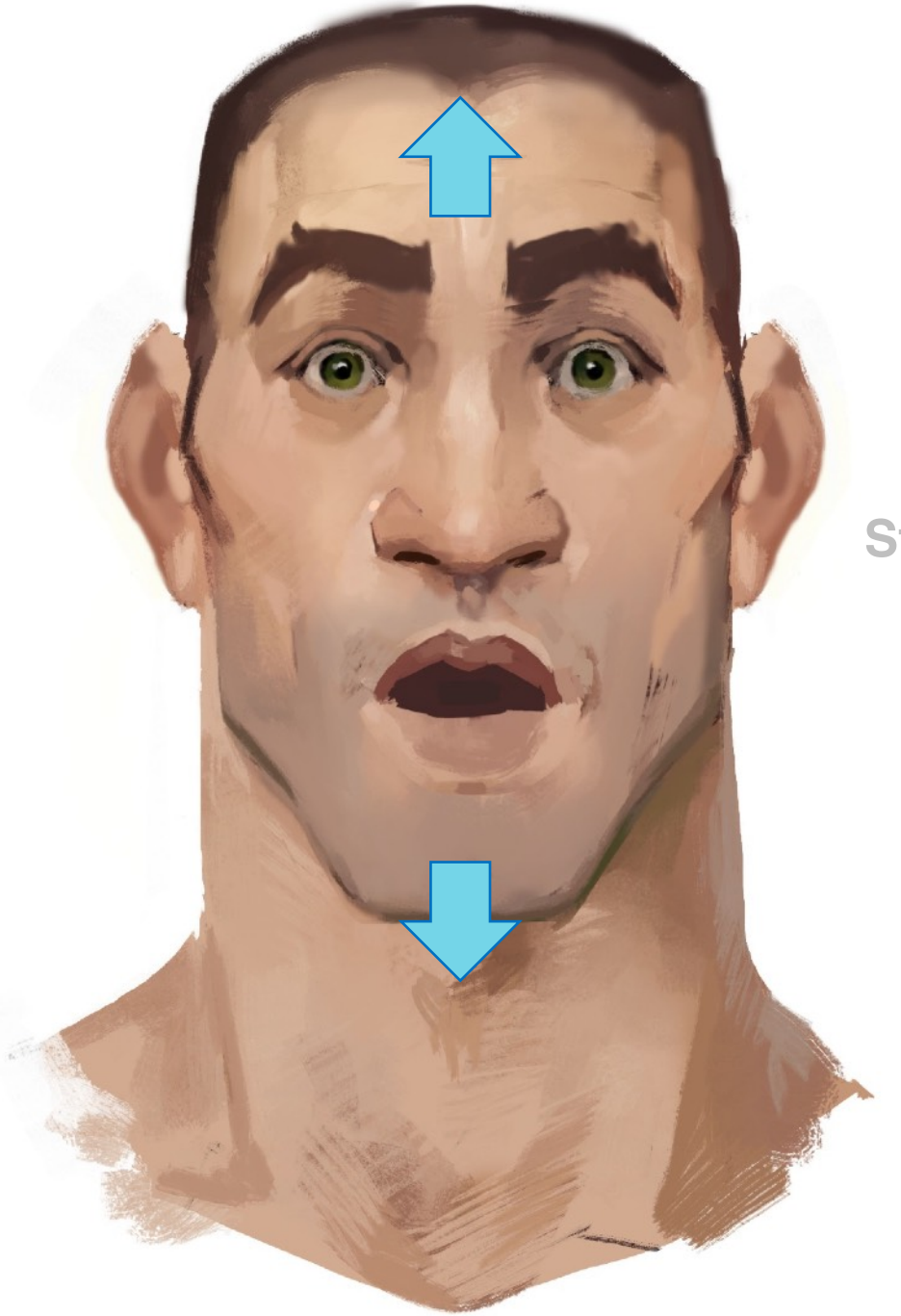
Whole brow moves straight up

Eyes widen

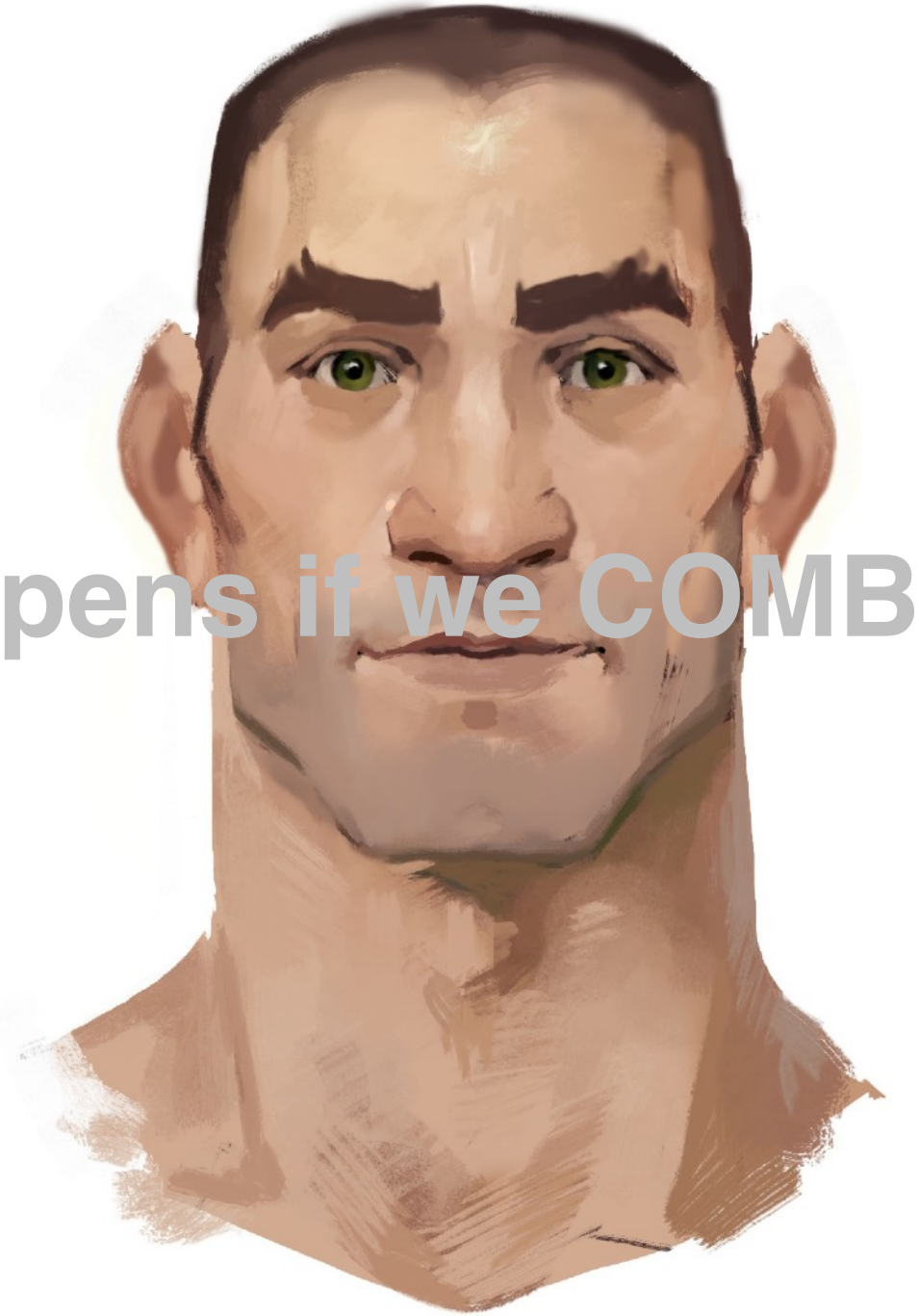
Mouth opens

Surprise

Intensified



Stretches more



What happens if we COMBINE them?

Happiness(Intense)

+ Anger(Intense)

e

ise

and corners go up

Free Puppies!

Happiness (Intense)

+ Anger (Intense)

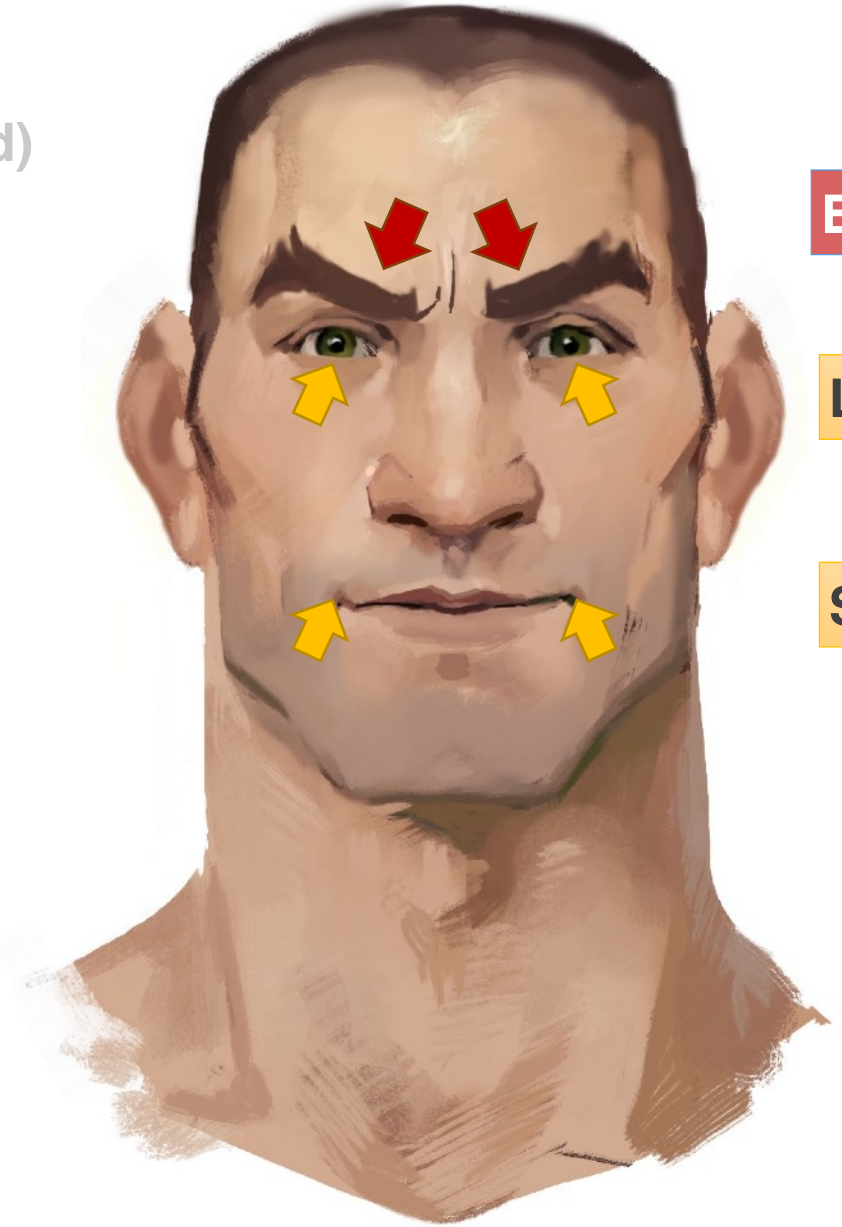
Eyebrows contract

Mouth opens and corners go up

Bully tears up your sketchbook

Happiness (Mild)

+ Anger (Mild)



Eyebrows contract

Lower lid raises

Slight upturn to mouth

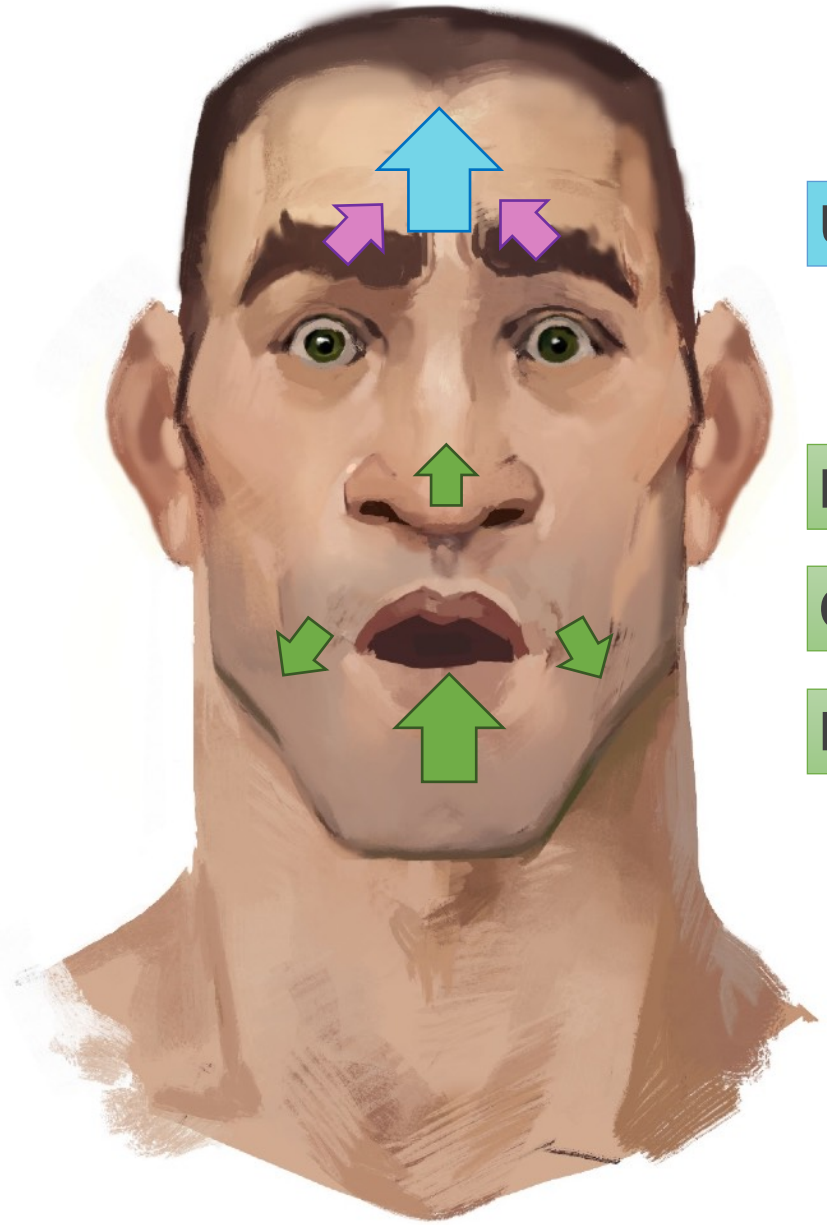
Smoulder

Surpri

+ Fear

Your kid backs your car into a mailbox

Surprise
+ Fear
+ Disgust



Unchanged eye movement

Nose wrinkles

Corners of mouth pull down

Lips protrude

Your kid backs your car into a mailbox

Happiness + Sadness

Takeaways

- Keep a mirror around
- Study the anatomy
- Use basic expressions as building blocks

Thank you!

Creating Compelling Characters

Simon Stafsnes Anderson
Art Director, D-Pad Studio

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UBM

FINDING THE PURPOSE AND FINAL TOUCHES TO YOUR CHARACTERS

AKA: LONG TITLE

OWLBOY
D·PAD
STUDIO

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE
OF YOUR DESIGN?

WHAT IF YOU KNOW THE
GOAL OF YOUR DESIGN
... BUT IT FEELS OFF?

PERSPECTIVE AS A PART OF THE DESIGN PROCESS

R
000

Enemy(s)
Egg Gang 2
68
542
Hp 3182
327
Ap
Hp 3707
84
Ap
Hp 1630
451
Ap
Hp 2888
214
Ap
Hp 2785
176
Ap
Hp 2586
223
Ap

SOME RULES OF THUMB FOR DESIGN THEORY

- REPEATED COLOR BLOCKS
- CONSISTENT PATTERNS

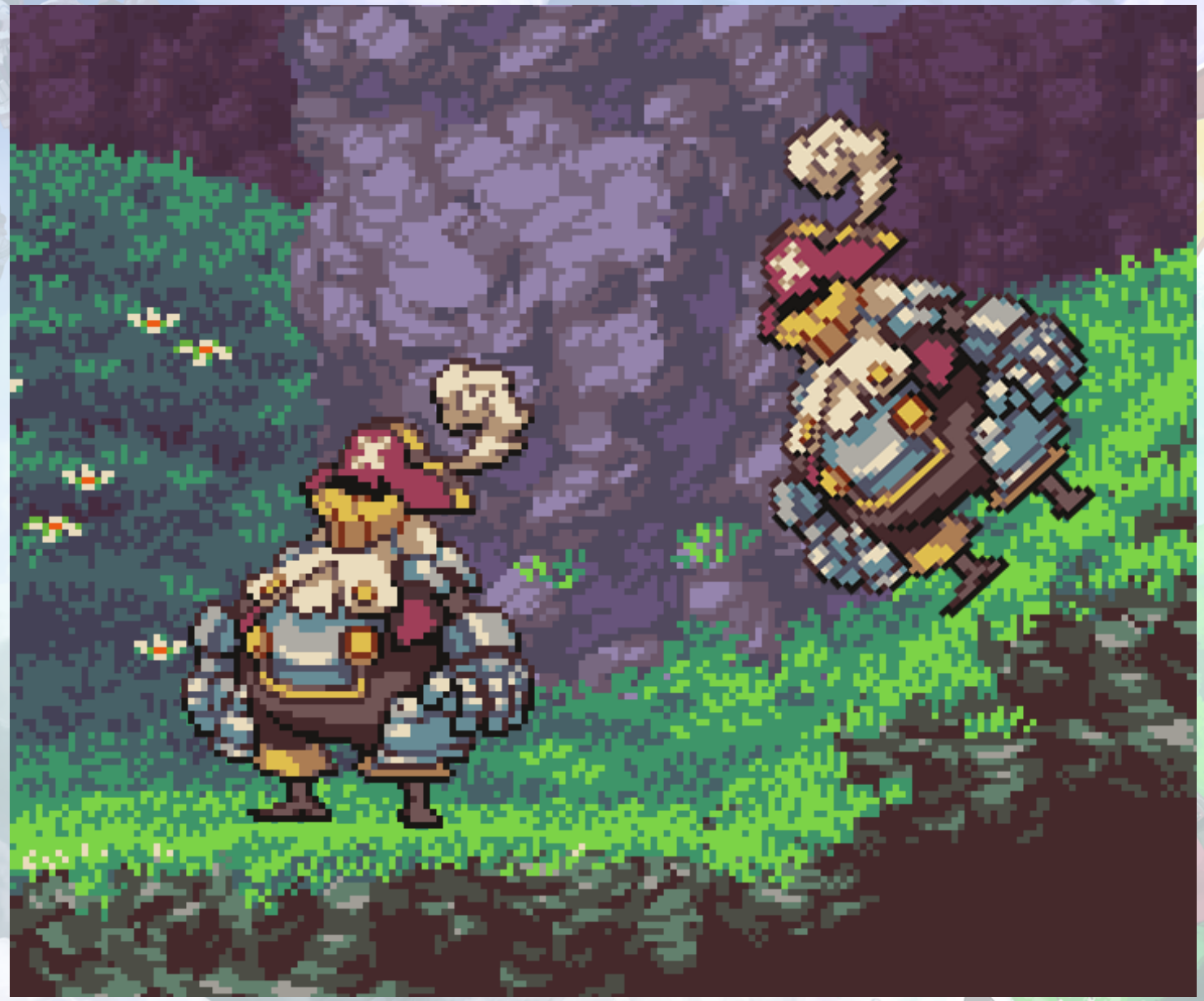
OLD DESIGN

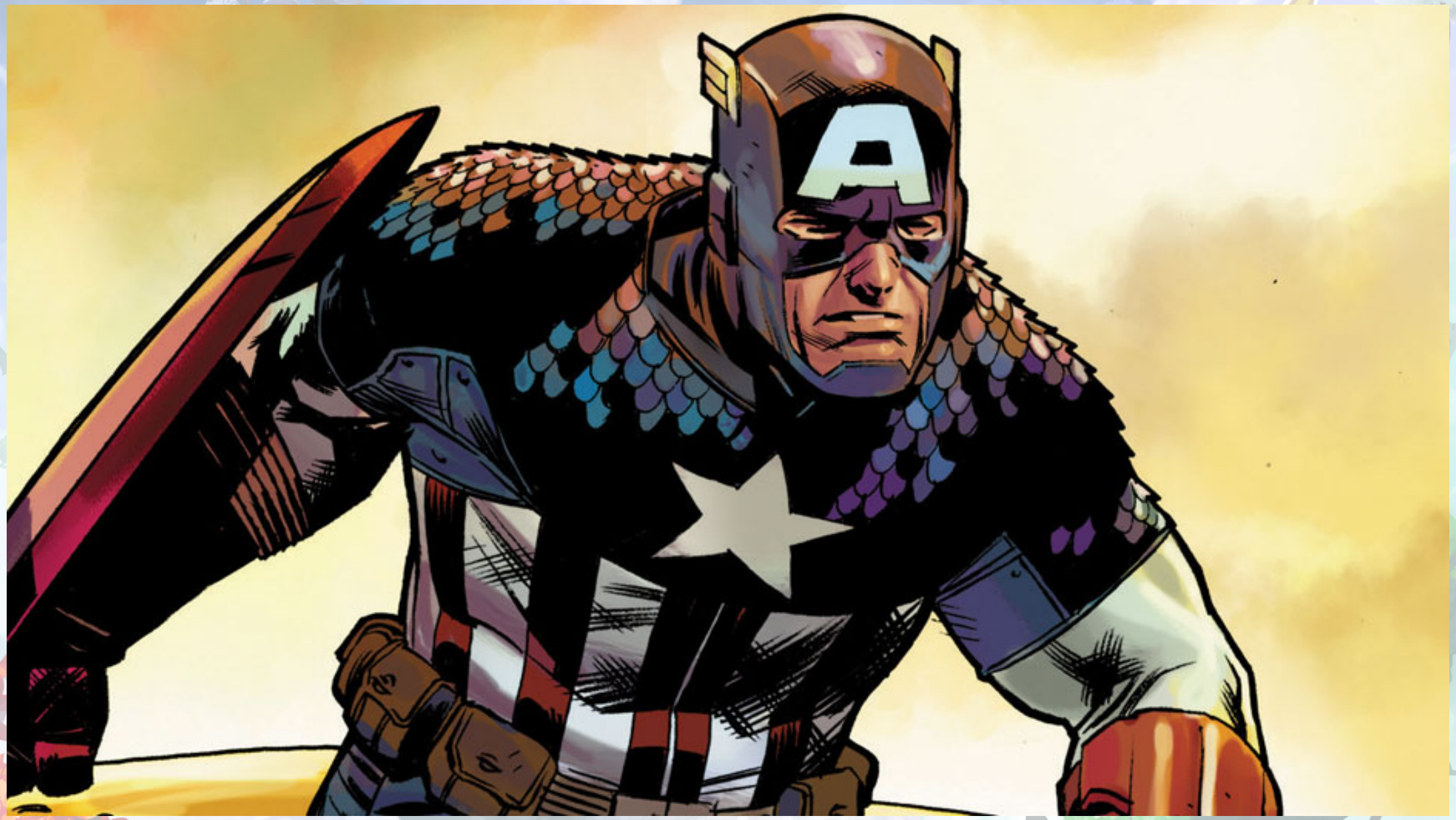
SIMILAR SHAPES:

SPIKE SHAPES
- HAIR
- SIDEBURNS
- EYEBROWS
- SHOE TIPS

FLAT CONE SHAPE
- NECK-FLUFF
- TOP OF SHOES

HOW TO USE ABSTRACT DESIGN PRINCIPLES ON REALISTIC CHARACTERS





FINAL THOUGHTS

THANK YOU
FOR YOUR TIME

GDC

Creating Compelling Characters

Richard Lyons (Naughty Dog), Claire Hummel (Campo Santo), Laurel Austin (Blizzard), Simon Stafsnes Anderson (D-Pad Studio)

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