WHISPERS OF MEANING

The Art of Storytelling in

The Legend of
AEGIS

Written and Directed by Anzel van Zyl

Exclusive
Teaser Book

The Whisper of Meaning campaign extends a helping hand to novice storytellers and animators, enriching their skills through accessible and easy-to-understand resources.

There are two simple rules towards immersive storytelling: 1) "Show, don't tell," and 2) if you decide to still tell, justify this information being shared. Furthermore, the campaign promotes a list of techniques that should be implemented to show and not tell.

The campaign promotes this philosophy and fosters a community where we can share and learn from each other.

WRITTEN BY ANZEL VAN ZYL

Watch 'The Legend of Aegis' Trailer!
Now available on YouTube

Aegis, a once prodigious druid, is faced with the heavy burden and responsibility of protecting the realms against chaos when they happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time (or was it destiny?).

Contents

Foreword

"Whispers of Meaning" is not merely a documentation of the creative process for the short film 'The Legend of Aegis"; it's an invitation to understand the language of storytelling, where every frame, colour choice, and line of dialogue whispers its own significance.

Crafting a tale that transcends the ordinary requires a delicate balance of artistry and technique. This book unveils the meticulous thought and conscious decisions that breathe life into the characters, worlds, and emotions within the animated short film. As you delve into the intricacies of storytelling, world building, and character design, you'll gain insights that demystify the magic behind the screen.

The Legend of Aegis explored themes of war, loss, and revenge. The narrative not only captures the essence of fantasy but also delves into the human experience, touching on the darkness of war and the resilience of those who stand against it.

May your exploration of "Whispers of Meaning" ignite your own creative flame, inspiring you to embark on your storytelling journey.

Enjoy the whispers.
Anzel
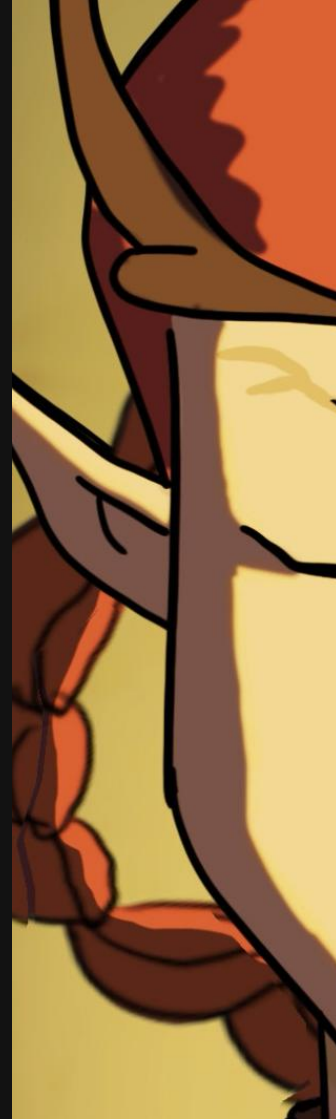
As a novice storyteller, the creator of "Whispers of Meaning" understands the hurdles faced by those starting their creative journey and aims to lend a helping hand towards others following the same path.

"Whispers of Meaning" is more than a campaign; it's a community. A community where novices can find support, inspiration, and a shared passion for the enchanting world of animation. It symbolizes the idea that, regardless of experience, every storyteller has a unique voice waiting to be heard, and every animator has the potential to breathe life into extraordinary worlds.

The campaign revolves around "The Legend of Aegis," an animated short film that serves both as a captivating narrative and a learning tool. The accompanying book provides a step-by-step exploration of the campaign's evolution, offering novices a roadmap for their creative journey.

"Whispers of Meaning" is committed to inclusivity, aiming to provide free and accessible resources to empower novice animators with the skills and confidence needed for their storytelling adventures. By supporting the start-up campaign, you enable us to extend this solution to a broader community of animators in future with a full campaign. We express our gratitude for your contribution in helping demystify the art of storytelling.

About
The Whisper of Meaning Campaign

The 2 Golden Rules

Now, let's dive into the secret sauce of making killer fantasy animations. We've got two golden rules, and trust me, these are game-changers. It's like upgrading your animation game from basic to boss by simply following a few easy steps and techniques. Before tackling the golden rules we must understand exposition, world building and their relationship.

Exposition and world building are closely interconnected in storytelling (Dercksen, 2023). Exposition is the means of communicating world building and story details to the audience (Green, 2017). World building provides the framework, creating a backdrop against which the narrative unfolds, enabling the audience to connect with the story. World building in fantasy literature and creative media entails crafting fictional worlds, including physical elements, cultures, societies, histories, and rules (Dena, 2009; Wolf, 2013; Wolf, 2016).

Exposition manifests in two forms: direct and indirect. Direct exposition explicitly includes expository details, often seen in introductory phrases like 'Once upon a time.' In contrast, indirect exposition, or incluing, subtly integrates expository details into the narrative, encouraging viewers to make inferences and enhancing their understanding (Bal, 1985/2009).

Exposition typically appears through dialogue, monologue, narration, character thoughts, introspection, flashbacks, memories, and in-universe media like news broadcasts (Bonheim, 1975; Kuznetsova, 2017). While these methods convey essential details, they can result in contrived or insincere storytelling if not used thoughtfully (Sheppard, 2009; Spisak, 2015).

Immersive exposition techniques enhance storytelling by effectively conveying vital information without resorting to info dumping which disrupts the immersive experience. That's why we came up with the two golden rules. The rules can be followed as a guide when creating narratives to ensure immersion.

Rule # 1:
Show Don't Tell

The first golden rule emphasizes the power of visual storytelling. Instead of overtly explaining elements within the narrative, creators are encouraged to showcase and imply through visuals. This rule also outlines a set of techniques that you can sort through when wanting to convey information which in turn would make this delivery more interesting and engaging.

These visual storytelling techniques include: Environmental Storytelling, Character Design, Colour, Lighting, Style, Shot Framing and Audio.

Rule # 2:
Justify the use of exposition

While our research mainly focuses on visual storytelling techniques, we can't deny that any good story requires a bit of telling. Rule #2 underscores the importance of providing context and reasoning behind any explicit information shared. If exposition is deemed essential, it should seamlessly integrate into the narrative, avoiding unnecessary information dumps. This rule encourages storytellers to question the relevance and impact of the information being conveyed. By justifying exposition, creators ensure that every piece of information serves a purpose, contributing meaningfully to the overall story without disrupting the audience's immersion.

Let's explore how our philosophy was applied to 'The Legend of Aegis'.

Environmental Storytelling

Environmental storytelling in animation involves using the physical elements and details within a scene or setting to convey narrative information. Instead of explicitly stating facts or background, this technique relies on the visual components of the environment to subtly communicate aspects of the story. It allows the audience to infer and interpret information by observing the surroundings, fostering a more immersive and engaging storytelling experience.

The ancient druidic temple, overgrown with thick trees, with the whole structure shifting and rocks and bushes surrounding the area showcases the age of this establishment. It sets the whole films genre and hints at the religious system.

The lush Heralia forest, where life thrives, serves as a visual reflection of the story's wild and chaotic essence. There is not a single man-made thing in sight which also shows how far away Aegis had to travel to try reconnect with their powers.

Each of the five gold statues in the temple symbolises the nature deities, such as Cernunnos, representing earth and animals, depicted through horns. The other statues symbolise the sky, forest, water, and energy deities, contributing to implicit world building. Furthermore, the overgrown moss and plants inside the temple conveys how old this temple is , hinting at the great age of the realms and the deities. In this scene, props serve as environmental storytelling. Each prop conveys a story: rocks spell "Lira" in the Celtic alphabet, the dagger symbolises Aegis's beliefs, the book indicates the spell being performed ("Connecting to the Spirit Realm"), and the staff represents Aegis as a druid.

Character Design

Character design, as a visual storytelling technique under Rule #1, revolves around crafting characters in a way that visually communicates essential information about them. Instead of relying solely on explicit descriptions or dialogue, the characters' shape language, appearances, clothing, and accessories/weapons are intentionally designed to convey aspects of their personality, background, or role in the story. This technique enables the audience to learn information about the characters through visual cues, enhancing their understanding and connection to the narrative without the need for direct exposition.

Cernunnos - The Earth Deity
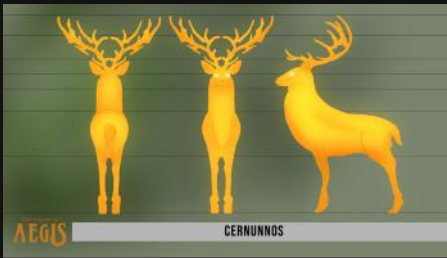
Cernunnos's design emphasises his divine nature. He appears as a majestic, large creature with golden tones, symbolising strength and wisdom. His piercing white eyes denote purity, while the combination of circular and rectangular shapes conveys softness and wisdom. Triangular horns add a touch of wildness and danger to the deity's character.

The sky deity's design subtly hints at their importance. The blue, representing the sky, stands out from the scene's colour scheme, drawing the viewer's attention. This choice becomes prominent when juxtaposed against a red environment during sunrise, signifying the film's epic fantasy nature and what viewers can expect. This deity also features glowing and peircing white eyes to signify divinity.
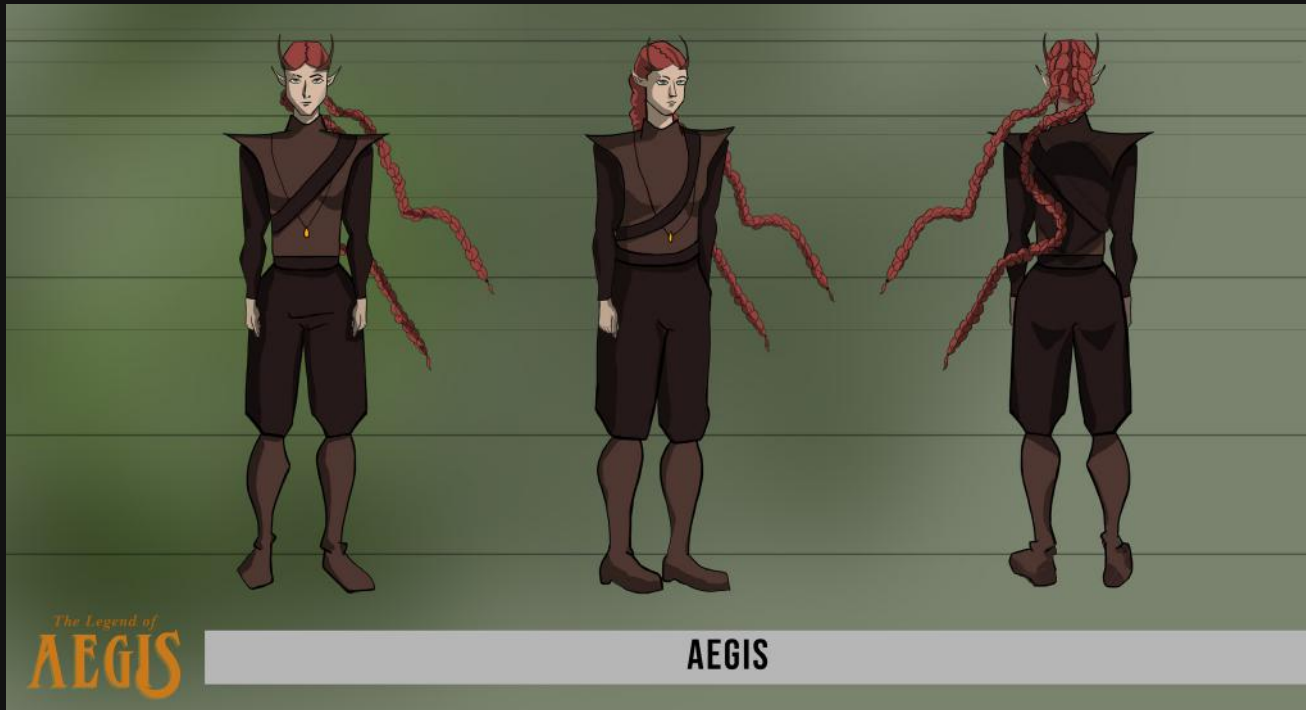

The Sky Deity

Murkthral's Henchman

The demon's representation as smoke symbolises its unreliability, with a dark and limited palette signifying evil. The obscured face in perpetual darkness emphasises its anonymity and servitude to a greater evil. The purple tones in scenes disrupt the colour scheme, emphasising discordance and disruption in the narrative.

AEGIS

Aegis's character design mirrors Cernunnos's colour palette, with shades of orange, albeit darker and less saturated, signifying a connection but a distance from divinity. Aegis's costume and props reflect their belief in non-violence agaisnt weaker or innocent opponents, relying on hand combat and ditching their druid staff. Their triangular shape language reflects determination, resilience, and an overall dangerous demeanour (they choose to not practice their great skill). A scar across the eyebrow hints at a warrior's past and a penchant for conflict, driven by a sense of greater purpose.

8

Colour

Rather than explicitly stating the mood or atmosphere, the chosen color palette becomes a silent yet powerful storyteller. Each color serves a purpose evoking specific emotions or symbolizing themes within the story.

In 'The Legend of Aegis' colour is attributed to different chracters (as mentioned under chrcater designes) to signify their roles, and the acts to hint at the mood and theme. The first act, green and orange denote life, hope, and prosperity, aligning with Aegis's harmony with the environment. The second act is blue and sets out through a stormy night. The dimmed blue hues represent evil, unpredictibility and danger while the demon with it's purple signifies chaos clearly a colour that stands out against the overall olour pallete. The last act is bathed in reds from the sun rising, signifying a new start hope but also mixed with anger that brews inside the protagonist.

Lighting

In visual storytelling, lighting is a silent director, subtly influencing the audience's perception and emotional response. By strategically employing lighting techniques, creators can enhance the overall narrative experience, drawing viewers deeper into the world of the story. Colour and Lighting are also very closely interconnected and if used together can become a strong visual tool.

In the second act, we transition to night and the flashing lights from the lightning storm adds to the dramatic events, intensifying the action.

The first act's light symbolises the importance, tranquility, and acceptance of Aegis's presence with the sun beams hitting right over the chrcater. The sunrise in the last scene symbolises a shift, a new beginning, and hope, even amidst ongoing chaos and evil.

Style

This style choice symbolizes an unreliable flashback, conveying guilt and the distortion of memories. Lira's figure is portrayed with minimal colour and detail to mirror the imprecise nature of memories. Shifting lines and glitches represent emotional interference, while darkness signifies the fading of Lira's features in Aegis's memory. This intentional style highlights the inevitability of forgetting specific details when someone passes away, emphasizing the emotional foundation of the scene.

Through unique artistic choices such as line work, color schemes, and composition, style sets the tone, conveys themes, and guides viewers' engagement with the story. It goes beyond aesthetics, acting as a narrative language that communicates emotions, moods, and even narrative reliability and more. This technique can be used in any way possible, depending on the artists style, but we can be more aware of how we can take advantage of it to convey meaning.

We also take inspiration from other styles in order for the audience to make connotation on what to expect. For instance, we studied what animation style is often used in epic fantasies. Them seeing the style and making the connotation to other media can aid with immersive exposition.

Shot Framing

You can think of using shot framing in the same way filmmakers use cinematography or artists use composition to convey meaning. Shot framing in animation conveys meaning by controlling what the audience sees and how they perceive it. Different shot compositions and angles can evoke specific emotions, emphasise character perspectives, and guide the viewer's attention to vital narrative elements.

In these close-up shots we are forced to confront the characters emotions and the events. Aegis is framed to feel trapped in the moment, we punch in to a closeup to feel their anger brew and we are forced to look as Cernunnos draws his last breath.

The shots above are all framed to signify the dominance and intimidating nature of the Demon. His size is shown through a suggestive shadow falling over Aegis's face. Rather than showing the demon growing in size we frame the shot to show Aegis's scared reaction to the demon making this more impactful in conveying the intimidating nature of the demon.

Audio

According to MacLeod (2019), the first thing you forget after a deceased loved one is their voice; we wanted to push this detail through audio. The shifting tones of Lira's voice symbolise this loss. We employ a technique for spells by reversing the audio to reveal the incantation's meaning, such as "Mlear tirips eh tot em ekat." When reversed, it is "Take me to the Spirit realm".

Furthermore, to signify Cernunnos's death further we made use of a heart beat slowing down to a stop at the climax of the trailer.

The trailer's music selection effectively establishes the events' mood and seriousness. We utilise classic trailer sounds to create impactful moments and incorporate silence when necessary.

Justify the use of exposition

In the trailer, we incorporated exposition, although it is more elaborated in the short film due to time constraints. For instance, Aegis's past dialogue with their farther provides insight into their beliefs and decision to leave home.

Another use of exposition occurs when the demon reveals its amusement towards Aegis fighting back, which aligns with the demon's manipulative personality and intent to break Aegis also showing that it an enity that enjoys causing pain. Additionally, when the demon says, "In the name of Murkthral, you shall be damned," it reveals that the demon serves a greater evil, Murkthral, whose ritualistic connection is crucial.

Finally, the Bird Deity's dialogue, asking Aegis to accept a burden, signifies responsibility and goodwill, sparking curiosity and interest in the film. These dialogues are justified as they serve essential plot and character development, providing the audience with key information that heightens their interest and anticipation for the film.

Exclusive Behind-the-Scenes:
The Making of the Trailer

Environments

The backgrounds were all painted in Photoshop. These were the first detailed backgrounds I ever painted, showcasing that enough planning and thought can produce great outcomes, even if you are just starting out.

We focused on use of colour, framing, lighting and environmental storytelling.
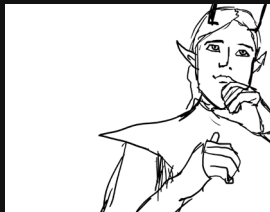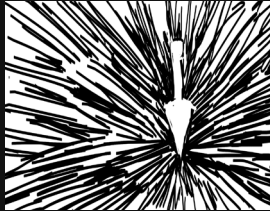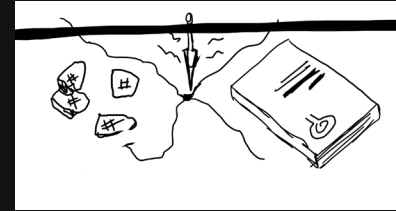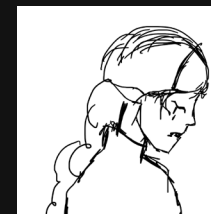
Storyboards

Storyboarding is an extremely important part of animation. Without it you have no plan, which in turn means your animation won't be executed well. It's a way to map out every detail before putting in all the effort. We can especially test out the framing technique and make sure we are conveying the story effectively. After static storyboards, we create an anamatic, which helps us test pacing, timing and audio. It serves as the base of out animation.

Watch the anamatic by scanning here
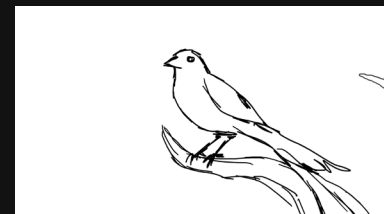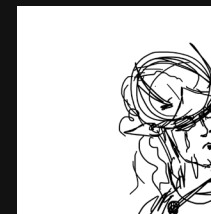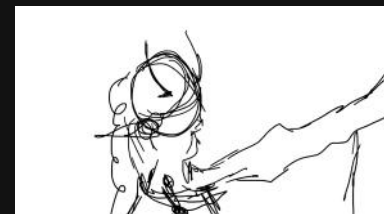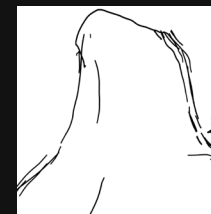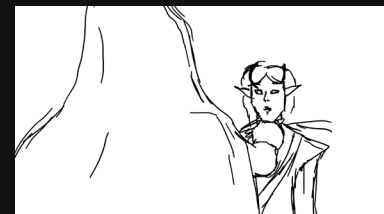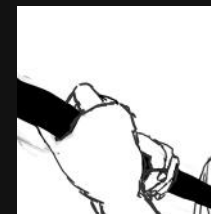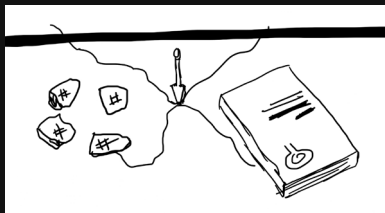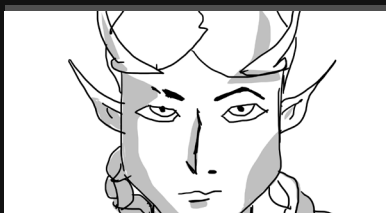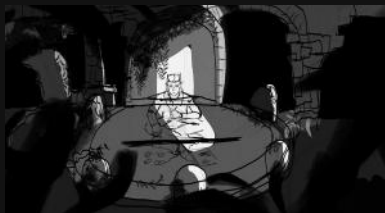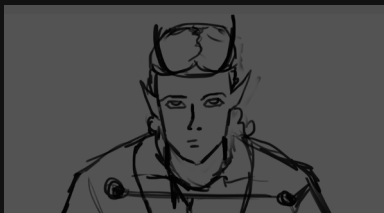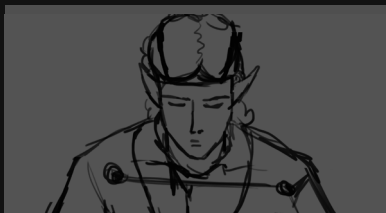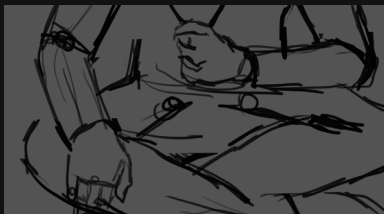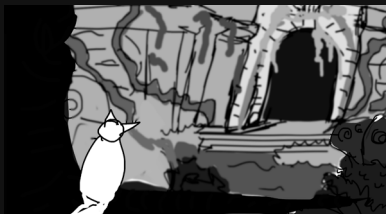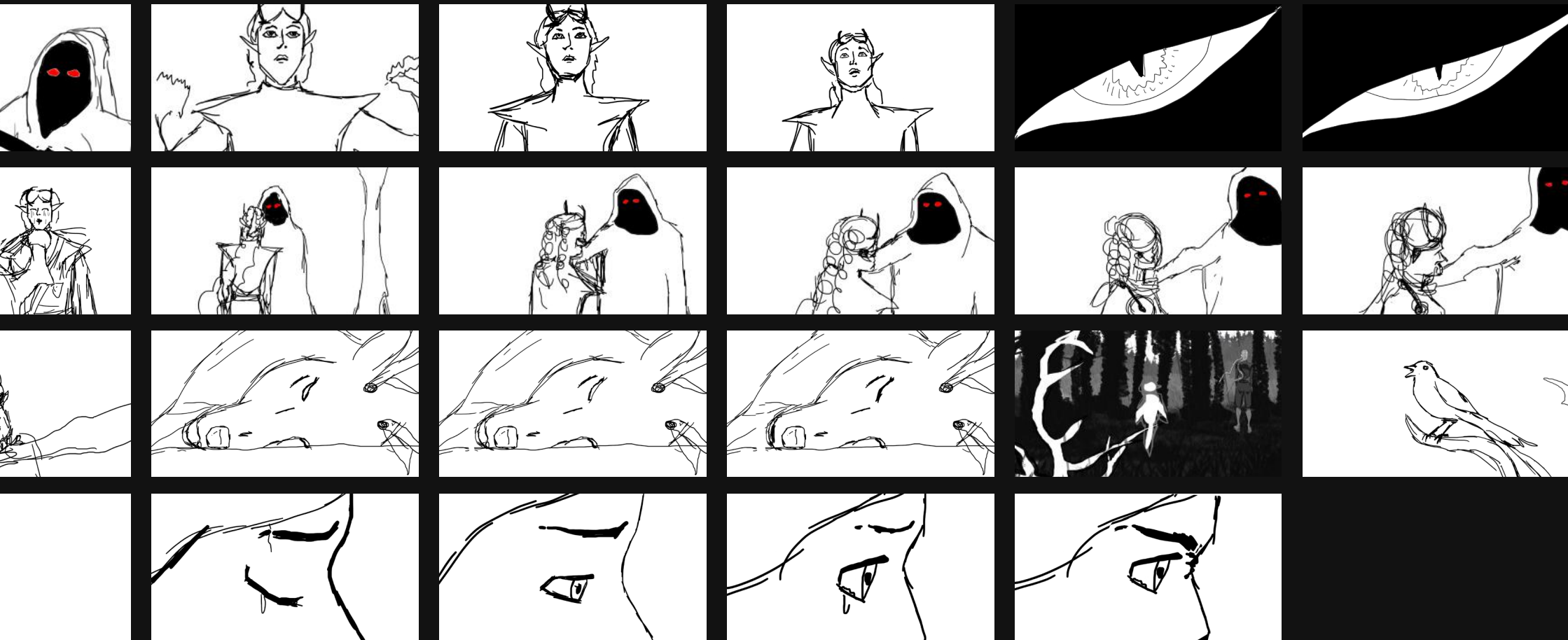
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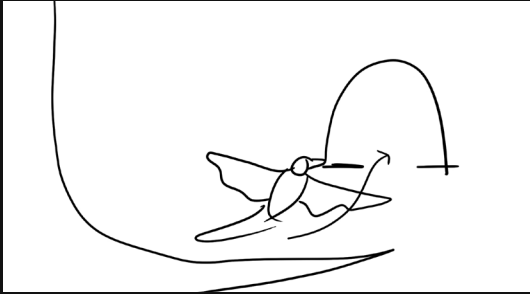
Storyboard 1

Anamatic

Clear
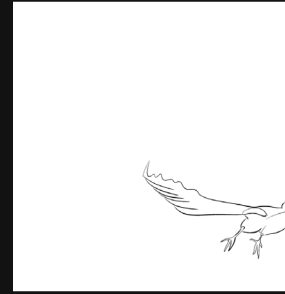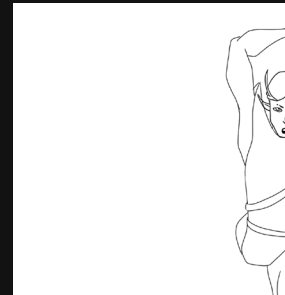
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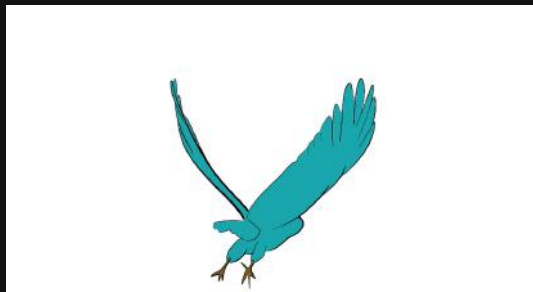
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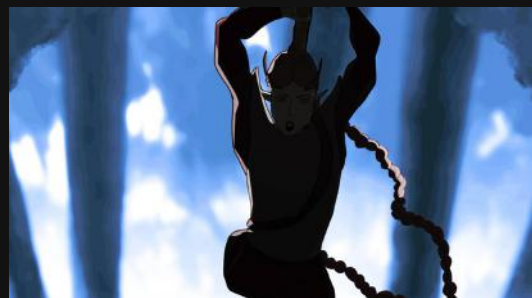
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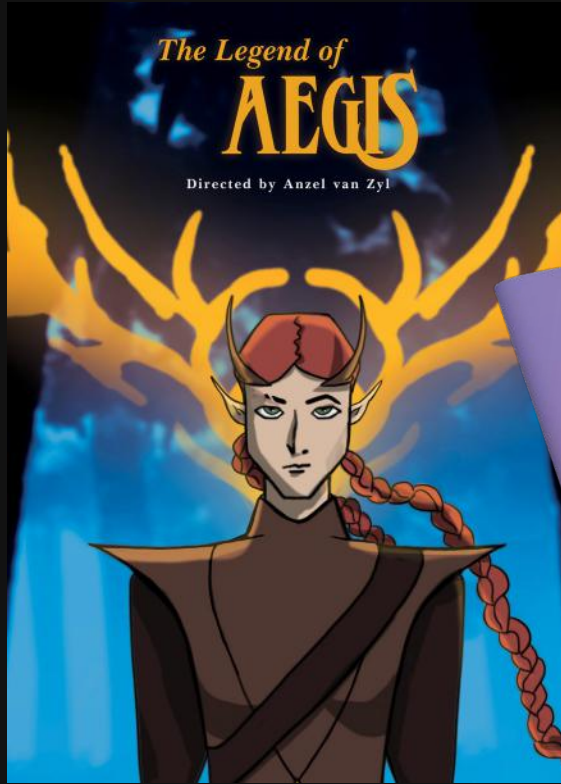
The Legend of Aegis: Cernunnos's Paladin and Whispers of Meaning: The Art of Storytelling in the Legend of Aegis Full Book

Support us so that we can support you!

Your support is instrumental in bringing the "Whispers of Meaning" campaign to life. By backing us, you contribute to the creation of valuable resources that empower novice storytellers and animators. This campaign is not just about receiving support; it's a reciprocal relationship. As we work towards demystifying the art of storytelling, your support fuels the development of accessible tools, insights, and a supportive community. Together, we can foster a space where aspiring creators can enhance their skills, share experiences, and collectively contribute to the vibrant tapestry of storytelling in animation. Support us today by checking out all that our startup campaign has to offer below, and become an integral part of a movement dedicated to nurturing creativity and storytelling excellence.

Website	Join our Discord Community!	Google Sheets Resource List	Funding Support

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Unlock the art of storytelling with "Whispers of Meaning: The Art of Storelling in The Legend of Aegis." Crafted by a fellow novice storyteller, this book is the ideal starting point for anyone seeking to dive into the world of narrative creation.

While this book delves into the captivating realm of storytelling within the medium of animation, its philosophy transcends boundaries, spanning a wide range of creative platforms.

In this accessible guide, you'll unravel the core philosophy of the Whispers of Meaning campaign. This philosophy is distilled into two simple yet powerful golden rules:
1) "Show, Don't Tell"
2) If you still decide to tell, Justify this use of Exposition

But that's not all. The exclusive book teaser takes you behind the scenes of the creative process that brought the Whispers of Meaning campaign's trailer to life, offering exclusive insights into its conception and execution.

As you embark on your storytelling journey, don't miss the opportunity to explore additional resources available as part of our campaign. Dive into a captivating short film and access a curated resource list to enhance your storytelling skills.

Ready to take your first step towards becoming a master storyteller? This book is just the beginning. To learn more about how you can support our campaign and be part of our storytelling journey, visit www.whispersofmeaning.com. Join us in bringing stories to life!