CREATING ELKWOOD

BUILDING AN ALTERNATE HISTORY

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Degree of Master of Art & Design

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ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement is made in the acknowledgements.

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ABSTRACT

THIS practice-led research project is concerned with 'world creation'. I use the term to describe the construction of a fictional universe that is internally coherent. The project is specifically interested in the role of narrative in world creation, and how an immersive story world might be constructed through the combination of illustration and writing.

The project creates a world that references the technological innovations and scientific beliefs of the mid-1800s. However, these are pursued through an imagined time trajectory into the 1930s. Here we encounter an isolated, innovative and intellectually sophisticated community whose ethical and technological codes have been shaped by the earlier period. Advancing beyond the scientific knowledge of the 1800s, the world has continued to pursue the utopian, science-led visions indicative of the period.

Special attention is paid to characterisation, costume, social technologies, environments and ethical frameworks. The project produces a series of illustrations (masquerading as photographic prints) and sketches from an ethnographic field study. An edited selection of these images is presented in a fictional National Geographic article from 1932. Illustrative field documents refused for inclusion in this publication are exhibited in an installed environment that details the discovery of *Elkwood*: the aberrant, isolated community that forms the imaginary site of the inquiry.

INTRODUCTION

T HE poet Patrick Overton said, "When you walk to the edge of all the light you have and take that first step into the darkness of the unknown, you must believe that one of two things will happen. There will be something solid for you to stand upon or you will be taught to fly" (1975, p. 96).

World Creation as a thesis topic may be likened to this. There is little critical literature in the field and much of what exists occurs outside of the academy. What is useful, however, is material considered from adjacent realms: narratology, illustrators' and writers' commentaries, and a growing corpus of image-based work that has moved world creation beyond the concerns of written, fictive environments.

This exegesis seeks to tell the truth about a lie. It discusses a fictional world and the ideas and research design that brought it into being. It has not had the luxury of pre-existing thesis journeys into the area to map its pathway forward. But this is not a bad thing. Journeying beyond Overton's "edge of all light" forces you to think deeply about the nature of what you are doing. One cannot simply resynthesise; you have to think.

Elkwood, Bastion of Innovation by Henry E. Caine is an immersive short fiction that employs illustrative and written texts in the creation of a story world. It explores the potential of illustration and writing to establish a cohesive, robust, and fertile 'secondary world'.

This exegesis explains and provides context for the research undertaken in realising the project. While *Elkwood* may be seen as the site of the creative research, this report positions the creative output within a theoretical and methodological framework. It is divided into four chapters. The first chapter discusses the positioning of the researcher by outlining prior practice and explaining the purpose of the thesis.

The second chapter establishes the critical ideas explored in the project. This chapter is divided into three sections. It begins by offering a consideration of world creation as a phenomenon. It then discusses issues affecting relationships between space and story. It concludes with a discussion of immersion and belief in fictive world creation. Each section in this chapter opens with an overview of contextually significant discourse, before examining the key ideas relating to the research.

The third chapter explains the project's unique research design. It offers a consideration of reflective practice as a methodological approach. It then discusses specific methods and experiments undertaken in the research process.

Fig. 1:1. *Silas and Mithras* (October, 2012). Digital Illustration, Jeremy Hanna.

POSITIONING OF THE RESEARCHER

PRIOR PRACTICE

MY childhood and teenage passions were dominated by illustration, movies, and video games. My interest in these subjects has remained remarkably unchanged throughout my academic history and continues, guiding the dawn of my professional career. However, the essence of my interest has shifted dramatically, my avid consumption of film and games has transformed into a desire to create the worlds that bring them to life.

I remember drawing vast jungle environments on large pieces of paper, upon which my brothers and I would launch epic battles. Frantically scribbling warriors equipped with strange equipment, we would immerse ourselves in our own game-world, creating elaborate stories and action scenes in a bid to trounce each other. Only now do I understand this as world creation.

In 2012 I co-authored a fantasy novella called *Haven*, which employed illustrative and written texts in the creation of an archetypical narrative (Figs. 1:1 and 1:2). As part of my Graphic Design Honours dissertation, the project investigated the potentials of illustration in creating a world that reached beyond the potentials of writing in the construction of mood, character, and narrative. While predominantly involving illustrative design, *Haven* also highlighted for me the usefulness of narrative theory and story design.

CURRENT CONTEXT

More recently I have become interested in the professional expansion of world creation in the film and video game industries. While world creation has a long history in literature (specifically associated with the fantasy and science fiction genres), it has become increasingly associated with film and game design. New technologies in these areas have provided opportunities for deeper levels of audience immersion and interactivity.

The implementation of the immersive high frame rate 3D technology in film (*The Hobbit: HFR*, 2012), for example, alongside the shift towards non-linear, expansive open world experiences in the video game industry, has introduced opportunities for growth in the complexity and expansiveness of the created worlds within which they function. Effective utilisation of these opportunities demands the creation of coherent and robust story worlds.

Fig. 1:2. *Haven* (September, 2012). Digital Illustration, Jeremy Hanna.

This was a book illustration project that sought to create a fantastical world called Haven. Haven was home to a dysfunctional royal family who, caught in a harrowing chronicle of deceit and desperation, re-lived the archetypical storyline of Shakespeare's Hamlet (2012). Haven was a walled city, frozen in an endless winter. In the rock and ice it lay, decaying both physically and morally. The work was selected as a finalist in the 2013 New Zealand BEST design awards.

PURPOSE OF THE THESIS

This project may be seen as the creative extension of the above influences. It constructs a richly conceived alternative portfolio that might support my entry into the film and game industry. It is designed to showcase my ability to create a credible, coherent, and highly original story world. The project has not sought to imitate current practice based on the conventions of science fiction and fantasy. Instead it has investigated the possibilities in ethnographic writing, geographic location and suspended histories. Richly and intricately conceived, the world of Elkwood is created as a fusion of the written and the illustrated, the historical, the physical, the ethical, and the imagined.

This thesis represents a creative consideration of world creation, as not just as a valuable supplement to storytelling, but also as an inseparable component of narrative.

CRITICAL IDEAS: WORLD CREATION

THROUGHOUT history, philosophers, literary theorists, and writers have examined connections between narratives and the worlds they occupy. In the twentieth century, the concept of world creation became closely associated with fantasy and science fiction. A number of significant writers broached the subject, including John M. Harrison (2007), Philip K. Dick (1985), C.S. Lewis (1975), and perhaps most notably J. R. R. Tolkien, in his essay *On Fairy-Stories* (1964). Tolkien not only discussed the fairy-story as a literary form, but also examined the concept of world creation in narrative, which he described as "sub-creation" (Fantasy, 1964, para. 2). Tolkien's friend and contemporary, C. S. Lewis, presented a significantly different approach to fantasy writing in his collection of essays *Of Other Worlds* (1975). In these texts he argued the validity of the author communicating a deep sense of themselves and the world around them. This was a sentiment Tolkien did not share.

In recent years, the idea of world creation has become increasingly associated with comics, film, and games. Dylan Horrocks (2004) usefully discusses the nature of "world-building" as a narrative art form. He examines its application in comics and role-playing games, while also investigating the visual contribution of illustration to world creation. To explore this concept further, we may also consider industry-focused texts by prominent practitioners within the film and video game industries. By considering design processes and approaches employed by filmmakers like Peter Jackson, Neill Blomkamp, George Lucas and James Cameron through 'making of' books that often accompany their films, we are able to gain insights into technical issues impacting on the designs. We also gain a greater understanding of conceptual and methodological processes underpinning the work. For example, *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey Chronicles - Art & Design* (Falconer, 2012) documents the work of Weta Workshop designers, discussing the process of collaboration with Jackson, the director. More significantly, however, it discusses how design and illustration are used to tell a story.[1]

In my previous work I have been primarily concerned with the illustrative component of world creation and its application to visual storytelling, hence I have used the term 'world creation' to describe the process of designing an

> imaginary environment that is internally coherent… [here] one does not create singular, idiosyncratic illustrations for the world of one's story but instead designs (in considered detail), a complex and cohesive environment (or visual diegesis) in which all elements co-exist logically. This world forms a cohesive, logical substrate from which all illustrative considerations are drawn. (Hanna, 2012, p. 2)

However, this thesis approaches world creation in a more holistic manner, using the term to describe the construction and communication of a fictional universe.[2] This statement assumes that we tell stories in more than the written word, thus image, space, time, dimension, ellipsis, layout and typography, might also be considered as 'telling' devices. Thus I suggest one might not simply illustrate a written world, but create it using a variety of modes of thinking and address.

NARRATION, WORLD AND DIEGESIS

Plato's (1892) explanation of diegetic narrative suggests that storytelling reports actions through the voice of a narrator, rather than showing the story through enacted, imitative action (as in mimesis). In turn, diegetic narrative features the presentation of an interior world, as experienced and retold by the characters or narrator. While *Elkwood* may be seen to align with Aristotle's theory of mimesis (in that it references and reflects on real histories, characters, technologies and geographies),[3] the story is retold through the voice of a narrator. This technique resembles a diegetic approach. When we compare these theories; narrative as *imitating* or *mimicking* action, in contrast with narrative as *retelling* or *reporting* action; we might suggest that diegetic narrative implies a higher level of realism through its delivery, and therefore affords the reader greater levels of believability.

In contemporary narratology, the term diegesis denotes "the (fictional) world in which the situations and events narrated occur" (Prince, 2003, p. 1964). Tolkien (1964) explained that a believable diegesis, or "secondary world" (Fantasy, 1964, para. 5), is reliant upon the successful expression of story (ibid. para. 2). He argued that it is the story that has the ability to provide the world with "the inner consistency of reality" (ibid.).

THE VALIDITY OF THE SECONDARY WORLD

To Tolkien, this act of sub-creation formed a fictional world for the reader's mind to enter, within which all actions, characters, and lands existed cohesively in accordance with the laws of the world. This continuity elicited what he called a "secondary belief" within the reader (Fantasy, 1964, para. 5). A well-crafted secondary world, he noted, was rare and difficult to achieve in narrative art. However, he saw successful instances as "story-making in its primary and most potent mode" (ibid.).

Tolkien's assertion may be contrasted with the thinking of the science fiction writer Harrison (2007), who describes

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1   Similarly unpacking the designer's role in world creation are books like *The Art of Star Wars: Episode II Attack of the Clones* (Vaz, 2002), *The Art of District 9: Weta Workshop* (Falconer, 2010), *White Cloud Worlds* (Tobin, 2010), and *Hollywood Costume* (Landis, 2012b).

2   By using this term 'universe' I refer to more than an explicit spatial construction. The word also implies characters, elements and relationships that serve to heighten narrative potential in the work.

3   Aristotle and Plato in their respective texts, *Poetics* (1932) and Book III of *The Republic* (1892) contrasted the theory of 'mimesis', narrative as imitation of the real world, with that of 'diegesis', narrative as a retelling of events by a narrator.
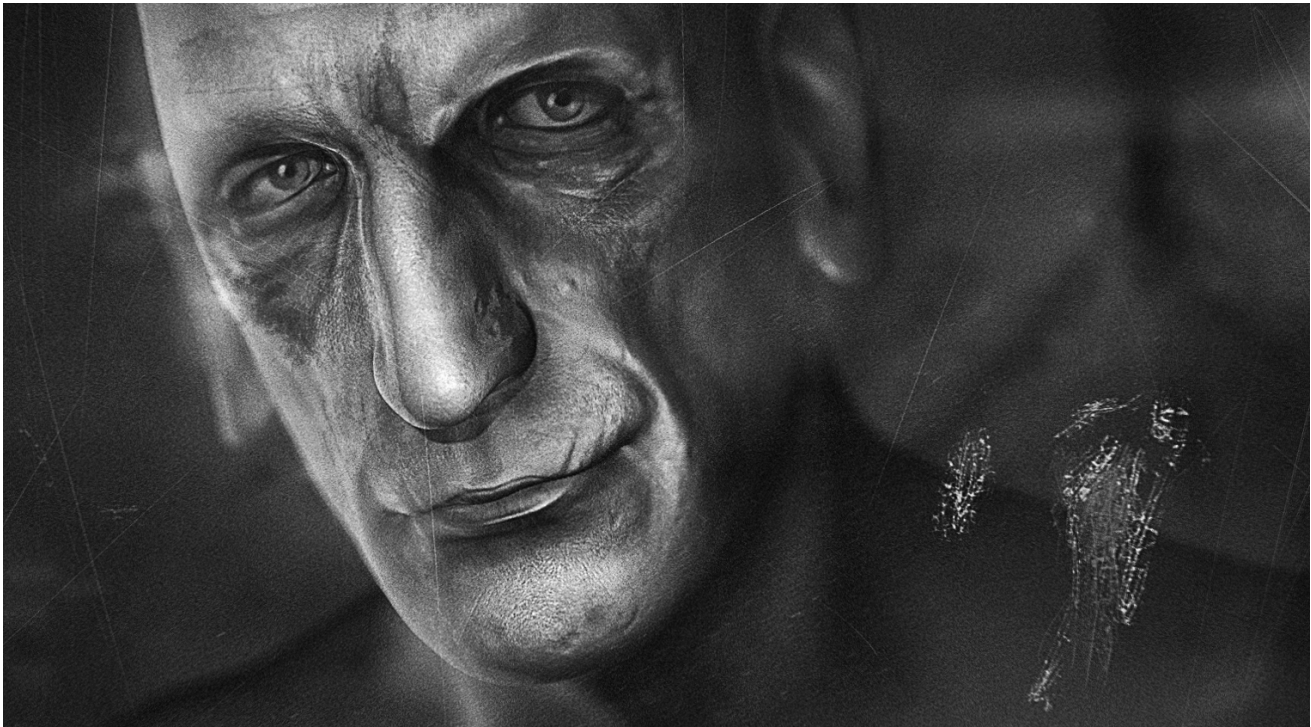
Fig. 2:1. *Character Development for Elkwood Elder*, (July, 2013). Digital Illustration, Jeremy Hanna.

The 'photographs' the fictional narrator uses to communicate his experience may also be understood as a kind of diegetic narrative. They retell the narrator's encounters within *Elkwood*. The characters and locations of the world are documented through the lens of his camera. In viewing the work above we experience the confronting gaze of the character, just as the narrator did when he (fictionally) took the photograph. In *Elkwood*, we never see the narrator depicted; instead, he is the vehicle through which we experience the story world.

sub-creation (termed "worldbuilding") as dull. He argues that it "literalises the urge to invent" (para. 2). He suggests that, "above all, worldbuilding is not technically necessary. It is the great clomping foot of nerdism. It is the attempt to exhaustively survey a place that isn't there. A good writer would never try to do that" (para. 3). Harrison argues that every moment of a story must "represent the triumph of writing over worldbuilding" (ibid. para. 1).

This thesis contests his assertion. In creating *Elkwood*, I use written narrative to reveal the chronology of the world. However I use illustration to immerse the reader within it. Although we journey into *Elkwood* via an anachronistic National Geographic article, the viscerality, tone, and moral nuances of the world are more richly described in pictures. Thus in my work, written narrative and illustration may be seen as co-creating agents in the construction of an environment that closely corresponds with Tolkien's concept of a secondary world.

THE IMMERSED AUTHOR

Comics theorist Scott McCloud (1993) suggests that art is a medium of one-way communication, through which the artist conveys a specific message to the audience (p. 195). Rejecting this view, James Kochalka (1999) argues that art represents the creation of an environment within which the artist can "boil in the intensity of [his or her] experiences, condensing and clarifying them" (p. 22). He suggests,

"When we encounter a great work of art the physical world fades away as we step into this new reality. We are alive in a living world" (p. 12). Horrocks (2004) explains that this idea "allows us to see viewers, readers and users of art as active, interactive participants, rather than passive recipients of the artist's message" (Art, 2004, para. 7). Examining Kochalka's approach to story making, Horrocks suggests,

> his role as the author has nothing to do with plot; all he is doing is creating an environment and a situation, into which he places characters like a scientist putting rats into a maze. His primary task isn't building a story; it's building a world. (The Comic as a Framework, 2004, para. 10)

Elkwood was produced from a similar perspective. I developed it through a process of immersion. It began with the creation of an internally consistent environment, founded upon strong technological, geographical and historical contexts. The created world then directed the process of story making, which I approached emergently; lead by characters, environments, and their potentials rather than by a linear plot.

This model, of story development that draws its origins from a created world, is not bound to written narrative; its progress towards realisation is visually led. The process may be compared to Cameron's (2013) discussion of Weta Workshop's designers and their creation of Pandora, the fictional world developed for his 2009 film, *Avatar*. He said,

They do not just design a weapon or a costume, they create the whole culture which stands behind it. Their approach to fantasy is holistic and immersive. They believe that only by understanding the world, the cultures in it, and the characters within the context of those cultures, can you begin to design the individual pieces which will go before the camera. (para. 1)

John Howe, a Concept Art Director for *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* (Jackson, 2012), suggests that with such a contextually robust approach to design, the resultant narrative imagery "contains not only what is explicit, but also what is implicit, in equal measure. It contains the promise of what happened before and the premise of what will come" (Howe, 2010, p. 128).

Accordingly, I argue that when underpinned by a rigorously constructed world, images may lead an author toward narrative. Moreover, pictures can provide an audience with a wealth of opportunities for creatively engaging with both the explicit content of a story *and* the non-narrated potentials of world in which the story unfurls.

CONCLUSION

World creation is not the design of a backdrop. Nor is it a context for a singular narrative. I suggest that it can also be used as an immersive approach to story development. In *Elkwood* the story unfolds as diegesis, narrated through the voice of a fictional author whom is an ethnographer writing for The National Geographic Society. Each of the characters and incidents within the story, as well as the narrator, are derived from the gradual creation of this world. They are products of its search to find form and meaning. In other words, the author's story of *Elkwood* did not precede the illustration of the world; it surfaced *from* its incremental creation.

Fig. 2:2. *Early Sketch for Perimeter Ranger* (July, 2013).
Digital Illustration, Jeremy Hanna.

When designing characters to populate the environment, I considered them in terms of their unique contributions to the world. However, I also thought about how the pre-established laws of internal consistency might shape their fictional presence. This character's garb emerged partly from his unique fictional occupation as a guardian against infection; the filtration device in his mask evidences the settlement's susceptibility to disease. Equally however, the attire is also cognisant of materials and clothing styles that would have been known to the community at the time of their isolation in 1882.

Fig. 2:3. *A Family of Butchers* (April, 2013).
Digital Illustration, Jeremy Hanna.

My non-didactic approach to illustrating Elkwood served two purposes. First, lack of detail while sketching gave me room to think. Possibilities dwelt in vast areas of missing information and encouraged both narrative and character to surface, not only while creating the drawings but also when viewing them days later.

The fertility of this approach made me realise its potential in terms of final depictions of the world. If missing details caused me to create, perhaps they could be used the same way for readers. Thus, I began working with approaches that enticed reader to think more deeply 'into' the world. I eventually included elements in the illustrations that were not explained by the written story. In the above sketch, the figure in the background is obviously involved in some purposeful action, yet we do not know what it is. Unexplained details such as this represent the potential for a more open reading of the narrative.

CRITICAL IDEAS: WORLD AND STORY

THIS chapter focuses on relationships between space and story. Ryan, Azaryahu, and Foote (in press) note that considerations of space have often been ignored in narrative theory because it traditionally concentrates on narrative as temporal. However, they suggest that rather than simply a backdrop for plot, geography plays a critical role in many types of storytelling.

Horrocks (2004) and Tolkien (1964) both discuss the concept of the geographical narrative. Horrocks asks,

> What happens when we focus on geographical narrative – the construction of a place – rather than temporal narrative – the construction of a series of events? When we replace plot with landscape as the central organising element? And when, instead of going on a journey through time, we set out to create and explore a space? (Geographies, para. 1)

He contemplates narrative as a space in which to play. In so doing he draws strong references to role-playing games. Tolkien approached the idea more obliquely in his 1964 essay *On Fairy-Stories*. He viewed temporal narrative as secondary to the creation of an immersive environment. To Tolkien, a well-crafted secondary world was not bound to the chronology of the text. He went as far as to suggest that, "There is no true end to a fairy-tale" (Recovery, Escape, Consolation, 1964, para. 18). By this, he proposed that the world of a story might exist beyond a specific narrative's end. So, for example, we might understand Middle Earth as a realm wherein other narratives and events can occur.[1]

NARRATIVE AND FICTIONAL SPACE

Ryan, Azaryahu, and Foote (in press) define four levels or scales of space represented by narrative. These move from the micro to the macro. They are the spatial frames[2], setting[3], narrative world[4], and narrative universe[5]. They also discuss how narrative can "organise symbolically the topography of the storyworld" (p. 7). That is, they discuss an allegorical function to a fictional location such that its narrative contribution is elevated beyond the role of a passive backdrop (Figure X;1).

Herman (2004) investigates the means by which narrative communicates a fictional space. He notes a distinction between topological and projective locations[6], and explores the interplay of these two modes of spatial representation within narrative discourse. This prefigures his discussion of the ways narrative can be used to help readers 'map' a story world in their own mind. Referencing the work of Zubin and Hewitt, (1995) he notes,

> Storytelling involves a shift of deictic centres, whereby narrators prompt their interlocutors to relocate from the *here* and *now* of the act of narration to other space-time coordinated – namely, those defining the perspective from which the events of the story are recounted. (Herman, 2004, p. 271)

Elkwood moves us from the here and now to what appears to be an authentic past. Within this we encounter characters who, through action, become more than portraits (Altman 2008). Although a number of theorists including Aristotle argue that character is largely unnecessary to narrative, Altman believes that in fiction, characters carry a function beyond representing action. He says, they "are in fact neither engendered solely by their actions nor fully defined by them" (p. 12). Like story worlds, he suggests characters "are also repositories of potential actions, existing independently of any specific completed action" (ibid.). Thus the characters and space described in the National Geographic article and accompanying exhibition are more than backdrops and embellishments on a narrative. They are designed so we think about the stories of *Elkwood* that are not included in what we see. We wonder about backstories, lives lived, and untold details. The World of *Elkwood* is as much a construction of what is left out as it is of what is revealed. We encounter what appears to be a solo mother who is a brutal butcher, but we don't know why. We see ruined railways but have no access to a backstory; we encounter environments bathed as much in detail as they are in shadow. The world of *Elkwood* is a space, a geography that while coherent, it is simultaneously enigmatic. Other stories could have happened here. This world, its characters and environments, exist both within, and beyond the confines of the presented narrative.

This is important because through the broader narrative that operates outside of the National Geographic article[7] we know that more stories existed. The exhibition is a protest by the fictional author about censorship. However paradoxically, we sense that his protestations only scratch the surface of what may have happened in his experience of *Elkwood*.

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1   Examples of these expansions include role playing games, conferences (http://www.3rdcome.org/), glossopoeia (the study of Tolkein's fictional languages), fellowship events, virtual communities, and musical responses to Middle Earth's cultures and storied events.

2   The 'spatial frames' are "the individual scenes of action" (Ryan, et al., p. 7).

3   The 'setting' is "the general socio-historico-geographic environment in which the action takes place" (ibid.).

4   The 'narrative (or story) world' is "the construction by the reader of a global, relatively homogeneous world serving as container for the characters and events" (ibid.).

5   The 'narrative universe' is "an even wider construct comprising not only the world presented as actual by the text but all the counterfactual and imaginary worlds contemplated by the characters" (ibid.).

6   Frawley (1992) defines topology as "the study of the geometric properties of objects that are invariant under change of the object" (p. 254). Projective locations he says, "vary in value and interpretation depending on how they are viewed" (p. 262). According to Herman (2004), projective locations therefore rely upon "an orientative framework projected by the viewer" (p. 280).

7   The exhibition of additional ethnographic visual data, written notes and rational for the display.

Fig. 3:1. *Draft illustration of Elkwood and Environment* (June, 2013). Digital Illustration, Jeremy Hanna.

Through illustration, we can explore ways to creatively structure the fictional world in a manner that allows the locations to contribute symbolic meaning to the narrative. The architecture here includes a towering graven image set into an aggressively pitched roof. This distorted facade masks mechanical structures that form the corpus of the building. This design might suggest a community based upon a dogmatic belief in science and technology. It might suggest a world of contradiction. Importantly, the environment offers us an opportunity to consider potential physical, psychological, social and cultural values implicit in the world (Ryan, et al., in press, p. 7).

We want to see more because the created world suggests more. We want another expedition, more information, deeper understanding; but all of this is denied. The closing lines of his journal article suggest the fatal annulment of any real closure. The author's story (despite his protestations) is designed as a feeble accounting of a world infinitely richer than his documentation. By encountering the broader narrative of Elkwood within an installed environment, we experience a hidden deictic shift. This immerses us within the fictional author's world, without explaining that the narrative is imagined. As such, the request for our compliant suspension of disbelief is also hidden.

THE NARRATIVE IMPLICATIONS OF SPACE

Ryan, Azaryahu, and Foote (in press, p. 7) suggest events within a narrative,

> are changes of state that affect individual existents. Insofar as these existents inhabit bodies, they both occupy space and are situated in space. All narratives therefore imply a

world with spatial extension, even when spatial information is withheld.

The reader, they suggest, in part generates the narrative implications of space. While the text may give details of the "spatial frames," or "setting," they argue that the "storyworld" is constructed by the reader, and represents "a global, relatively homogeneous world serving as container for the characters and events" (p. 7).

Herman (2004) discusses the means by which we communicate a location through narrative. He suggests that in order to understand this idea, we must first recognise the distinction between topological and projective locations (p. 280).[8]

The use of topological location descriptions might be seen

8   In narrative, a topological description of an object's location remains the same regardless of the viewer's position (for example 'the city is *north* of the mountain'), while a projective description changes based on the viewer's position (for example 'the mountain *was to our right, separating us from* the city').
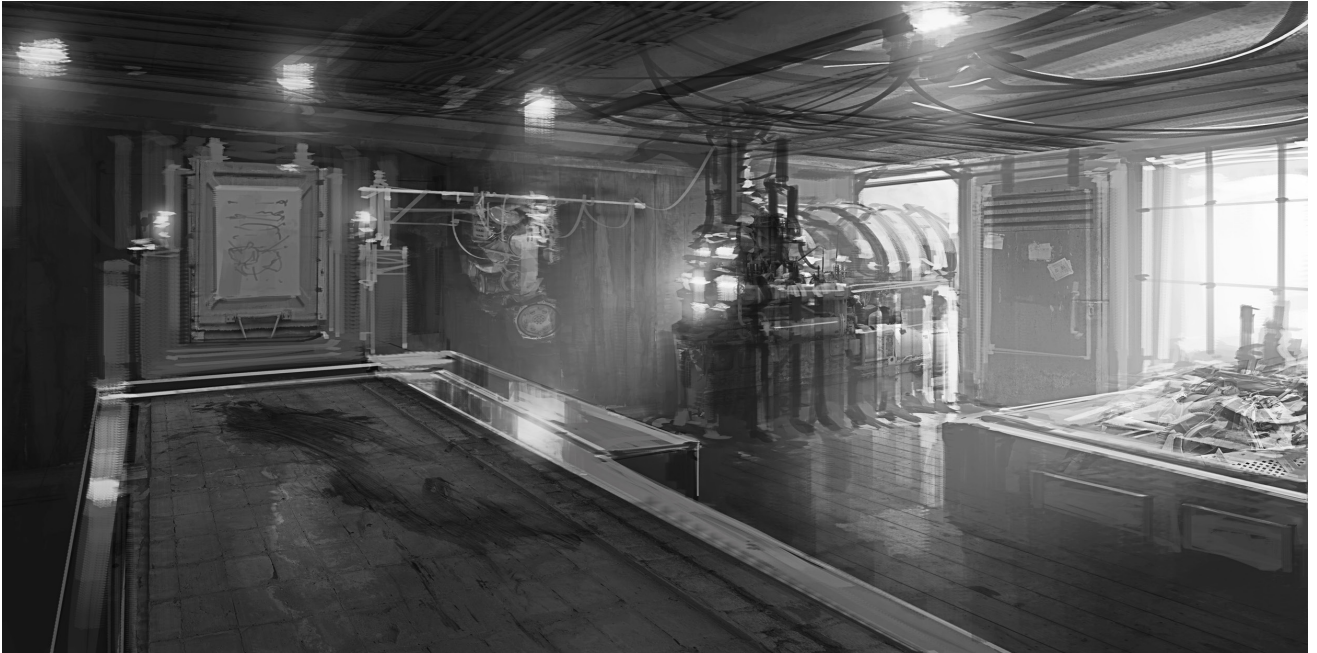
Fig. 3:2. *Butchery Interior* (April, 2013). Digital Illustration, Jeremy Hanna.

We can view *Elkwood* as more than just a series of static snapshots of spaces created as backdrops for narrative action. I design Images like this to illustrate anticipation, presence and possibility. They offer a glimpse into an endless world that is rich with potential for alternate action. This idea echoes Tolkien's (1964) never-ending fairy-tale (Recovery, Escape, Consolation, para. 18), as well as Kochalka's (1999) metaphor of the reader experience as being "alive in a living world" (p. 12).

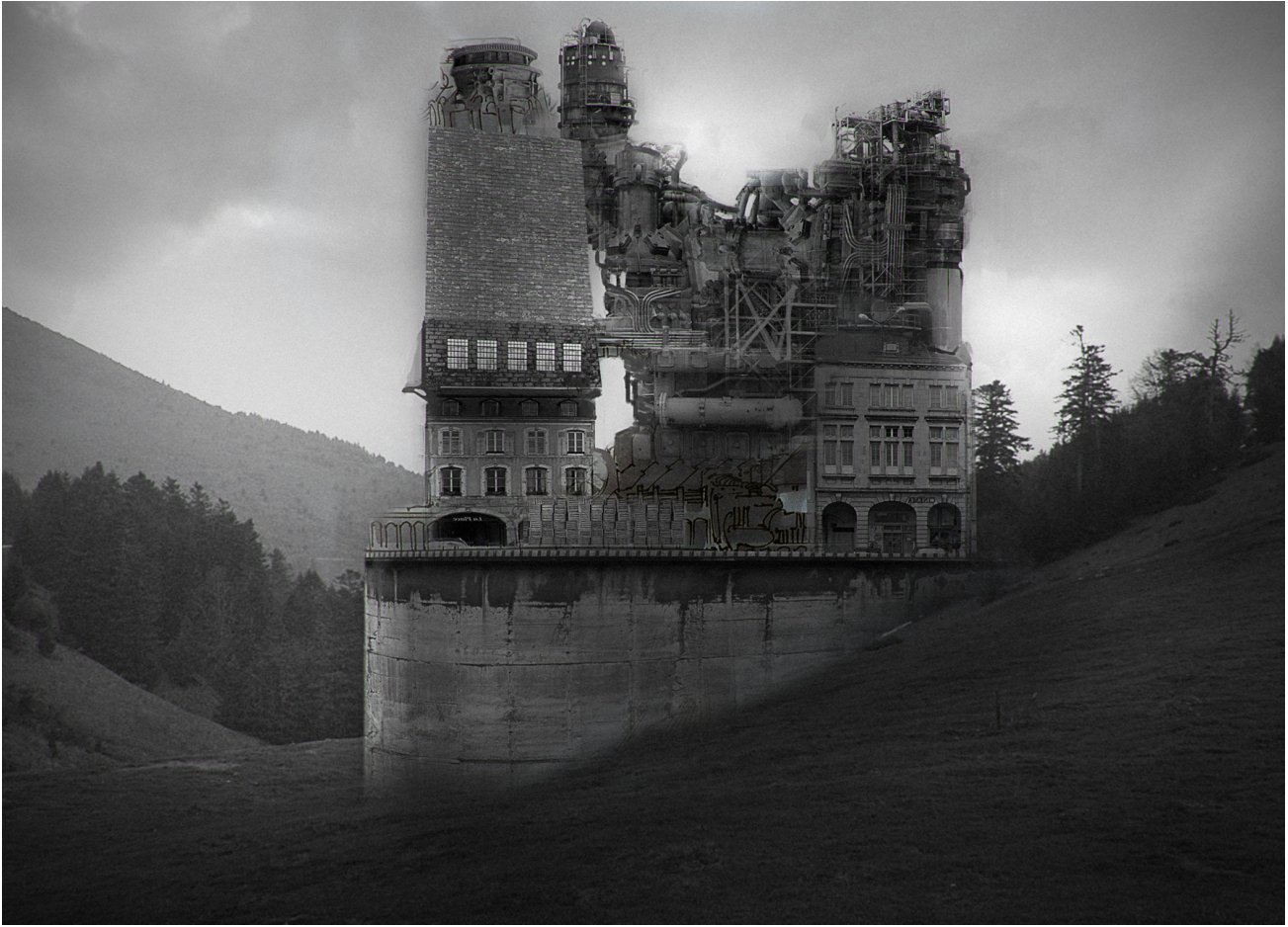Fig. 3:3. *Butchery Interior Upstairs* (April, 2013). Digital Illustration, Jeremy Hanna.

Fig. 3:4. *Draft Illustration of Elkwood Building* (April, 2013). Digital Illustration, Jeremy Hanna.

to inspire a top-down, cartographic impression of a space in question. Conversely, a projective description might prompt the reader to identify more closely with the narrator, since the technique "works to position the reader in the spatio-temporal coordinates that define the protagonist-narrator's changing vantage point within the storyworld" (p. 281). Herman suggests that in combination with topological and projective description, landmarks help the reader to "map" the narrator's progress through the environment. In addition, he says that "landmarks also lend a sense of authenticity and credibility to the account… that might otherwise seem exaggerated [or] romanticized" (ibid.).

CONCLUSION

The successful amalgamation of these different ways of describing space allows us to effectively create and communicate a fictional location through narrative. By combining real world landmarks with fictional spaces, and creatively organising them within a complex framework of topological and projective descriptions, Elkwood allows the reader to

mentally construct a spatial representation of the fictional world in their mind. The illustrations featured alongside the text (masquerading as photographs taken by the fictional narrator) may also be seen to operate as a kind of projective description of space. They generate a viscerally realistic point of visual reference for the reader, beyond that which can be achieved through written narrative. This allows the reader to more effectively visualise the expansive environment constructed in their imagination.

CRITICAL IDEAS: IMMERSION AND BELIEF

In this thesis I use the word 'immersion' to describe the imaginative engagement a reader, viewer, or player might experience in a story world. In this sense, the immersive quality of a work might be evaluated by the extent to which the story activates an audience's belief in the world and their propensity to create elements or meaning within it.

In considering the idea of believability in fiction, we must first consider Coleridge's seminal work, *Biographia Literaria* (1817). In this he discusses the reader's "willing suspension of disbelief" (p. 720). Coleridge suggests that by infusing "a human interest and a semblance of truth" into a work of fiction, the writer might elicit a degree of "poetic faith" (ibid.) from a reader. This faith, he suggests, would enable one experiencing the world created by the text to defer judgement on its implausibility.

Ferri (2007) suggests that this is "what happens when the reader prepares to read, then willingly allows the work to transport him or her into the story and characters" (p. 79). He makes connections between Coleridge's "willing suspension of disbelief" and the work of a variety of writers from diverse fields including Smith, 1995 (film theory); Tyler, 1970 (film criticism); and Gerrig, 1993 (psycholinguistics). Ferri's work, however, questions the reader's ability to make an experiential distinction between fictional and non-fictional narrative.

Underpinning these discussions is Aristotle's *Poetics* (1932), which examined the differences between fiction and non-fiction. He stated, "The poet and the historian differ not by writing in verse or in prose… The true difference is that one relates what has happened, the other what may happen" (IX, para. 1). However, Aristotle also usefully noted that fiction and non-fiction regularly intersect and he suggested that credibility might be lent to fictional work by the embedding of true elements within it.[1]

Tolkien (1964) discussed a certain duality when readers immerse themselves in fiction. He suggested that, on one hand, fantasy had an inherent advantage because it presents an "arresting strangeness" (Fantasy, 1964, para. 3). However, he also noted that this advantage can be "turned against it, and has contributed to its disrepute." Many readers, he suggested, "dislike being 'arrested'. They dislike any meddling with the Primary World" (ibid.). But importantly, he argued that fiction is not lies. He said,

> Fantasy is a natural human activity. It certainly does not destroy or even insult Reason; and it does not either blunt the appetite for, nor obscure the perception of, scientific verity. On the contrary. The keener and the clearer is the reason, the better fantasy will it make. (ibid., para. 15)

This concept, of a kind of inherent 'truth' within fiction, is also considered by Oatley (1999), who outlines three different forms of truth:

- Truth as empirical correspondence,
- Truth as coherence within complex structures, and
- Truth as personal relevance (p. 103).

He proposes that empirical sciences address the "criteria of the first type of truth. Fiction fails this criterion but can meet the other two" (ibid.).

In his 2011 book *The Art of Immersion*, Rose discusses the creator's fear of labeling their work as 'fiction'. He refers to Daniel Defoe's reluctance to allow the label to settle upon his book *Robinson Crusoe* (1900). Rose notes that Defoe feared his work would not be taken seriously, and that the reader would be reluctant to believe in his story, if they thought it to be untrue.[2] Rose documents several instances of unorthodox storytelling where the line between fiction and reality is blurred, including many examples from video games and film. In concord with Tolkien's observation, He suggests, "We fear the fictional even as we long to immerse ourselves in it. But from *Robinson Crusoe* to *Lost*, any fiction worth experiencing has been immersive" (p. 319).

ELKWOOD AND BELIEF

One of the primary objectives of this research project was to heighten the audience's belief in the phenomenon of *Elkwood*. Thus the literary style is based on a close reading of narrative approaches and linguistic constructions in writing from the period. When one reads *Elkwood, Bastion of Innovation* in The National Geographic Magazine, everything is done to suggest that we are encountering a genuine ethnographic narrative. Thus, the typographical selections and layout are direct references to editorial decisions of the time. More significantly, turns of phrase and colonialist attitudes are borrowed from indicative writing appearing in issues of the journal in that period (Rock, 1931; Sultan, 1932; Wilbur, 1932).

If we might become initially immersed in *Elkwood*'s world through written and typographically designed text that borrows references from existing material, we reach a higher level of belief when we engage with the imagery accompanying the text. Gerrig (1993) suggests that when we experience fiction, "all information is understood as true until some is unaccepted" (pp. 239, 240).

Illustratively, this has meant developing a method of depiction that so closely resembles photographic and illustrative recording of the period that we engage with the world in an "effortless construction" of meaning (Gerrig, 1993, p. 240).

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1   An example he gives is a poet's inclusion of real names and events into an otherwise fictitious story.

2   As a result of Defoe's anxiety, the first edition of the book attributed authorship to the story's fictional protagonist. In so doing it presented the narrative as a truthful retelling of real events (Rose, 2011, p. 31).

Fig. 4:1 *Perspective Study* (June, 2013). Digital sculpture, Jeremy Hanna.

By creating this character as a 3D model, I was able to compose and 'shoot' a portrait within the virtual world of the model. This process involved a consideration of lighting, composition, and the type of camera lens an ethnographer might employ in 1932. After deciding on a 35mm lens, I was then able to accurately mimic the slightly exaggerated perspective effect characteristic of such equipment.

Thus in the imagery I have concealed every suggestion of underlying brushwork or pencil drawing. What we encounter is a kind of photographic/ethnographic illusion. The colouring, focus, light, framing, and surface texture of the images are all based on close readings of photographs and drawings appearing in National Geographic articles of the period. The accompanying exhibited work (much of which the fictional editors refused to print in the journal article) continues this same attention to an illusion of authenticity.[3]

We encounter *Elkwood* as an internally coherent story world, where multiple elements are orchestrated in terms of their contribution to the whole. Thus considerations of geography, climate, narrative tone, history, culture, and technology contribute not only to decisions about how the world looks, but also to the kinds of character and narratives that develop within it.

We initially experience *Elkwood* via the narration of a fictional author. We trust the 'author's' story partly because it is seamlessly embedded (physically and stylistically), in an authentic edition of National Geographic from the period.[4] By framing the work as a non-fictional account from 1932, the reader begins their experience of the fictional world under the (false) impression that what they are reading is true.

CONCLUSION

By positioning fantastical elements within a framework of relatable 'truths', we may extend the audience's belief to places it might not normally venture. These truths may be found in the realistic visual treatment of the characters and landscapes; the references to real world histories, geographies, and technologies; or simply in the tone of the written narrative. This provides a foundation of believable reference upon which the fantastical world of *Elkwood* can flourish without being confounded with lies.

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3   Thus the thesis project is in two parts. The first is an illustrated National Geographic article. The second is the exhibition of more revealing field notes (photographs, sketches, observations) that the author has staged in protest at the bowdlerizing of his research by the conservative editorial staff of the journal.

4   This plays on Gerrig's suggestion that all information is accepted as true until some is rejected.

(Left) Fig. 4:2. *Technological Integration* (June, 2013).
Digital Illustration, Jeremy Hanna.

This image represents the combination of many different methods of image making. Following the process documented in Fig. 4:1, I used illustrative techniques to introduce realistic skin textures, varying flesh tones, and atmospheric details. By studying the unique ways in which different materials respond to light, I was able to introduce a subtle translucency and softness to the skin, while applying a highly reflective, specular finish to the metal structure in the character's brow. To be truly believable, the image needed a sense of photographic imperfection. This was achieved through subtle additions of film grain, chromatic aberration, and overexposed highlights.

RESEARCH DESIGN: METHODOLOGY

IN this chapter I discuss the rationale behind the project's unique research design: a reflective practice that engaged in phases of creative immersion, storytelling, collaborative evaluation, and planning. This section begins with a broad consideration of the inquiry as a reflective practice, before examining the project's research cycle and its three corresponding phases.

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

According to Schön (1991), "design knowledge is knowing-in-action, revealed in and by actual designing" (p. 2). He notes that this knowledge "is mainly tacit" (ibid.), referring to professional understanding that cannot be formally expressed. This is represented by "actions, recognitions, and judgements" (Schön, 1983, p. 54) that may be performed unthinkingly. For example, the action of drawing utilises tacit knowledge of form, perspective, colour, and proportion. He suggests that designers "best gain access to their knowing-in-action by putting themselves into the mode of doing" (1991, p. 2). Thus, design problems are best solved through creative action.

Design practice, Schön (1991) argues, is a "reflective conversation with the situation" where designers "respond to the demands and possibilities of a design situation, which, in turn, they help to create" (p. 4). Here, spontaneous improvisation is encouraged, with subjective decision-making taking priority over objective approaches. This allows for a flexible and dynamic research process, presenting opportunities for unexpected development and learning.

Schön explains that a design situation is perceived through "active sensory appreciation" and that this appreciation is often gained within the "virtual world of a sketchpad" (ibid.). Therefore, illustration may be seen as an important means of exploring an imaginary world. Through this process, "the designer constructs and reconstructs the objects and relations with which he deals, determining 'what is there' for purposes of design, thereby creating a 'design world' within which he functions" (ibid.).

Because Schön believes that "designing is a communicative activity in which individuals are called upon to decipher one another's design worlds" (1991, p. 5), evidenced in my design process are phases of collaborative evaluation and planning.

THE RESEARCH CYCLE

Because methodologically my project may be seen as a form of reflective practice, it is shaped by the nature of the inquiry and the proclivities of researcher operating inside it. The research design might best be described as trifurcate; it uses three overlapping phases that operate in a cyclic manner, incrementally moving the project forward (Fig. 5).

CREATIVE IMMERSION

The first phase involved immersing myself in the world I was creating. Rhodes proposes, "the role of a Concept Artist is the role of an explorer, tasked with charting a world without sunlight" (2013, para. 1). He explains,

You start off with your reference and research. These are well-established base camps. They're well lit, highly populated and safe. The better your reference the better your bearings will be. The artist's job is to start at base camp with a bag of torches and run furiously out into the darkness. Every doodle, sketch, painting and storyboard is a torch lit somewhere out in the black. You mostly find weeds and rocks out there. But if you keep pushing you sometimes find a rich landscape that can hopefully become a new base-camp. (para. 2)

Rhodes' analogy of design as the discovery and exploration of a world may be compared to the heuristic concept of immersion. Douglass & Moustakas (1985) explain that this phase of heuristic inquiry[1] "carries the sense of total involvement in a research theme or question in such a way that the whole world is centred in it for awhile [sic]" (p. 47). Immersion facilitates a deep mental involvement in the research question, embracing tacit understanding and subjective improvisation.

Befittingly, by engaging with immersion, the created world of *Elkwood* was afforded greater levels of internal coherency, complexity, and credibility. This is because when one is immersed in the world one is creating, extraneous or inappropriate information is intuitively rejected, while elements that fit with the established laws of the imaginary environment are accepted, assimilated, and built upon. Here, my primary mode of creation is illustration. At times, it felt as though these places and people would have been a part of this world whether I had drawn them or not. Thus drawing may be seen not only as an outcome, but also as a process of thinking.

This idea is not new. In his 2008 discussion of drawing as an ideational process, Rosenberg noted, "We are drawn into making drawing and the drawing draws us in to further thinking" (p. 110). In an immersive condition I become one with the world that is forming around me. Drawing produces a "field of attraction for ideas… into which we are then drawn as thinkers/ideators" (ibid.).

STORYTELLING

With the world's ethos established by illustration, the second phase of the research cycle employed fictive writing to 'retell' the stories I constructed while I was immersed.

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1   Douglass & Moustakas divide the methodology into three distinct phases: 'immersion', 'acquisition', and 'realization' (1985, pp. 45, 46).
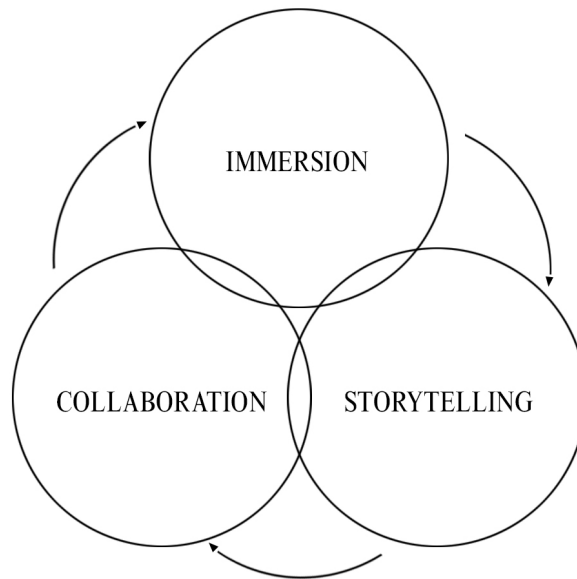
Fig. 5. Research Cycle.

While containing certain identifiable elements from Action Research models (Dick, 2006; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000), the cycle's first two phases are largely immersive and generative. The third is concerned with external feedback and planning.

According to Connelly and Clandinin (1990), "humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. Thus, the study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world" (p. 2). Telling diegetic stories, then, is a relatable means of communicating a fictional universe; it establishes the world through the window of a narrator's experience.

Furthermore, as Schön (1983) explains, "storytelling represents and substitutes for firsthand experience… Once a story has been told, it can be held as datum, considered at leisure for its meanings and its relationships with other stories" (p. 160). Storytelling presents *Elkwood* in an accessible format for others to experience and comment on. Creative data generated in this phase become conducive to collaborative evaluation.

COLLABORATIVE EVALUATION AND PLANNING

Unlike the first two phases of the project's research cycle, which featured independent creative action, the third phase may be described as collaborative. In this phase, recently generated work was collected and shared with design and narrative experts.[2] By reflecting on the illustrations and story in this way, I was able to evaluate the originality and relevance of the ideas generated, as well as to assess their communicative quality.

2   In developing the research I drew on established researchers and theorists in the area, some with whom I had the opportunity to discuss my work. This included world creation experts Paul Tobin and Nick Keller. The both offered reviews of my work at their two-day concept design workshop on May 10th and 11th at the Yoobee School of Design, where they affirmed the importance of design over presentational considerations. I met with other experts, like illustrator/narratologist Welby Ings, regularly to perform in depth evaluations of the work.

As the research developed I delivered a conference seminar on my project (*World Creation: Building an Alternate History*: AUT School of Art & Design Postgraduate Conference, 2013, July 29), and a poster containing my abstract and a review of contextual knowledge (AUT University Postgraduate Symposium, 2013, August 23). These presentations afforded useful feedback on the field of inquiry, as well as the developments I was making within it.

Practical work in development was exhibited at the New Zealand illustration and comic arts festival *Chromacon* (2013, May 12) and on the New Zealand Graphic Design website, *Assembly* (http://www.designassembly.org.nz/articles/postgraduate-jeremy-hanna). The latter was a selected example of innovative university research in graphic design.

I also frequently exhibited the work online, where finished work was uploaded for discussion on my website (http://www.jeremyhanna.co/). Because I work digitally, I was also able to stream my work process live. This meant that while I was working in my studio, I had immediate access to peer review from a variety of professionals watching from various parts of New Zealand and overseas.

Following critique and discussion, the design process shifted organically towards planning for the next cycle. Here, it was important to consider 'problem setting', which Schön (1983) descibes as "the process by which we define the decision to be made, the ends to be achieved, and the means which may be chosen" (p. 40). Schön notes, "in real-world practice, problems do not present themselves to the practitioner as givens. They must be constructed from the materials of problem situations, which are puzzling, troubling, and uncertain" (ibid.).

RESEARCH DESIGN: RESEARCH METHODS

THE project's success was largely reliant on the audience's belief in *Elkwood*. Thus, my research methods were chosen to facilitate a high level of realism and believability in both visual presentation and writing. This meant that my illustrative work needed to shift away from stylisation towards photorealism, without compromising the rich potentials of design and storytelling. As such, the project's research methods featured a variety of immersive strategies: drawing as a form of creative inquiry, fictional writing, and (importantly) illustrative approaches into believable world design.

IMMERSIVE STRATEGIES AND CONTEXTUAL RESEARCH

Throughout the project I strived to imaginatively establish myself deeply within the fictional world I was creating. I immersed myself in artistic, musical, filmic, narrative, historic, and cartographic works carefully chosen for their relevance to *Elkwood*. This included such works as the film *Cold Mountain* (Minghella, 2003), criminal portraits archived as *Sydney Police Photographs 1912-1948* (Doyle, 2005), maps and written documents concerned with surveying the Great Smoky Mountains , and close readings of various articles featured in the National Geographic Magazine (1930-35).[1]

An analysis of Joseph F. Rock's 1931 article *Konka Risumgongba, Holy Mountain of the Outlaws* was particularly useful in establishing the tone of my writing. The study of maps and historical, cultural, and geographical accounts

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1   These include maps covering the Qualla Indian Reserve (Temple, 1875-6), Mount Guyot (Gannet, 1893) and the expansive Great Smoky Mountain range, and texts including *Origin of Placenames in the Great Smoky Mountains* (Kephart, n.d.) and *The Great Smoky Mountains* (Thornborough, 1962).
  Landis (2012a) advocates compilations of influences into a "research volume". This, she suggests, ensures that design decisions are not simply made up, rather, each choice is justified by the designer's "bible" upon which it is based (p. 48).

Fig. 6:1. *Elkwood Building Exploration* (June, 2013). Digital Illustration, Jeremy Hanna.

of the Great Smoky Mountains also helped me to establish a more realistic substrate whence I could begin building both Elkwood's world and Henry E. Caine's narrative of it.

CONCEPTUAL DRAWING

As I began to draw *Elkwood* into being, I closely read referential imagery in order to ensure a believable result. Accordingly, I constructed numerous photographic arrays documenting American architecture, technology, and clothing throughout the 1800s. By arranging examples chronologically I could refer a variety of images simultaneously. From this perspective I was able to productively combine different elements that fitted with *Elkwood*'s back-story, while at the same time ensuring a sense of historical credibility.

Although I sometimes used traditional media to draw (See Figures 6:4 and 6:5), I found that working digitally afforded

Fig. 6:2. *Character Exploration* (July, 2013). Digital Illustration, Jeremy Hanna.
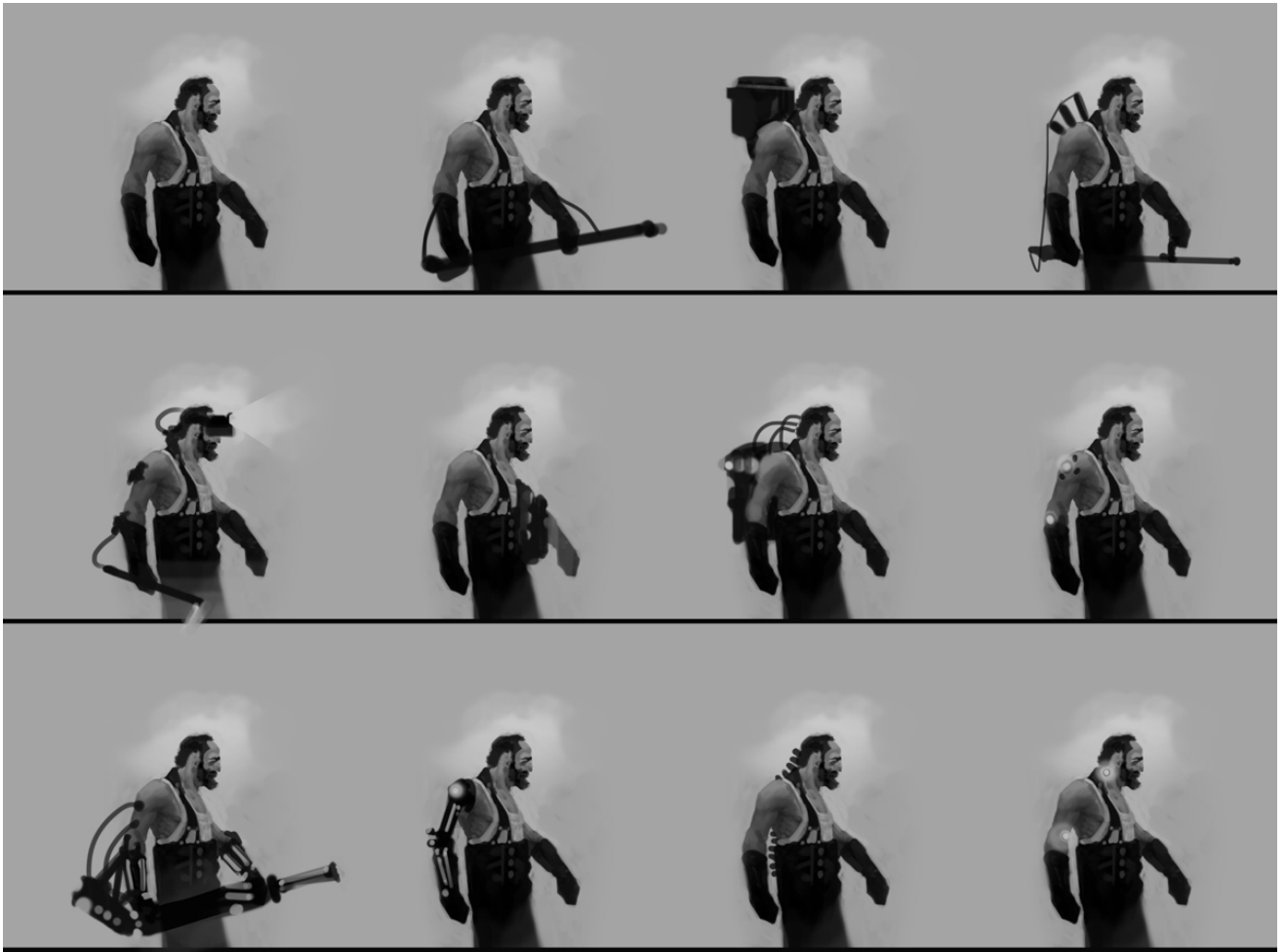
Fig. 6:3. *Design Iterations* (July, 2013). Digital Illustration, Jeremy Hanna.

Fig. 6:4. *Environmental Integration* (May, 2013). Marker Sketch, Jeremy Hanna.

Fig. 6:5. *Farmers* (April, 2013). Pencil Drawing, Jeremy Hanna.

Fig. 6:6. *Butchery Environments* (April, 2013). Mixed media, Jeremy Hanna.

Here, photographic imagery was combined with digital illustration. By combining, abstracting, and distorting the photographs to alter their perspective before painting over the top to establish consistent lighting, I was able to quickly construct new visual spaces within which to experiment. I could also work very quickly with atmospheric experiments. This meant ideas like threat, weight, ethical compromise, and contradictions between technological advancement and decay could be quickly trialled, adjusted, or rejected.

greater speed and iterative opportunities (Fig. 6:3). This is because this approach provided the ability to make sweeping changes to colour, proportion, and silhouette quickly and non-destructively. Also, the digital environment was conducive to the integration of photographic imagery, hand-rendered sketches, and digital illustration (Fig. 6:6). As such, it was a protean canvas upon which potentials could be developed, integrated, removed, or temporarily suspended.

CREATIVE WRITING

The process of creative writing served to contextualise the people and places I had designed illustratively, positioning them within a rich historical, geographical, and technological framework. While the written story may ultimately be seen as a method of communicating the world to others, as

the creator the process of writing from the perspective of a fictional narrator was methodologically an immersive tool. Writing myself 'into' the environment in this way strengthened my ability to relate to the characters and their emerging world. As components took form, the relationship between the world and Henry E. Caine's emerging narrative of it became dialogic. As one developed, it served to question and shape the other.

Initially, my creative writing used conversational language, as I introduced myself to the characters and began to establish the world around them. This approach, however, lacked the credibility captured by the National Geographic Magazine articles that I was using as a reference. By adjusting the nature of my narrative so it became a 'factually' based
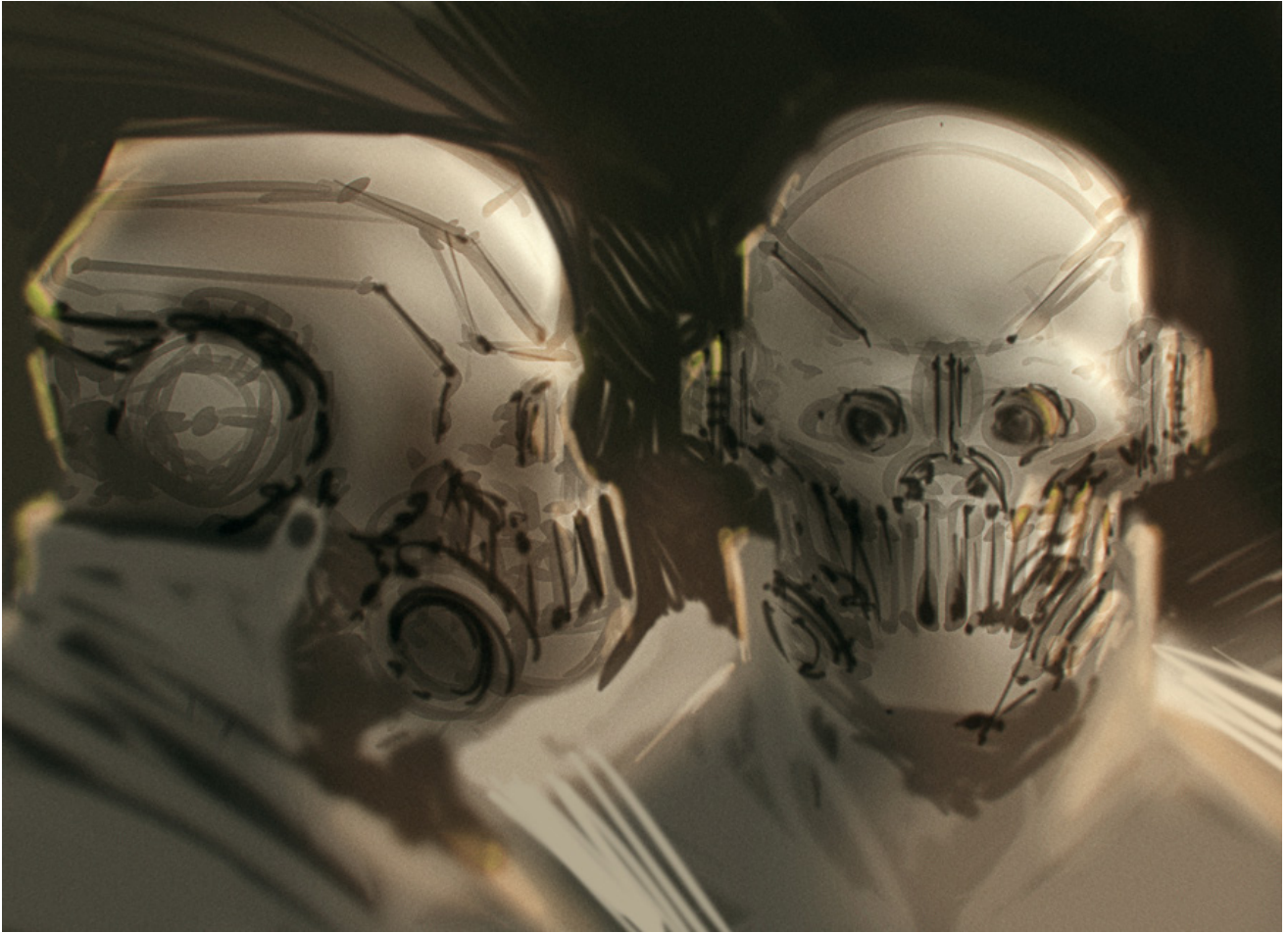
Fig. 6:7. *Watcher Mask Sketch* (June, 2013). Digital Illustration, Jeremy Hanna.

Fig. 6:8. *Mechanical Integration* (June, 2013). Mixed Media, Jeremy Hanna.

account, I was able to better communicate a sense of real-
ity within the story. This approach was reaffirmed where I
adapted the language, sentence structures, and grammatical
patterns employed by Rock (1931), into my own writing.
I also used Google's Ngram Viewer (Michel, Shen, Aiden,
Veres, Gray, Brockman, Pickett, Hoiberg, Clancy, Norvig,
Orwant, Pinker, Nowak, & Aiden, 2010) to compare the
frequency of certain words and combinations of words in
published literature over time. This allowed me to make in-
formed choices about the language I used, so that my writ-
ing became tonally appropriate to the era in which the article
was produced.

REALISTIC ILLUSTRATION

The project's emphasis on realism and believability neces-
sitated a change in my illustrative approach. In order to shift
my work from the stylisation epitomised in Fig. 6:9 towards
a more realistic result, I experimented with diverse methods
of image construction.

The inclusion of 3D digital sculpting to my workflow meant
that I could separate the formal design process from the more
complex considerations inherent in 2D illustration. Contem-
plation on, and execution of, colour, material, lighting, and
composition could all wait until after the 3D model had been
finalised in terms of design (Fig. 6:10). This finalised model
could then be interactively framed, lit, and rendered by the
computer, before being taken into digital painting software
to refine details through illustration (fig. 6:11).[2]

2   The software used in these processes included Pixologic ZBrush
(digital sculpting), and Adobe Photoshop (digital illustration).

Fig. 6:9. *Welcome* (May, 2013). Digital Illustration, Jeremy Hanna.
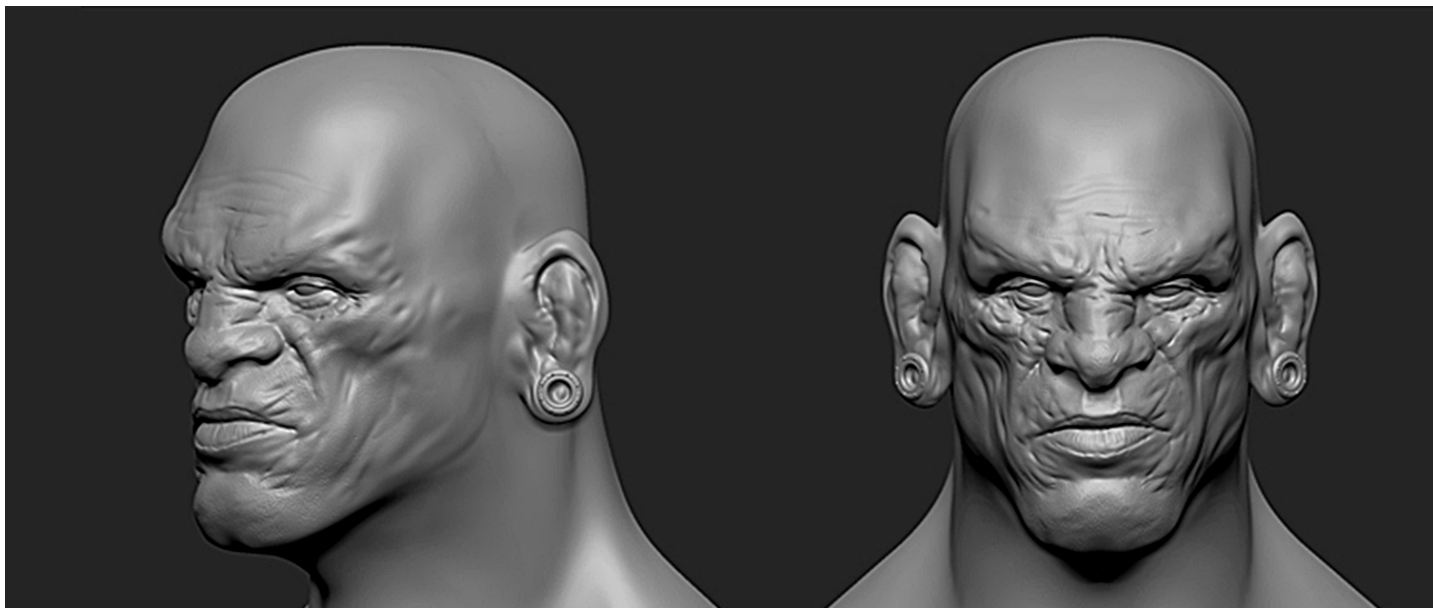

Fig. 6:10 *3D Character Model of Abraham* (July, 2013). Digital sculpture, Jeremy Hanna.

In this experiment, high-resolution details like wrinkles and skin pores were only included in the areas that were to be seen in the final image. Because
the computer controls lighting, perspective, and shadow autonomously when working in 3D, I was able to concentrate on foundational design elements
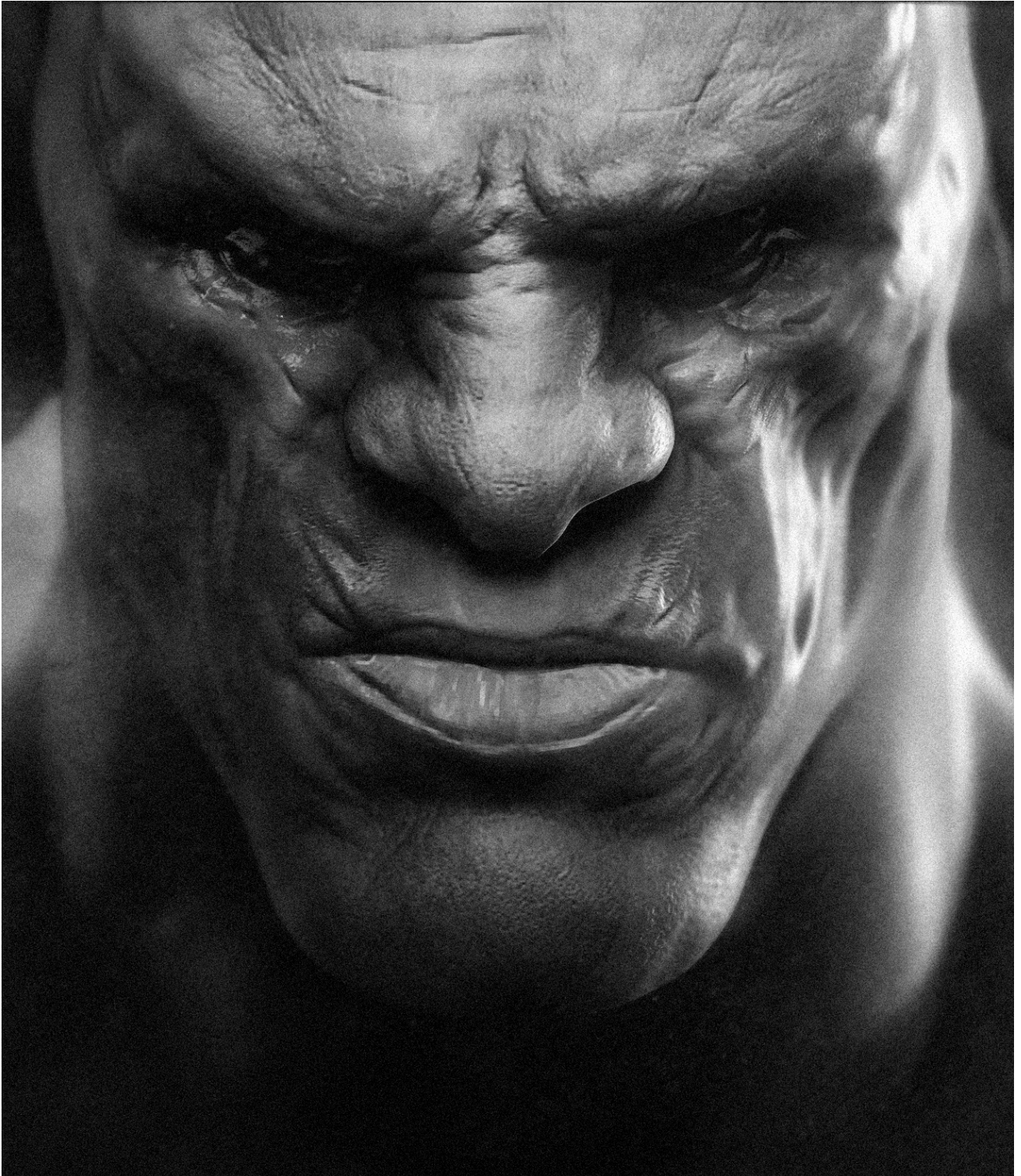such as shape, expression, form and silhouette.
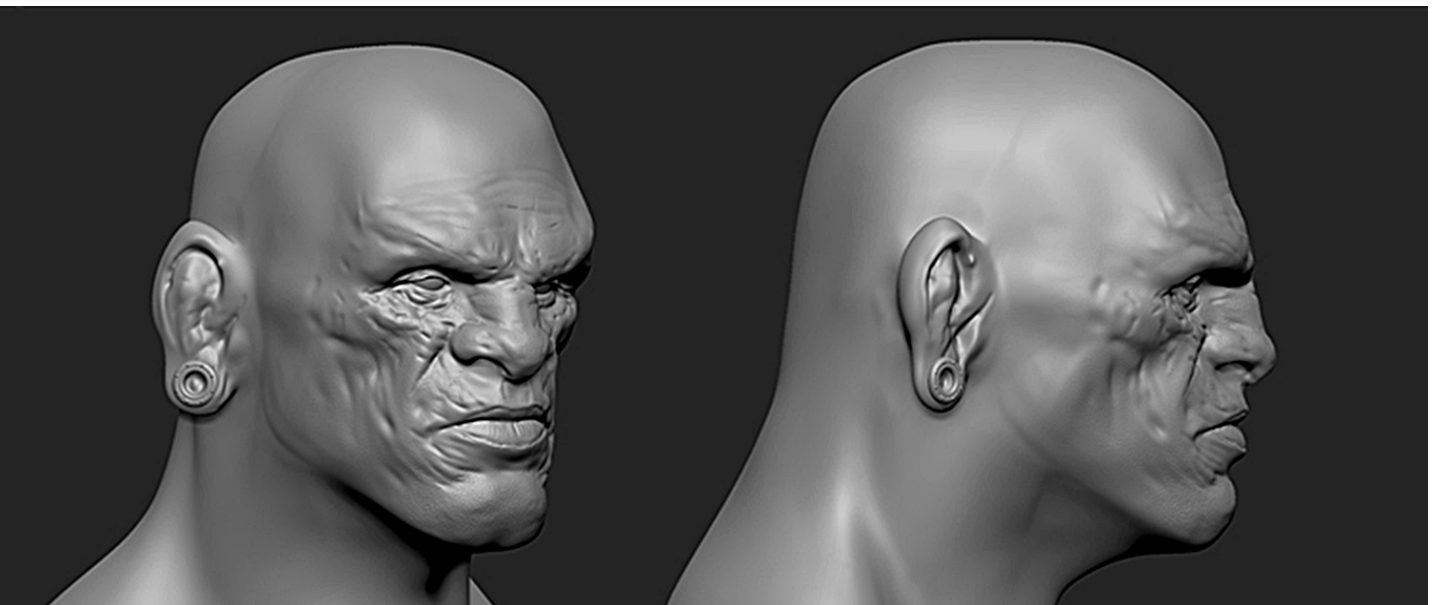
Fig. 6:11. *Character Development for Abraham* (July, 2013)

While this portrait achieved interesting skin textures and realistic directional lighting, the character was an archetype. The heavy brow and protruding chin made for a character that was not consistent with the world as a whole. In order to draw out a more distinctive, multi-tiered sense of personality, I referred to archives of convicted criminals.

Fig. 6:12. *Agnus Process* (July, 2013)

The process of bringing a 3D model to a realistically human level is complex. It involves not only the addition of elements such as skin blemishes, eye details, and fabric textures, but also the establishment of technical imperfections. The 3D program renders an image that is too 'perfect', one must use illustrative means to move certain areas of the image out of focus, introduce atmospheric elements such as dust and haze, and add scratches and grime to the photographic 'surface'.
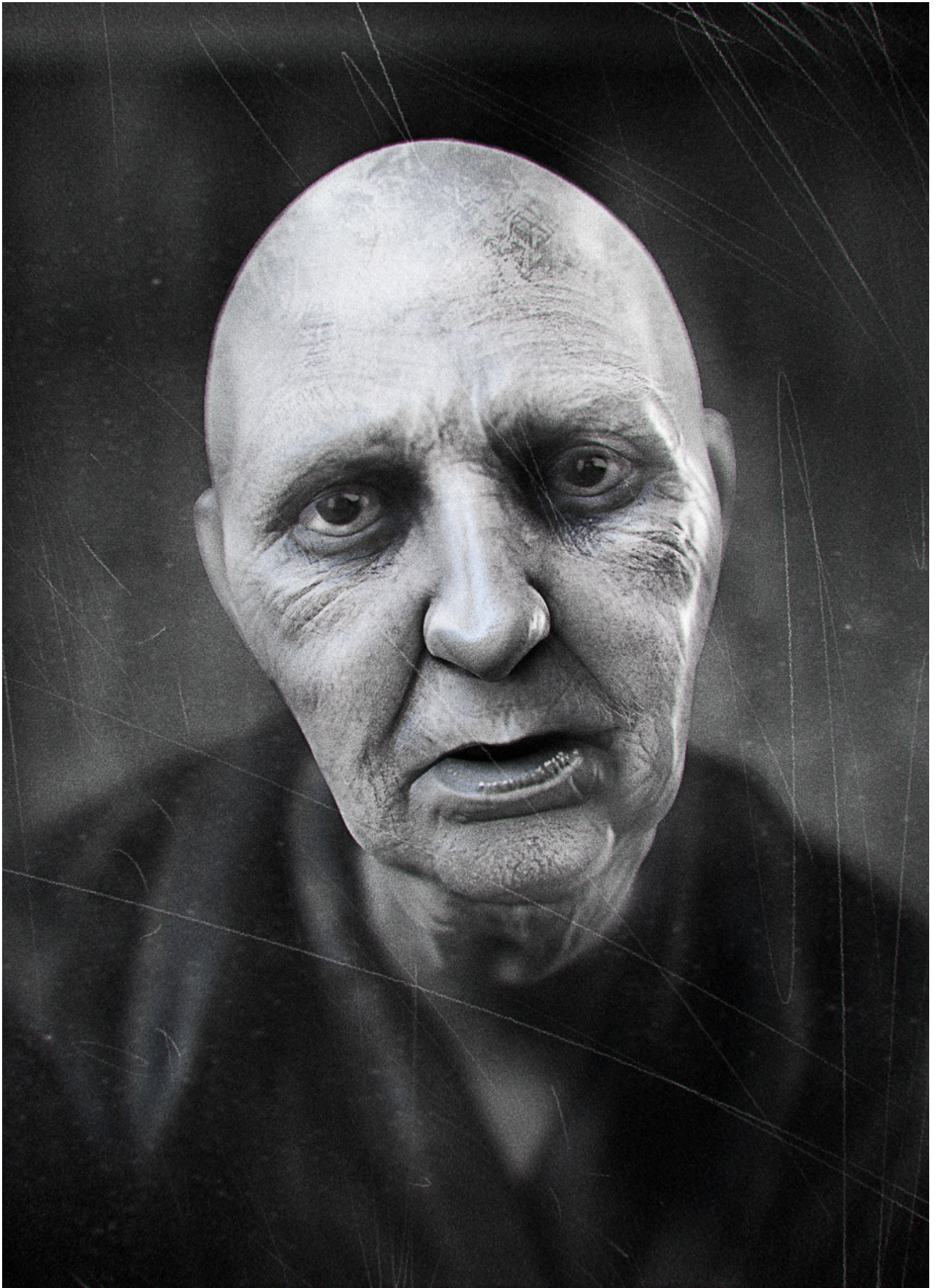
Fig. 6:13. *Agnus* (July, 2013). Digital illustration, Jeremy Hanna.

While 2D illustration may be faster in terms of ideational sketching and conceptual design, the inclusion of 3D in this way allowed me to achieve a photographically realistic result in a much shorter time.

Fig. 6:12 documents the process of taking a 3D model to its final presentation in Fig. 6:13.

CONCLUSION

In the end Elkwood and its inhabitants, atmosphere, and technologies are an amalgam of diverse elements. Its world speaks to us largely through the conventions of the camera (focus, depth of field, lighting, framing, and surface distress). What we encounter is suspended somewhere between what we know has to be illustration and what (by suspending disbelief) we accept as photographic. Within this visual tension lies the unique voice of the world.

The methods I have used to create Elkwood generally enable importation and adaptation. They are not totemic or discrete. Elkwood is a fusion, an anachronism, a technological wonder, and a space in progress.

So too, if one thinks about it, are the methods employed to create it.

EPILOGUE

CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

This project explores the field of world creation as an integrated outcome *and* as a process of design development, in a way that has not been theorised before.

The work moves beyond the normal skill-based portfolio developed for entry into the industry because it is conceptually interrogative. It goes beyond simply illustrating an imagined series of characters and landscapes. Rather, it rigorously constructs an internally coherent and expansive story world: An emergent universe possessing its own histories, communities, technologies, and lands.

It adds to an emerging body of research in the area that includes Greg Broadmore's *Dr. Grordbort's Exceptional Exhibition* (exhibited in Wellington, New Zealand, 28 Nov 2012 - 26 Jan 2013). In so doing it extends the concept of installation that has hitherto been largely the prerogative of Fine Arts practice. In turn, it moves world creation beyond the page and screen into space, artefact, and environment.

FUTURE RESEARCH

This project also builds on a personal trajectory; it reflects upon my passion for illustration and growth as a designer and story maker. It is to be used as a stepping-stone into the industry, but also as a contribution to practice-led scholarship in story design: a concept that has become the subject of a number of international conferences in the last three years. This year there were conferences dedicated to it in Prague (4th Global Conference on Storytelling, 21 - 24 May, 2013) and Brighton (Storyville: Higher Education Academy Arts and Humanities conference 29-30 May, 2013).

As with *Haven*, I will seek to expose my practice through institutions like the New Zealand BEST design awards, as well as disseminating the work and process online. This project has once again sparked my enthusiasm for creation, and while I hope to provide design solutions for the film and video game industries, I expect to continue to create my own worlds. Taking heed of Paul Tobin and Nick Keller's advice, in the summer I will submit a portfolio to Weta Workshop's design studio, in the hopes of securing a position as a concept designer.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Creating *Elkwood* was a huge undertaking that moved beyond the synthesis and generation of work. It involved a deep immersion inside a complex world that took physical and conceptual form as a transformative process.

I have learnt that the process of creating worlds is an unpredictable one. The created world gives birth to monsters and heroes alike, each with a mind of their own and a story to live out. The process of world creation may begin with a simple premise, but through a rigorous approach of unyielding investigation and exploration, even the simplest idea has the power to colour an entire universe.

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