

As Above

By JESSE ARMSTRONG

ARTIST STATEMENT

Jesse Armstrong primarily creates digital artwork but also enjoys working with traditional mediums such as charcoal, graphite, or ink. Their peers have described their art to be very textured, bold, dynamic, and detailed.

Jesse is interested in a variety of subjects including visual development, tattoo design, typography, and iconography. They're always looking for new ways to push themselves. Jesse currently lives in the Pacific Northwest with her cat, Lathander. When she's not making art you can find her lifting weights, playing video games, or spending time with friends.



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For my thesis project, I plan to create a sort of visual pitch deck for a comic based on my story idea titled *As Above*. I have a clear idea of what the visual components will be, and what media will be inspiring this project, however, I'm still actively developing the plot for *As Above*. My main goal with this project is to sharpen my visual development skills, primarily in the area of character design.

From the beginning of this project, I was very clear on what other media and art I wanted to play off of and take inspiration from. Starting with pop culture influences I have been heavily inspired by the series *A Game of Thrones* by George R.R. Martin. I've always been in awe at how alive the world of *GOT* feels, especially when it comes to the characters.

Another show that has inspired this project is the anime and manga series *Berserk* by Kentaro Miura. What drew me into the story of *Berserk* was how emotionally charged the story itself was. The relationships between the main characters were incredibly intense.

Finally, the last pop culture muse is the video game *Elden Ring* which was developed by the studio FromSoftware (Funnily enough, George R.R. Martin also helped in creating the story for *Elden Ring*). The main inspiration that I find myself taking from *Elden Ring* is in the visual components. A lot of the monsters, and many of the main character designs for this game are intensely grotesque, but I think that's my favorite thing about them. These influences all have very similar visual and thematic elements. All fall under the dark fantasy genre, they all have very epic, dramatic, and tragic storylines, and they all have very dynamic and compelling characters. These are all themes I want to include in my own story.

In addition to finding inspiration in modern media, I've also found myself looking into classical art and history. One of the aesthetics I have been researching so far has been the 16th century sometimes referred to as the Tudor era. While my story doesn't take place in 16th-century

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Europe, or even Earth for that matter, it's an aesthetic sensibility that I feel lends well to the overall tone of the story. Additionally, one of my characters, Queen Alexandria, is loosely based on Queen Elizabeth I. I've also found myself inspired by Dante Alighieri's poem *Inferno*. I'm primarily interested in how Dante depicts Hell, the shape it takes, and the characters who occupy it.

would describe the *As Above* story as a dark fantasy with elements of horror. I want the images for this project to feel dark, gritty, and apocalyptic. Collecting images and creating mood boards, and reference boards has helped me get an idea of what I want this project to look like at a glance. The narrative structure of *As Above* would likely fall under the fantasy epic category. However, for the purposes of my thesis, I'll primarily be focusing on creating images for the first "arc" of *As Above*. The characters I'll be focusing on, Waylon Blackthorn, Queen Alexandria, the Dowager Queen Nehiri, Halston York, and the

She-Wolf, are all characters that would be introduced in the first leg of the story. *As Above* takes place on the planet Antigone, which is being invaded by the Hell Vessel, a ship from outer space carrying demons. The story is told from the perspective of Waylon Blackthorn, who is the first human to be taken to the Hell Vessel and return alive. He has no memories from his time spent on the vessel and very few from before. This makes him the perfect candidate for the protagonist since the audience can learn about the world alongside him. When he arrives back on Antigone, five years have passed, the war on demons has progressed dramatically, two kings have died, and now Queen Alexandria leads. This is essentially where the story begins.

The core idea of my project is to be able to convey the tone, and vibe of a fantasy world through a series of character designs, backgrounds, environment designs, and other images. This will be accomplished by utilizing visual storytelling, repeated symbols and artifacts, and by

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sticking to a consistent color palette for certain characters and environments. For instance, Queen Alexandria will have lots of sun imagery in her armor, clothing, jewelry, etc., that eventually develops into eclipse imagery as her character becomes progressively more power-hungry and corrupt in the story.

This project will be done digitally using Photoshop and Procreate (primarily Photoshop). When I present my work I intend to print out each piece, likely 18x24 or larger, for a better viewing experience, for the final presentation. As far as what kinds of pieces I intend to create, my main focus will be on the character designs. Ideally, I'd like to design four (minimum) to 5 characters from the As Above story. Since this concept isn't technically being made for animation, I'd rather do alternative outfit designs than do a full turnaround for each character. I may draw multiple angles for certain looks if there are key elements that cannot be seen from the front. For example, Waylon has a back tattoo

that is important to the story and his character, so I would be sure to show that in one of his drawings. When presenting these character designs I envision having one piece that showcases 3-4 of their alternative full-body looks in flat color, and then a piece that showcases just one of their looks, likely their main one, fully rendered. I'd also like to create two environment designs to help showcase the setting these characters are in. There are multiple settings in this story, but as of now the two I'd want to portray would be the Hell Vessel where the demons come from, and the military camp where Queen Alexandria operates. These pieces would be fully rendered when finished, and I may also print out a sheet that showcases the sketch phase, line phase, value phase, and then final rendering to convey my process.

Additionally, I plan to explore sigil design and creation. Specific demons in this story have individual sigils that are used to summon or communicate with them. For example, the demon Queen Nehiri's sigil is

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tattooed on Waylon's back, as mentioned previously. My personal experience with sigil creation comes from my experience practicing Wicca. Part of my research for this project will be on where sigils have been used historically and by who.

Finally, I'd like to create an illustrative poster for my thesis. It could also act as a proposed cover if I were to ever develop the story further for comics, however, for my thesis, it would be used as a poster to advertise, and also to open up my presentation, before getting into the actual visual development work.

I'm undecided on whether or not I'll be presenting any written elements as part of my final presentation of my work. I do intend to write a general overview of the narrative, primarily to help myself organize my thoughts so I can clearly explain the characters, the scenes, the themes, etc. to others. I am interested in creating a script for the first chapter or

two or three for an As Above comic, however, I'm not sure how I would present this to an audience.

ABSTRACT

As Above is a series of character designs, poster illustrations, and icons. In this narrative, the *Hell Vessel* has descended upon the planet Antigone and unleashed an invading demonic horde. Our protagonist, Princess Alexandria, is fighting to protect her kingdom, but the invasion unearths deeply buried secrets that may tear her kingdom and family apart.





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by her family during the initial invasion. After the death of her father on the first day of their arrival, her younger brother, Mattias, ascends the throne. This is a point of frustration for her as she knows deep down that had she been born a man, she'd be ascending the throne. However, she puts these thoughts aside, as she sees how much the title of King means to her brother, especially given that he's been raised specifically to take over as King, and also because there is simply a much larger issue at hand- the invasion of their kingdom.

Moving into my deliverables, and what I actually created, I focused my efforts primarily on character design. There are many characters in this story, and I ended up choosing seven to explore. I did more in depth explorations with the two main characters of this story, and five shorter explorations with five key side characters. I also created two accompanying poster illustrations, four icon designs, a map, and a logo to help round out the project. So, First I want to get into the process

of creating Alexandria's design. After my initial research, I created a few sketch pages just nailing down her facial features, and alternate hairstyles. I then finalized two costume designs for her. I also explored different colorways just to help nail down her color palette. I ended up going with the red hair for her, because this character is loosely based off the real life Queen Elizabeth the first, and while at first I was worried this would be too on the nose, it ended up being a fun way to lean into this connection.

These are the two finalized looks for her design. On the left we have her battle attire which is what we would see her in the most, and on the right we have her formal look. The design of her dress is inspired by other Elizabethan era dresses. You can also see in the dress design that she's still wearing armor pieces here. While the invasion is happening she has little appreciation for any formal gatherings, and sees them as frivolous, and especially wasteful. It's hard for her to relax in these settings, and



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and feels more secure in her armor, just in case there is an attack during the festivities.

Our second primary character is Waylon Blackthorn. Waylon was a victim of demonic abduction. Part of the process of harvesting souls is being taken directly to the Hell Vessel, and Waylon was one of the unlucky many, taken on the very first day of the invasion. His story gets weird when a few months later he is cast down from the vessel, and crashes back onto Antigone, miraculously surviving. He later realizes he has no memory of the last few months, and more importantly no memory of his time on the Vessel. The only clue he has is a large wing-shaped sigil that has been branded on his back, which he can't see of course, but he can definitely feel, as it is still a very fresh wound.

The first drawing of him here on the far left is what he looks like when he falls. He is found by Alexandria and a squad of her men and taken

back to camp. Alexandria and her brother Mattias disagree on what to do with Waylon- Alexandria thinks they should interrogate him, and see what he knows about the demons, and Mattias thinks it's too big of a risk and that he's likely a spy of some sort. Eventually Alexandria manages to convince her brother to give him a chance. They help him regain his strength, and in time some of his memories. We eventually learn that it was the demon Lady Nehiri who casted him down from the vessel, and branded him with her sigil, but I'll be getting into that more a little bit later. His demon transformation, which is what you're seeing on the far right, happens much later and very slowly over the course of the story of *As Above*. During his time on the vessel his soul was in fact harvested, but because he survived this, his body began the transformation into becoming a demon. This is also one of the first clues for the viewer about the relationship between humans and demons.

Pictured here are the five side characters whose designs I developed for



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the story. From left to right we have The She-Wolf, Lord Barakas, Lady Nehiri, Florence Shore, and finally Prince Mattias. I'm going to go through my explanations of the characters somewhat out of order than what is pictured here and instead talk through them in order of their appearance or relevance in the plot.

First we have Lord Barakas. The Hell Vessel is ruled by a council of seven demons who are led by The Demon King. However, the King of the vessel has fallen into a hibernative state, for reasons unknown, rendering him completely unreachable, and the council ungoverned. Unsurprisingly, Lord Barakas happily steps into the role of King, assuring everyone that it's only temporary, and that he only wants to keep things running smoothly until his royal highness regains consciousness. During this time however he makes the decision to invade Antigone which could be seen as a risky move as this planet is located in territory previously occupied by the angels- unfathomable,

cosmic creatures who are not just enemies to the demons, but rather natural predators to them. In Barakas' mind, the invasion is worth the risk. Either the Demon King wakes up and rewards him for taking charge and doubling the resources of the Vessel, or the Demon king doesn't wake up, and the council makes the decision to promote him as king permanently after he proves himself worthy of the position. A win-win in his mind. Spoiler alert, he doesn't see either outcome come to fruition since there is someone else actively against him.

Lady Nehiri, also known as the mother of demons, is the wife of the Demon King. However, because she is not from the Hell Vessel, and is actually from another sister vessel known as Purgatory, she has no seat on the council and no claim to the throne. The development of her husband's comatose state has left her feeling abandoned, desperate, and angry. She visits the king's chamber as often as she is able and begs him to wake up, but nothing changes. After Barakas' move to invade

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Antigone, Nehiri decides she must do something to stop him. In her mind, she wants to protect her husband's seat on the throne, in case he does ever wake up, but she also sees an opportunity to seize power for herself. Perhaps if she destroys Barakas she can replace him on the council. In order to do this she takes a sneakier approach and decides the best way to defeat Barakas is to assist the humans in taking him down. So she forces an alliance with Alexandria, by slowly possessing her mind, and steering her towards victory. On one hand, it's a win for both parties, Nehiri gets what she wants, and Alexandria saves her people and her planet. However, as we will see, Nehiri's possession of Alexandria slowly drives her mad, and causes her to do unforgivable things in order to achieve victory over the demons.

Here we have The She-Wolf, also known as the Gatekeeper of Hell. She's a very stoic and mysterious figure. She's very physically imposing, even and especially to other demons who know exactly what

she is capable of. It's said that once she has your scent she stops at absolutely nothing to find you and that there is nothing you can do to survive her. Her primary role is to hunt down any demons, or prisoners who leave hell unauthorized. In As Above Barakas sends her out to track down Waylon after he escapes Hell, only this time he instructs her to bring him back alive. It's debatable if she would have actually left him alive. Unfortunately for her, and Barakas, but fortunately for Waylon, she is slain by Alexandria, to the shock of everyone.

Next up we have Florence Shore, one of Alexandria's oldest friends. Florence was a maid in Alexandria's household for a time while she was a child, and the two kept in touch for many years after Florence had to leave to go live with family. However, this was actually a lie told to Alexandria. Florence actually was caught practicing witchcraft, and was excused from the household. When Alexandria was older, Florence tells her about this, and to her surprise it doesn't bother the princess but

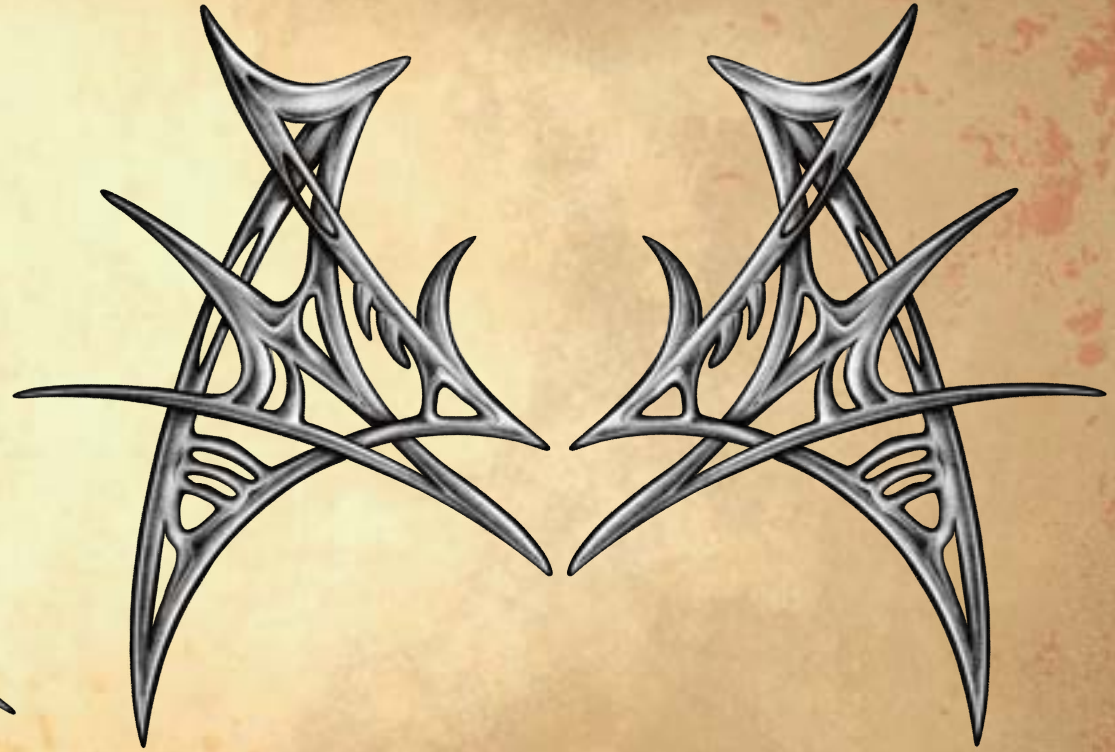
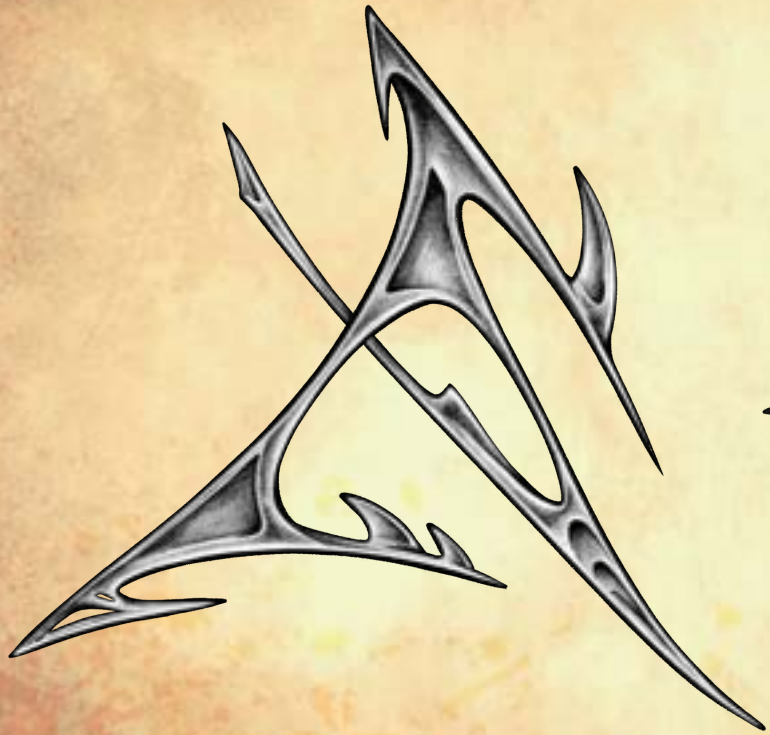
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rather intrigues her. She is introduced in the story shortly after Alexandria finds Waylon. She approaches Florence in secret, asking her what she makes of the markings on Waylon's back. She doesn't recognize the symbol, but identifies it to be a sigil of some kind. Alexandria decides to bring Florence back to their camp to help in their research on the demons, and on Waylon, but keeps her identity as a witch secret, as it is still heavily criminalized.

And finally this is Prince, and for a very short time, King Mattias. Mattias is vain, pampered, has a need to always be right, and is not exactly very skilled in or rather active in combat. He eagerly takes charge after the passing of his father, and is more concerned with what defeated Lord Barakas will do for his legacy, than actually saving his kingdom. He and Alexandria work well together initially, and he even grants her a high ranking position within the royal army. However, as months pass, and the conflict wears on Alexandria feels more

emboldened to speak out against some of her brother's orders. They begin to disagree more and more about where to send their forces. Mattias wants to prioritize getting the capital back, and killing Prince Barakas, while Alexandra sees that they need to focus on preventing the demons from actually gaining any more territory, and prioritize protecting their people. Ultimately, Mattias meets his end only a few months after the arrival of the Hell Vessel, at the hands of the She-Wolf.

In addition to the character design work for the project I also set out to create accompanying icons to go along with some of the characters. Pictured here we have the demon icons which are the sigils for Lord Barakas and Lady Nehiri. In the world of As Above, there is a light magic system built around sigil work. In short, there's not an immediate outcome to the spell and is more of a ritualistic process, or like snail mail... but with magic. A magic user casts spells by drawing specific icons or symbols that relate to the spell they're casting. The larger the



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spell, the more specific it is, the more intricate the design will be. Each of the ruling demon lords have a unique sigil based around the kind of magic they specialize in, and magic users build their practice around whichever demon they worship.

Lady Nehiri's sigil is one used in communication, or coercive magic. In the story, we see her sigil appear on Waylon's back. She places it there so that she can coerce him into getting closer with Alexandria. Nehiri planned all along for Waylon to join Alex, and hoped to use him as a way to get closer to her, so that she could eventually take control of Alex. She's ultimately successful in this as we later see her sigil appear once again but this time on Alex's chest after she has her first interaction with Nehiri. When a sigil is found on someone's body it takes the form of a wound that heals into a reddish scar which never fully heals.

Lord Barakas' sigil is used in domination spell work. His sigil is slowly revealed to have been branded onto the back of the necks of the other demon lords who are under Lord Barakas' control. He also attempts to brand the She-Wolf with his mark, but this proves unsuccessful as she takes it upon herself to remove the sigil from her body in a rather gruesome manner. Unfortunately for her, Lord Barakas finds other means of controlling her.

When creating these designs I started off by using the characters full title and putting it into this sigil creation chart. For Nehiri I used the title "Mother of Demons." From there I played with the symbol that was produced from this until I found a shape that I felt read well, or just looked cool. In the case of Nehiri's sigil, I found that when I mirrored its design it looked sort of like wings, which played well with all the other demonic imagery I was using. This is also how I came up with the idea for her sigil to appear on Waylon's back, and later manifest into actual



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wings.

Here is the development of Barakas' sigil. His took a little longer, because I wasn't thrilled with the shape that was created from the chart. I also wanted the demon icons to have a 3-dimensional, organic or even bonelike shape to them which for some reason was tough to achieve with this specific shape. As most of you may know, a sigil is often drawn or carved into something, the ground, a piece of paper, maybe a candle, which is also done with these sigils. But I also liked the idea of them being more tactile, and existing within space somehow, and just being more versatile in their use.

I also created icons for two of the major ruling houses of Valdara. The one on the left is for House Stoddard, which is Alexandria's family, and the one on the right is for House Underwood, the second largest as well as oldest house in the kingdom. During Mattias' time as king he

struggled with keeping an alliance with Lord Underwood, and it wasn't until Alexandria became Queen that the Underwoods joined in the fight against the Demons alongside them.

Here is the ideation for these icons. When approaching these designs I thought about the traits each of these families embodied. The Stoddards are the longest reigning family of Valdara, and they are most known for their might, glory, wealth, but also their vanity. The gauntlets holding up the sun are meant to convey the family sharing their wealth and power with others, which at the very least King Godwin was known for, his children however, not so much. The Underwoods primary symbol is the hound, which symbolizes loyalty, nobility, honor and grace. The Underwoods are known for their quiet power, and especially their humility. I chose green as their main color because I felt it brought a calmness to this design. The Underwoods are also located in a densely forested area, so the green also represents their proximity to nature.

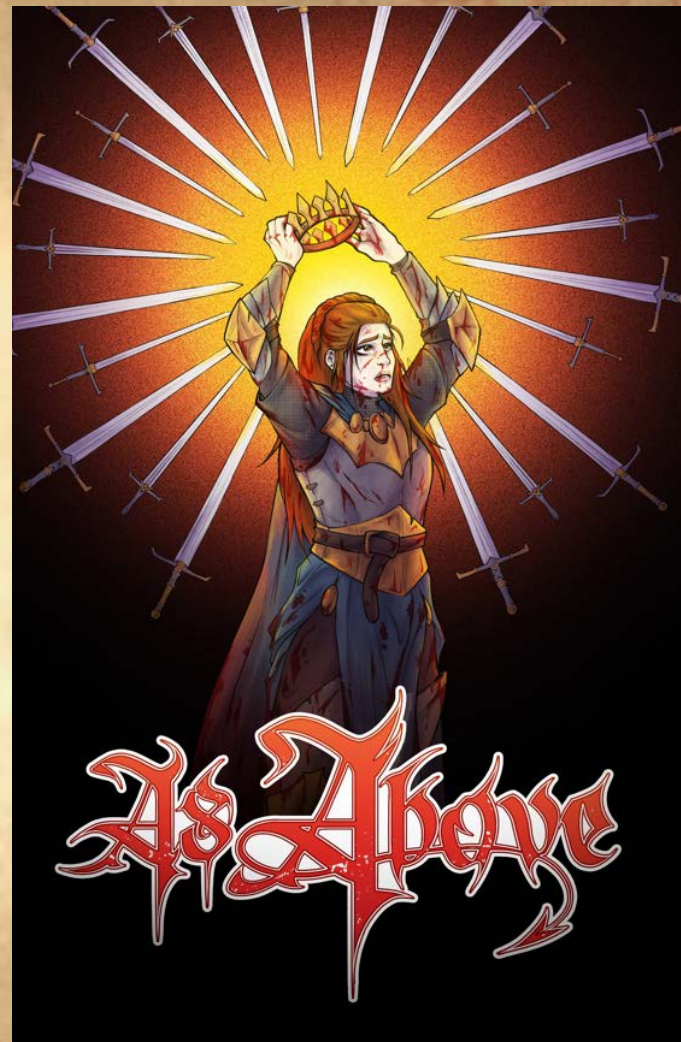
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I wanted to also include my process in creating the logo of the title for As Above. On the left was the very first iteration, which was just a font I found on the website FontSpace. I knew I wanted to find something in the medieval, gothic, or bold font family, or something that was a combination of the three. I'm really not an expert on fonts or type faces, but I do know aesthetics and I had a pretty clear idea on what I wanted to create for this. I ended up revisiting this initial version of the title and just putting my own spin on it based on other fonts and logos I had been looking at.

I eventually ended up with what you see here. I added a white inner line to the design as well as some weathering, just to make it look less polished, and more worn out. My personal favorite detail is the tail that also acts as sort of an underline to the title. Overall I'm very pleased with how this turned out, and I think out of everything I created this was one of the more fun things to design.

I don't have a great segway into this part but we're going to talk about the posters now! This first illustration is what I deemed to be the cover art for this project. It depicts Alexandria during her "coronation" which happens directly after her brother is slain by the She-Wolf. In a moment of pure shock, and with a slight telepathic nudge from Nehiri, she picks up the crown from his corpse and places it on her own head. The look on her face is meant to convey the mixture of fear, sorrow, and anxiety she feels in this moment. This isn't a moment where she feels triumphant, however there's a part of her that realizes just how badly she wanted this crown. It's meant to portray a huge turning point for her character, as well as the beginning of her descent into madness.

The second illustration I created depicts another powerful moment in Alexandria's story when she presents the severed head of the She-Wolf to her step-mother, the dowager queen Millicent, who was her brother Mattias' mother, and King Godwin's second wife. Stay with me here. In





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the fight against the She-Wolf it takes many people to bring her down, but it's ultimately Alexandria who lands the final blow by cutting off her head with a claymore. Her expression here is meant to come off as a little crazed, or perhaps a little evil. After crowning herself queen, some people disagreed with this motion, specifically Queen Millicent, who argued the line of succession would actually fall to her. Alexandria showing off the head to Millicent is meant to intimidate her, and say to her "I'm the one actually fighting this fight, which is why I deserve to be queen and not you." This is one of the final moments from the first part of As Above and a very striking one which is why I chose to illustrate it.

So that was essentially everything I made for the visuals. So let's move into my process and ideation for As Above and thesis as a whole. In the case of thesis we're asked to really dig deep and explain or apply personal meaning to our projects. And especially ask ourselves 'why?'

So, in my case, why visual development, why world building, why dark-fantasy, why As Above. Initially it took me a while to answer this question, and it became a very uncomfortable question for me to answer. I've never really been someone to go out of my way to make my work about my trauma. I have of course done it, I was in middle school during the tumblr era, I certainly made some "vent art" in my day, but it was always in a very private setting, not really like this. Having said that, when you're an artist I do believe that no matter how hard you try, your personal experiences, beliefs, trauma, feelings, etc. will inevitably bleed into your work. And I think that's always been my preferred approach, especially when it comes to character creation. To just let things manifest naturally. And to let things build on themselves as I work and as I figure out the story. Which happened a few times while I was writing As Above, especially when it came to Alexandria's character. The more I developed her the more I realized just how much of myself I was putting into her story.

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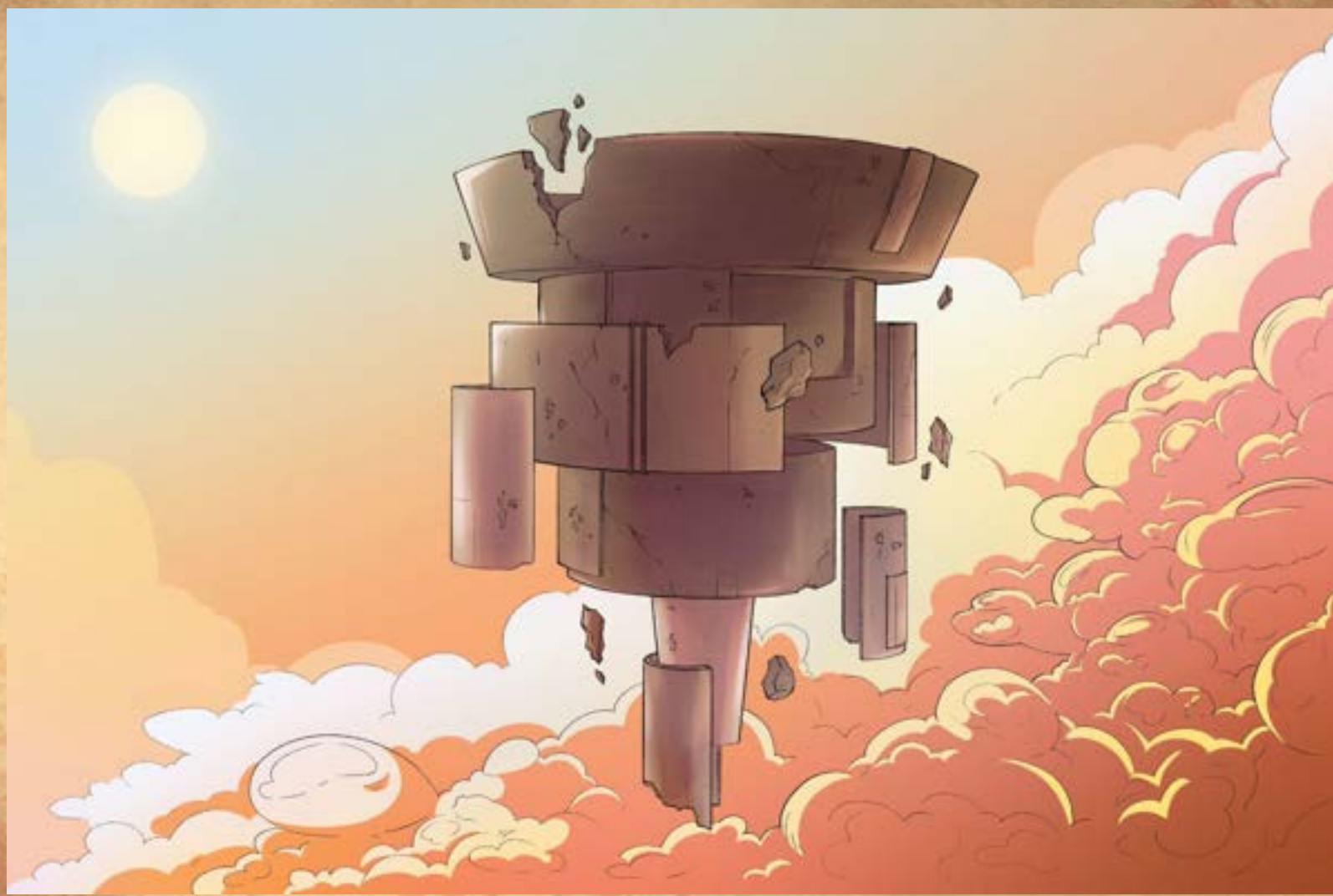
Part of my process when it comes to developing a character, is first creating a mood board and collecting reference images for them. In doing this I'm trying to find a loose idea of what they look like, what their color palette is, and what their symbols may be. I think of it like what would this character look like through blurry vision, and then it's up to me to focus in on that image, and refine it. I also like to make playlists for each character. I didn't do this for every character in *As Above*, but I did make one for Alex, Waylon, Nehiri and the She-Wolf.

I also had a playlist for the project as a whole, and a playlist of just instrumental music and movie scores... The playlist codes up now are for the master playlist, and Alexandria's. I'll also put them back up at the very end once we're done. I just really like making playlists. That being said, there was a use for them. This was helpful when it came to visualizing the character in my head and figuring out what they may be feeling, what their motivations may be, and also just coming up with

cool moments or scenes for them. It felt necessary to include this here as part of my creative methodology because it was and is genuinely helpful for me, and I can't imagine not including it in my process. And it's also just fun.

One of my primary academic influences for *As Above* was the *Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri, specifically the first part, *Inferno*, which details Dante's exploration or descent into the 9 circles of Hell. As we saw with the design of the Hell Vessel, I primarily took visual influences from this work as there is an abundance of paintings and lithographs inspired by the poem, a lot of which I find very visually compelling.

An illustration that immediately caught my eye in my initial research was Sandro Botticelli's painting titled "La Mappa dell'inferno" or "The Map of Hell" (1480-1490). One of the things that I like about this rendition is that it looks like a 3-dimensional object. Most portrayals of



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Hell depict it as a nebulous distant realm that can only be visited via supernatural means, like a portal, or a ritual. Given that my portrayal of Hell is a spaceship-like-craft that births and houses demons and other supernatural beings, this specific painting helped me in visualizing what that ship may look like.

One thing that I didn't quite take the time to explore within my project is the concept of each circle representing a different "sin," which if you are familiar with the poem is a major theme, and how I could reflect that into my own version of hell, or how I could symbolically work that into the story. One idea that I had for this was that perhaps as Alexandria loses herself to Nehiri's control, she would embody a different sin, starting with her lack or loss of faith in her God, and ending with treachery when she betrays Waylon and the rest of her people. It's an idea I hope to explore in the future as I continue to work on the narrative.

Additionally I also spent some time looking into the history of the Tudor family. As I stated earlier, Queen Alexandria is loosely based on Queen Elizabeth I. They share similar physical traits, but I was more interested in reflecting the story of how Elizabeth came to be queen and the events that followed in Alex's story. For those who are unfamiliar, Queen Elizabeth the first was the daughter of Henry the eighth and Anne Boleyn. She reigned as Queen of England and Ireland from 1558 to 1603, during a period known as the Elizabethan Era. She was the last monarch of the House of Tudor, a royal dynasty that ruled England from 1485 to 1603.. Elizabeth's life was marked by political intrigue, religious tensions, and ultimately, a powerful and successful reign that left a lasting impact on English history and culture. I found that taking inspiration from real life historical events was helpful when it came to developing the rest of the narrative for *As Above*, as it created a helpful foundation to build the dynamics of my own characters off of.

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The entirety of this project was created digitally using both Procreate and Photoshop. I did most of my sketch work and rough concepting on my iPad with procreate, and when I was ready to move onto final line work and rendering I would move the piece to Photoshop. I'm someone who likes to work in a lot of layers, especially with my more complex illustrations, and I have found that Photoshop is the best program for me to do that in, as it can accommodate larger file sizes.

I also wrote a broad outline for what I deemed the first "arc" of *As Above*. This outline detailed the initial few months of the demon invasion, up to the moment when Alexandria slays the She-Wolf and presents the head to her step-mother, the dowager Queen Millicent, in a display of power. This is an excerpt from that moment [read it]. I struggled writing this outline because it felt like everytime I took a step forward with the story I'd then want to take two steps back. There was a lot of deleting of paragraphs, a lot of lists of character names and places,

lots of abandoned word vomit drafts, and probably hours of unlistened to voice memos of me ranting to myself just trying to work out my ideas. In the end I managed to write a fifteen page brief for the story. Once it was finished I was able to take a huge deep breath, and it was easier for me to move forward with the designs, but also to be able to talk through my ideas with folks.

Even after finishing this outline however it still felt like I was working on the plot for this story while simultaneously working on the art and designs for it. I ended up doing a lot of backtracking throughout the design process, which at times was frustrating, given that it didn't always feel like I had the time to make all the edits I wanted to make. Having said that the beauty of visual development is that while in this stage of the image making or rather design process, none of this is truly final. I still feel that there are more iterations of each of these characters to be done. Even the Hell Vessel in my mind is a working design. I often

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thought about those big art books that you see for video games or movie franchises that have all the concept and vis dev work in them, and how different the design for one character will look on say page one, than the final outcome. I think of the designs I have for this project as phase one, of many. Pictured here are the redraws I did of Alexandria's initial designs that I made last semester. I mostly made changes to the silhouette of her more formal attire, but my initial idea for her armor changed quite significantly. I liked the idea of combining elements of steel and gold for her.

Her family, the Stoddard's primarily wear gold plated armor, which you see in her brother, Mattias's design. The siblings share almost an identical color palette, but the decision to put Alexandria in more battle attire than her brother, and to include more steel armor pieces, is meant to convey her more active role in combat against the demons. Canonically Mattias only sees combat once, and it's during the

She-Wolf's attack when she kills him. Poor Mattias. Mattias was always more sheltered, cared for, and more importantly adored by their father and their subjects, whereas Alexandria had to fight for all of that.

Because I engage with a lot of video games, anime, movies, and other media, it was easy for me to determine exactly what preexisting stories would influence my project once I decided what genre I wanted to work in. My big three for As Above have been the anime and manga series Berserk by Kentaro Miura, Game of Thrones by George R.R. Martin, and of course Elden Ring which is mostly credited to Hidetaka Miyazaki, but interestingly GRRM also helped write a lot of the history and lore for that game as well. Starting with Berserk, which has become my main muse, like many folks I find myself drawn to the aesthetics and overall design for the characters, and monsters of this anime. When watching this show I found myself gripped by the story of Guts and Griffith's friendship and the subsequent fall of that relationship. It's an

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incredibly tragic tale about friendship, and the lengths someone will go to achieve a life long goal, with sacrifice being one of the main themes of this story. There's a lot I could say about Game of Thrones. I was mainly influenced by the costuming, especially from what we saw in the Tv series. But I've also always been incredibly impressed by the intricate web of character relationships. There's about a dozen ruling families who live in Westeros, where this takes place, and between those families, hundreds of people who all have very specific roles in the story of Game of Thrones. It's a very character driven story with themes around politics, class, violence, and especially family. When thinking about the dynamics between my own characters, I would often think back to how certain kinds of relationships are handled in GOT. Elden Ring is one of the sources that gave me the confidence when I needed it to get real weird with some of the lore in As Above. In this game you play as the Tarnished, who must restore the Elden Ring, a magical object that governs the Lands Between, and thus become Elden Lord.

As someone who has watched an ungodly amount of lore videos about this game, it gets really weird, for lack of a better term. It's a dark fantasy game that ventures into cosmic or eldritch horror at times. You can especially see this in the design of a lot of the beings you fight in this game.

When thinking about who As Above would appeal to, I mostly thought about the people I know personally who enjoy epic fantasy stories, like the ones I just talked about. My focus group in my head was my dad, my best friend Paige, our family friend Abbie, and some of my other buddies. I tried to think about what kinds of story elements and characters they may want to see in this project. There were many moments when I even went to them for feedback or critique, and I probably sent hours worth of voice notes to my friend Paige, who patiently listened to each one, and always offered really great direction when I felt like I was losing the plot. That being said, I also thought

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about people I knew who don't always connect easily with fantasy epic plots. One of the issues I frequently ran into throughout this project was how difficult it could be to explain the story itself because there were just a lot of pieces to it. Of course, when creating any story like this you want it to be enjoyable even to non-fantasy or non-horror fans, and I did my best especially when breaking down the elements of this story to make it seem less intimidating or over the top, at least initially, but I quickly found that for one, I had more fun working on it once I leaned into more of the weirdness of it, and two, that at the end of the day a story like *As Above* will never appeal to everyone, and that's okay, in my mind. I decided that I 100% wanted to cater to fans of this genre, and more importantly myself, and my friends who also enjoy over the top fantasy epics.

The biggest shift that occurred with my original plan for this project, and what I ultimately ended up making, was just the amount of

illustrations I ended up creating, but I think that's often the case when you're working on a larger project like this. There were many other characters that I've mentioned, and some that I didn't, that at one point I had plans to depict alongside the five that I chose. Halston York, who is a knight of the Queen's guard and one of Alexandria's closest friends was one of them. Going into this I wanted to spend more time creating in-depth looks at each character, creating individual symbols for each one, exploring more outfits, and also just more in depth sketch pages for each one.

The truth is, if I were to do this all over again I would have focused on just two to three characters, instead of trying to do six. In thinking about what I'll realistically do with this project, and these characters next, I'd honestly just like to spend more time with Alexandria. I like drawing her, I like thinking about her, I know that I have more that I want to say and convey through her.

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But, How would I continue to develop this story further? I've had a hard time definitively saying whether or not As Above would exist as a video game, or a graphic novel, or even a movie or an animation. I'm someone who has engaged with a lot of transmedia storytelling, which is when one story is told using a variety of modes, like how Star Wars has the movies, but then also has books expanding on the universe, as well as TV shows, and even video games. Because I have engaged with, and enjoy this kind of storytelling, I kind of blame that for why I've had a hard time just deciding what As Above would be. And I think this is also because I could see it existing in a variety of mediums. More recently I'm beginning to view As Above as more of a prologue for a video game. This part of the story would be the history of how Antigone went to shit, and then within the game itself the player would slowly uncover the secrets of this world that has been overrun with demons. What I do know for sure is that I'm not done with these characters. When you have a story like As Above, with so much opportunity for

expansion, it's hard to just simply walk away from it.

CREATIVE BRIEF

For my thesis, I am creating a series of character designs, poster illustrations, and icons for my story *As Above*. In this narrative, the *Hell Vessel* has descended upon the planet Antigone and unleashed an invading demonic horde. Our protagonist, Princess Alexandria, is fighting to protect her kingdom, but the invasion unearths deeply buried secrets that may tear her kingdom and family apart.

I am very inspired by Dante's *Inferno* and classic medieval art, and I intend to weave these visual inspirations into this project's character and environment designs.

As Above is targeted to a more mature audience, as it features material unsuitable for younger audiences, such as violence, gore, demonic possession, and scary creatures. I have been classifying *As Above* as a dark medieval fantasy story that should resonate with people who are generally a fan of this genre as well.

The entirety of the project is executed digitally on both Procreate (iPad) and Photoshop (computer). Prior to executing each design I spent time collecting and reviewing reference material, before moving into the thumbnailing and sketch phases, and then into the line art and rendering phases.

My primary visual inspirations for this project are *Elden Ring* which is a video game, the anime series *Berserk*, and the TV and book series *Game of Thrones*. Each of these works fall under the dark, medieval fantasy genre, with some horror themes mixed in.

This body of work will primarily function as a collection within my portfolio to showcase my skills as a visual development artist. I am also taking this opportunity to explore visual storytelling through character design and environment illustration.

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DOCUMENTATION



JOURNAL

CONTINENT OF VALDARA



- HOUSE STORBARD
- HOUSE VALE
- HOUSE UTHBERKWOOD
- HOUSE EVERETTE
- HOUSE BEAUMORT



Waylon Blackthorne



Make it look like a bat's wings. It's not a bat's wings, it's a bat's wings.

Appear as a part of the body, not a separate part.



Buzzed



Boysen



Enko



Thur?













Non-r: Matter of Demons

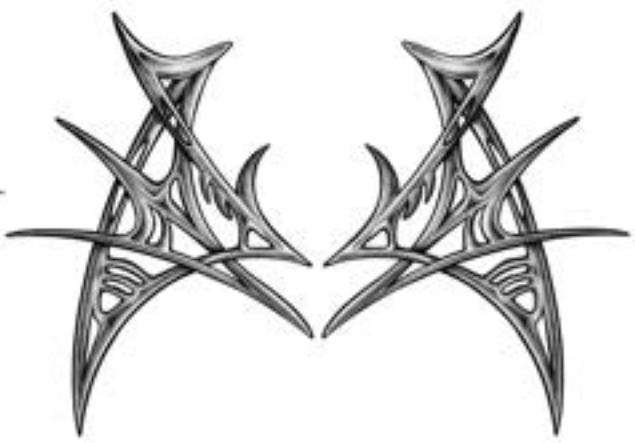
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Non-r: Matter of Demons

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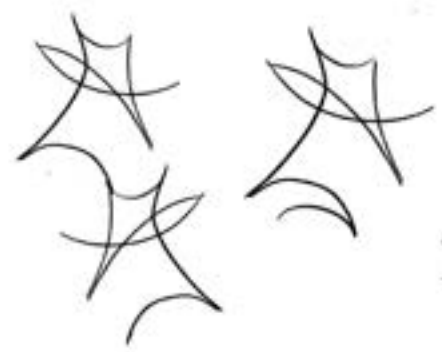
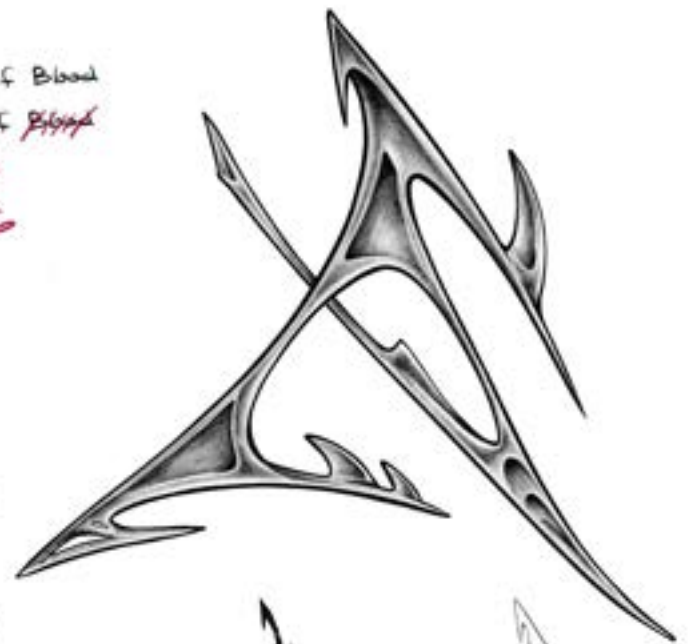
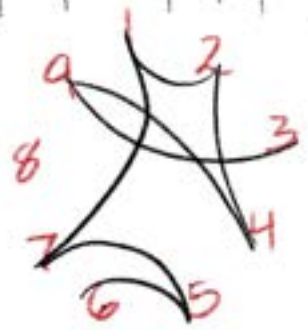
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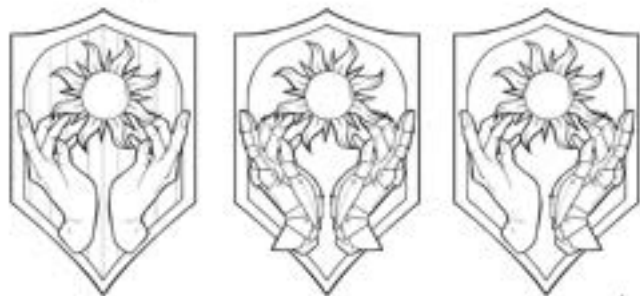
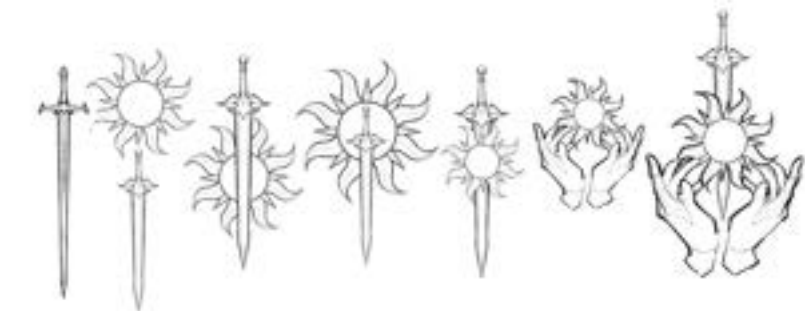
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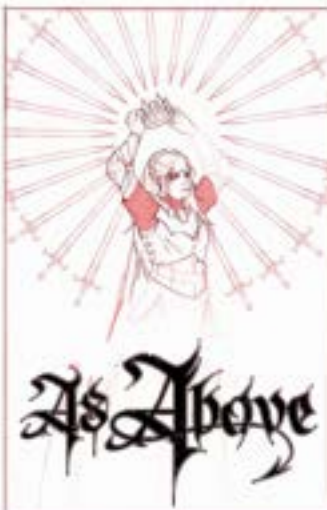
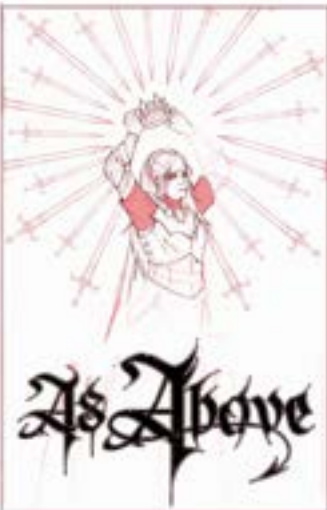




As Above

As Above

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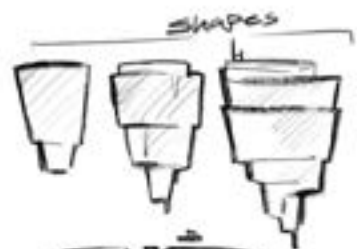
Out logo
All upside



Orbiting Antigone



partially open



* Floating
Debris



Come to my team please
It's happening here at this time
Follow my Instagram too

Come to my team please
It's happening here at this time
Follow my Instagram too

