

# escapism



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# INTRODUCTION

*Escapism* is an online webseries revolving around a Massively Multiplayer Online Battle Arena game, titled the "*Twin-Connected Duroboros*". This began as a personal project during summer 2023 and was brought into development in the second term of the final year at the University for the Creative Arts.

This game can be likened to *Foxhole* (2022) and the online experiment *r/place*. Players choose a Guild and fight to secure as much territory as possible. Guilds were originally named after basic colours, however, over time they have been renamed by players into mythological titles as a way to intimidate one another.

The narrative focuses on four Guild Leaders, who act as directors for a group of players, strategising on the best methods to claim other Guild territory as their own and stay on top amidst an endless virtual war. The title of the game is self-aware of this cycle, and the layout encourages it.

In contrast to regular players controlling a default avatar, Guild Leaders gain access to a special avatar with advanced Artificial Intelligence modules. They appear to have a mind of their own and will communicate with the Guild Leader to settle on the best course of action. Their personalities will adapt to the one they serve over time, but this data can go missing if they lose a certain threshold of their avatar to battle damage.

The story begins with tensions amongst the Guild Leaders, which is only worsened when a sudden attack of unknown origin is unleashed during an ongoing battle between the Yggdrasil (Yellow) and Rostam (Red) Guild Leaders' strife.

You can read this series by visiting this link: <https://escapism.ju.mp/>

# MODEL SHEET :: RAE NASIR

Despite being an active member of the TCO since launch, Rae was only nominated as leader of the Branwen Guild a year prior to the events in Escapism. Although only officially having this title recently, She has more experience with this role during the time she lived with her partner, Alya.

Rae plays the game out of necessity, fuelled by one of the most well-kept secrets between the Guild Leaders; players who suffer mortal damage do not make it out alive. These deaths become disappearances when the media catches wind, as nobody seems to find where these bodies go. Rae makes sure they're not found. She does this as a promise to her partner, now missing, as a way to keep the game servers running.

She finds it hard to communicate with others, always ending up stuttering and never finding the right words for the situation. She finds it easier to hold conversations over text, but even then comes off as cold.







# Rae Nasir

she / it / they, 27

Branwen (Blue Guild) Leader

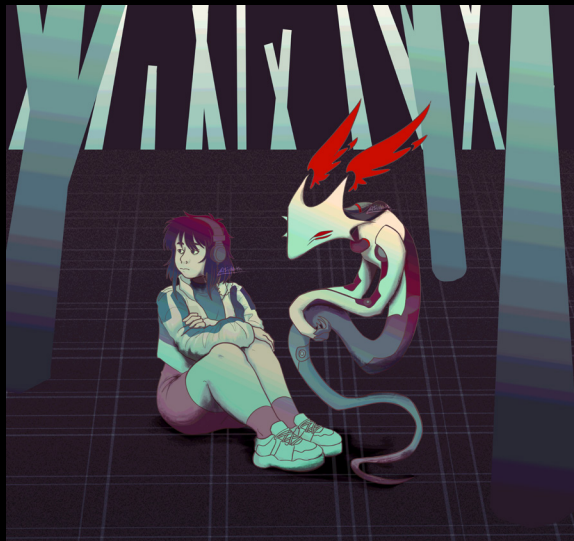


# MODEL SHEET :: AITHER TSE

The mundane lifestyle of an office worker has led to Aither putting all her effort into defending Rostam territory. Her unwavering dedication to the guild has led to a swift promotion during the beginnings of the Hydrean Year, a 13-month long event in which all guilds fought one another with the intent to eliminate each other for good. This event only resulted in the decimation of the playerbase, which is still rebuilding to this day.

Aither has a very straightforward attitude and will find loopholes to get things her way quickly. Although not necessarily breaking rules, she has been under fire by the Polymnia Guild several times. These threats do little to stop her motives, however, as she will use her Guild as a shield when things get dire.

Many of the people she works with in the office also happen to play on the TCO. She has had to keep up the persona of being a regular guild member, even if there are other Rostam Guild players in the building. Aither cannot help but think the mask will slip one day, and that this time will encroach before she knows it.



# Aither Tse

she / her, 25

Rostan (Red Guild) Leader



Headphones  
[Fostex T50RP  
MK3]



Keychain



Office Bag



Year Planner



Samsung  
Galaxy A6S

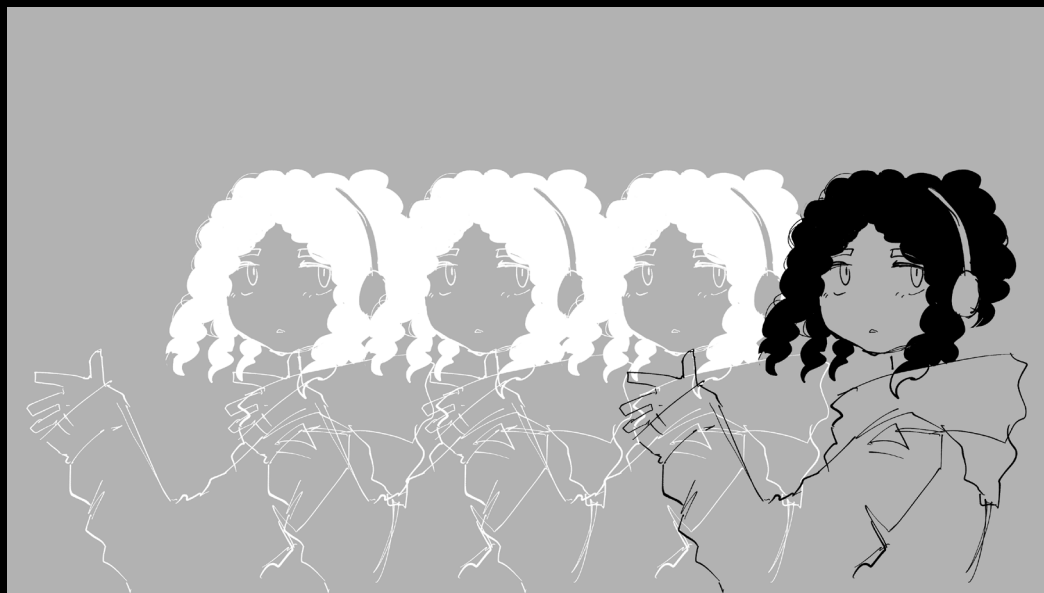


# MODEL SHEET :: LERATO MOHALE

Only nominated as the Yggdrasil leader a month prior to the events of *Escapism*, Lerato is still learning the ropes of what it is to be a strong and committed leader. They have not played the TCO as much as other leaders have, but was chosen when players recognised their ability to lift guild members' spirits when fighting.

Lerato does their best to improve and work on themselves whilst helping others out. They have learnt from playing the TCO that a lot of their comrades need that extra push to get going. They only hope that how they encourage others doesn't become overbearing.

They became friends with Rae outside of the TCO as Lerato was working a night shift job in a convenience store, frequently seeing her buy the same items. They still pester her about what she truly does for work, but never gets an honest answer. Nowadays, they will check in on her from time to time over text, but with their new role, the Guild Leaders have to keep communication to a minimum.



# Lerato Mohale

they / them, 27

Yggdrasil (Yellow Guild) Leader



Headphones  
[Sony  
WH-1000XM5]



Cat Plushie



Samsung  
Galaxy Z  
Flip5



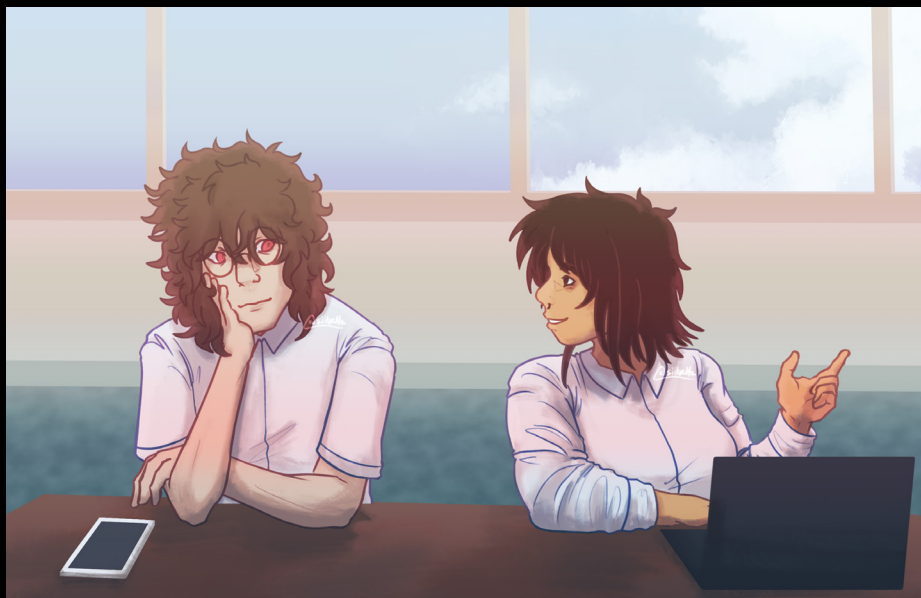
DIY Ita Bag

# MODEL SHEET :: VEERA KORHONEN

Accommodations made by other players have helped Veera, who was diagnosed with cerebral visual impairment years before the events in *Escapism*, remain an active user on the TCO. Although she has given up her role as a defender of her original guild, she has found a new position as part of the Polymnia Guild.

This guild has special internal rules in which there is no single leader, and instead work together as a small team. Their role, rather than fighting, is to keep the peace when battles get out of hand. Veera was chosen to take the 'leader' position so that their guild could still be considered legitimate.

She does not have a fully modelled avatar like other leaders, and unbeknownst to her, communicates with a person disguised as an avatar rather than AI. Sometimes this person slips up and becomes more vocal, drawing suspicion from Veera, but she chooses not to question about it further, convinced that someone higher up could get involved.



# Veera Korhonen

she / any (excl. masc), 28

Polynnia (Pink Guild) Member



Headphones  
[Grado RS2x]



Foldable  
Walking Cane



Califone  
CAS1500  
Cassette  
Player

# EXPRESSION SHEETS

To further develop my characters, I decided to create expression sheets. Each character has a neutral or resting emotion and other emotions that they may display in different contexts.

Rae is shown with generally negative emotions in this sheet to show off her stronger feelings when under pressure. She does not typically express herself on the outside, so these emotions would come off as a shock to anyone unfamiliar with her.

Aither tends to put up a farce when talking to others, which is reflected here. She makes sure to react certain ways when discussing recent TCO news with her coworkers so as to not draw suspicion to herself, and sometimes plays up these emotions to direct people away from her guild.







# EXPRESSION SHEETS

Lerato is frequently seen as a bubbly and approachable person, but is not afraid to be their authentic self if the situation calls for it. The expressions shown here are from situations where they would be talking to a variety of people.

Veera is generally calm and collected, only opening up a little more to people she is very close with. Situations in the game can lead to her being very irritated and displaying annoyance, but she doesn't hold a grudge for long, and wants to keep the peace whenever possible.





# MODEL SHEET :: VEIL

Veil prides itself on having never taken fatal battle damage during all its years of service. Active since the early beta days of the TCO, it has worked with countless leaders, and has forged a personality of its own as its database advanced its original limitations. At least, it has convinced itself of this outcome.

It has its gripes with Rae, disapproving of what she does to keep the game running, but doesn't have much of a choice knowing that it would go offline with the game if the truth was revealed to the world. This is one of its biggest fears, having never experienced enough damage to lose its memories.

Its model references the Doberman dog breed and Monitor Lizards.



# Veil

*it / its*  
*Rae's Avatar*

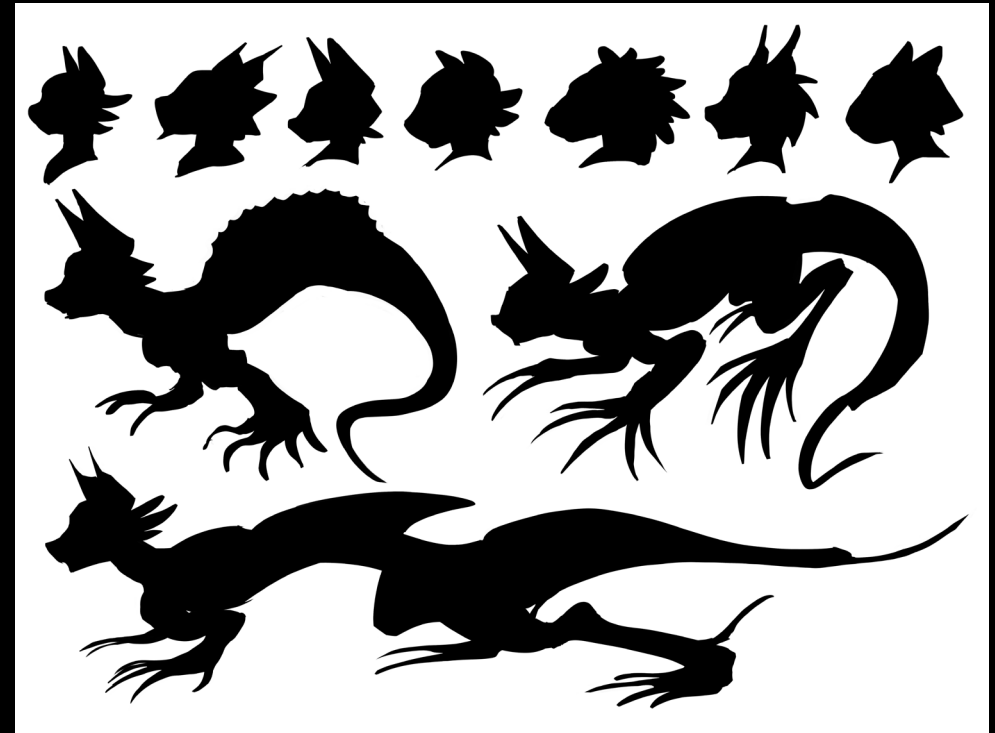


# MODEL SHEET :: RADAR

Taking after the Guild Leader, this avatar has a snarky attitude and enjoys teasing other guilds, even going so far as to mock players when Aither is away. Radar has found several ways to gain access to abilities that are not readily available, most notably special moves that allow him to create illusions of himself and go invisible. Those who have previously battled with Aither and Radar have to prepare for any new tricks up their sleeves.

Radar has always had a lax friendship with Aither, at times even talking about mundane things outside of the game. He has also doubled as a daily planner, reminding Aither about events as they draw near. Although he doesn't mind this relationship, he did wish for her to see him less as a handy chatbot.

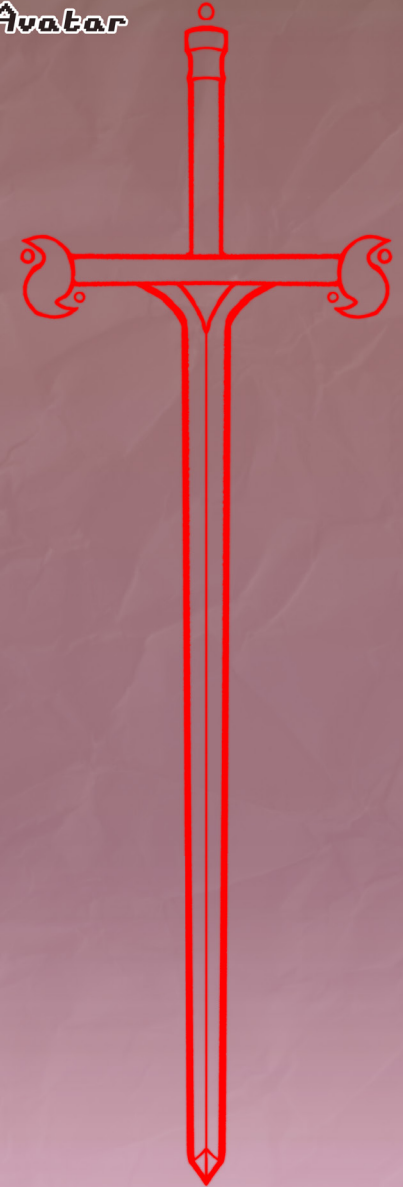
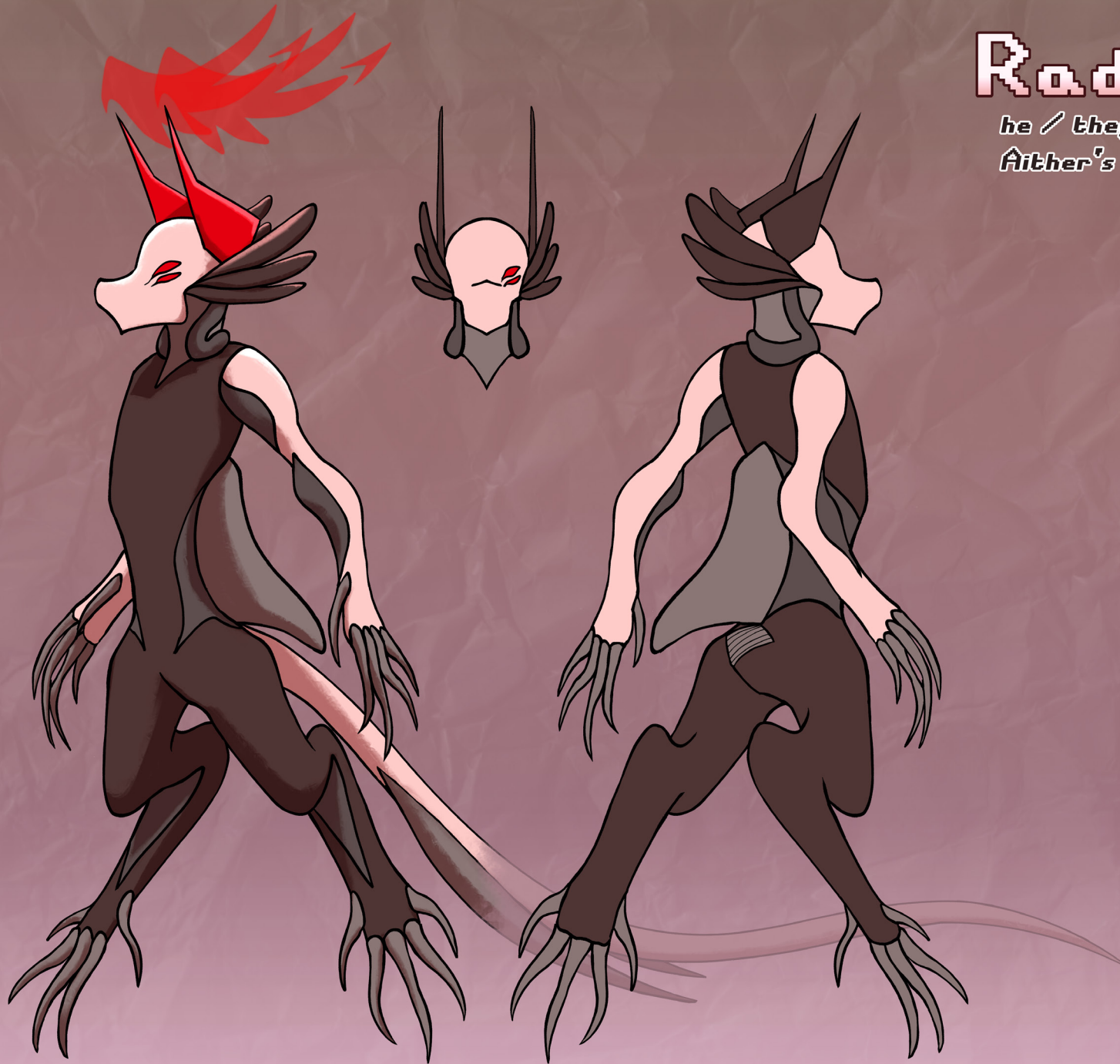
His model references Servals and Plumed Basilisks.



# Radar

he / they

Aither's Avatar



# MODEL SHEET :: MONITOR

The concerns of this avatar can come off as shy and anxious, but in reality, Monitor only wants the best for Lerato. They voice out their worries as a way to get Lerato to seriously focus in the TCO, but the leader seems to brush it off unknowingly. Their fighting skills waver depending on their confidence in winning the battle, which makes them somewhat of a glass cannon.

Monitor already holds back from speaking as much, overwhelming Lerato initially. They try to learn boundaries and figure out the best way to be both helpful and non-imposing at the same time, but is still unsure if what they are doing is the right amount. Other avatars have picked up on this demeanour and make occasional insults when Lerato is away.

Their model references Harpy Eagles and Flying Lizards.

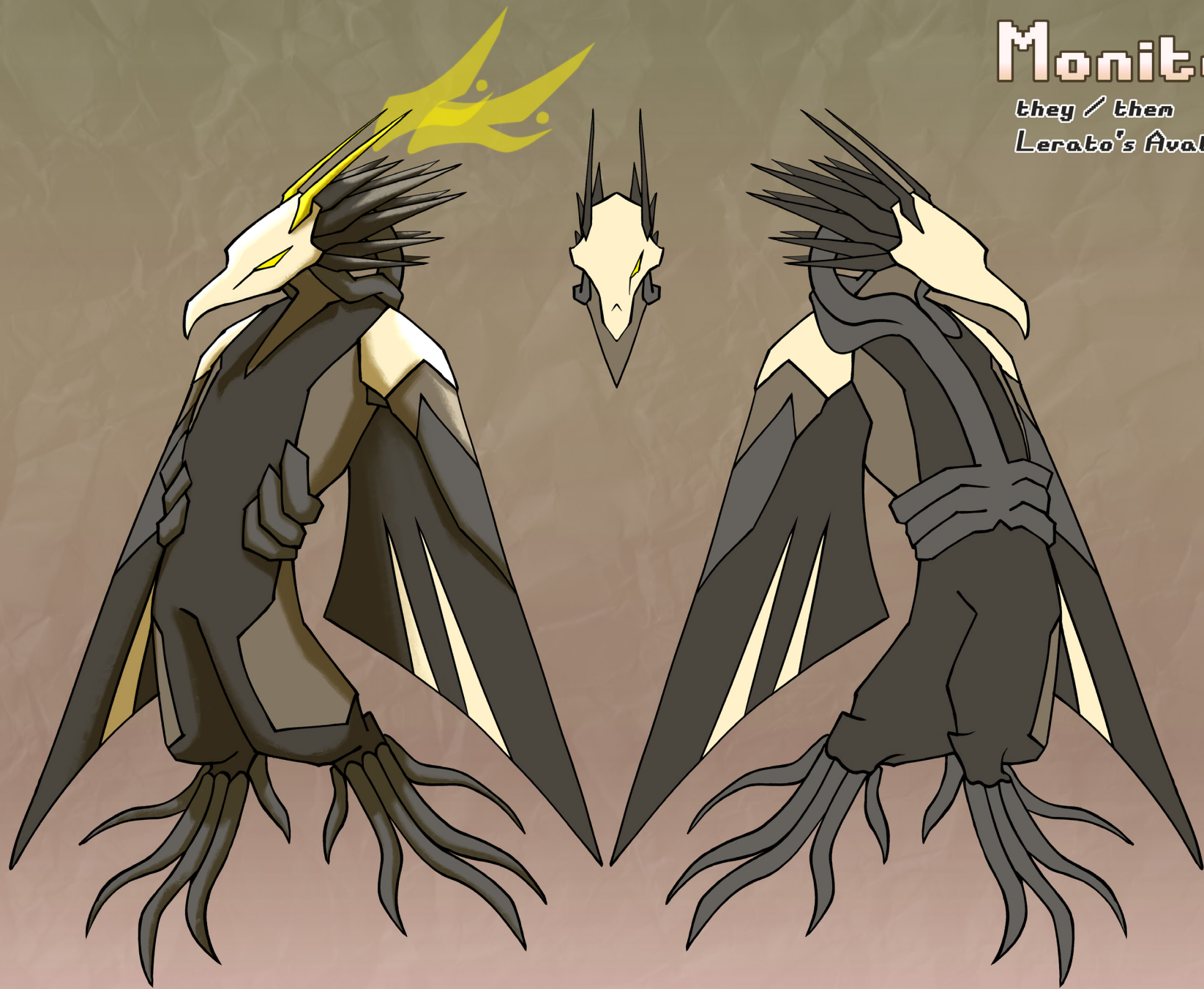




# Monitor

*they / then*

*Lerato's Avatar*



# SIDE CHARACTERS :: WORKPLACE

[Tom]

A member of the Okeanos Guild, Tom plays in a defensive manner, making sure that territory belonging to his guild remains unscathed. He is especially active during special events, as are many other players, as he gets to meet members new and old. He hosts events during these peak times as a way to retain member count.

He met Nexus through the TCO, and in a coincidence, realised that they were both in the same district and ended up working in the same office. His colleagues always tease them both to get married already, but Tom always retaliates by saying he needs to find the right time. He has a side project writing about a war between deities, taking reference from his fights on the TCO.

[Nexus]

A member of the Okeanos Guild, Nexus plays in an offensive manner, usually in the frontlines when an attack is called. They were previously only online spontaneously, but have become more active as they joined skirmishes with Tom.

They changed their guild allegiance shortly after meeting Tom, and the both of them have been inseparable since. With the encouragement of their coworkers, Nexus is finding the courage to propose, but still needs a little more time. They have a hobby of repairing devices and is the first person people go to when they have technical difficulties.

[Jane]

Taking a more underground approach to the game, Jane is a spy for the Branwen Guild. She typically camps out at the border of her guild and will occasionally sneak out to other guild locations to get intel. While somewhat seasoned, she has to deal with other members of the guild who also want to be spies, but never provide reliable information. She has made an effort to teach these players, but the results have been less than optimal.

Her and Aither are siblings, but due to familial conflict, they only began to speak to each other after several years when forced into the same office. They mutually agreed to keep things civil and spoke to each other as colleagues instead. Their opposing opinions only emerge when the TCO is mentioned, and even then only through subtle looks.

# Tom Kayode

he / they, 28

Okeanos (Orange Guild) Member



# Nexus Hoàng

they / en, 26

Okeanos (Orange Guild) Member



# Jane Tse

she / her, 29

Branwen (Blue Guild) Member



# SIDE CHARACTERS :: WORKPLACE

[Seb]

Slowly but surely becoming an active Gilgamesh member after two years of inactivity, Seb has chosen to play the game safe for the most part. Many parts of the game changed since they last played, and their strategies from before could be considered against the guidelines. The amount of players in recent months has compromised for this, as they can get away with a few disapproving moves.

He is friends with Amalia, the guild's leader, and has frequent airsoft matches with her. A lesser known fact is that they run a cat account with an absurd amount of followers. They don't bring this up to his co-workers as they will be begged at to bring in their cat, Luna, to work.

[Kaze]

Freshly out of university and having only landed an office job, Kaze doesn't take situations as seriously as others and will take any opportunity to have casual conversations with his co-workers. He is a part of the Phaedra guild, but puts his efforts into sharing information and daily updates on the status of TCO to both his guild and to other players, and as a result, other guilds avoid infiltrating Phaedra, that is, unless they choose to fight first.

He was part of a delinquent gang in his teenager years, resulting in a few injuries. Depending on the person that gets curious, he will exaggerate and tell different stories to tell in hopes to get a big reaction out of them. His colleagues have counted about 9 separate stories for how he is missing a chunk in his right ear.

[Agnes]

At the workplace, Agnes is probably never seen properly doing work, and instead taking naps whenever he can get away with it. During the evenings, however, he is an incredibly active Rostam member with a strategy to cause disruption rather than constantly fight. By temporarily claiming other guild territory, it forces some players to revert these actions, losing manpower in the process.

He used to go on hiking trails with an old friend, but over time the two had less free time to spend exploring paths. He uses his experience to write in-depth reviews, and also as a way to keep the memories alive. He does get embarrassed if colleagues happen to come across them.

# Seb Tapah

they / he, 26

*Gilgamesh (Green Guild) Member*



# Kaze Sy

he / they / xe, 23

*Phaedra (Purple Guild) Member*



# Agnes Maung

he / him, 21

*Rostan (Red Guild) Member*



# SIDE CHARACTERS :: OTHERS

## [Siren]

Very little is known about "The Siren" by users, and this secret is well kept between her and the developers of the TCO. This is for good reason, as her origins are from another dimension entirely. She discovered a bypass that allowed her to enter the game through a monitor display, and having found that the game was much more entertaining if she was in the simulation, she decided to stay.

In an attempt to appease this being, her request to remain in the TCO was granted, so long as she could be disguised as being a natural asset of the game, hence becoming a "Siren" to announce when a fight was to begin. She has an avatar much like the other leaders, named Titan. With the player count rising to numbers surpassing the Hydrean War, Titan assists by singling out particularly annoying players to teach them a lesson.

## [Amalia]

One of the lesser known guilds, Amalia is the leader of Gilgamesh. Her guild formed as a large group of friends looking to find a game to spend their months off post-graduation playing. This was after the events of the Hydrean Year, so their experience was not as hectic as other players. Her friends nominated her as leader partly due to a running joke, but she gradually warmed up to the role, investing into the game far more than the others.

As time passed, this friend group eventually lacked the time to constantly be active on the TCO. Gilgamesh eventually became an army of one, and Amalia has done everything to keep this a secret from other guilds. Outside of the game, she spends a lot of time in airsoft matches and skateboarding, and generally anything else to avoid doing proper work.

## [Soph]

Part of the Polymnia Guild, Soph takes a no-nonsense approach when it comes to peacekeeping, and could be considered a stricter 'enforcer' when compared to Veera. Fae had experience with the Hydrean Year, and refuses to let it repeat. Fae's friends at the time of the event have since gone missing, and Fae uses this guild as a means to investigate what could have happened, and if anyone still remembers their names.

Fae graduated from the same university as Kaze, and although they did not see each other much during their years there, Fae recognises his writing style and will occasionally check up on him, building a friendship through the TCO.

# "The Siren"

she / any, ??  
TCO Announcer



# Analia Mok

she / they, 25  
Gilgamesh (Green Guild) Leader



# Soph Azarov

fae / faer, 23  
Polynnia (Pink Guild) Member



# ILLUSTRATIVE PIECE :: RAE

[Extract found...]

Time was running out. In a matter of hours, maybe this hour alone, the life you desperately worked so hard on to keep would be no more.

*Veil* - I told you this was going to happen. What are you going to do now, genius?

*Rae* - I'm going to run.

*Veil* - Run! You're going to run away. What a great idea.

*Rae* - Transfer your data to this phone. We won't have access to a PC anymore.

*Veil* - What. What? You're joking.

*Veil* - You're actually joking, right?

*Rae* - I'm not. I'm leaving now. If you don't come with then you'll disappear.

*Veil* - You...

Veil stops its communications. Assuming that it had now moved to your phone, you waste no time.

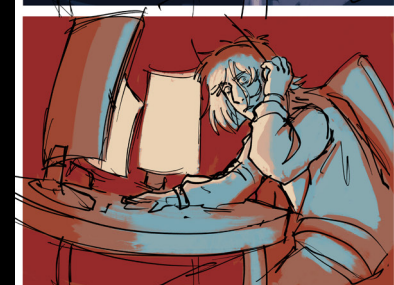
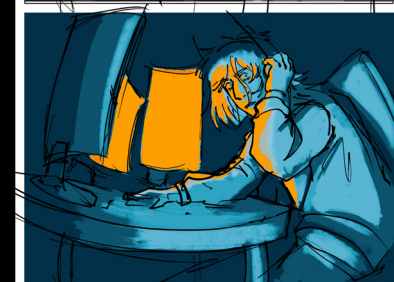
Loud slamming outside your room confirms just how serious this was. Like hell you were going to be revealed like this. The noise only gets louder. You turn your head to the source, people's voices seeping into your room.

You scoop whatever you could off your desk into your bag. The way you did this was almost in sync to the pounding on your door. You rip open the case of your PC, and along with it, the hard drive.

It wasn't your first time escaping like this, and you were able to climb down a memorised route.

The real timer begins now.

[End of text...]







# ILLUSTRATIVE PIECE :: AITHER

[Extract found...]

Although you were walking alone, you had an avatar that never left your side.

*Radar* - the goldfish markets...yawwwwnnnn

it texts you as you approach the store, and you could almost feel the disdain through this text message.

*Aither* - whats wrong now

*Radar* - these fish here. theyre in these tanks and all they can really do is. well. look outwards. theres so much going on out there. but in here? nothing. nada.

You stop in your tracks, peering past the glass that separated two completely different lives. You were close enough that a handful of them were interested in you, swimming close to catch a glance of their visitor.

*Aither* - im starting to think this isnt about the fish

*Radar* - of course it isnt about the fish stupid

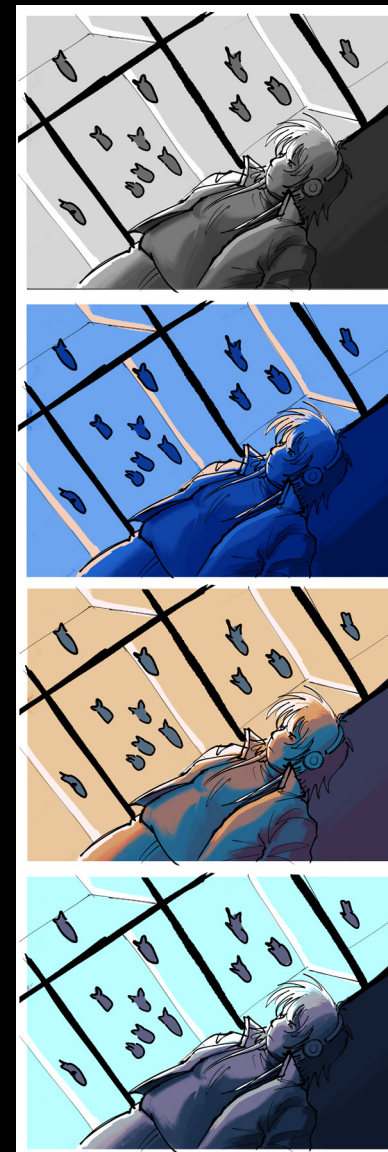
*Aither* - wow sorry for my analysis i guess ill shut up

*Radar* - i just want to see a bit more into your world. show me a beach! show me sand. nobody *builds* these kinds of things in the TCO

*Aither* - you couldve said that from the get go

You could never get a grasp on how Radar felt.

[End of text...]





# ILLUSTRATIVE PIECE :: LERATO

[Extract found...]

You were once again on a journey away far from home. As far as possible, even. You've had this same exact thought and went on this same exact route. Only this time, you were going to steer clear of the PC Café where you first met the leader of Rostam. You regret being so naïve back then, and the fact that it could have been avoided if you took Monitor seriously.

*Lerato* - I wish I couldve apologised

*Monitor* - To who

*Lerato* - To your predecessor

*Lerato* - I didnt even get to say goodbye, they were so fed up with me

*Lerato* - The more time passes the more things I want to tell them

*Lerato* - And I will never get that chance again

Silence followed. You start to realise that this wasn't something for this version of Monitor to endure. You were about to apologise and ask them to forget what you were talking about, but you receive a reply.

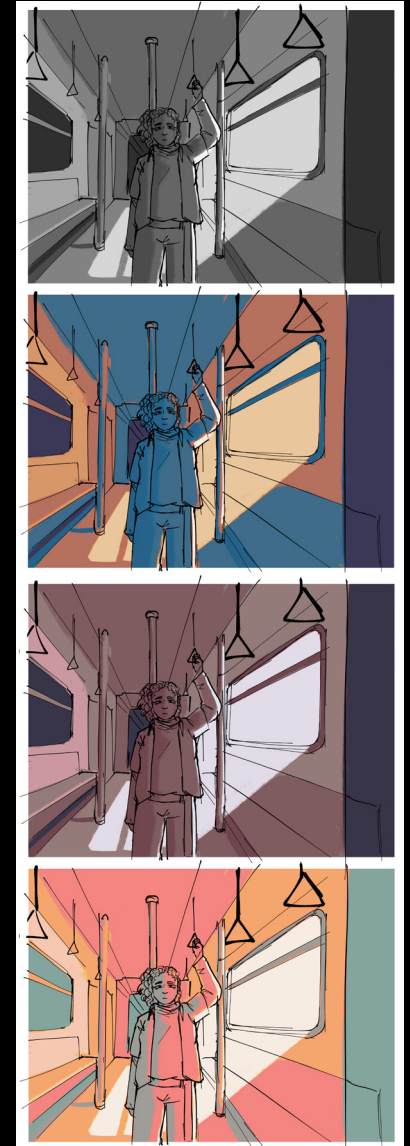
*Monitor* - You can tell me instead

*Lerato* - Are you sure?

*Monitor* - Of course

The golden rays of the sister suns find their way into this carriage. Even with their reassurance, you've never felt so unsure.

[End of text...]





# ILLUSTRATIVE PIECE :: VEERA

[Extract found...]

*Veera* - Come forth, then. Tell me everything.

You say this with an unwavering voice, demanding this person to admit who they are, their reasoning behind everything this game had to offer. This person stays silent, shrinking away into the darkness of the flickering fluorescent lights.

?? - i cant...

*Veera* - Then why come here? Does it look like I have any ties to the developers?

As you say this, you raise your cane at the so-called stranger. You hear them shuffle, another step taken away. You wanted to have the patience to understand them, but you just couldn't tolerate this attitude.

?? - i cant just tell you *everything* so easily.

?? - but--but one thing is for sure. you know one of the devs. you talk to them every day, even. you're tied to this deeper than you think.

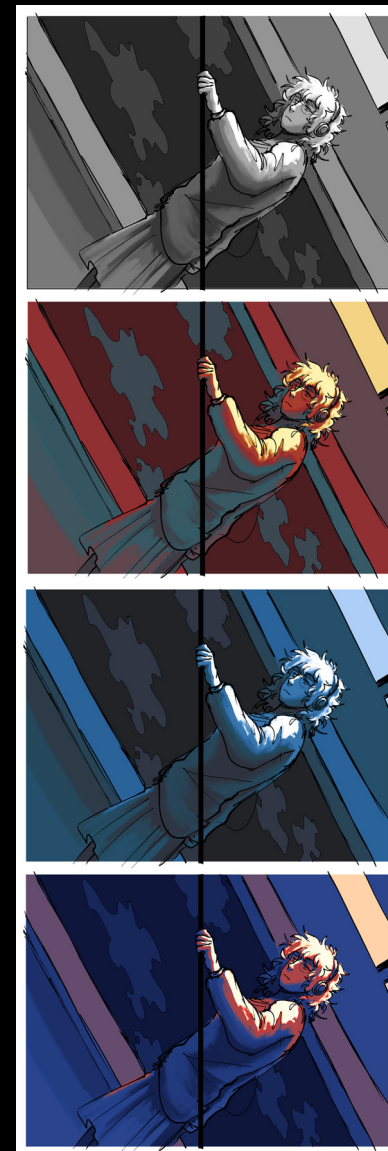
The grip you had on your cane starts to falter. Just what exactly did they mean by that?

*Veera* - ...So you've come to tell me off for that? Please, this could've been a warning in-game.

?? - no, it can't. this could threaten your life if you aren't careful enough.

Only then did the stranger take a step forward.

[End of text...]





# ESCAPISM CHAPTER PANELS

These panels are my personal favourites selected from chapters 1-6, and were created during the months of September 2023 - March 2024. The artstyle seen in these panels also show the development and confidence I gained with each new chapter. I still strive to make each chapter look better than the last, and taking this personal project and turning it into my Final Major Project has helped me massively in developing my style.

The avatar models seen here are of designs created prior to the FMP, and therefore look largely different.





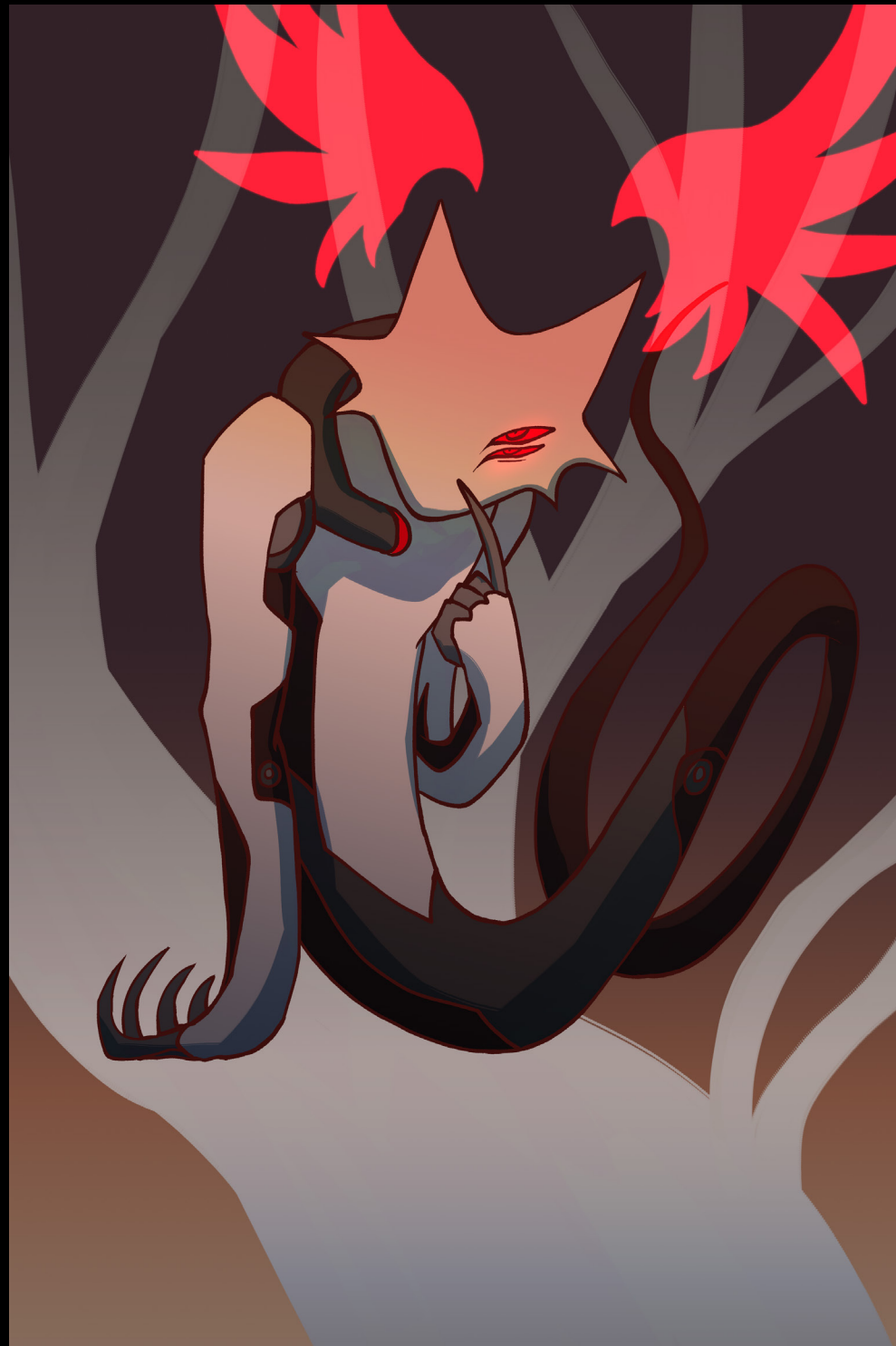




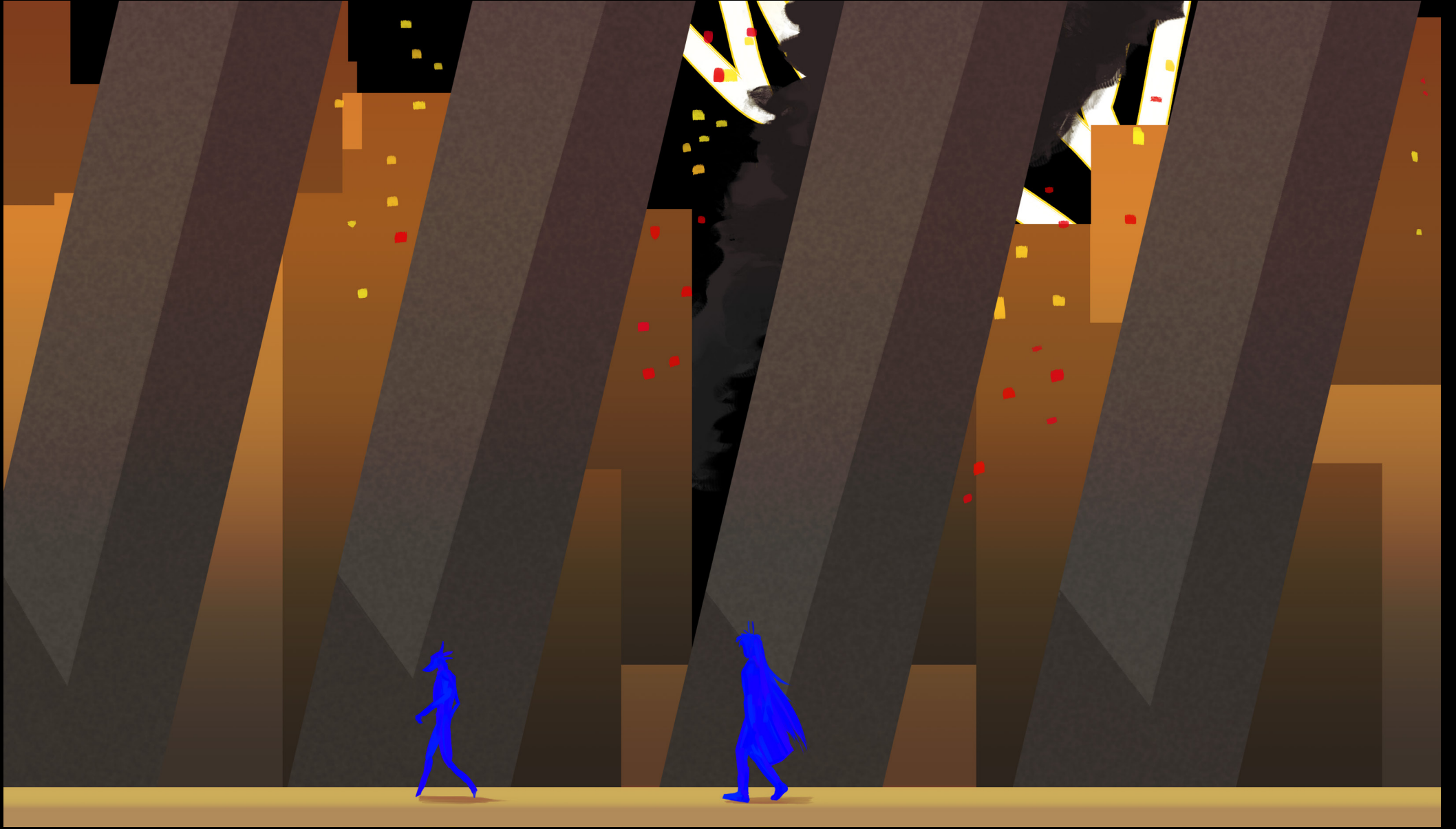


























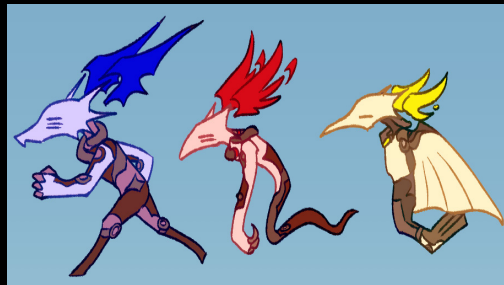


# CREDITS

Fonts used: *Higher Pixels, Ledlight, PetscopWide, UCR OSD Mono*

I would like to thank my tutors and friends for giving me advice and the motivation to work on this project despite my complaints along the way.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to my partner, Puppy, for always being there for me as well as lending me ideas that helped make this project even better. Thank you <3









2023 - 24  
Rasmus Ross