COLOSSAL: THE CONCEPT AND CREATION OF
AN ORIGINAL GRAPHIC NOVEL

by

Katie Starkey

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for Departmental Honors in
the Department of Graphic Design
Texas Christian University
Fort Worth, Texas

May 2, 2016
COLOSSAL: THE CONCEPT AND CREATION OF
AN ORIGINAL GRAPHIC NOVEL

Project Approved:

Supervising Professor: Dusty Crocker, Ph.D
Department of Graphic Design

Charles Varner, B.F.A
Department of Graphic Design

Peter Worthing, Ph.D
Department of History
ABSTRACT

*Colossal: The Concept and Creation of an Original Graphic Novel* follows the process of my phenomenological study spanned across two years of my undergraduate career. The study began with introspection as to why I was inspired to create my own novel using the artistic skills I had acquired throughout my childhood and honed through my completion of the BA degree in Graphic Design. The process then followed the research behind executing such a project, following the steps discovered within the research, then finalizing the portfolio with finished artistic pieces and polished concept development. This thesis covers my thought process behind every element within my story, as well as the finished products of communication through artistic means. This study involved many different contacts that contributed to its development, including supervision by professors in graphic design, illustration, traditional art, as well as outside sources for story formatting and critiques. This study allowed me to explore the true process behind creating such a project, taking on all roles that is required by a development team, as well as fulfill and childhood dream.
COLOSSAL

MY BEGINNINGS: CHILDHOOD DRAWINGS, COMICS, AND INSPIRATIONS

MY START
- My passion began at four years old. I was obsessed with digital technology, especially the rise of the video game industry. My love for games made me want to create my own worlds. That’s when I began to draw.

MY CHILDHOOD DRAWINGS
- My portfolio began with simple cartoons and recreations of characters I enjoyed. I even experimented with creating my own comics about my life, silly representations of everyday childhood events.
INSPIRATIONS

-Inspiring work included games like Kingdom Hearts, Final Fantasy, and The Legend of Zelda. Each of these franchises followed a single hero on a journey of self-discovery, as well as his dedication to save his friends and those he loved. The stories within were extremely well developed and had deeper messages meant to be discovered by the gamer. Because each character had their own depth, these virtual worlds naturally formed an emotional connection to their players, and in turn changed the way they saw the real world. It is because of these unique emotional experiences that I wanted to create something of my very own; something that could stimulate the same experience for others, but be of my own imagination. It was at this point I began to conceptualize my world and my heroes.
ROLE MODELS

As I grew older, I began to see myself in popular characters within these virtual worlds. Suddenly I identified with their passions, their struggles, and their values. Although they were figments of another’s imagination, it didn’t change how much I looked up to these heroes. They could do the impossible, and naturally I believed I could too. Then I thought to myself, if someone’s creation can affect a person’s view of themselves and the world around them to that extent, then art and video games could truthfully change the world. I was determined to use this medium to influence others with a positive force just as these characters did with me.
RESEARCH

LOOKING TO THE MASTERS TO BEGIN MY CREATIVE JOURNEY

-I read and studied different types of graphic novels, including different titles from Marvel, DC, and Top Cow Comics. The most read title included many volumes of Witchblade.

-I collected concept art books of many different novels and video games and analyzed their different art styles and creative processes.

-I went on multiple job hunts, studying to requirements for each artistic field. From these different companies I was able to identify what type of skills it took to be successful in this field.
FAMOUS ARTISTS

-Kekai Kotaki- Freelance digital painter that has worked for many different gaming companies. Master of character and landscape design.

-Tyler Edlin- Freelance landscape digital painter and educator. Master of perspective, space, and architecture design.

-Marc Silvestri- Pen artist for Marvel, DC, and Top Cow Comics. Main inspiration for my own work, studying and adapting his unique and edgy style.
RESEARCH RESULTS
THE THREE MAIN STEPS TAKEN IN CREATING A GRAPHIC NOVEL

STEP ONE

The first step in the process requires the artist to pencil down what they are thinking. These sketches are typically very quick, loose sketches that are just used to get the idea down. From this step, they move to the next in the development process.
The second step in the process takes the initial pencil drawing and turns to a straight black and white. This is done either traditionally by the artist through the use of black markers and pens, or is done digitally by the artist through the use of Adobe Illustrator, making use of shape tools to block in black areas and shading.
And finally, the third step in the process moves to the finished product. This is where the artist fills the art with color typically done using completely digital means. This is accomplished through programs like Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator. The artist also formats the frames and adds chat bubbles to make the artwork come to life and progress the story.
Laeth is the main character of my story. I began his concept process by looking to the fictional heroes of my childhood I looked up to. In a way, Laeth is my ideal. Laeth’s concept design began similarly to the graphic novel creation process; these were the first initial pencil sketches. These drawings gave me and idea of what he looked like, his expressions, clothing, hairstyle, and occupation.
LAETH’S FINAL STAGE

I then moved forward in the conceptual process, taking a full scale drawing of Laeth, inking his outline, then scanning him into Adobe Illustrator. From there I rendered him in full color.

Part of Laeth’s character creation also included elements of his backstory, where he lives, and his mission within the novel.

Laeth is a nineteen year old hunter within his small village known as Tier. Unbeknownst to him, Tier is actually a piece of a much bigger world called Eden that was split into shards after a devastating war at the beginning of time. These shards are now scattered throughout space, to remain forever separate. However, when Laeth’s world of Tier is threatened by a larger, dark power that seeks to reunite Eden in order to control it, Laeth must figure out how to travel and connect the shards in order to protect them, for he is the only one who can do this.

This adventurous coming of age story revolves around Laeth’s self-discovery as well as the importance of friendships he makes along the way.
KENNA

KENNA’S CREATION

Laeth’s journey cannot be done alone. It was then I began the concept process for my second main character Kenna.

Kenna is a priestess in the world of Tier. At eighteen years old, she already holds a prominent position within the village leadership. Laeth and Kenna live in separate social circles, but are forced to work together after they are both thrown into the dangerous adventure to save the worlds.

Kenna’s concepts followed within the same process as Laeth; first with initial pencils to get an idea of what she looked like, then taking it to the next step by inking her outline with illustration pens.
I wanted to take Kenna’s production a step further. This included more production pieces in full color showing her emotional depth and development. These pieces were specifically meant to highlight Kenna’s importance to the story, which gives the adventure and extra edge. Although Laeth appears to be the main character on the surface, much of what he does cannot be done without Kenna present.

Each full color representation was achieved through tools in Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator in order to capture the highlights and glossy effect.
This piece shows Kenna at the moment of discovery of her powers. It shows a more maturity to her character and highlights the journey she had to take to get to this point of her abilities.
Supporting Elements

Antagonist: Demetri

Demetri’s character begins as a best friendship to Laeth that turns to his worst enemy. This classic story adds an emotional element that many people can relate to at one or more points in their life. It is through this element I intended to achieve another level of emotional connection to the viewers of my work.
BEASTS
CELESTIAL KINGS

The main proponents of my origin story, these kings play a heavy hand in the fate of all my characters and the fate of Eden.
MAIN ADVERSARIES: THE COLOSSUS

These gigantic beasts, ranging from 100ft-200ft tall, are the main adversaries of my hero Laeth. In order to reach the other worlds, he must defeat each unique guardian.
LANDSCAPE DEVELOPMENT

CHAINING KING’S THRONE

The next step in my creative process was creating unique landscape digital paintings that encompassed the geographical features of my worlds. This was done completely on Adobe Photoshop using multiple brush tools and layering. This landscape showcases the mountain where my first colossus resides; where Laeth must meet him at his throne to defeat him.
The forest gateway demonstrates the type of portals that open in order to travel between the worlds. These portals are initially hidden to Leath and the others until they figure out how to open them.
In order to finish out my thesis, I put all the elements of my story together in a polished example of a two page spread found within my novel. This included full color art done in Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop, paneling, and scripting. Although the novel itself is unfinished, this thesis covered the conceptual process in order to take the necessary steps to a successful end product.
COLOSSUS: CONCLUSION
COMING TOGETHER AFTER THE COMPLETION OF MY PHENOMOLOGICAL STUDY

The process from the start of my conceptualization to the end product of my thesis study took a total of five semester, translating to about two and a half years of work. I learned many things from this study, including how the work to create a full graphic novel takes a team of many dedicated artists. This team can range from ten to thirty artists with different skill sets honed to make the end product the best possible. These jobs include pen artists, color artists, script writers, story boarders, art directors, layout designers, and so much more. All of these skills I had to embrace completely on my own. From this dedication to all areas of the job, I was able to not only show my adaptability to the challenge, but also showcase my talents in each of those areas.

This project and portfolio meant more to me than just a study. It was a chance for me to further my artistic passions and make a childhood dream become a reality. This story will now remain with me the rest of my life and its possibilities for development are endless. What may have started out as just an idea today could support me in becoming the next Stan Lee of Marvel Comics tomorrow.