



FREE CHAPTER 03

beginner's guide to  
**sketching:**  
characters, creatures & concepts





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# Drawing projects

In this section, four talented artists will guide you through their sketching process, developing characters and creatures from rough concept doodles and taking them through to fully sketched scenes. The final project will take a slightly different path and also show you how to use software to put your image together digitally. Every artist has their own unique approach to making an image and these detailed tutorials will help you find yours!



# Sketching an alien slave

Learn how to create a believable main character for an illustration.

By Brun Croes

It's easy to get lost in your imagination; it's one thing to see ideas in your head and another to put them down on paper. Here I will show you how to simplify that process by designing, drawing, and shading a character for a narrative illustration. Our goal is to experiment with designs and to figure out ways to ease the process.

## TOOLS

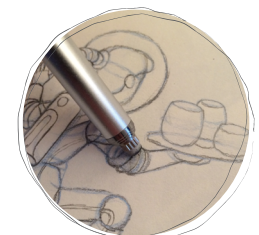
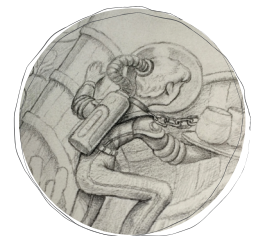
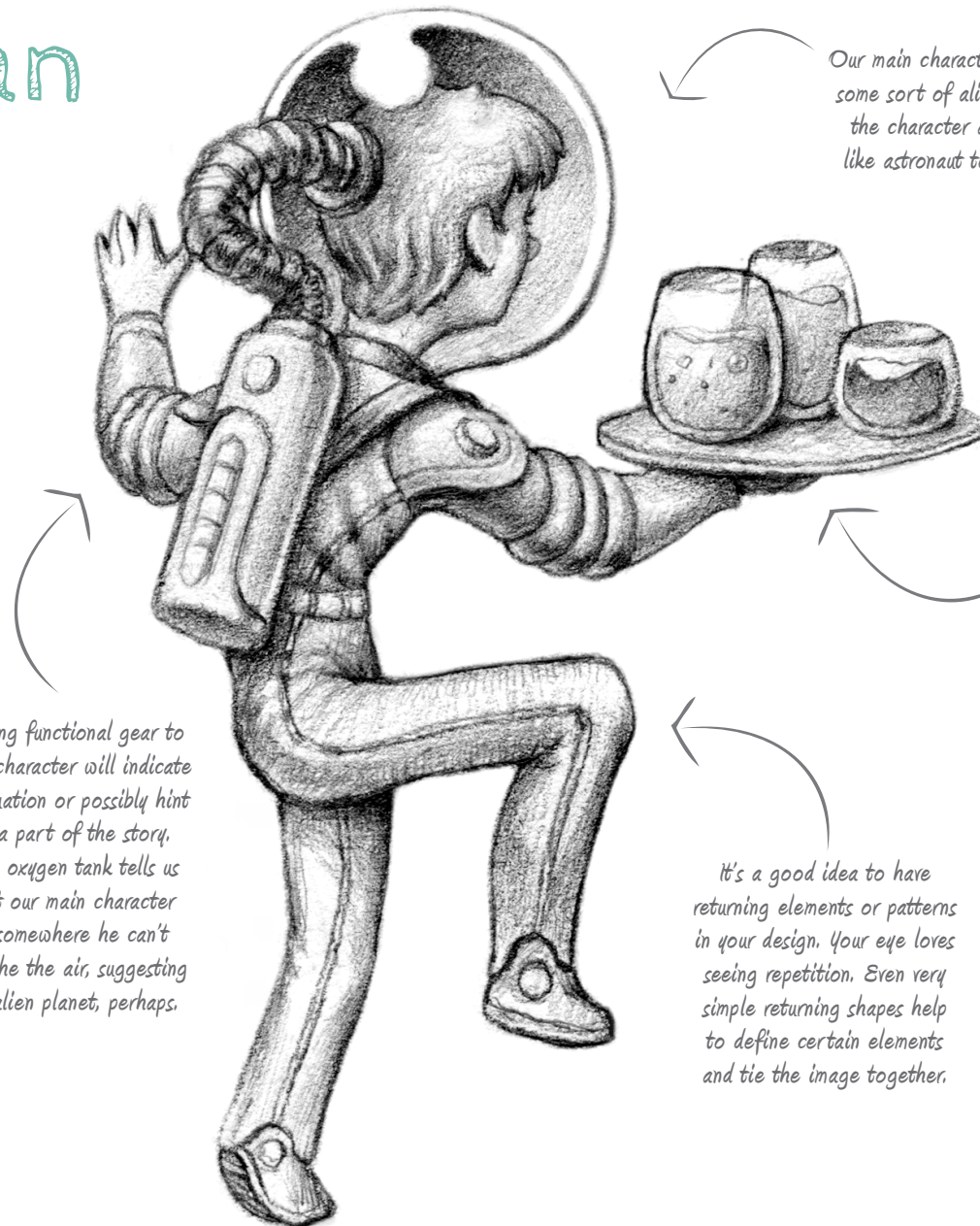
- Pencil (HB)
- Mechanical pencil
- Blue pencil
- Paper
- Eraser

Adding functional gear to your character will indicate a situation or possibly hint at a part of the story. The oxygen tank tells us that our main character is somewhere he can't breathe the air, suggesting an alien planet, perhaps.

It's a good idea to have returning elements or patterns in your design. Your eye loves seeing repetition. Even very simple returning shapes help to define certain elements and tie the image together.

Our main character is a human kidnapped by some sort of alien-like creature. I imagine the character as a young, almost child-like astronaut to bring out his innocence.

Tools and objects help to define the function of our character. In this case our astronaut is serving his captors, classifying our main character as a butler of sorts.





# Designing a pose

My character needs to possess elements that suggest a humanoid figure. Building up the pose with simple shapes will help you figure out the design before you go into details.



My chosen gesture for the character.

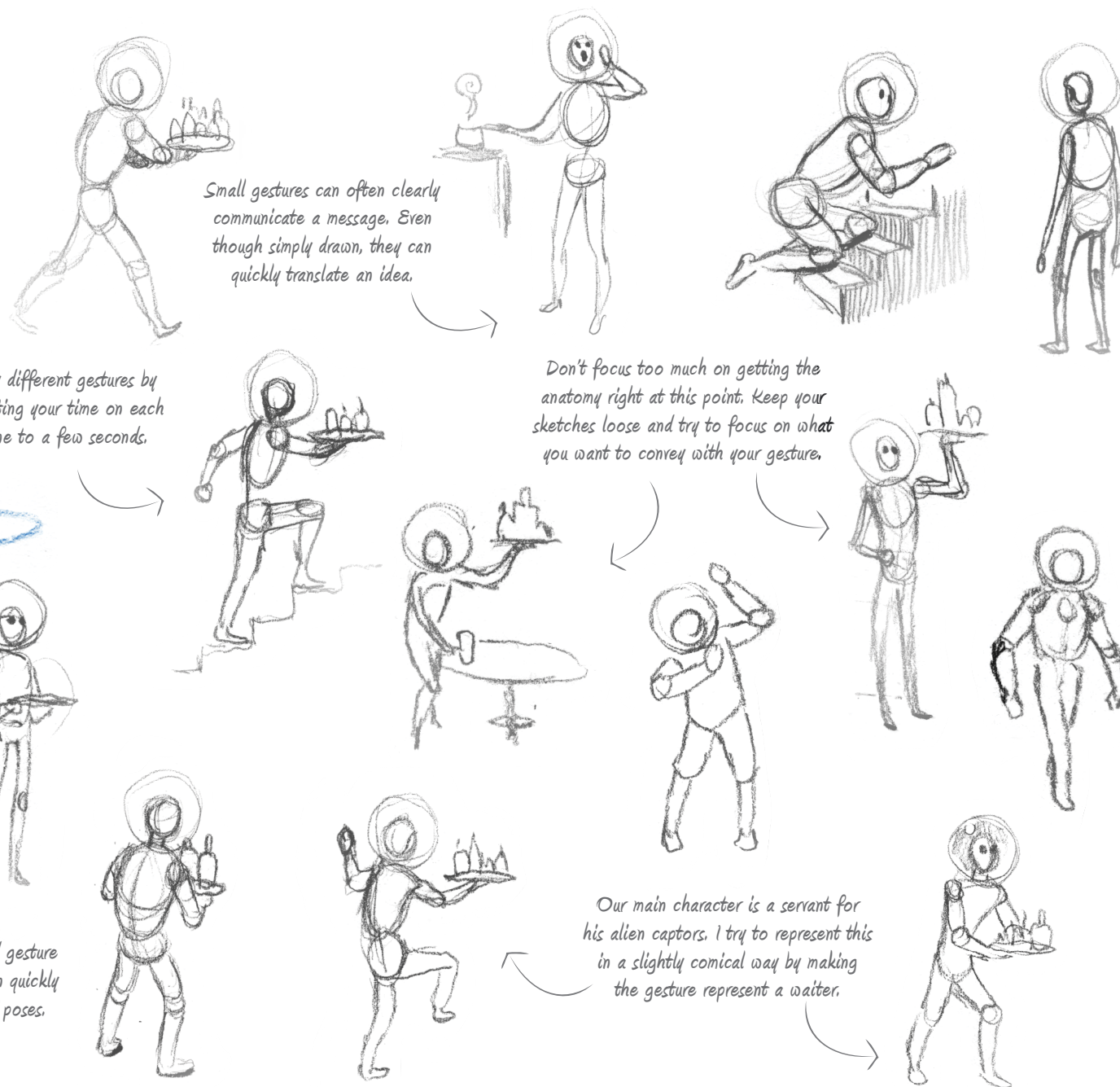
Using small thumbnail-sized gesture drawings means that you can quickly come up with a variety of poses.

Try different gestures by limiting your time on each one to a few seconds.

Small gestures can often clearly communicate a message. Even though simply drawn, they can quickly translate an idea.

Don't focus too much on getting the anatomy right at this point. Keep your sketches loose and try to focus on what you want to convey with your gesture.

Our main character is a servant for his alien captors. I try to represent this in a slightly comical way by making the gesture represent a waiter.





## 01 Getting started with the pose

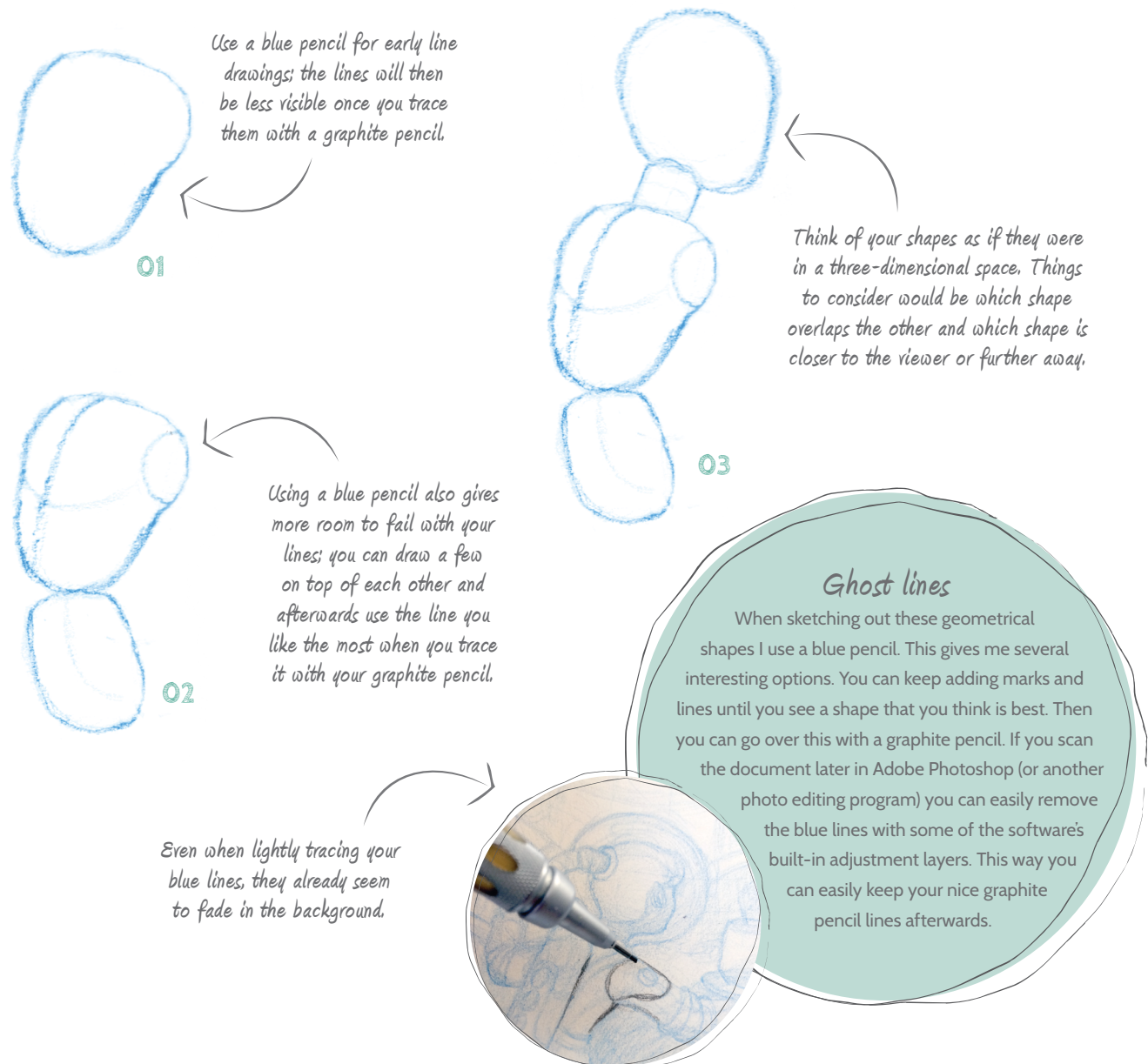
I've decided on a gesture that I like so I'm ready to start building up my character's pose. I begin by drawing geometric forms which, when combined, form a believable blueprint or template that I can then use later on to build my character's design around. When drawing a character, it's a smart idea to start with the torso and hips. They are the part of our body that all the rest – arms, legs, and head – are connected to, so they are essential to our pose. For the torso I draw a sort of narrow-to-broad elliptical shape. This gives an impression of the shoulders and a waist.

## 02 Adding the hips

Now I add the shape of the hips to help define the stance and how the spine-curve of the character will run, giving us more insight into the posture. Here I use the combination of torso and hip to show how the character is bending forward a bit. I add a few hints of directional lines which help to define the dimensions and form of the geometrical shapes. For the shape of the hips I use another elliptical shape – the top a bit more flat than the lower part.

## 03 Adding a head

Adding a head shape helps to convey the idea of a humanoid figure. It's a part that is instantly recognizable to the human eye. For the neck I use a small cylinder to connect the head shape and the torso. Notice how the cylinder is slightly in perspective, further helping us to determine the form of our character. I add the head by drawing another elliptical shape. I draw the top of the head shape a little bigger than the bottom part; this way we get a feeling that there's a chin and the indication of the head's brain case.





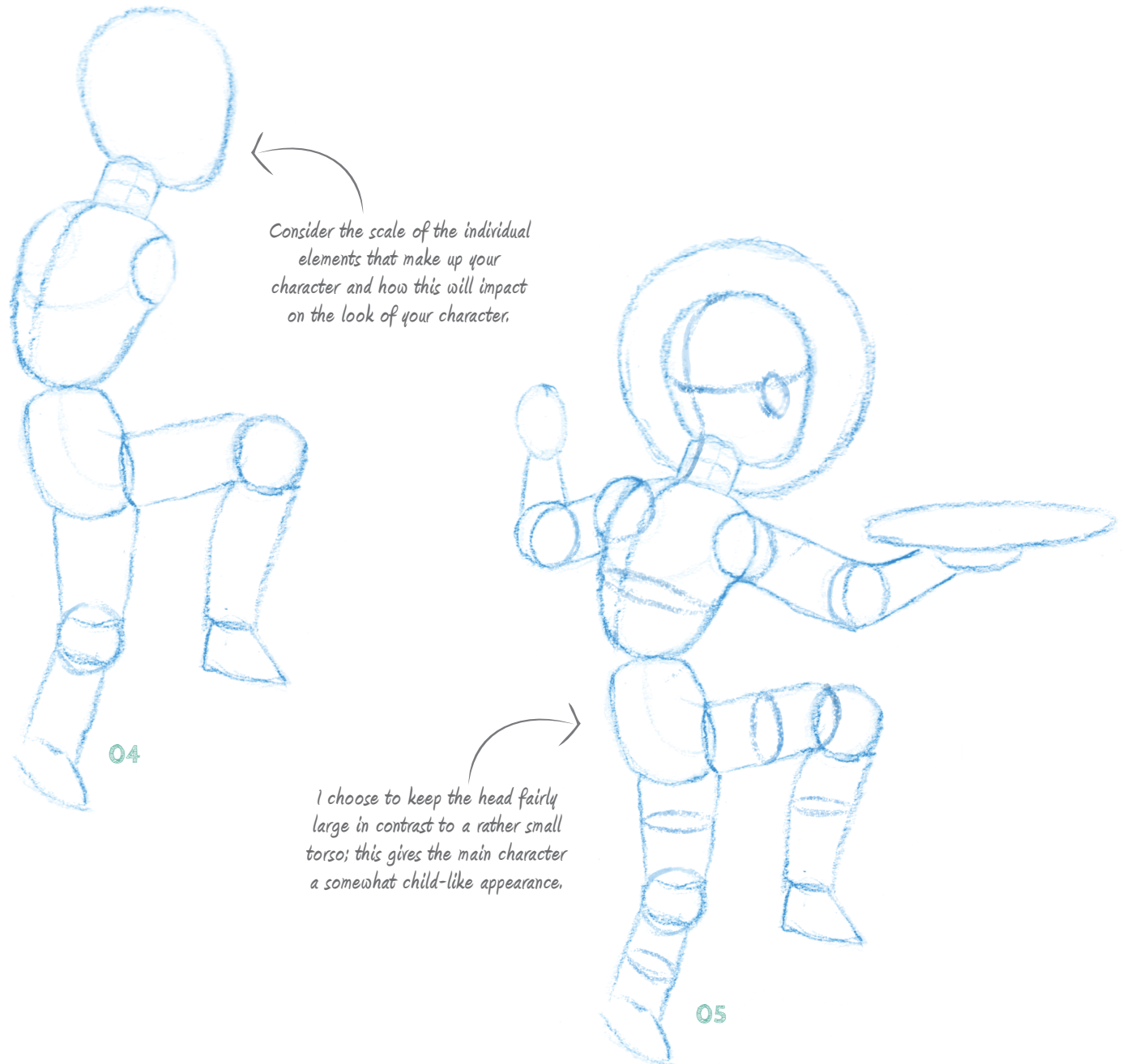
#### 04 Adding some legs and feet

Now I add some legs and feet to give our character a sense of motion. Drawing one leg up and another one straight down, with its feet slightly pushed up, can give the appearance that the character is walking up stairs. I make sure that the legs aren't drawn in straight lines and make them curve a bit, as if the character is bending through a bit of weight from his upper body.

I use simple cylinders and small circles to give an impression of the upper legs, lower legs, and knees. Working together as some kind of mechanical construction, the circles act as an anchor point on which the cylinders can rotate forward or backwards. It helps to look at some pictures of human skeletons to see how the joints are connected and able to move. For the feet I add some pyramid-like shapes.

#### 05 Adding arms, hands, and some form

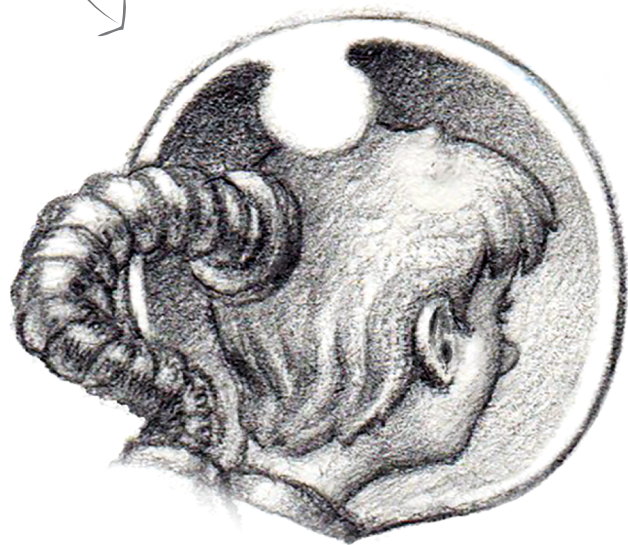
The arms and hands are similar to the legs and feet as they also play a crucial part in portraying the character's pose. As seen in the previous step, I build up the arms using cylinders and circles to represent the limbs and joints. For the hands I draw elliptical shapes, one of them more flat than the other because it is holding a plate and will most likely be covered for a part. I add some new lines along all of my geometric shapes to accentuate their form in space. I keep these lines loose and use them more as a suggestion. I also add a quick outline of the head.





# Drawing the head

The character is facing away from the viewer so exploring different elements such as hairstyles and the size of the features you can see (ear, head shape, and so on) are important in defining the character.



The character's face can be naked or hidden behind a mask. For our illustration I choose to go with a naked face. The front of the face is already hidden, but adding a mask would take away part of his humanity.



This is an exploration stage, so don't worry about drawing pretty things just yet. Try to imagine who this character would be in your illustration.



In this idea, an overgrown beard in a helmet might help to tell the story of someone who has been captured for a while. The big glasses and bald head help to give a feeling of old age as well.



Different hairstyles can define a character's mindset. A mohawk quickly gives a character some attitude while a cleaner haircut may give the character more innocence.

The fixed position of our main character's pose leaves us with the main focus on the back of his head. This leaves the face somewhat anonymous, giving the viewer a sense of mystery.



## 01 Building up the character's head

Using the template we made in the previous stage and now working in graphite pencil, I place a small oval to the right of the center of the head's elliptical shape. This will be the ear. Next to the ear I draw an "S"-shaped line that will represent the side of the face. For the purpose of this tutorial I made the line darker, but usually when drawing my lines at the beginning of a sketch I draw them very lightly so that they won't show at the end. I also add a simplistic representation of the character's hair. When drawing hair I begin by drawing its silhouette, imagining a form that fits around the character like a blob of clay.

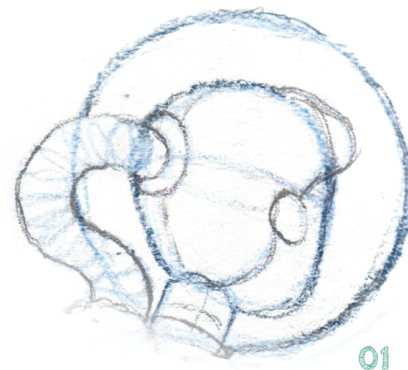
## 02 Adding some definition

Now that I have my building blocks ready I start to suggest more detail. I add small pyramid-like shapes along the curved outline of the hair shape, which immediately makes it more recognizable as hair. Underneath the shape of the ear I add some dark shading by making a few hard dark pencil marks. This starts to give the ear some form. I add a faint pencil line along the side of the glass helmet to indicate the border between where the light and dark parts will be. I add some small lines along the right bottom parts of the hair silhouette and the face shape, to indicate that the light is coming from a point behind him.

## 03 Shading in the shadows

It's time to add a little bit of form. I correct the "S"-shaped line of the face to give it more definition and personality. I imagine this character to be quite young so I exaggerate the cheekbone and eye socket. I add a small line near the eye to suggest eyelashes. I add shading by drawing very lightly over the paper and drawing small short lines close to each other. I imagine how every shape would look if it was a three-dimensional sculpture and follow the shape of the form.

The light comes from the direction of the viewer, so most of my shadows will be around the outlines of my shapes, leaving brighter spots of highlights in the center of the shapes. I use the same shading technique to suggest some hair locks, which follow the shape of the head. Where my shapes touch, around the ear and hairlines, I draw in the lines a bit darker. To suggest at the helmet's transparency and reflectiveness, I add darker shading underneath the border lines, leaving light and reflective areas on top of the helmet.



*For my graphite pencil lines I use a mechanical pencil. More specifically the GraphGear 1000 from Pentel. These pencils have a nice weight to them.*

*Start off with a fairly thick (0.9mm) HB pencil to give smooth lines with a little bit of that graphite texture.*



*When shading I try to keep my mark-making a bit rough. This will provide a bit of additional texture in the shadow zones when things get darker later on.*



## 04 Going a bit darker

Now I continue by putting a layer of shading on top of everything. I alternate between two methods to do this. I start off by using the same technique mentioned in the previous step, placing light pencil marks next to each other. Where I want my shading to be darker, I add an extra layer of shading on top. To create darker, smoother shading I make marks following small loop shapes.

For the helmet I add more shading on top, to contrast with the bright highlight spot that we left out in step 03. I darken the side of the ear, leaving a small area unshaded at the top to provide a highlight which will help define its shape. Some extra shading near his cheek and neck towards the front side of his head helps to accentuate the roundness of his face and the structure underneath it.

## 05 Refinement

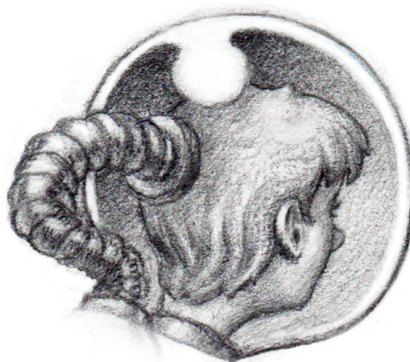
Time to refine all the elements of the face in order to complete it. At this point I mainly use the loop-marking technique to enhance my gradients, making sure that there's a nice contrast in the values that reads well. I put some more shading down around the eyes and draw them a bit more clearly by drawing in a "V"-shaped line for the eyelashes. I add a nose by placing a small "U"-like shape on the outside of the outlines underneath the eyes. The nose helps establish that we are looking at a human face.

I add a few small but dark marks inside the shadow area of the ear to suggest the inside of the ear shell. As a finishing touch I clean up certain parts with my eraser, such as the highlight area of the glass helmet.

*I make a few darker lines along the way, to accentuate certain areas of the face. Good places to do this are where two objects (such as the hair and the face) are about to touch.*

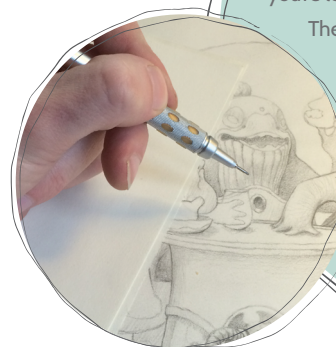


04



05

*Use an eraser to pick out highlights and make them cleaner.*



### Avoiding smudge

When shading, use an extra piece of paper underneath your hand. This will minimize the amount your hand smudges your pencil lines. If you're right-handed, start shading from left to right; if you're left-handed, start at the right and move to the left.

There's nothing more frustrating than trying to make a clean-looking drawing that loses its brilliance and value thanks to constant smudging. Instead, use smudging to your advantage every now and then to smooth out shading. You can do this with several tools (see page 16). I use a simple piece of tissue paper to get the job done.



# Adding clothing

The shape of the lines created by the design of the costume can help to create form and add a three-dimensional feel to your character.



Experiment with different shapes and parts; loosely follow the form of the template guidelines but don't be afraid to go outside them for parts such as shoulder pads or oxygen tanks.

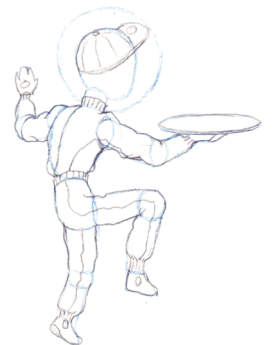
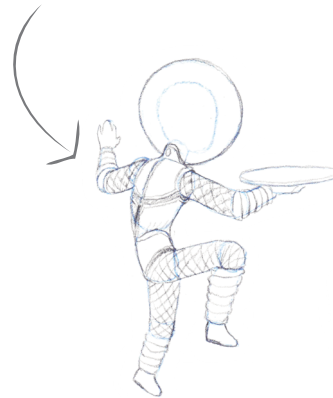
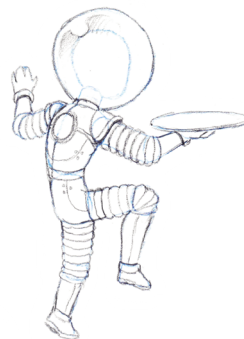
Breaking up the curved lines of the template gives the impression of looser clothing, in contrast to a more skin-tight suit.



Try looking for interesting patterns; these are great for exploring different designs and to quickly represent different types of material.



Adding an oxygen tank helps with the narrative as this way we know that the character is in a strange place, possibly in a world where he can't breathe without it. This helps to accentuate the alien theme.



Using our template you can quickly come up with different ideas for possible costume designs. Our main character has been captured by aliens, so I think it would be fitting to put him in some sort of spacesuit.



## 01 Building up the design

Using the template guidelines from the pose section, I begin constructing lines on top of them using a blue pencil. This helps me to draw circles along the template respective of their perspective, to give them a three-dimensional feeling. As mentioned, drawing with the blue pencil (or any color, really) gives you the chance to make mistakes and draw it again.

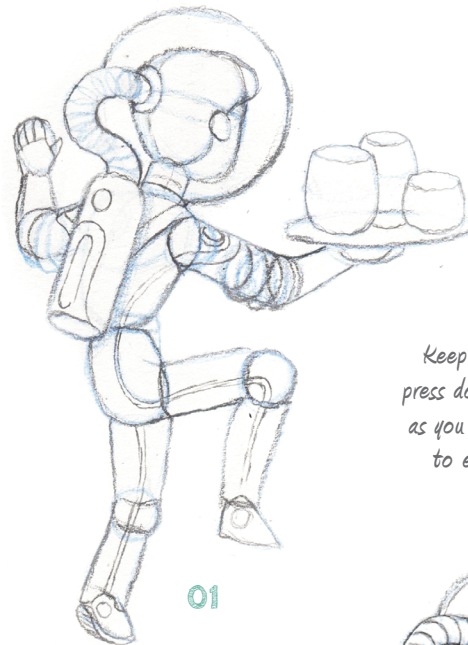
When you've decided on the right line you can draw over it with a graphite pencil and erase the blue lines. Using the exploration sketches I combine parts that I like into a final design. I pick the parts that fit best with the character's personality. I want to have a spacesuit which at the same time could pass as more regular clothing.

## 02 The importance of outlines

Now I erase all of the blue lines so that I'm left with my final design in outlines. Knowing and figuring out your design up front is crucial to any illustration, especially when working traditionally. When working digitally you can easily throw around layers and erase things to start again; when working traditionally and figuring out at the end of your illustration that something just isn't working, or isn't placed correctly in the composition, you often have to start again from scratch. Save yourself some time and try to get your outlines right from the get go.

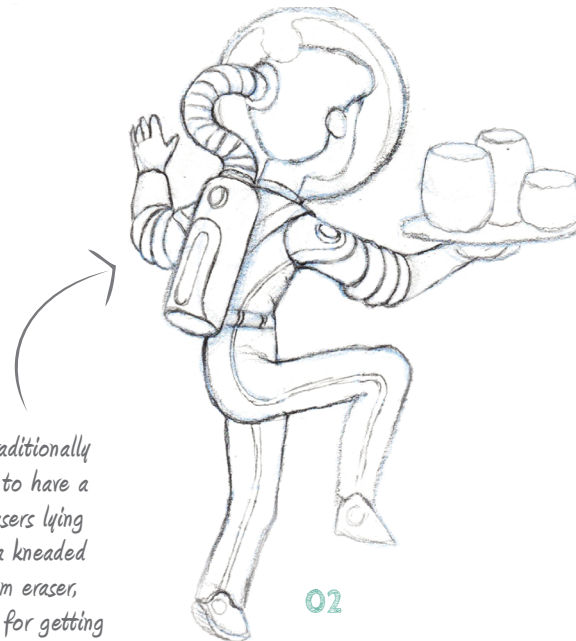
## 03 Start to shade

It's time to add some shading to the character. I focus on the general areas first, shading them according to the light source behind the character. If you aren't sure how to place the shadows, go back to the template and experiment with shading the simple forms. When it comes to the actual shading on the final character I often simplify the shadow zones according to the primitive shapes.



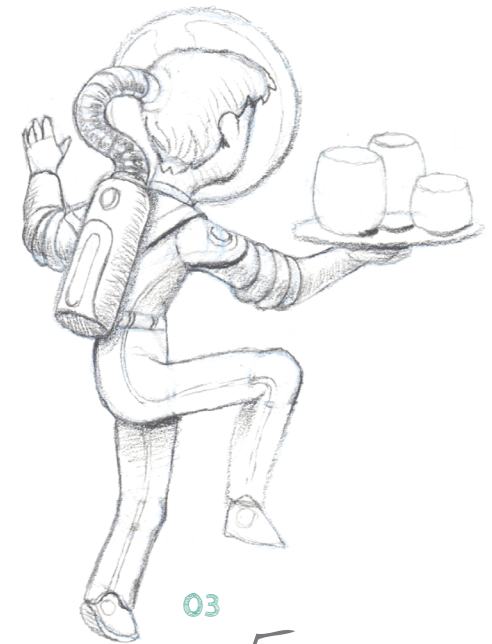
01

*Keep your lines light and don't press down too hard on your pencil as you might still want to be able to erase something later on.*



02

*When working traditionally it's a good idea to have a few kinds of erasers lying around such as a kneaded eraser and a gum eraser, which are perfect for getting rid of unused pencil lines.*



03

*Build up form by placing small marks instead of shading everything perfectly at once. It's good to get a general view of how things might look before diving in.*

## 04 Keep at it

While shading keep in mind what material you're dealing with. For the glass helmet and the oxygen tank I leave small areas unshaded by their outlines where the reflected light would be. This suggests to the viewer that it's made of a shiny material such as glass or metal. I also add some reflective light (unshaded areas) to certain parts of the clothing, such as the arms. Notice how the transition between the shading from reflected light to the shadow is much smoother, almost gradient like. This further helps to translate the material in our drawing. We can see how this is made of a different material to the helmet and oxygen tank.

## 05 Final details

I now finish up my drawing by accentuating certain parts of the design and shading. I make certain parts of the design stand out more by defining their silhouette with a darker line, such as the shoulder plates and the sleeve on his right hand. I darken the places where different parts are about to touch, because light is less likely to reach these areas. I continue building up my shading by adding layer on layer of subtle pencil lines, adding creases along the way and defining some cast shadows such as on his leg and the hand underneath the plateau.

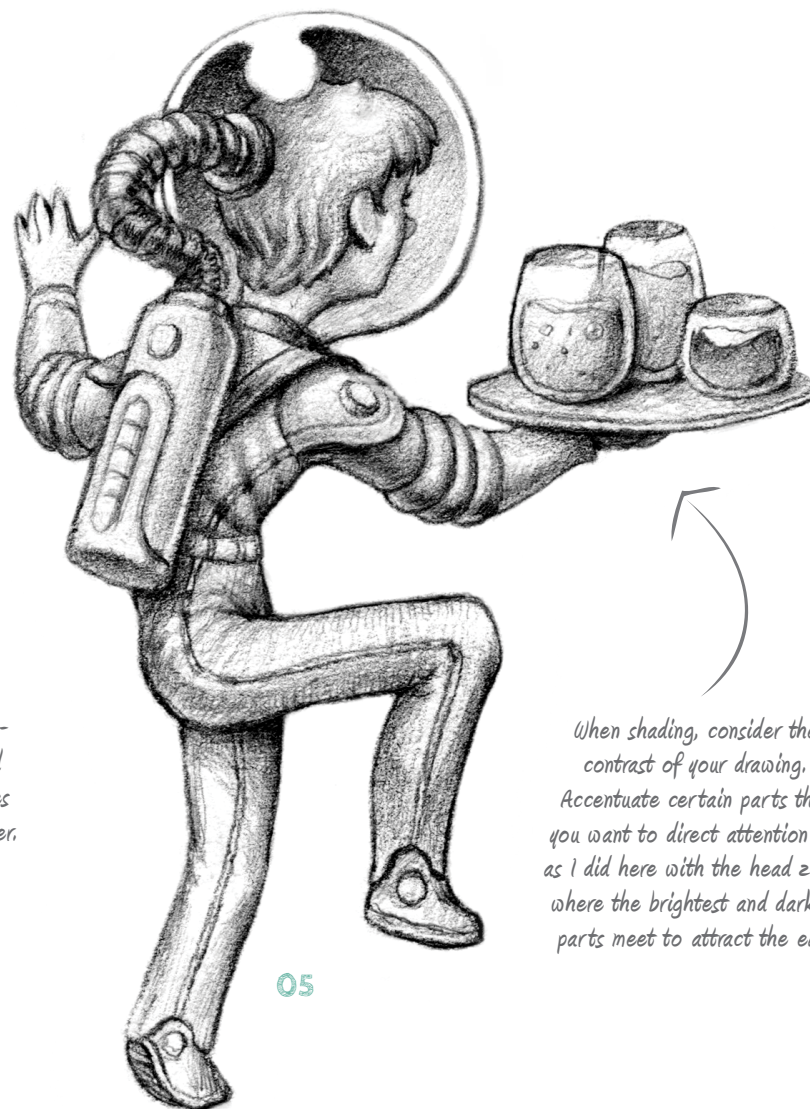
Now that we've drawn our character and explored different options, it's time to move on to the next section of our tutorial and meet the captors of our main character!

*Don't go to the dark side just yet!*

I often see people go very dark early on with their sketches. It's good to remember that you can always go darker but it's a lot more difficult to go lighter again when trying to erase a line that's been put down too hard or too dark. Build up layers of shading first to check your values are working.



*Try to avoid small, uncertain mark-making with your pencil; the final drawing needs to have smooth lines which feel like they belong together.*



*When shading, consider the contrast of your drawing. Accentuate certain parts that you want to direct attention to, as I did here with the head zone, where the brightest and darkest parts meet to attract the eye.*



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# Drawing a group of alien creatures

Learn how to develop the creatures for your illustration.

By Brun Croes

Now that we've figured out how our character will appear, it's time for us to take a look at his captors – the alien creatures who are enslaving our main character. As done previously, we will try to come up with some fun designs and figure out how our creatures will look and how to simplify the process of putting them down on paper.

## TOOLS

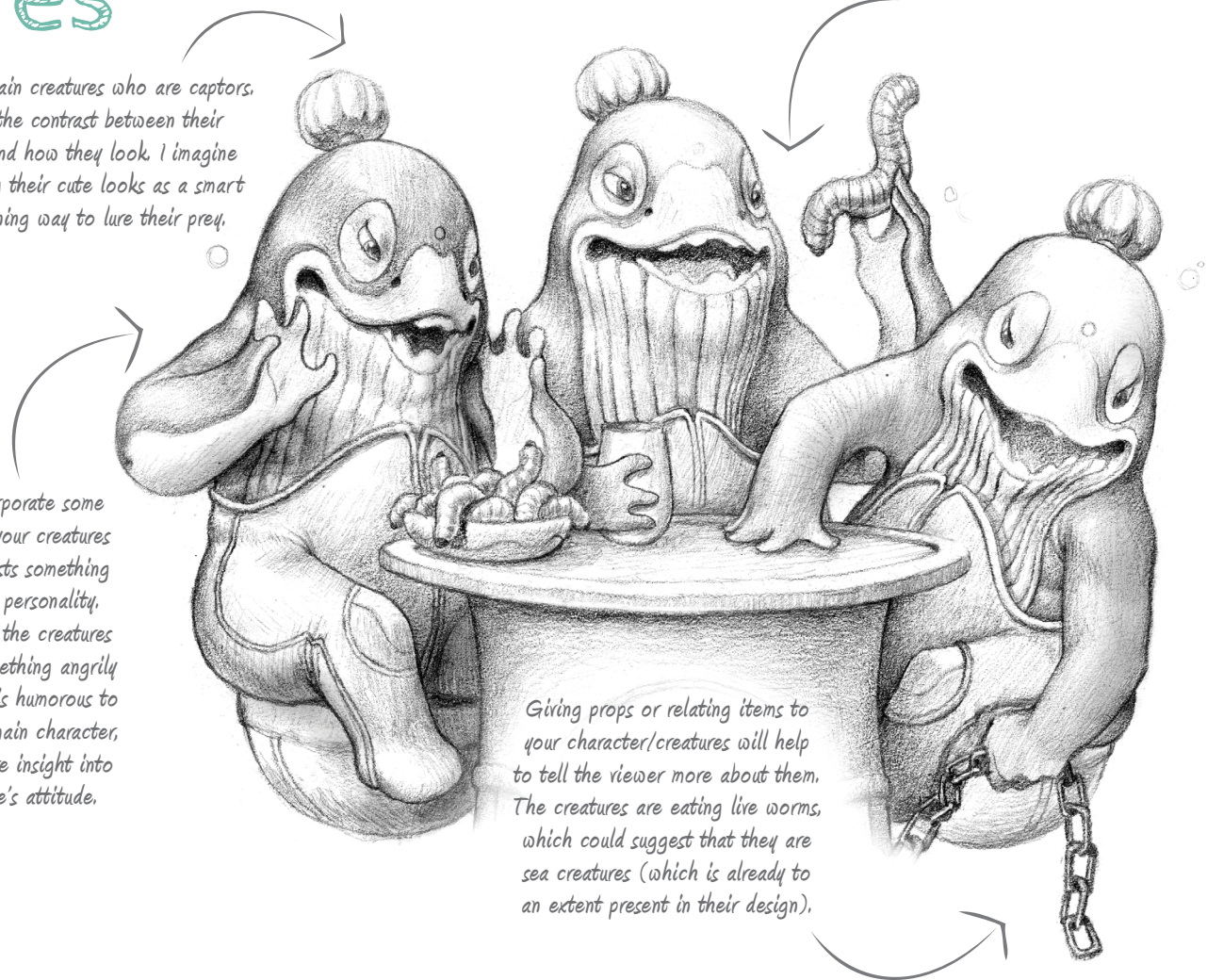
- Mechanical pencil (2B)
- Paper
- Eraser
- Pigment liner

Meet our main creatures who are captors. Notice the contrast between their actions and how they look. I imagine them using their cute looks as a smart and cunning way to lure their prey.

Try to incorporate some action into your creatures which suggests something about their personality. Here one of the creatures is yelling something angrily (although it is humorous to him) at our main character, giving us more insight into the creature's attitude.

Giving props or relating items to your character/creatures will help to tell the viewer more about them. The creatures are eating live worms, which could suggest that they are sea creatures (which is already to an extent present in their design).

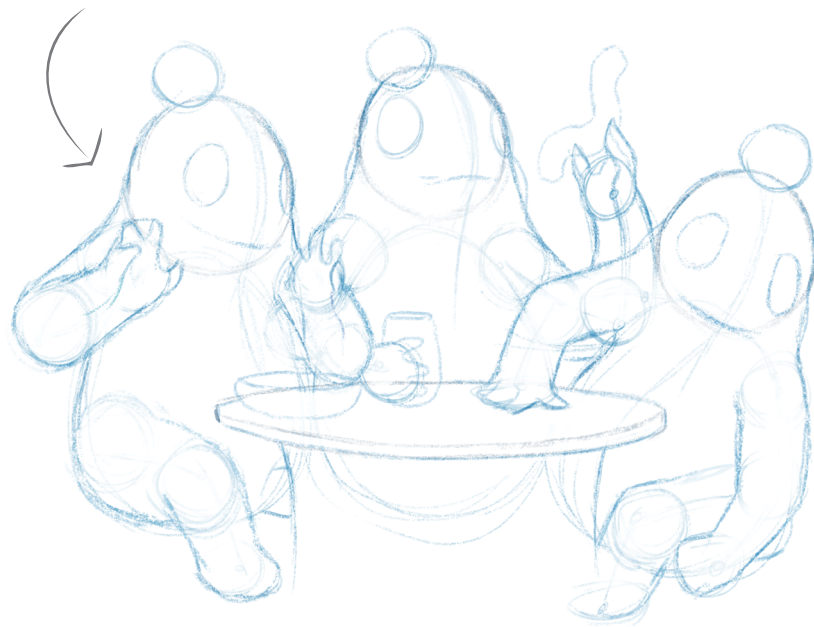
Giving our creatures a range of different emotions helps to make them more believable. We can sense that these creatures are smart, or at the very least smarter than animals, who don't tend to have as many different facial emotions.



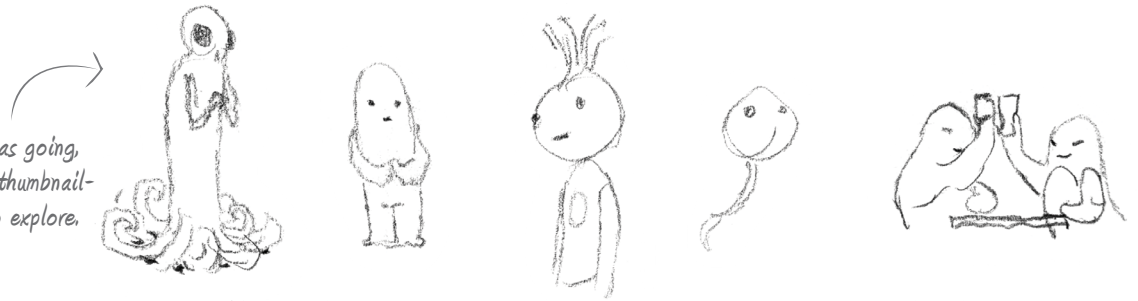


# Designing the pose

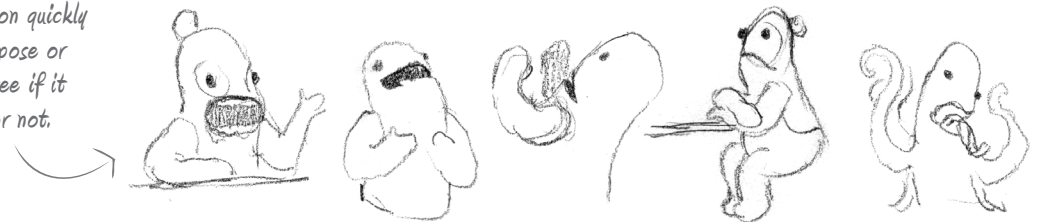
I choose to have the creatures grouped together in order to make them more intimidating. Setting them higher than the main character indicates who has the power in the situation.



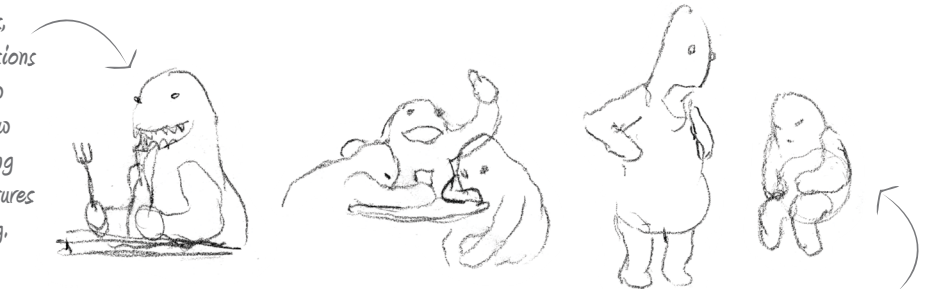
To get some ideas going, return to drawing thumbnail-sized gestures to explore.



Keep your focus on quickly representing a pose or basic idea to see if it would work or not.



Try different sizes, positions, and expressions by looking at how simple you can draw them without adding detail. Focus on gestures that tell something.



Don't focus too much on getting things right. Anatomy or details are absolutely unnecessary at this stage, although it's a good idea to start thinking a bit about those



These small drawings are often far from pretty, but in my experience they tend to be one of the most fun parts of the process when making an illustration. Remember to have fun with these and don't rush them. Make at least a few before committing to one of them.

## 01 Getting started with the pose

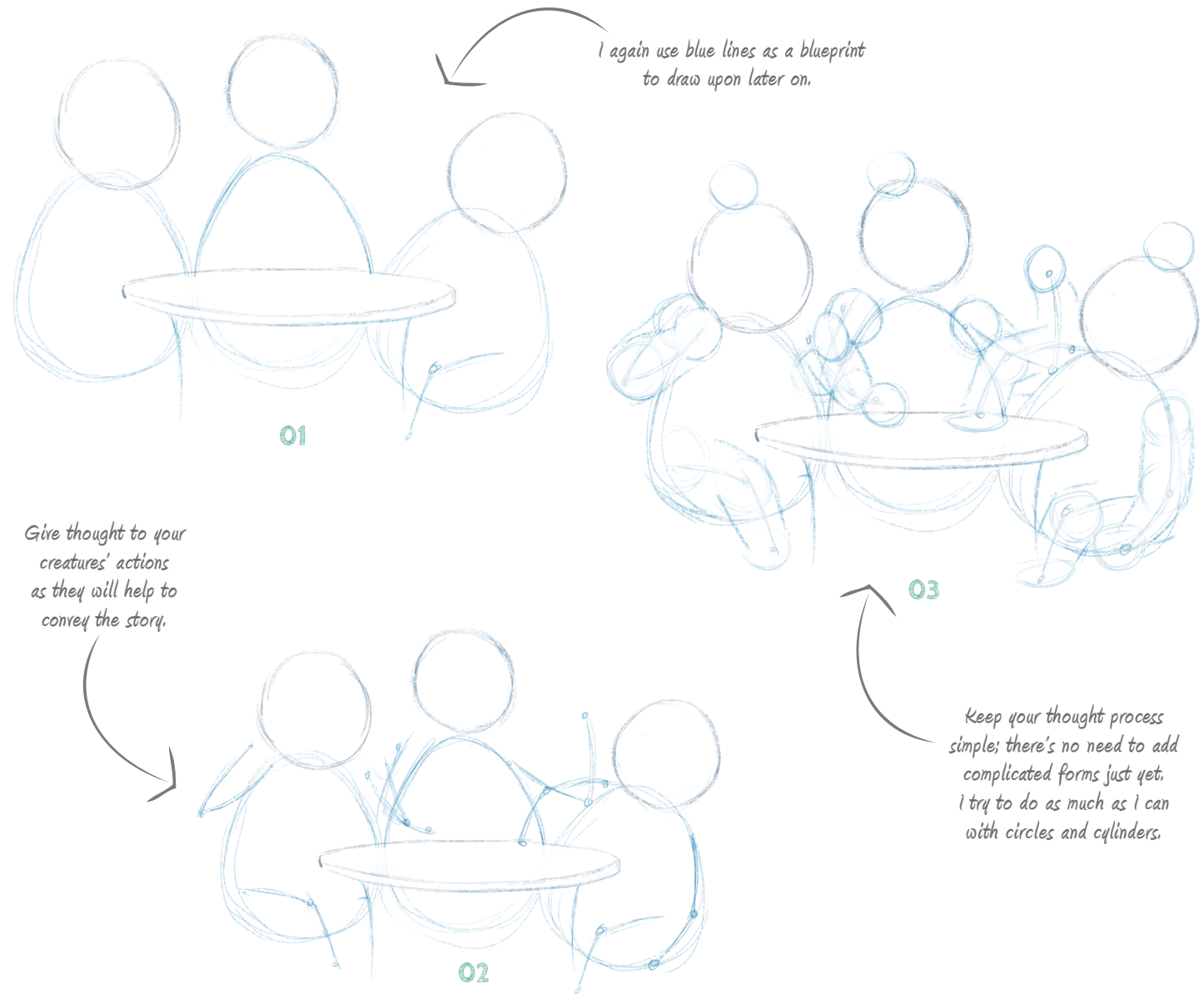
As with the character gestures before, I've decided on gestures for our creatures. I'm going to go with a group of them around a table celebrating something. From here I look back to my gesture drawings and start to imagine how they would look when drawn a bit bigger and clearer. Again, I do this by imagining the pose as a composition of shapes, adding more as I go to eventually produce something that can serve as a blueprint for our final drawing.

## 02 Head and torso

I imagine these creatures as kind of sumo wrestlers as far as their appearance goes. I start out with drawing a circle for the head and an elongated ellipse for the hips and torso. I put them roughly in the position of one of the gestures we drew earlier. I also provide some rough lines for a table, as I know they will be sitting around one. We'll go into more detail in the table in the next part.

## 03 Gestural lines

Now that we have the basic shapes of our body on paper, it's time to add some gestural lines to represent where and how the arms and legs will be placed and in what position. When drawing these lines, try to think about what you want the creatures to convey with their movement. The creature on the viewer's left will be yelling at our main character; the creature in the middle will be holding up a prop and happily looking at it; our third creature will be bending a bit below the table, looking at our main character in anger and holding some sort of chain that is connected to the main character.





## 04 Weight issues

With our gesture lines in place we can start to add some thickness and indication of weight to the arms and legs. By using small circles for the joint areas, such as shoulders, elbows, wrists, and ankles, I am able to think about and determine their placement in a more three-dimensional context. I want them to have some sort of hair-do so I decide to give them a small ball of hair on their head. For the moment I represent this by a circle as well.

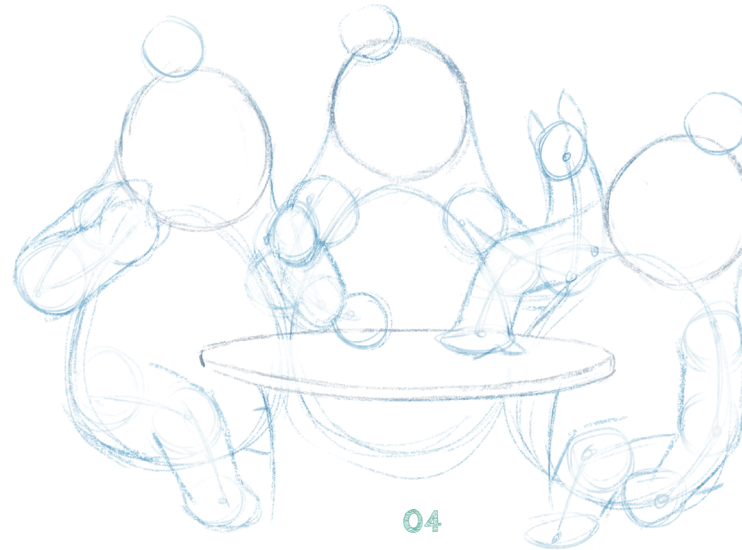
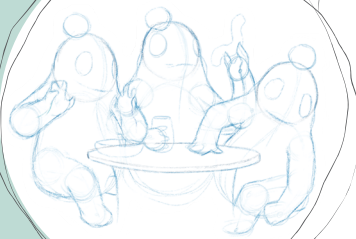
## 05 Cleaning up

It's time to clean up some of those lines. I carefully choose which parts of the creatures are overlapping and erase the unnecessary lines with an electric-powered eraser. I add some directional lines around the face area to accentuate the curve of the face and body. I've decided to give the creatures props of drinks, a plate with worms, and a worm in hand. I simply indicate where their mouths and eyes will be to help me be more confident about their placement when tracing them later on.

### Diversity

While building up the blue lines I have been thinking about who these creatures are, focusing on their gestures and what they represent, using arms, hands, and body movement to convey their expression without having drawn a single face. It is a good idea to put some thought into your characters

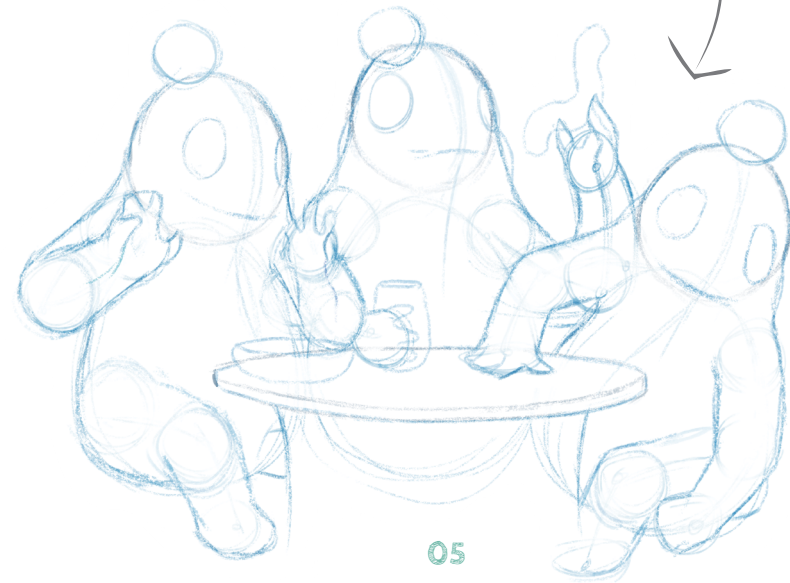
so that their intentions are clear from early on. Further detail is just icing on the cake and can be explored later on.



*Building up all the parts of my illustration with these simple forms, which are mainly circular, helps to give my illustration an overall sense of unity as far as line and form goes.*



*I choose to keep the building blocks of my creatures big, which is a result of them feasting most of the time.*



# Drawing the head

Use of shapes is important when it comes to the face and expression. I have given the creatures human-like eyes to portray intelligence and emotion. Shapes also help with indicating form, so I have used round shapes to render the head, tying in with the creatures' round body shape.



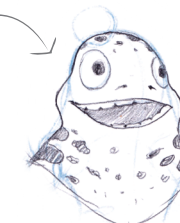
Experiment with different expressions to see which would fit best with the creatures' character. I find it helps to act out the expression you're trying to draw. Don't be afraid of using a small mirror.



Experiment with things like small mouths versus big mouths or small eyes versus big eyes. Look at how this impacts on your creatures' character and attitude.



Experiment with spots, stripes, bobs, or other animal-like patterns to enhance your creatures. Look at examples of animals in nature to get some inspiration.



Keep in mind that this is an exploration-based part of your process, so there's no need to over-complicate things. Keep it simple and avoid focusing too much on rendering.



Try different types of creatures. Dare yourself to step away from your idea and try something new. Don't feel like you should be chained to the template lines.



## 01 Building up our creature's face

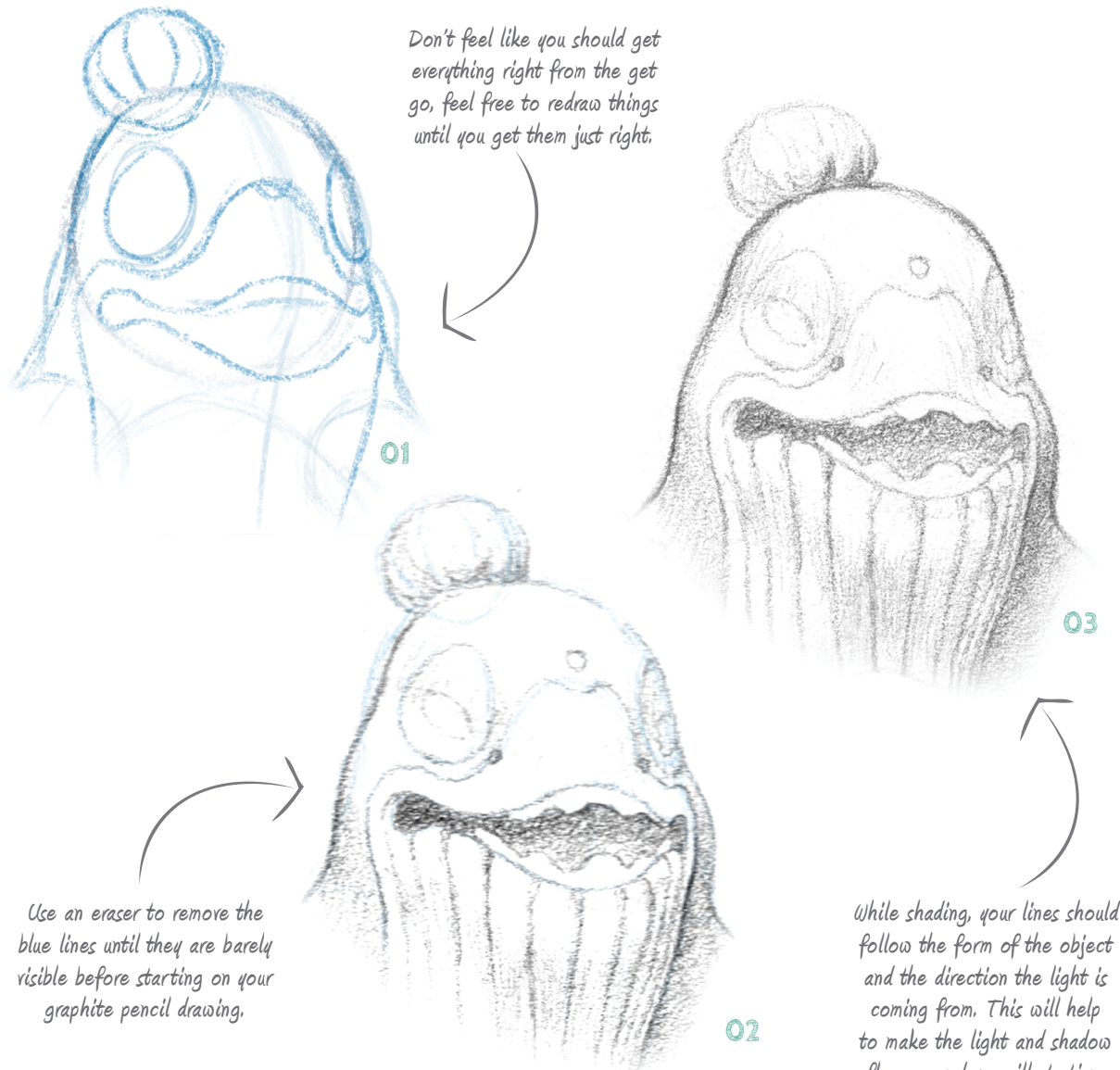
As with our main character, we will now build further upon our template. I'll walk you through the process for drawing one of the creatures' heads so you can do the same for the other ones. I draw in my lines using the blue pencil before I go into more detail rendering each creature. Take your time to focus on putting down those first guidelines just right. With the head I add shapes for the eyes and mouth area. Notice how this creature's face is turned into a 3/4 position, making the eye socket of his left eye turn slightly around the skull. This results in a somewhat smaller elliptical shape compared to his right eye shape. I apply the same thought process to the mouth features, thinking about how they would curve along the creature's face.

## 02 Taking it a step further

With my blue lines in place we can start working in more detail with a graphite pencil. Inside the eye shapes I add another pair of smaller elliptical shapes that get pointy towards their beginning and end; they will represent the eyeballs. I keep the bigger eye shapes I drew earlier and make them part of the creature's skin appearance. For the mouth I start to focus a bit more on how I want it to look. We can add sharp teeth but I think that might be a bit too much of a cliché. I want to exaggerate an element of cuteness a bit, so I represent the teeth in a more stylized way, using wave-like shapes instead of sharp, pointy ones.

## 03 More definition

Along the way I've added vertical lines down his belly and up to his mouth. This idea came to me when thinking of how the bellies of whales look. These small details help to add to your creature's believability and appearance. In addition, it is aesthetically pleasing to look at and is a design element that I will repeat throughout the complete illustration to further maintain a sense of unity. This is a good time to start enhancing and darkening some places. I'm pretty satisfied with the creature's outlines so I darken them a bit. The mouth is obviously going to be dark inside so I make it darker towards the top.



## 04 More shading

It's a bit tedious getting to this point of any drawing; rendering is essentially a straight-forward process which might feel less creative than the initial design stages of an illustration. That being said, it's a great feeling to see your drawing come to life thanks to your rendering. Right now I focus on finding the right places to put the shadows. I put some more shadow underneath the creature's mouth, insinuating that the mouth's jaw is sticking out a bit more. Notice how his face is just a collection of roundish features, making it easy to figure out how the lighting would fall.

## 05 Finishing up

It's time to take a close look at our creature's head and determine what could use a bit more work, where to put a little more contrast, and where to enhance some outlines. I add some more detail into the eyes; I choose not to draw special or weird eyes because I feel like adding normal, more human-like eyes adds to the creatures' intelligence. I push the contrast around the eye sockets and the mouth area with darker lines to really accentuate the curvature of the creature's face.

*For the darkest parts of my drawings I grab my 2B mechanical pencil, but if that's not dark enough I use a Staedtler pigment liner to accentuate some extra dark parts.*



04

*I keep the brightest spot of the creature above his mouth and between his eyes, drawing attention to his facial features.*



05

## Lightbox

A lightbox is a special drawing surface which is lit from behind, commonly used by comic and graphic artists to make a clean new drawing without damaging their original sketch. You simply tape your original sketch to the lightbox, and then place your new sheet of paper over the top. The light will enable you to see the drawing clearly underneath so you can draw in your new lines. This is a great alternative to erasers, if you have space for one!



*Use paper tape to keep your papers from moving and messing up your tracing lines.*

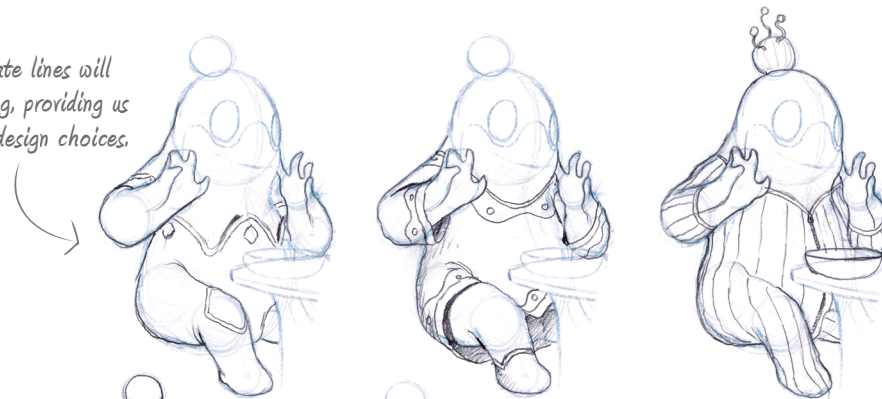


# Adding clothing

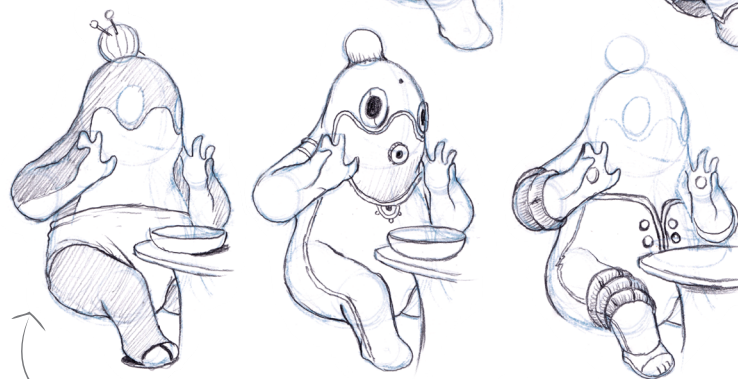
The direction of lines helps to focus the viewer's attention to a specific area, in this case the face. Repeating themes and patterns can also help to reinforce this, so I use recurring shapes from the face on the costume.



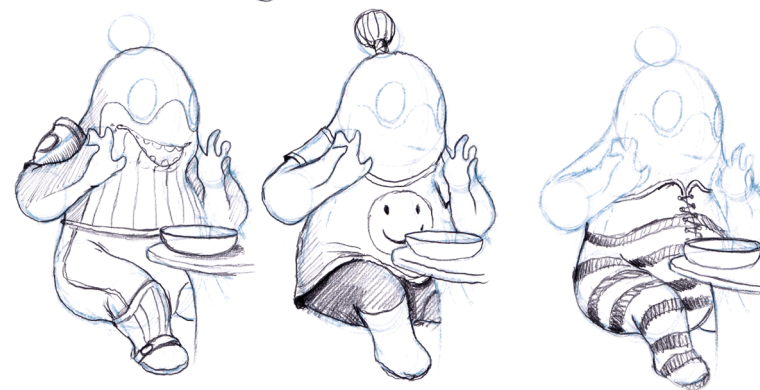
*Roughly following our blue template lines will give us a sense of where we're going, providing us room to experiment with different design choices.*



*Keep your focus on variety. Sometimes you need to draw a bad design to know it won't work. Every try is a good try!*

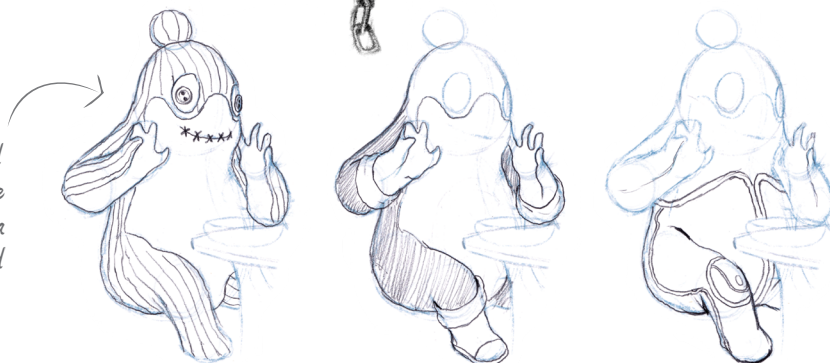


*I imagine our creatures having a simplistic overall clothing design to complement their simplistic bodies, something that's easy to get into and out of.*



*Experiment with different types of clothing and how they tell a story. Do you want loose clothes, skin-tight suits, or armor? When making these choices, think about what they tell you about the character.*

*Go off topic now and then and explore different options. At one point I play around with the idea of the creatures being some kind of living dolls or sumo wrestlers.*



### 01 Building up the clothing and body design

Once more it's time to grab our blue pencil and focus on getting the right lines down first, or at the very least a suggestion of those lines. I've decided that our creatures' uniform should not take too much attention away from the creatures themselves and their actions. I base my lines on one of the simpler exploration designs we made earlier. I place blue lines along the curvature of the creature's belly, indicating where their clothes will begin and end. In my imagination these clothes are some form of skin-tight trousers. Notice how the curvature of the trousers' belly line resembles the curvature of their heads and mouths. This is a form of shape language and another example of repeating patterns throughout your design which maintain a feeling of unity to connect everything in your drawing.

### 02 Moving around the image

Now that I have my template and guidelines ready I dive completely into rendering my characters. I like to keep focus on my drawing by moving between different parts, leaving some sections as outlines and others more rendered. It's a good idea not to focus on just one part of your drawing. When you see different parts of your drawing evolve simultaneously you get a better idea of how everything will work together. You don't want to draw something and render it really beautifully only to discover later on that it clashes with another part of your render and you have to redo it all over again. Try to keep your focuses divided over the complete drawing.

### 03 Building up form

Throughout my rendering process I keep thinking about gradients as a way of giving form to my creatures. Points closest to my light source (which is from the direction of the viewer) will remain nearly white, while everything curving away from my light source will be shaded darker. My render mark-making mostly follows the curvature of the forms it is placed upon, in the same direction as the light goes. This helps to accentuate the form of objects and shapes. Every now and then I break up that way of rendering by filling in large parts with random mark-making to deliver a subtle underlying contrast in texture.



*Give some indication of the props they will be holding or relating to, enhancing their actions and feeding the story.*

*I do tend to focus on heads first when rendering, even when moving around the image. I like to know who I'm drawing and it helps me relate to my character. I try adding fruit here in one of the creatures' hands.*



*I add a worm back into one of the creatures' hands instead of a piece of fruit as the fruit took something away from the story and made the character look too friendly. The worm brings back a welcome change from their cuteness.*



## 04 Thoughts on mark-making

In the previous step I talked about the direction of mark-making and the contrast between using it and not using it. As more of a guideline I tend to use directional mark-making in the places where I want the eye to focus on and where I want the form to read really well. I get looser with my mark-making in places where there is less detail and less need for attention. Work carefully with your rendering and keep in mind that you should build it up in layers.

## 05 Finishing touches

Our creatures are almost done. It's time to think a bit more about how the light is affecting them, where to put some darker shadows to accentuate form and mass, and how to shade the lighting to convey different materials. I focus on making their bottom parts a bit darker so that they are clearly sitting behind a table, which adds depth. A good way to adjust your drawing's contrasts is by making the places where surfaces are about to touch darker. You don't have to do this everywhere; carefully pick the places where you want the viewer's eye to focus on most, areas such as the head and hands.

### *Tissue paper and its many uses!*

Use a piece of tissue paper to smudge and blend your shading, as I did mostly on the right character's arm and head. It helps to soften the gradient of the shading and takes away some of the white space in a subtle way, further enhancing form and texture.



*Think about the materials your creatures are made from. I imagine their skin to be smooth and whale-like, resulting in sharp contrast between light and dark to give that smooth feeling.*

*Adding a reflection line of light (rim light) to the worms helps to indicate their slimy feel.*



# Designing an environment

Learn how to develop an environment to complete the story.

By Brun Croes

It's time to start thinking about our environment. In this tutorial the drawing has been divided into different segments (character, creature, and scene) in order to make it more digestible for you, but it's always a good idea to think about all of the elements together at a thumbnail stage before dividing them into separate pieces. This is what you will see in the next page.

## TOOLS

- Pencil (HB)
- Mechanical pencil
- Blue pencil
- Paper
- Eraser

A look at our final drawing, where every piece has come together to form a uniform final illustration.

Throughout the illustration there are several repeating design choices that translate into a feeling of unity and style, such as the vertical lines present in the creatures, the table, and the surrounding plants.

Follow the rule of three: if you add something to your scene, be it patterns, objects, or shape form, make sure you repeat it at least three times. This results in conscious choices leaving us with a good design and a unified end result.

Our composition is built up so that all the directional lines point upwards, leading our eye from the main character to the creatures. This is enhanced by the stairs which are going upwards from the character to his captors.

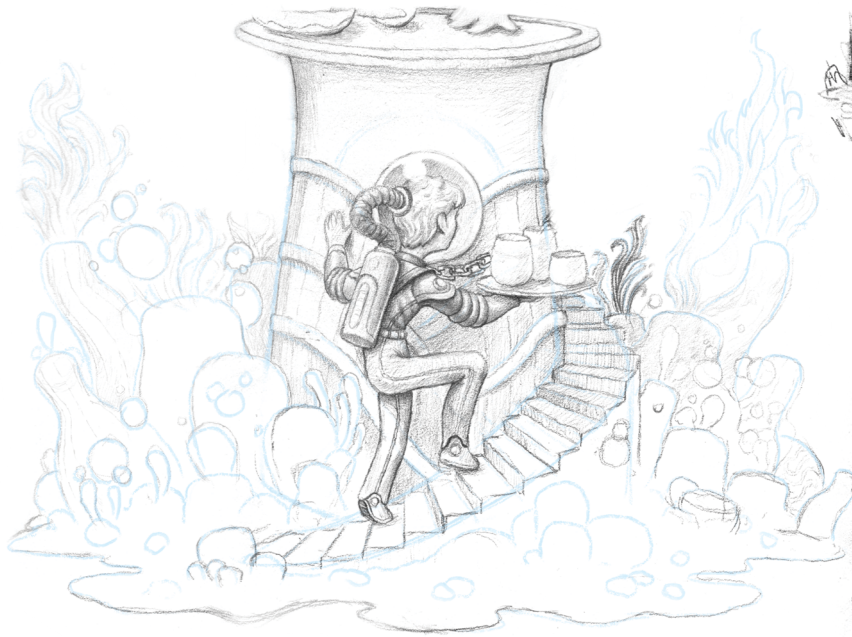




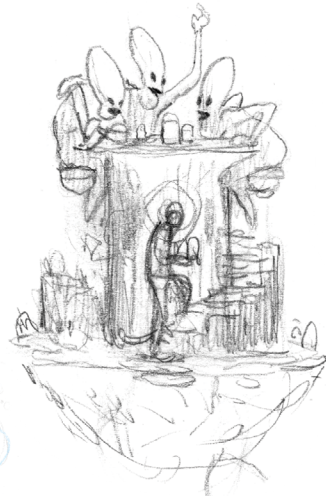
# Thumbnail and composition

Thumbnails help us to come up with a few ideas and to quickly look at how we might fit those ideas into a composition without having to draw it out on a large scale. Thumbnails often contain something delicate that is difficult to translate into a final drawing, so enjoy making them. Use them to explore your different ideas.

*Before starting on any of the main elements I sit back and enjoy drawing small thumbnails, focusing on composition and rough ideas.*



*Thumbnails are a quick way to come up with ideas and to give you a brief look at how the end result might appear. Use this to your advantage.*



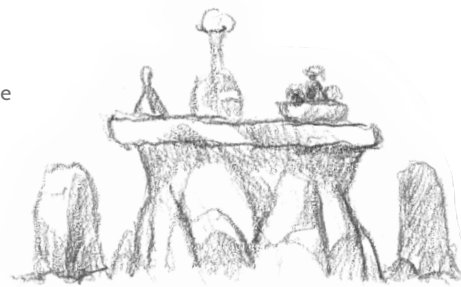
*Thumbnails are meant to be small and though no fixed size is attached to them, it is generally accepted that they should be around the size of a thumb, hence the name.*

*In these thumbnails, you'll quickly notice returning ideas, such as the long table with the creatures on top and the main character at the bottom. This tells us a bit about the story; placing the main character beneath the creatures gives us a sense of different classes. The creatures are clearly the masters.*



# Exploring the surroundings further: part 1

Now that I have figured out a rough idea with aliens sitting at the top of an organic-looking table with their human servant below, I start thinking about the design of individual elements such as the table.



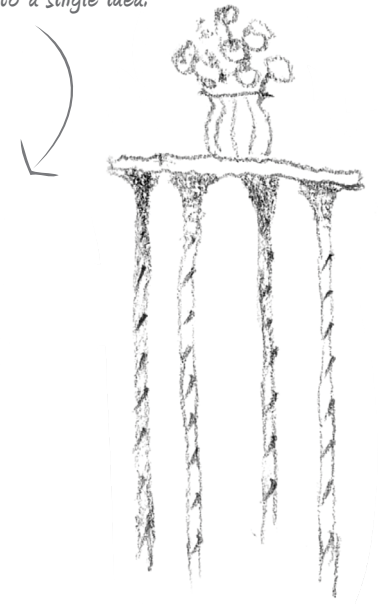
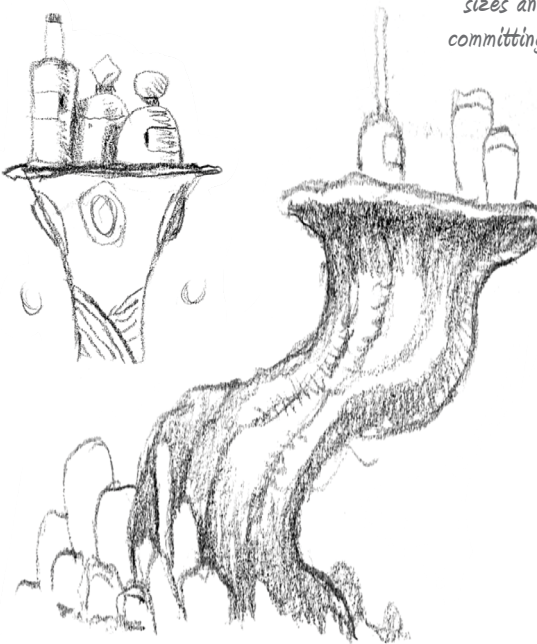
*The organic feel can be handled in a few ways. We can choose to use a table consisting of natural elements, such as naturally formed rocks; we can choose to design it with curves and organic forms that could have been constructed by someone else; or a combination of both.*



*I still want the table to be organic-looking, so these extra thumbnail sketches of tables will help me develop a look that's organic while fitting into the story.*



*Experiment with various sizes and designs before committing to a single idea.*



*For our story I find it's best to stick with something that's still human-made or manipulated (or creature-made!) instead of something that has grown naturally. This will help sell the alien setting and the fact that the aliens have some form of intelligence.*



## Exploring the surroundings further: part 2

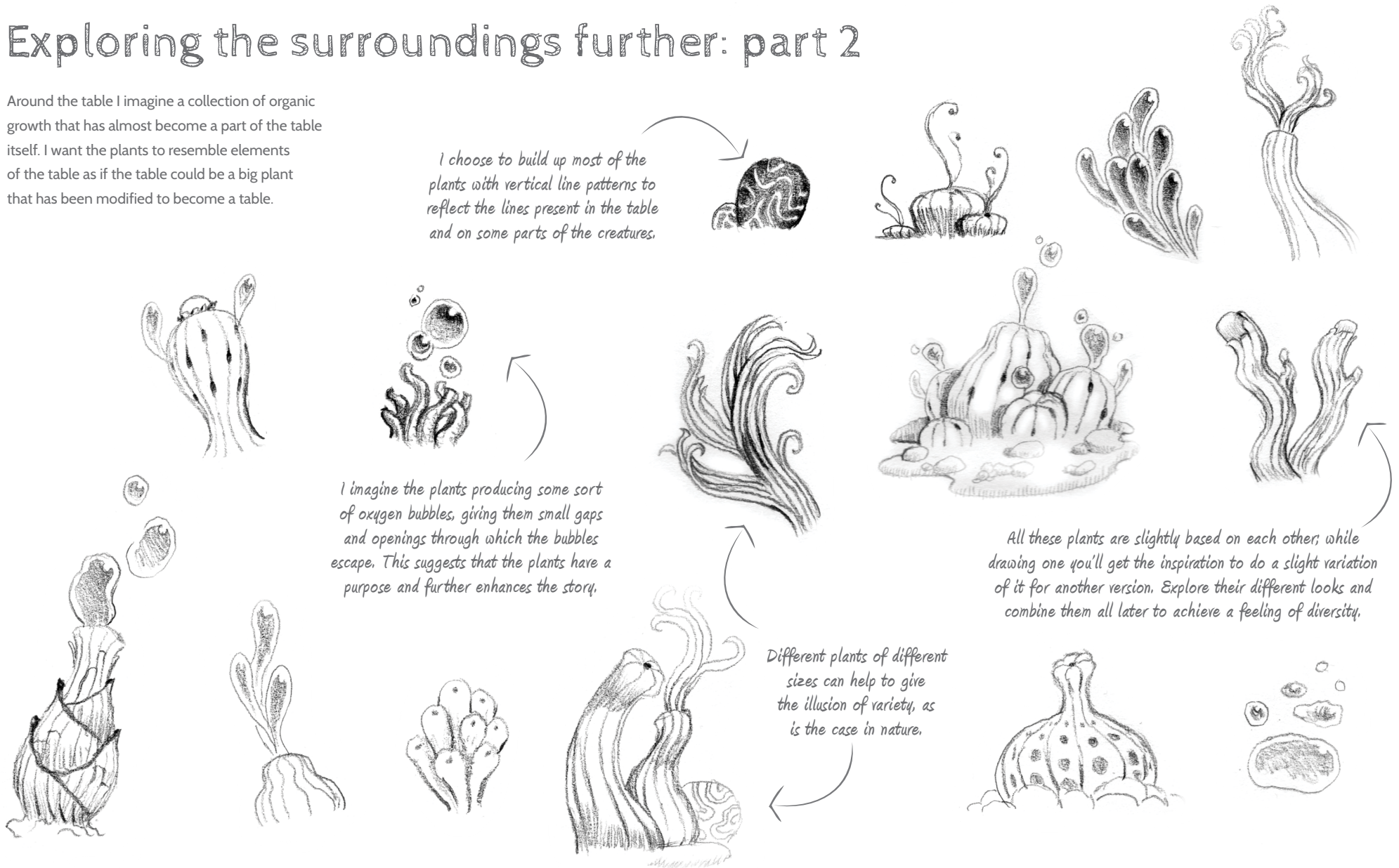
Around the table I imagine a collection of organic growth that has almost become a part of the table itself. I want the plants to resemble elements of the table as if the table could be a big plant that has been modified to become a table.

*I choose to build up most of the plants with vertical line patterns to reflect the lines present in the table and on some parts of the creatures.*

*I imagine the plants producing some sort of oxygen bubbles, giving them small gaps and openings through which the bubbles escape. This suggests that the plants have a purpose and further enhances the story.*

*Different plants of different sizes can help to give the illusion of variety, as is the case in nature.*

*All these plants are slightly based on each other; while drawing one you'll get the inspiration to do a slight variation of it for another version. Explore their different looks and combine them all later to achieve a feeling of diversity.*



## 01 Making our environment blueprint

Now that we have an idea of what our surroundings will look like, let's start building up the blueprints for our environment. The table will be the central point so let's start by drawing this first, as all the rest of the surrounding elements will be built up around it. I start with a flattened ellipse to suggest the tabletop. I then add two mirroring curved lines to suggest the body of the table.

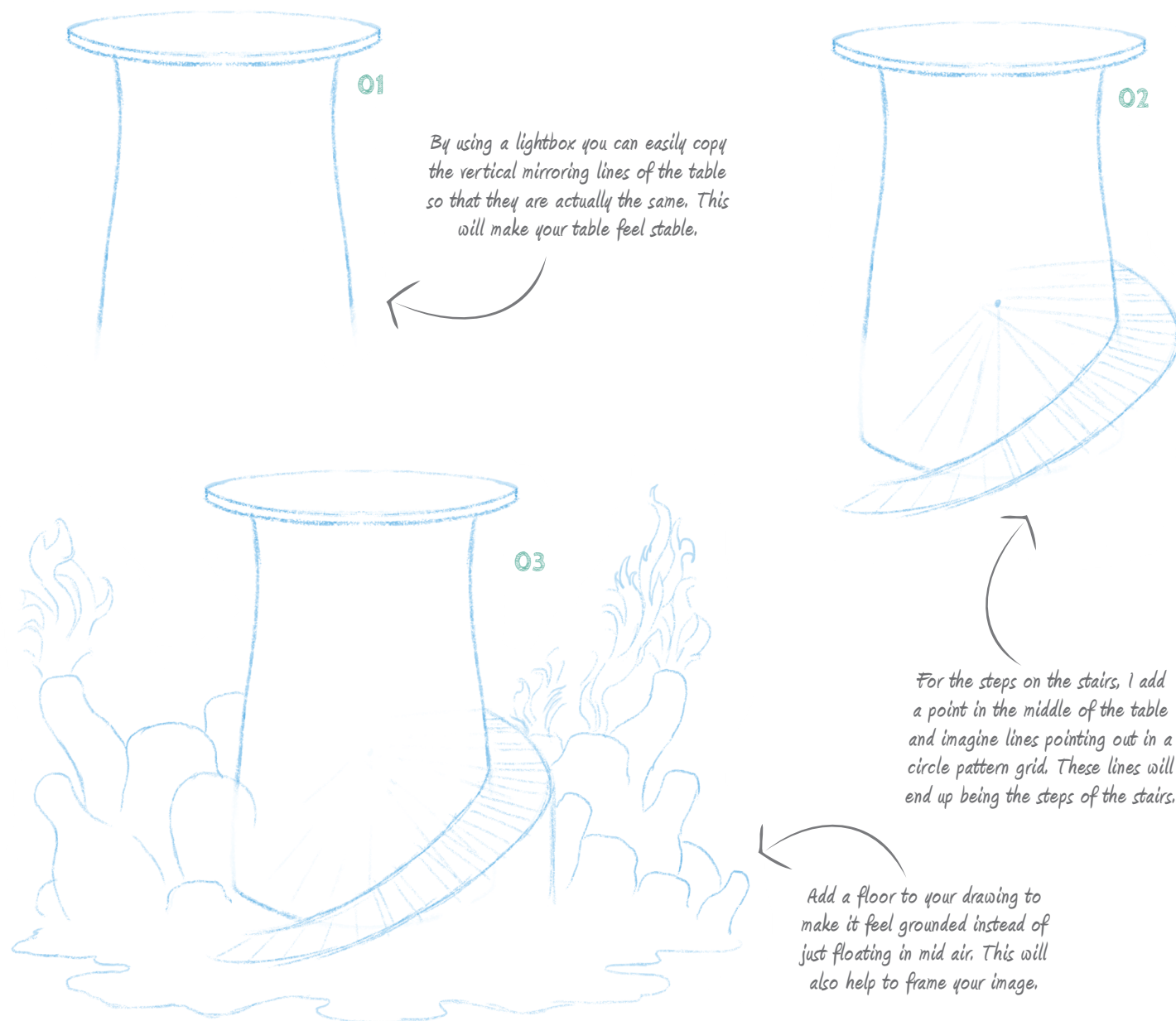
## 02 Take the stairs

Around the table I add a staircase. This will have several purposes, the primary one being that our main character needs a way of getting to the top of the table. The other one being a more psychological one, where the top of the table represents a better place than the bottom. This together with the angry creatures at the top helps to convey the story.

## 03 Silhouettes

I want to place some of the plants we've designed into the composition, so I add them in a somewhat symmetrical way. In combination with the shape of the table they form a pyramid-like composition, further helping to lead the viewer's eyes upwards.

In order to add the plants, I think of them as silhouettes, simplifying the exploration sketches we made earlier and focusing on the "skyline" and silhouettes of their forms. This helps me to think of them in the context of the composition, rather than focusing on their details just yet.





#### 04 Bubbles!

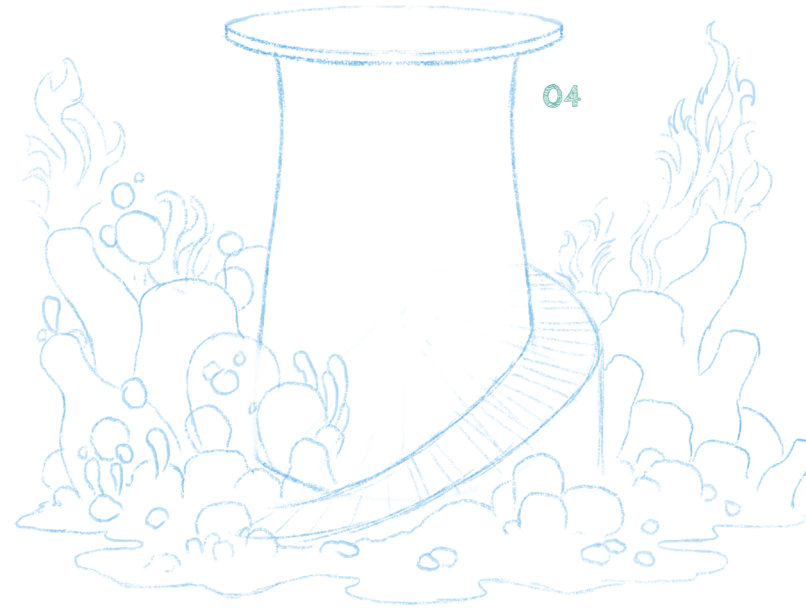
It's time to add the bubbles. In our exploration steps I imagined our plants having the function of producing oxygen bubbles. I want to create a flowing movement, so at the points where the bubbles are coming out of the plants I make the bubbles elongated in shape, and where they are disconnected from the plants I make them more circle-like. This helps to convey a feeling of motion, as if the oxygen bubbles snap or detach from the plants.

#### 05 Adding to the table

It's time to add some design elements on our table. I know that our main character will be in front of part of the table and the rest of our composition is a pyramid pointing upwards. I use the design of the table to point more towards the character by placing wave-like lines that bend down towards where the main character is standing. I also add a circle around the area where the character's head and helmet will be. This will give a place to rest with our eye in the grand scheme of the composition of the complete illustration.

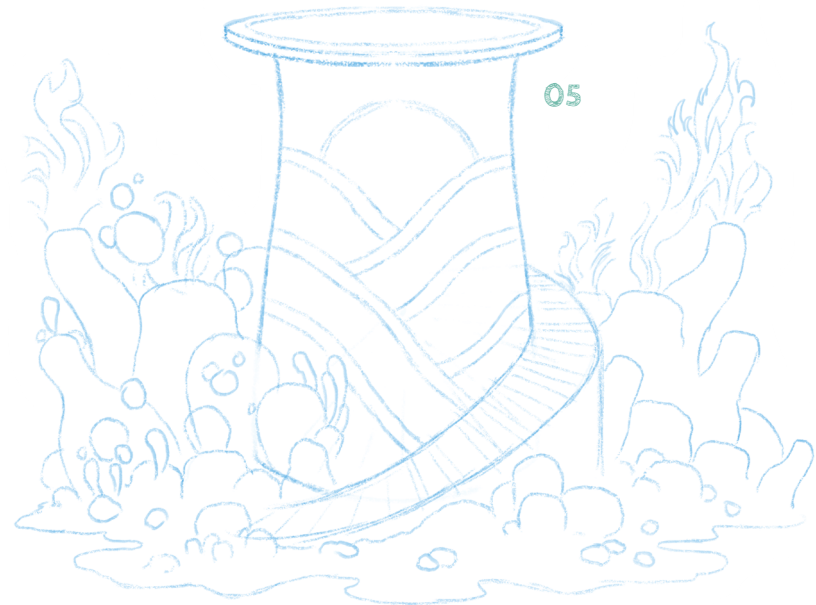
#### *Symmetrical, but not quite*

I like symmetrical drawings but they often look boring all too quickly. A good way to prevent this is to add some subtle changes and only keep the general lines symmetrical instead of mirroring every small part. Keeping some elements asymmetrical helps to avoid boring repetition.



*As long as you're drawing with the blue pencil, don't be afraid to draw shapes on top of each other. You'll erase marks you don't need later, when sorting out what elements will be in front of each other.*

*Overall our environment design has a pleasant and unified feeling, thanks to repeating forms and design choices and connecting these in different areas. Notice how the plants feel similar to the shape of the table, for example.*



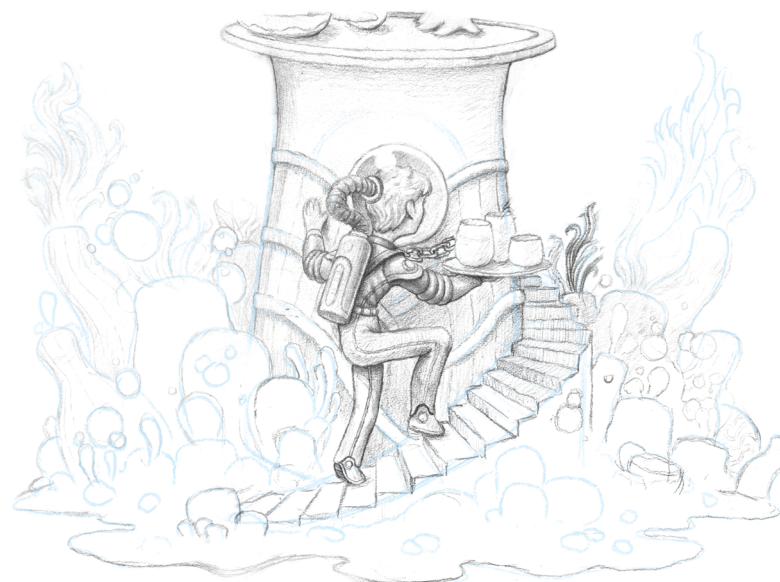
## 06 Following the lines

Now it's time to render our environment. With our blue guidelines in place I start to add more definition to the table and stairs, using the pre-made circle grid to determine where the steps will be. This will be important as our character will be walking upon it. Make a part of the stairs curve away behind the table to emphasize that it is going upwards, wrapping around the table. I've added some vertical lines to the table to make a connection between several parts of the illustration.

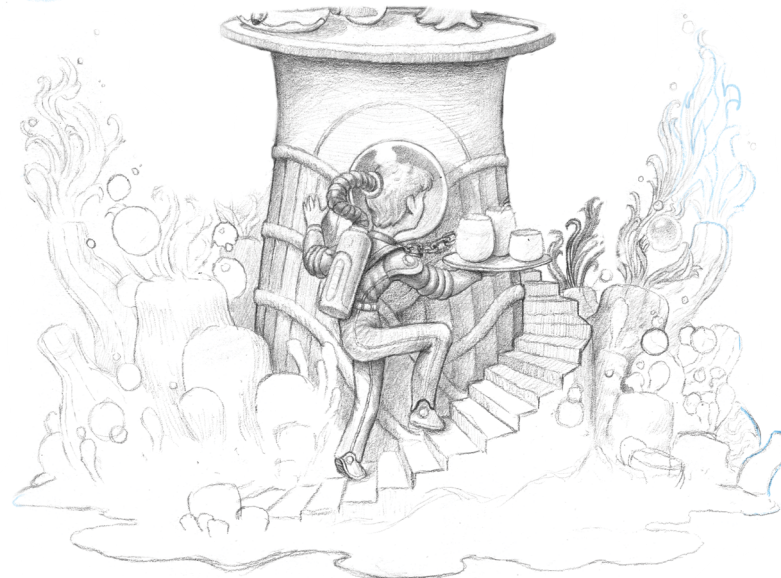
## 07 Enhancing the table

The table is the central point, so I start here by adding the first layer of shading. I start by adding small darker parts on the places that will receive the least amount of light. These are mainly present underneath the table top, where there will be a cast shadow from the table top onto the body of the table itself. I also add a cast shadow from the main character onto the table body in order to push the character further forward and to suggest that the two are close to each other.

For the vertical lines, which represent a plank-like structure, I shade in different tones: darkest to the sides of the table and lightest towards where our character is standing in the middle. This provides some contrast between the character and the table.



*To further suggest the curvature of the stairs, add some shadow to the part that is curving behind the table.*



*Having almost completed the shading on my table will help me keep the contrast of the rest of the illustration in check as I can use it as a central point of reference.*



## 08 More shading and definition

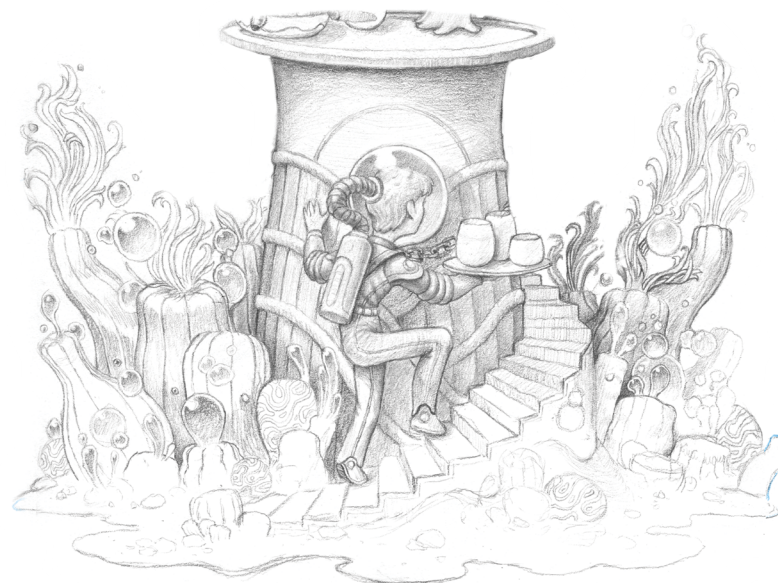
Now I add some shading to the plants. I start by the shading the plants that are in the back, furthest away from us. They will be the darkest. It's a good idea to set a point of reference for your shading, as I did with the table. Setting a point that will be the darkest area and a point that will be the whitest area will help you to keep your values in relation to each other.

For the bubbles, I use the same method as I did with the main character's helmet, giving them a bright white highlight and a reflection light/line along the side, with a gradient going from darkest at the top to lightest at the bottom. This is another visual nod at creative repetition throughout your painting as there's a connection between the oxygen bubbles and the helmet of our main character.

## 09 Shadows

Let's start to think a bit more about shadows and cast shadows. I don't tend to accentuate my cast shadows as hard as I should; it's almost a style choice for me as I mostly add them in later when coloring my pencil drawings. It's still a good thing to think about though.

There's a dark shadow on the stairs from both our table and our main character. This shadow further develops onto the plants in the back behind the stairs. The plants at the front left also cast some shadow on top of each other. A simple trick to use is to keep the brightest up front and the darkest in the back – a simple yet effective way of suggesting some depth in your illustration.



08

*For the parts in the illustration that follow those patterns of vertical lines (such as the table and some of the plants), I shade using vertical marks, further enhancing form.*



09

*Notice how I keep the brightest part of the drawing at the bottom, not only because I imagine the ground to be like white sand, but also because I want to keep the focus at the top and middle of our illustration where the story is happening.*

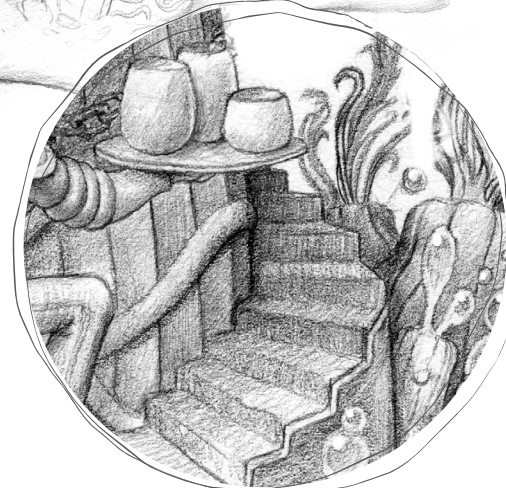


## 10 Cleaning up

Let's finish up our drawing by enhancing our shadow areas even more. It's time to start thinking about contrast again. In this case, there are a lot of overlapping parts. Make the parts where the overlapping is most clear a bit darker. Also darken the outline shapes of the elements that are in the front of the composition to make them pop even more. I use another piece of tissue paper to soften up some parts and darken some whites ever so slightly. This way the bright spot on the character's helmet and some of the oxygen bubbles will really shine.



*Keep a nice contrast going between a finished look and a more of a sketchy feel. I like to keep certain parts (such as the bottom of this illustration) almost untouched to create a nice dynamic between rendered and sketchy.*







### *Get sketching!*

Use the techniques covered in these tutorials to start experimenting with shapes and building up shading to craft a rendered illustration.





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