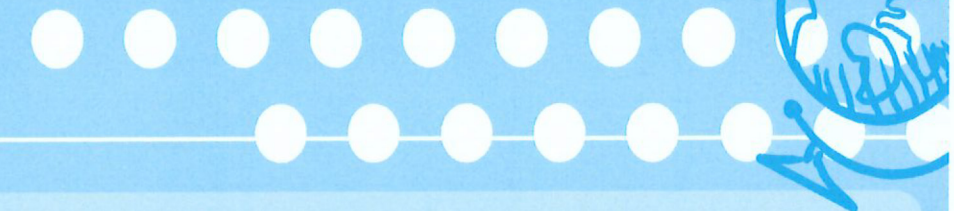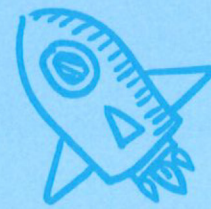# PROPOSAL

Animated TV Show: 'Grafted Grifters'

My Brief

My brief is an animated action-adventure television series called 'Grafted Grifters'. The series is set in a place called Deco City, where the rich and powerful have figured out a way to genetically modify their children before they're born. These 'gifted' children are given special abilities, designed to make them the perfect candidates for certain career paths, which are decided by their parents.

The series stars a trio of three such 'gifted children'- Bea, Frankie, and Oli. Each has been created by a specific group of people for one specific path, and they attend a prestigious private middle school, designed to help them hone their gifts before they're sent out into the world to fulfill their life paths. However, the kids have no interest in following the careers their parents have laid out for them- so, as an act of rebellion, they instead use their abilities to moonlight as criminals, using their last year of freedom in the academy to figure out who they want to be on their own terms.

Justification

The main point of the show is to explore the idea of 'gifted kid syndrome'- a real world phenomenon wherein schoolchildren who show a level of promise and talent are labeled as 'gifted', having high expectations placed upon them by their teachers, parents, and peers to continually excel at a 'gifted' level. The development of their identity is attached to their academic success and the approval of others, and most gifted children eventually burn out, developing social, emotional, and even academic issues later down the line.

The connection between this phenomenon and 'Grafted Grifters' is clear, and the premise is fully intended to be an allegory of sorts. I want this show to be an opportunity to explore the issue of gifted kid syndrome on a deeper level, having been someone who's experienced it myself. I feel like the topic often isn't given the nuance it deserves, being inherently connected to burnout, which is an extremely toxic mindset to have- I want to use 'Grafted Grifters' as a way to combat that. Each of the characters has been labeled as 'gifted', but none of them have reached the point of burnout yet- the story focuses on them finding ways to develop their identities and find happiness outside of academic success, through their secret identities as criminals. 'Gifted' children become burnt out because they believe that if they don't have academic success, they aren't successful. In using 'Grafted Grifters' to provide children with role models that oppose the harmful ideologies gifted kid syndrome fosters, I feel they can be guided to a much healthier philosophy around academics and personal development. By presenting it through an allegory, I can get right to the heart of the issue while still making it entertaining and interesting to the target audience.

Personal Connection

Bea, Frankie, and Oli are revamps of characters I made in middle school- I was being bullied at the time, largely for my reputation as a gifted child, especially one with obscure interests and social issues. Drawing them was a big comfort for me during that time, and their characters ended up reflecting a lot of the things I was struggling with. In revamping them, my hope is that I can incorporate my experience into my work, and bring the same comfort to others that these characters brought to me.

Sub-Briefs

Character Design:
Designing Bea, Frankie, and Oli, as well as their criminal outfits and weapons.

Logo:
Designing a logo for the series, and animating it to work with the show's intro.

Environment Design:
Designing the two primary locations as two separate sub-briefs- the school, 'Arc Academy', and Deco City, figuring out how they would be presented in the show.

Animated Intro:
Creating a 50 second animated intro for the show, as if it was a real thing- my audio is 50 seconds, and that tends to be the industry standard.

Target Audience

My target audience consists of middle schoolers and teenagers in their first few years of highschool. The main purpose of the show is to engage a younger audience with the idea of gifted kid syndrome in a way that doesn't talk down to them, and speaks to their experiences. The characters in the show are around the age of 12–13, so the target audience being around that age range makes sense in terms of creating a sense of relatability. I don't want it to be juvenile, though- just because the target audience is skewed young doesn't mean I'll forgo sophisticated design conventions.

'How do I make a TV show addressing the issue of gifted kid syndrome that's engaging to kids?'

There are three things I need to consider when addressing my pictorial concern- how to show the oppressive nature of perfectionism, how to show the freedom of self actualisation, and how to do all of that in a way that's entertaining, interesting, and aligns with my chosen medium. As such, I've decided to take influence from three different styles, and the conventions that come with each- Retro futurism, Cyberwave, and animated character design.

Artist Models

The design of the city and background art will be reminiscent of retro future artwork, specifically the work of Sam Chivers, with colors from that style being used during the day. This style connects more to the sci-fi esque worldbuilding, as opposed to leaning on the traditional cyberpunk conventions of dystopian worlds, and will allow for the contrast between day and night to be more obvious. The artificial, kitschy style also emphasises the themes of perfectionism, appearing unassuming and polished.

The Cyberpunk style will be used during the nighttime, modelled off of artists like Xuteng Pan. The holographic aspects and connection to the vaporwave style can be seamlessly incorporated into the retro future architecture, since it's all lighting, which can be turned off or overpowered during the day. It also serves as a visualisation of the Grifter's criminal personas- punkish, rebellious, out at night, hidden during day, and also reveals the potential 'dark side' to the show's more dystopian aspects.

The work of Dana Terrace, creator of Disney's 'The Owl House' and hanabushi_ will influence the character art- both are cartoonists that work in animation, so the designs are optimised to be easily animated. Since the show has so much emphasis on character driven storytelling, I also want to make sure the designs are interesting, versatile, and full of charm. Terrace's dynamic poses and use of body language in her illustrations are a really big inspiration to me, and I feel like by incorporating some conventions of hers, I'll be able to make the world of the show and the characters feel more alive.

INFLUENCE & RESEARCH

1. Gifted Kid Syndrome

While 'gifted kid syndrome' itself is a recently coined colloquial term, the prevalence of gifted and talented programs in modern education has been around for ages. It's in this acceleration that the primary issues around gifted kid syndrome arise- gifted children are inherently separated from their peers, and moved into a competitive learning environment with higher standards and expectations, where their academic ability is prioritized over their personhood. Their personal development is disrupted, resulting in a litany of developmental problems- former gifted children have often lamented their inability to socialize, a failure to invest themselves in hobbies or work if they aren't naturally skilled at it, a need to please others due to rejection sensitivity and high expectations, and an inability to adjust to adult life due to a lack of organization, work ethic, and personal identity. Many TV shows have succeeded in their portrayal of prodigious characters, and the negative ramifications that that label can have- Sherlock Holmes, Sheldon from *Big Bang Theory*, and Devi from *Never Have I Ever* serve as a few examples. These characters, however, are all adults or teens, as are the audiences for their respective media. The issues they face, ones that undoubtedly stem from inherent intelligence, are only shown in their developed form, never truly explored in earnest. By the time a gifted child becomes an adult, it's already too late to curb their impacts, which is why I made my pictorial concern depicting gifted kid syndrome in children's media. I want to use 'Grafted Grifters' as a way to combat this stereotype, and oppose the philosophies in our society that led it to its existence. Each of the central characters has a passion for learning, as well as a hobby they engage with on the side. They take time to develop their own identities, and rather than competing with each other, they combine their skills to create a team. They have undefined goals for themselves, but are always working towards self improvement and self-actualisation, in spite of the pressures from the world around them to resign themselves to one career path. In showing gifted children as children, at an age where the process of burnout would normally begin, I feel I'll be able to address the root of the problem, and dissect the many factors in our society that lead to the harmful idea of 'giftedness', and what we can do to combat them in our own lives.

2. Retrofuturism & Cyberpunk

Retrofuturism is a movement in the creative arts showing the influence of depictions of the future in an earlier era. It's characterized by the blending of retro styles with futuristic technology, and is often used to comment on the tensions between the past and future, as well as humanity's expectations for itself and how they've changed over time. My intent with incorporating retrofuturism into 'Grafted Grifters' is to evoke the consistently high expectations we have regarding work and success as a result of capitalism, taking specific reference from artwork from 1950's America. 1950's retrofuturism is comic book-esque, using stipple brushes, halftones, simple silhouettes, and bright colors. The world itself appears to be a buzzing hive of enterprise and economic prosperity, reflective of America after WW2. The capitalist, perfectionistic ideals of that era are reflective of the ones the characters in 'Grafted Grifters' face, and by telling a story of rebellion within a setting that reflects it, I'll be able to critique it. I'm not the first to have done so- the video games 'We Happy Few', 'Bioshock', and 'Fallout' all use retro future aesthetics within a dystopian setting to critique societal ideals present within those eras, while also exploring the ramifications of wartime and post-war ideologies on normal people.

'Cyberpunk 2077', 1950's Retro Future, and art for 'Fallout '76'.

In the same way Retrofuturism is often associated with utopian settings, Cyberwave and Cyberpunk are aesthetics commonly associated with dystopia- a utopia gone bad. Examples include the games 'Detroit: Become Human', and 'Cyberpunk 2077', and the films 'Blade Runner' and 'The Matrix'. They too are images of the future based off of the past, using preexisting aesthetics, technology, and ideologies to construct a speculative future, rather than an idealised one. The technology is sleek, everyone dresses in dark, techwear fashion, and cities are criminal hellscapes filled with pollution, holographic advertisements, and class inequality. As this suggests, Cyberpunk is frequently used to show a dystopia characterised by technology, where preexisting ideologies are fostered and made into law through technological development. The genetic modification of the children in 'Grafted Grifters' and the divide that comes with that matches with the ideas behind cyberpunk, and emphasising that divide also warns against the isolation, competition, and social persecution that comes with gifted kid syndrome. I primarily want to utilise Cyberpunk conventions within the art style and nighttime backgrounds of the show- the retro future art style would be difficult to replicate with my drawing software, so I want to mix the colours and architecture of retro future with the lighting and visual effects of Cyberpunk, creating a dystopian overlay to a utopian world. I also want to lean into the cyberpunk aspects when showing the Grifters' criminal personas, taking influence from techwear for their outfits and general Cyberpunk conventions for designing the city at night.

3. Complexity in Modern Animation

In recent years, animation has been used to explore more complex themes within the premises and characters of serialized shows. These explorations can range from fantastical settings being used to explore dark themes, as seen in 'Avatar: The Last Airbender' (2005), or 'Infinity Train' (2019), to more simple, slice of life shows giving otherwise goofy characters a surprising amount of emotional depth, such as 'Craig of the Creek' (2018) or 'Steven Universe' (2013). The aforementioned shows have been incredibly well received, with most receiving multiple seasons, dedicated fanbases, and vast profits for the companies involved. This proves that not only can children comprehend sophisticated media, they enjoy it immensely, and have the ability to digest complex lessons and ideas within animated narratives if they're told in the right way. I want to communicate a similarly complex idea in my brief, so I intend to take a page out of the books of modern animation, by placing an emphasis on diverse, complex characters, intriguing worldbuilding, and dynamic visual storytelling.

Traditional Background art from 'The Jetsons' and 'Dexter's Laboratory'.

4. Retro Future & Sci-Fi in Animation

Being primarily illustrative, the stylistic influences of retro future have been seen in animation for many years now. The simple silhouettes, color palettes, and shading style have made it an ideal artist model for backgrounds, especially back when most animated backgrounds were done traditionally, as in 'The Jetsons' (1962), 'The Powerpuff Girls' (1998) or 'Dexter's Laboratory' (1996). By incorporating it, not only will I be drawing on established practice with extensive visual references, I'll also be paying homage to the cartoons of days gone by. Furthermore, I'll be able to take the old and combine it with the new- modern animation has maintained the trend of fantastical sci-fi premises, but has also begun combining them with different aesthetics and narrative influences. Through combining the previous influences in animation of retro futuristic sci-fi, and reimagining those premises in combination with other aesthetics and styles, modern animated shows are able to create far more sophisticated and imaginative stories with deeper, more complex themes. Genre is reinvention, and while animation is technically a medium, I feel that by combining retro future and Cyberpunk, I'll be able to reimagine and reintegrate established practice into my work in a new and interesting way.

'Bee and Puppycat' mixes the sci-fi, magical girl, and fantasy genres, maintaining a grounded story alongside a cutesy art style. *'Voltron: Legendary Defenders'* takes the mecha-futuristic premise of the 2004 iteration and modernises it in combination with anime and sci-fi features.

CHARACTER DESIGN

1. School Designs

Since the designs were technically redesigns of characters I created in middle school, the concept process was mostly about finding ways to revamp their designs to better reflect the setting, as well as repurposing their old design aspects to better show their personalities. I decided their main outfits would be uniforms for the school for genetically modified children, Arc Academy, since that's where they'd be spending most of their time during the show. Their designs being a uniform also reflects the uniformity of their world, and how they're able to be individuals amongst conformity– I took influence from games like 'Persona 5' and 'D4DJ', where the characters have modified uniforms and distinct design features that show their personalities despite attending a strict school.

I also utilized basic character design conventions and techniques I observed in the work of Dana Terrace and other illustrators when finalising the designs– I placed a strong emphasis on shape language, with Bea having a lot of soft, circular shapes, Frankie being sharper and more balanced, and Oli being a mix of the two, sharp, yet relaxed. Color cohesion is another example– Bea is yellow for her positivity, Frankie is blue for her coolness, and Oli is red for his good nature. I wanted to find a way to use each of these colors in each of the characters' outfits, to show their friendship and cohesion as a team, while still keeping their palettes simple and having their designs be able to stand on their own. The primary color palette is also reflective of modernism, and can be seen as an accent to a lot of retro futuristic artwork.

Uniform Designs from 'Persona 5' and 'D4DJ'

## 2. Criminal Designs

The design of the vigilante suits was primarily based around the influence of the Cyberpunk aesthetic, and the practical considerations of the characters abilities. The shapes and colors are still quite simple, going darker and more detailed while fitting the existing art style, but I made sure to decide each character's role in combat *before* designing their gear. Frankie is a sniper, and Bea is a striker– Frankie gets protective and camouflage gear, whilst Bea's allows for agility and power. I took a lot of influence from the designs of the hero suits in '*My Hero Academia*'– in that show, each character has a superpower their hero suit is designed around, and there are multiple pieces of concept and official character art that show the practical considerations in each part of their design. In a lot of superhero media, the outfits for women are often wildly impractical, with more attention paid to aesthetic rather than function. For Bea and Frankie, I wanted to give them the dignity of practical outfits, showing their competence, skill, and personality through their clothes, and allowing them to have a different style than just 'cool superhero'. Through taking influence from retro future and Cyberpunk, I was able to find ways to break the molds surrounding female character designs, and the designs I ended up with are more dynamic and interesting thanks to it.
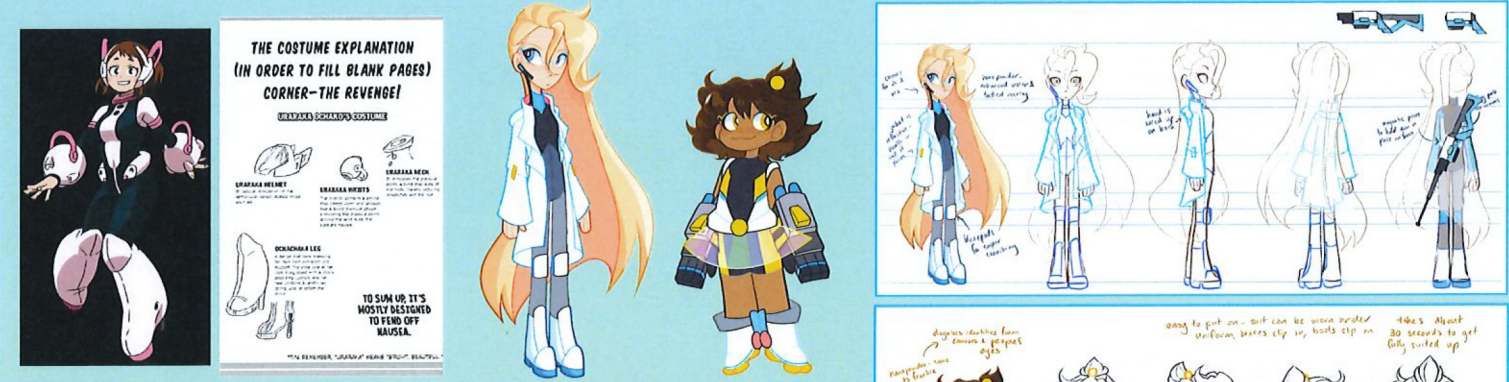
3. Weapon Designs

When designing the weapons, I wanted to make them iconic and personal. In action games, the character's weapon often serves as an extension of their personality, and the design of the weapon serves as much a benefit to the game's iconography as the character themselves, such as the weapons in the '*Overwatch*' or '*Splatoon*' series. Frankie's gun is able to transform because she's a quick thinker and powerful strategist. Bea's gauntlets are a permanent part of her body, showing her origin as a cyborg and inherent strength. They have multiple pop out functions that show her resilience and ability to adapt. They also carry on the bee stripe pattern from her jumper, connecting her personality to her power.
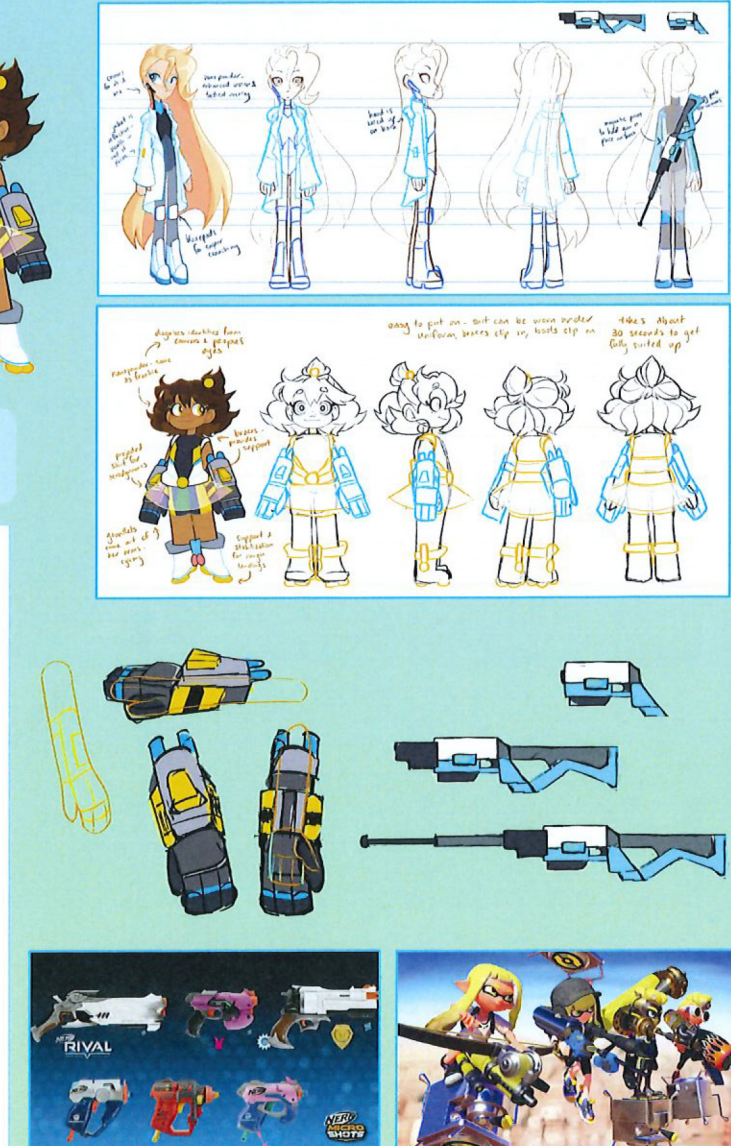
ENVIRONMENT DESIGN: ARC ACADEMY

1. Concepts

Concept 1: 'Futuristic Mall'
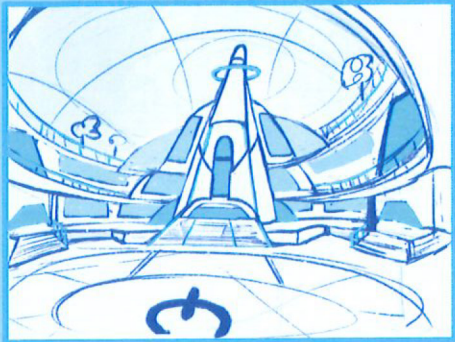
Based on shopping malls, space stations, and city plazas, specifically modern ones from architectural mockups. It was the first design I did, so my main focus ended up being on how it would be integrated into the city at large- it ended up looking small, like a specialist school, which was fine, but I also wanted to have room for outdoor areas and social spaces. It didn't feel like a landmark in the grand scheme of the city either, which takes away from the prestige.

Based on a number of universities, specifically modern ones focusing on the sciences. I liked the entryway, and how the back overlooked the lower levels of the city, but it also felt too open with how the buildings on the side were constructed. It's meant to come off as both prestigious and private-exclusive, in a way. Having it be open and round made it seem too public and friendly. I liked the monorails, though.

Concept 2: 'City Borders Uni'
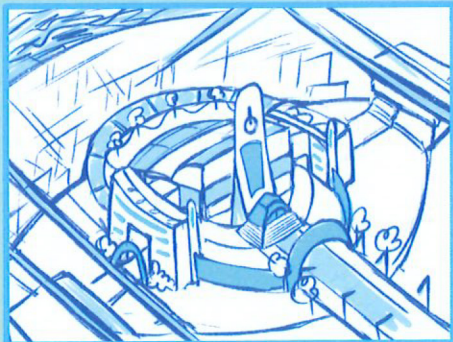
I liked the architecture of this one the best, it was based off of old high schools in New York. It almost ended up feeling too old, though, with the bell and high walls. I really liked the triangle silhouette and the tall tower- since this was the last one I did, I got to a good place with the layering of the central buildings. The open gate, yet the implication of a courtyard really worked for me, so I wanted to explore that more later.

Concept 3: 'Inner City Private School'

2. Development

For the development, I started playing around and 'future-ifying' the architectural aspects of my concepts, by adding retro future conventions like big, weirdly shaped windows, simple logos, shapes, and straight lines, and, of course, the weird 'Jetsons' ring thing. Form follows function, though, so I mostly figured out what I wanted and tried to make it work- floating back field, central tower, big entryway, etc. All the high budget private school stuff simplified, with the edges sanded off. I also tried to incorporate some simple iconography, like the arrow shapes on the paths and windows, as well as arches.


Final

The most important thing I considered when finalising the design was making it theoretically practical. There's a clear route to commute from any point in the school to another, a consideration of where all the rooms and essential school amenities are, as well as consideration of student population, branding, and leisure space. I incorporated a lot of mid century modern and contemporary interior design references when working on the final, so I could find a balance between what the inside could look like in reference to the outside, while still keeping in with the retro-future look. Overall, I'm happy with the result- it's prestigious, modern, and practical, and matches the pre-established vibes of the schools branding as seen in the character's uniforms. As you'll see in the next section, the design does develop in tandem with the art style, but the key components of the school stay the same.

Influences:

Universities and Private Schools: I frequently referenced university designs, specifically either more modern ones based around the sciences in places like Singapore, China, South Korea and Japan, as well as old money private schools in the US and England. Combining the motifs of the first with the style of the second was able to evoke feelings of prestige and nepotism while still keeping it modern, as well as making the school feel more mature than designs for a typical middle school. I wanted it to have an open plan 'montessori' vibe, where you have these kids with the mental age of a middle schooler being given the education and independence of university students.
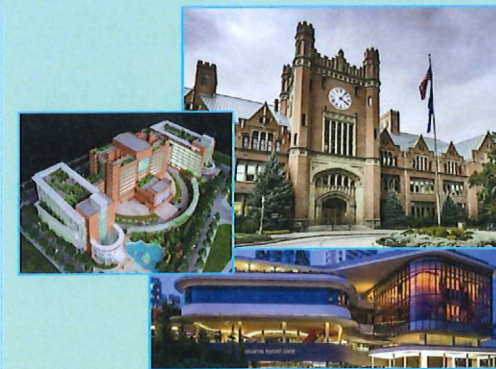
Modern Animation: Obviously I had to keep things simple, so I continually referenced school designs from other animated shows, such as 'Danny Phantom', 'My Little Pony: Equestria Girls' and 'Star vs the Forces of Evil.'

Sci-Fi Concept Art: Since the school is heavily based on the scientific premise of genetic modification, there was a lot of influence from sci-fi concept art, specifically space bases and cargo holds to indicate general importance and priority of contents. It also allowed me to achieve a more sleek, industrial feel when considering design aspects relating to the student's commute around the school, such as the use of tunnels connecting buildings in the final design.

Malls: I referenced a lot of concept art for modern malls- I didn't want to reference actual buildings, since the concept art works better as a reference, being cleaner and more straightforward. Modern malls are designed to combat the stuffy nature of the ones constructed in the 90s, and as such appear more open, friendly and vibrant while still existing as an isolated space. Their placement and design allowed me to consider how the school could be integrated into the city at large.

LOGO & MOTION GRAPHICS

1. Concepts

I knew from the start that I wanted the logo to be able to exist in both animated and static form, so I started off with doing some typography explorations, and trying to figure out ways I could manipulate the different fonts to give the illusion of motion, working with shape language and connecting the letters. I tried working with two styles– cartoonish, and graffiti, to see if I wanted to lean more towards retro futurism or Cyberpunk in the logo. I ended up taking a lot of inspiration from retro video game logos, since that felt like a good middle ground to start at.

Retro Game and 80's inspired logos.

2. Developments

In the first round of developments, I started experimenting with contrast by adding borders to some of the concepts, once again reminiscent of retro video game logos. Doing some work with the graffiti logo, I ended up combining that with 80's style metal texturing, resulting in some experiments that were a little too intense for my liking. In some of the simpler concept developments I experimented with glitches and halftone effects, which I really liked, so I decided to develop those.

Final

The final logo ended up being quite monochromatic, which worked well considering the color palette of the metal texturing was what tripped me up in previous designs. I was able to incorporate dynamic typography, halftones, and glitch effects by doing two versions of the logo, which also worked well to show the night/day parallel at the core of the show's storyline. It's quite complicated for an animated TV show logo, explained by the fact that, at this point, I was still under the impression that my brief was for a videogame. This ended up changing shortly after I finished the logo, but I think it works well as a combination of my primary influences nonetheless, developing that combo through influences from more recent retro design conventions that focus a lot on the textures and styles associated with industrialisation. It looks clean, but still feels solid, and reflects the show perfectly, helped by the scope on the 'S', which is reminiscent of the laser gun of one of the characters.

3. Second Developments

I did some experiments in attempts to rework one of the typography designs in combination with the border, glitch effects, halftone, and metal texture, in order to add a pop art twist to the industrial aspects of the last round of developments. They ended up looking really good, so I tried to figure out ways to combine them for the final logo, as well as figuring out a color scheme now that I'd nailed down the silhouette.

INTRO DEVELOPMENT

1. Established Practice

When storyboarding the intro, I took a lot of inspiration from the openings for 'Star vs The Forces of Evil', 'Amphibia', and 'Glitch Techs', as well as intros from the early 2000's like 'Danny Phantom', 'My Life as a Teenage Robot', and 'American Dragon: Jake Long'. Since the plots for old cartoons weren't typically serialised, the intro would serve as an introduction to the series' premise, often establishing the central conflict, narrative, and characters, aided by visual storytelling and the use of lyrics in the theme. Modern cartoon intros show off the characters and the world but reveal little about the story- since modern cartoons are more serialised, that would fall into spoiler territory. I leaned more towards the early 2000s intros- since the intro serves as a proof of concept, establishing the story, characters, and themes within it is really important. By telling a story within the intro, in the style of 2000's cartoons, I was able to accomplish this fairly easily. I didn't want to make it seem like the show would be too juvenile or slice of life, however, so I decided to take a page out of the book of modern animation, and opt for intro music without lyrics. That way, I could use the narrative techniques from the 2000s without making it seem like the intro spoils the entire show. Similarly, in modern animation, the intro tends to exist as its own thing, with sequences from the show very rarely being used, unliked 2000's cartoons. Every frame is important in setting up the show's premise in a nuanced way, often doing this through foreshadowing and dynamic composition. So, when it came to structuring the narrative, transitions, and flow of the show's intro, I heavily referenced conventions from early 2000's animation. When it came to designing the individual frames, I frequently referenced the visual storytelling techniques of modern animation.

The intro for 'Star vs The Forces of Evil' ends on this cool landing pose, featuring the two main characters, Star and Marco. Their poses show off their weapons, Star's wand and Marco's karate, and them appearing in the same frame with balanced, dynamic poses is a great way to visually link their friendship with their adventures. I designed similar poses for Bea and Frankie, to accomplish the same thing, with accompanying animations.

The foreshadowing scenes in 'Amphibia' hint at the conflict between the characters for each season. In 'Grafted Grifters', I wanted to foreshadow the characters conflict in their personal lives relating to their giftedness, so I designed similarly dynamic illustrations .

The slot sequences in 'The Owl House' show off the secondary conflicts in the form of side characters- I liked the idea of concisely showing story beats through segmented illustrations. I went for a more pop art route, designing a short, moving comic to show the Grifter's jewellery heist.

Like SVTFOE, 'Glitch Techs' also features a protagonist duo, in the form of Meko and Five. Their relationship is shown throughout the intro for the show, contrasting their hobbies as gamers with their fake jobs as technicians, with their real jobs as Glitch Techs. Similarly, I wanted to show the different aspects of the Grifters lives, by placing emphasis on their expressions and proximity to one another.

2. Music

I decided to use an Electro swing song called 'Comin' Up Swinging' by the Atom Smiths as the music for the intro. I opted for an instrumental track, in line with most modern cartoon intros. Electro Swing, as the name implies, is a mix of swing and electro music, adding modern EDM motifs and synthesisers to swing beats and instruments. It perfectly encapsulates the vibes of the show, combining the old with the new, much like retro future and Cyberpunk.

3. Final
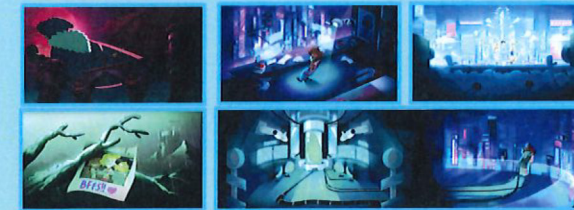
The final animation shows a day in the life of Bea, Frankie, and Oli- we see them staying up until early in the morning, overworked by their parents and the people around them, before they're shuttled off to school. Arc Academy seems to be a better environment for them- Despite being overworked, they still enjoy learning, but the pressure of their personal lives follows them no matter where they go, piling up until they collapse. At the end of a long day, they take solace in the student council room, and find themselves a new goal- a jewellery heist. Before we know it, they're in the midst of said heist, and completely in their element. They disappear into the night, successful in their mission. The next day, it starts all over again, with the kids just as exhausted as they've always been.

The image of the city in the background of Frankie's Dad's speech serves as a reference image for the actual layout- in this shot of Oli, you can see the central tower in the distance, and when we move to the school through the monorail, its placement and the fact that it's floating in the air lines up with where it is in the image.

In Oli's room, you can see a poster of one of the robocops that catches the Grifters during their heist.

In Bea's scene, we see a monorail go under a track, heading towards the school. The same tracks can be seen in all the other shots of the city, revealing how the residents of Deco City get around.

The story itself is told over three sequences, showing the Grifter's personal, school, and criminal lives. Emphasising these as three different areas shows the main three aspects of their characters, and how the constant stress they're under affects them. I wanted to show that, while they're all incredibly talented, and enjoy challenging themselves, the constant pressure from their school and the people around them makes their 'gifts' far less enjoyable, a clear allegory for gifted kid syndrome. As such, they use crime as a way to escape from the pressure of their lives, and to reclaim their gifts for themselves. I showed this by making the criminal sequence the only one that uses full body poses and animation, as well as pushing the pose dynamics and expressions. This is consistent even when they're caught by the police- it's fun for them to use their gifts in a new situation where the pressure is something they can use to challenge themselves. When they inevitably return to their lives, they're smiling, despite being completely exhausted. I wanted to use this narrative to show that people should be able to decide their growth on their own terms. The main issue with gifted kids becoming burnt out is that they have pressure placed on them by other people to succeed in a certain way- this pressure mounts until, eventually, the success isn't even their own. Emphasising the characters individuality within their routine was crucial to counteracting this- they have their own goals, interests, and forms of intelligence. In escaping the monotony of pressure, their gifts are truly able to shine. My hope is that the people watching the intro will want to see these characters succeed on both ends, being able to reclaim their academics and forge their own paths as criminals. In doing so, I'm also hoping they'll be able to advocate for themselves to do the same, making efforts to escape monotony and do the things that make them happy, because, ultimately, that's what will allow them to grow, too.

4. Regeneration

As a proof of concept, my main goal with the intro was to successfully incorporate all aspects of my sub-briefs into a cohesive body of work, that's continually evolved as I've developed this brief. The main ways I did this were stylistic cohesion, transitions, and practical considerations. I wanted to fully regenerate my style of background design in relation to the previous sub briefs and my artist models- I regenerated the use of the stipple and splatter brushes from my previous sub-briefs to easily add shading and texture, also adding in the use of halftone, circling back to the pop art influence from the show's logo. I incorporated more Cyberpunk aspects, regenerating the holographic screens from the student council room into holographic advertisements. I also stuck with a lineless style, focusing on clear silhouettes and interesting shapes, in line with my retro futuristic artist models. Going beyond the background, I also wanted to connect each frame together through transitions. Using background details and physical transitions between frames, I created a physical and holistic map of the setting, keeping in mind the connections between the characters, locations, and conflict. This also falls under practical considerations- by noting the visual relationships between the different parts of the setting, I was able to create a sense of continuity and lore within the intro. This was able to strengthen my visual storytelling, since, beyond the individual frames, I actually had a wider story I was attempting to tell, which lines up perfectly with my pictorial concern.

BEYOND THE BOARD

1. What Next?

If I had a fourth panel, I'd want to create poster renders. A lot of modern cartoons will have promotional posters made for them, often in a more detailed style, featuring the show's central characters, setting, and motifs, all in one dynamic illustration. If I designed one for 'Grafted Grifters', I'd be able to put a lot of time into composition and rendering, which would allow me to regenerate the shows style in detail. It would also give me an opportunity to possibly incorporate background characters, and explore secondary storylines through different concepts, which would be really good for developing my existing brief. I would execute this by taking reference from modern animation promo posters, and trying to recreate them with 'Grafted Grifters'- I'd probably try for one that's really dramatic, one that's a bit light-hearted, and one that's more action oriented. From there, I'd combine the different tones with references from retro future styled posters, experimenting with style and the different ways I could frame the show and it's themes through illustration, something I haven't really done in my boards thus far.

I'd also want to design merchandise, like stickers, bags, and clothing. I could reuse a lot of the assets from the poster renders, allowing me to further develop a more detailed style of promo art for the show, as well as experimenting with that style to create a wider promotional brand. You can usually get a lot more creative with merchandise than with marketing materials, so I'd really be able to push the brief's aesthetic, developing the existing look and possibly finding new iconography to incorporate back into the show. All the work I've done so far has been concept and practical art, so I think it'd be really fun to develop the brief further as a brand as opposed to just a product. A lot of modern animation merch is pretty lacklustre, so I'd take reference from fan-made merchandise on sites like Etsy, trying to use a more simplified, chibi style for small items like pins and stickers, and working with more dynamic, detailed illustrations for bags and shirts, maybe working in a more pop-art esque comic style. I could even have a go at collectible figurines, designing the poses and making them out of clay.

2. Beyond the Board

Going beyond the board, I'd probably develop a pitch bible. A pitch bible is a reference document used by screenwriters for information on characters, settings, and other elements of a television or film project. It would essentially allow me to further the development work I've done on the board, and flesh out the rest of the story enough to constitute pitching 'Grafted Grifters' to a network or studio. Realistically, New Zealand doesn't do a lot of TV animation, but having a pitch bible would mean I'd be prepared to develop the story in any way I wanted, whether that be creating a graphic novel, Youtube series, or other independently developed project. I feel like the brief as it exists so far isn't nearly as fleshed out as it could be, and I know that I could come up with a lot more if I continued developing it over the next few years.

Evaluation: *Have I figured out how to make a TV show addressing the issue of gifted kid syndrome that's engaging to kids?*

My overall concern when developing 'Grafted Grifters' was to utilise the conventions of TV animation to tell a story about an important issue in a way that can engage a younger demographic, so as to allow them to be aware of the negative ramifications of 'gifted kid syndrome' before they have to experience them themselves. On that front, I think I was successful- I've continued to regenerate the brief in line with established practice, and have continually reflected on my work to ensure the finished product aligns with my pictorial concern. When I started, my influences were very medium-centric, coming from animators like Dana Terrace and hanabushi_, and aesthetic styles like retro futurism and Cyberpunk. These influences have remained consistent, but as my folio developed, I sought influence from a litany of other areas, from video games to pop art to modern architecture. In doing this, I allowed my brief to not only develop in style, but to increase in depth. I gave myself more opportunities for exploration of my pictorial concern, and didn't limit myself to what was immediately relevant or obvious, but what I thought would best benefit the evolution of my folio and artwork. This project has really helped me grow as an artist- I delved into areas of design I had almost no experience with, and was able to increase my skills in disciplines I was already passionate about. In doing so, I feel like the project is reflective of my beliefs and experiences as someone that personally connects to its themes. That in itself proves that 'Grafted Grifters' is something that can be actively engaged with, in a way that transcends age demographics through the medium of design. I found it incredibly fun to return to characters I created in my adolescence, and to develop them in a way that reflects my personal growth. I still have a lot to learn, however- I would have liked to have done more technical experimentation with this project, for one. With such an extensive brief, time was of the essence, and a lot of my process focused on efficiency rather than detail. I'm proud of my final product, but it would have been nice to utilise different techniques, such as using Adobe After Effects to render lighting, add drop shadows, and create more visual depth than what I could do with Procreate and Premiere pro. Exploring a more cinematic style of animation would have fit my brief perfectly, but I'm sure the tone of the final product would have been completely different if I had. This has been a good starting point, though- media doesn't have to be serious to be effective, and while I'm keen to develop my style and explore different tones and themes when I study animation at uni, I think that, as 'Grafted Grifters' exists currently, what I've created is more than enough, and I'm incredibly proud of all the work I've done.

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