BHRAM

From comic origins to action figure

Submitted by
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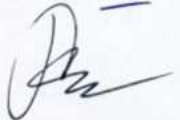
Guided by
Prof. Jayesh Pillai

Approval Sheet

The project titled "Bhram-from comic origins to action figure"
by Himanshu Bagati of M.Des. Communication Design (Batch 2022-24),
is approved for partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of
'Master of Design' at IDC School of Design, IIT Bombay.

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Internal Examiner: D. Bahava 29/5/24

External Examiner: 29/05/24.

Declaration

I declare that this written document represents my ideas in my own words
and where others' ideas or words have been included, I have adequately
cited and referenced the original sources. I also declare that I have adhered
to all principles of academic honesty and integrity and have not
misrepresented or fabricated or falsified any idea, data, fact or source in my
submission. I understand that any violation of the above will be cause for
disciplinary action by the institute and can also evoke penal action from the
sources which have thus not been properly cited or from whom proper
permission has not been taken when needed.

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Abstract

This project aims to add a storytelling aspect for audiences, starting with an origin story. The goal was to create a superhero comic illustrating a dystopian world that is starting to get affected by the negative effects of AI, introducing the setting and the hero striving to make a difference. Following this, readers can engage with action figures to create their own stories.

Contents

Introduction

The project comprises two components: an origin comic and an action figure. The comic's narrative delves into prevalent anxieties surrounding AI uprising, reshaping the conventional hero's journey with a moral compass attuned to contemporary concerns. Ending with a tantalizing cliffhanger, it invites users to delve deeper into the story through interaction with the action figure. Users can manipulate the figure, capture photographs, animate scenes, or simply envisage new adventures.

Ultimately, this project endeavors to foster an immersive and participatory user experience, encouraging creativity and exploration within its narrative universe.

Background

In today's world, worries about artificial intelligence (AI) are common. The trend of AI uprising has sparked fears of job loss and a troubled future, especially for the less fortunate. This project blends classic superhero tales with modern concerns about AI. On a personal level, it fulfills my long-time desire to create my own hero and action figure. The goal is to offer a fresh take on AI's impact and embrace the trend of interactive storytelling. Through comics and interaction, the project aims to make the story engaging and relatable, exploring our fears of AI in an immersive way.

Ideation

The initial phase involved crafting a concise and engaging story that provides enough detail for the audience to imagine the rest. After considering many ideas, I finalized this version. The final script is 11 pages long, and the comic spans 25 pages. Drawing inspiration from "The Watchmen," I chose a 3x3 panel layout for its challenging and unique style. Additionally, I designed the character to be a fun and versatile action figure with multiple attachment parts and versions. To achieve this, I studied the engineering of my own action figures and created the design in ZBrush. This comprehensive approach ensured that both the story and the action figure were well-developed and cohesive.

Script

The script for "Bhram" tells a dystopian story set in a future Gurgaon plagued by AI dominance. The protagonist, is a vigilante navigating the chaotic city, observing and combating crime. His journey is deeply personal, driven by the loss of his girlfriend in a violent encounter. The narrative explores themes of survival, societal decay, and the ethical dilemmas posed by AI advancements. The story blends intense action equences with introspective moments, culminating in his relentless fight against corruption and his struggle to make a meaningful impact in a city teetering on the edge of chaos.

Character Design

The character design was done to work well as an action figure and fit
seamlessly into the world. I went through multiple versions of designs and
ended up with a version that allowed me to use different materials and
create various accessories. These elements can be mixed and matched to
create different versions of the character. The design progression shows
the character's evolution, incorporating elements like a tactical outfit,
interchangeable masks, and various weapon attachments. This approach
ensures the character is not only visually appealing but also versatile and
engaging for users, enhancing both the narrative and the
interactive experience.

Version 1
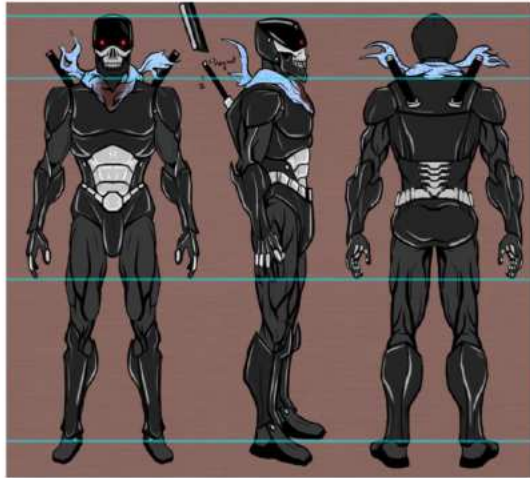
Version 2
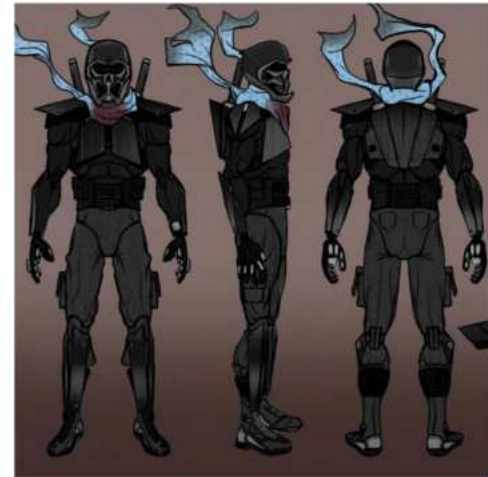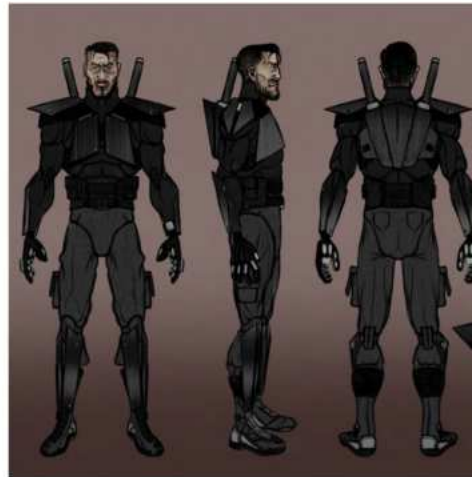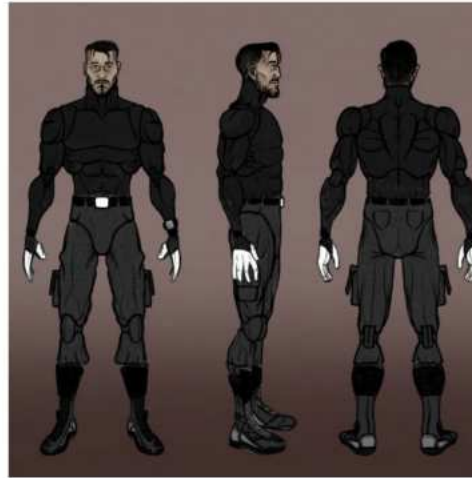
Version 3 (Final)

Storyboarding

For me creating storyboards for a project always begins with a broad, preliminary layout of the narrative flow, without intricate details. This approach stems from my belief that the storyboard shouldn't be too rigid as while Illustrating I would want to rethink and redevelop the frame. I aimed to add visual nuances and elements as the project progressed. The initial storyboard underwent continuous revisions to craft and interconnect the story in the most effective manner.

This flexible approach allowed the story to develop organically, ensuring a cohesive and engaging final product.

Storyboard

Illustration

The deliberate use of grunge brushes in the illustration style serves a dual purpose. Firstly, it contributes to a somber and dark atmosphere, effectively emphasizing the gravity of the issue at hand. Secondly, the rustic feel introduced by these brushes adds a unique visual character, ensuring that the work stands out from conventional styles. This intentional design choice not only underscores the seriousness of the narrative but also encourages users to linger on each frame, fostering deeper engagement with the content. Additionally, I experimented with colors to set tones for the scenes based on the emotions I wanted to convey. The overall feel is designed to give a dark, gloomy, dystopian vibe.

Cover

Sample pages from the comic
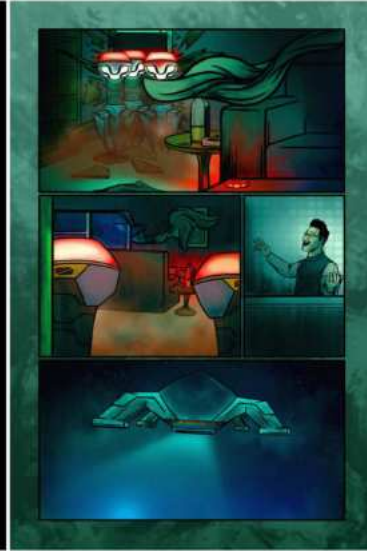
Book Design

The comic is 26 pages long, but I wanted it to have more substance to immerse readers in the world and familiarize them with the character. To achieve this, the comic book includes an "Afterwords" section showcasing rough sketches, the screenplay, character design, and background elements involved in the process. This approach allows readers to see the book as a complete set and become excited to learn more about it.

For the physical design, I want the cover to be a hardback to give it a premium feel. The pages will have a matte finish to enhance the reading experience and complement the dark, dystopian tone of the illustrations. This design ensures that the book stands out and offers a tactile, engaging experience for the readers.

3D Modelling

The process of modeling the action figure was tedious, despite my familiarity with character 3D modeling. I had never created an action figure before, where joineries are crucial. These joineries are essential as they allow the user to engage with the figure. The process was carried out on ZBrush, with each body part modeled separately to ensure detailed precision.

The model is at a 1/10 scale, and each joinery was carefully measured and sculpted to create a snug fit while allowing the necessary movement. The detailing of the suit and armor is for the visual appeal and not functionality. Given the small scale, the details had to be minimal to avoid over-sculpting and ensure the overall design remained cohesive and practical.

Body parts on ZBrush
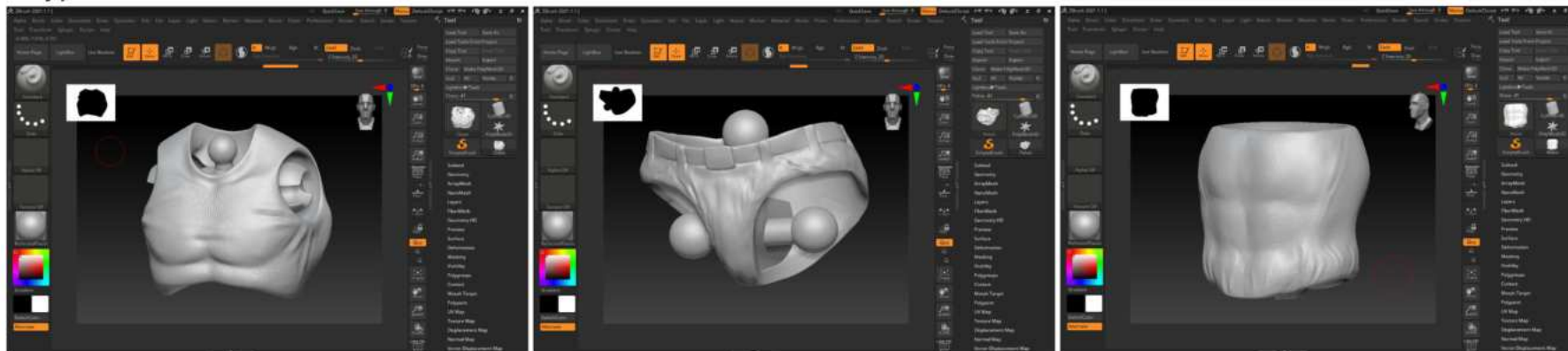
Printing

The printing process was conducted at IDC with the assistance of my guide's team, as this was my first experience with 3D printing. Initially, I used PLA filament, but I found that it didn't capture the details adequately. After learning to use a resin printer, I switched to that for its superior detail resolution. However, I discovered that resin printing produced hard and brittle joineries that tended to break. To resolve this, I decided to print the joineries using PLA. This combination of materials allowed me to leverage the strengths of each: resin for detailed sculpting and PLA for strength and flexibility. This hybrid approach ensured the final product was both detailed and durable.

Parts ready to print on PreForm

Painting

Most of the prints were in white and as my character was mainly dark, I decided to get it painted black as a base coat and apply paints on top of it. The base coat was done in 2k matte black in the paint studio. And later on I proceeded to colour it with acrylic paints and apply glossy or matte finish at the end.

The paints are minimal as that's what the character design required. There is paint chipping at certain parts due to movement of joineries but that is unavoidable. Generally for mass manufactured action figures, most of the molding is done in the desired colour plastic, but that is not what I could go for due to constraints.

Painting process

Diorama base

To create a multifunctional diorama base, I collaborated with my friend, Harsh Karani. The base, conceived after completing the action figure and comic, features folded metal as the base and the backdrop, which will allow the figure to magnetically attach to it. A storage drawer for accessories and peg holes for a flight stand were integrated for dynamic posing. Background illustrations stuck to magnetic sheets can be attached on the diorama which enhance the base's versatility for action figure photography.

Challenges

Numerous challenges arose during the course of this project. Crafting the story posed a significant initial hurdle, as I aimed to strike a balance between conciseness and world-building to ensure a seamless narrative experience for the audience. Over the span of approximately a month, I iterated through numerous revisions, incorporating feedback from guides, faculty, and peers to address any potential loopholes.

But the biggest obstacle was encountered during the creation of the action figure. The final piece repeatedly broke, presenting a persistent challenge. Due to limited access to a printer at the time, I improvised repairs using Mseal and Fevi Kwik to render the figure functional.

The processes of illustration, painting, and modeling proceeded with relative ease in comparison.

Conclusion

To sum up, this project combines an origin comic and an action figure to create an interactive experience. The comic explores modern anxieties about AI, encouraging readers to explore further with the action figure.

The action figure isn't just for display; it's a tool for imagination. Users can pose, photograph, and animate it, creating their own stories. This project aims to empower users to be part of the narrative.

In the end, it's about bringing storytelling and play together to spark creativity and engagement, leaving a lasting impression on its audience.

What's next?

In the next phase, I envision continuing the story and evolving the character further, possibly introducing new twists in both narrative and character design. Additionally, I aim to expand the roster of characters, exploring unconventional designs that can translate effectively into action figures. This could involve introducing a new hero or even assembling a team, thereby building an entire superhero universe complete with corresponding action figures.

Moreover, I intend to enhance interactive experiences by exploring avenues such as Augmented Reality or experimenting with creating comics exclusively using action figures. These possibilities have been a subject of lively discussion among my friends, and I am eager to explore them further. My goal is to push the boundaries of storytelling and user engagement, continually learning new skills and techniques to empower users to craft their own narratives within this evolving universe.

Learnings

In summary, managing the dual facets of this project proved to be a significant learning experience. Effectively allocating time between action figure modeling and 3D printing was paramount to its success. The iterative process of rectifying model flaws not only honed my skills but also underscored the importance of perseverance.

Furthermore, refining joint techniques for future endeavors emerged as a valuable takeaway. Crafting a captivating setting within the comic while maintaining intrigue showcased my creative adaptability. Similarly, the exploration of color palettes to evoke mood highlighted the potency of visual storytelling. Delving deeper into book design through the creation of the "Afterwords" section expanded my skill set. Lastly, I also learnt screen-play writing just to utilise it for my future projects as well.

In essence, this journey epitomized continual learning, growth, and the pursuit of innovative storytelling methodologies.