Charlie Cunningham

The Strange Case and Sin x Sin Artist statement

My two BFAs are different, but they both encompass a style and brand that is recognizable as me. Both feature characters inspired by different aspects of street fashion that reflect the personalities of those wearing it. I enjoy exploring how details and color can create fleshed out and relatable characters and worlds. In both BFAs I also incorporated 3D art, to have a better sense of the pitched finished product and to improve my modeling skills. Both BFAs also take heavy inspiration from video games and anime, reflected in a grungy yet bright style.

The Strange Case of the 2044 Fire is a pitch for an adventure sci-fi mystery game. Set in 2052, the game follows two urban explorers as they live stream their dive into the ruins of a burnt lab. Dylan and Dot explore the previously sealed off MCS-01 facility in Oak Ridge Tennessee to uncover what secrets lie beneath the rubble. The game is about how discovery and choices can change the course of a relationship. Dylan is more focused on discovery and what internet clout she can gain from it, while Dot wants to escape as soon as possible. When the urban explorers’ stream goes south, the choices made by the player begin to have life or death consequences reflected in the game mechanics and story paths. The close relationship between the characters then begins to fray. Players also uncover the strange happenings at the MCS-01 lab that eventually lead to the fire and the abandonment of the building. The combination of the mystery and the relationship between the two main characters create an eerie and engaging player experience.

The Strange Case is a slight twist on the adventure-mystery genre. Mystery is still prevalent in the story, but it is also focused on the relationship between the two characters. Dylan and Dot were close childhood friends, who reconnected as college students to start their urban explorer youtube channel. The awkwardness and excitement of their reconnected friendship makes the player’s choices when the characters fight over what to do in the lab more impactful. The art is focused on pre-production concepting and visual development of the game. All the pieces are made with the goal of being able to pass the work onto the next stage of development in mind. They flesh out the aesthetic and look of the world and the mystery of the lab. The story also takes place only 31 years in the future, so the pieces combine everyday and sci-fi elements.

Sin x Sin is a pitch for a semi-poseable toy figurine collection. In a world where all villains are ranked, the number one villain announces a contest to name his successor. The toys represent competitors for the number one spot, and each character approaches villany and evildoing from a different perspective. Upon entering the contest, each villain also gets a mask to represent them. These masks are also included with the toys as detachable props, and feature heavily on the box design.

Sin x Sin was born out of the audience tendency to favor villains. Their complexity makes them appealing and relatable to any person of any age. The collection mainly targets teens and young adults who still want to play with the toys they grew up with, but also want a sense of maturity and edginess not found in children's products. Sin x Sin’s aesthetic is heavily inspired by street fashion, particularly Harajuku fashion. The goal is to create a unique grungy yet colorful identity. This aesthetic could then be developed into a recognizable brand and be expanded.
Charlie Cunningham

BFA Thesis 2020

3 May 2020

*The Strange Case of the 2044 Fire and Sin x Sin*

My two BFAs, *The Strange Case of the 2044 Fire* and *Sin x Sin*, encompass a style that takes inspiration from comics, games, and anime. They all merge together to create a grungy yet bright style that is recognizable as my artistic identity. Both feature characters inspired by different aspects of street fashion that reflect the personalities of those wearing it. For example, Dylan and Dot from my fall BFA feature American street fashion which, generally, has a more neutral color pallet with pops of bright colors. The villains from my spring BFA feature mainly Harajuku style street fashion which—depending on the sub-culture—is very bright and colorful. I enjoy exploring how details and color can create fleshed out and relatable characters and worlds. Some examples being the stickers and drawings Dylan and Dot would put on the drone they own, or—in Sin x Sin’s case—how the masks of each character directly reflect their personalities.

In both BFAs I also incorporated 3D into my art. I started learning 3D modeling in junior year and by senior year I had discovered the technique called “gray boxing.” The technique is commonly used in concept art to speed up production. Grey boxing is when a concept artist will mock up an environment in 3D programs such as Maya. The mocked up environment, often in grayscale, is then exported as a 2D image and the artist paints on top of it to create a finished piece. If the gray box is of an environment, level designers might use it as the base to build up the rest of the level. I started learning digital sculpting as well. For my toy design BFA, upon
recommendation from a committee member, I bought a base mesh which I sculpted to fit my 2D turn arounds. I also explored the different aspects of 3D printing using the edited base mesh. I discovered the strengths and weaknesses of a polylactic acid (PLA) printer versus a resin printer. A PLA printer is better suited for larger and stronger prints, since the level of detail they can get depends on how thick the size of the filament is. Comparatively, a resin printer uses UV light to build up layers. The result of this is that the prints are usually smaller, however they also get a much higher level of detail. Companies such as Hobbymax and Good Smile Company use 3D resin printers to print their figurines’ bases for mass production. If I expanded my spring BFA into a company I would invest in a resin 3D printer. When I graduate, I will still develop my 3D skills.

Within the past decade, with the rise of the internet and mass communication, a new genre of mystery and puzzle solving has developed. This genre encourages participants to find pieces of a puzzle and solve it themselves, instead of having a character explain it all to the viewer. *The Strange Case of the 2044 Fire* is a response to this growing market.

*The Strange Case* is a pitch for an adventure sci-fi mystery game. Set in 2052, the game follows two urban explorers as they live stream their dive into the ruins of a burnt lab. Dylan and Dot enter the previously sealed off MCS-01 facility in Oak Ridge Tennessee to uncover what secrets lie beneath the rubble.

The game is about how discovery and choices can change the course of a relationship. Dylan is more focused on discovery and what internet clout she can gain from it, while Dot wants to escape as soon as possible. When the urban explorers’ stream goes south, the choices made by the player begin to have life or death consequences reflected in the game mechanics and
story paths. The close relationship between the characters then begins to fray. Players also uncover the strange happenings at the MCS-01 lab that eventually lead to the fire and the abandonment of the building. The combination of the mystery and the relationship between the two main characters create an eerie and engaging player experience.

*The Strange Case* is a slight twist on the adventure-mystery genre. Mystery is still prevalent in the story, but it is also focused on the relationship between the two characters. Dylan and Dot were close childhood friends, who reconnected as college students to start their urban explorer YouTube channel. The awkwardness and excitement of their reconnected friendship makes the player’s choices when the characters fight over what to do in the lab more impactful.

The art is focused on pre-production concepting and visual development of the game. All the pieces are made with the goal of being able to pass the work onto the next stage of development. They flesh out the aesthetic and look of the world and the mystery of the lab. The story also takes place only 31 years in the future, so the pieces combine every day and sci-fi elements. There is also significance to the story taking place in Oak Ridge Tennessee. Like the lab the story takes place in, the town itself was sworn to secrecy in 1942 when it was taken over for the Manhattan project. Since then, it has been a town where conspiracy theories are spawned and grown online. It is the perfect setting for a game about a government conspiracy.

*Sin x Sin* is a pitch for a semi-poseable toy figurine collection. In a world where all villains are ranked, the number one villain announces a contest to name his successor. The toys represent competitors for the number one spot, and each character approaches villainy and evildoing from a different perspective. Upon entering the contest, each villain also gets a mask to represent them.
The idea to have the figures be semi-posable is not a new concept. Nendroids from the Good Smile Company built their brand on it. However, in the west, it seems that a consumer can only find either unappealing static collectible figures or action figures that are meant for children. For Sin x Sin, being able to pose a figurine is important for establishing a connection between the consumer and the toy. When a consumer poses the toy, they have made it their own. Various aspects of the toys are changeable, such as the hands and the weapons. However, what makes Sin x Sin unique is the masks. These masks are included with the toys as props that can detach and reattach with an embedded magnet, and feature heavily on the box design. Each mask is designed in-universe to reflect the character's personality and inner desires. For example, Pop Star Selene’s mask features a crescent moon design. One side is smooth and bright, reflecting that she wants to appear cute and happy-go-lucky. The left side, however, is dark and covered in eyes to show that she is vain and desires everyone’s attention.

*Sin x Sin* was born out of the audience tendency to favor villains. Their complexity makes them appealing and relatable to any person of any age. The collection mainly targets teens and young adults who still want to play with the toys they grew up with, but also want a sense of maturity and edginess not found in children's products. Sin x Sin’s aesthetic is heavily inspired by street fashion, particularly Harajuku fashion. By taking inspiration from street fashion, the identity of Sin x Sin can directly reflect trends and evolve accordingly. The goal is to create a unique grungy yet colorful identity. This aesthetic could then be developed into a recognizable brand and be expanded.
Summary for both

My two BFAs, *The Strange Case of the 2044 Fire* and *Sin x Sin*, encompass a style that takes inspiration from comics, games, and anime. They all merge together to create a grungy yet bright style that is recognizable as my artistic identity. Both feature characters were inspired by different aspects of street fashion, and reflect the personalities of those wearing it. I enjoy exploring how details and color can create fleshed out and relatable characters and worlds. In both BFAs I also incorporated 3D art, to have a better sense of the pitched finished product and to improve my modeling skills.
The Strange Case of the 2044 Fire
Summary

The Strange Case of the 2044 Fire is a pitch for an adventure sci-fi mystery game. Set in 2052, the game follows two urban explorers and their drone as they live stream their dive into the ruins of a burnt and destroyed lab. Dylan and Dot explore the previously sealed off MCS-01 facility in Oak Ridge Tennessee to uncover what secrets lie beneath the rubble. The game is about how discovery and choices can change the course of a relationship. Dylan is more focused on discovery and what internet clout she can gain from it, while Dot wants to escape as soon as possible. When the urban explorers’ stream goes south, the choices made by the player begin to have life or death consequences reflected in the game mechanics and story paths.

The Strange Case is intended for 15-25-year olds who enjoy exploration, investigating, and character driven stories.
NOTICE

Sitting on September 11th there will be a shift in the regularly scheduled surgical checkups. Surgeries will now be performed on Saturdays and Wednesdays from 1:00 to 3:00.

For the following patients:
- MCS_026
- MCS_034
- MCS_045
- MCS_061

Unless you are designated personnel, you will not be permitted to enter floors B1 and B2 during these times.

Thank you for your understanding.

-Director, Surgery

Additional comment:

Dr. Chang's

Sage. This is a very serious matter. I hope these people are not going to be a problem. I want to know what you want to do about it. I don't know what you want to do about it.
The Strange Case of the 2044 Fire
Sin x Sin is a pitch for a semi-poseable toy figurine collection. In a world where all villains are ranked, the number one villain announces a contest to name his successor. The toys represent competitors for the number one spot, and each character approaches villany and evildoing from a different perspective. Upon entering the contest, each villain also gets a mask to represent them. These masks are also included with the toys as detachable props, and feature heavily on the box design.

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Nendoroid

Funko Pops
Dinsai studio

Jei Tseng
Turn around Jack Rabbit Jackie

Charlie Cunningham
Thank you!

Special Thanks:

My committee members:
- Jim Groman
- Kelsey Cretcher
- Robert Laurer

Illustration Faculty
- Susie McGinness

My friends:
- Robin Hall
- Grace Bohlen
- Leo Covault

& My parents
PROCESS BOOK
BFA 2021
Charlie Cunningham

The STRANGE CASE of the 2044 Fire
These are from my initial presentation on the idea and the research and inspiration still holds up and speaks for its self.
The Strange Case started out as a short story for my sci-fi and fantasy writing class. The story was still basically about two urban explorers who get trapped in an abandoned laboratory.

I began experimenting with 3D environments over the summer since I knew the game would be 3D.

When school started, within the first week or so I decided to change the genders of the main protagonists to women, and change Demetrius's name to Dot. I made this change because to me they're more relatable that way, and I felt there were enough games with male protagonists in the world.

For both of them I wanted their designs to be inspired by street fashion, within the context of the story they both dropped out of collage so they would buy all their clothes second-hand from thrift store.

The two major differences was that someone else was descending the lab at the same time, and that the two main characters were boys. Dylan had the same name but Dot used to be called Demetrius.

Here's some of the initial sketches I made for them.
I even tried a poll for Dylan’s final design since I was stuck! I wanted her character design to be all jacket.

I went through a few iterations but overall their designs stayed very similar to their male counterparts.

Dylan in particular I had trouble finding her character at first. So I did many sketches of her. I wanted her two main traits to be “sporty” and “stupid.”

I also had never designed a drone before! I went around the house and took pictures of objects with unique shapes to use as a base.

I went with a round cute shape. The idea was that these two had owned J-14 (the drone) for a long time so they covered him in stickers and drawings.

Before he was bought by Dylan and Dot J-14 was a search and rescue drone so it has hidden arms!

I’m very proud of the designs I’ve made. I think they’re unique, fun, and I love the dynamic I set up between Dylan and Dot.

I went with a round cute shape. The idea was that these two had owned J-14 (the drone) for a long time so they covered him in stickers and drawings.

There are many other characters I wish I could’ve included that are a part of the Strange Case mystery but they do appear in some side content I’ll get into later on.

Originally, Dot had glasses to show that she was the smarter of the two. But I thought this made her design too complicated, so I took it out.

I even tried a poll for Dylan’s final design since I was stuck!

I wanted her character design to be all jacket.

I went through a few iterations but overall their designs stayed very similar to their male counterparts.

Dylan in particular I had trouble finding her character at first. So I did many sketches of her. I wanted her two main traits to be “sporty” and “stupid.”
I thumbnailed out each environment. Each one shows a different aspect of the game. This one is focused on being the first environment and opener to the setting. I also taught myself how to use 3D to gray box an environment and later painted over it to create the final piece.

The story behind the first environment was that the facility would often have surgeries for their patients. This is because the disease they were studying was a blood born pathogen, so they often needed blood samples and wanted to see how this would affect the patient's organs. One of the surgery's went wrong and the patient they were operating on escaped using her teleportation powers and left the lab in ruins.

For this one I had the challenge of how to create broken glass. I ended up doing some glass breakage in the 3D model and some painted. With in all the environments I made sure to incorporate many details in the background.

The story with this environment was that the laboratory staff kept their patients in these containment chambers to observe them. If the patient was cooperative they were rewarded by being allowed to have decorations in their containment cell.
For this environment I wanted to have a more "flat" feeling camera angle.

Also, throughout the whole process the lighting was fighting me because it kept being too dark.

I wanted the monster to be vaguely human, but have the body warped and enlarged so that who ever it was is unrecognizable.

The story of this office is that it is directly connected to the containment chamber in the second environment. This office was used by the director and he was a fan of antique things such as old TV’s and gramophones.

This last environment was constructed in Unreal 4 with the intent of exploring what it could look like in engine. This was the first time I had used substance painter to texture objects. I wanted to give them all a very grimy and dusty feel.

The story behind this room is that it belonged to a character named Linda Brousard. She’s an important character in the Strange Case mystery and there are many important hidden documents in this room. However the door is blocked so the two main characters have to use J-14 to fly through a vent to grab the documents.
Finally, for my fiction writing class I wrote a 42 page story that is made up of documents that Dylan and Dot can find in-game. These documents are all focuses on the Linda character I mentioned in the previous page.

I printed all of the pages out and covered them in coffee and baked them to get that aged look.

I also thought I’d add the alphas I made for the cork board on the previous page. The reason its inverted is because for substance painter white is opaque and black is transparent.

Sin x Sin started off way differently initially. The initial idea was monsters that were also mages? Looking back the concept was too much. I wanted it to have a strict color pallet and take inspiration from rococo fantasy. You can still see some of the same inspiration and research being used in Sin x Sin proper but most of it isn’t used. When I presented the idea my teacher could tell there wasn’t any love for it and was pretty sure I couldn’t make a whole BFA out of it. So I went back to the drawing board.
I started sketching out ideas of whatever would come to mind. I returned to some old original character designs I had to see if I could think of any other inspiration. I was drawing monsters and "chibi" (small and cute) versions of my characters wearing masks and the idea intrigued me.

On the top of the second page you can see I wrote: "Tournament? Villains? Monsters?" And that is basically where the Sin x Sin tournament of villains idea spawned from.

I basically took a paragraph and just started writing whatever came to mind. I was doing this at the same time I was sketching on the previous page. You get to see my struggle.

I talked to Jim Groman who helped a lot for this transitional period. I gave this my bare-bones log line for Sin x Sin and he thought it was a great concept.

He told me to work on a title and list out the core aspects of the characters and you can see that not much has changed about them.

There's five character descriptions highlighted but one character ended up being cut for the sake of time.
I basically had to re-do my entire aesthetic for the project. On one hand I was very excited to find an idea that I really liked on the other I was very frustrated that I had to essentially start over and i lost a week. For a long time I felt like I was playing catch up.

The core aesthetic changed to some fantasy elements (via the masks) but mainly focused on a bright urban style. Much of it was inspired by street fashion. I would just scroll endlessly through blogs detected to documenting it.

First up we have Pop Star Selene. I thought about naming her Pop Idol Selene but not all Americans know what an idol is and i thought Pop Star had a better ring to it.

Her design also combined two designs I was working with already to create a new character. I think I just wanted a character with a huge kimono-style jacket. I added some more metal/punk elements with her horned hair and big belts.

Her mic-axe was also originally a violin-axe but the silhouette wasn’t working so I changed it to a mic instead.
Lover Boy Logan was created to be a twist on the “guy who goes after every girl” trope. Instead being in love with one contestant in the tournament and his sole reason for entering was to impress him. His sketches were more focused on figuring out his personally than what he wore because I found inspiration for his design quickly. I also wanted him to have a spiked bat because I picture cocky guys holding a bat.

I knew for the mercenary I wanted the character to a big coat or cloak. The other two have a jacket and clothes underneath but I wanted this character to be almost entirely engulfed in a coat.

Leon is the opposite of Logan. I spent a long time trying to figure out what he would be wearing and not so much his personality. I knew that he didn’t want to be participating in the tournament but was instead hired to be in it. The idea also sparked that he was short on cash and had clothes that were torn and patched because of his claw(s). He is also quite tall but he also slouches so he ends up shorter than Jackie.
Jack Rabbit Jackie was based on the concept of well... A jack rabbit! To me jack rabbits are the much scarier distant cousin of cute-fluffy rabbits.

So, when I designed Jackie I imaged that her reasons for joining the tournament were that she just wants to have a good time and fight!

I also wanted her weapon to be some kind of modified weapon that someone could make at home so I leaned towards a nail gun. To my surprise, when I looked into it, there were almost no designs for a nail gun that was an actual gun.

I also wanted her to be wrapped in the strips of nail that absolutely never be replicated in real life I’m sure she is in a massive amount of pain and does not care.

When doing research into the box design I wanted it to do minimal and stylish that would show off the character art. However, I had a hard time finding exact examples.

Then Jim showed me these two toy boxes here with a flap on the outside that revealed the toy on the inside and I thought that was perfect.
I created a quick mock up to sketch on and started playing with ideas and talked with my teachers for their input (you can see my scribbled notes.) I came up with the idea that the masks would fold onto the box like...A mask! I quickly made some boxes to print and make sure the idea could be actually feasible. I also wanted the sides to line up to create a split screen effect.

Once I had the boxes I had to figure out the poses for the box art. I went through a lot of these pages just slapping down ideas to figure out each character's pose. I wanted them to be as dynamic as possible. Many of these aren't even possible I just didn't care it was all about the ideation.
Posing all the characters was both fun and a challenge. It was putting my turn around’s to the test. some of them I was able to use the weapons from the turn around and others I wasn’t able to. I also did draw all of thier expressions underneath thier masks because I think it’s important to be thinking of what expression they’re making undreath it.

Here’s also a Selene pose I ended up not using.

Since these are figurines I wanted to explore how the characters might actually work in 3D. the models to the left here are my first attempts which aren't bad but they were very time consuming.

Upon recommendation from Robert Laurer I bought a base mesh and sculpted it to fit with my turn arounds. I had to stop before it finished though because I needed to focus on the illustrations.

Using my edited mesh I also wanted to make a test of detail. So, I made a bust of Dylan from my previous BFA in under a day. I’ll get more into why later.

Oh so many vertexes my computer hated this.
Here is why I sculpted this Dylan.
I wanted to compare the strengths and weaknesses of a polylactic acid (PLA) printer (L) versus a resin printer (R).
The PLA is larger and more sturdy but much of the detail is lost and is hard to distinguish. While the resin is much smaller it has a much higher level of detail. Its understandable why it's being used in toy production around the world now. As I continue with 3D I might invest in a resin printer.

Down here are other tests that I played around with. The white PLA one is a figurine that I own in real life that I modeled in Maya to understand how its components work. When we printed it we ran into many problems and it was a big learning experience. The second red PLA is a working ball join that i designed using Lover Boy Logan’s bald head. I realized I had to come up with an original design for the neck joint in order to allow the head to swivel and look around. I also didn’t want the design to be intrusive to his neck and be pretty hidden.

Here are just some extra sketches that didn't fit into any particular category.
I made these title cards for my power point presentation I will implement them into the boxes in the future.

I also made some post cards for an assignment with featured the characters on the back. I ended up going with the design on the bottom with all of the characters.