



# ZERO PARADEC



"THE BEGINNING OF THE  
WAR WILL BE  
S E C R E T "

JENNY HOLZER





HOUSING CAMPAIGN

# PORTOFIRO 96

PARTY ALLEY

THE BACKWAYS

BOOTLEG BAZAAR

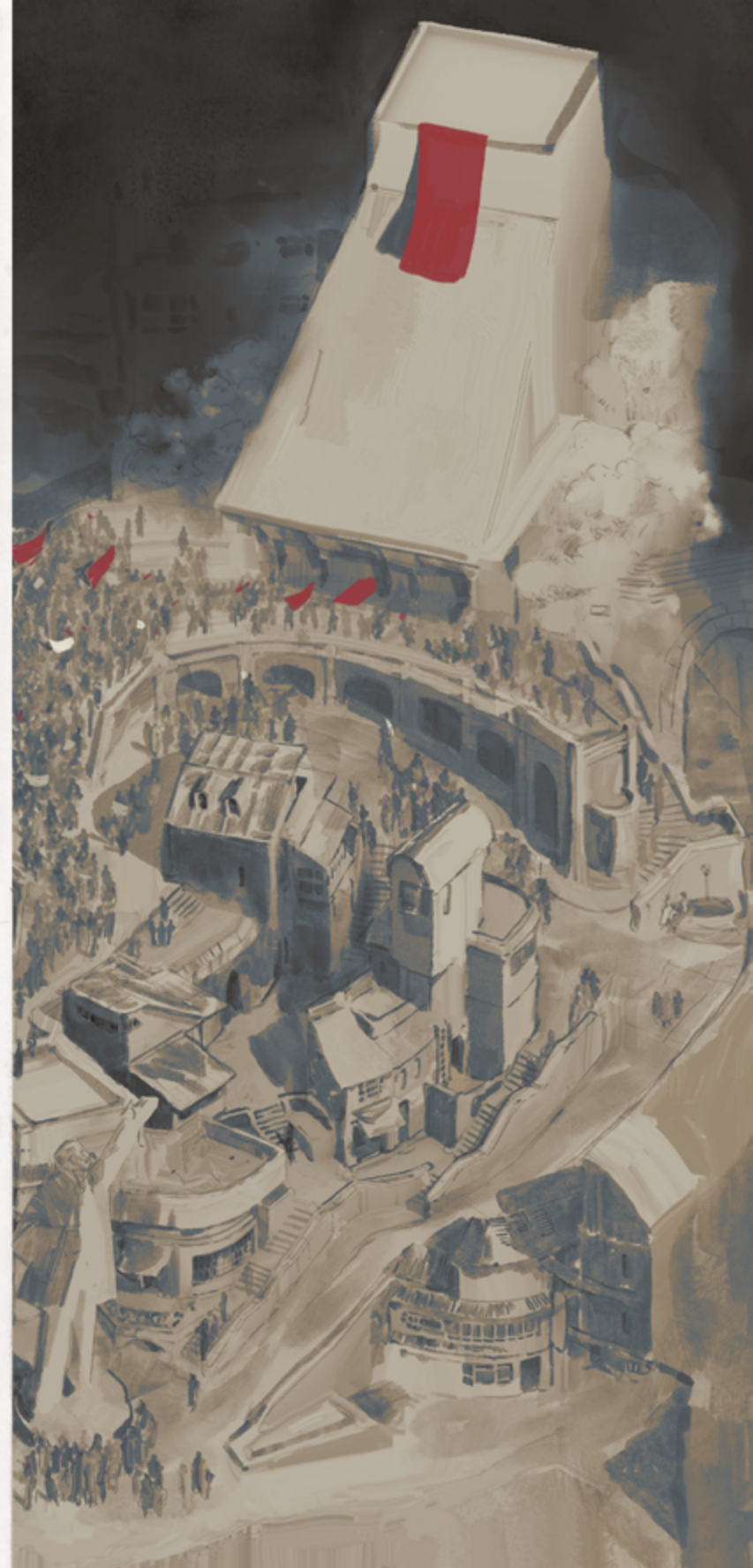
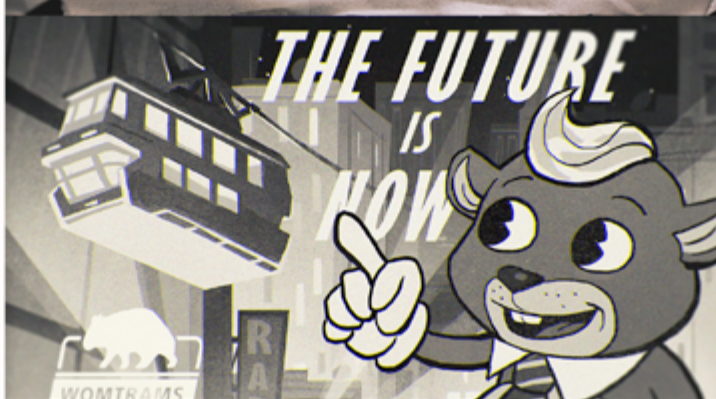
QUISACH ROUNDABOUT

OLD DOCKS

The theatre of action where our story takes place. Once a penal colony of La Luz, these days Portofiro has clawed its way into the Developed World with the support of EMERR's 'stabilisation programmes'. Here, as elsewhere, modern HVACs, television aerials, and braids of electrical cabling spring from the walls and roofs of buildings never meant to accommodate this scaffolding of modern living. Meanwhile, the crumbling facade of the Old Palace of Culture and the mossy ruins of the abandoned space programme attest to the larger canvas on which earlier generations used to dream.

On the surface, this seems to be a place where nothing of much consequence can happen. Behind the scenes, however, the world's clandestine services are the unacknowledged legislators of reality, working quietly and diligently to shape the whole world-picture.

Get ready, operant.





CREATING>

## HERSHEL WILK

Hershel Wilk (cryptonym: CASCADE) was a challenging character to nail down, going through many iterations before we settled on the character you control in-game. She was short, then she became tall. She's always been 'mature', but exactly how young or old took some searching. The player controls her alone, but we wanted Hershel to be contrasted against her motley crew of fellow spies and assets. There's a constant push and pull between allowing her to blend in as a spy, but also having to stand out as the protagonist.



EARLY SCULPT



CRYPTONYM:  
**CASCADE**





CRYPTONYM>

## CASCADE

A lot of the early work had to do with how she animates: how she carries herself, how she moves. We made several prototypes to get a sense of how it feels to move about in her skin, what the world feels like when you walk in her shoes.



HERSHEL'S COAT EARLY STUDIES



HERSHEL ACTION SHEET



EARLY SCULPT





NAME>

## HERSHEL

Hershel's look finally clicked when we saw this series of drawings of her. By this point we had nailed down the puzzle that is Hershel's crew.

She is with them, but circumstances have set her apart from them.



HERSHEL\_FINAL\_FINAL





THE WHOLE

## SICK CREW

Hershel's crew are a sort of jigsaw puzzle. They form a picture of a group of... what? Colleagues? Assets? Friends? Whatever they are, they've been scattered, and the player will have to see which pieces are still in the box and whether they even still fit together. Designing them was a lot of fun and, unlike Hershel, their core look and feel has largely remained consistent throughout.

Let's mix our metaphors: The crew is a puzzle that takes the form of a broken mirror, each crew member a shard of glass, reflecting a part of Hershel - and the player - back at themselves.



ESZTI

VESPAR

TEMPO

HOLOCENE

RAMSES

KAROLINA







CARMUNA

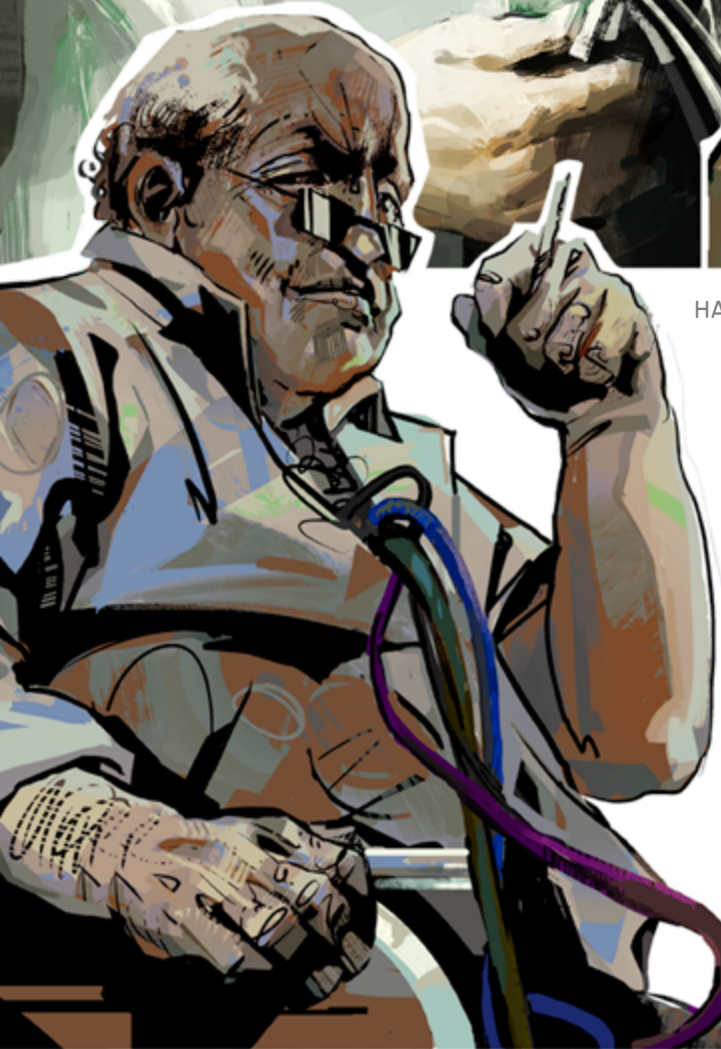
LOUD JOÃO



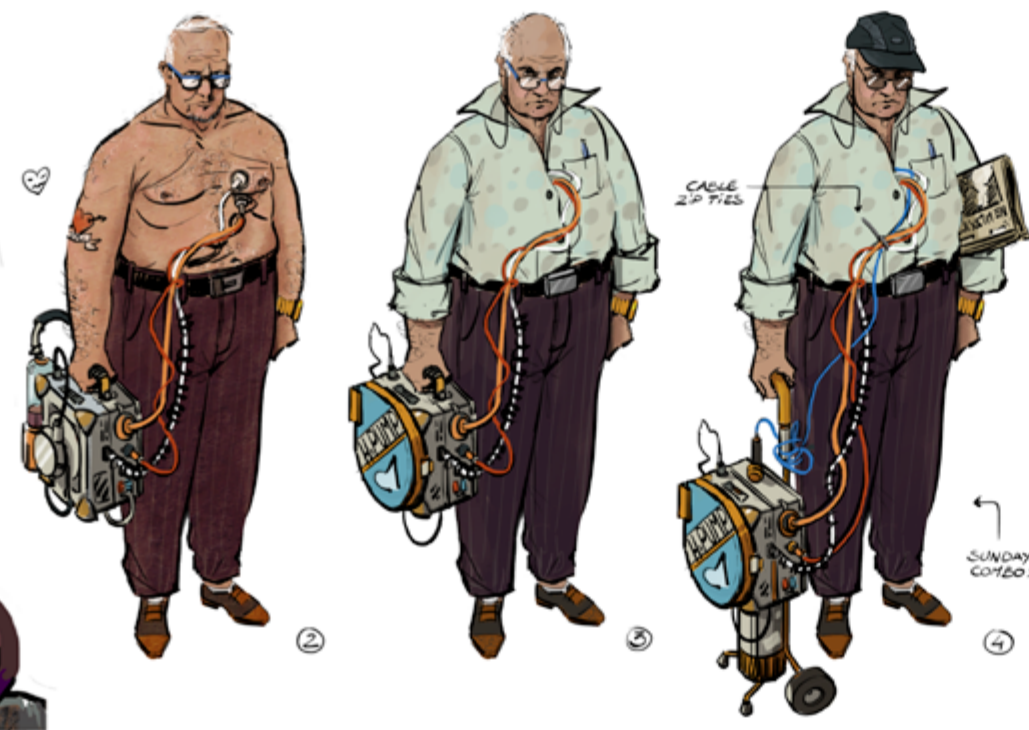
1

2

3



HAUZMANN



1

2

3



PHANTOM LINE ENGINEER



Non Player Characters

NPCs

Portofiro is an international city, with a mix of born-and-bred locals, expats, and a variety of dubious visitors like Hershel. To find its identity, we imagined entire genealogies of fashion and consumer trends to inform how the various NPCs dress and move through the world.

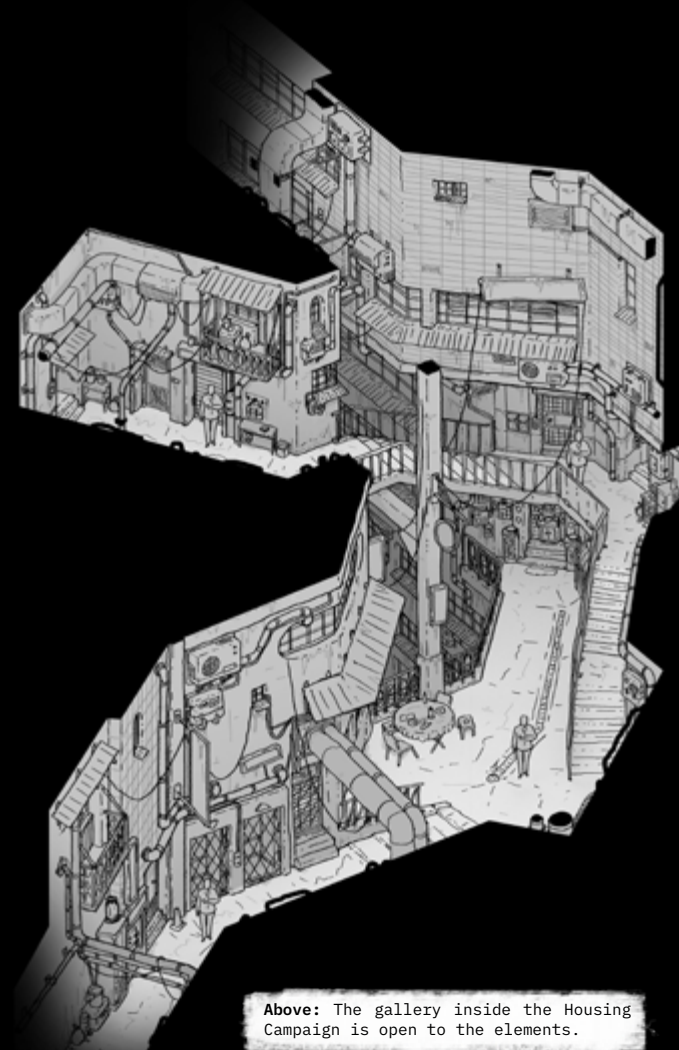






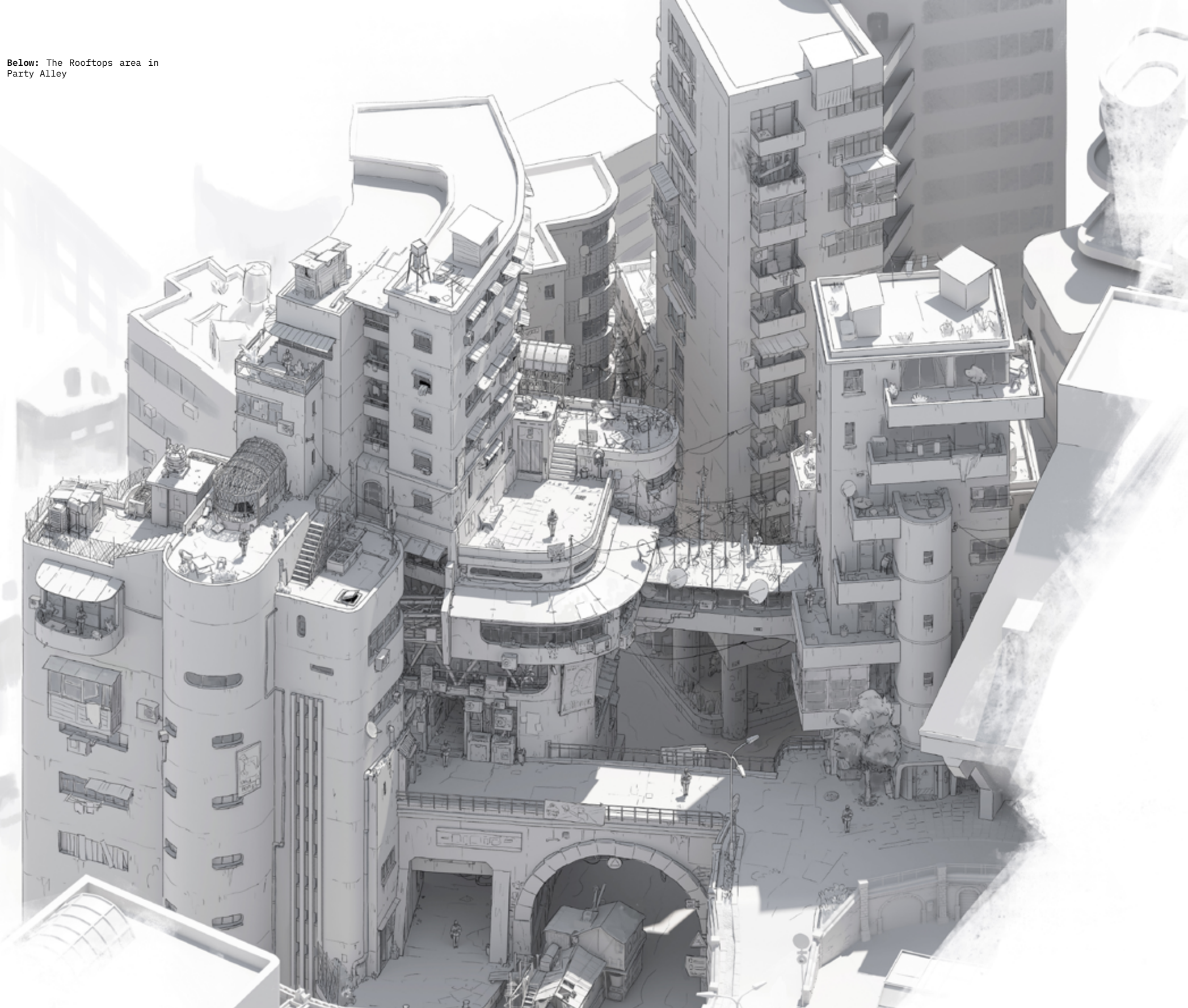


We set out to make Portofiro a place with history. A place with character. A place that is a character. She's old and weathered, she's witnessed generations and will see uncountable more. She reveals facets of herself to different kinds of Hershels. Internally we refer to the game world as the Objective. We hope that we've made her captivating enough to reward return visits.



Above: The gallery inside the Housing Campaign is open to the elements.

Below: The Rooftops area in Party Alley







Portofiro is a tangle of streets and stairs and walkways crisscrossing over and under impossible canals and whinging cables strung taut, ferrying trams to and fro.

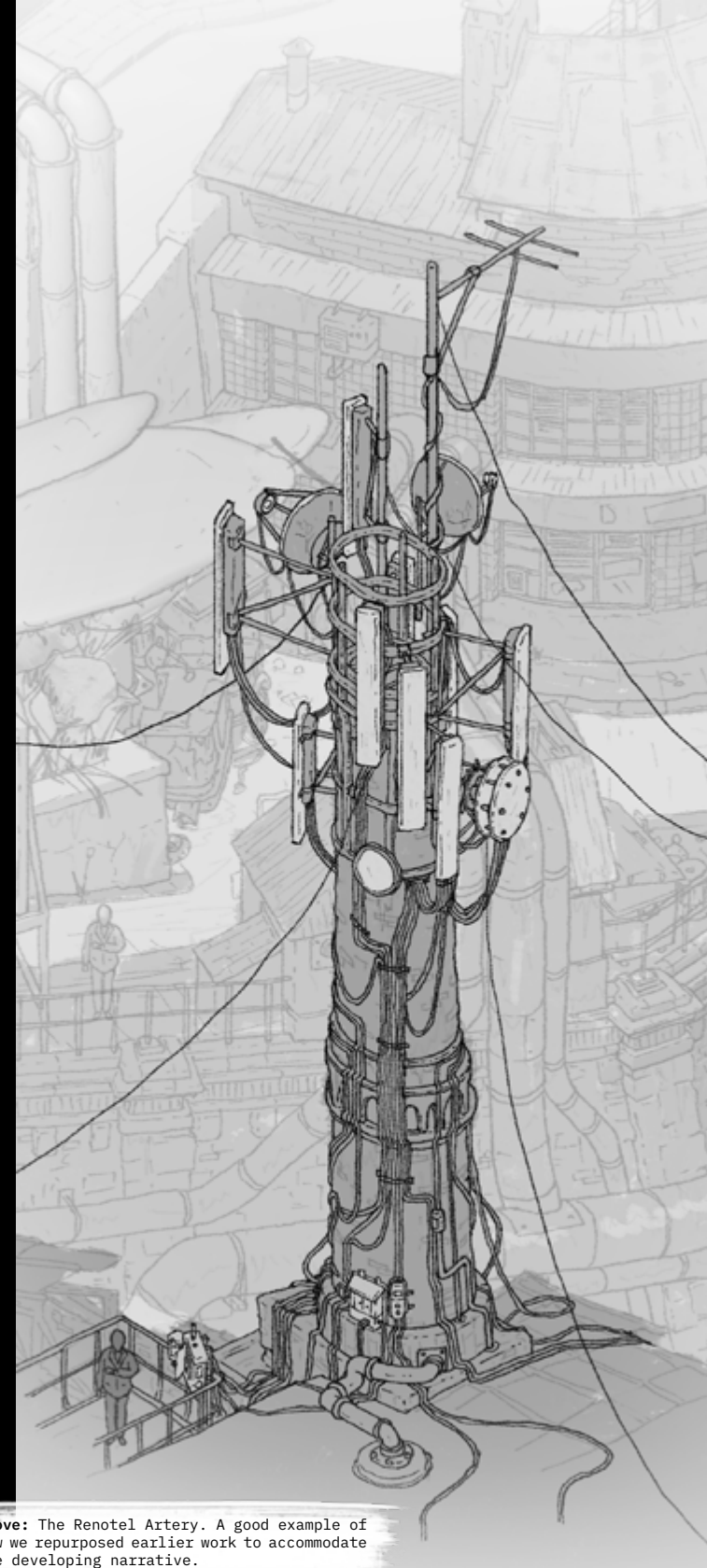
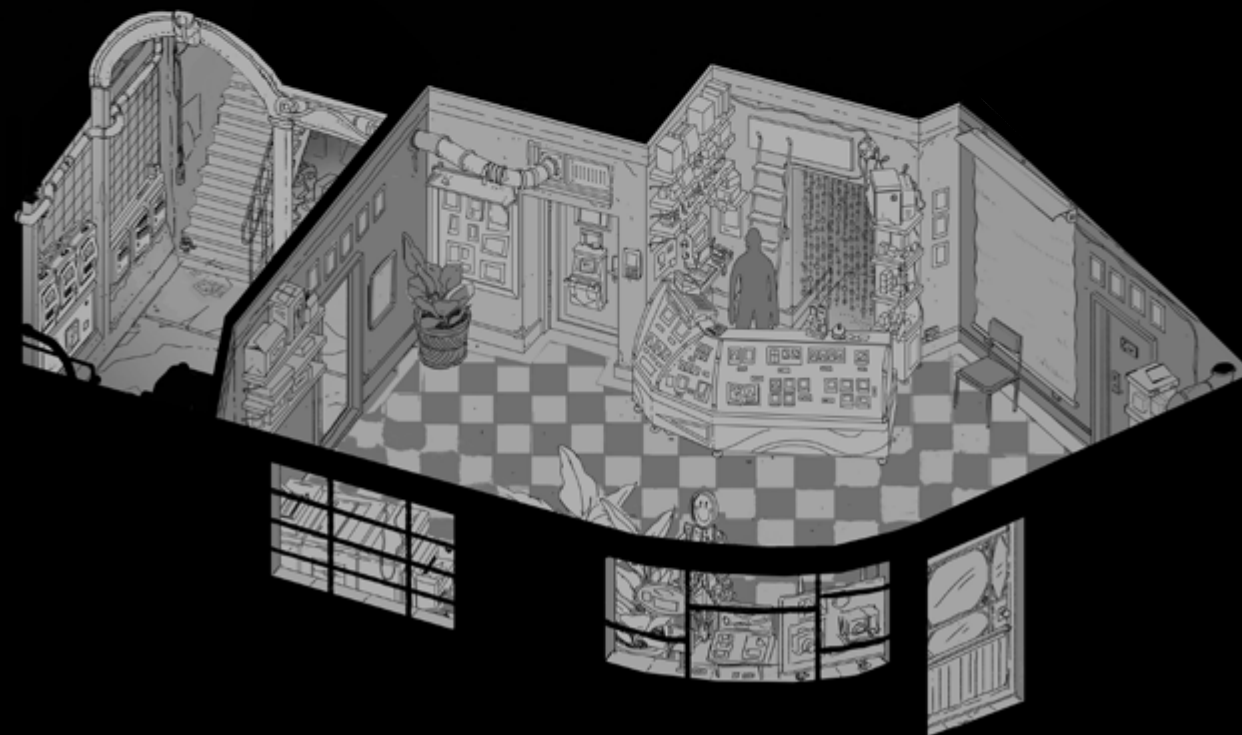
**Above:** A 3D render that offers a unique perspective

**Right:** Early look development work to figure out the amount of green



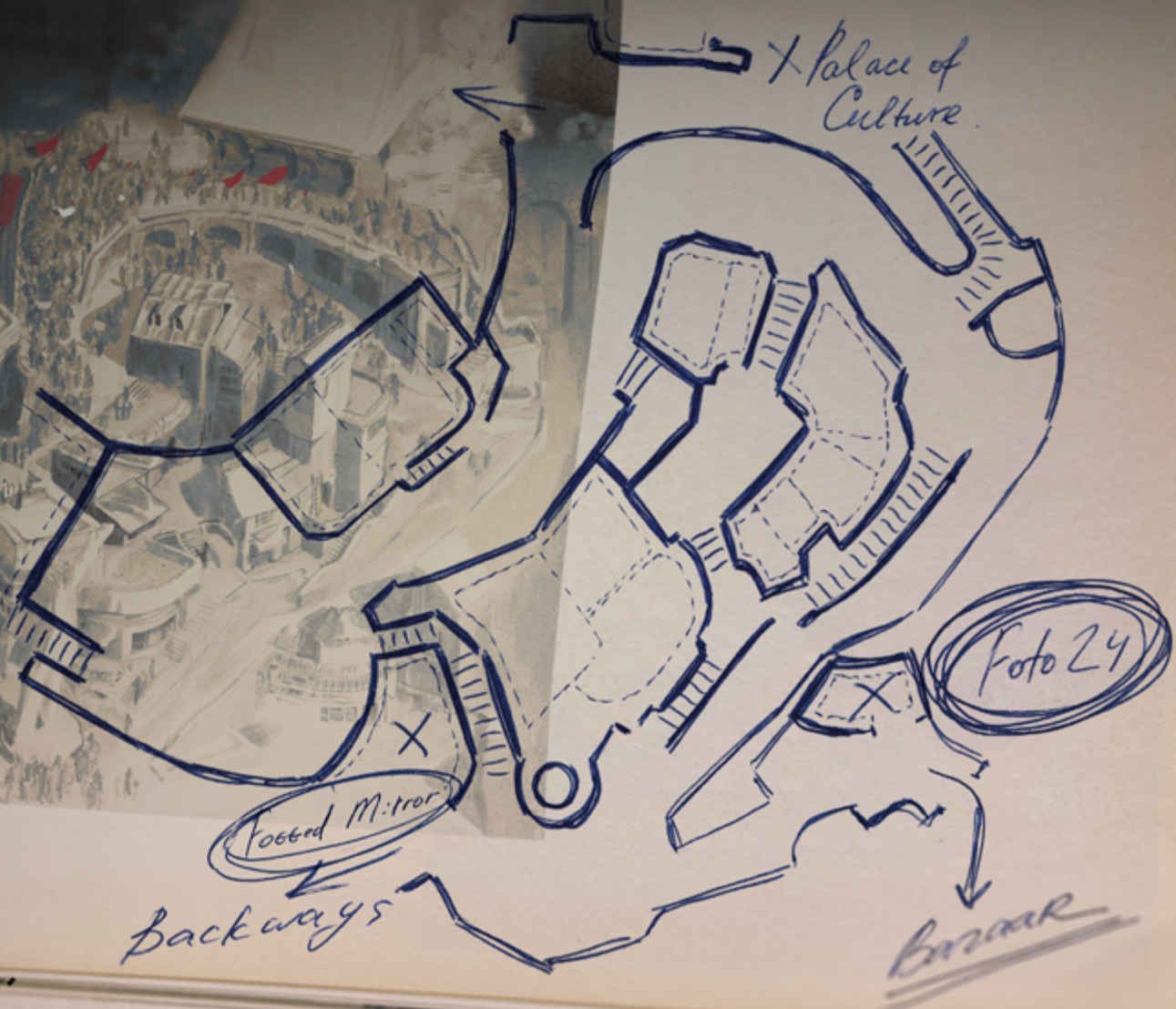
Portofiro has always been green and very walkable. Exploring her streets will make your calves ache, and plenty of façades could do with a fresh coat of paint, but if you squint and the light hits her just right you may see what former dictator Sweet Nestor saw: Portofiro as a dream perched on the side of a mountain. A sprawling sentinel witness to the ever changing moods of the open seas that crash at her feet. The player begins as a tourist yet may find themselves yearning to stay.

**Below:** Hershel's safehouse during her stay in Portofiro, above the 24-hour photo shop on the ground floor.



**Above:** The Renotel Artery. A good example of how we repurposed earlier work to accommodate the developing narrative.



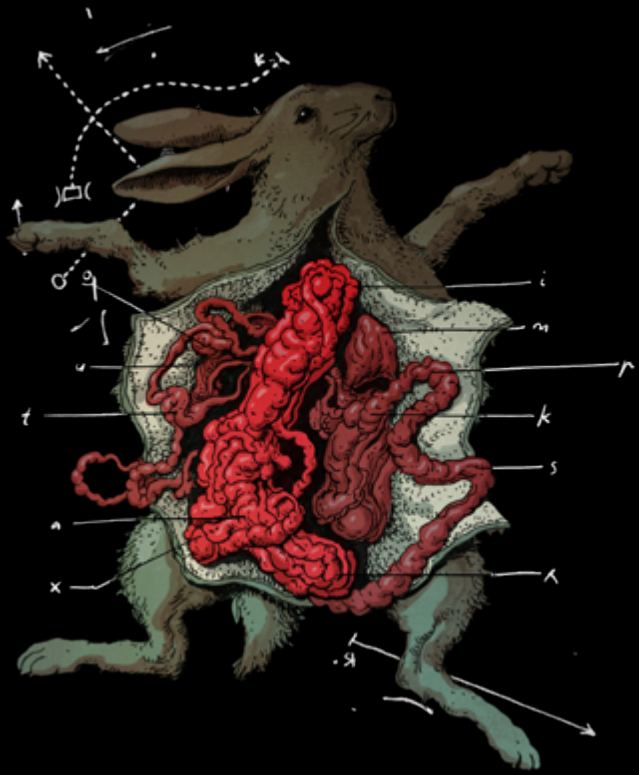


Below: The morning sun greets the Housing Campaign and the Palace of Culture over Party Alley

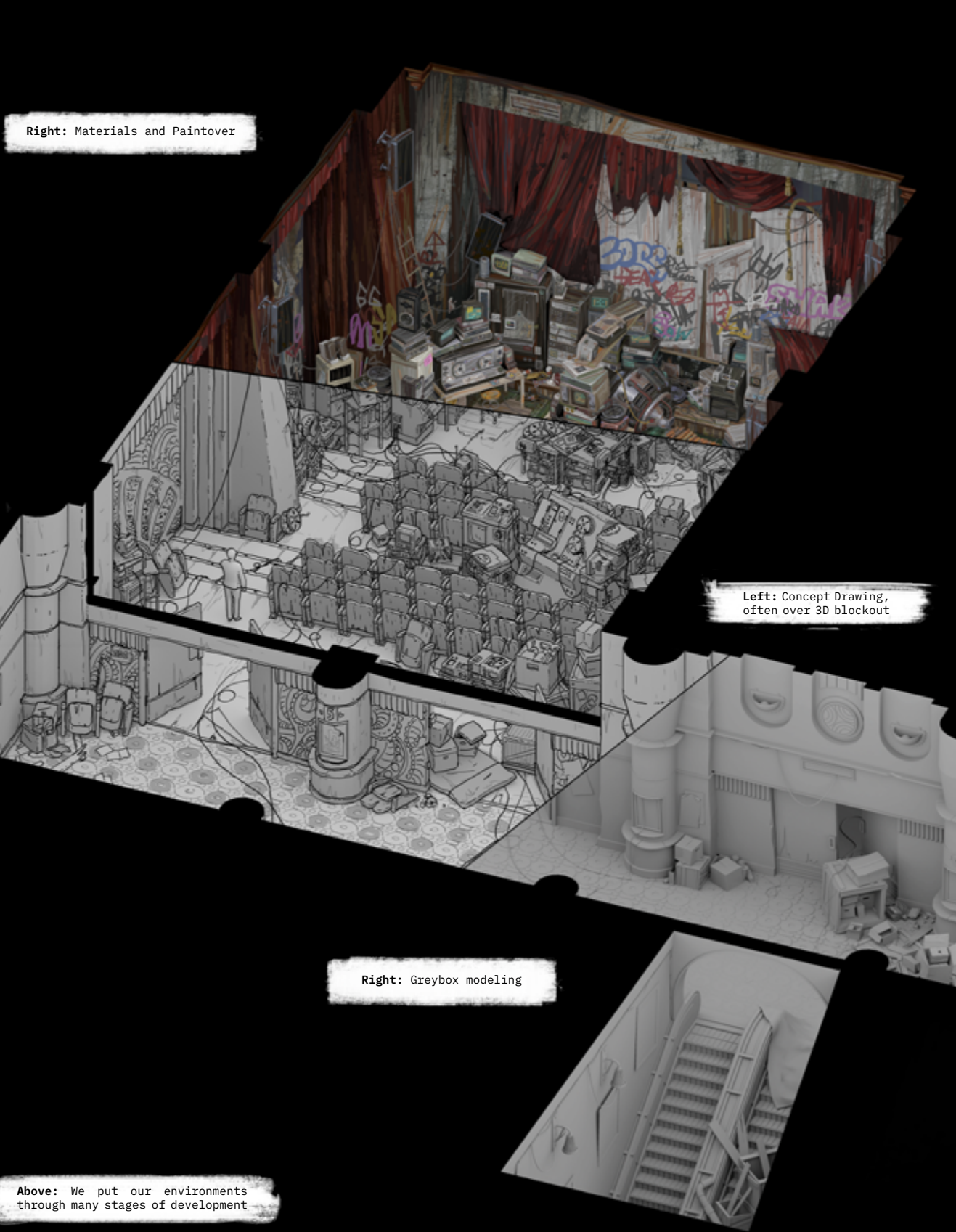




The game’s environments consist of hidden geometries, traces of discarded and repurposed drawings, layers of paint spread and spattered by half a dozen hands. It is animated by the ambiances in your ear, the sleight-of-hand of shader magic. Its smells and textures and stories reach out to you as God’s honest written word.



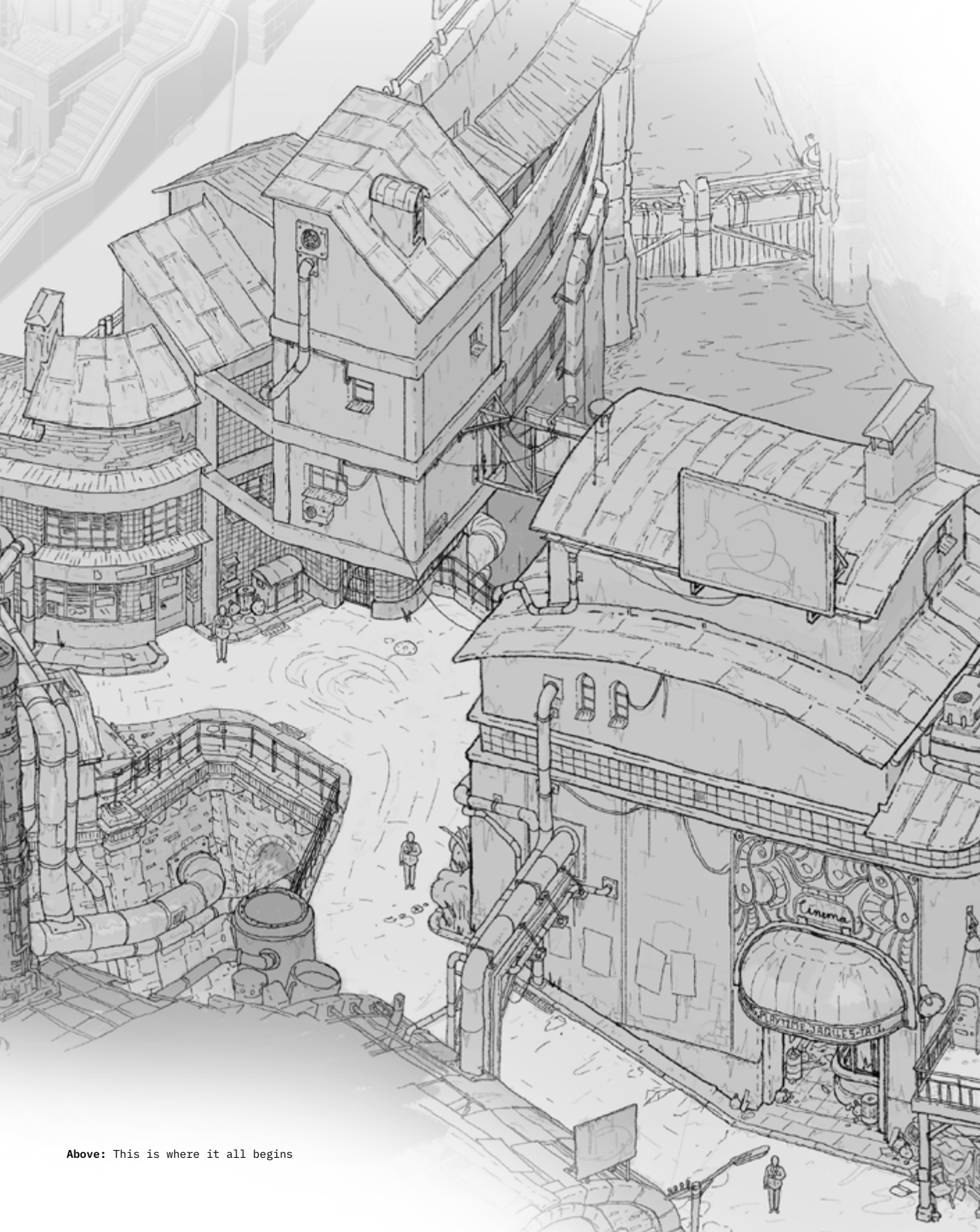
We call it two-point-five-dee. It is not quite 3D and not quite 2D, but more than the sum of its parts. It is very slow to make and that is part of why we love it.



Above: We put our environments through many stages of development



The maps in the map menu are of the game’s world. They welcome the player-as-anthropologist. Each of those images shows you what was, what is, or what could have been and may yet come to be. They’re messy like that. Notes and stickers evoke the sense of using the menu like you’d use a found pamphlet to jot down directions you received from a local.



Above: This is where it all begins





# ULTRA VIOLETA

COVER THE MOON  
WHEN  
I'M GONE

## ADS & PROPAGANDA

What surfaces are available in Portofiro are covered with colourful advertisements in the form of posters and flickering projections. A TV presenter with a paper bag on his head unravels apocalyptic fantasies about the nature of reality for his daily viewership while children in soiled t-shirts play hide-and-seek in the roof-top forest of aerials.

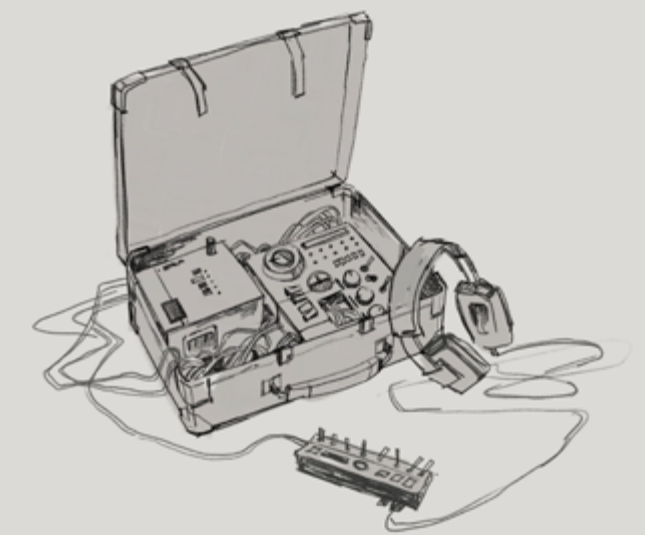
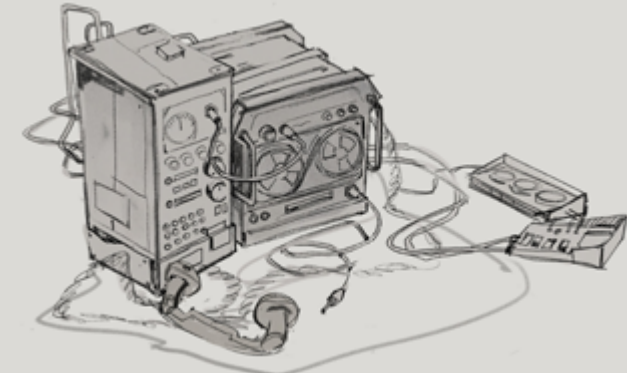
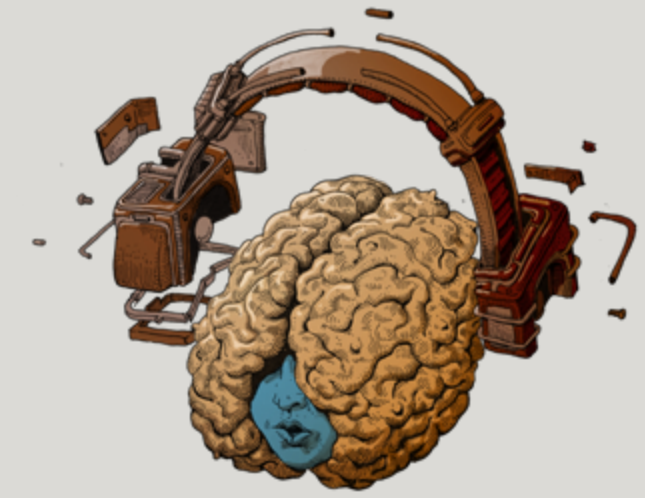
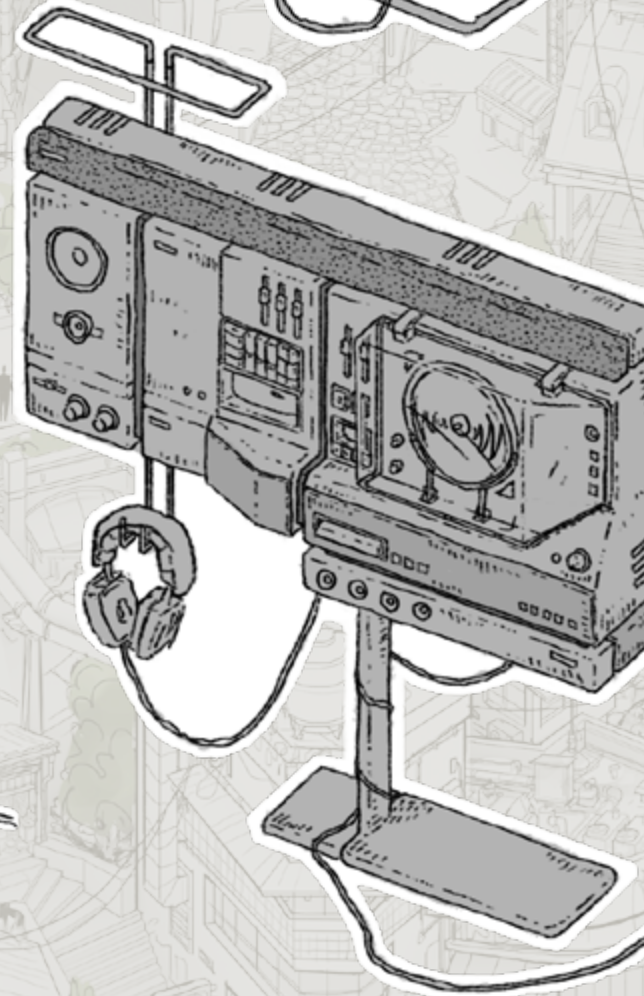
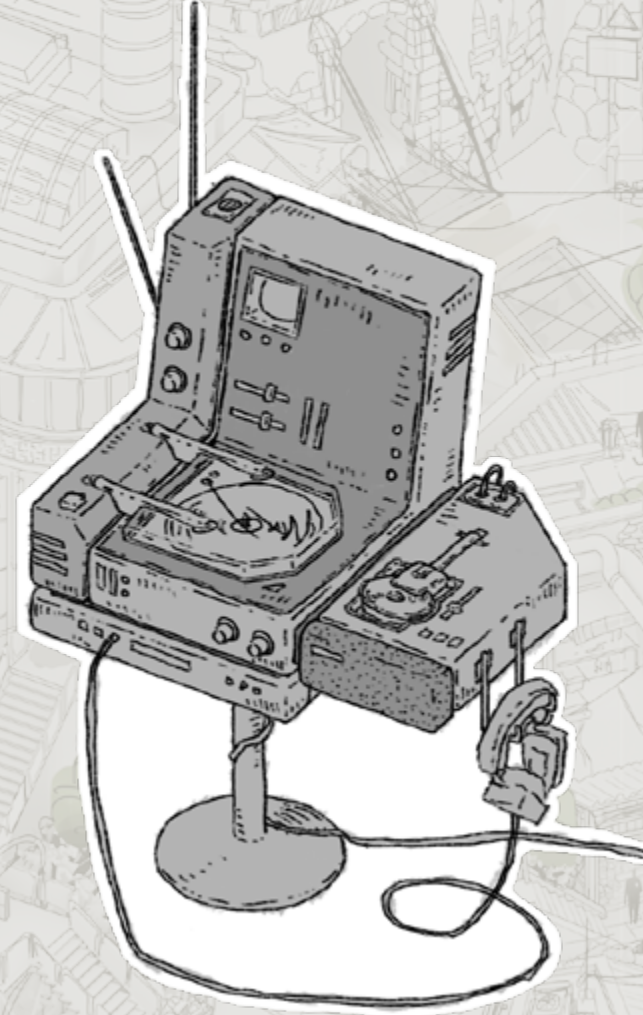
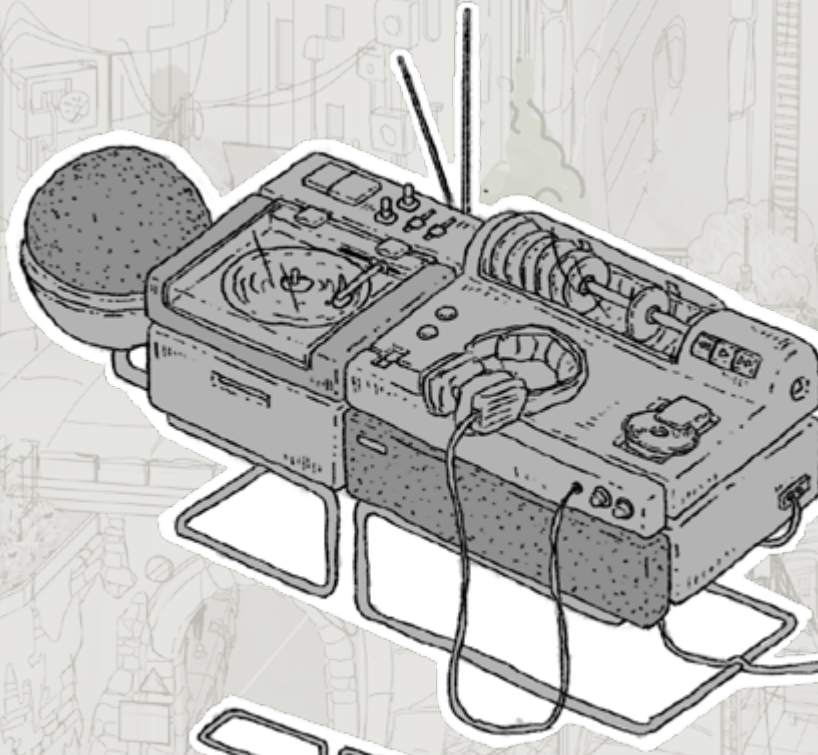
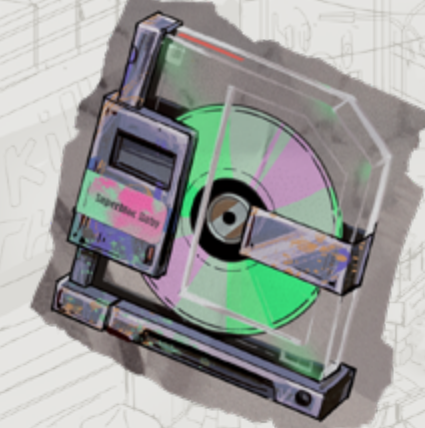
The variety of slogans and propaganda reflects Portofiro's diverse political and social landscape.

Our goal was to let the city speak for itself, across her buildings and billboards, offering a vibrant representation of its influences and inhabitants.





Below: Concept explorations of the Stereo System in the apartment above Foto24

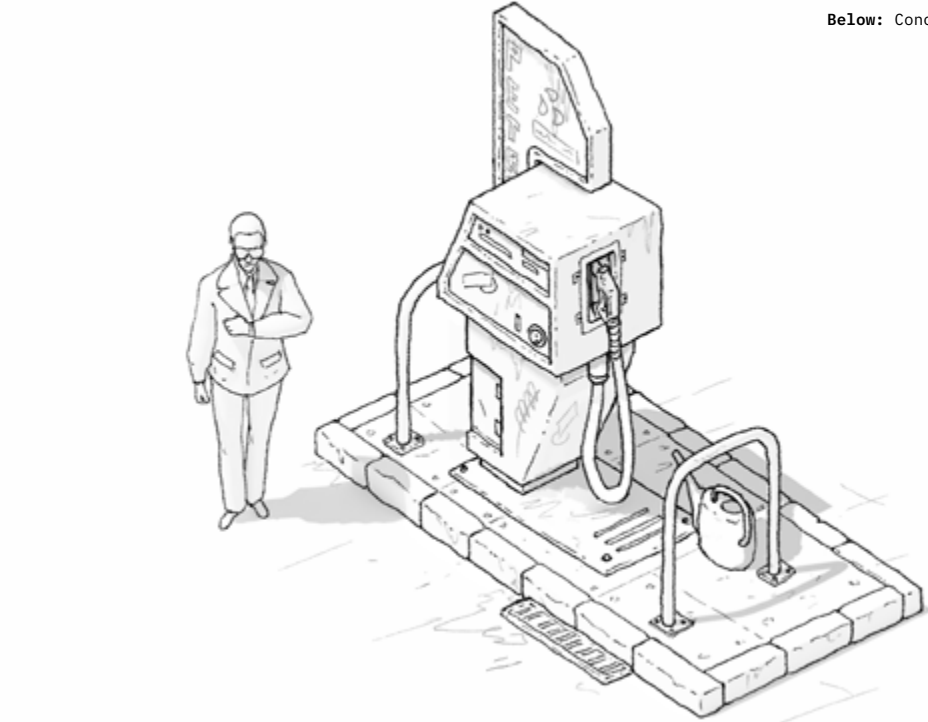


Above: Early explorations of general 'spy' equipment

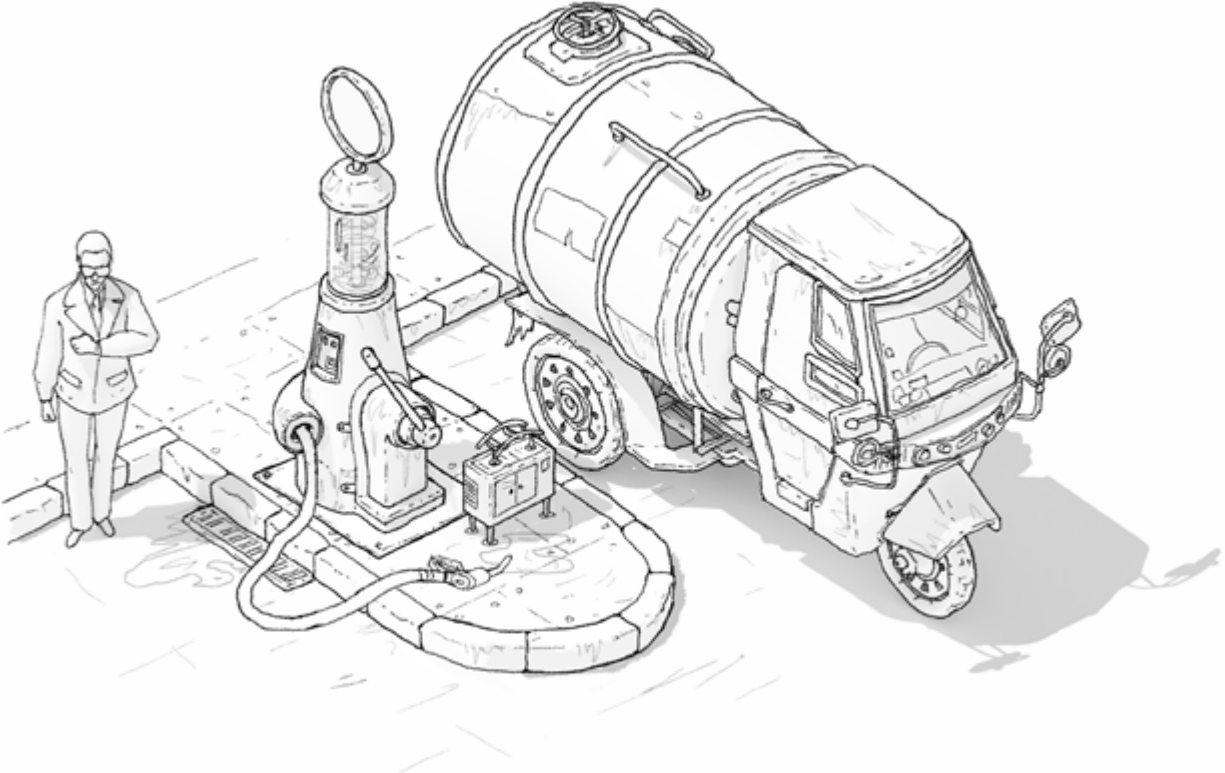


Gas pumps in distinct shapes and liveries, scattered across the city, imply friendly competition among oil companies – laissez-faire capitalism playing out on the curb. The recurring motif of the dolphin-themed payphones hints at Renotel’s telecom monopoly, abetted by foreign creditors.

Below: A few variations of the most common motorized vehicle in Portofiro



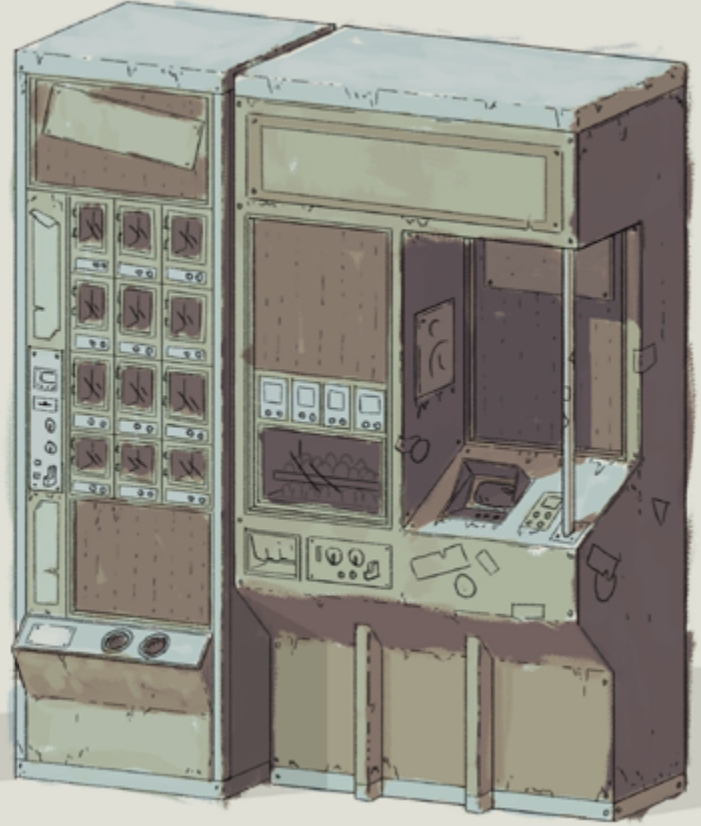
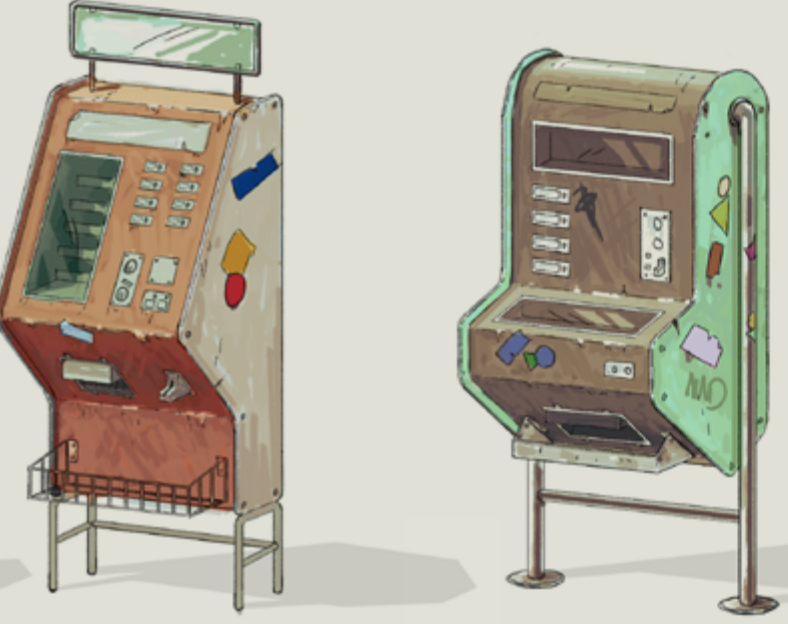
Below: Concepts for gas pumps



Below: Styles of Phone booths



Below: Variations of vending machines





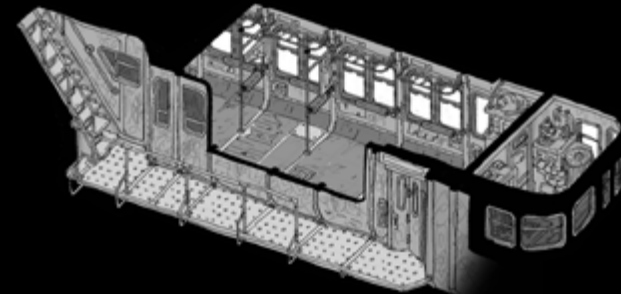
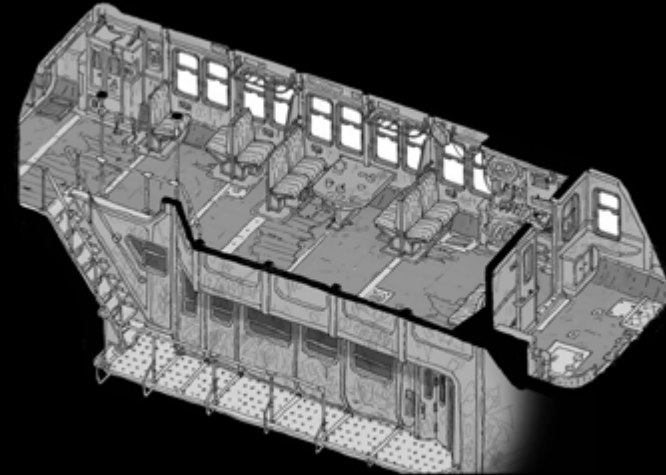
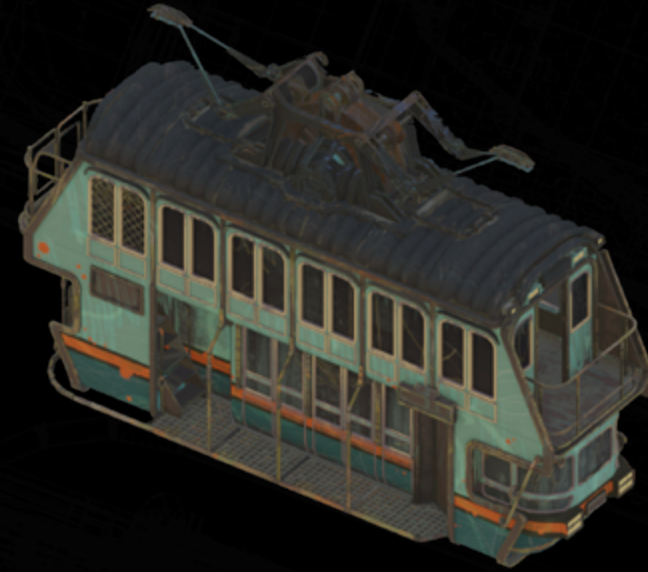
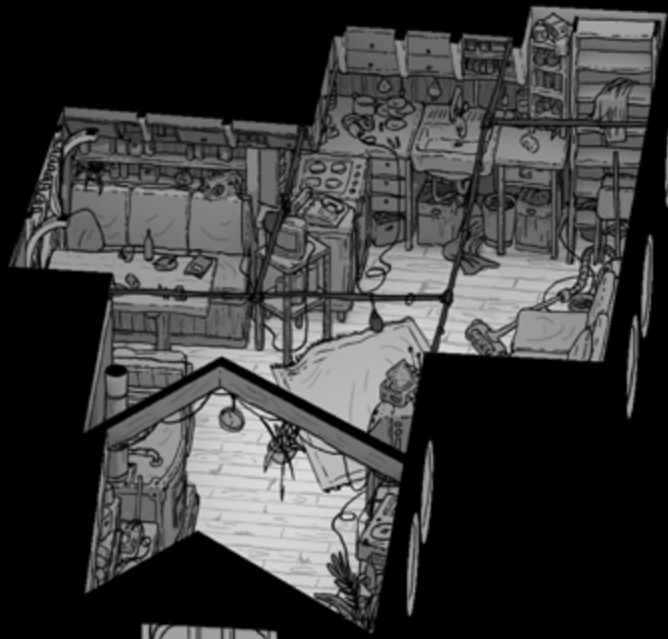


The configuration of a barge's deck is loaded with meaning and intended to prod your imagination. The cistern looks like it could be for non-toxic chemicals being transported to a factory nearby. The block of granite (or marble? or tofu?!) traces a slightly different trajectory through the imagined city in the viewer's mind. Surely not the same factory, perhaps a construction site, or a kitchen!

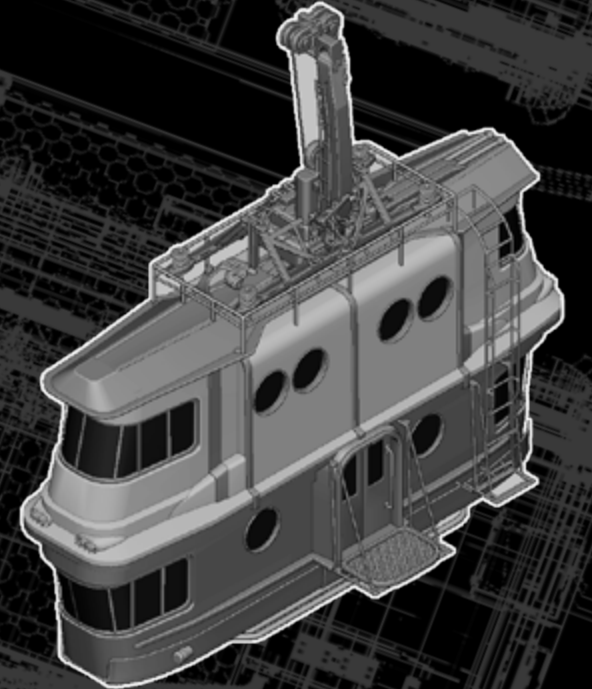
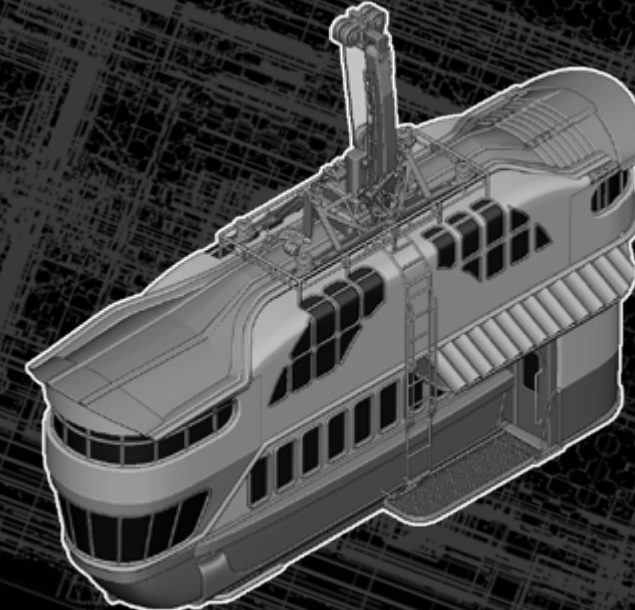
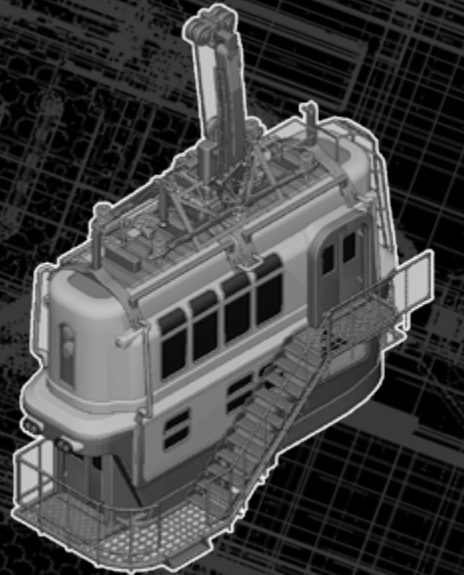
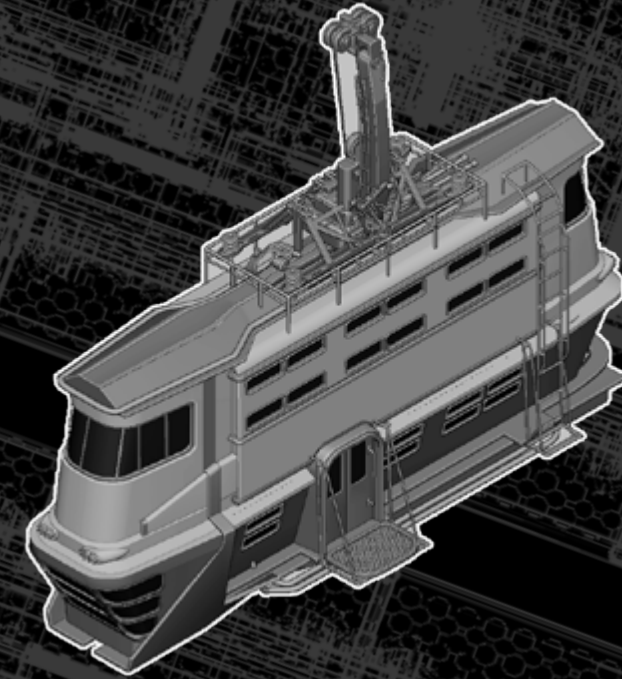
The one with the closed hatches: is it on a return trip from having offloaded its cargo, or is it going in for maintenance or repairs? You can almost see characters busying themselves on some of the barges.

Above: A few different types of river and canal barges

Right: An interior and exterior of a houseboat and the cutout of a double-decker aerial tram



Below: A bunch of trams, man.



Plenty of designs don't make the cut for release, but our source files have enough accumulated raw material that we could open up an entire new city district or shepherd in a whole new century.



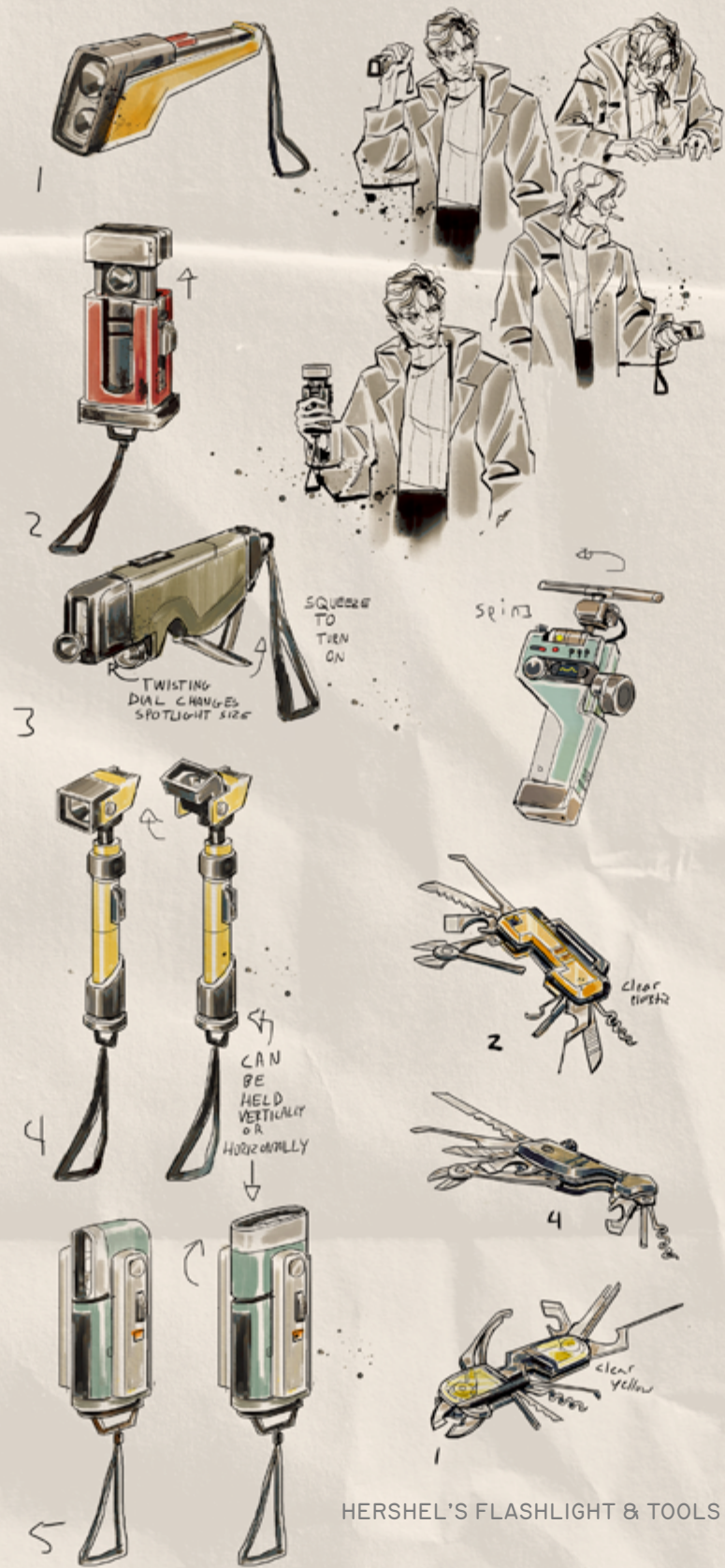
# FEATURES ITEMS

From medical dummies and death whistles to fleshwands and the dangerously collectible wolf cups, there are plenty of treasures to find and pick up in Portofiro.

We designed our items to immediately read as '90s,' while also feeling like something outside our own reality. Initially, most of our sketches would focus on functionality. We really wanted to make stuff that \*click\* or \*snap\* into place. A lot of this we achieve by blending real-life references with more surrealistic influences. As we progressed towards the final stages, we shifted our attention to consistency and readability. Do they all appear as part of one set, yet still stand out on their own?



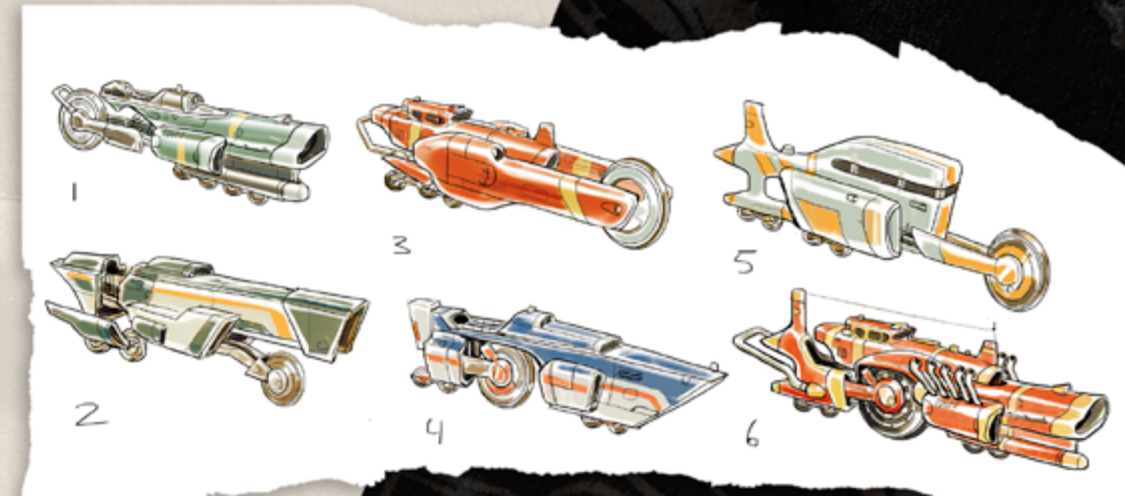
WOLF CUPS | CONCEPT ART



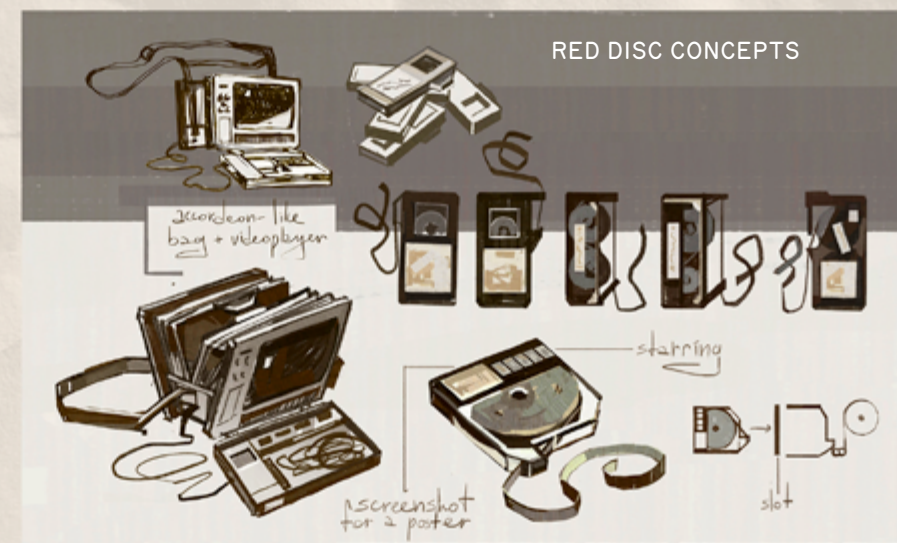
HERSHEL'S FLASHLIGHT & TOOLS

# PAPER CUT-OUTS

Our menu is not just a game interface, but a peek into the Subjective: the inner workings of Hershel's mind. The inventory, in particular, is laid out like a scrapbook, offering a tactile, self-made feel. Items are presented as little paper cut-outs that can be dragged and dropped onto Hershel, much like dressing up a paper doll. Nostalgia and familiarity are the feelings that we wanted to evoke.



RENO'S TRAIN CONCEPTS



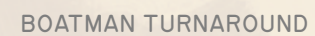
RED DISC CONCEPTS





## A black and white illustration of three characters in a sci-fi setting. In the center, a woman wears a hooded cloak and a helmet-like headpiece with circular details. To her right, a man has a mechanical headpiece and a large, complex gauntlet on his right arm. In the foreground, a man is seen from the side, holding a futuristic pistol. The style is detailed and dramatic, with heavy shading.

If you look closely enough, though, you can still find remnants of the old sets, like the pelota kit, the 'Ombre Hombre' costume, and the cleaning suit (a.k.a., the 'wiener suit').



EARLY CLOTHING CONCEPTS

PAPERDOLL-ESQUE DRESS UP OPTIONS FOR HERSEL

1 2 3 4 5



CONCEPT ART | OUTFITS FOR "HAYA" AND "HOLOCENE"



# Skills

Skills in Zero Parades represent the body of knowledge and tactics that an operant is trained in, each signified by a unique badge.

Held in the dossier, these skill badges link back to the Opera, and how your controllers rate and compare you against your peers. Our references here are the merit badges and enamel pins associated with youth organisations like the Boy Scouts and Soviet-era Young Pioneers, but with a dash of 90s collectability that also ties it to our broader 90s aesthetic.

Through multiple iterations, at times veering into the ethereal and occult, we landed on a more animalistic design. We wanted a clear identity for each skill that you can build a relationship with over your playtime, while also keeping some of the more esoteric imagery in the flow of lines and the splitting of form.







- 1. Evaluate. (Deliberate)
- 2. Advance. (Examine)
- E** Avoid. (Examine)

## **DE** Dramatic Encounters

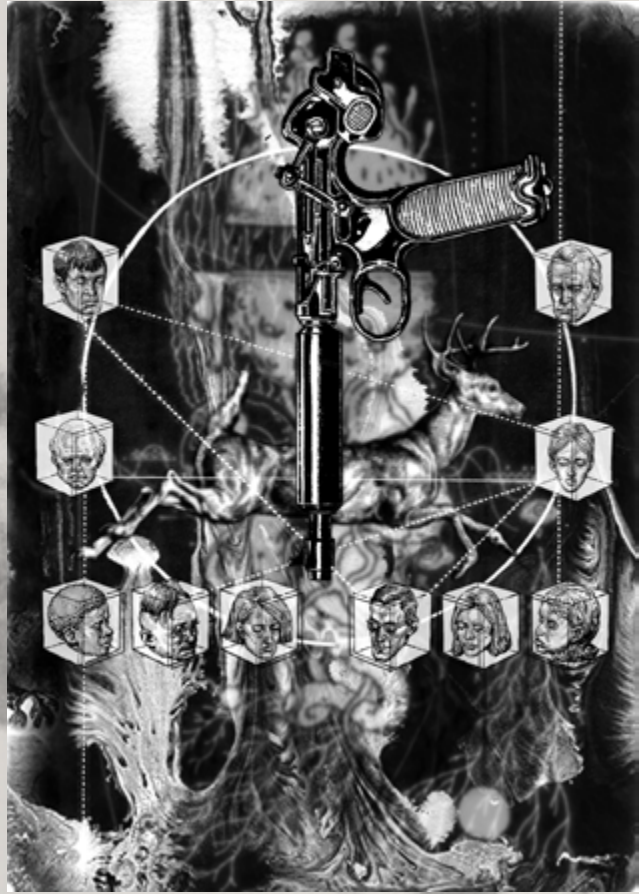
*"Quiet on the set! Lights! Action! Knowing that you've done this before doesn't do much to quieten the rush of blood behind your ears or dampen the thud thud thud of your heart against your ribs. Take a breath, one, two. Let it out, three, four. Focus! You've got this."*

The Dramatic Encounter is tighter as an experience than the common walk-and-talk game loop. Things get real even as the presentation gets more magic-realist. Here the Objective blends with the Subjective. It's all verbs and pictures and flashing lights. Artistic liberties taken to heighten the aesthetic of the moment.

FTG	3	■■■	
ANX	3	■■■	
DEL	5	■■■■■	

10:20  
DAY 1  
31 ◆◆





The mind in Zero Parades is both more powerful and more vulnerable than in the real world. It can be changed and reordered in all sorts of spooky, upsetting, and occasionally wondrous ways. According to certain amphetamine-addled spies, with the right conditioning, it can even alter material reality itself.

What you'll find here leans toward the spooky end of the range. Dramatic Encounters tease with clipped sentences and with surrealist imagery over a theatrically lit backdrop. This is deep in the realm of the Subjective: imagery cranking the written descriptions and the mechanical implications to eleven.

# CONDITIONING







This page is... slow art. The artworks for the Subjective come together sloooowly, not unlike the Objective game world, the two-point-five-dee. The stylus' nib goes tap tap tap as it erodes its tip away on the screen protector, rearranging pixels on the monitor. The mechanical pencil clicks as the artist expresses more of the medium before dragging stained grooves into the matted cellulose fibres. Abstracted markings coalesce into recognizable imagery, and as the picture progresses, recognizable imagery reconfigures into less recognizable imagery. What it loses in legibility, it gains in potency.





# JOURNAL ART

“Everything’s going according to plan, just not yours”

Rather than telling the player what they must do to advance, the Journal records and presents what they’ve discovered so that they can formulate their own plan and enact it. The journal isn’t about following orders, it’s about piecing together a story.

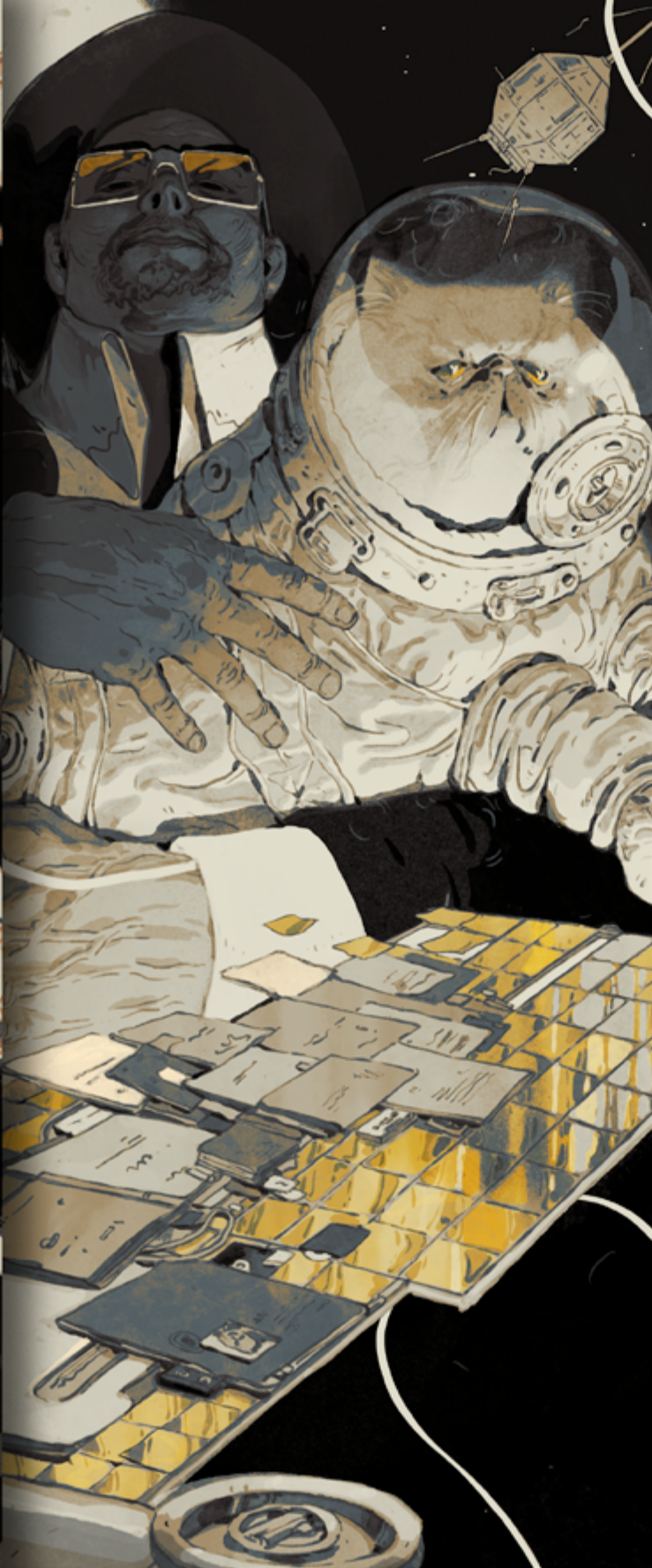


Each task begins with its own unique artwork which will change as they move forward and make their choices. The art evolves with them, which makes it really fun to replay certain quests and discover different outcomes and visuals.

Our Journal Art focuses on surreal storytelling, an abstracted narrative that leaves room for interpretation. Viewers and artists assemble the narrative together.











## “WHATEVER HAPPENS, HAS ALREADY HAPPENED...”

Operants are degenerate role-players and frustrated artists, playing make-believe for ego and money. They work unnatural hours. They are addicted to secrets and various grades of stimulants. What politics they once possessed have been aestheticised into vapour.

Time has had its way with them. If they had more self-awareness, they would probably be doing other things with their lives. But they don't. And they aren't.

What they do have is poetry and wonder, and that goes a long way in this world.

Keep dreaming, operant.







# *ZERO PARADES*